

the oral tradition, not the written copy, is what is to be trusted. Supposing this rule had been carried out, it is certain that the copies of no two kings would have been absolutely coincident. The second Caliph addressed a paper of instructions to a judge whom he appointed; we have five copies of it, preserved in the first place by oral tradition; no two agree absolutely, and in some cases the differences are considerable.¹ Only the comparison of copies in our possession is a very different process from the reconstruction of lost copies. Modest industry is sufficient for the one process; the genius of a Wellhausen perhaps scarcely sufficient for the other.

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THE ANGEL-PRINCES OF DANIEL.

It is evident to all men reading the Book of Daniel that a doctrine of angels comes to the front there which is not found elsewhere in the Bible. Traces of it, indeed, may be discovered elsewhere in the Old Testament, and something analogous to it is sufficiently plain in the New. But the teaching itself, in a direct and unmistakable form, is confined to the Book of Daniel among inspired writings. It seems to me that it has never been taken with sufficient seriousness, or at all adequately accounted for. It was at one time thought to be sufficiently explained by being called "Persian," because its rise coincided with the period of Persian domination. Nothing, however, was discovered in Persian lore which corresponded at all closely to the angel-princes of Daniel. Moreover, it was seen to be excessively unlikely that devout Jews (like the author of Daniel) would have taken over any doctrine of religion from their

¹ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1910, p. 307.

Persian masters. Their fixed standpoint (as the stories in Daniel abundantly testify) was the measureless superiority of their own religion to the religions of the nations—however powerful those nations might be. Against foreign ideas in religion they presented that unyielding front of obstinate dislike which is so familiar to us amongst their descendants to-day. To say that the later Jewish doctrine of angels was “Persian” was not to explain it, but to render it inexplicable.

More plausibly, the angel-princes have been regarded as the equivalents (under an enlarging horizon of religious knowledge) of the “gods of the nations,” whom the earlier Jews had recognised as having a certain existence and power. We know from the Moabite stone that Chemosh was to Moab, in a superficial sense, exactly what Jehovah was to Israel: and Israel himself recognised this fact without clearly perceiving what it involved. Chemosh was in some sort a divinity, and stood for Moab, giving them many good things and trying to give them victory as against Israel. Howbeit, he could not stand against Jehovah: if he seemed to, it was only because Jehovah was angry with His own people. Later on, as everybody knows, this conception of things (which was only a working hypothesis at best) was discredited by the growing conviction of the faithful that Jehovah was not only the God of Israel but the God of the whole earth: the “gods of the nations” were only lying vanities, impostures, nonentities. This is obviously the standpoint in Daniel, a standpoint long since attained and fixed. It seemed reasonable to suggest that, on the principle of a vacuum which must be filled, the angel-princes slid into the places left vacant by the gods of the nations—just as the popular saints of some Christian countries do, in fact, represent the old heathen deities of those lands. But the analogy is misleading. There is no evidence and no likelihood that any cult of angel-princes grew up amongst the

common people in an age of ignorance and superstition. The teaching was (as far as we can tell) put forward by the noblest and most devout spirits in Israel, like the author of Daniel—by men who held most firmly to the faith of their fathers, and had the least possible inclination to combine with it any foreign or alien elements. If the disappearance of the “gods of the nations” left any void for them (which is doubtful), it was one in which they gloried as leaving the more unbounded room for the eternal God.

The doctrine of the angel-princes was, in fact (I venture to think), a philosophy of political history forced upon the thinkers of Israel by the course of political events ever since the battle of Megiddo in which King Josiah fell.

It is quite possible, let us observe, to do without a philosophy of political history. Most Christians do. If they see any religious meaning at all in the course of this world, it is to recognise a practical dualism in which now the powers of good and now the powers of evil get the upper hand. Amidst the manifold confusions which result they console themselves with the prospect of a better world in which righteousness will be supreme. In this attitude they have, no doubt, much to support them both in Scripture and in history.

It was not possible for a Jew to take this line, because Jehovah was the one Almighty God *here and now*. The faithful might, indeed, force their way through to the conviction that Jehovah would be—must be—their God in Sheól also; but primarily, substantially, Jehovah ruled in the kingdom of men, in the affairs of this world. Now the affairs of this world were increasingly difficult to make anything of. When Israel was a “child,” he had no concern with other people, except with the Egyptians whom he had victoriously left behind, and the tribes which dwelt upon his border. These tribes sometimes had him for a time in subjection—that was because he himself had been faithless to

Jehovah. More often he trampled them under foot—that was because his God was matchless in power and ever mindful of His own. Even for the Assyrian wars in the days of Isaiah this simple theory would work ; whatever Israel suffered he had richly deserved, and when Hezekiah was true to Jehovah, Jehovah came to his assistance. But all this came to a violent end at Megiddo. No one could have been more pious, more conscientious, than Josiah ; or more obedient to the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah. Yet when he went forth to withstand Pharaoh as in duty bound, Pharaoh brushed him aside with scarce an effort, and killed him in doing so. “ When he had seen him . . . he slew him.” That was a catastrophe which called aloud for some explanation, and what followed was of a piece with it. The nation of the Jews was like a cork upon a swirling stream, tossed and driven hither and thither amidst the overwhelming thrust and counter thrust of warring empires. Even the restoration of Jerusalem, so gloriously hymned by the Second Isaiah, was blighted by the political dominance of Persia ; when Persia fell, a worse tyranny arose in its place ; nor did the decadence of “ Grecia ” promise any real relief, since Rome stood only too well prepared to take her place and more. The personal rule of Jehovah did not of itself provide the elements of intelligent explanation—even when all possible allowance was made for the effects of Jewish unfaithfulness. It was exactly when he could least be charged with “ holding up his hands to any strange god ” that Israel had seemed most hopelessly adrift amidst the strife of nations. It was only natural that in seeking for some tolerable solution of this monstrous difficulty men should suffer their thoughts to be guided by the analogies of human governance. In the kingdom of Persia, e.g., it was well known that the monarch was absolute ; what he would, he did, or had done. But it was equally well known that all

decrees were discussed, made, confirmed, in the inner circle of the royal counsellors. This fact did not make the monarchy "constitutional"; it did not affect the "autocracy" of the Persian monarch. All the same, it meant that there was in practice a real clash of opinions and of interests in the government of the Empire; it meant that in many ways unknown to outsiders that government was affected and modified by the personal character and influence of the counsellors. Everything pointed to the conclusion that analogous conditions prevailed in the Divine governance of the world. It was certain, of course, that God ruled, and ruled alone. But He must rule through agencies, through powers; and it must be this fact which gave such unexpected and uncomfortable play to the fierce antagonisms of the nations—antagonisms which involved so much suffering for Israel. If, again, He ruled through agencies, or powers of any sort, these must be living and personal—for the scientific or quasi-scientific notion of impersonal "laws," distinguishable from the direct action of God, was entirely unfamiliar to the Jews. And if He ruled at all through personal agents, ministers of His will, these could be none other than angels, who were already (and from of old) known to Jewish religious thought as forming the *entourage*, the family, the court, of the Almighty. Thus the angel-princes of Daniel fell into place, not because the place had been left vacant by the disestablished "gods of the nations," but because their presence there was imperatively demanded in the interests of faith, and suggested by the analogies of earth. One cannot help seeing that something similar has happened amongst Christians. They have been, as it were, compelled by their growing sense of the harshness and callousness of "nature" to interpolate between the bitter suffering of earth and the loving Providence of Heaven a whole system of "laws of nature," of which (as impersonal) no

regard can be demanded, or can be expected, for the happiness of any sentient being. The position is wholly illogical—for to the eye of faith God is always and everywhere immanent in “nature.” It is also irreligious in this sense, that the Bible gives no hint of any such thing; our Lord taught that God is directly concerned in an event so trifling as the fall of a sparrow; the New Testament taught (or implied) that “nature” is everywhere mediated by angelic beings. But for all that the notion of “laws of nature,” inexorable, undistinguishing, without bowels of mercies, but blameless because impersonal, practically holds the field and serves the purposes of Christian faith so well that one does not wish it to disappear at present. One may point out that “nature” is red in tooth and claw, without bringing a railing accusation against the Providence of God: and that is an enormous relief.

If now we turn back to the doctrine of angel-princes to whom the management of political affairs was committed, we may see that it afforded the same sort of relief to the devout Jew whose spirit burned within him as he looked out upon a world which was horribly misgoverned. The *king* can do no wrong; yet, if wrong be done under his sway, his *ministers* may be denounced by the most loyal of subjects. So, in the highest, the Eternal is beyond the possibility of criticism, being absolutely just and true and faithful; but since He rules through angel-princes it must be lawful to charge upon *them* the wrongs and iniquities which fill His earth. Was it not even then notorious that in such a kingdom as Persia the worst sufferings of the people flowed, not from any malevolence in the supreme ruler, but from the incapacity, the carelessness, the self-interest, the mutual animosity of his advisers and agents? Was it not true that men often suffered most under the rule of the kindest monarch, because his agents took the greatest advantage of

him ? If, then, there is a veritable welter of oppression and crime in the politics of earth, it must be chargeable upon the angel-princes, and it is not contrary to piety to say so openly. This is surely—as Canon Cheyne long ago pointed out—the motive of Psalm lxxxii. It is true that some of our best commentators still feel themselves obliged (doubtless with great reluctance) to stand by the mistranslation of the Authorised and Prayer-Book Versions. “Elohim,” they say, is used for “judges” in Exodus xxi. and xxii. It is not. It means there, as it always means, either God, or (so-called) gods, or at the least supernatural beings. In those verses of Exodus it means God as represented by the judges who gave sentence^d in His name. That the sacred writer could speak of a man as “coming before God” when he appeared before the theocratic judge only shows how awful was the religious sanction which attached to his decision in those old-world days. The Revised Version has very properly restored the word “God” in all these cases. “God standeth in the congregation of God ; he judgeth among the gods.” That is the situation contemplated by the psalmist. The solitary supremacy of the Most High is so far qualified for him that He is habitually seen by the eye of faith surrounded by an assembly, by a court, which is all His own ; as supreme Judge of all created beings He begins with His own counselors, the angel-princes who (like Himself) are heavenly and supernatural, who *when looked at from below* may even be counted as gods. In this (inferior) sense the psalmist himself acknowledges their claim to the title, but at the same time he warns them, he denounces them, he threatens them with an absence of restraint which nothing could justify or excuse except an overmastering sense of pity and indignation at the cruelty and wrong which filled the earth. It forms one more splendid example of the fact (in which we find so much comfort and encouragement) that the good God

will tolerate any plainness of speech, any seeming irreverence of language, so as it comes from a heart full of concern for others and of devotion to Himself. The righteous indignation which brims over in this Psalm sweeps away all respect for the angels as ministers of God ; it does not even stop to think whether angels *can* suffer the death-penalty ; it only sees that the world under their charge is full of darkness and cruel habitations, that the one possible remedy is for God to set His angel-princes aside, to judge the world Himself, to take all nations as His own inheritance. The extraordinary daring of this outburst is only matched by the poetical beauty of its form, by the uprightness and religious value of the passion which animates it.

The doctrine of the angel-princes, however, was not merely a theory of divine governance by means of angelic agency ; it was a theory of angels who represented the various countries they had in charge. In its most fully developed form it allotted one angel to each of the seventy nations which it covered in Genesis x. Now there was no "representation," properly so called, of its very varied constituent races in such a kingdom as Persia. But there was some approach to it in practice. There were satraps of the provinces who must to some extent have identified themselves with the interests of their provincials. Moreover, in every age men living under despotic government have as a fact contrived to retain the services of some powerful personage in the *entourage* of the king who should more or less openly champion their interests against those of other people. In the Turkish Empire, e.g., the ecclesiastical heads of the various Christian bodies have always had this duty to perform at the Sublime Porte, and that with the express sanction of the Sultan himself. In transferring this principle to the Court of Heaven, it was necessary to place the appointment of these angel-representatives wholly in the hands

of the supreme Judge. He who had made these nations to dwell side by side upon the earth, and settled the bounds of their habitations, gave to each an angel-prince to oversee its affairs and to advance its special interests in His heavenly counsels. The author of Daniel does not apparently contemplate angel-representatives for more than the few great powers which then strove for dominion over the inhabited earth. It was not possible for him to lump these great powers up with the "heathen" at large. They had so distinctive, and indeed so terrible, a significance for the whole world, and especially for the Jews, that they *must* have some supernatural support, some very potent backing in the counsels of Heaven. It was, as I have said, a religious philosophy of political history forced upon the thinkers in Israel by the circumstances of the age in which they lived. It did not *explain* those circumstances—they remained to a great extent inexplicable. But it helped to make them intelligible; it brought them under modes of thought which were already familiar; it pointed to conditions and causes which were very actively at work upon earth. It may be that no philosophy of political history can do more than this.

How this religious philosophy stands related to Christian faith and thought is another matter, and one of even greater interest.

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