

The Seven Heavens.

AN EARLY JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF.

BY THE REV. R. H. CHARLES, M.A., EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

II.

WE have now to consider whether Christian conceptions of heaven were shaped, or in any degree influenced, by already existing views of that nature. A knowledge of ancient thought on this subject would naturally lead us to expect such an influence at work, and we find on examination that our expectations are in certain respects fully realised. First, from 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3, we learn that St. Paul believed in a plurality of the heavens: 'I knew a man in Christ fourteen years ago . . . such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man . . . how he was caught up into paradise.' Heretofore exegetes have been divided as to whether St. Paul believed in the existence of three heavens or of seven. Owing to the fresh evidence on this subject furnished by the Slavonic Enoch, there is no longer room for reasonable doubt on the question. In the Slavonic Enoch we have presented to us a scheme of the seven heavens, which in some of its prominent features agrees with that conceived by St. Paul. Thus in the Slavonic Enoch, Paradise is situated in the third heaven, as in 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3; whereas, according to later Judaism, it belonged to the fourth heaven (see above). In the next place, the presence of evil in some part of the heavens is recognised. Thus in Eph. vi. 12 we meet with the peculiar statement, 'against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavens' (*πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις*). The phrase *ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις* occurs only in Ephesians of the Pauline Epistles. It is found five times (i. 3, 20, ii. 6, iii. 10, and vi. 12), and always in a local sense. It is thus in fact = *ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς*. This phrase is then capable of two interpretations. The 'hosts' in question are the fallen angels in the second heaven, or else the powers of Satan the prince of the air (cf. Eph. ii. 2). For the latter interpretation, the Slavonic Enoch xxix. 4, 5, might be quoted as a parallel: 'One of the ranks of the archangels, having turned away with the rank below him, entertained an impossible idea, that he should make his throne higher than the clouds over the earth, and should be equal in rank to My power.

And I hurled him from the heights with his angels. And he was flying in the air continually above the abyss.' The latter explanation of *ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις* is probably right. In Col. i. 20, however, we must, if we deal honestly with the context, suppose some such a view of the heavens as that given in the Slavonic Enoch to underlie the words: 'to reconcile all things unto Himself, whether things upon earth or things in the heavens.' That 'things upon earth' need to be reconciled to God is universally intelligible; but, so far as I am aware, no exegete has hitherto recognised any such necessity on the part of 'things' in the heavens.' Yet this is the obvious meaning of the words. Hence 'the things in the heavens' that are to be reconciled to God must be either the fallen angels imprisoned in the second heaven, or else the powers of Satan whose domain is the air. Though to certain Pauline principles the conversion of Satan is not logically impossible, it is nevertheless unlikely to be his thought here. Hence we seem to be restricted to the other interpretation. And thus we have therein an indirect parallel to 1 Pet. iii. 19: 'He went and preached to the spirits in prison.' Another statement in Eph. iii. 10 belongs to the same plane of thought: 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavens (*ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις*) might be made known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God.'

These 'principalities and powers' may also be taken as the fallen angels in the second heaven; but it is more likely that they are the rulers of the various lower heavens which are mentioned in iv. 10: 'He . . . that ascended far above all the heavens.' This thought of the seven heavens through which Christ passed or above which He was exalted twice recurs in Heb. iv. 14: 'Having then a great high priest, who had passed through the heavens' (*διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανοὺς*); vii. 26, 'made higher than the heavens' (*ὀψιγρότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν γενόμενος*). Before we pass on to the consideration of the Apocalypse, we should observe that Paul used *οὐρανός* frequently (cf. Rom. i. 18,

x. 6; 1 Cor. viii. 8, xv. 47), though he believed in a plurality of the heavens. In the twelfth chapter of Revelation we have a record of the war in heaven between Michael and his angels against Satan and his angels, with the subsequent overthrow and expulsion of the latter. These events spiritually interpreted symbolise, it is true, the victory of good over evil; but when studied in reference to their origin, they mark a revolutionising of the old Semitic conception of heaven. Evil can no longer be conceived as possible in the abode of righteousness, nor can its place any more be found in heaven. And thus Satan and his angels are cast down to the earth. When once evil in all its forms is driven forth from heaven, the *rationale* of a sevenfold division of it in the main disappears. There are, then, no longer conflicting elements which must be restricted to certain divisions, and kept apart by concrete barriers. The old Semitic doctrine of the seven heavens really presupposes, in some respects, dualistic influences. Such a conception could not long hold its ground in a monistic faith. It was this dualistic tinge that made it so acceptable with the heretics.

We must now follow the subsequent fortunes of this doctrine in the early centuries of Christianity.

First, we find in one of the Christian sections (vi.-xi.) of the Ascension of Isaiah an elaborate, but sinewless, account of the seven heavens. Evil has already been expelled, and the inhabitants of one heaven differ from those of another merely in possessing greater degrees of glory and knowledge. This account of the seven heavens is singularly wanting in variety and imaginative power; it is valuable, however, in an historical reference. Leaving the Ascension of Isaiah, we shall now give the evidence of Clement of Alexandria and Origen on the prevalence of this doctrine.

In the *Stromata* iv. 25 of Clement, there is a reference to the seven heavens which are obviously regarded as a true conception; while in v. 11, we have a quotation from a lost Apocalypse of Zephaniah: ἀρ' οὐχ ὅμοια ταῦτα τοῖς ὑπὸ Σοφονία λεχθεῖσι τοῦ προφήτου; καὶ ἀνέλαβέν με πνεῦμα καὶ ἀνήγεκέν με εἰς οὐρανὸν πέμπτον καὶ ἐθεώρουν ἀγγέλους καλουμένους κυρίου . . . ὑμνοῦντας θεὸν ἀρρητον ὕψιστον. This passage seems to be ultimately derived from the Slavonic Enoch xviii.

In the last Book of Baruch the Prophet, there was some account of the seven heavens according

to Origen, *de Princip.* ii. 3, 6: Denique etiam Baruch prophetæ librum in assertionis hujus testimonium vocant, quod ibi de septem mundis vel cœlis evidentiùs indicatur.

But to proceed to Origen's own views, we read in *Contra Cels.* vi. 21 as follows: ἐπτά δὲ οὐρανοὺς, ἢ ὅλως περιωρισμένον ἀριθμὸν αὐτῶν, αἱ φερόμεναι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἀπαγγέλλουσι γραφαί· ἀλλ' οὐρανοὺς, εἴτε τὰς σφαίρας τῶν παρ' Ἑλληνιστῶν λεγομένων πλανήτων, εἴτε καὶ ἄλλοτι ἀπορρητότερον εὐκασι διδάσκειν οἱ λόγοι. Though Origen says that there is no authoritative teaching as to there being seven heavens, it is clear that he really believes in there being this number; for elsewhere he identifies these heavens with the planets of the Greeks, *de Princip.* ii. 11. 6: si quis sane mundus corde, et purior mente, et exercitior sensu fuerit, velocius proficiens cito ad aeris locum adscendet, et ad cœlorum regna perveniet per locorum singulorum, ut ita dixerim, mansiones, quas Græci sphaeras, id est globos, appellaverunt, scriptura vero divina cœlos nominat; in quibus singulis primo quidem perspiciet ea, quæ ibi geruntur, secundo vero etiam rationem quare gerantur agnoscet; et ita per ordinem digredietur singula, sequens eum, qui transgressus est cœlos, Jesum filium Dei, dicentem: 'volo, ut ubi sum ego, et isti sint mecum.'

We shall now cite the evidence of Christian apocalyptic works as attesting the prevalence of this belief in the seven heavens. In the Apocalypse of Moses, p. 19 (*Apocalypses Apocryphæ*, ed. Tischendorf, 1866), Eve is bidden to look up to the seven firmaments: ἀνάβλεψον τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς σου καὶ ἴδε τὰ ἑπτα στερεώματα ἀνεωγμένα. On p. 21, Michael is bidden: ἀπελθε εἰς τὸν παράδεισον ἐν τῷ τρίτῳ οὐρανῷ. Thus the writer of this Apocalypse, so far as he touches on the subject of the seven heavens, agrees with the teaching of the Slavonic Enoch. In the Apoc. Esdræ (pp. 29, 30 *op. cit.*) there is mention made of a plurality of the heavens, and of Paradise as lying in the east. In the Apoc. Johannis (p. 84 *op. cit.*) the seven regions of the heaven are spoken of: καὶ γενήσεται κρότος μέγας ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ σαλευθήσονται τὰ ἑπτα (αἱ ἑννέα) πέταλα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

In our account of the third heaven, according to the Slavonic Enoch, we showed that hell was situated in the north of that heaven. Similarly in the Testament of Isaac (Testament of Abraham, ed. James, pp. 146-48), hell is understood to be

in one of the heavens. The same holds true of the Testament of Jacob (*op. cit.* p. 153).

Finally, in the Acts of Callistratus (ed. Conybeare), pp. 311, 312, the seven circles of the heavens are mentioned.

Speculations about the seven heavens prevailed largely among the heretics. Thus, according to Irenæus, *Contra Haer.* i. 5. 2, the Valentinians taught: 'Ἐπτὰ γὰρ οὐρανοὺς κατεσκευασμένοι, ὧν ἐπάνω τὸν δημιουργὸν εἶναι λέγουσι. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο Ἑβδομάδα καλοῦσιν αὐτόν, τὴν δὲ μητέρα τὴν Ἀχαμῶθ Ὀγδοάδα . . . τοὺς δὲ ἑπτὰ οὐρανοὺς οὐκ (?) εἶναι νοητοῦς φασιν, ἀγγέλους δὲ αὐτοὺς ὑποτίθενται . . . ὡς καὶ τὸν παράδεισον ὑπὲρ τρίτον οὐρανὸν ὄντα, τέταρτον ἀγγέλον λέγουσι δυνάμει ὑπάρχειν.

In Tertullian, *adv. Valent.* xx., practically the same account is given: "Tum ipsam cælorum septemplex scenam solio desuper suo finit. Unde et Sabbatum dictus ab hebdomade sedis suae. . . . Cælus autem noeros deputant, et interdum angelos eos faciunt . . . sicut et Paradisum Archangelum quartum, quoniam et hunc supra cælum tertium pangunt."

The Heretic Marcus taught, according to Hippolytus, a similar doctrine of the heavens, but according to Irenæus, *adv. Haer.* i. 17. 1, he reckoned eight heavens in addition to the sun and moon.

Basilides' view as to there being 365 heavens is well known (Augustine, *de Haer.* i. 4).

The Ophites (Irenæus, *adv. Haeres.* i. 30. 4, 5) believed in seven heavens ruled over by seven potentates, named Ialdabaoth, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonius, Eloeus, Horeus, Astaphaeus—a Hebdomad which, with their mother Sophia, formed an Ogdoad. A fuller account of this Hebdomad will be found in Origen, *Contra Celsum* vi. 31, and in Epiphanius, *Haer.* xxvi. 10.

In the mysteries of Mithras described by Origen, *Contra Celsum* vi. 22, there are certain speculations akin to the doctrine of the seven heavens.

A fragment of Theodotus is found regarding the creation of man: ὁθεν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τῷ τετάρτῳ οὐρανῷ δημιουργεῖται.

The doctrine of the seven heavens, therefore, being associated with so many grotesque and incongruous features, even in the thoughts of the orthodox, became, in due time, an offensive conception to the sounder minds in the Church, and this offensiveness was naturally aggravated by the important rôle it played in heretical theology.

Augustine, though he expounds a peculiar doctrine of his own which asserts the existence of three heavens (*de Gen. ad Litt.* xii. 67), feels himself beset with abundant difficulties on this question. On the subject in general, he writes: 'Si autem sic accipimus tertium cælum quo Apostolus raptus est, ut quartum etiam, et aliquot ultra superius cælos esse credamus, infra quos et hoc tertium cælum, sicut eos alii septem, alii octo, alii novem vel decem perhibent . . . de quorum ratione sive opinione nunc disserere longum est' (*de Gen. ad Litt.* xii. 57). In the fourth century of the Christian era, churchmen were required, according to the clear tenor of Scripture, to believe in a plurality of the heavens, but as to the number of these heavens they were at liberty to decide for themselves without prejudicing their orthodoxy. Thus Philastrius, Bishop of Brescia, at the close of the fourth century, holds it a heresy to doubt the plurality of the heavens, but a man may, without offence, believe in seven, three, or two. 'De cælorum diversitate est hæresis quæ ambigat. Scriptura enim in primo die cælum et terram facta declarat duo hæc elementa, secundo firmamentum aquæ factum, et nihilominus ipsum firmamentum cælum appellatum fuisse testatur. David autem dicit de cælis ita: *Laudate dominum cæli cælorum et aquæ quæ super cælos sunt.* Sive ergo sex cælos, secundum David, et septimum hoc firmamentum accipere quis voluerit, non errat; nam Solomon tres cælos dicit, ita: *Cælum et cælum cæli.* Paulus æque apostolus usque ad tertium cælum se raptum fatetur. Sive ergo septem quis acceperit, ut David, sive tres, sive duos, non errat, quia et Dominus ait: *Pater qui in cælis est*' (*de Haeres. Liber* xciv.). But these, and the like speculations, had become so objectionable to the master-mind of Chrysostom that, ignoring 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3, he declares the doctrine of a plurality of the heavens to be a mere device of man, and contrary to holy Scripture: τίς ἂν οὖν λοιπὸν μετὰ τὴν τοσαύτην διδασκαλίαν ἀνέχοιτο τῶν ἀπλῶς ἐξ οἰκίας διανοίας φθέγγεσθαι βουλομένων, καὶ ἀπεναντίως τῇ θεῷ γραφῇ πολλοῖς οὐρανοῖς λέγειν ἐπιχειρούντων (*Hom. in Gen.* iv. 2). And again, in order to discredit the last traces of this view, he maintains that the heaven neither revolves nor is spherical (*In Epist. ad Hebræos Hom.* xiv. 1).

Our task is now nearly done. It only remains for us to point out that this doctrine, on its rejection by the Christian Church, passed over, with many similar ones, into Mohammedanism. In

fact, Mohammedanism formed, in many respects, the *cloaca maxima* into which much of the refuse of Christianity discharged itself. Thus, in the Koran xxiii. it is written: 'And we have created over you seven heavens, and we are not negligent of what we have created.' And again in xli.: 'And he formed them into seven heavens in two days,

and revealed unto every heaven its office.' Into a detailed representation of these heavens by later Mohammedan writers, it is not necessary for us to enter. So far as I am aware, every detail is borrowed from Jewish and Christian Apocalypses. The Slavonic Enoch seems to have been in Mohammed's hands.

The Meaning of Christ's Prayer in Gethsemane.

I.

By Prebendary the Rev. THOMAS WEST, M.A.,
Hereford.

I HAVE read with much interest and care the various papers upon this subject which have recently appeared in the pages of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, but, with all deference to the very able writers who have furnished them, I am constrained to say that they do not strike me as quite satisfactory; they seem to me, for the most part, to show a straining after more than the narratives are meant to convey. We may, I think, apply to history, as well as to criticism, the canon of interpretation which lays down that the most obvious sense of a passage—and of a narrative—is the best and the first to be taken; and I venture to ask a little space, if the subject is not already closed, to set forth the aspect in which the incident presents itself to me as a plain student of the Divine Word.

The subject is, of course, one to be approached not with prying curiosity, but with all reverence and tenderness; it must not, however, be forgotten that it is amongst the things which are 'written for our learning'; and that, provided always we remember that the ground whereon we tread is holy, we need not shrink from its devout contemplation. There may be mysteries clustering around this, as around every other incident of our blessed Lord's earthly life; but I venture to think that a firm grasp of the great truth of His perfect and complete humanity will furnish such a clue as we are now capable of receiving to most of them, and will teach us that the simplest view of this incident may prove the most instructive and the most profitable.

As I read the narratives of our Lord's agony in the garden in connexion with Heb. v. 7, I cannot but feel that they put before us a distinct prayer

for deliverance from death, and that 'the death of the cross'; not, however, in any sense implying a withdrawal from the great work which He came expressly to perform, but a desire that some other mode of accomplishing it less agonising than that which through all His life had loomed before Him might, if possible, be found. The experience of most who know aught of life will teach us how comparatively slight an impression the contemplation of impending sorrow or suffering makes upon us while it seems at a distance, and how, as day by day it draws nearer, and we are about to enter the cloud, the realisation deepens and the shrinking from it becomes more intense. So I believe it was with our blessed Lord, and that we have in His case a natural and very human, but sinless, shrinking from the agony of the cross: a feeling akin to that which the Psalmist expresses in the 55th Psalm: 'My heart is sore pained within me; and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me.' It has often occurred to me, too, that our Lord's words to His slumbering disciples might be taken quite as much as an utterance of His own consciousness, as a gracious extenuation of their failure to watch with Him: 'The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.' We seem to have in this incident almost, if not quite, the last grapple with the arch enemy; the last desperate effort on his part to frustrate the great work of redemption which seemed so near to its accomplishment. The ancient objection that this view makes our Lord to manifest less courage in the prospect of death than multitudes of His martyred followers have shown does not appear to me of much weight, indicating, as it does, simply a desire to disparage Him in the eyes of men. The most perfect organisations are probably