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1911.

519TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.

MONDAY, MAY 22ND, 1911, 4.30 P.M.

PROFESSOR EDWARD HULL, LL.D., F.R.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read and confirmed, and the election as an Associate of the Rev. Claude C. Thornton, M.A., was announced.

The following paper was then read by the author:—

*THE DESCENT INTO HADES: A STUDY IN
COMPARATIVE RELIGION.* By Rev. Canon MAC-
CULLOCH, D.D.

THE belief in our Lord's descent into Hades occurs for the first time in a formal creed in A.D. 359, when it appears in the creed of the 4th Synod at Sirmium. Why it should not have appeared until then is not very obvious, unless, as seems likely, it is included comprehensively in the reference to the burial which occurs in many earlier creeds and summaries of doctrine. For there is scarcely any document of the first three centuries in which some reference to the descent does not occur, and it is known to all the Fathers, who usually write of it as an important doctrine.

A belief in the possibility of descent to Hades and return thence is well-nigh universal, though in nearly all the myths or legends which tell of it there is one important difference between the descent there recounted and that of our Lord—the person who descends and returns is a living person, God or man.* The purpose of this paper is to study the belief in our Lord's descent in relation to these myths, and to enquire into its sources and into the question of its indebtedness to pagan beliefs.

* The exceptions are mainly Hindu and Buddhist.

The universality of these myths is connected with early man's views regarding sleep and death. He believed that, in dreams, in which he saw and spoke to dead relatives, they had come to him or his soul had gone to them. Hence arose the belief that the soul could leave the body in sleep or trance, go to the Other-world, and return to the body. Savage affection is not so slight as is sometimes thought, and doubtless the intense affection for dead friends or relatives prompted the dream fancy. It was then an easy step to believe that what took place in dream might take place in actual fact; that the whole man, not merely the soul, might visit the Other-world! Always, from possibility to fact, from the "might be" to the "had been," was an easy step to the primitive mind. And as it is commonly believed that there is little difference between life and death, that the dead may revive, affection would easily suggest that one could go to the Other-world to bring back a dead friend. So arose stories of those who had gone, and these were all the more credible because the way to the Other-world was generally well-known.

These visits to the Other-world were made for different purposes. Mere curiosity, the desire to find out what the unknown region is like, prompts some of these mythical visits. In many others it is to obtain a boon by force or fraud or through their goodwill from the rulers of Hades. But in by far the largest number the object is to recover someone dead from the clutches of Hades. In another group, mainly Hindu and Buddhist, but including some later Jewish and Muhammadan examples it is to lessen the sufferings of the lost or to free them altogether from hell. In another small group, in which the descent is *not* to a region of the dead, but to the dark worlds of demoniac beings, the object is to overcome them by force or skill or stealth, and to rob them of their magic powers. We shall confine ourselves to the three last groups.

(1) *Descent to rescue a dead person.*—Of this group there are innumerable savage variants, usually told of mortals, and they occur most plentifully among the American Indians, Polynesians, and Melanesians. In many of these, as in more civilised versions, the quest is often unsuccessful, usually through the breaking of a *tabu*. From the higher religions there are Hindu, Japanese, Chinese, Babylonian, Scandinavian, and many Greek myths of this class, in which the descent is usually attributed to a divinity. Many of them preserve a great similarity, but this is not necessarily due to borrowing. The typical instance is the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Haunted by the

image of his dead wife, Orpheus resolves to seek her in Hades, and there enchants its inhabitants by his lyre. Pluto and Persephone are moved to pity and grant the restoration if Orpheus will observe one condition, that of not looking back till he reaches earth. But just before arriving at the fatal limit his love overcame him; he looked back and lost Eurydice for ever. Other Greek myths tell of the rescue of Semele by Dionysos and of Alcestis by Heracles.

The Babylonian instance is that of the descent of Ishtar presumably to rescue her dead lover Tammuz. She arrives at the gate of Hades and demands admission, threatening to break down the gate and set free the dead if it is refused. Allatu, the goddess of Hades, allows her to enter, but at each of the seven gates she is stripped of her ornaments and apparel, and is then struck with disease. All things languish on earth and die. The gods take steps to remedy matters, and Uddushunamir is sent to Hades to demand the water of life for Ishtar. Allatu is finally compelled to give this; Ishtar is restored and led back through the gates. The story, as connected with Tammuz, should have described his restoration, but the references at the end of the poem are obscure. In all probability two myths of descent have here coalesced—that of Ishtar to recover Tammuz, and that of Uddushunamir to rescue the dead Ishtar.

The Hindu and Buddhist descent stories of this class are told either of divinities or of mortals, living or dead, and they usually end in the success of the seeker.*

2. *Descent to assist the lost.*—This class is most certainly an extension of the former and perhaps has a natural place in religions in which the ethical aspect was fairly well developed and the idea of divine benevolence strong. In several Hindu and Buddhist legends the mere presence of a god or a pious mortal who has descended to the hells is sufficient to alter the whole condition of things there. The torments cease, anguish and despair change to joy and hope, and hell becomes a paradise. In some cases a dead person sent to hell to expiate a single slight fault is bidden to leave it when the expiation is complete. But his enormous treasury of merit has relieved the damned of their miseries. They beg him to stay, and though pressed by the gods he refuses to go and finally ransoms

* For all these myths see an article in the forthcoming volume of Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, on "Descent to Hades (Ethnic)," by the present writer.

the sinners from hell.* In the *Lalita Vistara*, the life of Buddha, at his descent to earth and at other moments of his existence, a marvellous light is projected from his body and illumines all the worlds, including those of the hells. Darkness is dispelled, suffering and torment cease, and joy reigns. At his birth Buddha prophesied that he would destroy the fires of hell and cause rain from the cloud of the law to fall and all beings would rejoice. Here there is neither descent nor release. But in a northern Buddhist myth Avalokiteçvara, of whom it was prophesied that he would bring even the miseries of Yama's kingdom to an end, visits the hell Avici as a glorious prince clad in light and frees the victims from their pains. Mild airs take the place of flames, the cauldron of boiling water in which men suffer bursts, and the sea of fire becomes a pool with lotus blooms. The saving work is carried on in the city of the Pretas, whose denizens are freed from torments. The damned, being granted the gift of right knowledge, are led as Bodhisattvas to the Sakhavati world.†

The origin of these Buddhist legends has been sought in the Christian descent story; others trace it from them. It is not unlikely that the Buddhist documents are later than the Christian story in origin, but though there may have been mutual interaction of each at a later time, it is probable that both are originally independent, and the Buddhist stories are simply a development of an idea inherent in Hinduism. The Jewish beliefs will be referred to later; it is certain that the Muhammadan belief in the release of souls in hell who have a particle of faith, at the intercession of the righteous dead in Paradise and by their mission to hell, is derived from Jewish sources.

3. *Descent to conquer the powers of darkness.*—This is found in two myths of the Mandaean religion. In one of these Hibil Ziwa descends before creation to the seven lower worlds. Remaining in each invisibly for thousands of years he finally reaches the lowest and compels its lord to give him the talismans by which the might of the opposing demon will be annihilated. As he ascends he seals the doors of each world, so that none can pass. In the fourth and third he takes the form of their rulers and then obtains other talismans. After his ascent he imprisons the female Ruha, whom he has brought

* See the *Ramayana*, xxv, 21; *Mahabharata*, xvii ff.; Wilson, *Journ. Royal Asiat. Soc.*, v, 295.

† Cowell, *Journal of Philology*, vi (1873), 222 ff. Cf. Rockhill, *Land of the Lamas*, 331 f. for a Tibetan variant.

with him, about to bring forth Ur, the demon who is to oppose the lords of light, and whom he ultimately overpowers.* The other myth tells of the descent of Mândâ d'Hajê, and his conquest of Ruha and Ur. Then we learn how Ruha and her sons met on Mt. Carmel where Mândâ appeared among them in their own form. They desired to make him their ruler. He agreed, if they would reveal their mysteries, and when they did this, he took his own form and overpowered them.† The first story recalls the descent of Ishtar, but its main incident is based on the Babylonian myth of Marduk's strife with Tiamat, and it is connected with the "international myth" of a divine conqueror of dark and hostile powers.‡ But in neither of these Mandaean myths, as is often alleged,§ is there any descent to free the dead, who do not yet exist.

We pass now to the Christian descent story and shall begin by summarizing the narrative of the second part of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, told by three of those who rose from the dead at the Crucifixion. They were in Hades when a light shone through it, to the joy of all. Then appeared John Baptist as forerunner of the Saviour in Hades announcing that salvation was coming to all. Meanwhile Satan came and bade Hades secure Jesus, who had done him much harm on earth. Hades answers that if Jesus was so powerful and yet dreaded death, He must be mocking Satan and would overpower him. Satan scorns this, but Hades beseeches him not to bring Christ here, for then none of the dead will be left to them. While they are thus debating a loud voice is heard commanding the gates to be lifted up that the King of glory may come in. Hades orders the gates of brass and the bars of iron to be made sure. Again the voice resounds, and the gates are shattered, the dead come out of their prisons, Christ enters and the darkness is dispelled. The conqueror seizes Satan and he is given over bound to Hades, while Adam and all his descendants are taken by Christ to Paradise. All this the three witnesses took part in, and were sent by Michael to proclaim the resurrection.||

* Brandt, *Mandäische Schriften*, Göttingen, 1893, 138 ff.

† Brandt, *Mand. Religion*, Leipzig, 1889, 34, 38, 182; Norberg, *Codex Naseræus*, 1815-6, i, 223.

‡ Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, 379 f.

§ E.g., by Pfeleiderer, *Early Christian Conception of Christ*, 1900, 100.

|| The Greek and Latin versions of *Nicodemus* offer many interesting variations. They are given in Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, Leipzig, 1876, 322 ff.

In this narrative, which influenced all later mediæval belief, we have the deception of Satan, the descent and bursting open of the gates, the binding of Satan (or Death), the release of souls, and the resurrection of the saints. But the preaching in Hades is not mentioned. To each of these, found separately or in connection in other documents, we shall now turn our attention.

(1) *Deception of Satan*.—Origen combined this idea with that of a ransom paid to Satan by God in exchange for souls. The devil did not know of the Incarnation or that he could not retain Christ's soul—the ransom, and thus Christ overcame him.* Ignatius already knew of this deception doctrine and taught that the Virginity of Mary and the Incarnation as well as the death of Christ were kept secret from Satan.† Perhaps he borrowed from the Christian sections of the *Ascension of Isaiah* in which Christ's descent to earth is hidden from the rulers of the heavens, because He takes their forms. The Virgin-birth escapes their knowledge, and thus when the Prince of this world caused Christ's death, he did not know who He was.‡ The central idea of the doctrine is that hidden behind the veil of flesh is a deathless Nature by which, in their hour of triumph, Death and Satan are deceived and conquered. But it is perhaps known to St. Paul who speaks of the hidden mystery of which the princes of this world were ignorant, else they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory (1 Cor. ii, 8). It may be referred to in Heb. ii, 14; Christ took human nature that He might destroy him that had the power of death, *i.e.*, the devil, and deliver his captives.

The same idea is found in various forms among the Gnostics, either in that of the descent of the heavenly æon Christ invisibly or in the form of the heaven-rulers to earth, or in the docetic doctrine of His body which could not really die. The descent here only concerned this earth, not Hades.§ But the Semi-Gnostic Marcion taught a Hades-descent. Christ, having a phantasmal body, could not die, but, as if dead, He went to Hades and deceived him and made him relinquish souls,

* Origen, *In Matt.* t. xii, 28; xiii, 8, 9; xvi, 8; *in Rom.* ii, 13; *Exhort. ad Mart.*, 12; *Hom. 6 in Luc.*

† Ignatius, *ad Ephes.* 19.

‡ *Ascen. Is.* x, 8—xi, 19, ed. Dr. Charles.

§ See below.

not of the righteous, but of those who had disobeyed the God of the Old Testament.*

The deception idea is perhaps derived from the doctrine of Christ's restraining the beams of His glory, and, save as used by the Gnostics, has no true pagan affinities. The deception formulæ in the Mandaean myths may come from Gnosticism, for in the Babylonian Marduk and Ishtar myths it does not occur. Perhaps the Gnostics borrowed the idea from Christianity, and altered it in accordance with current beliefs in transformation, making Christ *πολύμορφος*.† This is suggested by the combination of the Gnostic and Christian forms of the idea in the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

(2) *The bursting of the gates*.—This occurs with great similarity in patristic and apocryphal literature. Tertullian and Hippolytus already refer to it and it is mentioned in the creed of Sirmium, A.D. 359.‡ Most pagan under-worlds—Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, as well as Jewish—had gates and bars. The Babylonian Ishtar threatened to break down the gates of Hades and release the dead, and to this as well as to a supposititious form of the Mandaean myth, this idea as well as the whole descent doctrine has been traced.§ But it is found on Jewish soil, and Christian thought, familiar with the idea of gates of Hades, transferred such Old Testament passages as Psalm 107 to the story of Christ's victorious descent. The idea of release from sorrow and trouble is pictured under that of release from Sheol—"He hath broken the gates of brass and cut the bars of iron in sunder."|| But pagan conceptions may have coloured later forms of this idea, though its origin is not immediately pagan.

(3) *The binding of Satan*.—This idea, common in Apocryphal documents, varies much, and the devil is often identified with Death or Hades, while sometimes a battle is fought between Christ and Hades, the earthquake representing the shock of the conflict.¶ Hippolytus, Irenæus, and Clement connect the

* Iren. i, 27, 3, *cf.* a Melanesian myth of a woman who gives herself a "death-like smell" before going to Hades. Codrington, *The Melanesians*, 227-8.

† *Acts of Thomas*, ch. 48.

‡ Tert., *de Res. Carnis*, 44; Hipp., *Comm. on St. Luke*, 23.

§ Pfeiderer, *op. cit.*, 100.

|| *Cf.* Isaiah xlv, 2; 4 Macc. xvi, 13.

¶ *Narrative of Joseph*, ch. 4; Firm. Maternus, 24; "Hist. of John," Wright, *Apoc. Acts*, ii, 37.

conquest with the Passion, the liberation of the captives being rather freedom from Satan's power on earth than release from Hades.* Origen connects it with the descent alone, and adds that Christ broke asunder the prison-house.† Here once more this idea, ascribed to pagan myths, has its primary sources in Jewish belief and in the New Testament, though it was wrongly connected with the descent. The older and truer tradition traces the victory to the Cross. Before the Crucifixion Christ says, "Now is the Prince of this world judged," "Now shall the Prince of this world be cast out," "the Prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me."‡ Undoubtedly, too, the passages about the binding of the strong man and spoiling his goods§ refer to the victory of the Cross, as Irenaeus believed, though they lent themselves to the idea of an assault on Satan in Hades. To St. Paul, Christ's work was a deliverance from Satan, through the Cross, and Christ spoiled principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the Cross, the triumphal car in which the conqueror exhibited the vanquished powers.||

St. John writes that the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil, but the deliverance is still ideal, though at present effective to the faithful.¶ Hence being ideal, the binding and conquest could be referred to the future, to the beginning of the millennial period, followed by the complete subjection of Satan at its close (Rev. xx, 2, 10). An angel effects this, probably taking the place of the Messiah, child of the woman clothed with the Sun and persecuted by the dragon. This idea is probably borrowed from the Jewish conception of the final binding of Beliar by Messiah,** but it also echoes the "international myth" of the destruction of an evil, chaotic power by the divine Son of a goddess to whom that power is hostile.

* Hippol. in Theod., *Dial.*, 2; Iren., i, 20, 2; iii, 18, 6, 7; iii, 23, 1, 2, 7; v, 21, 1, 3; Clem. Alex., *Protrep.*, 11; *Paed.*, ii, 8.

† *De Princip.*, ii, 6, 2; *In Rom.*, v, 1; vi, 10. The destruction of Hades is also found in Firm. Maternus, *de Errore Prof. Rel.*, 23, 24.

‡ St. John xii, 31; xiv, 30; xvi, 11.

§ St. Matt. xii, 29.

|| Acts xxvi, 18; Col. i, 13; ii, 15.

¶ Cf. 1 St. John v, 18; *Hermas*, Mand., xii, 4, "Fear not the devil, for he has no power over you"; *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 25, "Give me the seal in Christ and temptation shall not touch me."

** *Test. of Twelve Patriarchs*, Levi, xviii, 12; Judah xxxv, 3. Cf. Isaiah xxiv, 22-3; *Assumption of Moses*, c. 10.

This section of the Descent story thus holds two distinct conceptions, one metaphorical, the conquest through the Cross; the other, with its source partially in myth, of the future destruction of Satan. From these, perhaps when apocalyptic ideas were seen to be mistaken, and from hints drawn from the Marduk and Tiamat class of myths, the ideas of the battle in Hades and the conquest of Death and Satan, and the destruction of Hades were drawn. But the foundation of the whole is Scriptural, for such fathers as Origen base the doctrine on the saying about the strong man. Metaphor becomes reality through the power of imagination and the influence of mythic conceptions. Perhaps also it owed something to the Gnostic idea of the conquest of the Archons either in the heavens or on earth (the lower world), the latter described so beautifully in the *Hymn of the Pearl* and in a prayer in the *Acts of Thomas*.*

(4) *The release of souls*.—This popular doctrine occurs in different forms, and there were different opinions regarding those released. Ignatius, followed by many others, thought that only the righteous of the Old Testament were transferred to a better region, and “numbered in the gospel of our common hope.”† This was also Marcion’s opinion, though in an inverse sense. The disobedient of the Old Testament, who had really obeyed a higher God, were rescued, the righteous were left behind.‡ But another tradition, followed by Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, in Apocryphal writings, and elsewhere, included all, pagans as well as righteous Jews, in this rescue.§ Hades was emptied, as in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. As St. Clement puts it, “There took place a universal movement and translation through the economy of the Saviour.” The result of this doctrine was a sharp division as to the future abode of the faithful. Some held that all would now go direct to Paradise, not to Hades, an opinion combated by Irenaeus and by Tertullian, who held that only martyrs went to Paradise at death.||

* In the former a king’s son is sent to Egypt (the world) to obtain a pearl guarded by a dragon (the evil world principle); in the latter the Divine Mother watches from afar “the combats of the noble combatant. Cf. Iren. i, 24, 2, 5.

† *Ad Magnes*, 9; *ad Philad.*, 5.

‡ Iren., i, 27, 3.

§ Hippol. in Theod., *Dial.*, 2; Clem., *Strom.*, vi, 6; Origen, *Comm. in Rom.*, vi, 10; *in Matt.*, xx, 18; *Hom. 2 on 1 Kings*; Euseb., *H. E.*, i, 13, 20.

|| Iren., i, 31, 2; Tert., *de Anima*, 55; *de Res. Carnis*, 43.

(5) *The resurrection of the saints*.—The rising of the dead at the Crucifixion is connected in *Nicodemus* with the rescue of souls from Hades. The same connection is found in other writings, but Clement and Origen allegorize this resurrection. Those who rose were translated and appeared, not in the earthly but in the heavenly Jerusalem.* Thus they avoided the difficulty of the fact that this resurrection takes place before the Descent, a difficulty escaped by others in more or less ingenious ways. The passage is a crude reflection of the rescue idea, and has two "moments," (1) the opening of the graves at Christ's death; (2) the resurrection from them after Christ has risen.

(6) *The preaching in Hades*.—With few exceptions (e.g., *Nicodemus*) the rescue is connected with a preaching in Hades. Hippolytus says, "Christ is become the preacher of the Gospel to the dead," and this is followed by most of the Fathers and by Marcion. But before them the docetic and possibly Gnostic *Gospel of Peter*, of which a fragment was found a few years ago, tells how two angels, their heads reaching to heaven, came out of the tombs with One whose head overpassed heaven. A cross followed them. From heaven a voice called, "Hast Thou preached to them that sleep?" and the answer came from the Cross, "Yea." As in Gnostic writings generally the Cross is a kind of *Doppelgänger* of Christ. The date of this Gospel is A.D. 110–130, but it should be noted that the witness of Irenaeus to the tradition of the preaching goes back to an earlier generation than his own, that of the Presbyter whom he quotes. Where this preaching is connected with a rescue of the righteous dead, it is not referred to the passages in 1 Peter, one of which seems to limit it to the disobedient of Noah's day (iii, 18 f.), the other referring it to all the dead (iv, 6). The passages must have been known, but did not suit a doctrine of preaching to the righteous dead only. Those who, like Clement and Origen, believed in a preaching to all the dead, cite them,† for if the disobedient heard the good news, so also might the heathen. Perhaps from early times two traditions existed—one limiting the preaching to the Old Testament saints, the other extending it to all. St. Peter seems to know the latter, but he says nothing of a release from Hades, and perhaps an early tradition did not include this, while a third

* Iren., ii, 171 (Clark's Ante Nic. Lib.); Origen, *Strom.*, vi, 6; *Comm. on Matt.*, t. xii, 43.

† The second passage seems to be echoed by Hippolytus.

tradition, mainly developed in Apocryphal writings as in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, knew nothing of a preaching, but only of an invasion and spoiling of Hades by Christ. The two traditions meet in Origen.* Perhaps St. Paul, who does not refer to the preaching, knew the tradition of the release, as his words, "when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive" (Eph. iv, 8, 9), followed by a reference to the Descent, seem to suggest.†

We now ask whether the traditions of the preaching and of the release, both found in the New Testament, owe anything to current mythical fancies.

(a) *The Preaching*.—Of this there is no trace in any Greek, Egyptian or Babylonian myth, and it would be somewhat bold to suppose that Buddhist legends of enlightenment in hell, had influenced early Christian thought in Palestine, apart from the fact that these legends may be post-Christian. But the idea of a preaching in Hades may have been current in Judaism. In the *Book of Enoch* (c. 12) Enoch is sent to proclaim God's destroying judgments to the fallen angels, and again there is joy among the antediluvian giants and the men whom they deluded because the name of the Son of Man is revealed to them (c. lx, 5, 25; lxiv; lxix, 26). An apocryphon quoted by Irenaeus and Justin from Jeremiah speaks of the Holy One of Israel remembering His saints and descending to them to preach His salvation and save them.‡ An addition to the Latin text of *Ecclus.* (xxiv, 32) speaks of wisdom penetrating to the under-world, visiting and enlightening all that sleep. And in *Bereschit Rabba* it is said, "When they that are bound, they that are in Gehinnom, saw the light of the Messiah [at its gates], they rejoiced to receive Him, saying, He will lead us forth from this darkness."§ Passages like these point to some current Jewish belief to which the Christian doctrine of the preaching may owe much.

(b) *The rescue of souls*.—To this there are no *immediate* pagan parallels. There are the Greek myths of Orpheus, Herakles,

* Cf. *Contra Celsum*, ii, 43, and *De Princip.*, ii, 5. 3; ii, 6, 2.

† Two other traditions may be noted, one, that as Christ had forerunners on earth, so He also had in Hades, cf. *Nicodemus* and Origen, *Hom. on 1 Kings*, Op., ii, 490 (Moses, the Prophets, St. John Baptist); the other, that the Apostles preached in Hades (*Hermas*, Sim., ix, 16; *Clem., Strom.*, vi, 6). This preaching is followed by an upward movement of those who listen and accept the Gospel.

‡ Irenaeus cites it six times, see e.g., *Adv. Haer.*, iii, 20, 4. Justin, *Dialog.*, 72.

§ Weber, *Jüdische Theologie*, 2, Leipzig, 1897, 368.

etc., the Babylonian of Ishtar, and the similar myths and folk-tales from all parts of the world. To such myths, but especially to that of Orpheus and to the Orphic teaching in general, the doctrines of the Descent and release have been traced.* But in these myths *one* person only is rescued, and the descent is made by a living not by a dead person. In the Buddhist and Hindu descent myths there is greater likeness to the Rescue doctrine, but were they known to the circles of Palestinian Christians at an early date? Perhaps they or the Orphic myths influenced later forms of the Descent tradition, e.g., in *Nicodemus*. In that the episodes of the glorious light in Hades and the cessation of trouble there resemble similar incidents in these Eastern myths. But may they not be natural attempts to amplify imaginatively the current doctrine? The episode of the light is referred to the prophecy, "the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light," and this sufficiently accounts for it. The other would easily be suggested in a story of release from a place of pain. We do not know the exact date of the Eastern stories, and borrowing might have taken place from West by East. And here again Jewish beliefs may quite well have been the foundation for the idea of the release.

Jewish Apocalyptic adherents associated the coming of God's kingdom with the binding and destruction of Beliar, the redemption of the righteous from his captivity, and their entrance to Paradise or to the bliss of God's kingdom, sometimes through the Messiah.† This may have been transferred to Christ's Descent when Apocalyptic views were seen to have been mistaken. In other passages we see how easily the release idea might suggest itself in connection with the Descent. In the Slavonic *Book of Enoch* Adam and the forefathers are to be led to Paradise by angels without incurring judgment, an idea which may have given a hint for that of Christ's taking them there.‡ In *Talkut Shimeoni* the righteous appeal to God for the godless Israelites in hell, and are bidden to go thither, to stand on their ashes and ask grace for them. Then their ashes stand upright and they pass to eternal life.§ It was also a common Jewish belief that the captives would be ultimately released from hell, by Messiah or

* See Gardner, *Exploratio Evangelica*, 272-3.

† *Test. Twelve Patriarchs*, Zeb. ix, 8; Asher vii, 3; Dan. v, 11, 12; Levi xviii, 10, 11.

‡ *Slav. Enoch*, xlii, 5.

§ Weber, 343.

by Abraham and the patriarchs.* Some of these are admittedly late beliefs, but they represent a much older tradition. In many Old Testament passages reference is made to prisoners being released from the pit or the prison-house.† The idea of release, and especially of release from Hades was in the air, and it was easy to transfer it to our Lord's Descent. It was native to Palestinian belief. Moreover, the idea of salvation from the under-world found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity, is a *natural* deduction from man's thoughts of mercy, nor need its place in the Christian scheme be ascribed wholly to outside borrowings.‡

The Gnostic version of the Descent originates from Christian tradition, but has connexion with pagan myths of a deliverer who conquers hostile powers, while possibly through the later Gnostic version some parts of the Christian Descent story may have received that pagan colouring of which we have spoken. The idea of preaching in Hades fitted in with the Gnostic doctrine of enlightenment, but the Descent was from Heaven to the dark earth world. The æon Christ descended to conquer the world rulers, or the Cosmocrator ruling in earth as Satan ruled in Hades,§ and through enlightenment to spoil them of souls imprisoned in bodies. Passing through the spheres of the heavens the Saviour took the forms of their rulers or became invisible, to outwit them or rob them of their power.|| Here we almost certainly find pagan mythic fancies. The Gnostic descent to earth had its parallel in the descent of the æon Christ out of the Pleroma to rescue the fallen Sophia. The Gnostic use of the Descent shows that unlike Christianity, Gnosticism was little interested in the fate of those who died before Christ came.

* Weber, 342-4.

† Zech. ix, 11, 12; Isaiah xlii, 7; xlix, 9; cf. li, 14; lxi, 1.

‡ The idea of the transference of souls from torment to bliss at the prayers of saints on earth was known to the Church. See *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, c. 28; *Passio Perpetuae*, ch. 7; *Test. of Abraham*, ch. 14. In the *Apocalypses of Paul and the Virgin*, they with angels and saints pray for remission of tortures to the lost. Christ descends and announces that on the Lord's Day or Pentecost this will be granted. In Jewish belief there was a respite of torments on the Sabbath and the tears of the righteous cooled the pains of hell (Weber, 343, 347).

§ Iren., i, 5, 4; i, 30, 8.

|| Iren., i, 23, 3 (Simonians); Hippol., v, ii (Naassenes), viii (Docetae); Iren., i, 30, 12 (Ophites); cf. *Ascen. of Isaiah*. In the *Hymn of the Pearl* the youth sent to take the pearl puts on "clothes of Egypt" (i.e., of this world) as a disguise.

An exception must be made in the case of Theodotus. Christ, descending through the spheres, was seen by Abraham and others in the "place of rest." They "rejoiced to see His day," and on His return from the earth He enlightened and transferred them to a higher region, the dwelling of Sophia.*

We may now glance briefly at New Testament passages which suggest the existence of the Descent idea at an early period. Some have already been studied and need not again be referred to. The descent, the conquest, and the release of souls seem to be known to St. Paul. *The descent*: "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth" (Eph. iv, 9); "who shall descend into the abyss [Hades], (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead?" (Rom. x. 8). *The conquest*: in Col. ii, 15, this is referred to the cross, but we hear of "things under the earth" bowing at the name of Jesus (Phil. ii, 10)—a possible reference to the conquest of the powers of Hades. *The release*: This may also be referred to in the words used in connection with the descent, "when He ascended up on high He led captivity captive" (Eph. iv, 8), recalling, as they do, the "spirits in prison" of 1 Peter iii, 19.

The descent is also known to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who tells how Christ was brought up again *from the dead* (xiii, 20), and he possibly knew also of the release. This has been suggested by Prof. Loofs,† who refers to xii, 23, and its mention of the "spirits of just men made perfect" in Heaven. These may be the Old Testament saints taken from Hades to Heaven by Christ, since under the old covenant, the way into the holiest of all was not yet open (ix, 8), though this was effected by Christ (vi, 20).

The conquest is also known to the writer of the Apocalypse, since he puts into the mouth of Christ, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of Hades and of Death" (i, 18).

Finally the passages in St. Peter's first epistle must be noted. We are not here concerned with the numerous methods of

* Clem. Alex., *Excerpt. ex Theod.*, 18. The idea of a supramundane enlightenment occurs here and there in Gnosticism, but not, as here, in the case of the dead. Cf. Hippol., vii, 14. As St. Paul contemplates the submission to Christ of spiritual beings in the heavens as well as under the earth he may have held a doctrine of Christ's enlightening the beings of the upper spheres. Cf. Col. i, 16, 20; Phil., ii, 10; Eph. i, 10. This would be the complement of the preaching to the spirits in prison.

† "Christ's Descent into Hell," *Trans. Third Internat. Congress of Hist. of Religions*, Oxford, 1909, ii, 299.

interpreting these, or with the explanations by which their fairly evident meaning has been attempted to be set aside. In iii, 18 f. we have the doctrines of the descent and the preaching, but a preaching apparently limited to a certain group—to those disobedient in the time of Noah, unless the reference to them is to be considered as typical of a larger number to whom the good news was brought. The verses, with their explanatory or limiting phrases, seem indeed to follow the outlines of some well known doctrinal formula. First is mentioned the Crucifixion, then the Death, then the Descent into Hades, then the Resurrection and the Ascension. Looked at in this way it can hardly be doubted that there is here a clear reference to the Descent idea. Admitting this, we can hardly help admitting that the reference in iv, 6, "For this cause was the Gospel preached to them that are dead," is equally clear, though it sets no limits to the preaching.

These are the passages which may be claimed as showing that the Descent, though possibly already separating into different traditions, was already known to the Apostles. As has been seen, there is no reason to believe that at this early stage borrowing from pagan sources had been resorted to, though we can see that there was a Jewish foundation for the doctrine. Can we trace it, then, to anything in current eschatology or in the teaching of our Lord Himself? The current doctrine of the life after death among the Jews was probably represented by the parable of Dives and Lazarus, *i.e.*, all souls fared to an intermediate state in which were two divisions, for the righteous and for the wicked. This, generally speaking, is the doctrine taught in writings which emanated from the schools of Palestinian, as opposed to Alexandrian Judaism. It is obvious, then, that the earliest disciples must have believed that the soul of Christ between His death and resurrection was in that intermediate state, Sheol, Hades, or Paradise. This they would also gather from words spoken by Christ:—"The Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (St. Matt. xii, 40), and the words spoken to the dying thief, "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise. This is given by St. Luke, and the Petrine teaching preserved by him in Acts ii, 31, regarding Christ's soul not being left in Hades agrees with it. The disciples, interested probably in the fate of those who died before Christ came, would naturally think, and their Jewish traditions would support the thought, that as Christ preached the good news on earth, He would also do so in Hades, since according to his own intention, the Gospel was to be preached to the whole world (St. Mark xiv, 9; xvi, 15), and it was not the will of His Father that

one of these little ones should perish" (St. Matt. xviii, 14).* This was also suggested by the remarkable passages in St. John v, 24, 28: "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God, and they that hear shall live . . . the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His Voice." If these passages were taken as prophesying the Preaching in Hades, they also suggest that this Preaching would bear fruit, as, according to one old tradition, it did. But that the dead should hear and live might easily, with minds accustomed to the traditional teaching of a rescue of sinners from Hades, form itself into a doctrine of the Spoiling of Hades and of the transference of souls from a lower to a higher state, aided perhaps by the miracles of raising from the dead, recounted in the Gospels. But this would necessarily imply a conquest of the powers of Hades, and the passages already considered regarding the spoiling of the strong man gave a *point d'appui* for this belief.

We see, then, how naturally and easily the belief in the Descent and its consequences could arise. On the other hand did the doctrine owe anything to some direct teaching of our Lord's after His resurrection? In trying to answer this question we must bear two facts in mind: (1) our Lord's constant reticence both with regard to the other world and with regard to Himself, and (2) the whole nature of the Descent doctrine with its notions of a local under-world, and preaching to souls imprisoned there, and the rescue of souls from this prison. We are therefore led to suppose that if our Lord spoke of His experiences in Hades He gave no more than a hint, and that this hint was, in all probability, not given in terms of actuality, but much more likely and by all analogy in terms of current belief, as in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. It was in terms of that current belief that the whole doctrine took shape. But whether our Lord spoke simply of a presence with the souls of the dead, or of a Descent, of a preaching, or of a removal of souls to a better state, the last signifying probably no more than an acceptance of the good news, it is impossible to say. What is certain is that whatever our Lord hinted at was soon enlarged, expressed in terms of current beliefs, while the more

* In Tatian's *Diatessaron*, § 26, v. 7, this passage is still more remarkable: "So your Father which is in heaven willeth not that one of these little ones that have strayed should perish, but seeketh for them repentance."

romantic and striking aspects of the doctrine, the conquest and rescue rather than the preaching, became more popular.

We do not now believe in a local and underground place of the dead, and we are less prone to dogmatize upon those regions whither we believe the souls of the dead to pass. Obviously, then, the old doctrine of the Descent, whether in its simpler or in its more complex forms, cannot be taken literally. But yet we cannot afford to regard it, as some would do, as mere "dead wood from the tree of Christian doctrine."* Whether we believe that our Lord Himself gave a hint of the truth in this matter, or whether we believe that the whole doctrine, as it comes down to us, rests on supposition, I think it has still an abiding value, for even that supposition is at least so far consistent with what we know of the love of God. Interpreted in terms of modern belief we can see in this doctrine the fact that in whatever state the disembodied dead are, thither our Lord passed, and that to them He communicated that Gospel of Love which He preached on earth both in actual words and by His death on the cross; that the dead, like the common people, heard Him gladly, and with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rejoiced to see His day. If we believe that beyond the grave it is possible for the soul to obtain forgiveness and to progress in knowledge and enlightenment, it is clear that the presence of our Lord in the Other-world, and His communication with souls there, must have been a great stage of progress in their growth. In some such way as this we may still find abiding value in the old yet beautiful ideas of a Descent to a local Hades, of a preaching, or of a conquest of Satan and a harrowing of Hades. But both the old and the new thoughts afford us ground of confidence that beyond the grave the love of God still exists and still serves to lead souls onwards and ever onwards to Him and to His peace.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN said: We shall all agree that we have listened with great pleasure to this learned and interesting paper. I am not competent to speak on it myself, but the meeting is now open for discussion.

* Gardner, *Exploratio Evangelica* 263.

Archdeacon POTTER, being invited by the CHAIRMAN to speak, said that he wished to congratulate the writer of the paper on the spirit, so manifest all through his paper, of a desire to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

As regards derivation of beliefs, sometimes they seemed to be taken from earlier religions ; but in many cases, notably in the case of Egypt and Babylon, as compared with Judæism and Christianity, the same ideas seem to have arisen spontaneously in the minds of people belonging to different ages and different religions. Man, when he reaches, in the process of evolution, the stage of deep thinking on the problems of life and death, eternity, origin of life, etc., explains these mysteries to himself in terms of his present knowledge. Revelation, which the speaker believed to be a process always going on where beings made in God's image exist, does not convey absolute knowledge on problems like that before us to-day. It concerns itself wholly with matters which directly affect the moral and spiritual life of man. The other questions as to where heaven is, or what the intermediate state is like, or where the soul goes before the judgment, are ones where man's own desire to know, and his interpretation of the few facts at hand lead him to lay down beliefs. Men's minds often run in the same groove, hence the agreement between the doctrines of different religions. With the larger hope expressed in the latter part of the paper, the Archdeacon entirely sympathised. How forgiveness should be limited, in the case of an eternal being, to an infinitesimally short period of his existence, and that by the decree of an all-just and loving God, he could not understand.

Rev. JOHN TUCKWELL, M.R.A.S. : Mr. President, while cordially thanking the writer of the paper for bringing this important subject before us, I must frankly confess that I cannot altogether agree with all the paper contains. In the first place the source of Comparative Religions may apply very reasonably to those religions which have degenerated from that early faith, which if Scripture is to be believed, was known to man in the first ages of human history, but cannot apply to that Faith which is a matter of revelation direct from God.

In the next place I cannot agree with the manner in which the writer appears to waive aside the interpretation of Scripture upon this subject. To me it appears that the truth lies entirely there.

Now the writer seems to have confused the term "Hades" with "Hell," and this I believe is done also in "The Apostles' Creed." Properly understood that Creed does not assert that our Lord went into the place of torment. "Hades" is a comprehensive term including the whole region of the departed like our word "Eternity." When we say that a man has gone into Eternity we do not assert whether he has passed to the multitude of the redeemed or into the region of the lost. Dives and Lazarus both went into Hades, but Dives into Gehenna—the place of torment.

Let me refer for a moment to the crucial passage 1 Pet. iii, 18–21. Here we read that our Lord was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit *by which*"—the Greek has $\epsilon\nu\ \phi$. Here evidently the "Spirit" is differentiated from the Christ who was put to death so that it was by that Spirit that "He went and preached unto the spirits in prison." But when did that preaching take place? During the interval between our Lord's death and resurrection? By no means, for the next verse tells us, "which sometime were disobedient." Now surely they were disobedient when they heard the preaching. But when was that? "When once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." That seems to me to be a logical and grammatical interpretation of the passage. In the first chapter of this same Epistle we are told that it was the Spirit of Christ which centuries before "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow."

With regard to the Gilgamesh Legend and the Deluge referred to by the Archdeacon, these and similar fables may have corrupted the faith of the early Christian Church, but I cannot see that there can be any other connection between the two. Gilgamesh loses his friend Ea-bani or Ea-du, and goes to his great ancestor Ut-napishtim to discover if he can get him restored, and becomes healed of certain diseases. But this like other Babylonian stories such as that of the Creation, the Fall, and Cain and Abel, is probably based upon some original which passing through Babylonian channels became corrupted by Babylonian ignorance and superstition.

The view that people who reject the Gospel on earth will have another opportunity after death I cannot find has any support in Scripture, and appears to me to be a very dangerous doctrine. People are now-a-days continually saying, "I never worry about the Gospel or trouble myself with the Bible. I mean to live the

best way I can and if I find myself wrong when I get into the other world it will all be put right." Surely the Scripture was never intended to encourage such a state of mind as that.

The Rev. J. J. B. COLES said: "We know that it is a golden rule in the interpretation of difficult passages of Holy Scripture such as 1 Pet. iii, 18-21, always to bear in mind the general tenour and teaching of the book or epistle as well as to pay close attention to the immediate context in which the passage is found.

In 1 Pet. i, 2, we read: "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify (τὸ ἐν αὐτοῖς Πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ) when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow."

It is then to the teaching of the "Spirit of Christ" through Noah, to the men of those days, that the Apostle is referring—who are awaiting the judgment, as also are the fallen angels who had helped on the awful corruption which called for the destruction by the Flood.

That the Lord did descend "into the heart of the earth," that He did go to the Paradise, to the place of the faithful departed, to "Abraham's bosom"—He himself tells us when He promised the dying thief—"This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

Now, may I suggest an important inference from what is found in the next passage in the New Testament in which "Paradise" occurs, 2 Cor. xii, 4, "Now that he (St. Paul) was caught up into Paradise?" The Lord when He rose from the dead, vanquished the power of death and the gates of Hades—and led captivity captive. The principalities and powers and Satan who had "the power of death" (κράτος) were led as captives before Him while God's faithful people of old time followed as the rescued ones in His triumphal train. A triumph, the *full* effects of which will be seen when in the glorious resurrection day resurrection bodies complete the victory over Death and Hades—which was then effected. Since that first resurrection morn "to depart and be with Christ" (for St. Paul was caught up to Paradise—so the *place* of Paradise is no longer in the heart of the earth, but where Christ is) is the happy lot of those who fall asleep in Him, and who can say, as Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

This teaching gathered from Holy Scripture alone, is certainly "very far better" than the false doctrine of purgatory and

purgatorial pains which from early days has clouded over the faith of the Church of God.

As to myths and mythological legends, they were perversions of Patriarchal faith by those who changed the truth of God into a lie, and who altered the true teaching of the Zodiacal Constellations in which were figured the victory over Satan by Death and Resurrection of the Seed of the Woman. His risen glories are now the joy of His redeemed and the earnest of still brighter glories to come.

These are days when a true scientific comparative study of "religious origins" reveals the undoubted fact that nearly all the supposed "anticipations" of Christian faith in the religions of Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and India were corruptions of truth revealed to the Patriarchs and especially perversions of those Constellation Figures to which I have referred in my recent paper on Theosophy and about which Mr. E. W. Maunder, of the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, has written in so interesting a manner in his *Astronomy of the Bible*. (Sealy Clark, Publisher.)

A comparative study of religious beliefs has resulted in demonstrating how impregnable is the Rock of Holy Scripture, and how unassailable is the position of one who defends his Christian position by a faithful use of the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

The Rev. DUGALD MACFADYEN said : Anything that I say will be mainly on the valuable paper which has been read to us this evening. I feel that it will be a great pity if we should part without having expressed our appreciation of the value of the paper. Its value to myself was in the happy combination of scientific study and the working of a religious mind on facts scientifically studied. At one of the first of the congresses on comparative religion, somebody got up and asked the question whether the reader of a certain paper was a religious man. The reply came from the Chairman that he could not answer for that, but that he would say he was a "comparatively religious" man. I felt to-day that Canon MacCulloch was giving us the working of a student of religion, and also of a religious man. One felt also that it very greatly confirmed a feeling which has constantly come to my own mind in reading such papers, that men came in the first century as they do now to the religion of Christianity, to the teaching of the word of Christ, with certain ideas already in their minds, and certain great questions waiting to be answered.

One of these questions is undoubtedly, what is the fate of the dead, of our loved ones? They found in the doctrines of a descent into Hades some answer to that pressing question, and to me the especial value of the paper lay in these last paragraphs. The paper is not a negative paper, it is a positive paper. It deals with the use of Scripture in answer to modern needs. Many people who are aware of these ancient stories realise how difficult it is to use that passage in Peter. Canon MacCulloch has borne that difficulty in mind, and he has suggested a use for a passage almost disused. If we believe in the love of God and recognise its omnipotent supremacy, do we suppose that the supremacy of the divine love ends with death? Canon MacCulloch has helped us to read a real and valuable testimony to the love of God into the passage in Peter. He has made it a testimony to the belief of all Christians in that love from the beginning. It secures, not indeed universal restoration, but the universal proclamation of the Gospel of the grace of God. When we come to look at the paper as a whole we shall value it for those last sentences in which this is summed up.

There is a story of a descent into Hades in Scottish literature which was not mentioned. It appears, by the poet Dunbar, in the poem the "Dunes of the Seven Deadly Sins," and I mention it because it was carried through by a person of my own name. It says that he descended into Hades in order to play a coronach on the bagpipes to those who were in distress, and that he suffered the direst penalties from the lord of those parts in consequence.

The Rev. Prebendary FOX said: Expecting that I should have the privilege of being here to-day, I refreshed both memory and spirit last night in reading Bishop Pearson's exposition of the subject now under discussion; and I would suggest that any present, who can, should do the same. His book on the Apostles' Creed is, I fear, less well known, even by the clergy, in these days than it should be. The bishop proves from various passages of Holy Scripture with forceful conclusion the fact of our Lord's descent into Hades, but expresses himself cautiously as to the effects of His presence among, or of His preaching to, "the spirits in prison." Our Lord's object, he believes, was that, as He had shared the conditions of human nature on earth and in the act of dying, so He might be equally partaker with men in the place where the departed await the Resurrection.

The contrast between the dignified restraint of the Biblical statements of this mysterious fact and the turgid exaggerations of the myths which have been so fully set before us to-day, is in itself evidence for differentiating their respective origins.

Chancellor LIAS, who had originally consented to preside, but was unable through ill-health, sent the following communication :— I regret that I was unable to preside, as announced, at the reading of Canon MacCulloch's able and learned paper. I feel that the thanks of the Institute are due to him for having thrown such light on a most interesting subject. The Descent into Hades is quite a common subject for treatment in mediæval art. I remember the impression produced on my mind fifty-five years ago by a fresco of it in the cloisters of Santa Maria Novella at Florence. Many of the mediæval hymns and sermons bear witness to the detailed belief of the Church in that period, as described in Canon MacCulloch's paper.

He refers to the famous "Dated Creed of Sirmium," so genially ridiculed by Athanasius for its pompous words of introduction, as the first Creed in which the Descent into Hades appears. That Creed, as the historian Socrates tells us (*Hist. Eccl.*, II, 37), was drawn up in Latin. The Greek Creed, submitted to the Council by Mark of Arethusa, omits the Descent. The Apostles' Creed, the only one of the three Creeds contained in the Service Books of the Church of England which mentions the Descent, is also of Latin origin. This looks very much as if the belief in the Descent in early times was more prominent and more detailed in the West than in the East.

Canon MacCulloch starts with the part of the Gospel of Nicodemus which contains the legend of the Descent. I confess I can hardly understand why. The Gospel of Nicodemus has come down to us in many forms, in Latin as well as Greek, and seems in its present shape to be the result of a gradual process of evolution (see the Canon's fifth note on p. 213), and to be of considerably later date than the third century, in which some critics imagine it to have appeared. The starting point of our investigations should surely be 1 Pet. iii, 18-21, as confirmed by iv, 6. I am not in sympathy, I must confess, with modern analytic criticism, and I can hardly admit that St. Peter (see p. 218) followed "an early tradition" in these passages. He had ample opportunities

of instruction by his Master in such matters, for we learn that during the great Forty Days between His Resurrection and His Ascension, He spake to His disciples concerning the things of the kingdom of God. Besides, as the Canon has shown, our Lord Himself prophesied His Descent into Hades (or Sheol). We may be sure that the Apostles of Christ were careful to follow His warning against supplementing His teaching by the "traditions of men." St. Peter, it is true, says nothing about a *release* from Hades, and he appears to confine Christ's preaching to the disobedient at the Deluge. Yet it would be strange if no results came of that preaching, and there seems also no reason why the Lord's work in Hades should be confined to the contemporaries of Noah. St. Peter's indefinite language can, I believe, only be explained by the intentional reticence observed by our Lord and His immediate disciples concerning the Intermediate State.

I observe that Canon MacCulloch, in common with most writers on Origen, imagines that this voluminous writer definitely taught that the ransom Christ paid for us was paid to the devil. It is true that Origen says so more than once. But few persons appear to realize that Origen, the pioneer of free speculation on the truths of religion, often dropped suggestions which fuller consideration induced him to retract. Thus he frequently speaks of St. Peter as the Rock. But when he comes to comment on Matt. xvi, 18, he rightly interprets our Lord's words as referring, not to the Apostle, but to his Confession. So in his sixth Homily on St. John (c. 37), (as also elsewhere), he treats the sacrifice of Christ in a very different fashion, saying that there "is more than one way by which Christ accomplishes the work of redemption. Some of these are clear to the mass of mankind, and some not."

Again (p. 214) to "keep secret" the way of salvation (the phrase used by Ignatius, is not, surely, equivalent to "deception"). Irenæus once more (p. 216 and elsewhere) says nothing about Hades, in speaking of Christ's Redemption in the passages cited in the paper, but he does not say that "Satan was vanquished by the keeping of God's Commandment by the Son of God," a statement equivalent to St. Paul's teaching in Rome.

The definite statement of Clement of Alexandria (p. 217) that the Saviour effected an "universal movement and translation" by His visit to Hades, discloses to us a feature in Alexandrian theology

from the third to the fifth century which dominated Hellenic and even Syrian thought. Gregory of Nazianzus (Orat. 33) definitely states that Christians in his day were free to speculate about the nature of the Judgment, and his friend Gregory of Nyssa taught, though perhaps not quite consistently, downright universalism, as did also the celebrated Syrian divine Theodore of Mopsuestia. I cannot think that there is any assertion anywhere (*see* p. 218) that the resurrection of the "saints who slept" must necessarily have *preceded* the Descent of the Saviour to Hades.

We are deeply indebted to the writer for recalling to our minds a fact which is missed by many readers of the Bible, that the Descent into Hades was foretold by our Lord Himself, and implicitly if not explicitly taught by St. Paul the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (pp. 222, 224). And we may be thankful for a protest, though it is by no means too strongly worded, against the idea that Christ's Descent must be attributed to "Pagan sources." Many competent critics are of opinion that other religions borrowed from Christianity in this and other points, and certainly the contrary opinion cannot be said to have been placed beyond all doubt. I may express my great satisfaction that the Institute has of late broadened the basis on which papers are permitted to be read before it, and that the various developments of Christian teaching during past ages find full and free discussion at our meetings. Such a course must tend to a broadening and a steadying of our views, and the ultimate banishing of "erroneous and strange doctrines from our midst."

Communication from Lieut.-Colonel ALVES :—

The earliest recorded prophecy in the Bible concerning our Lord's Descent into Hades appears to be that of David in Psalm xvi, "thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell (Sheol or Hades)."

Though this and "Sheol" is sometimes used as a synonym for "the Grave," we have no warrant for supposing that they are one and the same thing; the latter being for the body, the former for the departed spirit.

But if the earliest prophecy that we possess dates only from some 1,000 years B.C., we are not justified in asserting that those who lived before David and Moses had no revelation on the subject. There are two passages in the New Testament which seem to me to be evidence in favour of there having been some pre-Mosaic Bible

which, or part of which, was extant in writing or tradition, even in the days of the Apostles.

Peter, in his first Epistle, Chap. iii, verses 18 to 20, tells of this descent into, and preaching to the Spirits in Prison, by Our Lord between death and resurrection. There is no ambiguity in, or dispute about, the text. No unbiassed mind could interpret it otherwise. Jude also quotes a prophecy of Enoch. Neither of these writers writes as if he were revealing something new, as Paul does, in 1 Cor. xv, when revealing the resurrection of the dead.

Supposing that some such Bible, oral or written, existed in pre-Mosaic days, those who were scattered abroad after the confusion of tongues at Babel would carry away the oral tradition with them—and speedily corrupt it.

The history of the Early Church, and even of the Church in our own day, shows how pure teaching can become rapidly corrupted. The idea of a coming deliverer is one of these doctrines, and that of the Descent into Hades would appear to be another. The former is outlined in Genesis iii, “It shall bruise thy head”; the latter is not hinted at in that book, or in Job, which is believed to have been written by Moses.

The fact that nations which, from a very early period, lost all right knowledge of God, have preserved a tradition, however corrupted, of the Descent into Hades—is strong evidence in favour of the earlier Patriarchs possessing a fuller Bible than Genesis i to xi. Having served its purpose, Divine Wisdom has given us in its place His complete Revelation as we now have it.

The LECTURER in reply said: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I must express my thanks to you for the kind reception you have given to my paper, and also for the honour which the Council has conferred upon me in asking one who is a stranger, to read a paper here.

Mr. Tuckwell is of opinion that I have confused “Hades” with “Hell.” In reply to that I would point out that the same confusion is found generally in early Christian literature. In the New Testament “Gehenna” means roughly what we now understand by “Hell,” but probably a place of punishment after judgment. “Hades” is the place of all the dead, including (as in the Jewish idea of Sheol) the wicked. “Paradise” may mean a division of Hades, or a region in one of the heavens. It has this latter sense

in the passage where St. Paul refers to his ecstatic experience, and he plainly believed, as a result of his Jewish training, that there were several heavens, in one of which Paradise was situated. In early Christian literature, such a scheme as this is often adhered to, but very frequently Gehenna and Hades are used synonymously, and, as in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Hades is itself a place of punishment apparently for *all* the dead, who are described as coming out of their prisons at the call of Christ. In this document Hades is also the region where Satan dwells. These confusions are inevitable, and one is bound to follow them more or less. But it is fairly certain that many of those who believed in Christ's descent into Hades thought of it as a descent into a state where the wicked were.

Reference has been made to the passages in St. Peter's epistle. One is quite aware that these are still the subject of discussion, and that such interpretations as Mr. Tuckwell and Mr. Coles have mentioned have obtained a wide currency. But if we believe in the descent it is difficult to understand why we should not take the Petrine passages in what is their obvious sense and see in them a reference to it. The idea that the apostle is referring to a preaching not in Hades, but in the days of Noah by the Spirit of Christ, strikes one always as more ingenious than true. As I pointed out in the paper, many of the Fathers do not refer to these passages when speaking of this doctrine, probably because they did not suit their particular theory of the Descent. But, even if they contain no hint of a presence of our Lord with the dead, and His preaching to them between His death and resurrection, there are other passages in the New Testament which clearly do refer to these. This, added to the constant belief of the early Church in the Descent, makes it easier to give up, if necessary, the Petrine texts.

As to the criticism that the "larger hope" which one seems to find in the Descent doctrine is a dangerous teaching, we must remember that it is not claimed that we shall be forced to accept forgiveness in the other world, any more than we are forced to do so here. The human will must still have its power of choosing or rejecting these as here. Yet one may trust that even the most stubborn wills shall at length bow before the love of God, whose punishments work through love, and cry aloud for His mercy which is infinite and unailing. No Christian teacher would ever instruct people "not to worry about the Gospel," because "all will be put

right" in the Other-world, and such a popular but erroneous view is not a fair deduction from the teachings of those who trust the larger hope, or from the sentences at the close of the paper.

I should have liked more criticism directed towards what is the main purpose of the paper, viz., the inquiry regarding the sources of the doctrine—is it original to Christianity or was it entirely borrowed from pagan sources? The Descent doctrine has been much discussed in Germany, and there is hardly a German theologian of any repute who has not written a book or pamphlet on the subject. There is a strong tendency, exemplified in the writings of Professors Bousset and Pfleederser, to regard the doctrine as borrowed from pagan sources, probably by way of the Mandæan religion. But there are two objections to this theory, both of which seem fatal: (1) We know nothing regarding the date of the documents in which the Mandæan myths occur; (2) None of those Mandæan "descent" myths has any reference to a descent to the world of the dead. Men were created after the descent of Mandæan mythical personages to the regions inhabited by demoniac beings.

I should add that I chose the account in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* as introductory to the study of the Christian Descent doctrine, not because it is particularly early in date, but because it gives comprehensively most of the ideas connected with this doctrine which are found as a general rule separately in other writings. Chancellor Lias's criticisms, which have reached me since reading my paper, are valuable, but I do not understand his reference to my citations from Irenæus on p. 216, as I think I am in agreement with him that Irenæus is not referring to a release from Hades in connection with the binding of Satan. Elsewhere, of course, he refers to a preaching in Hades. The passage in Ignatius is, I think, open to the interpretation I have put upon it. Cf. Lightfoot's note in his *Apostolic Fathers* to this passage (Ignatius, *Ep. ad Ephes.*, 19).