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THE APOSTOLIC AGE
ITS LIFE, DOCTRINE, WORSHIP AND POLITY

BY
JAMES VERNON BARTLET, M.A.

SOMETIMES SCHOLAR OF EXETER COLLEGE AND SENIOR UNIVERSITY
GREEK
TESTAMENT PRIZE-MAN; LECTURER ON CHURCH HISTORY
IN MANSFIELD COLLEGE, OXFORD

APOCALYPTIC WRITINGS may be described generally as Tracts for the Times, and specially as Tracts for bad times. They are called forth by pressing needs. Their aim is a most practical one, namely to succour distressed faith by casting light upon the long way when it leads through dark valleys and over arid wastes, and when hope deferred maketh sick the hearts that wait on God. They are also essentially Latter-Day writings. For, though they generally begin with a review of God's past dealings with His people—cast in the form of visions vouchsafed to some Old Testament worthy — they always end with a forecast of the immediate future, viewed from the writer's own age and standpoint, and often of the Final Consummation also. In fact they paint the penultimate acts in the divine drama, " the mystery of God." Thus they are eschatological in substance, while historical in form. The historical survey serves to unfold the philosophy or rationale of God's dealings, His judgments in particular—whether on His own people or upon those used as instruments in His chastening hand; and so the mind is led to perceive by analogy what He is just about to do in the hour of action soon to follow the painful hour of His silence and apparent neglect.

THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN.
(pp. 388-409)
Such are the general laws of apocalyptic, both Jewish and Judaeo-Christian: for we have no early instance of a purely Gentile Christian Apocalypse. And to these laws the one Christian example, the supreme one of its kind, which the Christian consciousness, after many misgivings1 throughout the second and third centuries, decided to include in its sacred Canon, most notably conforms. This it does explicitly in proclaiming blessed "him that readeth and them that hear the words of the prophecy," who observe the practical instructions laid down for conduct during the season contemplated; "for the season is at hand" (i. 3). The plain meaning of this could never be missed save under the influence of an arbitrary theory, which sets the Divine purpose of the book in diametrical opposition (as regards time-reference) to the aim which its human author had in view in writing his visions. But now at least, the analogy of the apocalyptic form, to which the work supposedly conforms just as every other book in the New Testament to the literary type adopted, makes only one view possible to a candid reader. Its lessons were for its first readers, because they needed its explicit consolations and warnings. Its horizon therefore is their horizon. If it has abiding lessons for our age and every age, it is simply as have the other hortatory books of the Bible. It can speak airtly only to the mind that seizes upon the eternal principles of the spiritual world.

1These misgivings reaperead after the Reformtion, when Biblical truth and "the analogy of faith " as a whole began to be considered afresh.

All Apocalyptic is concerned with the strife of the Divine and the anti-divine in the world. These in the apostolic age were embodied in the Messianic Kingdom and its foes, the sway of Christ and forces of resistance which came in time to be summed up in the idea of Anti-Christ. But even in the Apostolic Age the scene changed rapidly. At first the prime foe was unbelieving Judaism, which for Christian thought passed more and more into final apostasy. After 70, however, Judaism was no longer of the first moment. And the rival of its spiritual successor, the New Messianic Israel the world over, was seen to be the world-power of Rome. There is thus no slight change as between 2 Thess. and John’s Apocalypse, a change concerning the place of the Roman State in relation to the people of God. To Paul the Roman system had stood for the Christians, as a system of law and equity restraining the lawless self-will of individuals and interested classes in society, such as the Jews. In the Apocalypse it appears, like one of the older empires in Daniel and later Apocalyptic, as the arch foe, the embodiment of brute force, of might versus right—in a word as the Beast. In this it simply reflects the new experience of the Church since Paul wrote, including his own death and that of Peter and the other victims of Nero’s atrocious brutality. Rome had changed in practice; and this, from the Christian standpoint, justified the new feeling toward the Roman State as such. Yet it was not merely the fact of persecution that gave to the Apocalypse its distinctive passion; it was equally the grounds on which it rested, namely Caesar-worship and the demand it made on Christians in common with all the Roman world. Such idolatry of Rome and her heads, the Emperors defiled after death, if not during life (the Beast's heads have "names of blasphemy"), was specially prevalent in the provinces, and most of all in provincial Asia. Here it was highly organized with a regular priesthood, "the False-Prophet " associated with the Beast (e. g., xvi. 13).I Accordingly everything points to "Asia " as the home of the Apocalypse, addressed as it is to the leading churches of that province. Into the great richness of detail and imagery drawn from various quarters,2 it is here needless to enter.

1 Lu xiii. 11 it seems meant by the Beast from the land, with two horns as of a lamb, perhaps Anti-Christ's caricature of the "two witnesses," cf. xi. 3 ff.
It is simply saturated with the imagery and language of the Old Testament (see the text as printed in Westcott and Hort). But it also implies a knowledge of current Jewish Apocalyptic; and in ch. xii. 1 ff. seems to use imagery derived ultimately from Babylonian astro-mythology (e.g., the conflict of Tiamat and Marduk, prime figures in its creation-myth).

The absorbing motive of the work, which, whatever the forms in which some of the material may have preexisted, presents an artistic unity, is clearly the struggle between the Kingdom of God and of the Lamb, on the one part, and that of the world (actuated by Satanic agencies) on the other. And as the worldly spirit attained its most fascinating form in the Roman Empire (the Beast), with its centre in the city of the Seven Hills (the Harlot beguiling the potencies of earth into spiritual fornication or infidelity to God), it is Rome in its several aspects of rivalry to God that fills the midst of the apocalyptic picture.

The key to the situation, then, lies in chapters xiii., xvii. The Beast from the sea (taken over from Daniel), with its compliment of ten horns (centres of power) and its seven heads on which were "names of blasphemy," was felt to be realized in the Roman Empire.1 Its irresistible might seemed but the focussed energy of the Satanic Power always at work in the world in opposition to God's sway. And not long before John wrote, it had given a striking proof of vitality. The Julian line of Caesars, five in number, had come to a violent end in the death of Nero (A. D. 68): but the wound which had gaped during a period of civil wars, was now healed in the person of Vespasian, supported by his son Titus. Yet it could not last. Nero's rule was clearly the prelude of the complete manifestation of Anti-Christ. There was but one more head wanting to complete the mystic seven, the perfect tale of the world's rivalry of God and His heavenly agencies (cf. the Seven Spirits of God, Seven Angels, etc.). It could not be long in appearing, nor could it long endure before the return to life of Nero (the eighth who was also " one of the seven ") should bring on the final catastrophe. His previous enormities were but a foretaste. In particular, he was to take his revenge in characteristic fashion on Rome whence he had been forced to flee in humiliation, and so become the scourge of God on the arch-foe. John expects that Nero, who even in his " return " was to ape the Christ, would be animated with more than his former measure of Satanic energies1 and, gathering about him the provincial governors (the " ten heads " of the beast), would turn upon the city of Rome and consume her with fire (as once before in part). Then would be the Messianic intervention; the riding forth of Messiah as " King of Kings and Lord of Lords," to take possession of His Kingdom; the final stand of the powers of evil and their overthrow; the casting of the Beast (Nero) and the False-Prophet2 into the " lake of fire," and therewith the loss of all real power to the Ancient Serpent, Satan; and the Millennial reign

1 The Ascension of Isaiah had imagined him developing into this without first dying.

Suggested perhaps by the Asiarch or chief priest of the Imperial cult in " Asia."

of Christ and His late martyrs, the heritors of the first resurrection. Yet in the borders of the inhabited earth there are unexhausted elements of revolt (cf. the active reign of 1 Cor. xv. 25 ff.). Satan is let loose once more, and leads the savage hordes of Gog and Magog (names borrowed from Ezek. xxxviii. f.) against " the camp of the Saints and the Beloved City." But God's fire devours them, and the devil, the ultimate root of error, is cast into the hopeless doom of the Lake of Fire. There ensues the second or general resurrection, and the Judgment of the dead according to their deeds, those not found in the Lamb's Book of Life being consigned to the " second death " of the " lake of fire."
Then at last comes the great transformation and renovation of all things, "the new heaven and the new earth," all evil and instability (of which the sea was the type) being forever done away. The Divine and heavenly penetrates and transfigures the earthly. The dream of prophets and psalmists is fulfilled. The outer and visible are in perfect accord with the inner and spiritual. The centre of the regenerate earth shall be the New Jerusalem, heavenly in origin and nature, the home of the redeemed, the sphere of God's manifested presence. Once more at the close, as at the opening of the book, the practical aim of the "prophecy" as a message for the writer's age comes out unmistakably (xxi. 10 ff.). Warnings and invitations are given; and the music dies away on its keynote: "He that testifieth these things saith, 'Yea, I come quickly.' 'Amen: come, Lord Jesus.'"

So far we have set forth the message of the Apocalypse as it was meant to influence Christian conduct at the point where the tension of faith was most sorely felt. The constant "aside," or parentheses pointing the moral of the drama of the near future, as it unfolds its pictures of warning and of glorious compensation, show the seer's deep solicitude that what he had seen should brace his brethren to the heroism of faith requisite to stand the dreadful strain which he expected to increase every day. For during an indefinite interval—"time, times, and half a time"—"the patience of the Saints" was to be tried, ere the Parousia stilled the raging of the Beast and brought the great Rest of the Messianic Reign. But his work also affords indirect but priceless evidence as to the religious situation within the churches best known to him. And to this attention must now be given.

While the prime theme of the book is the Church and its fortunes, the term "the Church" never occurs in its pages. This is not accidental: it arises from the author's mode of thought, and would have been impossible in St. Paul, if writing on such a subject. John thinks of the "churches" that are in Asia, that is the local communities of the Saints, over against the synagogues of those to whom he denies the high title of Jews, since they have proved unworthy of their ideal calling in rejecting the Christ of God. But in their collective being he thinks of Christians under one or other of the Old Testament titles for the Covenant People—saints, servants of God, those who fear God—or as "the Bride." This also is an Old Testament form of thought. The prophets had spoken of Israel as married to Jehovah, so that infidelity to His Covenant was described in terms of the conjugal relation. So John sees the New Jerusalem, the ideal community of the Saints, "descending out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Is. lxvi. 10; cf. lii. 1). It is true that the Bridegroom, in keeping with the mediatorial character of the Messianic Kingdom, is now described as the Lamb (xix. 7, xxi. 9; cf. xxii. 17). Yet the essential Old Testament idea abides, continuous with the old notion of a God as married to a chosen Land and People. This explains the fact that there seems to be an outer circle of men, less closely related to God than the inhabitants of the Beloved City. The whole outlook is of deep significance as showing that our seer conceives the Gospel and its People as a sublimated Judaism, from which indeed all practical exclusiveness, because all nationalism, has departed through the substitution of spiritual for natural or fleshly relationship as the essence of the Divine Covenant. 1 Yet the old forms

1 In this connection allusion may be made to the true sense of xi. 1 ff., a passage often thought to refer to the Temple of Jerusalem shortly before 70 A.D. The whole genius of the book fixes the scene as one in the spiritual world. The "Temple of God" means the spiritual reality of the earthly counterpart. This latter is now a thing of the past, being treated as "the outer court" and given over to the Gentiles, along with the Holy City, during the season of final pagan triumph. On the other hand "the Temple of God," measured as being under God's protection, signifies the Christian Church (cf. iii. 12; so Heb. xii. 22 ff.; Barn, xvi. 1, 8), and its "altar" the sacrificial function of the priestly Kingdom (i. 6) of Saints, who offer as incense their prayers (v. 9).

The True Judaism.

remain through and through, as types indicating the route by which the advance has taken place in the writer's experience and thought. Thus it is a complete mistake, due to a literalism alien to the work's transcendent poetic form, to see any preference for Jews as such, as contrasted with the Covenant piety which, for long peculiar to Israel as a People, has now received final expression in "the testimony of Jesus." It is on
acceptance or rejection of this that all turns. Thus all who, being Jews by birth and tradition, refuse Jesus—who as Messiah incarnated the Covenant religion—thereby declare themselves no true Jews in spirit, but spurious Jews and as such as much under Satan's sway as the unbelieving nations (iii. 9, xi. 8). Conversely those Gentiles who, by the spiritual adhesion of trust and obedience, claim affinity with Jesus, fall within the Covenant People, continuous with the holy core of Israel and whence Messiah was born through the special agency of God (xii. 1 ff.). They and the believing part of the Jewish Diaspora seem to be " the rest of the seed " of the " Woman arrayed with the sun," who herself represents true Israel within the limits of the Holy Land, in whose bosom Messiah was nurtured. Thus the 144,000, the ideal complement of those " called and chosen and faithful"

Thus "the worshippers" in this temple are the same as the 144,000, as already numbered (vii. 4) and again mentioned as standing with the Lamb on the spiritual "Mount /ion," in xiv. 1 ff. They are in fact the martyr Church, represented again figuratively as God's "two witnesses" (xi. 3 ff.). " The great city " where these lie slain is not " the Holy City " of v. 2, but the world—where their Lord suffered (cf. 1 Cor. ii. 8): so in v. 13.

ones" who form the first-fruits of redeemed humanity and share in the first stage of the Messianic Kingdom—the millennium preceding the final overthrow of the powers of evil —this company is gathered " out of every people " and by the Lamb's sacrificial ransom made "unto God a Kingdom and priests," destined to " reign upon the earth."! Thus ' the Judaism of our author is the Judaism merely in form which we also see in the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews,' 1 Peter, and the Gospel of Matthew. The light cast by the Apocalypse on the state of Christianity, at least in the province of Asia, some time during the second generation of Christians, is most vivid and informing. Beside clear echoes of the deep impression produced by the Neronian martyrdoms, including those of Paul and Peter (xvii. 6, xviii. 20), there are hints of the conditions nearer in time and place. Thus in Smyrna and Philadelphia the Jews were the chief instigators of hostility and persecution; while at Pergamum other and more special causes were operative. In this city stood the great temple of "Esclapius (Zeus Asklepios), the Healer or Saviour, whose symbol was the Serpent. It is most natural then to see in the phrase " the throne of Satan " a special reference to this cult, which as rival or caricature to that of the true Saviour of mankind might well seem

it. 9, vii. 3-9, xiv. 1-5. These passages, as Beyschlag shows convincingly (New Testament Theology, ii. 389 f.), refer to the same class, "the first-fruits to God and the Lamb." sealed unto the millennial triumph for fidelity in the days of tribulation between the persecution of Messiah and His Parousia.

more than ordinarily Satanic.1 This it was which caused an exceptional outbreak " in the days of Antipas," a Christian whose bold protest made him a victim to popular fury. His death was followed by lesser persecutions of his co-religionists, who had stood firm and " held fast to the Name."

But John's own enforced exile from Ephesus, a great centre of influence, to the solitary little isle of Patmos, seems to be the first case in those parts of a State policy of interference, with the object of checking the spread of the new religion regarded as inimical to the spirit of the Roman Empire, because obstinately indifferent to its religious claims. To punish the ringleader with exile would be the first stage of a repressive policy, and is not the token of settled severity. This looks, too, like the policy of a judicial ruler like Vespasion, rather than of a Nero or Domitian. Yet in it, and perhaps also in some later and more summary penalties on the humbler adherents in various cities, John sees the beginning of that overt hostility of the world-power whose inherent enmity in principle he had long felt. The world as such lay to his eye in the thraldom of the wicked one: and Apocalyptic literature and tradition had taught him to expect, ere Messiah's ardently looked-for Return, a sharp outburst of the inherent Satanism of the world. Hence he

1 This view, as based on the most distinctive feature of the place, seems better than that which sees in " the throne of Satan " the chief centre of Czcsar-worship, a thing which cannot be proved of Pergamum, rather than Ephesus for instance (see Zahn( Einleitung, ii. 600).
warned the Church at Smyrna not to fear what of suffering lay in the near future, the imprisonment with which the Devil was already threatening them unto their testing for a brief season (ii. 10). Hitherto Christian "endurance" has been tried chiefly by the machinations of blaspheming Judaism, "the synagogue of Satan"; but now it will feel the arm of the civil power (ii. 2, 9, iii. 9 f.). The State's repressive measures had not yet actually got beyond imprisonment for the Christian profession (ii. 10); but "fidelity even unto death" might soon be required. Yet the strain, through which faith should gain the Crown of Life, was not to be prolonged. From the season of yet greater testing, coming to try all dwellers upon earth, faithful Christians in Philadelphia are promised exemption; that is, they were to be rapt to the side of their returning Lord, to share in His judicial reign over the peoples (iii. 10 f., ii. 27 f.), and to be "pillars" in the spiritual temple of God, sharers in "the New Jerusalem that descendeth out of heaven from God." It is against foregoing this high privilege through unwatchfulness, as of the Foolish Virgins—for the Lord would come unlooked-for as a thief—that certain in Sardes are admonished. The dangers making for such unreadiness of soul were twofold, worldliness of heart and idolatry or unchastity in walk. To the former was due the cooling of "the first love," in a slight degree visible at Ephesus (ii. 4), and to a serious degree in Laodicea (iii. 15-19). The latter were the besetting sins at Pergamum and Thyatira. They were in principle the same as those combated by Jude and again in our 2 Peter. Here too there were light thoughts of idolatrous associations and of the moral habits which went hand in hand therewith. It is not quite clear, indeed, whether "fornication" is in all cases to be taken literally, rather than in the sense of spiritual infidelity to the sole allegiance to God, as often in the Old Testament (see ii. 20 as compared with ii. 14). But certainly it is so sometimes, as it was in Jude. In the special instance of the teaching of the "prophetess" called Jezebel, perhaps in a mystical sense, a theory of a "gnostic" nature underlay the conduct in question. She taught, that is, the indifference of outward action where the mind saw through "the deep things of Satan"—to use their phrase—and could regard the hold which evil seemed to get on the person through the body as mere deception, as long as the spirit asserted its "redemption" through Christ and its inalienable "freedom." Thus participation in an idol feast and its attendant usages simply did not matter: indeed, it showed superior enlightenment to feel free to join therein and not fear the usurping and now dethroned powers of ill. Whether this was precisely the same as the Nicolaitanism named as existing at Pergamum, and as having vainly tried to get a footing at Ephesus, we cannot be sure. To the latter place it had come from outside in the persons of false "apostles" (cf. Acts xx. 29), claiming the sanction of a certain Nicolaus, perhaps "the proselyte of Antioch" of Acts vi. 5, 1 who may with the lapse of years have

1 This is definitely alleged in the tradition followed by Clement of Alexandria.

turned into a "wolf" (cf. Did. xvi. 3). For the seductions of a city like Antioch, full of religious sensuality, were very subtle. Paul probably realized the existence of this tendency; and now it had reached Ephesus, along the main route from Antioch westwards. And once more an Apostolic voice makes itself heard in passionate protest against religion divorced from pure morals, light apart from life, or any freedom that was not the liberty of loving obedience to God in the footsteps of Jesus the faithful Witness, the holder of the "two-edged sword" that pierced through all tissues of lies, whose eyes were as a flame of fire to mark iniquity in the guise of holiness. Hence the recurring stress upon Christ-like "works," those "fruits" which the Master had made the one final test of true religion.

These messages to the churches may perhaps be taken to indicate the sort of prophetic exhortation which filled a prominent place in the worship of the early Christians, just as the hymns which occur in the later visions seem to echo their wonted praises, and, as such, have an extra interest for us. The phraseology is full of allusiveness, the full point of which largely escapes the modern reader. The figurative color borrowed from the Old Testament is obvious, both in the rewards promised to the "overcomers" and in the titles given to the Risen Christ, "the faithful and true Witness," once known on earth and through whose lips the messages now come from God by the Spirit (i. 18, ii. 7, iii. 14). But there is also allusion to the sacred
terminology of the pagan mysteries, in a passage like that in which "the manna, the hidden manna," and "the white (symbolic) stone," inscribed with the mystic "new name," are promised to the victor. Christians felt that theirs was indeed the hidden life, into which they had been initiated in a deeper sense than that afforded by their old pagan experience; that the illumination now enjoyed far surpassed that which the "mysteries" professed to give: and that the new sacred food nourished their souls in very deed. These realities, then, were their reward for foregoing the shadows of the old religious cults. Yet of such priceless and eternal privileges they had need to be oft reminded. For it was in "the stress and endurance in Jesus," as well as in His kingdom, that they all were partakers (i. 9). "If we endure with Him, we shall also reign with Him," was a chant needing often to be on lip and in heart. They shared His death ere they shared His life (2 Tim. ii. 11, 12). Yet He had passed through death unscathed, and now held the keys of death and Hades (i. 18, ii. 8): and His love, if kept warm and ever fresh, could vanquish all fear and the weariness of well-doing in the face of an alien world.

It is most important to distinguish in the Revelation things already past, or then in progress, and what was only imminent to the seer's vision. The surest evidence for the former are the Messages to the Churches in chapters ii.-iii.; and here there is, as yet, no sign of the death penalty for refusing Caesar-worship. On the other hand John recognizes the last hour to have begun, which, according to the tradition as to the Last Things, was to go from one degree of darkness to another. But these intenser stages of trial are only anticipated in vision forms, borrowed largely from Daniel. All past tenses used in speaking of the blood of saints are relative to a point yet future, in so far as they do not refer to the Neronian massacre or to the general bloodguiltiness of the world-power in its final form (Rome) for the deeds of the same power in its prior forms (e. g., Antiochus Epiphanes, as regards the Maccabean martyrs, etc.). Hence internal grounds for a date late in Domitian's reign disappear, once the prophetic standpoint is grasped aright. To John's eye the moment reached is that depicted in xii. 12, where the devil having been vanquished in principle, in the spiritual realm, begins to manifest his wrath in the visible sphere of human society, "knowing that his time is short." He tries to involve the Palestinian Church in the ruin of the Jewish state, and then turns to the spiritual Israel in the empire. So that instead of c. 95 A. D., some date like 75-80 becomes more likely. And this accords well with the internal state of the 1Irenasns' tradition that the Apoc. was seen under Domitian is easily explained. It was clear that Nero'a death is presupposed: and as severe persecution did not begin again till Domitian, it was assumed to fall in his day.

Even if Zahn be right, as he seems to be (see ii. 1 a, and the probable play on the proper name Zotikos, "Lively," in iii. 1 b), in taking the "angel" in each church to be a lending human personage, this still holds good. For the position of this "church-deputy," as we may perhaps render the peculiar Greek (r|a af(IIH<1 Tui iv 'Eiapw iM|Li/a"?a?), is purely representative, like that of the Shelach Tshbb& in the Jewish synagogue, f. e., a person deputed by the congregation, acting through its elders, to perform a certain function (apparently ad hoc) in public worship, such as Date of the Apocalypse.

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seven churches, particularly the Nicolaitanism akin to the errors combated in the Epistle of Jude. It also brings the idea of the "seven kings" of Rome (xvii. 9 ff.) into line with the similar passage in Barn, iv., so showing that the suggestions of the times were the same to minds filled with the Apocalyptic system springing from Daniel. We saw reason to place "Barnabas" under Vespasian, and probably not long after 70 A. D. Nor need we put Revelation many years later. For it is only after the reign under which John is living, and after the brief one expected for his successor, that the brutal tendency in the empire—resting at bottom on force and not on the Spirit—is to break forth in "the beast which was and is not," i. e., in renewed and consummated Nero-nian ferocity. Hence John is living under Vespasian's relatively beneficent rule, which he expects Titus to continue for a time. Yet even now the stress is beginning.

The book of Revelation was sent as an identical "open letter" to seven churches in the province of Asia with which the writer had special relations. Its aim was to inspire to steadfastness of godly living under the enhanced trials which he sees to overhang them
and the Brotherhood in the world, in the next few years. Beyond this horizon it has no more sig-

reading or prayer. Thus the function of "Reader" in Rev. i. 3 (cf. 1 Tim. iv. 13) is probably the particular one associated with the "angel," or congregational deputy, in John's mind when addressing his writing to each to lay before the church. Hence the church ia really addressed, as is clear from the collective force of the "Thou" in several contexts.

nificance than any other book of the New Testament: for beyond the brief last distress lay to the writer's eye only the Lord's return and the supernatural era then to dawn, and beyond that the Final Judgment and eternity. Its spiritual principles abide under all the conditions of that future which presented itself to him foreshortened by the traditional forms of Apocalyptic thought: but its actual form is full of the limitations of time, place, and pre-Christian tradition as to the last crisis in human history.

Its cryptic form is even partly of the nature of defensive color, since this " epic of Christian hope " would be viewed by the authorities as high treason against the State. Allowing for all this, it was clearly meant to be understood throughout by the hearers as it came from the lips of the reader in Christian assemblies, who perhaps acted also as an interpreter of its traditional imagery. Its contents were practical in the main; things -to be observed with a view to the near fulfilment of its burden (i. 3, xxii. 10 ἔλε) In this it is like all other apocalyptic known to us. Indeed hardly any book in the New Testament is so relative to the age that saw its birth, and less looks towards or is adapted to the distant future. This appears not only in its obscurity to the plain Christian in later times, owing to its temporary allusions and its symbolism, but also in the fact that the Church early felt doubt as to its utility. Its value had once been great, as an aid to faith in a very dark hour. But once the Church began to naturalize itself in the Empire and do its work as leaven, it became a positive danger as fostering a spirit of blind hatred to the Roman State in the souls of would-be Christian martyrs. So again in the Middle Ages it led, especially as the year 1000 drew nigh, to much wild theorizing, on the assumption that it was a book of literal oracles about times and seasons centuries after it appeared as light upon "things shortly to come to pass." And so, in spite of the courage which it has lent to reformers like Savonarola, its effect upon the Church has been of doubtful value. For it has never been understood since its own day, until our own. Now we are recovering the key to it, by the historic method of study : and it may become a means of good and nothing but good. But this implies that no specific references to events yet future must be imagined. The Christian must study it for analogies, not for " fulfilments."

Was it ever fulfilled? Not as expected. It suffered from the mistaken perspective which then marred all forecasts as to the "Parousia." Traditional modes of thought were but old wine-skins, wherein to pour the new wine of Christ's Gospel. They were, it is true, all that was then available. That they burst under the pressure of the larger and more expansive truths need not surprise us. It was so with other features in the Messianic expectation when Jesus came. And all were equally fashioned on the older precedents under which the progressive revelation had been given. In every case the moral is the same : the new wine must fashion skins to its own capacity—new truths of the spirit finding fresh mental vehicles—under the gradual teaching of Providence. For God's revelation of His " ways and thoughts " in His New Ecclesia is as real as that in the history of the Old. Nor need this compromise in our eyes the truths of the Spirit that break through the first forms in which the human recipients strove to body them forth in imagination. For it was not so with those inspired Apostles, whom bitter experience taught their own human limitations. Some indeed, who had little of the new life, stumbled and mocked. But the Apostles and those akin to them humbly accepted the lessons of God's dealings with His own Kingdom. Of such docility the writer of the Apocalypse is himself a notable example. When we compare his later writings,1 we see a growing disentanglement of the abiding "eternal life " from the changeful forms of its earthly history. In the First Epistle of John Anti-Christ is a spirit, active not so much in the State as in false doctrine: while in the Johannine Gospel there is strictly speaking no eschatology. There the vivid present experience of the Lord's return in the Spirit is everything to believers (xvi. 17) : the rest is left to the Father and His good time.

1 This progress in eschatology, and the absence of reference to any Christological error, are the final disproof of the view that the Apoc. falls as late as 90-95. Similarly in
its glowing passion against sinners we see the remains of the Boanerges temper, and in fact of Old Testament religion, the disciple not yet being "perfected" and so "as his Master" in the yearning of Divine Pity. Yet John's idea of religion, "the eternal Gospel" (xiv. 6) implicit in true Judaism and explicit in "the witness of Jesus," is on its way to that message of "the eternal" which meets us in the First Epistle and the Gospel. If we place the Apocalypse at c. 75 A.D., and these other some ten or fifteen years later, we satisfy all the facts.

What do YOU think?

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