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THE FALSE PROPHET OF THE APOCALYPSE.

THE history of the Apocalypse as a canonical book is very singular. There is no book which has been tortured into meanings so widely and irreconcilably diverse; no book which has been so extravagantly exalted above all the rest of Scripture; no book which has, on the other hand, been so absolutely discredited, and so sweepingly condemned. Even in the most advanced schools of modern criticism it has given rise to conflicting theories. Some eagerly claim it as the work of St. John, in order that by its help they may prove that the Gospel is a forgery; others, who still hold to the Johannine authorship of the Gospel, declare it to be impossible that the Apocalypse could have proceeded from the same pen. Others, again, have not only satisfied themselves that neither the Gospel nor the Apocalypse were written by the Apostle, but now confidently announce that all the legends and traditions of his later years are pure invention: that Irenæus, in recounting his reminiscences of Polycarp, confuses John the Beloved Disciple with John the Presbyter; that if the Apostle did not suffer a comparatively early martyrdom at the hands of the Jews—as is asserted in a recently discovered passage of Georgius Hamartolos, a writer of the ninth century, on the supposed authority of Papias—at any rate Ephesus and Patmos knew him not, and he never so much as set foot in Proconsular Asia at all.

This is not the place to examine theories which do but illustrate the extravagant credulity of a criticism which builds its entire system upon the most fantastic bases of conjecture, while it ignores the plainest evidence of fact.

But it will, I think, be admitted that a sane and historical explanation of this beautiful and marvellous Vision is essential to its secure establishment in the veneration of all Christians. Many readers now neglect it from the perplexity induced by endless comments, of which ninety-nine out of a hundred must be even grotesquely false. Others turn away from a book which has been converted into an arsenal of weapons for the fierce warfare of Christians against Christians. Others, again, are offended to see the science of exegesis dragged through the mire, and predictions made on its authority to the anxious and timid ignorance of incompetent enquiry, but laughed to scorn by the logic of events. In my last paper I ventured to surmise that the day was now rapidly approaching when the symbolic chapters of the Apocalypse would be thoroughly understood, and it would be universally acknowledged to be—what it professes to be—a sketch of contemporary history, and of the anticipations to which the sixth decade of the First Century gave rise. We shall then see in it the tremendous counter-manifesto of a Christian seer against the bloodstained triumph of Imperial heathendom; a pæan and a prophecy over the ashes of the martyrs; the “thundering reverberation of a mighty spirit” struck by the fierce plectrum of the Neronian persecution, and answering in stormy music which, like many of David’s Psalms, dies away into the language of rapturous hope.

But before I enter on the *special* difficulty which, in the following paper, I propose to consider, if not to elucidate, it is desirable on many grounds that we should realize the urgent necessity which there is for a due appreciation and sane exegesis of this book. Without here entering into the question of its authenticity, I will content myself with expressing my own unshaken conviction that it is, as it professes to be, the work of John, and that the John who wrote it was not the “nebulous presbyter,” but the

bosom Apostle, the son of Zebedee, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

But, if such be the case, it may well be thought surprising that so persistently, and from such early days, and in spite of the divine beauty of many of its visions and the infinite preciousness of its promises and consolations, the book should yet have been spoken of by some Christians with hesitating acceptance, by others with positive aversion, and by a few with something even approaching to contempt.

The first note of dislike comes from the Alagi, the heretics who denied St. John's doctrine of the Logos. "What have we to do," they asked "with a book which talks about seven trumpets and seven angels, and a Church in Thyatira when there is no Church there?" Strangely enough, they attributed the Apocalypse to Cerinthus, the carnally minded heretic who, above all others, was most severely condemned by St. John,¹ and against whom, according to tradition, his most serious teaching was directed. This view, however, extraordinary as it is, was adopted by the Presbyter Gaius, (A.D. 280). Writing against the Montanists, he speaks of the "Revelations," which Cerinthus pretended to have been written by a great Apostle, and in which he falsely introduced narrations of prodigies,² as if they were shewn him by angels, saying that the kingdom of Christ after the Resurrection was an earthly kingdom, and implying a reign of mere sensuous felicity for a thousand years in Jerusalem. Thus early, then, we trace a feeling of dislike to the Apocalypse because of its chiliasm and its imagery. Both of these stumbling blocks would have been removed if only it had been borne steadily in mind that the laws of Apocalyptic literature were perfectly well understood, and that they necessitated the adoption of symbols which,

¹ φιλοσώματος ὢν καὶ πανὸν σαρκικός. Dion. Alex. ap Euseb., *H.E.*, vii. 25.

² τερατολογίας...ψευδόμενος ἐπεισάγει, Euseb., *H.E.*, iii. 28. It has been suggested as possible that Gaius is thinking of some forged Apocalypses.

whether crude or not, belonged essentially to a particular cycle of Jewish literature. Still these peculiarities created a prejudice sufficiently strong to exclude the book from public reading in the Churches, and to cast on its authority a shade of discredit. St. Cyril of Jerusalem seems to put it on a lower level than other canonical books. It is not found in the Peshito version. It is omitted in the Canon of the Council of Laodicea in the fourth century. Eusebius seems uncertain about it, and did not include it in the copies of the Bible which he prepared by order of Constantine for the Churches of Constantinople, in A.D. 332. Gregory of Nazianzus mentions the doubts as to its authenticity. Theodore of Mopsuestia never quotes it. Theodoret alludes to it very sparingly. St. Chrysostom does not use it. Nicephorus even in the ninth century, omits it from his canon. In the Greek Church it was read, but any attempt to comment upon it in the pulpit was regarded with suspicion and dislike. It is altogether omitted in more than one ancient MS. (*e.g.*, A.C.) and down to the age of the Reformation the commentaries upon it are few in number.¹ The earliest is by Victorinus of Pettau, A.D. 270.

Side by side with dogmatic objections to the Apocalypse from the abuse to which it was subjected by chiliasts and others, a critical assault upon it was made as early as the third century by the eminent and learned Dionysius of Alexandria. He cannot believe that the John who wrote it was the Apostle, the son of Zebedee. In a very remarkable specimen of ancient criticism he says that its character, its language, and its general construction disincline him to

¹ On the other hand, Justin Martyr (*Dial. c. Tryph.*) accepts its authenticity, and, according to Eusebius, Melito of Sardis wrote on it. Two Cappadocian Bishops, Andreas and Arethas, in the fifth century, say that Papias accepted it, though on this point Eusebius is (perhaps purposely) silent. Irenæus (*Hær.*, iv. 20, § 11), the Churches of Lyons and Vienna, Tertullian (*c. Marc.*, iii. 16), and Ephraem Syrus, also accept it, and it is mentioned in the Muratorian Canon.

accept the Apostolic authorship. It was the habit of St. John to hide his individuality; here he obtrudes it. The Apocalypse does not deal in the same fundamental and abstract conceptions as St. John's other writings. There is no reference to it in those writings, and it has not so much as a syllable in common with them.¹ The style of the Gospel and Epistles is admirable, shewing the spiritual gifts alike of knowledge and of expression, but the Apocalypse contains barbarisms and even positive solecisms.² He therefore thinks that it was written by some other John. He confesses his inability to understand it, but attributes this inability to the depth and height of the book, which are beyond his reach.³

Commentaries on the Apocalypse are rare among the Fathers, but the general method of interpretation which they indicate is partly historical and partly allegoric. It was during the Middle Ages that the bad system began of making the Apocalypse refer to contemporary sects and heresies, by trying to torture it into an enigmatic prophecy of seven epochs of church history. Innocent III. regarded the Saracens as Antichrist, and Mohammed as the false prophet. At a later period Papal Rome was identified with the Scarlet Woman, and the Pope with Antichrist, while at the Reformation the Roman Catholics retorted by identifying Luther with the Beast.⁴ Such methods of interpretation involved chronological conjectures which, in every instance, time has rendered futile. It was the sense of discredit which thus began gradually to attach to the book

¹ This assertion of the learned Patriarch is quite untenable.

² Among the most startling (which it is vain to explain away as Winer tries to do) are i. 16, ii. 14, iii. 12, vi. 9, 10, vii. 9, xii. 5, xiv. 19, xvii. 4, xxi. 21.

³ *Ap. Euseb., H. E., v. 11, § 24.* He professes to follow earlier authorities who, he says, "utterly rejected and confuted the book, criticising every chapter, shewing it to be throughout unintelligible and inconsistent."

⁴ Pastorini explains the Fifth Trumpet, of the Reformation, and identifies Luther with the star falling from heaven.

that drove Hengstenberg in despair to the strange exegesis which regards the prophecy as completely fulfilled by accepting the Middle Ages as the millennial reign of Christ, the Reformation period as the letting loose of the devil, and modern socialism as the gathering of the forces of Gog and Magog.

In spite, however, of the controversial use which might have been made of the Revelation, many of the Reformers were unfavourably disposed towards it. Erasmus doubts its authenticity. Calvin and Beza did not allow their preachers to explain it in the pulpit. Scaliger thought unfavourably of it. Zwingli did not regard it as "Biblical," and would not accept texts drawn from it. Luther himself said that much was wanting in it to let him deem it either prophetic or Apostolical, and that he could discover no trace that it is established of the Holy Ghost.¹ Ecolampadius, Bucer, Carlstadt, and others, had similar doubts.

This prejudice of the Reformers arose partly from the exclusive value which they attached to the doctrine of Justification by Faith, and partly because they had never succeeded in grasping the true key to a wise and safe solution of St. John's Vision. In later times also many have spoken of it with a certain irritation, due not only to the Hellenism which disliked its Judaic form and special imagery, but also to its enigmatic character, and to the discredit which it has undergone at the hands of rash, uncharitable, and half-educated interpreters. Goethe writes to Lavater, that being a man of the earth, earthy, the parables of Christ appear to him more Divine ("if," he adds, "there be aught Divine

¹ Preface of 1522. His objections were: 1. that a book full of such visions is unapostolic; 2. that it resembles nothing in the New Testament, but is more like 4 Esdras; 3. that it is "far too arrogant in the writer to enjoin this book upon his readers as of more importance than any other sacred book;" 4. no one understands it; "it is believed in as though we had it not;" 5. "my spirit cannot adapt itself to the production;" 6. "Christ is neither taught nor perceived in it." It is needless to point out the rash tone of assertion in these remarks.

about the matter") "than the seven messengers, candlesticks, seals, stars, and woes." Schleiermacher, representing it as full of "universal plagues represented under sensuous images," considered that even a correct interpretation of the book would be productive of but little profit. The Tübingen school in general regard it as a product of Ebionising rigour and Judaic narrow-mindedness. It has become the fashion of many modern critics to speak of it with marked disrespect, as being clumsy and unoriginal in form, harsh in style, contracted in sympathies, material in its expectations, and sanguinary in its spirit.

And if indeed the Apocalypse were the kind of treatise which it has become in the hands of controversial manipulators—if it were assumed to be a compendium of anticipated Church history, echoing the most vehement anathemas of sectarian hatred, and yet shrouded in such thick veils of ambiguity that every successive interpreter has a new scheme for its elucidation—if it were a book in which Protestants only could take a fierce delight because it feeds fat the intensest spirit of denunciation against the errors of a sister Church—then it might be excusable if the spirits of those who "seek peace and ensue it," and who look on brotherly love among Christians as the crown of virtue, should turn away from it with a sense of perplexity and weariness. They would not gain much comfort and edification from pulpits in which—

"A loud-tongued pulpiteer,
Not preaching simple Christ to simple men,
Announced the coming doom, and fulminated
Against the Scarlet Woman and her creed.
For sideways up he swung his arms, and shrieked
'Thus, thus, with violence'—even as if he held
The Apocalyptic millstone, and himself
Were that great angel—'thus with violence
Shall Babylon be cast into the sea:—
Then comes the close.'"

There are few men who would find music in such "loud-lunged Antibabylonianisms" as these. They would at any rate prefer to turn aside from such threats of doom on their brother Christians and dwell with deeper pleasure on visions of which the spiritual loveliness and consolation shines through the material images employed to depict them. But when we put ourselves in the position of the Seer, when grasping the now *certain* clue to his meaning which is furnished us in the deciphering of the number of the beast, we accept his own positive and repeated assurance¹ that he is dealing with events which have recently happened, and are now going on around him, or which should issue as the immediate sequence from that near past and that immediate present; when, lastly, we discount as it were (exactly as every contemporary reader would have discounted) the hyperboles of Oriental symbolism, then we begin to understand what the Apocalypse was to those who first read it, and to whom it was directly addressed. Then for the first time we begin to understand its passion and its grandeur; then we see in it as Milton saw, "the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn Scenes and Acts with a sevenfold chorus of Hallelujahs and harping symphonies."

It may, we should think, be assumed that the Apocalypse was *meant* to be understood. But it would most assuredly have not been understood had it been intended to depict, in vague symbols which (if such theories were true) have proved so universally unintelligible, the Saracen conquests, the French Revolution, and the rise of Tractarianism. If any think that they can thus use the book with edification, peace be with them! but let them at least admit that the study of the rise of Islam and the growth of Tractarianism could have been but little profitable to the Asiatics, who

¹ Rev. i. 3; xxii. 10: "The time is at hand." Rev. i. 1; xxii. 6: "the things that must *shortly* come to pass." Rev. ii. 5, 16; iii. 2; xi. 14; xxii. 7, 12, 20.

would have had (in that case) as little conception of what was intended as the majority of Christians in all ages since. This much may most cheerfully be conceded to expositors of this school—that all Prophecy has “springing and germinal developments;” that Scripture furnishes us again and again, not indeed with the details of events yet future, but with the *principles* of a divine philosophy of history; that, by holding up the crystal mirror of revelation to the Past, we may be enabled also to understand the Present and the Future. It is only when we contemplate the Apocalypse in the light of the Neronian persecution and the Jewish war that it rolls with all its storms and burns with its intensest fire. Over the guilt of Jerusalem, over the guilt of Rome, it hurls the prophecy of inevitable doom. Around the diadem of Nero and the hydra-heads of Paganism in its hour of tyranny and triumph, it flashes the divine lightning of retribution. It is the thunderous defiance, uttered by Christianity for all time, against the tortures, the legions, and the amphitheatres of heathendom. Such is the passionate intensity with which the Seer, even at that hour of seeming ruin and terror and desolation, pours forth the language of inextinguishable hope, that it seems as though the hand which he had dipped in the blood of the martyrs flamed like a torch as he uplifts it to the avenging heaven. And since the truths which he utters become needful at every recurrence of similar crises, the Apocalypse has ever been dearest to the Church in the hours of her deepest need, and has helped to inspire her courage and to keep alive her faith. If we see that its primary import was to emphasize, with all the resources of prophetic symbolism, the great eschatological discourse which St. John had heard his Lord deliver on Olivet,¹

¹ Abauzit, in his *Essai sur l'Apocalypse*, is, according to Lücke, the first who made the pregnant suggestion that the Revelation is “Une extension de la prophétie du Sauveur sur la Ruine de l'Etat Judaïque.”

and in which He had with perfect distinctness prophesied that He should come again, and that the Æon should close and the Messianic kingdom begin, before that generation had wholly passed away,¹ then, and not till then, can we without exegetical extravagance give it what further developments may seem admissible, and regard it in the language of Herder, as “a picture book, setting forth the rise, the visible existence, and the (general) future of Christ’s kingdom in figures and similitudes of his first Coming, to terrify and to console.”

That the vision had its starting-point in contemporary history was known by early tradition to the Fathers,² who were even aware that the Wild Beast from the sea who has been wounded but should, in symbol if not in very reality, return again—as was widely expected, both then and five centuries later, was no other than the Emperor Nero.³ After this *historical* interpretation—the only one which can save the Apocalypse from being the prey of theological hatred and chiliastic fanaticism—had been mostly forgotten, and after every conceivable variety of false method had been tentatively applied in vain, the true path was once more partially opened by the good sense and erudition of Grotius, and widened by the genius of Herder.⁴ The consensus of all

¹ St. Matt. xxiv. 34.

² In my last paper, “the Number of the Beast,” I mentioned the two interpretations—*Lateinos* and *Teitan*—which are given by Irenæus, and shewed that they both point to Nero. No doubt some breath of the true tradition had come down to Irenæus from the days of St. John. I have there endeavoured to indicate the causes why his solution was not more exact.

³ Tac., *Hist.*, i. 2; ii. 8, 9. Suet., *Ner.*, xl., lvii. Dion Cass., lxi. 9. Sulp. Sev., *Hist. Sacr.*, ii. 28. Lactant., *De Mort. Persec.*, 2. Aug., *De Civ. Dei*, xx. 19. Jerome in Dan. xi. 28. Chrysost. in 2 Thess. ii. Sibyll. iv. 116 sq., viii. 1-216, etc.

⁴ Grotius was hampered by the mistaken notion that the solution has to be sought in the days of Trajan. Herder’s *Maranata, Es kommt der Herr* (Weimar, 1779) shewed with wonderful power and genius that the book was intended to represent the victory of Christ over all enemies, alike Jewish and Pagan. Ewald, in his *Commentarius* (1828), followed the same general line. Züllich, in 1835, was led astray by applying the book almost exclusively to

the keenest and ablest modern criticism in interpreting the number of the Beast by the Hebrew name of *Neron Kesar* furnishes a clue which it is hoped can never again be abandoned, and by means of which we are enabled to thread our way in safety through the mazes of a book which has proved to be to so many a dangerous labyrinth.

II. But if Nero be the Wild Beast from the sea, who is the Wild Beast from the land? If Nero be, in the parallel passages, the death-wounded yet slain *head* of the Beast, who is the False Prophet that wrought the signs before him?

Our great difficulty in answering this question rises from the fact that not the lightest breath of tradition upon the subject has been preserved in the first two centuries, and that the earliest suggestion is furnished by Victorinus at the close of the third. All commentators alike, Præterist, Futurist, Continuous, Historical, Allegorical, with all their subdivisions, have here been reduced to manifest perplexity, and have been forced to content themselves with explanations which violate one or more of the indications given us.

What are those indications?

They are mainly given in Revelation xiii. 11-17, and are as follows:—

1. I saw another wild beast coming up out of the earth (or “land”).

2. And he had two horns like unto a lamb.

3. And he spake as a dragon.

4. And he exerciseth all the authority of the first beast in his sight.

5. And he maketh the earth (or “land”) to worship the first beast whose death-stroke was healed.

Jerusalem, as is done by the able anonymous author of “*The Parousia*” (1878). Bieek, and others of the Schleiermacher school, have also firmly taken this line of exegesis, and since the discovery of the Number of the Beast by five or six almost contemporary enquirers (Volkmar, Reuss, Renary, Hitzig, Fritsche, etc.,) in 1836, the reactionary methods of Lange, Ebrard, Elliott, etc., have had but little weight.

6. And he doeth great signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast, that he should even make fire to come down from heaven upon the earth (or "land") by reason of the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast, saying to them that dwell on the earth (or "land") that they should make an image to the beast who hath the stroke of the sword and lived.

7. He gives breath to the image of the beast, and maketh it speak.

8. He causes the execution of those who will not worship the image of the beast.

9. He makes men of all ranks and classes receive a stamp on their right hand or their forehead.

10. He prevents all who have not the mark of the beast (his name and the number of his name) from buying and selling.

The only additional clue is that in the parallel description of Revelation xix. 20 he is called "the False Prophet that wrought the signs in the sight of the Beast wherewith he deceived those that had received his mark and worshipped his image."

Now in trying to discover the meaning of the symbol, we may pass over the countless idle guesses of those who have endeavoured to torture the Apocalypse into a prediction of the details of all subsequent Christian history. With these guesses we are not in the least concerned. Nothing, we may be sure, was further from the mind of the writer than a desire to gratify the fantastic curiosity of eighteen centuries of Christians as to events yet future, which in no single instance have they been able to predict. The resemblance of Nero to Antiochus Epiphanes, as the personification of savage enmity to the people of God, was enough to suggest the Apocalyptic form which was so common in that age, and which enabled the Seer to express with safety his inmost convictions. It was a misfortune to all sane

interpretation when J. A. Bengel (*Erklärte Offenbarung*, 1740) first suggested the application to the Apocalypse of those disastrous arithmetical guesses which traverse the direct hints of the book itself in every particular, and which have only led to disastrous vagaries. When this method of explaining the Apocalypse is adopted there are no two schools which accept the same explanation. The solutions do not even wear the aspect of being serious. They are mere polemical ingenuities, or fantastic methods of illustrating history. They make anything mean anything, but bring no conviction to any one. There is no shadow of a consensus as to the correctness of even the general outline of exegesis adopted, much less as to any of its particulars. This method is entirely contrary to the indications afforded us by the early Church, and was not so much as dreamt of till the thirteenth century. It has been fruitful in nothing but the exacerbation of uncharitableness. The expositions which see in the False Prophet the Papal Councils (Elliott), or the Papacy (Barnes), or the Pontiff for the time being (Wordsworth), or the Italian hierarchy (Low), or Rationalism (Auberlen), may for all practical purposes be set aside as having no exegetic significance, and only tending to confuse the proper study and due comprehension of the book. They have commanded no assent. They are but specimens of the "private interpretation"—the polemical and arbitrary conjectures of biassed idiosyncrasy—of which we are expressly warned that Scripture does not admit.¹ If any find them edifying, they must indulge in them as an exercise of individual ingenuity, but cannot pretend to force them as even probable upon the attention of the Church. We have already seen that St. John all but tells us in so many words—would no doubt have told us with absolute distinctness if the perilous condition of the Church had admitted the possibility of open speech—that by the ten-horned

¹ 2 Pet. i. 20.

and seven-headed Beast he means the Roman Empire; and that by the head of it, which though wounded to death yet recovers, he means Nero, who is sometimes identified with the Beast itself. Since then the Second Beast, also characterized as the False Prophet, is placed in the closest connexion with the First, the symbol must correspond to some institution or some person who stood in immediate relation to Nero, and in which or in whom are to be found the ten characteristics by which the Seer indicates that which political danger and the necessary form of Apocalyptic literature prevent him from mentioning with greater distinctness.

Let us then examine the solutions of the problem which have been proposed by those expositors who adopt what appears to be to demonstration the only sound method of primary explanation, leaving all secondary analogies and explanations for those who think them desirable or possible.

1. Many readers, who may not be familiar with the writings of the Tübingen school, may hear with a mixture of anger and disdain the opinion of Volkmar, more or less approved by other German and French expositors, that the Second Beast and the False Prophet is—St. Paul!¹

It need hardly be said that I consider this view to be hopelessly and radically false,—nay, even perversely arbitrary. If it could be demonstrated, I should regard it as a positive proof that those who had thought slightly of this sacred book were after all in the right, and that if the Presbyter Gaius was wrong in attributing it to Cerinthus, Dionysius of Alexandria was at any rate in the right in arguing that it could not be by St. John the Apostle, though it might be by John the Presbyter, if that person ever had a real existence.

¹ Volkmar, *Commentar zur Offenbarung*, pp. 99–213. He thinks, however (p. 104), that the writer had the Pauline party more in view than Paul personally.

But neither anger, disdain, nor strength of personal conviction will really avail in overthrowing error. That end will never be achieved but by sympathy, patience, and candour. How deep would have been the advantage to theology if those who write on the subject had taken to heart the wise words of Kant. "Humanity," he says, "is itself a dignity;" and he adds, "Upon this is founded a duty for every man, even in the logical use of reason, namely, not to reprehend his blunders under the name of '*absurdities*,' not to say that they are '*inept*,' but rather to suppose that there must be something true at bottom in them, and to endeavour to find out what this is towards which would be attached the still further duty of exerting ourselves to discover the false appearance by which the other was misled, and thus, by explaining to him the ground of his error, to uphold for him his reverence for his own understanding. And truly, when we deny all sense to an adversary, how can we expect to convince him that he is in the wrong?" "Treat me," said John Wesley, "as you would desire to be treated yourself upon a change of circumstances. . . . I entreat you not to beat me down in order to quicken my pace. May I request you further not to give me hard names in order to bring me into the right way? Suppose I were ever so much in the wrong, I doubt this would not set me right."

In the spirit of this advice let us see, with patience, what are Volkmar's grounds for this conjecture, however preposterous it may seem to be.

He starts from the historic certainty, the enforcement of which is the chief general merit of the Tübingen school, that the struggle between Judaism and Christianity *within* the Church was far longer and more severe than has been hitherto supposed, or than might have been superficially inferred from the eirenic tendencies of the Acts of the Apostles. In my Life of St. Paul I have shewn the reality and intensity of the struggle, which is amply proved even in the Acts and

still more by the references in St. Paul's epistles. It is further certain that among the extreme partisans of the Judaisers—especially among the Ebionites—there lingered on for two centuries a feeling of hostility against the work of St. Paul, so deadly that it led to a description of him under the thin pseudonym of Simon Magus, and to the denial of his work and the covering of his name with oblique slanders in the pestilent Ebionite romance known as the Clementine Homilies.¹

But the Tübingen school entirely exaggerated the significance of this isolated calumny. They forgot two most important facts; (1) that it is found in a book of tendencies confessedly heretical; and (2) that even under these circumstances it is so timid, covert, and (so to speak) subterranean, that not one word is said against St. Paul openly and by name, but the writer is obliged to disguise his falsehoods and his malice under anonymous or pseudonymous innuendoes.

In these passages, however, the Tübingen writers thought they had found a clue to the entire history of the early Church, and were eager to apply it to the books of the New Testament.² They not only claimed it as certain that the Epistle of St. James was written in a spirit of direct controversy against St. Paul, but also discovered in the Epistle of St. Jude one of the "letters of commendation,"³ breathing the most envenomed hatred, which the adherents of St. James sent round the Churches to discredit the work of St. Paul.⁴ They also announced that in the Apocalypse, St. Paul is the heretical teacher who lies concealed under the names of Balaam and Jezebel, and that his followers are the

¹ Schliemann, *Clementina*, 96 sqq. 534 sqq. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 308. Stanley, *Corinthians*, p. 366.

² Baur, *Church History*, vol. i. pp. 90, 91 (etc.) Id., *Paul, his Life and Works*, vol. i. pp. 88 sq., 231 sq.

³ *συστατικά ἐπιστολά.* 2 Cor. iii. 1. Baur, *Church History*, vol. i. p. 129.

⁴ Renan, *St. Paul*, p. 300.

Nicolaitans who are so scathingly denounced for their antinomian morals.¹

If it were not a digression, it would be easy to shew that all this theory is a pure chimæra, resulting from the abandonment of the clearest and weightiest indications, in favour of the most fanciful and untrustworthy hypotheses. It is certain, alike from tradition and Scripture, that the Apostles distinctly recognized the work of St. Paul; that they were united with him in relations, which, if not particularly warm and cordial—as was natural when the difference of their spheres of work and mental training are borne in mind—were yet perfectly friendly; and that, as regards alike the Jews and the Gentiles, the opinions and the practice of St. Paul and the Pillar-Apostles were in reality identical. Of these facts the Acts of the Apostles furnish a sure testimony which (exclusive of the Clementine forgeries and the baseless system built upon them) is in entire accordance with what the earliest documents of Church history shew us to have been the case. Apart from the fictions of Ebionite literature, there is everything in favour of the view that, by the Apostles as by the Church generally, the work of St. Paul was recognized and his name honoured even by those who did not adopt his special views.

Leaving the more general aspect of the subject, we find that Volkmar's grounds for identifying the False Prophet with St. Paul are, that ἡ γῆ here means "the land," *i.e.*, Judæa; that the lamblike form of the Beast indicates that he is nominally a follower of the Lamb, *i.e.*, a Christian; that his serpent-like speech indicates craft and subtlety; that he "made the power of the Beast complete" (so he renders *πᾶσαν*!) by teaching that "every soul must be subject to the higher powers," and by thus (as it were) habit-

¹ Volkmar, *Offenbarung*, pp. 37, 40, 80, 83-85. Reuss, *Apoc.*, p. 32. It is most unfairly argued that Rev. xxi. 14 is a trait expressly intended to rebut St. Paul's assumption of the title of an Apostle!

uating the world to prostrate itself before the "devilish" Nero; that he performed miracles; that he (in some sort of sense!) made the image of the Beast speak when he taught that "the powers that be are ordained of God;" and that he made men receive his stamp and prevented them from buying and selling except in his name, by insisting upon the truth that obedience was due to him!

It will be seen then that the whole force of the explanation, which is so singularly lame and impotent in its specific details, is made to turn upon such passages as Romans xiii. 1-7, in which St. Paul teaches the general Christian rule of obedience to authority! But the supposed solution of the symbol breaks down in every particular. It offers no explanation of the two horns. It hardly even pretends to explain in what sense St. Paul stamped the mark of the Beast on the great and the noble as well as on humble Christians. It is in flagrant disaccord with all historic fact. Nothing can be more outrageous than to describe St. Paul, who speaks of Nero as "the lion," and who suffered shameful injustice and final martyrdom at his hands, as his delegate, working miracles in his sight, and causing those to be executed who will not worship his image. Thus the hypothesis sinks to the ground under the weight of cumulative absurdities. St. Paul's teaching of the duty of subjection to visible authority, so long as it is lawfully exercised, is so far from being exceptional, that—as every Christian was well aware,—it was in direct accordance with the teaching of Christ Himself.¹ Further than this, it was quite as emphatically the teaching of St. Peter, who was not only an acknowledged Apostle of the Judaists, but also the dearest friend of St. John. St. Peter not only says "*Honour the king,*" but also in language no less explicit than that of St. Paul, and probably influenced by it, "*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the*

¹ St. Matt. xxii. 21.

king as supreme, or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.”¹

And, lastly, even as to the Divine authority of secular government, which on this hypothesis is supposed to have given the deepest offence in St. Paul’s teaching—we find in the Gospel of St. John himself an acknowledgment of the same truth in the words which our Lord addressed to Pilate, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, *except it were given thee from above.*”²

Thus St. Peter and St. John delivered to Christians the very same rule of obedience to the powers that be which is supposed to have led the Seer to brand St. Paul as the Wild Beast from the land! Their teaching has been accepted in every age of Christianity. Tertullian and other of the Fathers indignantly repudiate the calumny that the Christians were seditious and revolutionary. They, of course, rejected the base and senseless doctrine of passive obedience. They openly repudiated the right of the civil authority to command anything which was contrary to the will of God. But, within that limit, they accepted the protection of Roman law and rendered to it their cheerful obedience. And though the author of the Apocalypse is evidently steeped in national predilections, yet so far was he from being hostile to that admission of the Gentiles into the Church which was the main life-work of St. Paul, that he admits the Gentiles side by side with the Jews into the inmost privileges of the Messianic triumph.

2. Turning our backs on an hypothesis so wildly improbable that scarcely a single writer has been found to follow it, we find as early as the third century a suggestion in Victorinus of Pettau (A.D. 303), that the Second Beast and the False Prophet is the *Roman augurial system*; and this sug-

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14–17.

² St. John xix. 11.

gestion, resting as it does on a reasonable historic basis, is followed by Grotius, by De Wette, and by Hengstenberg.

There is in this suggestion much probability, and we may point out in passing that Victorinus in the third century, no less than Irenæus in the second, saw that the Apocalypse moved in the plane of contemporary events. The early mention of this solution may have been due to some breath of still more ancient tradition. Certain it is that, in calling the Second Beast also the False Prophet (Rev. xvi. 13; xix. 20; xx. 10), St. John lends some sanction to this view. The constant mention of *Chaldæans*, *Mathematici*, *Astrologers*, *Magi*, *Augurs*, *Medici*, *Prophets*, *Casters of Horoscopes*, *Sorcerers*, *Dream-interpreters*, *Sibyllists*,¹—Oriental charlatans of every description, from Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abonoteichos down to Peregrinus—is a phenomenon which constantly meets us in the Age of the Cæsars. They appeared in Rome more than two centuries before Christ. Ennius mentions them with contempt.² As early as B.C. 139, they had been ordered to quit Italy in ten days. In B.C. 33 they had again been banished by the Ædile M. Agrippa. Augustus and Tiberius had also directed severe edicts against them.³ But they held their ground.⁴ Tacitus calls the edict of Claudius "severe and ineffectual." We see both from Tacitus and from the anecdotage of Suetonius that almost every Emperor felt and indulged in some curiosity about these divinations. Tiberius reckoned the "Chaldæan" Thrasyllus among his intimate friends.⁵ Poppæa, the wife of Nero, had "many" of them in her household.⁶ Nero had his Balbillus;⁷ Otho, his Ptol-

¹ Σιβυλλιστάλ. Plutarch, *Marius*, 42. See Tac., *Ann.*, xii. 52; *Hist.* i. 22; ii. 62. Suet., *Tib.*, 36; *Vitell.*, 14. Juv. vi. 542.

² Cic., *De Div.*, i. 58.

³ See Val. Max., i. 3. Dion. Cass., xlix. i. Tac., ii. 27, 32; iii. 22; iv. 58; vi. 20.

⁴ Tac., *Ann.*, xii. 52.

⁵ Tac., *Ann.*, vi. 21.

⁶ Tac., *Hist.*, i. 22.

⁷ Suet., *Ner.*, 36.

mæus ;¹ Vespasian, his Seleucus ;² Domitian, his Ascletharion.³ Agrippina depended on Chaldæans for the favourable hour of Nero's usurpation.⁴ There is scarcely one of all the Emperors who had not some connexion or other with auguries, prophecies, and dreams.⁵ In the reign of Nero they were brought into special prominence,⁶ because the restless and tortured conscience of the Antichrist was constantly seeking to pry into futurity. It is remarkable that they especially encouraged his Oriental dreams, and that some of them even went as far as to promise him the empire of Jerusalem.

It has, however, been generally felt that the institution of prophets in general was not so prominent even in Nero's reign as to admit of our applying to it the ten definite indications of the apocalyptic Seer. False prophetism was hardly in any sense a *delegate* and *alter ego* of the Emperor. There is at least a probability that, as one person is specially pointed to by the symbol of the Beast, so one person is intended by his False Prophet. But in all the following suggestions it is observable, (i.) that no explanation is offered of the two horns of the lamblike beast, and (ii.) that in any case some of the allusions must remain obscure from our want of that minute historical knowledge which would alone have enabled us to decipher them. Rumours beneath the dignity of history may yet have played a powerful part in swaying the feelings of the multitude, and many a story may have been currently influential which has found no place in the page of Tacitus or even Suetonius.

Bearing these facts in view the names suggested as corresponding to the false prophet are,—

¹ Suet., *Otho*, 4. Tac., *Hist.*, i. 22, 23.

² Tac., *Hist.*, ii. 8.

³ Suet., *Domit.*, 15.

⁴ Tac., *Ann.*, xii. 68.

⁵ Suet., *Jul. Cæsar*, vii. 61 ; *Octav.*, 94 ; *Tiber.*, 16 ; *Calig.*, 57 ; *Otho*, 4 ; *Titus*, ii. 9 ; *Domit.*, xiv. 16. For Nero, see Tac., *Ann.*, xiv. 9.

⁶ Suet., *Ner.*, 34, 36, 40. Plin., *H. N.*, xxx. 2.

a. BALBILLUS OF EPHESUS.¹ Ephesus was a principal rendezvous of those who used "curious arts." Any one who played a prominent part in that city would naturally attract the notice of the Church, and of St. John as the Apostolic Head of the Churches of Asia after the martyrdom of St. Paul. Now Balbillus was an astrologer who had great influence with Nero,² and possibly afterwards with Vespasian.³ His importance is seen in the fact that he procured the establishment of certain games at Ephesus, called after him *Balbilleia*, and mentioned in inscriptions still extant. He was remembered in Christian circles, no less than three centuries later, among those who were reported to have had "a name and pre-eminence in such impostures."⁴ Nothing is more natural than that such a person, like Apollonius and Alexander, may have pretended to miraculous endowments, which would be greedily believed by an ignorant populace; and such a man endowed with any authority would naturally have been a cruel and confidential maintainer of imperial authority. Indeed we are told that Nero actually did consult him on occasions of importance when some eminent men had to be put to death.⁵

β. Others suggest TIBERIUS ALEXANDER. He was an apostate Jew, a brother of Philo, a warm supporter of the Romans. He even accompanied Titus to the siege of Jerusalem, and we may well imagine that he must, as Procurator of Judæa, between the years A.D. 46 and 47, have taken active measures in demanding tribute, insisting on the use of the current Roman coins, and generally in maintaining the authority of Rome. In these respects

¹ Suggested by Renan, *L'Antechrist*, p. 430.

² Suet., *Ner.*, 36; comp. 34, 40.

³ If he be the same as Barbillus (Dion. Cass., lxvi. 9).

⁴ Arnob., *Adv. Gentes.*, i. 52. The M.S. read *Bæbulus*, but Balbillus is a probable emendation.

⁵ Tac., *Hist.*, i. 22. Suet., *Nero.*, 36.

he would correspond more nearly than Balbillus to the description of the Second Beast. We know, too, that he was peculiarly execrable in the opinion of Jews, whose estimate of him would naturally be shared by Christians of Jewish proclivities. We know nothing, however, of any pretence on his part to work miracles. Moreover, he had long ceased to be Procurator before the Apocalypse was written; and in other particulars the suggestion has nothing very probable in its favour, except on the untenable supposition that the Apocalypse is exclusively a picture of the last days of Jerusalem.

γ. The same may be said of JOSEPHUS. He did indeed parade certain pretences to supernatural foresight,¹ and no doubt his talents and influence were supremely useful to the Romans during the siege of Jerusalem, on which account he afterwards held a very high position among them.² A cruel fighter and a subtle orator, who could try to make the Jews accept the Wild Beast as a Messiah, might well be looked upon as a personification of False-Prophethood.³ He is doubtless worthy of the scorn and hatred with which his compatriots regarded him,⁴ and all the more because he was both of priestly and kingly lineage, and had been a member of the chief Jewish sect.⁵ St. John may have personally known, and, if so, would most assuredly see through, him. But neither his supernatural pretensions nor his authority could have been described in this language of the Apocalypse without an exaggeration which would have effectually precluded the reader from discovering that he was meant.⁶

¹ See especially *Bell. Jud.*, iii. 7, § 9, and 8, § 3.

² He boasts of this in his *Jewish War* (iii. 7, § 9), and *Life*, § 75, 76, and mentions the constant accusations from Jews to which he was liable.

³ *Bell. Jud.*, iii. 8, §§ 3, 9; iv. 10, § 7.

⁴ *Suet.*, *Vesp.*, 5. *Dion. Cass.*, lxxvi. 1. *Bell. Jud.*, v. 13, § 3; *Vit.*, § 76.

⁵ *Vit.*, i. § 2, 5.

⁶ All that can be said in favour of this view is ingeniously stated by Krenkel, *Der Apostel Johannes*, pp. 179-189. But most of the details which would make

δ. More, on the whole, is to be said in favour of the view that the false prophet is SIMON MAGUS. In one direction he corresponds with remarkable closeness to the symbols. His baptism gave him a certain lamblike semblance to Christianity, while his gross heresies were the voice of the serpent. Christian tradition, which may well be founded on facts, has much to say about his pretended miracles, and two classes of those miracles are of the very character here indicated. It is said, for instance, that the False Prophet makes fire come down upon the earth. Now among the miracles of Simon we are told that one was to appear clothed in flame.¹ It is said that the False Prophet animates an image of the Beast, and Simon is expressly said to have made statues move, so that he may well have also pretended to make them speak.² If he attempted this at all, he is more likely to have applied his imposture to the statue of the emperor—"the image of the Beast"—than to any other. All that would have been needed was a little machinery and a little ventriloquism. Further, it was at Rome that Simon displayed his magic powers, and they are said to have been exercised with the immediate object of winning influence over Nero. In this the legend declares that he entirely succeeded, and that his influence was wielded to induce the Emperor to persecute and massacre the Christians. These features appear not in one, but in many authors;³ and, though the

Josephus appropriate belong to a date rather later than the publication of the Apocalypse.

¹ Arnobius (*Adv. Gent.*, ii. 12) speaks of Simon being precipitated from a fiery chariot. Augustine, *Haer.*, i., says that he professed to have come to the Apostles in fiery tongues. Nicephorus says that he professed to pass through fire unhurt.

² Clem., *Recogn.*, iii. 47. "I have made statues move about."

³ Justin Mart., *Apol.*, ii. p. 69. Tertull., *De Anim.*, 34; *De Præscr. Hæc.*, 37. Sulp. Sev., *Hist. Sacr.*, ii. 42. Clem., *Hom.*, ii. 34; iv. 4; *Recogn.*, ii. 9; iii. 47, 57; *Constt. Apost.*, vi. 9. Epiphany., *Hæc.*, xxi. 5. Arnob., *Adv. Gentes.*, ii. 12. Ambros., *Hexaem.*, iv. 8, § 31. Cyrill., *Catech.*, 6. Ps. Hegesipp., *De excidio*

sources from which we now derive this information are exceedingly dubious, there is nothing improbable in the supposition that Simon Magus did find his way to Rome—the reservoir, as Tacitus says, into which all things infamous and shameful flowed¹—and did there endeavour to win dupes by the same magic arts which had gained him so many votaries among the simple Samaritans.² If we suppose that he dazzled the mind of Nero, and that he was one of those men of Jewish race, who, with Aliturus and Josephus, taught Nero and his servants to discriminate between Jews and Christians, and to martyr the latter while they honoured the former, then in Simon Magus the False Prophet of the Apocalypse would stand revealed. It is true that the Pagan historians are absolutely silent about him and his doings; but the events themselves had no political significance, and lay outside their sphere. They belong to the history of the Church, not of the State.³

III. We now pass from what may be called the ecclesiastical and the religious fields of conjecture to the political. It must be remembered that it is, as it were, only by an afterthought that the Second Beast is called the False Prophet. May we not look for him in another region of Roman life?

a. The conjecture that the false prophet was ALBINUS or GESSIUS FLORUS is suggested by the author of “The Parousia,” in accordance with the systems which place the whole history of the Apocalypse in Judæa. The note of miraculous assumptions is, however, too wholly wanting to make the suggestion tenable.

β. But there is a suggestion which seems to me much

Hieros. August., *Serm.*, iii. de SS. Petro et Paulo. Nicephorus Callistus, *H.E.*, ii. 27.

¹ Tac., *Ann.*, xv. 46.

² Acts viii. 11.

³ Justin's mistake about a statue to him as a god was dispelled in 1574, when the inscription to the Sabine god, Semo Saugus was found in the place which he mentions.

more probable, and which, though elaborately supported by Hildebrandt in Hilgenfeld's *Zeitschrift* for 1874, has hardly (so far as I am aware) received the attention which it deserved. It is that by the False Prophet, or the "Second Beast from the land," is meant VESPASIAN. Let us apply to him the ten indications which the Seer has furnished.

1. Being a "*wild beast*" it is *a priori* probable that he will belong to the heathen world. He rises "from the earth" or "from the land." If we take the former rendering it may point to his taking his origin, as an important power, not from the sea, or any sea-washed peninsula like Italy, whence Nero had sprung, but from the vast continent of Asia; *i.e.*, the growth of his power is connected with the East. If the words be rendered "*from the land*," which is not only permissible, but even probable, it then applies to Judæa. Now both Jews¹ and Pagans² were struck with the fact that Vespasian, as Emperor, "went forth from Judæa," and they connected his rise in that country with many prophecies then current, not only in the East, but among the Romans themselves—prophecies which were familiar to more than one of the Cæsars, and had exercised no small influence on their aims and actions.

2. He had *two horns like unto a lamb*. There is hardly one of those who have been suggested as answering to the False Prophet to whom this description in any way applies. To Vespasian it *does* apply in a remarkable manner. His nature and his language, as compared with those of a Caligula and a Nero, were absolutely mild. He was indeed as indifferent to the blood and misery of a hostile people as all the Romans were; but there was nothing naturally ferocious and sanguinary in the character of this worthy bourgeois.³ Now since the *ten horns* of the

¹ Jos., *B. J.*, vi. 5, § 4.

² Suet., *Vesp.*, 6.

³ Josephus boasts of the generosity of Vespasian as something extraordinary.

Beast are ten provincial governors—ten powers which are, primarily, a source of his strength—we should expect that the *two horns* also indicated persons, and especially persons more or less imperial in their functions, in whose existence lay the strength of the Lamb-like Beast. Now this was the exact position of Vespasian. His force lay in the fact that he had *two sons, both of them men of mark*: Titus, the conqueror of Judæa, who kept the allegiance of the army firm for him while he was awaiting his actual accession to power; Domitian, who headed his party in Rome. But for their assistance his cause could not have prospered so decisively, and both of them succeeded to the empire after his death.

3. *He spake as a dragon or serpent*, that is, he used the language generically of Paganism, and specifically of subtle and deceptive intention. The allusion may be to circumstances which were better known to St. John than to us; but meanwhile, whether the allusion be generic or specific, there is sufficient evidence that it is appropriate in a sketch of the rise of Vespasian.

4. He is a *visible delegate of*, and responsible to, the First Beast. This applies better to Vespasian than to any one. The first outbreak of the Jewish war took place while Nero was indulging in his frantic follies of æstheticism in Greece, A.D. 66. He instantly despatched Vespasian to suppress the rebellion. Vespasian, with extraordinary skill and vigour

Antt., xii. 3, § 2. His natural kindness, and freedom from hatred and revenge, are freely admitted, and may account for his external semblance to “a lamb” in the apocalyptic symbol. But St. John, a Jew by birth and a true patriot, saw with Jewish eyes the inner wild-beast nature of the man. He would be little likely to share in the renegade admiration of Josephus for the general who caused such myriads of Jews—

“To swell slow pacing by the car's tall side
The stoic tyrant's philosophic pride;
To flesh the lion's ravenous jaws, and feel
The sportive fury of the fencer's steel;
Or sigh, deep-plunged beneath the sultry mine,
For the light airs of balmy Palestine.”

collected a powerful army, and handled his troops with such military genius that, from the first, the issue of the Jewish war could not be doubtful. To a general so placed it would have been an easy matter to revolt against the blood-stained buffoon who then afflicted the world. But as long as the Emperor lived, Vespasian, though not a favourite of Nero, remained conspicuously faithful. After the battle of Taricheæa, so powerfully described by Josephus, he put to death 1,200 of the oldest and weakest Jews, and sent 6,000 of the strongest to Nero to carry out his design of cutting through the Isthmus of Corinth. At the same time 30,400 Jews were sold into slavery. To a Christian, much more to a Jewish Christian, there must have been something frightfully ominous in such news as this. He must have seen in the advance of Vespasian, and the ever-approaching, inevitable fate of Jerusalem—for which he was prepared by the great eschatological discourse of Jesus on the Mount—a beginning of those “woes of the Messiah,” to which alike Jews and Christians looked with terror, but which would be only the travail-pangs of the Messiah, the prelude to the return of Christ.¹ It was about this time that even Josephus had been daring enough to salute Vespasian and Titus, in what he himself claimed as a moment of inspiration,² as the future Emperors. Yet they remained faithful to Nero till his suicide, and afterwards made their legions take the oath of fidelity to Otho, who was a mere reflex of Nero, as he had been his bosom friend.

5. And he *made the earth* (or “land”) *worship the First Beast*, whose death-stroke was healed. To enforce subjection to Nero, who even in his lifetime was “worshipped” as a god, was the express object of Vespasian’s mission to the East. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that by the Wild Beast is meant the Roman Empire in general as well

¹ Matt. xxiv. 8, ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων, the חַבְלֵי הַמִּשִׁיחַ Dan. xii. 1.

² Jos., B. J., iii. 8, § 4

as Nero, and Rome was worshipped as a goddess in many of the provinces.¹

6. It might seem an impossibility that any Roman general should have pretended *to work signs*, still more that there could be anything which could be brought to resemble his bringing down fire from heaven. It happens, however, that Vespasian is the one Roman—the only Roman in high places, *the only Imperial delegate*—to whom such language will apply. His visit to Alexandria was accompanied by signs and wonders which obtained wide credence. Not only had the Nile risen in a single day higher than it had ever done before, but Vespasian was believed to have worked personal miracles.² He had anointed with spittle the eyes of a blind man, and restored his sight; before a full assembly he had healed a cripple; and he had shewn a remarkable example of second sight.³ We do not, indeed, read that he had called down fire from heaven; but that expression may well be metaphorical of the fire and sword with which he scathed and devastated Palestine, and we *can* see the circumstance which may have given shape to the image. It represents the False Prophet as a Pseudo-Elias, and there was a circumstance which might well have suggested a sort of antithesis between the two. Vespasian had visited Carmel, and had received a remarkable communication from “the god Carmelus,” who, though not worshipped under the form of any image, had there an altar which was regarded as peculiarly sacred. This god Carmelus had given him an oracle, which, even in the version of Suetonius, reminds us strongly of Daniel xi. 36, namely, that “everything which he had in his mind should prosper,

¹ On the apotheosis of Emperors, often even in their lifetime, see Suet., *Octav.*, 59; *Tiber.*, 40; *Claud.*, 2; *Calig.*, 22, 24; *Vesp.*, 9. Tac., *Ann.*, i. 10, 74; iv. 15, 37; xiv. 31, etc., and the excellent chapter in Boissier, *La religion Romaine*.

² Dion. Cass., lxxvi. 8. Suet., *Vesp.*, 7.

³ Tac., *Hist.*, iv. 82.

however great it was.”¹ As a “*fulmen belli*,” Vespasian, in his brilliant successes at the beginning of the Jewish war, might well be said, in the style of writing which constantly intermingles the symbolic and the literal, to have flashed fire from heaven upon the enemies of the Beast.

7. He gives breath to the image of the Beast and makes it speak. Whether in this instance, again, we have some belief of a magic wonder current in that day we cannot tell. All that we know is that Vespasian would certainly enforce homage and reverence from the conquered Jews to the statues of the Emperor,² which Nero was specially fond of multiplying, and which the Jews regarded with peculiar abhorrence.³ In the “Ascension of Isaiah” it is made a characteristic of Nero that “he shall erect his statue in all cities before his face.”⁴ Since Simon Magus pretended to animate statues with life, there may have been a rumour that something of the kind had taken place in Judea. If not, the metaphorical meaning, the reanimation of the Roman power in Palestine, which the successful revolt of the Jews had for a time extinguished, is quite sufficient to meet the language of the Seer.

8. The *putting to death of those who will not worship the image of the Beast*:—the slaughter, banishment, and sale into slavery, of all who refused to accept the imperial authority, reverence the imperial images, and accept the imperial coinage, is a circumstance which will explain itself. The Jewish revolt would tend to put a limit to the contemptuous tolerance with which the Romans had, up to this time, conceded to the Jews at least some shadow of liberty by not compelling them to violate the strongest prejudices of their religion. The conquest of Galilee by Vespasian deluged even the Lake of Tiberias with blood.

¹ Suet., *Vesp.*, 5. Tac., *Hist.*, ii. 78.

² Jos., *Antt.*, xviii. 8, §1.

³ “The image of the beast is clearly the statue of the Emperor.”—*Milman*.

⁴ *Ascens. Is.*, iv. 11. *Lactant.*, ii. 7.

9. *He stamps men of all ranks and classes, high and low, rich and poor, with the image of his Beast, and the number of his name.* This detail, which only applies in the loosest possible manner to any of the others who have been regarded as the antitypes of the False Prophet, suits Vespasian very closely. It is little less than absurd to apply such language to St. Paul, or Josephus, or even to Simon Magus. It exactly describes the natural conduct of Vespasian in giving his soldiers the brand of their service,¹ and exacting from all classes the oath of allegiance, making them swear "by the genius of Cæsar,"—first of Nero, then of Otho.

10. *The forbidding all to buy and sell who have not got the mark of the Beast* seems to be a very natural reminiscence of one of Vespasian's most remarkable acts. When Nero was dead, and Otho also had committed suicide after the terrible battle of Bedriacum, neither Vespasian nor his soldiers felt inclined to obey the imbecile rule of the glutton Vitellius. Vespasian accepted his own nomination to the Empire by the legions of Mucianus as well as by his own, and he hastened to make himself master of the occasion by establishing himself at Alexandria. Any ruler who had hold of Alexandria could command the allegiance of Egypt, and the lord of Egypt could always put his hand upon the very throat of Rome. For Italy was supplied with corn by Egypt. If the corn ships did not sail from Alexandria, the populace of Rome was starved. Accordingly, the first thing which Vespasian did was to *forbid all exports* from Alexandria. That stern edict was felt throughout the Empire. The object of it was to starve Rome into an absolute acceptance of his imperial claim. It was entirely successful. Galba, Otho, and even Vitellius were regarded as isolated military usurpers; Vespasian, the Wild Beast's delegate, the Wild Beast's miraculous upholder, mounted the Wild Beast's

¹ See Ronsch, *Das N. T. Tertullians*, p. 702.

throne; and, like him, became one of the seven heads, and wielded the power of the ten provincial horns—once rebellious—now subdued.

To me these circumstances, which I have drawn out in my own way, but of which the original discovery is due to Hildebrandt, seem to be nearly decisive. My only doubt is whether, in that subtle interchange of ideas which mark all symbolic literatures, St. John may not have mingled two conceptions in his description of the Second Beast. If so, I should feel no doubt that the subordinate monster was meant to combine the features observable in the position and conduct of Simon Magus as the False Prophet and Impostor who supported Nero at Rome, and of Vespasian as a two-horned Wild Beast maintaining his power in the Holy Land.

Lastly, to revert for one moment again to the return of the Antichrist in the person of Nero, it is in apocalyptic and Oriental style amply fulfilled in the reign of Domitian. If Galba, Otho, and Vitellius be not reckoned as mere transitory usurpers who would hardly be regarded as Emperors at all, then Nero the fifth Emperor *did* reappear, not indeed in person, but in symbol, in the eighth Emperor, Domitian. Even Titus was regarded as likely to be a coming Nero. The Jews were very far from looking upon him as the *amor et deliciae humani generis*. It is probable that Sulpicius Severus may be preserving for us the testimony of Tacitus when (ii. 97) he attributes to him the thoroughly Neronian and Antichristian purpose of uprooting Christianity with Judaism in one and the same stroke. This purpose, if he ever had it, he did not live to carry out. But Domitian was an open persecutor of Christianity. Tertullian not only sets him side by side with Nero, but even calls him *portio Neronis de crudelitate* (Apol. 5). In Domitian the Christians saw the legend of *Nero redivivus* symbolically if not actually fulfilled.

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