

passage of the Old Testament upon which the Apocalyptist is working. It is Isaiah xxvi. 19, according to the LXX., which underlies the passage. How will this affect the theory of a Hebrew original?

There are a number of errors in the printing of the Syriac which the reader will readily correct.

Whether Mr. Charles succeeds in establishing all his positions or not, he has certainly written a very valuable work, for which the students of Apocalyptic Literature will give him their hearty thanks.

J. RENDEL HARRIS.

THE LAMB ON THE THRONE.

(REVELATION V. AND VI.)

THERE are two opposite things which cause a literary work to suffer—the unpopularity or the over-popularity of its subject. It may deal with themes so high as to be above the common appreciation; or it may be so intimately connected with the interests of life that its phrases have become household words. The Bible belongs to the last of these. Strange as it may sound, it is not too much to say that its literature has suffered from its own popularity. Its words have become so familiar that to the mass of readers they have lost their freshness. We have come to associate the Bible with simplicity as distinguished from originality. We look upon it as the wisdom of God seen through the foolishness of man, a rich gem in a very mean casket. A greater delusion is not to be conceived. Lord Byron says, that from being compelled to repeat the odes of Horace at school he was never able in after life to see their literary beauty. This is still more true of the Bible. We are taught its words before we can understand the half of their meaning. I do not condemn the practice;

I think it right. None the less it has the effect of blinding us in after years to the value of the case in which the jewel is enshrined, and preventing us from realising the fact that, even on their human side, the books of the Bible contain more originality of conception than the boldest flights of Shakspeare or the subtlest immersions of Browning.

There is no better illustration of this than that passage of the Apocalypse which we have made the subject of our present study. We have become so familiar with the expression "the Lamb on the throne" that we have ceased to see an image of it; or rather, it would be more correct to say, most of us never do see till later life the image which it implies. Yet, nothing is more certain than that the first impression of these words must have been one of the most startling originality. Throw yourself back into the standpoint of that world to which they were first uttered; you will find that they must have been ringing with paradox. To that old world the idea of a lamb on a throne was a contradiction in terms. I do not mean that the ancient earth was a stranger to gentleness. I do not mean that the poets of the olden time would have excluded the softer emotions from the life of their heroes. To combine in one nature the elements of the lion and of the lamb would be as natural for Livy as it was for the writer of the Apocalypse. But the old Pagan world, like the pre-Christian Jewish world, could never say of this element of gentleness, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory"; the kingdom, the power, and the glory were not for *it*. The part of man's nature reserved for them was the self-asserting part. No nation that I know had a lamb as a symbol of its greatness. The Roman would have understood an eagle on the throne, for his ideal was the soaring of ambition. The Jew would have understood a lion on the throne, for his Messiah was a physical conqueror, and

the strength he worshipped was the strength of roaring. But the lamb was ever a victim, the symbol of the vanquished, the sign of the dependent soul. Its place was not the throne, but the altar; it could never be the emblem of dominion.

Think, now, how startling must have been the utterance of the seer of Patmos. Into the heart of the Roman world a new and paradoxical symbol of royalty is suddenly introduced. An object which had always been the emblem of impotence is made the centre of dominion; the lamb is "*in the midst* of the throne." Not only so, but there is more than that. The seer carefully guards us against the delusion that the lamb has obtained the supremacy by changing its nature and becoming a lion. Such transformations are possible. But the seer tells us that the lamb is in the midst of the throne, not only in its own nature, but in its typical act of sacrifice, "a lamb in the attitude of being slain." That is the real sense of the passage, and it is one of deep significance. It suggests to us that even in our days we have a wrong view of Christ's exaltation. What is our view of Christ's exaltation? It is that He has vanquished His cross, ceased to be a servant, and become once more a king. St. John says it is the reverse. It is the cross itself which has been exalted, it is the servant himself who has been ennobled. The point is so striking as to demand a moment's reflection.

No one will deny that at the present hour Christ occupies a different position in the world from that which He held in the first century of our era. He has passed from the foot to the head of the social ladder; He has become the name that is above every name. This will be admitted by all classes—believing and unbelieving. What is the cause of this transformation? Is it that Christianity exerts more physical power over the world in our days than it did in the days of St. John? Assuredly not. In point of fact it does

not exert more physical power. There are laws in every Christian land as to the regulation of Christian worship, but no individual man is compelled to worship. Why then is it that, in some sense, men of every creed and of no creed bow down before the name of Jesus? It is because the thing which the old world disparaged is the thing which the new world prizes. We are living after the resurrection; but let us never forget that it is the resurrection of the Crucified. The Christ who has risen from the grave is not a Christ who has triumphed over suffering; it is a Christ in whom suffering has triumphed. We worship Christ as a servant and because He is a servant. We reverence Him because we see a perpetuation of those things which His first disciples wished to come to an end. We adore Him because that cross, which to the Jew was a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness, has become to us the power and the wisdom of God. The exaltation of Christ in modern times is the exaltation precisely of that element which the ancient world suppressed; and the Christ who has ascended to the right hand of the Father is precisely that Christ who was laid in an ignominious grave.

Such is the fact—a sober fact of history, nay, an object of present experience. It was foreseen and stated in advance by the seer of Patmos at a time when everything pointed in an opposite direction. What was the line of thought in the mind of this man? What was the train of ideas which led him to a conclusion so remote from that reached by his contemporaries? Can we trace the steps of the process by which he arrived at a conviction so intensely out of harmony with the spirit of his own age, so closely in sympathy with the best instincts of ours? Let us try.

And let us begin by asking what was that kingdom which the seer of Patmos had in his mind when he claimed for Christ the throne of universal dominion. His readers evidently understood him to mean the supremacy of the

Jewish nation. I do not think he had any such notion. The idea of a sacrificial lamb being at the height of empire was a thought foreign to the Jew, foreign even to the Jewish Christian. To the son of Israel the lamb was always an emblem of humiliation, never an instrument of conquest. He would have placed a lamb on the altar, never a lamb on the throne. And, from his own point of view, he was right. If the empire to be conquered be a physical one, it is not a lamb that will do it. Physical unruliness can only be controlled by physical rule. If the forces arrayed against the people of God be outward forces, then the kingdom can only be taken by violence, and the power that shall take it must be the reverse of lamb-like. No man who looked for a physical conquest could for a moment have conceived the simile of a world held in restraint by the power of a sacrificial life.

But suppose now we test the logic of St. John's words by another empire. For there is another empire—a kingdom more unruly than the physical, more lawless, more hard to subdue and more difficult to keep; it is the dominion of the human heart. Moreover, when we consult the earliest Christian writings we find that this and not the other is always the kingdom spoken of. Our Lord says that His kingdom comes not with observation, that out of the *heart* proceed all unruly things and all things to be restrained, that, if His kingdom were one of this world, His servants would require to fight; in other words, its forces could not be subdued by a lamb. And when we turn to the first attempt at a church history—the book of Acts, we are confronted on the very opening page by a passage which clenches the argument. The disciples ask, “Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” They are answered that they shall receive power when the Holy Ghost has come upon them. What is this but, in other words, to say that the kingdom lies in the spirit, that the enemies to be

conquered are in the heart, and that the power which would conquer them must pass through the heart. When, therefore, we hear St. John speaking of a lamb on the throne, and interpret it as a dominion over the heart, it is not fair to say that we are allegorising St. John. We are giving his first and original meaning ; we are removing his metaphor. John himself is the allegorist. He has clothed an abstract truth in an image ; we divest it of the image, and it re-appears again as the old, old story, the first story, the story which Christ told to His disciples when the seed was sown.

The kingdom to be conquered, then, is the heart ; we may consider this as settled. The next question is, How is the conquest to be made ? Now, at the time when St. John wrote there had already been three attempts to deal with the problem of the heart. They may be described under the names Stoicism, Buddhism, and Judaism ; but they represent tendencies which have appeared from time to time under many names. If I might be allowed to express epigrammatically their separate import, I would say that they aimed respectively to pluck the flower, wither the flower, and stunt the flower. Stoicism proposed to quell the passions of the heart by plucking out the heart altogether ; it sought to get rid of temptation by getting rid of feeling. Buddhism proposed to quell the passions of the heart by teaching that the heart itself was a delusion, that every pursuit of human desire ended in the discovery that the object was a shadow. Judaism proposed to quell the passions of the heart by the restraining hand of fear ; it proclaimed the presence of a lawgiver ; it set up an embankment against the flood ; it kept the tree of life by the cherubim and the flaming sword.

Now, to these three methods there is one thing in common—they all achieve their end by *contracting* the object of their search. Their aim is to conquer a certain

tract of country ; they do conquer it, but they reduce it to ashes in the process. Can any of these systems be said to possess the throne of the heart? Can Stoicism? The heart is burned up in its march to victory ; man ceases to be tempted by ceasing to feel. Can Buddhism? The heart is prevented from sinning, not by its conviction that the object is bad, but simply and solely by its despair of reaching it. Can Judaism? The heart is kept from doing evil by the continual presence of a policeman and the continual fear of that presence ; it is only saved by law. Does any of these involve the possession of a throne? To return to the old simile, the flower has indeed been made to suffer a change ; but in every case it has been a change by contraction ; it has lost its power of harmfulness by losing power all round. The Stoic has plucked it ; the Buddhist has withered it ; the Jew has stunted it. It is a conquest without a kingdom, a victory without a prize, a triumph that has been only purchased by the mutilation of what was made to be beautiful.

Now, this is not the conquest which any man desires. Even in the physical sphere, what a potentate seeks is an extended, not a contracted possession. In the sphere of the heart it is the same. The reason why we object to lawless passion in the soul is that it contracts the soul. That is the tendency of the disease, and we wish to counteract it. We do not want to cure either by plucking, withering, or stunting the flower ; we wish to expand it. We wish to cure lawless passion on the homœopathic principle —by creating passion on the other side. It is more life and fuller that we want. We do not desire to arrest temptation simply by plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right hand. We would neutralise them by introducing another eye, by creating another hand. “Walk in the spirit,” says Paul, “and you will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.” He means that you will never conquer the

lusts of the heart by contraction, by restraint, by prohibition, by the threat of the fires of hell. You want a counterpassion, an opposing attraction, a positive stimulus pushing the other way. The desire of the flesh can only be met by the desire of the spirit—the thing called love. The flower, which is merely contracted by being plucked, or withered, or stunted, is subdued at last by a process of expansion. It yields to the power of light, and, in yielding, its forces are brought out as they never were before. It reaches its own glory when it surrenders itself to the sun. It finds the secret of its being when it is clothed in a higher element. It blooms in the power by which it has been taken captive.

Now, remember that to St. John light is ever the analogue of love. He applies the two names as synonymous descriptions of God. And why? Because to his mind there was an identity between the process of the redemption of the flower by light and the redemption of the heart by love. We have seen that the light conquers the flower. We have seen that it conquers, not by contracting, but by expanding the flower. But there is one other thing which must be added to this; it conquers by dying for the flower; ere it can bring out the bloom, it must itself be slain. For, what is the process by which the flower is kindled? It is an act of death on the part of the kindling substance. It is not merely that when the flower gets above the ground the sunbeam is ready to crown it. That is the very smallest thing which the sunbeam has to do. It is in the ground itself it must first meet the flower. It must come down to the place of its burial. It must descend to the roots of its being. It must seek it in its humiliation, in its undergroundness, in its want of grace and beauty. So far from waiting till it grows, it must itself be the principle of its growth. It must go down to it in the dark and in the cold, must take part in its darkness and its coldness. If it reaps the glory of its resurrection, it is be-

cause it shares the ignominy of its grave. It sits upon the throne by reason of its sacrifice.

Such is the thought which St. John sees in light and transfers to love. He sees Christ sitting on the throne of human hearts—King, by the most infallible mode of conquest, and by a conquest that enhances the value of the possession. He asks what is the source of this empire; and the answer is not far. He feels that such devotion could only be got if it had first been given. He feels that, if the flower of the heart has blossomed toward the day, it must be through the power of the day itself. Christ has kindled the flower by sharing in its burial. His throne is built upon the steps of His sacrifice. He reigns by the attractive power of a love which He has Himself woven into human hearts, and woven by His own pierced hand. He has won universal love by stooping to that lowest round of the ladder where all universal things are. The common want is at the foot, on the ground floor. Every knee has bent to Him because He has taken on Himself the wants of the undermost servant. Had He stooped to anything short of the valley of death, He might have conquered the upper strata; by touching the lowermost He conquered all. He holds the throne of His dominion in the attitude of a lamb that has been slain.

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