

is very meet and right. . . ." There we read (Sw. p. 30, Br. p. 126): *Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δι' οὗ σοι σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀγίῳ πνεύματι εὐχαριστοῦντες προσφέρομεν, κ.τ.λ.* In the Ethiopic Liturgy it is constantly preserved, and is quite the regular form of the doxology.

The illustrations which have been here brought together place it, I think, beyond all doubt that the Prayer of St. Polycarp, whether it be the actual utterance of the Martyr, or whether it be only put into his lips by the martyrologist, is full of echoes of the liturgical language of the Church. I shall not enter upon the interesting questions which are raised by the observation of these parallels. I will only note that we have found them in almost every case among the earlier rather than among the later formulæ. I commend them to the attention of students alike of the Martyrdoms and of the Liturgies of the early Church.

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## APOCALYPTIC SKETCHES.

### I.

#### THE FIRST AND THE LAST AND THE LIVING ONE.

##### REV. I.

THE Book of Revelation is in many respects a tempting one to the expositor. It has not only the attractiveness of that which offers in any measure to lift the veil from the unknown future, but the advantage of being in the highest degree imaginative and pictorial, while it abounds in passages which reach the loftiest pitch of inspired ecstasy. On the other hand, it so bristles with difficulties that modest men are slow to encounter them, especially as its glowing pages have often been perverted so as to pander to vulgar curiosity, and sometimes made to minister to the most unhealthy excitement, in the hands of those who profess

to map out all the future and fix a precise date for the end of the world.

There is happily a fair agreement now among serious students of the book as to the principles on which it should be interpreted. No exposition could now obtain a hearing which was open to the fatal objection that it put an interpretation on the words which would empty them of all meaning to those to whom they were specially addressed. Of what possible use could it be to these persecuted saints of the first century to be supplied in advance with the history of Napoleon Buonaparte, or of any other great man who was to come into the world so many centuries after they were dead and buried, or to be furnished with *data* from which they might learn that the world was to come to an end in 1866, there or thereabout?

Modern critics have been prone to bring down the dates of the different scriptures; but in the case of the Apocalypse the tendency of critical investigation has been to assign it to an earlier period than had been supposed. A generation ago it was almost universally assumed that the Apocalypse was written by the Apostle John at an advanced age, some time during the persecution under Domitian. Now there seems reason to believe that it was earlier by more than a quarter of a century, and that the Emperor whom the writer would have specially in mind would be not Domitian, but Nero, and (what is of far greater importance) that Jerusalem and the temple were still standing, though within a year or two of their overthrow. Since the earlier date has been largely accepted, some interpreters of ability have worked out the theory that the destruction of Jerusalem, with the events leading up to and immediately following it, is the sole burden of the prophecy, and therefore that it was all fulfilled within the limits of that generation. This, however, is surely an inadequate explanation of those magnificent passages which the instinct

of the Church in all ages has assigned to the consummation of all things for their full realization ; but it is exceedingly interesting to find how closely the main drift of the prophecy adapts itself to the theory referred to, a fact which may well lead us to raise the question whether this was not the primary application of the greater part of it.

But there seems no reason to suppose that this immediate reference exhausts the significance of these marvellous visions. Does not St. Peter remind us that what was revealed to the prophets of the Old Testament was not for themselves alone, but for us (1 Pet. i. 11)? We may expect, therefore, that this great Seer of the New Testament, while ministering immediately to those who were exposed to the storms of the passing time, will have visions and revelations of God which are of continuous application to those who shall be exposed to similar trials till time shall be no more.

Not only must we put ourselves in the position of the writers and the first readers of the Apocalypse in order to interpret it aright, but we must read it in the light of the imagination. This great poem of the New Testament must be read in the poetic spirit. It is "of imagination all compact"; for it gathers up in a marvellous way the imagery of the older prophets and seers, so that there is scarcely a poetic utterance in all the Bible which does not find some echo here. Yet it is not a book of echoes. It has its own originality throughout. The borrowing is like that of all great poets, like that of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Tennyson. You see the relation to the old; but it is a re-creation, with a new beauty all its own. We must be careful, then, that we do not, with our prosaic Western minds, so interpret the details of this vision as to impoverish its great poetry into very poor prose.

It should be an exercise in music as well as poetry; for there are few books in the whole range of the world's

literature which equal this in the music of its words; and this is all the more remarkable in view of the blemishes in style, and even solecisms in grammar, which the Greek scholar recognises in reading the original. We all know that many of its passages are of such surpassing beauty that they have been taken up by the best musical composers, and made the vehicle of some of their loftiest flights. One need only refer to the closing passages of Handel's *Messiah* as a palmary instance. If we read the book not only in the poetical but in the musical spirit, it will go singing through our souls as a divine oratorio, in which the leading images of all the inspired poets and prophets of the Bible are combined in a grand finale.

We speak of it advisedly as a finale. It is almost certain that it was not the last book of the Bible in the order of production, just as it is generally agreed that Genesis, in the form in which we have it, was not the first. But it is surely clear that the hand of God is to be recognised in the fact that the Scriptures, as finally collected, make such a wonderfully harmonious whole, advancing from the Apocalypse of Creation at the beginning to the Apocalypse of Redemption at the end; and we certainly shall not go wrong if we take with us, as one of the suggestions for the intelligent reading of it, the remembrance that it is the grand conclusion of the oracles of God which begin with "the generations of the heavens and the earth," and end with "the Regeneration," the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The English of the Greek word Apocalypse, and of the Latin word Revelation, is Unveiling. Of what? Of the future? Not primarily. It is the unveiling of the Unseen. At the beginning of the book we hear John saying: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day," and then going on to describe how he heard the voice of his old Master, and saw

Him in the glory of His resurrection. That was no unveiling of the future. It was an unveiling of the Unseen, the unseen Christ, present there and then. Again, when, after the letters to the Churches, we come to the more strictly prophetic part of the book, how is it introduced? "After these things I saw, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven," and through the open door he saw the Throne of God. This, again, was an unveiling, not of the future, but of the unseen.

The object of this revealing was to strengthen faith and nourish patience amid the many tribulations of the time. This is indicated in the beginning, where John introduces himself to the Christians to whom he is writing as "their brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Christ"; and it reappears more than once, as in chapter xiii. 10: "Here is the patience and the faith of the saints"; and again (xiv. 12): "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." Faith sees the kingdom of God in the heavens; patience is needed to wait for its coming on earth. The one is the obverse, the other the reverse of the gold coin of the kingdom of God. Faith turns heavenward, Godward, face to face with the Unseen; patience is the earthward side, calmly confronting the tribulation of the time. It will help us not a little in our expository sketches to keep in mind this plain, practical bearing of the entire Apocalypse.

We may accept *vv.* 1-3 as the title-page, and *vv.* 4-7 as the dedication, including a salutation which breaks out into a doxology, and ends with a general announcement of the main subject of the book. Let us here note in passing the supreme importance attached to the person of Christ. The Revelation is to be the unveiling of Jesus Christ (*v.* 1); the salutation is indeed from Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;

but the name which is emphasized and dwelt upon is the name of Jesus Christ (*v.* 5); the doxology is "to Him that loveth us and loosed us from our sins by His blood"; and the great event of the future is, "Behold *He* cometh with clouds." Jesus Christ is all and in all.

After this introduction begins the great oratorio, with the striking of two chords, one major and dominant, the other minor; the one the chord of faith, the other the chord of patience. Listen first to the note of triumph: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord, the God,<sup>1</sup> which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." This is the great triumphant note of the exalted Christ which goes sounding on through all the book. The other is the minor tone of suffering humanity, giving the key-note of patience: "I, John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Now we are to follow the process by which John's prison was broken—not its walls, but its roof—so that, though he was still confined to his lonely rocky isle, there was conferred on him the freedom of the City of God. It is the morning of the Lord's Day, and he is looking wistfully across the waste of waters and thinking of the poor sheep in those hunted Churches of the mainland which were so dear to him. Fain would he be among them; but the "unplumbed, salt, estranging sea" is all around him, and there is no means of crossing it, not even of sending a

<sup>1</sup> This is the marginal reading of B.V., which is not only well supported by the authority of early MSS., but more in accordance with the context. The reference in the beginning of *v.* 4 is certainly to the Father; but after the mention of the name Jesus Christ, attention is concentrated on Him throughout *vv.* 5-7, so that it is natural to take the Lord Jesus as the speaker here, especially as it is unquestionably He who in *v.* 18 speaks of Himself as the First and the Last and the Living One. See also xxii. 13.

letter. As he sadly paces the shore, he suddenly hears a voice behind him: "What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven Churches; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea." Looking in the direction of the voice, he saw, by "the light which never was on sea or land," (for he was "in the Spirit,") seven golden lamps, of which he no doubt would have given some description, as did the prophet Zechariah on a similar occasion, had not his whole heart and soul been engrossed with the central Figure in the midst of them.

Who is He? He is a Being of surpassing glory, and yet He has "a human air," He is "one like unto a son of man," aye, like unto *the* Son of Man. He is transfigured in celestial light, as in that great day on the Mount; but the heart which throbs beneath that breast, the spirit which flames from out those eyes, the soul which utters itself in that voice, is the same as in the happy days of long ago. It is the same Jesus. He disappeared from Olivet, He reappears in lonely Patmos. He is clothed in the long robe of the priest, to show that He has power with God; and the golden girdle marks Him as the King to show that He has power with man. "And His head and His hair were white as white wool, white as snow, and His eyes were like a flame of fire, and His feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and His voice as the voice of many waters." This is evidently an impressionist picture. The first impression was one of joyful recognition of the Son of Man on whose bosom the beloved disciple had so often lain; but as he gazes, the glory dazzles him; the priest merges in the king; the Son of Man is lost in the awe-inspiring Judge. The Son of Man—the Judge: did not Christ Himself associate these two together? The time is coming when the beloved disciple

shall record it in his Gospel: "The Father . . . gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man." This is to be largely an apocalypse of judgment; so we shall not be astonished at the note of awfulness in the description of the Son of Man, as He appears to tell the things which must shortly come to pass.

"Who shall stand when He appeareth?" Even the beloved disciple could not, "so terrible was the sight." He had indeed no reason to fear; but the suddenness of the unveiling was too much for him. "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." The "great voice as of a trumpet" had startled him; but, so long as he only heard, he had strength to turn and stand and look; it was when he saw he fell. "I have heard of Thee," said Job, "by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." "And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, Fear not." That touch and these words must have recalled the memorable day when Peter, James, and this same John, having seen their Master's glory on the mount, "fell on their faces and were sore afraid; and Jesus came and touched them, saying, Arise, be not afraid." Yes, this Son of man, with eyes like a flame of fire, and a voice like the sound of many waters, and His face like the sun shining in his strength, is the very same at heart—as tender, as gentle, as compassionate—as in the old days when, with eyes like ours, and a voice like ours, and a face like ours, He went in and out among the people, and ate with publicans and sinners, and poured out His soul unto death upon the cruel cross.

Awful times are coming; men's hearts will soon be failing them for fear; the horrors of judgment which are about to be disclosed are only faintly foreshadowed in the description of the Judge; but to the true disciple there comes the word, "Fear not." Two reasons are given why



he should have no fear. The first is, "I am the First and the Last and the Living One." Love is the primal force; Love is the ultimate goal; Love is the presiding genius of life's mystery. I, Jesus, am the First and the Last and the Living One. This is the clear, strong note which we shall hear sounding and resounding throughout this book in the ear of faith.

What, then, of these awful horrors? See how the saints of God are falling before the sword of the cruel tyrant, *Is Love reigning? Is it not rather Death? Listen again: "I was dead." Dost thou fear death now? Death had its seeming triumph over Me. Was it a triumph? "Behold, I am alive." Perhaps to die again? Nay; "Behold, I am alive for evermore."* It seems to you that Nero has the keys of death. He can say, Let this man be wrapped in wool and pitch, and burn as a torch in my garden; let that woman be thrown to the lions in the amphitheatre—has he not the keys? Nay; "*I have the keys of death and of Hades.*" Have patience therefore. You must suffer awhile; but it is that you may be glorified together with Me.

Here is the secret of the martyr courage. Here is the faith and the patience of the saints. Give a man a true apocalypse, and he is indomitable.

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