

ST. PAUL IDENTIFIED WITH ANTICHRIST BY
THE JEWS.

THE reference to Mnason (Acts xxi. 15-18), as "an old-fashioned disciple of Cyprus," the native place of Barnabas the Prophet, is a distinctive prophetic feature in the history of the Acts. It seems clear that the point of mentioning an "old-fashioned" disciple as providing entertainment for St. Paul and St. Luke on the way to Jerusalem¹ is this: St. Paul represented the new fashion in prophecy, the new ideas which he and Barnabas had set forth at the Council of Jerusalem some eight years before, the new and much larger faith which opened *the door of faith* (Acts xiv. 27) to the Gentiles without entrance through *the door of circumcision*. This seemed at first to be a dangerous doctrine. Perhaps the danger might be lessened if their host adhered to the "old-fashioned" opinion and would at the same time vouch for his guests. This amount of guarantee, however, proved quite inadequate; and James accordingly now propounded his almost fatal plan, whereby St. Paul should as it were appease the rage of "the wild beast" by putting his head into its mouth.² Nothing could possibly show St.

¹ Blass is undoubtedly right in pointing out how much more clearly the position is described in the Western recension of Acts xxi. 16, "And having arrived at a certain village (between Caesarea and Jerusalem) we lodged with Mnason," etc. Mnason did not lodge in Jerusalem.

² Prof. Schmiedel, in Cheyne and Black's *Encyclopædia Biblica*, p. 46, remarks: "And had Paul been engaged in carrying out a Nazirite vow, it is hardly likely that his presence in the Temple could have led to an attempt on his life." This remark would supply justification, if any were needed, for the observations which follow, though they were written before I was aware of Prof. Schmiedel's article. The encyclopædists should, if possible, be read, as providing a valuable stimulus to study and promoting a clearer understanding of the Acts and of its author's point of view. Schmiedel also says (p. 43): "To prove that Paul himself constantly observed the Jewish law would, for Paul, have been simply an untruth, and that, too, on a point of his religious conviction that was fundamental (Gal. iv. 9-11; Rom. x. 4, etc.). This kind of assertion is incessantly overstated by encyclopædists. The question is important and requires further discussion.

Paul's marvellous faith in God's providence and purpose towards him, his absolute humility and consideration for others, and his willingness to submit to the judgement of others, more conclusively than his compliance with James's advice. Looking back upon the circumstances now, especially through the mild atmosphere of the historian of the Acts, we can see how the true colouring of God's purpose has mellowed the lurid passions of the Jews, who would have torn the Apostle in pieces in the Temple Court. In the twentieth century we can take the request of James as a matter of course in the unfolding of St. Paul's progress to the world's metropolis, where he intended to plant the Cross; we can see that it was a move upon the board, which brought in its sequel other necessary and most beneficial moves. But if we ask how an impartial observer—an intelligent Nicodemus or Gamaliel of the time, if we could find him—would have regarded James's action, there can be but one answer, that it was the rashest and most ill-judged course that could be advised.

James must have known something of Antichrist. He must have known that, just as Messiah was an all-pervading dream of the Jews of that and the preceding century, so Antichrist was a dream, an almost universal dream, a dream that fiercely haunted many of the Jews, and haunted some of them more closely than did that of Messiah. Their minds would be full of him; and some who could not rise high enough in the moral scale to thrill with the joyful hope and aspiration for a personal Son of Man, could very well summon up a fiery and patriotic indignation that would storm forth against so devilish a thought as "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet standing where it ought not" in the Temple of the Most High.

Now just as the dream of a Messiah took many different forms in different minds, so did the dream of an Antichrist. In the mind of John of Ephesus, since the term Antichrist

is not mentioned in the Apocalypse, we can hardly say¹ that it designated Rome. But the idea is essentially that Rome or its representative was Antichrist. St. Paul himself, though he again has never used the term, speaks of the Man of Sin as if he were Antichrist, and he takes the exactly opposite view to John in that he regards Rome as the beneficent controlling power which restrains Antichrist at present, while John in his indignation at the Emperor-worship under Nero regards Rome as the Church's deadliest foe. The true Roman citizen, who was also Jew by birth and training and Christian by conviction, would have been grievously vexed with the Ephesian seer's outburst against Rome. It is hardly too much to say that had Paul the Aged survived to read the Apocalypse it would have broken his heart. He was spared that piercing thrust, that "wounding in the house of his friends" (Zech. xiii. 6).

If all this difference of opinion could exist between two New Testament writers on the subject of Antichrist, it is plain that no less difference would reign among different Jewish minds.² There is an equal difference between the charges brought against St. Paul by the Jews in different places. When it suited them they could, as at Thessalonica, accuse him of "acting contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." Yet at Antioch in Pisidia the Jews, "filled with jealousy," had "urged on the *devout* women of honourable estate" (Acts xiii. 45, 50), presumably on high scriptural grounds of the Old Testament. At Corinth (Acts xviii. 13) again the Jews had alleged the injury done by Paul to the Mosaic Law. At Ephesus (Acts xix. 13) they complained of his injuring their trade in magic. Now it is certain that there were Jews in Ephesus, as everywhere else, who held strongly the belief in Antichrist.

¹ With Dr. Charles, *Eschatology*, p. 348 n.

² See Dr. Charles, *Eschatology*, p. 380 ff. n. for a discussion of the Jewish origin of the idea of Antichrist, which we must remember was as shifting and unsubstantial and yet impressive as a dream.

Nowhere was the Book of Daniel more closely studied : nowhere was there a more fruitful crop of Messianic literature : nowhere were persons more awake for Judaism than in the birthplace of the Apocalypse of John. Ephesus is the origin of a prophetic writer who within a few years of the time which we are considering was to invoke his countrymen¹ thus : "And thou, Asia, that art joined in heart to the splendour of Babylon (Rome), and art the glory of her person, woe be unto thee, thou wretch, because thou hast made thyself like unto her. . . . Therefore, saith God, I will send plagues upon thee, widowhood, poverty, famine, sword, and pestilence." At the same time he could address his readers in language which bears an unmistakable resemblance to our Apocalypse itself, and yet is Jewish without being Christian.

The Ephesian or Asiatic Jews—for of course "Asiatic" means of the Roman Province of Asia—would bear at this time a special grudge against St. Paul personally. At the tumult at Ephesus (Acts xix. 33) they had put forward Alexander, in order if possible, to prove to the excited mob that the Jews were not to be saddled with the offences of this apostate Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus. They failed, and they doubtless had suffered in consequence since. But above all they were infuriated by his teaching. Had he not himself said to the Thessalonians that there was to be a great "apostasy" (2 Thess. ii.) before Antichrist came? "Anathema!" they would say; "he is the apostate himself; he teacheth men to believe that Jesus is the Christ; he maketh the Law of Moses to be of none effect; he ceaseth not to speak against the Holy Place; he saith that the Jew hath no advantage; that Abraham hath nothing whereof to glory; that circumcision is nothing, that the Jew is abolished." They plotted to take his life at Cenchrea, and thought they were doing God service. For was it not

¹ 4 Esdras xv.

written in the Book of Daniel (Dan. xi. 21, 25, 26, LXX): "And in his place shall stand up a contemptible person, to whom they shall not give the glory of a king; but he shall come in suddenly, and obtain the kingdom by lottery (or inheritance, but in the Chaldee, *flatteries*). . . . But he shall not stand, for a device shall be devised against him." Had not St. Paul's weak bodily presence and contemptible power of speech been already criticised by the Corinthian objectors (2 Cor. x. 10)? Had not St. Paul preached much about the "inheritance of the Saints" and their *lot*? Had he not been already accused of preaching the Kingdom by *flatteries*, as he admitted himself when he wrote to the Galatians—"Am I now persuading men, or God? or am I seeking to *please men*?" (Gal. i. 10). Had he not enlarged in preaching about the "lot of inheritance" (Acts xxiii.)? It would be easy for Asiatic Jews¹ to see in many of his actions and doctrines the fulfilment of ancient prophecy. And it was easy to find more than forty resolute Jews who should forecast devices against him, in other words, plot his destruction. For there is no wind to fan the fanatical flame so strong as a popular belief in the fulfilment of prophecy.

The prophecies in the Book of Daniel continued: "And strong arms shall stand on his part" (Dan. xi. 31, LXX). Well, the strong arm of the law of Rome had protected him once and again against the spluttering fury of the Jews, at Corinth and at Ephesus (Acts xviii. 16; xix. 40). Only

¹ It seems possible, though improbable, that the Asiatic, i.e. Ephesian, Jews who took the leading part in arresting Paul were well versed in the Chaldee of Daniel vii.-xi., but they certainly knew it in LXX, and probably had other versions of it also. From the valuable articles of Dr. Gwynn on Symmachus, Theodotion, Hexapla, etc., in Smith's *Dict. of Christian Biography*, we gather that other versions existed. Such a famous eschatological passage as this would be most closely studied and jealously guarded. Thus it is probable that Aquila's version of Daniel ix. 26, 27 was so hallowed that when Symmachus came to make his version, he did not venture to alter it. By Aquila's literal version, to the fanatical students of prophecy it would be even plainer than by the LXX, that St. Paul was Antichrist, and ought to be slain at once, to do God service.

one step more was needed ; it was that he should be found standing in the Temple of God. " And they shall pollute the sanctuary of awe, and shall take away the daily sacrifice " (Acts xxi. 28 f.). Precisely so. Saul, they would say, is abolishing the sacrifice by introducing the polluted heathen into the Temple, where he had as a fact himself entered in order to make the offerings prescribed in the Law (Num. vi. 13-20). " And they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate." It was written—" He shall honour with gold and silver a god whom his fathers did not know " (Dan. xi. 38). " A kingdom of Gentiles shall corrupt the city and the Holy Place with the Messiah " (Dan. ix. 26, 27, LXX)—just what Saul of Tarsus was doing, in bringing the offerings, so long and carefully collected from the Gentile Churches, to aid the poor Saints in Jerusalem in the name of Messiah !—" and in the end of the week there shall be removed the sacrifice and the libation " (Dan. ix. 35). " And some of them of understanding shall devise for purifying themselves " (Acts xxi. 26)—exactly what St. Paul was doing in the Temple. Now they had watched for him day after day, and he had been seen in the Temple, at the altar, and his four ragged men with him. What were these four? Were they not also the four horns (Chaldee, notable ones) towards the four winds of heaven spoken of also by Daniel the prophet? And what was their poor ragged appearance but a crafty disguise of Beelzebub? For " the four bruised ones were not according to their real strength " (Dan. viii. 8, 22, LXX). And what was Saul doing but confirming his diabolic covenant for one week? And what was he about to do but to stop the sacrifice and overspread the abomination of desolation? They must not wait the full seven days, or they would be too late. So when the " seven days were almost ended, they stirred up the people and took forcible hold of him " (Acts xxi. 27).

The conclusion, the wild conviction and certainty, that the Jews would draw from these coincidences was that Saul of Tarsus was Antichrist himself. Swiftly enough the rumour flew from mouth to mouth. And no wonder that they cried, "Away with him!" There was for them no other way of dealing with "the man of lawlessness" who opposed the law of Moses, "the man of sin, the son of perdition" (2 Thess. ii. 3).

The subsequent measures for his safety which Claudius Lysias found it necessary to take are quite incommensurate with the idea of an ordinary accused person; but 470 foot and horse were not too many to guard the supposed Antichrist on his way to the court of justice at Caesarea, at least as far as Antipatris. Indeed the plot against St. Paul, subsequent to his rescue by the Chiliarch, appears to have been prompted by an increased conviction on the part of the Jews that Antichrist had been snatched from them. The Romans, in fact, were fulfilling their part of the prophecy in Daniel just as St. Paul had been fulfilling his. For Daniel continues—"And the Romans shall come and shall thrust him out, and he shall turn round" (Dan. xi. 30, LXX)—this St. Paul had done when he stood on the castle steps and waved his hand to the people (Acts xxi. 40; xxii. 20-22); "and they shall be angry upon the Covenant of the Holy One (or Holy Place)"—thus they had been angry when he reminded them of Stephen, and the covenant once made with their fathers and now extended to the heathen. Any one who will endeavour to read the 8th, 9th, and 11th chapters of Daniel¹ in the lurid light of an Ephesian Jew, so far as he can place himself in so passionate a position, will appreciate something of the half-reasoned frenzy which flung the mob and their conspirators upon the innocent Apostle. E. C. SELWYN.

¹ The whole passage, which is obscure enough in the original, is more so in the LXX, but it is quite capable of an interpretation which would make Saul of Tarsus to be Antichrist to a fervent Jew of 58 A.D.