

we saw, had not yet appeared above the horizon of Basilides. But had not Basilides already appeared above the horizon of the Fourth Gospel ?

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*THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST: A WARNING  
AGAINST MITHRAS WORSHIP.*

THE text (Apoc. xiii. 18) in Codex Alexandrinus reads : *καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ*. Codex Vaticanus has the same number 666 written with the three letters *χξϛ*. Codex *N* has the variant *ἑξακόσιαι*. Codex Ephraemi (C) reads *ἑξακόσια δέκα ἕξ*, 616, with Cod. 11 of unknown date in the library of Petavius. This alternative reading was known to Irenaeus at the end of the second century,<sup>1</sup> and has been accepted by Zahn, Holtzmann, and Spitta.<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus himself rejected it, accepting the witness of those who saw John face to face.

Irenaeus had learnt from them that the number of the beast, *κατὰ τὸν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ψῆφον διὰ τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ γραμμάτων*, was sexcentos et sexaginta et sex ; and then he adds (the Greek text is lost) : “ hoc est, decadas aequales hecatontasin, et hecacontadas aequales monasin.” Some authorities left out five decads from the middle figure : “ Ignoro quomodo erraverunt quidam sequentes idiotismum, et medium frustrantes numerum nominis, quinquaginta numeros deducentes, pro sex decadis unam decadem volentes esse.” He thinks it may be the fault of the MSS. :—“ Scriptorum peccatum, ut solet fieri ”—since the numbers were represented by letters, and it was easy to alter the Greek letter which stood for 60 “into an Iota,”—“in Iota.” Once the mistake was made, some adopted it without inquiry ; others usurped

<sup>1</sup> *Iren. c. Haer. V. xxx. 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *Encyc. Bibl. p. 210.*

the "denarium," i.e. the 10; others, again, in their ignorance, dared to seek out the names corresponding to the false number. The former may receive pardon from God; the latter deceive themselves and others. These must learn the true number of the name, that they be not numbered among the false prophets.

Irenaeus starts with the assumption that the number 666 represents the name of Antichrist: "hunc vere cognoscere esse abominationem desolationis. Hoc et Apostolus ait: Cum dixerint Pax, et munitio, tunc subitaneus illis superveniet interitus" (1 Thess. v. 3). He supports it by a prophecy of Jeremiah on Dan: "et veniet et manducabit terram et plenitudinem ejus et civitatem, et qui habitant in ea" (Jer. viii. 16). For this reason the tribe of Dan is omitted from the number of those who were sealed unto salvation (Apoc. vii. 5).<sup>1</sup>

"Certius ergo et sine periculo est, sustinere adimpletionem prophetiae, quam suspicari et divinare nomina quaelibet." But though this is the safe course, he frames his inquiry, "propter timorem erga Deum et zelum veritatis." He then refers to three names. The first is *ETANΘΑΣ*: "sed nihil de eo affirmamus." The second is *ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ*. He is drawn to it because it is the last kingdom: "valde verisimile est, quoniam novissimum Regnum hoc habet vocabulum. Latini enim sunt qui nunc regnant: sed non in hoc nos gloriabimur."

It then continues: "Sed et *TEITAN*, prima syllaba per duas Graecas vocales e et i scripta, omnium nominum quae apud nos inveniuntur, magis fide dignum est." It agrees with the number: "Etenim praedictum numerum habet in se." It is of six letters: "et literarum est sex, singulis syllabis ex ternis literis constantibus." It is ancient and uncommon: "et vetus et semotum." It is

<sup>1</sup> Iren. c. *Haer.* V. xxx. 3.

the name of no king : “ neque enim eorum Regum, qui secundum nos sunt, aliquis vocatus est Titan.” It is the name of no idol among either the Greeks or barbarians : “ neque eorum, quae publice adorantur, idolorum apud Graecos et barbaros habet vocabulum hoc.” The reference to public worship is important. The name was borne by none of the recognized divinities of Greek or Barbarian worship. Yet the name is divine : “ et divinum putatur apud multos esse hoc nomen, ut etiam sol Titan vocetur ab his qui nunc tenent ” (i.e. imperant). He concludes : “ tamen habet verisimilitudinem, ut ex multis colligamus ne forte Titan vocetur qui veniet.”<sup>1</sup> He will not do more than suggest it. If he who wrote the Apocalypse kept it dark, the time to reveal it had not come. Nor is it long since he wrote : οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἑωράθη, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς, πρὸς τῷ τέλει τῆς Δομετιανοῦ ἀρχῆς.

In this discussion Irenaeus finds the fulfilment of anti-Christian worship in a cult which he characterizes by the uncommon name of Titan. It is a cult not recognized among the public cults of the Greeks and Barbarians. It is a cult which gives divine honour to the Sun. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Irenaeus is referring to Mithras worship, the most typically anti-Christian of all the religions of the empire.

Irenaeus wrote his work on the Heresies between the years 181 and 189.<sup>2</sup> The last book, in which this inquiry is found, belongs to the latter end of the reign of Commodus (180–192). This Emperor was favourably disposed towards the Christians, many holding office at his court.<sup>3</sup> It was not, therefore, in the person of the Emperor that Irenaeus sought for the fulfilment of the dark signs of the Apocalypse :

<sup>1</sup> Iren. V. xxx. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Harnack, *Chron.* i. 320.

<sup>3</sup> Iren. c. *Haer.* IV. xxx. 1.

“neque enim eorum Regum, qui secundum nos sunt, aliquis vocatus est Titan.”<sup>1</sup> Commodus was vile enough, perhaps amongst the vilest of the Emperors, but he was not personally the foe of the Christians.

The progress of Mithraism in the West made rapid strides in the reign of Commodus: “Sous les Antonins, surtout depuis le règne de Commode, les preuves de leur présence se multiplient dans tous les pays. A la fin du ii<sup>e</sup>. siècle, on les célébrait à Ostée dans quatre temples au moins.”<sup>2</sup> These mysteries in honour of the Sun-God, Sol Invictus, were the most subtle obstacle to the Christian mysteries. They were celebrated in all the great military centres. They had the strongest influence where Christianity itself was strongest. They represented, therefore, at that period a great anti-Christian force. Tertullian says of Mithraism: “Mithras signat illic in frontibus milites suos: celebrat et panis oblationem, et imaginem resurrectionis inducit, et sub gladio redimit coronam. Habet et virgines, habet et continentes.”<sup>3</sup> The words: “Mithras signat illic in frontibus milite suos” may be compared with the words of the Apocalypse: *καὶ ποιεῖ πάντας . . . ἵνα δώσιν αὐτοῖς χάραγμα ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῶν* (Apoc. xiii. 16). “Here is wisdom: he that hath understanding, let him reckon the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν· καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ. The αὐτοῦ may refer to ἀνθρώπου as well as to the θηρίου of the previous clause. Is there in this a reference to the representation of Mithras in the form of a youth with Phrygian cap on head, so familiar in the sculptures of the old Roman cities of the West ?

There is therefore some reason for thinking that at the close of the second century in the age of Irenaeus and Ter-

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. V. xxx. 3.    <sup>2</sup> *Les Mystères de Mithra*. F. Cumont, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Tert. *de Praeser.* c. xl.

tullian the Christian Church looked upon Mithras as an embodiment of Antichrist, and found in the name Titan the title of the Sun-God, the fulfilment of the number of the Beast. Is there ground for thinking that the Apocalyptic writer in the age of Domitian (81-96) had the same cult in view? The researches of Mons. Cumont enables this question to be answered in the affirmative.

Statius, who wrote about 80, refers to the figure of Mithras slaying the Bull as known in Rome at this time.

“Persei sub rapibus autri  
Indignata sequi torquentem cornua Mithram.”

*Stat. Theb. i. 717.*<sup>1</sup>

But the most ancient dedication to Mithras is a bilingual inscription of the period of the Flavian Emperors (69-96). There is also in the British Museum a marble group of Mithras and the Bull set up by a slave of T. Claudius Livianus, who was Praefectus Praetorio under Trajan in 102.<sup>2</sup> The cult of Mithras was well established in Rome during the latter part of the first century.

This is the period at which the Apocalypse took its final shape. According to Apoc. xvii. 10, the Apocalypticist represents himself as writing under the sixth Emperor: *καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσὶν οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν, ὁ εἷς ἔστιν, ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν.* The five were Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero. The sixth (not counting the rule of Galba, Vitellius, and Otho, who all reigned and died between June 9, 68, and April 15, 69) is Vespasian, who reigned from July 69, to June 79. The seventh is Titus, whose short reign, June 79 to September 81, is referred to in the words: *καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μείναι* (Apoc. xvii. 10).

One of the acts of Vespasian was to convert the Colossus of Nero into a statue of the Sun-God. This remained until the reign of Hadrian (117-138), when it was removed

<sup>1</sup> Cumont, *myst. de Mithr.*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

to make room for the new Temple of Venus and Rome. This statue would be during the reign of Domitian, when the Apocalypse received its last touches in the city of Rome, a Titanic representation not only of the great persecutor, the Imperial Antichrist, but of the great anti-Christian system of Mithras worship.

Nor is this the only method in which the number of the Beast can be referred to Nero. The greatest monument of Vespasian in Rome is the Colosseum or Flavian amphitheatre, so called because it was erected immediately under the Colossus of Nero or the Sun-God. It must have given work to vast numbers of the poorer classes in Rome, the very classes in which Christianity was beginning to take root. Day after day their work lay beneath this Titanic statue. The Greek writer of the Apocalypse may have veiled the word Titan under his number 666; the Jews were equally ready to see that it read in Hebrew letters נרון קסר : Nero Caesar, the same number 666.

The last Apocalyptic editor was almost certainly at Rome. The same hand that wrote *Ἔδεν ἡ σοφία ἐστίν ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου* (Apoc. xiii. 18) wrote the passage referring to the Seven Hills : *ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλὰὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσὶν, ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν* (Apoc. xvii. 9). It is an example of Jewish and Greek word-play at Rome under the reigns of Vespasian and Domitian, the period in which Mithraism as well as Christianity was slowly being established. It is probable that Revelation xvii. 11 is by the later hand under the reign of Domitian, the reign referred to by Irenaeus. *Καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μείναι* is a *vaticinium ex eventu* in reference to the short reign of the seventh king, Titus : *καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοός ἐστιν, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστίν.* These last words refer to the legend of *Nero Redivivus*.

The writer of the Apocalypse gives expression to the popular expectation of the return of Nero. It is the head who is wounded to death and afterwards healed (Apoc. xiii. 3, 12, 14). He will come again from the abyss, and demand the worship and adoration of the people (Apoc. xvii. 8).<sup>1</sup> This idea rests on a historical basis. In the year 69 a Pseudo-Nero appeared in Asia Minor and Greece. In the reign of Titus (79–81) another Nero appeared on the Euphrates and was acknowledged by the Parthian king Artabanus. His name was Terentius Maximus. He was known in Asia Minor, and in face and voice and accomplishments closely resembled Nero. He went so far as to gather forces against Rome. After many negotiations he was handed over by the Parthian government to the Emperor Domitian.<sup>2</sup> Mommsen says of him: "The Nero of John is he who rose on the Euphrates under Vespasian, whom Artabanus recognized in the reign of Titus, and whom the Parthians in the year 88 delivered up to Domitian."<sup>3</sup> Bousset, under the year 88, speaks of a third Pseudo-Nero among the Parthians.<sup>4</sup> The constant terror of the return of Nero forms part of the historical framework of this vision of the Apocalypse.

Irenaeus in the reign of Commodus interprets the number not of the Emperor, but apparently of the spirit of the Antichrist centralized in the system of Mithraism. The Apocalyptic writer in the age of Domitian, while apparently cognizant of the *χάραγμα* of Mithraism among the slaves and traffickers of the Roman forum, combines with the new spirit of Antichrist the militant anti-Christian policy of *Nero Redivivus*. The two anti-Christian ideas were found combined in the Titan Sun-God, the Nero, who figured so prominently at the far end of the forum.

<sup>1</sup> *Encyc. Bibl.* p. 207

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> *Momm. Prov.* v. 521.

<sup>4</sup> *Eng. Bibl.* p. 211.

The number 616 still stands in need of explanation. The evidence of Codex C cannot be easily set aside; nor can the conclusions of Irenaeus be accepted without reserve. It is evident that there was a large body of witness for the number 616. Irenaeus gives voice to the predominant reading of the age of Domitian. He does not explain satisfactorily the reading 616.

No one had so nearly embodied the Antichrist of Daniel, i.e. the Antiochus Epiphanes of the Maccabaeian age, as Caius Caligula, the mad youth who thought himself the brother of Jupiter, and claimed for himself divine honours. In 39 he gave instructions to Petronius, the Governor of Syria, to enter Jerusalem with the Roman legions, and set up his statue in the Temple. The Jews flocked to the Governor, both at Ptolemais and at Tiberias, and begged him to use his influence to prevent the sacrilege. King Agrippa, the friend of Caius, at last went personally to Rome, and succeeded for the time in staying the hand of Caius. But the concession was confined to the Temple at Jerusalem, and then only for a time. He still had the statue in readiness when in January 41 he was murdered in the Cryptoportico on the Palatine by Chaerea.

It is this appearance of Antichrist in the person of Caius Caligula which underlies the Apocalypse of the Last Things in St. Matthew xxiv. 15: "Let him that readeth understand." There may also be an allusion to this terror in 2 Thessalonians ii. 3: "The Man of Sin, who sitteth in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

The letters of *Γάιος καίσαρ* make up the number 616. It is for this reason among others that Holtzmann and Spitta recognize a Jewish Apocalypse of the age of Caius Caligula as the original of this portion of the Apocalypse of John.

The interpretation of Irenaeus at least suggests that not only in his time, but in the age of Domitian, the Church

under the number of the Beast uttered a solemn warning against Mithras worship as an embodiment of the spirit of Antichrist.

THOMAS BARNS.

*JOB.*

II.

WE are to picture Job, then, suddenly plunged into overwhelming misfortune, dark thoughts of God's mysterious providence surging in his soul, and his friends gathered around to comfort him, but speechless in their sympathy—his pain was so great. Seven days thus pass in silent sorrow. At length the warm touch of friendship unseals the fountain of the heart, and the sufferer opens his mouth, and pours forth his pent-up feelings. With consummate art the poet leads up to the inevitable crisis. A long-drawn wail in which Job curses his day, because it brought him forth to all this agony, and longs wistfully for death and Sheol, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest," a hushed reference to the unnamed One who "has given light to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul," and at length Job names God as the One who has "hid his way," and "set an hedge about him," so that he can turn neither this way nor that (iii. 23). Eliphaz' glowing visions of the blessedness of the man whom God hath chastened only drive him into bitter tauntings of God for His inexplicable cruelty. It is His arrows that are within him; His terrors that have "set themselves in array against him" (vi. 4). It is He that setteth a watch over him, as though he were the dragon of the deep (vii. 12). And all the while Job feels that he has given God no occasion for such treatment. All his life long he has kept "the words of the Holy One" (vi. 10). Therefore he feels himself fast falling away from his faith, "forsaking the fear of the