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"The Apocalypse- Its Sources and Content"

1. Introduction.

- (a) Purpose.
- (b) Method.

2. Sources.

1. Old Testament.

- (a) General.
- (b) Book of Exodus.
- (c) Prophecy.

2. Apocalyptic.

- (a) Apocalyptic Spirit.
- (b) Doctrine.
- (c) Phraseology.

3. Personal.

- (a) Discipleship.
- (b) Persecution.
- (c) Spirit of God.

3. Content

- 1. Summary.
- 2. Symbolism.

- (a) Numbers.
- (b) Imagery.

3. Doctrinal Teaching.

- (a) God.
- (b) Christ.
- (c) Universalism.
- (d) Eschatology.

4. Spiritual Significance.

- (a) War
- (b) Preservation.
- (c) Victory.

Conclusion.

The prevailing idea in respect to the Apocalypse is that it is a book without any apparent plan or visible purpose, full of dark sayings and inexplicable mysteries. For such an opinion we must admit there is some justification. The book revels in much imagery that was no doubt familiar to an earlier world, but which is totally unfamiliar to the world of this present time. It uses symbolism which, perhaps, was clear as the noon-day sun to the contemporaries of the writer of the Apocalypse, but which veils rather than unveils truth to the reader many centuries removed from that time. It belongs to a type of literature much in evidence before the Apocalypse was written, literature that brought an inspiring message to its readers in days of gloom and despair; while, on the other hand, to the average modern reader it stands isolated and unapproachable.

It is the purpose of this thesis to show that the Apocalypse is not a book to be passed over as being too difficult and dark and mysterious for the reader of to-day, but rather one whose evident purpose is stamped on every page; one that professes an unwavering trust in the "larger hope", an unshakeable conviction in the triumph of right, an unflinching faith in the victory of the cause of Jesus Christ; one that exalts spirituality over materialism, that glorifies the martyr spirit, and that brings its message of hope and cheer to the people of every age and every clime.

In fulfilling this purpose no minute analysis or explanation of petty details will be attempted. Such a course would be impossible in a treatise of this kind; furthermore, it tends to obscure the beauty and significance of the whole. Rather will the present writer follow the broadest and sanest lines of interpretation, seeking in the literature with which the author was familiar, in the

events of his own time, and in his own personal experience the key to unlock the secrets of the Apocalypse.

But this alone will not sufficiently fulfill the purpose of this thesis. Having discovered in the Apocalypse the meaning it bore to the people of its time the writer hopes to indicate its wider message, its endorsement of the great principles of human conduct and Divine government that know no limit of time or place. According to the "Futurist" method of interpretation the Apocalypse had little, if any, interest for the immediate present, its interest was purely eschatological. According to the "Continuous-Historical" method it was a prediction of definite events yet to be fulfilled; and men have taxed their ingenuity for centuries in seeking the identification of the first Beast with some historical character of their own time, now finding it in the Pope of Rome, now in the leader of the Protestant Reformation, at one time in Napoleon Bonaparte, in our own day with the German Kaiser. Needless to say such a method has fallen into well-deserved disrepute. The "Preterist" method confined the scope of the Apocalypse mainly to the author's own time. Accordingly the book would have no interest for the student of to-day save that which it held in common with any record of purely past events. The method that will be followed here is that of the "Contemporary-Historical" combined with the Spiritual. In other words the writer expects to find in the Apocalypse the reflection of a situation past or present to its author; but he also expects to find in it prophecy, not prophecy of petty details and exact prediction, but prophecy in the highest and truest sense of the word, the enunciation of mighty principles of God in stern and arresting tones.

The Apocalypse is by no means to be considered a "laborious

piece of patch-work" or a "mosaic of earlier fragments," and yet a close comparison of it with the Scriptures of the Old Testament leads to the conclusion that the author did use "sources" in the presentation of his message to the churches of Asia Minor and to the church at large. Swete declares: "No book in the New Testament is so thoroughly steeped in the thought and imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures".¹ Again: "No writer of the Apostolic age makes larger use of his predecessors".² From another authority we learn that out of the four hundred and four verses of the Apocalypse two hundred and sixty-five contain Old Testament language, and about five hundred and fifty references are made to Old Testament passages. And yet one cannot help but feel that in using such material with a free hand the Apocalyptist first made it his very own. Rarely, if ever, are the

1. The Ap ocalypse of St. John "Intro. p. 53.
2. " " " " " " " 140.
3. Westcott & H ort "

exact words of an Old Testament writer used; and when the imagery is appropriated it is used with perfect consistency to the thought of the author and to the purpose of his book. Even where the thought of an earlier writer appears our author has, undoubtedly, used this not slavishly but creatively. In reality the old is fashioned into new.

No exhaustive illustration as to the dependence of the Apocalyptist on Old Testament literature can here be attempted, nor is it necessary. In conjunction with what has already been stated in a general way three or four illustrations will suffice. First of all it should be noted that the p lagues which followed the blowing of the Trumpets' and the plagues which followed the pouring out

of the Bowls ² have a marked resemblance to the Egyptian plagues recorded in the Book of Exodus. The destruction of the vegetation by hail and fire, the turning of the sea into blood, the darkening of the luminaries of heaven, the curse of the locusts upon the fruitful land, have a conspicuous similarity to the judgments of God which fell upon Pharaoh and his people. "And

1. Apocalypse VIII

2. " XVI.

the Lord said unto Moses, stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land; even all that the hail hath left." Each of the other plagues of the Apocalypse might be traced to its source in a similar way, and so traced can be interpreted. For should any doubt prevail in the mind of the reader as to why these things followed the Trumpets and the Bowls all doubt is dispelled when he finds that originally they meant God's judgments, stern and terrible, upon the oppressors of God's children.

Or, to take another illustration, the "measuring of the temple"² was in all probability, suggested by the vision of Zechariah: "I lifted up mine eyes again and looked and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand"³. And not only is there a similarity in expression noticeable here, but in the thought, as well. The object of the measuring in both cases is undoubtedly that of "preservation."

A like similarity is also discernible between the "Sealing of the One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand" in the Apocalypse and the account given by Ezekiel of the safeguarding of the righteous

1. Ex. X ^{1&2.}

2. Apocalypse XI ^{1.}

3. Zech. ^{1&2.}

in Jerusalem by the mark of the Lord placed on their foreheads ¹.

Finally, a comparison between the section of the Apocalypse that refers to the "Little Book" and a second vision of Ezekiel will help to prove what has been stated already as to the way our author uses his "sources." "And the voice which I ^hheard from heaven spake unto me again and said: 'Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel '----- and I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up ; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey ; and as soon as I had eaten it my belly was bitter. And he said unto me. 'Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations and tongues, and kings". ² The earlier writer described his vision thus: "And when I looked behold a hand was sent unto me, and lo, a roll of a book was therein;----- Moreover he said unto me----- eat this roll and go speak unto the house of Israel.' So I opened my mouth and he caused me to eat that roll ----- Then did I eat it and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. And he said unto me, go, get thee unto the house of Israel and speak with my words unto them" ³ This comparison

1. Ezek. IX⁴
8-11
2. Apoc. X
9 4
3. Ezek 11 - 111

will serve to illustrate the fact that the thought of our Apocalyptist is not limited by that of his "source". Ezekiel is bidden to prophesy to the "house of Israel;" but the New Testament Prophet, to "many peoples, and nations, and tongues and kings",- a commission infinitely wider.

No further comment is necessary to show that the writer of the Apocalypse drew freely upon the Scriptures of the Old Testament for

his material, for words, for imagery, and for thought.

Another evident "source" from which the writer of the Apocalypse drew freely was that of Apocalyptic literature. A few words regarding this literature will be in place here. The voice of the Old Testament prophet ceased to be heard when the idea became current that the Law was the infallible and final utterance of God. Thenceforth there was no room for the Prophet among the Jewish people. Nevertheless, inspiration had not ceased,- prophetic activity was simply manifested in a different form. No longer did the prophet appear in personal form denouncing in thunderous tones the vices of the times, and, with herald's voice recalling the people to their allegiance to the Most High,- he would not thus have been received. But he spoke to the people of his time in literary form, he wrote under the aegis of some great name of the past, he sought the aid of pseudonymity. The period between the writing of the last prophetic book of the Old Testament and the gospels of the New Testament has often been referred to as a "period of silence". This "period of silence," however, has been narrowed down into smaller and smaller limits by much scholastic research,- in fact it has been proved conclusively that it never existed at all. The period referred to was a period of great spiritual development and great literary activity. The proof of this is found in the Apocryphal and Apocalyptic literature. With the latter we are especially concerned here. The apocalyptist was the successor of the prophet. He learned the will of God in the same way through vision, trance and spiritual communion. He, too, had a message that he must communicate, although the mode of his communication was of necessity, different to that of the prophet. He sent out in literary form his message of comfort and

hope, and bade the God-fearing be of good cheer. To those hard-pressed in life's battle he promised the speedy deliverance of the Great Deliverer, the ushering, in by supernatural means, of a new heaven and a new earth. When the existence of evil seemed an incongruity in a world governed by a righteous God the apocalyptic foretold a time when evil would be defeated and right would triumph, when the unjust would be punished, and the just would be rewarded.

Small portions of this literature may be found in various prophetic books of the Old Testament, but the great Apocalypse in the Hebrew Scriptures is the Book of Daniel. This book appeared in the early days of the Maccabean struggle, a time of mingled hope and despair, with a piercing exhortation to endure all, and with a promise of near and full salvation. The "Book of ^{Enoch} Enoch", the "Assumption of Moses", the "Apocalypse of Baruch," the "Fourth Book of Esdras" are only a few examples of an extensive non-canonical apocalyptic literature. The message of this type of literature was adorned with abundant imagery and much supernatural coloring, but sublime conceptions and eternal truths were there also.

The first Christian Apocalypse "came on the crest of this long wave of apocalyptic effort"¹ Unlike the other literature of its class it bore the author's name; the Law had been dethroned by Christianity and the prophet could now fling aside the guise of pseudonymity. A natural inference would be that our Apocalypticist drew much of his inspiration and material from preceding apocalypticists. In fact one is not surprised that so thorough a student of Apocalyptic as Dr. Charles pronounces the writer of the New Testament Apocalypse to be "steeped in Apocalyptic literature". With this verdict the impartial student

can hardly refuse to concur. Yet one is also constrained to admit that in spite of our authors ~~indebtedness~~ indebtedness to Jewish sources he produces a product that surpasses them all. The ~~S~~ubstantiation of this statement may be found by a comparison of some of the doctrines common to both. In Jewish Apocalyptic Particularism contests the field with Universalism. Again and again the world is spoken of as the especial heritage of the Jewish people, in fact created for that purpose. "He hath created the world on behalf of His people" ² In the Christian Apocalypse

1. Swete "The Apoc. of St. John, p. XXVIII

2. "Assumption of Moses 1" ¹²

the wider and more universal outlook predominates: " And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." ¹

A Further comparison might be made in respect to the Messiah doctrine, and a corresponding development can be perceived. Many see a reference to the Messiah in the vision of Daniel, ² where mention is made of "one like the Son of man. " The connection, to say the least, is uncertain. However the "Son of Man" in Daniel may be the germ for the Enochic "Son of Man" who is "the Christ," "the Righteous one," " the elect one",. Here a wonderful development has taken place. And yet, though in phraseology the writer of the Apocalypse may revert to Daniel and the Book of Enoch, the Christ portrayed in the last book of the New Testament transcends all previous conceptions and predictions regarding the Messiah of God.- He is a victorious risen, glorified, personal Saviour.

Nevertheless, it must still be admitted that our Apocalyptist is under a large debt to his predecessors in the field of Apocalyptic. The similarity in phraseology is very distinct. In the opening vision

1. Apoc. XIV⁶ 9-13
2. Daniel VII

of the Apocalypse Christ is described as "one like unto the Son of man clothed with a garment down to the foot and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength"¹ Unquestionably the great original for the above description is found in the Book of Daniel: "And I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like fiery flame and his wheels as burning fire.----- one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him,"²

Enough has been said to show that, in the opinion of the writer of this treatise, the author of the Apocalypse used, and used freely the Apocalyptic literature with

1. Apoc. I^{13-16.} 9-13
2. Daniel VII

which he was familiar, both canonical and uncanonical. But at the same time he did not use it slavishly, he did allow his "source" to

circumscribe his own imagination and thought. He reinterpreted the material that he found at his hand, and sent it forth to bring its message of hope and comfort to a persecuted people, even as the Old Testament Apocalypse had done in the sad days of Antiochus Epiphanes.

But no consideration of the "sources" of the Apocalypse would be complete without taking account of the personal experience of the writer, the contemporary influences and events, the compelling inner spirit which made the task a sacred obligation. Without attempting to enter into any discussion as to the authorship and date of the Apocalypse it should be stated that the position herein adopted is that the Apocalypse was written by the Apostle John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," the one on whom the mantle of St. Paul had fallen so far as work among the churches of Asia Minor was concerned. As confirmation of this position there might be cited the evidence of the Apocalypse itself, where the name of the author is mentioned in both the opening and closing chapters, the evidence, almost unanimous, of the early church, the evidence of much modern scholarship; while the tone and temper of the book harmonize well with the gospel portrait of the son of Zebedee. Also, the view taken here is in favor of a late date- 96-97 A.D., at the close of the reign of Domitian. The Apocalypse looks back over a period of persecution and the immediate purpose of it is plain, it was intended to strengthen the faith of a people sorely tried under the strain and stress of a relentless persecution. And while it is true that persecution of Christians took place as early as the reign of Nero, yet that persecution was spasmodic and localized, while under Domitian it became widespread and a settled policy. The internal evidence of the condition of the Asian