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THE REVISED VERSION
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PREFACE BY THE GENERAL EDITOR FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE Revised Version has to some extent superseded the need of annotation on the books of the New Testament, so far as the meaning of words and phrases is concerned. But the present Edition will, it is hoped, serve a good purpose in drawing the attention of young scholars to the importance of some of the changes made in that Version.

Another aim is to present in a clear and intelligible form the best and most approved results of recent theological work on these books.

The General Editor takes this opportunity of noting that, as in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools*, each writer is responsible for the interpretation of particular passages, or for the opinion expressed on any point of doctrine. His own part is that of careful supervision and occasional suggestion.

ARTHUR CARR.

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INTRODUCTION

(I) THE APOCALYPSE AND ITS CHARACTER.

Every reader will recognize the very different character the last book of the New Testament has from all its predecessors. It is more like the books of Daniel and Ezekiel, full of visions and strange portents. And it has a different name, it is not a Gospel or Epistle but a Revelation, which means an unveiling of the unseen. But though this kind of writing is unfamiliar to us, it was not so to those who lived in the first century of our present era. The book of Enoch, which is full of accounts of angels and spirits and of the mysteries of the unseen world, and has many resemblances to the Apocalypse, was written at different times between B.C. 100 and A.D. 30 and probably widely read. And this was followed by "the Book of the Secrets of Enoch," which belongs to the first half of the first century, and in it are wonderful pictures of a great sea in the heavens, of a beautiful park full of fruit trees bearing all kinds of fruits, of great angels with six wings. A little later there appeared the Revelation of Baruch, who writes to comfort his Jewish brethren now that the holy city and temple are no more. He bids them look forward to the coming reign of the Messiah when a new Jerusalem will be built and Rome the city of evil will be destroyed. Still later at the end of the first century after Christ another Apocalypse was issued, called the Fourth Book of Esdras. It is supposed to contain the

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seven visions of Ezra, some of which picture the coming of the Messiah and the destruction of Rome. There are many other writings of the kind, such as the Jewish Sibylline Oracles, which express the same desire to penetrate the veil and to find from visions some interpretations of the strange historic events of the time. And as will have been noticed in this cursory sketch, they have many points of resemblance with the Christian Apocalypse. And not only in figure but also in purpose. Like the book of Daniel, which was probably written in the time of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes (B.C. $\frac{166}{85}$) to strengthen the faithful Jews when an attempt was being made to destroy their faith, so these Apocalypses were generally intended to cheer and uplift the spirits of devout Jews when their very existence seemed to be threatened. Now as all this was an expression of the religious spirit of the Apostolic age, what more natural than that it should find a place in the Christian Church? There was sore need of comfort. The Church of the first century passed through a terrible time. Probably none of its leaders escaped persecution and most of them suffered a cruel death at the hands of their enemies. Though Rome was naturally disposed to give a licence to the various religions of the subjected nations, was not disposed for example to find fault with the worship of Ephesus; the Christian religion was not national, it did not belong to one people or tribe more than another. It had a universal mission and as such was an element of disturbance in every religion. It would leave nothing alone, but claimed disciples from the Roman, Ephesian, Egyptian, Asiatic faiths alike. It was therefore bound to be persecuted. And our Lord had prepared His disciples for it. He had told them what to do and how to behave. But in spite of His warnings, persecution when it came was hard to face. Homes were destroyed, parents robbed of their children, and husbands of their wives, Christians boycotted, worship proscribed

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and every kind of contempt shewn to a religion that seemed weak and defenceless. The Christians who believed in the all-conquering might of their unseen Leader and the possibility of His immediate return were often much perplexed. And the Neronian persecution with its brutal cruelty made the truth of the Kingdom of Christ still more difficult to receive. Further, this special trial was not made more easy by the wars, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions which were characteristic of that first age. Questions were asked as to Divine Government which could not be satisfactorily answered or put aside. It was not unnatural therefore that the help which God sent should take the shape of an Apocalypse or Revelation, for it was in this way that He had helped the Jewish Church in similar difficulties. The immediate object and purpose of the book therefore is not to give, as has been sometimes thought, a prophecy of all future history, the wickedness of the Papacy, the ambition of Napoleon or the rise of some great social revolution, but to shew the Christians of that first century what the book of Daniel had shewn the Jews some three hundred years before, how that all these things were foreseen by God and, horrible though they were, allowed to have a place in His plan. The book when looked at in this light is not so difficult to understand as might be supposed. And if it helps us, as it certainly does, to read the message of that stormy time, it will help us to understand the mystery of every like age and so comes to be of eternal value.

(2) THE STRUCTURE.

The book is divided into two almost equal portions, each so complete in itself, that they might be regarded as separate volumes. They are alike in this that they shew that Christ the King not only knows the evil His children are enduring, but by His wisdom uses it to bring about

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a greater good. The first volume is concerned with Christ's relation to the Church and the world in general, the second, His special relation to the hostile powers that are trying to destroy her.

VOL. I (Chapters i—xi). First, we have a picture of the actual Church as represented in the seven Churches of Asia and only two are seen to be free from rebuke. The Church therefore is in need of purification. She cannot do without adversity and trial. This is succeeded by a vision of the Glory of God, of His Holiness and Majesty, and of the mystery that enwraps His plans which no one has yet been able to penetrate. It was the meaning of the Divine Providence that the Seer expected to see, and he is much disappointed when it seems to him at first that the secret will never be divulged. At last, to his joy, He sees the Christ come forward to open the book and to unfold the mysteries contained in it. The remainder of the volume describes what he sees, how earthquakes, wars, catastrophes, persecutions are really steps in the progress of human society; either removing obstacles, as the breaking of a seal enables one to get at a letter, or trumpet calls, i.e. stern appeals to the deaf conscience of the wicked to give up its rebellion. But though so painful to the world, the Church is seen to be quite safe and even to thrive under these terrible judgments.

VOL. II. The second volume (xii—xxii) shews us the Church, out of which has sprung the Incarnate Christ, under the figure of a woman arrayed with the sun, persecuted by the Dragon who uses both the civil and religious powers of the world to crush it. Rome and Paganism alike inspired by his fiendish hatred do their best but fail. This is the very heart of the mystery which so far has not yet been explained. And it is against these enemies that the Kingdom of God wars with its terrible judgments. At last, though we are not told when, Rome, Paganism, and the Dragon are over-

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thrown. It is in this part of the book that the chief difficulty is found, as it was necessary for the safety of the Christians that the message should be expressed in such dark figures that if copies were discovered they should not lead to any being implicated. So Rome is disguised as Babylon, Nero as the beast with the number 666, and the other emperors in other veiled language. The ultimate triumph and glory of the persecuted Church is shewn under the mysterious symbolism of the heavenly city.

(3) THE AUTHOR.

The writer speaks of himself both at the end and the beginning of the book as John, but there is no further description designating what John is meant¹. It would be natural to suppose that one who writes thus simply would be the Apostle, as being the most prominent person in the Church of that name. And this was the earliest belief. Justin who lived at Ephesus before he went to Rome, about the year 135, speaks of the Apocalypse as the work of the Apostle, and Irenæus, who wrote about A.D. 180, gives a common authorship to the Gospel and Apocalypse, both as being written by John the disciple of the Lord². With this other early writers agree and the first suggestion that some other John wrote it comes nearly a hundred years later from Dionysius, a Bishop of Alexandria, who on the grounds of the difference of thought, style and language concludes that the Author of the Apocalypse must not be identified with the Author of the Gospel. The chief difficulty he feels to lie in the language. "The Gospel and first Epistle are written in correct and flowing Greek and there is not a barbarism, solecism or provincialism in them: whereas the Greek of the Apocalypse is inaccurate, disfigured by unusual or foreign words and even at times solecistic." This argument against the

¹ i. 1, 4, 9; xxii. 8.

² See Swete's Introduction, p. ciii. and foll.

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Johannine authorship is weighty but not overwhelming. Had Greek been the Apostle's native language it would have been impossible to suppose that both books came directly or indirectly from the same hand. But we know too little of St John's knowledge of Greek to be sure that he would himself write both books. It is possible that the Apocalypse is his own Greek and the Gospel the Greek of another. It would not be so likely that he would dictate the former as the latter and "early tradition explicitly states that the Gospel was written from dictation and underwent some kind of revision at the hands of those who received it." (Swete, p. clxxix.)

The difference of thought, with the absence of some of the characteristic phrases of the Gospel, is amply explained by the unusual character of the Apocalypse. Such visions as fill the book shew a very marked elevation of spirit such as we call ecstasy, and we should not expect one who was struggling with the limitations of language, to express the large and tumultuous thoughts, surging up under deep spiritual excitement, to use the same images as those natural for a biography. But whilst noting the differences we must not forget "the marked affinities of the two books and the characteristic phrases and ideas which they have in common." These are almost as remarkable as the contrasts and seem to point to a common authorship.

If it be asked whether the Apostle was likely to see such visions and record them, it may be said that of all the Apostles, this quiet meditative spirit, who was constantly contemplating the life of "the Word made flesh" and who had beneath that outward calm, a strong fervent glowing spirit, which won for him the name of Boanerges, was the most likely. Living as tradition asserts to a great age and bearing the trials and sorrows of hundreds of Christians, who were continually telling him of the cruel persecutions and the terrible

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tribulations through which they had passed ; and having himself borne suffering and exile as a witness to the faith, he would long to find some word of comfort, and in the visions God gave him in Patmos he found it. It may be asked whether there is any evidence to connect the Apostle with Asia. Dr Swete sums it up in these words : " The witness of Irenæus shews beyond a doubt that a John who had been a disciple of the Lord resided in Asia within the lifetime of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who was born (Harnack) in A.D. 69. A Bishop of Ephesus at the end of the second century asserts that the John who lay on the Lord's breast was buried at Ephesus : and another Asian writer of the same period speaks of a miracle which John the author of the Apocalypse performed in that city " (Swete, p. clxxiv). And Clement of Alexandria, followed by Origen, speaks of his exile at Patmos. Such evidence is not absolutely conclusive, but it does not seem likely that Irenæus should have noted the fact of any other John being at Ephesus save the Apostle. And the more simple the designation, the more likely it seems that the son of Zebedee should be meant.

(4) THE DATE.

Here tradition is " practically unanimous " in its belief that the Apocalypse was written in the last years of Domitian and with this agree best the thoughts suggested by the book itself. The condition of the seven Churches gives evidence of a state of things considerably later than anything we read of in the Acts or indeed in the Epistles. Heresies seem in some places to be firmly rooted, definite persecution is treated as history. And, in the later chapters, the worship of the Cæsars is marked as being clearly pressed, those who refuse being boycotted. The political condition of affairs in Domitian's reign would suit this. Again, the strange legend of Nero's reappearance after

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death which St John makes use of to indicate Domitian—this being the easiest way of suggesting to those for whom he writes to whom he refers—cannot very well be applied to anyone else. If the Apocalypse were written earlier it is difficult to see to what the mysterious references in chapters xiii and xvii really refer. But the difficult passage xvii. 10, 11, 12 suggests that there were two editions of the Apocalypse, one earlier in Vespasian's reign, the other in Domitian's.

If early tradition is correct, then the Apocalypse was written a quarter of a century later than the destruction of Jerusalem. Chapter xi presents no real difficulties, for the Temple is only there used as a parable of the Church, the court indicating mere nominal adherents. We may therefore conclude that the book was written, or the second edition of it sent forth, in the last years of Domitian (90—96). Dr Swete sums up a very able discussion with the words: "This date appears to be consistent with the general character and purpose of the book. The Apocalypse as a whole presupposes a period when in Asia at least the Church was compelled to choose between Christ and Cæsar. And the prophet foresees that this is no local or passing storm, but one which will spread over the whole empire and run a long course ending only with the fall of Paganism and of Rome. The Coming of the Lord is no longer connected with the Fall of Jerusalem which is viewed as an event of past history. A new Jerusalem has taken the place of the old city of God and the Apocalyptist can already see its ideal glories revealed." (Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, p. c.)

(5) TO WHOM WRITTEN.

The Apocalypse is an expansion of the seven letters to the seven Churches of Asia. Though other Churches were more important than some of those to whom this prophecy was addressed, yet these seven cities stood on

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the great circular road that bound together the most populous, wealthy and influential part of the province, the West central region¹, and were therefore a very good distributing centre for the message which the Apostle was really addressing to the Church at large. There is no hint anywhere that it was to be confined to Asia. There was need everywhere for some inspired interpretation of the strange and awful perplexities which persecution, famine, fire and sword were continually raising in men's minds. And it was this the Apocalypse gave. No one could read it or hear it read without feeling strengthened and encouraged in the fight that each had to make with cowardice and the awful temptation to apostasy in the easy worship of the Cæsar. "Of the immediate effect of the Apocalypse upon the Asian Churches we cannot judge; certainly they weathered the storm, for in the next Christian writing which comes to us from Asia, the Letters of Ignatius, they are represented as large and flourishing communities. The storm itself passed within two or three years after the date which Irenæus assigns to the Apocalypse: Domitian was assassinated Sept. 18, 96, and the accession of Nerva probably gave peace to the Asian Churches." (Swete, p. xciii.)

(6) THE ANALYSIS.

BOOK I. CHAPTERS I–XI.

Part I. Christ seen in relation to His Church.

- i–iii. As King-Priest He rules, warns and encourages the Churches that make up His Body.

Part II. Christ seen in relation to the world.

- iv. The Glory of God.
- v. The Glory of Christ in God.

¹ Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 183.

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Part III. Christ is seen developing God's plan.

vi. Christ opens the seals. Consequences to the world.

Part IV. Interlude. Christ is seen protecting the Church from the judgments that fall on the world.

vii. The sealing of the servants of God.

Part V. Christ is seen summoning the world to surrender.

viii-ix. The seven trumpet calls of God.

Part VI. Interlude. Christ again assures the Church of His protection.

x. The end is in sight. "Time shall be no longer."

xi. 1-13. The true Israel is preserved, the old apostate Israel trodden under foot.

Part VII. Christ is seen triumphing.

xi. 15-19. The final victory of God's saints.

BOOK II. CHAPTERS XII-XXII.

Part I. Revelation of the mystery of wickedness that lies hidden behind the opposition of the world.

xii. The birth of Christ and the fury it excites in the great red Dragon.

Part II. The part Rome plays in the spiritual conflict of the Church and the Dragon.

xiii. The Dragon summons to his aid the Imperial and Provincial powers of Rome. The secret revealed.

Part III. As in the first book so here the Church is assured of her safety.

xiv-xv. The redeemed are seen enjoying great happiness, the apostates on the other hand are in torment.

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Part IV. The Roman Empire is punished for its rebellion against God.

xvi. The revelation of the vials of the wrath of God.

Part V. Rome is judged.

xvii-xviii. At first Rome seems triumphant, but her wickedness and internal dissensions bring her to ruin.

xix. 1-10. The fall of Rome excites great joy in the spiritual world.

Part VI. Paganism is judged.

xix. 11-21. The spiritual conflict with Paganism and its complete overthrow.

Part VII. The Dragon is judged.

xx. Satan is bound and cast into the lake of fire.

Part VIII. Revelation of the City of God.

xxi. 1-9. The new heaven and new earth with a picture of the new society.

xxi. 9-xxii. 6. The glories of the New Jerusalem.

Part IX. The Epilogue.

xxii. 6-20. The last words.

(7) BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY.

As very different views are taken of the meaning of the Book of Revelation it is not easy to recommend any particular commentary, beyond that which has in the main been followed in these short notes, namely *The Apocalypse of St John* by Dr H. B. Swete, Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge. This, which was published in 1906, is not only the latest study of any importance, but is marked by that rare scholarship and spiritual wisdom which make Dr Swete

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such a fitting successor to the great Cambridge commentators Drs Hort, Lightfoot and Westcott. The Bishop of Ripon's notes in the *Speaker's Commentary* are, as we might expect, marked by much spiritual insight and beauty of expression, and Dr Milligan's notes in the *Expositor's Bible* are of course of much value, but neither of these takes what may be called the historical view and their interpretations therefore differ from those given here. Archbishop Benson's Commentary is of extraordinary interest, but ought to be read from cover to cover rather than consulted for individual interpretations.