The Book with Seven Seals.

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UPON the words of the text of Revelation 5[1], critics are agreed: *καὶ εἶδον ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου βιβλίον γεγραμμένον ἔσωθεν καὶ ὄπισθεν κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγῖσιν ἑπτά.* Only a question of punctuation remains, Westcott and Hort, with most editors, inserting a comma after *ὄπισθεν*, and thus making both adverbs limit *γεγραμμένον*. Against this view, Zahn (*Einleitung*, II, p. 599), and after him Nestle (*Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament*, p. 333) maintain that only *ἔσωθεν* limits *γεγραμμένον*, "written within," while *ὄπισθεν* is to be taken with *κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγῖσιν ἑπτά*, "sealed on the back with seven seals." Nestle devotes a critical note to the verse: ". . . Zahn holds that *ἔσωθεν* and *ὄπισθεν* are not correlative terms, and that the idea of a papyrus-roll written on both sides (*ὀπισθόγραφον*) must be abandoned; compare above, p. 43, n. 2. The book was, in fact, not a roll but a codex. Two things point to this. There is, first, the fact that it is said to be *ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν*. Had it been a roll, it would have been *ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ*. Moreover, the word used for opening the book is *ἀνοῖξαι*, and not, as in the case of rolls, *ἀνελίσσειν*, *ἀνειλεῖν*, or *ἀναπτύσσειν*. That it was not written on the outside is also shown by the fact that it was sealed with seven seals, the purpose of which was to make the reading of the book impossible. Not till the seventh seal is broken is the book open and its contents displayed. This *βιβλίον* is quite different from the *βιβλαρίδιον* mentioned in 10[2.9]."

The dogmatic presentation of this position, not less than the questionable evidence adduced in its support, invites a reëxamination of the passage, less from the textual than the exegetical point of view. From the textual point of view, it is perhaps enough to observe that Nestle's own text, like Hort's, reads with a comma after *ὄπισθεν*, and must therefore be to that extent revised to sustain his present interpretation. From the point of view of interpretation, the ground

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may best be cleared by a detailed scrutiny of Nestle's words just quoted.

It is probably true that ἔσωθεν and ὄπισθεν are not correlative terms. ἔσωθεν implies ἔξωθεν (2 Cor. 7^{5}), and ὄπισθεν, ἔμπροσθεν (Rev. 4^{6}) as correlatives. But no one doubts that ἔσωθεν limits γεγραμμένον; the only question is as to ὄπισθεν. Now ὄπισθεν, as the word ὀπισθόγραφον implies, has an explicit technical appropriateness with reference to the back (*verso*) of a roll. The very fact that ὄπισθεν is substituted for the usual correlative of ἔσωθεν, points to a roll. Of a roll we can understand ὄπισθεν, but if a codex or leaf-book is thought of, how came it to be used in place of ἔξωθεν, which Zahn and Nestle agree is the usual correlative of ἔσωθεν? We can understand the deviation from the normal correlative, if a roll is meant; but if we think of a leaf-book, straightway a difficulty arises. The evidence adduced to show that the idea of a roll written on both sides must be abandoned, is thus found to point in the very opposite direction.

But two further grounds for the codex are noted; it is said to be ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν. These words may at first sight suggest a leaf-book rather than a roll. Yet it must not be forgotten that presently the Lamb comes and takes the book ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς, "out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne" (5^{7}). Indeed, when it is remembered that the βιβλίον is tightly closed, ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν is hardly more suggestive of a codex than of a roll, unless a very small roll is thought of in contrast with a large codex. If one were speaking, for example, of the Nabulûs roll of the Samaritan Pentateuch, ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν would be a perfectly natural expression. But that a large βιβλίον is here thought of, is evident from the number of seals used to secure it, and once the element of size is recognized, the superior appropriateness of ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν with a leaf-book vanishes away.

It is further urged in favor of a leaf-book, that ἀνοῖξαι is used of leaf-books and not of rolls. The three verbs named by Nestle as proper expressions for opening a roll, however, never occur in the New Testament, with the partial exception of ἀναπτύσσειν. This word appears in Luke 4^{17}, — ἀναπτύξας τὸ βιβλίον, — according to Tischendorf (following ℵD *et al.*) and the Textus Receptus. Westcott and Hort, however, read ἀνοίξας τὸ βιβλίον, with the very strong support of ABLΞ 33 *et al.* That a roll is meant in this passage is beyond question; rolls are still used in synagogues in the East, and that a leaf-book of Isaiah should have been used in the synagogue at Nazareth before A.D. 30 is not to be believed. The use of πτύξας of the folding up of the roll (Luke 4^{20}) after reading, further confirms the

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same position. Interestingly enough Nestle's own text in this very passage (4^{17}) coincides with Hort's, in reading ἀνοίξας τὸ βιβλίον[1]; which is perhaps a sufficient answer to his present contention.

"That it was not written on the outside," continues Nestle, "is also shewn by the fact that it was sealed with seven seals, the purpose of which was to make the reading of the book impossible." But the text says nothing about the "outside" of the roll; it speaks of the "back side," and a roll might have a hundred columns of writing on its back side (Juvenal's "*in tergo*," 1, 6), and yet when rolled up present an outside perfectly blank, if only the last few inches of its *verso* were left uninscribed. Even when six of its seals had been broken, the seventh would still secure the contents of a roll from inspection quite as well as those of a leaf-book.

"This βιβλίον," says Nestle in conclusion, "is quite different from the βιβλαρίδιον mentioned in chap. $10^{2.9}$." If this means only that they are not identical, it may readily be accepted. But if Nestle means that βιβλίον of 5^1 differs from βιβλαρίδιον $10^{2.9}$ as a codex differs from a roll, the later passage may be examined a little more closely. The βιβλαρίδιον of $10^{2.9}$ and ^{10} is called a βιβλίον in 10^8; and it is twice spoken of as ἠνεῳγμένον, "opened," $10^{2.8}$. The principal point previously urged against the roll-form of βιβλίον in 5^1 — the use of ἀνοῖξαι of it — is thus seen to apply with equal force against the roll-form of βιβλαρίδιον in $10^{2.9.10}$. But the latter is nevertheless pretty certainly a roll; for the language of $10^{9.10}$ unmistakably reflects Ezekiel 3^1, where the Hebrew has הַמְּגִלָּה, a perfectly unequivocal word for roll. Reference may also be made to Rev. 20^{12}, βιβλία ἠνοίχθησαν, a manifest reminiscence of Daniel 7^{10}, where both LXX and Theodotion use the same verb: βίβλοι ἠνεῴχθησαν. It will hardly be urged that βίβλος in the Greek versions of Daniel means "leaf-book," because ἀνοῖξαι is used with it. Ἄλλο βιβλίον ἠνοίχθη in the same verse (Rev. 20^{12}) enforces the same conclusion.

It thus appears that the points named by Nestle in support of his position fail to sustain it, indeed in some cases seem plainly to favor the very opposite. The roll is further favored by the Old Testament passages which seem to be reflected in the words in question: Isa. 29^{11}, הַסֵּפֶר הֶחָתוּם; LXX, τοῦ βιβλίου τοῦ ἐσφραγισμένου; and

[1] The explanation of this doubtless is that Nestle took the point over, unverified, from Zahn, whose argument he is reproducing *seriatim*; for Zahn expressly appeals to Luke 4^{17}, as an example of ἀναπτύσσειν, evidently following Tischendorf.

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Ezek. $2^{9.10}$, מְגִלַּת־סֵפֶר׃ וַיִּפְרֹשׂ אוֹתָהּ לְפָנַי וְהִיא כְתוּבָה פָּנִים וְאָחוֹר ; LXX, ἐν αὐτῇ (*i.e.* τῇ χειρὶ) κεφαλὶς βιβλίου. καὶ ἀνείλησεν αὐτὴν ἐνώπιον ἐμοῦ, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα ἦν τὰ ἔμπροσθεν καὶ τὰ ὀπίσω. In looking at the matter a little more broadly, two questions not specifically raised by Nestle seem pertinent. What, first, is the probability of the use of βιβλίον for a leaf-book in a Jewish-Christian work of the first century? Setting aside the etymological improbability as indecisive, there remain two elements in the question; first, what is the evidence for the parchment or papyrus leaf-book in the first century? and, second, supposing such book-forms to be familiar to the writer, what probability is there of his introducing them into this august scene, in place of the time-honored form dignified and even hallowed as for centuries past the sole vehicle of transmission of the Law and the Prophets? Egypt has yielded us no Ptolemaic leaf-books. Among codices of the Roman period the best known is perhaps the Oxyrhynchus Logia, the book-form of which its discoverers cite, among other considerations, as "putting the first century out of the question and making the first half of the second unlikely." (*Sayings of Our Lord*, p. 6.) This is the situation for papyrus leaf-books. Parchment leaf-books may have preceded them, but none can be produced, and the contemporary testimony for them in Greek literature is ambiguous and unconvincing. Unmistakable cases of βιβλίον in the sense of "roll" can be cited from other parts of the New Testament (Luke 4^{17}), and even from Revelation itself (10^{8}, 20^{12}); but no such evidence for the "leaf-book" meaning is to be found.

But a second question presents itself. What, on Nestle's interpretation, is the meaning of ὄπισθεν? How is a leaf-book "sealed on the back side with seven seals" to be understood? We may not render ὄπισθεν "on the outside," for Zahn has reminded us that ἔσωθεν and ὄπισθεν are not correlative terms, and thus closed that avenue of escape. If ὄπισθεν means "on the back side," as we use the phrase, sealing a book so would not secure it from inspection. But is ὄπισθεν a natural expression for the edges of a book? and would not the sense suggested by Nestle for the passage have been much more happily set forth by the omission of ὄπισθεν? What place can be found for ὄπισθεν on the codex theory of βιβλίον? Concerning this very obvious difficulty with his view, Nestle gives us no hint.[2]

If on the other hand, βιβλίον is a roll, not a codex, the force of

[2] Zahn understands the side away from the beholder to be meant.

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ὄπισθεν is clear. The roll before the apocalyptist is a portentous thing; terrific demonstrations attend the successive openings of its seven seals; and its own contents may naturally be expected to prove extraordinarily weighty and comprehensive. Anticipation is heightened by the fact that there is no blank space left in it; the whole, *recto* and *verso*, is crowded with meaning; it is written within and on the back side.

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