

not discover Him; he whose mind is dulled by prejudice and pride may see nothing but "men, as trees, walking;" but he whose eyes are opened by the Spirit's touch, will see Jesus the Christ, clothed in a seamless robe that is woven from the top throughout. Man will step aside, and the Evangelists vanishing, like Moses and Elias in the overshadowing cloud, nothing will be seen "save Jesus only"—the perfect Man, the perfect God.

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*THE EPISTLES TO
THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.*

INTRODUCTORY.

I DO not purpose entering on a discussion of the authorship or date of the Revelation which claims to have been written by John the Divine (ὁ θεολόγος). I accept the all but unanimous tradition of the writers of the ante-Nicene Church that it was the work of the beloved disciple, partly because the tradition in this case is sufficiently early to have something of an historical value (I refer especially to the Muratorian Fragment), partly on account of the internal coincidences of thought and language, on which I have dwelt elsewhere.¹ I hold, with not a few recent commentators, that it belongs to a date earlier than that of the persecution under Domitian, to which Patristic tradition for the most part assigned it; that it was written certainly before the destruction of Jerusalem, probably during a time in which the Asiatic Churches were suffering from the persecution of which we have traces as affect-

¹ "Bible Educator," i. pp. 27, 57.

ing that portion of the Empire in the Pastoral Epistles (2 Tim. i. 8, 15; ii. 3; iii. 12), yet more definitely in the First Epistle of St. Peter (i. 6, 7; ii. 12; iii. 14-17; iv. 1, 12-19), and in that Epistle to the Hebrews which I have been led to assign to the same period.¹ The Neronian persecution was obviously more than the effect of the cruelty or policy of an individual tyrant. It was only possible through the excitement, the suspicion, the hatred, which pervaded men's minds in the imperial city as they found themselves face to face with the power and life of the new society that bore the name of Christian; and that hatred and suspicion were as certain to be felt in every city of the Empire as in Rome itself.

About this period, then, probably shortly after the death of Nero (say *circ.* A.D. 68 or 69), John, who speaks of himself, as Paul (Phil. i. 1) and Peter (2 Pet. i. 1) and James (James i. 1) had done before him, as the servant (*δοῦλος*) of Jesus Christ, dropping the name of apostle where there was no pressing necessity to assert his authority as such, wrote the book to which he prefixed the title of Revelation. Exceptional as that title now is among the Books of the New Testament, we must remember that neither the word nor the thing were exceptional in the Apostolic age. It was by "visions and revelations of the Lord" that each Apostle was carried forward from truth to truth and received fresh insight into the work he had to do. In this way Stephen had seen the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God

¹ See papers in THE EXPOSITOR on "The Life and Writings of Apollos," vol. i. pp. 329-348, 409-435.

(Acts vii. 55, 56), and Peter had been taught that the gate of Eternal Life had been thrown open to the Gentiles (Acts x. 11), and Paul had been carried up to the third heaven and the Paradise of God (2 Cor. xii. 1-4, 7), and had from time to time beheld the form of the risen and ascended Christ (Acts xxii. 17, 18 ; xxviii. 9), or of some angel sent by Him (Acts xvii. 23). In this way prophets and apostles had been taught what before eye had not seen nor ear heard, neither had it entered into the heart of man to conceive (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10). Each mystery of the faith was imparted by a new revelation. An apocalypse extending to the far future, to the coming of the Lord, to the signs of its approach, is implied as given to St. Paul in 2 Thess. ii. 1-12 ; in 1 Tim. iv. 1-3 ; and to St. Peter in 2 Pet. ii. 10-13. It would hardly be a paradox to say that a state commonly so abnormal as that of trance or ecstasy was part of the normal life of the Apostles of the Faith. John, when he addressed his Revelation to the Churches of Asia was claiming no exceptional privilege. They would not be startled by it as by something altogether extraordinary.

The writer describes himself further as one "who bare record" (*ἐμαρτύρησε*) "of the Word of God and of the testimony" (*μαρτυρία*) "of Jesus, and of all things which He saw" (i. 2). I cannot bring myself to confine the application of these words to the contents of the Book to which they are thus prefixed. The Apostle had, for some greater or less length of time, been working and preaching in these Asiatic Churches, and describes himself as having done a work which they would recognize as truly his. If

we accept the Fourth Gospel as either being by St. John, or as, at least, representing the characteristic features of his teaching, we note that the idea of witness, record, testimony, is throughout the keynote of that teaching. When the spear pierced the side of Jesus, "he that saw it bare record, and his record is true" (John xix. 35). He closed his Gospel with the declaration, "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and wrote these things" (John xxi. 24). I do not, of course, assume that the Gospel was written before the Revelation, but I infer from the prominence given to the word *μαρτυριά* and its cognates alike in Gospel, Revelation, and Epistles, that it had all along been characteristic of his oral teaching, and that that teaching is referred to here. And, assuming this, I cannot hesitate to see in "the Word of God" to which he bore witness more than the spoken Message of the Gospel. He who beheld in Christ the "Word made flesh," who, even in the earlier stage of thought to which the Apocalypse belongs, saw Him who was faithful and true, on whose head were many crowns, who was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and whose name was called THE WORD OF GOD (Rev. xix. 11-13), was not likely in his opening words to use that name in any lower sense than when he wrote afterwards that, "In the beginning was the Word" (John i. 1), or that the "Word of Life" was that which he had seen with his eyes, and had looked upon, and his hands had handled (1 John i. 1).

And he writes to the Seven Churches of Asia. What chain of events brought the Apostle to that region we know not. The silence of Scripture is

nowhere more remarkable than in connection with the period of his life from the time of the Council at Jerusalem to that in which we find him as an exile in Patmos. All that we can say is that it is probable that the sacred charge of watching over the Virgin Mother kept him for several years in comparative seclusion, and that he appears to have left Jerusalem before St. Paul's last visit there, and not to have arrived at Ephesus when the last extant Epistle of that Apostle was written to Timotheus. We can, however, form a fairly full picture of the state of things which he found on his arrival, and which probably had drawn him thither that he might fill up the gap that had been left by the departure or the death of the two great Teachers to whom these Churches had till then looked for guidance. A time of fiery persecution, of fierce outrage, and foul calumnies; a time also of sects and schisms, evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived; the polity and discipline of the Church thrown into confusion; the teaching of St. Paul forgotten, or, worse still, exaggerated and distorted; the very teachers and bishops of the Church becoming the leaders of sects and schisms,—this is what we find portrayed in the writings which must have preceded his arrival (on the hypothesis which I have adopted as to the date of the Apocalypse) but a few short years or months. And the storm of persecution falls on him also, and he finds himself at Patmos. The tone in which he speaks of himself as being there “for the sake of the Word of God” (I do not abandon the higher sense even here) “and of the testimony of Jesus Christ” (i. 9) suggests the thought that he had been banished

there by some judicial sentence. Rejecting, as unsupported by any adequate evidence, the tradition that that sentence came from the mouth of Domitian, or of any other Roman emperor, I fall back upon an assumption which was in the nature of the case far more probable, *i. e.*, that he had been condemned by some local authority, most probably by the Proconsul of Asia, who had his seat at Ephesus; and I find in the comparative leniency of the sentence as a substitute for that of death, which fell on so many believers elsewhere, even in the Asiatic Churches, a token of the continued influence of those who, like the Asiarchs that were friends of Paul, and the town-clerk of Ephesus, were so far favourable to the Christian society as to be unwilling to join in violent measures for its extirpation. (Acts xix. 31, 37.) There is no proof, so far as I know, that Patmos was at this period one of the ordinary places of deportation, though it is true that any one of the Cyclades or Sporades might have been chosen for this purpose, and so far as the Book now before us suggests an inference, it points rather to solitary exile and comparative freedom. There is no trace of the *custodia* of a state-prisoner, no indication of chains or sentinels in guard over him.

At such a time the thoughts of the exile would naturally turn to the Churches from which he was thus for a time separated. He would know the excellences, the trials, the perils of each. They would be prominent in his anxieties and prayers. He would crave to know what were the right words to speak at such a time to his companions in tribulation. The Churches to which he is told to write

were, perhaps, actually those with which, and with which alone, he had been personally connected ; but it is also possible that the habit of his mind was to group whatever was presented to it under definite numerical relations ; and that the number Seven, so full of sacred and mystic meaning, the symbol of completeness and of calm, seemed to him to include all the chief types of spiritual life with which he had been familiar. Certain it is that that number is nowhere more prominent as clothed with mystic meaning than it is in this Book. Over and above the seven golden candlesticks and the seven stars which correspond to the Churches, we have the seven lamps of fire and the seven Spirits before the Throne, the seven seals and trumpets, the seven thunders and angels and vials ; the beast with the seven heads, the seven mountains, and the seven kings. The seven Churches thus chosen were accordingly for him the types and representatives of the whole family of God. It may be said, as our induction from the seven messages will shew, that there has never been a Christian community, flourishing or decaying, exposed to the dangers of persecution or prosperity, that may not find its likeness in one or other of them.

And to these Churches he writes with a salutation which the Epistles of St. Paul had made familiar,—“ *Grace and peace,*” and which, so far as we know, had been used by none before him. Men felt that it was truer and deeper than the old *χαίρειν* of the Greeks in either of its senses ; more full of meaning than the “Peace” which had been the immemorial greeting of the Hebrews. It brought with it the

truth that "grace," the favour of God, was more than joy, and was the fountain of all peace ; it did not suggest, as *χαίρειν*, like our Farewell, had come to do, the idea of parting. In any case it is interesting to note the fact that St. John, to whom both the other greetings must have been familiar in the Church at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 23, and James i. 1), throws himself thus freely into Pauline phraseology. If I mistake not, even this coincidence, trivial as it may seem, is at least of some weight against the theory of some recent critics, that the Apocalypse is a polemic anti-Pauline treatise. The individuality of the writer asserts itself, however, in the words that follow. It is not, as with St. Paul, "Grace and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ," but, "from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come,"—or, as the Greek has it, with a singular disregard of the technical rules of grammar—*ἀπὸ τοῦ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος*.

It would be idle to ascribe this departure from usage to any ignorance of those rules, and to infer from it the early date of the Apocalypse. It is clear that the Apostle looked on the Divine Name, though it took the form of words that admitted of inflexion, as having a character as sacred as that of Jehovah or Adonai had been in his mother tongue, not losing its majesty by changing its unapproachable loftiness. The LXX. translation of Exod. iii. 14 had made *Ὁ ὢΝ* ("He that is") the Greek equivalent for the I AM of our English Bible ; and that was, therefore, naturally the first word in the strange compound which the Apostle formed to express the Eternity of God. But that Eter-

nity, that Ever-present Being, might be thought of as stretching into the infinite past and the infinite future, and two other names were wanted. The Greek verb of being, however, had no past participle, and therefore he had to fall back upon its imperfect tense, "the He was." It might, of course, have supplied him with a future *ὁ ἐσόμενος*, but from that word he turned aside, partly, it may be, because it would have suggested the thought of coming into being at some future point of time, partly because Hebrew phraseology had led him to find the thought of futurity in the verb "to come." And so we have *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*, "he that cometh." It is possible that the familiar "he that cometh" of the Gospels, applied by the Jews of Galilee and Jerusalem to the expected Christ, might have helped to determine the choice of that word; but the distinct mention of Christ in the next verse forbids us to refer the words even remotely to the thought of his second coming to judge the world. The one idea which the Apostle strove to embody was that of the Eternal Now, as contemplated in the time before the world, and as it shall be when God shall once more be all in all. It is scarcely possible to think of this Divine Name without remembering that inscription so strangely like, so yet more strangely different, of which Plutarch speaks as being in the Temple of Athene (the Egyptian Isis) at Sais: "I am all that has come into being, and that which is and that which shall be" (*Ἐγὼ εἶμι πᾶν τὸ γεγονός, καὶ ὄν, καὶ ἐσόμενον*), "and no man hath lifted my veil." Alike in contemplating the mystery of existence as spreading through the infinite past into the infinite future,

they differ in all else as widely as any two creeds that the world has ever seen. The one, in its identification of God with the universe, in its postulate of an "Ever-becoming" instead of an Eternal Being, in the absolute exclusion of personality by its use of the neuter form of the participles; in its assertion that the Deity thus described is the unknown and unknowable, is the despairing creed of the Pantheist. The other is the proclamation of the name of One who is not only the I AM THAT I AM, but the Everlasting Father, revealing Himself through his Son. Is it altogether too bold a conjecture to suggest that the contrast between the two formulæ was deliberate and designed? The inscription at Sais was, we know, at this very time one of the familiar topics of many religious inquirers. Was it likely to have been unknown to the Alexandrian Jew who had recently been at Ephesus, mighty in the Scriptures, and not unversed, as a scholar of Philo, in the lore of Heathenism? Is not the contrast between the *ὁ ὢν* and the *πάν τὸ γεγρονός* identical in character with that so sharply drawn in the prologue to St. John's Gospel, between the self-same verbs, "He *was*" (*ἦν*) "in the beginning with God," and "All things *were made*" (*ἐγένετο*) "by him." (John i. 2, 3).

In the next words we have a yet more marked individuality. St. Paul nowhere joins the Spirit with the Father and the Son in the opening salutation of his Epistles. The nearest approach to such a combination was found in the well-known words of blessing of 2 Cor. xiii. 13, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." The

use of the three Names, however, in the formula for Gentile baptism (Matt. xxviii. 19), which by this time must, to a large extent, have superseded the earlier form, "In the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts ii. 38; viii. 16; xviii. 8), must have made it natural to use them in benedictions, as they were shortly afterwards used in doxologies; and we may add that the order in which the Names were to be used was shewn, by St. Paul's example in the words just cited, to be a variable one. We are startled, however, by a yet greater variation. He speaks not of the one Holy Spirit, but of "the Seven Spirits which are before the Throne." Why, we ask, should he, who so distinctly records afterwards and must even now have remembered the teaching of the Lord Jesus as to the One Spirit, the Paraclete, bring in here the idea of plurality? The answer is to be found, in part, in the nature of the visions which he proceeds to record. He had seen "the seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne" (iv. 5), and the seven eyes of the Lamb (v. 6), and had learnt to see in each of these the symbol of the Seven Spirits of God, as representing in their completeness all gifts of illumination and insight that are possessed by God, and are communicated to man. That imagery rested on the older symbolism of a prophet whom the writer of the Revelation seems to have studied devoutly. In the visions of Zechariah also there had been seen the seven lamps, or branches of the one lamp (Zech. ii. 2.), the seven Eyes of God (Zech. ii. 9; iii. 10.), as symbols of his Eternal Light and all-embracing Knowledge. But the genesis of the symbol carries us yet higher. In the

passage in Isaiah (xi. 2), which had most impressed on men the thought that the Messianic King was to be filled by the Spirit, there were found numerically seven spiritual gifts, each described as being an attribute of the One Spirit of the Lord. As an influence nearer to the Apostle's own time and traceably operating in other instances (as, *e.g.*, in that of the Logos) on his thoughts and phraseology, we may note the fact that Philo also speaks of the number seven in its mystical import as identical with unity, as unity developed in diversity, and yet remaining one. The Seven Spirits were, therefore, under such conditions of thought, the fit symbols of the diversities of gifts bestowed by the one and self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He wills.

It was to be expected that one who had first learnt to know God in Christ, the Father through the Son, should reserve the fulness of his thoughts and speech for Him whom he had thus known and loved. And the words are every way characteristic. For him the first great attribute which attaches to the name of Christ is that of "the faithful witness." That was the thought which had been prominent in the personal teaching of his Lord as recorded in his Gospel. He had come into the world to bear witness to the truth. (John xviii. 37.) He testified that which he had seen and heard. (John iii. 11, 32.) Though in one sense He did not testify of Himself, but of the Father, yet the works which the Father had given Him to do bore their witness of Him. (John v. 36.) But this thought also attached itself to Divine words of earlier date. In the very pro-

phesy which, as speaking of the "sure mercies of David," had come to be looked on as essentially Messianic (Acts xiii. 34), as the sequel to the invitation, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," which is quoted by St. John himself in this very book (Rev. xxi. 6 ; xxii. 17), we find the character of the coming Christ portrayed as one who is to be given as "a witness to the people" (Isaiah lv. 4). In the Psalm, which had in like manner acquired a like significance, the reign of the future King was described as that of one who should be as the "faithful witness" in Heaven (Psa. lxxxix. 38) ; and if those words referred, as they have been thought to do, to the "bow in the cloud" as being like the moon in her vicissitudes and her sameness, the ever-recurring token of the stability of the Divine promise, then "the rainbow round about the Throne, in sight like unto an emerald," of Rev. iv. 3, may well have recalled the very words (ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός) which had been used of it by the Psalmist. But the Christ is also "the first-begotten from the dead and the Prince of the kings of the earth." The reference which we have just traced to the great Messianic Psalm explains in part these words also. If that Psalm had been present in its completeness to the writer's memory, he would find there that it was said of the Divinely-appointed King, "I will make Him my first-born" (πρωτότοκος, LXX.), "higher¹ than the kings of the earth." More noticeable still is the fact that the very words now used by St. John had been used before by

¹ The Hebrew for "higher" is יְיָ־עֶלְיוֹן, the "Most High" of the Divine name, so prominent in many passages both of the Old and New Testament.

St. Paul (Col. i. 18), and that we must therefore infer either that the name had come, through the teaching of that Apostle, to be familiar to all the Asiatic Churches, or that the Disciple, who has been sometimes thought of as representing a different section of the Church and a different phase of teaching, deliberately adopted a title which St. Paul had used before him. But it must be remembered also that to him the words came with a special significance and power. He had seen his Lord after He was risen. He had heard the words, "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth." He had witnessed the great proof of that claim of Sovereignty in the Ascension into Heaven. And so his whole view of the world and its order had been changed. Above all emperors and kings, above all armies and multitudes, he thought of the Crucified as ruling and directing the course of history, and certain in his own due time to manifest his sovereignty.

In this last clause of the opening words of salutation the Apostle had been as regardless of the technical rules of language as he had been in the first. Here also the epithets stand, not in the genitive, as in apposition with the name of Christ, but in their unimpaired majesty, in the nominative. But that salutation is hardly ended before, with the speech of one who writes as in the ecstasy of adoration, he passes from it to a doxology. And the doxology thus uttered is marked by some special characteristics. It is not, as those of St. Paul for the most part are, addressed to the Father only, or to the Father through the Son, but directly and emphatically to Jesus Christ. Knowing, as we do, the

horror with which every devout Israelite shrank from ascribing Divine Glory to any but the Divine Being, we cannot but see in this the recognition that the Lord Jesus Christ, the first-begotten from the dead, was also one with the Father; that to Him, no less than to the Eternal, were due all glory and might for ever and ever. If there are still those who contend that prayer and praise and adoration were not offered by the Apostolic Church to the person of the Son, this takes its place among the foremost witnesses against their error. But the substance of the doxology is even more remarkable. The preceding words had spoken of the glory of the Christ in his own essential majesty. These tell of the special relation in which He stood to the spiritual life of the Apostle who wrote, and to all his fellow-believers: "*To Him that loveth us*" (I follow the better-supported reading, τῷ ἀγαπῶντι, the present, not the past), "*and washed us*" (I see no adequate reason for preferring λύσαντι το λούσαντι) "*with his own blood.*" We need scarcely dwell on the thought which had impressed itself upon the mind of the Disciple that the Lord, who had loved him with so deep and personal an affection upon earth, was still loving him, and loving others with an equal love, now that He was in Heaven. There is a deeper interest in the clause which speaks of the special act of which he thought as manifesting that love. It tells us, if I mistake not, that he had entered now into the full meaning of words that had once been dark and dim to him. We can hardly suppose that the hard saying, "He that is washed needeth not to save wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (John xiii. 10), had been clear at the time

to those who heard it. Who was to give them that entire cleansing? How were they to maintain their purity by that daily washing of the feet? The words came, we may believe, with a new force to the mind of the disciple who records them, when he stood by the Cross and saw the water and the blood flow from the pierced side of Him who hung there. How deep the impression of that moment was we see in the reference to it that follows immediately upon this. What we are now concerned with is the consciousness that then or afterwards it became clear within him that the Love which was consummated in that supreme act of sacrifice, the love which then seemed that of a man who "lays down his life for his friends," but was afterwards seen to be that of one who was content to die even for his foes, had a power which nothing else could have, to kindle a new love in his own heart also; and so, through the power of that new affection, to purify him from the taint of evil and from the close-clinging impurity of his lower selfish nature. Here was "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," in which the stains of the past life could be washed away. We are so familiar in hymns and sermons with the words and phrases which have flowed from this as from their source, that for the most part we hardly care to trace their *genesis* and meaning; but the process of thought and feeling, which I have ventured to indicate, seems the only legitimate explanation of the association of ideas, at first apparently so incompatible as are those of cleansing and of blood, which we find thus brought together. The two were at any rate linked indissolubly in the mind of the Apostle. He saw in

“the blood of Christ” that which “cleanseth from all sin” (1 John i. 7). The multitude of those whom he saw in vision “arrayed in white robes” had “washed those robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. vii. 13, 14).

But the train of thought thus originated led on in natural, or more truly perhaps, spiritual, sequence to another. Once before, as by some mystic embodiment of the great idea or dim foreshadowing of the great fact, blood had been received as the symbol of purification. The tabernacle and the vessels of the ministry had been sprinkled with it. In the bold language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “almost all things are by the law purified with blood” (ix. 21). But the special cardinal instance of its use had been when Aaron and his sons had been consecrated to their priestly office. The two ideas, of being cleansed with blood and of entering on a priest’s work, were accordingly closely linked together. But in that baptism of blood of which St. John thought the washing was not limited to any priestly family, but was co-extensive with the whole company of believers. They therefore had become what the older Israel of God was at first meant to be in idea and constitution, “a kingdom of priests.”¹ That sprinkling of blood upon the whole people, before the great apostasy of the golden calf, had been the symbol that they too were all consecrated and set apart for their high calling. (Exod. xix. 6, 10; xxiv. 8.) So St. John (in this instance also following in the track of the Epistle to the Hebrews) looked on the true priest’s work as not

¹ I follow this as a better reading than that which gives “hath made us kings and priests.”

limited to any order of the ministry. All might offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, the incense of praise and adoration; all might pass within the veil, and enter into the Holiest, and plead for themselves and for their brothers in the power of the blood of Jesus. To Him then who had done such great things for them in the past, the beloved Disciple offers an ascription of praise and glory and power like that which went up from the lips of every devout Israelite to the Everlasting Father.

But the thoughts of the Seer travel on to the far future. The words that had been spoken by his Lord in his hearing in the High Priest's palace had claimed for the Christ the fulfilment of the vision of Daniel, in which the prophet had seen one like unto the Son of Man come with the clouds of heaven, even unto the Ancient of days. (Dan. vii. 13; Matt. xxvii. 14.) Even before that utterance of the truth, as he, with Peter and Andrew and James, had sat on the Mount of Olives, hearing from their Lord's lips that wondrous unveiling of the future, he had learnt that a day would come "when all the tribes of the earth shall mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. xxiv. 29.) The reference here to that declaration is clear and unmistakeable, and so far we have a proof, in a book which the latest and least traditional criticism ascribes to the reign of Nero, which, at the latest, is as early as that of Domitian, that if not the whole Gospel of St. Matthew in its present shape, at least that prophetic discourse was already current, and recognized in the Churches of

Asia, or else that the memory of the writer of the Apocalypse supplied him with the selfsame record.

“And every eye shall see Him and they also which pierced Him.” Here, as elsewhere, we have words which carry us back, first, to the Gospel of St. John, and, secondly, to the teaching of an older prophet. The Fourth Gospel alone records the fact which the writer, we must believe, alone of all the four, had seen with his own eyes, of the pierced side, and of the water and the blood. (John xix. 34, 37.) The writer of this book remembers that fact, and connects it with words which are a literal Greek rendering (not, be it observed, from the version of the LXX., which translates the words quite differently) of part of Zech. xii. 10. The Gospel, the later work, as we believe, of the same writer, does explicitly what is here done implicitly, and cites the prophecy as fulfilled in the event; and with identically the same variation from the current Greek version as that which we find here. It would be difficult, I think, to find anywhere a much stronger indirect proof of identity of authorship. It is clear, however, that St. John had learnt to generalize and idealize the event to which he thus refers. As those who fell away from the faith, or became its open enemies, crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh (Heb. vi. 6), so it was not only the lance of the Roman soldier that actually pierced Him, but much more all those whose sins of act or thought, whose want of faith and love, had been to Him as those of the inhabitants of Jerusalem had been, in the language of the older prophet, cutting and *piercing* to the quick. And that coming in the

clouds shall bring with it, so run the words of the Apostle, wailing and lamentation to all the kindreds of the earth. That Epiphany of the Judge in his Majesty and Righteousness cannot but call forth terror and dismay in all who under this name, "of the earth," earthy, are described as unholy and rebellious. The memory of past sins, the dread of penalty, the shame at having sinned against the Holiest, these will all be elements of woe and sorrow unspeakable. The words seem at first to tell not only of such ineffable anguish, but of a wailing hopeless and irremediable. We turn however, to the words of the older prophet, which, as we have seen, were clearly in St. John's thoughts; and there, so far from the picture of an irremediable penalty, we find that look on Him whom men had pierced connected closely with the pouring out "of the spirit of grace and supplication," with a great and bitter mourning, it is true, but also with the opening even then of the fountain for sin and for uncleanness. (Zech. xii. 10; xiii. 1.) So it was, we may believe, that the Seer, accepting the thoughts of the terror and judgment as coming from the Manifestation of One who was infinitely righteous, could contemplate that dark vision of the future without misgiving, and add, as in adoring acceptance, "Even so, Amen." And then for the first time the form of the message changes, and the voice of the Lord is heard speaking in his own name: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending" (these words, however, are wanting in the best manuscripts, and are probably a gloss upon the names of the Greek letters), "saith the Lord God" (I follow the best manuscripts in this

reading), "which is, and which was, and is to come, the Almighty." I am not aware that there is any example in any writing earlier than the Apocalypse of this mystical use of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and the instances which are quoted of a like employment of the corresponding letters (corresponding, *i.e.*, in position) of the Hebrew alphabet, א and ת, are all of much later date. So far as the evidence goes it may well have been that St. John himself was the first to seize on that mystic significance, and to see in the two letters of the alphabet what was at least comparatively new to him, the symbol of the Eternity of God, so limitless that we can imagine nothing as either before or after it. As the words stand with the reading, "the Lord God," and interpreted by what has gone before in verse 4, they refer primarily to the Eternity of the Father. We need not fear lest, in adopting that reading, we should sacrifice one jot or tittle of the witness which, with the received reading, the words have been thought to bear to the divinity of the Son. The more distinctly we refer them to "the Almighty" in the Old Testament sense of the word (*ὁ παντοκράτωρ*, the LXX. rendering of the Lord of Sabaoth—the Lord of Hosts), the more wonderful is their explicit application in the immediate sequel to Him, rather, their utterance *by* Him, who was seen in the midst of the seven golden Candlesticks.

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