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*THE FLAVIAN PERSECUTION IN THE PROVINCE
OF ASIA.*

THE shadow of the Roman Empire broods over the whole of the Apocalypse. Not merely are the Empire and the Emperors and the Imperial city introduced explicitly and by more or less clear descriptions among the figures that bulk most largely in the Visions, an even more important, though less apparent, feature of the book is that many incidental expressions would be taken by the Asian readers as referring to the Empire. Their minds were filled with the greatness, the majesty, the all-powerful and irresistible character of the Roman rule; and, with this thought in their minds, they inevitably interpreted every allusion to worldly dignity and might as referring to Rome, unless it were at the outset indicated by some marked feature as not Roman. One such exception is the Horseman of vi. 1, who rides forth accompanied by Bloodshed, Scarcity and Pestilence: he is marked forthwith by the bow that he carries as the Parthian terror, which always loomed on the eastern horizon as the possible source of an invasion with its concomitant trials.

Those incidental allusions can be brought out only by a detailed study and scrutiny of the Apocalypse, sentence by sentence. But it will facilitate the understanding of the Seven Letters to notice here briefly the chief figures under which the power of Rome appears in the Apocalypse. Some of these are quite correctly explained by most modern commentators; but one at least is still rather

obscure. Almost every interpreter rightly explains the Dragon of xii. 3 ff., the Beast of xiii. 1 ff., and the Woman of xvii. 3 ff.; but the monster in xiii. 18 ff. is not quite properly explained, and this is the one that most intimately concerns the purpose of the present series of studies.

The Dragon of xii. 1, the supreme power of evil, acts through the force of the Empire, when he waited to *devour the child of the Woman* and *persecuted the Woman* and proceeded to *make war on the rest of her seed*; and his heads and his horns are the Imperial instruments by whom he carries on war and persecution. The Beast of xiii. 1, with his ten diademed horns and the blasphemous names on his seven heads, is the Imperial government with its diademed Emperors and its temples dedicated to human beings blasphemously styled by Divine names.

The Woman of xvii. 1, sitting on a scarlet-coloured beast with seven heads and ten horns and names of blasphemy, decked in splendour and lapped in luxury and *drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs*, is the Imperial city, which attracted to her allurements and her pomp *the kings of the nations*, the rich and distinguished men from all parts of the civilized world. "Kings" was a term often applied in the social speech of that period to the rich and luxurious. There were also the kings of client states in Asia Minor and Syria, one of whom was in Rome in A.D. 69, and fought for Otho in the Civil War.

To Rome go the saints and martyrs to be tormented, that the woman and her guests may be amused on festivals and State occasions. She sits upon the Imperial monster, the beast with its heads and its horns and its blasphemous names and its purple or scarlet hue (for the ancient names of colours pass into one another with little distinction), because Rome had been raised higher than ever before by the Imperial government. Yet the same Beast and the ten horns,

by which she is exalted so high, *shall hate her, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire*: for the Emperors were no true friends to Rome, they feared it, and therefore hated it, curtailed its liberties, deprived it of all its power, murdered its citizens and all its leading men, wished (like Caligula) that the whole Roman People had one single neck, and (like Nero) burned the city to the ground.

In a more veiled and yet a clearly marked way the Province Asia appears as a figure in the Vision. It must be understood, however, what "the Province" was in the Roman system and the popular conception. The Province was not a tract of land subjected to Rome: as a definite tract or division of the earth "Asia" had no existence except in the sense of the whole vast continent, which is still known under that name. A "Province" to the Roman mind meant literally "a sphere of duty," and was an administrative, not a geographical, fact: the Province of a magistrate might be the stating of law in Rome, or the superintendence of a great road, or the administration of a region or district of the world, but it was not and could not be (except in a loose and derivative way) a tract of country. The Province was the aspect in which Rome manifested itself to the people of Asia; and conversely the Province was the form under which the people of Asia constituted a part of the Empire. Rome stood before the Asians in two points of view.

In the first place the Province of Asia was the entire circle of administrative duties connected with that division of the Empire, which stood before the minds of the people of Asia (and among them of the writer of the Apocalypse) as the whole body of officials, who conducted the administration, especially the Senate in Rome acting through its chosen agent on the spot, the individual Senator whom the rest of the Senate delegated to repre-

sent it and to administer its power in Asia for the period of a year, residing in official state as Proconsul in the capital or making his official progress through the principal cities.

In the second place the Province was the whole circle of religious duties and rites which constituted the ideal bond of unity holding the people of Asia together as a part of the Imperial realm ; and this ritual was expressed to the Asian mind by the representative priests, constituting the Commune (or, as it might almost be called, the Parliament) of Asia: the one representative body that spoke for the " Nation," i. e., the Province, Asia.

Again, the Province was the status which a certain body of persons and cities had in the Roman Empire. They had a place and privilege in the Empire as members of the Province, and their rights and duties were determined by the " Law of the Province," which was settled when the Province was admitted. A Phrygian did not occupy a place in the Empire as a Phrygian, but as an Asian or a Galatian. A " Phrygian " was a member of a foreign conquered race. An Asian or a Galatian was a unit in the Roman population, with less privileges indeed than a Roman Citizen, but still honoured with certain duties and rights. His rights and duties were partly civil and partly religious: as an Asian he must both act and feel as part of the Empire, he must do certain duties and feel certain emotions of loyalty and patriotism: loyalty and patriotism were expressed through the Provincial religion, the State worship of the majesty of Rome and the Emperor.

The Province of Asia in its double aspect of civil and religious administration, the Proconsul and the Commune, is symbolized by the monster described xiii. 11 ff. This monster *had two horns* corresponding to this double aspect ; and it was *like unto a lamb*, for Asia was a peaceful

country, where no army was needed. Yet *it spake as a dragon*, for the power of Rome expressed itself quite as sternly and haughtily, when it was unsupported by troops, as it did when it spoke through the mouth of a general at the head of an army.

The monster *exerciseth all the authority of the first Beast in his sight*; for the provincial administration exercised the full authority of the Roman Empire, delegated to the Proconsul for his year of office.

It maketh the earth and all that dwell therein to worship the first Beast, for the provincial administration organized the State religion of the Emperors. The Imperial regulation that all loyal subjects must conform to the State religion and take part in the Imperial ritual, was carried out according to the regulations framed by the Commune, which arranged the ritual, superintended and directed its performance, ordered the building of temples, and the erection of statues, fixed the holidays and festivals, and so on—*saying to them that dwell on the earth that they should make an image to the Beast*.

At this point occurs a remarkable series of statements, constituting the one contemporary account of the Flavian persecution of the Christians in Asia. They are to the effect that the Commune attempted to prove the truth and power of the Imperial religion by means of miracles and wonders: the monster *doeth great signs, that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men; and he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the Beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth that they should make an image to the Beast. And it was given him to give breath to the statue of the Beast, that the statue of the Beast should both speak and cause that as many as should not worship the statue of the Beast should be killed.*" The last statement is familiar to us; it is not directly

attested for the Flavian period by any pagan authorities, but it is proved by the concurrent testimony of Christian authorities, and corroborated by known historical facts, and by the interpretation which Trajan stated about twenty-five years later of the principles of Imperial procedure in this department. It is simply the straightforward enunciation of the rule as to the kind of trial that should be given to those who were accused of Christianity. The accused were required to prove their loyalty by performing an act of religious worship of the statue of the Emperor, which (as Pliny mentioned to Trajan) was brought into court in readiness for the test: if they performed the ritual, they were acquitted and dismissed: if they refused to perform it, they were condemned to death. No other proof was sought; no investigation was made; no accusation of any specific crime or misdeed was made; as had been the case in the persecution of Nero, which is described by Tacitus. That short and simple procedure was legal, prescribed by Imperial instructions, and complete.

No scholar now doubts that the account given so far in these words of the Apocalypse represents accurately the procedure in the Flavian persecution. Criticism for a time attempted to discredit the unanimous Christian testimony, because it was unsupported by direct pagan testimony; and signally failed. The attempt is abandoned now.

Quite correct also is the statement that "the Province" ordered the inhabitants of Asia to make a statue in honour of the Beast. The Commune of Asia ordered the construction of statues of the Imperial gods, and especially the statue of the Divine Augustus in the temple at Pergamum.

But the other statements in this remarkable passage are entirely uncorroborated, nor does any even indirect evidence support them. It is nowhere said or hinted, except here, that the State cult in Asia, the most educated part of the Empire, recommended itself by tricks and pseudo-miracles,

such as bringing down fire from heaven, or making the image of the Emperor speak. With regard to these statements we are reduced to mere general presumptions and estimate of probabilities.

Are we then to discredit them as inventions, or as mere vague and empty repetitions of traditional apocalyptic ideas and images? By no means. This is the one contemporary account that has been preserved of the Flavian procedure: the one solitary account of the methods practised at that time by the Commune of Asia in recommending and establishing the State religion. It is thoroughly uncritical to accept from this account two details, which are known from other sources to be absolutely and strikingly true, and to dismiss the rest as untrue, because they are neither corroborated nor contradicted by other authorities. This account stands alone: there is no other authority: it is corroborated indirectly in the main facts. The accessory details, therefore, are probably true: they are not in themselves unlikely, though it is rather a shock to us to find that such conduct is attributed to the Commune in that highly civilized age—highly civilized in many respects, but in some both decadent and barbarous.

It must also be remembered that the people of the Province Asia were not all equally educated and civilized: many of them had no Greek education, but were sunk in ignorance and the grossest Oriental superstition. There is no good reason apparent why this contemporary account should be disbelieved; and we must accept it, and conclude that the attempt was made under the authority of the Commune, by one or more of its delegates in charge of the various temples and the ritual practised at them, to impress the populace with the might of the Imperial divinity by showing signs and miracles, by causing fire to burst forth without apparent cause, and declaring that it came down from heaven, and by causing speech to seem to issue from

the statue in the temple. The writer accepts those signs as having really occurred. The monster was permitted by God to perform those marvels, and to delude men for a time. None of the details which this contemporary account mentions is incredible or even improbable. A Roman Proconsul in Cyprus had a Magian as his friend and teacher in science : the Magian probably showed him the known sign of spontaneous fire bursting forth at his orders. In a Roman Colony at Philippi a ventriloquist, a slave girl, earned large sums for her owners by fortune-telling (Acts xvi. 16) : why should not ventriloquism be employed in Asia in the service of an Imperial temple at this time of intense excitement among persecuted and persecutors alike.

It is not necessary to suppose that the Commune of Asia encouraged and practised everywhere such methods. It would be sufficient justification for the statements in this passage, if the methods were practised by any of its official representatives in any of the Asian temples of the Imperial religion, without condemnation from the Commune. There is no reason to think that the shrine of the Sibyl at Thyatira was alien to such impostures, or that the people in Ephesus who were impressed by the magical powers of the sons of Sceva (Acts xix. 13 f.) and duped by other fraudulent exhibitors, were unlikely to be taken in by such arts when officially practised.

That these marvels and signs were connected more particularly with one individual, and not so much with the Commune as a body, is suggested by the only other reference to them, viz. xix. 20, when *the Beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against Him that sat upon the horse and against His army ; and the Beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the Beast and them that worshipped his image.* We must understand that these words refer to

some definite person, who exercised great influence in some part of Asia, and was the leading spirit in performing the marvels and signs: he is as real as the prophetess of Thyatira, ii. 20. He had been prominent in deceiving the people for the benefit of the Imperial government, and is associated with its approaching destruction. This association in ruin would be all the more telling, if the prophet had visited Rome and been received by some of the Flavian Emperors.

A personage like Apollonius of Tyana would suit well the allusions in the Apocalypse. He lived and exercised great influence in Asia, especially at Ephesus, where after his death he enjoyed a special cult as "the averter of evil" (Alexikakos), because he had taught the city how to free itself from a pestilence by detecting the human form, in which the pest was stalking about in their midst, and putting to death the wretched old man on whom he fixed the guilt.

Apollonius had the general reputation of a magician. He had been well received in Rome, and was the friend of Vespasian, Titus and Nerva. His biographer, Philostratus, defends him from the charge of magic, but represents him as a worker of signs and wonders; and it must be remembered that St. John does not regard the prophet as an impostor, but as one to whom *it was given to perform marvels*. Philostratus, it is true, does not represent him as an upholder of the Imperial cultus, and rather emphasizes his opposition to Domitian; but the aim of the biographer is not to give an exact history of Apollonius as he was, but to place an ideal picture before the eyes of the world. There is every reason to think that a man like Apollonius would use all his influence in favour of Vespasian and Titus, and no reason to think that he would discountenance or be unwilling to promote the Imperial cultus. While he was opposed to Domitian, it does not appear that the mutual dislike had come to a head early in

the reign of that Emperor, when according to our view the Apocalypse was conceived, though Philostratus represents Apollonius as foreseeing everything and knowing intuitively the character of every man.

It seems, then, quite possible that Apollonius may actually be meant by this prophet associated with the Beast ; but, even if that be not correct, yet it is certain that there were other magicians and workers of wonders in the Asian cities ; and it is in no way improbable that one of them may have been employed as an agent, even as a high-priest, of the Imperial religion. The over-stimulated, cultured and yet morbid society of the great cities of Asia Minor furnished a fertile soil for the development of such soothsayers, fortune-tellers and dealers in magic : the account which Lucian gives of Alexander of Abonoteichos in Paphlagonia may be taken as a good example in the second century. The existence of many such impostors in the Province Asia during the first century is attested, not merely by the passages quoted above from the Acts, but also by an incident recorded by Philostratus in the biography of Apollonius, vii. 41. The Asian cities by the Hellespont, dreading the recurrence of earthquakes, contributed ten talents to certain Egyptian and Chaldæan soothsayers for a great sacrifice to avert the danger. Apollonius encountered and drove away the impostors—the circumstances of the contest are not recorded—discovered the reason why Earth and Sea were angry, offered the proper expiatory sacrifices, averted the danger at a small expense, and the earth stood unmoved.

The monster, who stands for the Province, is described as *coming up out of the earth*. He is contrasted with the Beast which *came up out of the sea*. They are thus described as native and as foreign : the one belongs to the same land as the readers of the Apocalypse, the other comes from across the sea, and seems to rise out of the sea

as it comes. This form of expression was usual, both in language and in art. Foreign products and manufactures were described as "of the sea" (*θαλάσσια*): we use "sea-borne" in the same sense: the goddess who came in with the Phœnicians, as patroness and protectress of the Sidonian ships, was represented as "rising from the sea." Beings native to the country, or closely connected with the earth, were represented in art as reclining on the ground or emerging with only half their figure out of the ground.

Thus the Beast was marked clearly to the readers as having a home beyond the sea, while the monster was closely connected with their own soil, and had its home in their own country.

The monster causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand or upon their forehead; and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, the name of the Beast or the number of his name.

This refers to some unknown, but (as will be shown) not in itself improbable attempt, either through official regulation or informal "boycott," to injure the Asian Christians by preventing dealings with traders and shopkeepers who had not proved their loyalty to the Emperor. That such an attempt may have been made in the Flavian persecution seems quite possible. It is not described by St. John as an Imperial, but only as a provincial regulation; now it is absolutely irreconcilable with the principles of Roman administration that the Proconsul should have issued any order of the kind except with Imperial authorization; therefore we must regard this as a recommendation originating from the Commune of Asia. The Commune would have no authority to issue a command or law; but it might signalize its devotion to the Emperor by recommending that the disloyal should be discountenanced by the

loyal, and that all loyal subjects should try to restrict their custom to those who were of proved loyalty. Such a recommendation might be made by a devoted and courtly body like the Commune; and it was legal to do this, because all who refused to engage in the public worship of the Emperors were proscribed by Imperial act as traitors and outlaws, possessing no rights.

Only some enactment of this kind seems adequate to explain this remarkable statement of xiii. 16 f. In a very interesting section of his *Biblical Studies*, p. 241 f., Dr. Deissmann describes the official stamp impressed on legal deeds recording and registering the sale of property; and maintains that this whole passage takes its origin from the custom of marking with the Imperial stamp all records of sale. This seems an inadequate explanation. The mark of the Beast was a preliminary condition, and none who wanted it were admitted to business transactions. But the official stamp was merely the concomitant guarantee of legality; it was devoid of religious character; and there was no reason why it should not be used by Christians as freely as by pagans.

That the mark of the Beast must be impressed in the right hand or the forehead is a detail which remains obscure; we know too little to explain it with confidence. If it had been called simply the mark on the forehead, it might be regarded as the public proof of loyalty by performance of the ritual: this overt, public proof might be symbolically called "a mark on the forehead." But the mention of an alternative place for the mark shows that more wide-reaching explanation is needed. The proof of loyalty might be made in two ways; both were patent and public; they are symbolically described as the mark on the right hand or on the forehead; without one or the other no one was to be dealt with by the loyal provincials.

That something like a "boycott" might be attempted in

the fervour of loyalty and of hatred for the disloyal Christians seems not impossible. That "strikes" occurred in the Asian cities seems established by an inscription of Magnesia; and where "strikes" occur, an attempted "boycott" seems also possible. But the character attributed to this mark of the Beast extends far beyond the operation of a mere restriction on trading transactions. It must be remembered that the age was the extremest and worst period of "delation," i.e. of prosecution by volunteer accusers on charges of treason. The most trifling or the most serious actions were alike liable to be twisted into acts of personal disrespect to the Emperor, and thus to expose the doer of them to the extremest penalty of the law; a falsehood told, a theft committed, a wrong word spoken, in the presence of any image or representation of the Emperor, might be construed as disrespect to his sacred majesty; even his bust on a coin constituted the locality an abode of the Imperial god and made it necessary for those who were there to behave as in the Divine presence. Domitian carried the theory of Imperial Divinity and the encouragement of "delation" to the most extravagant point; and thereby caused a strong reaction in the subsequent Imperial policy. Precisely in that time of extravagance occurs this extravagant exaggeration of the Imperial theory: that in one way or another every Asian must stamp himself overtly and visibly as loyal, or be forthwith disqualified from participation in ordinary social life and trading. How much of grim sarcasm, how much of literal truth, how much of exaggeration, there lies in those words,—*that no man should be able to buy or sell, save he that hath the mark of the Beast on his right hand or upon his forehead*,—it is impossible for us now to decide. It is probably safe to say that there lies in them a good deal of sarcasm, combined with so much resemblance to the real facts as should ensure the immediate comprehension of the readers. But that there is an ideal

truth in them, that they give a picture of the state of anxiety and apprehension, of fussy and over-zealous profession of loyalty which the policy of Domitian was producing in the Roman world, is certain.

Such is the description given by a contemporary of the Flavian persecution. It shows that persecution to have been an organized attempt to combine many influences for the extermination of the Christians, and not a mere sporadic though stern repression such as occurred repeatedly during the second century. But it is already certain that the Flavian persecution was of that character. Trajan, while admitting the same principle of State, that the Christians must be regarded as outlaws and treated like brigands, deprived persecution of its worst characteristics by forbidding the active search after Christians and requiring a formal accusation by a definite accuser. Under the Flavian Emperors we see an extremely cruel and bitter public movement against the Christians, an attempt to enlist religious awe on the side of the Empire, and a zealous participation of the Asian provincial bodies beginning from the Commune in the persecution as a proof of their loyalty.

A recent writer on this subject expresses doubt as to "the degree to which the worship of the Emperor had become the normal test applied to one accused of being a Christian."¹ How any doubt can remain in face of this passage, even were it alone, it is hard to see. It is difficult to devise a more effective and conclusive declaration that the religion of Christ and the religion of the Emperor were now explicitly and professedly ranged against one another, and that the alternative presented to every individual Christian was to "worship the image of the Beast" or death.

It furnishes no argument against this view of the character

¹ Mr. Anderson Scott in his excellent commentary in the Century Bible, p. 51.

of the Flavian persecution, that during the persecutions of the second century no attempt seems to have been made actively to rouse religious feeling among the populace as an ally against the new religion. The attempt was made in the last great persecution, during the times of Diocletian and his successors. Then again the Imperial government attempted to seek out and exterminate the Christians. It "took advantage of and probably stimulated a philosophical religious revival, characterized by strong anti-Christian feeling; and employed for its own ends the power of a fervid emotion acting on men who were often of high and strongly religious motives. Christianity had to deal with a reinvigorated and desperate religion, educated and spiritualized in the conflict with the Christians. The *Acta* of St. Theodotus of Amyra furnishes an instance of the way in which the devoted fanaticism of such men made them convenient tools for carrying out the purposes of the government; the approach of the new governor of Galatia and the announcement of his intentions struck terror into the hearts of the Christians; his name was Theotecnus, 'the child of God,' a by-name assumed by a philosophic pagan reactionary in competition with the confidence of the Christians in their Divine mission and the religious names which their converts assumed at baptism."¹ This description gives some idea of the state of things in the Province Asia which prompted the words of St. John. We need not doubt that Theotecnus and others like him also made use of signs and marvels for their purposes. Theotecnus seems to have been the author of the Acts of Pilate, an attack on the Christian belief. A remarkable inscription found near Acmonia in Phrygia is the epitaph of one of those pagan philosophic zealots, not an official of the Empire, but a leading citizen and priest in the Province.² He is described in his epitaph as having received the gift

¹ *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, ii. p. 506. ² *Ibid.*, ii. pp. 566-7.

of prophecy from the gods. His very name, Athanatos Epitynchanos, son of Pius, "Immortal Fortunate, son of Religious," is quite in the style of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and marks his character and part in the drama of the time. His pretensions to prophetic gift were supported, we may be sure, by signs and marvels.

Less is known about the second last persecution, 249-51 A.D., in which Decius attempted in a similar way to seek out and exterminate the Christians. But another inscription of Acmonia is the epitaph of a relative, perhaps the grandfather or uncle of Athanatos Epitynchanos.¹ His name was Telesphoros, Consummator, and he was hierophant of a religious association in Acmonia; and his wife and his sons Epitynchanos and Epinikos (Victorious) made his grave in company with the whole association. This document is a proof that a similar religious pagan revival accompanied in Acmonia the persecution of Decius; and Acmonia must be accepted as a fair example of the provincial spirit generally. In fact it is evident that in those great persecutions a strong public feeling against the Christians acted on and stimulated the Emperors; and the Emperors in turn tried to stimulate and urge on the religious feeling of the public into fanaticism, as an aid in their attempt to exterminate the sectaries.

In both those later persecutions formal certificates of loyalty were issued by the government officials to those who had complied with the law and taken part in the ritual of the Imperial religion. These certificates form an apt parallel to the "mark of the Beast," and prove that that phrase refers to some real feature of the Flavian persecution in Asia.²

¹ The inscription was first published in the *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 1901, p. 276; and a correction of one letter Δ for Α was made in the same journal, 1902, p. 82, by M. Chapot, and accepted by the present writer, 1902, p. 269.

² Several of these certificates have been found in Egypt, and are published in recent times.

These three persecutions stand apart from all the rest in a class by themselves. The intermediate Emperors shrank from thoroughly and logically putting in practice the principle which they all recognized in theory—that a Christian was necessarily disloyal and outlawed in virtue of the name and confession. All three are characterized by the same features and methods, which stand clearly revealed in the Apocalypse for the first of them and in many documents for the last.

The analogy of the official certificates in the time of Diocletian suggests that in the Flavian period the mark of the Beast on the right hand may have been a similar official certificate of loyalty. A provincial who was exposed to suspicion must carry in his hand such a certificate, while one who was notoriously and conspicuously loyal might be said to carry the mark on his forehead. In the figurative or symbolic language of the Apocalypse hardly anything is called by its ordinary and direct name, but things are indirectly alluded to under some other name, and every word has to be understood as implying something else than its ordinary connotation; and therefore it seems a fair inference that the mark on the forehead is the apocalyptic description of a universal reputation for conspicuous devotion to the cult of the Emperor.

The shadow of the Imperial religion lies deep over the whole book. But the remarkable feature of the book,—the feature which gave it its place in the New Testament in spite of some undeniable defects, which for a time made its place uncertain, and which still constitute a serious difficulty in reading it as an authoritative expression of the Christian spirit—is that the writer is never for a moment affected by the shadow. He was himself a sufferer, not to death, but to an extent which he would feel as a worse fate: he was debarred from helping and advising his Churches in the hour of trial. But there is no shadow of sorrow or discouragement.

ment or anxiety as to the issue. The Apocalypse is a vision of victory. The great Empire is already vanquished. It has done its worst; and it has already failed. Not all the Christians have been victors; but those who have deserted their ranks and dropped out of the fight have done so from inner incapacity, and not because the persecuting Emperor is stronger than they. Every battle fought to the end is a defeat for the Empire and a Christian victory. Every effort that the Emperor makes is only another opportunity for failing more completely. The victory is not to gain: it already is. The Church is the only reality in its city: the rest of the city is mere pretence and sham. The Church is the city, heir to all its history and its glories, heir too to its weaknesses and its difficulties and sometimes succumbing to them.

The most dangerous kind of error that can be made about the Apocalypse is to regard it as a literal statement and prediction of events. Thus, for example, xviii. 1-xix. 21 is not to be taken as a prophecy of the manner in which, or the time at which, the downfall of the great Empire and of the great City was to be accomplished; it is not to be understood as foreshadowing the Papacy, according to the foolish imaginings, "philosophy and vain deceit" as St. Paul would have called them (Col. ii. 8), of one modern school; it is not to be tortured by extremists on any side into conformity with their pet hatreds. Those are all idle fancies, which do harm to no one except them that waste their intellect on them. But it becomes a serious evil when the magnificent confidence and certainty of St. John as to the speedy accomplishment of all these things is distorted into a declaration of the immediate Coming of the Lord and the end of the world. Time was not an element in his anticipation. He was gazing on the eternal, in which time has no existence. Had any Asian reader asked him at what time these things should be accom-

plished, he would assuredly have answered in the spirit of Browning's Grammarian:—

What's time? Leave "now" to dogs and apes:
Man has forever.

Moreover, the Apocalypse declares in its plainest way that the series of the Emperors is to continue yet for a season. The Beast himself is the eighth Emperor; he is the climax and incarnation of the whole seven that precede; he is Domitian, the visible and present embodiment of the hated Imperial system. But the Beast has ten horns: *these are ten Emperors which have not been invested with Imperial power as yet; but they receive authority as Emperors with the Beast* (i.e., as units in the Imperial system) *for one hour. These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them* (xvii. 12, 14).

The number *ten*, here as in ii. 10 (where Smyrna is to be exposed to persecution for ten days), merely denotes a finite number: the series of Emperors is limited and comes to an end. Rome shall perish. In one sense it is perishing now in every failure, in the victory of every martyr. *The Beast was and is not.* In another sense *the end is not yet.* But there is an end. The power of each Emperor is *for one hour*; he shall have his little span of pomp and pride, of power and failure; and he shall go down to the abyss like his predecessors.

W. M. RAMSAY.