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ARTICLE III.

DATE OF THE APOCALYPSE FROM INTERNAL EVIDENCE

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RELATION OF THE QUESTION TO THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK.

The question whether the Apocalypse was written at an early or in the very closing period of the apostolic ministration, has importance as bearing on the interpretation of the book. A true exposition depends, in no small degree, upon a knowledge of the existing condition of things at the time it was written; i.e. of the true point in history occupied by the writer, and those whom he originally addressed. The same is manifestly true of the prophecies in general; eminently so of those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. If the book were an epistle, like that to the Romans or to the Hebrews, it might be of comparatively little importance in ascertaining its meaning, to be able to determine whether it was written at the commencement or at the very close of the apostolic era.

It is obvious that if the book itself throws any distinct light on this subject, this internal evidence, especially in the absence of reliable historical testimony, ought to be decisive. To this inquiry, therefore, this Article will be devoted. Instead of appealing to tradition or to some doubtful passage in an ancient Father, we interrogate the book itself, or we listen to what the Spirit says that was in him who testified of these things. It will be found that no book of the New Testament more abounds in passages which clearly have respect to the time when it was written.

It is necessary only to premise that the question in regard to the authorship of the Apocalypse will be considered as settled; that is, it will be taken for granted that it was written

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by the apostle John, the same who wrote the fourth Gospel, and the Epistles that bear his name.

1. Evidence from Peculiar Idiom.

The peculiar idiom, so thoroughly Hebraistic, in which it is written, proves that it was the first of the books written by John, and one of the earliest of the New Testament.

The entire New Testament, it is true, is written in this Greek of the synagogue, or Hebrew-Greek. It records doctrines and precepts originally delivered in Hebrew, or in a dialect of that language, and events many of which had been predicted in the Hebrew scriptures. Moreover, the Hebrew, or this dialect, was the vernacular of the principal actors and speakers mentioned in the narrative parts. It was unavoidable that the writers of the New Testament, themselves Hebrews, in expressing these new and peculiar ideas in a foreign language, should attach new shades of meaning to many words, coin new ones, and imitate Hebrew phrases and constructions. This language or idiom had already been prepared for them, as to a considerable portion of the terms by the Septuagint translation of the scriptures. Some of the words in this Hellenistic Greek are used in senses which, as remarked by Dr. Campbell,¹ "can be learned only from the extent of signification given to some Hebrew or Chaldaic word, corresponding to the Greek in its primitive and ordinary sense," as found in classic authors.

Now what is true of the Greek of the entire New Testament and of the LXX, is very especially true of that of the Apocalypse. WE find here far more numerous instances of these changes or this extension in the meaning of words, imitations of whole phrases, analogous formations of new words, and examples of the combination of Hebrew inflections and constructions, and a predilection for the preposition, where the Greeks use only the cases. It is especially deserving of notice how the writer of the Apocalypse, when expressing in Greek a Hebrew epithet, for which no proper

¹ Preliminary Dissertation, p. 23. The Rev. W. Creighton Campbell, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Roanoke, Va., graduated Princeton Theological Seminary, and was a member of its Board of Trustees. He may have been the same W.C. Campbell who pastored the Harper's Ferry Presbyterian Church in West Virginia.

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representative is found in the Greek language, puts it in the nominative case where the syntax would require a genitive or a dative or an accusative, thus conforming to the Hebrew nouns he is representing, which do not admit of inflection in the oblique cases. The following are examples, chap. 1.4, 5: ἀπὸ ὃ ὦν καὶ ὃ ἦν καὶ ὃ ἐρχόμενος . Those words are a rendering in Greek of the word “Jehovah,” which is indeclinable. The ἀπὸ requires the genitive; but the writer, governed by the Hebrew, recognizes no oblique cases. He sees no room for flexion in translating that name which expresses attributes belonging only to him who is the same present, past, and future. In the original it is literally from who is, and who was, and who comes. And so in the next verse, ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, κ.τ.λ. We learn from 3.14, that these words define the meaning of the indeclinable Hebrew noun, Amen; Hence the *casus rectus* again.

We sometimes have in a single word an example of the manner in which John weds the Hebrew and the Greek. Thus in 1.15, in the description of the appearance of the Son of man, it is said his feet were “like unto fine brass,” χαλκολιβάνῳ, a word which has greatly perplexed students. It is found only in this book, and was probably a word of John’s own composition. The explanation which commends itself above any other is as follows: it is composed of a Greek word and a Hebrew, χαλκός, *brass*, and לבן, *to make white*; so χαλκολιβάνον means brass brought to a white heat, in an incandescent state, of a glittering whiteness. This explanation was first proposed by Bochart.¹ It has been adopted by Vitringa, Hengstenberg, and Trench. Hengstenberg says: “In the formation of this word we are presented with a small image of the innermost nature of the Apocalypse, the singular manner in which the Hebrew and the Hellenic are fused together in it.”² We have perhaps another somewhat similar example in the word Νικολαϊτῶν, 2.6, the best interpretation of which is that it is derived from the Greek

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words νικᾶν τον καον, which would express in a name, Nicolaus or Nicolas, what Balaam expresses in Hebrew, “destroyer of the people,” and is therefore equivalent to Balaamites. As the other names in this book are predominantly mystical and symbolic, in all probability this is so as well.³

But so conspicuous is this Hebrew idiom in the Apocalypse that it is unnecessary to multiply examples. While it is Greek in language, it is Hebrew in form and spirit. It lies upon the very surface and is patent to the most cursory examination. It is admitted by all who have bestowed any attention on the subject, that it is more prominent here than in any other part of the New Testament, not excepting the other writings of John. It causes the book to bear somewhat the aspect of an elementary, initiatory work, as if it might be the fontal source of those further idiomatic changes required in the Greek of the synagogue, to adapt it to the expression of the truths of the gospel of Christ. Now what are we authorized to infer from this? Clearly, that it was one of the earliest written books of the New Testament. Beyond all question, as the New Testament contains other books written by John, this Hebrew complexion, so marked in the style of the Apocalypse, proves that the writer of it was but recently arrived among a Greek population, and that this was his first attempt at composition in Greek. At this result we have certainly arrived, that the Apocalypse, in its verbal language, bears evidence of having been written before the Gospel and Epistles of John. Tholuck says: “When we compare it [the style of the Gospel of John] with the style of the Apocalypse, the Gospel, to all appearance, must have

¹ De Animalibus, Sacr. Script. II. 16.

² Comm. on Rev. i. p. 101, note.

³ See Trench on Epistles to the Seven Churches.

been written at a considerably later period.”¹ He thinks that the interval of twenty or twenty-five years would not be too great to require to account for the great diversity in their language. Of all the arguments adduced by Sir Isaac Newton, none appears more cogent to Michaelis than that which is drawn from the Hebrew style of the Revelation, from which Sir Isaac had drawn the conclusion that John

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must have written the book shortly after his departure from Palestine, and before the destruction of Jerusalem.²

2. Seven Churches only in Asia at the time it was written.

There appear to have been but seven churches in Asia, that is to say, in Proconsular Asia, or that part of Asia Minor lying along the western sea-board, when this book was written. It is dedicated to these seven alone, by the careful mention of them one by one by name, as if there were no others (1.4, 11); ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, to the seven churches in Asia. The expression “the seven churches,” seems to imply that this constituted the whole number, and hence affords one of the most striking incidental proofs in favor of an early date. “There were but seven churches,” says Dr. Tilloch, “in Asia when the Revelation was given.”³ If it is necessary to suppose that the church at Colosse had been already established, lying as this place did in immediate proximity to Laodicea, it may have been regarded as part and parcel of the church at the latter place. It is certain that Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians addresses these churches together as if they were closely identified, if not organically one.⁴ The churches at Trelles and Magnesia could not have been established until a considerable time after the Apocalypse was written. Those who contend for the later date, when there must have been a greater number of churches than seven in the region designated by the apostle, fail to give any sufficient reason for this mentioning no more than seven.⁵ That they mystically or symbolically represent others is surely not such a reason.

3. Judaizing Heretics and Enemies Active.

The epistles to the seven churches disclose that Judaizing heretics were exerting a great influence, and that there

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was vigorous activity on the part of Jewish enemies, such as could not have belonged to these people subsequent to the catastrophe which befel their nation. The angel of the church of Ephesus is commended (2.2) for having “tried them which say they are apostles, and are not.” “Among the properties belonging to an apostle,” says Bengel, “it was one that he should have seen the Lord Jesus Christ. So that false apostles were persons who not only broached false doctrine, but also set this forth with an apostolic air, as if they might have seen Christ, or falsely pretended to have done so.” It would have been too late in the reign of Domitian, when John, who was the youngest of the apostles, and the only survivor, was nearly a hundred years old, for such a claim as this to be set up with any degree of plausibility. Those to whom John refers must be regarded as identical, if not in person, in character, with those of whom Paul complained in

¹ Com. on Gospel, Int. §3.

² Introductory Lecture, Marsh’s Translation, 1793, 8vo. Vol. iv.

³ Dissertations, etc., p. 32.

⁴ Col. 2.1; 4.15.

⁵ Epistles to Seven Churches, by Abp. Trench. pp. 42, 44.

his second Epistle to the Corinthians, and whom he thus describes: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ," etc. (11.13).

Again, the church of the Ephesians is commended for hating "the deeds of the Nicolaitans" (2.6). The best explanation of the term "Nicolaitans" makes it symbolical, like Balaam (2.14), and Jezebel (2.20), and makes all these names apply to the false apostles or apostates before named, or the Judaizing heretics that infested the church. There are insuperable objections to the derivation of the name from a sectarian called Nicolaus, that is to a historical explanation. Balaam, according to its etymology, signifies "destroyer of the people"; and Nicolaitans, according to its etymology, is simply Balaamites in Greek. The Nicolaitans, and those mentioned afterwards as Balaamites, and the followers of the woman Jezebel, were those precisely who repeated the sins of Balaam and Jezebel by becoming tempters of the people of God. They were the same troublers to whom Paul refers (2Cor 2.17; 11.4, 5, 13; Gal 1.7; 2.4), and who were represented at a very early period in the apostolic

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history, as going down from Judea (Acts 15.1) and causing no small dissension in the churches among the Gentiles, by teaching that circumcision was still essential to salvation. It became necessary for Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem and lay this matter before the apostles and elders. The council that was convened sent a written answer to Antioch and Syria and Cilicia that no greater burden was laid upon them than these necessary things, to "abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication" (Acts 15.28, 29). Paul had warned the elders of Ephesus, when taking his leave of them (Act 20.29, 30), that he knew after his departure "grievous wolves" should enter in among them "not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." These words in respect to Ephesus, and several of those churches addressed in the Apocalypse, were now fulfilled. The "grievous wolves" had come; these "perverse men" had arisen.

To the church of Peramos it is said: "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication." And to the church of Thyatira: "I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." The woman Jezebel, although the name is symbolical, points also, it may be, to some busy, influential female Judaizer and heretic among these disturbers of the peace and purity of the early church.

It would seem from the answer of the council at Jerusalem, that the same class of false teachers who insisted on circumcision, were disposed to encourage a dangerous license in respect to idolatrous feasts and indulgence of lascivious passions; for the same decree that declared circumcision to

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be necessary, in express terms condemned such license. There can certainly be in such expressions as these no allusion whatever to the doctrines of those ethnicizing seducers, who, at a subsequent period in the Christian church, exercised so pernicious an influence. They clearly point to an earlier period, when the assault came from quite a different quarter. In the epistle to Philadelphia the claims of the Judaizing heretics, who are distinctly described as "the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews and are not," are annihilated as by a single stroke; "I, Christ your Saviour, have the key of David, and open and no man shutteth." Again, in the epistle to Smyrna it is said: "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold the devil shall

cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days,” etc. They called themselves Jews, and no doubt were by natural descent the children of Abraham. But they had a spirit so malignant that the synagogue to which they belonged might be called the synagogue of Satan. The source of this persecution, or rather the fact that the Jews were its zealous agents, points clearly to a date anterior to the great disaster which came upon the Jewish nation. The Jews, it is true, even after this catastrophe, exhibited great bitterness of spirit against Christianity; but there is greater power attributed to them here than they can be supposed to have possessed after their dispersion and extreme humiliation by reason of the overthrow of their city and temple. They were never a persecuting power subsequent to this disastrous period in their history.

4. The Jews still Occupying, as a Distinct People, their own Land.

In chapter 7 we have what has been styled “the vision of sealing,” but which is evidently a continuation of what was disclosed in the sixth seal, of which we have the opening in chapter 6. The tornado of judgments is stayed until

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a process of sealing the servants of God in their foreheads could be accomplished. “And I heard,” says John (7.4), “the number of them which were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.” And then the tribes are named one by one, and twelve thousand of each are sealed. The language and the manner in which the whole thing is stated could hardly more distinctly imply that the Jewish nation was still existing and occupying its own land, — a land exposed to some impending desolation, from which the sealed, the one hundred and forty-four thousand were to be exempt. The twelve tribes are named, notwithstanding so many of them had been lost because the destruction revealed in connection with the sealing was to overtake the whole land of Judea, once the inheritance of, and partitioned among, these twelve tribes. It was a destruction that was to overtake Judea, and therefore Jewish Christians are alone selected. Bengel held very strongly that Israel is here spoken of in the natural sense and in the figurative. “As certainly,” says he, “as the tribe of Judah is that from which the victorious lion, the lamb sprung (Apoc. 5.5), so certainly are all the tribes to be literally understood.” Many thousands, we know, had been converted from the Jewish to the Christian faith (see Acts 2.41; 6.7; 12.24; 19.20). According to the Saviour’s own words (Matt. 24.22), “the elect” were to be secured or cared for in that day of calamity. He gave them a sign, and when it should be seen they were to seek places of security.¹ These one hundred and forty-four thousand represent either symbolically or literally the number of those gathered out from among the Israelites, of whom God would never for a moment lose sight as his own, in the things that were coming on the earth, and to whom his special grace and providence would be extended. These sealed ones appear again in this prophecy (14.1-5) on Mount Sion following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and are there expressly recognized as “the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb.”

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Hengstenberg maintains that the “tribes of the children of Israel” are here mentioned in the sense that “the whole Christian church, however composed, is what is meant by them as being the legitimate continuation of ancient Israel.” But it seems strange that Jewish Christians alone should be selected as representing the whole church in a writing originally addressed to churches so remote from Judea, and composed largely, if not mainly, of Gentile converts. And such a designation would only seem the more strange in a writing the date of which is referred to a period some twenty-five or thirty years subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem and the

¹ Matthew 24.15-22.

dispersion of the Jews. But the view of Hengstenberg is further shown to be wholly inadmissible, inasmuch as immediately upon the sealing of the one hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel, we have the numberless multitude¹ out of all nations set over against these sealed ones as the complete harvest, of which the sealed ones are but "the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb." The multitude which could not be numbered are put in contrast with the first-fruits, the one hundred and forty-four thousand; and the "all nations and kindreds and people and tongues," with the twelve tribes of Israel.

5. The City of Jerusalem undestroyed, and the Temple still standing.

When the Apocalypse was written, as the book itself intimates, if it does not distinctly state, the temple was still standing undisturbed, and the city of which it was the glory undesolated (see 11.1-13). John says there was given to him a reed, and he was directed to measure "the temple or God and the altar"; but "the court that is without the temple" he was not to measure; "for it is given unto the Gentiles, and the holy city shall they tread under foot, forty and two months." Power was to be given to "two witnesses," who should "prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days." They should then be killed and their

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dead bodies "lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." But their lives should be marvellously preserved, while they were working miracles, and till their prophecy was ended. Their bodies, unburied, after three days and a half should come to life, and they should ascend "to heaven in a cloud."

It is difficult to see how language could more clearly point to Jerusalem, and to Jerusalem as it was before its overthrow, where were the temple of God and the altar, where also our Lord was crucified. The prophecy in the most striking manner seems to adopt the very expression of our Lord as recorded by Luke 21.24, in which the destruction of Jerusalem is universally allowed to be foretold: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles." Regarding the literal Jerusalem and the external temple and altar as named, and this particular prediction as having reference to their desolation, it follows of course that this book must have been written prior to that event. On the other hand, if we regard the whole - the city, the temple, the altar, as well as the measuring - to be symbolical, as we must if we adopt the later date, it seems very strange and altogether unnatural, that the apostle, in writing to churches so remote from Judea gathered on Gentile soil, should make use of such symbols, and that, too, when nearly or quite a generation had passed since that city with its temple had been destroyed. This interpretation indeed seems too unnatural to be admitted, especially where we have so much ground from other parts of the prophecy for the assumption that the temple and Jerusalem were still standing.

The parts symbolical in the passage are the measuring-reed and the measuring, the two olive trees, the two candle-sticks, and the beast ascending out of the bottomless pit to make war against the witnesses. The parts that are literal are the temple, the altar, the court without the temple, the holy city trodden under foot by the Gentiles, the witnesses prophesying forty and two months, and the equivalent period,

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a thousand two hundred and threescore days; and that there might be no doubt as to the city intended, it is described as the city "where our Lord was crucified."

The measuring-rod and the measuring are here symbolical of destruction. In previous visitations or threatenings of evil on the holy city, we find analogous figures employed. "I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab" (2Kings 21.12, 13).

¹ Chapter 7.9.

“Behold I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel ... and the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,” etc. (Amos 7.8, 9; see also Isa. 34.11; Lam. 2.8). In such passages as these, in which the very implements made use of in construction are employed as symbols of demolition, we have ample authority for the meaning attached here to the measuring-rod and the measuring. It was to be applied to the temple, the altar, and them that worship therein; that is, these holy places were to be overthrown, and the worship connected with them brought to an end. The direction to leave out and not to measure the court without the temple, may denote that this court and all that lay outside of the temple proper was not in the same sense holy; it was the court of the Gentiles to which they already had access. The consecrated temple and altar were not to be permitted to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised. God would save them from such dishonor by their destruction, and the worship peculiar to the temple would pass away never more to be re-instated Hence we see, perhaps, the propriety of employing the implements of construction here as symbols. The destruction was in order to save consecrated things. The Roman general found it impossible, although he made the most strenuous efforts, to rescue the temple.¹ Titus now gave orders to demolish the whole city, except three towers and that portion of the wall which inclosed the city on the west side. The towers were preserved to prove to posterity how strongly fortified a city had been subdued; and the wall to

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afford a camp for the garrison he was to leave behind. The rest of the wall “was so thoroughly laid even with the ground [to use the language of Josephus, as if he had written with the very words of our Lord's prediction, Luke 19.44, present to his mind] by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe that it had ever been inhabited.”² The worship peculiar to the temple, the great national religious observances to which the whole people went up, passed away never more to be celebrated on Mount Zion.

As to the times or periods specified in the passages, there is no difficulty in making out in accordance with the application or interpretation suggested, a literal fulfilment. Vespasian appears to have received his commission from Nero, i.e. the war was declared³ the first part of February A.D. 67; three years and six months after, namely the tenth of August A.D. 70, Jerusalem was destroyed. Here, then, we have the “forty and two months,” or the equivalent period, “twelve hundred and sixty days,” during which, understanding “the holy city” by a common figure of speech, as representing the entire Holy Land, that land was to be laid waste by the Gentiles. It is a striking confirmation of the literal interpretation which has been given to the temple and altar in this passage, and from which we necessarily infer the earlier date of the book, that from this point in the prophecy they entirely disappear, and no more recur in the book. Immediately upon the overthrow of the city where our Lord was crucified, the temple, in the remaining part of the prophecy, in the visions and pictures by which it is unfolded before the apostle's mind, is treated as if it had already passed away, had been transferred from earth to heaven,⁴ until in the final vision, that of the New Jerusalem, it disappears even there. “I saw no temple therein.”⁵ This vision of the New Jerusalem

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¹ Josephus, Bell. Jud. vi. 4, §§ 6, 7.

² Bell. Jud. vii. 1, §1.

³ See Lardner, Jew. Test. §viii.

⁴ Chap. 11.19; 14.17; 15.5, 6, 8; 14.1, 17.

⁵ Chap. 21.22.

very significantly forms the bright and cheering close to a prophecy of which the earlier part relates to the destruction of the old, the earthly Jerusalem.

As to the witnesses, it is in this interpretation supposed that there were precisely two. The two were enough to perform the work to which God had called them. If we had a Christian history extant, as we have a Pagan one by Tacitus, and a Jewish one by Josephus, giving an account of what occurred within that devoted city during that awful period of its history, then we might trace out more distinctly the prophesying of the two witnesses. The great body of Christians, warned by the signs given them by their Lord according to ancient testimony, appear to have left Palestine on its invasion by the Romans. After the retreat of Gallus from Jerusalem, and the disasters he suffered at the hands of the Jews, "many of the most eminent Jews," to use the words of Josephus, "swam away from the city as from a ship when it was going to sink."¹ Perhaps John, the writer of the Apocalypse took his departure at this time. But it was the will of God that a competent number of witnesses for Christ should remain to preach the gospel to the very last moment, to their deluded, miserable countrymen. It may have been part of their work to reiterate the prophecies respecting the destruction of the city, the temple, and commonwealth.² During the time the Romans were to tread down the holy land and city, they were to prophesy. Their being clothed in sackcloth intimates the mournful character of their mission. In their designation as the two olive trees and the two candlesticks or lamps standing before God, there is an allusion to Zech. 4, where these symbols are interpreted of the two anointed ones, Joshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel the prince, founder of the second temple. The olive trees, fresh and vigorous, keep the lamps constantly supplied with oil. These witnesses, amidst the darkness which has settled round Jerusalem, give a steady and unflinching

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light. They possessed the power of working miracles as wonderful as any of those performed by Moses and Elijah. What is here predicted must have been fulfilled before the close of the miraculous or apostolic age. All who find here a prediction of the state of the church during the ascendancy of the papacy, or at any period subsequent to the age of the apostles, are of course under the necessity of explaining away all this language which attributes miraculous powers to the witnesses. They were at length to fall victims to the war, or to the same power that waged the war, and their bodies were to lie unburied three days and a half in the streets of the city where Christ was crucified. Their resurrection and ascension to heaven, like their death and lying without burial, must be interpreted literally; although, as in the case of the miracles they performed, there is no historical record of the events themselves. If these two prophets were the only Christians in Jerusalem, as both were killed, there was no one to make a record or report in the case, and we have here therefore an example of a prophecy which contains at the same time the only history or notice of the events by which it was fulfilled. The wave of ruin which swept over Jerusalem and wafted them up to heaven, erased or prevented every human memento of their work of faith, their patience of hope, and labor of love. The prophecy that foretold them is their only history, or the only history of the part they were to take in the closing scenes of Jerusalem. We conclude, then, that these witnesses were two of those apostles who seem to be so strangely lost to history, or of whom no authentic traces can be discovered subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem. May not James the less or the second James, in distinction from the brother of John, commonly styled the bishop of Jerusalem, have been one of them? Why should he not remain faithful to his post to the last? According to Hegesippus, a Jewish Christian historian, who wrote about the middle of the second century, his monument was still pointed out near the ruins of the temple. Hegesippus says that he was killed in the year 69,

¹ Bell. Jud. ii.20, §1.

² Commentaries of Daubus, Lowman, Wetstein, and Stuart.

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and represents the apostle as bearing powerful testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus, and pointing to his second coming in the clouds of heaven, up to the very moment of his death. There seems to be a peculiar fitness in these witnesses for Christ, men endowed with the highest supernatural gifts, standing to the last in that forsaken city, prophesying its doom, and lamenting over what was once so dear to God.

The main, if not the only, argument of Hengstenberg against the view here presented of the passage in the eleventh chapter, in support of the later date which he advocates, is founded on what appears to be a very singular interpretation. He makes the import of the measuring to be preservation: "Where the measuring ceases, there," he says, "the line of abandoning begins." In other words what was measured, the temple, the altar, etc., were to be preserved; and what was not measured was to be destroyed. It is on the ground of an interpretation such as this, that he objects to that view of the passage which finds in it proof that the book was composed before the taking of Jerusalem. He devotes several pages to a protest which it will be seen was lost labor, when it is understood that John, by the symbol of measuring, meant destruction and not preservation. Hengstenberg, making the measuring a symbol of preservation, considers the temple as a symbol of the church, and the altar a symbol of that free-will sacrifice by which believers present themselves to him who redeemed them with his blood, and the outer court as denoting those who have not been reached, or are only superficially affected, by the spirit of the church. He makes everything symbolical. "Spiritually," he says, is to be applied not only to Egypt and Sodom, but to the expression "where also our Lord was crucified"; and that Jerusalem is here intended to denote the church as degenerate on account of the ascendancy of the world, and filled with offences, thus crucifying the Lord afresh. He makes the whole prophecy here if not "to swim in the air," to use one of his own favorite expressions, to sink out of sight; for he makes it to mean simply the preservation of the church and its worship. No

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events are foretold; it is nothing more than a re-affirmation, in highly figurative language, of the promise that God will ever have a seed to serve him.

Another interpretation makes this prediction relate to what will befall the restored temple and the rebuilt Jerusalem, for which those who adopt it are looking in the future. They hold that the Jerusalem of Palestine is yet to know a splendor and magnificence becoming the metropolis of the Christian world; and that a third temple, surpassing the first and second, is to be erected, and the Jews are to form a sort of spiritual nobility in the church. Mr. D. N. Lord, one of the ablest of the Millenarian writers, however, adopts a view more nearly resembling that of Hengstenberg. He makes the great and peculiar truths of the scriptures proclaimed by the Reformers to be symbolized by the temple, the altar, and the offerers of worship; and the outer court generally to be occupied by apostates. Mr. Croly and Mr. Barnes present a very similar view.

6. The Sixth of the Roman Emperors on the Throne.

The book of Revelation, according to its own representation, was written or its visions seen during the reign of the sixth of the kings or emperors of Rome. In chapter 17 there is a passage which professedly explains the mystery of the beast having seven heads and ten horns, on which sat the woman who was arrayed in purple and scarlet. "The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings, five are fallen and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh he must continue a short space. And the beast that was and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition." But see the entire passage, vs. 7-12.

That Rome is here intended, there can be no mistake. It is distinctly said that the seven heads of the beast symbolize “the seven mountains on which the woman sitteth”; that is, the seven hills on which Rome was built. And as little room is there for mistake in the words, “And there are seven

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kings; five are fallen, one is, and the other is not yet come.” That the line or succession of emperors is here meant, and not the primitive kings of Rome, is certain from the connection of the “five” who have “fallen” with the one “who is,” the one then reigning, and with the one who is to “come,” that is, his successor. We have then only to reckon the succession of emperors, and we must arrive with certainty at the reign under which the Apocalypse was written or was seen. If we begin with Julius Caesar it stands thus: Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius; these make up the five who have fallen. “One is,” Nero. The ancients, although the empire was not fully established till the time of Augustus, reckoned from Julius Caesar. He had been declared perpetual dictator, and had concentrated sovereign power in his hands. Josephus calls Augustus the second emperor of Rome, and Tiberius the third.¹ “And the other is not yet come; and when he cometh he must continue a short space.” Galba, who reigned seven months, makes the seventh. The context, “the beast that was, and is not, and yet is” (v. 8) strikingly describes Nero by alluding to the popular belief, that after disappearing for a time, that emperor would reappear, as if he had risen from the dead. And again in the words, “And the beast that was and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.” Had the expectation in regard to Nero, that after disappearing for a time he would come again been fulfilled, he would have been the eighth; and he might also be said to be of the seventh, as his successor Galba is generally reckoned as one of the mock emperors. This popular belief in regard to Nero was founded on a prediction of the soothsayers in the early part of his reign. Accordingly after his death several imposters appeared, professing to be Nero; and there were not wanting those who, in full expectation of his return and recovery of power, “adorned his tomb with spring and summer flowers,”² with the hope, doubtless, of thus ingratiating

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themselves into his favor. It appears from numerous sources, Jewish as well as Pagan, that there was a wide-spread expectation of Nero's return.³

To harmonize this passage with the theory which refers the time of the Apocalypse to the reign of Domitian, it has been maintained that the seven kings represent the seven hills of Rome, merely to characterize them as kingly or princely hills. The ten horns are said to represent the number of sovereigns that had ruled in Rome. That five of her seven kings (which are so many magnificent hills) are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come, etc., merely represents the condition of Rome as “not having reached its acme in external greatness, but nevertheless wasting away in its internal strength.” Others, who for the most part have held to the same interpretation, have departed from it in some particulars, understanding by “the beast that was, and is not, and yet is,” the Roman empire, idolatrous under the heathen emperors, then ceasing to be for some time under the Christian emperors, and then becoming idolatrous again under the Roman pontiffs; and by the ten horns the ten kingdoms into which the Roman empire is represented as divided after it became Christian.

“The seven hills of Rome,” says Hengstenberg, “could only be pointed to as a symbol of the seven-formed worldly power.” “Of the seven kings mentioned, five belong to the period already

¹ Antiq. xviii. 2. §2.

² Vernis aestivisque floribus tumulum ejus ornarent. — Suet. §57.

³ Prof. Stuart's Commentary, ii. pp. 434 sq.

past; and of the two others one appeared at the time then present on the stage of history, and the other had still not entered on it. The five kings, or worldly kingdoms, that had already fallen at the time of the Seer, are the kings of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece. The one that is, accordingly, must be the sixth great monarchy, the Roman, for it was this that was in existence at the time of the Seer. With the seventh phase of the ungodly power of the world, the beast goes also into perdition, the heathen state generally comes to an end.”

“The scene,” says Mr. Lord, “was the site of Rome. The

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seven heights were the seven hills of the city, and they were symbols of the seven kinds of rulers who exercised the government of the ancient empire.” All seem to agree that Rome is meant. But those who understand the prophecy to mean kingdoms or dynasties when it says “kings,” assign no good reason for an interpretation by which they give scope to the utmost latitude of speculation in the application of the prophecy. The comparison of these interpretations with that which makes the sixth ruler, then ruling, the emperor Nero, leaves no room for choice to a mind uncommitted to some favorite theory requiring a later date.

We therefore conclude that a reader of the Apocalypse, without prepossessions as to the date, consulting the book itself as a witness on this point, could not fail to come to the conclusion that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, in the reign of Nero, the sixth in succession to Julius Caesar in the empire of Rome.

The precise year of our Lord, probably, cannot be ascertained. It is not easy to determine the exact time when John left Judea and took up his abode in Ephesus. We infer that he was not yet in that city when Paul was there (A.D. 58 or 59), as there is no allusion to him in the scene recorded in Acts 20.17, which could not have been avoided had he been there. And yet afterwards, when Paul reached Jerusalem, as would appear from Acts 21 and Gal. 1.19, he did not find John there. This may have been but a temporary absence; we however infer from all the facts that can be gathered in the case, that not long after Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, John arrived, and took up his abode in that city. He was quick to discern in the agitated state of Judea the signs of the destruction that was hastening, and no doubt under the special direction of the Holy Spirit took his departure for Asia Minor, where he had a great work to do for many years to come. He was probably one of the earliest, being one of the most pre-eminent of the disciples and apostles of the Lord, who felt the persecution which commenced under Nero (A.D. 64), when it

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reached Ephesus. At some time during the four years of this persecution, while he was in Patmos, to which he seems to have been banished for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, the visions of the Apocalypse were seen and recorded by him. If we fix upon A.D. 64 or A.D. 68, or one of the intermediate years, it makes little or no difference, as the destruction to which so considerable a portion of the prophecy relates would still be at hand, even at the doors. Or if we suppose that John did not leave Judea till after the war was declared, A.D. 67, and that he was sent to Patmos almost immediately on his arrival at Ephesus, it only brings the catastrophe he predicts still nearer. The twelve hundred and sixty days had already commenced, and on his lonely rock the banished apostle could see the lightning's flash and hear the thunders of the tempest and the trumpets of the armies gathering for the overthrow of the devoted city he loved so well. In its very title his prophecy professes to be a revelation of “things which must shortly come to pass.” The fulfilment was in the immediate future. This is repeated again and again (2.15, 16; 3.11; 11.14; 16.15; 22.7, 12, 20): A very large part of the book was to be speedily fulfilled, and although a part of it related to the distant future, and some of it to scenes and events following the end of the world, yet the “shortly” and “I come quickly” never lose their

appropriateness and significance as the very key of this book. The complete argument for the early date, from internal evidence, can only be found in the full exposition of the book, showing that while it has its starting-point in the state of things existing at the time it was written, it progresses in the order of history from that point until every anti-Christian power is overthrown, and the consummation is reached in the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, and the new heaven and the new earth. Such an exposition would show, for example, a most remarkable coincidence between the first six seals, viewed as premonitions of the great catastrophe, and the signs of this catastrophe as foretold by our Saviour (Matt. 24; Luke 21).

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And so striking an instance of scripture interpreting scripture ought not perhaps to have been omitted in that cumulative proof involved in the very nature of the question under consideration.

NO INTERNAL EVIDENCE FAVORING THE LATER DATE.

So clear is the internal evidence in favor of the earlier date of the Apocalypse. And no evidence can be drawn from any part of the book favoring the later date so commonly assigned to it. Some, it is true, have thought they had found internal marks inconsistent with the earlier date in the state of the Seven Churches of Asia, as inferred from the special epistles addressed to them contained in the Apocalypse.¹ With a considerable degree of certainty considering the inherent difficulty which belongs to the chronology of the Acts, taking the Claudian decree² in *A.D.* 51, requiring Jews to leave Rome, as the starting-point, we learn that Christianity was first introduced at Ephesus in *A.D.* 53 or 54, and that near the close of the last-named year there had been gathered there, under the labors of Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla, and Apollos, a church, “the men,” or male members of which numbered twelve.³ If we suppose that John wrote the Apocalypse somewhere between *A.D.* 64 and *A.D.* 68, these churches had been in existence at least some ten or twelve years, a sufficient length of time, considering that most of them no doubt were converts from heathenism, for them to have undergone all the changes to be inferred from these epistles. The church of Smyrna is represented as troubled with false apostles. The church of Pergamos had such as held the doctrine of Balaam. The church of Thyatira had some who suffered the woman Jezebel to teach and seduce the people. And so on. Only the church of Philadelphia had nothing laid to her charge. But we find in the epistles of the other apostles the churches in general which were no older, troubled with precisely the same evils. See Paul's

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Epistles to the Corinthians, *passim*, and his second Epistle to Timothy, in which he sorely complains of some who were called Christians, and mentions several who were of the churches of Asia — Demas, Alexander, Hermogines, and Philetus. Peter wrote against those who held the doctrine of Balaam. Jude did the same. Lardner assigns Jude's epistle to *A.D.* 64 or 65. But the exhortations of Paul in his epistle to one of these seven churches, that of Ephesus,⁴ to put away from them bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil-speaking, malice, and even stealing, as much imply a departure from their first love, as the exhortations in the epistle to them in the Apocalypse imply such a departure. And Paul, in writing to Timothy in his first epistle, beseeches him to abide at Ephesus. And for what purpose? That he might charge some that they teach no other doctrine; and he speaks of some as having swerved from sound doctrine, and

¹ See Dissertation in Woodhouse's Apocalypse Translated.

² Acts 18.2.

³ Acts 18, 19.

⁴ Written, according to Wieseler, *A.D.* 61 or 62, Chronol. p. 455.

turned aside to vain jangling (1Tim. 1.6). There is nothing in any of the epistles to the seven churches which indicates a more serious charge. Instead of these epistles affording any internal evidence unfavorable to the earlier date claimed for the Apocalypse, it has already been shown (Arg. 3) that there are features about them wholly inconsistent with referring the book to a date so late as the time of Domitian.

SIR ISAAC NEWTON'S ARGUMENT.

There is another argument which might have been included in the foregoing enumeration, showing the strong internal evidence which the Apocalypse bears in favor of the early date. It is one that was suggested by that great man — great in his reverence for God and God's word, and great in his childlike humility as a Christian, no less than for his learning and contributions to science — Sir Isaac Newton, who appears to have brought as clear an intelligence to the study of the scriptures as to the works of God's hand; to wit, that the book clearly furnishes expressions and allusions which are found in epistles known to have been written

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before the destruction of Jerusalem. Sir Isaac mentions particularly the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistles of Peter. He supposes that the writers of these epistles must have read the Revelation and often made it the subject of their meditations; and that its topics furnished matter for allusion in their own inspired writings. That it is the original, and that John did not, on the other hand, find matter for allusion in these epistles, will be sufficiently evident to anyone who makes the most cursory comparison. The Revelation was the fountain, the primal source of the expressions and imagery in question, where they appear in full, or carried out *in extenso*; in the epistles are mere quotations or allusions. There are figures, allusions, and even some forms of theological statement found in English literature since the publication of Paradise Lost, which were unknown to it before. If other proof were wanting, it might be made evident in regard to some contemporary author of the age of Milton, that he wrote after that great poet, by the distinct impression his writings could be shown to have derived from Milton's great work. Now it is something analogous to this which may be noticed in the relation of the epistles to the Apocalypse:

“The Apocalypse seems to be alluded to,” says Sir Isaac Newton, “in the Epistles of Peter, and that to the Hebrews, and therefore to have been written before them. Such allusions in the Epistle to the Hebrews I take to be the discourse concerning the high priest in the heavenly tabernacle; and those concerning the word of God with the sharp two-edged sword, the heavenly city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; the cloud of witnesses; Mount Sion; the general assembly; spirits of just men made perfect; and the shaking of heaven and earth, and removing them, that the new heaven, new earth, and new kingdom, which cannot be shaken, may remain.” He says “the second Epistle of Peter from 1.19 to the end seems to be a continued commentary upon the Apocalypse. There, in writing to the churches of Asia, to whom John was commanded to send his prophecy,

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he tells them they have “a more sure word of prophecy,” to be heeded by them as “a light which shineth in a dark place.” “In the second chapter he [Peter] proceeds to describe out of this sure word of prophecy how there would be false prophets or false teachers who should bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.” In the third he goes on to describe their destruction more fully, and the future kingdom.”

Bishop Newton was satisfied that the argument founded on allusions to this prophecy pointed out by Sir Isaac in the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle to the Hebrews, were conclusive. This

argument is also elaborated at great length by Dr. Alexander Tilloch in his "Dissertations Introductory to the Study of the Apocalypse."

MAIN GROUND IN SUPPORT OF THE LATER DATE.

With all this clear evidence from the book itself in favor of an early date, it may be asked how it has happened that so many have accepted, or seemed to take for granted, the later date. It has been supposed the external testimony required it. Irenaeus, who lived so near the apostolic age, has been interpreted as declaring that the Apocalypse was seen by John near the end of the reign of Domitian. The passage occurs in a chapter of his work against heresies,¹ the object of which is to show that nothing should be affirmed rashly in interpreting the number 666, in the passage, Rev. 13.18, inasmuch as it may be made to agree with so many names. He has been understood in this connection as recording his opinion that the Revelation was seen near the end of Domitian's reign. The passage is as follows: *Ἡμεῖς οὖν οὐκ ἀποκινβύνευομεν περὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ Ἀντιχριστοῦ ἀποφαινόμενοι βεβαιωτικῶς, εἰ γὰρ ἔδει αναφανδὸν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ κηρύττεσθαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, δι' ἐκείνου ἂν ἐρρέθη τοῦ καὶ τὴν Ἀποκάλυψιν ἑωρακότος· οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἑωράθη, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς, πρὸς τῷ τελεῖ τῆς Δομετιάνου ἀρχῆς.* "In regard to this name of Antichrist, we do not therefore run the risk of speaking positively; for, if it were necessary at present to proclaim distinctly his name, it would have been done by him who also saw the Apocalypse; for it is not a long time ago [he, or John himself] was seen, but almost in our generation near the end of the reign of Domitian."

It will be observed that *ἑωράθη* has no nominative expressed. If *Ἀποκάλυψις* is to be supplied, then it is evident that the testimony of Irenaeus is, that the Revelation was seen near the end of the reign of Domitian. But if *Ἰωάννης* is taken as the subject, then Irenaeus simply says: "For it was not a long time ago he was seen, but almost in our day, near the end of the reign of Domitian." And of course his authority cannot be adduced in support of the later date, as the assertion that John was seen, that is, was alive, near the close of Domitian's reign, does not by any means prove that this book was written at that time. It is admitted that the application of this verb to the man who had seen the vision appears somewhat unusual; and that it is used just above in the active voice, of the vision itself, which makes the transition to the seer somewhat sudden. But in the beginning of the chapter, Irenaeus, beyond all doubt, applies the same verb to John himself. His words are: *Ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς σπουδαίοις καὶ ἀρχαίοις ἀντυγράφοις τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τούτου κειμένου, καὶ μαρτυρούντων αὐτῶν, ἐκείνων τῶν κατ' ὄψιν τὸν Ἰωάννην ἑωρακότων, κ.τ.λ.* "In all the best and oldest manuscripts this number is found, and those themselves seeing John in the face bear testimony," etc.; that is, in favor of the reading 666, in opposition to the other reading 616.

Again, the scope of the entire passage is to assign a reason why it was not necessary at the time Irenaeus wrote, for it certainly to be known who was pointed out by the number "Six hundred threescore and six." He argues that if this knowledge had been important at that time, it would have been communicated by the writer of the Apocalypse, who lived so near their own time that he might almost be said to be of their generation. There was therefore really no

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ambiguity to be avoided, requiring him to use the name of John or the Personal pronoun as the subject of *ἑωράθη*, the verb of sight. The scope requires this nominative, and no other.

¹ v. 30.

There was, moreover, something about John, considering his great age, and the deep interest which the church had in him as surviving apostle, which makes the verb ἑωράθη peculiarly appropriate. To say of one “he was seen,” meaning thereby he was alive at a certain time, might seem unusual, whether in Greek or English, as applied to an ordinary man. When we consider, however, how much would be thought of seeing this most aged apostle who had seen the Lord, there is nothing unnatural in the use of such an expression. In fact this verb is applied to him in precisely the same sense in the beginning of the chapter.

Wetstein understood John to be the nominative of ἑωράθη. The ancient translator of Irenaeus renders it *visum est*; i.e. τὸ θῆριον, the beast was seen; so also Storr. Guerike, in his “Introduction to the New Testament” (1843) retracts his former opinion in favor of the later date, and although he understands Ἀποκάλυψις as the subject of ἑωράθη, suggests that Δομετιάνου, being without the article, is not a proper name, but an adjective, belonging, in accordance with the Greek formations, not to Domitian (which would make an adjective of the form Δομιτιανικός), but to Domitius, which was Nero's name — Domitius Nero. This would make Irenaeus testify to the fact that the Apocalypse was written near the end of the reign of Nero. But as Irenaeus was merely assigning a reason why it was not necessary for it to be known at the time he wrote, what name was pointed out by the number in question, or it would have been communicated by John himself, it seems utterly foreign to his design to say anything respecting the time when the Apocalypse was seen or written, whether under Nero or Domitian; and entirely in furtherance of it to state that John was alive at a period so near his own time, and that of his original readers. Besides, Domitius is a very unusual appellation for Nero,

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and several of the Greek fathers do not appear to have thought of anyone here other than Domitian, the last of the Caesars.

Eusebius, who flourished in the early part of the fourth century, and not Irenaeus, was the first who expressly asserted that John was an exile in Patmos during the reign of Domitian; but it is to be observed that he does not ascribe the Revelation to this apostle at all; for he expressly says: “It is likely the Revelation was seen by John the elder.” Lardner thinks that the argument of Dionysius of Alexandria, who wrote against the Chiliasts or Millenarians, has great weight with Eusebius. Dionysius held that the Apocalypse was written by an elder of Ephesus, whose name was John, “a holy and inspired man.” He endeavored to prove from the book itself — and it was this argument which evidently influenced Eusebius — from its style, especially its alleged solecisms, ἰδιώμασι μὲν βαρβαρικοῖς,¹ which so strikingly distinguish it from the Gospel and Epistles of the apostle that he could not have been the author. It is doubtless on the authority of Eusebius that the theory which assigns Apocalypse to the time of Domitian mainly rests. But as he does not recognize John the apostle as the author of the Apocalypse, his opinion as to the time of his imprisonment is of little account in determining the date of this book. Jerome, and most of the other ancient authorities commonly adduced in favor of the later date, plainly depend on him. But what is stated by Jerome as true of John in the year 96, that he was so weak and infirm that he was with difficulty carried to the church, and could speak only a few words to the people,² is wholly inconsistent with this opinion. The interesting anecdote related by Eusebius as founded on what occurred after his return from exile, in his pursuit of a young robber in the fastnesses of the mountains, is equally inconsistent with fixing the time of this exile in the reign of Domitian, when the apostle was nearly one hundred years old.

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¹ Euseb. Hist. Eccl. vii. 25.

² Epist. ad Galat. opp. 4, c. 6.

OTHER ANCIENT TESTIMONIES.

The name of "the tyrant" upon whose death Clement of Alexandria represents John as returning to Ephesus, is not given by him.¹ But Nero, above all other Roman emperors, bore the name of "tyrant" among the early Christians. Neither does Origen, who, in commenting on Matt. 20.22, 23, speaks of a tradition which assigns the condemnation of John to Patmos to "a king of the Romans," gives the name of that king.² Epiphanius [fl. A.D. 366] dated the Apocalypse in the reign preceding that of Nero. He is, however, admitted to have been an inaccurate writer. Andreas, a bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, near the close of the fifth century, in a commentary on the Apocalypse, says it was understood to have been written before the destruction of Jerusalem. Arethas, one of his successors, in the next century, assigns to it the same date. In the Syriac version this book is entitled: "The Revelation which was made by God to John the evangelist in the island Patmos, into which he was thrown by Nero Caesar." And Theophylact, in the eleventh century, places the origin of the Apocalypse during the reign of Nero.

COMPARATIVE VALUE OF THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ARGUMENT.

The external evidence seems, on the whole, to be of comparatively little value in deciding the true date of the Apocalypse. The main reliance, it is clear, must be upon the argument from internal evidence. When it has been made to appear that Irenaeus says nothing respecting the time when the book of Revelation was written, and that Eusebius ascribes its authorship to another John than the apostle, it is sufficiently evident that the remaining testimony of antiquity, conflicting as it is, or about evenly balanced between the earlier and later date, is of little account in deciding the question. And when we open the book itself, and find

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inscribed on its very pages evidence that at the time it was written, Jewish enemies were still arrogant and active, and the city in which our Lord was crucified, and the temple and altar in it were still standing, we need no date from early antiquity, nor even from the hand of the author himself, to inform us that he wrote before that great historical event and prophetic epoch, the destruction of Jerusalem.

¹ Quis Dives, 42, and Euseb. iii. 23.

² Opp. iii. p. 720.