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ARTICLE VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

I.

"NERO REDIVIVUS."

BY THE REV. WILLIAM E. BARTON, WELLINGTON, OHIO.

"THE beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come. Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth; and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition" (Rev. xvii. 8–11, R. V.).

The Praeterist theory of interpretation of the Apocalypse, which rests on the postulated early date of the writing of the book, is now adopted by a large and increasing school of interpreters in America, England, and especially Germany, who find it, unlike the thousand far-fetched and fanciful interpretations based on the assumption of the later date, simple, consistent with itself and with other known facts, and manifestly fulfilled, for the most part, in events near at hand when the book was written, and repeatedly alluded to with statements that these things must "shortly come to pass" (i. 11); that "the time is at hand" (i. 3; xxii. 10); that these things "must shortly be done" (xxii. 6); and closing with the emphatic and repeated assurance, "surely I come quickly" (xxii. 7, 20). Not only does it imply what Christ foretold, a fulfilment of all these things while that generation lived (Matt. xvi. 28; xxxiii. 26; xxv. 34), but states that the generation then living had scarce time for repentance before the final catastrophe (xxii. 11).

The book is explicit in statements from which its own date may be determined. It was written while the temple was still standing (xi. 1), in the city in which our Lord was crucified (xi. 8), before the three and one-half years' war in which it was trodden under foot of the Gentiles (xvi. 10). It was written during the supremacy of the seven-hilled city (xvii. 12) which perse-

cuted the church(xvii. 6; xviii. 24), and while its sixth monarch (xvii. 10) was ruling over the nations of the earth (xvii. 18).

The fact that the numerical value of the letters in *Neron Kaisar* is, in Hebrew, 666 (xiii. 18), and that the number 616 given in a few MSS. is readily accounted for by the omission of the final "n" from Nero, as it was sometimes written, would seem to identify the beast beyond question. And it is easy to see that the essential conditions required for a fulfilment of the prophecy concerning his coming again, are met in the reign of the later persecutor, Domitian. The reference to the beast as being, and not being, and coming, have thus a deeper significance than a mere identification of the beast with Nero, the hero of a dozen legends that he should not die, or had not died,[1] and was coming again:[2] it connected his persecution with that which was to come, inaugurated by the same government, under an emperor of like spirit toward the church, and so much like him in character as to be called "the bald Nero."[3] The resemblances between these two persecutors are well brought out in the recent work of Rev. Alexander Brown, of Aberdeen, entitled, "The Great Day of the Lord" (pp. 187–188).

Most Praeterist interpreters thus agree that the beast which was of the seven, and is also an eighth, is Nero and Domitian; but so far as the writer is aware, no one has shown satisfactorily how this can be consistent with the number of the Roman emperors. Farrar makes the effort by striking out Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, on account of the brevity of their reigns. But this evidently will not do with Galba, for Farrar believes, and is probably correct, that the book was written in the reign of Galba; and John is specific in telling us that the then reigning monarch is to be counted: "the one (or the sixth) now is."[4] Brown says: "The most probable interpretation is that Vespasian may be John's sixth emperor . . . . The seventh, who continues a little while, is Titus, who reigned only twenty-six months."[5] But it is not easy to see how John, writing in the reign of Galba, should have considered himself as writing in the reign of Vespasian. A sufficient answer to this theory is the fact that none of John's contemporary readers, for whom the book was primarily intended, and some of whom must have been desired to understand the puzzle, would have guessed at so ingenious an explanation. Moreover, the twenty-six months of Titus were only those which elapsed from the time of his father's death to his own: he had been reigning with his father for eight years before this.

The list of Roman emperors as usually reckoned is as follows:—

1. Julius Cæsar.
2. Augustus.
3. Tiberius.
4. Caligula.
5. Claudius.

[1] Tacitus i. 2; viii. 2. [2] See Stuart's Commentary *in loc.*

[3] See Farrar's Early Days of Christianity, p. 553.

[4] Farrar's Early Days, pp. 412, 474, 482. [5] The Great Day of the Lord, p. 186.

6. Nero.
7. Galba.
8. Otho.
9. Vitellius.
10. Vespasian.
11. Titus.
12. Domitian.

This is the simpler reckoning, in some respects, as according to it the book was written in the reign of Nero. But many interpreters with much reason begin the list with Augustus. Both methods have excellent authority, and ancient as well: Tacitus adopts one method; Suetonius, the other. But Julius was not emperor, and is usually reckoned with the others more to give the *gens Juliae* complete than for historical exactness. It is better to begin the list where the empire began, with Augustus. This brings the writing of the book in the reign of Galba. If the question should be asked, Why should John have concealed the name of Nero, if he were already dead? the answer is, that the beast is both generic and specific: representing the emperor, indeed, but as the representative of the government, which more exactly the beast depicted. Nero was indeed dead, but the persecuting power lived, and other persecutions were to come. If the book was to be of service to the church, it must not be the occasion of increasing their persecutions; in short, the reason is exactly the same, whether Nero were dead or alive.

If it be objected, again, that the Neronian persecution, if already past or just dying out after his death, is thus described historically and the prophetic character of the book is destroyed, the answer is, that, whether these persecutions were just past or at their height, the prophetic character of the book is the same: its mission was not to inform the church of what it already knew, but to prepare for another persecution, and assure the church of the final triumph of the church of Christ over opposing Judaism and persecuting Rome, and finally all the enemies of Christ to the end of time.

There is no other question as to the kings that had fallen when John wrote. If he intended the list to begin with Augustus the list is settled as far down as the sixth from him, namely Galba, in whose short six months' reign the book was given to the church. Concerning the subsequent kings the task is more difficult. But the matter becomes somewhat more simple when we place ourselves as nearly as possible in the position of the seer, looking forward over the history of the church, and recording in advance some of the most important events in its immediate future. He could hardly represent the reigns, if they could be called reigns, of Otho and Vitellius. Neither was entitled to the crown. Their reigns were synchronous, and occupied but a few months. Otho in Rome and Vitellius in Germany, each proclaimed himself king. During their struggle, the church had peace. Just as those lists which begin with Julius skip the interval between him and Augustus, the seer in looking forward to the next real monarch would skip the vastly shorter interregnum of Otho and Vitellius. It was not a reign nor two reigns; it could not be

represented by a head nor by two heads; there was no way to describe it in harmony with the chosen figure of the seer; and there was no need to describe it, for it was too short to be important from lapse of time, and brought no events of interest to the church in connection with the events of this portion of the prophecy.

Vespasian began to reign in December, 69, and reigned ten years. When he ascended the throne, his son Titus was in Palestine, commanding the armies which overthrew Jerusalem. Soon after the return of Titus, two years later, Vespasian took Titus into his throne with him. Titus outlived his father two years. Interpreters without exception, so far as the writer is aware, count this as two reigns. But nothing can be simpler than to suppose that from the standpoint of the seer, this joint reign of father and son, each of which projected two years at its own end, constituted together a single period in its relation to the church.

If to this it be objected that this joint reign was thus twelve years, which is not a "short space" or "a little while," but a long one when compared with the reigns of Vespasian and Titus' immediate predecessors, the answer is that no such comparison need be assumed as referred to in the text. The short space is not that of a comparatively short reign, but a comparatively short respite from persecutions during the ascendency of the seventh head. The purpose is not to tell how long one emperor shall continue as compared with others, but to assure the believers that the interval between the apparent destruction and reviving of the persecuting power was to be but "a little time."

The list of emperors as John seems to have intended to represent them, then, reads thus :—

1. Augustus (B. C. 31–A. D. 14).
2. Tiberius (14–37).
3. Caligula (37–41).
4. Claudius (41–54).
5. Nero (54–9th of June, 68).
6. Galba (June, 68–Dec. 68).

   Interregnum (Dec. 68–Dec. 69).

   { Otho (Jan. 3d, 69–April 15th, 69).
   { Vitellius (Jan. 3d, 69–Dec. 69).

7. { Vespasian (Dec. 69–79) and
   { Titus (71–81).
8. Domitian.

The failure thus to show that the eighth is properly Domitian, has led some excellent commentators to look with disapproval on the interpretation as referring at all to the superstitions of *Nero redivivus*.[1] Others have failed to find in this passage anything else than a reference to the superstition, and hence find no fulfilment of the prophecy.[2] The reference to this current su-

[1] See Cowles, Com. *in loc.*, who replies almost with severity to Stuart.

[2] See review of Renan's L'Antechrist in Edinburgh Review (Oct., 1874), Vol. cxl. p. 249.

perstition need not imply that John believed it, but it served his purpose in helping to designate the beast, and at the same time conveyed more tangibly the desired truth of the revived persecuting power. In the same sense in which John the Baptist was Elijah, Domitian was Nero. They had the same character, the same office, and the same relation to the church that their forerunners had.

II.

BRACE'S "UNKNOWN GOD."[1]

BY FREDERIC PERRY NOBLE.

CRITICISM, when it must confine itself to pointing out defects, is a task as unpleasant as it appears unlovely. This is especially the case when the book is a work of such catholicity and Christ-like spirit as "The Unknown God" of Mr. Brace. The sermon which he puts into the mouth of an ideal missionary is a model, deserving the study of every candidate for the foreign field. His closing prayer is of elevated and tender devoutness.

But Mr. Brace is not felicitous in his exegesis of the Scriptures which strike the keynote of his thought. His idea of biblical inspiration is nebulous. The interpretation of several forms of pre-Christian faith is in flat contradiction to the testimony of students and authorities. More than a few misstatements and apparently unaccountable errors occur.

1. Mr. Brace holds that in Acts xvii. 23 "the" with "unknown god" is equally correct with "an," while agreeing better with Paul's argument. Several considerations make this assumption at least doubtful. Hellenic usage did not require "the." Meyer adds: "In public calamities of which no definite god could be assigned as the author, in order to propitiate the god concerned, by sacrifice, without lighting on a wrong one, altars were erected which were destined and designated *agnosto theo*." This would seem to dispose of the fancy that this altar was "built, we may suppose, by pious Greeks to gain the protection of some foreign god or by some genuine worshipper of the 'God of All.'" The altar indicated no definite god, and bore witness to no deeper thoughts than those of the popular polytheism. Again, Paul's next words are: "*What* accordingly ye worship in ignorance, *that* set I forth unto you." He did not say "Whom . . . Him," for the best manuscripts have a neuter and not a masculine pronoun. In other words, Paul refers not to a person but to a thing, and thus declares that the Athenians are ignorant of any personality in that power which here they call "divinity." The effectiveness of the ensuing argument consists to some extent in this very contrast

[1] The Unknown God; or, Inspiration among Pre-Christian Races. By C. Loring Brace, author of "Gesta Christi," "Races of the Old World," etc. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son. 1890. (pp. ix. 336. 6¼x4.) $2.50.

between the neuter and the masculine, the thing with the person. Since the adjective *agnosto* means not only "the unknown" but equally "the unknowable," the inscription was virtually the affirmation of agnosticism.

2. Passing by the other instances of the incorrect interpretations, or the acceptance of the less likely renderings which characterize Mr. Brace's exegesis, his understanding of inspiration requires notice. If he distinguish Hebrew inspiration from Gentile inspiration, it cannot be discerned, or is else a distinction without a difference. He believes that "every human being can recall . . . . moments when sudden and grand visions of truth, not to be accounted for by any apparent causes, burst upon his mind. Such may be divine inspirations, perhaps not miraculous, but from the ever-acting Spirit of God, working through the laws of the human soul" (p. 301). But is not that a far cry from a mere human vision of truth to the divine inspiration? Divine influence is one thing, divine inspiration is to Christian thought altogether another. The former is universal, the latter specific and particular. Mr. Brace appears to think of one, but in all his writing to speak of it as of the other. He had said: "This inspiration [viz., opening the soul to the spiritual influence of the true Light from God which lighteth *every man*] may be defined as a supernatural elevation of the moral and spiritual faculties; . . . . . a power is given to see moral truth more distinctly, and better to know God" (p. 300). It may be; but such definitions lose us more than they gain. If the power to see moral truth more distinctly elevate Æschylus and Dante and Emerson to the level of Isaiah or Paul or David as spokesmen of God, the inspiration of the poet differs only in degree from that of the spiritual seer. In fact, however, no man can read candidly the holy Book of Jewry and of Christendom, and then read the sacred writings of the Gentiles, without feeling, if not clearly seeing, that in the one there is an element which is not in the others. The latter indeed have a golden thread of divine truth running through the mass of error, but the former is the very word of God, and in it are the presence and personal power of the Holy Spirit. The touchstone that defines Jewish and Christian inspiration, and differentiates it from all other inspiration as divine, is this of its result: The Bible when rightly interpreted furnishes full and infallible principles of faith and conduct. But the Vedas allow theft, and the Koran teaches salvation by works. These differences in kind as well as degree between the outside revelations of God and the divine inspiration recognized by Christianity, are what Mr. Brace does not seem to see. To his eyes the Buddha was to a high degree inspired;

space permit, witness after witness could be cited to give testimony. It is claimed that "to Seneca returned the conception of God as One;" but Seneca said: "Will you call God the world? You may do so without mistake, for he is all that you see around you. What is God? The mind of the universe: all that you see and all you do not." Zeller, in "Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics," proves Seneca to be a pantheist. Mr. Brace's own pages contain refutation in abundance of his idea that Seneca was a genuine theist. Schwegler says: "It seemed to [the Stoics] impossible to dissever God from matter. God is the active, formative energy of matter dwelling within it and essentially united. The Stoics considered God and matter as one identical substance which on the side of its changeless energy they called God."[1] Ueberweg adds, "The working force in the universe is God."[2] Lewes confirms this: "The active element which forms things out of matter [is] reason, destiny, God."[3] Even Canon Farrar declares that with Seneca "God is no personal, living Father, but the fiery, primeval, eternal principle which transfuses an inert, no less eternal matter, and of which our souls are, as it were, divine particles or passing sparks."[4] The singular scriptural parallels in this Spaniard's rhetoric, which weigh so much with Mr. Brace as natural Christianity, are thus handled by Lightfoot: "All deductions made, a class of coincidences remains, of which 'spend and be spent' may be taken as a type, and which can hardly be considered accidentally."[5] As for the remaining Christian phrases and their seemingly Christian ideas, the air was full of them, and all was grist that came to Seneca. The historical probability is that the philosopher had at least a guarded interchange of opinion with the apostle to the Gentiles. Even the monotheism of Marcus Aurelius is such that Uhlhorn can characterize "the Emperor's religion as a fatalistic pantheism; nature was his God."[6]

In his exposition of Buddhism Mr. Brace is scarcely more self-consistent. He does not so discriminate the teachings of Gotama himself from the later developments of this faith that the ordinary reader can form a correct judgment. Take a single instance: On p. 226 Mr. Brace presents, if he does not accept, B. C. 557 and 477 as the years of Gotama's birth and death; on p. 247 he speaks of Asoka arising B. C. 260,—"about one hundred and twenty-five years after the death of the Buddha." How did Mr. Brace resolve the discords of B. C. 477 and 385 into some higher harmony? Such self-contradicting statements abound even in the matters of doctrine. Not seldom he reads Christian conceptions into Buddhist language, as when, despite the almost unanimous testimony of scholars, he persists in regarding what Gotama calls the causer of the body as a personal Creator. Gotama was an agnostic who

[1] History of Philosophy, p. 163. [2] History of Philosophy, Vol. i. p. 194.

[3] History of Ancient Philosophy, Vol. i. p. 290.

[4] Seekers after God, p. 296.

[5] Commentary on Philippians, p. 300.

[6] Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism, p. 283.

stood near the edge of atheism, but Mr. Brace keeps in the background the fact that Gotama's thought was summed up in these words: "The existence of a God is not proved." *Law was the Buddha's God.*

It causes such pain to speak of such shortcomings (so serious and to all seeming so needless) that the present writer cannot pursue the matter. These faults have not been ferreted out, but stare the reader in the face from page to page. What confidence can an author inspire who thus misquotes Plato?—for there is no proof that the "Phaedo" was ever actually spoken by Socrates and his friends—: "Socrates said that at length one would arise among the barbarians who could charm away the fear of death."[1] The correct rendering is this:—

Cebes. "There is a child within us to whom death is a sort of hobgoblin; we must persuade him not to be afraid when alone with [the goblin] in the dark."

Socrates. "Let the voice of the charmer be applied daily till you have charmed him away. . . . There are barbarous [i. e. foreign] races not a few; seek for him [the charmer] among them all, far and wide, sparing neither pains nor money. . . . Nor must you forget to seek among yourselves too; for nowhere is he more likely to be found."[2]

Now, what *hope* of a Redeemer does this express? Socrates simply says: Seek! He does not add: And ye shall find. What justifies Mr. Brace in claiming that "Socrates has apparently heard of the Jewish or Persian hopes of a Redeemer?" So it is with a sense of disappointment, despite its many merits, that we lay aside the study of "The Unknown God." Mr. Brace had the opportunity and the power to make a contribution of positive and permanent value to comparative theology; he has given us a sketch with many a stroke taken amiss.

[1] P. 294; and cf. p. 179. [2] Jowett, Vol. i. p. 406.