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justice question a judgment so extreme as this, and at the same time admit that there is no sharper test of the Christian temper than that which is furnished by the virtues we have just been considering. Revenge, it has been truly said, is the last stronghold of the natural man[1]; it is the last fort which he holds against the spirit of the gospel, and in its capture we have the most decisive evidence of the triumph of the Christian spirit. Indeed, so peculiarly characteristic of Christianity is forgiveness felt to be that, as the author of *Ecce Homo* has pointed out, when a Christian spirit is spoken of it is a forgiving spirit that is usually meant.[2] The pagan in us all dies hard; but when from our hearts we have learned to forgive we have dealt him his death-blow.

GEORGE JACKSON.

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN SYMBOL OF THE OPEN BOOK.

II.

As it is now clearly established that during the early centuries the Christians sometimes indicated on gravestones an open book or pair of tablets, it is necessary in the next place to try to discover the origin of this custom. It may be regarded as certain, in view of the symbolic character which is clearly shown in early Christian art and

ness as "the one thing in which Christian ethics may be said to have absolutely failed." Readers of *Ivanhoe* will recall Wamba's quip: "'I forgive you, Sir Knight,' said Rowena, 'as a Christian.' 'That means,' said Wamba, 'that she does not forgive him at all.'"

[1] Take as an illustration the words which Rolf Boldrewood puts into the lips of an old man who had led a wild, rough life in the Australian bush: "Mine ain't been such a bad innings, and I don't owe much to any man. I mean as I've mostly been square with them that's done me a bad turn. No man can say that Ben Marston was ever back'ard in that way; and never will be, that's more. No! them as trod on me felt my teeth some day or other."

[2] Pop. ed., p. 272.

thought, that the figure of the book was symbolical: in other words, this representation was chosen with the intention of rousing a certain idea in the minds of those who saw it.

We have already recognized that the open book must be regarded as symbolizing the judgment of God, the day of reckoning. The custom of writing important legal documents inside a pair of tablets,[1] which were to be opened at a legally appointed time or in a law-court, is well known in Roman usage.

Such documents were used for a great variety of purposes[2]; and when important they were sealed by witnesses. The tablets were closed and tied with a triple thread, and the seals of the witnesses were placed over the thread, so that the tablets could not be opened without breaking the seals or cutting the thread. When triple tablets were used for documents of this important kind, the first two leaves or tablets were fastened together by the thread and sealed up, and the third leaf or tablet was left untied and unclosed. We shall find in the course of this article reason to prove that the "book" of the Apocalypse v. 1 was a pair of tablets and not triple tablets. It is unnecessary to give any proof that the word "book" (*biblion*) could be applied to a document of this kind: a glance at the *Thesaurus* will discover the proof that *biblion* was used much like the Latin *libellus* as a generic term for a legal document.

No document of this character was admitted as valid unless the seals and thread had remained untampered with from the time when it was executed and sealed by the witnesses. Thus the breaking of the seals and the opening of the book or set of tablets indicated the process of judgment; and the symbol of the open book was thus pecu-

[1] Triple tablets were also used in some cases (see following paragraph).
[2] See Marquardt, *Privatleben der Römer*. pp. 805–7.

liarly suitable for Christian tombstones, on which some appeal to the judgment of God was expressed in various forms very frequently in that early period.

Such a symbolism is likely to have originated from the way of understanding (or misunderstanding) some passage of the Bible popular at the time when the symbol was first devised. Any suggestion as to the origin of an early Christian symbol is likely to be even more uncertain and subjective than suggestions as to the meaning of such symbols must (as we have seen) always be. Hence the following theory is advanced with full consciousness that it can only rank as possible or probable.

The starting-point from which the use of this symbol proceeded is probably to be found in the Apocalypse v. 1 ff.: *I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. (3) And no one in heaven, nor on the earth, nor under the earth, was able to open the book.*

The modern interpreters of this passage usually, and not unnaturally, begin from the obvious, indisputable fact that it was suggested to the mind of the seer through his familiarity with Ezekiel ii. 9: *Behold, a hand stretched out towards me; and lo, a scroll of a book therein. And he spread it before me: and it was written within and without: and there were written therein lamentations and mourning and woe.*

The argument which would be required to support the absolute rejection of the theory which is here proposed, would have to take the form that the imitator must have been careful to mean exactly the same thing in every detail as the original model; and, since Ezekiel is plainly and explicitly speaking about a roll, therefore St. John also must be speaking about a roll; and therefore also his readers throughout the early centuries must have understood that he was speaking about a roll.

This line of reasoning seems to the present writer to be a mistaken one from first to last.

In the first place, it is a modernism which is out of keeping with ancient modes of thought. The desire for accuracy in such details, and the dislike for anachronisms and inconsistencies are a modern and not an ancient characteristic. We desire to understand exactly and precisely in all its surroundings the meaning of the literature of the past. The ancients were careless in such matters, like the mediaeval and even more recent writers or readers; and they never hesitated to read the past in terms of their own contemporary situation, and to imagine the characters of the past clothed as persons of the present and surrounded by similar circumstances.

In the second place, there is no reason to believe that St. John must have seen exactly the same image which Ezekiel describes. The passage of Ezekiel suggested to his mind a certain train of symbolic imagination; but it does not follow therefore that he would reproduce the original model faithfully and slavishly in every detail. In fact he does not do so. His description contains certain points of difference. The book which he saw was sealed on the outside with seven seals: that which Ezekiel saw had no seals. The book which Ezekiel saw was spread, i.e. unrolled, before him: the book in the Apocalypse was opened after the seals had been broken.

Moreover, the book in Ezekiel was first unrolled, and then the prophet saw that it was written on the inside and on the back. The slightest thought about the appearance of a *volumen* is enough to prove that this order is strictly true. When a *volumen* was rolled up, it would be impossible to see that it was written on the back; the end of the roll, which remained visible on the outside when the book was rolled up, was of a different material, forming a sort of

cover and not intended or adapted for writing on, but merely serving as a protection for the writing on the roll.

On the other hand, the book in the Apocalypse was seen to be written on the back, while it was still closed and sealed up. In other words, the writing on the back was public and open, whereas the writing inside was secret; and an essential characteristic of the contents was that they should remain secret until the due time arrived and the properly qualified person opened the seals and disclosed the writing. The seer of the vision could not actually behold the inner writing, but inferred this from the seals: sealed tablets were written tablets, necessarily and invariably, according to a common custom, familiar to all at that time.[1]

The argument just stated, even if it stood alone, seems absolutely to preclude the possibility that the "book" mentioned in Revelation v. 1 was a roll or *volumen*. But, further, it appears impossible to interpret the seven seals reasonably, if the "book" had the form of a roll. I know of no analogy which could be quoted as a parallel to justify the idea that a roll was ever sealed on the outside to keep it shut up and secret, or for any other purpose. Moreover, I do not know that seals were used by the ancients, as we often employ sealing-wax, purely and simply to keep a set of papers shut. The ancient seal was, so far as I know, always the seal of an individual person, and was placed on any object for a definite legal purpose. Seven seals meant, in ordinary circumstances, the seals of seven different persons, required according to some legal provision. It is not intended here to maintain that there were never any cases in which an individual put his own seal several times on some object for some special purpose. It is only intended

[1] In a roll, also, the inner writing would be even more completely invisible than the outer writing, but it could have been inferred from the outer writing, if there had been any way of seeing that the outside was written.

to assert that, when seven seals on a document or book were mentioned, the natural and inevitable meaning which would be gathered by the listener or reader from this statement would be that the seals of seven persons were put on the article, according to some legal requirement. The seal was far more widely and commonly used in ancient times than at the present day: practically, every individual of any education or position in society had his own seal: the seal (and not the signing of the name in writing, as in modern times) guaranteed and represented the witness and free act of the individual: in short, the seal was the expression of his personality, and seven seals meant seven persons concerned in the act of closing up the sealed "book."

Here, again, we do not intend to maintain a negative, a foolish and unnecessary proceeding. We do not intend to assert that a roll or *volumen* was never sealed up by seven persons for some purpose. Had the other facts of this case tended to show that the "book" of Revelation v. was a *volumen*, it would have been necessary to accept the apparent statement that the *volumen* was for some reason or other sealed up, strange as such a proceeding would be. But, the other facts prove absolutely that the "book" could not be a roll; and we shall now find that the seals, while unsuitable to a roll, were natural and common in the case of a "book."

The word which is here used, *biblion*, was used sometimes in the sense of a roll or *volumen*, sometimes in that of a small codex, or of a set of tablets, or of a letter (which was written not on a roll, but on a paper folded *in folio*, in the form of four pages). A set of tablets (*tabulæ* or *tabellæ*), practically amounted to two or more leaves made of wood and wax instead of paper. They were thin slips of wood, usually oblong in shape, fastened together along one of the long sides, so that they could be opened or shut. There was a hollow in one or both faces of each tablet or slip,

and this hollow was filled with wax, to receive the writing.

Our view is that the sealed book of the Apocalypse was a set of tablets.

Now documents of a briefer kind were frequently written on paper or on tablets; and especially when the purpose was to keep the writing private and to reserve it for certain eyes, and ensure that it came before those eyes unaltered and unread, was practically universal, whether the material might be paper or tablets (wooden or of other material). When this purpose of privacy and reservation was aimed at, it was common to close and seal the two leaves so that the interior could not be disclosed without breaking the seal. When tablets were used, a triple linen thread was passed round them according to a common Roman legal usage, and the seals of witnesses placed over the thread with their names attached. These witnesses could afterwards be summoned in a court of law to attest that their seals had remained unbroken since they were attached.

The number seven in this case points to Roman usage. In the earlier Greek usage the number was not fixed, but varied according to convenience and caprice. In Egyptian Hellenistic usage the number of witnesses and seals was fixed as six.[1] In Roman usage, at least for testamentary purposes, the number was fixed regularly as seven, though in special cases where the number of fully qualified legal witnessess could not easily be got (as among rustics, or in time of epidemics), a smaller number was permitted and accepted.

The custom is most familiar in the case of the Roman written, or prætorian, will.[2] When this class of will was

[1] This statement rests on the authority of Gerhard and Gradenwitz in *Philologus* (1904), p. 500 f.

[2] I am indebted to my colleague, Professor N. J. D. Kennedy, for aid in this subject.

introduced, under the authority of the Prætor, its validity depended on its bearing the seals of seven witnesses, impressed over the linen thread that closed the tablets. After the death of the testator, the will was produced in court, tested to prove that it had never been opened or tampered with, then opened and recognized as valid. But it is practically certain that this method of guaranteeing authenticity was not confined to wills, but was a general device, adopted in the case of wills from existing custom. It had a Greek origin, being similar to Greek facts, and was not of Roman origin.

Again, the statement that there was writing inside and on the back of the "book" now acquires a new meaning to the reader of the Revelation. In the corresponding passage of Ezekiel, the roll was written inside and outside, because the tale of lamentations and woe was so long that it overflowed on to the back of the *volumen*. The case is exactly similar to that of which Juvenal tells in his first Satire, lines 5, 6: he describes the tediously long tragedy. *Orestes* as written even on the back of the *volumen*, when the border to the very end was full. In this description the reader is understood to be gradually unrolling the *volumen* as he goes on, and he comes at last to the end, where the paper is fastened to the central stick (*umbilicus*); the last part or border of the paper, where it touches the stick, is covered with writing, and then the back also is covered with writing, and yet the poem is *not* finished. Juvenal's picture, like many others in his *Satires*, is exaggerated far beyond the realities of actual practice, and must be understood in that way.

In both cases, the roll of Ezekiel and the poem mentioned by Juvenal, the purpose is the same: the emphasis is laid on the length of the writing, because the mere length of the tale is the critical fact: the longer the writing, the more woe does it record: the longer the poem, the greater

writing and the inner sealed and secret writing, was preserved to a much later date. In the fifth century after Christ, and even later, the old form was followed, at least in the case of wills.

The inference, already drawn with some probability from the number of seals, that the "book" in Revelation v. 1 was suggested by Roman, not by Greek usage, is confirmed by these considerations. The "book" was a pair of tablets, closed by the seven seals from human eyes, until the due time had come when the proper person should open the seals and read the writing.

Now how far does this suggestion throw any new light on the purpose of the "book"? It is, of course, necessary here and always in the Apocalypse, to remember that the symbolism is employed with a perfectly free hand; the ideas and figures taken from common life are not always used by the writer in the exact and precise way in which he knew them in ordinary usage. He did not consciously imitate works and facts of the ordinary world and of common social surroundings; but he unconsciously was swayed by his own experience and knowledge. The forms and details, taken one by one, are drawn from contemporary life or from the literature of the Jews (chiefly the Prophetic and the Apocalyptic literature); but the spirit, the purpose, the general effect are not imitated. "The current forms are used, not slavishly, but creatively and boldly; and they must not be interpreted pedantically. A new spirit has been put into them by the writer."[1] The scene in Revelation v. must, therefore, not be assumed to be modelled on the circumstances in which a Roman "book" was opened before a Roman court. The single detail is caught, but freely worked up into the scene which the writer imagines. It may be assumed as natural that there was one special official, alike in Roman and in

[1] *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 59 f.

earlier Hellenistic usage, whose duty it was to break the seals and disclose the *scriptura interior*; and it seems certain that in Hellenistic usage there was one special official whose duty it was to produce the document before the court.[1] But this analogy is worked up with a very bold and transforming hand into the scene where the "seals" are broken in the Apocalypse. The scene is, as a whole, Jewish and Apocalyptic, both in conception and in most of the details.

One thing, however, seems highly probable with regard to the "book." It can hardly be a book of prophecy of coming events, though the interpreters in modern times seem almost all to assume that it was prophetic. The *scriptura exterior* seems meaningless in that case, unless we are to understand that this outer writing was merely the title and description of the contents; and, of course, this might be defended by the analogy of Roman Testaments, in which the outer writing could hardly be more than a title and general description. But it seems more probable that the "book" was not prophetic, but rather the record of the Covenant between God and man. The judgment is about to begin. The reckoning is to be taken. The carefully guarded record is produced, and the duly qualified person alone is empowered to open it for the solemn occasion.

And even those who prefer to interpret the "book" as a prophecy with regard to the future, and not as a statement of the principles and conditions on which the judgment of God is to be conducted,—even they must admit that our interpretation was at least not an unnatural view for the Christians of the second and third century to adopt. In the Phrygian and Lycaonian monuments described in the first part of this article is found the evidence that this view was

[1] This second point is stated as certain for Graeco-Egyptian usage in the already quoted article, *Philologus*, 1904, p. 500.

at that time dominant. The "book" is engraved on the tombstone, as symbolizing the appeal to the judgment of God, whether this takes the form merely of an intention to warn off intruders from violating the tomb, or contains the more serious and elevated thought that the judgment of God must be reckoned with and prepared for by all, and that this message and warning is preached at every death and on every grave.

W. M. RAMSAY.

JERUSALEM FROM REHOBOAM TO HEZEKIAH (*continued*).

3. JEHOSHAPHAT: *circa* 873–850.

IT is not easy to estimate the effects upon Jerusalem of the long reign of Jehoshaphat. Owing to the character of the traditions we must deal largely with inferences. Yet the general facts from which these have to be drawn are well attested. The long war between Israel and Judah had at last come to an end. Asa's efforts must have so far strengthened the latter as to render the house of Omri willing to enter an alliance. Had it been otherwise, so ambitious a dynasty, with increasing wealth and political influence, would hardly have consented to a relation in which there was probably more equality between the contracting parties than modern historians have perceived. Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, was married to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat[1]; and Jehoshaphat assisted both Ahab at Ramoth-Gilead and Ahab's son, Jehoram, against Moab.[2] It is true that on each of these occasions the king of Israel was the one who made the proposal, and that Jehoshaphat immediately and unreservedly complied. The terms in which he did so are,

[1] 2 Kings viii. 18.
[2] 1 Kings xxii.; 2 Kings iii. 4 ff.