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"*HURT NOT THE OIL AND THE WINE.*"

WHEN the third seal is opened, in the first series of punitive visions in the Apocalypse of John (vi. 5–6), a black horse is seen, whose rider holds a beam or pair of scales. *And I heard as it were a voice in the middle of the four living creatures, saying: A measure of wheat for a denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius; and injure not the oil and the wine.* Famine is metaphorically called *αἰανής* and *αἶθοψ* by Pindar and Hesiod, which serves to explain the dismal, gloomy colour of Hunger's steed in this vision, though the four chargers of vi. 1–8 (white, red, black and pale) may be derived indirectly, like so much else in the Apocalypse, from the astrological fancies of the Babylonian mythology, where the various planets (here = Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) had more or less equivalent colours assigned to them.[1] This, however, is a minor detail. Whatever may have been the quarry from which such conceptions were hewn, the prophet uses them freely for his own purposes, either unconscious of or indifferent to their original setting. In the present case, the main significance of the vision lies in the mysterious utterance addressed to the spectral figure of Hunger.

The first clause of the admonition offers no difficulty to the interpreter. It is a straightforward prediction of bad times, when provisions become excessively dear. A *χοῖνιξ* of wheat, the usual rations of a working man for one day, is to cost twelve times its usual price, and, whereas (cf. 2

[1] So Zimmern (cf. Schrader's *Keilinschriften u. Alten Test.*, 1903, 633), and Winckler (*Forschungen*, ii. 386 f.), with A. Jeremias (*Babylonisches im Neuen Test.*, 1905, pp. 24 f.). In an elaborate study (*Zeitschrift für die neutest. Wissenschaft*, 1907, 290–316), M. W. Müller traces the four colours to phases of the sun as interpreted in popular folklore, while Mr. W. G. Collingwood (*Astrology in the Apocalypse*, 1886, pp. 58–59) includes lunar phases as well.

Kings vii. 18) a denarius, the labourer's daily pay (cf. Matt. xx. 2), could usually buy twenty-four measures of barley, the coarser grain,[1] it is now unable to command more than an eighth of this quantity. The bare necessaries of life are thus enormously heightened in price, even if the computation be slightly lowered, to the proportions of a seventh and a fourth respectively. Wheat and barley are not to disappear entirely from the earth; otherwise, of course, there would be no famine. But food-stuffs are to be extremely scanty and therefore cruelly expensive. When grain is sold carefully by weight (Lev. xxvi. 26, Ezek. iv. 16), hard times are abroad.

The following clause is more enigmatic, alike in itself and in its connexion with what precedes. The introductory *καί* has an adversative force and the aorist of prohibition implies that no damage has yet been done. The Hunger-demon is not told to stop injuring the vines and olives. He is cautioned, at the outset of his dreadful mission, to avoid any such destruction. But the heart of the passage remains still to be reached. *Καὶ τὸ ἔλαιον καὶ τὸν οἶνον μὴ ἀδικήσῃς.* What is the meaning of the last word? Usually it is taken in the sense of "hurt" or "injure," while "oil" and "wine" are supposed, by metonymy, to mean the olive and the vine. This seems obvious enough. But A. Bischoff, in Preuschen's *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1908, p. 172), proposes to take "oil" and "wine" in their strict sense, with *ἀδικεῖν* in the corresponding sense of "consume" (so *φθορά* in Col. ii. 22, 2

[1] "It may be inferred from a variety of passages, such as Ruth ii.17, John vi. 9, 13, that barley was, even during the times when it was cultivated along with wheat, the staple food of the poorer class" (*Encyclopædia Biblica*, 484). During the last agonies of the siege, Josephus describes how the many inhabitants of Jerusalem "sold their possessions for one *χοῖνιξ* of wheat, if they were wealthy, and for one *χ.* of barley if they were poorer" (*Bell. Jud.* v. 10, 2).

Pet. ii. 12). Rinck had already proposed to render it by "waste"; the commodities are too precious to be squandered. Yet ἀδικεῖν elsewhere in the Apocalypse (e.g. ii. 11, vii. 2, ix. 4) is used variously in the ordinary sense of "injure" or "hurt" (cf. Thuc. ii. 71, iv. 98), and the metonymy which it involves here is not so violent as to warrant a departure from this normal usage. Even in Joel i. 10 (ἐξηράνθη οἶνος, ὠλιγώθη ἔλαιον), οἶνος and ἔλαιον, as the context shows, refer primarily to the grapes and olive trees of the country; the fruit stands for the tree.

Taking the phrase, then, in its usually accepted sense, we proceed to determine its precise meaning in relation to the preceding clause. Here two rival interpretations have been suggested—for the allegorical view of *oil and wine* as an equivalent for Christians need not detain the modern investigator. So far as the actual words go, they may denote either (*a*) a mitigation, or (*b*) an aggravation of the famine.

(*a*) In the former case, it is a mark of the mercy with which God's judgments are tempered, that the olives and vines are to be spared (so Alford). This is meant as a reminder (after Ps. xxiii. 5) of the care exercised by God over the righteous and faithful, whose wants are supplied while God's judgments starve and crush the rest of men (so, e.g., Milligan). Or, we are invited to think of an invasion which stops short of the barbarity involved in a destruction of olive trees and vines within the Mediterranean world. "The loss of the harvest of wheat and barley means scarcity and high prices; but a new year brings new crops. The loss of olives and vines means lasting ruin, for new olive trees take about seventeen years to grow, new vines also need a good many years."[1] The cruelty and scarcity of the invasion are held within bounds; no wanton destruction

[1] Sir W. M. Ramsay: *The Cities of St. Paul* (pp. 430–432).

of what constituted the basis of civilized life is to be permitted.

The objection to all such interpretations is that they drag in a feature which is irrelevant to the sweep and aim of this series of woes. The phenomena which occur at the opening of the six seals in chapter vi. denote the successive catastrophes immediately prior to *the great day of the Divine wrath*. These catastrophes are full of unrelieved and irremediable horror. They overtake the pagan world. God's people are left out of account. The only reference to Christians (in vi. 11) shows that the prophet expected nothing but martyrdom for them during this period of overwhelming disasters. Any alleviation of their lot is quite outside his horizon. He anticipates no favour for them on earth from man or from God. They are simply to be *killed*, like the martyrs who are impatiently calling out for the speedy execution of God's vengeance on the persecutors. John is not thinking of any invasion which sweeps over the East and passes away, leaving civilization to right itself after the tremendous shock. His visions of war, pestilence, and famine are unrelieved,[1] and they lead up to the final vision of the cosmic dissolution (vi. 12 f., viii. 1–5),[2] which overthrows mankind and the universe together.

When the words are taken as an aggravation (*b*) of the famine, the connexion of the two clauses becomes plain. In this case, the distress is heightened by the fact that oil

[1] This general tenor of the seal-visions also tells against the hypothesis that the mysterious voice addressed to the third figure fixes the maximum price for food and lays an "embargo on any attempt to destroy the liquid food of the people" (Swete). The voice does not forbid, it foretells famine prices.

[2] There is rather a curious coincidence between vi. 12 (*the full moon became as blood*) and the remark attributed to Domitian on the day before his death: *conversus ad proximos affirmavit, fore ut sequenti die luna se in aquario cruentaret factumque aliquod existeret, de quo loquerentur homines per terrarum orbem* (Suet. *Domit.* 16).

and wine, which are comparative luxuries or accessories of life, are left untouched by the famine, which rides roughshod over the land. Grain is to be dear, but the exasperating thing is that wine and oil remain as usual. Now even an Oriental can make a shift to live without wine and oil at a push; the poor have often to do so. But grain is the staple of existence. Consequently it is a sore time when the necessaries of life are enormously heightened in price, whilst the luxuries are unaffected. "On this occasion, too, as is always the case in famines, those provisions lasted longest which are less suited to the ordinary needs of life. When the seed-corn was consumed, the common man might look bitterly at the olives and vines thriving in the rich man's plantation close to his own meagre crop of corn." [1] Such a perversion of things surely denoted the end of the world. Here were the vine and the olive rampant on earth; their plantations flourished. Yet the grain—the *Ceres casta*—was becoming more and more scanty. The fields of corn and barley could not produce their normal quantity. Such dearth and such abundance were a cruel mockery to luckless men.

Had there been no contrast between grain on the one hand and the oil and wine upon the other, the latter might have been taken generically as products of the earth. Thus in Jubil. xxiii. 17–18 their destruction [2] forms part of the final messianic punishment inflicted on the world for men's iniquities: *Behold the earth will be destroyed on account of all their works, and there shall be no more seed of the vine, and*

[1] Hausrath: *A History of the New Testament Times*, ii. 188–189. Hausrath, who had adopted the Neronic date of the Apocalypse, considered that the famine referred to was the one under Claudius. But he is right in arguing that the prophet has a reason for excepting the oil and the wine. "If the writer of the Apocalypse had been simply creating from his imagination, he would not have weakened his picture by such reservations."

[2] In Joel i. 10 f. oil and wine are grouped with corn and barley, and afterwards with figs, etc.

no oil, for their works are altogether faithless, and they shall all perish together. But in the Apocalypse, while oil and wine were not strictly speaking luxuries [1] for an inhabitant of Asia Minor, oil at any rate would be regarded by the ascetic prophet as at least superfluous, whether its culinary, medicinal (Luke x. 34), or toilet purposes were in his mind. Much more so with wine. It was intolerable that oil and wine should flow, while grain trickled thinly into the grasp of people in their extremity of hunger.

A further interest attaches to these words, however. They not only depict realistically the aggravation [2] of famine in the latter days, but they may be regarded as a water-mark of the Apocalypse's date and origin. This has been already done, in favour of the Neronic date, by those who find an allusion to John of Giscala. That doughty leader of revolt, during the siege of Jerusalem, seized the sacred oil and wine of the temple and distributed them to the starving population of the city (Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* v. 13, 6). But this reference is extremely forced. A happier juxtaposition is to be found at a later date, not in Palestine but in Asia Minor.

In 92 A.D., or thereabouts (cf. *Chron. Pasch.* i. 466), the Emperor Domitian made a futile fiscal experiment. He attempted to place restrictions upon the cultivation of the vine, not only in Italy but in the provinces. According to one account, that of his biographer, Suetonius (*Domit.* 7), his object was to prevent the vine ousting cereals. *Ad summam quondam ubertatem vini, frumentii vero inopiam existimans nimio studio neglegi arva, edixit, ne quis in Italia novellaret, utque in provinciis vineta succiderentur, relicta*

[1] Yet a passage like that in Proverbs xxi. 17 is significant—*he that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.*

[2] This is the view of most recent editors, e.g. Farrar, B. Weiss, J. Weiss and Bousset (who has come over to this opinion since he published his first edition).

ubi plurimum dimidia parte; nec exsequi rem perseveravit. The failure noted in the last four words is explained later on. Domitian, says Suetonius (*op. cit.* 14) with a characteristical note of disparagement, was scared by the political menace conveyed by the agitation of the "trade." He was in such nervous dread of assassination that any unpopularity suggested at once a source of personal danger. So much so, *ut edicti de excidendis vineis propositi gratiam facere non alia magis re compulsus credatur, quam quod sparsi libelli cum his versibus erant*:

Κἄν με φάγῃς ἐπὶ ῥίζαν, ὅμως ἔτι καρποφορήσω,
ὅσσον ἐπισπεῖσαι σοι, τράγε, θυομένῳ.

The lampoon was a tag adopted from Evenus;[1] read *καίσαρι* for *σοι τράγε*, and it fitted admirably. Domitian might gnaw at the vines (cf. Vergil's *Georgics*, ii. 371 f.), but the vines would see him dead! He would be sacrificed, not they!

Philostratus suggests a more plausible reason for the Emperor's tactical retreat. According to him, the Ionians rose in protest against an edict which interfered with the local vine-trade. Whether or not it was Apollonius who first incited them, as his biographer avers (*Vita Apoll.* vi. 42), the probability is that the commercial interests of Asia Minor soon made themselves felt and heard (*Vit. Sophist.* i. 21).[2] The townships dispatched the brilliant and eloquent Scopelianus to lay their case before the Emperor, who, after listening to his representations, handsomely withdrew the obnoxious embargo. Scopelianus

[1] Compare Ovid's loose rendering in *Fasti*, i. 357–358:—

Rode, caper, vitem: tamen hinc, cum stabis ad aram,
In tua quod spargi cornua possit, erit.

[2] He makes the decree more sweeping: ἐδόκει τῷ βασιλεῖ μὴ εἶναι τῇ Ἀσίᾳ ἀμπέλους, ἐπειδὴ ἐν οἴνῳ στασιάζειν ἔδοξαν, ἀλλ' ἐξηρῆσθαι μὲν τὰς ἤδη πεφυτευμένας, ἄλλας δὲ μὴ φυτεύειν ἔτι.

returned to Asia Minor in triumph, and no more was heard of any injury to the local cultivation of the vine.

Suetonius may be prejudiced in attributing the withdrawal of the obnoxious decree to personal fear on the part of the Emperor, and it seems rather far-fetched of Philostratus to suggest that Domitian wanted to strike a side-blow, by means of legislation, at the connexion between drink and seditious rioting. Temperance legislators are indeed apt to be misjudged. Perhaps Domitian was, like better men in recent days, a maligned statesman who did not get credit for his sincerity and public spirit in attempting to control vested interests. More likely, however, he was suspected of ulterior protectionist ends. His ostensible motives were not his real ones. The vine-growers of Ionia and the provinces may have seen nothing in his decree but another attempt to buttress the commercial interests of Italy at the expense of the provinces. And there was some ground for this criticism, since the Emperor merely prohibited the increase of vineyards within Italy itself, whereas the existing plantations in Asia Minor and elsewhere were to be reduced by half. These irate traders and planters did not or would not see, as the modern historian perceives, that such legislation was part and parcel of the agricultural policy and problem which the empire had inherited. For over a hundred years the decadence of agriculture in Italy, as opposed to the *cultus arborum*, had been deplored.[1] The superior attractions of military service had detached increasing numbers of able-bodied men from the land. The rush to the towns, for excitement and amusement, had also begun. As a result of this, imports of corn and wine from the provinces had become a necessity, and this had helped in its turn to swamp the home farmers. Finally those who still

[1] Cf. Mr. E. H. Oliver's essay on *Roman Economic Conditions* (Toronto, 1907), pp. 58 f.

worked on the land found that Columella was right (*de R. R.* III. iii. 3, 4) in advising vineyards as the most profitable line, and olive-yards [1] as the next, for all who tilled the soil. Cereals were thus handicapped on different sides, and the pressure of this problem was felt by the responsible authorities during the later days of the Republic. Even then Italy needed not only encouragement for her grain-growers but protectionist legislation for her vines and olives. In the transalpine provinces no one was allowed to plant vines or olives (Cicero, *de Rep.* iii. 9, 16; cf. Stéphane Gselle's *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Domitien*, 1893, p. 153); in the case of the olives this regulation was no less imperative than in the case of the vines, for grazing threatened to supersede the cultivation of the olive as a paying concern, and the Italian olive-planters required to have the market artificially restricted in order to encourage them to persevere with olive trees instead of letting their lands pass into pasture.

Thus, on the one hand, cereals were being generally neglected in favour of vines and olives; while, on the other hand, in Italy itself, even vines and olives required to be protected against the free trade of the provinces. Domitian's intervention, in one aspect, might commend itself to the agriculturist and the moralist. Statius, writing in 95 A.D. (*Silv.* iv. 3, 11–12), naturally praises him for it :—

Qui castæ cereri diu negata
Reddit iugera, sobriasque terras.

But the vine-growers of Asia Minor were up in arms against the interference of this imperial protectionist with their local trade. They organized their opposition, and they carried the day.

The question is whether we may not find, in this at-

[1] Olives were easier to cultivate than vines (Verg., *Georgics*, ii. 420 f.).

tempted injury to the wine-trade of Ionia, a background for the allusion *Hurt not the wine* in the Apocalypse which the prophet John addressed, during the last years of Domitian, to Christians resident in that very district. Seven years ago this was proposed in an ingenious study by Solomon Reinach,[1] and his suggestion has been accepted by Harnack (*Theologische Litteraturzeitung*, 1902, 591–592), Bousset, J. Weiss, and (independently ?) Dr. E. A. Abbott (*Notes on New Testament Criticism*, 1907, p. 89), amongst others,[2] although Wellhausen (*Analyse der Offenbarung Johannis*, 1907, p. 10 note) incidentally demurs.[3] The suggestion is extremely attractive. But it must not be pressed too far. The ascetic author of the Apocalypse, it may be conjectured, would have been entirely in sympathy with any such attempt to restrict luxury as Domitian may have ostensibly essayed. But he is not thinking of Domitian at all. He is not reproducing an incident which was fresh in the minds of his hearers. The point of the saying does lie in the recent events which had stirred Smyrna and other cities in Asia Minor ; but John simply uses the public edict of Domitian as an apposite point for his delineation of the imminent last horrors. It provides him with a bit of colour for his palette as he paints the hues of coming doom. Hunger, he foretells, is to overrun the land. But you Asiatics need have no fears for your vineyards and olives, he grimly adds ! There will be no Domitian to hurt them.

[1] "Sur la mévente des vins sous le haut-empire romain" (*Revue Archéologique*, 1901, 356–380), cf. his *Cultes, Mythes, et Religions* (Paris, 1906) ii. 356–380. But honour to whom honour is due. Farrar, in his *Early Days of Christianity* (ch. xxviii.) had already noted Domitian's edict in this connexion, though he failed to draw the further inference.

[2] Cf. J. M. S. Baljon : *de Openbaring van Johannes* (Utrecht, 1908), pp. 82–83, and Professor F. C. Porter's *Messages of the Apocalyptical Writers* (1905), p. 190.

[3] So does Schürer (*Theol. Literaturzeitung*, 1906, 258), on the ground that oil is included. See below.

Comfort yourselves on that point! Only, it will be small enough comfort to have your superfluous luxuries spared and your grain reduced almost to starvation point! The very plenty of the former will only irritate the miserable conditions of your lot!

In this light there is a characteristic note of bitter, deep irony[1] visible in the prophet's words. A hint about the destruction of the wines was enough to recall to Asiatics a recent, local cause for panic, and John seizes on the allusion to lend vividness and realistic point to his predictions of the local anguish which was to herald the world's final tragedy.

Why he adds the allusion to oil is not so clear, for we have no evidence that any similar legislation was contemplated against olive-groves. The touch is probably one of his artistic embodiments, introduced in order to fill out the grim sketch.[2] Vines and olives, as we have already seen, were closely connected in economic problems.[3] But, in any case, the reference to the vines, when interpreted in view of Domitian's futile edict, forms one of the minor details which corroborate the proof, based on other and irrefragable grounds, of the Domitianic date of the Apocalypse, just as it serves to show that the seals-vision is not an earlier source which was adopted and adapted by the final editor.

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[1] Dr. Sanday, like Reinach, takes a slightly different view (*Journal of Theological Studies*, viii. 489). The withdrawal of the edict, which let the production of wine and oil go on unchecked, was looked upon by the Apocalyptist "as a calamity which only pandered to drunkenness and immorality."

[2] It is no era of peace, far from that. Yet the olive, "the darling of Peace," as Virgil calls it, thrives, so awry and mocking are the times.

[3] "The impetus given to the cultivation of the olive coincides with the greater development of vine-culture, and with the first phase of the decadence of cereals in Italy" (E. H. Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 117). The olive was sometimes used, also, to support the vine.