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## The Odes of Solomon and the Apocalypse of Peter.

BY J. RENDEL HARRIS, LITT.D., LL.D., D.D., BIRMINGHAM.

WE have recently had brought before us by Dr. Mingana a new version of the Apocalypse of Peter, which follows, but at a long remove, the Scripture of the same name which was read in the Early Church along with the Apocalypse of John, and which in its first form may even be antecedent to that valued residue and record of early Christian hopes and horrors. This supposed Petrine text was soon discarded by Christian believers, and as a result of its deposition from literary honour and apostolical dignity, it was lost to the Christian records except for occasional fragments and quotations, and especially a long Greek fragment found in a tomb at Akhmim, on the Nile; there has also been recovered an Ethiopic version, which appears to be related to Dr. Mingana's find. Dr. Mingana's text is of great length; it is written in Arabic through the medium of Syriac characters, and is evidently a composite document made up from various quarters. It retains the title which proclaims itself descended from the lost primitive text of Peter; the latter suffers from a defective transmission, and has grown in dimension almost out of recognition of its ancestry.

What has interested us more than anything in the new text is that it contains, as Dr. Mingana at once perceived, an undoubted quotation from, or coincidence with, the Odes of Solomon, the passages involved being as follows:

### APOCALYPSE OF PETER<sup>1</sup>—

*'Pharaonic chariots which carry both the Deceiver and the Error.'*

### ODES OF SOLOMON, xxxviii. 10—

*'And I asked the Truth, Who are these? And he said to me, This is the Deceiver and the Error.'*

Dr. Mingana observes that 'the comparison is rendered more forceful by the introduction of the element of the "chariot,"' because this very Ode begins with the mention of a chariot. 'I went into the Light of Truth as into a chariot,' and he argues the dependence of his new Petrine text upon the Ode, with a suggestion that perhaps both the Apocalypse and the Ode may be drawing upon a common earlier source. As Dr. Mingana believes with myself that the Odes are a first-century document, and as the common opinion with regard to

<sup>1</sup> *Woodbrooke Studies*, No. 7, p. 426.

the Petrine document in its primitive form does not place it lower than the second century, it is evident that an interesting problem in origins has been proposed; to this problem we address ourselves. We can hardly do less than recognize the new Petrine matter with regard to the Deceiver and the Error as being a part of the primitive nucleus of the new document, and if so, the problem is simplified to a discussion of the relations between the original Apocalypse of Peter and the Odes. Dr. Mingana has raised a very interesting question.

In order to resolve it, we will first make a few observations with regard to Apocalypses in general, in order to determine what is meant by 'the Deceiver and the Error.'

When we read the Epistles which pass under the name of St. John, we can readily see that the writer is trying to substitute one kind of a belief in Antichrist for another. He wants to be rid of an Antichrist in whom he has ceased to believe, and not being able to get rid of his fateful figure by a direct contradiction, he substitutes an intellectual Antichrist for the personal form in which the Church generally was believing, multiplies the form until he has rid himself of the person, and then says with a wisdom that at any rate was worthy of an apostolic leader, who has to change his front:

*'Ye have heard that Antichrist is coming'; yes, ever so many of him; he is here already; this is his description. We know that these are the last days because there are many antichrists.*

A very little teaching of this kind was enough to burn up, or at least to push into the background any number of Apocalypses. One wonders how the Canonical Apocalypse survived it. This single pronouncement divides the Early Church into two periods, an Apocalyptic period and a post-Apocalyptic. There may be a survival of Antichrist and his companions in certain quarters, but as regards the Apostolical Church, there was a complete change of emphasis. The Apocalypse was replaced by the Gospel; it was, however, as M. Couchoud has been pointing out lately, an earlier stratum of belief than the Gospel, which gave way to the Gospel. The spectacular receded before the evangelical doctrine. Returning to the Johannine Epistles, let us see if we can determine what was

the character of the Antichrist, the *One*, whom he replaces by the *Many*; that is, the people who do not admit that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. A careful reader will not fail to notice that in these Epistles it is assumed that the Antichrist is *par excellence* or rather *par excès*, the Deceiver. Just as John says there are *many antichrists* who do not confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh; so he also says that there are *many deceivers* who have gone out into the world, who have the same doctrine. When we put side by side these two passages :

- 1 Jn 2<sup>18</sup>, *ὄν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν*  
2 Jn 7, *πολλοὶ πλάνοι ἐξήλθον εἰς τὸν κόσμον*

we see that they are strictly parallel, and then the writer adds for us the identification of the Antichrist and the Deceiver, by saying, 'they do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh: that's the Deceiver and that the Antichrist.' We can see, then, that Deceiver is one of the names by which the Antichrist is known. This is the title of the mysterious figure in the Odes of Solomon. It is involved in the Johannine language (1 Jn 2<sup>18</sup>), that 'I wrote these things to you concerning them that *deceive you*.' As we saw that ὁ *Ἀντίχριστος* [the Antichrist] was replaced by *πολλοὶ ἀντίχριστοι* [many antichrists], so we see that ὁ *Πλάνος* [the Deceiver] is replaced by *πολλοὶ πλάνοι* [many deceivers]. Now this explanation is not the over-subtlety of an interpreter; if we look into the Johannine Apocalypse or even into the Gospel, we shall see further intimations that the Evil One has amongst his other names that of **THE DECEIVER**, in capital letters. For instance in Apoc. Jn 12, the Devil is described as being 'the Devil and Satan which *deceived* the whole world.' In Apoc. Jn 22, 'Satan, the Dragon, the Old Serpent, the Devil' is cast into the bottomless pit, that he should *deceive* the nations no more.' It is not necessary to multiply parallels; it is sufficient to say that *the Antichrist is the Deceiver*.

Returning now to the 38th Ode of Solomon, we see that it is an Apocalyptic Ode. This is what made it so difficult of interpretation. The Ode is deliberately cast into an Apocalyptic mould. Reflect for a moment what is one of the commonest characteristics of an Apocalypse, whether great or little, early or late. Its most popular form is a peregrination of Heaven and Hell, beginning with the latter, under the sufficient guidance of Saint or Angel. Virgil travelling with Dante is only the last of these spiritual personally conducted tours through Time and Space. The 38th Ode begins by the Odist telling how he was under the guidance

of the Truth itself who went with him to keep him from error. Under such guidance one passes from scene to scene with an inquiry; the conducted looks up to his conductor, with an interrogation, 'Who is this?' 'What are these?' 'Why this particular suffering?' the interrogation is the connecting link between the scene that is left, and the scene that is approached, whether of Heaven or Hell.<sup>1</sup>

In the somewhat later Apocalypse of Paul, every torment that is disclosed has its attached question, and we are, of course, familiar with the Johannine query of the angel that showed him the mysteries, 'What are these . . . and whence came they?' So when we turn to the Ode of Solomon we find the Odist saying to the Truth that goes with him and protects him, as follows :

'I asked the Truth, Who are these?  
and He said to me, This is the Deceiver and the Error':

the parallel is not only a general one with the Apocalyptic method, it is also singularly like the Johannine statement that

'This is the Deceiver and the Antichrist.'

In the Johannine letter the personified Deceit is called Antichrist; but in the Ode we have the personification disguised: here Error is feminine, and in Greek it would appear as ὁ *Πλάνος καὶ ἡ Πλάνη*. Here we have the explanation of the Odist's mysterious Bridegroom and the Bride, the false ones who imitate the true, and who intoxicate the world with poisoned cups.

What we have tried to show, then, is that this 38th Ode of Solomon is an Apocalypse in verse, and must be understood as such. If that is so, then it is not the Apocalypse of Peter that imitates and copies the Odes of Solomon; the converse is the reality. The Ode being Apocalyptic has copied the Apocalypse. That is to say, the Apocalypse of Peter in its first form is earlier than the Odes of Solomon, and must have first rank among the Christian documents generally. It will probably turn out to be earlier than its companion, the Johannine Apocalypse.

We may recapitulate the result of our inquiry as follows :

The original Petrine Apocalypse was a peregrina-

<sup>1</sup> Virgil has the same Apocalyptic manner in his vision of Avernus :

'What shapes of crime are here, O maiden, say;  
With what pains visited? What cry so swells  
To Heaven?'—*Æn.* vi. 500.

Similarly Dante, *Inferno*, Canto ix.

tion of Heaven and Hell, in which the Seer, who is an apostle, is shown the next world by a Saint, in this case perhaps the Lord Himself. It is characteristic of such narrations to be cast into the form of Horrors or Delights punctuated by interrogations on the part of the Conducted and replies on the part of the Conductor. Of later forms of such Apocalypses, Dr. M. R. James says in his *Apocryphal New Testament* (p. 504), that 'a description of Antichrist is perhaps the most notable feature.' It is probably also a primitive trait.

For the interrogations in the Petrine document we may take the following :

Peter, who is astonished at the beauty and glory of the redeemed, says thus :

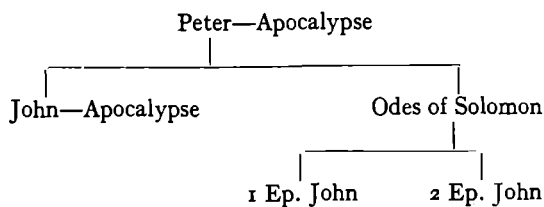
'I drew near to the Lord and said, *Who are these?* And he said to me, These are your righteous brethren whose appearance ye did desire to see. And I said to him, And *where are all the righteous?* and *of what sort is the world wherein they are?*'

Here we have the conventional series of inquiries.

In the Ethiopic text we have preserved, with some modification, the note of the Antichrist, and the Lord promises that 'Enoch and Elias shall be sent to teach them (the children of Israel), that *this is the deceiver* which must come into the world to 'do signs and wonders to deceive.' Here we have the Antichrist defined as Deceiver in language which agrees with the Canonical Apocalypse, and also with the Second Epistle of John, '*this is the Deceiver*' (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Πλάνος καὶ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος), where capital letters should be added to the printed text of the NT, and it is this very same expression that is in Ode 38 of Solomon ('*this is the Deceiver* and the Error'), in reply to a definite question, 'Who are these?' addressed to the Truth who is conducting the Odist. The same equivalence of Deceiver and Antichrist is found in the Johannine

Epistles which speak of many *deceivers* and many *antichrists* in equivalent terms. We infer that of the documents quoted the Apocalypse of Peter has the priority over the others, the Odist having evidently imitated an Apocalyptic document; thus the Apocalypse of Peter is one of the earliest, perhaps the earliest, of the Christian documents.

If we are right in finding an apocalyptic model in the 38th Ode of Solomon, betrayed by its definition of Antichrist, by the occurrence of a Conductor with whom the Conducted can carry on conversation by means of interrogation and response, we may go a step farther in our study of the relations between the Odes, the earliest Apocalypses and the Johannine Epistles. It will be remembered that the Odist has for his Conductor the Truth itself, and was kept from falling into Error, because the Truth went with him. Now in the Second Epistle of John (v.<sup>7</sup>) the Antichrist is defined in the terms of his false doctrine, as that 'This is the Deceiver, and this the Antichrist,' which is a modification of the original personal object of terror. In this same Epistle we are told by the writer (v.<sup>2</sup>) that 'the Truth is with us and shall be with us for ever'; this corresponds to the language of the Odist about the Truth that went with him. We infer that the Odist stands between the author of the Epistle and the primitive Petrine Apocalypse. The relation between the documents may be something like this :



where the underlined documents represent a reformed eschatology.

