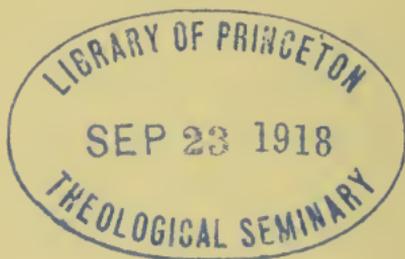


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THE BIBLE AT A SINGLE VIEW



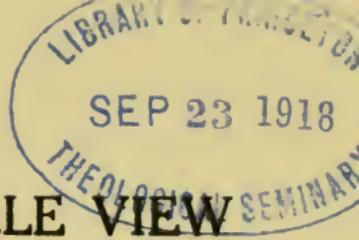
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THE BIBLE AT A SINGLE VIEW

WITH AN APPENDIX

How to Read the Bible

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THE BIBLE AT A SINGLE VIEW

THE BIBLE AT A SINGLE VIEW

THE Bible at a single view, details merging in the light of the whole: this is what is here attempted. Not a compendium of theology or religious truth founded on the Bible. That is a separate matter. First that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual. First, certainly, in order of time: the natural sense of the text, read in the full light of its literary setting, must precede any deductions to be inferred from it. Perhaps, first also in importance. I, for one, believe that literature, holding truth in solution, not precipitated into system nor interrupted by analysis, is the most powerful medium for the spiritual.

When a reader, familiar in a general way with the

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Bible, sets himself to make a mental summary of it, very likely his first impression will be that what he is dealing with is history; and this from the simple fact that one who has gone through the Bible from cover to cover has been traversing the ages, from the creation of the world to some day of judgment in the future. But this is only a first impression. Closer inspection shows that what the Bible contains of history is historic framework, that serves to hold together other kinds of literature, such as story, song, discourse, drama, philosophy, epistles. These other kinds of literature, sometimes called the higher literary forms, contain the real message of Scripture.

With this consideration goes another. What I am calling the historic framework must, in the nature of things, be late in its date. Only at the close of the period of ancient Israel, only at the close of the era of the primitive Church, could be made the disposition of their books which has come down to us. On the other hand, the several

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stories, songs, discourses, epistles, would be of every variety of date, from the earliest to the latest.

Putting these two ideas together we see the whole of Scripture approaching the form of an autobiography. For, in the case of an autobiography, no one supposes that the chapter on the hero's childhood was written by him when he was a child; or that the chapter on his marriage, the chapter on his entrance upon a business career, would be written during his honeymoon or his apprenticeship. Presumably, the man would be advanced in years before he would conceive the idea of writing his autobiography. As an elderly man he would describe his childhood, but would introduce into the description some writings of his boyish years, with their nursery language and delightful misspellings. As an elderly man he would tell of his marriage, but would illustrate the narrative with a selection of love letters; he would support the story of his business career with documents of appropriate dates. The framework of the whole

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would have been made at the close of life; the illustrative documents would range from early to late. In the same way the Bible may be conceived as an autobiography; not the autobiography of an individual, not exactly that of a nation, but the autobiography of a spiritual evolution. And this is a consideration of deep suggestiveness. For literature is of two kinds, progressive and eternal. The greatest work of history, or of science, must tend in the course of a generation to become obsolete; either it is cast aside, or by annotation is brought up to date. But no one has ever proposed to bring the Iliad up to date, or to modernize the plays of Shakespeare. From the moment of its first appearance poetry is, for good or for evil, eternal and unalterable. Now, it is obvious that autobiography is one of the kinds of literature that are eternal; it is unalterable after it has left the hands of its author. The Bible is not to be regarded as a history but as an interpretation of history; an interpretation made once for all by

DRAMA IN TWO ACTS WITH INTERLUDE

the sacred writers. In a phrase of Scripture itself, it is a "faith once for all delivered to the saints."

Another condition for clearly grasping a mass of literature is to have a correct idea of its leading sections and component parts. It has been traditional to think of the Bible as in two parts, the Old and the New Testament. It is better to think of it as in three parts. The third is made by the Books of Wisdom: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, in the Bible itself, to which must be added in the interest of connectedness Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon, which are contained in the (so-called) Apocrypha. How these books of wisdom stand apart from the rest of Scripture is manifest when we remember that in three out of these five books there is no mention of the Messiah, of the Law, of the Temple; if in the other two books these do appear, they occupy there a very subordinate place. Wisdom is simply meditation upon human life. Now, in their logical relation, these books of wisdom belong to the interval between

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the Old and the New Testament. When the sun goes down the stars come out. When the lofty mission of Israel to the nations has broken down in failure and disappointment, and before another world mission has begun which centers around Jesus Christ, in this interval simple human life comes to the front. And devout meditation on this human life is wisdom literature.

Thus the whole Bible seems to take literary shape as a Drama in two Acts of the Old and the New Testament, with Wisdom literature as an Interlude. The late Sir John Seeley has pointed out how, in earlier times, a continuous conception of God's dealings with mankind, founded on the Bible, had served to general culture as a map of all history; how with the neglect of the Bible this has been lost, and there has been no substitute. But Seeley understates the case. When to the historic framework of Scripture the other literary forms are added, the different parts of the Bible are felt to draw together with the connectedness

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of a literary plot, the progression from beginning to end has the intensity of a dramatic movement. Of course, it is not drama in the narrower sense which we associate with the stage. The Hebrew people had no theater: their powerful dramatic genius projected itself wholly in the world of the spiritual. The dramatic movement of the Bible has for its stage the whole universe, for its period all time; God is the hero of this drama, and its plot is Divine Providence.

I

THE word "Testament" in modern English has lost the sense it had in the language of our translators, where it was equivalent to "Covenant." The Old Testament is the Covenant between God and a Chosen People; the New Testament is the Covenant between God and individual hearts. Indeed, "covenant" is the characteristic word of Scripture. The Bible is not a treatise on God;

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its theme is the intercourse between God and man, and successive covenants voice this intercourse with its varying shades of intimacy. The Bible opens with Abraham, the "Friend of God"; it culminates with One who declares, "I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."

But this Abraham does not appear until what stands as the twelfth chapter of our versions. The preceding eleven chapters make a Prologue to the Old Testament. The Old Testament itself is occupied with a covenant between God and a Chosen Nation; the Prologue glances at previous covenants between God and all mankind as represented in common ancestors. Adam appears as the first man; God enters into covenant with Adam; sin comes into the world, and a sinful world is swept away by the Flood. Then we have again a common ancestor of men in Noah; there is a covenant between God and Noah, having for its perpetual symbol the rainbow — the bridge of light linking heaven and earth. Sin again invades,

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but there is something more: the curious story of Babel suggests the separating languages that will ultimately make separating nations. Only then is it possible for one nation to be chosen out of the rest. But in what sense "chosen"? The words of the call make this clear: that in them all the families of the earth may be blessed. One nation is chosen for the high function of bringing the rest of the nations to the knowledge of its God.

The first Act of the Biblical Drama having thus opened, its successive stages are easily distinguished. Genesis, as the word implies, is the Origin of the Chosen People; it originates in the descendants of Abraham, later the children of Israel. We have a skeleton of historic framework connecting with the world in general; the essential literature is the stories of the patriarchs. Simple and vivid narration makes the Homer of the Bible; but this biblical epic is an epic of family life, family life that becomes slowly touched with the divine. Each story adds something to the advancing history.

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The Story of the Call of Abraham — half a page in length — narrates the most original thing ever done in the world. Abraham is inspired to found a nation that is to be distinguished, not by geographical or ethnological relations, but by a spiritual mission; the oriental household transforms itself into a nomadic people, and at every halt in the pilgrimage Abraham builds an altar to God. Some of the stories, like the Wooing of Isaac, are idyls of domestic life; they bring out also the care that is being taken to secure purity of descent. Isaac is seen on the altar of sacrifice, with the knife lifted to slay him: we see in symbol a people, yet latent in its ancestor, devoted to a mission; when the lifted knife is arrested we catch the spiritual idea of a “living sacrifice.” Some of the stories, like that of Lot, of Ishmael, of Esau and Jacob, filled with the pathos or bustling activities of family life, show one and another less worthy member dropping out of the line of succession. There is a climax in the Story of Joseph and his Brethren — master-

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piece for all literature of the single story; its extended length is justified as we note it connect the wandering people for a while with the world civilization of Egypt.

The second stage, covering three biblical books, is the Exodus, or Emigration from Egypt. This stage of emigration is also the consolidation of a family into a nation; it is accordingly treated as the constitutional history of Israel, and crowded with covenants or statistical documents such as would stand as appendices to a modern work of history. Twice only does the force of literary story come in. At the commencement we have the brilliant epic of the Plagues of Egypt, revealing the raw material out of which a nation is to be formed — slaves trembling beneath taskmasters. Towards the close we get the more spiritual Story of Balaam: it pictures a nation organized for victory, and the terror of surrounding peoples; the foreign prophet who is hired to curse it at the very sight of this people changes his curse into a blessing.

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All this portion of Scripture culminates in the great Book of Deuteronomy — the Farewell of Moses to Israel. It has the unusual literary form of a drama built up out of orations. Underlying the whole is a dramatic situation which has ever since fascinated the imagination of men: in the vast multitude gathered together Moses is the only one who realizes the land of promise, and Moses is the only one who will never see it. On the background of this pathetic situation we follow the succession of orations. In the first, Moses reveals the secret of his deposition from the leadership of Israel. In the second, Moses appears surrounded by the Levites and Elders; in his hand he holds the Book of the Covenant — first appearance in the world of the Bible, the revelation of God in written form; the appealing oration concluded, he solemnly hands over the Book of the Covenant to his successors. A still more imposing national function accompanies the third of the orations — the Oration at the Rehearsal of the Blessing and

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the Curse. The rehearsal of this solemn ceremony is interrupted before it is complete, and Moses takes into his own hands the matter of the Curse: scathing oratory of denunciation that finds a climax in an exodus reversed — Israel in Egypt selling themselves as bondmen to their enemies and finding no man to buy them. More oratory follows, and oratory gives place to song. We then reach the finale of the drama and the Passing of Moses. The whole multitude is assembled to see the last of their great leader; from the vast numbers of the people select representatives of the twelve tribes have come out and made a lane along which the departing leader will pass. With the failing step of extreme age he passes along this line, speaking as farewell words to each tribe, what to us may seem mystic expressions, what thrills the hearers as the war cries of each tribe. When at the end of this line of the tribes Moses turns round to take in for the last time the whole people at one view, for a moment all his old vigor comes

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back to him, and he raises his arms in the final blessing :

None is like unto God, O Jeshurun,
Who rideth upon the heavens for thy help,
And in his excellency upon the skies.

THE ETERNAL GOD IS THY DWELLING PLACE,
AND UNDERNEATH ARE THE EVERLASTING ARMS.

Then he turns away, and passes into the solitude of the mountain of vision, the solitary death, the burial in the sepulcher that no man knoweth. The curtain falls on the mourning of Israel for Moses.

All this constitutes the first of the grand divisions of Scripture, called in the language of Scripture itself THE LAW. It centers around legal ordinances ; its highest spiritual note is "holiness," in the earliest sense of that word — the organized separateness of Israel from the other nations of the world. In terms of literature, this corresponds to what is recognized as the exposition stage of a drama : the elaboration of the opening situation before the entanglement of the plot has appeared.

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This opening situation presents Israel as a theocracy amid the peoples, its only government the government of the invisible God. With the blessing of its founder Israel is dismissed to its sacred mission among the nations. No invincibility of warrior hosts is assured to it; but spiritual arms will forever be felt supporting. No region of earth is indicated as a final goal: wherever the eternal God is, there is the home of Israel.

II

THE element of entanglement in this biblical plot—to retain the phraseology of drama—appears in the intrusion of the practical spirit. The theocracy is a lofty spiritual ideal. But “we must be practical”: we must have kings to go before us in battle like the other nations. And so throughout religious history the standing problem is to maintain spiritual ideals amid complication of secular machinery by which they are to be

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realized in practice. We thus reach a transitional stage: it is the Transition from a Theocracy to a Secular Government. The characteristic word of this stage is the Judges: temporary and local kings raised up in times of emergency; apart from these "every man did that which was right in his own eyes," in other words, we have local but not national government. Against the meager historic framework stand out the strenuous stories of the Judges — of Joshua, of Gideon, of Barak, of Jephthah. Occasionally, for relief, we have such as the exquisite idyl of Ruth: the romantic friendship of a young woman for her mother-in-law, which brought a Moabitess into the ancestral lineage of David. Or, humor is made to carry on the work of divine providence, where the exuberant physical vitality of a Samson brims over in practical jokes, covering with ridicule the Philistine foe before whom the spirit of the Chosen People had begun to cower. With the great name of Samuel we have an anticipation of a later era; the judge is also

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a prophet, and the abortive kingship of Saul is a kingship under prophetic tutelage. The climax of this stage is the longest epic of the Old Testament, which centers around the names Saul, David, Jonathan. In Saul we have the broken kingship which belongs to the past; in David, the kingship "after God's own heart." The link between these is Jonathan: the natural heir finds himself bound to the man who is to supplant him by the tenderest tie of ideal friendship.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan!

Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women!

We now enter upon the most important division of the Old Testament. It should have as title, not The Kings, but The Kings and The Prophets. We recognize the underlying law of all free government, by which an administration that governs is confronted with an opposition that criticizes; in this case it is a Secular Government of Kings with Spiritual Opposition of Prophets. For the word

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“prophet” signifies “mouthpiece of God”; against a merely secular government the Prophets maintain the ideal of the theocracy. We have bare annals of the Kings, but spiritual stories of the Prophets told with vivid and moving detail. We should distinguish between the Earlier and the Later Prophets. The Earlier Prophets, like Elijah, are men of action; they come into literature as heroes of stories which others tell. The Later Prophets, such as Isaiah, without ceasing to be men of action, are also men of letters, voices of a great literary age. The stories of the Earlier Prophets, as in previous parts of the Bible, are fitted into the exact point of the historic framework to which they belong. It is otherwise with the Later Prophets. They are represented by miscellaneous “Books of the Prophets,” which we have ourselves to read into the continuous narrative of the historic framework. These Books of the Prophets reflect both sides of prophetic activity. At times we have an Isaiah or a Jeremiah, like Elijah or Elisha, con-

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fronting king or people in some momentary crisis. But there is more than this. What may have been the subject matter of some fifty or a hundred daily ministrations, stripped of all that is occasional or accidental, has been worked up afresh by the prophets into some higher literary form — of discourse, or song, or drama — and comes down to the ages with a message that is for all time.

David and Solomon, with all their errors, nevertheless ruled in the spirit of the theocracy. With the son of Solomon there comes a schism of the Chosen People. The northern tribes revolt and make a nation in themselves; they are soon absorbed into the idolatry of the surrounding peoples. Here then is the great field for prophecy, and this part of the Bible glows with the grand prophetic ministry of Elijah and Elisha. When the northern nation falls into captivity there ensues a reconstitution of the Chosen People of God. It had begun by being a nation; it is reconsecrated to its mission as the single tribe of Judah. The magnificent

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seventy-eighth psalm may stand in place of national anthem to this new Kingdom of Judah. By a favorite effect in Hebrew poetry, the pendulum swing of its strophes alternates between opposite thoughts, between the Divine energy on behalf of Israel on the one hand and on the other hand the human frailty that ever defeats the Divine purpose, until, as a climax, the "Lord awakes as one out of sleep," thrusts northern Ephraim contemptuously aside, and reconstitutes the people of his choice in the lineage of the shepherd David.

It is at this point that we realize fully how we have passed into the second of the grand divisions of Scripture. THE LAW has given place to THE PROPHETS. Instead of the holiness of a national organization we have new motives: the passion for Righteousness; the presentation of God as the Lover of Israel; confronting the evil that is in the world Righteousness and Love unite to make the supreme ideal of Redemption, and the final note of the whole Bible is already anticipated.

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Varied as may be its outer forms, the topics of prophetic literature sum up as two. The prophets sing of a Golden Age: a Holy Mountain, flowing with milk and honey; a serenity in which the wolf and the lamb lie down together, a little child leading them; songs of deliverance sound daily around wells of salvation. Greek poetry had its age of gold: but this was placed at the beginning of things, and later time was a slipping down to ages of silver, brass, stone. The Golden Age of the Hebrews is ever in the future: there is a spiritual tonic in the constant thought of a glorious consummation which the faithful are themselves to aid in bringing to pass. But side by side with this is the other topic of the purging Judgment through which alone the Golden Age may be reached; and reached only by the faithful remnant.

It is naturally here that the dramatization of the spiritual — the main contribution of the Bible to literary form — is most prominent. Speakers in such dramas are God and the Celestial Hosts;

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Israel Suffering, or Israel Repentant; the Saved and the Doomed, the East and the West, answer one another. The Voice of Prophecy has a dominant place in the dialogue; impersonal Voices and Cries help to carry on the movement; at times, like the chorales of a modern oratorio, hymns of meditation mark an emphatic point. In harmony with such spiritualized speakers we have a spiritualized dramatic scenery in snatches of prophetic vision. Sometimes these hardly transcend the domain of imagery: the judgment appearing as the burning of fire under the glory of the thickets until they roll upward in volumes of smoke; or as a Day of the Lord, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, when men fling away their idols to go into the caves and rocks and holes of the earth before the glorious majesty arising to shake mightily the world. At other times the scenic suggestion is more pronounced: as when the veil of judgment darkness that wraps the nations is suddenly rent, and the Mountain of Salvation stands out above a

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ruined world; from its embattled heights the songs of the Saved are heard telling of death swallowed up for ever and tears washed away from all faces.

The dramatic movement pervading the Old Testament reaches its point of greatest intensity as we gradually realize that this purging judgment in the earth is to involve the fall of Israel as a nation. But where the darkness is greatest, in the book of Jeremiah, there is a gleam of light beyond it, and we begin to hear of a New Covenant.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt: which my covenant they brake. . . . But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the LORD; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it.

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The Theocracy of a nation is to break down; it will give place to a Kingdom of God that is within men. The Old Covenant, the Old Testament, lingers in spirit to the days of John the Baptist. The New Testament, the New Covenant, has its germ in the Book of Jeremiah.

The Captivity is a parenthesis in the general movement of the Old Testament. Ezekiel ministering, in quaint yet strong forms of oratory, to the captives by the river Chebar; the stories in the books of Daniel and of Esther, which appeal to children and furnish critics their models of the grand style; these unite to present the Chosen People even in captivity witnessing for their God to the nations. The Return from Captivity is the return neither of a nation nor of a tribe; it is those who are anxious to restore the worship of God and renew the broken covenant who brave the journey across the desert to the Holy Land. Once more the Chosen People has been reconstituted: the Hebrew Nation has reappeared in the form of the Jewish Church.

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Alike the form of government and the prevailing spirit is ecclesiastical. The history of the Kings is recast in the form of ecclesiastical Chronicles, with all the prophetic stories eliminated. From THE PROPHETS we have reverted to THE LAW; the holiness of the first era has taken a new form in the ceremonialism that seeks to frame a "hedge about the Law." But the spirit of commentatorship which makes the scribe is also the spirit which initiates the collecting together of the rich literature of Israel. The supreme treasure of its collection is the Book of Psalms. Its prologue contrasts, under the exquisite image of the rooted Tree and the Chaff blown about by the wind, the meditative and the worldly life. What follows makes, for literature, the high water mark of lyric poetry. In the sphere of the spiritual, it is a manual of devotion that appeals equally to all ages and all varieties of mind; the psalms are the confidant of the soul in all the varying moods of its intercourse with God.

III

As there has been a Prologue, so there is an Epilogue to the Old Testament. This Epilogue, in our ordinary versions, does not stand separated from the rest of the Book of Isaiah; although those whose standpoint is history like to speak of the fortieth and following chapters as a "second Isaiah." In literary terms, this Epilogue is the most sublime of spiritual dramas; the great Rhapsody of "Zion Redeemed."

After the opening note of Jehovah's word of comfort for his people has been borne by a succession of voices across the desert that separates the land of exile from the Holy Land, the curtain rises upon the most stupendous scene in all prophecy. The nations of the earth, away to the farthest isles of the sea that make the boundary of the prophetic world, are summoned before the bar of God to hear of one scattering the nations like dust. It is the triumphal career of Cyrus among the peoples

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that makes the starting point of this drama. Touches of poetic scorn picture the assembling of the idolatrous peoples: the carpenter encourages the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smiteth the anvil; they look well to the soldering of the idols that they may be strong to encounter the true God; all the while that Israel is being brought to the place of meeting with journeying mercies. The imagination conceives the scene of the nations before the bar of God, the idolatrous nations on the one side and on the other side the Chosen People of Israel. Jehovah challenges the Idols, "to declare former things," "to shew things to come" — in other words, to put such significance on the whole course of events from first to last as will compare with the significance the true God is about to reveal. It is nothing less than a divine philosophy of all history that is about to be proclaimed from the throne of the universe. The Idols are dumb. Then Jehovah speaks his own interpretation of history. It is the proclamation

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of Israel as His Servant; and the service is to bring judgment to the nations. But not by violence; not by conquest. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench; by agencies gentle as the light shall he bring the nations to God. But as the interrupting hymns of adoration die down, the proclamation is heard continuing: how this Servant of Jehovah is blind, is deaf, is hid in the prison houses of the nations for his sins. Then is heard the note of redemption, enshrined in beautiful imagery.

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned. . . . I have given Egypt as thy ransom; Ethiopia and Seba for thee . . . since thou hast been precious in my sight.

In this quaint figure is poetically hinted, what Ezekiel expresses in plain prose, how that the triumph of the conqueror over the nations is the "wages" Jehovah gives him for his setting the

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Chosen People free. But it is not deliverance only. "Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears": Israel emerges from the prison houses of the captivity awakened at last to its sublime mission. In the second scene the awakened people is ministering to its own exiles, to afflicted Zion, and to the nations, inviting them "without money and without price" to return from their sins unto "our God."

But the central figure of this spiritual drama seems to undergo change as the movement proceeds. At the commencement, the Servant of Jehovah is unmistakably the Nation of Israel. A little later it is spoken of in terms that imply personality rather than nationality; as one who gives his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that pluck off the hair. In the very center of the poem — the climax of emphasis in the movement of Hebrew poetry — this Servant of Jehovah has become a Mystic Personality: the Chorus of Nations catch the great thought of vicarious sacrifice.

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He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities :
The chastisement of our peace was upon him ;
And with his stripes we are healed.

What is stranger still, from this point the expression "Servant of Jehovah" disappears altogether ; the central figure of the poem appears under another name. There are pictures of moral chaos, the Voice of Prophecy still striving to minister to those who are blindly groping for judgment. Jehovah is displeased that there is no intercessor ; His own arm shall bring salvation ; as a rushing stream which the breath of the LORD driveth, a Redeemer shall come to Zion. The Hymn of Zion Redeemed rings out ; as its lofty strains die away the Redeemer is pictured as entering Zion, speaking his message of peace.

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me ; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; . . . to comfort

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all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

It is now the REDEEMER who occupies the whole field of view; he is seen comforting Zion — no longer afflicted Zion — and calling on the Watchmen of Jerusalem to cast up the highway for those who are returning to the city of the redeemed. And, to mark the conclusion of the whole movement, there follows immediately the Day of Judgment: a judgment of chariots of whirlwind for the sinner; for the saved a new heaven and a new earth, Jerusalem and her lovers rejoicing together, her peace flowing like a river. And with this theme of Redemption triumphant the curtain falls on the Old Testament.

IV

THE gap between the Old and the New Testaments is filled with a new interest — Wisdom literature. This wisdom is of two kinds. In part, it

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is made up of brief sayings, bright in expression and profound, which convey particular aspects of human life. But there is also a higher Wisdom — often expressed in the literary form of personification — which is seeking to realize the harmony of all things. The nineteenth psalm delights to place side by side the starry heavens above and the law of God within us. So to the higher Wisdom the life without and the life within are one; the power that restrains from sin is akin to the power that holds the universe together.

The historic framework which gives connectedness to the Old and to the New Testament is entirely lacking in the books of wisdom. We have to supply it from secular history. What was going on in the world at large in the interval between the Old and the New Testaments? For one thing, the center of gravity of civilization was shifting steadily westward. The latest historical note of the Old Testament is the triumphal career of Cyrus the Persian. In the centuries that followed, the domination of the world passed from Persia to Greece, in the

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conquests of Alexander; before the New Testament is reached it has passed from Greece to Rome. But there is something more. It cannot be reiterated too often that the foundation of our modern culture and civilization lies in the union of two elements that come from antiquity, the union of Hellenic and Hebrew civilizations. What we call the secular in modern times is the continuation of what was begun for us by the Greeks. Of our spiritual nature the roots are not Greek but Hebrew; that Hebraic civilization which is reflected in the literature we call the Bible. These two things, Hellenic and Hebraic, were the grand originalities of antiquity; they were also separate one from the other, each working out its course independently. Now, it was in the interval between the Old and the New Testament that Hellenic and Hebraic civilizations were first brought together. The conquests of Alexander forced Greek culture upon the whole civilized world, and so upon the Jews. After strenuous opposition, forever associated with the glorious

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struggle of the Maccabees, Palestine was gradually Hellenized. Moreover, a new city named after the conqueror, the modern Alexandria, became a seat of Judaism hardly second to Palestine. All this has an important bearing upon wisdom literature, and upon the idea of human life which it embodies: what is involved is nothing less than the question of the immortality of the soul.

Hellenic civilization stood for the idea of immortality. But it was immortality in a sense that modern thought would entirely reject, for it was immortality apart from individuality. The soul, it was conceived, was in its nature indestructible. But individuality was something alien to the soul, something akin to evil; only after everything of personality had been purged away could be attained the immortality of the universal soul, individuality disappearing as a drop is lost in the ocean. Of immortality in this sense the Old Testament knows nothing. Where, in a few passages, it touches what is beyond death, the reference is to a concep-

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tion entirely different; the conception, common to all ancient civilizations alike, of a dim consciousness surviving even in the grave, an ever-waning consciousness which slowly goes out like a mist dispersing in air. On the other hand, Hebrew thought stood for the idea of Personality. It conceived God as a personal God. Of course, Greek thought had its personal deities; but with the Greeks Deity was only the second power in the universe; beyond Deity was the impersonal power of Destiny, for "not even Zeus can escape the thing decreed." It is the great achievement of the Bible that it strikes down once for all this idea of Destiny, with its paralysis of the moral energies; the word never occurs in the Bible, except in a few passages where those who "prepare a table for Fortune and fill up mingled wine unto Destiny" stand as synonyms for the wicked who are to be overwhelmed in the judgment. The Bible knows only of one supreme power in the universe, God expressed in terms of personality. This is not to be styled

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anthropomorphism; on the contrary, the supreme sin of the Old Testament is the sin that would make God in the likeness of anything in the heavens above or the earth beneath or the waters that are under the earth. God is conceived of as personal only because, after all search has been made, personality remains the highest conception of which the human mind is capable. It is the constitution of our eyesight which obliges us to see the horizon as circular; similarly, the finite can comprehend the infinite only in terms of what is its highest conception. There is nothing in this of limitation: as man's mind expands its horizon expands with it, and this horizon of man is God. The account then stands thus: of our two ancestral civilizations the one proclaims immortality apart from individuality, the other emphasizes personality ignoring immortality; when Hellenic and Hebraic civilizations come together the way is cleared for a conception that transcends both — the immortality of the individual soul.

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In Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus the idea of immortality is conspicuous by its absence. With the Book of Job, it is only in moments of spiritual insight that Job rises to the new idea. Intent upon the vindication of his innocence, which is also the vindication of the righteousness of God, Job is moved at times to a surety that, "even after worms have devoured this skin," he will see his heavenly Vindicator standing upon the earth. Even Job does not follow up these flashes of inspiration; and the other speakers in the dialogue entirely ignore them. Ecclesiastes comes from the Judaism of Palestine, at a time when the atmosphere of Palestine is full of this novel ideal of immortality; the Hebrew proclivities of the writer prevent the assimilation of the idea, and he plaintively exclaims, Who knoweth the spirit of a man that it mounteth upward, and the spirit of a beast that it goeth downward to the earth? From the Judaism of Alexandria comes the final book of wisdom; almost its opening words declare that God made not death, that right-

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eousness is immortal. With the sustained rhetoric of Greek style it pictures the life of the wicked as inspired by despair of aught beyond the grave, as led to antagonism against the righteous with their higher hope. Then the picture is reversed: from a dishonored grave those same wicked rise to learn how all the while "the souls of the righteous have been in the hand of God"; this triumph of "the righteous who live forever" contrasts with the vanity of the ungodly life that vanishes as foam before the tempest. Then all the elements of nature combine in a tempest of destruction that sweeps evil away. In the despair of Ecclesiastes the higher Wisdom had disappeared; its place was taken by a Vanity of vanities, an emptiness of all meaning in the sum of things. With the new hope is recovered the higher Wisdom, the Wisdom in which immortality has a place.

If, then, Wisdom literature makes an interlude between the Old and the New Testament, it is also a link binding them together. Wisdom is only

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meditation on life. But the life which passes from the Old to the New Testament is a life irradiated with the idea of immortality.

V

THE curtain rises on the Second Act of the Biblical Drama. The New Testament, like the Old, shows historic framework and higher literary forms. We have, first, the Acts and Words of Jesus: the Acts the framework to the Words. Then we have the Acts and Words of the Apostles; these Words taking the form of epistolary literature. There remains the single book that serves as epilogue, alike to the New Testament and to the Bible as a whole.

And a powerful dramatic movement underlies the whole New Testament. But here is found the difficulty which attaches to every case in which a work of ancient history is being followed by a modern reader — the difficulty that the reader knows the end from the beginning; what the course of the

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narrative presents of crises and climax is discounted beforehand by its familiarity. It needs distinct mental effort on the reader's part to place himself in the historic position of the events he is following. When this is done, the dramatic movement of the New Testament is abundantly evident; it is found in the slowly and gradually enlarging conceptions of Jesus Christ which the course of the narrative reveals. And this is a progression from zero to infinity.

With the instinct of an historian, Luke has indicated the starting point of this movement where he describes Jesus opening his ministry in the city where he had been brought up. The courtesies of the synagogue are extended to him; he is invited to read the lesson for the day and speak a word of exhortation. The lesson which it falls to him to read is the very passage of the Isaiahan rhapsody where the Redeemer is pictured as entering Zion.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; he hath sent me

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to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Returning the roll to the attendant, Jesus assumes the seat of authority. Luke writes that the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on Jesus; and we fancy the eyes of all history fastened on Jesus in this his first pronouncement on himself. The opening word is decisive: To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears. In unmistakable terms Jesus identifies himself with the Redeemer of Zion; the broken work of the Old Testament is resumed under his leadership. But with what result? Not a soul of those who hear accepts; on the contrary, there is a wrathful movement of the whole congregation as if for an act of lynching. With this blank negation of all claims there starts this slow progression in men's conception of Jesus Christ, until, before the end of the New Testament, language is strained to find for these conceptions expression.

In the first half of the gospel narrative Jesus

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appears as a Master, that is Teacher, with a band of Disciples, who slowly take on organization as Apostles. The teaching is in the form of the brief sayings and parables of wisdom literature; the theme is a kingdom of God on earth which, at this stage, might seem no more than the prophetic dream of a golden age expressed in the language of wisdom. Wonder works, which a later age of science will call miracles, accompany the teaching; and they are works of healing and mercy. A turning point comes in the Confession of Peter. Answering the challenge of Jesus, Peter leads the Disciples — but only the Disciples — in the recognition, Thou art the Christ, the King of this Kingdom of God on earth. Most decisive is the word of acceptance; playing upon the name of Peter (which signifies rock) Jesus declares that on the rock of this confession his Church stands founded. What follows is significant. “From that time,” writes Matthew — and Luke and Mark follow the same order of narration — “Jesus began” to speak of his suffer-

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ings and death at Jerusalem. What then follows is still more significant: when the idea of the Cross has thus been linked with the idea of the King we have the Transfiguration, — the momentary vision of Jesus in glory, with the Law and the Prophets, represented in Moses and Elijah, doing homage to the higher dispensation.

With slow stages of advance there follows a movement towards the sacred metropolis; on the one side, works of healing and teaching; on the other side, growing expectation of a kingdom to be revealed. The entry into Jerusalem is in kingly state, which echoes the imagery of Old Testament prophecy. The battle between old and new follows in daily clashes throughout the Temple and the holy city. The close of the conflict is not long delayed. Among the earlier parables of Jesus had been one which told of a barren fig tree, with the cry to cut it down met by pleas for mercy and time for amendment. At this point, the sight of a fig tree with a brave show of leaves and no fruit is

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lifted into a symbol: Henceforth no fruit shall grow on thee for ever! And Matthew groups the repeated denunciations of a barren religion into a Sevenfold Woe, echoing the Sevenfold Woe of Isaiah. Then follows a final word.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!

The King of the new kingdom of God on earth thus dissolves the old dispensation. Jesus, in the privacy of intimate communion with his followers, awaits the close of his ministry on earth.

VI

THESE last hours of Jesus with the Disciples, his Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, topics on which devotion loves to linger, all this is a pause in the

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onward movement of the Bible. It is when we reach the Acts of the Apostles that the full range of the New Testament becomes clear. The Christ of God's kingdom on earth has founded his Church; the Church of the New has superseded the national theocracy of the Old Testament. But what are we to understand by the Church? The word "ecclesia" exactly echoes the original "call" of Abraham and his descendants from among the nations. The high function to which this Church is called is to be "witnesses"; that to which they are to witness is an "evangel," a message of gladness. Thus THE GOSPEL makes the last of the grand divisions of Scripture, the final dispensation to which, in the Transfiguration, the Law and the Prophets had done homage. Apostles take the place of Prophets; holiness has a new meaning in a spiritual relation to Christ; the Law itself must yield to the higher and more exacting law of Christian "liberty."

The Book of Acts furnishes the historic background for this part of Scripture. No literary work was

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ever more clear in its structure, nor more complete, than the Book of Acts when once its purport is understood. The commission to the Apostles is twofold: they are to witness for Jesus (1) to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and (2) to the uttermost part of the earth. Obviously, the two parts of this commission stand in different relations to historic narrative. A few pages may relate the opening of the gospel to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. But how can a book of the first century deal with the opening of the gospel to the whole world, a process extending through the ages, imperfectly realized even now? All that is possible in a work of this date is to present the conception of world-evangelization; an ever enlarging conception of the message itself and the machinery by which it is to be propagated. The successive stages of this enlarging conception make the structure of the Book of Acts; and each successive stage is accentuated by vision, or by miracle, or by a combination of the two.

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The Opening of the Gospel at Jerusalem dates from the day of Pentecost. This incident of Pentecost is to the New what the incident of Babel was to the Old Testament; the latter foreshadowed a world falling apart into separating languages and nations, from the day of Pentecost the separated nations are to be drawn into the unity of the gospel. The many-peopled crowd at Jerusalem are confronted with a wonder: they see that all who speak to them are Galileans, yet "every man heareth in his own language wherein he was born." So throughout the ages those who speed on the gospel message can but speak it as they understand it; but those who receive the message, by a mystic process, reinterpret it, each in terms of his own national life and civilization.

From this starting point the first stage of advance is the Opening of the Gospel to the Gentiles. The modern reader, himself probably a gentile, takes this as a matter of course; to the New Testament world this is a perpetual stumbling block, the unthink-

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able idea that men could become Christians without first becoming Jews. The vision of Peter reveals the new idea. The miraculous conversion of Paul brings the instrument for realizing it; a leader combining Hellenic and Hebraic culture, a means of mediation between the two halves of the intellectual world.

We are confronted with two Christianities; a Jewish Christianity centering at Jerusalem, a Gentile Christianity with its seat at Antioch, where first the followers of Jesus are called "Christians." An incident of this Church at Antioch reads like a second Pentecost; by sudden revelation is brought to the Church the idea, to us so familiar, that the machinery for the propagation of the gospel lies, not in any scheme of conquest or enterprise, but in the simple missionary journey. The missionary spirit is interwoven into the framework of Christianity; the Church can stand only by forever advancing.

The itineraries of Paul are no more than a detail.

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The crisis that follows appears where these journeyings seem mysteriously checked: the apostles would move in one direction and are hindered, they would move in another direction and "the spirit of Jesus suffers them not." Vision comes to their aid: the vision of a man of Macedonia crying, Come over and help us. Macedonia is Europe: the new stage of advance is the extension of the gospel from Asia to Europe; from stationary Asia to progressive Europe; from Asia, where religions naturally rise and tend to stagnate, to Europe, in which Christianity will leaven the whole evolution of the world's civilization.

A new departure soon follows, affecting the machinery of world-evangelization. Paul, grappling with his heavy task in the large cities of Europe, is commanded in vision to undertake a more settled ministry. The effect of this is indirect: prevented by such extended residence in Corinth or elsewhere he can no longer make his frequent visits to the other churches, and must keep in touch with them

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by letters. Thus the machinery of the missionary journey is supplemented by this new organ of ecclesiastical literature. The Pastoral Epistles begin, which we must read into the proper place for each in the historic framework of the Book of Acts. These Pastoral Epistles make a counterpart to the Books of the Prophets; like those Books of the Prophets they deal alike with what is transient and what is permanent. Each epistle seems called forth by some burning question; in each there is a widening out to fundamental ideas of the new religion. In the Church of Thessalonica some of the brethren have died: have these fallen out of the Christian hope? The Epistles to the Thessalonians reassure on this point, but go on to the whole topic of the resurrection. The Epistle to the Galatians is called forth by the antagonism of Judaizing Christianity; the fiercely controversial tone of the epistle does not preclude enlargement on the sublime conception of spiritual liberty, a liberty the restraining power of which transcends law. Particular matters

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of only antiquarian interest draw the Epistles to the Corinthians; the passing problems are met, but the argument from time to time opens up basic religious ideas. The resurrection of Jesus is made the spiritual resurrection of his followers; the Church is conceived as a vital organism; above all, the new attitude to all humanity can find no word in current language to express itself, until it transforms the old word "love" into a new meaning, a spiritual climax beyond even the climaxes of faith and of hope.

It might seem as if we had here commenced a progression that would extend through the ages to our own time and beyond. But for the age of the New Testament there is a point of finality: the world is a unity under the headship of Rome. Hence a climax to the Pastoral Epistles is found in the Epistle to the Romans. Here it is no longer single questions, but the whole conception of the "new righteousness" which is unfolded; an exposition which is at the same time a harmony of Hellenic

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and Hebraic, the Old Testament and the New, Law and Gospel; and it is addressed to an audience which stands for universal civilization.

With Paul a prisoner in Rome we lose the historic framework of the Book of Acts. A framework may be supplied by inference from the books of the New Testament that follow. It may occur to many readers of Scripture to wonder why the New Testament ends just where it does end, and why the narrative is not continued to take in the centuries that succeed. But the age of the primitive Church was sharply sundered from succeeding times by a peculiar idea which possessed the minds of the first Christians. It was the idea that their age was "the last times," that the end of the world was close at hand. The expected consummation they express sometimes as the second "coming of Christ"; sometimes they use the more significant phrase, "the revelation of Jesus." Closely following the day of Pentecost the idea appears in the community of goods; if the world is near its end,

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what use is there in property, unless to relieve immediate needs of the poorer brethren? Given an absorbing ideal like this, it is natural that the longer the consummation is delayed the keener becomes the expectation of the crisis. It is this quickened expectation of the near coming of Christ that makes the framework into which we can read the remaining books of the New Testament. Shorter epistles — of Timothy, of Titus, of Peter, of Jude, of John — are filled with emphasis on the idea of the last days, the end of all things. In the larger works, under the tension of this quickened expectation, the always enlarging conception of Jesus Christ and his gospel is seen to advance by leaps and bounds.

We have the Epistle to the Ephesians, with its characteristic word “mystery.” It must be understood that this word in the New Testament never has its modern meaning. The reference is always to popular religions of the time known as “Mysteries.” Such Mystery Religions involve two things: there is an imposing outward ceremonial, open to

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all the world, but there is also a hidden meaning of such ceremonial known only to the initiated. In this spirit the Epistle to the Ephesians speaks of the "mystery of Christ," the "mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God," the mystery of "summing up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth." The idea is startling in its boldness: as if the whole natural course of visible things, which men call history, was but an outward show, the hidden meaning of which had now been revealed as Jesus Christ.

We have again the Epistle to the Colossians. Here the thought is of another type of popular religions, of which the characteristic word is *pleroma*, or "fullness." Based on the feeling of the awful distance between humanity and deity, such religions essayed to "fill up" the gap with a graded hierarchy of "Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers." Turning upon them their own word, the Epistle declares that in Jesus "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Dominions and

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Principalities are a mockery: Jesus Christ "fills up" the whole interval between man and God.

All the while without respite is continuing the struggle against Judaizing Christianity, the foundation of which is insistence upon the rite of circumcision. When we reach the Epistle to the Philippians, another word "concision" is contemptuously applied to this Jewish rite; the word "circumcision" is spiritualized into a connection of the soul with Christ.

In what is entitled "An Epistle to Hebrews," we find the most intensely Hebraic of Hebrews addressing his fellow Hebrews. He maintains, in close argument and sonorous eloquence, that the whole Mosaic law and priestly ceremonial was but a preparation for a higher covenant of which the mediator is Jesus Christ. The honored roll of Israel's worthies become a "cloud of witnesses" encompassing those who find in Jesus the author and finisher of their faith.

The advancing religion has absorbed into itself

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and given new meaning to the popular religions, and the religion of Jewish law. Now comes a tribute from another quarter. The Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew, read in their correct literary structure, are found to be cast in the forms of wisdom literature. In Matthew, so soon as the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven has sounded, there follows, expressed in a chain of maxims, the Sermon on the Mount, as it were the *magna charta* of this new kingdom of heaven. With the underlying image of the winnowing fan, under operation of which the chaff is scattered and the wheat drawn closer together, the sections that follow alternate between this wheat and chaff, between the Church accepting and the hardening world rejecting the spiritual message. At its opening this alone of the four gospels mentions the visit of the Wise Men from the East to Jerusalem. When the close of its narration reaches what in other gospels is the mountain of the ascension, Matthew omits even to mention the ascension of Christ into heaven :

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to its last word this is the gospel of the kingdom of God on earth. In all this we see wisdom literature paying its tribute to Jesus Christ.

Wisdom is the philosophy of the Hebrews; but a widely different Greek philosophy pervaded the age of the New Testament. Its favorite form was that of dialectic disputation. Among the subtlest of its questions was the haunting problem of the connection between Mind and Matter. Now, language is the most obvious medium by which the world of thought passes out into the external world; hence THE WORD had become a supreme symbol in Greek philosophy. The fourth gospel preserves one aspect of the life of Jesus absent from the other gospels: it exhibits Jesus in dialectic disputation with the Jews of Jerusalem. And the prologue to this gospel is an intricate philosophical argument, leading to the startling climax that THE WORD HAS BEEN MADE FLESH, and has dwelt visibly among men in the person of Jesus Christ.

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VII

THE whole course of the New Testament has been marked by advancing attempts to grasp the significance of Jesus Christ; in the later books the thoughts presented have been such as strain the mind to comprehend and language to express. The separate elements in this conception of Jesus Christ are, by the final book of the New Testament, drawn together into a fullness of illumination which makes the whole New Testament and the whole Bible a unity.

Most unfortunately, no book in all literature has suffered so much from the vagaries of interpreters as this last book of the Bible. Historical scholars could without difficulty reckon up a hundred different interpretations of this one book; a sure indication that something has gone wrong with the process of interpreting. Nor is the error far to seek. There has been a general tendency to leave out the literary factor of interpretation; this is

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only one of several factors, yet essential, for it is impossible to grasp the matter of a piece of literature without first realizing the literary form.

The title of the book is Revelation, though, by a curious perversity, it is popularly quoted as if in the plural — *Revelations*. The word has more than one meaning in Scripture; are we to look for revelation of the future, as in the Book of Daniel, or revelation of types and symbols, as in the revelation to Moses in the Mount, or is there some third significance? The question is answered by the opening words of the book itself, which pronounce it THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. It deals with the future only as it deals with the past or present. No doubt the wording of the book contains such phrases as “things which must shortly come to pass,” or, “the time is at hand”; but these phrases associate themselves with the fixed idea of the New Testament Church, and as such could only refer to an immediate future. So far as the primitive Christians looked for the second “com-

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ing of Christ" as close at hand, their expectation has been belied by the event. But when we turn to the other phrase in which they voice their hope — "the revelation of Jesus" — here we find it announced in the book that closes the New Testament canon. Men had expected the Messiah to appear as a conquering warrior; they found him in a babe at Bethlehem. The first Christians expected the revelation of Jesus in a shattered universe; it was vouchsafed to them in an outpouring of prophecy.

The content of the book is found to be a succession of visions which pass like dissolving views before the eye of the imagination. Our imagination must fully grasp these visions before the work of the interpreter can begin. Unfortunately, interpretations of the book are often offered us by persons whose powers of imagination are too feeble for anything more spiritual than arithmetic. What is a vision? The popular idea is of a sort of supernatural telescope, by which (for example) Ezekiel by the River Chebar could see exactly what was

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going on at the moment in Jerusalem; or John in the Isle of Patmos could scan events in the far future. This is entirely out of keeping with the use of the word in Scripture. In reality, the symbolism of the Bible is extremely simple. Its foundation is a peculiarity of prophetic discourses, which had their starting point, not like modern discourses in a verbal "text," but in some piece of emblematic or other visible action — Ezekiel seen joining together the broken pieces of a stick, Jeremiah wearing in the streets of Jerusalem the wooden collar of slavery. When the emblematic action, instead of being performed by the prophet, is supernaturally presented to him, we have a vision in the Biblical sense of the word.

There is another consideration. Here we have an elaborate poem built up out of symbolic details. On examination, no one of these symbolic details is new; they are all echoes of Old Testament symbolism. We recognize the important principle of literary echoing, which pervaded poetry from

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the age of Homer to the age of Milton, though it is almost entirely lacking in the literature of modern times. But nowhere is this literary echoing more significant than in this Book of Revelation, where it is a tribute to the supreme sacredness of the theme. The author will not use a single symbol which has not been sanctified by association with ancient scripture. The reader then must not seek to interpret what seems symbolic by ingenuity or guesswork; he must turn to the Old Testament, and be prepared to see an old thought in a new adaptation.

The meaning of this Book of Revelation ceases to be perplexing when, instead of an exegesis that wanders among symbolic details, we seek an interpretation of perspective, which surveys the book as a whole, and notes how its parts hang together. But even here it is possible to go astray. In modern literature we are accustomed to look for some climax or catastrophe coming near the end of a poem. In a broader survey of literature, and

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especially in the Bible, there is another type of poetic movement which has its turning point in the very center of the poem. This type of poetic movement has been beautifully compared to the figure of an arch—a most helpful suggestion. For, in the figure of the arch, not only is the turning point in the center, but this central turning point is also the foundation of the whole, the keystone of the arch. Moreover, the principle of symmetry comes in: for everything we find on the one side of the turning point we may expect a point of correspondence on the other side. This is not a mere matter of artistic beauty: such symmetry is a key to interpretation. In the present case, traditional interpretation, with its prepossession for revelation of the future, concentrates attention on the concluding chapters of Revelation as a storehouse of eschatological secrets. Meanwhile the real climax of the poem, to which all the rest is only accessory, it has passed over as a detail at the center.

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The literary form, then, of the book may be thus summed up. Between a Prologue of the Words to the Seven Churches, and an Epilogue of the Seven Last Words, we have a succession of Seven Visions passing like dissolving views before the imagination; these Visions are built up of symbols, all echoing the symbolism of the Old Testament; and the master thought which binds the whole into a unity is to be looked for at the center and not at the close.

As we pass from the Prologue to the First Vision, heaven opens: all that belongs to time or space has disappeared. What Ezekiel had seen as a vision of movement is here beheld in the eternal splendor of repose: the Throne of Deity, rising out of the crystalline sea, he that sits thereon lost in the light of his own glory, rainbow-fringed. Around are the thrones of lesser powers: Elders around the Ancient of Days. Powers of Nature are added: thunders and lightnings and voices proceeding out of the throne. Where Ezekiel's vision of move-

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ment had given us wheels within wheels mystically moving, in this vision of repose we have the seven lamps of fire burning, spiritually linking every part of the universe with the central throne. Powers of life are added: eyes that flash, wings that wave, forms that distinguish. And all blends in an unceasing Holy, Holy, Holy, adoration of Being that was, and is, and is to come.

But the vision becomes modified to the eye of the seer. In the hand of him that sits upon the throne is seen a Book. It is a sealed Book. It is a Book sealed with Seven Seals. With the intensity of dream emotion the seer weeps that no one is worthy to open the book and loose the seals. A voice of comfort is heard proclaiming that the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath overcome to open the book and loose the seals. While this echo from the Blessing on the Tribes is yet in our ears, lo, a great surprise: no Lion, but a Lamb standing as though it had been slain. Associations begin to gather from the Isaiahan rhapsody, of one led as a

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lamb to the slaughter, sheep before shearers dumb; associations from John the Baptist's Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. When to the Lamb is transferred the Book of mystery, all heaven's adoration is transferred with it; the sevenfold adoration is heard of power and wisdom and riches and might and honor and glory and blessing. And there is a new symbol, golden bowls full of incense rising, interpreted in the vision itself as the prayers of the saints, not seen until the Lamb has become the center of view. As this incense rises and fills the whole scene, the First Vision begins to dissolve, and dissolves away; leaving on the memory two thoughts — the Book sealed with Seven Seals, and the Lamb standing as though it had been slain. Against a background of eternity is seen the Mystery of Time, as a Book sealed with Seven Seals; over against it is the symbol of that by which the mystery will be unfolded, the Lamb standing as though it had been slain.

And now the Second Vision begins to loom upon

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the eye of the imagination, and we reach the idea of Judgment, the Scriptural expression for divine providence. But the second vision is Judgment Potential: powers of judgment pass before us, but are not as yet seen in their sphere of operation. The symbolism is a blending of Jeremiah and Zechariah. Jeremiah had sung of a fourfold woe: captivity, and the sword, and famine, and death. Zechariah's vision had shown horses — red, sorrel, and white — spirits of ministration coursing through the earth to carry into execution what Jehovah should ordain for his people. Now the two symbols blend, and there is meaning in the colors of the horses. As the First Seal is opened, there passes the White Horse; he that sits on it has the bow that taketh captive. As the Second Seal is opened, there passes the Red Horse; its rider has the sword of war. As the Third Seal is opened, there passes the Black Horse; and its rider holds in his hand a balance, which the prophecies of Ezekiel have accustomed us to connect with the careful weighing

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of food in famine. With the opening of the Fourth Seal, there passes the Pale Horse of Death. When the Fifth Seal is opened, precisely as in the Vision of Zechariah, the souls of the martyred beneath the altar raise their cry of Lord, How Long? When the Sixth Seal is opened, from all over the field of prophecy are gathered just those symbols which tell of immediate doom. As in Joel, the sun becomes of the color of sackcloth and the moon of blood; with an echo from Nahum, the stars drop from heaven as a shaken fig tree casting its figs; as in Isaiah, the sky rolls up as a scroll, mountains and islands move out of their places, kings of earth and bondmen and freemen hide themselves in caves and rocks; as in Hosea, men are heard crying to the mountains and the rocks to fall on them and hide them. But there is a sudden restraining. Precisely as in Ezekiel's vision of Jerusalem, when slaughter was that moment to be unloosed, it was checked until one appearing like a writer with his inkhorn should note the faithful to be spared, so

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here we have a momentary glimpse of the four winds of heaven held back that they blow not on the earth until the saints of God have been sealed on their foreheads. In ordered ritual we have the sealing of the successive tribes of Israel, and then a great surprise: the vast multitude that no man can number, out of every nation and kindred and tribe, arrayed in white robes with palms of victory in their hands. Then only may the Seventh Seal be opened: there falls upon the scene a great silence. It is the silence of expectation: for the Second Vision is dissolving and fading away; the Second Vision, like the First, pointing onwards to the consummation in the center of the poem.

The Third Vision breaks, and judgment begins to move forward. But at every point it is checked: this Third Vision is Judgment Imperfect. The symbolism is that of the Seven Angels with their trumpets: mystic trumpets like those before which the walls of Jericho fell flat, trumpet tones such as those that open a prophetic Day of Judgment.

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Hitherto judgment has taken the forms of ordinary life — captivity, famine, war: we now pass into the region of miracle. As the First Angel sounds, the Plagues of Egypt appear intensified; hail and fire mingled with blood are cast from heaven upon the earth: yet only a third part of the earth is burnt up. As the Second and Third Angels sound, we have passed from wonders of the Law to wonders of the Prophets; ideas of Jeremiah appear, the burning mountain cast into the sea, the star wormwood cast upon rivers and fountains; yet but a third part of creatures in the sea and in the rivers perish. When the Fourth Angel sounds, Isaiah's miracle is reversed; yet it is but a third part of the light of sun and moon and stars which is darkened. Four times judgment has descended from on high. With the sounding of the Fifth Angel, judgment breaks out from beneath: the abyss opens like a furnace rolling out its clouds of smoke, like the locust cloud of Joel, yet a destructive power limited in that it may torment but may not kill. As the

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Sixth Angel sounds, judgment appears at Euphrates, mystic center of the earth, and spreads to the four quarters of heaven; all powers of destruction seem massed together, and yet it is but a third part of what is left in the earth that may be destroyed.

But will there not be an end of all this restraining when yet another Angel is seen, sphered in the clouds, crowned with the rainbow, one foot upon the sea and one foot upon the earth; when he speaks, not seven trumpets, but the seven thunders utter their voices? There comes a restraining of another kind: the seer is bidden to seal up and write not what the seven thunders utter. The sense of restraint is the keener, because already this Angel has been seen to lift up his hand to heaven and swear by him that liveth forever that when the Seventh Angel has sounded there shall be finished the mystery spoken as gospel to the prophets. Yet something of significance comes to us; for, with an echo from Ezekiel, the seer becomes himself a part of the vision, and receives from the

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Angel the little book, so sweet in the mouth, so bitter when swallowed. He must himself pour forth prophetic utterances: mysterious, yet each word an echo of what is familiar. They echo the measuring wand of Ezekiel, and the sons of oil of Zechariah; they tell of power, like Elijah's, to shut the heaven that it rain not for a period, power, like that of Moses, to plague the earth and turn the river into blood; they hint of the Jerusalem that killeth the prophets; of dry bones, as in Ezekiel's vision, and how breath from God enters them and the dead stand upon their feet. It is as our mind is laboring with these prophetic utterances, wrapped in mystery and imperfection, that the long expected Seventh Angel sounds with his trumpet, and all heaven bursts into the shout that brings the consummation towards which all has been working:

The kingdom of the World is become
The kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ:
And He shall reign forever and ever.

The Mystery of Prophecy is unsealed in Christ!

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We thus reach the Central Vision, the keystone of the arch. As a Vision of Salvation it towers above the other Visions of Judgment. And its theme is, the Kingdom of the World becoming the Kingdom of Christ.

It must pass through its seven phases. In the first phase we have the "woman with child" of Isaiah, and the Serpent of Genesis waiting to devour that which should be born of the woman: thus is symbolized the origin of the contest between the Kingdom of the World and the Kingdom of Christ. In the second phase it is a contest in heaven: Michael and his angels warring against the Dragon and his angels. In the third phase it is a contest on earth: the Dragon making war upon the woman that gave birth to the child: this is enshrined in the primitive symbolism of all poetry, familiar from Job and Isaiah, the conflict of the water and the earth. In the fourth phase we see beast-like forms, tempting in their detailed suggestiveness, but it is enough that they symbolize brute force arrayed

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against the Kingdom of Christ. The beast-like form of the fifth phase has "horns like a lamb": as if the symbolism of the two sides of the contest had become entangled, the dreadful thought of holiness on both sides of the conflict. In the sixth phase we see the followers of the Lamb arrayed for war, singing the song that none can learn but themselves; at a distance it is as the sound of thunder, close at hand it is sweet as harpers harping with their harps. The seventh phase brings the white cloud of judgment, and he that sits on it is like unto a son of man. The sickle of Joel's vision marks the ripe time for harvest; with an echo from Isaiah, the vintage of this harvest will be cast into the winepress of the wrath of God. The glassy sea glows with the fire of victory, and the whole culminates in the Song of Moses and the Lamb: song of Moses, first salvation of the people of God by the Red Sea, the song of the Lamb, the final salvation of all.

But all that is left imperfect must be brought

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to completion, now that the key to all mystery has been unveiled. There is a Fifth Vision that balances the Third. The Third Vision had been Judgment Imperfect; the Fifth Vision is Judgment Consummated. For symbolism the Third Vision had the Seven Angels with their trumpets; in the Fifth Vision we have Seven Angels with their golden Bowls — the “Cup of the Lord’s Fury,” reserved in prophecy for dooms spoken against the enemies of God’s people. As before, we have judgment poured out on earth, on sea, on rivers and fountains, on the sun, on the throne of the beast beneath, on Euphrates. The whole culminates in the long-drawn Mystery of Babylon; judgment poured out upon the actual Babylon of Jewish history, on Tyre, on a city seated on seven hills: we catch the thought that every city setting itself against the kingdom of Christ is included in this Mystery of Babylon. So the Sixth Vision supplements the Second: that was Judgment Potential, this is Judgment Enthroned. For the

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many horses of the Second Vision we hear now of but one horse, for he that rides on it is called Word of God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords: he hath another name which none knoweth but himself. The end of this Sixth Vision displays the thrones of judgment which once Daniel had seen; the dead, great and small, stand to be judged. Finally, death and Hades are cast into the fire of destruction.

The first Vision had given us the eternal repose of Deity, before the slightest ripple of mystery — mystery that craves solution — had come to disturb. The Seventh Vision gives us the peace that is on the other side of judgment. We see a new heaven and a new earth; a New Jerusalem adorned as a bride. From Ezekiel comes once more the measuring wand for marking out the fair proportions of God's commonwealth on earth; from the Isaiahan rhapsody come further touches of beauty — pavement of transparent gold, foundations of precious stones. We go back to the Book of Ezekiel for the river of the water of life flowing from the

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throne to purify the streets of the city. And there is one symbol more. The first symbol of Genesis becomes the last symbol of Revelation — the Tree of Life, lost from Eden, reappearing beside the water of life, with leaves for the healing of the nations.

The procession of symbolic wonders, oppressing the imagination as they pass, these are not the revelation itself, but the poetic movement that makes a climax of the revelation when it comes in clear unfigurative language. This is not the first time that such movement of thought has appeared in Scripture. When Elijah at Horeb is awaiting what is to him a supreme revelation, it is written that a great wind rent the rocks and tore them in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice, and in this voice the divine message was heard. So here,

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forms of mystery advance, and raise our expectations, but they retreat: yet higher mysteries advance and excite our expectations the more, yet these again retreat. At last we hear, no longer a still small voice, but the shout of all heaven's hosts, bringing as final consummation the full REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

To this climax has the whole movement of the Bible, with its divine philosophy of things, been steadily advancing. The Bible is not history, it is not ethics, it is not theology, although it is a fountain from which all these may draw inspiration. These things divide men into specialists; in the sphere of the spiritual all are one. Who defines God denies him, cried Spinoza. But the Bible has no formula for God. It is concerned with the spiritual intimacy between man and God; an intimacy open to all varieties of men, in all ages and in all climes. At the beginning a Friend of God sets out to bring to his God the rest of the world; his descendants make a nation, with the sublime ideal of

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a national theocracy; but even a national theocracy must give way before a kingdom in the hearts of men. The first thought is of conquest: before the Old Testament is complete it is seen as a conquest that knows no force, that works by the agency of the light, by the compelling power of vicarious suffering. The Golden Age to come inflames our hopes; the purging Judgment forever at work keeps us from slipping into a truce with evil. A sure foundation is Righteousness; but it is Righteousness that is linked with Love; both unite in the supreme ideal of Redemption that brings evil itself to good. Even Law is but a transition stage to a Liberty in which Law is lost in its own inspiration. Where a world has bowed down before external forces—of Destiny that crushes men's spirits, or Fortune that mocks them—the Bible knows of only one supreme power in the universe; in its highest conception of Personality, a conception forever enlarging, it frames its God; in personality alone is immortality. When the

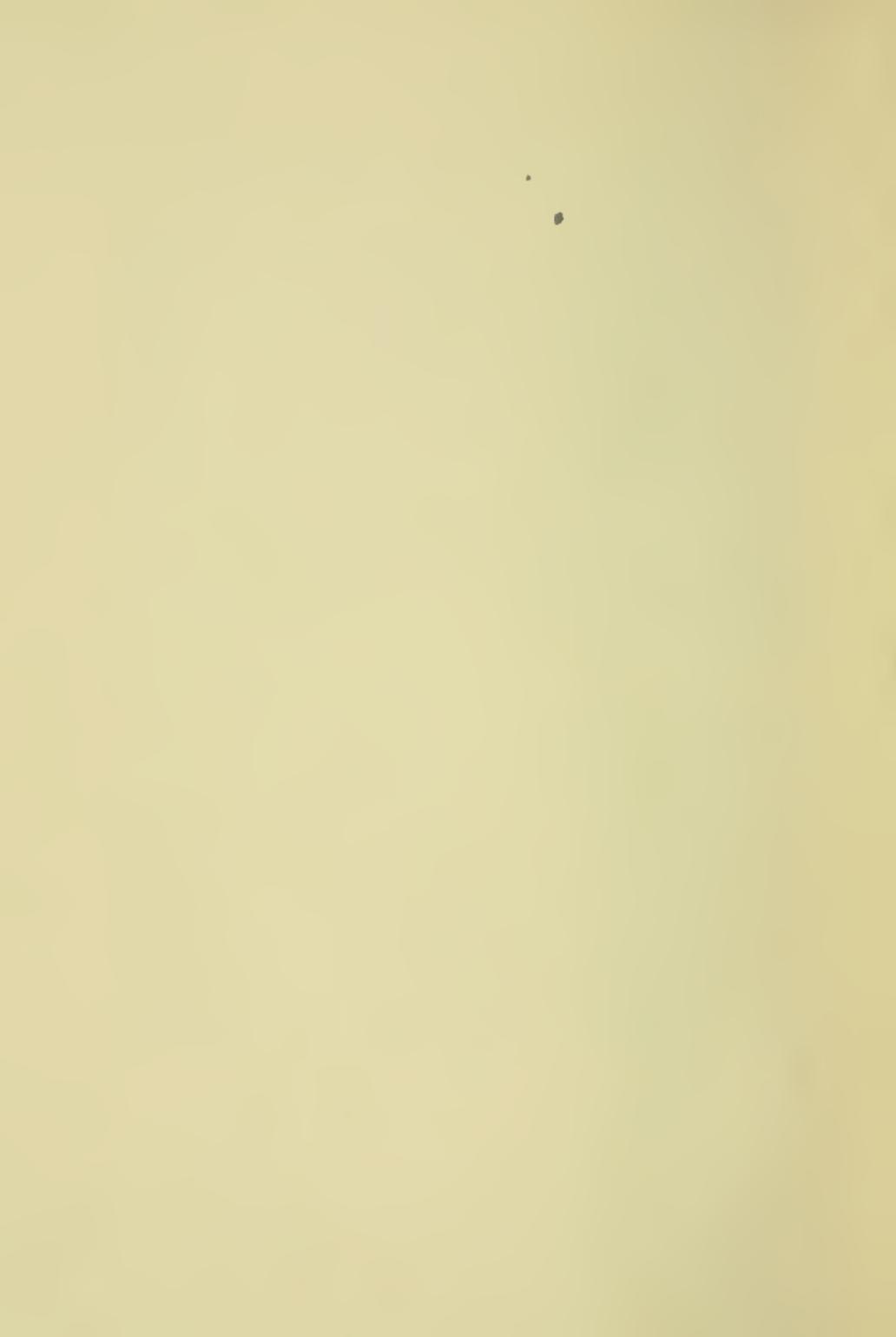
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New Testament is reached, all lines meet in Jesus Christ. The Master becomes a King; the link between the King and his followers is the Cross. To be witnesses to this message of gladness is the mission of the Church, through the ages, to the uttermost part of the earth. Apart from this, the whole course of things is but the outward show of a Mystery with the hidden truth unrevealed. Finally, all powers of imagination are strained to frame an exaltation — a kingship above all kings, a lordship above all lords: but this exaltation is for the Redeemer of the world.

This sublime poem, which thus closes the canon of the New Testament, also brings home to our minds the question what, from the standpoint of literature, we are to think of the Bible as a whole. This library of some seventy books, by different writers, in different languages, in every variety of literary form — is it only the enterprise of printers which has bound its separate books into a single volume? Or is this merely a reading list, the

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seventy best books of the churches? Or are we to look for an inner and spiritual unity? It seems to be the mission of the final book of the canon to make this unity with its thought that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." From all over the field of prophecy, which is spiritual poetry, are gathered gems of symbolism to make a crown for the consummation of prophecy. All history, past, present and to come, sums up as the Kingdom of the World becoming the Kingdom of Christ.



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HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

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WHATEVER other uses men may wish to make of the Bible, our first and paramount duty is to READ IT.

This may sound like a mere truism. But in fact, the straightforward reading of the Bible has been made a very difficult thing owing to an accident that happened to the sacred scriptures during their transmission through the centuries. Many readers of the Bible seem unaware of this accident; scholars, who cannot but know the fact, are too intent upon their special questions to give the fact its proper emphasis.

How current versions misrepresent the Bible

It is a matter connected with the nature of ancient manuscripts. All manuscripts, in all languages, older than about the first or second century of the Christian era, were entirely lacking in literary "form." By such "form" is meant distinctions of prose and verse, of dialogue and narrative, of sentences, paragraphs and the like. A page of an ancient manuscript shows nothing but alphabetical letters, not divided into words, still less into sentences with punctuation; no names of speakers in dialogue appear, nor is there any division of the speeches; there is no distinction of lines in verse, still less of

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Passage of Scripture
as it would appear in an Ancient Manuscript

THE VOICE OF HIM THAT CRIETH IN THE WILDERNESS PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD MAKE STRAIGHT IN THE DESERT A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE EXALTED AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL SHALL BE MADE LOW AND THE CROOKED SHALL BE MADE STRAIGHT AND THE ROUGH PLACES PLAIN AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD SHALL BE REVEALED AND ALL FLESH SHALL SEE IT TOGETHER FOR THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HATH SPOKEN IT THE VOICE SAID CRY AND HE SAID WHAT SHALL I CRY ALL FLESH IS GRASS AND ALL THE GOOD LINES HERE OF IS AS THE FLOWER OF THE FIELD THE GRASS WITHERETH THE FLOWER FADETH BUT A USE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD BLOWETH UP ON IT SURELY THE PEOPLE IS GRASS THE GRASS WITHERETH THE FLOWER FADETH BUT THE WORD OF FOUR GODS SHALL STAND FOREVER

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Passage of Scripture as it would appear in full literary structure

[*Voices carry on the tidings across the desert to Jerusalem*]

A VOICE OF ONE CRYING

Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the LORD,
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be exalted,
And every mountain and hill shall be made low :
And the crooked shall be made straight,
And the rough places plain :
And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together :
For the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

A SECOND VOICE (*in the distance*)

Cry!

A DESPAIRING VOICE

What shall I cry?
All flesh is grass
And all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field :
The grass withereth,
The flower fadeth,
Because the breath of the LORD bloweth upon it :
Surely the people is grass!

THE SECOND VOICE

The grass withereth,
The flower fadeth :
But the word of our God shall stand for ever.

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anything like stanzas. If the reader will look at page 86 he will see a familiar passage of Scripture in the form in which it would appear in such a manuscript, the language being changed to English. On the opposite page he will see the same passage with its literary form and structure restored in the way which is taken for granted in the case of any modern book, or of ancient literature intended for modern readers.

What has been said applies to all ancient literature; the poems of Homer, or the Greek tragedies, were preserved in this kind of manuscript. But a difference arises. All other ancient literature was in the hands of literary men, who in spite of the manuscripts were keenly sensitive to literary form. Accordingly, when the advance in manuscripts came which enabled the page to reflect the form, these literary men gave to what they were preserving its true form; Homer came out as epic poetry, Sophocles as dramatic dialogue. But at the corresponding period the Bible was in the hands of scribes and rabbis who were not literary men but commentators. They scrupulously preserved the *words* of Scripture, but had no interest in literary form; their idea of Scripture was that of material for commentary, each clause being made the subject of lengthy discussions. Accordingly, when

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the advance in writing reached these commentators, the form they gave to Scripture was that of *Texts for comment*. These "texts" were mechanically numbered for convenience of references, and collected in convenient "chapters." In this form of mechanically numbered chapters and verses the Bible is circulated in modern times; and the great mass of Bible readers only think of it as in chapters and verses.

Such versions unconsciously misrepresent the real Bible. It is a double misrepresentation. As so read, there is an absence of the forms of dialogue or narrative, prose or verse, which belong to all other literature. On the other hand, there is the form of chapters and verses mechanically numbered, which is no part of the Bible, but was the creation of medieval commentators. It is this distortion which makes the main obstacle to intelligent reading of the Bible.

Form in literature essential to meaning

I am aware that to many readers of the Bible what has been stated will appear a thing of no importance. They will say that they are willing to leave to experts what concerns literary form: their concern is with the matter and spirit of Scrip-

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ture. They overlook a foundation principle of all literature, that its external form must be realized before we can catch its meaning and spirit. Such an attitude of mind would be impossible but for the fact that the modern printed page presents the literary structure so clearly and automatically that the reader is never called upon to think about the form; it acts upon him as unconsciously as the attraction of gravitation. It is where this structure of the printed page is lacking that we can see how closely external form affects meaning.

To illustrate.¹ 1. Suppose a simple untutored reader of Scripture is following a chapter of the Bible as a devotional exercise. It happens to be a chapter in the Book of Job, continuation of a previous chapter which had commenced with the statement, "Then answered Bildad the Shuhite." What he is reading, then, is the words of a certain Bildad. Now, at the end of the Book of Job God is represented as saying that the three Friends of Job — Bildad and the other two — have not said of him the thing that is right. Thus our reader is seeking to bring home to his soul as a divine message the words of a speaker whom God expressly repudiates.

¹ This, and the pages immediately following, are a condensation of a fuller discussion in Chapter III of my *Modern Study of Literature* [published by Chicago University Press].

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The mistake has arisen from the reader's overlooking the dramatic form of this Book of Job. Passages read out of a drama do not give the sentiments of the dramatist, but only such sentiments as are appropriate to the character in the drama who speaks the words, — not the sentiments of Shakespeare, but of Othello or Hamlet or Iago. Thus the devotional exercise has gone wrong — devotionally wrong — through overlooking the dramatic form.

2. Take next a very different case. A learned historian is studying the Book of Micah, that part of it which in our versions stands as the last two chapters. As he reads, he notices a sudden change in the spirit of what is said: up to a certain point all has been woe and trouble, from that point there is only joy and confidence. Intent on historical considerations, he is led to the idea that this latter part must be an "interpolation" in the Book of Micah from some later age. As one such historian phrases it, "between verses 6 and 7 [of chapter 7] there yawns a century." Had this historian given attention to the literary form of what he was reading, he would have seen that what "yawns" between the two verses is nothing more than a change of speakers in the dramatic dialogue. All this portion of Micah is introduced by a title (verse 9 of chapter 6) which announces a dialogue between

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God, the City and the Man of Wisdom. This is exactly carried out: the Divine denunciation continues to the end of the sixth chapter; at the opening of the seventh the Despairing City speaks; at the point in question we have the Man of Wisdom voicing his confidence in the God who has interposed on his behalf. Thus we see a learned historian can go wrong in his history, as we saw a simple reader go wrong in his devotions, all through overlooking a point of literary form — dramatic dialogue.

3. It must not be supposed that it is only broad literary differences, such as that between drama and other literature, which are the source of misreadings. A minute mistake as to the literary structure of a passage may lead us astray as to its whole meaning. Let the reader turn again to the passage of Isaiah presented on page 87. This passage has been admirably set to music by a noted composer. The composer has seen, rightly, that two different voices are answering one another. But he has divided the voices wrongly. Thus, in the musical setting, the Bass says, Cry; the Soprano answers, What shall I cry? the Bass says, All flesh is grass; the Soprano obediently echoes, All flesh is grass. The Bass goes on, And all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the Soprano repeats these words; and so on. The

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composer has understood two voices of which the one echoes the other; a different division of the lines (see page 87) makes two *contrasting* voices, the Voice of the Tidings and a Voice of Despair. Thus the meaning of a passage has been exactly reversed by so small an error in literary structure as a wrong division of lines.

4. Few parts of Scripture are more fundamentally misunderstood than the Book of Ecclesiastes. This arises from the fact that almost every one reads into it the morbid pessimism of Solomon its reputed author. If a student of history makes the objection that the book is later than Solomon's age by centuries, the ordinary reader has an answer which at first seems plausible; viz. that the book itself claims Solomon as author, in the words, "I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem." Thus a critical deadlock arises: but only because both parties to the discussion have ignored the literary form of this Book of Ecclesiastes. On analysis it is found to be a series of Five Essays, the space between the Essays filled in with proverbs and miscellaneous sayings, and the whole bound into a unity by a Prologue and Epilogue. With the correct form before us we may inquire, Does this book claim the authorship of Solomon? We turn first to the Prologue and Epilogue, as the natural

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place in which to find light on the question of authorship: we discover in this Prologue and Epilogue no suggestion as to Solomon or any other author. The same applies to the miscellaneous proverbs, and to four out of the five Essays. All connection with Solomon is confined to the First Essay; and this, on examination, proves to be a narration of an imaginary experiment to test different types of life; the experiment is put into the mouth of the historical personage best fitted to make it, and told in the first person. When the supposed experiment is concluded, the first person is dropped, and there is no further connection with Solomon. When the book is read in its literary form, it is clear that Solomon is not made the *author* of the book, but the *hero* of one incident narrated. The critical deadlock ceases, for there is now nothing to set against the late historic date claimed for this work; when read with unbiased mind it seems written in a very different spirit from that of Solomon.

Recovery of literary form in the Bible

The recovery of the literary form of the Bible, obscured by the medieval presentation in chapters and verses, has been a slow process. When King James's Version was made, the wisest scholar in

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England had no idea that there was such a thing as poetic verse in Scripture. The principle of verse in Hebrew had been lost for centuries, and was re-discovered by an English bishop more than a century after King James's Version was completed. The early translators, like all others of their time, thought of the Bible as a collection of "sayings"; they used scholarship and literary taste to make each "saying" as beautiful as it could be made. The Bible in their hands may be compared to a chaplet of pearls with the string broken. Later scholarship, without losing the beauty of the pearls, has tied the string of connectedness that makes "sayings" into paragraphs, poems, books. A good illustration of this restored connectedness may be appreciated by the reader if he compares the twenty-eighth chapter of Job in the King James Version and in the Revised Version.

THE KING JAMES VERSION

1. Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it.
2. Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone.
3. He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: the stones of darkness and the shadow of death.

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4. The flood breaketh out from the inhabitant; even the waters forgotten of the foot: they are dried up, they are gone away from men.
5. As for the earth, out of it cometh bread; and under it is turned up as it were fire.
6. The stones of it are the place of sapphires; and it hath dust of gold.
7. There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen:
8. The lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it.
9. He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots.
10. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing.
11. He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.

THE REVISED VERSION

Surely there is a mine for silver,
And a place for gold which they refine.
Iron is taken out of the earth,
And brass is molten out of the stone.
Man setteth an end to darkness,
And searcheth out to the furthest bound

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The stones of thick darkness and of the shadow of death.

He breaketh open a shaft away from where men sojourn ;

They are forgotten of the foot that passeth by ;

They hang afar from men, they swing to and fro.

As for the earth, out of it cometh bread ;

And underneath it is turned up as it were by fire.

The stones of it are the place of sapphires,

And it hath dust of gold.

That path no bird of prey knoweth,

Neither hath the falcon's eye seen it ;

The proud beasts have not trodden it,

Nor hath the fierce lion passed thereby.

He putteth forth his hand upon the flinty rock ;

He overturneth the mountains by the roots.

He cutteth out passages among the rocks ;

And his eye seeth every precious thing.

He bindeth the streams that they trickle not ;

And the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.

In King James's Version, the passage reads as a series of disjointed texts, or sayings, often obscure, and apparently dealing with separate topics, such as God or Nature. In the other version the whole comes out as a clear unity—a brilliant picture of the miner breaking open a shaft and exploring the depths

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of the earth. Indeed, the whole chapter (Job xxviii) can now be seen as a single thought: There are mines out of which men dig gold and silver, but where is the mine out of which we may dig wisdom?

But the Revised Version went only a little way towards restoring the full literary form and structure of the Bible. There is a recognition of verse and prose. But the Revisers left to a later generation the task of representing each portion of Scripture in its full literary form; whether story, or history, or dialogue, or lyric verse, or essay, or philosophic discourse.

One such restoration of literary form to Scripture is "The Modern Reader's Bible." (See page 136.) By aid of internal evidence, and in the light of literature as a whole, it presents to the eye each part of the Bible in its proper literary form and detailed structure; doing thus for the sacred Scriptures what, as a matter of course, is done for all other literature, ancient or modern, by the arrangement of the printed page.

It may be well to particularize some of the more obvious differences that such literary structure involves. 1. Very large portions of the Old Testament are made up of legal and statistical documents, dry and hard to follow, and interrupting the continuity of the history. Yet these have their proper

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place in Scripture; but they would, in a modern book, appear as appendices and footnotes. By a special arrangement of type it is possible, without altering or removing them, to present them as appendices and footnotes. They are in their places for all who want them, but they cease to distract from the general drift of the Bible. 2. Considerable portions of the prophetic books are in dialogue, the speakers having to be inferred from the context. The division of speeches, and the speakers, are indicated. In addition to this, often some action is implied as accompanying the dialogue, such as (in a drama intended for acting) would be made stage directions.

3. It is hardly necessary to say how much of poetic beauty depends upon delicate variations of verse. The verse system of Scripture, though it rests on a basis different from that of modern meter, yet has all the variety and refinement of English or Greek verse. It is easy to indicate such varieties to the eye, when once they have been ascertained.

4. A considerable portion of Scripture has the form of essays and brief lyrics. Now, the soul of an essay or short lyric is its title, which of course expresses the unity of the thought. Ancient manuscripts lacked such titles; by careful study it is possible to supply them.

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5. Whenever a book is of considerable length, it becomes of high importance to indicate clearly its proper divisions and sections. On such arrangement clearness of understanding largely depends.

I speak of the Modern Reader's Bible because, so far as I know, this is the only case in which structural presentation has been applied to Scripture *as a whole*. Of course, every modern commentator, in citing lengthy passages of the Bible, will present them with more or less of literary form. The execution of the task attempted in the Modern Reader's Bible is always open to criticism and revision, until (we may hope) the authoritative versions of the Bible, whatever translation they use, will arrange that translation in clear literary structure. Those who do their Bible reading in the medieval form of chapters and verses are taking the responsibility of placing themselves in the most disadvantageous position possible for catching the meaning and force of Scripture.

It is not without experience that I make these remarks. For the last twenty-five years a considerable part of my personal work has been with classes, in and out of the university, who are studying the Bible in English. During the greater part of this period, I found that practically the whole time of an extended course of study was occupied

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with getting at the surface meaning of what was read, with no opportunity left for other treatment. During the last ten years it has been possible to put in the hands of students the Bible in its full literary structure. I have found that these later classes were able to start at the point where their predecessors left off. Nothing in my whole life as a teacher has been more satisfactory than the way intelligent students seize the point of a literary presentation of Scripture. Many scores of such students have volunteered the remark that this had altered their whole attitude to Bible reading; what they had discontinued as a dreary duty they had resumed, and found no less attractive than the best of literature ancient or modern.

I do not overlook the fact that other kinds of assistance to Bible study abound, of the utmost variety and copiousness. These have intrinsic value. But where the question is of straightforward reading of the Bible, the very superabundance of these helps threatens to make them a hindrance. *Annotation is interruption.* References, and cross-references, and other similar devices, interpose so much the more delay between the beginning and the end of a sentence or a book of Scripture, and dilute the force of connection. The place for such aids to Bible study is that of books of reference. No

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book of reference is more indispensable than a dictionary; but a man would find himself in a bad way if he sought to use a dictionary as a guide to a literary classic.

Reading particular books of the Bible

Our first impression of the Bible is that it is a library, containing literary works of great variety. Just as in other literature a man may wish to read Tennyson, or Browning, or Sophocles, so in the Bible he may choose to read Job, or Isaiah, or Revelation. For reading of this kind the main requisite is the text of the book in its proper literary structure. In addition to this the Modern Reader's Bible offers for each book a literary introduction and notes; but these are of secondary importance. Indeed, large part of the difficulties to explain which notes are written vanish when the book is read in its correct literary structure.

Here, however, a point arises which may be expressed by the phrase *A Book at a Sitting*. In technical language this is represented by the difference between the Interpretation of Exegesis and the Interpretation of Perspective. Exegesis is a mode of interpretation which follows successively all the details of a book, bringing light from various

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sources to bear upon each, with a sure confidence that when all the details of a work have been explained the whole book has been mastered. But this confidence is often fallacious. In the case of the higher literary forms the whole is a different thing from the sum of the parts. It is quite possible to have considered every detail of a literary work and yet to be far from understanding the work as a whole; nay, our very preoccupation with the details may have obscured the sense of the whole, just as we say, proverbially, that a man is unable to see the city for the streets, is unable to see the wood for the trees. On the other hand, the Interpretation of Perspective keeps the book before the student always as a whole, with attention to the way in which its different parts hang together. If there are obscurities, we must sweep through the book a second and a third time — or, it may be, a twentieth and thirtieth time — and watch the obscurities vanish in the light of the book as a whole. The difference might be illustrated by the difference between seeing a play of Shakespeare upon the stage and reading the same in an annotated edition. The scholarship represented by the stage, or even the acting, may be second rate: and yet the spectator cannot fail to form some idea of the play as a whole, though it may be an impression that needs correc-

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tion. On the other hand, he may have read the play in a scholarly edition, and obtained valuable information as to allusions and peculiarities of language, and yet he may have failed altogether to grasp the drama as a unity.

Of course, when a reader approaches an ancient poem for the first time, he may find himself unable to read the book at a sitting. Study of particular parts may be necessary, and perhaps assistance from others may be required. The point is, that when this study has been done, the reader must not suppose that he knows the book, until he has set himself to take in the whole at one view. And those who direct study can render no greater service to their pupils than putting, by "interpretative recital" or otherwise, the whole of a book at a single sitting.

Reading the whole Bible as a spiritual unity

But few readers will be content with single books of the Bible. There is always the question of the Bible as a whole, in its literary and spiritual unity. Here is a case for the Interpretation of Perspective on a larger scale. And I think that special students of the Bible owe to the general reader the assistance of restating, from time to time, the general drift

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and unity of the sacred Scripture. One such re-statement I have attempted in the first part of this book. With or without the assistance of such a general view of the Bible, students will wish to do detailed reading that serves to bring out for the Bible the interconnection of its parts. Hence I am here offering a Scheme of Reading in the Bible as a whole which I have found useful in my own teaching. The Scheme is self-explaining; but three preliminary remarks may be made. (1) It is announced as a Scheme of Reading in the Modern Reader's Bible, and occasionally references are made to the pages of that work. But in its essential points the scheme can be followed by those who use other versions. (2) It is drawn up on the basis of Historic Framework and Higher Literary Forms in parallel columns. What is called the Historic Framework is not intended for reading, but may be assumed. The reading is to be in the Higher Literary Forms as they stand in relation to the Historic Framework. Here, however, a misunderstanding is to be avoided. Where some portion of Scripture stands in relation to the Framework, the meaning is not that the work was *produced* at the historic point indicated. The date of production of any part of Scripture is a question that belongs to the historic, not the literary study of

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the Bible. The meaning is that the work in question *illustrates* the part of the Historic Framework to which it is attached. (3) At the end of the Scheme three special Notes will be found, relating to questions of the Bible about which there is a good deal of misunderstanding. — The Scheme of Reading will be found below (pages 113-36), followed by particulars of the Modern Reader's Bible (page 136).

Exercises in Bible study

It is a gratifying sign of the times that a great awakening of interest in the Bible appears on all sides. Study clubs, and reading circles, are being formed; and the question is much discussed whether the Bible cannot be restored to its place in general education. I am sometimes asked by such study clubs to offer suggestions; in particular, to suggest "exercises" in Bible study. As to this last point, I feel great difficulty in acceding to such requests, as I believe that no one can draw up effective "exercises" who does not know all the particular circumstances of those who are to use them. I am, however, offering here a set of exercises which I have found useful in my own teaching. But if any reader finds that these exercises do not appeal to him, I shall not be surprised. It is for the local

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directors of Bible study to find out exercises appropriate to their particular constituency.

*Specimen exercises*¹

I. Book of Job. Note what appear as Five Solutions for the mystery of human suffering. Note the speakers, or parts of the poem, from which these different solutions come. A free talk on the value of these solutions for human life.

II. How does the "Satan" of the Book of Job differ from ordinary conceptions of "the Devil"? [Compare page 1661.] — Compare with the Mephistopheles of *Faust*, or the Satan of the *Paradise Lost*. — Is this Satan hostile to God? or to Job?

III. Meter in Biblical Poetry. [A simple description on pages 1431-33; a more elaborate treatment commencing page 1517.] Read aloud Psalm 105, verses 8-15, omitting alternate lines; read again, putting in these lines: thus realize how "parallelism" may have the effect of verse in other languages. — For the bearing of such parallelism on the meaning, compare the Song of Lamech (page 7), the Lord's Prayer (page 1256), the Eighth Psalm (page 751), and the first chapter of Genesis (compare page 1543).

¹ Study of Introductions and Notes of *M.R.B.* assumed.

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IV. The unity of a poem (or series of poems) may lie in the external circumstances of its delivery. As an exercise, read the historical account in Samuel of the bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem (see page 1607); read it a second time putting in the series of psalms indicated. Realize this as a picture of a single day's solemnity. — A similar exercise is to compare Psalms 116 and 118, the latter being read dramatically. — A more extended illustration is to read Psalms 120-134 (see note on pages 1622-23).

V. Read dramatically Deborah's Song (Judges v). Read also the narrative in the preceding chapter. [Note the hint in iv. 10-12 of Heber's treachery.] A free talk on the nature of this incident.

VI. Read the four National Anthems (see page 1617) in the order 136, 105, 78, 106. Discuss how these reflect successive stages in the national history. — Add Psalm 107 as a further stage.

VII. The unity of a lyric poem may take a variety of forms. As an illustration, read aloud Psalms 29, 1, 23, 139, 65 and 84. [For the last see note on page 1535.]

VIII. Study the note on Dramatic Psalms (page 1602). As illustrations read aloud Psalms 57, 3, 50. Discuss what is essential to make a lyric poem "dramatic."

IX. The Song of Songs is a series of poems with

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an underlying love-story. The successive poems put the incidents of the story in an order *different* from the order in which the incidents would actually take place. After studying this, turn the whole into a (brief) narrative following the order in which the incidents would take place (beginning with what appears at the bottom of page 894). — A free talk on the whole poem (1) as a love-story, (2) in its spiritual application.

X. Deuteronomy. Let four members of a class give the substance of the four orations, with the finer passages; let a fifth do the same with the Song; and let a sixth deal with the Farewell Scene. — As an addition: read aloud Psalms 90 and 91 as expansions of the parting words of Moses.

XI. Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus. Let different members of a class pick out interesting examples of proverbs, riddles, maxims, number-sonnets, and especially essays. A free talk on such "wisdom" as the philosophy of common life.

XII. Read aloud: (1) The Imaginary Search of Solomon for Wisdom as it appears in Ecclesiastes (page 1010) and (2) the Historical Incident of Solomon's finding Wisdom as it appears in the Book of Wisdom (page 1025). — A free talk on all that this suggests.

XIII. Read aloud the brief account in Exodus x.

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21-23 of the Plague of Darkness, and then the elaborate treatment of the same in the Wisdom of Solomon (pages 1033-34). — Free talk on simple descriptions and highly imaginative pictures.

XIV. Study the description of a Prophetic Rhapsody (pages 1392-93). Take such an example as Isaiah xxiv-xxvii (pages 497-501): and (like a spectator watching the presentation of a drama) indicate exactly what passes in this rhapsody before the eye of the imagination. — For another illustration take Joel (see page 1420).

XV. The Rhapsody of Zion Redeemed (pages 512-42). Let members of a class in succession give the substance of the Prelude and the Seven Visions: and then discuss (1) the change in meaning of "Servant of Jehovah" as the poem proceeds; and (2) how the "Redeemer" succeeds to the place of this Servant in the later visions. Consider this as a link between the Old and New Testaments.

XVI. After studying by itself the heavy-faced type found in the text of *M.R.B.* in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, write a paper on Jesus considered as a literary author.

XVII. Book of Acts. Distinguish successive stages in the idea and machinery of world-evangelization, noting how each is ushered in by vision or miracle.

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XVIII. Illustrate from the later Epistles the sense of "the last days," or near approach of the expected revelation of Christ. Show how these epistles make distinct contributions to the enlarging conception of Jesus, his Person and Kingdom.

The Bible for young people

The question is often raised, what kind of treatment is required for interesting in Bible reading children and young people. I may point out that in the small-volume edition of the Modern Reader's Bible (see page 137) three additional volumes have been prepared with this purpose in view. They are entitled, Bible Stories — Old Testament; Bible Stories — New Testament; and Biblical Masterpieces. The stories are in the language of Scripture altered only by omissions. A thread of connection between the stories is indicated in italic type; but this is intended for the teacher. The underlying idea of these two books is that "story" is the natural food of the youthful mind, and equally a prominent feature in large parts of the Bible. Without too much anxiety as to the spiritual significance of these stories it is well to make them familiar; when at a later stage higher uses of the Bible come to the student, he will be doing this

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higher work upon material which has become a part of his literary inheritance. The design of the third volume is to present, in full literary structure, portions of the Bible other than stories, and in this way to obtain familiarity with Biblical lyric, or oratory, or drama.

Conclusion

There has been no intention in what has been said to undervalue other uses of the Bible than the one discussed. My own special work is the literary study of the Bible; and, however much this may seem to be crowded out by other modes of dealing with the sacred Scriptures, I am persuaded that this literary study of the Bible is the prerequisite for making other modes of Bible study sound and impressive. To sum up the whole matter in a sentence: It is when we set about reading the Bible "like any other book," that we realize fully how profoundly the Bible is different from every other book.

READING SCHEME
IN THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE

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STRUCTURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Historic Frame

Higher Forms

PROLOGUE TO THE OLD
TESTAMENT (Genesis i-
xi)

Stories of the World's
Beginnings

The Old Testament, as Covenant between God and a Chosen People, is prefaced by brief surveys of previous covenants between God and all mankind as represented in common ancestors, Adam and Noah.

GENESIS: ORIGIN OF THE
CHOSEN PEOPLE IN THE
FORM OF A FAMILY

Stories, etc., of Patriarchal
Families

THE EXODUS: MIGRATION
OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE:
DEVELOPMENT FROM A
FAMILY TO A NATION
— (Exodus, Leviticus,
Numbers)

Psalms of the Exodus:
114, 77, 136
Stories, etc., of the Migra-
tion
[Appendices in the form
of Constitutional Docu-
ments, especially Cove-
nants]

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Oratorical Drama: "Deuteronomy or The Farewell of Moses to Israel"
[Echoed in Psalms 90-91: see page 1619.]

The above constitutes the first of the grand divisions of Scripture, THE LAW. The underlying spiritual idea is "Holiness," in the sense of separateness from the world.

From the dramatic point of view the above concludes the Exposition of the plot: Israel dismissed to its world-mission with the Divine blessing. The element of Complication begins with the appearance of the secular spirit: Kings for practical warfare.

THE JUDGES: TRANSITION
FROM A THEOCRACY TO
A SECULAR MONARCHY
— (Joshua, Judges, part
of Samuel)

Psalms 105
Stories, etc., of the Judges
David's Lamentation over
Saul and Jonathan (II
Samuel i)

What follows opens up the second of the grand divisions of Scripture, THE PROPHETS. (See Note below on Prophecy.) The spiritual ideas are the struggle toward Righteousness and Love, developing Redemption as a supreme ideal. Enlarging idea of "Holiness."

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THE KINGS: SECULAR GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGS WITH SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION OF THE PROPHETS

ANNALS OF THE KINGS	STORIES AND BOOKS OF THE PROPHETS
Reigns of the spiritual kings: David and Solomon	Psalms for the Inauguration of Jerusalem: 30, 24, 132, 101. (See page 1607.) Prophetic Stories Dedication Prayer of Solomon (in I Kings viii)
The Schism: Revolt of the Northern Kingdom	Prophetic Stories (up to page 354) Book of Hosea, a native of the Northern Kingdom Book of Amos, a missionary from Judah
The Kingdom of Judah succeeds to the position of the Chosen Nation	Psalm 78: Inauguration of Judah as the Chosen Nation
Kingdom of Judah in its flourishing period (culminating in the reign of Hezekiah)	Book of Isaiah [Isaiah i-xxxix], a statesman of the capital Book of Micah, a country prophet The Sennacherib Psalms: 46, 48, 76

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The Prophets sing of a Golden Age in the future and a Judgment through which this Golden Age will be reached for a remnant. (M.R.B., pages 1393-95.) The crisis of the dramatic plot is found where it gradually appears that the Judgment involves the Fall of Israel as a nation. There is a glimpse of a New Covenant (page 578), foreshadowing the New Testament.

Decline and Fall of the Kingdom of Judah — partial recovery under Josiah with the discovery of Deuteronomy	Book of Jeremiah Book of Zephaniah Anonymous Prophecies (pages 737-42) Book of Lamentations (page 876)
The Captivity [Historic Frame lacking]	Book of Daniel (Babylon) Book of Ezekiel (colony on the River Chebar, before and after the Capture of Jerusalem) Psalms of the Captivity: 106, 74, 79, 137 Stories of the Captivity in Tobit and Esther

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PROPHETIC WORKS WITHOUT SPECIFIC CHRONOLOGICAL RELATIONS

Relations with external peoples	Prophetic Doom Songs in Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah
The Chaldean Empire at its height	Book of Habakkuk
Nineveh — at its height of power	Book of Jonah
Nineveh — in its fall	Book of Nahum
Ideal Pictures of Judgment	Book of Joel Isaiah xxiv-xxvii

What follows is a reversion to THE LAW, in its later meaning of Ceremonialism. But the collections of lyrics belonging to this stage voice the devotional spirit in touch with all the ideals of Scripture.

RETURN OF THE REMNANT OF JUDAH — Period of the Scribes, and Tradition of the El- ders	Psalms of the Return: 85, 107; 120-34 (see also note to Psalm 84, pages 1619 and 1535) The History of the Kings recast as "The Chron- icles" (compare pages 1383-87)
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Prophetic Books of Haggai, Zechariah (Zechariah i-viii) and Malachi (page 742)

Collections of Lyrics of all periods: Book of Psalms — Book of Lamentations — Song of Solomon

EPILOGUE TO THE OLD
TESTAMENT
The Divine Scheme of
all history

Rhapsody of Zion Redeemed (Isaiah xl-lxvi. Compare *M.R.B.*, pages 1395-98).

WISDOM LITERATURE

A third of the grand divisions of Scripture is WISDOM: a devout philosophy of life. It stands apart from the general movement of the Bible, and attaches itself in the main to the interval between the Old and the New Testament. (See Note below on Wisdom.)

**Historic Frame Supplied
from Secular History**

Center of Civilization shifting westward: Persia — Macedonia — Rome

Higher Forms

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Meeting of Hellenic and Hebraic	THE BOOKS OF WISDOM
Hellenic: emphasizing the idea of Immortal- ity apart from Person- ality	Proverbs Ecclesiasticus Ecclesiastes Wisdom of Solo- mon
Hebraic: emphasizing the idea of Personality apart from Immor- tality	Job: Wisdom drama- tized
Resulting conception of Personal Immortality	

STRUCTURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

What follows constitutes the fourth of the grand divisions of Scripture: THE GOSPEL, or Divine Message of Jesus Christ.

The dramatic movement of the New Testament may be seen in the gradually enlarging conception of Jesus and his claims, from total rejection at the beginning to his final revelation as climax of all Scripture and all history.

The idea of "Holiness" still further spiritualized, to the climax of the Christian "Liberty" that is higher than "Law."

Historic Frame

ACTS OF JESUS (in Luke or Mark)

Higher Forms

SAYINGS OF JESUS — distinguished in the *M.R.B.*

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1. Total rejection of Jesus at the opening of his ministry (Luke iv: 14-30) by heavy type, making possible the study of Jesus as an author
2. Jesus as the Master (i.e. Teacher) with a following of Disciples gradually organized into Apostles
3. From the turning-point of Peter's Confession: Jesus the Christ of the Kingdom of God on earth
4. Advance to Jerusalem — Royal Entry — Clash with Jewish hierarchy — the Old Dispensation dissolved by Jesus

The last days of Jesus with his Disciples, his Passion, Resurrection, Ascension: these make a pause in the general movement of the New Testament.

- ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: MISSIONARY EPISTLES OF
in stages PAUL
1. Opening of the Gospel in Jerusalem and the Holy Land

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2. Opening of the Gospel to the Gentiles :
Distinction of Jewish Christianity (Jerusalem) and Gentile Christianity (Antioch)
3. Revelation (at Antioch) of the Missionary Journey as the machinery of world-evangelization
4. Extension of the Gospel from (stationary) Asia to (progressive) Europe, with Rise of Ecclesiastical Literature (epistles) as medium of world-evangelization. (Acts xvi: 6-10.)

Thessalonians: The earliest deaths in the primitive community have raised the question of the resurrection

Galatians: Struggle with "the circumcision," the contention that converts must become Jews before they can be Christians

I Corinthians: Difficulties of church discipline — especially, questionings of the resurrection

II Corinthians: Rivalries undermining the authority of Paul,

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which is needed to confirm his higher conception of Christian truth

Romans: A climax: reconciliation of Law and Gospel to an audience which represents universal civilization

CONCEPTION (inferred from the Higher Forms) OF "THE LAST DAYS": quickened expectation of the "Coming of Christ" or "Revelation"

The Conception of Jesus absorbs the "Mystery" Religions

LATER PAULINE AND GENERAL EPISTLES

Timothy, Titus, Peter, Jude, John: emphasis on the Last Days

Ephesians: On the analogy of the Mysteries [popular religions taking the form of an outward ritual open to all, but an inner interpretation only for the initiated]: the whole course of secular history such a "mystery" with Jesus Christ for its hidden meaning. (Compare i: 9-10; iii: 9.)

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The Conception of Jesus
absorbs the Religions of
"the Fulness"

Colossians: On the analogy of popular religions which "filled up" the interval between humanity and deity with a hierarchy of supernatural beings: Jesus Christ the "fulness of the godhead," filling the whole interval between God and Man. (Compare i: 15, 16, 19; ii: 9, 15-19.)

The Conception of Jesus
absorbs the Religion of
the "Circumcision"

Philippians: The old "circumcision" degraded to a "concision": in Jesus Christ is the true circumcision

Recognition of Jesus from
the side of the Law

Hebrews: The most intense of Hebrews argues to his fellow-Hebrews that the Hebraic Law was only a preparation for Jesus Christ

Recognition of Jesus from
the side of Wisdom Philosophy

Gospel of Matthew and
Epistle of James: The
Gospel of Jesus Christ

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Recognition of Jesus from
the side of Greek Phi-
losophy

cast in the forms of
wisdom literature
Gospel of John: "The
Word" [a foundation
idea in Greek philos-
ophy] made flesh in
Jesus Christ

PROPHETIC CLIMAX TO THE
WHOLE BIBLE:
New revelation of the
Divine plan of all
history

St. John's Revelation:
A Vision Rhapsody:
presenting Jesus
Christ as the Central
idea of all Scripture —
and all history as the
Kingdom of the World
becoming the King-
dom of Christ

NOTE ON PROPHECY [Compare *M.R.B.*, pp. 1388-91]

1. The idea that "prophecy" means "prediction" is purely modern, the result of a false etymology. The *pro-* in *prophecy* is not like the *pro-* in *program*, but like the *pro-* in *pronoun*: a prophet is one who speaks in place of God, a mouthpiece of God. Compare Exodus vii. 1. In Psalm cv. 15 it is applied to the whole People who represent God to other peoples.

2. A more specific meaning comes into the word with the establishment of the Kings: Prophets are now leaders of opposition, spiritual agitators: representatives of the Theocracy in antagonism to the Secular Monarchy.

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3. Distinguish between the Earlier Prophets (like Elijah), who are men of action, and the Later Prophets (like Isaiah) who, without ceasing to be men of action, are also men of letters. The Earlier Prophets come into literature as heroes of Prophetic Stories; the Later Prophets are represented by miscellaneous Prophetic Books.

4. Page 354 of the *M.R.B.* makes a dividing point. Up to this point the "higher forms" have appeared exactly at that part of the historic frame to which they belong. From this point the framework is unbroken historic narrative, into which the Books of the Prophets have to be fitted as "higher forms." Compare the table on pages 1390-91.

5. The Later Prophets, to their own generation, serve like the Earlier Prophets as leaders of opposition. But, in addition to this, the eternal element of their Divine message, stripped of all that is accidental or occasional, is embodied in the higher literary forms (of discourse, song, drama, etc.) with a message that is for all time. Our Books of the Prophets reflect both kinds of prophetic activity. [Compare Jeremiah xxxvi, where the daily ministrations of a long course of years are at once condensed and intensified in a written form not too long to be read at a single sitting.]

6. Special literary forms are characteristic of the prophets: especially (1) the Doom Form [Divine monologue, interrupted by passages of lyrics realizing this in action: compare *M.R.B.*, page 1399] and (2) the Rhapsody, or Spiritual Drama [see *M.R.B.*, pages 1392-93].

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NOTE ON WISDOM LITERATURE

The Books of Wisdom, taken as a whole, belong, logically, to the interval between the Old and the New Testaments. The world-mission of a national theocracy has fallen; the new world-mission of Christianity has not yet arisen; in the interval the interest of Human Life comes to the front, and Wisdom is devout meditation on Life. [The *M.R.B.* is especially full on this portion of Scripture: in addition to the regular introductions and notes there is a Syllabus for difficult books (pages 1634, 1646), and Notes on Special Topics (pages 1536, 1538).]

The Historic Frame for this part of Scripture has to be supplied from secular history.

In the interval between the Old and the New Testaments the center of civilization shifts westwards: from Persia to Macedonia (conquests of Alexander and his successors), and finally to Rome. The Holy Land is profoundly affected by these changes: in particular, the forcible extension of Greek civilization by the conquests of Alexander produces the fierce struggle of the Hebrews under the Maccabees against the cruel Antiochus Epiphanes. Moreover, the city of Alexandria is founded, and becomes a center of Judaism hardly second to Palestine.

Thus to this important period belongs that which is the foundation of modern civilization: the fusion of the two great civilizations of antiquity, Hebraic and Hellenic. [This is fully discussed in the Author's *World Literature*, published by Macmillan.]

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All this has a special bearing upon Wisdom Literature in regard to the question of Immortality. Note:

- (1) The ambiguity in the phrase "Life beyond death." Our modern idea of this is a *new* life, commencing at death. The ancient idea was a waning *survival* of life in the grave [compare Job xiv. 18-22]. All antiquity recognized such waning survival of life, and it was associated with the idea of retribution: compare Sheol, Tartarus, etc. [A variant of this is the oriental conception of "metempsychosis": the individual life reappearing in lower animal and vegetable forms; each such life retributive to the previous life.]
- (2) Hellenic civilization stood for the idea of Immortality in the sense that the soul was indestructible. But it was immortality at the expense of Personality, the ultimate goal being the absorption of the individual into the Universal Soul.
- (3) Hebrew civilization ignored such Immortality, but laid the emphasis upon Personality: the supreme power of the universe a Personal God. Hellenic thought conceived its personal deities as only the second power in the universe: above them was the impersonal force of Destiny, Fate. Hebrew religion achieved the deliverance of the world from this idea of Destiny.
- (4) From the fusion of these contrasting civilizations comes the conception of the Immortality of the Individual Soul.

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Thus a special interest for Wisdom literature is the gradual attainment of this idea of Immortality. In Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus the idea is conspicuous by its absence. The author of Ecclesiastes belongs to Palestine: all around him are floating these ideas of Immortality, which his Hebrew proclivities will not allow him to accept: hence his pessimism. The Wisdom of Solomon comes from the Judaism of Alexandria: its foundation thoughts are that God made not death, that righteousness is immortal. (Compare pages 1475, 1477-80.) In Job, the idea of immortality is found in momentary flashes of spiritual insight. (Compare page 1494, and Job xiv; xvi. 19; xix. 23-30. Note that the other speakers in the drama pay no attention to these suggestions of immortality.)

NOTE ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The straightforward reading of this book has been made less easy than that of other parts of Scripture by a peculiarity of form that can readily be understood from literary history. On the one hand, we have a Vision Poem, singularly clear and logically coherent; this is the poem sketched in the first part of this book, and its form is easy to follow in the M.R.B. arrangement. On the other hand, there are particular passages, which do not conflict with the Vision Poem, nor suggest any

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alternative interpretation, but which do seem to interrupt the continuity of the thought at the points where they occur.

It must be remembered that the "apocalypse" was an exceedingly common form of literature in the centuries preceding and following our Book of Revelation. The centuries were times of persecution and trouble; and these apocalypses were organs of consolation. Ultimately, this form of literature is based upon the Vision Poems of the prophets, but there is a difference. Prophecy deals with general principles of Divine Providence, and uses symbols that are typical; the apocalypses went beyond this to specific predictions and particular applications. Historical scholars have suggested that our Book of Revelation was arrived at by the working over of one or more of these apocalypses. What seems more probable is that the text of our Revelation is made up of the Vision Poem described above with the addition of comments and reflections upon particular points in it. The comments would be written originally on the margin of the book, and in course of long time have been drawn into the text. These comments may have come from some reader of the original poem; more probably they have come from the author, the seer who names himself John. In this latter case, the

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comments must be kept distinct from the body of the poem. A prophet may well, in his more ordinary moods, comment on points which specially appeal to him in what he received during moments of supernatural inspiration. While no exact parallel can be cited, readers of the prophetic books, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel, will be familiar with the idea of the prophet commenting upon what he receives from outside. Many passages of Revelation fit in with this suggestion.

1. There are first the reflections of the seer himself in the course of the visions [distinguished in the M.R.B. by italic type]. These must be understood as part of the Vision Poem; they go beyond reflections, and include dialogue with the personages of the visions. A typical case is xiii. 9-10, where the seer, at a point where hostile forces are being revealed, strengthens his "patience" by recalling other parts of the visions.

2. Two passages xiii. 18 and xvii. 9-11 seem to announce themselves as such comments. The first begins with the words *Here is wisdom*, and proceeds to make application of a symbolic expression just received to some particular person — an allusion intelligible to contemporaries but lost to modern readers. Similarly, the second opens with the words *Here is the mind which hath wisdom*,

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and makes a particular application of what has just been said. The whole context xvii. 6-18 is coherent without the interrupting verses; it is noticeable that in what belongs to the vision itself each item explained by the angel to the seer is accompanied with the words *which thou sawest*: these words are absent from the interrupting verses. Perhaps the last clause of ix. 11 is a similar comment: the preceding sentence has reached a natural conclusion in the mention of the "angel of the abyss," whereupon a note is added giving the name of this personage in Hebrew and in Greek.

3. What appears in the M.R.B. as the "Seven Last Words" is especially important from this point of view. As read in ordinary versions the passage (xxii. 6-17) is apt to appear as a continuation of the vision, especially as personal pronouns are used. It is much better to understand it as seven separate reflections or comments, the last vision having reached a pronounced climax and conclusion in verse 5. Choice passages of the visions are cited, with more or less exactness, or single difficulties are explained. Thus verses 6-10 are echoes of xix. 9-10 [compare xxi. 5]. It is surely not meant that twice the seer fell down before the angel and twice received the same rebuke. Verse 7 is founded on iii. 3 and 11. Verse 16 is

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the author's explanation of ii. 1; the second clause is his interpretation of "first and last" in i. 18. This verse also repeats i. 1-8. In reference to what stands as title page in the M.R.B. arrangement (i. 1-8) I understand the real title of the book to be merely the words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ"; the rest is an exegetical addition and application to what the author believes to be the last times. The use of the pronouns would be clearer if we were to write in verse 8 *I (John) am he that heard*, and in verse 16 *I (Jesus) have sent*.

4. It is noticeable also that the Prologue of the Words to the Seven Churches, while echoing in its structure the Book of Amos, is also constructed on the basis of fragments from the visions with *applications* to particular churches. One passage of this (i. 7-8) is clearly an example of the kind of comments under consideration. The Prologue commences in the exact form of the superscription to N. T. epistles, down to the word *Amen*; it would naturally continue, as in verse 9, "I, John, your brother, etc."; what is interjected between is a double ejaculation of adoration called forth by the words of the superscription.

5. It will be remembered that throughout the N. T. epistles two phrases are used to express the

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sense of the last times — viz. “the coming of Christ” and “the revelation of Jesus” — and there is no suggestion of any conflict between the two expressions. The Vision Poem itself is clearly founded upon “the revelation of Jesus”; the reflections show the writer clinging to the other idea, the coming of Christ. The expression “The time is at hand,” and similar expressions, cannot be a basis for what is called the “futurist” interpretation of the whole book, since the reference is clearly to an immediate, not a distant future. Expressions of time in the body of the book refer to time *in the course of the visions*. Compare, at the beginning (iv. 1), “The things which must come to pass hereafter,” with the words of the Seventh Vision (xxi. 6) “They are come to pass.” So in x. 6-7, the expression, “There shall be time no longer,” has no reference to the distinction of Time and Eternity, but (as the context shows) to the time of the mystery of prophecy giving place to the unfolding of this mystery in the proclamation of Christ. The expressions of time in the visions — such as *a thousand years, forty and two days* — are to be read as longer or shorter divisions in the symbolic time of the visions, and have no significance in actual time. The sequence of the visions is logical, not temporal. Compare the vision

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rhapsody of Isaiah xxiv-xxvii (M.R.B., pages 1572-73).

6. Outside the Book of Revelation is the clear parallel of the Book of Daniel, which is generally recognized as a Vision Poem supplemented by other visions of an apocalyptic character. Differences of language and modes of expression emphasize the different character of the two. (See Introduction to Daniel in M.R.B., pages 1416-18.) A minor parallel is the conclusion to the Gospel of John where, when the narrative has reached its conclusion, there is a comment (verse 24) by some reader, or by the Church, endorsing the book as the composition of John.

When once the idea of comments and reflections is recognized, it becomes easy, in reading, to separate them from the clear and coherent narration of the vision. Of course, such passages remain a part of the canonical Book of Revelation. This, however, is a matter that belongs to theology, not to literature.

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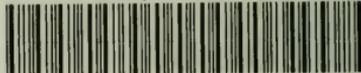
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