

## VI.

### CRITICAL NOTE.

#### THE VISION OF EZRA THE SCRIBE

##### CONCERNING THE LATTER TIMES OF THE ISHMAELITES.

THE following is translated from one of the Syriac manuscripts recently acquired by the Union Theological Seminary from its alumnus, the Rev. James E. Rogers, a missionary to the Syrians near Lake Oroomiah, in Persia. The manuscript is a copy, made in 1884, from a Nestorian manuscript of the last century, which contains a collection of curious compositions. In that manuscript this Vision begins at page (or folio) 145. The copy contains ten and a half pages, regularly of fifteen lines each, written in a fair Nestorian hand, with a few copyist's slips. The copy several times divides words at the end of the line, and presents a few other difficulties to the reader. Some peculiarities of punctuation show that the copyist did not preserve the lines of the manuscript which he transcribed.

Two other manuscripts are known to contain this Vision; both of them Nestorian, both dated near the beginning of the last century, and each made up of a like collection of curious compositions. One is in the British Museum, and is described by Wright, in his Catalogue, at 1065, *b*. Extracts there given from the Vision show a few verbal differences from this copy. The other is in the Vatican Library, and is described by J. S. Assemani, in his *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, tom. II., p. 498, No. XVII. A quotation from the Vision, occurring in still another manuscript, is noted by Assemani, *ibid.*, tom. III., pars I., 282, n. 3. All these manuscripts, which contain the Vision, come from the same locality.

As Assemani remarked, the Vision cannot take rank with the so-called New Testament Apocrypha, for it mentions "Constantinople." But the whole matter of the Vision shows that it belongs to a time subsequent to the rise and spread of Muhammadanism. The Vision has never before been either translated or published; though for various purposes it is worth editing in the original.

Its general *quasi* apocalyptic character will escape no one; but the original discloses *no acquaintance whatever* with the Syriac Apocalypse, though much familiarity with the Peshitto, in both the Old and the New Testaments. It seems clear that the Syriac New Testament *antilegomena* were unknown to the

author of this composition. Besides sundry verbal correspondences with other passages, the Vision either quotes or adapts from Dan. vii. 2, 6, 8 ; viii. 25 ; xi. 7, 43 ; xii. 1, 4 ; x. 14, 18 ; Matt. v. 36 ; xxiv. 7, 19, 22, 31. I do not deem it worth while to load the translation with notes, since they would be loose-fitting and clumsy without the Syriac text.

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The following is the translation :

Again by the hand [*i.e.*, with the help] of God I write the Petition which Ezra the Scribe asked, when he was in the wilderness, and his disciple was with him whose name was Carpus.

He asked from God that he would reveal to him concerning the things that were to be in the latter times. And he said to Carpus his disciple, Hear, my son Carpus, and I will tell thee concerning the latter times.

On a sudden I \* was in the likeness of a fearful vision, and I asked of God that he would show me concerning the latter times of the Ishmaelites. And I saw a youth, whose like I never saw, for he was clad in white raiment, and the form of a roll was in his right hand. And he answered and said to me, For behold thy prayer is heard before God, and I am sent to show thee concerning the latter times of the sons of Ishmael ; that which has been concealed from many. Open this book of the roll, and read therein, and see how they are to become in the latter times.

And I opened the roll, and read concerning the times and the sorrows that are to come to pass. And my tears poured forth with sighing, and I said, God be merciful to me, and have mercy upon thy handiwork ; because a serpent that was in the wilderness devoured them. And I saw twelve horns upon the head of the serpent, and nine on its tail, small and fierce [*i.e.*, bitter], that went up from the East, and made war with every creature under heaven, and afflicted the people of God.

And I saw an angel, that was clothed with a flame of fire ; and he descended from heaven, and uprooted the twelve horns that were in the head of the serpent, those great ones. And I said, I praise thee, O Lord, because the prophecy of Moses is to-day fulfilled. And the angel of the Lord said to me, Be of good courage, Ezra, because to Daniel also it was revealed concerning these nine horns, small and fierce.

And I saw : in the tail of the serpent, on a sudden, there sprouted forth one great horn ; and in its head there were two small ones. And an eagle came from the south, and brake in pieces the great horn, and devoured the small ones. And the world was filled with darkness and a tempest ; and the tempest smote the eagle, and uprooted its two talons. And there came a voice from heaven, that said, The eagle shall be rewarded according to its retribution.

And I saw a viper that came from the East, and cast venom upon all flesh,

\* I add a single letter to one word of the Syriac in order to get this rendering ; for the correction seems obvious. Otherwise the rendering is, " There became in the likeness," etc.

and went up to the extremities [of the land\*] of promise. And there was an earthquake on the earth, and a voice and thunders in heaven, and an echo [*lit.*, daughter voice] was heard: Let those four angels be loosed that are bound at the great river Euphrates, those that are to devastate one out of three of mankind. And they were loosed, and there came to pass a great strife. Out of the darkness came ravens, from the East, and pierced the viper; and the viper fled to the extremities of Egypt, and there made itself small. And it took two birdlings, and passed over to the right-hand side. And the one small birdling went up to a lion's whelp, and took refuge with it. And the lion's whelp received it with joy; and the small birdling trusted the lion's whelp, that he was sufficient to comfort it from those ravens that were seeking to devour it. And the lion's whelp sent ambassadors to the leopard of the South, in order that he might come forth to his help, because a bull was setting in commotion the land of the West, with many miseries; because he was the king of the ravens, and he gnashed his teeth at the lion's whelp. And three horns were in his head; and with the one on the right he made war, and with that on the left he destroyed, and with that in the middle he laid waste. And he will desolate, so as to lay waste the sons of his house, and will gather much gold and silver; and will desolate so as to smite and put to shame everything that is under his power; and he will exalt his heart, and not give glory to God. And one of his horns will go to make war with the lion's whelp, and will lay waste the strong rebels, and will contend with those round about; and those round about they will lay waste; and much blood shall be shed on both sides. And the bull will plot an evil plot against the seven hills and the great city Constantinople; and his people shall be routed, and much blood shall be shed of those round about that city.

And that birdling of the viper received strength from Trachonitis (*Tarqono*), and from the lofty grades of the west, and will enter with blood. And the father of the small birdling will hear, and shall gather much people from the Cushites, and from the peoples that are round about them, and shall come to the help of the birdling; and Egypt he will lay waste. And that birdling shall descend from the land of promise, and shall lay waste great cities, and shall let go them that take spoil from the inhabitants; because great mischief is wrought in them. And he will cast down the slain in the land like dew. And Damascus will he lay waste in that time.

And the lion's whelp shall be excited with fierce heat, and shall go forth after those ravens, and shall lay waste and destroy them, from Antioch of Syria even unto the low places of the East, the ravens' own land. And the leopard went forth from the North, and much people went forth, as the locusts fly. And he will go up even to the river Euphrates, and he shall rise up in aid of the lion's whelp; and from there the two will go down to the land of Persia. And the bull will go forth to meet them, in great power; and the lion's whelp shall enter between the horns of the bull, and break them both in pieces. And the land he will lay waste, and spoil, and destroy with fire. And the ravens will

\* These bracketed words are omitted; doubtless by a copyist's slip.

flee from before him, and go down to their land ; and the lion's whelp shall pursue after them, and destroy them with the mouth of the sword ; because God hath turned away his face from them, because their impurity is multiplied. And their land he will capture and spoil ; and he will lay them waste even to the foundation ; and it shall no more be inhabited again forever and ever ; because they rejected the Lord, and made light of his commandments. And there shall be great commotion in the land ; and earthquakes, and famines, and pestilences, and the tyranny of fear, and quaking upon men, even until they fall and die without disease and without sickness, from the fear that tyrannizes over them.

And the lion's whelp in much strength shall go up to the land of promise, and shall bring it under tribute ; and there shall be great affliction in the land, such as never was like it from the beginning. And he will build the walls of Phœnicia round about it. Damascus shall he lay waste even to her foundation, because she most loftily exalted herself. And to Jerusalem shall he go up with great pomp, and from there he will go and ascend to his royal city [*lit.*, to the city of his kingdom].

After three weeks and a half week there shall go forth from the South a mighty hero with much people, and his power shall go forth upon the land of promise, and he will make great peace, and will work great blessings in the land, three years and seven months.

Then shall be set in commotion the four winds of heaven, and peoples shall rise one against the other, and shall lay one another waste, until the earth cries out by reason of the blood that is shed upon its face.

And I, Ezra, fell upon the earth, and was all of me filled with tears. And the angel of the Lord said to me, Let it not grieve thee, Scribe Ezra, for these [things] shall not come to pass until that uncleanness and luxury and whoredom defile the earth, and when men leave the bed of marriage, and pollute and defile their bodies and their souls with the uncleanness of whoredom, and with excess of wine, and sodomy, and with fearlessness at the shame they practice. Then shall the righteousness of God be wroth, that the rebellious seed shall be delivered into the hands of their enemy, because their latter [time] is come, and their end hasteneth.

And issuing blood with fear, I was cast prostrate on my face. The angel of the Lord stretched forth his hand, and raised me up, since I was [as one] drunk with fear. And I said, Who is able to live (or, to be saved) in that time ? And he said to me, Those in whom God hath pleasure. And great rebellion shall wax strong, and the sons of faith shall be buffeted ; and their cry and their sighing shall go up before the throne of the kingdom of the greatness of God, that he may speedily send a mighty angel, and lay hold of the teeth of the destroying sword, and without mercy destroy the rebellious seed.

But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in that time ! Because there shall be tribulation, the like whereof hath not been from the creation of the worlds. And on a sudden shall be opened the mountains of the sons of the North ; and they shall go forth from the place of Gog and

Magog, and be working very great sorrows in the earth. And the two tribes from the seed of Ishmael, and they that are left in the low places of the mountain of the South, shall come and take refuge among them, and shall be taken captive, and shall go up even to Jerusalem the city of the Great King. And there God will send upon them Michael the mighty angel, and he shall lay them waste without pity. And except those days should be shortened, no flesh should be saved ; because in that time a year shall become as a month, and a month as a week, and a week as a day, and a day as an hour. And then shall be seen the Christ revealed ; and he shall show his curse and the fury of his evil [*i.e.*, vengeance] ; and he shall go up to Enoch and to Elijah \* beside the altar ; and shall shed their blood upon the earth with great suffering. And mighty angels shall be sent, and shall overthrow the son of perdition in the midst of the Gehenna of fire ; and [then] shall be the end. But keep these words until their times.

And I, since I was in great fear, I worshipped and praised God the Redeemer, who deemed me worthy to see this. Blessed art thou, O God my Redeemer ; and blessed be thy name forever and ever. Amen.

Ends, in the help of our Lord, the vision which Ezra the Scribe saw concerning the kingdom of the Ishmaelites. And [to] God be the glory. Amen.

This book was copied by David Qeryat 'Amadi [*i.e.*, of the village of 'Amadi] in the year of Christ 1884. To God be the glory. Amen.

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\* The reading here is a little obscure ; but the above avoids most difficulties. The alternative is " to the tabernacle and to the one fatigued (or lamenting)."