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JAMES i.18 AND THE OFFERING OF FIRST-FRUITS

From certain circles there has come an interpretation of Jas. i.18 which makes the verse teach the eventual salvation of all men. The basis of this interpretation is confessedly Westcott's thesis that in the Old Testament offering of first-fruits the part offered was thought of as sanctifying the whole. So 'the Church . . . forms the covenant people of the new order, the first fruits of God's renewed creation (Jas. i.18) in which "the open consecration of a part marks the destiny of the whole" (Westcott).' (J. A. T. Robinson in *The Historic Episcopate*, ed. K. M. Carey, 1954).

It is our contention that this interpretation of Jas. i.18 has but flimsy evidence in its support, on two grounds.

1. Westcott's thesis on first-fruits seems to be a reading back of a concept which appears in Paul (Rom. xi.16 'if the *aparche* be holy, so is the *phurama*') into the Old Testament. In none of the classic Old Testament passages on first-fruits is there mention of the significance of the offering on the rest of the crop. The offerings are demanded by God as His due portion, and are to be used for the support of the priesthood (Nu. xviii.13; 2 Ki. iv.42). They are God's tithe (Ne. xiii.5), and to deprive Him of His right is plain theft (Mal. iii.8).

First-fruits and first-born are closely allied words, both having the same Hebrew root *bkr*, and we find exactly the same thought lying behind the latter word. The first-born 'are mine' (Ex. xiii.2), but the Levites are taken in their stead (Nu. iii.41) as God's portion. Here is no thought of the sanctification of the rest by the offering of the first; rather the opposite, that the offering of God's portion frees from taboo the rest of the people or of the harvest, that they or it may be employed for secular use. This is confirmed by the Mishna Bikkurim (ii.5): 'Bikkurim, before it has been set apart, renders forbidden what is on the threshing-floor.' This seems quite clear. The offering is God's share of the harvest, and far from sanctifying the rest of the crop by being offered, it frees it from the need to be offered, and renders it lawful food.

In the New Testament Rom. xi.16 is the only case where Westcott's interpretation is certainly the one to be taken.

2. *aparche* is a much wider word in its meaning than has been readily assumed. It is used for more than first-fruits in the purely technical sense. Certainly it is regularly used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *bikkurim* (but no more than is *protogennemata*), but it also translates three other words used for offering, *terumoth*, *reshith* and *helebbh*, and is far from being the exclusive word to translate any of these. Sometimes the translators seem to have employed it simply as a word for 'offering' (cf. Ex. xxxviii.24, 'the gold of the *aparches*'), sometimes to mean 'chief' or 'best of' (cf. Nu. xviii passim; Dt. xxxiii.21; Ps. lxxviii.51, cv.36). To the Hebrew, primacy in time meant primacy of rank. It was the first-born who had the birthright. So *aparche* came to mean anything from 'of prime quality' to simply *ho protos* in time, with usually, but not always, the thought of an offering in the forefront. It is a word of very wide significance in the LXX.

Moulton and Milligan quote various uses, including a most interesting one for death duties. Here the payment of the *aparche* is hardly a guarantee that the rest of the estate will follow!

If the background of the offering of first-fruits and of the Greek word *aparche* is as we have contended, then to claim that Jas. i.18 teaches universalism is surely overstepping the mark, and reading some unintended subtlety into the mind of James.

Liverpool.

F. H. PALMER.

THE LUKEWARMNESS OF LAODICEA (Rev. iii.16)

In his study of the *Letters to the Seven Churches*, Sir William Ramsay argued that, at the time that the Apocalypse was written, each letter had been especially appropriate to the particular church to which it was addressed. The phraseology of each letter contained allusions to the contemporary circumstances of the city concerned. These allusions had been used as symbolic material to portray the spiritual character of each church. Some have dismissed Ramsay's interpretation as far-fetched, but on a recent visit to the sites of the seven cities it was felt that the majority of the suggested geographical allusions were plausible. This note arises out of some observations made around Laodicea, and is concerned with the significance of the terms 'hot', 'cold' and 'lukewarm'. It is curious that Ramsay offered no interpretation of this part of the letter. Most other commentators have taken 'lukewarmness' as a symbol of compromise between the fervent 'heat' of a believer and the indifferent 'cold' of an unbeliever. But this interpretation involves a straining of the text. It assumes that even 'cold' is better than 'lukewarmness', that even a pagan unbeliever is preferable in God's sight to a lapsed Christian; whereas in the text the association of 'hot' and 'cold' is repeated three times in a way which suggests very strongly that they symbolize *equally* commendable alternatives to 'lukewarmness'.

Ramsay pointed out that Laodicea was built on a site which was chosen only for its position at an important road-junction. It lacked a natural water supply, and had to obtain its water from some source lying to the south, for the terminal part of an aqueduct from that direction is still extant. It is in the unusual form of two stone pipes, which are badly choked with mineral matter similar to that deposited by the hot-spring at Hierapolis a few miles away. Hot-springs are not uncommon in the area, and it is possible that, in the absence of any permanent source of more normal water in the neighbourhood, Laodicea had to obtain its supply from *another* such hot-spring. If this was so, the hot water would have cooled very slowly in stone pipes, and even after flowing several miles it would probably still be warm when it reached the city. The 'lukewarmness' of the Laodicean church may therefore be an allusion to the city's water supply.

It is possible that the terms 'hot' and 'cold' also had definite local significance. At Hierapolis the hot-spring water apparently played a major part in the healing cult which flourished there. The mineral matter deposited from the water has formed a terrace edged with spectacular white cascades. These are clearly visible from Laodicea, and are one of the more conspicuous features of the view. Hence the mention of 'hot water' might well have reminded a Laodicean of the curative waters of his city's closest neighbour. For the greater part of the year the region is very hot and dry. In such a climate cold water is a most valuable source of refreshment, and the mention of 'cold water' inevitably brings to mind associations of that kind.

If this reconstruction of the local situation is correct, Laodicea must have been notorious as a city which, for all its prosperity, could provide *neither* the refreshment of cold water for the weary, *nor* the healing properties of hot water for the sick; its lukewarm water would be useless for either purpose, nauseous in taste and only fit to be 'spewed out of the mouth'. The church in Laodicea may have been intended to see in itself a similar uselessness: it was providing *neither* refreshment for the spiritually weary *nor* healing for the spiritually sick; it was totally ineffective, and hence distasteful to its Lord. On this interpretation, the church was not being informed of the state of its own 'spiritual temperature'; instead, it was being called to reflect upon the quality and effectiveness of its *works*. The statement of its 'lukewarmness' is followed by an analysis of the cause ('for you say . . .') of its ineffectiveness: it is self-satisfied, complacent and unaware of its true state. But this self-deception, though culpable, is unconscious; there is no hint of deliberate compromise. It had not become 'lukewarm' because worldly interests had chilled its proper fervour; but it had become ineffective because, believing that they were spiritually well-equipped, its members had closed their doors and left their real Provider outside.