

**THE COUNTING AND THE
INTERPRETATION OF
THE APOCALYPTIC
'NUMBER OF THE BEAST'**

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Apocalyptic "Number of the Beast"

BY THE REV.

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Ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν.—REV. xiii. 18

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THE
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"HERE IS WISDOM: LET HIM THAT HATH UNDERSTANDING COUNT
THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST; FOR NUMBER IS OF MAN, AND
HIS NUMBER IS SIX HUNDRED THREESCORE AND SIX."

Rev. xiii. 18.

[Reasons for translating *ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν*, "for number is of man," in place of "for it is the number of a man," in the Authorized Version, will be adduced in the course of the interpretation that will be given of the whole passage in the dissertation.]

FROM the above text two inferences may be immediately drawn:

First, that the terms in which the problem is proposed evidently indicate that the counting of the beast can be effected by human intelligence.

Secondly, that whoever shall first be able to give the solution may, on the authority of this Scripture, claim to be endowed with understanding and wisdom.

With respect to the first of these inferences Alford has, I think, judiciously remarked in a note to the passage, that "the terms of the challenge serve at once to show that the feat is possible, and that it is difficult;" that "the number *may* be calculated, and is *intended to be known*."

As to the other inference, it does not appear that such claim can be founded on any solution that has hitherto been proposed. Alford has expressed in his Note the opinion, that "of all the hundreds of attempts which have been made in answer to the challenge, there is but one which seems to approach near enough to an adequate solution to require serious consideration, and that one is the word mentioned, though not adopted, by Irenæus; namely, *λατῆινος*." Then, after adverting to characteristics of the Latin Empire, the Latin Church, and Latin Christianity, he adds, "Short of saying absolutely that this *was* the word in St. John's mind, I have the strongest persuasion that no other can be found approaching so near to a complete solution." However, in his *Prolegomena to the Apocalypse* (§ v. par. 32), he asserts, "Even while I print my note in favour of the *λατῆινος* of Irenæus, I feel almost disposed to withdraw it. It is beyond question the best solution that has been given; but that it is not *the* solution I have a persuasion amounting to certainty. It must be considered merely as worthy to emerge from the thousand and one failures strewed up and down in our books, and

to be kept in sight till the challenge *ὡδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν* is satisfactorily redeemed."

Dr. Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln, has produced, in his *Notes on Revelation* xiii. 17, 18, a learned dissertation in favour of the name ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ, concluding with the remark, that "the exposition given by S. Irenæus and S. Hippolytus in the second and third centuries has gained by time a force and clearness which they could not foresee; and if it was, as they affirm, very probable then, it is still more probable now."

It appears, therefore, that of the solutions hitherto proposed, that which is judged to be the most worthy of consideration is not pronounced to be wholly satisfactory.

Moreover, it is important to notice that "the number of the name of the beast" is spoken of in two other passages; namely, in Rev. xiii. 17, and in Rev. xv. 2, and in such connection as to show that complete understanding of the mystery implies being able not only to count the number of the beast, but also to reveal what the number signifies. The fact that no answer has yet been given which is capable of satisfying this condition, is of itself sufficient evidence that the true solution remains to be found.

From these prefatory statements I proceed at once to indicate an answer which, at the same time that it succeeds in counting the given number of the name of the beast, conducts also to an interpretation of the application of the number.

In the Academical Easter Term of 1880 I heard a sermon preached in St. Mary's Church, Cambridge, by the Rev. Dr. Farrar, in which he took occasion to advert to a passage in the Catholic Epistle commonly ascribed to the apostle Barnabas, for the purpose of exemplifying the arbitrary and fanciful interpretations of Scripture which are thought to be given in certain of the early Christian writings. The passage he referred to is thus translated by Archbishop Wake: "Understand, therefore, children, these things more fully, that Abraham, who was the first that brought in circumcision, looking forward in the Spirit to Jesus, circumcised, having received the mystery of three letters. For the Scripture says, that Abraham circumcised three hundred and eighteen men of his house. But what, therefore, was the mystery that was made known to him? Mark, first, the eighteen, and next the three hundred. For the numeral letters of ten and eight are IH; and these denote Jesus. And because the cross was that by which we were to find grace, therefore he adds three hundred, the note of which is T [the figure of the cross]. He who has put the engrafted word of his doctrine within us, knows that I never taught to any one a more certain [*or, genuine*] truth; but I trust ye are worthy of it." (§ ix.) Dr. Farrar called the author of the epistle "Pseudo-Barnabas." It is, however, to be observed that there is nothing in the epistle from which a name, or pretence of a name, of the author can be inferred.

The authority for ascribing it to the apostle Barnabas is the consensus of very early Christian writers as to his being the author, and the acceptance which they accorded to its contents. In fact the authority is the same in kind as that whereby names of authors have been attached to several of the canonical books of the New Testament, as, for instance, the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark. The appellation Pseudo-Barnabas, which implies that those who use it do not consider the real author to be the apostle Barnabas, has probably been founded on the conclusions of modern critics, who, on account of the peculiar allegorical character of certain interpretations which the epistle contains, refuse to admit that the Barnabas who was associated with St. Paul in preaching the gospel to Gentiles could have been the author. Thus a result of modern criticism is placed in direct opposition to the expressed belief of writers that lived at epochs comparatively near the age in which Barnabas discharged his apostolic ministry. (See what is said on this question by Archbishop Wake in sections 18-34 of his *Preliminary Discourse of the Epistle of St. Barnabas*.)

The question as to whether the apostle Barnabas was actually the author of the epistle ascribed to him, has an important bearing on the present undertaking, because the principle of the application to sacred subjects of counting according to the numerical values of Greek letters (which has been adopted in the