

THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

History of Interpretation.

During the 1900 years of the Christian Church's history no portion of God's word has proved to be more attractive and even alluring to Bible students than the Book of Revelation. It is safe to say that more literature has been produced, more explanations offered, and more commentaries and expositions published concerning this book than any other portion of the sacred writings, and yet, while it is true that so much has been written, and so much time and effort expended in attempting to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of its message, it is equally true that of this vast amount of literature, comparatively little is of any real value. This will be readily understood when it is learned that the great majority of these writers have followed the old and unscientific method of adopting some *a priori* theory, and then by the application of this theory, attempting to disclose the secret treasures which the book was supposed to contain.

The earliest writers whose views have come down to us, are Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Victorinus, who lived and labored from fifty to one hundred years after the book had been written and its message received by its first readers. They all use what is known as the Eschatological method, and all are strongly chiliastic in their interpretation, or, as we would say, they all stand firmly on the belief in the speedy return of Christ to defeat His enemies, set up His kingdom, and reign with His saints on the earth for a thousand years. In their writings, however, are found traces of a contemporary historical interpretation, by which they attempt to identify certain figures and references with persons and events of the author's own time. And again, there are to be found the beginnings of that tendency of the Alexandrian School to allegorize, a tendency which, as we shall see, held complete sway for more than eight hundred years. It succeeded in crowding out the Eschatological method as the opposition of the Empire to the Church died out and the Christian religion became more popular. Chiliasm then became a thing of the past, and Christ's reign of a thousand years was interpreted as simply a period in the history of the Church. To Tyconius it was that period between the first and second advents of Christ. The second was to take place three and a-half days, *i.e.*, 350 years after the first or about 350 A.D. To most scholars and teachers it meant a thousand years from either the birth or the death of Christ, and so intense and widespread was this belief that when the year one