

F. Roguenet Perron

A SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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CHRISTIANITY AND MYTHOLOGY.

A SHORT
HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

BY
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PREFACE.

AN attempt to write the history of Christianity in the space of an average novel is so obviously open to objections that, instead of trying to parry them, I shall merely state what seems to me the possible compensation of brevity in such a matter. It is or may be conducive to total comprehension, to coherence of judgment, and in a measure even to the understanding of details. A distinguished expert in historical and philological research has avowed that specialists sometimes get their most illuminating ideas from a haphazard glance into a popular and condensed presentment of their own subject. Without hoping so to help the experts, I humbly conceive that the present conspectus of Christian history may do an occasional service even to an opponent by bringing out a clear issue. Writers of a different way of thinking have done as much for me.

The primary difficulty is of course the problem of origins. In my treatment of this problem, going as I do beyond the concessions of the most advanced professional scholars, I cannot expect much acquiescence for the present. It must here suffice to say, first, that the data and the argument, insofar as they are not

fully set forth in the following pages, have been presented in the larger work entitled *Christianity and Mythology*, or in the quarters mentioned in the Synopsis of Literature appended to this volume; and, secondly, to urge that opponents should read the study on the Gospels by Professor Schmiedel in the new *Encyclopædia Biblica* before taking up their defensive positions. But so far am I from supposing my own solutions to be definitive that I desire here to avow a modification of opinion made since the first part of the book was printed. It is there assumed that the received translation of a familiar passage (Luke xvii. 21), "The kingdom of God is within you," is right. On challenge and reflection I have to admit that it is not: the proper translation is almost certainly "in your midst"; and the passage thus falls in line with the other accounts in Luke of the kingdom of heaven as a religious movement or communion. My line of argument is not here affected; but it may well be that some other such necessary correction might somewhere impair it.

One of the drawbacks of short histories is that in them at times a disputable proposition has to be summarily put. I doubt, however, whether this occurs oftener in the following pages than in lengthy treatises, where full discussion is fairly to be expected. For instance, I have held that the reference in Rev. ii. 8 to "the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan," is to the Pauline or other Gentilising Jew-

Christists. That is the view of Renan. Harnack, who passes for a more solid authority, pronounces summarily that the phrase is cast by Jew-Christists at orthodox Jews. Such a decision seems to me to be irrational, but it is impossible in such a work to give space to a refutation, where Harnack has offered no argument on the other side in a monumental treatise. The same authority has justified masses of conformist historiography by the simple dogmatic assertion that the time is near at hand when men will universally recognise, in matters of Christian origins, "the essential rightness of tradition, with a few important exceptions." In putting forth a sketch which so little conforms to that opinion, I would but claim that it is not more unjudicial in its method than more conservative performances.

After the period of "origins" has been passed, there is happily less room for demur on any grounds. The statements of fact in the second and third parts are for the most part easily to be supported from the testimony of standard ecclesiastical historians; and the general judgments sometimes cited in inverted commas, in all four parts, are nearly always from orthodox writers. What is special to the present treatise is the sociological interpretation. It was indeed to the end of such interpretation that the researches here summarised were begun, over sixteen years ago; and in a documented work on *The Rise of Christianity, Sociologically Considered*, I hope more fully to present it. But as my first perplexity was to

ascertain the real historical *processus*, I have never subordinated that need to the desire for explanation.

It hardly needs actual experience of the risks of error and oversight in a condensed narrative to convince one of the difficulty of escaping them. Where no single authority is found infallible, I must at times have miscarried, were it only because I have aimed at something beyond a condensation of current accounts. No criticism, therefore, will be more highly valued by me than one which corrects my errors of fact.

In order to cover the ground within the compass taken, it was absolutely necessary to digest the subject-matter under general heads; and the chronological movement may in consequence be less clear than in histories which proceed by centuries. As a partial remedy, dates have been frequently inserted in the narrative, and it is hoped that the full index will help to meet the difficulty which may sometimes be felt as to where a given name or episode should be looked for.

It is perhaps needless to add that the appended Synopsis of Literature does not in the least pretend to be a bibliography for professed students. It is designed merely as a first help to painstaking readers to search and judge for themselves on the problems under notice.

December, 1901.

PART I.—PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNINGS.

§ 1. *Documentary Clues.*

IN the ancient history of religions, as in the ancient history of nations, the first account given of origins is almost always a myth. A divine or worshipped founder is craved by the primitive imagination no less for cults and institutions, tribes and polities, than for the forms of life and the universe itself; and history, like science, may roughly be said to begin only when that craving for first causes has been discredited, or controlled, by the later arising instinct of exact observation. Such a check or control tends to be set up by the presence of intelligently hostile forces, as in the case of the religion of Mohammed, whose teaching warred with and was warred on by rival cultures from the first, and whose own written and definite doctrine forbade his apotheosis. Some of the early Christian sects, which went far towards setting up independent cults, had their origins similarly defined by the pressure of criticism from the main body. But before the Christian system had taken organised historic form, in virtue of having come into the heritage of literary and political method embodied

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in the Greco-Roman civilisation, it is rarely possible to trust the record of any cult's beginnings, even where it professes to derive from a non-supernatural teacher; so ungoverned is the myth-making instinct in the absence of persistent criticism. Buddha, Zoroaster, and Moses are only less obviously mythical figures than Krishna, Hercules, and Osiris. Of the Christian cult it can at best be said that it takes its rise on the border-land between the historical and the unhistorical, since any rational defence of it to-day admits that in the story of its origins there is at least an element of sheer myth.

The oldest documents of the cult are ostensibly the Epistles of Paul; and concerning these there are initial perplexities, some being more or less clearly spurious—that is, very different from or much later in character than the rest, while all of the others show signs of interpolation. Taken as they stand, however, they reveal a remarkable ignorance of the greater part of the narratives in the Gospels, and of the whole body of the teachings there ascribed to Jesus. In three respects only do the Pauline writings give any support to the histories later accepted by the Christian Church. They habitually speak of Jesus as crucified, and as having risen from the dead; they contain one account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, in agreement with the gospel account; and they make one mention of "the twelve." But the two latter allusions occur in passages (1 Cor. xi. and xv.) which have every mark of interpolation; and when they are withdrawn the Pauline letters tell only of a cult, Jewish in origin, in which a crucified Jesus—called the Messiah or Christos or Anointed One—figures as a saving sacrifice, but counts for absolutely

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important

nothing as a teacher or even as a wonder-worker. *important*

A Eucharist or religious meal is celebrated in his name, but no mention is made of any teaching uttered by the founder. And nothing in the epistles enables us even to date them independently of the gospel narratives, which they so strangely fail to confirm. Thus the case stands with the New Testament very much as with the Old. As the Book of Judges reveals a state of Hebrew life quite incompatible with that described in the Pentateuch as having preceded it, so do the epistles of Paul reveal a stage of Christist propaganda incompatible with any such prior development as is set forth in the gospel. And the conclusion in the two cases is the same: that the documents setting forth the prior developments are not only later in composition but substantially fictitious, even where they do not tell of supernatural events. *important*

What needs to be explained in both cases is the way in which the later narratives came to be compiled. Within a hundred years from the date commonly assigned to the Crucifixion there are Gentile traces of a Jesuist or Christist movement deriving from Jewry, and possessing a gospel or memoir as well as some of the Pauline and other epistles, both spurious and genuine; but the gospel then current is seen to have contained some matter not preserved in the canonical four, and to have lacked much that those contain. Of those traces the earliest are found in one epistle of Clement called Bishop of Rome (fl. about 100), which, whether genuine or not, is ancient, and in the older form of the epistles ascribed to the Martyr Ignatius (d. about 115?) of which the same may be said. About the middle of the second century the writings of Justin Martyr tell of a Christist memoir, but show no

knowledge of the Pauline epistles. All alike tell of a spreading cult, with a theology not yet coherently dogmatic, founding mainly on a crucified Jesus, faith in whom ensures salvation.

Like the letters of Paul, those ascribed to Clement and Ignatius tell of schisms and strifes in the churches: that is the constant note of Christian history from first to last. As to rites, we have but a bare mention of the eucharist and of baptism; the story of the founder's parentage is still unknown, and his miracles are as unheard of as most of his teachings. There is nothing in Clement, or in the older Ignatian epistles, or in that ascribed to Polycarp (circa 150), or in that of Barnabas (same period), to show knowledge of the existing gospels of Luke or John; a solitary parallel to Luke being rather a proof that the passage echoed had been taken from some earlier document; and the gospel actually cited as late as Justin is certainly not identical with either Mark or Matthew. Even from Paul there is hardly any quotation; and Clement, who mentions or is made to mention his epistle to the Corinthians, pens a long passage in praise of love which has no quotation from the apostle's famous chapter on that head, though it would have seemed made for his purpose. In view of their lax way of quoting the Old Testament we may infer that the early fathers or forgers had few manuscripts; and it is plain that they set no such store by Christian documents as they did by the Jewish; but the fact remains that they fail to vouch for much even of those Pauline epistles which commonly rank as incontestable. At times, as in the Pauline use of the word *ektroma* (1 Cor. xv. 8), which occurs in a similar phrase in one of the Ignatian epistles, there is reason

to conclude that the "apostolic" writing has been interpolated in imitation of the "post-apostolic."

It does not indeed follow that documents or chapters not quoted or utilised by the fathers were in their day non-existent. The letters of Paul, supposing them to be genuine, would in any case be only gradually made common property. All the evidence goes to show that the early Christians were for the most part drawn from the illiterate classes; and the age of abundant manuscripts would begin only with the age of educated converts. But what is inconceivable is that one so placed as Paul should never once cite the teachings of the Founder, if such teachings were current in his day in any shape; and what is extremely improbable is that one so placed as Clement, or one forging or interpolating in his name, should possess Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians as it now stands, and yet should barely mention it in a letter to the same church dealing with almost the same problems. In the first case, we are forced to conclude that the gospel narratives were non-existent for the writer or writers of the Pauline epistles up to the point of the two interpolations which allege an accepted tradition; and that the Pauline epistles themselves are nowhere quite certainly genuine. Such irremovable doubt is the Nemesis of the early Christian habits of forgery and fiction.

There emerges, however, the residual fact that Paul ranked in the second century as a historical and natural personage, in whose name it was worth while to forge; even as for Paul's period Jesus was a historical personage, not supposed to be supernaturally born, though credited with a supernatural resurrection. Broadly speaking, the age of an early

Christian document is found to be in the ratio of its narrative bareness, its lack of biographical myth, its want of relation to the existing gospels. As between the shorter and the longer form of the Ignatian epistles, the question of priority is at once settled by the frequent citations from the gospels and from Paul in the latter, and the lack of them in the former. But all the documents alike appear to point to a movement which took its rise among the Jews long before the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem by Titus in the year 70, and subsisted in Jewry long afterwards; and, as the Jewish environment lacked many of the forces of change present in the Gentile, it is to the Jewish form of the cult that we must first look if we would trace its growth.

§ 2. *The Earliest Christian Sects.*

The first properly historical as distinct from the "scriptural" notices of the Church at Jerusalem tell of a quasi-Christian sect there, known as Ebionites or *Ebionim*, a Hebrew word which signified simply "the poor." From the point of view of the Gentile Christians of the end of the second century they were heretics, seeing that they used a form of the Gospel of Matthew lacking the first two chapters, denied the divinity of Jesus, and rejected the apostleship of Paul. As they likewise rejected the Hebrew prophets, accepting only the Pentateuch, there is some reason to suppose that they were either of Samaritan derivation or the descendants of an old element in the Judean population which, from the time of Ezra onwards, had rejected the later Biblical writings as

the Samaritans did. On either view it would follow that the Jesuist movement rooted from the first in a lower stratum of the population, hostile to orthodox or Pharisaic Judaism, as were the Sadducees among the upper classes. The Samaritans made special account of Joshua (=Jesus), having a book which bore his name; and we shall see later that that name was anciently a divine one for some Syrian populations.

Later notices bring to light the existence of a smaller sect, called by the Greeks *Nazoraioi*, Nazarites or Nazaræans, the term said in the Acts of the Apostles (xxiv. 5) to have been applied to the early Jesuists, and often applied in that book as well as in the gospels to Jesus. According to one account this sect objected to be called Christians, though it appears to have been on the assumption of their derivation from the first Christians that they had not earlier been stamped as heretics. Through the two sects under notice may be gathered the probable development of early Jesuism.

It cannot have been from the place-name Nazareth that any Jesuist sect were first called Nazaræans, a term standing either for the variously-spelt *Nazir* (Nazarite, or, properly, Nazirite) of the Old Testament, or for a compound of the term *netzer* (=a branch), used in the passage of Isaiah (xi. 1) supposed to be cited in the first gospel (ii. 23). Even the form "Nazarene," sometimes substituted in the gospels for the other, could not conceivably have been, to start with, the name for a sect founded by a man who, like the gospel Jesus, was merely said to have been reared at a village called Nazareth or Nazara, and never taught there. In none of the Pauline or other canonical epistles, however, is Jesus

n. ever called Nazarite, or Nazarene, or "of Nazareth"; and the Ebionite gospel, lacking the Nazareth story, would lack any such appellation. The Ebionite sect, then, appears to have stood for the first form of the cult, and to have developed the first form of gospel; while the later Nazaræan sect appears to be either a post-Pauline but Judaic growth from the Ebionite roots, or a post-Pauline grafting of another movement on the Jesuism of the Ebionites.

Ebionism, to begin with, whether ancient and quasi-Samaritan or a product of innovation in the immediately pre-Roman period, is intelligible as the label of a movement which held by the saying "Blessed are ye poor" or "poor in spirit," found in the so-called Sermon on the Plain and Sermon on the Mount (Luke vi. 20; Matt. v. 3). In poverty-stricken Jewry, with a prophetic and proverbial literature in which, as generally in the East, the poor are treated with sympathy, such a label would readily grow popular, as it had done for the Buddhist "mendicants" in India. Its association, however, with a cult of a slain and Messianic Jesus raises the question whether the latter was not the germ of the movement; and there are some grounds for supposing that the sect may have arisen around one Jesus the son of Pandira, who is mentioned in the Talmud as having been hanged on a tree and stoned to death at Lydda, on the eve of a Passover, in the reign of Alexander Jannæus. It was customary to execute important offenders at that season; and as the Paschal feast had a specifically atoning significance, a teacher then executed might come to be regarded as an atoning sacrifice. But there are traces in the Old Testament of a Messianic movement connected with

most important

(the name Jesus at some uncertain period before the Christian era. In the book of Zechariah, of which the first six chapters appear to be much later than the rest, there is named one Jesus (*Heb.* Joshua), a high priest, who figures Messianically as "the Branch," and is doubly crowned as priest and king. In the obscurity which covers most of the prophetic literature, it is difficult to say for what historic activities this piece of symbolism stands; but it must have stood for something. From it, in any case, we gather the fact that much stress was laid on the symbol of "the Branch" (or "sprout"), called in the present text of Zechariah *tsemach*, but in Isaiah *nazar* or *netzer*. Among the Gentiles that symbol belonged to the worships of several Gods and goddesses—as Mithra, Attis, Apollo, and Dêmêtêr—and appears to have meant the principle of life, typified in vegetation; among the Jews it was certainly bound up with the general belief in a coming Messiah who should restore Jewish independence. It is not impossible, then, that a Messianic party were early called "Netzerites" or "Nazaræans" on that account; and such a sect could in the Judaic fashion find all manner of significances in the name of the high priest, since "Jesus" (=Joshua) signified Saviour, and the ancient and mythical Joshua was a typical deliverer. The Mosaic promise (*Deut.* xviii. 15) of a later prophet and leader, which in the Acts is held to apply to the crucified Jesus, had formerly been held by Jews to apply to the Joshua who succeeded Moses; and in that case there is reason to surmise that an older myth or cult centring round the name had given rise to the historical fiction of the Hebrew books. But the subject must remain obscure. There is even some

(= netzer
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doubtful evidence of the later existence of a sect of "Jesseans," possibly distinct from the historical "Essenes," who may have founded on Isaiah's "Branch from the roots of Jesse."

The following, then, are the historical possibilities. A poor sect or caste of *Ebionim*, marked off from orthodox Jewry, and akin to the population of Samaria, may have subsisted throughout the post-exilic period, and may either have preserved an old Jesuist cult with a sacrament or adopted a later Samaritan movement. From that might have been developed the "Nazarene" sect of Christist history. On the other hand, a sect of "Nazaræans," holding by the Messianic name of Jesus, *may* have existed in the pre-Roman period, but may have come to figure specially as *Ebionim* or "poor" when the earlier or political form of Messianic hope waned. Their name may also have led to their being either confused or conjoined with the "Nazirites" of Jewry, a numerous but fluctuating body, under temporary vows of abstinence. But that body, again, may have become generally Messianist, and may have adopted the Messianic "Branch" in the verbalising spirit so common in Jewry, while continuing to call itself Nazarite in the old sense. It is indeed on record that some Jews made vows to "be a Nazarite when the Son of David should come"; and such were free to drink wine on Sabbaths, though not on week days. Such Nazarites could have constituted the first sacramental assemblies of the Christists. And as the Hebrew *Nazir* (Sept. Gr. *Nazoraïos*) had the meaning of "consecrated" or "holy to the Lord," the early Gentile Christians may very well have translated the word into their own languages instead of

transliterating it. On that view the *hagioi* or "saints" of the Acts and the epistles and the Apocalypse may have strictly stood for "the Nazirites," "the *devoti*."

Seeing, however, that the later Nazaræans are reported to have adopted the (obviously late) first and second chapters of Matthew, while the Ebionites rejected them; and seeing that these chapters, embodying the story of the flight into Egypt, make Jesus at once a Jewish and a Gentile Christ, it would appear that the Gentile movement had then reacted on the Jewish, and that the ultra-Jewish Jesuists had now relinquished the name of Nazaræan to the less rigid, who at this stage probably used a Greek gospel. Finally, as the original sense of "Nazirite" implied either a Judaic vow—irksome to the Gentile Christians, and probably to many of the Jewish—or a specially Judaic character in the founder, and as the political implication of the "netzer" (supposing that to have adhered to the sect-name) was anti-Roman, there would arise a disposition to seek for the term another significance. This, doubtless on the suggestion of Gentiles accustomed to hear Jewish sectaries called "Galileans," was found in the figment that the founder, though declared to have been Messianically born in Bethlehem, had been reared in the Galilean village of Nazareth or Nazara. Instead of being a historical datum, as is assumed by so many rationalising historians, that record is really a pragmatic myth superimposed on the Bethlehem myth. The textual analysis shows that wherever it occurs in the gospels and Acts the name Nazareth has been foisted on the documents.

Hence, however, arose the Greek form "Nazarenos,"

very important

which finally became to a certain extent imposed on the canonical gospels, but especially on that of Mark, which appears to have been redacted under Roman authority in the interests of ecclesiastical order. Naturally, the Latin Vulgate adopted the same term throughout the Gospels and Acts, save in the crucial text, Matt. ii. 23. Otherwise the texts are almost wholly in favour of the form "Nazoraïos"—that is, Nazaraean or Nazirite.

§ 3. *Personality of the Nominal Founder.*

Even for minds wont to see mere myth in the idea of such long-worshipped Saviours as Apollo and Osiris, Krishna and Mithra, it cannot but be startling to meet for the first time the thought that there is no historic reality in a figure so long revered and beloved by half the human race as the Jesus of the gospels. It was only after generations of scrutiny that rationalism began to doubt the actuality of the Teacher it had unhesitatingly surmised behind the impossible demigod of the records. The first, indeed, to see in him sheer myth were the students who were intent chiefly on the myths of action in the story: to return to the teaching as such was to recover the old impression of a real voice. It is only after a further analysis—a scrupulous survey of the texts—that the inquirer can realise how illusory that impression really is.

The proposition is not that the mere lateness of the gospels deprives them of authority as evidence (for they proceeded on earlier documents), but that throughout they are demonstrably results of accretion through several generations, and that the earliest

sections were put together long after the period they profess to deal with. The older portions of the Pauline epistles show no knowledge of any Jesuine biography or any Jesuine teaching—a circumstance which suggests that the Jesus of Paul is much more remote from Paul's day than is admitted by the records. Later, the Christian writers are found to have certain narratives, evidently expanded from generation to generation, till at the end of the second century there exist the four canonical gospels, which, however, are not known to have been even then completed. Celsus, in his anti-Christian treatise, supposed to have been written between 170 and 180, speaks of the gospels as having undergone endless alteration; and additions were still possible after the time of Origen, who weakly replied to Celsus that the alterations were the work of heretics. Side by side with the four there had grown up a multitude of "apocryphal" gospels, of which some were long as popular as the canonical, though all were ultimately discarded by the Councils of the Church. The principle of exclusion was essentially that of the tentative criticism of modern times—the critical sense of the inferiority of mere tales of wonders to narratives which contained, besides wonders, elements of moral instruction.

In natural course, criticism first rejects miraculous episodes, next excludes teachings which profess to come from a God-man, and then seeks to infer a personality from those which are left; but inasmuch as those, like the rest, are disparate and even contradictory, the process usually ends in an avowedly arbitrary selection. And to all such selection the loyal study of the texts is fatal. To put aside, as

some still do, the fourth gospel, and then take a stand on the synoptics, is merely to arrest factitiously the critical process, which, when consistently pursued, leads to the conviction that the synoptics were built up by the same order of impulses, under the same conditions of unchecked invention and interpolation, as gave rise to the most obvious fictions in the gospel of "John." We are led without escape to the conclusion that no strain of teaching in the gospels can be fathered on the shadowy founder, who for Paul is only a crucified phantom. The humanistic teachings are no more primordial, no less capable of interpolation, than the mystical and the oracular. Some of the best sayings are among the very latest; some of the narrowest belong to the earliest tradition. Collectively, they tell of a hundred hands.

Realising that the nominal founder of Paul's Jesuism may possibly be the slain Jesus Pandira of the Talmud, a hundred years "before Christ," we next ask whether any such founder must not be supposed to have taught *something*, to make men see in him a Messiah and preserve his name. The answer is that the name alone was a large part of the qualification for a Jewish Messiah; that the chance of his execution on the eve of the Passover would give it for some Jews a mystic significance; and that a story of his resurrection, a story easily floated in case of an alleged sorcerer, such as the Talmudic Jesus, would complete the conditions required for the growth of a myth and a cult, seeing that the Jews traditionally expected the Messiah to come at midnight of the day of Passover. Doubtless the alleged sorcerer may have been an innovating teacher. It is quite possible, indeed, that as a bearer of the fated name he may have made

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Messianic claims: the form of death said to have been inflicted on him suggests energetic priestly or political hostility. But of his utterances history preserves no trace: even in the Talmud his story has passed into legendary form. Thus it is not even certain that the earliest Jesuism took shape round the memory of an actual man. The mythic Joshua (Jesus) of the Old Testament is seen to have been in all likelihood, like Samson, an ancient Semitic but non-Jewish Sun-God, his name, "the Saviour," being a common divine epithet; and as he is in Arab tradition the son of the mythic Miriam (Mary), it may be that the roots of the historic Christian cult go back to an immemorial Semitic antiquity, when already the name of Jesus was divine. In the shadow of that name its origins are hidden.

When the historic Church set about a statement of its history, it could not even fix satisfactorily the year of its supposed founder's birth; and the "Christian era" was made to begin some years—two, three, four, five, or eight—after those on which the chronologists were later fain to fix, by way of conforming to their most precise document. Their data, however, have no more value than any other guess. So little of the semblance of historical testimony do the gospels yield that it is impossible to establish from them any proposition as to the duration of the God-man's ministry; and the early Church in general held by the tradition that it lasted exactly one year, an opinion which again points straight to myth, since it is either a dogmatic assumption based on the formula of "the acceptable year of the Lord," or a simple reversion to the story of the Sun-God. Of the life of the alleged teacher from the age of twelve to thirty

—another mythological period—there is not a single trace, mythical or non-mythical, though at his death he is represented as the centre of a large and adoring following. Ultimately, his birth was placed at the winter solstice, the birth-day of the Sun-God in the most popular cults; and while that is fixed as an anniversary, the date of his crucifixion is made to vary from year to year in order to conform to the astronomical principle on which the Jews, following the sun-worshippers, had fixed their Passover. Between those fabulous points everything the gospels affirm as biographical fact is fortuitous or purposive invention, which on scientific analysis “leaves not a wrack behind” in the nature of objective history.

Before accepting such a verdict the sympathetic seeker is apt to grasp at the old argument that such a figure as the gospel Jesus cannot have been created either by fortuitous fable or by fictions; that its moral stature is above that of any of the men we can trace in the gospel-making period; that its spiritual unity excludes the theory of a literary mosaic. It must first be answered that these positions beg the question and falsify the data. That the figure of the gospel Jesus is actually devoid of moral unity is made clear by the very attempts to unify it, since they one and all leave out much of the records; and the claim to moral superiority collapses, even apart from the obvious fact that the texts are aggregations, as soon as we compare them with the contemporary and previous ethical literature of the Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Hindus. There is not one teaching in the gospels that is not there paralleled; and the passages which have been claimed as most characteristic—for instance, the Sermon on the Mount—are mere compilations of earlier Jewish

utterances. Thus the unity credited to the records, and the personality ascribed to the founder, are but creations of the same sympathetic human imagination that wove tissues of poetry and pathos round the figures of Dionysos and Buddha, and framed for the cult of Krishna its most impressive document when the cult was already ancient beyond reckoning. As man has made his Gods, so he has made his Christs: it would be strange indeed if the faculty which wrought the one could not create the other.

§ 4. *Myth of the Twelve Apostles.*

In one of the Pauline epistles, which are usually understood to belong to the generation immediately following on that of the founder, there is mention of three chief Apostles with whom Paul had disputes, but none of any contemporary group of Twelve; and the only historical allusion to the latter number is in one of the interpolations in First Corinthians, where it appears to be a patch upon a patch. In the Acts of the Apostles, which though a fraudulent is an ancient compilation, there is a preliminary story of the election of an apostle to fill the place of Judas, deceased and disgraced; but not only is there no further pretence of such a process of completion, the majority of the twelve themselves speedily disappear from the history. Once more we are dealing with a myth. In the Apocalypse, again, after the original Judaic document has pictured a New Jerusalem with twelve gates and angels, named after the twelve tribes, the Christian interpolator has betrayed himself by the awkward invention of twelve "basement courses"

named after the "twelve Apostles of the Lamb," where a Christian author would have given the apostles the gates if anything, had a list of twelve Jesuist apostles existed. In heaven the Lamb is surrounded, not by twelve disciples, but by the "four and twenty presbyters" of the older cult, which knew no divinely-ordained *cortège* of twelve.

In the gospels the lack of historic foundation is no less decisive. Circumstantial but irreconcilable accounts, obviously mythical, are given of the selection of four or five apostles, whereafter the narratives, without a word of preparation or explanation, proceed to a sudden constitution of the group of twelve, with only the mythological detail, in one case, that they were "called" by the Master on a mountain. Thus the element of the Twelve is not even an early item in the records, but has been imposed on documents which set out with no such datum, but with primary groups of five, four, and three.

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The historical solution of the problem as to the source of the fiction is now tolerably certain. It is on record that the Jewish High Priest of the latter days of the Temple, and after him the Patriarch at Tiberias, employed certain "Apostles" as tribute-collectors and supervisors of the many faithful Jews scattered throughout the neighbouring kingdoms. By common Jewish usage these would number twelve. As the dispersed Jewish race multiplied abroad after the fall of the Temple, it is probable that under the upper grade of twelve there was created a body of seventy-two collectors, who answered to the traditional number of "the nations" in Jewish lore. Such a body is the probable basis for the admittedly mythical "seventy" or "seventy-two" of the third Gospel. At

this stage the twelve appear to have exercised chiefly teaching and regulative functions, for it is clear that the quasi-Christian document, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, recovered in 1873 and published in 1883, was originally a purely Jewish manual of moral exhortation, and as such bore its existing title. To the six or seven purely Judaic and non-Jesuist chapters which seem to constitute the original document, and which contain passages copied in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, there were gradually added others, introducing the rites of baptism and the eucharist, the name of Jesus, the doctrine of the Trinity, and various rules of economic procedure. In this gradual fashion a Jesuist cult, in which Jesus is called the "servant" of God, was grafted on an originally Judaic moral teaching, the prestige of the Jewish "Twelve Apostles" being all the while carried on. It was to give a Christian origin for this document that the gospel myth of the Twelve Apostles was framed. After the time of Athanasius, the expanded document, being still unduly Judaic and otherwise unsuitable for the purposes of the organised Church, passed into disuse; but the myth remained.

As regards the three "chief" apostles named in one of the Pauline epistles, there is a reasonable presumption that they were either leading propagandists of the Jesuist cult as it existed at the time of the writing, or so reputed by later tradition; but the assumption that they had been associates and disciples of the founder must be abandoned with the rest of the gospel tradition. They were necessarily woven into the gospel narrative by the later compilers; but the Epistle to the Galatians lies under the general suspicion of having been interpolated, if not wholly

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forged ; and its very naming of the Judaic apostles is as much a ground for question as a datum for construction. It is probable, further, that the title "brethren of the Lord" was originally a group-name, and that the literal construction of it was a misconception by the later interpolators of the epistles and the gospels. The name of Peter, finally, became a nucleus for many myths ; and the two epistles which bear his name have so little relation to the personality set forth in the gospels that both have been widely discredited as forgeries ; the second having indeed been so reputed in the days of Eusebius. The Simon-Petros (Cephas) of the gospels, however, is in himself a mere literary creation, all that holds good being the fact that a tradition grew round the names in question, both of which hint of mythology,—Petros ("the Rock") being the name of an Egyptian God and of the popular Eastern deity Mithra ; and Simon the name of a no less popular Semitic God. In his final aspect as leader of the twelve, basis of the Church, and keeper of the heavenly keys, Peter combines the attributes of Mithra and of Janus, both official deities of the Roman military class, as well as of the Egyptian Petra—who is door-keeper of heaven, earth, and the under world.

The Epistle of James, by whomsoever written, is in no sense a Christist document—containing as it does not a single Jesuit or Christian doctrine, save perhaps the appended invective against the rich, which is Ebionitic. Of its two namings of Jesus, one is clearly an interpolation, and the other is presumptively so. There remains only a moral exhortation to Jews meeting in synagogues, a teaching strictly comparable to the original and pre-Jesuine "Teaching

of the Twelve Apostles," though the epistle makes no mention of any other apostles. Such writing tells of an essentially different propaganda from that of the Christists proper; and its preservation by them testifies to its priority. The epistles ascribed to John, on the contrary, belong to a considerably later period; telling as they do of a fanatical movement which swears by the name of Jesus the Christ as one who has died to take away sin, but which is full of apprehension as to the advent and functions of a number of Antichrists.

Judas (Ioudas), of whom there is no mention in any of the epistles, and whose traditional treason is not recognised in the lately-recovered "Gospel of Peter," or in the pseudo-Pauline reference to "the twelve," is a late creation; having probably taken shape first as a simple *Ioudaios*, "a Jew," in an early Christian mystery play of the crucifixion and resurrection. Mythologically, the conception may derive from the *Diabolos* or "Adversary" of Persian lore, as Judas in the Gospels is called "a devil"; and the tradition which gave him red hair assimilated him to Typhon, the slayer of the Egyptian Saviour-God, Osiris. The story of the betrayal in the gospels is in any case fabulous, and its presence can be best explained on the theory that such a mystery-play, arising among the Gentiles, would represent a Jew as betraying the Lord, even as the twelve were represented as forsaking their master. A bag to hold the blood-money would be a dramatic accessory, and would originate the view that Judas had been the treasurer of the apostolic group.

§ 5. *Primary Forms of the Cult.*

In its first traceable historic form Christianity was simply a phase of Judaism, being the creed of a small number of Jews and Jewish proselytes who believed that the long-desired Messiah had come in the person of one Jesus, who had been so slain as to constitute an atoning sacrifice. Such believers were wont to meet at simple religious banquets, of a kind common in the Greco-Roman world, where they ate and drank in a semi-ceremonial way. A sacrificial banquet of this kind was one of the most universal features of ancient religion, being originally the typical tribal ceremony; and though among the Jews it had been to a remarkable extent superseded by sacrifices without communion, the usage was once as general with them as with the Gentiles. If grown rare in their life, the idea was abundantly preserved in their sacred books. The presumption is that such a banquet was connected with the Semitic God-name Jesus or Joshua before the Christian era; otherwise we must conclude that a sect of Jesuists, starting from the bare belief in the sacrificial death, adopted arbitrarily a kind of rite which was identified with the heathen worships of the surrounding Gentiles, and adopted also the Gentile sun-worshippers' practice of assembling by night. Paul's Corinthian converts are described as frequenting indifferently the table of Jesus ("the Lord") and the table of "dæmons"—that is, of heathen Gods or demigods. As the less orthodox Jews had long dabbled in similar "mysteries," there is every probability that private "Holy Suppers" had been practised even in Jewry by some groups long before

the Christian period, whether or not in connection with the name of Jesus "the Saviour." The gospel phrase, "blood of the covenant," points to a standing usage, the original form of which was probably the mutual drinking of actual human blood by the parties to a solemn pledge. In the Hebrew system some such covenant was held to be set up between the Deity and the worshippers on the one hand, and among the latter themselves on the other, when a sacrifice was partaken of. But it is further probable that the idea of a mystical partaking of an atoning or inspiring "body and blood" was of old standing in the same kind of connection. Such a practice was certainly part of the great Asiatic cults of Dionysos and Mithra; and as the ancient idea of a sacrificial banquet in honour of a God usually was that in some sense the worshipped power was either eaten, or present as partaker, it is more than likely that any banquets in connection with the Syrian worships of Adonis and (or) Marnas (each name = "the Lord") carried with them the same significance. In early Christian usage the ministrant of the eucharist spoke in the person of the founder, using the formulas preserved in the gospels; and as the priest in the cult of Attis also personated the God, there is a strong presumption that the same thing had been done in Jewry in the pre-Christian period, by way of modifying a still older usage in which a deified victim was actually slain and eaten.

For such an ancient Jesuine eucharist (revived, perhaps, as old mysteries were apt to be among the Jews, no less than among other ancient peoples, in times of national disaster) a new meaning *may* have been found in the story of an actually slain man Jesus, whose death took a sacrificial aspect from its

occurrence at the time of the atoning feast. In the earliest teaching, certainly, Jesus is not a God; he is merely the Jewish God's "holy servant." The eating of his symbolic body and blood, however, was on a par with the rituals in which Pagans mystically partook of *their* deities, and it thus lay in the nature of the eucharist that he should become divine if he were not so originally. The expression "Son of God," once of common application, would in his case come to have a special force, in terms of the ancient Semitic doctrine that the great God Kronos or Saturn or El had sacrificed his "only begotten Son." Abraham undertakes to do the same thing in the legend in Genesis; and Abraham and Isaac were presumptively ancient deities. On the other hand, the evolution of a fabulous hero from man to demigod, and thence to a status among the highest Gods, is a common phenomenon in the ancient religions—Herakles and Dionysos being typical cases—and among the recognised Syrian worships there was already one of a *Theandrios* or God-man. Even for the Jews the name Jehovah was applicable to the Messiah. It lay, too, in the nature of the religious instinct that the man-like and man-loving God should gradually take the foremost place in a cult in which he was at first subordinate, as happened in the worships of Dionysos, Mithra, Herakles, and Krishna. Some such tendency is seen in the worship of demigods among the earlier Hebrews (Deut. xxxii. 17; *Heb.*).

It is not necessary to suppose that the Christian cult arose solely by way of a mystic sacrament. There may have been a blending of the usage of quasi-commemorative banquets, the simpler *Agape* or love-feasts of antiquity, with that of a special "mystery"; and in

the case of the latter there may have been many varieties, as there were later in the matter of liturgies. The humble Corinthian banquets appear to have combined the features of *Agapæ* and *Eucharistia*, and in the former aspect they were anything but solemn; some of the members sleeping, some drinking too much—a pathetic picture of the dim yearning for communion among a heavy-laden caste. But the nature of the eucharist proper, the claim to present an immortal “body and blood” for regenerative eating and drinking, involved a striving after sacrosanctity; and as soon as a regular ministrant was appointed by any group he would tend to develop into a priest of the Christist mysteries, magnifying his office.

The great feature of the Jewish Feast of the Passover being the eating of a lamb “before the Lord,” that usage would in Jewish circles be preferred to, or at least combined with, the sacrament of bread and wine, “Ceres and Bacchus,” which was perhaps commonest among the Gentiles. In the legend of Abraham and Melchisedek, priest of the Phœnician God El Elyon, there figures a sacramental meal of bread and wine (Gen. xiv. 18); and in the non-canonical book Ecclesiasticus there is a passage (l. 15) which suggests a use of wine as symbolical of blood. The “shew-bread,” too, seems to have had a measure of sacramental significance. But while such a rite would seem to have flourished in the background of Judaism, that of the Passover was one of the great usages of the Jewish world; and the first Jesuists clearly held by it. It is indeed one of the hierological probabilities that the paschal lamb was anciently “Jeschu” or Jesus, the springtide symbol of a Sun-

God so named; for in the book of Revelation, which is markedly Judaic, "the Lamb" figures as the known symbol or mystic name of a Son of God "slain from the founding of the world," and identified with a mystic Jesus who is one with Jehovah—this long before the Christian cult in general had arrived at such a doctrine. There is a mythological presumption that such language had reference to the fact—dwelt on by later Jewish writers—that the date of the Passover fell at the entrance of the sun into the constellation Aries in the zodiac; and the rule that the paschal lamb must be roasted, not boiled, tells also of the sun myth. Yet again, the lamb is the animal latterly substituted in the myth of Abraham and Isaac for the sacrificed only-begotten son Isaac, whose name in the Hebrew (Yischak) comes near to the common form of the name Jesus (Yeschu), and who is mythologically identifiable as a Sun-God. In any case, "the Lamb slain for us" in the Apocalypse implies a recognised sacrament of lamb-eating, such as that of the Passover, which was anciently the time for sacrificing first-born sons (Ex. xxii. 29), and which is explained even in the priestly myth as a commemoration of the sparing of the first-born of Israel when the first-born of Egypt were divinely destroyed. To such a national precedent the Hebrew Jesuists would tend to cling as they did to the practice of circumcision.

But mere poverty on the one hand, and on the other the then common ascetic instinct (which in some cases put water for wine), would tell among Gentiles against the eating of actual flesh even when the pretence was to eat flesh and drink blood. In some early Christian groups accordingly the sacrificial food took the shape of a model of a lamb in bread (a kind

of device often resorted to in pagan worship with a special form of animal sacrifice), while others actually ate a lamb and drank its blood, as did some of the Mithraists and some of the Egyptian worshippers of Ammon. The Pauline phrase, "Our Passover also has been sacrificed, Christ"—which may or may not be an interpolation—would square with either practice; but that Jews who had been wont to make much of a paschal lamb, and who held Jesus to have represented that lamb, should pass at once to a sacred meal of simple bread and wine or water, is unlikely; and the gospels themselves indicate that a dish of another kind preceded the bread and wine formality in the traditional Supper.

Light is thrown on the original nature of the Jesuist rite by the Paschal controversy in which the Eastern and Western churches are found embroiled towards the end of the second century. It turned nominally on the different accounts of the crucifixion in the synoptics and the fourth gospel. Whereas the synoptics make Jesus take the Passover with his disciples in due course, and die on the cross on the first day (the Jewish day being reckoned from evening to evening), the fourth gospel makes him sup informally with his disciples on the day before the Passover, and die at the very hour of the paschal meal. The idea obviously is that implied in the Pauline phrase already quoted—that he is henceforth the substitute for the lamb; and in actual fact the Eastern Christians of the second century are found breaking their Easter fast on the Passover day, while the Westerns did not break it till the Sunday of the resurrection. Evidently the Eastern Christians had all along preserved an immemorial usage of eating their eucharist on the

Passover. They did not do this as orthodox Jews, for they called their meal one of "salvation" in a Christist sense, and their opponents did not charge them with Judaizing; but they argued that they must take the eucharist at the time at which Jesus took it with his disciples; while the Westerns contended that the time for rejoicing and commemoration was the day of resurrection. The explanation is that the story of Jesus eating with his disciples is a myth of the kind always framed to account for an ancient ritual practice; that the Jewish circumstances naturally gave the story a form which made Jesus obey a Judaic ordinance; and that the Westerns, coming newly into the cult, either recoiled from the procedure of a banquet on the very eve of the Lord's betrayal, or followed an Adonisian or Attisian usage, in which the original sacrificial banquet, though perhaps not abandoned, had been overshadowed by the "love feast" on the announcement that "the Lord has arisen."

In the nature of the case, the controversy was insoluble by argument. The Easterns had always taken the Holy Supper at the time of the Passover, and they had the gospel story telling them to repeat it "in remembrance" of the Lord who so supped at the Passover. The Westerns had the fourth gospel as their evidence that Jesus actually died at the time of the Passover, thus constituting a universal substitute for the Jewish sacrifice; and as in this gospel there is no use of bread and wine, but merely the nondescript meal which precedes the ritual in the synoptics, and in which the only symbolic act is the giving of a "sop" to the betrayer, they were left to practise the traditional eucharist in the way most conformable to their feelings or to their pre-Christian

usages. All theory was finally lost sight of in the historic church, with its daily celebration of the "mass," which is the annual sacrifice turned into a weekly and daily one; but from the whole discussion there emerges the fact that the sacrifice is the oldest element in the cult, antedating its biographical myths. And as the symbolic eating of bread and wine as "body and blood" in the pagan cults is a late refinement on a grosser practice of primitive sacrifice, so it was in the Christist. As the wafer in the Catholic ritual is the attenuated symbol of the bread of the mystic supper, so that bread was in turn an attenuated symbol of an earlier object.

When Christianity comes into aggressive competition with Paganism, one of the common charges of its Roman enemies is found to be that the Christians were wont to eat the body of an actual child in their mysteries. There is no good reason to believe that this horror ever happened among them; though the language of the rite tells of a pre-historic practice of human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism, such as actually took place among the early Semites and the pre-Christian Mexicans, and was said to have been in use among the Druids about the beginning of the Christian era; but it is probable that in some Christist groups there was a usage of eating a baked image of a child, as had been done in the Dionysian mysteries. The manipulation of the Abraham and Isaac legend, taken with other data in the Pentateuch and elsewhere, makes it clear that child-sacrifice had been practised among the early Hebrews as among the Phœnicians, and that the sacrifice of a lamb or kid became the equivalent, as it was perhaps the prototype. When it was permitted to substitute a

dough image for the actual lamb, the mystical principle could be further served by a dough image of the child that the lamb itself typified. Under the veil of secrecy, which was as much a matter of course with the early Christians as with the Pagan initiates of the Eleusinian and other mysteries, such variations of the cult were possible to an indefinite extent. It was only when there grew up an ecclesiastical organisation, in the spirit and on the scale of the imperial system itself, and when the compiled gospels had become a recognised code for the Church in general, that they were reduced to the norm of the pagan sacrament of bread and wine.

The only other primary Christian rite, that of baptism, is shown even in the gospels to have been pre-Christian; and the anti-Judaic John the Baptist may have been a historic figure among the Jews, though his connection with the Christos is a myth, seen in the gospels in different stages of its development. The presumption is that it was framed at the stage at which the Jewish Christists, faced by the Pauline and Gentile opposition to circumcision, hitherto held binding among the Jesuists, decided to substitute baptism (which already had a Jewish vogue) and thereby maintain a Jewish primacy. But baptism too was a common Gentile usage, as was the use of holy water, later adopted by the Christian Church.

With these Christist rites, it is clear, there was originally associated a fixed belief in the speedily-approaching end of the world, that being the notion which most completely pervades every book in the New Testament. The rites then, like the similar mysteries of the Pagans, were regarded as the way of entrance into the future life, whether that were

conceived as the apparition of a supernatural new Jerusalem on earth, or as a transformed existence in a material heaven in the skies. For the Pauline period, the approaching catastrophe was evidently the supreme pre-occupation; and to the fear of it the whole of the early Christian propaganda appealed. There is no reason, however, to believe that the Christians at Jerusalem ever "had all things in common," as is asserted in the Acts of the Apostles, where other passages confute the claim. Such communities indeed had frequently arisen in antiquity, and there was a kindred tradition that Pythagoras had centuries before, in Italy, converted by one discourse a multitude of hearers, who adopted a communal life. But the narrative in the Acts, especially as regards the fable of Ananias and Sapphira, seems to have been framed in the interest of some of the Christian communist groups which arose long after the period in question, and whose promoters needed at once an apostolic precedent for their ideal and a menace against those who temporised with it. In the Pauline epistles the Gentile converts, so far from cultivating community of goods, are seen going to law with each other before heathen judges.

It is probable that the use of the sign of the cross, as a mark of membership and a symbol of salvation, belonged to the earliest stages of the cult; at least the sign in question figures as the mark of a body of religious enthusiasts in Jewry as early as the Book of Ezekiel (ix. 4; *Heb.*); and in the Apocalypse (vii. 2, 3) the "seal of the living God" appears to have been understood in the same sense as the sign prescribed by the prophet. The Hebrew letter *tau*, there specified, is known to have represented at

different periods different forms of cross; and the oldest of all is believed to have been the *crux ansata* of the Egyptians, which was a hieroglyph of immortal life. Thus the historic form of the crucifix was determined, not by the actual manner of normal crucifixion (for in that the arms were drawn above the head and not outspread), but by previous symbolism. In the Egyptian ritual of Osiris a spreading of the arms on the cross was in remote antiquity a form of mystic regeneration; and in some amulets the *stauros* or tree-cross of Osiris is found represented with human arms.

§ 6. *Rise of Gentile Christism.*

A severance between the Jewish and the Gentile Christists was the necessary condition of any wide spread of the cult. Though it was the success of Jewish proselytism that paved the way for the propaganda of Christism, only a minority of Gentiles would willingly bow to the Jewish pretension of holding all the sources of "salvation." That a Grecised Jew, as Paul is represented to have been, should begin to make the cult cosmopolitan, in despite of opposition from Jerusalem, is likely enough; and continued opposition would only deepen the breach. The Judaic claim involved a financial interest; and as local economic interest was a factor in the development of every Gentile group of Christists, a theological argument for Gentile independence was sure to be evolved. As the composition of the Christ-myth proceeded, accordingly, various episodes to the discredit of the mythic twelve disciples of Jesus are framed: "one of the twelve" figures as the betrayer;

Peter openly denies his Master, and the others forsake him in a body in the hour of trial; while their incapacity to understand him in life is often insisted on. John the Baptist and Jesus, again, are made explicitly to teach that the "Kingdom of God" is taken away from the Jews, though Jesus also promises the twelve that they shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes. Finally, there is a manipulation of narratives on the question of the responsibility for Jesus' execution, the outcome being that it lies neither with the Roman governor nor with the sub-Roman king, but with the Jewish priests and people. In all likelihood most of those episodes were first set forth in a Gentile Passion-play, whence they passed into the common stream of tradition; but such an item as the part played by Pilate is likely to have been first introduced from the Jewish side, Pilate having been an object of special Jewish detestation.

(cf. Apocrypha)

In such matters the literary or myth-making faculty of the Gentiles, with their many Saviour-Gods, gave them the advantage over the Judaists; but the strife of the two interests was long and bitter. It flames out in the Judaic book of Revelation, in the allusion to those who "say they are apostles and are not"; and long after the time allotted to Paul we find him caricatured in certain Judaising writings, the so-called Clementine *Recognitions* and *Homilies*, in the person of Simon Magus, an entirely unhistorical personage, who also appears in the Acts of the Apostles. Simon Magus is, in fact, a mythical figure evolved from Semo Megas or Great Sem (= Sem-on, as Samson is Samas-on), an old Semitic Sun-God worshipped by the polytheists of Samaria, and in connection with whose cultus there was evidently

a Gentile Christist movement, of a Gnostic or mythical character, its Christ being conceived as non-human. Such a movement being competitive with that of the Jewish Jesus, "Simon," to whom was ascribed an impressive Gnostic treatise, became the type of anti-Jewish heresy; whence the late Christian story in the Acts, where Elymas again (= Great El) is a mythical duplication of Simon.

There are many signs that Samaritan elements entered early into the Christist movement. The fourth gospel even represents the founder to have been accepted in Samaria as the Messiah; and in so far as the cult became Gentilised, even if the Ebionites did not stand for an ancient local and quasi-Samaritan foundation, Samaritans would be the more ready to join it, since they were thereby helping to discomfit the more exclusive Jews. But they too had their Christ-myth; and the conception of the Holy Spirit as a dove came from them to the Christians. Seeking to found finally on the Old Testament, the scripture-makers of the latter movement had to explain away their Samaritan antecedents by myths of heresy.

The book of Acts as a whole, however, stands for an ecclesiastical tendency in the second century to make out that the first apostles had not been divided; that Peter too was a preacher of Gentile Christism, to which he had been converted by a vision; and that Paul, in turn, had made concessions to Judaism. When the Judaic Church became less and less dangerous as a possible monopolist, the organising Gentile churches could thus proceed to construct a theoretic connection between Christianity and Judaism, the "new dispensation" and the old, thus preserving for the new creed the prestige of the Old

Testament, with which, as a body of sacred books, the New could not for a long time compete, even in the eyes of its devotees. At the same time the apostles, who had long figured as church-founders, were effectively glorified as wonder-workers, being credited with miracles which rivalled those of the Christos himself; and Peter raises a "Tabitha" from the dead as Jesus had done the "Talitha" or maiden in the gospels—a myth which was itself a duplicate of a traditional pagan miracle later credited to Apollonius of Tyana.

Alongside, however, of the systematising or centripetal process there went on a centrifugal one, the process of innovating Gentile heresy. Already in Paul's epistles we read of "another Jesus" whom the apostle "had not preached"; and in the second century a dozen "Gnostic" heresies were honey-combing the movement. Their basis or inspiration was the mystic claim to inner light, "gnosis" or knowledge, disparaged in the Pauline phrase about "knowledge [or science] falsely so-called." It was in nearly all cases a combination of ideas current in the theosophies of Asia and Egypt with the God-names of the Judaic and Christian cults. So powerful was the instinct of independence, then as in later periods of political change, that the spirit of Gnosticism, in a Judaic form, found its way into the expanding gospels, where Jesus is at times made to pose as the holder of a mystical knowledge, denied to the capacities of the multitude, but conveyed by him to his disciples; who, however, are in other passages reduced to the popular level of spiritual incapacity. It cannot be doubted that the ferment thus promoted by what the systematisers denounced as heresy helped

at first to spread the cult, at least in name, since all Christists alike would tend to resort to the eucharist, or to the assemblies which were to develop into Churches.

At first the Jewish Christists may well have shared in the ordinary Jewish detestation of the Roman tyranny; and for them Nero may have been "anti-christ," as he appears to be in the Apocalypse; but there is no good reason to suppose that in Nero's day the Christians in Rome were a perceptible quantity. Martyr-making later became an ecclesiastical industry; and the striking passage in Tacitus which alleges the torture and destruction of a "vast multitude" of Christians at Nero's hands is nowhere cited in Christian literature till after the printing, under suspicious circumstances, of the *Annals*. No hint of such a catastrophe is given in the Acts of the Apostles. An equivalent statement to that of Tacitus is first found in the chronicle of Sulpicius Severus in the fifth century, where it is an expanded episode in the midst of an extremely curt epitome. The similarly suspicious passage on the same subject in Suetonius is put in further perplexity by the same writer's statement that in the reign of Claudius the Jews in Rome were constantly rioting, "Chrestus stirring them up"—an expression which suggests, if anything, that there was on foot in Rome a common Jewish movement of Messianic aspiration, in which the Christ was simply expected as a deliverer, apart from any such special cult as that of Jesus. It is quite inapplicable to any such movement as is set forth in the Pauline Epistles. In any case, after the fall of Jerusalem Jesuit hopes were visibly confined to the religious sphere; and Gentile Christianity above all was perforce resigned to

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the imperial system, of which it was one day to become a limb.

There is seen, too, even on the face of the Pauline epistles, a superimposing of new Greek terms and concepts on the vocabulary of Jewish theology, terms of metaphysic and religion such as *immortality, conscience, providence, natural, corruptible, invisible*—and in the language of the gospels and the Acts the Grecising influence becomes more and more marked, increasing in the Acts and in the third gospel, and becoming paramount in the fourth. The very conception of religious as distinct from temporal salvation is Hellenistic or Persian rather than Judaic; and the title of Saviour, which becomes the special epithet of the Christ, is constituted as much by Pagan usage as by the original significance of the name Jesus. Gentile also, rather than Judaic—though common to the pre-Judaic Semites and the idolators among the Hebrews—was the idea expressed in the Pauline epistles that the Christist who partakes of the mystic rite *suffers with* and henceforth is one with the slain demigod, being “crucified with Christ.” That conception is predated generally in all the cults of ritual mourning, and particularly in that of Attis, in which the worshippers gashed themselves and punctured their hands or necks; some of the priests even mutilating themselves as the God was mutilated in the myth. The Pauline expression is to be understood in the light of the passage in which a bitter censure, for having taken up a false Christism, is passed on the Galatians, “before whose eyes Christ had been openly depicted, crucified” (cp. 1 Cor. xi. 26, Gr. and A.V.). In some but not in all MSS. are added the words “among you,” words which may either have been omitted by

in either case their significance is great

(late transcribers whom they embarrassed, or added by some one desirous of accentuating the already emphatic expression of the original. When we connect with these the further passage, usually taken also without inquiry as purely metaphorical, in which Paul says he "bears branded on his body the marks of Jesus," we find reason to surmise that, even as the ministrant in the Dionysian college was called by the God's name, Bacchus; as the Osirian worshipper spread himself on the cross and became one with Osiris; and as the priest of Attis personated Attis in his mysteries, so Paul or another personated Jesus in the mysteries of his sect; that what has so long passed for verbal metaphor stood originally for a process of acted symbolism; and that the theory of the mystery was that he who personated the crucified demigod became specially assimilated to him. The Pauline language on this head coincides exactly with the general and primordial theory of theanthropic sacrifice: "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." Obscure and violent if understood as sheer metaphor, such expressions fall into line with much ancient religious belief when read as describing a symbolic rite.

In any case, the first-cited passage seems to tell of a dramatic or an artistic representation of the crucified Christ in connection with the sacrament; a procedure which would probably not be favoured by the art-hating Jews, but which, gradually developed among the Gentiles in the fashion of the drama-loving Greeks, is the probable origin of many of the gospel narratives. It belonged to the conception of all such mysteries that their details should never be divulged

important

to outsiders; hence the rarity of such allusions, even in letters to the faithful. The Christian cult adopted the very terms of the heathen practice, and its initiates were called *mystæ*, like those of all the rival religions.

A study of the early Christian tombs shows how much of more or less unconscious compromise took place wherever Christism made converts. The charming myth of Psyche had become for Pagans a doctrine of immortality; and in that sense the figure of the child-goddess was without misgiving carved on early Christian tombs. So with the figure of Hermes Kriophoros, Hermes the Ram-Bearer, who is the true original of the Christian conception of the Good Shepherd, in art and in thought, though a figure of Apollo in the same capacity may have been the medium of conveyance. Orpheus was assimilated in the same fashion; and when art began to be applied to the needs of the new cult, Jesus was commonly figured as a beardless youth, like the popular deities of the Pagans in general.

Last but not least of the Gentile elements which determined the spread of the Christist cult was the double meaning attaching to the Greek form of the Messianic name. In the unpalatable passage above cited from Suetonius, that is spelt Chrestos, evidently after the Greek word *Chrēstos* = "good, excellent, gracious," which occurs frequently in the New Testament, and which was a special title of the "infernal" or underworld Gods of the Samothracian mysteries, also of Hermes, of Osiris, and of Isis. The two words were pronounced alike; and the coincidence is often such as would be made much of by ancient thinkers, went to lay great stress on words. In the gospel

phrase so loosely rendered "my yoke is easy" the Greek adjective is *chrēstos*; in the epistles *chrēstotes* is the word used in the phrase "the goodness of God"; and in the familiar Pauline quotation from Menander "good manners" is in the Greek *chrēsta ēthē*. Among the Pagans, again, this epithet constantly figured on the kind of tomb called *herōon*, erected to distinguished persons who thus received the status of inferior deities or demigods, and who in consequence of this very epigraphic formula came in later times to be regarded as Christian martyrs, and to be so celebrated in festivals which were really continuations of the pagan feasts in their honour. The Christians themselves, on the other hand, habitually wrote their founder's name *Chrestos* or *Chreistos* on their tombs in the second and third centuries, thus assimilating it to the pagan epigraphic formula *chrēste chaire*; and the term Christian frequently followed the same spelling. Several of the Fathers, indeed, make play with the double spelling, claiming that the terms are for them correlative. So fixed was the double usage that to this day the spelling of the French word *chrétien* preserves the trace. There was thus on the Christist side an appeal to Gentiles on the lines of a name or badge already much associated with Gentile religion, and attractive to them in a way in which the name "Christ" as signifying "one anointed" would not be.

How far this attraction operated may be partly inferred from such a document as the apologetic treatise of Theophilus of Antioch, conjecturally dated about the year 180, in which there is not a single mention of Jesus as a basis of the Christian creed, while the names *Christos* and *Christian* are repeatedly

bracketed with "chrēstos." The writer figures less as a Pauline Christist than as a Gentile proselyte who founded on the Hebrew sacred books, and believed in some impersonal Christ at once "good" and "anointed." Similarly in the apology of Athenagoras, belonging to the same period, the founder figures purely as the divine *Logos*, not being even mentioned as a person with a biography, though the writer quotes the *Logos* through an apocryphal gospel. In such a propaganda the Greek associations with the epithet *Chrēstos* would count for much more than those of the Judaic standpoint.

But above all other gains on this score may be reckoned those made in Egypt, where the cult of the cross belonged alike to the ancient worship of Osiris and the recent one of Serapis. Not only was Osiris in especial *chrēstos*, the benign God, but the hieroglyph of goodness, applied to him in common with others, had the form of a cross standing on a hillock, while the cross symbol in another form was the sign of immortal life. In the imported worship of Serapis, which inevitably conformed in the main to that of Osiris, the cross was equally a divine and mystic emblem. It thus becomes intelligible that some devotees of Serapis should, as is stated in the well-known letter of the Emperor Hadrian, figure as bishops of Christ; and that Serapis-worshippers should rank as Christians, their God being like Osiris "Chrēstos." To gather into one loosely-coherent mass the elements so variously collected was the work of the gradually-developed hierarchical organisation; and the process involved a retention of some of the characteristics of the various worships concerned.

That there were yet other sources of membership

for the early Church, apart from direct conversion, is to be gathered from the allegorical writing known as the "Pastor" of Hermas, which is known to have been one of the most popular books in the whole Christian literature of the second century. This work, apparently written in Italy, never once mentions the name Jesus or the name Christ, and never quotes from any book in either Testament, nor alludes to a crucifixion or a eucharist; but speaks of One God, a Holy Spirit, and a Son of God who underwent labours and sufferings; of a "Church" which appears to mean the community of all good men; and of bishops and apostles and presbyters. It is intelligible only as standing for some species of pre-Jesuist propaganda very loosely related to Judaism, inasmuch as it appears to cite some apocryphal Jewish work, yet utters no Judaic doctrine. Its sole specified rite is baptism; and its moral teaching barely recognises the idea of vicarious sacrifice. Such a work must have had its public before the Jesuist movement took sectarian or dogmatic form; and its popularity in the early Church must have come of the inclusion of its earlier following. When the Church attained definite organisation and a dogmatic system the book was naturally discarded as having none of the specific qualities of a Christian document.

A "Church" such as is ambiguously set forth in the *Pastor* may conceivably have been set up by one of the movements of Samaritan Christism already mentioned, or by that connected with the name of the Jew Elxai, who is recorded to have written of "Christ" without making it clear whether he referred to the gospel Jesus. As among the Elcesaites, so in the *Pastor*, Jesus is conceived as of gigantic

All this is important

stature. On any view, being neither Christian nor anti-Christian, but simply pre-Christian, yet turned to Christian uses, the book strengthens the surmise that a number of the so-called heresies of the early Church were in reality survivals of earlier movements which the Church had absorbed, perhaps during times of persecution. The "heresy" of Simon Magus was certainly such a pre-Christian cult; that of Dositheus appears to be in the same case; and the ideas of the *Pastor* conform to no canonical version of the Christian creed.

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§ 7. *Growth of the Christ Myth.*

The Christist cult gained ground not because there was anything new either in its dogma or in its promise, but on the contrary because these were so closely paralleled in many Pagan cults: its growth was in fact by way of assimilation of new details from these. Step by step it is seen to have adopted the mysteries, the miracles, and the myths of the popular Gentile religions. The resurrection of Jesus is made to take place like that of Mithra, from a rock tomb; and to the sacred banquet of twelve represented by the last supper there is added, in the fourth gospel, an episode which embodies the common pagan usage of a sacred banquet of seven. In the way of miracle the Christ is made to turn water into wine, as Dionysos had been immemorially held to do; he walks on the water like Poseidon; like Osiris and Phœbus Apollo he wields the scourge; like the solar Dionysos, he rides on two asses and feeds multitudes in the desert; like Æsculapius, he raises men from

the dead, gives sight to the blind, and heals the sick; and like Attis and Adonis he is mourned over and rejoiced over by women. Where the parallel is not exact we still find pagan myth giving rise to Christian; for the fable of the temptation is but a new story told of the oft-copied ancient Babylonian astronomical symbol in which the Goat-God (the sign of Capricorn) stands beside the Sun-God—a scene turned by the Greeks into the myths of Pan leading Jupiter to the mountain-top, of Pan or Marsyas competing with Apollo, and of Silenus instructing Dionysos. Above all, the Christ had to be born in the manner of the ever-cherished Child-God of the ancient world; he must have a virgin for mother, and he must be pictured in swaddling-clothes in the basket-manger, preserved from immemorial antiquity in the myth of Ion and in the cult of Dionysos, in which the image of the Child-God was carried in procession on Christmas day. Like Horos he must be born in a stable—the stable-temple of the sacred cow, the symbol of the Virgin Goddess Isis, queen of heaven; and the apocryphal gospels completed the pagan parallel by making the stable a cave, the birthplace of Zeus and Mithra and Dionysos and Adonis and Hermes and Horos. Prudence excluded the last detail from the canonical gospels, but it became part of the popular faith; and the Christ's birthday had been naïvely assimilated by the populace to the solstitial birth-day of the Sun-God, 25th December, long before the Church ventured to endorse the usage.

Judaic manipulation, however, was not lacking. Though Jesus is born of a virgin, it is in the manner of Jewish theosophy; for the "Spirit of God" broods over Mary as it had done on the germinal deep in

Genesis. Having been a Jewish Messiah before he was a Gentile or Samaritan Christ, Jesus had further to satisfy as many as possible of the Jewish Messianic requirements. He must be of the line of David, and born at Bethlehem; but inasmuch as Jewish tradition expected both a Messiah Ben-David and a Messiah Ben-Joseph—the latter being apparently a Samaritan requirement—he was made Ben-David by royal descent, and Ben-Joseph through his putative father. Yet again, there being Messianists who denied the necessity that the Anointed One should descend from David, there was inserted in the gospels a story in which Jesus repudiates such descent; the two opposed theories being thus alike harboured, without discomfort and without explanation. In the same fashion the ascetics of the movement made the Son of Man poor and homeless, while the anti-ascetics made him a wine-drinker, ready to sit at meat with publicans and sinners. For the Jews, too, he had to raise the widow's son as did Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament story—a Hebrew variant of the Gentile myth of the raising of the dead Attis or Adonis, or the dead child Horos or Dionysos, further reproduced in the resurrection of the Christ himself; and there had to be at his birth a massacre of the innocents, as in the myth of Moses and in the Arab myths of the births of Abraham and Daniel. Yet again, he had to figure in his crucifixion as bearing the insignia of royalty, like the sacrificed "only begotten son" of the Semitic God El, and the sacrificed God-man of the Babylonian feast of Sacæa. It may be that Barabbas, "the son of the father," is a survival of the same conception and the same ritual usage, similarly imposed on a narrative of which no part is historical.

As with action, so with theory. In the East there had long prevailed the mystical dogma that the Supreme God, who was above knowledge, had incarnated himself in or created a deity representing his mind in relation to men, the *Logos* or Word, in the sense of message or revealed reason. Such was Mithra, the Mediator, in the Mazdean system, whence apparently the conception originated; such was Thoth in the theosophy of Egypt; such was Hermes, son of Maia and messenger of the Gods, in the pantheon of the Greeks; and the Jews had long been assimilating the principle, partly by making the deity figure as the *Logos* in human or angelic form (as in Gen. xv.); partly in the form of a personalising of *Sophia*, wisdom, as in the books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs and in the Old Testament apocrypha; partly in the later form of a theoretic doctrine of the *Logos*, as developed on the basis of Plato in the writings of Philo the Jew of Alexandria, about the beginning of the Christian era. In the fourth gospel this doctrine is summarily imposed on the Christist cult in an advanced form, though the three synoptic gospels had shown no trace of it. The new myth was welcomed like the others; all alike went to frame a deity who could compare and compete with those of the other cults of the day.

Doctrine followed the same law of assimilation; the Christ must needs reflect in his teaching all the phases of the religious thought of the age, however contradictory. First he had to voice the Judaic hope of a kingdom of heaven, with stress laid on the claims of the poor; he must insist on the speedy coming of the Judaic doomsday and on his own function at the catastrophe; but yet again he is made

Consider why
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ism that is
similitude +
Empire +
but another
sect -

to present the kingdom of heaven as a kind of spiritual change; and last of all he is made to utter the wisdom of the thinker who had penetrated all the popular delusions and seen that "the kingdom of heaven is within you"—or nowhere. In one gospel he excludes Samaritans and Gentiles from his mission; in another he makes a Samaritan the model "neighbour"; in another he goes among the Samaritans in person. He becomes as manifold in doctrine as is Apollo or Dionysos in function. Even when he is made to lay down, as against Jewish superstition, the sane principle that victims of fatalities are not to be reckoned worse sinners than other men, a later hand appends a tag which reaffirms the very superstition impugned. Every variety of ethic, within the limits of the Jewish and Gentile ideals of the time, is imposed on him in turn. Alternately particularist and universalist, a bigoted Jew and a cosmopolitan, a lover of the people and a Gnostic despiser of their ignorance, a pleader for love to enemies and a bitter denouncer of opponents; successively insisting on unlimited forgiveness and on the ostracism of recalcitrant brethren, on the utter fulfilment of the Mosaic law and on its supersession; alternately promising and denying temporal blessings, avowing and concealing his belief in his Messiahship; prescribing by turns secrecy and publicity to his auditors, blind faith and simple good works to his disciples—he is the heterogeneous product of a hundred mutually frustrative hands, a medley of voices that never was and could not be in one personality. Through his supernatural mask there speak the warring sects and ideals of three centuries: wisdom and delusion, lenity and bitterness, ventriloquise in

turns in his name. Even as the many generations of Jewish teachers had precluded all their changing counsels with a "thus saith the Lord," so did their Christist successors seek to mint their cherished dogmas, their rigid prejudices, and their better inspirations, with the image and superscription of the new Logos, the growing God of a transforming world. The later product is thus as unreal as the older.

It is only on presuppositions themselves the fruit of belief in the myth that such a growth seems unlikely or impossible, or that something supernatural is needed to account for the wide development of the Christian system. Those who look upon the historic flood in the broad and peopled plain are slow to conceive that it had its rise in the minute rills and random brooks of a far-off mountain land. But it is so that the great rivers begin.

Consider this:

Sects have founders, but not religions;

Religions only when Sects - is
 Mohammedanism, ~~the~~ ^{one} people's ali-

ment, uniform afterwards or other
 before; not, as Christianity, a re-

ligion summing many opinions
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ammed as representative, not found-
 er [See this]

CHAPTER II.

THE ENVIRONMENT.

THE artificial organism which we have seen beginning to take shape is to be conceived, like those properly so called, as depending on and adjusting itself to its environment. Of this the nature has been partly set forth in tracing the beginnings of the cult, but it must be considered in itself if the relation is to be fully understood.

§ 1. *Social and Mental Conditions in the Roman Empire.*

The world in which Christianity grew up was above all things one of extinguished nationalities, of obliterated democracies, of decaying intellectual energy. Wherever the Roman Empire spread, a rigid limit was set to the play of public spirit, whether as criticism of the political order or as effort to improve the social structure. The forms of municipal government remained; but the natural and progressive struggle of classes and interests was at an end. The Jew must give up his polity of applied theocracy; the Greek his ideal of the City State; even as the Roman Senate itself shrank into an assembly of sycophants, content to register its master's decrees. All alike, on pain of extinction, must mutely or fawningly accept the imperial system, and abandon hope of shaping

good.

their own political destinies. In such a world the thinking faculty, denied almost all exercise on the living problems of polity and conduct, necessarily turned to the themes that were open to it; and as the very calibre of men's minds had narrowed with the suppression of their freedom, which meant the curtailment of their personality, there was no such faculty available as could grasp the difficult problems of science and philosophy led up to by the hardy speculation of the ages of freedom and by the skilled specialism of the endowed students of pre-Roman Alexandria. For the mass of the people, above all, save where the Greek drama was still presented to them, concrete religion was the one possible form of mental life; and for the more serious such mental life was at once a solace and a preoccupation. Under a despotism which in so many ways conformed to oriental types, serious men developed something of the oriental aloofness from the actual: from action they turned to brooding, from seen interests to the problems of the unseen. Even in Rome itself, where the upper classes were much more indifferent to Christism than those of the Eastern provinces, the new conditions developed a new interest in theological problems on the pagan side.

Broadly speaking, types and classes of men have always been meditatively religious or reflective in the degree of their exclusion from practical concerns. In the ancient world the law reveals itself at every vista. At one extreme stood the energetic Romans, sedulous first in agriculture and later in warfare; superstitious but unspeculative; making ritual religion a methodical province of polity, a part of the mechanism of the republic: at the other the Hindus, predestined to

despotism by their physical and economic conditions, and to inaction by their climate, the true children of reverie, for whom religious evolution was a deepening absorption in boundless speculation. Midway stood the Greeks, active but not laborious, too alive for much brooding and too cultured for wholly pedantic superstition, the natural framers of a religion of poetry and art. Their science and philosophy began in Asia Minor, on the soil of the half-scientific, half-religious lore of the overthrown Assyrian and Babylonian cultures of the past, in a leisurely and half-oriental atmosphere; and after the first free evolution of its germs in the manifold life of their countless competitive City States, the most notable growth of their philosophy was in the period when their political failure began to declare itself, and the shadow of despotism was falling on men sobered and chagrined by the spectacle of ceaseless intestine strife. When despotism became permanent, thought still progressed in virtue of the acquired stores of culture and stress of impulse; but in that air the higher life soon flagged, and philosophy lapsed to the levels of ancient mysticism, becoming a play of fantasy instead of an effort of critical reason.

Where the cultured few underwent such a destiny, the uncultured crowd could but feed on the simpler religious doctrine that came in their way. It necessarily ran to a more intimate employment of the standing machinery of the creeds, to a use of the more emotional rites, to a freer participation in the consolations and excitements of the dramatic mysteries. Where civic life was precarious without being self-ruling, the more serious came more and more under the sway of the oriental preoccupation over the future

—a habit of mind developed in lands subject to chronic conquest and to the caprice of tyrants and satraps. Growing Greece, while free, had taken from the East, centuries before the Christian era, stimulating and emotional cults, especially dear to women, with mysteries which promised to their initiates a blessed life beyond the troublous present; and by a natural tendency those who had least share in controlling the present clung most to such comfort. So, in republican Rome, it was found that the women and the imported slaves were always most hospitable to a new "superstition"; and in times of dangerous war the proclivity quickened.

In this way there went on a kind of religious enfranchisement in the Mediterranean world both before and after the Romans became the universal masters. In the early City States of Greece and Italy, but especially in Rome, worship was originally in large measure a privilege of rank. The most constant and intimate worship was naturally that of the household Gods, the *Lares* and *Penates*; and the men with no ancestral home, whether slaves or paupers, were outside of such communion. Only in the worship of the Gods of the city was there general communion; and even here the patrician orders long monopolised the offices of ministry in Rome; while even in more democratic Greece, with some exceptions, the slaves and the foreign residents were excluded from the sacred banquet which was the mark of all cults alike, public or private. Even the first imported cults were put under a civic control, which doubtless promoted decorum, but also made for class interests. In later republican Rome the usage prevailed of bringing to the sacred banquet-table the

statues of the Gods, who were believed to partake with the worshippers; and the company was naturally kept very select. For the Roman common people, accordingly, religious association was mainly confined to the worship of the public *Lares* and *Penates* instituted for their benefit. In Greece the city banquet was liberalised with the progress of democracy; but at best it was the heritage of the free citizens; and the antique simplicity of its rites must have made it lack emotional atmosphere. At times it was even necessary to practise compulsion to secure the due attendance of "parasites" at the smaller sacramental repasts held daily in the temples, which would lack the attraction of the public feasts.

Thus it came about that in the course of the ages the common people, especially the many aliens from Asia Minor, slave and free, everywhere tended to seek more and more a religion for themselves—something in which they could share equally and intimately; somewhat as, in a later period, the common people in so many parts of Europe recoiled from official Catholicism before as well as at the Reformation, or as the townspeople in England later set up their own dissenting chapels in dislike of the Established Church. As early as the Peloponnesian war we find new religious societies arising among the humbler Athenians, making accessible to them Dionysian or other eastern mysteries of sacred baptism, and a sacred banquet of "body and blood," in which a kid was the victim. Some such banquet was the normal basis; and the societies, which were numerous, were self-supporting and self-governing, appointing their own priests or priestesses, and keeping their own sacred books. In these cults slaves, aliens, and

women were alike admitted ; and, though in some the worship was orgiastic, in keeping with the then common level of popular culture, it is not to be supposed that the avowed ideals of "goodness, chastity, piety," were for such groups in general devoid of moral significance. They were condemned by the educated classes alike in republican Greece and in republican Rome as vulgar and licentious ; but if these imputations are to be fully believed as against the pagan societies, they must be equally believed as against the Christians, concerning whom, in turn, they were generally made in the second and third centuries. Of neither movement, probably, were they more than partially true. In any case, the Greek societies gave a model to the early Christian churches in more than one point of organisation, most of them having had "presbyters" and a "bishop" (*episcopus*), and some being called "synagogues," a term synonymous with *ecclesia*. So great, finally, became the competitive pressure of the private cults that those of the State had to offer inducements as against them ; and in course of time the once exclusive Eleusinian mysteries of Athens were opened to all members of the State, and latterly—save in exceptional cases, such as those of avowed unbelievers, or Epicureans, or Christians—to all members of the Roman empire ; even the slaves, finally, being initiated at the public expense.

So far as the gospels can be taken to throw light on Christian beginnings, the cult grew up under conditions similar to those above described. Some of "the poor" in Jewry as elsewhere felt themselves in a manner outside the established worship ; and, though declamation against the rich had long been popular, the names given to the legendary disciples.

suggest that there too the new cults were in large measure promoted by aliens. The accounts of the founder as mixing much with "publicans and sinners" tell of the presence of such in the sect; and there too the constant presence of women stood for a sense either of feminine dissatisfaction with the bareness of the official worship, or of the need for a personal recognition which Judaism did not give to the subordinate sex. It does not appear that slaves were similarly welcomed in the Jewish stage of the movement; portions of the gospels even make Jesus appeal to the ideals of the slave-owner; and nowhere is the slave himself sympathetically brought to the front. But it is clear that when the cult entered on a Gentile development it admitted slaves like the religious societies of the Greeks; and in the first Gentile period the members appear to have paid their way and managed their own affairs in the democratic Greek fashion.

The determining political condition everywhere was the social sway of the empire, keeping all men impotent in the higher public affairs. Exclusion from public life, broadly speaking, had been the cause of the special addiction of the women, the slaves, and the unenfranchised foreigners of the Greek cities and of Rome to private cults and communions. Under the empire, all the lay classes alike were excluded from public power; and new interests must be found to take the place of the old. Within the pale of the Roman "peace," those interests were summed up for the majority in athletics, the theatre, and the circus on the one hand; and on the other in the field of religious practices. Hopes of betterment, and despair after vain revolt, were alike fuel for the religious spirit;

since the hope turned to vaticination, and the despair crept for shelter to the mysteries that promised a better life beyond the grave. But the prevailing lot of men had become one of unwarlike submission; the material refinements of civilisation had bred in the cities a new sensitiveness, indeed a new neurosis; vice itself set up reactions of asceticism; and over all there brooded the pessimism of the prostrate East, the mood of men downcast, consciously the puppets of an uncontrollable earthly destiny, and wistful for a higher vision and rule.

§ 2. *Jewish Orthodoxy.*

Between the new sect and the normal or established Jewish religion, which had contained within it or was easily adaptable to every element that went to make early Jesuism, the force of separation was not doctrinal or intellectual, but political and economic. Save for the later-evolved concept of an Incarnation—which also, however, was foreshadowed in Jewish thought—there is almost no principle in the Christian system that was not to be found either in the sacred books or in the current rabbinical teaching of the Jews, whose development is to be measured no less by the liberal ethical teaching of such rabbis as Hillel than by the mere traditionalism ascribed to the mass of the scribes and Pharisees. Their sacred books spoke sympathetically of the poor; and their sacred treasury must have fed many, although—as in the days of the prophets and in our own time in Europe—there were some irreconcilables. Even among the Pharisees there were some who proclaimed the “law of the heart” as the highest. As regarded religious

thought, the Jews' system of sacrifice on the one hand, and their higher or supra-ecclesiastical ethic on the other, provided for all the forms of bias appealed to in the gospels and epistles, with the one exception of the kind of sentiment which sought a demigod rather than a God; a humanly sympathetic divinity, acquainted with griefs, rather than a remote and awful Omnipotence. Even this figure was partly evolved on Jewish lines, in the conception of a Messiah who should suffer and die. But a Messiah who died and did not soon come again in triumph had no tenable place in the Jewish system; and when the cult of such a Messiah came into Gentile vogue, especially after the ruin of Jerusalem, it was necessitated either to take a new and substantive status outside of Jewry or disappear altogether. It is true that the so-called Nestorians (properly Nazaráens) of Armenia have reconciled Judaism with Christism by defining the sacrifice of Jesus as the final sin-offering, while maintaining the other sacrifices of the Mosaic law; but that course was impossible to the hierarchy accused of causing the crucifixion; and the Nestorians were as anti-Jewish as other Christians.

Judaism, so to speak, was riveted at once to its national and to its economic basis. Its primary appeals to Gentile proselytes were those of a great historic shrine and a body of sacred literature; and on both grounds the clerical class of Jerusalem claimed a revenue from the faithful, Hebrew or proselyte. Financial interest secured that the converted alien should be treated as the more liberal prophetic literature urged; but it was of the essence of Judaism that the temple or the Patriarchate should be the fiscal headquarters of all the faithful; and herein lay a

moral as well as a financial limit. Ordinary racial instinct, and ordinary Gentile self-interest, must tend to clash with such claims in the case of rabbinical Judea as in that of Papal Rome; and the merely moral or ideal character of the Judaic influence, coupled with the effect of the common Gentile disesteem for the Jewish personality, brought it about that the Romanism of Jewry, always more restricted, collapsed by far the more swiftly. The later collapse of Jewish Jesuism was a phenomenon of the same order.

Early Jesuism, it is clear, flourished as a new means of Jewish proselytism among the Gentiles; and the fact best established by the dubious literature which surrounds the "apostles" is that their Gentile converts were expected to contribute to headquarters, just as did the ordinary Jew. Even after a Gentile differentiation had definitely begun, whether under Paul or at the hands of others who forged in his name, it was Jewish forces that did the work so far as literature went. Throughout the synoptic gospels the notion given of the Messiah's function is for the most part latter-day Jewish; he is to preside over the approaching day of judgment, and his apostles are to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. The early Jesuists, accordingly, must have held themselves included in the Judaic fold. All sections alike, down to the rise of anti-Jewish Gnosticism, founded on the Jewish sacred books in the Greek translation; a moral manual of the Jewish Twelve Apostles, as we have seen, served as a Jesuist handbook; and the ethic of the gospels is throughout, even in its contradictions, substantially a Jewish product. If John the Baptist could reject the racial pride and prejudice of the

Jews as he is alleged to have done, universalism had already begun within the Jewish field. Even on the point of opposition to divorce—an attitude deriving from non-Jewish rather than from Jewish ideals—there were elements in Jewry on which to found as against the looser orthodox practice; and it is quite likely that the absolute as well as the qualified prohibition in the gospels came from Jewish pens. Thus the moral and religious atmosphere of Judaism in general was perfectly compatible with the early Jesuist way of life. It is a sectarian fallacy to assume that the repellent aspects typified by the "Scribes and Pharisees," or even by the shambles of the Temple, were primary grounds for a moral revolt among Jews and proselytes, or that Jesuism so began. The types of the worse scribes and Pharisees were very speedily developed in the new sect, as in every other; and such Jesuists as are portrayed in the first epistle to the Corinthians cannot be supposed to have rejected Judaism on the score of its moral crudity. What they were much more likely to resent was its demand for tribute concurrently with its disparagement of the Gentile proselyte; and, last but not least, its barbarous rite of circumcision, for which even the pro-Jewish Jesuists had finally to substitute baptism.

The relation of Judaism to Jesuism, then, was somewhat as that of a mother country to a colony; the latter growing by help of the former, deriving from it speech, lore, ideals, methods, models, and prestige, till in time the new environment elicits special characteristics, and mere geographical division no less than self-interest vetoes the payment of the old tribute. As usual, there was in the colony a loyalist party which bitterly resisted the severance.

§ 3. *Jewish Sects : the Essenes.*

While Josephus specifies four Jewish "sects," there was in Jewry really only one dissenting sect in the modern sense of the term, apart from the Jesuists. Pharisees and Sadducees were analogous rather to the sections or "schools" of the Churches of Rome and England, the former being "orthodox and more," inasmuch as they held by the law, but further insisted on the doctrine of a future state, which was not contained in the Mosaic books; while the Sadducees, either from pre-Maccabean conservatism or from Hellenistic scepticism, held by the pure Mosaic system, of which, being for the most part of priestly status, they were the main administrators. It is noteworthy that it is the Pharisees, who held the tenet of a future life, rather than the Sadducees, who rejected it, that are most acrimoniously handled in the gospels: the former being naturally the most dangerous competitors of the new cult within the Jewish pale. A third body mentioned by Josephus, that of Judas the Galilean, was rather a political than a religious party, being bent simply on maintaining the Jewish nationality as against the Romans.

The term "sect," however, to some extent applies to the Essenes, whose existence and characteristics are specially noteworthy in connection with Christian beginnings. All the evidence goes to show that there had existed in Jewry for many generations a body so named (or perhaps formerly called *Chassidim*), living an ascetic life, rejecting animal food and animal sacrifices, avoiding wine, warm baths, and oil for anointing, wearing white garments and preferring linen to wool,

forbidding all oaths save one, and greatly esteeming celibacy. Many of them lived in a male celibate community, by their own labour, with community of goods, on the shores of the Dead Sea, under a strict hierarchical rule; but many others lived scattered through the Jewish cities, some marrying, but all maintaining ascetic principles. To secure entrance into the community there was needed a long probation. On the side of creed they held firmly by the law of Moses, yet also revered the sun, to which they sang a morning hymn of praise; strictly observed the Sabbath; conducted their religious services without priests, and studied magic and angelology, but tabooed logic and metaphysics. Ethically the cult was in the main one of physical purity and fraternal humility, hostile to slavery and war as well as to the normal vices, but running to mysticism on the line of a belief, often seen in early religion, that asceticism could raise men to supernatural powers. As a whole, the system had so much in common with that of the Pythagoreans on the one hand, and with the Mazdean religion and Buddhism on the other, that it must be held to prove a connection between these, and to point to a movement which once spread over Asia as far as Buddhist India, and over the Mediterranean world as far as early Grecian Italy, surviving for many centuries in scattered sects.

It thus appears that, without the intervention or even the tradition of any quasi-divine personality, there could subsist in Jewry a cult which outwent the Christist in point of asceticism and humility, attaining the kind of fraternity at which the latter ostensibly but vainly aimed, and maintaining itself for many generations on substantially celibate lines, partly by

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accessions from without under a rigid probation, and partly by the adoption and education of children. Such a system, expressly aiming at selection and exclusion, negated the idea of a world religion, and, though it was still standing in the fifth century, could not survive the final ruin of its environment, save as an ideal passed on to Christian monasticism. But its long duration serves to make clear the range of possibilities open to religious movements in Palestine and the East apart from any gifts of leadership or any semblance of supernatural innovation.

How far Essenism reacted on early Jesuism cannot be ascertained. Despite some approximations, such as the veto on oaths and the esteem for celibacy, it is clear that there was no such close resemblance between the movements as has been supposed by the writers who seek to identify them; but they tell of a similar mental climate. The non-mention of Essenism in the gospels is to be explained by the fact that the two systems were not rivals. One was localised, monastic, exclusive; the other peregrine and propagandist: and only in the minds of the ill-informed Roman forgers of the second century could they be supposed to have come into hostile contact. Essenism needed no innovating Messiah; and Jesuism had to go afield for adherents.

§ 4. *Gentile Cults.*

What Christism had to compete with in the Greco-Roman world was not so much the collective principle of polytheism or the public worship of the endowed temples, as the class of semi-private cults to which itself belonged, and the popular worships equally

associated with suffering and dying Saviour-Gods. Of these the most prominent were the ancient worships of the Syrian Adonis, the Phrygian Attis, Dionysos, and the Egyptian Osiris, all of which had become partly assimilated in theory, in ritual, and in public observance. But contemporarily with Christianity there began also to spread through the empire the Persian cult of Mithra, which had been first introduced into the Roman army after the Mithridatic wars; and in the end this became the most dangerous rival of the new church. All six cults alike gave prominence to the idea of the God's death and resurrection; and all lived in a common atmosphere of ancient superstition, emotional unrest, craving for communion, anxious concern for the future and for the washing out of guilt by religious rites and penances. And all six deities were "born of a virgin."

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Of the competing cults in the East the least developed in a theological sense were those of Attis and Adonis, originally deities of the Vegetation principle, whose annual death and resurrection stood primarily for the yearly decay and rebirth of the general life of Nature, and secondarily for the waning and waxing of the power of the sun. While all cults in the ancient world tended to assimilate, however, the older were marked by certain special usages; and in the case of Attis and Adonis these were the festivals which began with mourning and ended in rejoicing. Attis, son of the virgin Myrrha, was symbolised by the cut pine-tree, which meant the life principle in man and Nature; and at the spring equinoctial festival this was carried in procession to the temple of Cybelè with the effigy of a young man bound on it, to represent the dead and mutilated God. Anciently, it

would seem, there had been so bound an actual youth who was slain as a victim, and whose death was supposed to ensure at once physical fertility and moral well-being to his land and people; but in virtue of the general law of mitigation a mystic ceremony at length took the place of the primitive deed of blood. The bearing of the God's name by his priest in the mysteries was a memorial of the older time.

These mysteries were twofold. In the spring time, Attis figured as a self-slain youth, beloved by Cybelê, the Mother of the Gods, and devoted to her cultus. Later in the year, he figured as *Papas*, "Father," and Lord of All; and in this aspect he was more important than Cybelê, who was throned beside him in the mystic drama, with a crowd of women around. The initiate became *mystes Atteos*, the initiate of Attis; and at this stage the God was adored as the bringer of peace to a disorderly world. But "many were the thyrsus-bearers; few were the *mystae*": it was the spring festival that dwelt in the common knowledge and memory; and then it was that, after a day of procession and mourning, a day of solemn rites, and a "day of blood" on which the high-priest cut his arms and presented his blood as an offering, the slain demigod rose from the dead, and all was rejoicing for his resurrection. It was the great Phrygian festival; and though the Romans, in introducing the worship of the Great Mother while Hannibal maintained himself in Italy, nominally accepted her alone, it was impossible that the allied worship of Attis should be excluded from the later mysteries. The *galli* or mutilated priests, who figured in her *Hilaria* festival, were in fact the God's

representatives. Thus his was one of the popular cults of the later Roman world.

Round Adonis, the Tammuz of old Assyria, there had played for long ages a more tender devotion. For the Syrians his name meant "the Lord" (=the *Adonai* of the Hebrew Bible); and over the tale of his untimely slaughter by the boar on Mount Lebanon the Eastern women had yearly wept for a hundred generations. The "women weeping for Tammuz" in the temple of Jerusalem before the exile were his worshippers; and in the Athens of the days of the Peloponnesian war he received the same litany of mourning. For his sacred city of Byblos he was as it were the soul and symbol of the yearly course of Nature; the annual reddening of the Adonis river by the spring floods being for his devotees a mystery of his shed blood. Then came the ritual of grief, in which his wooden and painted effigy, lying with that of Aphrodité, the Goddess who loved him, took the place of the victim in the older rite in which he too was doubtless slain "for the people." The "gardens of Adonis," shallow trays in which various green plants grew quickly and as quickly died, had been originally charms to hasten the fertility of the spring, like the sacrifice itself; but long custom made them mere symbols of untimely death, and the cult was one of pathos and compassion, passing in the usual way to exultation and gaiety when, after his effigies had been thrown as corpses into the sea or the springs, the God rose from the dead on the third day, and in the presence of his worshippers, by some mummery of make-believe or mechanical device, was represented as ascending to heaven. As in the cult of Attis, it was

women who "found" the risen Lord, whose death they had mourned.

In such worships, it will be seen, much depended on the spirit of sex, which was evoked by the pairing of God and Goddess, a common principle of the ancient Semitic pantheon, here subtilised by romance. Such myths as those of Attis and Adonis, indeed, lent themselves to contrary emotions, the amorous and the ascetic passions figuring in the devotees by turns. Thus the very eunuch priests who represented the extremity of anti-sexualism were credited with a mania of licentiousness; and on the other hand the Great Mother, who in the primitive myth was enamoured of Attis, and yet in one version mutilated him, was by her graver devotees regarded in a holier light. So even Aphrodité, the lover of Adonis, had her supernal aspect as Urania; and the legend of the indifference of Adonis, like that of the self-mutilation of Attis, conveyed a precept and pattern of chastity. Everywhere, as the world grew sophisticated, and the primitive simplicity of appetite was overborne by pessimism and asceticism, the cruder cults tended to become refined and the Goddess-worships grew in dignity. At the sacred city of Hierapolis, in Syria, there was long worshipped a Goddess of immemorial fame, round whose history there floated myths like those of Cybelé and Aphrodité, Attis and Adonis, but whose prestige was apparently maintained rather by minimising than by retailing them. In her cult all the worshippers were wont to puncture their hands or necks, probably in mystic imitation of a slain demigod such as Attis, connected with her legend; and in her service ascetic priests or hermits ascended phallic pillars to win sanctity by vigils of a week long. Thus

was set up for the Goddess a religious renown comparable to that of Yahweh of Jerusalem, bringing multitudes of strangers to her every festival, and filling the treasuries of her priests with gifts.

Of kindred character and equivalent range with the cults of Attis and Adonis was that of Dionysos, the most many-sided of the divinities adopted by the Greeks from Asia. Figuring first as Bacchus, the God of wine, he seems to have made way in early Greece partly by virtue of the sheer frenzy set up in his women worshippers by unwonted potations; but such phenomena caused their own correction; and the adoption of the cult by the cities brought it within the restraining sway of Greek culture. Of all the older Greek worships, the most popular was that (also oriental in origin) of Dêmêtêr and Persephonê, the Mourning Mother and the Virgin Daughter, who had primarily signified mother earth and the seed corn; and with their worship in the great Eleusinian mysteries was bound up that of Dionysos. Son of Zeus and the Virgin Goddess Persephonê or the mortal virgin Semelê—for the myths were legion—he was carried in effigy as a new-born babe in a manger-basket on the eve of the winter-solstice. In this capacity he was pre-eminently the Babe-God, Iacchos, "the suckling." Further, he figures in one myth as being torn to pieces by the Titans, and as restored to life or re-born (after Zeus has terribly avenged him) by his mother Semelê or by the Mother-Goddess, Dêmêtêr; wherefore he is represented as a suckling at Dêmêtêr's breast. In the triennial dramatic mysteries in his honour an eating of raw flesh by the devotees was held to commemorate his sacrificial death, which was however mystically conceived to

mean the making of wine from grapes. In other and commoner forms of the sacred banquet, the wine figured specially as his blood, and the bread as Dêmêtêr = Ceres; and in this transparent form the symbolism of "body and blood" was a household word among the Romans, in whose popular religion, being assimilated to an ancient Roman God, he was known as Liber, "the child," as "Father Liber," and as Bacchus, while Ceres or Proserpine was paired with him as *Libera*. The doctrine, found among the Manichæans in the fourth century, that "Jesus hangs on every tree," is in all likelihood a development from this worship, in which Dionysos was God of the vine in particular, but of all vegetation besides. For such mystics as wrote and conned the Orphic hymns, however, he was a God of manifold potency; and there centred round him a whole theosophy of ascetic ethic, in which the ideal of the worshipper was to strive, suffer, and conquer in common with the God, who was the giver of immortality.

Of his cult in particular it is difficult to grasp any general significance, so inextricably did it become entwined with others, in particular with the Phrygian cult of Sabazios, and with the Corybantic mysteries, in connection with which are to be traced a whole series of local deities of the same stamp as those under notice, just as the myth of Apollo can be seen to have absorbed a whole series of local Sun-Gods. Thus the mortal Jasion or Iasious is slain by Zeus for being the lover of Cybelê, who however bears to him a divine son, Korybas; and he in turn figures also as the son of the Virgin Persephonê, and without father, human or divine. In the Orphic hymns Korybas is the mighty Lord of the under-world, who frees the

spirit from all terrible visions, giver of blessedness and of sorrow, a God of double nature. So Dionysos, like the Hindu Fire-God Agni, is born of two mothers; and like Hermes and Herakles he has descended to Hades and returned, victorious over death. In all such cults alike is to be noted the gradual emergence of the relation of maternity as well as paternity, the Mother Goddess coming more and more to the front as such; while the Son-God, in the case of Dionysos and Dêmêtêr, tends to overshadow or supersede the Daughter-Goddess, who in Rome had twinned with Bacchus under their names of Liber and Libera.

In the case of the far-famed cult of Osiris, again, there gradually took place a similar transformation. In the oldest Egyptian lore, Osiris is at once the brother and the husband of Isis, who, when he is slain and dismembered by Typhon, gathers together the scattered limbs for burial. Thereafter their son, Horus (who in turn had been found dead in his floating cradle and reborn by his mother), avenges his father, who remains Judge of the Dead in the underworld. But as the cult developes, Horus, who in one of his aspects—perhaps originally signifying different deities—is an adult and powerful God, becomes specially the child of Isis and Osiris, and is typically represented as a suckling at his mother's breast, or as the babe born on the eve of the winter solstice; while Osiris remains the suffering God, to be mourned and rejoiced over; and it is to him that the devotee turns in the mysteries for the mystic regeneration, which involved a worship of the Osirian cross, the emblem of the God. "I clasp the sycamore tree," says the Osirified soul in the Book of the Dead; "I myself am joined unto the sycamore tree, and its

arms are opened unto me graciously." But Osiris in turn "shall establish as prince and ruler his son Horus"; and the soul in the underworld, in some rituals, becomes one with Horus, as in others with Osiris. Out of the medley there emerged for the popular mind the dominant impressions of Osiris as the Saviour and Judge of the Dead; of Isis as the Queen of Heaven, the Sorrowing Goddess, the Mother Goddess; and of Horus as the Divine Son, Hor-pakhrot, "Horus the Child," of whom the Greeks in their fanciful way made a Harpocrates, the God of Silence, misunderstanding the symbol of the finger in the mouth, which for the Egyptians meant merely childhood. As we have seen, the Osirian cult and that of Serapis, grafted on it in the time of the Ptolemies, made popular the symbol of the cross long before Christianity, and prepared for the latter religion in many other ways.

Perhaps its closest counterpart, however, was its most tenacious rival, the worship of the Persian Sun-God Mithra, first introduced into Rome in the time of Pompey, whose troops received it from the Cilician pirates, the *débris* of the army of Mithridates, whom he conquered and enlisted in the Roman service. Mithra being the most august of all the Gods of war, his worship became the special religion of the Roman army. Apart from its promise of immortality, its fascination lay in its elaborate initiations, baptisms, probations, sacraments, and mysteries, which were kept at a higher level of moral stringency than those of almost any of the competing cults. The God was epicene or bisexual, having a male and a female aspect; and there seems to have been no amorous element in his myth at the Christian period. Unless

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it be decided that such rituals had prevailed all over the East, the Christian eucharist must be held to have been a direct imitation of that of Mithraism, which it so closely resembled that the early Fathers declared the priority of the rival sacrament to be due to diabolic agency. The Mithraist ritual, indeed, appears to have been the actual source of part of the Christist mystery-play, inasmuch as Mithra, whose special epithet was "the Rock," was liturgically represented as dead, buried in a rock tomb, mourned over, and raised again amid rejoicing. For the Mithraists also the sign of the cross, made on the forehead, was the supreme symbol; and it was mainly their cult which established the usage of calling the Sun-day, the first of the week, "the day of the Lord," Mithra as the Sun being the first of the seven planetary spirits on whose names the week was based. In the third century, the chief place of the cult in the empire was on the Vatican mount at Rome; and there it was that Christian legend located the martyrdom of Peter, who, as we have seen, was assimilated to Mithra both in name and in attributes.

In a special degree the Osirian and Dionysian and Mithraic cults seem to have insisted on the doctrine of immortality correlatively with the doctrine of eternal punishment; and in so far as Mithraism is to be known from the present form of the Zendavesta, which is but a revised portion of the older Mazdean literature, it appealed to the imagination on this side at least as winningly as did the Jesuist literature in respect, for instance, of the Apocalypse. Mithra was the God of the upper and the nether world, the keeper of the keys of heaven and hell, of life and death; and,

like Osiris, he was the judge of men's deeds. Like the other Saviour-cults, too, Mithraism anticipated Christism in evolving the attraction of a Mother-Goddess, the worship of Cybelè being adapted to his as it had been to that of Attis. In one other aspect it seems to have run closely parallel to early Jesuism. The singular phrase in the Apocalypse about garments "washed in the blood of the Lamb" points to an early Jesuist use of the practice of the *kriobolium*, which with the *taurobolium* was one of the most striking of the Mithraic rites. In these repulsive ceremonies the ram or bull—always young, on the principle that the sacrifice must be pure—was slain over a grating, so that the blood dripped on the initiate, who was placed in a pit beneath, and who was instructed to wear the blood-stained garment for some days. It was believed that the ceremony had a supreme saving grace; and the initiate was solemnly described as *in æternum renatus*, "born again for eternity." In regard to both animals the symbolism was partly astronomical, having latterly reference to the sun's entrance into the constellations of the Bull and the Ram at different stages of his course. Mithra's oldest and best-known symbol was the bull; but inasmuch as the sun had anciently been seen by the Chaldean astronomers to be in the constellation Aries at the spring season, the beginning of the ancient year, the lamb had long been likewise adopted into the mysteries of the solar cults. About the beginning of the Christian era, the year-opening constellation was Pisces; and the Divine Fish accordingly figures to a great extent in early Christian symbols.

As we have seen, the primordial Jesuism, with its Lamb "slain from the founding of the world,"

probably conceived of its deity in terms of the astronomical symbol; but the prominence given by Mithraism to the blood-ritual would serve to bring that into disuse among the Gentile Christists, whose creed further made Jesus the final paschal sacrifice, and reduced the apocalyptic phrase to a moral metaphor. Nonetheless, the rites and theories of the great pagan cults, all of which flourished in Palestine itself in the pre-Roman period, must be recognised as factors in its creation.

§ 5. *Ethics: Popular and Philosophic.*

It lies on the face of the case that the Christist cult could make no rapid headway by offering to people of any class higher ethical ideals than they had already been wont to recognise. To claim that it did is to upset the concurrent theorem that the pagan world into which Christianity entered was profoundly corrupt. If men and women on all hands welcomed the new teaching for its moral beauty, they must already have acquired a taste for such beauty, and cannot conceivably have been "sunk in trespasses and sins." It is true that in every unlettered population—in modern India and pre-Christian Mexico as well as in classic antiquity—a repute for asceticism has brought great popular honour, men reverencing a self-denial they feel unable to practise. But a cult and a community which actually seek to embrace the common people cannot exact from them a "saintliness" which in the terms of the case is a rare phenomenon. In reality, the Christian ethic was duplicated at every point by that of Judaism or of one or other of the

pagan schools or cults; and the contrast still commonly drawn between the church and its moral environment is framed by merely comparing Christian theory with popular pagan practice. Theory for theory, and practice for practice, there was no such difference.

If the ethical literature of the period be first taken, it is found that the teaching of (for instance) Seneca had so many points of identity with that of Paul as to give colour to a Christian theory that the pagan moralist and the apostle had had intercourse. It is now admitted that no such intercourse took place, and that the pretended letters of Paul and Seneca are Christian forgeries; but the community of doctrine is undisputed. It was largely traceable to elements of oriental ethic which had been imported into Greek Stoicism by writers of Semitic race; and on Seneca's side the moral principles involved are at some points much further developed than they can be said to be in either the gospels or the epistles. In some respects he is concrete and practical where the gospels are abstract, as when he condemns all war and urges habits of kindly fellowship between masters and slaves. On the latter head, Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish Platonist, went still further, explicitly condemning slavery as the worst of evils and denying Aristotle's dictum that for some men it is the natural state. Such doctrines as those of reciprocity and the forgiveness of injuries were of course the common property of the moralists of all civilised countries before the Christian era—of the teachers of China and India as well as of Greece; and the duty of practical beneficence, which in a section of the gentilising third gospel is made the whole question of moral and religious life, was indicated in almost exactly

the same terms in the much more ancient sacred books of Egypt.

Where the Christist ethic differed most from that of the higher paganism was on the point of sacrificial substitution or "salvation by blood," and on the point of moral self-humiliation. Stoicism on the contrary cultivated self-respect, here carrying on a strain of thought found in rabbinical Judaism; and it is at least an open question whether "voluntary humility" (which in the later epistles is disparaged) proved in practice the more efficient moral principle. In such a writer as Juvenal we find a protest against the habit of praying to the Gods for all manner of boons, the argument being that the Gods know better than their worshippers what the latter really need. In the gospel, a similar teaching precedes the Lord's prayer; and whereas in both cases the principle laid down is deviated from, the pagan, who prays for a sound mind in a sound body, is in no worse case than the Christist, who proceeds to pray for daily bread—if, that is, the ordinary rendering be accepted. If, as seems probable, the intention was to pray for "spiritual food," the contrast is again between a cultivation of self-reliance and a cultivation of the sense of spiritual dependence. Yet at bottom, inasmuch as the sense of divine support would theoretically give confidence, the practical outcome was probably the same, for good or for evil. When, however, to the doctrine of salvation by faith the Pauline theology added the principle that God was the potter and man the clay, without moral rights, there was set up a conception of morals which could not but be demoralising, and to which there was no parallel in the higher pagan teaching.

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As regards the Christist doctrine of sacrificial salvation, it is found that both under Judaism and under paganism higher moral standards had been reached by many thinkers; and Christism, as we have seen, was rather an adhesion to the popular religious ethic, which on this side was of an immemorial antiquity. So, too, many of the greater pagan and Jewish thinkers, while holding to the belief in immortality, had long before transcended the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, and had repelled the conception of a God of wrath; whereas the Christists stressed the conceptions prevalent among average Jews and Gentiles, taking over bodily, in particular, the popular idea of hell-torments, which was as vivid, and as inefficacious, in the ancient world as in the medieval. Worse still, the new faith ultimately introduced the frightful dogma of the damnation of all unbaptised infants, a teaching before undreamt of, and capable only of searing the heart. For the rest, the formal ethic was very much the same in all cults as to the duties of honesty, truthfulness, charity, and chastity; and the practice in all seems to have been alike precarious. Not any more than any of the contemporary religions did Christism offer any such social or political guidance as might conceivably have arrested the political paralysis and decadence of the whole imperial world; on the contrary, the gospels and epistles alike predict a speedy doomsday, and counsel political submission, showing no trace of any other ideal; while at the end of the second century such a teacher as Origen is found coupling the principle of the universal Roman dominion with that of the universal church. To any surviving vestiges of the ideal of self-government, Christian literature was

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broadly hostile. Inasmuch, too, as the gospel explicitly urged celibacy as a condition of ready salvation (Luke xx. 35; cp. Matthew xix. 12), it tended to hold at arm's length the mass of normal people and to attract the fanatics and the pretenders to sanctity. In all likelihood, however, such doctrines were stressed only by the more ascetic teachers and sects; the Pauline letters, for instance, holding a middle course.

Insofar, finally, as the principle of brotherly love is traditionally held to distinguish Christist teaching and practice from that of either Jews or pagans, there has occurred a fallacy of inference. All the documents go to show that the inculcation and profession of mutual love came currently from mouths which passed with no sense of incongruity to denunciation. In Christian tradition, the John who figured as the preacher of love was without misgiving called a "son of thunder" and reputed to have shown intense malice towards a heretic; and all the early teachers in turn, from Paul to Tertullian, are found alternating between praise of love and display of its contrary, even as Jesus is made by the gospel-framers to vituperate the contemporaries whom he was supposed to have exhorted to love their enemies. Even the duty of forgiveness is in one passage enforced by the threat of future torture at the hands of a Heavenly Father who is thus to imitate the cruelties of human law; whereas rationalistic thinkers among the Greeks a century or two before had grounded the duty on the naturalness of error, urging that wrongdoers should be taught rather than hated. So far were the Christists at any period from attaining the height of feeling kindly towards those

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 outside their creed, that they exhibited an exceptional measure of strife among themselves—this by mere reason of the openings for strife set up by their dogmatic system and the need of unifying it. In times of persecution, doubtless, they were thrown together in feeling, as any other community would be; but here, in the terms of the case, it was the persecution, not the creed, that created the fraternity. Nor can it be said that any contemporary Christian teachers, unless it might be some of the ostracised Gnostics, compare well in point of serenity and self-control with such pagans as the later Stoics. For the rest, the human material indicated in the Pauline accounts of the congregational habit of *glossolalia*, “speaking with tongues” (a mere hysterical outcry, of which the sounds had no meaning), is clearly neurotic, and must have been liable to all manner of lapses.

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 To say this is but to say that actual Christianity at length became popular in the only possible way—by assimilating ordinary human nature in mass. Had it persistently transcended or coerced average character, it could never have become one of the world-religions. To say, again, that the written doctrine at its best prescribed higher standards than those actually followed by its adherents, is but to claim what can equally be claimed for many other systems, popular and philosophic. The fundamental source of error in this connection is the assumption that mere moral doctrine can possibly regenerate any society independently of a vital change in social and intellectual conditions. In the ancient world, as in the modern, these were the substantial determinants for the mass of men and women.

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CHAPTER III.

CONDITIONS OF SURVIVAL.

§ 1. *Popular Appeal.*

OVERSHADOWED among the Jews by the common traditions of Judaism, and faced among the Gentiles by such competition as we have seen, the Christian cult had to acquire all the chief attractions of popular pagan religion if it was to outdo its rivals. Such success could never have been reached through mere superiority of ethical ideal, even had such superiority been present: by the admission even of Christian advocates, there were high moral ideals in most of the pagan ethical systems current among the educated class; but those systems never became popular, not seeking to be so. To gain the mass, the new propagandists found, the tastes of the mass had to be propitiated; and at best the more conscientious of them could but hope to control the ignorance and the superstition they sought to attract. When in the second and third centuries the more rigid Puritans, such as the Montanists, formed themselves into special communities, they were necessarily repudiated by the main body, which had to temper its doctrine to the characters of the average laity and the average clergy. Thus the development of primitive Christianity was necessarily such an assimilation of neighbouring lore and practice as we have already in part

traced. The story of the Christ had to take on all the lasting dramatic features of the prehistoric worships; and the mysteries had as far as possible to embody those details in the dramatic pagan fashion.

Where dramatisation was going on, new details would naturally be added, all tending to the same end; and on the basis of these early dramatic inventions would arise many of the gospel narratives. This, however, must have been a matter of time.

In the earlier stages of propaganda, the appeal was primarily to Jews, and secondarily to Jew proselytes; but after the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem it must have been made in an increasing degree to Gentiles, chiefly of the poorer classes, whether artisans or traders. As among the pagan religious societies before mentioned, slaves were admitted; such being not seldom in as good a position as artisans. There is also evidence that, on the avowed theological principles of the sect, men even of bad repute were received, of course on condition of repentance. "Let him that stole, steal no more," is one of the injunctions in one of the later epistles. In the nature of the case such adherents could not be multiplied, in the teeth of the attractions of the other cults, without a continual offer of congenial entertainment; and the weekly "love-feast," on the "day of the Lord," would be the first mainstay. The constant warnings and admonitions in the epistles exclude the notion that these assemblies escaped the usual risks of disorder; and the standing problem of the supervisors was to maintain the social attraction without tolerating open licence. Insofar as they succeeded, it was by appeal to ideals of abstinence which, as we have seen, had long been current in the East.

In the main, the popular success of the movement must have depended on a compromise. When "freedom from the yoke of the law" went so far as to set up a serious scandal among the pagans (1 Cor. v.) it was necessarily suppressed; but from the first there evidently occurred such irregularities as were later charged by Tertullian against his fellow-Christians in the matter of their nocturnal assemblies. Only out of average material could a popular movement be made, and the more the cult spread the more was it compelled to assimilate the usages of paganism, giving them whatever new colour or pretext seemed best. But to the successful manipulation of such a movement there was necessary a body of propagandists, a written doctrine, and a machinery of organisation; and it was chiefly by the development of such machinery that the Christist movement secured itself in the struggle for survival. In this regard its success as against Mithraism becomes perfectly intelligible. The priests of Mithra seem never to have aimed at popular acceptance save in so far as their cult became co-extensive with the Roman army; their ideal being rather that of a religious freemasonry than that of an open community. The Christists, on the other hand, seem to have carried on from the first the Jewish impulses of fanaticism and proselytism, aiming at popularity with the acquired Jewish knowledge of the financial possibilities of any numerous movement.

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§ 2. *Economic Causation.*

The play of economic interest in the establishment and maintenance of religions is one of the constant

forces in their history. In the simplest forms of savage life, the medicine-man or priest makes a superior living out of his function ; and every powerful cult in antiquity enriched its priests. The developed worships of Assyria and Babylon, Phœnicia and Egypt, were carried on by great priestly corporations, with enormous revenues ; those of the Egyptian priesthood in particular being reckoned even in the Roman period at a third of the wealth of the nation. Early Greece and Rome, in comparison, showed little ecclesiastical development by reason simply of the fact that their relative political freedom offered so many other channels to economic energy. In republican Rome, priesthood was a caste-privilege enjoyed by a select few, the majority of the ruling class being content to have it so ; and there and in Greece alike the normal conception of deities as local, with local worships, precluded even the thought of a universal priesthood, though the Roman policy gave all the Gods of the extending State a place in the common pantheon. In old Greece it came about that the fixed ideal of the City-State, and the very multiplicity of cults even in the separate states, kept all the worships isolated ; while the republican habit kept the priests and priestesses members of the body politic, and not associations apart. The Christian church began its historic growth on this ground, in the period of imperialism and decadence, with the eastern examples before it, the Jewish system of church-finance and propaganda to proceed upon, the Greek democratic practice to facilitate its first steps, and the Roman sway to allow of its spread and official organisation. Lastly came the usage, imitated from the later political and religious life of the Greeks, of Church Synods, in

which disruptive doctrinal tendencies were more or less controlled by the principle of the majority vote, and the weaker groups were assisted and encouraged by the others. In every aspect, the evolution was by way of adaptation on tried lines.

As we have seen, Judaism in the Hellenistic and Roman period was financed through a system of travelling "apostles" and collectors, who followed up the dispersed Jewish race wherever it flourished, and got together great revenues for the temple service and the priestly and rabbinical class. Jesuism began on those lines, and so set up habits of intercommunication between its groups, which for their own part were locally and independently financed by their members in the Greek and Jewish fashion. Whatever may have been the practice of enthusiasts such as Paul would appear to have been, the principle that "the labourer is worthy of his hire" must have become general; and insofar as special preaching was a requisite and an attraction for the members, the travelling preachers would have to be fee'd or salaried. One of the later epistles makes mention of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, as different types; also of elders (presbyters), deacons, and bishops (overseers); and as the groups increased and began to possess buildings, the creation of professional opportunities set up a new economic interest in propaganda.

In neither Greek nor Roman life was the phenomenon new. Centuries before the Christian era, the influx of the Dionysian and other mystic cults in Greece had been followed by the rise of swarms of religious mendicants, many of whom carried with them sacred books, and ministered consolation while playing on credulity; and on a higher plane the educated

“sophists” or humanists of the pre-Macedonian period had made a livelihood by moral and philosophical teaching or lecturing. Later, the Stoics and other philosophers became a species of religious directors or “spiritual advisers” as well as ethical lecturers; and in Rome especially this calling had practically the status of a profession. Thus had arisen a specific means of livelihood for the whole class of educated men without official posts or inherited incomes. But any religious cult which should set up an organisation would have as against such teachers an obvious financial advantage, in respect of its power of attracting numbers, its local permanence, and its means of collecting revenue; and even men incapable of success as lecturers could attain relatively secure positions as presbyters or “bishops”—that is, overseers, first of single churches, and later of district groups. The original function of the bishop was that later assigned to “elders” in the presbyterian system—the supervision of the public offerings or “collections” and their distribution among needy brethren. Later, the bishop became the religious head of the group, and its representative in communication with others. Not till such organisation was reached could the new sect count on permanence.

An important source of income from an early stage was the munificence of the richer women converts; and insofar as the Christist movement stood for a restraint on sexual licence it doubtless gained from the moral bias as well as from the superstition of women of the upper and middle classes throughout the empire. The richer women were indeed made to feel that it was their duty to make “oblations” in proportion to their means. On the other hand, then as

now, the giving of alms to the poor was a means of enlisting the sympathetic support of serious women ; and the Christists here had a lead not only from oriental example in general and that of later Judaism in particular, but from the policy of food-doles now systematically pursued in the Roman empire. The later epistles show that much was made of the good offices of "widows," who, themselves poor and wholly or partly supported by the congregations, would serve as comforters of suffering or bereaved members, and ministrants to the sick. The death-rate was doubtless high in the eastern cities, then as now. In this way were attracted to the church large masses of the outside poor who were not similarly considered or sought for by any of the competing pagan cults. But it was necessary to compete in other ways with the mass of itinerant diviners and religious mendicants, who had much the same kind of vogue as the begging friars of later Christendom ; and exorcists were at an early date a recognised class of officers in connection with the Christian churches.

At what stage revenue began to be derived from the usage of praying for the souls of the dead it is impossible to say ; but as early as the third century it is found to be customary to recite before the altar the names of givers of oblations, who were then publicly prayed for. In various other ways the church was able to elicit gifts. It lies on the face of all the canonical books that a prediction of the speedy end of the world was one of the constant doctrines of the early church ; and such a belief would naturally elicit donations in the first century as it did in the tenth. Obviously, too, the gradual development of the "mysteries" would strengthen the hands of the

priestly class. In particular, as it was early made compulsory on all baptised persons, except penitents, to take the sacrament, the privilege of administering or withholding the eucharist was a sure source of revenue, as was the power of initiation into the mysteries of the other cults for their ministrants.

§ 3. *Organisation and Sacred Books.*

It was finally to the joined influences of ecclesiastical organisation and of popular sacred books that Christism owed its measure of success as against the freely-competing pagan cults; and on both sides its primary advantage, as we have seen, came from its Judaic basis. For nearly two centuries, the Hebrew Bible, made widely accessible in the Septuagint version, was its literary mainstay, by reason of the prestige attaching to such a mass of ancient religious literature in the Greco-Roman world; and whereas other cults also had their special lore, the Christist movement was specially buttressed by its system of ecclesiastical union, also imitated from the Judaic. The ecclesiastical system, above all, was a means to the development of the new sacred books which completed the definition of Christianity as something apart from Judaism; and these in turn made a permanent foundation for the historic church. A glance at the cult associated with the name of the pagan Apollonius of Tyana, who won fame in the first century, makes it clear that even where a great renown attached to a travelling religious reformer and reputed wonder-worker, and where an adoring biography served in some degree to prolong his fame, the lack of a

hierarchy or connected series of religious groups prevented on the one hand its continuance, and on the other hand the necessary development of the literature which should conserve it.

The first traceable literature special to the Christians, as we have seen, consisted in "apostolic" and sub-apostolic epistles of exhortation, which were read aloud in the churches after the Jewish manner. Priestly needs conserved such documents, and further evoked forgeries, aimed against new heresies and schisms. But the mass of men are always more easily to be attracted by narrative than by homilies; and the mystery-play, by means of which alone could the church at the outset compete with the pagan cults similarly provided, lent itself to a written as well as to an acted history. Anyone who will attentively follow the account of the Last Supper, Betrayal, Passion, Trial, and Crucifixion in the first gospel, will see that it reproduces a series of closely-continuous dramatic scenes, with no room given to such considerations as would naturally occur to a narrator of real events, and no sign of perception of the extreme improbability of the huddled sequence set forth. A more or less unnatural compression of events is the specific mark of drama, even in the hands of great masters, as Shakespeare and Ibsen; and the primitive mystery-play, as might be expected, is excessively compressed. Jesus is made to take the Passover after dark; then to go forth in the night with his disciples, who sleep while he prays; then to be captured in the darkness by a "multitude"; then to be taken straight to the high priest, "where the scribes and the elders were gathered together." These now proceed, in the middle of the night, to "seek false witnesses," and

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“many false witnesses” come, to no purpose, till “afterward” come two who testify to his words about destroying the temple; whereupon he is judged and buffeted, and the night’s history ends with the episode of Peter’s denial. No hint is ever given of anything said or done or felt by Jesus on the way from the Supper to the Mount, or in the interval between the Jewish and the Roman trials.

Such a narrative cannot have been originally composed for reading. A writer, whether inventing or reproducing hearsay, would have sought to explain the strangely protracted midnight procedure of the high priest and scribes and elders; would have given some thought to the time necessary between event and event; would have thought of the Lord in his dungeon. The story before us yields exactly what could be scenically enacted, nothing more; and where on the stage the successive scenes would originally raise no question of the time taken, the unreflecting narrative loses all verisimilitude by making everything happen in unbroken sequence, and by making the Master utter words of prayer which, apart from the audience of the drama, there was no one to hear. In the play the “false witnesses” would of necessity be sent for and introduced without lapse of time, and the action would raise in a popular audience no perplexity, where the narrative loses all semblance of probability by turning the dramatic act into a historical process. After the unspecified slight pause till “the morning was come,” the action is resumed before Pilate with the same dramatic speed, and the execution impossibly follows immediately on the trial. We are reading the bare transcript of a mystery-drama; a transcript so bare that, in the scene of the Passion, the speech beginning

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“Sleep on now,” and that beginning “Arise, let us be going,” are put together as if they were one utterance, without specification of the required exit and entrance between.

Such a document is in itself the proof of the priority of the mystery play to the gospel story. In this degree of detail the play must belong to a stage of the movement at which it had made some Gentile headway; and its reduction to writing may be supposed to have taken place either at a time when the Christians by reason of persecution were prevented from carrying on their usual rituals or festivals, or, more probably, when the hierarchy decided for prudential or disciplinary reasons to abandon the regular resort to dramatic spectacle. It does not follow, of course, that none of the didactic parts of the gospel were in writing before the play was transcribed; but the fact that none of the Pauline epistles quote any of the Jesuine teachings, and that the first Clementine epistle alludes to but one or two, is a reason for holding that they came very slowly into existence. The dramatic development would naturally occur for the most part or wholly in Gentile hands. It is not certain, indeed, that the later Jews remained uniformly averse to drama, which was partly forced on them by the Herods; and the theory of a dramatic origin for the Apocalypse is not quite untenable; but it happens that the most obviously dramatic parts of the gospel story are those which, on Gentile lines, throw the guilt of the crucifixion on the Jews. // n.

When once a gospel existed, interpolation and alteration were for some generations easy; and what happened was a multiplication of doctrines and

documents at the hands of different groups or sects or leaders, the men with dogmatic or moral ideas taking this means to establish them, without regard to the coherence or consistency of the texts. Many passages are visibly inserted in order to countervail others, it being easier to add than to suppress. Only late in the second century can a canon have begun to be formed, as the Clementine epistles quote a now lost document in the nature of a Gospel, and Justin's "Memoirs of the Apostles" diverge from those preserved. The later rejection by the Church of such documents proves them to have been regarded as in part heretical; and parts of the canonical gospels were altered for various dogmatic reasons after they had been made to include much of the matter in the uncanonical. The third gospel avows that "many" previous narratives existed; and apart from all these there have been preserved a number of rejected gospels, which run mainly to miraculous stories. Some of these were long abundantly popular, that of "Nicodemus" having had common vogue down to the Middle Ages. But the more thoughtful clergy would soon recognise the greater value of documents which by their teaching could impress the more educated of the laity; and the double influence of the supernaturalism and the moral appeal went to create cohesion throughout the movement.

The organisation, in turn, operated as a check on the spread of heresies, which, after carrying it further afield, soon threatened to dissolve the cult into an infinity of mutually repellent groups. Insofar, indeed, as these appealed to the more speculative and quasi-philosophic minds, they were foredoomed to decay with the decay of culture, and to be at best the

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creed of the few. Those, in particular, who carried anti-Semitism to the point of discrediting the Jewish Deity, lost the support of the Jewish sacred books, of which the mere literary mass and variety constituted in such an age a solid basis for a cultus. Yet even on those lines the Manichæan cult spread far and lived long, so easy was it for any cult to rise. Survival lay with simple concrete myth of the popular sort, concrete ritual, and explicit dogma; and the needs of popular faith kept ever to the front the human aspect of the crucified God, even when he was being dogmatically declared to be at once distinct from and one with his co-eternal Father. This indeed was but one of the many irreducible contradictions imbedded in the sacred books. To bring these to consistency was impossible; but the hierarchy could set up formal creeds over and above them; and it mattered little to the official and financial continuity of the Church that these creeds were themselves chronically altered. What was necessary to success was simply some common standard and common action.

§ 4. *Concession and Fixation.*

It is not to be supposed that any abnormal sagacity presided over the formation of either the creed and canon or the official system of the Church; but insofar as it survived it can be seen to have done so in virtue alike of assimilation and of refusal to assimilate. Much expansion was needed to make an area broad enough for the pagan populace; and on the side of custom and myth hardly any pagan element was ultimately refused. At the outset the great cause of

strife between Christian and pagan was the contemptuous refusal of the former to show any respect for "idols"—a principle derived by Jewry from Persia, and passed on to the first Jesuits. When, however, the Christian cult became that of the State, it of necessity reverted, as we shall see, to the psychology of the multitude, and carried the use of images as far as pagans had ever done. Even the so-called "animal-worship" of the Egyptians partly survived in such usages as the presence of the sacred ox and ass in the mystery-play of the Nativity (an immemorial popular rite, belonging to sun-worship), in the adoption of the "four *zoa*" of the Apocalypse as the symbols of the four evangelists, and in the conception of "the Lamb." Before the period of image-worship, too, the Church had fully accepted the compromise by which countless pagan "heroes" and "geniuses," the subjects of local cults, became enrolled as saints and martyrs, whose bones had given to tombs and wells and shrines a sacred virtue, and whose old festival-days became part of the new ecclesiastical calendar. Above all, there was finally forced on the Church a cult of the Mother as Virgin Goddess, without which it could never have held its own against the great and well-managed worships of Isis and Rhea-Cybelê and Dêmêtêr; since the first and last in particular aroused in multitudes a rapture of exalted devotion such as was not psychologically possible towards even a crucified God, save insofar as the emotion of women worshippers towards the slain demigod realised that of male devotees towards the Queen of Heaven and the Mother and sustainer of things. If the original Jesus of the myth had not had a mythical mother, it would have been

necessary to invent one. Once invented, her elevation to the honours of Isis was inevitable.

No less necessary, on the other hand, to the official survival of the new system was a dogmatic limit to new doctrine. Where concrete myth and ritual enlarged the scope of the cult, freedom of abstract speculation dissipated its forces and menaced its very existence. All manner of streams might usefully flow into its current, but when the main river threatened to break up into a hundred searching rivulets there was a prospect of its being wholly lost in the sands. This danger, sometimes charged solely upon the Gnostics, arose with the very first spread of the cult; every Pauline epistle, early or late, exhibiting the scope it gave for schism and faction. Mere random "prophesying," which it was difficult to discountenance, meant endless novelties of doctrine. At every stage at which we can trace it, the early Church is divided, be it by Judaism against Gentilism, faith against works, Paul against Apollos, or one Jesus against another: the very nature of the forces which made possible the propaganda involved their frequent clash; and multitudes of converts were doubtless won and lost in the chances of sectarian strife. When to the Jews and proselytes and illiterates of the earlier movement there began to be added speculative Gentile Gnostics, for whom Yahweh was but one of many rival tribal Gods, and Jesus one of many competitive slain Saviours, there came with them a species of heresy which bade fair to lull all schism in a euthanasia of universalism. The theosophies of Egypt and the East were alike drawn upon in the name of Christism, and there resulted endless webs of grandiose

mysticism, in which the problem of the Cosmos was verbally solved by schemes of intermediary powers between deity and man, and endless periods of transformation between the first and the last states of matter. In these philosophies Jesus was explained away or allegorised just as were the Gods of paganism, and the motive force of fanatical ill-will against those deities on the score of their characters was lost in a reconciling symbolism. Framed for brooding minds that could not rest in the primitive solutions of the popular cults, such systems on the other hand could never attach or hold the mass of the people; and as they were yet produced on all hands, the Christian organisation was soon forced to define its dogma if it would keep any distinguishing faith. Insofar as so-called Gnosticism lent itself obediently to the embellishment of the canonical writings, and the confutation of the heathen—as in the works of Clement of Alexandria—it was accepted without much demur; but all new or independent theory was tabooed. Speculative minds were dangerous things in a church aiming at practical success; and they were assiduously barred out.

The conservative process, of which we shall trace the history, was carried on partly by documentary forgeries, partly by more honest polemic, partly by administrative action and the voting of creeds. But in the nature of the case the forgeries, where successful, were the most central and decisive forces; and we may still see, in the schematic narratives of the Acts of the Apostles, in the interpolations of the Apocalypse, in some of the readjustments of the gospel text, and in the more certainly spurious Pauline epistles, how faction and fanaticism were fought with intelligent

fraud; and how a troublesome popular delusion was guarded against by creating another that lent itself to official ends. The "true" creed is just the creed which was able to survive.

§ 5. *Cosmic Philosophy.*

As we have seen, Gentile philosophy did actually enter into the sacred books of the new faith, notably in the doctrine of the *Logos* or "Word," which in the fourth gospel virtually reshapes the entire Jesuit system. That gospel, rather than the preaching of Paul, is the doctrinal foundation of Gentile Christianity. In the synoptics the founder broadly figures as a Judaic Messiah, who is shortly to come again, at the world's end, to judge the quick and the dead; and only for a community convinced of the speedy approach of doomsday could such a religion suffice. In the Pauline as in the other epistles we see the belief in full play; and only in one of the later forgeries (2 Thess. ii.) is a caveat inserted. When the period loosely specified for the catastrophe was clearly passed, and the Church had become an economic institution like another, it must needs present a religion for a permanent world if it was to hold its own; and while the changing speculations of the Gnostics must be vetoed in the interests of solidarity, some scheme of philosophic dogma was needed which, like theirs, should envisage the world as an enduring process. Paul's polemic did but claim for believing Gentiles a part in the Jewish salvation, and such a view had been reached by Philo before him. The fourth gospel, substituting the Christ-sacrifice for the Jewish

Passover, and putting a world-Logos in place of a descendant of David, gave the theoretic basis of a permanent cosmopolitan cult analogous to those of Egypt and Persia. The invention of a gentilising history of the first apostles was a part of the same process of adaptation ; but the fourth gospel supplied the religion for the Church which the official adaptors sought to develop.

Such an evolution was psychologically prepared for by the whole drift of latter-day Jewish thought outside of Judea. The idea of "the Word" of the deity as an entity, capable of personification, had long belonged to Jewish theology in terms of many passages in the Old Testament, and is but one variant of the psychological process by which Brahmans came to conceive of the Vedas, and Moslems of the Koran, as eternal existences. The Chaldaic word *Memra* had already much of the mystic significance of *Logos*, which meant both "word" and "reason"; the books of Proverbs, Job, and the Wisdom of Solomon had made familiar the conception of a personified divine Wisdom, dwelling beside the deity ; and the Alexandrian Jew Philo had made the *Logos* a central figure in his theosophy. But in the theosophies of Egypt and Persia the same conception had long been established ; Plato had made it current in the theosophy of the Greeks, combining it with a mystic doctrine of the cross ; and Thoth and Hermes and Mithra were already known as the *Logos* to their worshippers. Thus, whether the fourth gospel were framed at Ephesus or at Alexandria, by a cosmopolitan Jew or by a Gentile proselyte, it had grounds of appeal to every Christist save the original Judaic Jesuists, whose monopoly it was framed to overthrow. It of course gave no coherent philosophy of the universe,

and merely evaded the problem of evil, which the Gnostics were constantly seeking to solve ; but it was none the worse a religious document for that.

Nonetheless, it needed the stress of circumstance to force it into its fitting place in the new religion. Despite the many passages inserted to bring its narrative into harmony with the other gospels, the fourth differs so much more from them than they do from each other that only the vital needs of the cult in its struggle for existence can account for the final adoption of all four. But these needs were compulsive, and overrode the opposition the fourth gospel evoked. Such a mass of doctrine purporting to come from the very mouth of the founder could not in any case be refused by such a community ; and when once the treatise on such grounds had been taken into the canon, it played its part in paralysing the faculty of judgment. The fourth gospel directly excludes the pretence that the God-man was born at Bethlehem ; yet it was grouped, like the second, which ignores the tale, with the first and third, which circumstantially yet discordantly enounce it. Where irreconcilable differences on the most essential matters of biographical fact could thus be let pass, the widest divergence of doctrinal idea could find acceptance. The two pressures of predisposition and corporate interest availed to override the difficulties they had created ; and the primary momentum of ignorant credulity among the faithful carried all before it. Easiness of belief correlated with proneness to invention, and the religious community cohered, as others do, by force of the gregarious bias, the hostile environment, and the economic interest.

PART II.—CHRISTIANITY FROM THE SECOND CENTURY TO THE RISE OF MOHAMME- DANISM.

CHAPTER I.

SCOPE AND CHARACTER OF THE UNESTABLISHED CHURCH.

§ 1. *Numbers and Inner Life.*

WHEN the "Catholic" Christian Church becomes politically and socially distinguishable in the second century, it is a much less numerous body than is pretended in the literature of its champions. Formulas such as those used in the Acts of the Apostles (chaps. iii. iv. v. vi.) greatly falsify the state of the case. The first "churches" in the cities of Asia Minor, like the groups addressed by Paul in his epistles, were but small conventicles, meeting in private houses. Even in the fourth century, sixty years after Constantine's adoption of the faith, the church of Antioch, one of the oldest and most important, appears to have numbered only a fifth part of the population of the city, or about one hundred thousand out of half-a-million. In the extensive diocese of Neo-Cæsarea, in the third century, there were declared to be only seventeen believers; and in

the church of Rome itself, in the same century, there were probably not more than fifty thousand members all told out of a population of over a million. In Egypt again there was no church outside Alexandria till about the end of the second century. Thus the language of Justin and Tertullian and other Fathers, to the effect that the Christians were everywhere throughout the empire, and that the gospel had been preached and Jesus prayed to in every nation, is mere rhetoric in the oriental taste. Only in the towns of the empire—though often in small towns in the East—did the church exist at all: the *pagani* or people of the rural districts were so uniformly fixed in their beliefs that their name became for Christians the generic term for the adherents of the old faiths; and though there were some missionary movements in Persia and Arabia, the western provinces were hardly at all reached by the propaganda in the first two centuries. Even in Gaul there were few adherents; while as regards Britain, where there is said to have been a group at York in the third century, there is not to be found a single monumental trace of the presence of Christianity during the four centuries of the Roman occupation, though remains of the Mithraic cult, which flourished in the army, are frequent. At the end of the second century, then, probably not a hundredth part of the population even of the central provinces of the Roman empire was Christianised, while the outlying provinces were practically unaffected.

Of the average inner life of the converts at this period it is possible to form some idea by noting at once the current doctrine, the claims of the apologists, the complaints of the apostolic and later epistles, and

the tenour and temper of the whole literature of the Church. Something too may be inferred from the fact that the early believers were mainly easterns even in Rome itself. Even on these data, indeed, it would be a mistake to assume that any concrete character type was predominant; but at several points we are entitled to generalise as between the Christian movement and its antecedents and surroundings. It was, for instance, very weakly developed on the intellectual side, avowedly discouraging all use of reason, and limiting the mental life to religious interests. Save for a certain temperamental and moral energy in some of the Pauline epistles, there is nothing in the propagandist literature of the early Church which bears comparison with the preceding literature of Greece and Rome. The traditions concerning the apostles present men of a narrow and fanatical vision and way of life, without outlook on human possibilities, joyless save by way of religious exaltation, painfully engrossed in theological contention and apocalyptic forecast. The happiest teachers were perhaps the least intelligent. Papias, bishop at Hierapolis, whom Eusebius later presents as having talked with men who had heard the apostles, is pronounced by that historian to have been of small understanding; and his ideas of the millennium, as passed down, justify the criticism. Other traditional figures of the second century, as the bishops Polycarp and Ignatius, are presented mainly in their character of hortatory martyrs, the most advantageous light in which ungifted men can be placed; and not a line ascribed to them is above suspicion. Of the early Christians in general, indeed, a transfiguring ideal has been shaped in terms of the aspect of martyrdom and persecution—trials

which, by forcing men and women back on the central virtues of courage and constancy, positively ennoble character. Such a compensating dignity of endurance is found where it is apt to be least expected—in men and women long broken to oriental tyranny; in Egyptian fellaheen, used to the lash; in peasants wont mutely to toil and obey. But the possibility of such a correlation does not alter the facts of normal life for the types in question. Ignorance and fanaticism and superstition yield their normal fruits in normal conditions. And there is Christian record that even among the martyrs there were men of bad character, seeking a short way to Paradise.

Of the early Christian community many were slaves, and perhaps from three to five per cent paupers. The proportion of women was perhaps as large as it is in the churches of to-day; for it was one of the pagan taunts that to women the preachers preferred above all to address themselves, and rich women members seem to have been relatively numerous. All orders alike believed fervently in evil spirits; and the most constant aspect of their faith was as a protection against demoniacal influence. In the service of the Church of Rome in the third century there were forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolythes or clerks, and fifty "readers," *exorcists*, and janitors; and the *exorcists* were at least as hard-worked as any other members of the staff. On the side of morality, much stress was laid on the sins of the flesh, partly because these were the commonest, partly because the idea of an intellectual ethic had not arisen; and while the Church was liable to gusts of persecution its practice was naturally somewhat strict. Men and women who had

joined the body mainly for its alms or its *agapæ* were not likely to adhere to it in times of trouble; and the very proclamation of an ascetic standard would primarily attract those persons, found in every community, who had a vocation for asceticism. At almost any period, however, such were to be found in the heretical or dissentient groups as well as in the main body, while the testimony of the Pauline epistles is distinct as to the antinomianism of many "apostolic" converts. Some Gnostic sects were stringently ascetic if others were antinomian, the *à priori* principle lending itself alternately to the doctrines that the spirit must mortify the flesh and that the deeds of the flesh are nothing to the spirit. Within the main body, the conflicting principles of faith and works, then as later, involved the same divergences of practice. The evidence of Tertullian is emphatic as to the illusoriness of much Christian profession in his day in the churches of Carthage, where zeal was at least as abundant as elsewhere.

Taken individually, then, an average Christian of the second century was likely to be an unlettered person of the "lower-middle" or poorer classes; living in a town; either bitterly averse to "idols," theatres, the circus, and the public baths, or persuaded that he ought to be; utterly credulous as to demons and miracles; incapable of criticism as to the sacred books; neurotic or respectful towards neurosis; readily emotional towards the crucified God and the sacred mystery in which were given the "body and blood"; devoid alike of æsthetic and of philosophic faculty; without the thought of civic duty or political theory; much given to his ritual; capable of fanatical hatred and of personal malice; but either constitu-

tionally sober and chaste or chronically anxious to be so, and in times of persecution exalted by the passion of self-sacrifice; perhaps then transiently attaining even to the professed ideal of love towards enemies. But the effective bonds of union for the community, whether in peace or during persecution, were rather the ruling passion of hostility to pagan beliefs and usages and the eager hope of "salvation" than any enthusiasm of humanity, social or even sectarian. And, as an orthodox ecclesiastic has remarked, we cannot "even cursorily read the New Testament without being astonished by the allusions so often made to immoral persons calling themselves Christians."

Over such worshippers, in the first centuries, presided a clergy of precarious culture, sometimes marked by force of character, never by depth or breadth of thought. To compare the Christian writers of the ancient world with the pagan thinkers who had preceded them by three or more centuries is to have a vivid sense of the intellectual decadence which had accompanied the growth of imperialism. From Plato to Clement of Alexandria, from Aristotle to Tertullian, there is a descent as from a great plateau to arid plains or airless valleys: the disparity is as between different grades of organism. But even between the early Christian fathers and the pagans near their own time the intellectual and æsthetic contrast is flagrant. Justin Martyr and Clement, put in comparison with either Plutarch or Epictetus, create at once an impression of relative poverty of soul: the higher pagan life is still the richer and the nobler; the Christian temper is more shrill and acrid, even where, as in the case of Clement, it is nourished by learning and pagan metaphysic. Even the cultured and

relatively liberal Origen, in his reply to Celsus, is often at a moral disadvantage as against the pagan, who, especially when he passes from mere polemic on Jewish lines to philosophic thought, is distinctly more masculine and penetrating. So far from being less superstitious, the Christian reverts to such vulgar beliefs as that in the magical virtue of certain divine names. Yet Origen, who was born of educated Christian parents, is almost the high-water mark of ancient Christian literature on the side of culture and mental versatility (185-254).

Up to the time of Clement and Origen, then, it may be said, the Christian cult had won from paganism hardly one mind of any signal competence; religious humanists such as Plutarch and fine moralists such as Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus having gone to their graves without being even transiently attracted by it. What laughter was left in literature remained aloof from religion; Lucian could have no place in the church, though it is probably his ridicule of pagan deities that has won the preservation of his works at Christian hands. It is only when the disease of empire has invaded all the sources of the higher life, in the third and fourth centuries, that the Christian writers, themselves representing no intellectual recovery, begin to be comparable, mind for mind, with those of contemporary paganism; and even then largeness of vision seems to linger rather with the mystics of the older way of thought, as Porphyry and Plotinus, than with the bitter polemicists of the newer faith, as Cyprian and Arnobius. The moral note which in the modern world is supposed to be typically and primordially Christian, that of the *Imitatio Christi*, is the one note never struck by the Christian Fathers,

or, if sounded, never sustained. It is rather a result of medieval brooding, the outcome of many generations of cloister life and of a settled ecclesiastical order, which walled-in an abnormal peace.

During those ages in which the Christian Church was so spreading as to become at length the fit cultus of the decaying State, its history is almost wholly one of internal and external strifes, conflicts between the Church and its pagan persecutors, between its literary champions and pagan criticism, between the champions of orthodoxy and the innovating heretics, between the partisans of dogmas whose life-and-death struggle was to determine what orthodoxy was to be. The central sociological fact is the existence of an organisation with a durable economic life—durable because of ministering to an enduring demand—in a society whose institutions were suffering more and more from economic disease. Of this organisation the component parts united to resist and survive external hostility when that arose; and for the command of its power and prestige, later, the conflicting sections strove as against each other. In the history of both forms of strife are involved at once that of its dogmas and that of its hierarchic structure.

§ 2. *Growth of the Priesthood.*

In the Jesuist groups of the first century, as we have seen, there were "bishops" or overseers, and other "presbyters" or elders, so named in simple imitation of the usages of other Greek-speaking religious societies, Jewish and Gentile, in the eastern parts of the empire. The bishop was merely the

special supervisor and distributor of the "collection," whether of money or of other gifts, and was spiritually and socially on the same level with the presbyters and deacons. None was specially ordained, and ordinary members could at need even administer the eucharist. Teaching or preaching was not at first a special function of any member of a group, since any one could be a "prophet" (unless indeed the "prophets" were so named later, after the supervising priest or bishop in certain Egyptian temples, whose function was to distribute revenue); but discourses were for a time given by travelling apostles, who aimed at founding new groups, and who ministered the eucharist wherever they went. It lay in the nature of the case, however, that the function of the bishop should gain in moral authority because of its economic importance; and that the informal exhortations or "prophesyings" of the early days, which were always apt to degenerate into the hysterical *glossolalia*, or unintelligible "tongues," should be superseded by the regular preaching of ostensibly qualified men. In the first century these must have been few, and they would usually be made the acting bishops, who would gradually become more and more identified with the administration of the "mysteries," and would naturally repel "lay" interference. Here again there was pagan precedent, some of the pagan societies having a "theologos," while in all the "bishop" had a certain precedence and authority.

As congregations grew and services multiplied, however, the bishop would need assistance, and to this end presbyters became officially associated with him as con-celebrants. Only gradually, however, did the sacerdotal spirit take full possession of the cult.

Liturgy was long a matter of local choice ; and it is probable that the complete mystery-play of the Passion and Crucifixion and Resurrection was never performed save at a few large centres, in competition with special pagan attractions of the same kind ; but a eucharist, with varying ritual and hymns, sung by special officials, was the primary function of every church. As numbers and revenue increased, men of an ambitious and administrative turn would inevitably tend to enter the movement ; and the second century was not out before the avarice and arrogance of leading bishops were loudly complained of. Nonetheless, their self-assertion promoted the growth of the sect. Such men, in point of fact, tended to build up the Church as warlike nobles later built up the fabric of feudalism, or self-seeking "captains of industry" the special structure of modern commercial societies. Righteousness and gentleness and spirituality could no more create a popular and revenue-yielding Church in the Roman empire than they can to-day create and maintain a "paying" industrial organisation. An early bishop, indeed, needed to recommend himself to the congregation, in order to be elected ; but in a large town, with personal magnetism and a staff of priests, he was certain to become a determining force in church affairs. The aspiring priest looked forward to a bishopric for himself ; and in an illiterate congregation there could be no effectual resistance to official assumptions which were made with any tact. Thus were the scribes and Pharisees rapidly duplicated.

In an age of unbounded credulity the invitation to deceit was constant ; and, while credulity itself means the faculty for innocent false witness, it could not be but that frauds were common in matters of miracle-

working of all kinds. To suppose that all the miracle-stories arose in good faith when the deliberate manufacture of false documents and calculated tamperings with the genuine were a main part of the literary life of the Church, is to ignore all probability. The systematic forgery and interpolation of "Sibylline Books," by way of producing pagan testimonies and prophecies on the side of Christism, is to be regarded as a clerical industry of the second century. A bishop's business was to forward the fame and interests of his Church; and in Ambrose's transparent account of his discovery of miracle-working relics of saints at Milan in the fourth century we have a typical instance of the methods by which the prestige of the faith was advanced. Ambrose was above and not below the moral average of previous bishops. To find what might pass for the bones and relics of saints and martyrs, to frame false tales concerning them, to win illiterate and poor pagans to the Church by imitating their festivals and ceremonies—these were, by the grieving admission of many Christian historians, among the common activities of the Church from the second or third century onwards; and the priesthood were the natural agents of the work. By the very fact, however, that there were special reputations for wonder-working, as that of Gregory Thaumaturgus in the third century, we are reminded that the pretence was not universal. Imposture is a variation like another; and there must always have been a good proportion of normally honest minds, however unintelligent and uncritical. It was their incapacity that evoked fraud. Some, on the other hand, have recorded how the bones of executed robbers were at times made to do duty as relics of martyrs.

On one side the character of the early as of the later clergy of the "Catholic" Church has suffered severely from their own affirmation of a primitive theory of morals to which they could not conform. In an age of lessening science and freedom, with growing superstition, the barbarian ideal of asceticism gained ground like other delusions. The idea that by physical self-mortification men attain magical or intercessory power in spiritual things—an idea found in all ancient religions, and enforced in numerous pagan priesthoods—was imposed to some extent on Christism from the first, and became more and more coercive as the cult passed out of Jewish hands. The average presbyter of the second century, accordingly, won his repute for sanctity in many cases by professing celibacy, which in a large number of cases was too hard for him to maintain; and between his own unhappy ideal and the demand of the crowd that he should fulfil it, his life became in general a deception. In these matters the multitude is always preposterously righteous. Aztecs in the pre-Christian period, we know, were wont to put to death professed ascetics who lapsed; and the normal denunciation of priestly immorality in Europe in the Middle Ages seems rarely to have been checked by the thought that the priest's error consisted in taking up a burden he could not bear. That priests ought to be celibate the average priest-taught layman never doubted. Hence a premium on hypocrisy in the period of church-creation. An artificial ethic created an artificial crime, and Christian morality evolved demoralisation. In the second century began the practice of open priestly concubinage, often on the naïve pretence of a purely spiritual union. Denounced periodically by

bishops and councils for hundred of years, it was never even ostensibly checked in the period of the empire; and the later discipline of the Western Church did but drive the symptom beneath the surface to form a worse disorder.

In the Roman period no machinery existed by which celibacy could be enforced. Councils varied in their stringency on the subject, and many bishops were capable of voting for a rule to which they did not in private conform. As for the bishopric of Rome, it had at that time only a ceremonial primacy over the other provinces. In the second century, Bishop Victor of Rome is recorded to have passed sentence of excommunication on the easterns who would not conform to his practice in the observation of Easter; but his authority was defied, and his successors do not seem even to have asserted it in any similar degree for centuries. In the third century, Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, the first zealous prelatist in the literature of the Church, claimed merely primacy, without superior authority, for the chief bishoprics, and for Rome over the rest. All bishops he held to be spiritually equal—as indeed all presbyters, bishops included. This held good theoretically as late as the fourth and fifth centuries, with the exception that by that time the bishop alone had the right to appoint to Church offices—originally the function of the whole community. But alike the internal and the external conditions made for the creation of a hierarchy. When in the third century the puritan party in the Church at Rome sought to appoint Novatian as its separate bishop, alongside of another, the bishops in the provinces, led by Cyprian, zealously resisted, and secured the principle that no town should have more

than one bishop. In other ways the bishops necessarily gathered power. To them had soon to be relegated the right of admitting or refusing new members; and when there arose the question of the treatment of those who lapsed in a time of persecution, there was no way to secure uniformity of method save by leaving the matter to the bishops, who in the main agreed on a rule. For such uniformity they naturally strove in the days of danger; and the Church Synods, which began in the second century and developed in the third, were tolerably unanimous up to the time of the Establishment of the Church under Constantine (313). It was when the Church as a whole had no longer cause to fear the heathen that the worst strifes arose.

§ 3. *The Gnostic Movement in the Second Century.*

In New Testament Greek, the same word has to stand for "sect" and "heresy," a fact premonitory of what must happen to every new idea in religion. Any process of reasoning whatever must have led to differences of opinion among the converts of Paul or of the Pauline epistles; and such differences, leading necessarily, among zealots, to animosities, are among the first phenomena of Christism. As we have seen, the chief "heresies" of the first century, stigmatised as such by the later Church, were really independent cults older than itself; and there is reason to think that the "Nicolitaines" execrated in the Apocalypse were really the followers of Paul. At the beginning of the second century, again, the first heretics on record are the Elcesaites, who, however, are obviously

not an offshoot from the Christists, but a separate body, their Christ being a gigantic spirit and their doctrine a cluster of symbolisms. It is with the so-called Gnostics, the claimants to a higher *Gnosis* or knowledge, that heresy begins in Gentile Christianity; and as some of these are already in evidence in the Pauline epistles, and had interpolated the synoptics (Mt. xiii., Mk. iv., Lk. xii. 49, ff.), to say nothing of framing the fourth gospel, they may fairly be reckoned among "the first Christians." Ere long, however, they begin clearly to differentiate from the Christism of the New Testament.

If the early Gnostic systems be compared with that of Paul, they will be found to have rather more in common with it than with the Judaic Jesuism from which he ostensibly broke away. It is thus not unlikely that their Christism, like his, is older than that of the gospels, which is primarily of Jewish manufacture. The "Simonians" of Samaria have every appearance of being non-Jewish Christists "before Christ"; and the later Gnostics have several Samaritan affinities. Like Paul, they have no Jesuine biography; but whereas he holds by an actual man Jesus, however nondescript, they usually declare outright for a mere divine phantom, bearing a human semblance, but uncontaminated by mixture with matter, which was the Gnostic symbol for all evil. They did but attach the name of the Christos, and the hope of salvation, to a general theosophy, as Paul attached it to Judaism; and their great preoccupation was to account formally for the existence of evil, which they commonly figured as either an evil power or an essential quality of matter, forever opposed to the principle of good. Hence the allusion to the

“oppositions of science falsely so-called”—that is, “the antitheses of the Gnosis”—in the Pauline epistle. But they varied somewhat in details according to their environment, being roughly divisible into two groups—Asiatic and Egyptian.

At the beginning of the second century those of Syria are identified with the teaching of Saturninus of Antioch, in whose theory a good God had made the seven angels, who in turn made the world and created a low type of animal man in God's image, whom, however, God compassionately endowed with a reasonable soul. Of the seven angels one was left to rule the world, and figured as God of the Jews; but the others competed with him; and Satan, the chief evil power, made a race of men with an evil soul. Thereupon the Supreme God sent his son as Jesus Christ, human only in seeming, to bring men to the knowledge of the Father and defeat the rebel angels. Another Syrian, Bardesanes, who lived in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, was less anti-Jewish, and made the one God the creator of the world and of man, who was at first ethereal and pure, but seduced and so degraded to the form of flesh by the Adversary; the Christ's function being to secure a higher future life to those who accept him. From both points of view, mortification of the flesh was a primary duty—all the carnal instincts being evil—and Jesus on the same ground was denied bodily existence. Always the effort is to account for evil as involved in matter, the work not of the Supreme God, but of a subordinate power who will be vanquished. Thus Tatian, a pupil of Justin Martyr and contemporary with Saturninus, makes the world-creator a subordinate God, and seems to have derived Judaism and the gospel similarly from

inferior deities. Some, as Bardesanes and Tatian, held by a bodily resurrection; others, as Saturninus and Cerdo (fl. 140), stressed the anti-material principle and denied that the resurrection could be in bodily form. On such an issue, of course, it was easy to compromise in the concept of a "spiritual body," the same to the eye as the real body, but impalpable to touch—in short, the "spirit" of all ages.

It is reasonable to infer that the Gnostic systems were suggested by the spectacle of the earthly Governments around them, no less than by the previous theologies. Even as the Autocrator reigned without governing, and the evils of misgovernment were chargeable on proconsuls, so, it was thought, the head of the universe, the Pantocrator, could not be implicated in the evil wrought under him. Such a conception seems to have first arisen in the great monarchies of the East. It followed, however, that as some satraps and proconsuls governed well, there might be good subordinate deities; and in the system of Basilides the Egyptian, who belonged to the brilliant reign of Hadrian, the attribute of goodness is graded endlessly, down to the angels of the 365th heaven, who made this world and its inhabitants. As in the system of Saturninus, God gives these a reasonable soul, but the angels rebel; and their chief, who becomes God of the Jews, draws on that nation the hatred of all others by his arrogance. Egyptian Gnosticism thus bore the stamp of the old Egyptian pantheism, its every power emanating from the Unbegotten One; while the Asiatic systems embody in some form the Mazdean principle of two opposed powers, of which the worse is only ultimately to be defeated. Egyptian precedent explains also the

countless generations of the Gnostic systems of Alexandria. As in Egyptian history dynasty followed on dynasty, and as in the pantheon God was begotten of God, so in the system of Basilides the Unbegotten produces from himself *Nous*, Mind; which produces the *Logos*; which produces *Phronesis*, Judgment; which produces *Sophia* and *Dynamis*, Wisdom and Power; and these last in turn produce angels, who in turn reproduce others down to the 365th grade. The system of Valentinus, assigned to the period of Antoninus Pius, frames fresh complications, partly suggestive of an immemorial bureaucracy which had duplicated itself in the heavens, partly of an *à priori* psychology which sought to explain the universe, now by first principles, after the fashion of the early mythology of Rome, now by adaptations of the current theosophy.

In the hands of Valentinus religion becomes an imbroglia which only an expert could master; and the functions of the Christ in particular are a mere tangle of mystery. *Nous*, the first of many "Æons," is the "only begotten" Son, his mother being *Ennoia*, Thought; yet with him is born Truth; and these three with the Father make a first Tetrad. Then *Nous* produces the *Logos* and Life; which beget Man and the Church; which two pairs beget more Æons; and so on. In a later stage, after a "fall," *Nous* begets the Christos and the Holy Spirit; while later still the Æons produce the Æon Jesus, *Sophia* and *Horos* playing a part in the evolution. Such a maze, though it is said to have had many devotees, could not possibly be the creed of a popular Church, even in Egypt; and wherever the gospels went their ostensibly concrete Jesus held his own against such spectral competition.

Note. // The systems which made Jesus non-human and those which made of him an elusive abstraction were alike disadvantaged as against that which declared him to have been born of woman and to have suffered the last agony for the sons of men. Women could weep for the crucified Man-God as they had immemorially done for Adonis and Osiris: they could not shed tears for a phantasmagoric series of Nous—Logos—Christ—Æons—Jesus, begetting and begotten.

Other Gnostics, still making mystical pretensions, were content to represent Jesus as a superior human being born of Joseph and Mary in the course of nature. Carpocrates of Alexandria, who so taught in the reign of Hadrian, had a large following. Such tolerance of "materialism," however, brought on the sect charges of all manner of sensuality; and there is categorical record that, following Plato, they sought to practise community of women. Similarly the Basilidians were charged with regarding all bodily appetites as indifferent, their founder having set his face against the glorification of virginity, and taught that Jesus was not absolutely sinless, since God could never permit an innocent being to be punished. There is no proof, however, that any sect-founder was openly antinomian; and while license doubtless occurred in many, we have the evidence of the Pauline epistles that it could rise in the heart of the primitive Church as easily as in any sect. In the same way, whatever might be the doctrine of particular sections, it may be taken as certain that the charge of bowing before persecution, cast at some, held partly true of nearly all.

Systems such as the bulk of those above described, drawing as they did on any documents rather than

the Old and New Testaments, are obviously not so much Christian schisms as differentiations from historic Christianity—developments, in most cases, of an abstract Christism on lines not merely Gentile but based on Gentile religions, as against the Jewish. Broadly speaking, therefore, they tended to disappear from the Christist field, inasmuch as paganism had other deities better suited to the part of the Gnostic *Logos*. The intermediate type, bodiless at best, must die out. Gnosticism had not only no canon of its own, but no thought of one: while the fashion lasted, every decade saw a new system, refining on the last and multiplying its abstractions, till the very term *gnosis* must have become a byword. Success, as has been said above, must remain with the simple and concrete system, especially if that were organised; and the Gnostics of the second century attempted no general organisation. Yet Gnosticism left a lasting impress on Christianity. In its earlier stages, as we have seen, it modified the gospels; and after it had evolved away from the gospel basis it left an influence on the more philosophically-minded writers of the Church, notably Clement of Alexandria, who is as openly anxious to approve himself a “good Gnostic” as to found on the accepted sacred books of the Church. Deriving as it partly did from the Jewish Platonist Philo, it brought into the Church his fashion of reducing Biblical narratives to allegories—a course much resorted to not only by Origen but by Augustine, and very necessary for the defence of Hebrew tales against pagan criticism. Further, the regular practice of the Church in the matter of separating catechumens from initiates was an adoption of the Gnostic principle of esoteric knowledge.

A.M.C. // In yet other ways, however, Gnosticism influenced early Christianity. It was the Gnostics who first set up in it literary habits: they were the first to multiply documents of all kinds; and it is not unlikely that their early additions to the gospels gave a stimulus to its expansion on other lines. They were, in short, the first to introduce a tincture of letters and art into the cult; and it was their spirit that shaped the fourth gospel, which gave to Christism the only philosophical elements it ever possessed. They are not indeed to be regarded as having cultivated philosophy to any good purpose, though they passed on some of the philosophic impulse to the later Platonists. Rather the average Gnostic is to be conceived as a leisured dilettante in an age of learned ignorance and foiled intelligence, lending an eager ear to new mysticisms, as so many half-cultured idlers are seen still doing in our own day. They cared as much for abracadabral amulets, apparently, as for theories; and their zeal for secret knowledge had in it something of the spirit of class exclusiveness, and even of personal arrogance.

M. // (It would seem as if, when tyrannies in the ancient world made an end of the old moral distinctions of classes, men instinctively caught at new ways of being superior to their fellows—for the spirit of Gnosticism arose among the later Greek pagans, who here followed the lead of Egyptian priests, as well as among Samaritans and Grecised Jews. At most we may say of the Gnostics that they were much more concerned than the orthodox to frame a complete and consistent theistic theory of things, and that in their learned-ignorant way they sought to walk by reason as well as by faith. Necessarily they were in a minority. It was, however, their theoretic bent, surviving in the

gospel-reading Church, that determined the dogmatic development of the Christist creed. Their recoil from the conception of a Saviour-God in a human body comes out in the later debates and creeds as in the fourth gospel; and if the final doctrine of the Trinity be not truly Gnostic, it is because the Gnostics showed more concern for plausibility, and never aimed at tying thought down forever to a plainly self-contradictory formula. Much of their movement probably survived in Manichæism, which, though sufficiently dogmatic, never flaunted such propositions as those of the Nicene creed, and was a critical thorn in the flesh of the Church. Even their amulets seem to have had a Christian vogue; and the worship of angels, which began to flourish among Catholics in the fourth century, seems to have been a reflex of their teaching.

In some respects, finally, the modern Church has confusedly reverted to their view of a future state. While the "orthodox" Christians of the second century believed that souls at death went to the underworld, to be raised with the body for the approaching millennium, or thousand-years reign of Christ, the Gnostics, scouting the millennium as a grossly materialistic conception, held that at death the soul ascended to heaven. That appears to be the prevailing fancy among Protestants at the present day, though men have grown cautious of formal dicta on the subject.

§ 4. *Marcionism and Montanism.*

Apart from Gnosticism, the Church of the second century was affected by certain heretical or sectarian movements which centred round single teachers of

an influential sort, in particular Marcion of Sinope and Montanus, who became the founders of something like separate churches. Marcion, who was a disciple of the Gnostic Cerdo, and like him flourished in the reign of Antoninus Pius, held by some of the main Gnostic theories, but differed from the Gnostics in general in that he founded solely on New Testament writings and did not absolutely oppose Judaism. In his system the Supreme God, who is Good, creates a Demiurge or world-maker, who is merely Just or legalist, the God of the Jews; while Satan, the offspring of Matter, governs the heathens. Only the Christians are ruled by the Good God, who is first revealed to men solely by the Christ. It was in this way that he applied the Gnostic principle of "oppositions" or "anti-thesis," in a work bearing that title. His ethic appears to have been a sectarian version of that of Bardesanes, who had defined the good as those who did good even to the wicked; the just as those who did good only to the good; and the wicked as those who did evil even to the good. It does not seem to have occurred to Marcion that in classing all pagans as outside of the pale of goodness he was stultifying his own avowed principle of divine love and mercy; but in this respect at least he was not heretical, for all who bore the Christian name agreed in limiting salvation to Christists, and dooming all other men to hell-fire.

That he was a fanatic of exceptional force of character is proved by the facts that (1) it was he who forced on the Church the problem of a canon, he being the first to form one, by way, as he explained, of excluding Jewish documents and Jewish interpola-

tions in the gospel and the Pauline epistles ; and that (2) he was able to form a separate organisation, which subsisted for centuries, with some variations in doctrine, alongside of the "catholic" Church, being heard of as late as the seventh century. The controversies he set up affected the whole literature of the Church for generations ; and though it was a point of honour with the orthodox to accuse him of corrupting the texts as well as the faith, it is finally held that some of his readings of the third gospel, which he specially favoured, are really the original ones. Inasmuch, however, as he laid stress on asceticism, to the extent of prohibiting marriage, he necessarily failed to attract the multitude, though his was one of the influences which fostered ascetic ideas within the Church from his time onwards.

The movement of Montanus, known also as the Cataphrygian heresy, has two aspects—that of a sect founded by a zealot of strong personality, who felt that he had special inner light and claimed to be inspired by the Paraclete promised in the gospel, and that of a general reaction against officialism in the Church, somewhat in the spirit of the Quakers of the Reformation period. It stressed all the extremer social tendencies of the early Church, the prediction of the end of the world, the impropriety of marriage and child-bearing in prospect of the catastrophe, the multiplication of fasts, the absolute condemnation of second marriages, the renunciation of earthly joys in general. Christ, said Montanus, had withdrawn the indulgences granted by Moses ; and through himself the Paraclete cancelled those given by Paul. Thus true religion, having had its infancy under Judaism, and its youth under the gospel, had reached maturity

under the Holy Spirit (an idea revived a thousand years later in Catholic Europe). Hardness of heart had reigned till Christ; weakness of flesh till the Paraclete. A special feature of the Montanist schism—which spread far, and ultimately absorbed Tertullian, who for a time had opposed it—was the association of the founder with two wealthy women of rank, Maximilla and Priscilla, who endowed the movement. It is noteworthy that this special growth of asceticism took its rise in Phrygia, one of the regions specially associated in pagan antiquity with sensuous and orgiastic worship. It would seem as if an age of indulgence led in natural course to a neurotic recoil. In any case it is neurosis that speaks in the ascetic polemic of Tertullian, who became a typical Montanist.

Montanism, it has been said, was “all but victorious”; but its victory was really impossible in the circumstances. It would have meant arresting the growth of Christism to the form of a State Church by depriving it of all popular attraction; and the vested interests were too great to permit of such a renunciation. The movement may be loosely compared to the secession of more rigid bodies from the relaxing sects of Methodism and Calvinism in our own time: voluntary austerity must always be in a minority. A Church which absolutely refused to retain or readmit any who committed a cardinal sin or lapsed during persecution—saying they might be saved by God’s grace, but must not be allowed human forgiveness—was doomed to the background. But Montanism, appealing as it did to an ideal of holiness which the average Christian dared not repudiate, influenced the main body, especially through the writings of such a valued polemist as Tertullian, who

taunted them with being inferior even to many pagans in the matter of chastity and monogamy. The main body was not to be metamorphosed; but it read the lesson as inculcating the need for at least priestly celibacy. Every notable "heresy" so-called seems thus to have left its mark on the Church.

What above all is proved by the movements of Marcion and Montanus is the power of organisation in that period to maintain a sect with sacred books of any kind. They had learned the lesson taken from Judaism by the first Christists, and proceeded to show that just as organised Jesuism could live apart from Judaism in the Gentile field, so new Christist sects could live apart from the orthodox Church when once separation was forced on them. Montanism, like Marcionism, survived for centuries, and seems to have been at length suppressed only by violence on the part of the Christian emperors, who could persecute more effectually than pagans ever did, having the Church as an instrument. In the face of such developments, and still more in view of the later success of Manichæism, which, as we shall see, applied still better the principle of organisation, there can be no longer any difficulty in accounting for the rise of Christism on purely natural grounds. Given the recognition of a few essential conditions, the creation of a sect was a very simple and facile matter. Montanism and Manichæism successively endured as much persecution, pagan and Christian, as the Christian Church ever did; and it was only the essential unpopularity of the ideals of Montanism that permitted of its suppression as a sect even by the persecuting established Church. Manichæism, as we shall see, was almost insuppressible, even when

political changes had given the Church a power of centralisation and coercion which otherwise could never have been developed. At the end of the third century, in short, the Church of its own nature was rapidly approaching disruption into new and irreconcilable organisations.

§ 5. *Rites and Ceremonies.*

Apart from the habit of doctrinal discussion, derived from Judaism, the Christianity of the third century had distinctly become as much a matter of ritual and ceremonial as any of the older pagan cults. Churches built for worship, rare in the second century, had become common, and images had already begun to appear in them, while incense was coming into general use, despite the earlier detestation of it as a feature of idolatry. In the wealthier churches, gold and silver medals were often seen. Pagan example had proved irresistible in this as in other matters.

By this time, baptism and the eucharist had alike become virtual "mysteries," to which new-comers were initiated as in the pagan cults. Baptism was administered only twice a year, and then only to those who had undergone a long preparation. The first proceeding was a solemn exorcism, which was supposed to free the initiates from the power of the evil spirit or spirits. Then, after they had repeated a creed (which in the Western Churches had to be recited both in Greek and Latin, the Greek being in the nature of a magic formula) they were completely immersed, signed with the cross, prayed over, and touched ceremonially with the hands of the officiating

bishop or presbyter ; finally they partook of milk and honey, and returned home decorated with a white robe and a crown.

The eucharist, commonly administered on Sundays, was regarded as absolutely necessary to salvation and resurrection ; and on that account infants were made to partake of it, this before baptism had been declared to be essential in their case. Only the baptised were allowed to be present at the celebration ; but portions of the consecrated bread and wine were taken away for sick members, and believed to have a curative virtue. The sign of the cross was now constantly used in the same spirit, being held potent against physical and spiritual evil alike, insofar as any such distinction was drawn. But diseases were commonly regarded as the work of evil spirits, and medical science was generally disowned, the preferred treatment being exorcism. A baptised person might further use the Lord's Prayer, with its appeal against the Evil One—a privilege denied to the catechumen or seeker for membership.

§ 6. *Strifes over Primary Dogma.*

The nucleus for a theistic-Christist creed, as we have seen, was given to the Church in the fourth gospel. The first Jewish Jesuists were simple Unitarians ; and the Jesus of Paul, so far as can be safely inferred from epistles indefinitely interpolated, was certainly no part of a trinity in unity. At the beginning of the second century the "orthodox" Christists had no more definite theology than had the unlettered believers in any pagan Saviour-God ; and at most

the gospels taught them to regard the supernaturally-born Christ as having ascended to heaven, to sit in visible form at the right hand of the Father, as Herakles or Dionysos or Apollo might sit by his Father Zeus. At the middle of the century Justin Martyr speaks of the Logos not as a personal form of deity, but as the inspiration given by God to men in different degrees at different times. It is after him that the fourth gospel begins to do its work. Christian apologists, deriding the beliefs of the pagans, had to meet the charge that they too were polytheists, and the old challenge: If the suffering Saviour were a man, why worship him? if he were a God, why weep for his sufferings?

An attempt to meet the difficulty was made in the heresy of Praxeas, a member of the Church who, coming from Asia to Rome late in the century, seems to have taught that the Son and the Holy Spirit were not distinct from the Father, but simply functions of the One God, the Father having descended into the Virgin and been born as Jesus Christ. At once he was accused of "making the Father suffer" on the cross, and his sect accordingly seem to have been among the first called *Patripassians*. In the same or the next century, Noëtus of Smyrna is found preaching the same doctrine; and in the hands of Sabellius of Libya, whose name was given to it by his opponents, the teaching became one of the most influential heresies of the age. Sabellius in fact formulated that theory of the Trinity which alone gives it formal plausibility: the three *personæ* were for him (as they could etymologically be in Latin and in the Greek term first used, *prosopon*) not persons, but aspects or modes of the deity, as power, wisdom, and goodness; or law,

mercy, and guidance—a kind of solution which in later times has captivated many theologians, including Servetus and Coleridge. But Sabellius, like his predecessors, had to meet the epithet of “Patripassian,” and he appears to have parried it with the formula that only a certain energy proceeding from the Divine Nature had been united to the man Jesus. In the way of rationalising the irrational and giving consistency to contradictories, the Church could never do better than this. Under such a theorem, however, the Man-God as such theoretically disappeared; and as that was precisely the side of the creed which identified the cult, gave it popularity, and won it revenue, Sabellianism, though accepted by many, even by many bishops, could not become the official doctrine. It persistently remained, nevertheless, in the background, the idea taking new forms and names in succeeding generations, as new men arose with courage and energy enough to reopen the insoluble strife, during a period of four hundred years.

A solution by a different approach was offered by such second-century teachers as Theodotus of Byzantium, a learned tanner living in Rome; another of the same name, a banker; and Artemon, all founders of sects by whom Jesus was regarded as merely a superior man, supernaturally born. As this form of the Unitarian doctrine struck directly at the essential element of the Christ's deity, in respect of which the cult vied with others of the same type, it was no more generally acceptable than the Sabellian; and it is more than likely that the mere *odium theologicum* gave rise to the story that Theodotus had first denied Christ under persecution, and then framed a theology for his predicament. Yet such doctrines as his must have

gone on gaining ground among the more stirring minds; for when in the next century Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, began to restate the Unitarian thesis, he found an extensive following. The Logos, he taught, was not a person distinct from the Father, but merely his wisdom, which descended into but was not united with Jesus. Given forth about the year 260, Paul's teaching was condemned by a council at Antioch in 264, he giving a promise of "reformation" which he did not keep. Another council, which met in 269 or 270, deposed and excommunicated him; but he refused to obey, and Queen Zenobia of Palmyra, who then ruled Antioch, protected him. Not till 272, when Antioch was retaken by Aurelian, did the majority succeed in ousting him, by the emperor's express intervention. And still the "heresy" persisted, and the theological hatreds grew. (It belonged to the nature of the religion, a pyramid poised on its apex, to be in unstable equilibrium wherever any breath of reason could blow.

The development of the councils in the third century is a proof at once of the growth of organisation in the Church and of the need for it. It is not to be supposed that all orthodox Churchmen looked practically to the main chance; it is clear, on the contrary, that many were moved by the conservative zeal of the Bibliolater of all ages, as the heretics were presumably moved by a spirit of reason; but the bishops must at all times have included many who looked at questions of creed from the standpoint of (finance, like so many members of modern political parties; and they would be apt to turn the scale in every serious dispute. Even they, however, with whatever aid from polemical propaganda, could not

long have availed to preserve anything like a preponderating main body if the Church were left to itself. The polemical writers, broadly speaking, converted nobody, but merely inflamed those already convinced; and party strife was becoming more and more comprehensive, more furious, more menacing, when the Church was saved from itself by the State.

CHAPTER II.

RELATIONS OF CHURCH AND STATE.

§ 1. *Persecutions.*

IT was involved in the aggressive attitude of the Christist movement that it should be persecuted by countervailing fanaticism. The original bias of all ancient religion, indeed, in virtue of the simple self-interest of priesthoods, had been to resent and suppress any new worship; and though nowhere else is the course so ferociously enjoined as in the Hebrew sacred books, there are many traces of it in the pagan world. Thus the Dionysiak cult had been violently resisted on its introduction into Greece; and the early Roman law against foreign worships was turned against it, under circumstances plainly exaggerated by Livy, about 187 B.C. Later, a religious panic led to the official suppression in Rome of the worships of Isis and Serapis. Empire, however, everywhere involved some measure of official toleration of diverging cults; and as in Babylon and Egypt, so under the Hellenistic and Roman systems, the religions of each of the provinces were more or less assimilated in all. When even early Athens had been constrained to permit the non-aggressive cults of the aliens within her walls, far-reaching empires could do no less. Indeed, the very vogue of Christism depended on the fact that throughout the empire there was taking place a new

facility of belief in strange Gods. There can be no more complete mistake than the common assertion that it made its appeal in virtue of the prevalence of "desolating scepticism." On the contrary, rationalism had practically disappeared; and even the Roman pagans most adverse to Christism were friendly to other new cults.

Had the Christian cult been, like its non-Jewish contemporaries, a mere effort to "worship God according to conscience," it need not have undergone pagan persecution any more than they, or than Judaism, save when the State imposed the duty of worshipping the emperor's statue. A God the more was no scandal to polytheists. Christism had taken from Judaism, however, as a first principle, the detestation of "idols," and its propaganda from the first had included a violent polemic against them. For the Christians, the pagan Gods were not unrealities: they were evil dæmons, constantly active. Insofar, too, as the first Jesuists in the western part of the empire shared the Jewish hatred for Rome that is expressed in the Apocalypse, they were likely enough to provoke Roman violence. A constant prediction of the speedy passing away of all things was in itself a kind of sedition; and when joined with contumely towards all other religions it could not but rouse resentment. Thus, though the story of the great Neronian massacre is, as already noted, an apparent fiction as regards the Christians, being unnoticed in the book of Acts, Jesuists and Jews alike ran many chances of local or general hostility under the empire from the first. The express doctrines, put in the mouth of the founder, that he had come to bring not peace but a sword, and to create strife in families, were not fitted

to soften the prejudices aroused by the religious claims of the new faith ; and in the time of Tertullian they were defined in the west as "enemies of the Gods, of the emperors, of the laws, of morals, and of all nature."

According to Tertullian, writing under Severus or Caracalla, only the bad emperors had persecuted the Church. But its danger had always lain less in special imperial edicts than in the ordinary bearing of the laws against secret societies and nocturnal worships, and in the ordinary tendency of ignorant and priest-led fanaticism to a panic of cruelty in times of popular distress or alarm. An earthquake or pestilence was always apt to be visited on the new "atheists" as provokers of the Gods. The mere habit of midnight worship, which is one of the proofs that early Jesuism was in some way affiliated to sun-worship, was a ground for suspicion; but as Mithraism was freely tolerated in spite of its nocturnal rites, Christism might have been, but for its other provocations. And even these were for long periods ignored by the Government. If the often-quoted letter of Pliny to Trajan (about the year 100) be genuine, it proves an official disposition to protect the Christians, when politically innocent, from fanatical attacks; and Tertullian, who speaks of such a letter, credits Marcus Aurelius with limiting the scope of the laws which tended to injure the sect, though we know from Marcus himself that Christians suffered death. By common consent, though there was certainly much random persecution in the first three centuries, the formula of "ten persecutions" is fabulous; and that ascribed to Domitian is hardly better established than that ascribed to Nero. That the Christists suffered specially as tradition asserts in the reign of Hadrian, when

the Jews were specially hated because of their last desperate revolt, is probable; but Hadrian gave no general orders, and is credited like the Antonines with shielding the new sectaries. It is finally very doubtful whether any ordained and legalised persecution of Christians ever took place save (1) in Egypt under Severus, who at first and afterwards was friendly; (2) on a small scale under Maximinus; (3) in the east under Decius and (4) under Valerian; and (5) throughout the empire under Diocletian and his colleagues (from 303 to 311). These episodes occurred within a period of little over a hundred years.

In all periods alike, from the end of the first century down to Constantine, there was no doubt much random cruelty. The letter from the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, cited by Eusebius, and assigned to the year 161, is a doubtful document; but the savageries there described were only too possible. Public cruelty seems to have worsened in the very period in which the inhabitants of cities had become most unused to war, and the finer minds had grown most humane: like the other animal instincts, it had grown neurotic in conditions of vicious idleness, and many men had become virtuosi in cruelty as in lust. The Christian gospel itself now held up "the tormentors" as typical of the processes of divine punishment; and torture was for many an age to be a part of Christian as of pagan legal procedure.

Insofar as persecution was legalised, it is to be understood not as a putting down of a new religious belief, but as an attack on its political and social side. In the case, for instance, of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, who after a flight and a banishment was put to death under Valerian and Gallienus (258), the

bishop's far-reaching activities are the presumptive reason for his fate. It is to be remembered, as Gibbon notes, that in ten years of Cyprian's tenure of office four emperors themselves died by the sword, with their families and their adherents. At times, no doubt, the attack on Christians was unprovoked, consisting as it might in a challenge to a Christian to swear allegiance by or sacrifice to the statue of the emperor, when he was willing to swear by his own creed. The public worship of the emperor was the one semblance of a centralised religious organisation which, like that of the Christian Church, existed throughout the empire. Precedented by old Egyptian and eastern usage, and by the practice of Alexander and his successors, it had first appeared in Rome in the offer of the cringing senate to deify Julius Cæsar, and in the systematic measures of Augustus to have Julius worshipped as a God (*divus*), an honour promptly accorded to himself in turn. The apotheosis was signalled by giving the names of Julius and Augustus to the months Quintilis and Sextilis; and only the final unpopularity of Tiberius prevented the substitution of his name in turn for that of September, an honour offered to and refused by him in his earlier life. Some of the madder emperors later tried to carry on the process of putting themselves in the calendar, but were duly disobeyed after death. Detested emperors, such as Tiberius and Nero and Domitian, were even refused the apotheosis; but in general the title of *divus* was freely accorded, so abject had the general mind grown under autocracy; and it was usual in the provinces to worship the living emperor in a special temple in association with the Genius of Rome; while the cults of some emperors lasted long after their death. The common sense as

well as the sense of humour of some rulers led them to make light of the institution ; and the jest of the dying Vespasian, " I fancy I am turning God," is one of several imperial witticisms on the subject ; but it lay in the nature of autoeracy, in Rome as in Egypt or in Incarian Peru, to employ sagaciously all methods of abasing the human spirit, so as to secure the safety of the throne. One of the most obvious means was to deify the emperor—a procedure as " natural " in that age as the deification of Jesus, and depending on the same psychological conditions. And though the person of the emperor was seldom quite safe from assassination by his soldiery, the imperial cult played its part from the first in establishing the fatal ideal of empire. No sequence of vileness or incompetence in the emperors, no impatience of the insecurity set up by the power of the army to make and unmake the autocrat, no experience of the danger of a war of claimants, ever seems to have made Romans dream of a saner and nobler system. Manhood had been brought too low.

Imperialism being thus an official religion in itself, the cult of the emperor lay to the hands of any magistrate who should be disposed to put a test to a member of the sect which decried all established customs and blasphemed all established Gods. It was the recognised way of imposing the oath of allegiance apart from any specific law. Where such a procedure was possible, any malicious pagan might bring about a stedfast Christian's death. There is Christian testimony, however, that many frenzied believers brought martyrdom wilfully on themselves by outrages on pagan temples and sacred statues ; and it is Tertullian who tells how Arrius Antoninus, pro-

consul in Asia, drove from him a multitude of frantic fanatics seeking death, with the amazed demand whether they had not ropes and precipices. The official temper evidently varied, as did that of the Christians. In the period before Diocletian, save for the intrigues of pagan priests and provincial demagogues, and the normal suspicions of autocratic power, there was nothing in the nature of a general and official animosity, though the Christian attitude was always unconciliatory enough. But by the beginning of the fourth century the developments on both sides had created a situation of strain and danger. The great effort of Diocletian to give new life to the vast organism of the empire, first by minute supervision, and then by subdivision under two emperors and two Cæsars, wrought a certain seriousness of political interest throughout the bureaucracy; and the Christian body, long regarded with alternate contempt and dislike, had become so far organised and so considerable a force that none who broadly considered the prospects of the State could avoid reckoning with it. At the same time paganism had taken on new guises: the Neo-Platonists, so-called, restated the ancient mythology and theology in forms which compared very well with the abstract teaching of the Church; and among the educated class there was some measure of religious zeal against Christians as blasphemers of other men's Gods. It may or may not have needed the persuasion of his anti-Christian colleague, the Cæsar Galerius, to convince such a ruler as Diocletian that the Christian Church, a growing State within the State, still standing by an official doctrine of a speedy world's-end, and rejecting the cult of the emperor, was an incongruous and dangerous element

in the imperial scheme. It was in fact a clear source of political weakness, though not so deadly a one as the autocracy itself. To seek to suppress it, accordingly, was almost a natural outcome of Diocletian's ideal of government. He had sought to give a new air of sanctity to the worship of the emperor by calling himself *Jovius* and his colleague Maximian *Herculius*; and to make the effort succeed, it might well seem necessary to crush the one cult that directly stood in the way, alike as a creed and as an organisation. The refusal of some Christian soldiers, too, to submit to certain commands which they considered unlawful, gave Galerius a special pretext for strong measures.

It is not to be forgotten that the emperors and the bureaucracy had some excuse for a policy of suppression in the bitter strifes of the Christian sects and sections. Eusebius confesses that these were on the verge of actual warfare, bishop against bishop and party against party, each seeking for power; and for all it was a matter of course to accuse opponents of the worst malpractices. Some of the darkest charges brought by the pagans against Christians in general were but distributions of those brought by the orthodox against heretics, and by Montanists and others against the orthodox. A credulous pagan might well believe that all alike carried on vile midnight orgies, and deserved to be refused the right of meeting. It is not probable, however, that the two emperors and the persecuting Cæsar proceeded on any concern for private morals; and though Galerius was a zealous pagan with a fanatical mother, the motive of the persecution was essentially political. What happened was that the passions of the zealots

among the pagans had now something like free scope ; and, unless the record in Eusebius is sheer fable, the work was often done with horrible cruelty. On the other hand, there is Christian testimony to the humanity of many of the better pagans, who sheltered their Christian friends and relatives ; and the Cæsar Constantius Chlorus, a tolerant pagan, who ruled in Gaul and Britain and Spain, gave only a formal effect to the edict of the emperors, destroying churches and sacred books, but sparing their owners. The fact, finally, that in ten years of persecution the number of victims throughout the eastern and central empire appears to have been within two thousand, goes to suggest that the mass of the Christians either bowed to the storm or eluded it. Bitter discussions, reviving some of the previous century, rose afterwards as to the proper treatment of the *traditores*, those who surrendered and forswore themselves ; and the more zealous sects and churches either imposed long penances or refused to receive back the lapsed. As the latter course would only weaken themselves, the majority of the churches combined policy with penalty.

The time was now at hand when the Church, from being an object of aversion to the autocracy, was to become its instrument. Just before his death in 311, Galerius, who was little of a statesman, began to see what Diocletian would doubtless have admitted had he lived much longer, and what Constantius Chlorus had probably suggested to his colleagues, that the true policy for the government was to adopt instead of crushing the Christian organisation. Only the original anticivism of the cult, probably, had prevented a much earlier adoption of this view by the more politic emperors. It was the insistence on the

imminent end of the world, the preaching of celibacy, the disparagement of earthly dignitaries, the vehement assault on the standing cults of the State, no less than the refusal to sacrifice to the emperor's statue, that had so long made Christism seem the natural enemy of all civil government. The more the Church grew in numbers and wealth, however, the more its bishops and priests tended to conform to the ordinary theory of public life; and as theirs was now the only organisation of any kind that reached throughout the State, save the State itself and the cult of the emperors, the latter must evidently either destroy it or adopt it. The great persecution, aiming at the former end, served only to show the futility of official persecution for such a purpose, since pagans themselves helped to screen staunch Christians, and the weaker had but to bow before the storm. Already Constantine, acting with a free hand on his father's principles, had given complete tolerance to the Christians under his sway; and Maxentius, struggling with him for the mastery of the West, had done as much. Even in the East, Maximin had alternately persecuted and tolerated the Christians as he had need to press or pacify Galerius. The language used by Galerius, finally, in withdrawing the edict of persecution, suggests that besides recognising its failure he had learned from his opponents to conceive the possibility of attaching to the autocracy a sect so much more widely organised and so much more zealous than any of the other subsisting popular religions, albeit still numbering only a fraction of the whole population.

To many of the Christians, on the other hand, long persecution had doubtless taught the wisdom of

recanting the extremes of doctrine which had made even sceptical statesmen regard them as a danger to any State. It is clear that bishops like Eusebius of Cæsarea would readily promise to the government a loyal attention to its interests in the event of its tolerating and befriending the Church; and the sacred books offered texts for any line of public action. The empire, always menaced by barbarism on its frontiers, needed every force of union that could be used within; and here, finally adaptable to such use, was the one organisation that acted or was fitted to act throughout the whole. To the leading churchmen, finally, association with the State was the more welcome because on the one hand general persecution would cease, and on the other all the party leaders could hope to be able by the State's means to put down their opponents. A generation before, in the year 272, the Emperor Aurelian, on the express appeal of the party of bishops who had deposed Paul of Samosata, had intervened in that quarrel to give effect to the will of the majority, which otherwise could not have been put in force; and such occasions were sure to arise frequently. It needed only another innovating emperor to bring about the coalition thus prepared.

§ 2. *Establishment and Creed-Making.*

On the abdication of the co-emperors Diocletian and Maximian, the Cæsars, Galerius and Constantius Chlorus, became the Augusti, the former, as senior, taking the East, and the latter the West. At once the plans of Diocletian began to miscarry; and Galerius, instead of raising to the Cæsarship, as the

other had wished, Maxentius the son of Maximian and Constantine the already distinguished son of Constantius, gave the junior titles to his nephews Severus and Maximin. The speedy death of Constantius, however, secured the election of Constantine to the purple by his father's troops in Britain; and there ensued the manifold strifes which ended in Constantine's triumph. Maxentius, and his father, who returned to power, put down Severus; and Maximian gave his daughter as wife to Constantine, thus creating a state of things in which three emperors were leagued against a fourth and one Cæsar. Soon Maximian and Maxentius quarrelled, the father taking refuge first with Constantine and later with Galerius; who, however, proceeded to create yet another emperor, Licinius. Immediately the Cæsar Maximin revolted, and forced Galerius to make him Augustus also. The old Maximian in the meantime went to league himself afresh with Constantine, who, finding him treacherous, had him strangled. Soon after, Galerius dying (in 311), Maximin and Licinius joined forces; while Maxentius, who held Italy and Africa, professing to avenge his father, declared war on Constantine, who held Gaul. The result was the defeat and death of the former, leaving Constantine master of the whole West (312). In 314 he fell out with Licinius, who had in the meantime destroyed Maximin, and won from him Illyrium, Macedonia, and Greece. For twelve years thereafter Constantine divided the empire with Licinius; then, quarrelling afresh with his rival, he captured and strangled him, and was sole autocrat (324).

Out of this desperate drama emerged Christianity as the specially favoured cult of the Roman empire.

Constantine, we saw, had protected the Christians from the first, as his father had done before him ; and Licinius had acquiesced in the same policy, though in his final war with Constantine he persecuted the Christians in order to attach pagans to his cause. There has been much discussion, nevertheless, as to whether Constantine turned Christian on political or on religious grounds. The fact seems to be that, in the ordinary spirit of ancient religion, he trusted to have the support of the God of the Christians in his great struggle with Maxentius, who appealed to the Gods of paganism with old and evil rites ; and that after his first great success he became more and more confirmed in his choice. The story, however, of his having the *labarum* presented to him in a dream or a vision is an obvious fiction, possible only to the ignorance of the first Christian historians, who read the Greek letters Xρ (Chr)—though the tradition ran that the accompanying words, "In this sign conquer," were in Latin—in a solar symbol that had appeared on Egyptian and other coins many centuries before, and had no reference whatever to the name of Christ, though Constantine used it for that on his standards. A similar tale is told of his son Constantius, on whose coins, however, the symbol is associated with the pagan Goddess of Victory. For the rest, Constantine was a Christian like another. His father had been a monotheist, who protected the Christians on philosophical principles ; and from the constant success of Constantius in all his undertakings, as compared with the ill fortune of his own rivals, the son argued that the religion of "One God" was propitious to his house. His personal success in war was always his main argument for the Christian creed, and in such

an age it was not the least convincing. The fact that he postponed his baptism till shortly before his death is not to be taken as indicating any religious hesitations on his part. Multitudes of Christians in that age did the same thing, on the ground that baptism took away all sin, and that it was bad economy to receive it early. In his case such a reason was specially weighty, and there is no reason to suppose that he had any other. Since, however, the pagans still greatly outnumbered the Christians, he could not afford to declare definitely against all other cults; and, beginning by decreeing toleration for all, he kept the pagan title of *pontifex maximus*, and continued through the greater part of his life to issue coins or medals on which he figured as the devotee of Apollo or Mars or Herakles or Mithra or Zeus.

While, however, he thus propitiated other Gods and worshippers, he gave the Christians from the first a unique financial support. Formerly, the clergy in general had been wont to supplement their monthly allowances by trading, farming, banking, by handicraft, and by practising as physicians; but the emperor now enacted that they should have regular annual allowances, and that the church's widows and virgins should be similarly supported. Further, not only did he restore the possessions taken from believers during the persecution, he enacted that all their priests, like those of Egypt and of the later empire in general, should be exempt from municipal burdens; a step as much to their interest as it was to the injury of the State and of all public spirit. The instant effect was to draw to the priesthood multitudes of gain-seekers; the churches of Carthage and Constantinople soon had 500 priests apiece;

and so strong were the protests of the municipalities against the financial disorder he had created that Constantine was fain to restrict his decree. Certainly pagan flamens and public priests of the provinces, a restricted class, had had the same privilege, and this he maintained for them despite Christian appeals; nor does he seem to have withdrawn it from the priests and elders of the Jewish synagogues, who had also enjoyed it; but his direct gifts to the churches were considerable, and by permitting them to receive legacies in the manner of the pagan temples he established their financial basis. So great was their gain that laws had to be passed limiting the number of the clergy; and from this time forward laws were necessary to restrain priests and bishops from further enriching themselves by lending at interest. Clerical power was still further extended. Bishops, who had hitherto acted as arbitrators in Christian disputes, had their decisions legally enforced; and the important legal process of freeing slaves was transferred from the temples to the churches. Some pagan temples he temporarily suppressed, on moral grounds; some he allowed to be destroyed as no longer in use; but though he built and richly endowed several great Christian churches and passed some laws against pagan practices, he never ventured on the general persecution of pagans which his Christian hangers-on desired; and the assertions of Eusebius as to his having plundered the temples and brought paganism into contempt are among the many fictions—some of them perhaps later forgeries—in the works of that historian. As it was, Christian converts were sufficiently multiplied. Constantine's severest measures were taken against private divination, the practisers

of which he ordered to be burnt alive; but here he acted on the standing principles of pagan law, and doubtless under the usual autocratic fear of sooth-saying against himself. The measure of course had no effect on popular practice. The emperors themselves usually consulted diviners before their own accession; and their veto on divination for other people was not impressive.

It is in his relations to his chosen church, code, and creed that Constantine figures at his worst. In the year after his victory over Licinius, when a doubly convinced Christian, he put to death his son Crispus, a nephew, and his wife, Fausta; and he had strangled Licinius and *his* son after promising to preserve their lives; but not a word of censure came from the Christian clergy. At one stroke, their whole parade of superior morality was gone; and the church thenceforth was to be as zealous a sycophant of thrones as the priests of the past had ever been. Constantine lived without rebuke the ordinary life of autocrats; and by the admission of his episcopal panegyrist he was surrounded by worthless self-seekers, Christians all. Such as he was, however, Constantine was joyfully accepted as head of the Church on earth. His creation of the new capital, Constantinople, was regarded as the beginning of a new era, that of Christianity; since the upper classes of Rome were the most zealous devotees of the old Gods, and were said to have received Constantine on his last visit with open disrespect. Remaining *pontifex maximus*, he presided over the Ecumenical Council of the Church; and one of the abuses he established was to put the entire imperial postal service, with its relays of horses and chariots, at the service of the bishops travelling to attend them.

For all his efforts he had the reward of seeing them quarrel more and more furiously over their central dogmas and over questions of discipline. Under his eyes there arose the great schism of Arius, and the schism of the Donatists in Africa, both destined to deepen and worsen for many generations. The failure of the Church as a means of moral union becomes obvious once for all as soon as the act of establishment has removed the only previous restraining force on Christian quarrels, fear of the pagan enemy. Clerical revenues being mostly local, schism was still no economic disadvantage to any sectary; and the Christian creed availed as little to overrule primary instincts of strife as to provide rational tests for opinion or action.

It would seem as if whatever mental impulse were left in men must needs run in the new channels opened up for ignorant energy by ecclesiasticism and theology in that world of deepening ignorance and waning civilisation. Literature as such was vanishing; art was growing more impotent reign by reign; and the physical sciences, revived for a time in their refuge at Alexandria by the Antonines and Flavians, were being lost from the hands of the living. To attribute the universal decadence to Christianity would be no less an error than the old falsism that it was a force of moral regeneration: it was an effect rather than a cause of the general lapse. But, once established as part of the imperial machinery, it hastened every process of intellectual decay; and under such circumstances moral gain could not be. A doctrine of blind faith could not conceivably save a world sinking through sheer lack of light.

To Constantine, the endless strifes of the clergy

over their creeds were as unintelligible as they were insoluble. Like the centurion of the gospel story, wont to command and to be obeyed, he looked for discipline in divine things; and as the theological feud became more and more embroiled he passed from uneasiness to a state between fear and rage. The *Divinitas*, he protested, would be turned against all, clergy and emperor and laity alike, if the clergy would not live at peace; and he quaintly besought them to leave points of theory alone, or else to imitate the pagan philosophers, who could debate without hatred. The ever-quarrelling Church was becoming a laughing-stock to the Pagans, being derided in the very theatres; and its new converts could be those only who went wherever there was chance of gain. So, in one of his rages, he decreed murderous punishments against intractable schismatics, only to find that the menace multiplied the offence. Such as it was, however, the Church was an instrument of autocratic organisation not to be dispensed with; and thus, at the stage at which its theological impulses, unchecked by sane moral feeling, would in the absence of persecution by the State have rent it in mutually destroying factions, the official protection of the State in turn came in to hold it together as a nominal unity. Thus and thus did the organism survive—by anything rather than moral vitality or intellectual virtue.

Leaving to the councils the settlement or unsettlement of dogmas, the emperor took upon himself, to the great satisfaction of the clergy, the whole external administration of the Church, assimilating it to his body politic. The four leading bishoprics—Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople—were put on a level with the four prætorian prefectures; under

them were ecclesiastical exarchs, corresponding to the thirteen civil exarchs of given territories or dioceses; and next came metropolitans or archbishops who superintended the single provinces, 116 in all. In the next century, the Bishop of Jerusalem, formerly subject to Antioch, became independent; and those five sees became known as the five Patriarchates. Numbers of churches still remained for various reasons technically independent; but the natural effect of the whole system was to throw all authority upwards, the bishops overriding the presbyters, and all seeking to limit the power of the congregations to interfere. As the latter would now include an increasing number of indifferentists, the development was the more easy. On the side of external ceremony, always the gist of the matter for the majority, as well as in myth and theory, Christianity had now assimilated nearly every pagan attraction: baptism, as aforesaid, was become a close copy of an initiation into pagan mysteries, being celebrated twice a year by night with a blaze of lights; and when Constantine enacted that the Day of the Sun should be treated as specially holy, he was merely bracketing together pagan and Christian theology, the two sanctions being equally involved. It was of course not a sacred day in the modern Puritan sense, being simply put on a level with the other great festival days of the State, on which no work was done, but play was free.

It was in the year after his attainment of the sole power that Constantine summoned a General Council at his palace of Nicæa in Bithynia (325), to settle the theological status of the founder of the Church. The question had been ostensibly decided as against Paul of Samosata and the Sabellians (who made the Son a

mere manifestation or aspect of the Father) by the dictum that they were different persons. That was for the time orthodox dogma. When, however, Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, declared as against his bishop that "the Son is totally and essentially distinct from the Father," the trouble began afresh. Arius found many adherents, who accused the bishop of Sabellianising when he affirmed that the Son and the Father were of the same essence; and the Church saw itself once more driven to define its God. Bishop Alexander had Arius cast out of the Church by two Alexandrian Councils, with the effect of driving him to a more zealous propaganda, which succeeded as promptly and as widely as any previous heresy. Thereupon the Council of Nicæa, by a majority vote, enacted that the Son was of the same essence (*homoousios*) with the Father, yet a different person, and one with yet born of the Father; a creed to that effect was framed; Arius was sent into exile; and the leading bishops on his side were deposed. It was a mere snatch vote by a packed jury, since only some 300 bishops were present, whereas the Church contained at least 1,800; and five years afterwards Constantine, who on his own part had ordered that the writings of Arius should be burned, yet expressed himself as an ultra-Arian, became persuaded that the heresiarch had been ill-used, and recalled him from exile. Thereupon the restored Arian bishops began to persecute their persecutors; and Athanasius, the new bishop of Alexandria, having refused to reinstate Arius, *he* in turn was deprived of his office by the Council of Tyre (335) and banished to Gaul, other depositions following; while a large council held at Jerusalem formally restored the Arians; and the

emperor commanded the bishop of Constantinople to receive the heresiarch. Before this could be done, however, Arius died at Constantinople (336), apparently by poison, and Constantine died the year after, baptised by an Arian bishop, leaving the two parties at grips for their long wrestle of hate. Within a few years, the emperor's son Constans was threatening to make war on his brother Constantine if he did not reinstate Athanasius.

No vainer dispute had ever convulsed any society. As an ecclesiastical historian has remarked, both parties believed in salvation through the blood of Jesus: on this primitive dogma, inherited from prehistoric barbarism, there was no dispute: and the battle was over the hopeful point of "assigning him that rank in the universe which properly belonged to him." Orthodoxy would have it that the Son was Son from all eternity—exactly, once more, as devout Brahmans and Moslems have maintained that the Vedas and the Koran were "uncreated," and existed from all eternity. Man's instinct of reverence seems to lead mechanically to such conceptions in the absence of critical thought. But the thought, on the other side, which made Jesus a God born in time, and *homoiousios* (of *similar* essence) with the Father, was only relatively saner. Thus the Arians, rational in one aspect, took their stand on a fundamental irrationality; while the Trinitarians, as represented by Athanasius, found a sufficient substitute for argument in boundless vituperation. The fact that the Arians opposed monasticism and the ideal of perpetual virginity served to heighten orthodox resentment. The hatred was beyond all measure, and can be accounted for only by recognising that a creed which appeals

to emotion and degrades reason is potentially the worst stimulant of evil passions. On the intellectual side, if it can be said to have had one, the theory of the Trinity was a simple appropriation by Christianity of the conception of divine Triads which prevailed in the old Egyptian system; and of which the Trinity of Osiris, Isis, and Horus was a well-known instance. Athanasius was but adding Christian passion to yet another pagan theorem, assimilated on Gnostic lines, with a new stress laid on the verbal affirmation of monotheism. The one quasi-rational argument applicable to the case would be the non-moral one that the cult was visibly between the Scylla of polytheism and the Charybdis of a monotheism which reduced Jesus to mere manhood; and that if a nakedly self-contradictory formula could preserve it from collapse on either side such a formula should be enacted. Such an argument was of course not put forward, but probably it appealed to some of the shrewder and less honest bishops, who in the ensuing strifes would nevertheless adapt themselves to the political urgency of the moment. The State had happily created a species of official integument, within which the warring members remained nominally one church. Within that superficiality the chaos became indescribable. The Arians in their turn broke up into half-a-dozen mutually anathematising sects, each brandishing a creed; and every new phase of heresy evoked orthodox rejoinders which in turn were found to be heresies in the other direction. On the first series of strifes followed a second, as to the manner of the combination of the divine and human natures in Jesus; with yet a third, over the personality or modality of the Holy Ghost;

till theology had become a kind of systematic insanity.

While Egypt and the East were thus embroiled, northern Africa, "orthodox" on the Trinity, was being given up to the schism of the Donatists, one of the many outbreaks of the Puritan or ascetic instinct there, where of old had flourished some of the most sensual worships. The quarrel began over the election of a bishop of Carthage, and the puritan side received its title from one or both of two bishops named Donatus. Council after council failed to compose the feud; and the emperor fared no better when he took from the schismatics some of their temples, banished some of their bishops, and put numbers to death. In the year 330 one of their councils numbered 270 bishops; and still the schism went on growing. Any sect, it was clear, might grow as the Jesuit sect itself had done. Alongside of the others now rose yet a new movement, that of Manichæus or Manes, a Persian, who combined in Gnostic fashion the Christian scheme and that of Mazdean dualism, identifying Jesus with Mithra; and this cult in turn, being carefully organised, spread fast and far, flourishing all the more after Manes had been put to death by the Persian king as a heretic to Mazdeism (? 275). It had a president, representing Christ; twelve masters, representing the twelve apostles; and seventy-two bishops, representing the seventy-two apostles of the third gospel or the seventy-two travelling collectors of the Jewish patriarchs. Like most of the earlier Gnostics the Manichæans were "Docetists," holding that Jesus had only a seeming body and could not really suffer; and they not only denounced the Old Testament, calling Jehovah the Evil Spirit, but rejected the four gospels in favour of

a new one, called Erteng, which Manes affirmed had been dictated to him by God. Improving on Montanus, he claimed to be the promised Paraclete; thus beginning a new cultus on all fours with the Christist. On the side of ethics the new cult extolled and professed all the ascetic virtues, and held by a theory of a twofold purgatory, one of sacred water in the moon, and one of sacred fire in the sun, which burned away the impure body, leaving an immortal spirit. With its independent gospel, Manichæism had all the popular vitality of Montanism with the intellectual pretensions of Gnosticism. Nothing, it was clear, could hinder the creation of new sects out of or alongside the main body; and nothing but the most systematic and destructive persecution could prevent their separate continuance while zeal subsisted.

Under the family of Constantine his creed and his policy were maintained, with no better fruits under either the personal or the political aspect. To his three sons — Canstantine II., Constantius, and Constans—with two of his nephews, he left the empire; but immediately the nephews were massacred with their fathers; of the three sons the second destroyed the first in war (340); and the third, succeeding to the western provinces of the first, fell in war with a new competitor, Magnentius (350); whereafter Constantius, defeating the latter by deputy, became sole emperor (353–361). To him appears to be chargeable the deliberate assassination at one stroke of the two surviving brothers of his father and all their sons save two, Gallus and Julian, the sons of Julius Constans; and at his hands began at least the theoretical persecution of paganism on the eager pressure of the church which forty years

before had been persecuted. It thus remains matter of history that while many pagans had been in favour of tolerance before the establishment of Christianity, the Christians, who had naturally condemned all persecution while they suffered from it, were ready to become zealous persecutors as soon as they had the power. The treatise of Julius Firmicus Maternus on pagan errors is an eager appeal to the sons of Constantine to destroy all pagan worships. In point of fact, pagans were not the first to suffer. Excommunications, banishments, and executions of schismatics had been among the first fruits of Constantine's headship; and though for a time many recoiled from putting to death their heretical fellow-Christians, within a century that scruple too had disappeared. Thus again was "the Church" enabled to survive.

Christian persecution of paganism, on the other hand, did not take effect as promptly as its instigators would seem to have wished. In 341, Constantine made an absurd law that "superstition should cease, and the madness of sacrifices be abolished," on pain of death to all who persisted. No official action seems to have been taken under this decree; and next year, being doubtless forced to respect the pagan party, he enacted that though superstition must be suppressed the old temples should be spared. In 353, Constantius in turn appears from the Theodosian Code to have decreed that all temples throughout the empire should be closed; that all who resorted to them or offered sacrifice should be put to death, and their property confiscated; and that governors who did not enforce the law should themselves be so punished. In the same year he ostensibly struck at nocturnal pagan rites at Rome, where Christian rites had so long been

nocturnal. Three years later, when Julian had become Cæsar under him, he framed a law, signed by both, which in a few words reaffirms the death penalty on all who sacrificed, or worshipped idols—this when some Christians were already worshipping idols in their churches. As there is no trace whatever of any official action being taken under these laws, and as there is abundant monumental proof that at least in the western empire and in Egypt the pagan worships were carried on freely as before, we are forced to conclude that the edicts, if really penned, were never given out by Constantius. It remains on record that he, keeping the pagan title of *pontifex maximus*, passed stringent laws, as Constans had done, against all who desecrated pagan tombs; and further that he went on paying the stipends of flamens, augurs, and vestals—personages usually of high rank. It appears that in fact the autocrat could not or dared not yet enforce his laws against the pagan worships. In the East in general, however, and even in Italy, wherever temples were unfrequented and ill defended they were liable to shameless plunder or destruction by Christians, who were safe from punishment.

On the other hand, Constantius multiplied the financial privileges of Christians, gave higher stipends to the clergy and doles of corn to the congregations, and maintained an enormous retinue of vicious Christian parasites, the whole process worsening the already desperate public burdens, and straining to the utmost a financial system already near the point of collapse. As head of the Church, he presided at Councils; and as a semi-Arian he encouraged Arianism and persecuted Athanasianism, the orthodox not daring openly to gainsay him. As little did either party

condemn him when he brutally murdered the young Gallus, the Christian brother of Julian, leaving only the latter alive of all Constantine's house. To the bishops assembled in council he announced that his will was as good as a canon; and he forbade them to condemn opinions which he held. One bishop he caused to be tortured; others to be banished; one he put to death; and he would doubtless have slain Athanasius had he not been so well concealed by the monks of Egypt. Under his pressure the council of Rimini declared for Arianism; and for himself he framed the new title "His Eternity," calling himself the lord of the universe. Only the favor of the empress, and the emperor's own fears, saved Julian from his brother's fate, as his death seems to have been planned. The Church was worthy of its head. "At each episcopal election or expulsion," says an orthodox writer, "the most exalted sees of Christendom—Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch—furnished scenes that would have disgraced a revolution." Julian has told how whole troops of those who were called heretics were massacred, notably at Cyzicus and at Samosata; while in Paphlagonia, Bithynia, Galatia, and many other provinces, towns and villages were utterly destroyed. In one massacre at Constantinople, the second in connection with the forcible re-installment of the semi-Arian bishop Macedonius (342), there perished more than three thousand people—considerably more than had suffered death in the whole ten years of the last pagan persecution. The orthodox populace, divided in furious factions, fighting like savages in their very churches, were as brutal as their masters; and no priesthood was ever more powerless for good than the Christian clergy in face

of these horrors. Gregory of Nazianzun, whose own ferocities of utterance illustrate the character of the period, declared truly that he had never seen a synod do aught but worsen a quarrel. Such was Christianity under the first Christian-bred emperor. And if Tiridates of Armenia (conv. 302) be taken as the first Christian king, the beginnings of State Christianity are not greatly improved, since there the new faith was spread by fire and sword, and the old persecuted unremittingly for a hundred years, during which time raged many wars of religion between Armenia and Persia. The new faith had "come not to bring peace."

3
§ 4. *Reaction under Julian.*

By common consent, the episode of the short pagan "revival" under Julian is the most interesting chapter in the later history of the Roman Empire proper. The one emperor after Marcus Aurelius who attracts us as a human being and as a mind, he set himself a task which, whether he failed or succeeded, must lift his name high in the annals of a decadent civilisation: his failure, in fact, makes him the most living figure in the long line of autocrats from Constantine to Charlemagne. It is by such contrast, indeed, that he becomes eminent. Measured by the standards of progressive civilisations, against the great minds of the pre-imperial world and the best statesmen of later realms, he is neither a great ruler nor a great intelligence. To look for a ruling mind of the highest order in that environment of decay would be to miss the first and last lesson of the history of the empire. Supposing a really great faculty to be born in such a

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society, it could not conceivably grow to efficiency: the intellectual and the emotional atmosphere forbade. Before there can be all-round minds there must be all-round men; and the empire had made an end of the species. Intellectual originality had long disappeared from a world in which the topmost distinction stood for mere brute force, cultured men groveling before it like scourged animals. The brooding intensity of Lucretius and the large sanity of Cæsar were become as impossible to men of the Roman name as the life of the forum of Coriolanus' day, or the Greek literature of the age of Aristophanes. The process of putting a yoke on the world had duly ended in a world of yoke-bearers, whose best leaders could but harness them. Julian, a wistful child, saved from the massacre of his house, and growing up in a library whose lore there was no man competent to comment for him, became finally a believer in every religion save the one which sought to exterminate the rest. Steeped in theosophies, he was capable of exulting in the disappearance of the Epicureans, the sanest because the least credulous of the philosophic sects. Yet the lore he loved, such as it was, had sufficed to make him or keep him a model of temperance and self-control; chaste and abstemious while master of the world; just and magnanimous under provocations which, if he would, he could have met by wholesale slaughter; caring above all for the inner life while wielding capably the whole armed power of the State. If we talk of moral success, it must still be said that Christianity never gave any section of the Roman Empire a ruler worthy to stand by Marcus and Julian; and that on all the thrones of the world to-day there is no man who can be compared with them in moral

a hard list

nobility. If, again, we keep our eyes on the age of Constantine, we cannot but be struck by the fact that Constantius "the pale," the father of Constantine, a monotheist but not a Christian, and Julian, who turned away from Christianity to polytheism, are by far the best men in the series of rulers of that house. Christianity attracted the worse men, Constantine and his sons, and repelled or failed to satisfy the better; and the younger Constantius, who was bred and remained a Christian, is the worst of all. The finer character-values are all associated with paganism: on the Christian side there is a signal defect of good men.

Julian's short life was crowded no less with experience than with study. Educated as a Christian, he learned, while his life lay at the mercy of Constantius, to keep his own counsel as to the creed of which he had seen such bloody fruits. It seems to have been before the murder of his brother (354) that he was secretly converted to paganism, during his studies at Pergamos. When he was appointed Cæsar (355) it was under strict tutelage; and during his five years of able generalship as Cæsar in Gaul and Germany, even after the legions had proclaimed him Augustus (360), he concealed his creed. It was only when marching against Constantius that he avowed it, and offered sacrifices to the ancient Gods; but when the death of the terror-stricken emperor left him in sole power (361) he at once proceeded zealously to reinstate the old rites. Himself an ardent idealist and practical ascetic, he yearned to make paganism a ministry of purity and charity, which should copy from the Christians their primary Judaic practice of feeding the poor, and set its face against popular ribaldry as steadfastly as they once had done, but with a Stoic

temperance rather than a gloomy fanaticism. To this end he built and endowed new temples, re-endowed the priesthoods where they had been robbed, and forced the return or repair of such of their lands, buildings, and possessions as had been stolen or confiscated; at the same time taking back the privileges and endowments accorded to the Christians. For all this, and no less for his antipathy to the vulgar side of paganism, he was scurrilously and insolently lampooned, notably by the pagan and Christian mobs of Antioch; but he attempted no vengeance, though he was sensitive enough to reply by satire. The intensely malignant attacks on his memory by churchmen leave it clear that he never descended to persecution, unless we so describe his action in excluding Christians from teaching in the schools of rhetoric, for which he had at least the pretext that they constantly aspersed the pagan literature there studied, and ought in consistency to have left it alone. Some of them indeed had earnestly desired the total suppression of those very schools. What most exasperated his Christian assailants, it is clear, was his sardonic attitude to Christian quarrels. Instead of persecuting, he protected the factions from each other, restored exiled heretics, and invited rival dogmatists to dispute in his presence, where their animosities served to humiliate their creed to his heart's content. It was the sting of such a memory that drove Gregory of Nazianzun, bitterly conscious of Christian hates, to such a passion of hate against Julian, whose body he would fain have seen cast into the common sewer.

It has been questioned whether the eagerness of Julian's desire to discredit Christism would not have made him a persecutor had he lived longer; and such

a development is indeed conceivable. His zeal was such that with all the load of empire and generalship on his shoulders he found time in his short reign to write a long treatise against the Christian books and creed, of which his full knowledge and excellent memory made him a formidable critic; and his tone towards Athanasius seems to have grown more and more bitter. It is hard for the master of thirty legions to tolerate opposition and to remain righteous. On the other hand, Julian gave proofs not only of an abnormal self-restraint, but of an exceptional judgment in things purely political; and the very fact that his young enthusiasm had led him astray, making him hope for a vital restoration of paganism out of hand, would probably with such a mind have counted for caution after the lesson had been learned. Falling in battle with the Persians (363) after only twenty months of full power, he had no time to readjust himself to the forces of things as experience disclosed them to him: he had time only to feel disappointment. Had he lived to form his own judgment instead of merely assimilating the ideas of his Neo-Platonic teachers he would be in a fair way to frame a better philosophy of life than either the polytheistic or the Christian. Such a philosophy had been left by Epictetus, to name no other; and Julian's passion for rites and sacrifices was really a falling below pagan wisdom and ethics current in his time, as his facile belief in myths was a falling below the pagan rationalism set forth a little later by Macrobius, and not unknown in Julian's day. No less unworthy of the best pagan thought was his affectation of cynic uncleanness—an inverted foppery likely to have passed with youth. A few years must have taught him that men were not to be regenerated

by pagan creeds any more than by Christian; and to his laws for the reform of administration he might have added some for the reform of culture. Dying in his prime, he has formed a text for much Christian rhetoric to the effect that he had dreamed a vain dream. Insofar, however, as that rhetoric assumes the indestructibility of the Christian Church at the hands of pagan emperors, it is no sounder than the most sanguine hopes of Julian.

To say that Julian had hopelessly miscalculated the possibilities of paganism is to misconceive the whole sociological case if it be implied that Christianity survived in virtue of its dogma or doctrine, and that it was on the side of dogma or morality that paganism failed. As a regenerating force Christianity was as impotent as any pagan creed: it was indeed much less efficacious than one pagan philosophy had been, and had visibly set up in the State new ferocities of civil strife. Under the two Antonines, Stoic principles had governed the empire so well, relatively to the possibilities of the system, that many modern historians have been fain to reckon theirs the high-water mark of all European administration. No such level was ever reached in the Christian empire, from Constantine onwards. Julian himself schemed more solid reforms of administration in his one year of rule than any of his Christian successors ever accomplished, with the exceptions of Marcian and Anastasius; and could he have foreseen how the empire was to go in Christian hands he would certainly have had no reason to alter his course. To take the mere actual continuance of Christianity as a proof of its containing more truth or virtue than the whole of Paganism is to confuse biological survival with moral

merit. "The survival of the fittest," a principle which holds good of every aspect of Nature, is not a formula of moral discrimination, but a simple summary of evolution. The camel which survives in a waterless desert is not thereby proved a nobler animal than the horse or elephant which perishes there. Christianity, as we have seen, while utterly failing among the Jews, where it had birth, had subsisted from the first in the pagan world (1) through adopting the attractive features of Paganism, and (2) because of its politico-economical adaptations. Paganism—nominal paganism, that is—disappeared as an institution because such adaptations were not given to it.

Nor is it reasonable to say that Julian's undertaking was impossible. His plans were indeed those of an inexperienced enthusiast; but had he lived as long as Constantine, and learned by experience, he might have witnessed his substantial success; and a century of intelligently continuous policy to the same end might have expelled Christianity as completely from the Roman world as Buddhism was soon to be expelled from India. No one who has studied the latter phenomenon can use the language commonly held of the attempt of Julian. Buddhism, representing at least as high a moral impetus as that of Christism, had arisen and flourished greatly in direct opposition to Brahmanism; after centuries of success it is found assimilating all the popular superstitions on which Brahmanism lived, even as Christianity assimilated those of paganism; and it was either by assimilating elements of Buddhism on that plane or by such policy joined with coercive force that the Brahmans finally eliminated it from their sphere. Had a succession of Roman emperors set themselves

to create a priestly organisation of pagan cults, with as good an economic basis as that of Brahmanism, or as that of Judaism was even after the fall of the Temple, they could have created a force which might triumph over the new cult in its own sphere even as Brahmanism and Judaism did. And if at the same time they had left the Church severely alone, allowing its perpetual strifes to do their own work, it would inevitably have dissolved itself by sheer fission into a hundred mutually menacing factions, an easy foe for a coherent paganism. Mere spasmodic persecution had previously failed, for it is not random persecution that kills creeds, though a really relentless and enduring persecution can do much. In the period from 330 to 370, and again in the sixth century, the Persian kings did actually, by sheer bloodshed, so far crush orthodox Christianity in their kingdom (leaving only the Nestorians as anti-Byzantine heretics) that it ceased to have any importance there—a circumstance little noted by those who dwell on its "success" in Europe. And the same Sassanide dynasty, beginning in the middle of the third century, effected the systematic revival of the Mazdean religion, which before had seemed corrupted and discredited past remedy.

Had Julian lived to learn in Persia the methods so successfully used by Ardeshir, he might no less successfully have copied them. Only an idealist like Julian, of course, would have thought the effort on peaceful lines worth while. A much abler and better man than Jovian would reasonably decide in his place that the religion of Mithra, having come from the triumphant Persian enemy, could hardly continue to be that of the Roman army; and that the most politic course was to revert to the cult which Julian had

opposed, and whose champions saw in his death the hand of their God working for them. Nonetheless, the common verdict on Julian as the victim of a hopeless delusion is hardly better founded than the gross fable that on receiving his death-wound he cried, "Thou hast conquered, Galilean." The Christians, indeed, might well exult and fabulise over his death. It probably made all the difference between prosperity and collapse for their creed, already riven in irreconcilable factions, and capable of a general cohesion only through the coercive power of the State.

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§ 5. *Re-establishment: Disestablishment of Paganism.*

It is significant that neither the weak Jovian, thrust on the throne by a cabal of Christian officers at the death of Julian, nor the forceful Valentinian who succeeded him, attempted to persecute paganism, though both were professed Christians. In the assertions of the ecclesiastical historians to the contrary, in the next century, the wish was father to the thought. Jovian's ignominious retreat from Persia was made after open pagan auguries; the nominally Christian senate of Constantinople sent him a deputation headed by the pagan Themistius, who exhorted him on high grounds of pagan ethics to practise an absolute toleration; and he did, save as regards the continued crusade against secret magical rites, though he re-established the Christians in many of their privileges. Of Valentinian it has been said that he of all the Christian emperors best understood and maintained freedom of worship; and beyond confiscating to the imperial domain the possessions formerly

taken from pagan temples and restored to them by Julian, he left them unmolested. Pagan priests of the higher grades he treated with greater fiscal favour than had been shown to them even by Julian, giving them immunities and honours which exasperated the Christians. It may have been the fact of his ruling the still strongly pagan West that made Valentinian thus propitiate the old priesthods; but his brother Valens, who ruled the East, enforced the same tolerance, save insofar as he, an Arian, persecuted the Athanasians. His forcing of monks to re-enter the *curia*, that is, to resume the burdens of municipal taxation, may have been motivated by dislike of them, but was a reasonable fiscal measure. The cruel persecution of diviners, carried on by both brothers, was the outcome of both fear and anger at the rapid spread of divination, to which was devoted at that period an extensive literature: the public or official Roman divination by augury was expressly permitted, as were the Eleusinian mysteries. All the while, Christians were little less given to divination than pagans.

Thus in the thirty years from the death of Constantine to the accession of Theodosius the Great, while the Church continued to grow in wealth, it can have made little progress politically, and it certainly made none morally. The law of Valentinian against the gain-seeking monks and priests of Rome is the testimony of a Christian emperor to the new demoralisation set up by his Church. Perhaps on pagan pressure, but apparently with emphasis, he forbade ecclesiastics to receive personal gifts or legacies from the women of property to whom they acted as spiritual advisers. Such a law was of course

evaded by such expedients as trusteeships: greed was not to be balked by legal vetoes. The higher clergy showed the same instincts; and in the final struggle of Damasus and Ursinus to secure by physical force the episcopal chair of Rome (366), one hundred and thirty-seven dead bodies were counted in the basilica, Damasus having hired gladiators to carry his point. In the provinces, doubtless, the church was often better represented; and the new species of *chorepiscopi* or rural bishops must have included some estimable men; but at all the great Christian centres reigned violence, greed, and hate. In North Africa the feud between the Donatists and the rest of the Church had reached the form of a chronic civil war, in which Donatist peasant fanatics, called Circumcelliones, met the official persecution by guerilla warfare of the savagest sort. In the East, the furious strifes between Arians and Athanasians were sufficient to discredit the entire Church as a political factor; and the better pagans saw in it a much worse ethical failure than could be charged on their own philosophies. "Make me bishop of Rome," said the pagan prefect Praetextatus jestingly to Damasus, "and I will be a Christian." What rational element lay in Arianism was counter-vailed by the corruption set up by court favour; and orthodoxy found its account in popular ignorance. One of the last notably philosophic heretics was Photinus, bishop of Sirmium, who in 343 revived the doctrine of a "modal" Trinity. Anathematised and ostracised by Athanasians and Arians alike, he died in exile.

The accession (379) of Theodosius, made co-emperor by Gratian, son of Valentinian, on the fall of Valens,

marks the final establishment of Trinitarian Christianity, with the official suppression of Arianism and paganism. The young Gratian had been partly educated under Bishop Ambrose of Milan, one of the first notable types of masterful ecclesiastic; and under that influence he confiscated the lands of the pagan temples in the West, withdrew the privileges of the priests, and caused to be removed from the Senate at Rome the ancient and sacred statue of the Goddess Victory, formerly removed by Constantius and restored by Julian. Fiscal needs seem to have had much to do with the confiscations, for the economic life of the western empire was steadily sinking. The young emperor did not attempt to prohibit pagan worship or abolish the right of the temples to receive legacies; and though he is said to have refused the title of Pontifex Maximus it seems to have been officially given to him. His anti-pagan policy, however, seems to have counted for something in his unpopularity, which became so great that when Maximus revolted in Britain and invaded Gaul, Gratian was abandoned on all hands. Maximus too was a Christian—another proof that since Constantine many military men had come to think “the luck was changed”—and though he conciliated the pagans he did not re-endow their cults. It was under his auspices, too, that Priscillian, bishop of Avila, in Spain, who had adopted Gnostic views closely resembling those of the Manichæans, and had been banished under Gratian, was tried in Gaul for his heresy, put to the torture, and executed at Treves with several of his followers. A new step had thus been taken in the process of establishment, so that when Theodosius overthrew Maximus and left the empire of the west to the young Valentinian, the

cause of official paganism was much weakened. And when Valentinian in turn was deposed and slain by the pagan party, though Ambrose confessedly thought the Christian cause in the west was lost, Eugenius did not venture to restore to the priesthoods the possessions and revenues which had been turned to the support of the decaying State, menaced all along the north by a hungry barbarism that grew ever more conscious of its power, and of the impotence of the imperial colossus.

When Eugenius and his party in turn fell before Theodosius, the cause of State-paganism was visibly lost; and though Theodosius died in the following year (395) he left the old cults finally disestablished in Italy as well as in the East. In his reign of sixteen years in the East he had as far as possible suppressed Arianism, depriving the Arians of their churches; had caused or permitted many of the already disendowed pagan temples to be robbed and dismantled; and had prohibited all pagan worships, besides continuing the crusade against divination. Under the shelter of such persecuting edicts, monks and other enterprising Christians, calling themselves "reformers," were at liberty everywhere to plunder or destroy the shrines, and even to secure the lands of pagans on the pretence that they had defied the law and offered sacrifices. So gross became the demoralisation that Theodosius, more scrupulous than the clergy, at length passed a law to punish the Christian spoilers; but this could not save the pagans. Many of them, to save themselves, affected conversion, and went to Christian altars to do inward reverence to their old Gods. There can have been no worthy process of moral suasion under such circumstances.

Coercion, applauded by Augustine and personally practised by such Christian leaders as St. Martin of Tours, became the normal procedure; and naturally the constrained converts brought with them into the Church all the credences of their previous life. For the Church, such a triumph was glory enough, especially when there was added to it a law by which all Christian offenders, clerical or lay, were amenable to trial and punishable before ecclesiastical tribunals only.

It does not appear that the many cruel laws of Theodosius against heretics and pagans were carried out to the letter: it had sufficed for the overthrow of official paganism that it should be cut off from its financial basis; and the emperor not only tolerated but employed professed pagans, being even willing to grant to those of Rome concessions which Ambrose could not endure. On their part the pagans, though still very numerous, were non-resistant. Broadly speaking, they consisted of two sorts—the more or less philosophic few, who were for the most part monotheists, inclined to see in all Gods mere symbols of the central power of the universe; and the unphilosophic multitude, high and low, who believed by habit, and whose spiritual needs were on the ordinary Christian plane. The former sort were not likely to battle for the old machinery of sacrifice and invocation; and the latter, with none to lead them, were not hard to turn, when once new habits had time to grow. Whoever gave them a liturgy and rites and sacraments, with shrines and places of adoration, might count on satisfying their religious learnings; and this the Christian organisation was zealously bent on doing. Their festivals were preserved and adapted; their local “heroes” had become

Christian martyrs and patron saints; their mysteries were duplicated; their holy places were but new-named; their cruder ideals were embraced. In the way of ceremonial, as Mosheim avows, there was "little difference in those times between the public worship of the Christians and that of the Greeks and Romans." The *lituus* of the augur had become the crozier of the bishop; the mitres and tiaras of the heathen priests were duly transferred to the new hierarchy; and their processions were as nearly as possible copies of those of the great ceremonial cults of Egypt and the East. A sample of the process of adaptation lies in the ecclesiastical calendar, where in the month of October are (or were) commemorated on three successive days Saint Bacchus, Saint Demetrius, and Saints Dionysos, Rusticus, and Eleutherius, all described as martyrs. The five names are simply those of the God Dionysos, whose rustic festival was held at that season. In the same way, Osiris becomes St. Onuphrius, from his Coptic name, Onufri. It is probable, again, that from the year 376, when the shrine of Mithra at Rome was destroyed by Christian violence, the Roman Pope, who succeeded the high priest of Mithra at the Vatican mount, sat in the Mithraic sacred chair, as he does at this day. As representing Peter, he bore Mithra's special symbols. And where the higher paganism had come to repudiate the popular religion of trappings and ceremonial no less than that of sacrifice and that of mere self-mortification, established Christianity placed the essence of religion anew in external usages on the one hand and asceticism on the other; cherishing the while every "superstition" of the past, and beginning a species of image-worship that the past had hardly known. What was

overthrown was merely public or official worship: the religious essentials of paganism—to wit, polytheism; the belief in the intercession of subordinate spiritual powers; the principles of sacrifice and propitiation, penance and atonement; the special adoration of local shrines and images; the practice of ritual mysteries and imposing ceremonies; the public association of a worship with the fortunes of the State—all these were preserved in the Catholic Church, with only the names changed. There was no “destruction of paganism,” there was merely transformation. And so immeasurably slow are the transformations of national habit that for many generations even the terminology and the specific usages of paganism survived in every aspect save that of open worship; so that Theodosius and his sons were fain to pass law after law penalising those who ventured to revert from Christianity to paganism. Such reversions were the measure of the moral as compared with the official success of Christianity.

The last act in the official crusade against paganism, open spoliation, had become possible at length through the sheer decadence of character in the empire. In the west, so-called Romans had lived on a tradition of ancient rule till they were become as masquerading apes in the light of the retrospect: all that was left of patrician semblance was a faculty for declamation, pedantry, and pomp. The repeated discussions over the removal of the statue of Victory were on the senatorial side a tissue of artificial rhetoric, on the Christian a mixture of frank bigotry and bad sophistry. Religious fanaticism, the last and lowest form of moral energy, abounded only with the mob; and the formless pagan crowd, never in touch with priests

or senators, and never conscious of a common centre, was useless for political purposes when at length the upper class had need of it; while the much smaller Christian mob, drilled and incited to a common fervour, was a force formidable even to the autocrat. Patricians whose line had for centuries cringed in all things political were not the men to lose their lives for a ceremonial; and those of them who as priests had been plundered by Gratian and Theodosius were on this side also devoid of organisation, and incapable of joint action. The rule of Valentinian had forced the Christian Church to remain in touch with its original and popular sources of revenue; whereas the pagan priesthoods, once deprived of stipends and domains, had nowhere to turn to, and may be said to have fallen without a blow, unless the deposition of Valentinian II. by Arbogastes, and the short usurpation of Eugenius, be regarded as their last official effort to survive. But the cause of empire in the west was no less moribund than that of the ancient Gods. Italy was reaching the last stage of economic and military depletion. The richest revenue-yielding provinces of the empire lay in Africa and the East; and when there came the fatal struggle with barbarism, the eastern and richer part of the empire, so long wont to act independently of the western, let that succumb. It was at least dramatically fit that the multiform and fortuitous contexture of Roman paganism, evolved like the empire itself by a long series of instinctive acts and adaptations, unruled by any higher wisdom, should yield up its official form and sustenance to feed the dying body politic, and should be expunged from the face of the State before that was overthrown. Augustine might

say what he would to the reproachful pagans, but the last humiliation came under Christian auspices; and the fanatical Jerome, type of the transformation of Roman energy from action to private pietism, had to weep in his old age that his cult could not save the immemorial city whose very name had so long ruled the world, and was almost the last semblance of a great thing left in it.

It consisted with the universal intellectual decadence that neither the pagans nor the Christians realised the nature of either the religious or the political evolution, the former regarding the new faith as a blasphemy which had brought on the empire the ruinous wrath of the Gods; the latter calling the barbaric invasion a divine punishment both of pagan and Christian wickedness, and seeing in the decline of all pagan worship the defeat of a false faith by a true. Neither had the slightest perception of the real and human causation; the degradation of the peoples by the yoke of Rome; the economic ruin and moral paralysis of Rome by sheer empire: and as little could they realise that the fortunes of the creeds were natural socio-political sequences. What had socially happened was essentially an economic process, howbeit one set up by a religious credence. Paganism as a public system disappeared because it was deprived of all its revenues; Christianity as a system finally flourished because the church was legally empowered to receive donations and legacies without limit, and debarred from parting with any of its property. Any corporation whatever, any creed whatever, would have flourished on such a basis; while only a priesthood capable of building up a voluntary revenue as the Christian church had originally done could survive

on pagan lines after the Christian creed had been established. The pagan priesthoods, originally generated on a totally different footing, could not learn the economic lesson, could not readjust themselves to a process which, as we have seen, originated in conditions of fanatical nonconformity, which latter-day paganism could not reproduce. But so far were the mental habitudes and the specific beliefs of paganism from disappearing that Christian historians in our own day bitterly denounce it for "infecting" their "revealed" creed. What had really died out on the "spiritual" side was the primitive ideal of the Christian Church. What survived as Christianity was really an idolatrous polytheism. *W.*

CHAPTER III.

FAILURE WITH SURVIVAL.

§ 1. *The Overthrow of Arianism.*

THEODOSIUS was the last ruler of the empire proper who was capable of leading his army; and from his death onwards the fall of the western section proceeded at headlong rate. His sons, Honorius and Arcadius, were worse weaklings than even the sons of Valentinian: to fit for the throne a child born in the purple, always a hard task, seemed impossible under Christianity. At the end of the fourth century begins the series of convulsions which mark the end of the Roman empire properly so-called. In the year after Theodosius' death, Alaric invaded and ravaged Greece; and, manœuvred thence by Stilicho, proceeded to invade Italy. The tentative character of these unsuccessful first attempts, and of that of Rhadagast, only made more sure the triumph of the later; and invasion followed on invasion, till by the middle of the fifth century the West had lost Gaul, Spain, and Africa; and in the year 476 Rome, thrice sacked, received at last a barbarian king.

Through all these storms Christianity more than held its ground. The invaders were Christians, like the invaded, albeit heretics; the first conversion of Goths by the Arian Ulphilas in the previous century having been widely extended. The form of the

dogma mattered nothing to the political function of the church, which was, among the barbarians as in the empire, to promote centralisation up to the point at which schism became ungovernable. The Teutonic chieftains, it is clear, saw in the Christian church a means of partially welding their peoples somewhat as Rome had been welded; and while Arianism held the ground among them, it furthered the unity that in the Eastern empire was now being lost. And inasmuch as normal community of creed made possible an assimilation between the invaders and the conquered, Christianity positively facilitated the fall of the Western empire. In Africa, again, where the Donatists, with their four hundred bishops, had been freshly persecuted under Honorius, the schism helped the invading Vandals, who paid for the Donatists' help by giving them freedom of worship. It is probable that the Manichæans, who were numerous in the same province, and who were also much persecuted, at first welcomed the invaders. So obvious was the risk of such alienations of heretics that Honorius, listening for a moment to the advice of tolerant pagans, went so far as to issue a law of general toleration. This, however, the orthodox clergy forced him to repeal, and the persecution of Donatists went from bad to worse. All the while the old paganism was still so common in the West that Honorius, who on the advice of his pious minister Olympius, after the fall of Stilicho, had sought to expel by edict all pagans and Arians from the service of the State, was fain later to entreat leading pagans to return. But the Arian Goths in turn showed the pagans no favour; in Greece, Alaric even broke up the Eleusinian mysteries; and the Vandals in Africa