

as one of the characters of Cornwall was also one of its worthies. And the object of the present writer will be attained if he has given the readers of the CHURCHMAN some better idea of the picturesque personality of the Parson-Poet of the West.

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THE WORLD INTO WHICH CHRISTIANITY CAME.¹

“Das Heidentum ist verchristlicht, das Christentum romanisiert.”—
WERNLE: *Die Anfänge*.

IN order to understand any religious or social movement, it is important to get as clear a conception as possible of the condition of the society which it seeks to influence; for both the course and the results of any such movement will, to a great extent, be governed by the condition of the material which it struggles to affect. In the New Testament Christianity is likened both to a seed cast into the ground and to leaven placed in the midst of meal; and the lesson of our Lord's first parable is that the harvest will depend, not only on the nature of the seed, but upon the condition of the soil.

Christianity may be said to have been a seed containing the possibility of a new life planted in the midst of the great Roman Empire; and during the earliest period of the Church's history the Empire was practically the field in which it grew. What, then, was the social and religious condition of, say, Asia Minor, Greece, or Italy, and especially of Rome itself, during this period? What were the social, and ethical, and religious standards and ideals then accepted? and how far were these actually realized in various classes or grades of society? What, apart from Christianity, were the chief philosophical and religious influences which were moulding men's opinions and conduct? How far were such religious conceptions or convictions which had been influential in the past still of present power? and what new religious ideas, or forces, or forms of worship, apart from Judaism and Christianity, were competing for the attention or acceptance of men?

An answer to all these questions cannot fail to be very helpful to the student of early Christian history, and especially if the answer be evidently based upon very adequate

¹ “Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius,” by Samuel Dill, M.A. London: Macmillan and Co., 1905.

knowledge. Such an answer to each of these questions will be found in Professor Dill's volume.

Usually our study of the period of which it treats—the period of 125 years between A.D. 54 and A.D. 180—has been, and still is, far too one-sided. The period is “a crisis and turning-point in the life of humanity, a period pregnant with momentous issues, a period in which the old order and the new are contending for mastery, or in which the old is melting into the new” (p. v). As we study this period we are witnessing a conflict; but the vast majority of students are content to view only the action of one party in the struggle—namely, the Christian. Professor Dill's book is an extremely valuable picture of the other side, a picture so complete and crowded with detail that it is often difficult to get a comprehensive view of even this side of the conflict. And possibly his attention is so concentrated on this one side that he hardly does justice to the effects which were already being felt from the Church's mission. But the balance both of knowledge and interest has for so long and to such a degree preponderated on the one side that there is little fear that the importance of the Church's work should be forgotten.

Let us take a modern parallel. Christianity is to-day being propagated among various peoples—*e.g.*, among the educated classes in India, China, and Japan, as well as among savage tribes in Africa. Suppose we could look forward a hundred years. Will the *resultant* Christianity at the end of the present century be the same in each of these various fields of effort? In the essentials of the faith—in a belief in one God who is the Father of all, in one Divine Saviour who has redeemed all, in one Holy Spirit who sanctifieth all—we hope and believe it will be the same; but while it is influencing and moulding the social and religious character of those among whom it is working, the local or national character of the resultant Christianity will be affected by the racial, ethical, and former religious forces and peculiarities inherent in these various peoples. And when the history of Christianity during this twentieth century comes to be written in the distant future—say, a thousand years hence—one key to the changes or developments in its presentation or expression, or in the influences which it exerted, will be found in a careful study of the various societies or peoples among whom it was propagated.

Professor Dill's book, as its title suggests, describes to us the condition of the Roman world during the first 125 years in which Christianity was being propagated as a missionary religion in its midst: it describes the world to which the teaching and appeals of St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John, of Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, of Justin Martyr, Irenæus,

and the early apologists, were addressed. A study of this book will help to make clear not only the cause of the difference of the presentation of Christianity in the Epistle to the Ephesians and in the Gospel of St. Matthew, but that of the difference between the Catholicism of the end of the second century and the picture of the Church in the early chapters of the Acts.

I might draw yet another analogy. We are, I think, learning more and more the meaning of the words, "God never left Himself at any time without witness." There was a preparation for the Gospel not only in Judaism, but also in the higher teachings of the old Greek philosophy—*e.g.*, in the more spiritual teachings of Plato. The same is true of the best side of Stoicism, and (though to a less extent) in one aspect of Cynicism. That St. Paul was in agreement with—indeed, that he may to some extent have been influenced by—some of the ideas of Stoicism, is now widely accepted. Professor Dill's book gives us not only a very clear account of the principles of those philosophies which were influential during the first and second centuries, but it reveals to us the means and methods by which they were propagated: and many of these methods, as I shall point out, were remarkably similar to the methods employed by the Christian teachers. Then, again, as the Gospel followed the Law—a truth whose practical importance is often forgotten—or as the Law formed a foundation for the Gospel, so the higher teaching of Stoicism, and the self-denial of the Cynics formed among the heathen, at least a portion of the foundation (at any rate, in regard to ethics) upon which the Christian teacher had to build. Lastly, as the Old Testament has become more intelligible since it ceased to be studied in isolation, and since it has been read in the light of researches made into other Eastern religions, so will early Christian history become more luminous when we consider it side by side with other religious systems at that time claiming the allegiance of men.

To pass now to the book itself: let me say at once that what can easily be found elsewhere will not be found here. We have no history of the Empire, or of any of its various provinces; there is nothing about the succession of the Emperors, about the laws they made, or about the wars they waged. But we have a wonderfully complete picture of how various classes of people were living, and especially of the views they were holding and expressing upon a great variety of subjects.

The period of which the book treats was, as our author states, a very important one. It was, indeed, an age in which "great social and spiritual movements were incarnate in some striking personalities, who give a human interest to dim forces

of spiritual evolution" (p. v). Looked at from a distance, the change from a Nero or a Caligula to a Marcus Aurelius was certainly very great; but the age must not be thus measured, and we shall probably feel that the more we know about this period the less ready shall we be to give a verdict which shall presume to be at once adequate and comprehensive. It was "a period of almost unexampled peace and prosperity under skilful and humane government. It closes as an age of civic splendour, not only in Rome, but in almost countless great towns scattered throughout the various provinces; and the life of these towns was remarkable for its many social charities. At the same time we are shocked by the materialism and the social vices—the concomitants of a luxurious highly-organized civilization—for which this period is notorious." This is one aspect, but there is another. As Professor Dill says, the age "was one dignified and elevated by a great effort for reform of conduct, and a passion—often, it is true, sadly misguided—to rise to a higher spiritual life, and to win the succour of unseen Powers" (p. vi).

To students of philosophy and ethics this book will be of special interest. During the reigns of the Antonines, and, indeed, in the immediately preceding age, philosophy made "a serious and very practical effort to effect a moral revolution; but the effort was to a great extent vain." Philosophy "might hold up the loftiest ideal of conduct; it might revive the ancient gods in new spiritual power; it might strive to fill the interval between the remote Infinite Spirit and the life of man with a host of mediating and succouring powers. But the effort was doomed to failure. It was an esoteric creed, and the masses remained untouched by it. They longed for a Divine light," (as they do still), for what they believe to be "a clear authoritative voice from the unseen world. . . . The voice came to them at last from the regions of the East." As far as heathenism was concerned, "it came through the worships of Isis and Mithra, which promised a hope of immortality, and provided a sacramental system to soothe the sense of guilt and prepare the trembling soul for the great ordeal on the verge of another world (p. vii). To a description of these "worships," their strength and their weakness, a great proportion of the latter part of the volume is devoted, and the treatment of them, as of other subjects with which the book deals, is very full. While this is an advantage to the student, to the ordinary reader the method pursued may appear a little tedious. The whole volume is so packed with information, its author is so steeped in the literature of the period, and he evidently feels that so much of that literature throws valuable light upon the ideas and standards of the time, that possibly—at any rate,

for a truly artistic picture—he has overcrowded his canvas with detail. Then, many of the chief figures—*e.g.*, Seneca, Epictetus, Pliny, Tacitus, Juvenal—appear and reappear in quite different connections; they move so rapidly on and off the stage that the effect is apt to be confusing. We do not wish to accuse the author of undue haste, though the many cases of repetition of the same statement, often in almost identically the same words—*e.g.*, p. 96, *cf.* p. 94; p. 147, *cf.* p. 143; p. 140, *cf.* p. 144, etc.—seem to suggest that by some condensation his book would have gained in lucidity.

The whole work is divided into four “books.” In the first of these there are three chapters: “The Aristocracy under the Terror,” which gives a vivid, indeed a lurid, picture of life during the reigns of Nero and Domitian; “The World of the Satirist,” for which Juvenal is the chief authority; and “The Society of the Freedmen,” a chapter of great interest and one that deserves to be very carefully read, because, as far as I know, the information which it contains has not elsewhere been collected.

Into these three chapters “religious” questions enter less than they do into the rest of the book. Still, they will repay careful study, for they give an excellent insight into the *private* life of various classes in the chief cities of the Empire at the end of the first and at the beginning of the second century. I have not space to deal with the first two of these chapters in detail, but the following extracts will give an indication of some of Professor Dill’s judgments:

“Nero formed a school which laughed at all virtue and made self-indulgence a fine art” (p. 52).

“Domitian, who was the ruthless enemy of the nobles, like all his kind, was profusely indulgent to the army and the mob. . . . The populace of Rome was pampered with costly and vulgar spectacles. Domitian’s indulgence of that fierce and obscene proletariat was only a little more criminal than that of other Emperors, because it ended in a bankruptcy which was followed by robbery and massacre” (p. 56).

“Juvenal seems to be as much under the influence of old Roman conventionality as of permanent moral ideals. He condemns eccentricities, or mere harmless aberrations from old-fashioned rules of propriety as ruthlessly as he punishes lust and crime” (p. 77).

The third chapter, as I have already said, is especially important; for in the rise of the “Freedmen” we see a movement which, like Christianity itself, demanded the practical recognition of a new conception of society. It was not merely the beginning of those “middle” classes, of which the ancient world knew nothing, but who were destined to play so im-

portant a part in the modern world, but it was also the recognition that in 'work and in "trade" there was nothing essentially degrading—that there might be a "true nobility of labour." And in this chapter, as in the whole book, we are struck by the remarkable similarity between the experiences of the second century and those of the present time. Human nature was then very much the same as human nature is now; hence the "social problems" which then caused difficulties and demanded solution are almost identical with those demanding solution now. I am tempted to quote from almost every page of this chapter, but the following must suffice.

How essentially modern is the following experience of wealth without culture! Speaking of the opinion of the rich freedmen held by men like Juvenal and Martial, Professor Dill says: "The polished man of the world was alternately amused and disgusted by the spectacle of sudden fortune—with no tradition of dignity to gild its grossness, yet affecting and burlesquing the tastes of a world from which it was separated by an impassable gulf" (p. 104).

Yet there was a better side, for "after all reservations, the ascent of the freedmen remains a great and beneficent revolution. The very reasons which made Juvenal hate it most are its best justification to a modern mind. It gave hope of a future to the slave; by creating a free industrial class, it helped to break down the cramped social ideal of the slave-owner and the soldier; it planted in every municipality a vigorous mercantile class, who were often excellent and generous citizens; above all, it asserted the dignity of man" (p. 105).

The second book, like the first, also contains three chapters. These are entitled respectively: "The Circle of the Younger Pliny"; "Municipal Life"; and "The Colleges and Plebeian Life"; and in them we may be said to have three pictures—each again somewhat overcrowded with both figures and detail—of the *social* life of the period in three different grades of society. How difficult it is to form a judgment of any society which shall be at once true and comprehensive is at once suggested to us when we compare "the high tone of the world which Pliny has immortalized with the hideous revelations of contemporary license in the same class which meet us in Juvenal, Martial, and Tacitus. . . . The truth is that society in every age presents the most striking moral contrasts. . . . That there was stupendous corruption and abnormal depravity under Princes like Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, we hardly need the testimony of the Satirists to induce us to believe; that there were large classes among whom

virtuous instinct and all the sober strength and gravity of the old Roman character were still vigorous and untainted is equally attested and equally certain " (p. 142).

There are many other passages in this chapter I should like to quote, but I must be content with two :

" In this sounder class of Roman society it will be found that the saving or renovating power was not so much any religious or philosophic impulse as the wholesome influence, which never fails from age to age, of family duty and affection, reinforced, especially in the higher ranks, by a long tradition of Roman dignity and self-respect, and by the simple cleanliness and the pieties of country life " (p. 144). And again this with regard to Quintilian, who was Pliny's teacher : " Quintilian believed that in education moral influence and environment are even more important than intellectual stimulus. . . . Quintilian's first principle is that the orator must be a good man in the highest and widest sense. . . . This tone, combined with his own high example of seriousness, honour, and the purest domestic attachment, must have had a powerful effect on the flower of the Roman youth who were his pupils for nearly a generation " (pp. 149, 150).

The next chapter, upon " Municipal Life," is full of most valuable information. It deals with that life, not only in Rome, but in the vast number of provincial towns scattered throughout the Empire ; and, as Professor Dill says, " in any attempt to estimate the moral condition of the masses in that age the influence of municipal life should occupy a large place " (p. 199). To the student of the social problems—the problems of " town " life—at the present time this chapter will be most instructive. Again and again he will see that also in this sphere the difficulties of that age were strangely like our own. Those who groan to-day under municipal burdens will learn that then " the demands of the populace, together with the force of example and emulation, contributed to make the load which the rich had to bear more and more heavy " (p. 245). Those who deplore the way in which municipal office to-day is often shunned by the men who should be the best fitted to fill it will find how Plutarch " exhorts men to strive by every means to raise the tone of their own community, instead of forsaking it in fastidious scorn or ambition for a more spacious and splendid life " (p. 246).

In the third chapter, upon " The Colleges and Plebeian Life," we approach a subject which cannot fail to interest the student of early Christian history. We are reminded how " the immense development of the *free* proletariat in the time of the early Empire is one of the most striking social

phenomena which the study of the inscriptions has brought to light" (p. 251). Then we are told of "a growing pride in honest industry . . . a new and healthy sign, a reaction from the contempt for it engrained in old Roman society"; and of how the workmen "were finding a means of developing an organization which at once cultivated social feeling, heightened their self-respect, and guarded their collective interests" (p. 253). Then we are reminded of the "laws of association," and how "down to the time of Justinian the right of free association was jealously watched as a possible menace to the public peace." Again, how "the primary object of a multitude of colleges . . . was undoubtedly the care of the memory of their members after death." Those who have wandered through the catacombs, and who call to mind the words, "This do in remembrance of Me," will not be surprised at the analogy which has been pointed out between the earliest Christian societies with their "common meal" and these *collegia* or brotherhoods. And those who read this chapter carefully will obtain much help in any effort they may make to realize the nature and the ideas of the society which Christianity was then penetrating, which it was affecting, but by which it was also as surely in turn being affected. A consideration of the rest of Professor Dill's interesting volume must be deferred until next month.

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SPAIN AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE.

IN the opinion of many thoughtful students of international politics Spain is destined to play an important part in the future of Europe. Its geographical position, mineral wealth, and increasing population point in this direction, and the intellectual and scientific revival of the last twenty years are too little considered by most Englishmen. During the present year the Nobel prize for literature was awarded to Don José Echegaray, and the most coveted scientific honour, the Helmholtz Medal of the Berlin Academy, was given to the eminent histologist, Señor Ramón y Cajal. In every branch of knowledge a renaissance is observed, and freedom of thought and discussion take the place of former apathetic acceptance of traditional beliefs.

The Madrid Athenæum gathers together the forces that form and mould thought. During the months of March and April the "religious problem" was discussed every week in the