

the Church in South Africa cannot yet rear her own ministry, but must look to the Home Church for some years yet to supply her with clergy, there can surely be but one thing to do. It is a God-given opportunity that lies before us. Let us arise and seize it, and in the Name of the Lord take our place alongside of our brethren who are rearing a noble Temple in which the glory of God shall dwell, and whose light shall guide many a wanderer to the true home of his heart.

H. L. C. DE CANDOLE.

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## THE WORLD INTO WHICH CHRISTIANITY CAME.

### II.

IN my previous article I considered the first two books into which Professor Dill's volume is divided. We now pass to the third. And if the first book may be said to have dealt chiefly with the private life of the period, and the second mainly with its public and social life, in the third our author may be regarded as placing before us a great number of *ideas*, and as explaining to us the methods by which those who held them were seeking to propagate them. Here again we have a division into three chapters, and these are entitled respectively, "The Philosophic Director," "The Philosophic Missionary," and "The Philosophic Theologian."

As the student of religion will find that the second book is more interesting than the first, so, I believe he will find that this third book is more interesting than the second; and as in the last chapter of that book he will have seen many analogies between the customs of the *collegia* and Christian rites and usages, so in this book he will find still more striking similarities between the *methods* employed to teach heathen philosophy and to propagate "the word of life." In merely speculative philosophy—that is, in philosophy as an attempt to explain the universe—the Roman seems at no time to have had much interest. In the period of which we are speaking the study of philosophy was "the study of moral problems with a definite practical aim"; and the "value of an idea" consisted not so much in what it explained as in what *effect* it had, or might have, upon life and conduct. Stoicism and Cynicism, translated into a Latin atmosphere, become "modes of life"; they were almost altogether "kinds" of conduct. And conduct implies discipline, and discipline is suggested by rule, by order, by a conception of society which at least savours of a military organization. And to what may

the Western Church of the early Middle Ages be more appropriately compared than to a vast military system, living by, and striving to enforce, a "law"—a body of customs, often expressed in "rites and ceremonies"? In this "third book" of Professor Dill's volume a flood of light is thrown upon the causes of this phenomenon. *Das Christentum romanisiert.*

To just as great a degree as the New Testament would be unintelligible except when explained by the Old, is Mediæval Christianity unintelligible if we forget the ideas and ideals of the age and the society of which this third book gives such a complete explanation.

In the first chapter we have an admirable sketch of the rise of the individualistic philosophies, and more particularly of Stoicism; and of how individualism, when pushed to its logical conclusion, naturally developed into universalism. Again, we are shown how morals and religion were gradually separated from politics, with which in the old world they were so closely connected. We see, too, how men are craving for some "inner law of life which should bring order into the chaos of their conduct and desires . . . how all the schools—Stoic or Epicurean, Sceptic or Eclectic—are seeking for the secret of inner peace, and how singularly unanimous they are in their report of the discovery. The inner life of the spirit becomes all in all" (p. 292). At the opening of the volume, in the description of the men who surrounded Nero, Seneca was shown to hold an important place. "Seneca is here re-introduced to us, but now in a different capacity—"as an ideal director for the upper class of such an age." The picture of Seneca drawn for us in p. 297 *et seq.* is a very beautiful one. It shows how similar were the deepest wants of human nature then to what they are now. "Seneca can teach because he has learnt, and he can help because he has experienced; the vicissitudes in his own fate and character made him a powerful and sympathetic adviser. . . . He had passionately adopted an ethical creed which aimed at a radical reform of human nature" (p. 297). The parallels drawn between Seneca and Thomas à Kempis on the one side and Kant on the other are extremely interesting. Yet, as Professor Dill says, "The gospel of Seneca, with all its searching power, is wanting in some of the essentials of an effective religion which can work on character. . . . Where is the force to come from which shall nerve the repentant one to essay the steep ascent? And what is the reward which can more than compensate for the great renunciation?" (p. 310). Passage after passage in this deeply interesting chapter tempts me to quotation, but I must refrain.

But the influence of Seneca, in spite of "his clear conception

of human equality and brotherhood," and of Stoicism as a creed, with "its elaborate physics and metaphysics, its essentially intellectual solution of the problems both of the universe and human life," was confined practically to the cultivated upper classes, and hardly affected the crowd. In the second chapter we have described for us how in those days, by the philosophic missionary, it was sought to gain an influence among "the people." This chapter is just as interesting as the last, and because in seventeen hundred years human nature has altered so little, there is here many a hint (both as to what and what not to do) which the Christian preacher might take from the Cynic missionary preacher of the second century; there is also many a warning to be found in the pages of Lucian which the many seekers after a cheap popularity might to-day with advantage take to heart. The two following quotations will show what the reader may expect in this chapter: (1) "Common, ignorant people have caught the passion for apostleship. Everywhere might be met the familiar figure, with long cloak and staff and scrip, haranguing in the squares or lanes to unlettered crowds. And the preacher is often as unlearned as they, having left the forge, or the carpenter's bench, or the slave prison, to proclaim his simple gospel of renunciation, with more or less sincerity" (p. 342).

(2) "Just as in modern Christendom, though sectarian landmarks and designations are kept up, the popular preaching of nearly all the sects tends to a certain uniformity of emphasis on a limited number of momentous moral truths, so the preaching of pagan philosophy dwells, almost to weariness, on the same eternal principles of true gain and loss, of the illusions of passion, of freedom through renunciation" (p. 343).

Two other points in this chapter demand notice: one is the admirable account of the Cynics (p. 351 *et seq.*); the other is the extremely interesting picture of Dion Chrysostom and his work (p. 367 *et seq.*).

We pass now to "The Philosophic Theologian." In the opening pages of this chapter we have a very comprehensive account of the religious conditions of the age, how "the times were ripe for a theodicy"; how "the old religion had not lost all hold on men's minds, as it is sometimes said to have done," but how, "for the deeper spiritual wants and emotions it furnished little nutriment"; how "God is no longer a mere intellectual postulate. He has become a moral necessity. His existence is demanded by the heart as well as by the intellect. Men craved no longer for a God to explain the universe, but to resolve the enigma of their own lives, for an Infinite Father, guiding in wisdom, cherishing in mercy, and finally receiving His children to Himself" (p. 389). In this chapter Plutarch

is the principal figure, and our author's chief example of the philosophic theologian. He is described as "a preacher of righteousness." "He would have those in moral difficulty to remain after the sermon . . . and lay bare their faults and spiritual troubles." "His conception of the philosophic gathering is, perhaps, the nearest approach which a heathen ever made to the conception of the Christian Church." To him "theology is the crown of all philosophy, and to form true and worthy conceptions of the Divine Being is not less important than to pay Him pious worship" (p. 417). In connection with Plutarch and other religious teachers of that age we have a long and careful treatment of the important subject of dæmonology, a subject of deep and practical interest to the student of religion, for "the paganism which the Christian Empire found it hardest to conquer, and which propagated itself far into the Christian ages, was the belief in magic and occult powers founded on the doctrine of Dæmons" (p. 433). Towards the close of this chapter (again in connection with Plutarch) we have a very careful inquiry into the various (heathen) theories of "inspiration." We must not quote more than the following sentences: "It is interesting to see how, in many a flash of insight, Plutarch reveals a truth for all generations. We in our time are perhaps too much inclined to limit the powers of the human spirit to the field of sense and observation. The slackening hold on faith in a spiritual world and a higher intuition may well be visited by the proper Nemesis, in the darkening of the Divine vision, whether as religious faith or artistic inspiration" (p. 440).

The fourth and last book is entirely concerned with religion. Its six chapters are upon "Superstition," "Belief in Immortality," "The Old Roman Religion," "Magna Mater," "Isis and Serapis," and "The Religion of Mithra." Those who would learn how strange and diverse were the religious conceptions and worships of that world into which Christianity came should study these chapters. They will see how involved the situation was. It was not as if a new religion—Christianity—had simply to win its way into the stronghold of, and to capture, an old religion. The actual condition was very different from this. There was, first of all, an old religion, which in many ways had a far stronger hold upon the people than we are apt to assume; then there were the "philosophies" of which we read in the last book, and which were often held by thoughtful men—*e.g.*, Marcus Aurelius—who, from custom or reasons of policy, were still carefully "practising" the old religion. Lastly, there was the constant stream of new religions always "pouring in" from the East—from Egypt, Asia Minor, Syria, and Persia. Among these

must be placed Judaism and Christianity (whose difference from Judaism would at first be little understood). Each one of these religions, according to Cicero's definition of the term, was a "superstition." Now, can we wonder that among all this crowd of faiths and practices competing for men's allegiance the difficulties of Christianity were very great? Two points I think the careful student of these chapters will note: First, that as in the Old Testament we see a long and careful preparation for Christianity, so in the world of which this book treats we also see, under the "providence" of God, a preparation for the same, though this "preparation" is very different from the other. Secondly, he will see that it was to a great extent in the apparent similarities between some of these religions and Christianity that the greatest danger to the latter lay. While their votaries assimilated something of the spiritual teaching of Christianity, on the other hand Christianity assimilated far more from them. Religious "syncretism," as Professor Dill constantly insists, was "in the air." Each of these *new* religions spread over various parts, and often over the same parts, of the Empire; as they spread they absorbed and assimilated much from each other, and Christianity did not escape the effects of this process. This is the key to the problem of how to explain the difference between the "Christianity" of the fourth, or even the third, century and the "Gospel" of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> It is also the key by which we may explain trouble after trouble in the history of the Church from those days to the present time. Students of Professor Dill's book will read how "Greek philosophy for eight centuries had been teaching a doctrine of one Divine force or essence"; how "pagan theology had elaborated a celestial hierarchy, in which the Deity . . . was linked to humanity by a graduated scale of inferior spiritual beings"; they will read of "the religions of the East, with their doctrines of expiation for sin and ascetic preparation for communion and visions of immortality"; they will read of "two solemn daily offices in the ritual of Isis," and how "the priest offered the holy image to the adoration of the worshippers," and how "he made the round of the altars reciting the Litany and sprinkling the holy water"; and again, how, in connection with the festival of Osiris, "on the third day, when the god . . . had been restored, the joyful event was celebrated by a banquet of the initiated." Once more, they will read how "the Oriental religions . . . were distinguished . . . by the possession of a numerous and highly-organized priest-

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<sup>1</sup> See an admirable lecture by Professor Bartlett: "How and Why the Gospel won Europe."

hood, and an intensely sacerdotal spirit," which, "in an age of growing religious faith gave them enormous power"; how "the priest became a necessary medium of intercourse with God"; . . . and how this was "one of the many traits in the later paganism which prepared and softened the transition to the reign of the Mediæval Church."

I trust I have shown that this is a book to be read. I do not agree with all its many judgments upon both religion and life, though some of these exhibit a remarkable penetration. But it is a veritable storehouse of knowledge, which must have been gathered at the cost of immense effort, and it contains a mass of information which helps us to understand many an ecclesiastical and doctrinal problem which meets the student of Church history. A careful study of it will throw light upon the origin, not only of forms and ceremonies, but of "ideas" which are evidently foreign to the essence of "the Gospel." The Mediæval Church it has often been asserted, is the real continuation of the world-wide Empire of Rome. "Unter der Hand schob sich so die römische Kirche an die Stelle des römischen Weltreichs; in ihr lebte dieses Reich thatsächlich fort." This assertion of Harnack's is capable of a deeper meaning and a wider application than is generally given to it. To understand the continuance of the Roman Empire in the Western Church, we must not think merely of its external system, with its one central authority or visible head and its multitude of subordinate officials in their various grades. The Mediæval Church was the representative, the offspring, of the Empire in a far deeper sense than this. The true character of a society is only read in the "ideas" which its members hold, and religious ideas are the strongest and most permanent of all ideas.

That the Mediæval Church shows many traces of the organization and of the legal system of the Empire is generally recognised. Professor Dill's book will, as I have just said, help us to solve a deeper and much more important problem; it will help us to trace the genesis of many *ideas* which, while entirely foreign to the teaching of the New Testament, are yet claimed as "Christian" to-day. And it is not outward forms or ceremonies, it is not methods of organization, but *ideas* which ultimately rule.

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