

till help arrives. And so, while we still mourn the hurtful separation between rich and poor, employer and employed, more cultured and less cultured, shall we not through it all not only believe that God is now, as of old, fulfilling Himself and His purposes in many ways, but also press, alike more hopefully and more urgently, each in our several spheres, for the breaking down of the middle wall of partition which is the source of so much hindrance to the spread of Christianity, and which makes so difficult the work of our town parishes in poor districts? And yet, thank God, even when it is most difficult, it is the happiest and most inspiring of works.

S. B. BENSON.



THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE.¹

CHURCH history has only too often been the hunting-ground of the ecclesiastical partisan. To produce a useful brief there is no necessity to say what is untrue. By a judicious selection of facts, and by carefully throwing upon these facts the particular coloured light in which it is wished that they shall be viewed, it is comparatively easy to produce quite different impressions of the same age and circumstances. Such a method of writing Church history has been all too common in the past. But of late years we have had many examples of the growth of a better spirit. Professor Bigg's volume is eminently such an example, viz., of the dedication of historical study to a higher and a nobler purpose.

I would especially commend his preface. There we read how Church history should be written; we learn in what spirit and temper the records of the past should be approached; we must search simply for knowledge in order to express the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Beyond a clear expression of the truth, whether it agrees or not with our predilections and preconceptions, we must not go.

The period covered by the book—the first four or five centuries of the Christian era—is one of peculiar difficulty, though, thanks to the untiring labours of many genuine searchers after truth, we are year by year becoming more able to form a clear conception of what *ordinary* people then thought and how they lived.

This period is in almost every diocese chosen as one of the

¹ "The Church's Task under the Roman Empire." Four Lectures, with Preface, Notes, and an Excursus, by Charles Bigg, D.D. Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1905.

periods of Church history to be studied by ordination candidates. Owing to its intrinsic importance this is almost inevitable; still, I have often wished it might be left to a later period in a clergyman's studies. For many reasons the period is one of exceptional difficulty, and to the young student, I would add, of considerable danger. In it we discern the first signs of tendencies which later become strongly developed, but which are as yet so undeveloped that it is often difficult to discern either their exact source or the exact direction of their development. During this period the Church very rapidly *absorbed* influences from many external sources, and much that is apt to pass for a "different aspect of Christianity" is not Christian at all, but entered the Church generally through the very imperfect Christianization of "converts" (so-called), who flocked into the Church at times in large numbers. In order to estimate these various mixed elements at their right value it is most necessary to have a considerable knowledge of the systems from which they came—that is, of the various heathen religions and cults in existence at the time. Again, as Professor Bigg points out, it is most important to study the *relation* between the Church and the Empire, between the small Christian world and the great heathen world in which it was immersed. To do this we must have much knowledge of both worlds, for only so can we estimate "the condition, intellectual, moral, and material, of the people who filled the ranks of the Church." To insist upon the necessity of studying this relation between the Empire and the Church, and to help us to know more of the condition of the early converts, is the double object with which Professor Bigg has written this book.

To return to the preface. It is pointed out how rapidly of late years our knowledge has increased of the life then lived by *ordinary* men and women. Until recently here, as elsewhere, history has been too much concerned simply with the great. Now "we are beginning to hear the voice of the common people," and it was from these that by far the greater number of the early converts came. As secular history has hitherto dealt mainly with the lives of kings and conquerors and statesmen, so has Church history dealt chiefly "with the lives of a few eminent clergymen"; now we seem more able to improve our acquaintance with the ordinary priest, and even with the ordinary layman. This is important, because the most significant changes "were not imposed upon the Church by the bishops from above, but forced upon the bishops by the pressure of popular opinion from below." Professor Bigg then points out many new sources of knowledge which "throw much light upon ideas which were not

unfamiliar in the lower strata of the early Church, and which were destined as time went on to take their place among recognised beliefs" (p. vi). But most of these new sources of knowledge are as yet comparatively unworked fields. To understand the history of the early Church, as we should desire, we must have not only many more workers, but there must be a greater community and purity of purpose among these. And our author believes that could this be secured we should find in the resultant greater knowledge of Church history a great "peace-maker." The need is for more workers, and also that these should be competent and unselfish.

This last word may well form the transition to the subject of the second part of the preface. What is the fundamental difference between heathenism of all shades and Christianity? Professor Bigg believes it lies "in the doctrine of Vicarious Sacrifice—in the Passion of our Lord." In other religions we may find belief in the Fatherhood of God and in the immortality of the soul, we may find sacrifice, prophecy, and law—Judaism had its Messiah, and Platonism its "inspired men," but "the Cross is the peculiar property of the Gospel." From the Cross flow all the *distinctive* beliefs of the Church; and such beliefs as the Church incorporated from other religions received from the idea of the Cross a specially Christian development. It is in the light of the Cross that the deficiencies of the highest of non-Christian faiths are most clearly revealed. Professor Bigg admits the admirable account of duty given by the great Stoics (and which was to a great extent adopted by Christianity), but the Stoic never rose to the idea that "the voluntary suffering of the good lifts up the bad, and makes the good better than he was." The Platonists "were more humane than the Stoics. . . . They admitted that one man must show the way to another," but they would not admit that "the undeserved voluntary suffering of one could make another better." With both Stoic and Platonist "the ultimate formula is 'my soul and God.'" With the Christian it is "my soul, my brother's soul, and God." The Oriental cults came in some respects nearer to the Christian idea. They were to a certain degree missionary, and the term "brethren" was not unknown to them. Of course, the moral consequences of the faith of the Cross, where this was *truly* held, were very great; but, as Professor Bigg points out, "being the highest of all moral laws, it is naturally the most difficult to assimilate, especially for ignorant and undisciplined people, such as were probably the great mass of the converts to Christianity."

The remainder of the book consists of four lectures, the first being upon "Education under the Empire," the second

and third upon "Religion under the Empire," and the fourth upon the "Moral and Social Condition of the Empire." It is quite obvious that in one or even two lectures such subjects could only be treated in outline, and therefore naturally the reader will find here only (1) the results or conclusions of the author's investigations, and (2) hints or suggestions for further study which he may himself pursue.

Education is a subject of narrower compass than either religion or morality, and, probably for this reason, the chapter which deals with it is more satisfactory (as well as being more original) than the other three. In this chapter the following facts are made clear: first, that while the Empire contained a wonderful diversity of people of every degree of civilization, the scheme of education (at first under private, and then under public management) which was pursued both in Rome and in the provinces exhibited a remarkable unity of both method and purpose; secondly, that while the area of civilization increased, its depth diminished, and at the same time the education generally given became steadily more artificial and more useless.

For all except a very limited number this education was obtained first in the grammar school and then in the rhetoric school, the first of these being always dominated by the second. The entire system made no effort to "aim at scientific results of any kind." The judgment which it endeavoured to form was purely aesthetic. Its object was not to produce students or thinkers, but *urbanitas*—the ability "in all social relations to say the right thing in the right way." When the writings even of the great thinkers and teachers of the past were studied, it was not for the sake of the matter they contained, but to find out how their writers produced, or failed to produce, "the desired effect upon the mind of the reader." Even truth and morality were subordinated to effect; and, as Professor Bigg states, "education . . . was wanting in solidity, and concerned far more with words than with things; but it was admirably adapted to spread a rapid varnish of refinement over the coarsest natural grain." The result of this education was a decline in intelligence. We pass now to the relation of this education to the Church. "Every Christian child who received any education at all passed through these schools . . . and Cyprian, Basil, and Augustine began life as teachers of rhetoric." The effect of this education upon the teachers of the Church and upon the clergy was disastrous. It caused men like Origen to despise the plain sense of Holy Scripture; it caused men "to read history without any conception of orderly development." Thus, the Church "was unable to find an effectual answer

to the Gnostic and pagan attacks upon the morality of the Old Testament." Again, "it was this same inability to grasp the idea of progress which led to the wholesale importation of ideas and practices from the Old Testament into the Christian Church."

I am tempted to quote from almost every page of this instructive lecture; but I have already said enough to show how valuable an insight it gives us into more than one cause for the "development" (so-called) of Western Christianity during the second, third, and fourth centuries. We are enabled to see how many influences, not only foreign, but actually inimical to the spirit of the Gospel, entered the Church— influences which during the succeeding centuries were destined to produce a rich harvest of evil. A study upon the lines of investigation here suggested will help us to understand much in mediæval Christianity for whose existence it is difficult otherwise to account.

The two following lectures—upon "Religion under the Empire"—also deserve careful study. But little is said either of the old Roman religion or of the Greek religion, which during an earlier period than the one with which we are dealing, exercised a strong influence in Italy. It is to the systems of Isis and Mithra that the first of these two chapters is mainly devoted, for they were certainly the most popular of the many cults which were then bidding against each other for men's allegiance. Both these forms of religion exhibit some very curious resemblances to Christianity—resemblances for which it is not easy to give a satisfactory reason. Christianity seems to have been influenced by both, and they in turn seem to have owed at least something to Christianity. In Isis worship "we discern an organized body of worshippers, an organized body of clergy, a Prayer-Book, a Liturgy, a tonsure, a surplice, the use of a sacred language, and an elaborate and impressive ceremonial in many respects very similar to that of the mediæval Church. . . . The service of Isis is a *militia* . . . there is a *sacramentum*, and the initiated are said to be 'regenerate'" (p. 41).

"Mithraism" was a higher and purer form of religion than the worship of Isis. Professor Bigg calls it "the most elevating of all the forms of heathenism known to have existed in the Empire." It was immensely popular, and its influence extended over a very wide area. In its monuments which have survived we discern, if dimly, the existence of a lofty system of religious speculation, and of a not inconsiderable acquaintance with the needs of humanity." We have also glimpses of "a highly organized Mithraic Church . . . there were companies of ascetics and virgins . . . among the rites of initiation was a

baptism in water; and there was a sort of Agape . . . in which the worshippers partook of bread, water, and wine."

We are here in the midst of that most interesting problem of religious "syncretism," a problem which, whatever results it may yield, is likely to become more involved the more we know of the details of the many religious systems which flourished at this time. It is a problem which must be approached dispassionately, and in which the greatest care is needed if we are not continually to confuse cause and effect. As in the physical world action and reaction between different bodies are always taking place, so in this caldron of religious ideas and worships we find each one of these influencing and being influenced by every other. We seek in vain for a *pure* religion—that is, for one of which we can say that its present faith or practice can be wholly traced to its original source.

In the third lecture we find much help towards a clearer apprehension of the nature of "Gnosticism"—a term which, as Professor Bigg states, "embraces a bewildering variety of systems, some wholly pagan, some more or less Christian." He also shows what a great influence the Gnostic sects allowed to women. "They attributed exaggerated honour to the Virgin Mary—the pleroma of all pleromas, as she is called in the *Pistis Sophia*. In this direction there is only too much reason for supposing that the Gnostics were largely instrumental in corrupting the doctrine of the Church." Our author then proceeds to deal with the "philosophies" of the age, and especially Stoicism and Neo-Platonism. His treatment of the first seems inadequate. I do not think he sufficiently recognises what we may term the part which Stoicism played in the great scheme by which God was preparing for the possibility of a universal religion. He rightly lays stress upon the individualism of Stoicism, and upon its high, pure, stern ethical standard (in which it might be compared to Calvinism); but he does not show how this very individualism prepared the way for universalism, nor how Stoicism may even be said to have done for the heathen what the law did for the Jew—the one as surely as the other was "a schoolmaster towards Christ." Of course, it had great defects, and these "unfitted it for playing a part in the new world; and accordingly we find that from the beginning of the second century¹ the great religious writers are almost exclusively Platonist." After a few words upon Dion Chrysostom, Plotinus, and Maximius Tyrius, we pass to an interesting account of that strange phenomenon of "demonology," which probably "was the really operative religion of the vast mass of the population of

¹ I doubt the truth of this assertion.

the Empire." For "gods who like to do harm are always much nearer to the ordinary man than gods who promise only spiritual blessings in return for the distasteful virtues of self-control and moral purity." At the end of this chapter we have some useful remarks upon the growth of "superstition"—*e.g.*, "good and intelligent men . . . sanctioned practices of which they did not approve in order to make it easier for the heathen to come over; and the ignorant, undisciplined converts thus acquired sensibly lowered the tone of the whole community"—and also upon the first beginnings of the "persecutions" of heretics—by those who considered themselves the orthodox Christians.

The fourth and last lecture is upon the "Moral and Social Condition of the Empire." This lecture is also an interesting one, though, like the others, it suffers somewhat from the inevitable necessity of over-condensation. Professor Bigg points out the danger of comprehensive judgments upon the moral state, "not of a nation, but of a world," and a world which contained not only all classes, from the patrician to the slave, but Greek and Italian, African and Briton. What was true of one class or one race might be far from true of another. He then shows that in the rapid increase of wealth, and in the breaking down of frugal habits and the growth of personal indulgence, the first two centuries offer a curious parallel to much in our own time. Again, we still know little of the "home life" of the period, and it is in this sphere that character is best revealed. Then the old writers "generalize"; they describe for us types rather than individuals. Of course, as our knowledge of inscriptions and of the contents of the papyri increases, we shall know more. What we do know teaches us to be chary in making sweeping statements. We find the loftiest standards and very high realizations of married life. We find just the reverse; we find parents devoted to their children, and at the same time proofs of how widespread was the practice of infanticide. Upon slavery Professor Bigg states that he has little to say that is fresh. He then passes on to consider the amusements of the age. Neither drunkenness, or gluttony, or gambling seems to have been so prevalent as with us. Gambling was condemned alike by law and by public opinion, and there were "neither Monte Carlos nor lotteries." Yet "the amusements of the ancient world form one of the darkest blots upon its moral character . . . their cost was gigantic, and formed a terrible burden on the coffers of the State and of individuals," and we must remember that "the colossal and hideous shows of the amphitheatre were provided gratis." The result of this immense expenditure upon free amusements, free food, and

upon doles of money for the vast multitude of the unemployed—"this Socialism run mad"—meant slowly but surely approaching financial ruin.

Following this picture, we have, in the last few pages of this lecture, an excellent survey of "the magnitude of the task which lay before the Church," and of how far she was or was not successful in accomplishing it. "It was in the field of private morality that she accomplished most . . . if we turn our eyes to the field of public virtue it must be acknowledged that the Church produced very little result indeed." The Church knew the poor, and she knew the social evils of the time better than anyone else, but "she did not grasp the meaning of her experience, partly from defective education, partly because asceticism, which regarded the service of the world as the service of the devil, warped her view."

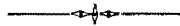
In all this there does seem to be a very solemn warning for ourselves at the present time. Too many of the clergy to-day are content to deal with individuals, and with attempting to palliate individual cases of distress. Possibly, from "defective education" in those laws and principles which govern the welfare of society, they are unable to take that broad and comprehensive view of conditions and tendencies without which they cannot exercise a far-reaching and salutary influence for good.

As we study the lives of first the Empire and secondly the Church side by side during, say, the fourth and fifth centuries, "two reflections seem forced upon us." "One is that orthodoxy and even private virtue will not save a State that is rotten at the core." The other is that, unfortunately, the Church was content to continue to do what she had done a hundred or two hundred years before, "palliating by charity the evils inflicted by injustice. She showed no broad and statesman-like grasp of the social conditions and the social needs of the time, and of the causes which had gendered and were still responsible for these. Hence, we cannot be surprised that she made no real attempt to remove them." Professor Bigg thus concludes this his last lecture: "Only in quite modern times have we begun to understand that there is a still higher conception of Christian duty, that the private virtues cannot flourish without the public, that religion and policy ought to go hand in hand, and that for the old ideal of Church and State we ought to substitute that new ideal of the Church-State which hovered before the minds of Piers Plowman and John Wycliffe, but has not yet been realized."

It is impossible not to compare this book with Professor Dill's recent volume, which covers so much of the same ground. But the two writers have quite different objects.

Professor Dill is the historian telling us of the ordinary life of the Empire during a certain period. Professor Bigg's task is a much more difficult one—to estimate the Church's difficulties in the midst of the Empire, and to try to account for her successes and her failures. Both books deserve and will repay study, and our appreciation of the second, and of its usefulness to us, will be immensely increased if we approach it in the light of the knowledge which we have gained from the first. The information we shall gain from the study of these books combined will not be merely interesting, it should be most helpful at the present time. We notice, and we deplore, not merely the existence, but the growth (possibly rather the recrudescence) of what are termed mediæval tendencies in the Church at the present time. The best way to combat such of these tendencies as are wholly foreign to the spirit of Christianity is to make clear their real origin. We must be able to show whence they came, and how they first entered the Church. That entrance was far earlier than is generally supposed. We accuse men of going back to the errors of the eleventh or the sixteenth century. But the phenomena of these centuries arose from causes which were active eight or nine hundred years earlier. A careful study of Dr. Bigg's lectures and of Professor Dill's history will make this abundantly clear.

W. EDWARD CHADWICK.



THE SPIRITUAL AND THE SOCIAL WORK OF THE CLERGY.

I NEED not stop to inquire at the outset what the precise distinction between spiritual work and social work may be, for we all have a pretty clear idea in our own minds as to the kinds of efforts denoted by these two titles, and, further, the distinction will become clear enough for the purposes of discussion as this paper proceeds. I propose, rather, to seek at once the principles underlying these efforts, and then to consider them in relation to the ideal of the clerical life.

And in seeking the principles we turn instinctively to the example of Christ, Who knew what was in man, Who knew, too, the mind of God, Whose principles and practice are, therefore, a safer guide than either our preconceived ideas or even our daily practice, which is too often (I speak from my own experience) the resultant of the outside forces which bear upon us rather than the mature expression of well-thought-out ideas.