

BREVIA.

Arnold's "Neronian Persecution."¹—In this careful monograph Dr. Arnold has made an important contribution to the history of the later apostolic age, founded upon a most thorough and satisfying critical investigation of the vexed passage Tac. *Ann.* xv. 44. Such an investigation was certainly called for. Since Gibbon (chap. xv.) suggested that Tacitus might have been misled by the name "Galilæans" to see, in proceedings against a supposed fanatical Jewish sect of that name, a persecution directed against Christians, the credit of the Tacitean account has been called in question from many quarters. Merivale regards the Jews as the primary objects of the *crimen incendii*, the Christians having been (*indicio eorum*) delated by them in the second instance. Hermann Schiller has more recently (1872) elaborated the hypothesis of Gibbon, while Hochart (*Études*, 1885) and others suppose the passage to have been interpolated by Christian hands. Arnold aims at an exhaustive treatment of the problem. The following are its main points: (1) the correct text of *Ann.* xv. 44; (2) the exegesis; (3) historical criticism of its statements; (4) the nature and area of the persecution, in reality and in later tradition; (5) general results.

The textual discussion (pp. 4–11), which is throughout full of interest, is remarkable not least for its thorough sifting of the crux "*aut crucibus affixi aut flammandi atque ubi defecisset dies*" etc. Without attempting to condense so concise a discussion, its general result may be stated. Arnold combines the almost certain conjecture of Meursius *utque* for *atque* (which moreover must have been read by Sulpicius Severus) with the happy substitution of *sunt* for the second *aut*, so that the passage runs "*aut crucibus affixi sunt flammandi atque ubi defecisset*" etc. The resulting construction, the gerundive co-ordinated with an *ut* or *ne* clause, is not infrequent in the *Annals* (ii. 36, iv. 9, and Dräger pp. 30, 31), and this restoration of the passage yields for the first time a satisfactory sense. I would add that it satisfies at once the just objection of Nipperdey (who brackets the words *aut crucibus . . . flammandi*), that these tortures do not come under the head

¹ Arnold, Lic. Dr. F. C.: *Die Neronische Christenverfolgung*. (Leipzig: Richter, 1888, pp. viii. 120.)

of *ludibria*, and the equally acute remark of Renan (*Antechrist*, p. 165²): “Peut-être le second *aut* est-il de trop. *Flammandi*, au sens de *ut flammarentur*, est bon.” Arnold gives in illustration of his textual criticism a welcome photozincograph of the whole passage as it stands in the Cod. Mediceus II., our primary authority for this portion of the *Annals*. In the exegetical discussion which follows (pp. 11–30) I would single out for special commendation the explanation of *per flagitia invisos*, which he shows to be applicable to the charges of *Θύεσσηα δειπνα* and *Οιδιπόδοιοι μίξεις*, rather than to offences against public order, and that of the very important *qui fatebantur*, which, by a careful and convincing induction from general and in particular from Tacitean use, he proves, in opposition to a host of scholars (Nipperdey, Orelli, Renan, Aubé, Weizsäcker, Holtzmann, etc.), to mean neither profession of religious belief (*profiteri*) nor voluntary confession (*confiteri*), but confession of the crime (*incendium*) with which they have been charged (*subdidit reos*, the *igitur* pointing back to the clause preceding the digression on the origin of the name *Christiani*). After a short analysis, which brings out the perspicuity and masterly arrangement of the passage, Arnold passes to the historical objections which have been alleged against its statements. He shows that both Clement of Rome and Suetonius knew of a persecution of the Christians under Nero, although the latter writer, perhaps in conformity with the general plan of his life of Nero, says nothing of their having been accused of *incendium*. With reference to the objection that Tacitus may be putting down to Christians what had really befallen Jews, he points out, firstly, that Tacitus can be proved (pp. 46–50) to have been aware of the distinction between the two; secondly, that the objections which have been raised against so early a currency of the name Christian (p. 53) in Rome are inconclusive; thirdly, that the admitted tendency to confuse the two at this early date (when Christianity spread, as Tertullian says, “*sub umbraculo licitæ religionis*”) would account for Christians being spoken of as Jews, but not for Jews being spoken of as Christians. The populace then, as early as Nero's time, both knew and hated the Christians. But why? Arnold brings evidence to show that the popular belief in their *flagitia* may well have arisen by this date, and argues that the heathen character of the *flagitia* is not inconsistent with the statement of Justin that these charges originated in Jewish quarters.

He alleges in support of the latter statement some (rather slight) rabbinical evidence earlier than Justin. He proceeds to show the likelihood (p. 63 *seq.*) that the first confessions and *indicia* were obtained by torture, quite irrespectively of the real guilt of the accused; and that the *flagitia*, the *crimen incendii*, and that of *odium humani generis* hang well together (pp. 64-75), especially in view of the eschatological beliefs of Christians, of their claim to miraculous gifts, and of the fact that magic (*superstitio nova ac malefica*, Suet.) and arson both came under the *Lex Cornelia* (Sullæ) *de Sicariis*. The general result is to draw a broad distinction between the Neronian and the later persecutions: the latter being dictated by grounds of public policy or principle, while the former was merely an attempt of the emperor to avert popular suspicion by fastening it upon an unpopular sect. The next step is to examine the growth of tradition on the subject, with the result of reducing our estimate of the importance of this persecution as marking an epoch in the relations of Christianity to the State. Arnold successfully shows that the supposed traces of it in the Sibylline books have other references, and that the true tradition was gradually discoloured by the apologists, whose natural tendency was to ascribe persecution only to the bad emperors. Hence to later writers Nero becomes the *πρῶτος θεομάχος* (Eus. *H. E.* ii. 25), the deliberate hater of the Christian religion, and the persecution a general one, instead of what it really was, merely local to Rome. I have necessarily omitted many points of interest, but hope that enough has been said to direct many readers to so sober and scholarly a piece of criticism. I will mention in conclusion two burning questions which are affected by Arnold's investigation.

1. The belief in Nero's future return was neither of Christian origin nor a result of the persecution, as maintained by F. C. Baur and others. That an unpopular sect, almost exclusively of foreign origin and Greek in language, could have impressed this fixed idea on the native Roman populace, is in itself unlikely, while the origin of the idea is naturally enough to be found in the *varius rumor* attending Nero's death, and in the popularity he undoubtedly enjoyed among the rabble (*e.g.* Tac. *Hist.* i. 78). Such is Arnold's contention (p. 70-78). Accordingly, and in view of the true nature and extent of the persecution, he wholly rejects the view that the Apocalypse is to be explained by reference to the Neronian persecution. This result will certainly require

careful consideration before it can be taken as established. Granted that the belief in Nero's return was of heathen origin, it may yet have been shared by Christians. We know moreover, from Tac. *Hist.* ii. 8, 9, that it caused disturbances in the Ægean region. Again, even if we reject the tradition of St. John's visit to Rome, the constant intercourse with Rome would amply explain the deep impression made upon Christians in Asia Minor by this persecution. And there is justice in the remark of Lüdemann (in a generally favourable notice in the new issue of Lipsius' *Theolog. Jahresbericht*), that Arnold fails to give any positive account of the Apocalypse in view of his results.

2. The fact of the popular hatred of the Christians in Nero's reign shows that at Rome even thus early they were readily distinguishable from Jews; so much so, that they were marked out for a general persecution which, so far as all our evidence goes, left the latter quite untouched. This result, tallying as it does with Acts xxviii. and with Romans i. 5, 13, xi. 13, xv. 16, adds one more to the numerous difficulties which encumber the view, characteristic especially of the Tübingen school, and most ably defended in recent years by Mangold (*Der Römerbrief u.s.w.* 1884), that the Roman Church consisted almost entirely of Jewish Christians. The counter-theory has its difficulties (especially the language of Romans vii. 3, 4), but they lose in weight when we bear in mind the importance of the class of proselytes of the gate as a factor in the problem. The general tendency of recent criticism is certainly in favour of the mainly Gentile composition of the Roman Church, and in spite of the protest of Lüdemann (*ubi supra*), I cannot but think that Dr. Arnold has materially contributed to its support, at any rate so far as concerns the period after that sojourn of St. Paul which marks so important an epoch in the history of Christianity in the Eternal City. We shall look forward with interest to the author's projected monograph (p. vi.) on the traditions connecting St. Peter as well as St. Paul with the early history of the Roman Church.

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St. Philip's Calculation (St. John vi. 5-7).—There is an interesting hint of character in this incident, which, so far as I know, has not been noticed by the commentators. Our Lord, we are told, asked Philip the question to prove him. It was a trial