

THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF CHRIST.

THE writings of Dionysius Areopagita became widely known in the first decades of the sixth century. Their diffusion through the Syrian Church induced Sergius of Ras'ain, the famous physician and writer on medicine, to translate them into Syriac. Sergius died in 536 A.D. ; and it is probable that his theological writings were the work of his earlier years. About 530 John of Scythopolis commented in Greek on the works of the Areopagite. And in 533 they were cited, at a theological assembly held in Constantinople, as the authentic writings of Dionysius, the convert and disciple of St. Paul.

In the Western Church the reception of these writings was, as we should expect, more tardy. But there is evidence that Gregory the Great had studied them ; and in his *Homilies on the Gospels* he speaks of them with respect, although he hesitates to affirm their authenticity. In the seventh century Popes Martin I. and Agatho accepted the Dionysian writings. They were sent by Paul I. to Pepin of France, in 758 ; but their importance was not then recognized. A few years later other copies were sent by Adrian I. to Abbat Fuldrad. In 827 still another set of the works of Dionysius was received in Paris—the gift of the Emperor Michael II. to Louis the Meek. The writings were committed to the care of the Abbot of St. Denys, Paris. Hilduin (d. 840), whose pleasure it was to identify Dionysius with the Apostle and Patron-saint of France, endeavoured, but without success, to translate the precious manuscripts into Latin. About 860 John the Scot (Erigena), who had brought to the Palace-school of France an ample store of learning, won in an Irish monastery, accomplished

the translation into Latin of all the works of Dionysius. He added original expositions on *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and *The Mystical Theology*. The translation is bare and difficult : it has been characterized as a rendering of words rather than of thoughts ; but the annotations are sometimes singularly acute.

Erigena made no attempt to reduce to orthodoxy the writings of Dionysius : he endeavoured to interpret them simply, and according to their true meaning. His familiarity with the Syncretic philosophy of Alexandria made it possible for him to do this with understanding ; but he did not maintain the acrobatic poise of the Areopagite between pagan and Christian doctrine. In his teaching he leans heavily towards pantheism. Harnack reminds us that all of Erigena is to be found in the writings of Stephen bar Sudaili. But we can scarcely believe that the Irish scholar was himself a student of the Syrian mystic. Rather, the Platonist scheme of thought was transmitted to him through Clement of Alexandria, Victorinus, Augustine, and Maximus Confessor.

Erigena's doctrine of Christ is historically important. It moulded the teaching of the mystical sects of the Middle Ages ; through Eckart it stamped its impress on the Christology of the Church mystics ; finally, it passed into the transcendental philosophy of Germany. To understand it clearly one must go back for a moment to Neo-platonism.

Plotinus teaches that certain principles inhere in the soul—Movement, Energy, Mind, Unity. From the consideration of these we rise to the recognition of the All. *Movement* discloses to us the World of Phenomena, that which we call the material universe, although, strictly speaking, it is mere privation of being. *Energy* enables us to apprehend the Soul of the World, the originating cause of the individual soul, that which vitalizes all things, which

orders and rules. *Mind* directs us to that Universal Intellect which is cognizant of itself and, in itself, of the eternal ideas which become patent in time, and clothe themselves in creature existence. *Unity* leads to the acknowledgment of the primal, super-essential One, without distinction or qualities, yet existing in all, and embracing all.

The first of these principles fills space and time; the remaining three form the Neo-platonic trinity.

Asserting, with Parmenides, the identity of knowing and being, Plotinus beholds in himself the One and the All. The soul images itself in the eternal Mind, which is, in turn, the image of Being. Being, possessing no determination, becomes actual only in its image—"Mind confers upon Being existence and understanding." From the interrelation of Being and Mind proceeds that essential energy which we call the World-soul.

With a good deal of strain and with serious injury to the faith, the Christian schematists adjusted to the theogony of the Neo-platonists the Scripture doctrine of God. They conceived of Deity as undifferentenced unity, receiving distinction, and so becoming actual, in the generation of the Son. The Son they identified with the Universal Intelligence of the Greeks, the Holy Spirit with the World-soul.

By casting the Christian doctrine of God into the mould which the later Greek philosophy had prepared, the Christian Platonists distorted the Scripture view of each of the Three Persons. But it is their representation of the Son which alone concerns us now.

In memorable words Augustine marks the vital distinction between Neo-platonism and Christianity: "Thou procurest for me, by means of one who was much puffed up with his own conceit, certain books of the Neo-platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. And therein I read, not indeed in the very words, but to the very same purpose,

enforced by many and diverse reasons, that 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God : the same was in the beginning with God : all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made : that which was made by Him is life, and the life was the light of men ; and the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.' And that the soul of man, though it 'bears witness to the light,' yet itself is not that light ; but the Word of God, being God, 'is that true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' And that 'He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.' . . . But that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,' I read not there. . . . In that saying, 'The Word was made flesh,' Catholic truth is distinguished from the falsehood of Plotinus."

The incarnation of the Word is by no means the only distinguishing truth which separates the Platonist conception of the Universal Mind from the Scripture doctrine of the Son. But it may be said that every other divergence strikes its roots there. This will appear as we proceed.

The Church fathers believed that they had found in the incarnation of the Word the demonstration of the true being of God. This was the "one thing more" which, as it seemed to them, revelation had added to human thought. For the coming of Christ to earth not only signalized, it certified the union of matter with spirit, of the imperfect with the complete, of the finite with the absolute, of nature with God. And in this "Emmanuel-knot of union" reconciliation was made and harmony established between things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth.

But with Erigena Christ is a principle rather than a Person : the incarnation of the Word is the eternal becoming of the finite.

(a) The Alexandrines had taught that God, who is utter simplicity, attains to actual being in the generation of the Son. Following in the path of their speculation, Erigena affirms that the Deity is mere characterless unity which, passing forth from itself in ceaseless progressions and returning again in rhythmic cycles to its rest, realizes itself in the Eternal Mind, thence streaming forth in creative fulness. This Eternal Mind in which the Godhead becomes God is Christ. In Christ, the Father eternally effects the harmony of the divine attributes, or "names"—goodness, being, wisdom, righteousness, power, and the rest. Within the Godhead these exist "primordialiter et causaliter": they are distributed throughout creation by the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, Eckart teaches that the Living God is God in Christ. The Son is endlessly begotten and endlessly taken again into the One Essence. All that the Father utters, all that He effects, He utters and effects in the Son, in whom, as in a clear mirror, He beholds Himself and all things: "In one eternal moment God acts all things, and His action is the Son."

Böhme also maintains that "the abyss of the groundlessness" holds itself in absolute quiescence, while God, by an eternal act conceiving Himself, creates His own image. "As He manifests Himself to Himself, the Son is formed." In the mirror of the Eternal Wisdom the Godhead beholds itself in trinal oneness, and affirms itself as the Everlasting Yea.

(b) Erigena, in the spirit of pure mysticism, confines existence within the Wheel of Life, in which non-being returns, through becoming, to non-being. In this pauseless flow no explanation of the movement of the Absolute from simplicity to diversity appears. The only solution which lies to one's hand is that one should assume the elevation of the creature into the being of God. Erigena therefore

posits an eternal nature—"that which creates, and is itself created." Thus the trinal distinction within the Godhead is thrown back beyond cognition, and the creature becomes the affirmation of God.

The author of the *Deutsch Theologie* painfully elaborates this thought, and finds to his exceeding perplexity that it breaks as a spent wave against the Christian doctrine of God :—"Here we must turn and stop, or we might follow this matter and grope along until we knew not where we were, nor how we might find our way back again."

This Teutonic knight, recapitulating for the edification of his devout readers the conclusions of German mysticism, declares that to God, as Godhead, belong neither will, nor knowledge, nor manifestation, nor aught that we can name, or utter, or imagine. But to God, as God, it belongeth to express Himself to Himself in love and knowledge, and all this without any creature. But without the creature knowledge and love exist in God only as Being—not in act nor in reality. "Will, and love, and justice, and truth, and, in short, all virtues. . . . are, in God, one Substance, and none of them can be put in exercise and wrought out into deeds without the creature; for in God, without the creature, they are only as a substance or well-spring, not as a work." And as God is "pure act," God is not God apart from the creature.

With these "dark sayings" of the *Deutsch Theologie* Böhme is in substantial agreement :—"Here we have not yet cause to say that God is three Persons, but He is threefold in His eternal evolution. He gives birth to Himself in Trinity; and in this eternal enfoldment He is nevertheless an only Being, neither Father nor Son nor Spirit, but only the eternal life of God. The Trinity will become comprehensible in His eternal revelation only when He reveals Himself by means of eternal nature—that is to say, in the light by means of the fire."

To one moving forward along these lines it became impossible to hold together in one scheme the Christian and the mystical doctrines of God. The author of the *Deusch Theologie* plainly affirms the mystical doctrine:—"Thus the Self and the Me are wholly sundered from God"; then he hastens to fling the ample folds of Church orthodoxy over this naked statement—"and belong to Him only in so far as they are necessary for Him to be a Person." Schelling reduces the discord by rejecting the Christian doctrine of the Son. He draws the mystical doctrine of Christ into the framework of the transcendental philosophy. He affirms that the true Christ is not Jesus of Nazareth, whose life can be fully explained by the circumstances which environ it. Historical Christianity obscures the Christ-idea; for, seeing that God transcends all temporal relations, it is impossible that He should be born in time. The Eternal Son is finite existence as it stands in the mind of God. The incarnation of the Son is the eternal becoming of creature existence, under the forms of space and time. The incarnation of God is an unbeginning, unending movement of Deity.

(c) Whereas to Erigena nature is the self-unfolding of God, man, who is the mid-point of the universe, combining in himself the most extreme antagonisms, is the image of the Word. In man God realizes Himself as *essentia*, *virtus*, *operatio*; so that the Divine Trinity is (to our knowledge) only the far-flung shadow of the tripartite nature of man. It is obvious, therefore, that to Erigena the Son of God is at once the idea, the archetype, and the nature of manhood. The incarnation is the assumption by the Word of human nature in its entirety. And Christ is the fulness of humanity.

When one has come so far one begins to apprehend that the distinction between nature and grace has been lost.

Mysticism is not ethically true ; it is almost invariably characterized by a tempered sense of the sinfulness of sin ; and very many mystics have fallen into the deep pit which here lies across their path. Erigena did not quite save himself. The Christ of history, in his view, is not so much a Redeemer as a Guide and Precursor of His fellows. In Jesus of Nazareth, first, the essential Christ wrought into oneness that disintegration which resulted from the Fall. And it is by His teaching and example that there comes that awakening of Divine knowledge in man which is salvation. To the true mystic "introversion" is the new birth.

Amaury of Bènnès, near Chartres, was a disciple of Erigena and an important member in the mystical succession which led on to Eckart. He appears to have taught that man is consubstantial with Christ. The Brethren of the Free Spirit held that one who lived like Christ was not inferior to Christ. Some of them, following the process of Christ beyond the grave, dwelling with Him in the heavens, seated with Him on His throne of dominion, and "glorified together with Him," alleged that they had climbed to a serener point of perfection than was attained by the Lord in the days of His humiliation. They were holier than Jesus ; they were one with God. This crude arrogance repeated itself in many of the mystical sects which held themselves apart from Romanist, Lutheran, and Reformed alike. The Seekers maintained that "The mystery of salvation is no other than Emmanuel, or God with us, or God in flesh—not only in that man Christ, but in the whole Christ ; Christ being no more than an anointed one, and that one is our nature, or weakness, anointed with the Spirit." The Ranters declared that "The coming, dying, resurrection, ascension, and intercession of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ are merely figurative" ; that "The Christ of God is the universal Christ" ; and that "The

Christ whom we adore is the indwelling Christ." The Children of the Light affirmed that to know the hypostasis of the Son is to know the Son in oneself: "The saints," said Erbury, "that's the Son."

(d) The doctrine of the recapitulation of all things in Christ which had been impressed on Erigena by the Antiochenes, possibly also by Methodius, and certainly by Maximus Confessor, brought into clearness our Lord's official position as Representative of the race, and Head of the new humanity. The parallel of the two Adams supplied many of the terms in which this conception was expressed. "Christ is the Second Adam," says Erigena, "because in Him is restored to simplicity that which in the First Adam was scattered and broken."

With much grace of speech Julian of Norwich relates a vision which "our courteous Lord" showed to her, in order that she might understand how, "by the endless assent of the full accord of all the Trinity, the Mid-Person willed to be Ground and Head of this fair Kind; out of Whom we be all come, in Whom we be all enclosed, into Whom we shall all wend."

She saw God seated upon His throne; and before Him a servant—in which sight there dwelt a mystery. *Outwardly* the servant was "clad simply as a labourer which was got ready for his toil; and he stood full near the Lord. . . . His clothing was of a white kirtle, single, old, and all defaced, dyed with sweat of his body, strait-fitting to him, and short, as it were an handful beneath the knee; threadbare, seeming as if it should soon be worn out, ready to be ragged and rent. . . . And *inwardly*, in him was showed a ground of love; which love that he had to the Lord was even like to the love that the Lord had to him." That servant stood mystically for Adam, and All-man, and the Son of Man, and the Mid-Person of the Trinity, which is "rightful Adam";

“for Jesus is all that shall be saved, and all that shall be saved is Jesus.”

In Church mysticism the doctrine of the representation and headship of Christ shades off into the Pauline teaching of Christ living in the hearts of gracious men. The author of the *Deutsch Theologie* asserts that, “Where the truth always reigneth, so that true, perfect God and true, perfect man are at one, and man so giveth place to God, that God Himself is there, and yet the man too, and this same unity worketh continually, and doeth and leaveth undone, without any I, and Me, and Mine, and the like; behold, there is Christ, and nowhere else.” Hilton of Thurgarton enjoins the contemplative to realize his true being in Christ: “It behoveth thee to delve deep in thy heart, for therein Jesus is hid; and cast out perfectly all loves and likings, sorrows and fears of all earthly things, and so shalt thou find Wisdom, that is, Jesus.” And Francis de Sales says, “There is no longer any ‘Me,’ or ‘My.’ My ‘Me’ is Jesus; my ‘Mine’ is to be His.”

In Puritan England there was a fresh reversion to Platonism. At first it was turbid and obscure, but after a time it ran clear. At length the “Cambridge Platonists” were able to assimilate the doctrine of Plotinus: they reduced it to such harmony with Anglican theology, that, though “the cross shone but dimly” in their writings, there was nothing peculiar in their doctrine of the Person of Christ.

1. One of the earliest of the seventeenth century Platonists in England was John Everard. His conception of the essential Christ is bare in the extreme. With the help of the Aristotelian categories he succeeded in reducing Platonism to absurdity. “Can you but take all accidents from everything, and that which remains is Christ. . . . As if you take from me all height and depth, all greatness

and littleness, all weight and measure, all heat and cold, and all kinds of matter and form—for these are all accidents—and then that which is left is He that bears up all, even Jesus Christ, blessed for ever. For there was something of me before I was either high or low, great or little, heavy or light, old or young, and that was Christ, the beginning of all things.”

2. Peter Sterry, Court Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, constructed with much painful labour a scheme of thought according to which Neo-platonism becomes the interpretation of Christianity. He repeats all the familiar phrases with a poetical intonation. His doctrine of Christ, in briefest outline, is as follows.

(a) Christ is the Supreme Reason who comprehends Himself and all things in that One who transcends both multiplicity and unity, even God.

(b) In the eye of God He is the eternal Image of all images : to us He is at once the image in which each thing is seen and the light by which that image appears. His manifestation is the coming of God as God, the discovery of His very being, and of all truths in Him.

(c) He is the Seed of the world, giving life to all things, riding forth in a chariot of light upon the face of all forms of things, bringing forth in Himself the creation, brooding over it until it break the shell of this dark flesh, and converting it to His own light and image. Behind the visible forms of things He hides Himself ; all creatures are the print of His feet ; and their whole conduct the motion of His feet.

(d) He is the redemption of the creature. Every fleshly thing is a veil between the creature and Deity. Christ comes consuming the flesh, calling the creature into spirit. By His coming in creaturehood and fleshly nature He redeems the flesh and the creature. “ Our Lord Jesus was

in nature—so He became capable of being. He sinks Himself out of nature into darkness, which is a shadow flying round about this creation—so He died. Through this darkness He shoots Himself forth into the light of God which encompasseth all—so He is risen from the dead. By this death all things die ; His death being the universal one, including and bringing forth all particular deaths. For the world is crucified by the cross of Christ. By His resurrection all things are raised into the life of God, as the soul raiseth all parts of the body, making to itself so many several resurrections in them.”

3. A still more complex system was wrought out in the restless mind of Sir Harry Vane, the politic lord of Raby.

Vane wrote a number of theological treatises, all highly mystical, and all hard of interpretation. The “peculiar darkness” of his religious writings has been the theme of copious sarcasm. Baxter says, “His obscurity, some thought, “was designed ; some thought he did not understand himself. He was able to speak plain when he pleased.” Sir Benjamin Rudyerd describes Vane’s theological works as “too high for this world, and too low for the other.” Bishop Burnet regarded their cryptic character with amazement, and confesses, “Though I have sometimes taken pains to see if I could find out his meaning in his works, yet I could never reach it.” A later writer speaks of the “unaccountable medley of enthusiasm and incomprehensible nonsense” to be found in Vane’s treatises. And so subtle a thinker as David Hume affirms that these writings are “absolutely unintelligible,” presenting no traces “of eloquence, or even of common sense.”

It does not need so imposing an array of authorities to convince us that Vane’s mystical writings are exceedingly hard to understand. But it would be an unwarrantable reflection on one of the wisest men of his age to assert that

they are undecipherable. The difficulty of interpretation does not seem to lie in the remoteness of his thought—his mystical philosophy is quite congruent with the popular mysticism of his age. There is, it is true, a certain mingling of elements—Platonism and Behmenism, the Contemplative Theology and the doctrines of the Seekers are flung into a witch's caldron and left to seethe and interfuse. But that is quite after the fashion of the time, and presents no insurmountable difficulty. The real perplexity—one which almost confounds the careful reader of Vane's religious works—is that he constructs his speculative scheme within the strict lines of Puritan orthodoxy. The philosopher writes as a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines; he wears a Geneva gown; he marks each stage of his progress by the citation of an appropriate text of Scripture; he constructs his mystical doctrines in terms of the federal theology—a very bed of Procrustes to a Platonist.

The depth of religious feeling which marked the age of Puritanism threw an unmistakable emphasis on the distinction between nature and grace to which allusion has already been made. The doctrine of the two Adams had helped to impress that distinction; the doctrine of the two Covenants made it still more evident.

(a) With all Neo-platonists, Vane teaches that God is simple, incomprehensible essence, unable to communicate Himself directly, either in creation or by revelation. Being in Himself incommunicable, He condescended to clothe Himself with a two-fold creature-form, natural and spiritual. Christ is that Person in whom God first forms Himself. He is the original and primitive pattern of all perfections, the root of all being.

(b) Corresponding to the two-fold creature-form of Christ there are two creations, and Christ is Head of both. In the one He is related to the creatures according to the Covenant

of Nature—this we call His first appearance ; in the other, according to the Covenant of Grace—this is His second appearance, or coming. In the first creation God gives us ourselves ; in the second, Himself.

(c) The first appearance of Christ is His coming forth in the natural creation. All things were created by Him, and were pronounced by Him to be very good ; yet they had in them the seed of decay. In His second appearance He comes to change the natural creation into spirit and incorruptibility, to breathe into it the very breath of God. As the Head of both creations He first effected this change in Himself. Jesus of Nazareth was the most perfect righteous man that ever was. As a branch, He had a heavenly place in His Head and Root, whereby He was found in union with the Word of life. By this emptying of Himself, He was led out of the first, or natural creation, and taken into a new spring of light and divine birth, wherein He became the ingrafted Word, being rooted in God in such wise that the Father became all His life, activity and power. This renunciation of self, whereby He became one with the Father, was accomplished through His sufferings and death. The power of that death shall be seen in us when we follow Him in self-crucifixion.

(d) But the first Covenant appeared so excellent that men elected to remain in it, contrary to the will of God. By this choice sin entered into our nature, and man fell. From this disablement he shall be redeemed by Christ.

(e) Man, redeemed and renewed by Christ, must render up the ruling power of his own spirit to be bruised, crucified, and triumphed over by the fire-baptism of the Spirit of Christ upon it. This perfect work of Christ is now in progress, although it is not yet fully disclosed. It is hidden in individuals who have gone forth from Babylon, and are the spiritual seed, the true Israel of God, separated from all

church-order and now living in the wilderness, awaiting the promised glory.

DAVID M. M'INTYRE.

*THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF JESUS CHRIST IN
RELATION TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.*

It is proposed in this paper to point out : First, with what qualifications Christians, generally speaking, regard Jesus Christ as unchangeable ; and, Secondly, that His Person, even as already imperfectly comprehended, constitutes a test of doctrine, as to whether it be in principle true or false, and that fuller comprehension of His Person embodies the line along which the true development of Christian doctrine must proceed in the future.

It may help to give our thoughts on this subject a right direction if we begin by an attempt to get a clear grasp of the exegesis of the *locus classicus* about the unchangeableness of Jesus Christ : Hebrews xiii. 8, 9. " Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, yea, and for ever."

The closing chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, from which those words are quoted, has no direct connexion with the treatise, carefully planned and elaborately worked out, which occupies the twelve preceding chapters. Bishop Westcott, in his commentary, entitles it A Personal Epilogue, and points out that it deals with three distinct topics : the social duties of the Hebrews, their religious duties, and the personal instructions of the writer.

The words we have chosen as our starting point come from the opening of the second section, that on religious duties ; and it is not very easy to trace the connexion of thought in this paragraph. The slight obscurity which we perceive is, no doubt, due to the state of things—moral and