

and yet are not quoted by a single Apostolic Father? Or how is it that 1 Thessalonians, the earliest Pauline Epistle, has left no trace on Barnabas, the Didaché, 1 Clement, Polycarp, 2 Clement? But I need not further press this argument. Dr. Plummer's question is answered satisfactorily by the fact that, when the New Testament books were published, they speedily ousted from circulation the very books on which the Jews who embraced Christianity had been brought up, and by which they had been prepared for the higher revelation.

One more note and I have done. Dr. Plummer cannot understand how it is that the Testaments have so largely influenced St. Matthew and St. Luke and have hardly if at all influenced St. Mark. Here again the answer is obvious. The influence of the Testaments as an essentially ethical work is naturally seen in the First and Third Gospels, which record the ethical teaching of our Lord. There is little room for the exercise of such influence in the Second Gospel, which confines itself to narrative.¹

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STUDIES IN CONVERSION.

I. JUSTIN MARTYR.

IN the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew, besides the Parable of the Sower, there are three pairs of parables, in which the commencement, the development and the consummation of the kingdom of heaven are respectively set forth—its commencement in the Parables of the Treasure Hid in a Field and the Pearl of Great Price, its development in the Parables of the Mustard-seed and the Leaven, and its consummation in those of the Wheat and the Tares and the Drag-net.

¹ The eschatological element naturally had some influence on the New Testament, but this was wholly secondary.

The two parables dealing with the commencement of the kingdom are tolerably like each other. Both represent Christianity as the supreme good—as a prize so valuable and dazzling that he who finds it will abandon every other pursuit in order to attain it ; and he will be justified in so doing. Yet there is a difference : the finder of the treasure hidden in the field comes upon the prize by chance, when engaged in a pursuit of a totally different nature ; while, on the contrary, the finder of the pearl of great price is in search of pearls, the finding of which is his occupation.

This was a prophecy that, in the history of Christian experience, there would be two kinds of conversion : some people would be suddenly awakened to the consciousness of there being in the Gospel an object worthy of the most ardent and exclusive pursuit, whilst their attention was fixed upon an object entirely different or wandering from one worldly object to another ; whereas others, being formed of finer clay and cast in a less worldly mould, would be bent not on the pleasures of sense, but on the satisfactions of the soul, and, whilst thus engaged, would, after enduring many illusions and disappointments, come at last, in Christianity, on the perfect satisfaction of all their longings.

This prophecy of the Author of Christianity has been fulfilled in every generation. Sometimes the conquests of His Gospel have been won from the ranks of the worldly or the dissipated, whom the vision of the facts of the world unseen has drawn away from the pursuits of business or pleasure with the irresistible force of religious conviction ; at other times those destined to become Christians have been votaries of art or science, of literature or philosophy, when the call of the Gospel has come to them ; they have been athirst for truth, beauty or goodness, and have been pursuing it wherever they have considered it likely to be found ; till it has dawned upon them that Christ is the way and the truth and

the life ; and at last their weary wanderings have terminated at His door.

Of the latter type an early example is to be found in the conversion of Justin Martyr.

This man was a Samaritan, as we learn from the opening sentence of his First Apology, where he introduces himself thus—"I, Justin, the son of Priscus and grandson of Bacchius, natives of Flavia Neapolis in Palestine," this being the Roman name for the place known to all readers of the Bible as Shechem. Though, however, a Samaritan by birth, he was not either Samaritan or Jew by religion, but a heathen. He appears to have been a person of independent means ; for he was able to devote his entire time to the study of philosophy, and he wore in public the philosopher's cloak. It may have been the thirst for knowledge that carried him to the West, where the foremost representatives of philosophy were then to be found. We read of him at Ephesus, and afterwards at Rome, where he died a martyr's death, probably a little after the middle of the second century. His life may not have been long. One ancient authority mentions that at the time of his death he was only thirty years of age ; and there is nothing about his writings that can be called decisive to the contrary ; for they are of limited extent, and they bear the stamp of youthful enthusiasm and conviction. His Second Apology was an indignant protest against an act of injustice to a Christian perpetrated beneath the veil of authority ; and there may have been something youthful in the confidence that in such a case anything could be accomplished by such an appeal. His own condemnation appears to have come from the same official whom he had thus attacked, and he may have sacrificed his life to his zeal. But he met his death like a man. Indeed, in his Second Apology he had expressed the expectation that martyrdom would be his own fate ; but he was

not afraid of it ; for it was a maxim of his, that persecutors may kill but cannot harm God's true people.

It was not in the religion in [which he had been brought up that Justin found a preparation for Christianity. On the contrary, the scandals of the mythology of Parnassus, and especially the tales related of the Father of the gods, had entered deeply into his soul, and none of the early Christian writers are more severe than he on these inconsistencies of the popular religion. It may be that there are heathen religions capable of satisfying in some degree the cravings of the religious nature and conducting their votaries a certain distance in the right direction ; in which case it may be the true policy of missionaries to avail themselves of the opportunities thus made to their hand and to acknowledge the good elements even in systems that as a whole are false ; but, in Justin's age, the religion of the classical nations was not worthy of any such commendation. Those athirst for God had to turn away from it ; and the point to which they were attracted was philosophy. Justin speaks of wisdom as " the most valued possession, the most valued by God, to whom it alone leads back and unites us ; for those are, indeed, holy who have applied their minds to philosophy."

If this expresses accurately his mental condition when he was a votary of philosophy, it shows how pure and refined were his aspirations even before he became a Christian. It is not surprising, therefore, that, when the great change took place, it was not necessary at all points to break with the past. He continued to wear the philosopher's garb, because, he found, it helped him to get into conversation with persons disposed to talk on serious subjects. Thus the Jew Trypho, a dialogue with whom is one of Justin's principal works, was drawn into conversation by the bait of the cloak. Justin was one of those of whom there have

been too few, who have "talked" rather than preached the Gospel. It may have been from him that the custom was derived of calling Christianity by the name of "philosophy"—a suggestive trait of early Christian literature. The same influences led him to take a sanguine view of the destiny in the next world of those who had in this world been earnest cultivators of philosophy; and he expected to meet such worthies as Socrates and Plato in the kingdom of heaven.

At first, however, he was very far from the kingdom himself; for, having heard nothing of the followers of Christ but the vilest slanders, he believed them to be persons whom a man like himself should carefully avoid. The love-feasts of the early Christians, their figurative language in speaking of the Lord's Supper, and the absence of any representations of the Divinity in their places of worship were construed by the heathen in the most sinister sense, the children of darkness interpreting the children of light by the knowledge of what they would be doing themselves in similar circumstances. But it is probable that, when he came to Ephesus, Justin had more ample opportunities than before of observing the behaviour of actual Christians. These he watched, when he got the chance, at first with suspicion, but by degrees with an open mind; and the result was that, even when still a pagan, he came to the conclusion that the deeds of darkness alleged to their discredit were calumnies; and to such a degree did this discovery move his indignation that, he says, he longed for a rostrum, from the top of which he might denounce and shame the heathen for imputing to the Christians the sins which were their own. This also is the prevailing tone of his two Apologies, which were addressed to the highest authorities in the state, the author assuring them, that the Christians, instead of deserving persecution, were worthy of praise and encouragement as the best citizens which any government could possess.

In spite, however, of the partiality for intellectual pursuits retained by Justin, philosophy had proved a failure in his case; and it was by the despair thus produced that he was driven to the more excellent way. In the dialogue already alluded to, he is led, for the sake of assisting another, to detail at some length his personal experience.

He does not tell how the thirst at first had awakened in him; but it was at once a thirst for knowledge, a thirst for happiness, and a thirst for God; and he does tell us how he tried to satisfy it. He put himself under a Stoic, a member of the philosophical sect to which at that time many of the best people belonged; but this man, while devoted to certain aspects of wisdom, had apparently nothing of the instinct for God, and, indeed, confessed that he did not know what it meant. His next venture was with a Peripatetic, or follower of Aristotle, who appears to have had an abundant share of the matter-of-fact and utilitarian spirit of his master; for, after a few days, he began to talk of his fee, about which he seemed to have more concern than about either his subject or his student; and so Justin fled from him, accounting him to be no philosopher at all. The third he tried was a Pythagorean, who had an air of wisdom, but considered the secret so recondite that he would impart it only to one who could profess to have already studied music, astronomy and geometry; and the soul of Justin was too passionately desirous of satisfaction to tolerate so long delay. So he withdrew from this teacher also and tried another, a Platonist, who proved to be the most attractive he had yet experienced; for, as the master expounded the Platonic doctrine of ideas, the disciple felt as if the wings of his soul were budding, and that he might soon hope to reach the vision of God after which he was aspiring.

All this is narrated not without humour. Here was a soul athirst for the highest good and trying cistern after

cistern ; but it was an apparently fortuitous circumstance that was destined to bring home to him the bottomless emptiness of the endeavour. One day he was walking not far from the sea, in what town we know not, in a sequestered spot, where he was wont to meditate, when a stranger, an old man, made up to him and, entering into conversation, proved to be one who had gone through the very same round of philosophical inquiry as Justin had been pursuing, with the same negative result. But he was able to tell of a source of knowledge quite different from any yet tried by the younger man. This was in the Old Testament, of the prophets of which he spoke with such kindling enthusiasm as to excite the desire of his fellow-inquirer. He led Justin from point to point, so as to bring home to him the consciousness of how completely at the essential points he had, by the way of philosophy, been brought up against a stone wall, and then he drew him aside and pointed out the more excellent way.¹

So completely was the old man's communication a reproduction and completion of Justin's own experience that some have looked upon the messenger as merely a fiction, used for the purpose of showing dramatically how the service rendered by philosophy was exhausted and another guide had become necessary. But there is no real reason for doubting that this momentous encounter was an actual event ; at the crises of religious experience such providential meetings are not uncommon.

¹ It is not easy to follow some parts of the Dialogue with this anonymous interlocutor, which Justin reports ; but the drift of it seems to me to be as indicated in the text. From the close of the report the following words may be worth quoting :—"When he had spoken these and many other things, which there is no time for mentioning at present, he went away, bidding me attend to them, and I have not seen him since. But straightway a flame was kindled in my soul ; and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me ; and, whilst revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable."

At all events this is obviously the record of a spiritual crisis. In this old man's demeanour Justin saw the evidence of Christian experience and felt the charm of spiritual peace. Under the direction thus obtained he betook himself to the holy oracles, and the copiousness of his own quotations from the Old Testament proves with what result. These Scriptures pointed the way to Christ, for whom he was led to entertain a glowing faith and love. In Christ he embraced with special fervour the gift of immortality, as did the generation of the martyrs to which he belonged ; and this glorious hope enabled him to meet with calmness and dignity the fate to which he was early destined.

Justin Martyr is not by any means the only figure in the ancient world whose experience illustrates the parable of the Pearl of Great Price. To many besides, philosophy served as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. And instances to the same effect could easily be adduced also from modern times. Indeed, the Reformation itself was introduced by the Renaissance, and Rationalism was undermined by both literature and philosophy before it was overthrown by the Evangelical Revival. We too readily think of those beyond the pale of Christianity as abandoned by God ; but Justin's perception was truer when he spoke even of heathenism as sown with the seeds of the Logos. Origen bears witness that Christianity gained more adherents from the thoughtful and virtuous elements in heathenism than from those of an opposite tendency. The work of the Holy Spirit is far-reaching ; it is not confined to Christians or even to Christendom ; and ambassadors for Christ will do well to make those the objects of their special aim whom this divine Guide has been leading towards the light.

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