

necessarily endless separation, but possibly only a phase : a receding wave of an incoming tide, a stage in a process that knows vicissitudes. Seeking, rather than finding, is the purpose of this life in the twilight : intercourse, question and counter-question ; hope, faith, exploring love, rather than acquisition of certainty. The risks that attend faith, then, are not necessarily fatal for men of goodwill ; and they seem to be conditions of God's fulfilling of us for ourselves or for Himself. It is enough for us that " we feel that we are greater than we know " ; and that it is just the trust of some such rationally unwarranted feeling as this, that, in all our knowledge, such as it is, and in all our reason, whatsoever it be, has actually guided intellectual search, giving it the zest of adventure and according it success : the substantiation of things hoped for, the evidencing of things not seen.

F. R. TENNANT.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND THE HELLENIC WORLD.

THE subject suggested by the title of this Paper has many aspects, which could only adequately be treated as a whole in a comprehensive work on a large scale, and by a band of competent scholars. All that is attempted in the following pages, and within the limits of a single article, is to touch on one or two phases of, and to emphasise the importance of some neglected factors in, a large and complicated problem.

I.

It is far from my desire to underestimate the importance of the fact that historical Christianity, though fundamentally Jewish in origin, was born into a world which had been

almost completely hellenised. The significance of this fact cannot be ignored. Greek culture, the Greek language, Greek institutions were all-pervasive. Judaism itself could not escape this atmosphere. In the first century of our era the number of Jews outside Palestine, who used the *κοινή* as their vernacular, was probably not less than the Jewish population of Palestine itself, including the province of Galilee. It may well have been substantially more. And even in Palestine there was a considerable leaven of Greek influence, down to A.D. 70 and even later, among the Jewish population. In Galilee, indeed, the population was, to some extent, bilingual. Sometimes the two languages, the vernacular Aramaic and the *κοινή*, existed side by side, as for instance in Bethsaida, which appears to have possessed a Greek quarter, where the upper classes mostly resided, and an Aramaic-speaking quarter, which was inhabited mostly by the humbler folk. It is interesting to note that Galileans often bore two names, one Greek and another Aramaic, a striking example being the Apostle Peter, whose Greek name (*Πέτρος*) is simply a translation of the Aramaic word which we know as *Cephas*, i.e. "rock." In Judæa, where the Jewish population was less mixed, and Jewish life and feeling were most intense, the Greek language was usually known to the educated classes; and, in fact, many Greek words had penetrated into the vernacular Aramaic, and even into the scholastic Hebrew which was used by the doctors of the Law for scholastic purposes.

But though Judaism, even in its central strongholds, had been profoundly influenced by its Greek environment, and in the first and second centuries of our era was immersed in a world of culture and ideas which were Hellenic—though it was subjected to the enormous and incessant pressure of these cultural forces—it never completely surrendered to

them. Its central fire still glowed and burnt defiantly in spite of the Hellenic flood. Once indeed in its chequered history it had seemed to be on the point of succumbing, when that ardent and over zealous apostle of Greek culture, Antiochus Epiphanes, in his impatience to be done with the barbarous obstinacy of an obscure tribal cult, as he regarded it, which was holding up his grandiose scheme for the complete cultural unification of his heterogeneous provinces, resorted to persecution and precipitated the Maccabean revolt. As the result Judaism became more solid and self-conscious, and incidentally Antiochus secured for himself a place in history which he would have been the last to desire. He figures in Daniel as the "little horn," and became the prototype of Antichrist and the Beast of the later Apocalypses. At the heart of Judaism there was something which resisted all the alluring and disintegrating effects of Greek culture. This something was its intense realisation of the personality of God as the God of righteousness. To the Jew, God—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who was also the Creator of the world and the Ruler of the universe—was primarily a Person, who demanded ethical righteousness. This conception of God is fundamental, and was never completely obscured even by the *minutiæ* of a legalistic religion. By the first century of our era Judaism, especially the Judaism of the Jewish communities who lived in various parts of the Græco-Roman Empire outside Palestine, had, in a sense, come to terms with Hellenism. But this by no means meant that the Jews of the Dispersion had become completely Hellenised. They used the Greek language, and had ceased to understand Hebrew (this, at least, is true of the mass of them). They read their sacred scriptures in Greek (the LXX.), and even used the Greek language in their synagogue services. But they were still acutely conscious of being Jews, and not Greeks, in religion. As Philo

puts it, the Jews (of the Dispersion) called themselves Palestinians in religion, but Hellenes in language.¹

The Jew of the Dispersion was fired with a burning enthusiasm to convert the heathen world to his own monotheistic faith. Philo proclaims that the Jewish people is the priestly nation, "one that has received the priesthood for the whole human race";² and this conviction animated the Jewish Diaspora as a whole. It found overt expression in an intense missionary propaganda which, in spite of fierce opposition in some quarters, was attended with immense success. It was largely among the proselytes who had been won over from the heathen world by the Jewish missionaries that St. Paul found his first converts to Christianity. The typical Jew of the Diaspora had been subjected to Greek influence on a large scale; but we must be on our guard against exaggerating the effects of this influence. At the heart of the Jew's religion was the unshakable belief in the One God and His ethical requirement; the ethical standpoint remained strictly Jewish, and made all the difference. This will account for the remarkable fact that the Jewish population in the Dispersion, though it assimilated so much of its environment, yet remained unmistakably distinct. The Jews lived mostly in the cities, and in a separate quarter; they enjoyed special privileges and exemptions under the law, and were allowed to organise themselves as autonomous communities.

Th. Reinach has described the situation well. He says:³

"Speaking broadly the middle classes in the Greek cities were not favourably disposed towards the Jews. Their religious and racial peculiarities; their undisguised contempt of the Hellenic cults, pageants and gymnastic displays—in short of all that constitutes

¹ Cf. *Jewish Encycl.* vi. 337.

² *de Abrah.* ii. 15.

³ Art. "Diaspora" (*Jewish Encyclopædia*).

the essence of a Greek city . . . and finally the efficacy of the religious propagandism—all contributed to the unpopularity of these new-comers.”

It is easy to overrate the extent to which Judaism was hellenised in the Græco-Roman world. In spite of all outside influence and pressure there was an element in Judaism that obstinately refused to be absorbed. This was fundamental, and, in the last resort, determinative.

What this core of conviction essentially was I have already indicated: it was the belief passionately held in *one* God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, as revealed in Moses and the Prophets. It was the ethical monotheism of the Hebrew Prophets, with its burning sense of Jehovah's righteousness, holiness, and ethical requirement, and its passionate hatred of idolatry in all its forms and associations that fired the Diaspora Jew with his intense missionary enthusiasm to convert the heathen world. Nothing could well be more Greek in form than the so-called Sibylline Oracles, which, in fact, are, as is well known, largely missionary tracts. When we examine the Jewish parts of these productions what do we find? The poems are full of exhortations to the heathen world to accept belief in the one God, whose chosen people is the Jews, and to lead moral lives in accordance with the ethical code of the divine Law.

In spite of their Greek form nothing could be more intensely Jewish. The fervent spirit of the Jewish missionary is on fire with the conviction that in preaching ethical monotheism he has something to offer the Gentile world which is infinitely precious, and which it cannot find elsewhere.

II.

At the time when Christianity came out into the world, the world that confronted it was a hellenised world. And this was true not only of Europe, but of Asia over a very

wide area. Everywhere both in the East and the West, in the countries included within the Roman Empire, the Greek language was spoken and read by the educated classes. Over a large area, of course, it was the language of every-day life. Everywhere, too, Greek institutions like the gymnasium and the theatre were in evidence. Mr. Edwyn Bevan, in his vivid and arresting way, brings the matter home when he remarks: "We are often told in popular books that 'the East never changes,' that Orientals have an invincible repugnance to western ideas, and so forth . . . Well, you would make a great mistake if you imagined, say, the Damascus of St. Paul's time like the Damascus of to-day. In St. Paul's time we should have found ourselves in a Greek city. Arabs from the desert in native dress would no doubt have appeared in the streets, and Jews with their fringes and phylacteries, but we should have seen the citizens of the upper class to all appearance Greek, we should continually have heard Greek talked around us, and the environment would be largely made up of Greek temples, and halls and colonnades."¹

Greek civilisation and Greek institutions had indeed transformed the world. Hellenism had filled life with new interests. There was something very alluring about Greek culture—it captivated and enthralled. Among other achievements it created a new tradition of education. When Christianity emerged into the wider world it came face to face with an *educated* world. Everywhere in the towns grammar schools were to be found, while at certain centres were great seats of learning, rather like the mediæval universities to which students of all classes resorted. Tarsus in St. Paul's time was a centre of this sort. Students then, as now, attended lectures, and sometimes showed by their manner that they were thinking of other things.

¹ *Jerusalem under the High Priests*, p. 30.

“Many persons,” says Philo, “who come to a lecture do not bring their minds inside with them, but [let their minds] go wandering about outside, thinking ten thousand things about ten thousand different subjects—family affairs, other people’s affairs . . . and the professor talks to an audience, as it were, not of men, but of statues.”¹

Teachers and professors occupied positions of social distinction and were treated with special consideration by State and municipal authorities both in the matter of endowment and exemption from taxation.

The Hellenic world—or perhaps it would be more accurate to describe it as the “hellenised world”—was thus permeated with cultural forces which were all-powerful and all-absorbing. On its nobler side this Greek culture quickened and enriched human life generally. But it sometimes assumed base and degraded forms. Mr. Edwyn Bevan has noted how these effects were specially noticeable in the Province of Syria in the centuries both immediately before and after the Christian Era.²

When we ask ourselves, what was the moral state of the Græco-Roman world in the first two centuries of our era? it is perhaps not quite so easy to generalise as is sometimes assumed. Dr. Hatch, indeed, attempts to discount the evidence that has come down to us. He says:—

“It has been common to construct pictures of the state of morals in the first centuries of the Christian era from the statements of satirists who, like all satirists, had a large element of caricature, and from the denunciations of the Christian apologists, which, like all denunciations, have a large element of exaggeration. The pictures so constructed are mosaics of singular vices, and they have led to the not unnatural impression that these centuries constituted an era of exceptional wickedness.”³

Dr. Hatch goes on to remark:—

“It is no doubt difficult to gauge the average morality of any

¹ *Quis rerum div. heres*, §1, cited by Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 37.

² *Cf. Op. cit.*, p. 41 f.

³ *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 139.

age. It is questionable whether the average morality of civilized ages has largely varied ; it is possible that if the satirists of our own time were equally outspoken, the vices of ancient Rome might be found to have a parallel in modern London ; and it is probable, not on merely *a priori* grounds, but from the nature of the evidence which remains, that there was in ancient Rome, as there is in modern London, a preponderating mass of those who loved their children and their homes, who were good neighbours and faithful friends, who conscientiously discharged their civil duties, and were in all the current senses of the word 'moral' men." ¹

This statement puts the case in as persuasive a manner as is possible. Yet it seems to me not to allow for patent facts. It does not allow sufficiently for the fact that the age was one of disintegration—the old moral and religious sanctions had broken down ; the best spirits of the time were acutely conscious of this, and this fact will explain the movements towards moral reformation that had grown up. The world was desperately in need of a religion that would be adequate to the new needs ; there was a conflict of religions, and in the end Christianity emerged victorious as the world-religion ; but the conflict had not become decisive till well on towards the end of the second century of our era ; and in the interval there was, to a large extent, religious and moral chaos.

How can we explain the moral energy of the Jewish (and later the Christian) missionary propaganda unless there was present the conviction on both sides that paganism lacked the moral fibre that only Judaism or Christianity could give ?

In this connexion it is instructive to study the lines along which the Jewish indictment of paganism moves. To a large extent the early Christian polemic directed against pagan life and religion is parallel. The real mind of the Jewish teachers about these matters is revealed in the early Rabbinical literature which grew up in Palestine in the

¹ *Op. cit. ibid.*

first and second centuries A.D. The attitude of these teachers was, it is true, less "liberal" towards the Græco-Roman world than that of the earlier Diaspora Judaism, and became exacerbated when the disastrous war broke out under Hadrian (132-135 A.D.) with the tragic results that followed. We must make full allowance for the bitter feeling that grew up and estranged the Jewish from the outside world from this time. But after making full allowance for this the indictment is sufficiently formidable, and is remarkably confirmed by the early Christian apologists. In particular the idolatry of the heathen world is denounced. Not only is all direct recognition of idol-worship forbidden, but participation in anything that goes to the furtherance of such worship, even indirectly, is sternly reprehended. At the time of the Hadrianic persecution it was enacted by the Rabbis in Lydda that an Israelite should rather suffer martyrdom than be guilty of idolatry, fornication or murder. The luxury that was indulged in by heathen is equally abhorrent to the Jewish and Christian teachers (e.g. Tertullian). The money laid out upon luxuries would be better spent in charity. Sharp opposition was made to any participation in the spectacles at the theatre, circus and games, because of their deep implication in polytheism. This was the strict requirement both of the Jewish and Christian leaders, and it may seem, perhaps, to savour rather of an extreme form of Puritanism. But it must be remembered that both Judaism and early Christianity were face to face with a system which, in the mass, and over large sections of the population, exercised a degrading and demoralising influence. Anything short of this sharp protest would have been unavailing. And the protest was justified by the result. As Harnack remarks:¹ "When Constantine granted privileges to the Church, public opinion

¹ *The Expansion of Christianity* (E.T.), i. 380.

had developed to such an extent that the State immediately adopted measures for curtailing and restricting the public spectacles." Both Jewish and Christian teachers emphasise the fact that such things as the gladiatorial shows were not only implicated in idolatry, but were in themselves brutalising as spectacles. It may be added that such spectacles, in spite of prohibition, proved irresistibly attractive to many both of Jews and Christians.

The desperate need in which the age felt itself to be for moral amendment and reformation is reflected in certain developments of philosophy and religious movements within the pagan world itself. Dr. Hatch remarks justly that "the age in which Christianity grew was in reality an age of moral reformation."¹ This manifested itself especially in Stoicism and the growth of the religious guilds associated with certain "mystery" cults.

"In Stoicism"—to use Mr. Edwyn Bevan's words—"the mind of antiquity had not only reached in some respects its highest expression, but that expression had become popular in a way unparalleled in the history of any later school. The Stoic missionary, preaching the self-sufficiency of virtue in a threadbare cloak at the street corners, had been one of the typical figures of a Greek town many generations before St. Paul."²

Through these cynic preachers of righteousness Stoicism had made a profound impression upon the public conscience. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this is the fact that it had created a new set of ethical terms. Bishop Lightfoot, commenting on this fact, says :

"It is difficult to estimate, and perhaps not very easy to overrate the extent to which Stoic philosophy had leavened the moral vocabulary of the civilized world at the time of the Christian era. To take a single instance: the most important of moral terms, the

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 149 f.

² *Hellenism and Christianity*, p. 72 f.

crowning triumph of ethical nomenclature, *συνείδησις*, *conscientia*, the internal, absolute, supreme judge of individual action, if not struck in the mint of the Stoics, at all events became current coin through their influence. To a great extent, therefore, the general diffusion of Stoic language would lead to its adoption by the first teachers of Christianity."¹

Stoicism was thus a real preparation for Christianity. It was governed by a great ideal, it was marked by high ethical power, and it produced a few great men of noble character. It impressed the conscience of the Greek and Roman world. But its ethics were not Christian—it was a creed of despair and acquiescence, and it despised all the Christian virtues that depend upon the affirmation "God is love." It had no belief in progress, and its outlook on the world was dark and forbidding—removed poles asunder from that of the Christian. It totally lacked the dynamic which carried Christianity forward and made it a religion of moving power for mankind. If Christianity largely absorbed its ethical terminology, it invested the terms with an entirely new content, and new values. If we turn to the "mystery" cults we can see in these religious brotherhoods another indication of the pathetic yearning of the ancient world for regeneration and salvation. The vogue of these mystery cults in the Imperial Age is well known. One of the most influential, and one, moreover, that illustrates the syncretistic character of these later religious movements, is the cult of Isis, as described by Plutarch in his famous treatise. The Isis-Serapis worship was widely practised in the Hellenistic world. It can be traced at Athens, Pompeii and Rome, and it spread wherever Roman influence penetrated. The cult evidently made a wide appeal, with its splendid ceremonial and "contemplative devotion" ordered with all the precision characteristic of Egyptian liturgic tradition. It also embodied the elaborate precision

¹ "St. Paul and Seneca" (*Commentary on Philippians*, p. 303).

of the ancient Egyptian eschatology. Dr. H. A. A. Kennedy, speaking of its wide diffusion and influence, says :

“The Isis Mystery-Religion exercised a peculiar attraction just because of its syncretism. Isis could be identified with innumerable deities. As queen of heaven, as Selene, as goddess of the cultivated earth, as Demeter, as giver of crops, as mistress of the underworld and also of the sea, as goddess of women and beauty and love, as queen of the gods assimilated to Hera and Juno, as goddess of salvation, and also of magical arts, she could claim the adoration of a motley throng of worshippers.”¹

In Apuleius there is preserved a full account of initiation of Lucius at Cenchreæ into these Mysteries. The candidate, we are told, remained within the precincts of the Temple until summoned by the goddess. Otherwise he might incur the guilt of sacrilege and die. “For,” says the high priest, “the portals of the nether world and the guardianship of salvation are placed in the hand of the goddess, and the initiation itself is solemnised as the symbol of a voluntary death and a salvation given in answer to prayer, for the goddess is wont to choose such as, having fulfilled a course of life, stand at the very threshold of the departing light, to whom nevertheless the great mysteries of religion can be safely entrusted ; and after they have been by her providence, in a sense born again, she places them again on the course of a new life in salvation.”² Lucius awaited the will of the goddess, giving himself up to prayer and fasting. When at length the wished-for day arrived, he was escorted by a band of Isis-worshippers and bathed by the high-priest in the sacred laver. Thereafter, in presence of the goddess he receives mystic communications. Ten days of ascetic preparation follow, and then he is led into the innermost sanctuary. A mystic delineation is given of his culminating experience. “I penetrated to

¹ *St. Paul and the Mystery Religions*, p. 99 f.

² *Op. Kennedy, op. cit.*, p. 100 f.

the boundaries of death," he says. I trod the threshold of Proserpine, and after being borne through all the elements I returned to earth; at midnight I beheld the sun radiating white light. I came into the presence of the gods below and the gods above, and did them reverence close at hand."¹ Fortunately we have this sympathetic picture of some of the aspects of a typical Hellenistic Mystery Religion: the solemn external preparation in the prescribed abstinences, the solemn baptism, the communication of the mystic formulæ, culminating in the overpowering scenes which came at the last; there is also the inward experience, a genuinely religious one, in the heart-preparation, the idea of cleansing, the conception of regeneration, and the final mystical rapture which unites the soul of the initiate with the deity.

These and the religious brotherhoods which made purity of life a condition of membership are genuine manifestations of the religious spirit, and may be regarded as a real preparation for Christianity. But it is very doubtful whether these cults entered so closely and intimately into the organic life of Pauline Christianity as is sometimes suggested. That St. Paul was ever really influenced in his thought by the mystery-religions is very unlikely. His thought and that of the mysteries move in two different worlds. As Professor Kennedy says:

"There is no real analogy between the New Testament idea of a fellowship in the sufferings of Christ and that ritual sympathy with the goddesses who mourned the loss of Osiris and Attis, or with the woes of those deified beings themselves. In the former self-sacrificing devotion which shrinks from no hardship is the core of the experience. The latter is the result of sensuous impressions more or less artificially produced."²

St. Paul's mysticism is thoroughly ethical in character. The Cross is central. The mystic death to sin of which

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 101 f.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 214 f.

the Apostle speaks is wholly different in conception from the mystical identification of the initiate in the Mystery cult with the death of the divine personage whose restoration to life was celebrated and depicted in the Mystery-ceremonial. To quote Dr. Kennedy again :

“The ceremonial dedication to a deity whose ritual, based on the revival of life in the world of nature, suggested the soul-kindling prospect of a life beyond the grave could very naturally be described as a dying to the ignorant past and the entrance on a new life of hope. But it requires an unusually daring imagination to fill these terms in the mystery cults with the profound ethical content which they held for St. Paul.”¹

St. Paul undoubtedly uses terms which are characteristic of the terminology of the Mystery-Religions, just as he uses occasionally short technical terms. But in both cases the language is charged with a new meaning and a new content. The truth is that behind St. Paul's language there is a fundamentally different conception of God. The Jewish conception of God could not make terms with the Greek idea at all. To the Jew God was one unique and Holy Being, supreme and transcendent, the Creator and Ruler of the world, whose majesty could not be shared. To the Jew the very idea of the deification of a man was utterly abhorrent. Not so to the Greek. Apparently in the earlier period of Greek religion heroic qualities or the possession of unusual powers, might lead to apotheosis. The mortal, as in the Mystery-cults, might achieve divinity. The extent to which this was carried in the Hellenistic world from the time of Alexander the Great and onwards, when divine honours were paid to living rulers, and legends grew up about their supernatural origin is well known. First the Seleucidæ and then the Ptolemies adopted the cult, and finally it was transferred to the Roman world and culmin-

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 229.

ated in the state-worship of the Emperors. It may be possible to regard all this as the perversion of a true instinct in humanity, which leads men to regard supreme powers and endowments as god-like, and therefore to be invested with the halo of divinity. But to carry the process to the lengths reached in the Hellenistic period inevitably meant the frittering away of all worthy concepts of deity. To the Jew the State worship of the Emperor was the blasphemy of blasphemies.

III

When Christianity came face to face with this Hellenic world, it confronted it with a lofty conception of God which had its roots in the ethical monotheism of the Hebrew Prophets. It was the God revealed in Jesus Christ whom it preached, a lofty and exclusive conception that would tolerate nothing in the nature of apotheosis in the Greek manner. Whatever use Christianity made of Greek philosophical terms like *Logos*, or other terms like *σωτηρια* or *γενησια* it never compromised its central conception of God, which indeed stamped its use of these terms with a new content and new meaning. And this is true not only of Pauline Christianity, but also, fundamentally, of the later type of Christian thought and theology, when the Church had really become deeply influenced by Hellenism in various ways. Though threatened in the third century with syncretistic tendencies, the Church kept its recognised theology free from idolatrous taint. The heathen philosopher Porphyry is illuminating on this matter—his words show how the pagan conception of deity still lived on in strength and vigour. He wrote :

“If therefore you declare that beside God there stand angels who are not subject to suffering and death, and are incorruptible in nature—*just the beings we call gods*, inasmuch as they stand near

the godhead, then what is all the dispute about, with regard to names? Or, are we to consider it merely a difference of terminology? So if anyone likes to call them either gods or angels—for names are, on the whole, of no great moment, one and the same goddess, for example, being called Athene and Minerva, and by still other names among the Egyptians and Syrians—then it makes no great difference, as their divine nature is actually attested even by yourselves in Matthew xxii. 29-31.”¹

And yet what to Porphyry seems to be a mere question of names was to the Christian and Jewish conscience fundamental. When the people of Lystra insisted upon offering divine honours to Barnabas and Paul, calling Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercury, the distress of the Apostles was intense, and Paul tried to make them understand that they were the bearers to them of a message from the living God (Acts xiv. 12 ff.). Similarly the seer in the *Apocalypse*, when he is represented as prostrating himself before the angel, is bidden to desist, and “worship God” (Rev. xxii. 9). This lofty conception of deity with its implications is central both in Jewish and Christian theology. It dominates and forms the distinctive element in both. It is possible to argue ingeniously that Christianity, in spite of its Jewish heritage, shares many elements with Hellenism. But there has been a fundamental transvaluation of values produced by the Jewish (Christian) conception of God, and unless this is fully grasped detailed comparisons will prove largely misleading.

G. H. Box.

¹ Cf. Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 375.