THE DRAMATIC HISTORY

OF THE

CHRISTIAN FAITH

FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE DEATH OF ST. AUGUSTINE

BY

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PREFACE

THERE is no more thrilling and dramatic history than that of the Christian Religion. First, the wonderful life of its Founder, then the heroic struggles of a handful of disciples against an entire world. From a superstition to be held in ridicule Christianity grows to be an influence to be dreaded and opposed, finally even a faith to be persecuted. And after thousands had suffered martyrdom and Christianity had emerged triumphantly, there still remained the Herculean task of unifying and organising the growing Church, and—last, not least—of settling its relation to other doctrines such as Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism. In how far the Church strayed from Christ, in how far it owes inspiration to non-Christian philosophies, and even assumed some of the characteristics of the faiths it conquered, is the theme of the following pages.

As far as possible each of the periods considered has been centred round some representative figure. The history of any movement is the history of living men and every change in such a history has ever found its fullest expression in a leader or prophet who, in his person, united the aspirations of the multitude.

The present volume deals with Christian history until the death of St. Augustine. Of him alone can be said that he unites and concludes within himself Christian thought up to his time and—through his person and writings—transmits it to the next great period of Christian history, that of the Church in the West.

At some future time I hope to continue the present history in a second volume, dealing with the Church in the early and later Middle Ages, in the time of the Renaissance and Reformation, through the age of doubt and darkness to the present day, with its revival of Christianity in a new and yet so ancient form.

The volume now published does not pretend to be a history of Christianity, not even an outline. It is but an attempt to help others to see, as I have seen, the deeply interesting and dramatic features of Christian history.

J. J. VAN DER LEEUW.

CORRECTION SHEET

OWING to my not being in India to supervise the printing of this book a number of mistakes have been made, especially in Greek words. I need not say how much I regret this having occurred, especially since due care had been taken to have all Greek and Latin terms in the manuscript entirely correct.

THE AUTHOR

page	*line*	*for*	*read*
5		Jeshua ben Pandra	Jeshua ben Pandera
8		*κἀωυεσ.σ*	*κάθαρσις*
23		*ὁ Πχράκλητος*	*ὁ Παράκλητος*
		τὸ Πνεῦμα το ῾Αγιου	*τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ῾Αγιον*
		in spirare	in-spirare
40		Theos-Soter	Theos Sotēr
68		*ἄνθρωποζ χαλὸζ χ'αγαθόξ*	*ἄνθρωπος καλὸς κ' ἀγαθός*
98	13	first book of the Ennead	first book of the fifth Ennead
111		*ευ τούτῳνίκη*	*ἐν τούτῳ νίκη*
114	15	*circa*	circa

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CHAPTER I

THE SETTING OF THE STAGE

THERE is no more wonderful history than that of the Christian Faith.

It is true, we of the Liberal Catholic Church do not hold that Christianity is the one and only revelation of Truth to the world and do not believe that God left His world in darkness until the coming of Christ; it is true, we recognise that Truth is eternal and that its manifestations in the great religions of the world are many and varied, each showing forth some especial beauty of its own in the life and teachings of the great Messengers of divine Truth. Yet we cannot help realising that in our Christian religion, precious and dear to us as it is, being the religion of our civilisation, we also possess a religious history unequalled in dramatic interest and unique in its variety and wealth of events.

First the age to which Christ came, a period wrought with momentous happenings, seeing the birth of Rome as a world-power, having emerged victoriously from a long and protracted war with her great rival, Carthage, and trying to adjust herself to a new era of her career. It was an age

full of struggle and uncertainty, both in the nation and in the individual, of groping for a new light. In the midst of all this complexity of a highly developed civilisation comes the life of Jesus Christ, eloquent with beauty, marvellous in simplicity, radiant with love. Three short years of a perfect life, yet sufficient in its inspiration to be the heart and life of a religion destined to conquer the new world. It was a life dramatic in every one of its great events, and dramatic in such a universal way that it is the drama of every human soul.

After the climax of that life in a death, which in itself was a victory of the eternal spirit over a world of change and decay, a small group of disciples sets out to conquer a world in His name. Through martyrdom and persecution they carry the message of universal love and of eternal life to its triumphant reign over the new race. Century after century thereafter the new Faith is brought into touch with all types of civilisation, with all races and nations, it is alternately glorified by saints and sages, degraded by hypocrisy and even crime, stained by blood, and cleansed again by self-sacrificing love and purity.

Through all these changes and experiences the Christian Faith grows and expands, constantly changing in form, ever the same in its abiding Reality—the Living Christ. It is not in some especially Christian dogma, not even in some particular way of living, that the essential and abiding element of Christianity can be found.

Different Christian churches adhere to different dogmas, other great world-religions may preach the same way of living ; these dogmas and ethics are not the heart of the Christian faith, but rather the radiant Presence of Him Who is Love incarnate, the Living Christ. It is His living Presence, His constant inspiration, which has made it possible that Christianity should not be overwhelmed by dogmatism and sectarianism, but that the lamp of living faith should ever have been kept burning in the hearts of His true followers. Thus in its form Christianity is a changing, growing, evolving organism ; the life which urges on this evolution is ever the same—His life. It is hard to grasp for many good but ignorant Christians that their especial form of church-worship, their doctrines, their ritual, or their organisation is one of many, not the one and only way to God. They are apt to look upon their particular church or sect as the only form of salvation given by Christ to a humanity in darkness. They do not recognise the evolutionary character of all institutions, do not realise not only that their church is the product of a process of growth or change within the Christian religion, but that the Christian faith itself did not originate by spontaneous generation but is largely determined in its forms and doctrines by pre-Christian religions and philosophical conditions. In fact, so much does Christianity owe to pre-Christian thought, belief and custom that many modern students in the glamour of their discovery that all the forms of the Christian

faith can be traced to pre-Christian times, have come to deny the historicity of our Lord and look upon Christianity as the culminating product of pre-Christian ideas.

Both views, however, are one-sided: the dogmatic and narrow belief of some particular Christian church or sect that their form of Christianity is the one created by the Christ in the darkness of heathenish ignorance which He came to dispel, and the view that, whereas all elements of Christian belief and worship can be traced to pre-Christian faiths and ideas, Christ never lived and the religion called the Christian is not due to His inspiration, but is the mere product of pre-existing conditions.

It is impossible in the light of historical research to maintain that Christianity is *sui generis,* a spontaneous growth from nothing, but it is equally impossible to deny that the inspiration of a great personality was necessary to make Christianity possible.

The material out of which Christianity is made, was there, but the divine touch of the great Master-Builder was necessary to form from it the living Temple of the Christian faith.

It is ever thus. When the "times are ripe," when a new ideal is stirring in the hearts and minds of great masses of human beings there must always appear some great personality, a truly "representative man," who in his life and works can bring to conscious birth that which was vaguely stirring in the hearts and minds of the many.

And when a new ideal of life is to be given to all humanity then the One who appears is the One who is representative for all mankind, its Heart and Life, He whom we call the Christ.

Thus Christianity is undoubtedly rooted in non-Christian and pre-Christian soil, but the sunshine which made it grow was not derived from existing conditions, but was the glowing inspiration, the radiant love of Christ.

The subject of our first chapter is "The Setting of the Stage." The drama of Christianity was to be played on a stage, the World-Stage, in a setting which needs to be studied in order to understand fully what the essential and new contribution of Christianity was.

In studying the world and time in which Jesus the Christ appeared we must first ask: which world and what time? It is generally accepted that our Lord was born some six or seven years before what we call the beginning of the Christian era. There is however no trustworthy outside confirmation of this, and amongst several scholars of note the theory is gaining ground that the tradition found in *Talmud* and *Toldoth* about Jeshua ben Pandra who lived under the Maccabaean king Jannai or Alexander (104-78 B.C.) is likely to be the correct, contemporary Jewish record of Jesus the Christ.

The earlier date of Jesus certainly fits in better with the general trend of civilisation in the first

century B.C. About the middle of that century the birth of the "new" ideal of universal brotherhood which was the essence of Christian faith is perceptible, a fact which cannot be explained if Jesus should have lived and taught at the usually accepted time. Thus when we study the time in which Jesus appeared it is well to keep in mind the possibility that He did live at the earlier date. There are however many religious elements which are to be found both at the earlier and at the canonical date and some of these we can now consider, always bearing in mind that religious movements, which flourished a century after Christ, are yet important as elements in the birth of the Christian faith, having influenced Christianity when it began to spread as a world-religion.

More important, however, than the exact time in which Christ appeared is the world to which He came. Which world was it? Not the world of Palestine. The new faith was not given to Israel alone, it was given to the civilised world of the day, to the Graeco-Roman world; and if we would understand the history of Christianity we must study that Graeco-Roman civilisation even more than that of the Hebrew people where the new life was born, but where it did not come to its consummation.

The Graeco-Roman world had already a long history behind it. It had passed through a "Golden Age," a time of unity, before man awakened to a sense of his own individuality. When this awakening came, in what we term the Greek Renaissance,

Greece gave birth to the priceless contributions which will ever be associated with her name; the classical drama, Greek sculpture and architecture and Greek thought. It is Greek philosophical thought which was destined to be one of the chief contributions of Greece to the Chirstian faith; from Greece Christianity derived the terminology for its doctrines. Plato was the father of Christian philosophy as Plotinus was to be the father of Christian mysticism.

Whereas Greece contributed its thought to Christianity, Rome gave it the wonderful structure of its mighty organisation. Where Greece inspired, Rome confirmed; where Greece ruled the ideal world, Rome ruled the material world; where Greece determined the ways of thought, Rome constructed the roads of physical intercourse along which Christianity could travel to the furthermost parts of the world.

In a religious sense Greece and Rome, as far as their state-religions were concerned, did not contribute much to the Christian faith. But then these state-religions had long since lost their influence over the individuals; they were a time-honoured institution, but neither inspired nor satisfied. It was to the mystery-religions that we must look if we would find the real and living religion in which the cultured man of Greece and Rome could find satisfaction for his religious and mystical life. They inspired enthusiasm, their teaching was vital, their initiations full of solemn

meaning. In the greatest of the Greek Mysteries, those of Eleusis, the main teaching was that of the journey of the soul through periods of existence in matter (the myth of Persephone) to a divine life in the spiritual world, its true home. The way to this higher life was through purification and illumination (*κάθαρσις, ἐποπτεία*), the same stages which we shall find later on in Christian mysticism. It was through the mediumship of St. Paul that much of the teaching and terminology of the mysteries flowed into the Christian religion and became the means of expressing its spiritual contents. Ideas and terms like that of "spiritual regeneration," "redemption," "salvation," "baptism" can all be traced to the mystery-religions from which they were derived to express Christian conceptions.

In the Roman world the most popular mysteries were those of Isis and Mithras. The Mysteries of Isis, coming as they did from ancient Egypt, brought with them much of the Egyptian religious beliefs which thus became vehicles for the expression of Christian thought.

Isis, the great Mother of all, truly the *Consolatrix Afflictorum,* who bore her son Horus, having miraculously conceived him after the death of Osiris, became one of the prototypes of the Virgin Mary and the worship of the two is characterised by the same touch of tender motherhood and comforting love. In Osiris, who in a triumphant resurrection overcame his enemies even in death, we find a

conception closely approaching the Christian one of crucifixion and resurrection. As the Christian commemorates the death and resurrection of Christ and in it sees the hope of his own spiritual rebirth, so the Egyptian looked upon the death and regeneration of Osiris as the promise of his own Osirification. Truly, we cannot blame those students who in their discovery of the central doctrines of Christianity in pre-Christian religions came to deny the historicity of Jesus Christ. Their mistake was psychological rather than historical, for without a life like Christ's a movement like Christianity could never have been brought about. The material was there but the Master-Builder built from it the new Temple of Faith.

The cult of the Great Mother was even stronger in Asia Minor where under the name of Cybele she was worshipped, especially in Phrygia. It is interesting to note that wherever the worship to "God the Mother" was strong in pre-Christian times we find a deep devotion to the Virgin Mary afterwards. Thus the cave near Antioch where Cybele was worshipped is now dedicated to Our Lady; and Ephesus, where the great Temple to Artemis stood as one of the wonders of the world, became the chief centre of worship to Our Lady in Asia Minor.

Other Mysteries which contributed elements to the Christian faith were the Mysteries of Mithras, more widely spread than any. These Mithraic Mysteries were of Persian origin and became exceedingly

popular under the Roman Empire; places of Mithraic worship have been found wherever Rome's power extended.

Mithras was the Son and Champion of God, miraculously conceived, born in a cave, adored by shepherds, worshipped as the "Lord of Love". Brotherhood was the ideal of those who belonged to the Mithraic Mysteries, and in their *agapé* or "love-feast," they partook of the body of the God in the shape of consecrated bread, sometimes marked with a cross, a form of spiritual communion not unlike the Christian one.

In an old Mithraic liturgy the candidate says: "Let me, though now held down by my lower nature, be reborn into immortality—that I may become mentally reborn, that I may become initiated, that the Holy Spirit may breathe in me!" Truly this prayer would not be amiss in any Christian ritual, yet it belonged to a non-Christian Mystery religion. Thus the Mysteries provided the spiritual frame-work of Christianity; just as Greece gave the mental structure and Rome the physical.

But it was to Israel that we must look for the emotional element.

Many have wondered why Christianity was born in Palestine, in a far-away obscure country instead of in the heart of the Roman world. Why not in Rome, why not in Alexandria, where all cultures, Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Hebrew met? But if we study with an open mind we shall understand. Palestine, to begin with, was not so obscure a

country. Through it ran the trade route from Egypt to Asia-Minor. Travelling was slow in those days, so that a traveller had ample opportunity to absorb anything new along his route and carry it on to the country of his destination. But even more than that, Jews were to be found all over the world, then as now, and anything started in Palestine would soon spread over the entire world. That, however, which made Israel destined to be the home of the Christ, was the emotional nature of the Hebrew nation; a fervent, almost fanatical, faith, a fiery devotion, a stern, uncompromising morality. These were great elements for the making of the new religion; then as now the maxim holds good that it is the emotional element in religion which determines its appeal to the world at large. With all their shortcomings the Jews could furnish that element; their worship of the one God was often narrow and fanatical, Jehovah at times was no more than a tribal Deity, but He was also "the One second to none," the living God of the Prophets. Their nature might be stern but they were the one people whose morality was one with their religion, ingrained in their life; their expectation of the Messiah might be a material one, of a King to make Israel great, but at least they expected one and some were ready to receive Him. The Pharisees and Sadducees might be hypocritical and proud, but there were Brotherhoods like the Essenes and the Therapeuts in whom a deeply mystical faith and a very true brotherhood were to be found.

Thus Israel was chosen to receive the Christ. There alone the perfect Life could be lived which was to kindle a flame of Love enveloping the earth; there could be sown the seed from which could spring the mighty faith of Christianity which was to illumine the Western world.

Such was the setting of the stage on which the great Drama was to be played, such the world waiting for Him Who came to bring the greatest gift of all, that of a divine Life lived amongst men.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF THE NEW FAITH

THERE is a world of evolution between knowing how to live and living according to that knowledge.

The world at the time of Christ's coming knew most of the teachings which Christianity has come to consider as its own. There were those who knew and worshipped one God ; the doctrine of the Trinity was familiar to many, the existence of divine Mediators between God and Man was recognised, they were called " Son of God," " Saviour-God," " Lord," were thought of as miraculously conceived, proving their Divinity by miracles and finally conquering death itself in a triumphant Resurrection. Again, the Graeco-Roman world knew those teachings about man, his origin and destiny which so many look upon as specifically Christian. The Initiates of the Mysteries knew that the world surrounding man was not the real world, but rather a prison-house in which the divine Spirit of man was exiled from its true home, the world of the Spirit eternal. They knew that man could gain life in that world by renouncing the things of this world, that he could be regenerated, attain to a second Birth which would

make him more than man, would make him God. They treasured sacraments of Baptism and of mystic Union to the great God in the sacred communion of the *Agapé* or Love-Feast. All this was known to the world to which Christ came; the elements of Christianity could be found scattered throughout the world. But the one thing lacking was the power to live according to the knowledge thus possessed. The coming of Christ gave that power.

It is the same in our own day. We know the teachings of Christianity; we know and confess with our lips that there is a Kingdom of God, the treasures of which are greater than any earthly treasures. But we do not dare to give up the kingdom of earth for the Kingdom of God; it is too great a risk. We know that all human beings are "sons of the Most High," that every one of us is divine, but we do not dare to claim our divinity. We prefer to be human—it is safer. We know that he who would gain his life must lose it and sing about the glories of the life thus gained. But in practice we would rather keep the life we have. We are afraid to live according to our knowledge. Now, as two thousand years ago, humanity needs the divine example of One who will live in a perfect life that which all know, but none dare to live.

Such a life was that of Jesus Christ. He came to a world quivering in agony, material and mental. Centuries of war, the world-war of those days, between Rome and her rival Carthage had drained the country and disorganised its traditions. Following

in the wake of war came the great slave-rebellions, the uprising of the masses, downtrodden and abused through ages of suffering, against their oppressors; a rebellion smothered in blood. Never was there such acute contrast between fantastic wealth and abject poverty; luxury and want undermined the social order. Man was groping for a way out of this darkness; he had gone through centuries of individualism and materialism, tasted pleasure and power, and found them turned to ashes in his mouth. The official state-religion was a fine but lifeless tradition, the Mysteries helped the chosen few, but the masses had nothing to hope for, nothing to appeal to. Is it to be wondered that they yearned for One who would be their Comforter, One who would show them a way to happiness? From the agony of downtrodden millions the cry went up which humanity ever sends up in the hour of its distress, when all hope seems to have gone, the cry for Him in whom all believe whether they know it or not. And from the Heart of Love the answer came which He, whose ear is never deaf to the cry of suffering man, ever sends when humanity needs Him.

Thus did He, Who is the supreme Teacher, come forth again to man lost in darkness, man who knew how to live, but could not live according to his knowledge. He taught man how to live, not only by the divine words which fell from His lips but by the divine Life that He led. Many had spoken of spiritual wisdom and love, but through Him

universal Love was manifest in a life without flaw, a life which proved that man could live according to his innate divinity, renouncing this world but gaining the world of real and lasting power.

To the Jews of His time, expecting the coming of a Messiah as a King in all his glory who was to make Israel great amongst the nations, the manner of Christ's coming must have been a lesson in itself. He came without privileges of outer power or possession to further the work that He was to undertake. He had renounced all those weapons which the man of the world thinks indispensable in his struggle to achieve. He did not stoop to defend Himself when attacked; never in those short but marvellous years of His ministry did He use His superhuman powers to assert Himself. His strength throughout lay in the Kingdom within, not the kingdom without.

We are slaves of the kingdom without; our food and shelter, clothes and comfort, are so dear to us that they possess us, not we them. We fear to do anything that might jeopardize our safety in the material world. We look upon a man as successful when he has amassed so much wealth, gained so strong a position in the outer world that his material future seems safe. Who is there even among well-meaning Christians, who, if brought face to face with two individuals, the one prosperous, well-groomed, honoured in his community, never infringing the rules of respectability but never exceeding the limits of gilt-edged morality;

the other poor, shabby, held in pity or contempt, because he refuses to elbow his way into the struggle for the goods of this world, but shares what he has with those who have less, taking no thought for the morrow—who is there who would not look upon the first man as a success, upon the second as a failure, in direct denial of the central teaching of Christ?

His teaching was all woven around the Kingdom of God within, the Kingdom open to all who care to enter—and who prove their ability to fulfil the conditions of entrance. Here no privileges of money or position can bribe the guardians of the sacred Portal, here the Soul of man, alone, naked in the renunciation of all that belongs to the world without, must seek entrance in the strength not of what he has, but of what he is. Rags cannot hide, nor kingly robes impersonate that nobility of the Soul itself, which alone will admit it to the Company of the Elect, the Communion of Saints, who by virtue of their spiritual aristocracy are inhabitants of the Kingdom of God.

It was this Kingdom which Christ opened to Israel, which disdained it; it is this Kingdom which yet is open to all who are not slaves of the outer kingdom, who have enough faith to let go the outer life in order to find the inner.

As long as we doubt in our hearts and hold something back in case we fail to gain the Kingdom within, we defeat our own ends and shall find ourselves outcasts of both the outer and inner

Kingdom. No compromise can suffice, no two Masters can be served if man means to attain. We would fain carry the encumbrances of our earthly self with its possessions, ties and desires with us as we ascend the Mount. But at the barriers of that Kingdom within we have to discard all such goods which cannot pass through the portals of the inner life. This renunciation means suffering; we have identified ourselves so strongly with what we are not that to part with it is like death. Yet it is by this "death unto ourselves" that we truly come to Life.

Christ, in the crystalline perfection of a life that knew no compromise, showed the way to the Kingdom and the fruits of attainment. It is as if He set out to make clear from the beginning what is essential and what non-essential. Privileges of birth, station, wealth or power He relinquished; efforts to dominate or to convince those around Him He never made; He allowed Himself to be taken, insulted, humiliated, killed to show that all this could not bar the way to Victory. Never again could any, failing to achieve, blame misfortune or surroundings. Christ in His life took these weak excuses from us, by undergoing all we can undergo and worse, by renouncing from the outset all the weapons we might think indispensable in our quest, and conquering in the strength of the Spirit alone.

Our lives are chiefly centred round ourselves. Even if we love we generally expect love in return, or at least kindliness; in our meetings with people

and our attitude towards events, our chief concern is how they will affect us and our existence. It is an instinctive attitude which centres the universe around ourselves. If we would enter the Kingdom this attitude must change to that of Christ, whose love has become radiating, ever giving out to the surrounding world, whether deserving or not, whose life is centred in the Divine, common to all. In Him there is no remnant even of a separate personality, battling for its own existence or aggrandisement; the cup of His existence is emptied of all that is personal and become filled with the wine of divine Life, shared by all. We, by a continuous, though possibly unconscious, effort may maintain the centre of separate life which we call our personality; if we would follow Christ, we have to give up the laborious struggle for individual assertion in the desire to be the life of the Whole rather than that of a part. Thus alone can we enter the Kingdom where no separateness can be. This is one great lesson Christ taught, by living it to perfection, a lesson embodying one of the conditions of entrance to the Kingdom of God—the condition of self-renouncing love for all that is.

The condition which goes with it is that of utter purity: of not being attached to or attracted by the things of the outer world. Impurity is self-identification with the things of the flesh, whatsoever they may be—power, possession, food or pleasure. When a man can shift the centre of his life from the world of outer things to the world of the inner he becomes

pure and free from the bonds with material things which up to that time kept him from entering the Kingdom. Once he has disentangled himself nothing from without can ever again hurt or hinder him, the Spirit within, living his own real life in the world of the Real. Then he has followed in the steps of Christ who Himself was all-powerful in the world of matter because nothing in it could affect Him. The victory of the Cross is the victory of the Spirit triumphant, who in the death of the separate life in matter finds the birth into the unity of Life Eternal. This Regeneration was the final message given by Christ to His world: that man by renouncing self in universal love, by conquering matter through utter purity, could gain the Everlasting Life of the Kingdom within, and in that life is victorious even over the powers that might appear to trample and conquer Him in the world without.

His enemies conquered Christ in this world of matter; He allowed Himself to be conquered, for only thus could He teach the supreme lesson that He came to teach—that nothing from without can ever conquer the Spirit within and that man in death can triumph over both life and death. Could anything be more wonderful than this message taught by Christ in His life? He came to a world of complicated civilisation without anything or anyone to support Him, without privilege, protection or power. He never defended or protected Himself, never cared for or worried about His existence, allowed

His enemies to take Him and kill Him. And yet the message He lived became the Gospel of untold millions; yet these three years of ministry became the foundation of a new world; yet He became the inspiration of a new religion which was to last for many thousands of years. A life of utter purity and universal love, of child-like simplicity and of God-like wisdom was the message He brought to a world in agony, teaching it that thus alone man could gain the Kingdom of God, in which all problems and troubles are solved.

That, the teaching He lived, was the essential, the new thing He gave to this world; from that spread Christianity; by that living Fire it is maintained.

Then as now the Christian Faith is centred in the living Christ, then as now His life of love and purity is the way to the Kingdom of God—the way He went, the way we follow.

CHAPTER III

ST. PAUL AND THE SPREADING OF THE FAITH

THE Founder of the Christian faith did not make a new religion nor did He found a Church. He, like all great Teachers, lived a life in which the Divine became manifest to men on earth and—through that life—taught men the wonder of their own divinity. That was His mission, that His message. To descend from that height to what men in their material blindness call essential in the starting of a new movement—organisation, rules and rulers—would have been to deny that which He, the perfect Wisdom, knew as the truly essential teaching and enabling men by example to live according to the one commandment by which men would know them as His disciples: that they should love one another. One of the grandest elements of Christ's life is His never-failing trust in the all-sufficiency and power of the spiritual ideal, knowing, as He alone could, that as long as it was strong and pure, His mission would succeed and all details of organisation would follow naturally. And they did. During the life of a great teacher, the disciples he gathers round him

do not feel the need of an organised movement; he, the teacher, fills their life, he is the movement. It is only when he has left this earthly life and the disciples suddenly find themselves thrown back on themselves, left to their own resources, that the need for consolidation of that which binds them is felt, henceforth their inspiration is to come from within instead of from without. Thus it was with the disciples of Christ, instead of Christ, their Paraclete, the One they could call upon at all times (ὁ Παράκλητος—the One who can be called upon, the Helper; in Latin: *advocatus*), they now receive another Paraclete, the Holy Spirit within themselves, the source of inspiration in their own consciousness. The belief in and activity of the Holy Spirit is one of the most fundamental realities of Christianity; the way in which God manifests Himself in man is by His holy Breath (τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιου, *Spiritus Sanctus*) which is the Giver of Life, the Spirit of Truth, the true inspiration (*in spirare*: to breathe into). Thus at Pentecost, the promised Paraclete became manifest in the disciples, stirring them up to miraculous works, inspiring and helping them.

The Holy Spirit is the creative activity of God, and when it touches man with its vivifying spark, he becomes filled with a Life greater than his own, energised with a power stronger than any on earth, endowed with a wisdom which comes through him, not from him. The knowledge of things beyond man's ordinary ken, the guidance in matters spiritual and material, the performing of miracles, the

speaking in languages not ordinarily known to the speaker, all these and many more were and are manifestations of the Holy Spirit in man, answers of the Paraclete to man's appeal.

The working of the Holy Ghost was not without its dangers to the early Church as also in later ages. Just as under the name of mysticism much vague sentimentalism and even hysteria goes hidden, to the detriment of true mystics, so, too, side by side with true inspiration we find a wide range of psychic, mediumistic and illusionary experiences pretending to be manifestations of the Holy Ghost. We read in his Epistles how St. Paul had to warn the early Churches against these excesses and aberrations; a century later the Montanist heresy was to endanger the life of the Church in a similar manner.

Yet the meaning and value of the working of the Holy Ghost in man was and is profound. Though the physical presence of Christ no longer inspired His followers, they thus continued to receive divine guidance, and the founding and evolution of the new religion and church was not to be a mere man-made thing.

Even during His lifetime the Christ had given authority to some disciples to teach and perform miracles in His name, sending them out as messengers of His Gospel. Then, the day before He suffered, He gave power to His disciples to go out into the world as He had been sent by His Father. Also He gave them the most precious gift of

consecrating Bread and Wine so that these might be vehicles of His consciousness, whenever and wherever their consecration should be done in proper form by those empowered to do so.

All this shows that Christ intended that the new life, which He had brought to men should be shared by all. Yet never by word or act did He hint at the formation of a new religion or a church. Even for some time after His death, the small group centred round Him was looked upon as one of many similar sects in the Jewish religion. Prophets were never lacking in Israel, nor they who felt called to stone them; and the story of Christ and His followers was to many contemporaries just one of many. They, like Gamaliel, would look upon the movement with a serene indifference, or if their temperament was more fanatic, with hatred. This hatred was strengthened by the claims made by the Christ and His followers, that He was the Son of God, this being blasphemy to the rigidly monotheistic mind of the Jew, as also by their contempt for religious forms and concentration on religious life only. This last attitude remained a silent reproach to the priests and adherents of the established faith with its rites and customs. The miracles, especially those of healing, served only to intensify the hatred in those who in their inability to copy them would pronounce them as evil magic. The arrest of Peter and the other apostles was the outcome of this hatred and even though the wise counsel of Gamaliel saved them from worse than a flogging,

the general attitude remained unfavourable to the "Nazarenes".

Still there was no church, nor a new religion. The apostles looked upon the message of Christ as intended for Israel alone and having as its main purpose the purification of the Jewish Faith. Their hopes of Christ as an earthly king, making Israel great, had been shattered, but rose again in the expectation of Christ's near return (*chiliasm*) for which Israel had to be prepared so that this time He might accomplish His mission as an earthly ruler.

Meanwhile the number of followers grew, including native Jews as well as Greek-speaking or Hellenic Jews. It was because of the dissatisfaction of the latter with regard to the daily distribution of food amongst the widows, in which they claimed their own were neglected, that the Twelve decided to appoint seven men to look after all administrative work, thus setting them free to devote all their time to teaching and prayer. So they laid hands upon them, imparting the Holy Spirit as they themselves had received it from Christ. It was Stephen, one of the seven, who by his signs and wonders amongst the people once more aroused the wrath of the Jews. His spirited defence when accused only increased their hatred; they dragged him outside the city and stoned him, laying their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul, who entirely sympathised with this murder of an innocent man.

It is hard to reconcile Paul the Apostle with Saul the heresy-hunter. Not only did Saul sanction the murder of Stephen, but he himself was foremost in the subsequent persecution of the disciples, hunting them down and bringing them to justice wherever found, finally even asking for letters of introduction to the synagogue in Damascus in order to continue the work of persecution there. A great sinner can certainly become a great saint, as witness St. Augustine, but his sins were due to moral weakness which he finally overcame. A St. Augustine could never have taken a keen pleasure in hunting down heretics and dragging them before the tribunal. Whether one who did delight in that could ever show forth the radiant loving-kindness, so characteristic of Christ, seems doubtful. It is true, on the way to Damascus Saul, being struck with blindness, was filled with fear and in his joy at being healed by Ananias after three days of great suffering, changed his attitude with regard to the sect he had been persecuting and became its apostle instead of its enemy. But even so he is not entirely representative of the spirit of Christ's teaching.

There is no denying the greatness of St. Paul. He was a man of strength, passionately intent on the work he was doing, whether that of destroying or propagating the new faith. He had vision, which the other apostles seem to have lacked, and saw the enormous future of the new faith Christ had kindled. He changed it from a Jewish sect to a

universal religion, from an ill-defined movement to a well-organised Church, from inarticulate beliefs to clearly-expressed dogmas. Having been initiated in the Mysteries and taught there the possibility of man's spiritual rebirth through mystic death and resurrection, he saw in the new movement the historical embodiment of the mystery-teaching and in the story of Christ, especially in His death and resurrection, a vehicle for the central truth of the Mysteries. Hence the historical Jesus Christ plays practically no part in the Pauline teaching; the Christ of St. Paul is the Divine within man, the mystic Christ. In thus emphasising the glorious reality of the Christ within, to be crucified and reborn in every human soul, St. Paul did not, as some would have it, betray Christianity and make it subservient to his own teaching.

Those who thus accuse St. Paul of perverting the new faith, lose sight of the fact that Christ, the World-Teacher, is both God and Man. By His manhood, He is the fruit of human evolution, having risen through many lives from the level of primitive man to that of Perfect Man, having reached the goal of human evolution and become one with the Divine Life, from Which all come, to Which all return, but of Which we are oblivious during our human pilgrimage. As such Christ is the perfect human being, become superhuman in reaching the end of human evolution. Yet of all Those who have reached that goal only One became Christ the World-Teacher. In the hidden Government of the

world, without the supervision and guidance of which mankind would have perished long since, undone by its own follies, there are sublime ranks and offices, bestowing upon Those who hold them powers and greatness far beyond our understanding. One of these is the office of the World-Teacher, the One who watches over mankind's religious life, the Guardian of souls, educating them towards divinity, helping them in this divine education by the different religions given at various times to the world. The One who holds this office of World-Teacher is, by virtue of His rank, made the representative of and one with the second Person of the Divine Trinity, the Cosmic Christ, the Wisdom of God, in Whom we live and move and have our being, by Whom all things were made. Perfect Man is one with God and—through God—with all humanity, with the entire world. As such His life is in all men, all men's lives in His. But there are degrees of union and unity and by His office the One who holds the exalted rank of World-Teacher is at-oned with God and through God with man and Nature in so complete a manner that to us the difference seems lost in unity. The second Person of the Trinity, be He called Vishnu or Christ, is the same during the entire existence of a Universe; the World-Teacher of the moment holds His rank temporarily, passing on to higher things yet when His work is done and leaving in the hands of His Successor the sacred duty of Guardian of souls.

Man, being in the image of God, shows forth the Trinity in his own divine spirit, though the divinity in most men is but slumbering. Thus within man too is the second Person of the Trinity, the Christ within, and by the birth of this mystic Christ in man, the soul awakens in the world of the divine, the exile returns to his home.

Whenever the World-Teacher comes to mankind and lives amongst them, His life on earth is more than a merely individual life. The life of the ordinary man is true for himself, but has no representative meaning for others. The life of a great man is wider in scope and becomes representative for many, many souls. The life of the World-Teacher is, by virtue of His having attained perfection and by virtue of His having become one with the cosmic Christ, representative of all mankind and of all Nature. The events of His life are historically real but their history is at the same time the history of every human soul. Thus every soul has to pass through mystic birth, baptism, transfiguration on the Mount, agony in the Garden, death on the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension. The events in the life of the historical Christ, the World-Teacher, using the body of the disciple Jesus, are the same as the events in the life-history of the mystic Christ, the divine Self in each of us. Not as a symbol or allegory, nor by interpretation are they representative, but they are actually the same if we can see it. Thus St. Paul does but stress the wider meaning of the events in Christ's life, when he

sacrifices the historical Jesus Christ to the Christ in man, a process that had already been accomplished in part when he began his work.

If it be true, and it seems likely, that Jesus Christ lived and taught about 75 B.C. and was not crucified but stoned and His body hung on a tree,[1] then in making the manner of His death that of death on the Cross, the pious compilers of the Gospel-stories had already confused the story of Jesus the Christ with that of the mystic Christ. In the same manner the story of Christ in nature, the mythic Christ, who in the mythology of most races is found under many names as the Sun-God, whose death in winter and rebirth after the shortest day (Christmas) are representative of the life of the cosmic Christ in Nature, whose cosmic life-story again is one with the historical life of Jesus the Christ, was worked into the Gospel-story, so that it finally became, not only the story of a life on earth, not only the story of each human soul, but the story of the divine Life crucified in Nature, reborn through nature, the story of Christ, the second Logos, the cosmic Christ, Who in this manifestation in Nature is the source of the Sun-God myth, the mythic Christ.

Truth is greater than the finite mind of man and our inability to see all aspects and meanings of a truth does not mean that they do not exist. St. Paul saw and rightly emphasised the truth of the mystic Christ, in and through the story of the historic Jesus Christ, thus preserving for later

[1] Acts 5, 30 and 10, 39.

Christianity a precious heritage of mystic life which else might have been lost sight of.

Yet it cannot be denied that St. Paul, who had never met Jesus the Christ, who had not been inspired by the example of this fragrant life of gentleness, compassion and serenity, does not emphasise either in his life or writings that very element which was Christ's great gift to the world. St. Paul alone could never have conveyed to us the great lesson Christ taught by this Life. A St. Francis could have done it, his life breathes that same fragrance of Christ's life, but St. Paul was a passionate and even somewhat dogmatic propagator of a doctrine, an able organiser, in fact the founder of the Church, but not one who trod in His footsteps. Yet, a man like St. Paul was necessary for the work that was to be done, a character like his was essential to the success of it. His missionary zeal led to dogmatism, but without it the Jewish sect would not have become the world-religion.

St. Paul was a universalist. He thought in continents where the other apostles thought in villages. He saw all mankind waiting for the message and he brought it. Practically alone he overcame the resistance of those who desired to keep the new message for Jews only and resented his attempts to spread it to the Gentiles. Alone he planted the seed of the new faith throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, forming small and devoted groups of followers wherever he went and keeping in touch with them, instructing and exhorting

them, by correspondence. It was a gigantic task for any one man to have undertaken and accomplished. It is true he was helped by fellow-disciples, true also that others did work similar to his in establishing important Churches in Rome, Alexandria and elsewhere. But only Paul had a Luke to make his work immortal. The fame of having made a universal religion from an obscure Jewish sect, of having spread this religion through almost the entire civilised world of his day, of having established the Christian Church as such and having given it a coherent doctrine, will forever be associated with the name of St. Paul. Jesus the Christ brought the new impulse, realised the new ideal, St. Paul made the new religion, even though some may say he unmade it. Without him and his less famous helpers in missionary work, the new faith might not have become the universal religion. He freed it from its Jewish shackles and enabled a world to participate in the new Life. It was inevitable that in the process something of Christ's essential message should be lost, that the inspired character of the earliest days should give way to the more dogmatic type of the established religion. But the great work had been begun: the Christian religion was born.

CHAPTER IV

CHRIST OR EMPEROR, THE AGE OF MARTYRDOM

WITH the birth of the Christian religion as such the second act of the Drama of the Christian faith closes, and the curtain rises for the next act, the one in which the young religion will have to undergo and overcome the attacks of the world around it.

In the Prologue to the Drama we have seen the setting of the stage, the conditions of the world to which Christ came; the First Act showed His Coming and the kindling of the fire of the new Faith and in the Second Act we saw how from the inspiration Christ had given, the Christian religion as such originated and spread throughout the civilised world of that day. Now, in the Third Act the new religion will have to find its place in the world surrounding it, adjust itself to existing conditions, both influencing them and undergoing their influence. It was inevitable that this inter-action with the outside world and this adjustment to it should be a time of struggle.

The new sect which had first been looked upon with derision gradually began to be feared and

finally even hated as it spread and became a power to be reckoned with. The Jewish faith was a *religio licita* and as long as the new faith formed part of the Jewish religion it was protected by the tolerance which Rome had for the religions of the nations it conquered. But when with the change from a Jewish sect to a universal religion the new faith broke with the Jewish religion and became independent, it lost that protection and had to rely on its own strength. The hatred of the Jews for the followers of Christ, which existed already during the lifetime of the great Teacher, became even stronger when Christianity opened its doors to Jews and Gentiles alike; riots between Jews and Christians became frequent and it was only natural that the authorities should blame the latter for them, the more so as the Jews lost no opportunity in maligning the Christians and sowing suspicion against them whenever they could.

But that which chiefly made the Christians unpopular in an age of imperialism was that they were of no race or nation but essentially universalist in type. The Jews, too, were hated but their religion was at least nationalistic in character; and whereas national ideals were respected, the new ideal of internationalism, being adverse to the imperialistic tendencies of Rome, naturally called forth opposition.

Then as now men were only too ready to believe evil of that which was unknown or new and no accusations were too base to be used against the Christians. The main charge of course was that

of immorality; it was said that their love-feasts were in reality shameless debauches, in which all conceivable excesses were committed; they were accused of child-murder as part of their religious ritual and people were only too willing to believe that they were incendiaries and dangerous revolutionaries. We can easily understand that the masses should credit such accusations, but it is sad to find cultured men like Tacitus and the younger Pliny accusing the followers of the new religion of the most terrible crimes. Thus Tacitus, speaking of the fire of Rome for which many held Nero guilty, says:

Neither works of benevolence nor the gifts of the prince nor means of appeasing the gods ended the shameful suspicion, nor caused that it was no longer believed that the fire had been caused by his command. Therefore, to overcome this rumour, Nero put in his own place as culprits, and punished with most ingenious cruelty, men whom the common people hated for their shameful crimes and called Christians. Christ, from whom the name was derived, had been put to death in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate. The deadly superstition, having been checked for a while, began to break out again, not only throughout Judea, where this mischief first arose, but also at Rome, where from all sides all things shameful and scandalous meet and become fashionable. Therefore, at the beginning some were seized who made confessions; then, on their information, a vast multitude was convicted, not so much of arson as of hatred of the human race. And they were not only put to death, but subjected to insults, in that they were either dressed up in the skins of wild beasts and perished by the cruel mangling of dogs, or else

put on crosses to be set on fire, and as day declined, to be burned, being used as lights by night. Nero had thrown open his gardens for that spectacle, and gave a circus play, mingling with the people dressed in a charioteer's costume or driving in a chariot. From this arose, however, toward men who were, indeed, criminals and deserving extreme penalties, sympathy on the ground that they were destroyed not for the public good, but to satisfy the cruelty of an individual.[1]

It is strange enough to hear Tacitus condemning the Christians as criminals without any proof of crimes committed by them, but it is even more deplorable to hear him accuse of hatred of the human race those who followed the teachings of universal love and brotherhood. Yet we can understand how this accusation originated.

Those who, united in a common ideal, find themselves different from the rest of the human race and seek rather the company of those who think alike than that of those whose purpose in life is entirely different, will naturally be accused of contempt or even hatred of their fellowmen, because they do not share their life and pleasures. Those who turned Christian would naturally no longer be interested in the games and gladiatorial fights; their attention would be directed towards things on high, not towards things of this world. The essential characteristic of Paganism is a glorification of this world, a worship of nature in which the worshipper feels himself as part of

[1] *Annals*, XV, 44.

nature. Thus Paganism is diametrically opposed to the other-worldliness which was so characteristic of the early Christians, who sought the subjugation of the flesh in extremes of asceticism. To the Pagans of that age the early Christians must have appeared as kill-joys, who disdained those things which alone could give pleasure to man. True spirituality neither shares the Pagan glorification of this world nor the extreme asceticism, which looks upon this world as essentially evil. Christ Himself, and the true followers of the Christlike St. Francis, did not disdain nature but loved its beauty and found upliftment in its contemplation. Yet their love of nature is very different from that of the Pagan. In Paganism man is part of the nature which he glorifies; he does not control it but is bound to it. In true spirituality man has overcome nature and by his victory is able to discern the Divine manifest in it. The early Christians looked upon the world surrounding them as a dangerous enemy trying to tempt them away from the spiritual life, and their fanatical fight against Pagan creeds was partly due to fear of that world which they had not really overcome. They had inherited the almost dogmatic and jealous worship of one God from their Jewish ancestors and no sin could be worse in their eyes than that of worshipping other gods. It was this uncompromising denial of any other worship but their own which brought about the final clash between the followers of Christ and the Roman authorities.

The national state-religion of Rome was no longer a vital creed, but the recently instituted Emperor-worship was the most precious bond of unity the growing Empire possessed.

The idea of deification of a Ruler was not new. In Egypt the Pharoah was worshipped as the Son of God and was the centre of an elaborate ritual in which the adoration of the multitude went up to him as God incarnate. It was however not till Alexander the Great that the worship of the Ruler as Divine began to spread to Europe. In Rome Julius Caesar was the first to be entitled " Divus " Julius but he had not been worshipped. During the reign of Augustus Emperor-worship had become universal, even though he himself did not encourage it. Later Emperors, however, recognising the value of this worship as a bond of unity for the entire Empire, insisted on it and gradually it became the religion of the day. The usual form of the worship would be to burn incense in front of the statue of the Emperor or bring a victim to be sacrificed and after the sacrifice to partake of the offerings in the sacrificial meal. In the early days of Christianity it was one of the conditions on which the Apostles would allow St. Paul and his helpers to spread the Faith to the Gentiles, that they should abstain from food which had been offered to idols. Christianity did not suffer anything or anyone to share in the worship which was due to God alone, and while they were willing to give to Caesar what was

Caesar's they refused to give him what was God's.

We can easily imagine what would happen on those occasions of national rejoicing when every loyal citizen came to join in the worship which played such a great part in the life of the Empire. The Christians would naturally abstain from worshipping, and not being overtactful in their fanaticism would utter uncomplimentary remarks to the address of those who did worship. These in turn, not being able to appreciate the reasons why the Christians abstained from the common worship, would suspect them of being disloyal to the Emperor and revolutionary in tendency. We can understand how easily the tension which was bound to arise out of this might cause a riot and naturally the Christians would be blamed for it all.

When we understand the enormous place which titles like *Kurios* (Lord) and *Theos-Soter* (Saviour-God) held in Christian worship we can see how impossible it was for the Christians to grant these same titles to any being but God.

This refusal to participate in the worship of the Emperor, which had become a symbol of the unity of the Roman Empire, was one of the main causes, if not the sole cause of the persecutions which followed.

Up to this time Christianity had been tolerated, though not recognised as a *religio licita.* Christian communities were allowed registration as burial clubs, and we even know of one instance where

registration took place for a guild of dyers or "purple-dippers," which in reality was a Christian congregation. For a while they could work unmolested in this manner and enjoy the legal privileges granted to such clubs and guilds. But now as a result of the continual riots both with Jews and Pagans and of the hatred which the new faith aroused because its followers were different from the rest, but most of all as a result of the accusations of disloyalty and anarchism made against them, this toleration changed to persecution.

We have already seen how the new faith suffered in the Neronian presecution. But this persecution was an incident, not a policy. In like wise Domitian punished even members of his own family for their Christian tendencies; but here again the attacks were spasmodic and not universal. The cause for the earlier attacks was generally mob-incitement as a result of clashes between Jews and Christians or between Christians and Pagan worshippers.

The case was different however when Pliny the Younger in his famous correspondence with the Emperor Trajan, wrote as follows, complaining about the disorganising influence of the Christians on the religious customs of his province:

> It is my custom, my lord, to refer to you all questions about which I have doubts. Who, indeed, can better direct me in hesitation, or enlighten me in ignorance? In the examination of Christians I have never taken part; therefore, I do not know what crime is usually punished or investigated or to what extent. So I have no little uncertainty whether there is any

distinction of age, whether the weaker offenders fare in no respect otherwise than the stronger; whether pardon is granted on repentance or whether when one has been a Christain there is no gain in him in that he has ceased to be such; whether the mere name, if it is without crimes, or crimes connected with the name are punished. Meanwhile I have taken this course with those who are accused before me as Christians. Those who confessed I asked a second and a third time, threatening punishment. Those who persisted I ordered to be led away to execution. For I doubt not that whatever it was they admitted, obstinacy and unbending perversity certainly deserved to be punished. There were others of like insanity, but because they were Roman citizens I noted them down to be sent to Rome. Soon after this, as it often happens, because the matter was taken notice of, the crime became widespread, and many cases arose. An unsigned paper was presented containing the names of many. But these denied that they were or had been Christians, and I thought it right to let them go, since at my dictation they prayed to the gods and made supplication with wine and incense to your statue, which I ordered to be brought into the court for the purpose, together with the images of the gods, and in addition to this they cursed Christ, none of which things, it is said, those who are really Christians can be made to do. Others who were named by an informer said that they were Christians and soon afterward denied it, saying, indeed, they had been, but had ceased to be Christians, some three years ago, some many years ago, and one even twenty years ago. All these also not only worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, but also cursed Christ. They asserted, however, that the amount of their fault or error was this: they had been accustomed to assemble on a fixed day before daylight and sing by turns (*i.e.*, antiphonally) a hymn to Christ as a God; and that they bound themselves with an oath, not for any

crime, but to commit neither theft, nor robbery, nor to break their word and not to deny a deposit when demanded; after these things were done, it was their custom to depart and meet together again to take food; and they said that even this had ceased after my edict was issued, by which, according to your commands, I had forbidden the existence of clubs. On this account I believed it to be more necessary to find out from two maidservants, who were called deaconesses (ministrae), and that by torture, what was the truth. I found nothing else than a perverse and excessive superstition. I therefore adjourned the examination and hastened to consult you. The matter seemed to me to be worth deliberation, especially on account of the number of those in danger. For many of every age, every rank, and even of both sexes, are brought into danger; and will be in the future. The contagion of that superstition has penetrated not only the cities but also the villages and country places; and yet it seems possible to stop it and set it right. At any rate, it is certain enough that the temples, deserted until quite recently, begin to be frequented, that the ceremonies of religion, long disused, are restored and that fodder for the victims comes to market, whereas buyers of it until now were quite few. From this it may easily be supposed that a multitude of men can be reclaimed if there be a place of repentance.

The Emperor Trajan, answering this letter, gave the following ruling:

You have followed, my dear Secundus, the proper course of procedure in examining those who were accused to you as Christians. For, indeed, nothing can be laid down as a general law which contains anything like a definite rule of action. They are not to be sought out. If they are accused and convicted, they are to be punished, yet on this condition, that he who denies that he is a Christian and makes the fact evident by an act, that is by worshipping our gods,

shall obtain pardon on his repentance, however much suspected as to the past. Papers, however, ought not to be admitted in any accusation. For they are a very bad example and unworthy of our times.

In this ruling Trajan improved the state of things for the Christians rather than anything else. Since Nero had treated Christianity as a *religio illicita* the standpoint of the imperial government with regard to the Christians had been: "The law does not allow you to exist"; and this remained the attitude during the second century and the first half of the third. Trajan's ruling, by regulating exactly when and how Christians might be punished, became a protection against officials who out of personal dislike of Christianity might go to extremes of persecution. Yet even so many were sought out during the reign of Antoninus Pius; for instance, St. Polycarp suffered martyrdom having been dragged from the farm near Smyrna where he had taken refuge during the riots in which so many Christians perished under the most horrible tortures.

It is a curious fact that the worst persecutions often took place during the reign of the most high-minded and noble Emperors. Thus, for instance, it was during the reign of the philosopher-Emperor Marcus Aurelius that the terrible persecutions in Vienna and Lyons took place, in which latter persecution the famous Blandina and her fifteen-year-old brother Ponticus, notwithstanding the most appalling tortures, remained steadfast and died in the faith.

The reason why the best Emperors were so severe in their persecutions was that they, more than any others, realised the danger of the growing faith for the Roman Empire and felt it their duty to stop it at all costs. The result of the persecutions however was exactly the opposite. Instead of destroying the young Church they only served to make it stronger by weeding out the weak and faint-hearted and by inspiring and strengthening the remainder by the noble example of the martyrs. Martyrdom, far from being considered a misfortune, was looked upon as a most desirable consummation. The certitude of gaining the crown of martyrdom and the everlasting bliss of heaven was sufficient to make many desire martyrdom eagerly, so much so that the magistrates at times had to restrain those who tried to force martyrdom upon themselves. Characteristic of this attitude is the Epistle written by St. Ignatius of Antioch when on his way to be martyred:

I write to all the churches and impress on all, that I shall willingly die for God unless ye hinder me. I beseech you to show no unreasonable good-will toward me. Permit me to be the food of wild beasts, through whom it will be granted me to attain unto God. I am the wheat of God, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice wild beasts, that they may become my tomb and leave nothing of my body, so that when I have fallen asleep I may be burdensome to no one. Then I shall be truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world sees not my body. Entreat Christ for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice to God.

Though we may not agree that the passion for martyrdom was a true interpretation of the teachings of Christ, yet there is no doubt that the persecutions were the making of the Christian Church. Under successive Emperors they grew in severity. Thus the first official edict against the Christians, issued by the Emperor Severus in the year 202, forbade people under heavy penalties to become Christians. This merely prevented the making of converts, but was not directed against those who were Christians. The edict of Decius, however, issued in the year 250, fixed a date by which all had to make public profession of paganism. A commission of magistrates was appointed for each locality, the names of the inhabitants were called out, and each, in veil and crown, had to offer a sacrificial victim, or, at least, incense and a libation; to renounce Christ and partake of the sacrificial meal. Those who fell off from Christianity in this manner were called the *lapsi* and amongst these again we can distinguish the *sacrificati*, those who had brought a sacrificial victim, the *thurificati*, who had offered incense, and the *libellatici*, who had procured a certificate or *libellus* from the magistrates without actually having taken part in the worship. In later years the Church was to know serious controversies with regard to the possible return to the Church of these different groups of *lapsi*.

It may be interesting to give an example of such a *libellus* found in Egypt, in the Fayum:

Presented to the Commission for the Sacrifices in the village of Alexander Island, by Aurelius Diogenes, the son of Satabus, of the village of Alexander Island, about seventy-two years of age, with a scar on the right eyebrow.

I have at other times always offered to the gods as well as also now in your presence, and according to the regulations have offered, sacrificed, and partaken of the sacrificial meal; and I pray you to attest this. Farewell. I, Aurelius, have presented this.

I, Aurelius Syrus, testify as being present that Diogenes sacrificed with us.

First year of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius, Pius, Felix, Augustus, 2nd day of Epiphus. (June 25, 250.)

They are tragical documents, these *libelli*, and the mental agony of some of the *lapsi* may well have been greater than the physical suffering of many martyrs. Worst of all perhaps was the case for those who were not martyred, suffering perhaps a few hours of terrible torture, but who were condemned to the mines to a lifetime of perpetual agony, in which there were no admiring crowds to cheer them in their heroism.

Thus the persecutions continued through the third century. The edicts against the Christians issued by the Emperor Valerian were more especially directed against the members of the Christian clergy. In his first edict, issued in A.D. 257, the clergy were forced to sacrifice under pain of exile. A later edict, of the year 258, made death the punishment, and extended it to include members of the laity, stating that senators, men of rank and Roman

knights should lose their dignity and be deprived of their property, whereas freed men were to be condemned to the lowest ranks of slavery. It was under this persecution that St. Cyprian of Carthage was beheaded.

The last great persecution took place under Diocletian who, in the year 303, issued three edicts, each one more severe than the previous one. The first one forbade meetings for worship, commanded the churches to be levelled to the ground, the scriptures to be destroyed with fire, and Christians of official position to be deprived of rank and citizenship. The second edict was directed against the clergy threatening them with imprisonment. The third edict, while providing an amnesty to clerics who were willing to sacrifice, made things worse by ordering torture to be employed, as an act of mercy, in order to persuade them to take advantage of it. Shortly before its publication Diocletian fell ill and his successor Maximian put out a fourth edict in the name of himself and of his co-Augustus in which the laity were to sacrifice or to suffer death. It was during this last great persecution that St. Alban, the first English martyr, suffered.

The Diocletian persecution was the last great effort to crush out Christianity, and, terrible as it was, it yet meant the failure of the authorities to destroy the Christian Church. The persecutions far from destroying the Church had made it stronger; and the blood of the martyrs truly proved the seed of the church.

CHAPTER V

MARCION AND THE GNOSTICS: HERESY OR ORTHODOXY

WHILE the Church was holding her own in her struggle with foes from without, there was little time or opportunity for internal dissension; but whenever the attacks from without became less, differences within the Church arose and caused struggles as dangerous, if not more so, than those with the outer world. It was inevitable that such internal struggles should arise. Christ Himself had lived a perfect life among men and taught them the Wisdom of which He was the embodiment; but He never taught a system or a theology. His teaching was not dogmatic; what He said could naturally be interpreted in many different ways, and so it was. His vital message was grafted on to the different religions and philosophies of His day, and naturally varied accordingly.

Amongst the orthodox Jews who had accepted Christ, His coming was looked upon as the fulfilment of the Law. Their expectation of a Messiah had been that of an earthly king who was

to make Israel great among the nations, and the coming of Christ as a spiritual Teacher, willing to suffer defeat at the hands of earthly enemies so that He might show forth the invincible power of the spirit, had been a disillusionment to many. Thus even after His departure they looked forward to His coming back as an earthly king; they could not abandon their original expectation nor see the limitations of it, and the first century of Jewish Christianity is one of Chiliastic expectations—at any time the long-desired millennium might break and Christ return in all the triumph of earthly power. In this Jewish Christianity, too, we can find the origin of the idea that Christ the Son of God had been offered as a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God and to reconcile Him to humanity.

The Christianity of St. Paul grafted the message of Christ on to the old Mystery-teaching, thus raising it above Jewish national limitations and opening the way for Christianity as a universal religion. This Pauline Christianity, centred as it was round the figure of the mystic Christ rather than round the figure of the historical Jesus, was naturally very different from the Jewish Christianity with its narrow nationalism.

Again a different branch of Christianity was the Alexandrian Church, where that wonderful blend of Christian ideals with Greek philosophy, Egyptian wisdom and Asiatic traditions was made which later on was to culminate in the greatness of the Alexandrian School.

Finally, we find scattered here and there in Asia-Minor and Egypt a strange mixture of the doctrines of Christ with Persian and Indian esoteric traditions known in later ages as Gnosticism. Much that was fantastic and offered little value masqueraded as Gnostic teaching, but even in the very imperfect and mutilated fragments of real Gnosticism which have come down to us we can recognise a most important though little-recognised aspect of Christ's teaching.

Well may we ask ourselves which of all these was Christianity, what was the true teaching or orthodoxy. In the great struggle of Christianity with the Roman world, the early Fathers had found themselves obliged again and again to define the Christian tradition and expound the Christian teachings in their apologies written to deny the different accusations levelled against the new religion. It is one of the main results of attacks from without that they force any movement to define its position ; and in the case of Christianity the work of the apologists had brought about a crystallisation of doctrine which was the beginning of an orthodoxy.

Side by side with these refutations of the often absurd accusations brought against Christianity we find the writings against the many so-called "heresies" of the growing Church. A heresy originally meant nothing but a sect or group, but gradually the additional meaning became attached to the word of a group holding false doctrine. On

the one hand we can recognise the necessity of refuting some of the more fantastic excrescences which are bound to grow up around a new movement, though even there the wiser course might have been to ignore them ; but on the other hand we can but deplore the loss of very valuable and essential elements of early Christianity through the ignorance and narrow-mindedness of some of the Christian Fathers, who in their heresiologies often show but little understanding of the doctrines they attack and discard.

This is especially true with regard to the great Gnostic Heresy—under which title the many different schools and exponents of Gnosticism were refuted and condemned. Jewish Christianity was ethical and democratic ; it maintained that Christ had given but a lofty ethical doctrine which was available to all and could be understood by all. The Gnostic claim that there was a Christianity for the few as well as a Christianity for the many, that Christ had taught a deeper wisdom, the Gnosis, to the more advanced of His disciples and that this inner doctrine could only be obtained by those who were spiritually ready to receive it, was a thing abhorrent to Jewish and orthodox Christianity. The struggle became one between democratic Christianity which looked upon all men as equal in the sight of God, and aristocratic Christianity which, though recognising that all were sons of one Father, maintained that some of these sons were younger in the spirit and less capable of

understanding the inner things than others who were more advanced in the school of life. Christ Himself made this distinction; we read how He taught in secret to His disciples the things about which He could but speak in parables to the multitude. He thus recognised what we might term the aristocracy of the spirit, which does but mean that some souls are more capable of receiving wisdom than others, and thus more fitted to be leaders amongst men. The inner things of the Kingdom, which would have been as pearls cast before swine if given to the multitude, were thus given by Christ and His successors to the chosen few who by rigid self-control and spiritual training had made themselves ready to receive them.

Some of the early Fathers themselves recognised the existence of a hidden doctrine and were far from claiming that they knew all there was to be known in the Christian teaching. Thus St. Polycarp, the Martyr Bishop of Smyrna, writes a letter expressing the hope that his correspondents are "well versed in the sacred Scriptures and that nothing is hid" from them; "but," he writes, "to me this privilege is not yet granted," acknowledging thereby that he is not yet ready to receive full Initiation into the final Mysteries. St. Ignatius of Antioch writes in a similar vein and speaks of himself as "not yet perfect in Jesus Christ". Addressing his correspondents as fellow-disciples, he speaks of them as "initiated into the mysteries of the Gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred". And again he

says, "for even I, though I am able to understand heavenly things, the Angelic orders, the distinction between powers and dominions, and the diversities between thrones and authorities, the mightiness of the æons . . . though I am acquainted with these things, yet am I not therefore by any means perfect, nor am I such a disciple as Paul or Peter." This last passage shows that the teachings with regard to the Angelic Hierarchies, which are certainly not to be found in the Gospels, were part of a hidden tradition given to the few in terms which strongly remind us of Gnostic teachings.

Much later we find St. Clement of Alexandria saying:

> The Lord allowed us to communicate of those divine mysteries, and of that holy life, to those who were able to receive them. He certainly did not disclose to the many what did not belong to the many; but to the few to whom He knew that they belonged; who were capable of receiving and being moulded according to them.

And again:

> The mysteries are delivered mystically; that which is spoken may be in the mouth of the speaker, but not so much in his voice as in his understanding. . . . The writing of these memoranda of mine, I well know, is weak when compared with that Spirit, full of grace, which I was privileged to hear. But it will be an image to recall the archetype to him who was struck with the Thyrsus.[1]

All this shows that the claim of the Gnostics that Christ gave a teaching for the few as well as a

[1] *Stromata.*

teaching for the many was quite justified, though we may well doubt whether some of the Gnostic systems were really a fair presentation of this teaching for the few. That there was a secret school, however, the so-called Mysteries of Jesus, in which the deeper truths were taught, is certain; and also that some of the greater Gnostic teachers must have been Initiates in these Mysteries.

The different Gnostic systems differ a good deal amongst themselves, but there are some teachings common to all which certainly form a valuable element of Christian doctrine. The Gnostics made a clear distinction between Jehovah, the tribal deity of the Jews, the God of wrath and of jealousy, who was the central figure of the Jewish scriptures, and the one God, Father of all and Fount of all love, beyond human conception and yet the indwelling life in man himself. This was the God of love of Whom Christ taught, and was not to be confused with the man-made God of the Jews. With this different conception of God the Gnostics combined a somewhat different conception of creation. Instead of the creation of the world in six days by Jehovah they recognised great creative Beings, the so-called Æons, through whom God realises His plan of creation. The teaching about the real nature of these æons, as also of the different orders of Angelic Beings, who were the ministers of the creative activity, was one of the elements of the Mystery-teaching, as we have already seen in the above-mentioned statement of St. Ignatius.

The Gnostics distinguished between the world of the Real, the *Pleroma* or fullness, and the world of illusion, the *Kenoma* or emptiness. The worlds of our daily existence belong to the *Kenoma*; they are illusory in character; it is only by retreating within himself that man can come to know the *Pleroma* or fullness of things. The myth of *Sophia*, the divine Soul in man, who has become a prisoner in the world of illusion and has to be redeemed by Christ, was representative of man's existence in this world of every-day life, from which those who desired initiation into the Mysteries of Jesus had to pass into that inner world where the kingdom of heaven was to be gained. The Gnostics taught that his pilgrimage of the human soul through matter took place through repeated lives on earth, in which man gradually drew nearer to his final redemption. They also claimed to be able to control the hidden forces in Nature and in man, and many of the Gnostic remains are of a magical character. Much of this Gnostic magical teaching, as found in the *Pistis Sophia* and the *Books of Jeu*, is unintelligible to us; but it is not altogether fair to blame the Gnostic teachers for that, since none of their works have reached us in a pure version, and the few fragments which are trustworthy are not only intelligible but give evidence of a lofty and profound doctrine. Some of the Church Fathers in their eagerness to discredit Gnosticism and in their inability to understand its deeper teachings give us but crippled accounts of what they imagined the

Gnostics taught, and since they are our main source of information, much of the contempt in which Gnosticism is held to-day should rather go to those through whom it reached us than to its original exponents. The true Gnosis was an intrinsic part of primitive Christianity and the ignorance and intolerance which discarded it as dangerous and worthless robbed Christianity of its most powerful appeal to the mind, limiting it to a system of lofty ethical teaching which, however noble, cannot fill the gap left by the elimination of the wisdom-teaching which the original Gnosis certainly gave. With the Gnosis as part of its message Christianity would never have experienced that insufficiency which now has estranged so many thinking men from a Church that even now holds some doctrines which might have fitted in with the conception of a Jewish Jehovah but which are hardly in harmony with the living God, of Whom Christ was the embodiment.

It was, as already mentioned above, one of the main arguments of the Gnostics that a clear distinction should be made between Jewish orthodoxy centred around an angry and revengeful tribal deity and Christianity with its God of Love, Who was a Father to all men, to whatsoever race or nation they belonged.

The main exponent of this antithesis between the Jewish faith and the teaching of Christ was a certain Marcion, son of a rich shipowner in Pontus. He is usually counted amongst the Gnostics though

his only connection with them seems to be this distinction between the God of the Jews and the God of Christ.

Marcion may well be called the first Church-reformer. He came to Rome about the middle of the second century and interested himself in the Church there, to which he is said to have made a large donation. When however he began to ask questions which were thought to be lacking in faith he was excommunicated from the Church and with his many followers formed a new church which soon became very strong and was the most serious rival the orthodox communion knew. Marcion, besides being a man with a very clear insight into the true values of Christianity, was a very able organiser, and if his successors had been men as able as he the Marcionite Church might have lived and flourished. He himself wrote a book called *Antitheses* in which he compared the God of the Jews, who was merely a just God, to the God of Christ who was not only just but loving. Many of his comparisons are very well made and certainly characteristic of the difference he wished to emphasise. Thus he compared the story of Elisha—who when mocked by children cursed them in the name of Jehovah, and found his prayer promptly answered when Jehovah sent two she-bears who devoured the children—to the saying of Christ: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me," and the love which our Lord ever showed to children all through His wonderful life. Again he showed how Jehovah cast forth the lepers whereas Christ cured them.

In the Gospel which the Marcionite Church used there was no reference whatever to the Old Testament; Marcion left out all passages which might possibly link Christianity up with the religion of the Jews. It is interesting to compare the Gospel-criticism of Marcion with modern movements which claim that Christianity should be clearly distinguished from the religion of the Jews and that the New Testament alone should be the Christian Scripture. It is certain that if Marcion's Christianity had prevailed, the Church would have suffered less from the intolerance and hardness which the Jewish element brought with it.

We know little about Marcion, since his books were destroyed and his reputation slandered by the followers of the orthodox church; but we do know that he was a man full of deep reverence for Christ and His teachings, though he had but little respect for any man-made distortions of the sublime teachings of our Lord.

Too little has come down to us from the great Gnostic doctors like Basilides, Valentinus and Bardesanes to allow for any connected statement of their doctrines. The few excerpts which we find, often in a sadly mutilated form, in the writings of their adversaries give us a glimpse of a profound and lofty philosophy which we can well believe to have formed part of the teaching which our Lord Christ gave to the few. And reading them we wonder whether much that was condemned as heresy by the Church, which called itself the

orthodox church, had not as much claim to be called orthodoxy or true doctrine as that for which it was rejected. When we remember in how many different forms Christianity appears to us in the first century, according to the beliefs of the nation or race by which it was taken up, we may well question the right of any of these forms to call itself orthodox to the exclusion of all others; and in the original teaching of our Lord Christ much may have found a place which afterwards was rejected as heretical. However this may be ethical Christianity won the day, and by its fight against heresies lost the inner doctrine of Christ which was His teaching given to the few.

It is necessary that a Church should have a teaching for the multitude, but it is also necessary that it should have a teaching for the few who are capable of receiving the things of the spirit; and we can but hope that some day the Mysteries of Jesus may once more take that place in Christianity which our Lord evidently intended them to take when He taught the things of the Kingdom in secret to His chosen disciples. May that day come soon!

CHAPTER VI

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, AND THE RISE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

EVERY great movement begins with inspiration and ends in dogma.

Thus it was in the history of the Christian faith; Jesus Christ was the living source of personal inspiration from which originated the new religion. His disciples, the Apostles especially, still did their work by the power of the Holy Ghost working within them as the Voice of living Truth, but gradually true inspiration became rare and false inspiration increased. St. Paul already warns against the dangers of psychism usurping the place of true inspiration and it must have been a very real danger to the young Church when so many claimed experience of spiritual truths and did but voice fantastic imaginations. We have seen how even the splendid esoteric wisdom of the Gnostics was clouded over by the ravings of those whose Gnosticism was restricted to the name they arrogated. The danger of all this was that men, seeing the vagaries of

false inspiration and unable to distinguish between true and false, feared to acknowledge any inspiration at all, but rather looked for formulated dogma to take its place. It is ever so; when the experience of living truth within man's own consciousness ceases, man is forced to place his faith in outer doctrine as a substitute for inner Reality. Truth cannot be exteriorised; not being an objective thing it cannot be contained even partially in any statement or book, however sublime. Truth is the living relation of things as they are and can only be realised from within. From the moment when man, devoid of inspiration which is that voice of truth within, extols the false idol of dogma in its stead, the struggle between mysticism or inspiration and orthodoxy or dogmatism has begun.

Thus we now enter upon a period of the Christian Faith which shows the rise of formulated doctrine of theology. This development was hastened on the one hand by the attacks and persecutions from a hostile world which necessitated the writing of apologies refuting the accusations and falsehoods and stating what beliefs the Christians held in reality, and on the other hand by the heresiologies which in refuting the "heresies" or false doctrines also had to state what the true doctrine or orthodoxy was. With regard to the first it was inevitable, where the most incredible slander and misconception was circulated about the young religion and its adherents, that these latter should in self-defence try to show their opponents the injustice

of these attacks and at the same time state what the Christian beliefs really were and why they themselves held them. Thus Christianity for the first time was forced to crystallise its doctrines and formulate its beliefs intellectually. As long as the new faith was not attacked a vague belief in the teachings of the Christ was sufficient, but where enemies began to ask why these beliefs were held and what they really were, each man who took his religion seriously had to come to some sort of definition with regard to it. Attacks always lead to consolidation and definition of belief and the persecutions which the Christians had to suffer not only strengthened the Church and the faith of its members but also gave rise to a Christian theology. In some respects this was a doubtful advantage, for with the birth of theology and dogma came intolerance and sectarianism—the worship of form instead of spirit. This was even more the case with regard to the heresiologies in which the upholders of orthodoxy enumerated and refuted all the so-called heresies. Where the attacks from without only necessitated a general statement as to what Christianity was and what it was not and what teachings Christ had given to men, the refutation of heresies gave birth to abstruse theological arguments and subtleties of metaphysical definition. The pity was that this part of Christian theology was not born of inspiration but of refutation; it was negative and defensive in character, and lacked that constructive element which could have made it a living teaching.

It is interesting to read what Irenaeus, a pupil of St. Polycarp, and himself Bishop of Lyons, writes in his *Overthrow of Science* (*Gnosticism*), *falsely so called;* and which, in its way, forms one of the earliest creeds of Christianity. He says:

The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their disciples this faith: In One God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advent, and birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord, and His manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father, to gather all things into one, and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race.

In these words of Irenaeus we can see how already in the second century the essentials of Christ's teaching were obscured by dogmatic non-essentials, belief in which Christ Himself never demanded of any man. Irenaeus writes as if this statement of Christian belief were the original teaching of Christ and the universal belief of the Church wherever it existed. He says:

As I have already observed, the Church having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered thoughout the whole world, yet as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them

and teaches them and hands them down as if she possessed only one mouth. For though the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world.

The truth of the matter was very different; far from holding one and the same doctrine the different Churches, as I showed in the previous chapter on "Marcion and the Gnostics," held views differing according to the spiritual soil in which the Christian seed had been sown.

Nor was Irenaeus the only one who indulged in the fancy of an established orthodoxy as the original teaching of Christ. Tertullian, one of the great lights of the North African Church, wrote a work called *On the Prescription of Heretics*, the very title of which is as far from Christ's teaching of love and tolerance as anything could be. Yet the works of Tertullian had a profound influence upon Christianity; so much indeed that he has been termed the Father of Latin Christianity. He not only defined the orthodox views as opposed to the heretical doctrines, but in doing so he coined the words which were to become the vocabulary of Latin theology in future times. Thus it was he who first used the term *liberum arbitrium* round which so much theological discussion was to rage in centuries to come.

It seems a strange anticlimax that Tertullian, whose keen legal mind should have taken so much trouble in refuting the Gnostic heresies and denying their right to interfere in any way with the Christian scriptures, should himself finally have landed in the Montanist heresy, but this may have been due rather to grievances against his own Church than to a real sympathy with Montanism.

Tertullian, Irenaeus and the latter's pupil Hippolytus were the chief exponents of this defensive and sometimes offensive dogmatism which in refuting heresies lost sight of the living teachings of Christ and laid the foundation of an intolerant orthodoxy which was destined to obscure the living truth of Christian inspiration for centuries to come. Yet, in studying the origin of defensive theology we can understand how the three causes which brought it about—the failing of inspired teaching, the apologies against attacks from without and the refutation of heresies from within—were inevitable in the history of the Church, and a necessary phase of the great drama of the Christian faith.

It is with relief that we turn from this defensive theology to the constructive theology of the school of Alexandria. Alexandria has always been one of the most remarkable of the Christian churches; here Egypt, Greece, Israel, Rome and the Orient met, not only in commerce, but also in intellectual and spiritual intercourse. Nowhere did the new faith find a richer ground in which to develop. It

was here that Philo of Alexandria had given his spiritual interpretation of the Jewish scriptures and taught his Logos-doctrine which afterwards was to prove such a useful receptacle for the doctrine about Christ. It was here that the Therapeuts had had their communities, which might have been taken for early Christian monastic settlements, so strong was their resemblance to the new religion in doctrine and in practice. Here again, in Alexandria, the famous library had been a centre of learning, the like of which could not be found anywhere in the civilised world of those days, the Museum had become the leading Greek university and the main centre of philosophical learning in the Roman Empire. Naturally the Christian church in Alexandria became with Rome the leading Church of the Christian religion. Here from the earliest days the instruction of members in the Christian doctrine was organised better than anywhere else; here for the first time we find a critical study and arrangement of the Christian scriptures.

The first head of the catechetical school of Alexandria was one Pantaenus, a Sicilian by birth, who after having travelled through India and become acquainted with the doctrines of Indian religious philosophy returned to Alexandria and became the principal exponent of Christianity in that Church. His greatest pupil, greater indeed than his master, was Clement of Alexandria, an Athenian by birth, who had been converted to Christianity and thus combined in himself the

nobility of Greek culture with the depth of Christian faith. Many had thus passed through Greek philosophy to Christianity, but few were able like Clement to make a synthesis of Greek philosophy and culture with the doctrines and ethics of the Christian church. His enthusiasm for the new religion did not impair his width of vision and philosophical tolerance. To him truth could never be exteriorised and crystallised; as he himself expressed it: "The way of Truth is therefore one, but into it, as into a perennial river, streams flow from every side." Such a man could not be a heresy-hunter; the theology that he built up was a living structure born of faith and inspiration, not as a defence against attacks nor as a refutation of heresy but as a revelation of living truth. He considered Greek philosophy and Jewish law to be the *paedagogus* meant to lead man to Christ, and believed that the Logos directed and inspired the philosophy of Greece until He could be fully manifested in Christ. Thus Christianity was shown as the natural and necessary consummation of Greek and Jewish culture, and in his writings Clement does not so much ask his countrymen to give up their culture in favour of Christianity as to find in the latter the necessary complement to the former. The picture he paints in his *Stromateis* of the true Gnostic or ideal Christian is one of the noblest ideals ever conceived by man. The Greek ideal of the ἄνθρωπος καλὸς κ' ἀγαθός in Clement's life, together with the spiritual demands of Christ, made him a type of Christian very

much nobler than that of some of the more fanatical, ignorant contemporaries who believed that to be good meant to be dirty and that wisdom could not be combined with faith. To Clement the true wisdom or gnosis was that inner illumination to which the true Christian could attain if he lived the life of purity and love which our Lord had taught. Thus man entered into the Mysteries of the Kingdom of God which were for the few, willing to bring the necessary sacrifices and capable of making the effort.

Many have doubted the existence of the Mysteries of the Kingdom which Christ delivered to His disciples in secret and to which so many of the leading Christians in the early Church testified. Clement himself was an initiate in these Mysteries and speaks of them repeatedly in his writings. Thus he says:

> The Mysteries are delivered mystically, and what is spoken may be in the mouth of the speaker; rather not in his voice, but in his understanding . . . The writing of these memoranda of mine, I well know, is weak when compared with that spirit, full of grace, which I was privileged to hear. But it will be an image to recall the archetype to him who was struck with the Thyrsus.[1]

The theological writings of Clement were the outcome of this inner spiritual experience, and are far above the intellectual subtleties or defensive arguments of those theologians whose dogmatism was born not of inspiration but of irritation. The result is that they are free of the man-made dogmas

[1] *Stromateis*, Book I, Chap. 28.

which defensive theology substituted for the living teaching of Christ and which by their lack of common sense and inner reality have done so much to estrange thinking men from the Church.

Thus Clement teaches that it is not God's wrath which is to be appeased but man's impurity which is to be overcome, so that unity with the Divine may be attained. Ignorance, to Clement, is the cause of sin, and as man grows in inner wisdom he emerges from the darkness of ignorance and sin into the light of the spiritual world. This victory, which Christ attained in His resurrection, is the goal to which every Christian should aspire ; and it is to the risen Christ and not to the crucified Christ that Clement bids us look. The message which Christ brought to man was not that life meant a crucifixion, but that through the crucifixion of our earthly self the spirit within could attain to the new birth. Joy therefore should be the hall-mark of the Church as well as of its members, for Christianity essentially brought a message of gladness. Most Christians in Clement's time looked upon joy, beauty and wisdom as essentially sinful and as leading man away from God. Primitive Christianity in opposition to Christ's own teaching was bowed down under an intense feeling of sinfulness and evil from which alone God's pardon could bring release. Clement taught that God was the fount not of pardon but of Life, and that it was through wisdom, love and beauty that man grew nearer to God. His scheme of training was one in which he led his pupils through science, dialectics,

ethics and philosophy to theology as the crown of all, thus giving them a wide range of knowledge, culminating in the Christian tradition and scriptures in which all found their unity.

The life of Clement was essentially a life of harmony and beauty; his character was noble and gentle and showed that perfect balance and sense of proportion which was the precious heritage of Greece. His common sense prevented him from allowing himself to be martyred during the persecution of Severus while he could preserve his life by flight; and, though less heroic, his way was certainly the more useful one. Until his flight in the year 202 he was the head of the catechetical school, though he lived until 215, leaving behind him a number of works of which the *Stromateis* were the most important. He was acknowledged as one of the Saints of the Church till the time of Benedict XIV, who struck his name off the calendar as a result of the hostile opinions of Photius, the reading of which brought Benedict to his unjust decision. If ever a man deserved to be termed a Saint it was Clement, whose life of truly Christian virtue and wisdom together with the greatness and nobility of his character make him a true disciple of the living Christ, following in the footsteps of the Master in a time when the message of Christ was but too often obscured by the doctrines of his followers.

CHAPTER VII

ORIGEN, THE INITIATE IN THE MYSTERIES OF JESUS

WHEN Clement of Alexandria fled in order to escape the persecutions under Septimus Severus, a successor had to be appointed as head of the catechetical school, and the choice fell on a young pupil of Clement, called Origen. Though only seventeen years old at the time of his appointment, such was already his reputation for purity of life and depth of learning that he was considered worthy to be the head of this most famous school of Christian instruction. Unlike Clement, Origen was born of Christian parents; at the time of his birth in the year 185, his father, Leonides, resided in Alexandria, though the name "Origen," meaning "offspring of Horus," makes it likely that at some time his family resided in Egypt.

While Clement had been reared in the gentle atmosphere of Athenian culture Origen's childhood was lived amid the struggle of the Christian Church against Roman persecution and scenes of martyrdom stirred his fiery imagination while he was but a

child. His father, Leonides, was one of those who had been arrested during the persecution under Severus, and suffered martyrdom in the year 202. Origen himself decided to share his fate, and had it not been for his mother who prevented him from going out on the fateful day by the simple expedient of hiding his clothes, he would have done so, and the greatest light of the early Church would have been lost to Christianity. We can only be grateful to the maternal wisdom which prevented this precious life from being sacrificed while its great promise was as yet unfulfilled, though on the other hand we can imagine the passionate despair of the boy, who knew that his father was to undergo the terrible ordeal of martyrdom, and he was prevented from being at his side in his last moments. All he could do was to write a letter to his father, bidding him stand firm and not consider his family in the sacrifice that he was about to make. It was inevitable that such dramatic scenes of martyrdom should deeply affect Origen, whose nature was intense and glowing with a fiery devotion. If Clement had shown to the world how Christian piety and Greek beauty could be combined in a life of utter serenity and gentleness, Origen was to combine in himself the learning of a great scientist with an intensity of devotion only paralleled by the original disciples of Christ Himself.

Origen's nature was like tempered steel; not for nothing would he be called Adamantius in later days; his was truly a will of iron. Nothing was

ever allowed to stand in his way when it came to serve the faith which he loved with his whole heart and his whole mind. He literally followed the command of Christ to His apostles, not to have more than one shirt and one pair of shoes, and to have no care for the morrow. In his fiery zeal, he went to extremes of asceticism, subjugating his body entirely to the force of his unswerving determination. It was the same with regard to his studies, in which he had already attained to such remarkable proficiency when barely seventeen years old; here again he would work with the utmost patience and an indomitable perseverance until he had mastered his subject. Never yet in the history of the Church had the mind of a genius, the devotion and piety of a saint, the fiery zeal of an apostle, and the iron will of a reformer, been combined in one personality. The Church was not long in recognising his remarkable gifts, and so it was possible that one so young should have been entrusted with the most responsible task of instructing the members in the Christian religion in what, at that time, was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the Christian Churches.

Origen refused to take any money for his work as head of the school; he sold his books, which he valued above all things, for a small annuity, yielding him about four oboli a day, which in our present money would be about six pence. With that and with the money he made apart from his work in the school in giving lessons and copying

manuscripts, he managed to keep himself and his family, which had been left destitute at the death of his father. For a while he was helped by a wealthy lady, but even this support was withheld when Origen found himself at odds with her Gnostic chaplain, to whose views he was so opposed that rather than be associated with him, he gave up the support which he could so ill spare. But Origen was never one to let anything stand between him and what he considered to be his duty. In his ascetic zeal he went even so far as to follow literally the injunction of Matthew xix, 12, acting literally upon the precept to become a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake, and hoping, in view of his having many women as well as men among his hearers, that he might thus escape slander and calumny. This may have been the result, but in later years when without the knowledge of his bishop, he was ordained a priest of the Church, this fanatical action of his youth was to cause much trouble.

The years between his appointment as head of the catechetical school and his temporary absence from Alexandria during the fury of Caracalla were years of great activity in all directions. So many came to hear his lectures that he was forced to hand over the elementary instruction to Heraclas, one of his pupils, who in later years was to become his successor and Bishop of Alexandria. Even so, his teaching was but a part of his work; his studies were deep and varied. Thus he attended the lectures of

Ammonius Saccas, the father of Neo-Platonism, and made a study of Plato, Numenius, the Stoics and the Pythagoreans, so that he might understand non-Christian thought and be better able to expound the Christian teachings to the followers of these different philosophies. Then again he learnt Hebrew, so as to be able to study the Old Testament in the original, the result of which studies appeared in the *Hexapla*, his *magnum opus*, in which he compared the Hebrew text with the Greek version and tried to bring out a reliable text of the *Septuagint*, a labour which took over twenty years to complete. In this period, too, comes his visit to Rome in the days of Pope Zephyrinus, to which journey, he says, he was driven by the desire to see the most ancient church of the Romans.

After twelve years of concentrated work as head of the school Origen had to withdraw temporarily as a result of the wholesale massacres ordered by Caracalla, who had been satirised by the people of Alexandria for the murder of his brother. Origen left for Caesaraea in Palestine, where he met with a warm welcome from the metropolitan, Theoctistus of Caesarea and Alexander, Bishop of Jerusalem, who had also been a pupil of Clement. Though Origen was still a layman he was asked to expound the scriptures during the public worship in the Churches, which he did with great success. When, however, Demetrius, Origen's bishop in Alexandria, heard of this he raised objections, as it was not the custom in Alexandria to have laymen deliver

sermons in Church. Of course Origen should have been ordained years before, being one of the leading teachers of Christianity and having devoted himself with the greatest zeal to the welfare of the Church in Alexandria. One cannot help feeling that the wrath of Demetrius was at least partly rooted in his jealousy of Origen's growing reputation, which jealousy in later years was to cause an open rupture between them. Demetrius recalled Origen to Alexandria in 219, and it proves the gentleness and meekness of Origen's nature that, fiery and passionate though he might be in the ardour of his work, he was yet able to submit himself to the unjust censure of his bishop.

In the years which now followed, Origen's activity became greater and more varied than ever. He had succeeded in converting to the orthodox Church one Ambrose, who had been a follower of the Gnostic doctor, Valentinus. Ambrose soon became a devoted disciple of Origen, and more than that, it was, thanks to his generosity and farsightedness, that Origen's literary activity could be so great. Ambrose supplied him with a staff of seven shorthand writers, seven copyists and several "ladies skilled in calligraphy," and with the help of this literary staff Origen started on an extensive programme of work. It is in this time that he began to write his treatise of systematic theology called *De Principiis,* the first constructive theology the Church had yet produced.

But it was not alone Origen's literary activity and his fame as a teacher which made him one

of the leaders of the Church; his great intellect combined with a profound sympathy and understanding of human nature made him the unofficial arbiter in many quarrels and difficulties in the Eastern Church. Not only did the churches of Achaia and Arabia call upon him to settle their differences, but he was consulted even by Julia Mammaea, the Empress-mother, by the half-Christian Emperor Philip, and by the Empress Severa. Had it not been for the lack of recognition by his immediate superiors, especially the Bishop of Alexandria, together with the natural humility and unassuming gentleness of Origen's nature, he might have become the official leader of the entire Eastern Church.

Demetrius still continued to withold the privileges of ordination from Origen, and, though it certainly was a mistake on Origen's part, one can hardly blame him for accepting ordination when it was offered to him by his friends Theoctistus and Alexander as he passed through Caesaraea at the time of his visit to Achaia. It is probable that they ordained him so that he might preach in their churches without once again incurring the censure of Demetrius. The result, however, was a greater instead of a lesser indignation on the part of Demetrius, who naturally should have been consulted before one of his workers received ordination, though on the other hand Origen was not a member of the clergy of Alexandria and as such under no obligation to receive ordination from Demetrius only.

When Origen returned to Alexandria after his visit to Achaia he was in disgrace, and Demetrius called a synod of bishops and presbyters, which banished Origen from Alexandria and, somewhat later, a synod of bishops only, which deposed him from the presbyterate. Demetrius made these decisions known to the Christian Churches all over the world, and though they were disregarded by the Bishop of Palestine, the Churches of Arabia, Phoenicia and Achaia and the Church of Rome joined in condemning Origen.

Having been forced to leave Alexandria, Origen, with some of his devoted disciples, now settled at Caesaraea in the year 231, and there resumed his many activities, building up a flourishing school. Amongst his pupils was Gregory Thaumaturgos, later Bishop of Neo-Caesaraea in Pontus, who afterwards extolled the greatness of Origen as a teacher in his *Oratio Panegyrica.* It was by such pupils that Origen's influence became so far-reaching and permeated the Church as much as by his writings. Origen preached a good deal, though it was not till his sixtieth year that he would allow his sermons to be taken down in shorthand, another proof of the amazing humility of so powerful a speaker and so deep a thinker. Kidd gives the following interesting summary of some of Origen's experiences as a preacher:

> So was the Sermon, for which Origen allows himself an hour. He would ask the bishop—his patron Theoctistus, perhaps—which of the selections

for the day he should take for his subject; then he would begin its exposition, and sometimes continue for an hour and a half. We can scarcely be surprised that the congregation grew restive. Some would come only on feast-days, or not even then. Some went out before the Sermon. Others gathered in groups at the back of the Church and talked till it was over.

The women were the greatest nuisance to Origen in this respect.

> Their tongues wag so with gossip that you cannot get silence; and as they think about nothing but their children, their spinning,' and their household affairs what is one to think of their mental or their spiritual condition?[1]

Origen's life as a preacher must at times have been trying indeed if such were the congregations whom he had to address. Especially where Origen himself frankly acknowledges that, though he endeavours to improve to the best of his ability the unintelligent found in all Churches, he would not desire to build up the Christian community out of such materials, but would rather seek those who were able to understand the deeper sayings. Both in his lectures and in his writings Origen was thus obliged to give teachings such as the majority could understand, and it was only in the company of a small group of closer disciples that he could expound the deeper doctrines and be understood. Several of those disciples he lost during the persecutions; his friend Ambrose, to whom he addressed his *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* during the persecution of Maximin, and Alexander of Jerusalem

[1] *History of the Church* to A.D. 461 (Vol. I, p. 405).

during the Decian persecution. In this last persecution he himself was attacked, imprisoned and made to suffer a variety of torments. He was eventually set free, but such had been his sufferings that he never quite recovered and died at Tyre in the year 254, being at that time in his seventieth year. Thus the desire of his youth was at last gratified and he died a witness of the faith he had so faithfully served during a lifetime of unequalled activity.

Where the writings of Origen are so many in number (at one time they were said to number six thousand) it is not easy to determine what his main contribution to Christian theology was. His accomplishments are so varied and in many he was practically a pioneer. Thus he was not only the first theologian worthy of that name, but at the same time the first Biblical scholar, the first real commentator, the first to make a sound textual criticism in his *Hexapla*, and at the same time the first systematic teacher of Christian doctrine, being greater in this respect even than his master, Clement.

In his exposition of the Scriptures Origen boldly faced the fact that when read literally passages often contradicted each other; and, furthermore, that some of them were obviously impossible. Thus he says:

> What intelligent person would fancy, for instance, that a first, second, and third day, evening and morning,

took place without sun, moon, and stars; and the first, as we call it, without even a heaven? Who would be so childish as to suppose that God after the manner of a human gardener planted a garden in Eden towards the east, and made therein a tree, visible and sensible, so that one could get the power of living by the bodily eating of its fruit with the teeth; or again, could partake of good and evil by feeding on what came from that other tree? If God is said to walk at eventide in the garden, and Adam to hide himself under the tree, I fancy that no one will question that these statements are figurative, declaring mysterious truths by the means of a seeming history, not one that took place in a bodily form. And Cain's going forth from the presence of God, as is plain and clear to attentive minds, stirs the reader to look for the meaning of the presence of God, and of any one's going forth from it. What need of more, when all but the dullest eyes can gather innumerable instances, in which things are recorded as having happened which did not take place in the literal sense? Nay, even the Gospels are full of sayings of the same class; as when the devil takes Jesus up into a high mountain, to show him from thence the kingdoms of the whole world and the glory of them. Who but a careless reader of such words would fail to condemn those who think that by the eye of flesh, which needed a height to bring into view what lay far down beneath, the kingdoms of Persians, and Scythians, and Indians, and Parthians, were seen, and the glory men give to their rulers? Countless cases such as this the accurate reader is able to observe, to make him agree that with the histories which literally took place other things are interwoven which did not actually happen.[1]

Origen's conception of the Scriptures was that they could be interpreted in three different ways, the first being according to the letter or the body of

[1] *De Principiis*, IV, 16.

the Scriptures, the second according to the soul, giving the allegorical meaning of the different passages, and the third according to the spirit, giving the esoteric interpretation. He expresses these succeeding depths of interpretation in a magnificent way in the following passage:

> Since then Scripture itself also consists as it were of a visible body, and of the soul in it that is perceived and understood, and of the spirit which is according to the patterns and shadow of the heavenly things—come, let us call on Him who made for Scripture body and soul and spirit, a body for them that came before us, a soul for us, and a spirit for them that in the age to come shall inherit life eternal, and shall attain to the heavenly and true things of the law; and so let us for the present search not the letter but the soul. And if we are able, we shall ascend also to the spirit, in our account of the sacrifices whereof we have just read.[1]

Thus to Origen the Scriptures were a means to reach the living truth within, "the heavenly and true things of the law" as he calls it, which man experiences when "he ascends to the spirit". Origen had made this ascent to the spirit and had come to the experience of the hidden mysteries which to him are the consummation of a Christian life. He, like Clement, held that the Church had a dual function: on the one hand it had to give ethical precepts to those whose lives needed purification, that is to say, it taught man to be good; but on the other hand it had a higher mission for those who were already good. As Origen expresses it: "God the Word was sent, indeed, as a physician to sinners, but as

[1] *In Lev. Hom.*, V.

a teacher of divine mysteries to those who are already pure and who sin no more."[1]

He explains this standpoint at length in his refutation of the attack of Celsus on Christianity. Celsus had confused this twofold work of the Church; to bring sinners to a life of purity and to lead those who already lived good lives to participation in the hidden mystery-teaching, and he accused the Christians of inviting men of sinful life to the mystery-teaching and reproached them of desecration of sacred things. Origen answers:

> Now, in answer to such statements, we say that it is not the same thing to invite those who are sick in soul to be cured, and those who are in health to the knowledge and study of divine things. We, however, keeping both these things in view, at first invite all men to be healed, and exhort those who are sinners to come to the consideration of the doctrines which teach men not to sin, and those who are devoid of understanding to those which beget wisdom, and those who are children to rise in their thoughts to manhood, and those who are simply unfortunate to good fortune, or—which is the more appropriate term to use—to blessedness. And when those who have been turned towards virtue have made progress, and have shown that they have been purified by the word, and have led as far as they can a better life, then and not before do we invite them to participation in our mysteries. 'For we speak wisdom among them that are perfect.'[2]

And again he says:

> Not to participation in mysteries, then, and to fellowship in the wisdom hidden in a mystery, which

[1] *Contra Celsum*, III, 62.

[2] *Ibid.*, 59.

God ordained before the world to the glory of His saints, do we invite the wicked man, and the thief, and the housebreaker, and the poisoner, and the committer of sacrilege, and the plunderer of the dead, and all those others whom Celsus may enumerate in his exaggerating style, but such as these we invite to be healed.[1]

But on the other hand:

. . . whoever is pure not only from all defilement, but from what are regarded as lesser transgressions, let him be boldly initiated in the mysteries of Jesus, which properly are made known only to the holy and pure. The initiated of Celsus accordingly says, "Let him whose soul is conscious of no evil come." But he who acts as initiator, according to the precepts of Jesus, will say to those who have been purified in heart, "He whose soul has, for a long time, been conscious of no evil, and especially since he yielded himself to the healing of the world, let such an one hear the doctrines which were spoken in private by Jesus to His genuine disciples." Therefore in the comparison which he institutes between the procedure of the initiators into the Grecian mysteries, and the teachers of the doctrine of Jesus, he does not know the difference between inviting the wicked to be healed, and initiating those already purified into the sacred mysteries![2]

From all this it is clear that Origen not merely believed in the existence of the Christian mysteries, but that he knew and spoke of them with the authority of one who had been initiated into them. Thus he held with Clement that the Church had not only an outer teaching for the many but also an inner teaching for the few. It was and is this

[1] *Contra Celsum*, III, 61.

[2] *Ibid.*, 60.

doctrine of "Reserve," maintaining that only the outer teachings were given out by the Church, whereas the inner mysteries could only be experienced by them who were fit to receive them, that has always aroused the indignation of those who would see in Christianity a teaching of such divine simplicity that even the most ignorant could respond to it and take it in. This is certainly true with regard to the ethics of Christianity; the teachings of Christ with regard to the life man should live are certainly of a divine simplicity and such as all men can understand. But ethics, far from being the end of Christ's message, are only the beginning of it; the ethical life is the path along which man can travel to illumination, the inner experience of the mysteries of the Kingdom, and to union with the Divine as the highest consummation. In this inner experience the living truths of which the exoteric doctrines are but a symbol are revealed to man and henceforth he can speak as one who knows. Exoteric Christianity teaches man to be good, to live a life of purity and love, and gives him a theological system to serve him until such time as his experience of divine wisdom within himself shall have made him a partaker of the Mysteries of which theology forms but the outer shell. The resentment of those who are as yet unable to partake of these Mysteries against their existence does not alter the fact that they do exist and that to-day as two thousand years ago, the door is open to those who knock.

Even in Origen's time this existence of the Mystery-teachings was resented by some, and he says:

> . . . to speak of the Christian doctrine as a secret system, is altogether absurd. But that there should be certain doctrines, not made known to the multitude, which are (revealed) after the exoteric ones have been taught, is not a peculiarity of Christianity alone, but also of philosophic systems, in which certain truths are exoteric and others esoteric. Some of the hearers of Pythagoras were content with his *ipse dixit*; while others were taught in secret those doctrines which were not deemed fit to be communicated to profane and insufficiently prepared ears. Moreover, all the mysteries that are celebrated everywhere throughout Greece and barbarous countries, although held in secret, have no discredit thrown upon them, so that it is in vain that he endeavours to calumniate the secret doctrines of Christianity, seeing he does not correctly understand its nature.[1]

The important fact emerging from this controversy with Celsus is that in it we find indubitable proof that at the time of Origen there existed an inner school called "the Mysteries of Jesus" which was looked upon by its initiates, of whom Origen certainly was one, as the real Christianity and the heart of the Church. In them those who had been trained sufficiently in the precepts and doctrines of the Outer Church could attain to that spiritual awakening which gave them immediate experience of the living truth—the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Many, besides Origen, have borne witness to the existence and inspiration of these Christian

[1] *Contra Celsum.*

Mysteries, and it was only when intolerance and dogmatism rejected the Mysteries that Christianity began to lose its hold on those who desired more than the Church, with its exoteric teaching, could give.

Even during Origen's lifetime he had many enemies amongst those who in their inability to gain admittance to the Mysteries found satisfaction in denying or discrediting their existence; and after his death it was inevitable that his writings, not being a dry theological system but the expression of his inner experience of the mysteries of the Kingdom, should become the subject of controversy and misunderstanding. Thus we find Origen claimed by the Arians as supporting their standpoint, whereas Athanasius proves by quotations that he was Nicene in doctrine.[1] The fact that his writings lent themselves to unorthodox interpretations finally led to their condemnation by Pope Anastasius in 400 and finally to Origen's condemnation in the edict of Justinian in 543, and in the eleventh canon of the fifth Œcumenical Council at Constantinople in 553. Thus one of the greatest lights of the Christian Church was denied the place to which his greatness so fully entitled him: that of being one of the founders of constructive Christian theology.

The work of Clement and of Origen marked the birth of Christian philosophy, and the history of the school of Alexandria as it existed under their leadership will ever form one of the noblest chapters in the history of the Christian Church. It is to

[1] *De Decretis*, par. 27.

them that we must look for a truly constructive and inspired theology, a theology born, not of refutation of heresy or slander, but of an inner participation of the Mysteries of the Kingdom which were and are the only source of Christian Truth, the Truth of which Christ was the embodiment on earth, the Truth of which He is still the living fount to those who seek the living Christ behind the doctrines of the Church.

CHAPTER VIII

PLOTINUS, THE FATHER OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

WHILE Origen was head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria he made it his custom to visit the lectures of non-Christian philosophers so that he might be the better able to explain Christianity to them and, if necessary, refute their doctrines. Thus at one time he attended the lectures of one Ammonius Saccas, a man of humble origin (the surname Saccas refers to his former occupation as a porter) who had been a Christian but now was preaching a philosophy of his own, destined to become the most famous of his time. We do not hear what Origen thought of Ammonius' teachings; perhaps his zeal for the Christian doctrine of which he was so able an exponent, prevented him from recognising a kindred spirit in one who had given up Christianity for a philosophical mysticism, which in its essence was very similiar to Origen's own teachings. Little could he have thought that the seed sown by this humble philosopher was to flower forth into a philosophy which in times to come

would serve some of the greatest of Christians as a vehicle for their own mystical experiences. Yet such was the case ; from the teachings of Ammonius Saccas grew that magnificent school of philosophy known as Neo-Platonism, which deeply influenced St. Augustine, the pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite and a number of others whose writings, permeated with the spirit of Neo-Platonism, carried the teachings of Ammonius Saccas and his disciples into the very tissue of Christian theology.

Ammonius Saccas, like so many other great teachers, committed nothing to writing and if it had not been for Porphyry, the systematic and understanding pupil of Plotinus, the teachings of this greatest disciple of Ammonius would have been lost to posterity also.

Plotinus was born in the year 205 in Lycopolis, now Syout, in the Thebaid, in Egypt. He himself never spoke of either his family or home, feeling that his body was too unimportant to give any details about the place or time when it was born. Thus, when he was asked for his permission for a portrait to be painted of himself, he said : " Is it not enough for me to have to carry around this image, in which nature has enclosed us? Must I besides transmit to posterity the image of this image as worthy of attention? " All the same his friends succeeded in obtaining his picture by inducing the most famous painter of those times, Carterius, to attend Plotinus' lectures and commit his face to memory so that he could paint it

afterwards. It is not known what became of this picture and we do not know of any trustworthy portrait of Plotinus at present existing.

When Plotinus was twenty-eight years of age he determined to devote himself entirely to philosophy. But, though he went to the most famous lectures of his time, none of them could satisfy him. It was not until one of his friends led him to Ammonius that he found satisfaction and exclaimed: "This is the man I was looking for!" The next ten years Plotinus spent with Ammonius and so great became his eagerness to study deeper the philosophy of his master that he decided to attach himself to an expedition of the Emperor Gordian against the Persians in order to learn their philosophy and that of the Hindus. There must have been a connection between the teachings of Ammonius and the oriental philosophies, for why should Plotinus desire to study oriental philosophy unless his teacher himself had told him, or Plotinus had found out that the source of his teaching was to be found in the East? Since Alexandria was a place where Egypt, Greece, Rome and the Orient met, it is evident that with the traders the philosophies and religions of the nations whence they came must have reached Alexandria and become known to its philosophers, who were ever eager to study new things. We have already seen how Pantaenus, the first head of the Catechetical School, travelled through India before settling down in Alexandria and we cannot imagine that an eager

student like Pantaenus should have travelled through a deeply religious and philosophical country such as India without learning something of its beliefs and doctrines. The attempt of Plotinus was not a success; the Emperor was killed and it was only with difficulty that Plotinus managed to save himself at Antioch. He finally settled in Rome, and it was there that he began to teach regularly and gathered around himself a group of devoted pupils, able to carry on his philosophy.

Originally Plotinus and the chief disciples of Ammonius had agreed amongst themselves to keep his teachings secret, but when one of them, Herennius, broke the agreement and the others followed suit, Plotinus himself, though carrying out the promise he had made in not publishing any of Ammonius' teachings, yet felt free to instruct others in what he himself knew. In the original teaching of Ammonius there must have been a great deal more than mere speculations and theory, for why should such be kept secret? Judging by the essentials of Plotinus' teaching it would not seem unlikely that Ammonius actually taught his disciples those methods of reaching higher states of consciousness leading to ultimate union with the Divine, which in India we find under the name of *Yoga*.

Plotinus certainly possessed many of the qualities which would be the results of such training in *Yoga*. Thus he often showed knowledge about things which could not have become known to him in the

ordinary way. Porphyry himself tells us that, when, unknown to all, he was contemplating suicide, Plotinus came to him and warned him not to do so, but advised him rather to travel and thus throw off his melancholy. Then again at one time, when a valuable necklace had been stolen from Chione, a widow who resided with Plotinus and the children entrusted to his care, Plotinus was able to point out the one amongst the slaves who had committed the theft. Many people of note used to entrust their children to Plotinus so that they might have the advantage of being brought up by him, and sometimes Plotinus would predict what would become of those young people in later life. All these events seem to prove that Plotinus possessed powers not usually wielded by man, which in our days we should call clairvoyance. He evidently had gained control over those lower orders of unseen creatures who, in the sacrificial worship of his days, were called upon and worshipped. When once his disciple Amelius besought him to come and take part in a sacrifice of that type Plotinus answered him: "It is the business of those divinities to come and visit me, and not mine to attend on them." In such utterances speaks not only the philosopher Plotinus, but also the practical occultist who commands where others obey.

Owing to the weakness of his eyesight Plotinus never re-read what he had written, and if he were interrupted in the midst of a sentence he would

continue immediately after the interruption without needing to look over what he had written before. Porphyry says that Plotinus used to meditate about a subject on which he intended to write and then do the actual writing as if he were copying from a book, evidently having the entire discourse clear in his mind. He seemed to live a double life, of inner concentration on the one hand and of intercourse with those around him on the other. As Porphyry expresses it, " he was able simultaneously to live with others and with himself."

His lectures were inspiring and forceful; when he spoke " his intelligence seemed to shine in his face and to illuminate it with its rays ". Often Porphyry would question him and the discourse of Plotinus would consist of answers to the different questions and objections Porphyry would put to him. We can trace this method in *The Enneads* where one after the other the different questions and objections in connection with a subject are dealt with, each contributing something to the point at issue. This questioning of Porphyry was a great help to Plotinus and he himself once said: " If Porphyry does not by his questions bring up the difficulties that we should solve we should have nothing to write." Then again, during his lectures, he would read the works of different Platonic philosophers, comment upon them and put forward his own ideas.

In all his discourses Plotinus showed a spirit of extreme gentleness and humility. Yet his fame

grew constantly and not only did many entrust their children to his care but he would often be called in to solve disputes and became recognised not only as an irreproachable trustee but also as a just and wise arbitrator.

For twenty-six years Plotinus thus lived and taught in Rome, and later near Rome at the estate which had belonged to one of his friends, Zethus. Here he died in the year 270. His disciple Eustochius tells us how he was called to Plotinus when the end drew near. When he finally reached him Plotinus said: "I have been waiting for you, I have been trying to unite what is divine in us to the divine in the universe." When he had spoken those words a serpent glided out from under his bed, disappeared into a hole in the wall, and Plotinus died.

The greatness of Plotinus' philosophy is due to the fact that it is more than a profound intellectual system and has its roots, not in logic and argument only, but in a supra-intellectual experience which is the foundation of all mysticism. The intellect alone is unproductive of truth; without the illumination of the spirit within, its activities at the best lead to clever theories and constructions but not to vital and real conceptions. At the time of Plotinus Greek philosophy had approached the great problems of life from many different angles, each attempt contributing something of value to the store of human knowledge. None however had penetrated to the final mystery; no merely

intellectual philosophy can ever do this unless it transcends the limits of the intellect as in our own days Kant recognised. Plato had transcended those limits in his world of ideas or archetypal world, and it was along the line of Plato's teaching that Plotinus built further. In this "Neo-Platonism" it was for the first time clearly stated how man could reach that world of the Real within, where alone true knowledge could be found, not the knowledge of the intellect, but that true and living Wisdom which is the result of inner experience, of intuition. True, there had been mystics before Plotinus, but none had ever been able to speak in comprehensible language about his experiences and about the vision of truth gained in them. A true mystic is a rare thing, but a mystic who can convey anything of the unutterable things he has experienced in the mystic state is rarer still. Such an one was Plotinus, and for ever afterwards mystics were to find refuge in him, who had expressed what they themselves had experienced. No philosophy of mysticism had been given to the western world before him; none has been given since to equal that of the disciple of Ammonius. As long as his works remain, mystics will recognise their most sacred experiences in his writings, just as his great predecessor, Plato, will ever remain the refuge of all true idealism. In Plotinus That which is voiceless had found a Voice; That which will ever be beyond the intellect had found a mind great enough to express something of the splendid Reality within.

Thus Plotinus became the father of mystics and like a golden thread his influence can be traced throughout all later mysticism, whether Christian or non-Christian.

Plotinus did not, like most philosophers, attempt to solve the problems of life by means of an intellect subject to the limitations of our illusionary existence. For him the home of the human soul was the Divine and only in its true home could it come to know the mystery of life. Thus the first task of the philosopher, according to Plotinus, was to return to that Divinity from which he had strayed. In the first book of the *Ennead* Plotinus describes the aberration of the soul from its divine home as follows:

> Like children, that were separated from their family since birth and that were long educated away from home, finally lose knowledge of their parents and of themselves, so our souls, no longer seeing either the Divinity or themselves, have become degraded by forgetfulness of their origin, have attached themselves to other objects, have admired anything rather than themselves, have like prodigals scattered their esteem and love on exterior objects, and have, by breaking the bond that united them to the Divinities, disdainfully wandered away from it.[1]

Thus men are Gods in exile; lost in the darkness of an outer world man has become oblivious of his own divinity and, gazing in admiration upon the world around him, fails to see the God within.

The first work of the philosopher must be to disengage himself from that world of outer appearances in which he finds himself caught. This is the

[1] V, 1, 1.

state which in all mysticism is recognised as the preparatory stage of *Purification*, in which man gradually turns his attention from things without to things within. Thus Plotinus describes the beginning of the great work:

> How shall we start, and later arrive at the contemplation of this ineffable Beauty which, like the Divinity in the mysteries, remains hidden in the recesses of a sanctuary, and does not show itself outside, where it might be perceived by the profane? We must advance into this sanctuary, penetrating into it, if we have the strength to do so, closing our eyes to the spectacle of terrestrial things, without throwing a backward glance on the bodies whose graces formerly charmed us. If we do still see corporeal beauties, we must no longer rush at them, but, knowing that they are only images, traces and adumbrations of a superior Principle, we will flee from them, to approach Him of whom they are merely the reflections.[1]

The fundamental idea of all mysticism is that this world surrounding us is not the world of Reality, but merely the image produced in our consciousness by the divine Reality within, which cannot be seen but which is experienced when man has disentangled himself from his own world-image. As long as man seeks for the Divine in the world without he seeks in vain. The Divine is not in any particular place and yet can be reached anywhere. As Plotinus says:

> Do not let yourself be distracted by anything exterior, for the Divinity is not in any definite place, depriving the remainder of its presence, but it is

[1] *Ennead*, I, 6, 8.

present wherever there is any person who is capable of entering into contact therewith.[1]

Thus the soul has to purify itself of all outer affections so that the vision within may be seen.

The Divine within is the One without a second, and all consciousness of separateness or multiplicity must be overcome if we are to reach the One. This also is the reason why mere intellectual knowledge can never give Truth. Plotinus emphasises this distinction between mere intellectual knowledge and inner experience when he says:

> The principal cause of our uncertainty is that our comprehension of the One comes to us neither by scientific knowledge, nor by thought, as the knowledge of other intelligible things, but by a Presence which is superior to science. When the soul acquires the scientific knowledge of something, she withdraws from unity and ceases being entirely one; for science implies discursive reason and discursive reason implies manifoldness. To attain Unity we must therefore rise above science, and never withdraw from what is essentially One; we must therefore renounce science, the objects of science, and every other right except that of the One; even that of Beauty, for Beauty is posterior to Unity, and is derived therefrom, as the daylight comes from the Sun. That is why Plato says of Unity that it is unspeakable and indescribable. Nevertheless we speak of it, we write about it, but only to excite our souls by our discussions, and to direct them towards this divine spectacle, just as one might point out the road to somebody who desired to see some object. Instruction, indeed, goes as far as showing the road, and guiding us in the way; but to obtain the vision of the Divinity

[1] *Ennead*, VI, 9, 7.

is the work suitable to him who has desired to obtain it.[1]

Man's nature is to be attuned to the divine Reality before the vision can be seen. The divine Beauty and Reality always surround man, but as long as he is lost in the darkness of this outer world he is unable to see the Beauty within.

If you try to fix on it an eye soiled by vice, an eye that is impure, or weak, so as not to be able to support the splendour of so brilliant an object, that eye will see nothing, not even if it were shown a sight easy to grasp. The organ of vision will first have to be rendered analogous and similar to the object it is to contemplate. Never would the eye have seen the sun unless first it had assumed its form; likewise, the soul could never see Beauty, unless she herself first became beautiful. To obtain the view of the Beautiful, and of the Divinity, every man must begin by rendering himself beautiful and divine.[2]

So far the first stage of the mystical process according to Plotinus, that of Purification. In the next stage it is supposed that the candidate has already to some extent freed himself from the bonds of this material world and has attuned his nature sufficiently to higher things to be able to begin the contemplation of the Divine. Plotinus describes the way of contemplation as follows:

Now the only way to pray is for a person, when alone, to advance towards the One, Who is entirely Alone. To contemplate Unity, we must retire to our inner sanctuary, and there remain tranquil above all things, in ecstasy; then we must observe the statues,

[1] *Ennead*, VI, 9, 4.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 6, 9.

which as it were are situated outside of soul and intelligence, and in front of everything the statue that shines in the front rank (Unity), contemplating it in a manner suitable to its nature.[1]

What really happens in this mystic contemplation is that the soul, instead of looking upon the world-image produced in its consciousness, directs its glance the other way and within itself discovers the world of true Being, of which the image was but the shadow. This attaining of inner vision is called *Illumination* in the history of mystical experience. Thus Plotinus describes the inner vision:

In this Intelligible World everything is transparent. No shadow limits vision. All the essences see each other and interpenetrate each other in the most intimate depth of their nature. Light everywhere meets light. Every being contains within itself the entire Intelligible World, and also beholds it entire in any particular being. All things there are located everywhere. Everything there is all, and all is each thing; infinite splendour radiates around. Everything is great, for there even the small is great. This world has its sun and its stars; each star is a sun and all suns are stars. Each of them, while shining with its own due splendour, reflects the light of the others. There abides pure movement; for He who produces movement, not being foreign to it, does not disturb it in its production. Rest is perfect, because it is not mingled with any principle of disturbance. The Beautiful is completely beautiful there, because it does not dwell in that which is not beautiful (that is, in matter).[2]

[1] *Ennead*, V, 1, 6.

[2] V, 8, 4.

It is through this vision of the Divine that man comes to desire union with that which before he contemplated. Even in the contemplation of the Divine, man was not separate from That which he beheld; his vision was in the nature of an inner experience, in which he was that which he knew. Yet there is still a higher and final state in mysticism, that in which the individual is merged in the divine Life and reaches the ecstasy of *Union*. Thus Plotinus says:

> The very word "divine spectacle" does not, here, seem sufficient to express the contemplation of the soul; it is rather an ecstasy, a simplification, a self-abandonment, a desire for intercourse, a perfect quietude, and last a wish to become indistinguishable from what was contemplated in the sanctuary. Any one who would seek to see the Divinity in any other way would be incapable of enjoying His presence.[1]

The greatness of Plotinus was that, where other mystics were struck speechless by their divine experiences, he was able to discourse intelligently about the mystic state and describe the psychology of it. Thus he describes it:

> When a man is entranced by the Divinity, he loses consciousness of himself. Then when he contemplates the divine spectacle which he possesses within himself, he contemplates himself and sees his image embellished. However beautiful it be, he must leave it aside, and concentrate upon the Unity, without dividing any of it. Then he becomes simultaneously one and all with this Divinty, Which grants him His Presence silently. Then is the man united to the Divinity to the extent of his desire and ability. If,

[1] *Ennead*, VI, 9, 11.

while remaining pure, he return to duality, he remains as close as possible to the Divinity, and he enjoys the divine Presence as soon as he turns towards It.[1]

Plotinus himself attained four times to this state of ecstasy while Porphyry lived with him. Whether these experiences were repetitions of the same state of ecstatic unity or whether Plotinus reached four successive stages of union with the Divine is not clear. Porphyry says: "I, myself, had the blessed privilege of approaching this Divinity, uniting myself to Him, when I was about sixty-eight years of age."

It is evident that for Plotinus and his followers, union with the Divine was the consummation of their philosophical endeavours. It is in this that Neo-Platonism distinguishes itself from other philosophies; where the latter were content with discussion and speculation the Neo-Platonist sought after *experience* of that which he desired to know. Thus in a profound sense his philosophy was empirical instead of merely deductive. There is no more splendid description of this supreme goal of human evolution than that which we find in Plotinus' essay on the Beautiful.

Thus, in her ascension towards Divinity, the soul advances until, having risen above everything that is foreign to her, she alone with Him who is alone, beholds, in all His simplicity and purity, Him from whom all depends, to whom all aspires, from whom everything draws its existence, life and thought. He who beholds Him is overwhelmed with love; with

[1] *Ennead*, V, 8, 11.

ardour desiring to unite himself with Him, entranced with ecstasy. Men who have not yet seen Him desire Him as the Good; those who have, admire Him as Sovereign Beauty, struck simultaneously with stupor and pleasure, thrilling in a painless rapture, loving with a genuine emotion, with an ardour without equal, scorning all other affections, and disdaining those things which formerly they characterised as beautiful. This is the experience of those to whom Divinities and Guardians have appeared; they reck no longer of the beauty of other bodies. Imagine, if you can, the experiences of those who behold Beauty itself, the pure Beauty, which, because of its very purity, is fleshless and bodiless, outside of earth and heaven. All these things indeed are contingent and composite, they are not principles, they are derived from Him. What beauty could one still wish to see after having arrived at the vision of Him who gives perfection to all beings, though Himself remains unmoved without receiving anything, after finding rest in this contemplation, and enjoying it by becoming assimilated to Him? Being Supreme Beauty, and the first Beauty, He beautifies those who love Him, and thereby they become worthy of love. This is the great, the supreme Goal of souls; this is the Goal which arouses all their efforts, if they do not wish to be disinherited of that sublime contemplation, the enjoyment of which confers blessedness, and privation of which is the greatest of earthly misfortunes. Real misfortune is not to lack beautiful colours, nor beautiful bodies, nor power, nor domination, nor royalty. It is quite sufficient to see oneself excluded from no more than possession of Beauty. This possession is precious enough to render worthless domination of a kingdom, if not of the whole earth, of the sea, or even of the heavens—if indeed it were possible while abandoning and scorning all that natural beauty to succeed in contemplating Beauty face to face.[1]

[1] I, 6, 7.

The philosophy of mysticism which we find in Plotinus was not his only contribution to Christian religious philosophy. In many ways Christian theology is indebted to this prince of mystics, who yet would have scorned the name of Christian. To give but a few examples, it is in Plotinus that we first find an intelligible exposition of the Trinity, in him we read of the Son coming forth from the Father and yet being of one substance with the Father. The theological discussions at the Council of Nicea certainly derived depth and clarity from the teachings of Plotinus.

Through many different channels did Neo-Platonism reach the Christian Church and become part of Christian theology. Through the Alexandrian branch of the school we find the doctrines of Plotinus expounded by that great woman-philosopher Hypatia and her disciple the Christian bishop Synesius; the Athenian school was to bring forth the genius of Proclus who, through his writings and those of his follower Dionysius the Areopagite, was to influence Christian theology for times to come. But most important of all perhaps was the introduction of Neo-Platonic ideas through the work of St. Augustine. It was in Neo-Platonic writings that St. Augustine first found satisfaction and, though later Christianity became to him the supreme Truth, the Neo-Platonic influence in his writings remains. Thus St. Augustine's work on the Trinity is distinctly Plotinian in character; like Plotinus St. Augustine derives the Trinity in man from the divine Trinity

and again reaches an understanding of the Trinity above by Its manifestation in his own consciousness. St. Augustine's description of the mystic Path and the state of Union in his *Confessions* is in all points similar to that which we find in Plotinus. Nor was St. Augustine the only one amongst Christian mystics who found a language for his experiences in the writings of Plotinus and his disciples. We might quote a long list of names, from St. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gennadius to Scotus Erigena, Meister Eckhardt and St. Thomas Aquinas.

Apart from these well-known names the Plotinian teaching with regard to the mystical experience provided a vehicle for all mystics who came after him and his influence is by no means limited to those few in whose writings we can trace direct references to Neo-Platonic sources. We might say that the doctrines of Plotinus have become the vesture of all intellectual mysticism, and while the mystical experience is beyond words any attempt at description will necessarily revert to the one who so fitly may be termed the Father of Christian Mysticism.

CHAPTER IX

CONSTANTINE AND THE TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIANITY

IT was a great moment in the history of Christianity when the Emperor Galerius, who had been largely responsible for the Diocletian persecution, found himself forced, when on his deathbed, to put forth an Edict in which it was said "that Christians may exist again and set up their meetings." In this first "Edict of Toleration" Galerius practically recognised defeat; in the unequal struggle between the young religion and the powerful Roman State victory had come to the followers of the Galilean who, like Him renouncing all material aids, had triumphed by meekness, humility and perseverance. There is a wonderful lesson contained in this inability of a mighty Empire with powerful armies, ruthless in its persecution, to overcome a handful of defenceless men and women. Once again it was the same lesson which Christ Himself had taught when He allowed His enemies to conquer and slay Him—the lesson that no physical power or violence can ever conquer true spiritual greatness. Materially

Christ and His followers had been conquered again and again; spiritually they rose triumphant from every defeat, strengthened not weakened by the struggle.

Soon after having issued the Edict, which, once again, made Christianity a *religio licita,* Galerius died and was succeeded by Maximin in his Asiatic dominions, Licinius in Eastern Europe, while in the West Constantine ruled Gaul and Britain and Maxentius maintained a tyranny in Italy, Africa and Spain. Of these four, Constantine was the only one who was really favourable to Christianity, while Licinius for a while shared his attitude but afterwards became hostile, and Maximin and Maxentius were frankly antagonistic, pursuing, though in vain, the old policy of persecution. Christianity from this time onwards became more and more a political factor; the Christians had become a party to be reckoned with and their support made it worth while for an Emperor to espouse their cause. Thus it was natural that Maximin and Maxentius in their fight for supremacy against Constantine and Licinius should be anti-Christian and make a bid for Pagan support, and that Licinius should forsake his erstwhile friendly attitude when he became Constantine's rival instead of his co-regent. However, as long as Constantine and Licinius had common rivals in Maximin and Maxentius, they were united in their efforts for Christianity. Thus it was by their joint action that, after Constantine's victory over Maxentius,

the two Augusti issued the famous Edict of Milan in March, 313. This Edict was more than a recognition of Christianity ; it was a document of religious freedom, the like of which had not been known before. Thus in its first part it says :

> We judge it . . . consonant to right reason that no man should be denied leave of attaching to the Christians or to whatever other religion his mind direct him . . . Accordingly . . . the open and free exercise of their respective religions is granted to all others, as well as to the Christians ; for it befits the well-ordered state and the tranquillity of our times that each individual be allowed, according to his own choice, to worship the Divinity.

The Edict was many centuries ahead of the times ; the very Christians whom it was to benefit were as yet unable to allow one another to worship God each according to his own choice. If only Christians could have been as tolerant as this Pagan Emperor, the indignities of the Arian Controversy, the horrors of the Inquisition and the grim intolerance of Calvinism would not have marred the history of the Christian faith. It was to be one of the bitterest experiences for Constantine the Great that the same Christians, whose faith he was to champion so valiantly, were to prove themselves unable to appreciate the greatness of their victory and to deny their very Christianity in futile controversy and petty jealousy.

The second part of the Edict concerned the Christians only. It recognised the Church as a corporate body and declared that all property

which had been confiscated during the persecutions was to be restored, while proper indemnity was to be paid to present owners. Thus the places of worship which had been taken from Christian communities during the persecutions were returned and henceforth there was to be no impediment in the way of the Christian religion. That Christianity was to enter upon one of the most tumultuous periods of its existence was due to the blindness of its followers only, not to opposition from outside.

It was while he was marching against the tyrant Maxentius in Italy that Constantine, before the battle of Saxa Rubra, had seen the famous vision in the sky of a flaming Cross with the accompanying words ἐν τούτῳ νίκη "by this sign thou shalt conquer". Whether or not the vision of Constantine is a historical fact (and there seems no reason to doubt it), it is certain that from this moment onwards Constantine, though not himself member of the Christian Church, took the Cross for his standard and became the greatest champion Christianity had ever known.

There is no doubt that Constantine's love for Christianity was very real and not merely caused by political considerations. With Licinius the case was different; when the struggle for supremacy between him and Constantine began he did not hesitate to become hostile to the Christian faith and call upon Paganism to support him. This however did not prevent his ultimate defeat at the hands of Constantine, and with the death of Licinius in 323

Constantine had become the sole and undisputed ruler of the Roman Empire.

Even during his ten years' struggle with Licinius Constantine had enacted a number of measures, part of which put Christianity on a level of equality with Pagan religions, whereas the later measures go beyond equality and show a distinct preference for the Christian Faith. It was Constantine's aim to make the Christian worship fully as magnificent as that of the Pagan religions, and to that end he built great Churches endowed at public expense, furnished with copies of the Scriptures and opened with splendid ceremonies of dedication. Thus in Constantinople the famous Church of St. Sophia was built by him, and in all great Christian centres like Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome traces of his architectural activity are to be found.

One of his most famous measures was *Sicut indignissimum*, an enactment of the 3rd of July, 321, which provided for "rest on the venerable day of the sun," ordering cessation of public works and the closing of the law courts, and placing the Christian's holy day on a level with Pagan festivals. In this measure we can already see Constantine's preference toward Christianity in that he contrasts "the rights of a foreign superstition" with the Christian service of the most holy law.

Many of Constantine's measures show the influence of Christian morals. Thus the lot of slaves was improved, the poor and destitute provided for, cruelty to children and to animals was mitigated

and respect for human life increased. The law in which he forbids drivers in the public postal service to overtax their animals is perhaps the first example of legal protection of animals.

When finally, in 323, Constantine had made the Roman Empire safe for Christianity he was justified in looking forward to an era of peace. In so far as his love for Christianity was inspired by political considerations he looked to Christianity as to a sound basis of unity for the Empire. Constantine was farsighted enough to recognise that a common ideal is necessary for unity. His predecessors had tried to find that unity in the worship of the Emperor as divine, but where the divinity of some of the Emperors was of such a very doubtful character this did not prove a sure basis of imperial unity. The struggle with Christianity had largely centred round the question: Christ or Emperor, and in this struggle Christ had been triumphant. It is only when we fully understand Constantine's expectations of Christianity as a unifying influence in the Empire that we can appreciate his disappointment and impatience when, instead of the unity he had contemplated, he was met with a series of controversies and schisms, which made Christian unity seem but a far-off dream.

The most serious of these controversies was that which centred round a priest of Alexandria, named Arius. This Arius had been implicated, when a deacon, in the Meletain schism and had consequently been deposed from the diaconate. The next Bishop

of Alexandria, Achillas, though a worthy and able man, made the fatal mistake, in the three months of his short rule, of restoring Arius not only to the diaconate, but to advance him to the priesthood and to put him in charge of one of the most important churches in Alexandria, the famous parish Church of Baucalis. Without this ill-advised action of Achillas the Arian controversy would never have been possible, though perhaps the discussions as to the true nature of Christ would have taken place in any case.

According to Socrates the historian, the beginning of the controversy is to be placed *circa* 318. Alexander had succeeded Achillas as Bishop of Alexandria and one day, as Socrates has it, " in the presence of the presbyters and the rest of his clergy, he was discussing too ambitiously the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, teaching that there was a unity in the Trinity. But Arius, one of the presbyters under his jurisdiction, a man of no inconsiderable logical acumen, imagining that the bishop was subtly introducing the doctrine of Sabellius the Libyan, from the love of controversy took the opposite opinion to that of the Libyan, and, as he thought, vigorously responded to the things said by the bishop. 'If,' said he, 'the Father begat the Son, He that was begotten had a beginning of existence; and from this it is evident that there was a time when the Son was not. It follows necessarily that He had His subsistence (hypostasis) from nothing.'"

This beginning is characteristic both of the character of Arius himself and that of the entire ensuing controversy. Arius was a man of keen intellect, but singularly devoid of spiritual insight; in his manner he was pleasant and full of charm, he lived a strict life and was generally recognised to be an able man. He was however vain and ambitious, suffering from that pride of intellect, which considers the Deity Himself subject to its petty rules of logic. Throughout the entire controversy Arius committed the mistake of so many theologians of dragging down divine Realities to the level of the human intellect and discussing That which is beyond time and space within the limits of our world of change and separateness. The intellect and its method, logic, are subject to the limitations of our sense world. That which is beyond that sense world can no more be expressed within the limits of our time and space than a three-dimensional object can be expressed in a two-dimensional plane. Only aspects of divine Truth may be seen by the intellect and they always appear to exclude one another; the intellect can only see that this *or* that is true, never this *and* that. In the same way to a two-dimensional being a cylinder might appear as a circle or as a rectangle, but by no stretch of the imagination can a two-dimensional being recognize an object which is a circle when seen from one side and a square when seen from the other. To introduce the element of time into a discussion of divine Realities which are beyond time means vitiating the

problem from the beginning. He who would know the Divine must find it within himself and gain that experience *of* God or *Theosophy* which makes discussion *about* God or *Theology* superfluous. But to drag down the Divine to the level of a logical proposition is a prostitution of sacred things which can only end in confusion. Yet this was the very mistake which Arius made and, from the account of Socrates, it would seem that he undertook the discussion with Alexander for the mere love of controversy. Arius might have made a good lawyer, as a theologian he was a danger to the Christian Church.

Having once started, his intellectual pride led Arius to gain adherents for his idea and, being a popular priest, he soon made for himself a considerable following. Now that persecutions were over life in the Christian Church was becoming somewhat dull for the more sensational of its members and here, in the points raised by Arius, a rich field of acrimonious discussion was opened up. We can thus understand why the population of Alexandria took up the fight with such unholy joy, and why it soon spread over the entire Christian Church. With all this the degradation of sacred things became even greater; Arius did not shrink from using popular and convivial tunes, the so called *thalia*, as a means of spreading his theological views. Thus to the tune of lascivious songs the mysteries of the Godhead were shouted through the slums of Alexandria.

Let us however first try to understand what Arius taught. We cannot do better than quote his own words in a letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, like Arius a pupil of Lucian the Martyr. He says:

> . . . But we say and believe and have taught and do teach, that the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the Unbegotten; nor from any substance (hypokeimenon), but that of His own will and counsel He has subsisted before time and before ages, as perfect God only begotten and unchangeable, and that before He was begotten or created or purposed or established He was not. For He was not unbegotten. We are persecuted because we say that the Son has a beginning, but that God is without beginning. This is the cause of our persecution, and likewise because we say that He is of that which is not. And this we say because He is neither part of God nor of any substance (hypokeimenon). For this we are persecuted; the rest you know.

Arius, by teaching that Christ was essentially different from God the Father, denied His divinity and placed Him on the side of the created things instead of on that of the Creator. In the teaching of Arius the doctrine of the Trinity has no meaning, for the latter implies one God manifest in three Persons, each of Which is entirely and truly God and none of Which can be said to be prior to or greater than the other. To Pagans, and Christians with Pagan inclinations, the Arian doctrine was attractive, for it placed Christ on a level with the demi-gods of Paganism, and made it easy to yield Him a place in their ranks. Then again Arianism had a fatal attraction for the lower type of intellect,

which likes to feel that it can analyse and sound the mysteries of the Godhead as easily as any ordinary problem of daily life.

Alexander felt that he could not allow a teaching so confusing as that of Arius to continue, and about 320 he took action in the matter. First he discussed the question with Arius in a private meeting, and after that it was considered at a conference of the clergy. The first meeting was without results; at the second it was decided to send a letter to Arius and his followers "exhorting them to renounce his impiety and to submit themselves to the sound catholic faith". The letter had no effect and in 321 Alexander called a synod of bishops of Egypt and Libya, who consequently met in Alexandria to the number of about one hundred. On finding that Arius taught that "God was not always Father," "that the Son was a creature and a work, foreign from the essence of the Father," and that possessing freewill He was originally capable of vice no less than of virtue, they excommunicated Arius and his followers. One cannot help feeling that Alexander might have done wiser in ignoring the entire issue and following the wise counsel of Gamaliel: "Refrain from these men and let them alone, for if this counsel or this work be of men it will come to nought, but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God." It is not unlikely that without any opposition the doctrine of Arius would have died with him, but with his excommunication the point at issue achieved the

inevitable notoriety attendant on any public controversy.

. Arius now began to seek support in Palestine where he found shelter with Eusebius of Caesarea, the well-known church-historian. Afterwards he took up his abode with the other Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia, afterwards Bishop of Constantinople. Both associations were of great importance in the Arian controversy ; Eusebius the historian was the one who was to present the baptismal formula of his Church as a creed to the Council of Nicaea. He never joined the ranks of the Arians proper, but always assumed a conciliating attitude. A more congenial spirit Arius found in the Nicomedian Bishop, an astute and ruthless statesman, who as court-prelate was to have great influence on the subsequent attitude of Constantine. Thus the excommunication of Arius had already strengthened the ranks of his followers considerably. The intrigues and false accusations, which during the entire controversy introduced a most undesirable element in what might have been a pure theological discussion, were largely fostered by Eusebius of Nicomedia who probably did more to estrange all concerned than even Arius himself.

It soon became necessary for Alexander to re-state his case in encyclical letters. The most important of these, which was signed by a great number of priests and deacons, is too concise and carefully worded to be the work of Alexander ; in language and thought it is clearly the work of his secretary

Athanasius, a young man destined to become the main exponent of the Catholic doctrine concerning the Christ. Alexander had taken him into his household when only a boy and he very soon became so well-versed in the scriptures and in Christian theology in general, that he became invaluable to the Bishop. Henceforth it is Athanasius who is the exponent of the orthodox standpoint, teaching the divinity of Christ, co-eternal and con-substantial with the Father.

It was at this stage of the proceedings that Constantine found it necessary to intervene. One can well imagine how annoyed he was to find the imperial unity of which he had dreamt disturbed over a matter which, to him, naturally seemed very trivial. He decided to send his ecclesiastical adviser Hosius, Bishop of Corduba, to Alexandria. Hosius carried with him a letter from Constantine to Alexander and Arius in which the Emperor wrote as follows:

I had proposed to lead back to a single form the idea which all people make to themselves of the Divinity, because I feel strongly that if I could have induced men to come to unison on that subject as was my hope, the conduct of public affairs would have been much facilitated. But, alas, O Divine Goodness, what news has broken so cruelly upon my ears and pierced my heart! I hear that there are more dissensions among you than there were formerly in Africa. And the cause of these seems to me very trifling and quite unworthy of so many fierce contests. Thou, Alexander, didst wish to know what thy priests were thinking on a point of law, even on a portion only of a question

itself entirely devoid of importance, and thou, Arius, if thou didst have such thoughts thou shouldst have kept silence . . . . There was no need to make public these questions or the replies to them, since they are problems which there is no call to discuss, which idleness alone suggests, and whose only use is to sharpen men's wits. Is it just, that on account of vain words, you should let strife loose between brothers? . . . These are silly actions worthy of inexperienced children and not of priests or reasonable men. Restore to me, I pray you, my quiet days and my nights without anxiety, so that I may for the future know the charm of the pure joy of life.

Constantine's letter was the letter of a statesman, a very tolerant and broad-minded statesman too, but betrayed an entire ignorance of the point in question. To begin with, Constantine in his letter speaks to Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria and head of the Church in Egypt, and to Arius, a priest of a parish Church in Alexandria, excommunicated by a Synod of a hundred Bishops, as one would speak to two unruly children who are quarrelling about some childish matter. One would like to know whether Constantine, if a similar event had occurred in the army instead of the Church, and if an officer had been deposed from his rank by a council of his superior officers, would have written to the Commander-in-Chief and to the officer expelled from the army in the same manner, describing their behaviour as " silly actions worthy of inexperienced children and not of officers or reasonable men ". Apart from any opinion on the matter itself Constantine should have begun by supporting

the authority of the Episcopal Synod and not have treated its decrees as non-existent and its standing as no more worthy of reverence than that of an excommunicated priest. Furthermore, where all Christianity is centred in Christ one can hardly call the teaching with regard to His nature " a portion only of a question in itself entirely devoid of importance ".

The mission of Hosius could not be anything but a failure, and on his return to Nicomedia, where he reported to the Emperor, Constantine decided, perhaps advised by Hosius, to call together a council of the entire Christian Church to meet at Nicaea in the coming spring. It is possible that the matter had gone too far to be ignored, but on the other hand nothing could be better calculated to make the controversy a universal one than this convocation of a general council.

CHAPTER X

ATHANASIUS, THE DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

IT was the first time in the history of Christianity that a council of bishops of the entire Church was called together, and it was a significant fact that the descendant of Pagan Emperors, himself Pontifex Maximus of Paganism, was the first to call a general council of the Church. Incidentally it marked the first definite interference of worldly authority in the internal affairs of the Church. Constantine's own attitude with regard to this is well expressed in the words he addressed to the assembled bishops at Nicaea, when he said: "You are in charge of the internal affairs of the Church, I am appointed by God to be bishop of her relations to the world at large."

No doubt Constantine was right in saying that as Emperor he could not be indifferent to controversies which, though of a religious nature, were so serious and universal in scope that they affected the peace of the Empire. Yet, in answering his call the bishops of Christendom had recognised his

right to call them, a right which only the Head of the Church itself could have. As yet there was no such Head, or rather the supreme authority in the Christian Church was divided between the Bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch.

It would indeed have been better for the future of the Christian Church if its bishops, instead of answering the call of Constantine, had respectfully acquainted him with the fact that, great as he was and great also as was the obligation of Christianity to him, yet the Church of Christ was a body in which none held authority but the members of its clergy. In silently recognizing Constantine's right to interfere in a matter of Church policy the first step had been taken along a slippery path, which in the next few centuries was to lead to untold misery.

The Council of Nicaea began to gather in May, 325. More than three hundred bishops from the East and West arrived, attended by their priests and deacons. The largest number of representatives came from the Eastern Church, while there were but comparatively few bishops from Latin-speaking countries. There was a bishop from Gaul, one from Italy (the Bishop of Rome did not attend in person but sent two legates), and naturally there was Hosius of Corduba who thus represented Spain. Many of those present had suffered under the persecutions—Hosius himself under Maximian—and this naturally lent great authority to the Council.

The whole gathering must have presented a very motley effect; from the rough ascetics from Egypt to the polished prelates of Constantine's court all types of Christians were to be found. The Bishops assembled in the large hall of the Imperial Palace; and when all were present Constantine himself entered, tall and resplendent with diadem and precious purple robe. It is said that he blushed when he entered. It might have been that he felt shy in the presence of so august a gathering; possibly however he remembered the recriminations, which had been handed to him when he arrived and which certainly formed a sad testimony of unchristian spirits. After an opening address in which he discoursed in Latin on the necessity of peace and unity he produced the bundle of accusations which he had received and, reminding all present of the duty of forgiveness, he burnt the lot. After that the debates began. First Arius expounded his views, so frankly indeed that "the bishops stopped their ears". After that it was decided to examine the Scriptures with regard to the points in question. This however proved useless as each party explained the texts according to their own point of view. Thus it was finally resolved that a formula or creed should be made up as a test of orthodoxy.

In trying to understand the proceedings of the Council we must be well aware of the fact that the majority of those present were simple-minded men to whom the entire controversy was strange and

who were ready to be convinced by those whose views were definite. The leader of this large section was Eusebius of Caesarea, the historian, who would have wielded an even greater influence had he been as great in theology as he was in literary and scholarly attainments. On the one side of this central block were Alexander and his followers, the Catholics or Nicenes, some thirty only in number, but mostly men of knowledge and authority. The Western bishops, including Hosius, belonged to this group. The main figure in it however was Alexander's young deacon Athanasius who, though not a constituent member of the synod, was the mouthpiece of the Catholic group. On the other side of the central group was Arius himself with his immediate followers, a small group, but very determined ; and a second group with Eusebius of Nicomedia as their leader, who sympathised with Arius but were careful not to risk themselves too far.

It has often been represented as if the controversy raged over the minute difference between that standpoint which looked upon Christ as of the *same* substance as the Father, and the opposite standpoint which considered Him to be of *like* substance, which difference is expressed by the two Greek words *homoousios* (of the same substance) and *homoiousios* (of like substance). This view is erroneous, the term *homoiousios* did not arise till much later in the controversy, while the word *homoousios* was only introduced by Hosius towards the end of the

Council. The latter term certainly expressed the view of the Catholic party, which taught that God the Father and Christ the Son were of the *same* substance, but the doctrine of the Arian opposition could only be expressed by the term *anomoios*, unlike or foreign (to the Father). When seen in this light it becomes clear that very much more was at stake than is often supposed. Thus also is explained the horror of the bishops present when Arius expounded his views, implying that Christ was a created being subject to sin and foreign to the nature of the Father. The same doctrine was expressed in the formula presented by Eusebius of Nicomedia and his effort was torn to shreds in the presence of the assembly and rejected as heretical. It was then that Eusebius of Caesarea came forward with a formula consisting mainly of the baptismal creed of his own Church with an addition directed against the Sabellian heresy. It was decided to accept this creed with the addition (proposed by Constantine on the advice of Hosius) of the term *homoousios*, so that the Council might express its definite opinion with regard to the nature of Christ. Constantine's proposal was accepted and thus the Nicene Creed (not to be confused with its later version, now generally called the Nicene Creed) was produced.

It may make matters clearer if we give the baptismal creed of Eusebius and the Creed of the Council side by side, emphasizing the words in which they mainly differed.

THE CREED OF EUSEBIUS	THE CREED OF THE COUNCIL
We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the maker of all things visible and invisible,	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible,
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the *Word* of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, Son only begotten, first born of every creature, before all the ages, begotten from the Father, by Whom also all things were made;	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the *Son* of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, *that is of the substance of the Father*, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, *begotten not made, of one substance with the Father*, by whom all things were made, both those in heaven and those on earth;
Who for our salvation was made flesh, and lived as a citizen among men,	Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and lived as Man, among men,
And suffered	Suffered,
And rose again on the third day,	And rose the third day.
And ascended to the Father,	Ascended into heaven.
And will come again in glory to judge the quick and the dead.	Is coming to judge the quick and dead.
And we believe also in one Holy Ghost.	And in the Holy Ghost.

The Council attached to its Creed a final clause which ran as follows: "But those who say 'Once He was not,' and 'Before He was begotten He was not,' and 'He came into existence out of what was not,' or 'That the Son of God was of a different essence (hypostasis) or being (ousia),' or 'That He was made,' or 'is changeable or mutable,' those the Catholic Church anathematizes."

After the Creed had been read out in the Council all present signed it with the exception of only a few. Some, like Eusebius of Caesarea, hesitated for a while, afraid of the possible consequences of the

term *homoousious*, but they ended by signing with the exception of only Secundus and Theonas. These, together with Arius, who naturally opposed the formula, were anathematized by the Council. Then once again the State interfered in Church matters and the Emperor banished the two bishops with Arius and his friends to Illyricum.

As the proceedings of the Council came to an end, the Emperor entertained all its members at a splendid banquet; and it is said that this was the only meeting of the Council from which none was absent.

The Council not only settled (or at least thought it settled) the Arian controversy, but it also pronounced on a number of minor points which yet were of considerable interest. Thus the sixth canon "That the ancient customs prevail" decrees that the Bishop of Alexandria shall have the same authority in Egypt which the Bishop of Rome has in Italy. This canon clearly proves that at the time of the Council of Nicaea the Bishop of Rome was no more the Head of the Christian Church than the Bishop of Alexandria and that the doctrine of Papal supremacy was as yet unknown.

Though Constantine, at the banquet which ended the Council meetings, had congratulated the Bishops on the success of their proceedings, time was to prove that the Arian controversy was far from settled. It is true the Arians had been defeated, but their defeat only intensified the bitterness of their opposition. From now onwards they were to follow a subtle policy of undermining the work

of Nicaea, and under the cunning leadership of Eusebius of Nicomedia their exile was to be changed into triumph. Intrigue and false accusations would accomplish what open controversy had failed to do.

After their defeat at Nicaea, Arius and his followers began the subtle and patient labour of poisoning the mind of Constantine against the leaders of orthodoxy. In this the position of Eusebius of Nicomedia as court-prelate of Constantine was an important factor; without the help of this master of intrigue, the Arians would never have succeeded in thrusting themselves once again on the Emperor's attention.

From now on the Nicene leaders were attacked and one after the other eliminated. First came Eustachius, Bishop of Antioch; the Arians managed to procure his deposal in a council held at Antioch and consequently his banishment to Thrace.

Athanasius was the next to be attacked; the wildest accusations were brought against him and, though he himself succeeded in refuting them all, he was deposed at the Council of Tyre and subsequently banished by the Emperor to Trêves, in Gaul. Constantine might or might not have believed in the innocence of Athanasius, but he was tired of the whole controversy and looked upon him as an obstacle to the peace he desired so much.

After Athanasius, Marcellus Bishop of Ancyra was deposed on accusations from the side of the

Arians, and this for the moment completed the removal of the Nicene leaders. The time was now ripe to reinstate Arius. He was summoned to Constantinople but died suddenly in the midst of a triumphal procession through the streets of the city. Constantine did not outlive him long; in May, 337, he too died, having received the sacrament of baptism on his deathbed.

There is no denying Constantine's greatness even though he was no match for the astute Eusebius of Nicomedia, who managed to draw the Emperor into intrigue and partisanship under the guise of furthering the unity of the Church. We cannot blame Constantine for having been ill-advised and for not being able to appreciate the subtleties of theological controversies which he did not understand. His will ever be the honour of having been the first ruler to champion the cause of Christianity and, by his support, to establish it practically as the religion of the Roman Empire. It is true, Christianity would not be the state religion till nearly sixty years after Constantine's death, but after his work the final issue was inevitable. Christianity had triumphed over all attacks from without and henceforth its only danger came from within.

For thirty years and more, after the death of Constantine, the Church was rent asunder by the bitter struggle between Arians and Catholics. For Athanasius it was a period of alternate banishments and triumphant returns to his beloved Alexandria. He had been allowed to return after the death of

Constantine, but soon after that he is forced to leave Alexandria once again, because of the riots caused by his presence, and for several years we find him in Rome where his influence is great. In 346 he is granted permission to come back to Alexandria and this time he is able to stay for ten years, perhaps the most profitable years of his eventful life. The Council of Milan, the so-called Robber-Synod, however, once more condemns Athanasius, forced to do so by the Emperor Constantius, and as a result the Church of Athanasius is besieged and he himself forced to flee to the desert where, amongst the ascetics, he spends his third exile.

Meanwhile the Arian party showed signs of internal division ; now for the first time, more than thirty years after the Council of Nicaea, we find the party of the Semi-Arians introducing the term *homoousious* (of like nature) as describing the relation of the Son to the Father. The Arians proper are now definitely called Anomoeans, thus clearly expressing their doctrine that the Son is unlike, or foreign to, the essence of the Father.

The third exile of Athanasius was ended by the general amnesty granted by Julian the Apostate to all bishops in exile and once again Athanasius is received back in Alexandria with great rejoicings. This however was not to the liking of Julian ; in his sincere but hopeless endeavour to destroy Christianity and revive a Paganism which no longer existed, Athanasius stood to him as a personification of the faith he hated. Thus once again Athanasius

is forced to flee, this time to Memphis. In the following year however Julian dies of wounds, a pathetic figure in his noble fight for a cause which could never win. Once again Athanasius is back in Alexandria which, for the last time, in 365, he is forced to leave by riots attendant on a general persecution of all Nicenes. In 366 he is able to return; and from now onwards until his death, seven years later, he lives and works undisturbed.

His work during these last years is, as ever, dedicated to upholding the Catholic or Nicene doctrine; and, even though it may be true that Athanasius at times was somewhat unyielding, yet we cannot but admire the fortitude and perseverance with which he upheld the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ the Son, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. It is not saying too much to state that, had it not been for the labours of Athanasius, extending over more than half a century, had it not been for his unswerving and one-pointed dedication to the faith he served, the doctrine of the Trinity might not now be part of Christian theology.

Yet one cannot help but think that the Nicene faith might have been upheld while yet recognizing the foundation of truth in the Arian conception of Christ as a created Being, different from the Father. It is only the limitations of our earthbound intellect that make it impossible to grasp simultaneously the truth of two apparently exclusive doctrines. Christ the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy

Trinity, from all eternity inseparably One with the Father, part of the same eternal Godhead, is a splendid conception of divine Truth; but so is Christ the Teacher of men Who, a created Being like all men, having completed His human pilgrimage and achieved that final consummation in which man becomes more than man, is now consciously part of that Deity in a marvellous union so close, so far transcending all we know as union here on earth, that it becomes impossible to separate the Two. Thus Christ the Teacher of the world, He Who took the body of the disciple Jesus at the Baptism, though the perfect flower of *human* evolution, was *superhuman* in the Union He had attained and as such inseparably one with the Cosmic Christ, the eternal Son of God, Himself uncreate, by Whom all things were made and Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost forms the eternal Trinity of the one Godhead. Such a transcendent union however cannot be understood by the analysing intellect which, in its logic, can only see the truth of this *or* that, not the truth of this *and* that. The struggle between Arians and Nicenes would have been impossible had both parties recognized this fundamental truth: that the things of the spirit can be recognized by the spirit alone, and that to drag them down to the level of discursive reasoning is but to cast pearls before swine.

For many years to come Arianism in one form or another was to cause disturbance in the life of the Church. But the great battle had been fought;

thanks to Constantine the Great, Christianity had triumphed over its enemies from without, and thanks to Athanasius the Great, it had triumphed over the enemy within. Christianity had become the religion of the Roman Empire; through death and persecution the faith of Christ had risen triumphantly and was now established as the religion of the peoples of Europe.

CHAPTER XI

ST. AUGUSTINE, THE PASSIONATE SEEKER AFTER GOD

IN the previous chapters we have traced the dramatic history of the Christian Faith through the first four centuries of its eventful development and have seen how, after a battle against overpowering odds, the Church emerged triumphantly both with regard to the attacks from without and those from within. In the present chapter it still remains to describe its consummation in the life and teaching of the greatest of the Church Fathers, St. Augustine. It is as if in the comparative quiet which followed the furious storms of the centuries of persecution and internal disruption there now shone forth a brilliant star in whose rays was focussed and gathered all that early Christianity had given. From time to time we meet with such figures in the history of mankind, whose minds are comprehensive enough to embrace the entire culture of a previous age and transmit it to posterity.

Such an one was St. Augustine and we can truly say that he was the synthesis of early Christianity

and that with him the early history of the Church concludes. For more than twelve centuries afterwards Christian theology was to be governed by the voluminous writings of the Bishop of Hippo, and since St. Paul no other mind has had such a far-reaching influence on the development of Christian doctrine. Even now, in the twentieth century, he is the only one of the writers of the early Church whose books have still a vital message to modern man and, apart from the Scriptures themselves, no early Christian work enjoys as great a popularity as the *Confessions*.

Yet strange are the ways of destiny. Who could have expected that the brilliant young teacher of rhetoric in Carthage, who disdained Christianity and its teachings, was to grow into one of the greatest of the Christian Saints and become a burning and a shining light to the Church? Certainly not Augustine himself; in those early years he felt himself far superior to Christianity and its followers.

He was born in the year 354 at Thagaste, in the north of Africa not far from Carthage, the present Tunis. His parents were Christians, and his mother Monica later became the classical example of maternal piety and Christian devotion. It was she who during the stormy years of Augustine's youth never lost hope of seeing him too share the light which was the happiness of her life, and if ever prayers were efficacious they were those of Monica for her erring son.

From his earliest years Augustine gave evidence of a brilliant mind; both at school and at his university in Carthage he outstripped his fellow students, mastering with the utmost ease subjects full of difficulty even to his teachers, so that soon he was the best student at the university. Student life in Carthage was wild in Augustine's days and in his *Confessions* he tells us of his association with a group of students who called themselves *Eversores* or "Wreckers," whose influence on the younger students was destructive and whose one delight appears to have been the overturning or wrecking of whatsoever they could lay hands on. Though Augustine was not one of them he yet took a certain pride in their acquaintance, even though he abhorred their doings.

Even at this period of his career Augustine began to manifest that ardent love for truth which was to become the outstanding feature of his life. It was about this time, in his nineteenth year, that he read Cicero's *Hortensius*, which book first turned him towards philosophy. As he himself says:

> This book quite altered my affection, turned my prayers to Thyself, O Lord, and made me have clean other purposes and desires . . . With an incredible heat of spirit I thirsted after the immortality of wisdom, and began now to rouse up myself that I might turn back to Thee . . . How did I burn then, my God, how did I burn to fly from earthly delights towards Thee . . .[1]

[1] *Conf.*, III, 4.

It was his thirst after truth and his love for philosophy which shortly afterwards brought him in touch with the Manichees, followers of Manes, the originator of a Christian heresy centred round himself as the promised Paraclete. For nine years after, Augustine was to be a follower of the fantastic doctrines of Manichæism, though he never found satisfaction in them. His main stumbling block was to prove their teaching of a fundamental duality underlying all things, and their idea of evil as a substance in itself, though less powerful than its opposite substance good. Even at that time Augustine's keen philosophical intuition was sufficiently developed to make him see the impossibility of a dual universe. His all-pervading thirst for truth was essentially a thirst for the One underlying the Many, or, as he would come to recognize it later, for God as the supreme Good. Through all the tempestuous struggles of his life Augustine, though at times unknown to himself, was ever pursuing the one final Reality in which his soul could find rest. Augustine was as it were born with an intense desire for God which he himself did not understand until much later in life, a desire which so pervaded his entire being that it became the dominant passion of his life. Even in his worldly years it was God he sought in the creatures of this world and his love for them was but the seeking of the One Who yet can never be found in the outward universe, but Who, as Augustine the Mystic was to discover, can only be found within.

After he had finished his years at the university in Carthage, Augustine settled as a master of rhetoric in his native town of Thagaste. The death of his dearest friend, who, on his deathbed, had become a Christian, affected Augustine so deeply that Thagaste became unbearable to him, and once again he went to Carthage. Augustine, who never was half-hearted in anything, gave himself entirely in his friendships; and with the passing of his dearest friend the world looked dark indeed.

During the years of his teaching in Carthage his dissatisfaction with the Manichees grew and, when finally their chief exponent and bishop, Faustus, came to Carthage, Augustine was so deeply disappointed in his lack of true knowledge that he practically ceased to be a follower of Manichæism, even though for several years to come he would still belong to it in name. From Manichæism he gradually drifted into scepticism, a transition to the one philosophy which was to give him satisfaction, that of Neo-Platonism.

In Carthage the riotous behaviour of the students was one of the reasons for Augustine's departure for Rome and much against his mother's wish he sailed for Italy, where somewhat later she joined him. Here we see Augustine trying to find abiding truth through logic and dialectic. In his book *Contra Academicos* (386), we find evidences of his logical search for truth. Thus Augustine argues in it:

> If there are four elements in the world, there are not five. If there is one sun there cannot be two. The

same soul cannot be at the same time mortal and immortal. It is not possible for man to be happy and unhappy simultaneously. When the sun shines it is not at the same time night. We are either awake or asleep at the present moment. What I seem to see is either a body or is not a body.[1]

There is not one of these apparently irrefutable assertions which cannot be answered by its opposite statement. And the above quotation is but a proof how, in this period, Augustine's search for reality was an intellectual one; he had not yet discovered that higher faculty of inner vision in which the higher mind beholds eternal Truth by direct experience. Augustine was to know this realm of the Divine Mind in his later life, and in it he would come to experience those eternal verities which are ever paradoxes to the lower mind.

In the years which now opened before him Augustine achieved the transmutation of a brilliant and eager intellect into a far more brilliant but profound intellectual Vision. This transmutation could only be brought about by the intensity of his desire for Truth. There are many who profess to desire truth, but if they do not find it they yet can be happy. It was not so with St. Augustine. He speaks of himself as "struggling for the breath of Thy Truth"[2] and later on, when in Milan he was joined by his friend Nebridius, he tells us that he came "that he might live with me in a most ardent pursuit of Truth and wisdom (*in flagrantissimo studio veritatis atque*

[1] *Contra Acad.*, III, 29.

[2] *Conf.*, V, 11.

sapientiae)"[1] When a man desires truth in that most passionate and intense manner then, and then alone, can he hope to find it.

There is a story of an Indian teacher to whom came a candidate for the higher knowledge. The teacher gave him a profound saying to meditate upon and told him to come back when he had mastered it. When the disciple came back the teacher repeated the same thing and told him to return once more. A third time the same thing happened, until he grew impatient and demanded to be guided into Truth. Whereupon the *guru* took him to a small lake adjoining his dwelling and invited him to enter the water with him. There he held his disciple's head under water and did not release him until he was gasping for breath. When the young man had recovered his teacher asked him, "When you were under the water what did you desire most?" and the disciple answered, "Air, I desired air above all things." Then said the teacher, "When you desire truth as much as you desired air just now you will find it, but not before." Such was Augustine's desire for Truth.

There are few amongst men who desire Truth so whole-heartedly that there is no life possible for them unless they find it. The very passion which led Augustine astray in his youth became the intensity of his desire for Truth in manhood; Augustine the Saint was the transmutation of Augustine the sinner. It is only an ardent nature

[1] *Conf.*, VI, 10.

like St. Augustine's that can question life with the entire soul. Where others might casually ask themselves questions with regard to the nature of the Deity, the meaning of the Holy Trinity, the mystery of Creation, or the secret of Time, to St. Augustine the answer to these problems was as food to a starving man ; he could not live unless he knew. Thus he succeeded where those others could only fail, thus he gained that inner illumination of the higher mind in which the intellect or lower mind is transcended and superseded. See how he questions the nature of Time, how passionately he insists that this shall be revealed to him :

> My soul is all on fire to be resolved of this most intricate difficulty. Shut it not up, O Lord God, O my good Father; in the name of Christ I beseech Thee, do not so shut up these usual, but yet hidden things, from this desire of mine, that it be hindered from piercing into them: and let them shine out unto me, Thy mercy, O Lord, enlightening me.[1]

And then the answer comes to him, not as an intellectual solution of his problem, but as a revelation of the mystery itself which he was seeking to understand.

All through the *Confessions* one cannot help being struck by Augustine's marvellous and often merciless power of self-analysis and his psychological acumen. It is this detailed description of the workings of his own mind, both in his moral struggles and in his philosophical researches, but most of all

[1] *Conf.*, XI, 22.

in his mystical experiences, that makes St. Augustine's writings, and especially the *Confessions*, a living thing to every age. Whatever he discusses, whatever problem he deals with, it is always a vital and real thing to him, and therefore to his readers.

We can therefore well understand his impatience with the empty questionings of people who would know the divine mysteries, but who have not yet begun to understand the nature of the questions they put. Of them St. Augustine says:

> Nor will I suffer the questions of such people who, in criminal sickness want to drink more than they can contain and say: 'What did God make before He made heaven and earth?' or, 'Why came it in His mind to make something, whereas He never made anything before?' Give them grace, O Lord, well to bethink themselves what they say; and to find that they cannot say Never, when there is no time.[1]

In such questions the root of error is contained, so that they can never be answered, being wrong in themselves.

Most merely intellectual questions with regard to the great problems of life are vitiated from the very beginning by the limitations of the intellect, so that they can never be answered, but must be transcended by the reality itself. We find a good example of this in the much disputed question as to the nature of Evil, one of the perennial questions of philosophy and theology. As the question is usually put, Evil is presupposed in it as an existing thing, the origin of which needs to be explained, and

[1] *Conf.*, XI, 30.

consequently the answer becomes impossible. Let us now see how St. Augustine set about to understand this mystery. He says:

> I with much anxiety sought, from what root the nature of evil should proceed. What torments did my teeming heart then endure, and what groans, O my God! Yet even to them were Thine ears open, and I knew it not: and when in silence I so vehemently enquired after it, those silent contritions of my soul were strong cries for Thy mercy. Thou, and no man, knewest how much I suffered. For, how little was that which my tongue sent forth into the ears of my most familiar friends![1]

The question was a vital one to St. Augustine. He, himself, in his own nature found himself continually confronted by the presence of evil passions which led him astray from the higher purposes which he had recognized, and the nature and cause of this evil in himself became an abiding problem to him. We cannot understand St. Augustine's philosophy, and especially his theology, unless we constantly remember that he was never free from internal struggle and that his life was one long battle of Augustine the Saint with Augustine the sinner. This explains the preponderance of the consciousness of sin in his theology and the repeated assertion that only by the descent of divine grace can man be redeemed from the state of sin.

But all this was to come later in his life; at present we find him in Milan, whither he had come from Rome in the hope of finding a more congenial

[1] *Conf.*, VII. 7.

environment. Here he was joined by his close friends Nebridius and Alypius; and the three of them, with Augustine's natural son Adeodatus, a wonderfully mature mind, formed the small company of philosophers in search of Truth. St. Augustine had an intense love for his son, who was so like him in all that was best in his own nature; and yet, throughout the *Confessions*, we hardly find him mentioned. Perhaps his death while still a youth caused St. Augustine such deep suffering that he found himself unable to open the old wound when writing the *Confessions* so many years later, but where he does mention him it is with the greatest tenderness and love.

In Milan Augustine came into touch with St. Ambrose, who was to exercise a profound influence on his life. St. Ambrose was a man of great strength of character, as he showed clearly when he refused admission to the Emperor Theodosius when the latter sought to enter his cathedral in Milan, barring the doorway with his own arms. Theodosius had behaved cruelly in the massacre of the Thessalonians, and Ambrose excommunicated him, considering him unfit to enter a Christian church until he had repented and done severe penance. It needed a great deal of courage and spiritual authority thus to repulse a great Christian Emperor from the Church and publicly humiliate him. In addition to this strength of character, Ambrose was a cultured man and a gifted preacher such as Augustine could appreciate. Ambrose received

him courteously and guided him in his readings of the Christian Scriptures, expounding the passages which had hitherto seemed absurd to Augustine. Thus gradually he became better disposed towards the Christian religion and went so far as to become a catechumen, though it would still be some time before he would take the great step of baptism.

Augustine was in the midst of his passionate enquiry after the cause and nature of evil when he came into touch with some Latin translations of Neo-Platonic writings, presumably those of Plotinus. Next to his actual conversion this was the most important moment in St. Augustine's life, for it was through the writings of Neo-Platonism that he discovered that realm of abiding Reality, for which he had longed since first he came into touch with philosophy in his nineteenth year. All this time he had attempted to find Truth by the intellect, now there opened before him that world of inner vision in which he experienced the Reality he had been seeking. As he himself expresses it: "I had by this time found the unchangeable and true eternity of Truth, residing above this changeable mind of mine."[1]

In the illumination which was the result of the new world he had entered, things became clear to St. Augustine which he had long sought to know. Thus he describes his entry into the world of the higher mind:

> And being hence admonished to return to myself, I entered even into mine own inwards, Thou being my

[1] *Conf.*, VII, 17.

Leader: and able I was to do it, for Thou wert now become my Helper. Into myself I went, and with the eyes of my soul (such as it was) I discovered over the same eye of my soul, over my mind, the unchangeable light of the Lord: not this vulgar light, which all flesh may look upon, nor yet another greater of the same kind; as if this should shine much and much more clearly, and with its greatness take up all the room. This light was none of that but another, yea, clean another from all these. Nor was it in that manner above my mind, as oil is upon water, nor yet as the heaven is above the earth: but superior to my soul, because it made me; and I was inferior to it, because I was made by it. He that knows what truth is, knows what that light is; and he that knows it, knows eternity. Charity knows it. O eternal Truth! and true Charity! and dear Eternity! Thou art my God, to Thee do I sigh day and night.[1]

In this inner world St. Augustine discovered the supreme Reality besides which nothing exists in the universe. This was to him at the same time supreme Truth and supreme Good, and in the vision of it the questions with regard to the nature of evil which had tormented him for so many years were solved or rather superseded. How could there be anything evil in itself, when there was nothing but the Supreme, Who at the same time was the eternal Good? Consequently St. Augustine says:

. . . that evil which I sought, whence it should be, is not any substance: for were it a substance it should be good.[2]

[1] *Conf.*, VII, 10.

[2] *Ibid.*, 12.

And somewhat further:

> And to Thee is there nothing at all evil: yea, not only to Thee, but also not to Thy creatures in general; because there is not anything which is without, which can break in, or discompose that order which Thou hast settled. But in some particulars of Thy creation, for that some things there be which so well agree not with some other things, they are conceived to be evil: whereas those very things suit well enough with some other things, and are good; yea, and in themselves are good.[1]

Thus St. Augustine was the first Christian to teach the relativity of evil, and to recognize that nothing is evil in itself, but that evil is a relation of one thing to another. In this respect it is interesting to note how far superior St. Augustine the mystic and philosopher is to Augustine the theologian. When we wish to meet the real St. Augustine we must not go to his controversial writings in which he sometimes says more than is real to him, but to his psychological writings in which whatsoever he says is the result of direct personal experience.

The idea of the relativity of all things was to become a favourite doctrine of St. Augustine. Thus he says:

> And I marked how that all things did agree respectively, not to their places only, but to their seasons also.[2]

And again in the next chapter:

> I both found and tried it to be no wonder that the same bread is loathsome to a distempered palate, which

[1] *Conf.*, VII, 13.

[2] *Ibid.*, 15.

is pleasant to a sound one: and that to sore eyes, that light is offensive, which to the clear is delightful.

This idea of the relativity of things is found back again in his great work, *De Civitate Dei*, the first Christian work in which the history of mankind was looked upon as the manifestation of God's plan, and in which the purpose which is innate in the course of historical evolution is traced and expounded in a wonderful manner.

But the greatest gift which Neo-Platonism gave to Christianity through St. Augustine was that of an intellectual mysticism, of which he became the classical representative. Like all true mystics St. Augustine yearned for union with God with his entire heart, and he manifests that quality which we found in Plotinus, the ability to discourse intelligently upon the nature and content of the mystical experience and to analyse the mystical state psychologically. Thus he describes the way he went within himself:

I had by this time found the unchangeable and true eternity of truth, residing above this changeable mind of mine. And thus by degrees passing from bodies to the soul, which makes use of the senses of the body to perceive by; and from thence to its inner faculties, unto which the senses of the body are to represent their outward objects; and so forward, as far as the irrational creatures are able to go: thence again I passed on to the reasoning faculties, unto which whatever is received from the senses of the body is referred to be judged. This also finding itself to be variable in me, betook itself towards its own understanding, drawing away my thoughts from custom, and

withdrawing itself from these confused multitudes of phantasies, which contradict one another; that so it might find out that light, which now bedewed it, when without all further doubting, it cried out that what was unchangeable was to be preferred before what was changeable, by which it had come to know that unchangeable . . . thus by a flash of the twinkling eyesight it came so far as That which is. And now came I to have a sight of those invisible things of thee, which are understood by those things which are made. But I was not able to fix mine eye long upon them: but my infirmity being beaten back again, I was turned to my wonted fancies; carrying along with me no more but a liking of those new thoughts in my memory . . .[1]

More almost than any other mystic St. Augustine was to experience the unending strife *between the* Divine calling him from within and the burden of his own worldliness. He himself says in a wonderful passage:[2] "I was caught up to Thee by Thy Beauty—and presently I was torn from Thee again by my own weight." Gradually the mystic life was to grow stronger and stronger within him and conquer or transmute his earthly passions, but as yet the struggle was intense. "Thus did my two wills," says he,[3] "one new and the other old, that carnal, and this spiritual, wage war within me, and by their disagreeing wasted out my soul." There is no greater exhaustion than that of internal struggle; there is no greater suffering than that of being no longer the old Adam and not yet

[1] *Conf.*, VII, 17.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, VIII, 5.

the new Christ. In this transition stage St. Augustine now found himself; the divine yearning which he had known since youth was now clearly revealed to him as the desire for God and for God alone. But not yet could he possess or rather become that which he contemplated. In one of the most beautiful passages of the *Confessions* he says:

> Too late came I to love Thee, O thou Beauty both so ancient and so fresh, yea too late came I to love Thee. And behold, Thou wert within me, and I out of myself, where I made search for Thee: I ugly rushed headlong upon those beautiful things Thou hast made. Thou indeed wert with me; but I was not with Thee: these beauties kept me far enough from Thee; even those, which unless they were in Thee, should not be at all. Thou calledst and criedst unto me, yea Thou even breakedst open my deafness: Thou discoveredst Thy beams and shinedst unto me, and didst chase away my blindness: Thou didst most fragrantly blow upon me, and I drew in my breath and I pant after Thee; I tasted Thee, and now do hunger and thirst after Thee; Thou didst touch me, and I even burn again to enjoy Thy peace.[1]

St. Augustine suffered intensely during this period in which he had seen the highest good and knew that in it alone he could find abiding peace, but yet found himself unable to enter it, yes, even found part of himself unwilling to abandon the joys of this world for the joys of the Kingdom within. There can be no greater suffering for a man than to recognise fully and deeply what he should do and yet lack the will to do it. Thus St. Augustine expresses his misery:

[1] *Conf.*, X, 27.

When I shall once attain to be united unto Thee in every part of me, then shall I no more feel either sorrow or labour: yea, then shall my life truly be alive, every way full of Thee. Whereas now for that whom Thou fillest thou also raisest, am I a burden unto myself, because I am not yet full of Thee. The joys of this my life which deserve to be lamented, are at strife with my sorrows which are to be rejoiced in: and which way the victory will incline, I yet know not. Woe is me, O Lord, have pity on me: my sorrows that be bad are in contention with my joys that be good: and on which side is the victory I know not.[1]

The time of his deliverance, however, was drawing nigh; it was as if during the twelve years which had elapsed since he first came in touch with philosophy, years full of intense moral struggle, he had accumulated a spiritual energy which did but await the touch from without to discharge itself and bring about his conversion. Conversion means "turning the other way," the changing of the polarity of man's nature, so that where before he was animal man and had glimpses of his own divinity he now becomes spiritual man with remnants of his old worldliness.

This, then, was the manner in which the great change came for St. Augustine. One day a friend, Ponticianus, called, and in the course of their conversation told him the story of St. Anthony, the founder of Christian monasticism. From his own experience he related how two young men of his acquaintance, government officials, on reading the life of St. Anthony, were so struck by the idea

1 *Conf.*, X, 28.

of surrendering this world for the greater world within that they forthwith gave up their worldly ambitions and became monks after the manner of St. Anthony.

Nothing more was needed to arouse Augustine's spiritual strength. Here others had done with utmost ease and directness that which had now taken him so many years to decide. Up to now he had seen the necessity and value of the surrender of all earthly things, but there had been that in him which refused to make the surrender. But now, he speaks to his friend Alypius, crying out:

'What ails us? What is this, that thou heardest? The unlearned start up and take heaven by violence, and we with all our learning, see how we wallow us in flesh and blood! Because others are gone before, is it a shame for us to come after? Is it not a shame not even to go after them?' Some such words as these I then uttered: and in that heat away I flung from him, while with silence and astonishment he looked upon me. For my speeches sounded not now in the key they were wont to do: yea, my forehead, my cheeks, my eyes, my colour, and the accent of my voice, spake out my mind more emphatically than the words did which I uttered. . . . I was for the time most soberly mad, and dying, to live: sensible enough what piece of misery for the present I now was, but utterly ignorant how good I shortly was to grow.[1]

In this wrought-up state of mind they went out into the garden adjoining their house, and there the crisis of his spiritual life came upon St. Augustine. As he describes it, "there rose up a mighty storm, bringing as mighty a shower of tears

[1] *Conf.*, VIII, 8.

with it; . . . I rose from Alypius: for I conceived that solitude was more fit for a business of weeping."[1] He flung himself down under a tree and there gave vent to his tears, sending up these exclamations: "How long? How long still 'to-morrow,' and 'to-morrow'? Why not now? Wherefore even this very hour is there not an end put to my uncleanness?"

At that moment a child's voice spoke from near-by and repeated again and again in a singing tune: "Take up and read, take up and read." Augustine, taking this to be a Divine command, went back to the place where Alypius was still sitting and where he had left the volume of St. Paul's letters which they had been reading before. He opened it and in silence read the first chapter his eyes fell upon: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in strife and envying: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

Then he continues:

> No further would I read; nor needed I. For instantly even with the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of confidence now darted into my heart, all the darkness of doubting vanished away.[2]

From this moment Augustine was changed. He gave up his teaching of rhetoric and went to prepare himself for baptism at the country house of his friend Verecundus, at Cassiciacum. Presently

[1] *Conf.*, VIII, 12.

[2] *Ibid.*

he was baptized by Ambrose at Milan together with his friend Alypius and his son Adeodatus, who was now almost fifteen years old. The story goes that when the baptism was over, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine burst forth into joyous strains of alternate singing, thus producing the *Te Deum* as we know it at the present day. Though this is doubtful, it is certain that with the baptism of St. Augustine into the Christian Church a power was set free which was to mould theology for more than twelve centuries to come and have a profound influence on Christianity, especially through that mysticism of which St. Augustine will ever be the classical example, a mysticism rich in fervour, clear as crystal in its intellectual perception and yet warm with a human tenderness, to which truly " nothing human was strange ".

CHAPTER XII

ST. AUGUSTINE, THE MYSTIC

AFTER his conversion St. Augustine's mystical experiences increased, and so intense became his desire to serve God better that, when a countryman of his, Euodius, had also been converted and baptized in Milan, they decided to return to Africa so as to find more suitable surroundings for the life they now intended to lead. It was at Ostia, where they awaited the sailing of their ship, that Augustine's mother, Monica, died after a brief illness.

Only a few days before she and St. Augustine, one evening as they looked out over the garden belonging to the house where they stayed in Ostia, had a long conversation on the subject of the inner life which forms one of the profoundest and most moving passages of the *Confessions*. After a discussion on the eternal life of the saints and its nature, they lifted up their hearts in aspiration towards the higher life that, as St. Augustine expresses it, "we might in some sort meditate on so high a mystery". And then he continues:

> **And when our discourse was once come unto that point, that the highest pleasure of the carnal senses,**

and that in the brightest beam of material light, was, in respect of the sweetness of that life, not only not worthy of comparison, but not so much as of mention; we, cheering up ourselves with a more burning affection towards that Self-same, did by degrees course over all these corporeals, even the heaven itself, from whence both sun, and moon, and stars do shine upon this earth. Yea we soared higher yet, by inward musing, and discoursing upon Thee, and by admiring of Thy works; and last of all, we came to our own souls, which we presently went beyond, so that we advanced as high as that region of never-wasting plenty, whence Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth, and where life is that wisdom by which all these things are made, both which have been and which are to come. . . . . And while we were thus discoursing and panting after it, we arrived to a little touch of it with the whole effort of our heart; and we sighed, and even there we left behind us the first fruits of our spirits enchained unto it; returning from these thoughts to vocal expressions of our mouth, where a word has both beginning and ending. How unlike unto Thy Word, our Lord, who remains in himself for ever without becoming aged, and yet renewing all things?[1]

And now occurs to St. Augustine the thought which runs like a golden thread through the *Confessions*, the question whether it is not possible for man to live continually and entirely in that divine world, which in his moments of exaltation he touched for a short while. This is how he himself expresses it:

We said therefore: If to any man the tumults of flesh be silenced, if fancies of the earth, and waters, and air be silenced also: if the poles of heaven be silent also: if the very soul be silent to herself, and by

[1] *Conf.*, IX, 10.

not thinking upon self surmount self: if all dreams and imaginary revelations be silenced, every tongue, and every sign, if whatsoever is transient be silent to any one . . . could this exaltation of spirit have ever continued, and all other visions of a far other kind been quite taken away, and that this one exaltation should ravish us, and swallow us up, and so wrap up their beholder among these more inward joys, as that his life might be for ever like to this very moment of understanding which we now sighed after: were not this as much as Enter into thy Master's joy? But when shall that be? Shall it be when we shall all rise again, though all shall not be changed?[1]

It is one of the greatest trials of the spiritual life, especially of the mystic, that brief periods of intense rapture and divine certainty are followed by long times of spiritual dryness and inexplicable absence of that supreme Presence which is the only reality of the higher life. When the moments of spiritual certainty come to us we feel that now at last we live, we wonder why we did not enter this glory before, the kingdom which was ours for the taking. We know then that it was around us all the time, that it was not a strange and far-away country towards which we had to travel, but our own eternal divine Home from which we did but estrange ourselves by our illusions of separateness and by the weakness which causes us to be entangled and dominated by the body which is meant to be our servant. In those moments all seems easy; we can hardly understand why a moment ago we knew such a thing as internal struggles, how there could

[1] *Conf.*, IX, 10.

have been obstacles impeding us on our path towards perfection. We then know our own divinity and our own unlimited powers of overcoming any obstacle that may be in our way.

How much more must this have struck St. Augustine whose internal struggles were a daily crucifixion, and how well we can understand his intense desire to possess God for ever, to live in nothing but this greater life, losing his selfhood in That which is beyond self. The cry which ever rings through the *Confessions* is that with which he begins them: "For Thou hast created us for Thyself and our heart is ever restless till it finds its rest in Thee." Thus we find Augustine using the whole strength of his great mind and the power of his psychological analysis to unravel the workings of our inner life, that mysterious inner world which is such an unknown territory to most human beings. The result is found in the marvellously subtle descriptions of what we might call the "technique" of the inner life, descriptions which will ever remain a guide to all aspirants. And though he himself had not yet reached it, Augustine saw with unerring clearness the great Goal ahead: complete and utter union with God, the consummation of all mystical endeavour.

Meanwhile we find him returning to Africa, where soon he became an active power in the life of the Church. It was inevitable, with a mind so great and active as that of St. Augustine, that wherever he was placed his influence would be

felt. Now it was the custom of the early Christian church congregations to elect, often against their own inclinations, men of good repute as their priests or bishops in the expectation of finding in them a sure protection and a safe guidance. Thus Synesius, the friend of Hypatia, was made a Bishop of the Church and the same thing happened in the case of Augustine. He found himself practically forced to accept the high calling of a priest and soon after of a bishop in the Church of Christ, and though in true humility he protested his own unworthiness, those who elected him were far-sighted enough to recognise in him one who would make the Church great. Thus it was that St. Augustine became Bishop of Hippo, the position which he held until his death.

From this time onward begins the enormous literary activity of St. Augustine; on the one hand controversial writings, expounding the orthodox standpoint against such heresies as those of the Manichees, the Donatists and the Pelagians, and on the other hand constructive theological writings amongst which the most valuable are perhaps *De Civitate Dei* and *De Trinitate.* Even in his controversial writings St. Augustine shows himself full of tolerance and gentleness even though firm in resisting what he considered to be erroneous doctrines or dangerous practices. Thus he made himself many friends and managed to weld the Church together into a very much closer unity than it had known before. It was perhaps most of all his

innate culture and wide vision which made him a guide unto many. There are few leaders of the early Church who could have written:

> The identical thing that we now call the Christian religion existed among the ancients, and has not been lacking from the beginnings of the human race until the coming of Christ in the flesh, from which moment on, the true religion, which already existed, began to be called Christian,[1]

and could yet be full of fiery zeal for Christianity and the Church.

St. Augustine was one of the first writers to show the historical outlook; he never saw anything by itself but ever as part of a process of evolution. This is shown clearly in his booklet on the catechizing of the uninstructed, where in teaching newcomers about the Christian religion he does not present Christianity as a spontaneous growth but as the consummation of a long historical development. Even in our present day we find but few who can take this standpoint; most men are apt to have the limited view which can only see the immediate outlook and not its connection with past and present. *De Civitate Dei* has a similar but grander purpose. In it St. Augustine sees all history as the unrolling of the Divine Plan, which is but a religious term for the truth of evolution. On this account *De Civitate Dei* has often been called the first philosophy of history.

In a similar way his great work on the Trinity takes a peculiar position in Christian theology.

[1] *Retractationer*, I, 13, 3.

Whereas the theology of his time was largely intellectual, controversial or apologetic, the theology of St. Augustine was based on a psychological mysticism which gives it a vital message for all ages. It is his tendency of basing all his teaching on psychological experience which has earned him the name of being the first modern man, as so many writers have called him. Thus in *De Trinitate* he discovers within his own consciousness that human trinity which we find in modern psychology as will, perception and thought; and from that he ascends towards that greater Trinity of which the human trinity is but a manifestation at a lower level. All through the *Confessions* we find plentiful evidence of this principle of St. Augustine to base his philosophical knowledge upon the facts he observed in his own mind, thus laying the foundation of a philosophy which may well be called scientific, since it did not lose itself in intellectual speculation but was based on psychological facts. Thus his discussion on the nature of time and on the meaning of memory[1] form a rare example of psychological philosophy and as such are of value even to modern man.

In his theological writings, especially in the controversial ones, Augustine's zeal for the orthodoxy he had gained through so many struggles often lead him to dogmatic statements which Augustine the philosopher could never have vindicated. And especially in later centuries, when his theology

[1] *Conf.*, Books X and XI.

dominated the Christian Church, these dogmatic statements exercised an unfortunate influence on the doctrines of the Church, especially where they became detached from the mystical and psychological background of St. Augustine's life.

The greatness of St. Augustine however will ever lie in his sincerity. No other work exists like the *Confessions*, giving us so intimate a history of the moral, intellectual and spiritual struggles of a great mind, merciless in self-analysis and profound in psychological understanding. The keynote of his life was a passionate desire for God, a desire which inspired the errors of his youth, the intensity of his intellectual search and the depth of his mystical attainment. He indeed beheld that world of living Truth in which knowing and being are one, and in which Truth is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be experienced. As he himself expresses it in the final words of the *Confessions*:

> And what man is he that can teach another man to understand this ? Or what angel, another angel ? Or what angel, man ? Let it be begged of Thee, be sought in Thee, knocked for at Thee ; so, so shall it be received, so shall it be found, and so shall it be opened. Amen.[1]

It is largely from his letters, of which many have been preserved, that we gain a conception of St. Augustine's mode of life as Bishop of Hippo. He was always at his best when surrounded by a few intimate friends with whom he could pursue freely his divine quest. He soon collected around him a

[1] XIII, 38.

small community of which he was the head and teacher and which lived a beautiful and simple life. In his letters we find that the rules of life in his community made it almost a monastery with Augustine himself as Abbot. At the same time it was a kind of seminary or ecclesiastical college, and of the pupils of St. Augustine a considerable number became priests, and no less than ten bishops in the Church. Thus by writing and by teaching the influence of St. Augustine spread through his diocese and from there throughout the Christian world of his day and, although the diocese of Hippo was not an important one, such was the strength and greatness of its bishop that he became the leading authority of his time and the greatest of the Church Fathers.

As the Vandals were invading Italy and Africa and while they were actually besieging Hippo, St. Augustine fell ill, and after several days spent in solitude and meditation, the greatest of the Church Fathers died in the night of August 28, 430. He was thus spared the pain of witnessing the final decay of the Roman Empire, and yet it was significant that his death coincided with that of the civilisation of which in its Christian aspect he was to be the synthesis.

Many have been his biographers, many more his followers and admirers. The great Leibnitz, though opposed to him in many points, called him *vir sane magnus et ingenii stupendi* and Harnack, in his *History of Dogma*, devotes an entire volume to the

Bishop of Hippo whom he, too, considers as the first modern man and at the same time as the greatest theologian the Church has ever known.

It was largely through his works that the doctrines of the early Church were transmitted to the new civilisation which was just beginning in Western Europe. Little could St. Augustine have thought that in religious and even political matters he would become the leading authority in that new civilisation, and that for twelve centuries to come theology was to be dominated by his writings.

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