The History of the Origins of Christianity Book II The Apostles

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THE HISTORY

OF THE

ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY.

BOOK II.

THE APOSTLES.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

CRITICISM OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS.

The first book of our history of the Origins of Christianity has traced

the story as far as the death and burial of Jesus. We must now resume

the narrative at the point where we left it--to wit, Saturday, 4th

April, 33. This will be for some time yet a continuation, in some sort,

of the Life of Jesus. Next, after the months of joyous rapture, during

which the great Founder laid the foundation of a new order for

humanity, these last years were the most decisive in the history of the

world. It is still Jesus, some sparks of whose sacred fire have been

deposited in the hearts of a few friends who created institutions of

the greatest originality, moves, transforms souls, imprints upon

everything his divine seal. We have to show how, under this ever active

and victorious influence over death, the faith of the resurrection, the

influence of the holy Spirit, the gift of tongues, and the power of the

Church, established themselves. We shall describe the organization of

the Church at Jerusalem, its first trials, its first conquests, the

earliest missions which it despatched. We shall follow Christianity in

its rapid progress in Syria, as far as Antioch, where was formed a

second capital, more important in a sense than that of Jerusalem, which

it was destined to supplant. In this new centre, where the converted

Pagans constituted the majority, we shall see Christianity separating

itself definitely from Judaism, and receiving a name of its own; we

shall see especially the birth of the grand idea of distant missions,

destined to carry the name of Jesus into the world of the Gentiles. We

shall pause at the important moment when Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark

set out for the execution of this great design. There we shall

interrupt our narrative, and cast a glance at the world which those

daring missionaries undertook to convert. We shall endeavour to give an

account of the intellectual, political, religious, and social condition

of the Roman Empire about the year 45, the probable date of the

departure of Saint Paul upon his first mission.

Such is the subject-matter of this second book, which we have entitled,

The Apostles, for the reason that it expounds the period of common

action during which the small family created by Jesus acted in concert,

and was grouped morally around a single point--Jerusalem. Our next

work, the third, will take us out of this company, and we shall be

devoted almost exclusively to the man who, more than any other,

represents conquering and travelling Christianity--Saint Paul.

Although, from a certain epoch, he called himself an apostle, Paul had

not the same right to the title as the Twelve; he is a workman of the

second hour, and almost an intruder. The state in which historical

documents have reached us are at this stage-misleading. As we know

infinitely more of the history of St. Paul than that of the Twelve, as

we possess his authentic writings and original memoirs detailing

minutely certain periods of his life, we assign to him an importance of

the first order, almost exceeding that of Jesus. This is an error. Paul

was a great man: in the foundation of Christianity he played a most

important part. Still, we must not compare him with Jesus, nor even

with any of the immediate disciples of the latter. Paul never saw

Jesus, nor did he ever taste the ambrosia of the Galilean preaching.

Hence, the most commonplace man who had had his part of the celestial

manna, was from that very circumstance superior to him who had only had

an after-taste. Nothing can be more false than an opinion which has

become fashionable in these days, that Paul was really the founder of

Christianity. The real founder of Christianity was Jesus. The first

places, next to him, ought to be reserved to those grand and obscure

companions of Jesus, to those faithful and zealous women, who believed

in him despite his death. Paul was, in the first century, a kind of

isolated phenomenon. He did not leave an organized school. On the

contrary he left bitter opponents, who strove, after his death, to

banish him from the Church and to place him, in a sort of way, on the

same footing as Simon Magus. They tried to take away from him that

which we regard as the peculiar work--the conversion of the Gentiles.

The church of Corinth, which he himself had founded, claimed to owe its

origin to him and to St. Peter. In the second century Papias and St.

Justin never mention his name. It was later, when oral tradition came

to be regarded as nothing, and when the Scriptures took the place of

everything, that Paul assumed a leading part in Christian theology.

Paul, it was true, had a theology. Peter and Mary Magdalene had none.

Paul left behind him considerable works: none of the writings of the

other apostles are to be compared with his, either in regard to their

importance or authenticity.

At first glance the documents for the period embraced in this volume

are rare and altogether insufficent. The direct testimony is reduced to

the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles--chapters, the

historical value of which is open to serious objections. Yet, the light

which these last chapters of the Gospels cast upon that obscure

interval, especially the Epistles of St. Paul, dispels, to some extent,

the darkness. An old writing serves to make known, first, the exact

date at which it was composed, and, secondly, the period which preceded

its composition. Every writing suggests, in fact, retrospective

inductions as to the state of society which produced it. Composed, for

the most part, between the years 53 and 62, the Epistles of St. Paul

are replete with information concerning the early years of

Christianity. Moreover, seeing that we are here speaking of great

events without precise dates, the essential point is to show the

conditions under which they formed themselves, On this subject I ought

to remark once for all that the current date inscribed at the head of

each chapter is never more than approximate. The chronology of these

first years has but a very small number of fixed land-marks. Yet,

thanks to the care which the editor of the Acts has taken, not to

interrupt the succession of events; thanks to the Epistle to the

Galatians, where are to be found some numerical indications of the

greatest value; and to Josephus, who gives the dates of events of

profane history connected with some facts concerning the apostles, we

are able to create for the history of these last a very probable canvas

upon which the chances of error are confined within very narrow limits.

I shall again repeat at the beginning of this book what I have already

said at the beginning of my Life of Jesus. In histories of that kind,

where the general effect alone is certain, and where almost all the

details lend themselves more or less to doubt, in consequence of the

legendary character of the documents, hypothesis is essential. Upon

periods of which we know nothing no hypothesis is possible. To

endeavour to reproduce a group of ancient sculpture, which has

certainly existed, but of which we possess only a few fragments, and

concerning which we possess scarcely any written account, is an

altogether arbitrary work. But to attempt to recompose the entire

building of the Parthenon from what remains to us by the aid of the

ancient text, availing ourselves of the drawing made in the seventeenth

century of all the information possible; in one word, inspiring

ourselves with the style of those inimitable fragments, trying to seize

their soul and their life--what can be more legitimate? We need not

boast of having found the ancient sculptor once more; but we have done

what we could to approach him. Such a work is so much the more

legitimate in history since language permits doubtful forms, which

marble does not allow. There is oven nothing to prevent the reader from

proposing a choice between diverse theories. The conscience of the

writer may be easy since he has put forward as certain that which is

certain, as probable that which is probable, as possible that which is

possible. In those places where the footing between history and legend

is uncertain, the general effect alone is all that need be sought

after. Our third book, for which we shall have absolutely historical

documents, where we shall have to paint characters of flesh and blood,

and to speak of clearly defined facts, will offer a more definite

story. It will be seen, however, that the character of that period is

not known with greater certainty. Absolute facts speak more loudly than

biographical details. We know very little of the incomparable artists

who have created these masterpieces of Greek art. But these

masterpieces tell us more about the personality of their authors and

the public who appreciate them, than the most circumstantial

narratives, and the most authentic texts could do.

For the knowledge of the decisive events which happened in the first

days after the death of Jesus the authorities are the last chapters of

the Gospels containing the narratives of the appearance of the

resuscitated Christ. I need not repeat here what I have said in the

Introduction to my Life of Jesus as to the value of these documents. On

that side we have happily a control which was too often wanting in the

life of Jesus; I intend to imply an important passage of St. Paul (1

Cor. xv 5-8), which establishes: 1st the reality of the appearances;

2nd, the long duration of the apparitions as opposed to the narrative

of the synoptical Gospels; 3rd, the variety of places in which the

apparitions took place in contradiction to Mark and Luke. The study of

this fundamental text, together with other reasons, confirms us in the

views which we have enunciated as to the reciprocal relation of the

Synoptics with the fourth Gospel. In all that concerns the narrative of

the resurrection and the apparitions, the fourth Gospel maintains that

superiority which it has for all the rest of the Life of Jesus. If we

wish to find a consecutive logical narrative, which allows that which

is hidden behind the allusions to be conjectured, it is there that we

must look for it. I am approaching the most difficult of the questions

connected with the origin of Christianity. "What is the historic value

of the fourth Gospel?" The use which I have made of it in my Life of

Jesus is the point to which enlightened critics have taken the most

objection. Almost all the scholars who apply the rational method to the

history of theology reject the fourth Gospel as apocryphal in every

aspect. I have anew reflected much upon this problem, and I am unable

sensibly to modify my first opinion. Only as I differ on this point

from the general opinion I have thought it necessary to explain in

detail the reasons for my persistency. I intend to make it the subject

of an appendix at the end of a revised and corrected edition of the

Life of Jesus which will shortly appear.

The Acts of the Apostles are the most important document for the

history which we are about to relate. I ought to explain myself hero as

to the character of that work, its historical value, and the use which

I have made of it.

The one thing beyond question is that the Acts had the same author as

the third Gospel, of which they are a continuation. It is not worth

while to stop to prove this position, which, however, has never been

disputed. The preface at the beginning of both writings, the dedication

of both to Theophilus, the perfect similarity of style and of ideas

furnish abundant demonstrations in this regard.

A second proposition, which is not quite so self-evident, but which may

be regarded as very probable is, that the author of the Acts was a

disciple of Paul. who accompanied him during a great part of his

journeyings. At the first glance this proposition appeared indubitable.

In many places beginning with the 10th verse of chapter xvi., the

author in his story makes use of the pronoun "we," indicating thus that

thenceforward he made one of the company of Paul. That appears to be

beyond question. One issue only presents itself to destroy the force of

this argument: it is that of supposing that the passages where the

pronoun "we" appears have been copied by the last editor of the Acts

from an earlier manuscript by, for example, Timothy, and that the

editor, out of inadvertence, had omitted to substitute for "we" the

name of the narrator. This explanation is scarcely admissible. Such an

inadvertence might easily occur in a vulgar compilation. But the third

Gospel and the Acts are compositions most carefully edited, composed

with reflection, and even with art, written by the same hand, and

according to a deliberate plan. The two books together form a whole of

absolutely the same style, offering the same favourite locutions, and

the same manner of quoting the Scripture. A blunder of editing so

really shocking as that would be inexplicable. We are then forced

invincibly to conclude that he who wrote the end of the work wrote the

beginning also, and that the narrator of all is he who wrote "we" in

the passages mentioned.

This becomes still more striking, if we note in what circumstances the

narrator thus puts himself in company with Paul. The use of "we" begins

at the moment when Paul goes into Macedonia for the first time (xvi.

10). It ceases at the moment when Paul leaves Philippi, It is renewed

when Paul, visiting Macedonia for the last time, again goes by way of

Philippi (xx. 5-6.) Thenceforward the narrator never again separates

himself from Paul until the end. If we further remark that the chapters

in which the narrator accompanies the apostle have a specially precise

character, it is impossible to believe that the narrator could have

been a Macedonian, or rather a man of Philippi, who went before Paul to

Troas during his second mission, who remained at Philippi after the

departure of the apostle, and who at the last passage of the apostle

through that city (third mission) joined him, not again to leave him.

Can it be understood that an editor, writing at a distance, could thus

have allowed himself to be ruled by the remembrance of another? Such

memories would spoil the unity of the whole, The narrator who says "we"

would have his own style; his special expressions; he would be more

Paulinian than the editor himself. Now that is not so: the work is

perfectly homogeneous.

There will, perhaps, be some surprise that a thesis so evident should

have been contradicted. But criticism of the writings of the New

Testament shows that many things which appear to be perfectly clear

are, upon examination, full of uncertainty. In the matter of style,

thoughts, and doctrines, the Acts are scarcely what might be expected

from a disciple of Paul. They in no way resemble his epistles. There is

not a trace of the lofty doctrines which constitute the originality of

the Apostle of the Gentiles. The temperament of Paul is that of a stiff

and self-contained Protestant; the author of the Acts gives us the

impression of a good Catholic, docile, optimist, calling every priest a

"holy father," every bishop "a great bishop," ready to swallow any

fiction, rather than believe that these holy fathers and great bishops

quarrel amongst themselves and often make rude war. Whilst professing a

great admiration for Paul, the author of the Acts avoids giving him the

title of apostle, and is anxious that the initiative of the conversion

of the Gentiles should belong to Peter. We should say, in short, that

he is a disciple of Peter, rather than of Paul. We shall soon show

that, in two or three circumstances, his principles of conciliation

have led him gravely to falsify the biography of Paul; he makes

mistakes and omissions of things which are very strange in a disciple

of this last. He does not mention a single one of his epistles; he

keeps back, in the most surprising fashion, explanations of the first

importance. Even in the part, where he must have been the companion of

Paul, he is sometimes singularly dry, ill-informed and dull. In short,

the softness and vagueness of some of his narratives, the

conventionality which may be discerned in them, suggest to us a writer

who had no personal communication with the apostles, and who wrote

between the years 100 and 120.

Must we insist upon these objections? I think not, and I persist in

believing that the last editor of the Acts is really the disciple of

Paul who says "we" in the last chapters. All the difficulties,

insoluble though they may appear, should be, if not set on one side, at

least held in suspense by an argument as decisive as that which results

from this word "we." We may add, that by attributing the Acts to a

companion of Paul, two important peculiarities are explained: on the

one hand, the disproportion of the work of which more than three-fifths

are consecrated to Paul; on the other, the disproportion which may be

remarked, even in the biography of Paul himself, whose first mission is

dispatched with great brevity, whilst certain parts of the second and

third missions, especially his last journey, are told with minute

details. A man altogether a stranger to the apostolic history, would

not have exhibited these inequalities. His work would have been better

planned as a whole. That which distinguishes history composed from

documents, from history written wholly or in part by an actor in it, is

exactly this disproportion: The historian of the closet takes for his

framework the events themselves; the author of memoirs takes his

recollections for his framework, or, at least, his personal relations.

An ecclesiastical historian, a sort of Eusebius, writing about the year

120, would have bequeathed to us a book very differently distributed

after chapter xiii. The bizarre fashion in which the Acts at this time

leaves the orbit in which they had revolved until then can, to my

thinking, be explained only by the peculiar situation of the author and

by his relations with Paul. This result will be naturally confirmed if

we find amongst the known fellow labourers of Paul the name of the

author to whom tradition attributes our writing.

This is in effect what took place. Manuscripts and tradition assign as

the author of the third Gospel a certain Lucas or Lucanus. From what

has been said it is evident that if Lucas be really the author of the

third Gospel, he is also the author of the Acts. Now we find this Lucas

mentioned precisely as the companion of Paul in the Epistle to the

Colossians (iv. 14); in that to Philemon (24), and in the II Timothy

(iv. 11.) This last Epistle is of more than doubtful authenticity. The

Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon on their side, although very

probably authentic, are not, however, the most undoubted of Paul's

Epistles. But those writings are, in any ease, of the first century,

and suffice to prove that there was a Luke amongst the disciples of

Paul. The fabricator of the Epistles to Timothy, in short, is certainly

not the author of those to the Colossians and to Philemon (supposing,

contrary to our opinion, that these last are apocryphal). To admit that

a forger should have attributed an imaginary companion to Paul is to

suppose something very improbable. But assuredly different forgers

would not have pitched upon the same name. Two circumstances give to

this reasoning a peculiar force. The first is that the name of Luke, or

Lucanus, is an uncommon one amongst the early Christians; the second

that the Luke of the Epistles had no other celebrity. To write a

celebrated name at the top of a document, as is done in the second

Epistle of Peter, and very probably in Paul's Epistles to Titus and

Timothy, was in no way contrary to the habits of the time. But to write

at the top of such a document a false name, otherwise obscure, is not

to be believed. Was it the intention of the forger to throw over his

book the authority of Paul? If it were, why did he not take the name of

Paul himself? or at least the name of Timothy or Titus, disciples of

the Apostle of the Gentiles, who were much bettor known? Luke scarcely

had a place in tradition, legend, or history. The three passages of the

Epistles above mentioned are not sufficient to make his name a

generally accepted guarantee. The Epistles to Timothy were probably

written after the Acts. The mention of Luke in the Epistles to the

Colossians and to Philemon are equivalent to one only, the two

documents being really but one. We think, therefore, that the author of

the Acts was really Luke, the disciple of Paul.

The very name of Luke, or Lucanus, and the profession of physician,

which the disciple of Paul thus named exercised, answer completely to

the indications which the two books furnish as to their author. We have

shown in effect that the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts was

probably from Philippi, a Roman colony, where Latin was the prevailing

language. Further, the author of the Gospel and of the Acts knew little

of Judaism and the affairs of Palestine; he scarcely knew Hebrew. He is

abreast of the ideas of the Pagan world, and he writes Greek with

tolerable correctness. The work was composed far from Judea for the use

of people who knew little of its geography, who cared nothing for

either profound Rabbinical learning's or for Hebrew names. The dominant

idea of the author is, that if the people had been free to follow their

inclinations they would have embraced the faith of Jesus, and that it

was the Jewish aristocracy who prevented them. The word Jew is always

used by him in a bad sense, and as synonymous with enemy of Christians.

On the other hand he shows himself very favourable to the Samaritan

heretics.

What date may we give to the composition of this important document?

Luke appears for the first time in company with Paul on the occasion of

the first journey of the apostle to Macedonia, about the year 52.

Suppose that lie was then 25 years of age; there is nothing unnatural

in supposing him to have lived to the year 100. The narrative of the

Acts stops at the year 63. But the edition of the Acts being evidently

later than that of the third Gospel, and the date of that third Gospel

being fixed with sufficient precision in the years which followed the

destruction of Jerusalem (70), we cannot dream of placing the

production of the Acts earlier than 71 or 72.

If it were certain that the Acts were composed immediately after the

Gospel we might stop at this point. But doubt is permissible. Some

facts lead to the belief that a considerable interval passed between

the composition of the third Gospel and that of the Acts. Thus there is

a singular contradiction between the last chapters of the Gospel and

the first of the Acts. According to the former account the ascension

took place on the very day of the resurrection; according to the Acts

it took place only after forty days. It is clear that the second

version presents the legend to us in a more advanced form--a form which

was adopted when the need was felt for creating a place for the various

apparitions, and for giving to the life beyond the tomb of Jesus a

complete and logical frame-work. We are even tempted to suppose that

the new fashion of conceiving things was not told to the author or did

not come into his head except in the interval between the composition

of the two works. In any case it is very remarkable that the author

finds himself compelled to add new circumstances to his first account

and to extend it. If his first book were still in his hands why did he

not make the additions to his first account which, separated as they

are, look so awkward? That, however, is not decisive, and a grave

circumstance leads to the belief that Luke conceived at the same time

the plan of both. That is the preface placed at the head of the Gospel,

which appears common to the two books. The contradiction we have

pointed out may perhaps be explained by the little rare which was taken

to present an accurate account of the way in which the time was spent.

This it is which makes all the accounts of the life of Jesus after his

resurrection in complete disagreement as to the duration of that life.

So little care was taken to be historical that the same narrator made

no scruple about proposing two irreconcilable systems in succession.

The three accounts of the conversion of Paul in the Acts present also

little differences, which prove simply that the author did not trouble

himself much about the exactness of the details.

It appears then that we shall be very near the truth in supposing that

the Acts were written about the year 80. The spirit of the book, in

fact, corresponds completely with the age of the first Flavians. The

author carefully avoids all that can wound the Romans. He loves to show

how favourable the Roman authorities were to the new sect; how they

sometimes even embraced it; how they at least defended it against the

Jews; how greatly superior is imperial justice to the passions of the

local powers. He insists especially on the advantages which Paul owed

to his rights as a Roman citizen. He abruptly cuts his narrative short

at the moment of the arrival of Paul at Rome, perhaps in order to avoid

the necessity of relating the cruelties of Nero towards the Christians.

The contrast with the Apocalypse is striking. The Apocalypse, written

in the year 68, is full of the memory of the iniquities of Nero; a

horrible hatred of Rome overspreads it. Here we see a mild man, who

lives in a period of calm. After about the year 70 until the last years

of the first century, the situation was not altogether unpleasant for

the Christians. Personages of the Flavian family attached themselves to

Christianity. Who knows if Luke did not know Flavius Clemens, if he

were not of his familia, if the Acts were not written for that powerful

personage, whose official position required caution? Some indications

have led to the belief that this book was composed at Rome. One might

have said indeed that the principles of the Roman Church weighed upon

the author. That Church, from the earliest ages, had the political and

hierarchical character which has always distinguished it. The good Luke

could enter into that spirit. His ideas of ecclesiastical authority are

very advanced: we see the form of the episcopate sprouting. He writes

history in that tone of an apologist at any cost which is that of the

official historians of the court of Rome. He acts as an ultramontane

historian of Clement XIV would act; praising at the same time the Pope

and the Jesuits, and seeking to persuade by a narrative full of

compunction that both sides in that debate observed the rules of

charity. In two hundred years it will also be settled that Cardinal

Antonelli and Mgr de Merode loved each other like two brothers. The

author of the Acts was, but with a simplicity which will not again be

equalled, the first of those complacent narrators, sanctimoniously

satisfied, determined to believe that everything goes on in the Church

in an evangelic fashion. Too loyal to condemn his master Paul, too

orthodox not to share the official opinion which prevailed, he smoothed

over differences of doctrine, to allow only the common end to be

seen--that end which all these great founders pursued in effect by

paths so opposed and through rivalries so energetic.

We can understand how a man who has placed himself intentionally in

such a disposition of mind, is the least capable in the world of

representing things as they really happened. Historical fidelity is a

matter of indifference to him; edification is all he cares for. Luke

scarcely conceals this; he writes in order that Theophilus may

recognise the truth of what the catechists have taught him. There was

then already a recognised system of ecclesiastical history, which was

officially taught, and the framework of which, as well as that of the

Gospel history itself, was probably already settled. The dominant

character of the Acts, like that of the third Gospel, is a tender

piety, a lively sympathy with the Gentiles, a conciliatory spirit, an

extreme pro. occupation with the supernatural, love for the humble and

lowly, a grand democratic sentiment, or rather the persuasion that the

people are naturally Christian, that it is the great who prevent them

from following their good instincts, an exalted idea of the power of

the Church and of its heads, a remarkable taste for community of life.

The system of composition is the same in both books, so that we are

with respect to the history of the apostles on the same footing as we

should be with regard to the Gospel history if we had one single text

only, the Gospel of Luke.

The disadvantages of such a situation are manifest. The life of Jesus,

as related by the third evangelist alone, would be extremely defective

and incomplete. We know it, because so far as the life of Jesus is

concerned, comparison is possible. Together with Luke we possess

(without speaking of the fourth Gospel) Matthew and Mark, who, as

compared with Luke, are in part, at least, original. We can lay a

finger on the violent proceedings by means of which Luke dislocates or

mixes up anecdotes, on the way in which he modifies the colour of

certain facts according to his personal views, of the pious legends

which he adds to the most authentic traditions. Is it not evident that

if we could make such a comparison of the Acts, we should find faults

of a precisely similar description? The first chapters of the Acts

would even appear, without doubt, inferior to the third Gospel, for

these chapters were probably composed with fewer and less universally

accepted documents.

A fundamental distinction, in fact, is here necessary. From the point

of view of historical value, the book of the Acts divides itself into

two parts; one, including the first twelve chapters, and relating the

principal facts of the history of the primitive Church; the other

containing the remaining sixteen chapters, all devoted to the missions

of St. Paul. That second part includes in itself two distinct kinds of

narrative; those on the one hand, of which the narrator gives himself

out as eye-witness; on the other, those in which he relates only what

he has been told. It is clear that oven in the last case his authority

is great. Often the conversations of Paul have furnished his

information. Towards the end, moreover, the narrative assumes an

astonishing character of precision. The last pages of the Acts are the

only completely historical pages which we possess of the origins of

Christianity. The first, on the contrary, are those which are most open

to attack of all the New Testament. It is especially in the first years

that the author obeyed impulses like those which preoccupied him in the

composition of his gospel, and even more deceptive. His system of forty

days; his account of the ascensions, closing by a species of final

carrying off, theatrical solemnity; the strange life of Jesus; his

manner of relating the descent of the Holy Ghost, and the miraculous

preachings; his mode of understanding the gift of tongues, so different

from that of St. Paul, unveil the preoccupation of a period relatively

low when the legend is very ripe, rounded as it were in all parts.

Everything is done with him with a strange setting and a great display

of the marvellous. It must be remembered that the author wrote half a

century after the events, far from the country where they happened,

concerning incidents which neither he nor his master had seen,

according to traditions in part fabulous or transmogrified. Not merely

is Luke of another generation than the first founders of Christianity,

but he is of another world; he is Hellenist with but very little of the

Jew, almost a stranger to Jerusalem and the secrets of the Jewish life;

he has not touched the primitive Christian society; he has scarcely

known its last representatives. We see in the miracles, which he

relates, rather inventions a priori than transformed facts; the

miracles of Peter and Paul form two series, which answer each other.

His persons resemble each other. Peter differs in nothing from Paul,

nor Paul from Peter. The discourses, which he puts into the mouths of

his heroes, though admirably appropriate to the circumstances, are all

in the same style, and belong to the author rather than to those to

whom he attributes them. We even find impossibilities. The Acts, in a

word, are a dogmatic history, arranged to support the orthodox doctrine

of the time, or to inculcate the ideas which seemed most agreeable to

the piety of the author. Let us add that it could be no otherwise. The

origin of every religion is known only by the narratives of the

faithful. It is only scepticism which writes history ad narrandum.

These are not simple suspicions, conjectures of a criticism defiant to

excess. They are solid inductions; every time that we are permitted to

examine the narrative of the Acts, we find it incorrect and

unsystematic. The examination of the Gospels, which can be done only by

comparison with the Synoptics, we can make with the help of the

Epistles of Paul, especially of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians.

It is clear that where the Acts and the Epistles clash, the preference

ought always to be given to the Epistles--texts of an absolute

authenticity, more ancient, of a complete sincerity, and free from

legends. In history documents have the more authority the less they

possess of historical form. The authority of all the chronicles must

yield to that of an inscription, of a medal, of a map, of an authentic

letter. From this point of view, the letters of certain authors, or of

certain dates, are the basis of all the history of the origins of

Christianity. Without them, it might be said that doubt would attach to

them, and would ruin, from top to bottom, even the life of Jesus

itself. Now, in two very important particulars, the Epistles put in a

striking light the private tendencies of the author of the Acts, and

his desire to efface all trace of the divisions which existed between

Paul and the Apostles of Jerusalem.

And first, the author of the Acts says that Paul, after the incident at

Damascus (ix, 19 et seq., xxii, 17 et seq.), having come to Jerusalem

at a period when his conversion was hardly known; that he was presented

to the Apostles; that he lived with the Apostles and the faithful on a

footing of the greatest cordiality; that he disputed publicly with the

Hellenist Jews; that a plot of theirs, and a celestial revelation,

brought about his departure from Jerusalem. Now Paul tells us that

things came about very differently. To prove that he owed nothing to

the Twelve, and that he received his doctrine and his mission from

Jesus, he asserts (Gal. i., 11 et seq.), that after his conversion he

avoided taking counsel with anyone whatever, or going to Jerusalem to

those who were apostles before him; that he went of his own accord, and

without commission from anyone, to preach in Hauran; that three years

later, it is true, he accomplished the journey to Jerusalem to make

acquaintance with Peter; that he stayed there fifteen days with him;

but that he saw no other apostle unless it were James, the Lord's

brother, so that his face was unknown to the churches of Judea. The

effort to soften down the asperities of the rude apostle by presenting

him as a follow worker with the Twelve, labouring at Jerusalem in

concert with them, evidently appears hero. Jerusalem is made his

capital and point of departure; it is desired that his doctrine shall

be so identified with that of the apostles, that he might in some sort

replace them in the preaching; his first apostolate is reduced to the

synagogues of Damascus; he is described as having been disciple and

auditor, which he certainly never was; the time between his conversion

and his first journey to Jerusalem is materially abridged; his stay in

that city is prolonged; he is described as preaching there to the

general satisfaction; as having lived intimately with all the apostles,

although he himself says that he saw only two; the brethren of

Jerusalem are described as watching over him, whilst Paul declares that

his face was unknown to them.

The desire to make of Paul an assiduous visitor to Jerusalem, which has

led our author to advance and to prolong his first stay in that city

after his conversion, appears to have induced him to ascribe to the

apostle one journey too many. According to him Paul came to Jerusalem

with Barnabas, bearing the offering of the faithful during the famine

of the year 44 (Acts xi. 30, xii. 25). Now Paul declares expressly that

between the journey which took place three years after his conversion

and the journey about the business of the circumcision, he did not go

to Jerusalem (Gal. i. and ii.) In other words, Paul formally excludes

the idea of any journey between Acts ix. 26 and Acts xv. 2. If we were

to deny, against all reason, the identity of the journey related Acts

xv. 2, et seq. we should not obtain the smallest contradiction. "After

three years," says St. Paul, "I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter . . .

Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas."

It has been doubted whether these fourteen years date from the

conversion, or the journey which followed three years after that event.

Let us take the first hypothesis, which is the most favourable to those

who would defend the account in the Acts. There would then be eleven

years, at least, according to St. Paul, between his first and his

second journey to Jerusalem; now. surely there were not eleven years

between what is told Acts ix. 26 et seq. and what is told Acts xi, 30!

And if against all probability that hypothesis is maintained, we find

ourselves in the presence of another impossibility. In fact, what is

told in Acts xi. 30 is contemporaneous with the death of James the son

of Zebedee, which furnishes the only date fixed by the Acts of the

Apostles, since it proceded by very little the death of Herod Agrippa

I. which happened in the year 44. The second journey of Paul having

taken place at least fourteen years after his conversion, if Paul had

really made that journey in the year 44, the conversion would have

taken place in the year 30, which is absurd. It is, therefore,

impossible to maintain for the journey related Acts xi. 30 and xii. 35

any reality.

These comings and goings appear to have been related by our author in a

very inexact fashion. In comparing Acts xvii. 14-16; xviii. 5, with I.

Thess. iii. 1-2, we find another disagreement. But seeing that does not

concern matters of dogma, we need not speak of it here.

That which is most important about our present subject which furnishes

thin critical ray of light for the difficult question of the historical

value of the Acts is a comparision of the passages relative to the

business of the circumcision in the Acts (chap. xv.) and in the Epistle

to Galatians (chap. ii). According to the Acts the brethren in Judea

being come to Antioch and having maintained the necessity of

circumcision for the converted Pagans, a deputation, composed of Paul,

Barnabas and many others was sent from Antioch to Jerusalem to consult

the apostles and the elders in this question. They were received with

much warmth by the whole community; a great assembly took place.

Dissension scarcely showed itself, checked as it was under the

effusions of a common charity and the happiness of finding themselves

together. Peter announces the opinion which he had expected to find in

the mouth of Paul, that converted Pagans do not become subject to the

law of Moses. James appends to that only a very slight restriction.

Paul does not speak, and, to say the truth, is under no necessity of

speaking, since his doctrine is put into the mouth of Peter. The

opinion of the brethren of Judea is supported by none. A solemn decree

is formulated by the advice of James. This decree is signified to the

churches by deputies specially appointed.

Let us now compare the account of Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians.

Paul's version is that the journey to Jerusalem which he undertook on

that occasion was the effect of a spontaneous movement, and even the

result of a revolution. Arrived at Jerusalem, he communicates his

gospel to those whom it concerned; he has, in particular, interviews

with those who appear to be considerable personages. They do not offer

him a single criticism; they communicate nothing to him; they only ask

that he should remember the poor of Jerusalem. If Titus, who

accompanied him, consented to allow himself to be circumcised it is

"because of false brethren unawares brought in." Paul makes this

passing concession to them, but he does not submit himself to them. As

to men of importance (Paul speaks of them only with a shade of

bitterness and irony), they have taught him nothing new. More, Peter,

having come later to Antioch, Paul "withstood him to the face, because

he was to be blamed." First, in effect, Peter ate with all

indiscriminately. The emissaries of James having arrived, Peter hides

himself and avoids the uncircumcised. "Seeing that they walked not

uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel," Paul apostrophises

Peter before them all, and reproaches him bitterly with his conduct.

The difference is palpable. On the one hand a solemn agreement, on the

other anger ill-restrained, extreme susceptibilities. On the one side a

sort of council; on the other nothing resembling it. On one side a

formal decree issued by a recognized authority; on the other different

opinions, which remain in existence without any reciprocal yielding,

save for form's sake. It is useless to say which version merits the

preference. The account in the Acts is scarcely probable, since

according to this account the council was occasioned by a dispute of

which no trace is to be found when the council has met. The two orators

expressed themselves in a sense altogether different from that which we

know to have been otherwise their usual part. The decree which the

council is said to have decided upon is assuredly a fiction. If this

decree of which James would have settled the terms had been really

promulgated, why those terrors of the good and timid Peter? Why did he

hide himself? He and the Christian community of Antioch were acting in

the fullest conformity with the decree the terms of which had been

settled by James himself. The business of the circumcision occurred

about the year 51. Some years afterwards, about the year 56, the

quarrel which the decree ought to have ended is more lively than ever.

The Church of Galatia is troubled by new envoys from the Church of

Jerusalem. Paul answered this new attack of his enemies by his

thundering epistle. If the decree mentioned in Acts xv. had had any

real existence, Paul had a very simple means of silencing debate--he

had only to quote it. Now all that he says supposes the non-existence

of this decree. In 57, Paul, writing to the Corinthians, ignores the

same decree, and even violates its prescriptions. The decree orders

abstinence from meats offered to idols. Paul, however, is of opinion

that those meats may be eaten if no one is scandalized thereby, but

they ought to be abstained from in cases where scandal would arise. In

58, then, about the time of the last journey of Paul to Jerusalem,

James is more obstinate than ever. One of the characteristic features

of the Acts--a feature which proves plainly that the author proposes to

himself less to prevent historical truth and even to satisfy logic,

than to edify pious readers--is the circumstance that the question of

the admission of the uncircumcised is always settled, yet is always

open. It is settled at first by the baptism of the eunuch of Queen

Candace, then by the baptism of the centurion Cornelius, both

miraculously ordained; then by the foundation of the church of Antioch

(xi. 19, et. seq.) then by the pretended Council of Jerusalem, which

does not prevent that; on the last pages of the book (xxi. 20-21.) the

question is still in suspense. To tell the truth it has always remained

in that state. The two fractions of the nascent Christianity never

agreed upon it. One of them, however, that which clung to the practices

of Judaism remained infertile, and faded into obscurity. Paul was so

far from being accepted by all that after his death a part of

Christendom anathematized him, and pursued him with calumnies.

In our third book we shall have to deal in detail with the question

which lies at the root of all those curious incidents. Here we have

desired to give only some examples of the manner in which the author of

the Acts understands history, of his system of conciliation, of his

preconceived ideas. Must we conclude from them that the first chapters

of the Acts are devoid of authority, as some celebrated critics think,

that fiction so far enters as to create both pieces and persons, such

as the eunuch of Candace, the centurion Cornelius, and even the deacon

Stephen and the pious Tabitha? I think by no means. It is probable that

the author of the Acts has not invented the persons, but is a skilful

advocate, who writes to prove his case, and who makes the most of the

facts which have come to his knowledge to support his favourite

theories, which are the legitimacy of the calling of the Gentiles, and

the divine institution of the hierarchy. Such a document must be used

with great caution, but to reject it absolutely is as uncritical as to

follow it blindly. Some paragraphs, besides, even in the first part,

have a universally recognised value, and represent authentic memoirs

extracted by the last editor. Chapter xii., in particular, is excellent

matter, and may have been the work of John-Mark.

It may be seen in what distress we should be if the only documentary

authorities we have for this history were a legendary book like this.

Happily, we have others which refer directly to the period which will

be the subject of our third book, and which shed a great light upon

this. These are the Epistles of St. Paul. The Epistles to the Galatians

especially is a veritable treasury, the basis of the chronology of this

age, the key which opens everything, the testimony which ought to

re-assure the most sceptical as to the reality of matters concerning

which they might doubt. I beg, serious readers who may be tempted to

regard me as too bold or too credulous, to read again the two first

chatters of that remarkable document. They are certainly the two most

important chapters for the study of nascent Christianity. The Epistles

of St. Paul have, in fact, an unequalled advantage in that history:

their absolute authenticity. No doubt has ever been raised by serious

criticism as to the authenticity of the Epistle to the Galatians. of

the two Epistles to the Corinthians, of the Epistle to the Romans. The

reasons for which the two Epistles to the Thessalonians and that to the

Philippians, have been attacked are valueless. At the beginning of our

third volume we shall have to discuss the more specious, although

indecisive, objections which have been raised against the Epistle to

the Colossians, and the note to Philemon; the special problem presented

by the Epistle to the Ephesians; the strong reasons, finally, which

point to the rejection of the two Epistles to Timothy, and that to

Titus. The epistles of which we shall have to make use in this volume

are those whose authenticity is indisputable; for, at least, the

inductions which we shall draw from the others are independent of the

question of whether they have or have not been dictated by St. Paul.

It is not necessary to refer in this place to the rules of criticism

which have been followed in the composition of this work; that has

already been done in the introduction to the Life of Jesus. The first

twelve chapters of the Acts are in effect a document analogous to the

synoptical Gospels, and require to be treated in the same fashion.

Documents of this kind, half historical, half legendary, can never be

regarded as wholly legend or wholly history. Almost everything in them

is false in detail, nevertheless it may enclose some precious truths.

To translate these narratives pure and simple is not to write history.

These narratives are, in fact, often contradicted by other and more

authentic texts. In consequence, even when there is only one text, one

is always constrained to fear that if there had been others there would

have been the same contradictions. For the Life of Jesus the narrative

of Luke is continually controlled and corrected by the two other

synoptical Gospels and by the fourth. Is it not probable, I repeat,

that if we had for the Acts the analogue of the Synoptics and of the

fourth Gospel, the Acts would be corrected on a host of points where we

have now only their testimony? In our third book, where we shall be in

clear and definite history, and where we shall have in our hands

original and often biographical information, we shall be guided by

other rules. When St. Paul himself tells us the story of some episode

of his life which he had no interest in presenting in any particular

light, it is clear that all that we need do is to insert his very

words, word for word, in our narrative, according to the method of

Tillemont. But when we are concerned with a narrator preoccupied with a

system, writing as the advocate of certain ideas, editing after this

infantine fashion, with vague and soft outlines, colours absolute, and

strongly marked such as legend always offers, the duty of the critic is

not to stick close to the text; his duty is to discover what truth the

text may embody, without ever being too certain of having found it. To

debar criticism from such interpretations would be as unreasonable as

to command an astronomer to concern himself only with the apparent

state of the heavens. Does not astronomy, on the contrary, consist in

rectifying the parallax caused by the position of the observer, and to

construct a real and veracious chart instead of a deceptive apparent

one?

How besides can it be pretended that documents should be followed to

the letter when they are full of impossibilities? The first twelve

chapters of the Acts are a tissue of miracles. Now it is an absolute

rule of criticism to give no place in historical documents to

miraculous circumstances. This is not the result of a metaphysical

system, but simply a matter of observation. Facts of that kind can

never be verified. All the pretended miracles that we can study closely

resolve themselves either into illusions or impostures. If a single

miracle were proved, we could hardly reject all those of ancient

history in a mass, for after all, admitting that a great number of

these last were false, it is still possible to believe that certain of

them were true. But it is not thus. All discussable miracles fade away.

May we not reasonably conclude from that fact that the miracles which

are removed from us by centuries, and concerning which there is no way

of establishing an exhaustive discussion, are also without reality? In

other words, there is no miracle except when one believes it; the

substance of the supernatural is faith. Catholicism itself, which

pretends that the miraculous power is not yet extinct within its bosom,

undergoes the power of this law. The miracles which it pretends to work

happen only in places of its choice. When there is so simple a method

of proving its authenticity, why not do so in open daylight? A miracle

in Paris, under the eyes of competent and learned men, would put an end

to all doubts. But alas! that is what never happens. Never has a

miracle been wrought before the public whom it is desirable to convert,

I would say before the incredulous. The condition of the miracle is the

credulity of the witness. No miracle is performed before those who

might discuss and criticise it. To that rule there is not a single

exception. Cicero said, with his usual good sense and acuteness, "Since

when has that secret force disappeared? Is it not since men have become

less credulous?"

"But," it is said, "if it is impossible to prove that there has ever

been a supernatural fact, it is equally impossible to prove that there

has not been one. The positive savant who denies the supernatural

proceeds then as gratuitously as the believer who admits it." In no

way. It is for him who affirms a proposition to prove it. He, before

whom it is affirmed, has but one thing to do, to wait for the proof,

and to yield if it is good. Supposing we had called upon Buffon to give

a place in his Natural History to sirens and centaurs, Buffon would

have answered, "Show me a specimen of these beings, and I will admit

them; until you do, they do not exist for me"--"But prove that they do

not exist?"--"It is for you to prove that they exist." The burden of

proof in science rests upon those, who make the assertion. Why do we

not believe in angels or devils, although innumerable historic texts

assume their existence? Because the existence of an angel or a devil

has never yet been proved.

To maintain the reality of the miracle appeal is made to the phenomena,

which, it is said, could have been produced only by going beyond the

laws of nature, the creation of man for example. "The creation of man,"

it is said, "could have come about only by the direct intervention of

the Deity; why should not that intervention be repeated at other

decisive moments of the development of the universe?" I shall not

insist upon the strange philosophy, and the paltry idea of the Divinity

which such a method of reasoning involves, for history has its method,

independent of all philosophy. Without entering, in the smallest

degree, upon the province of theodicy, it is easy to show how defective

such an argument is. It is equivalent to saying that everything which

does not happen in the existing state of the world, everything which we

cannot explain by the existing condition of science, is miraculous. But

then the sun is a miracle, for science is far from having explained the

sun; the conception of every man is a miracle, for philosophy is still

silent on that point; conscience is a miracle, for it is an absolute

mystery; every animal is a miracle, for the origin of life is a problem

concerning which we have almost no information. If we say that all

life, that every soul is in effect of a superior order in nature, we

are simply playing upon words. We are anxious that this should be

understood; but then there must be an explanation of the word miracle.

Can that be a miracle which happens every day and every hour? Miracle

is not the unexplained; it is a formal derogation in the name of a

particular will of known laws. What we deny is the exceptional; those

are the private interventions, like that of a clockmaker, who has made

a clock, very well, it is true, but to which he is from time to time

obliged to put his hand to supply the deficiencies of the wheel-work.

That God permeates everything, especially everything that lives, is

distinctly our theory; we only say that no special intervention of a

supernatural force has ever been proved. We deny the reality of private

supernaturalism until a demonstrated fact of this kind has been

presented to us. To seek this fact before the creation of man; to fly

beyond history to periods, where all verification is impossible, in

order to escape from verifying historical miracles, is to take refuge

behind a cloud, to prove one obscure thing by another still morn

obscure, to dispute a known law, because of a fact of which we are not

certain. Miracles are appealed to which took place before any witness

existed, simply because it is impossible to quote one of which there is

any credible witness.

Without doubt, in distant ages, things happened in the universe,

phenomena which offer themselves no more, at least upon the same scale

in the actual state of things. But these phenomena may be explained by

the date at which they have occurred. In the geological formation a

great number of minerals and precious atones are found, which it would

appear are no longer produced in nature. Nevertheless Messrs.

Mitscherlich, Ebelman, de S�narmont, Daubree have artificially

recomposed the majority of these minerals and precious stones. If it is

doubtful whether they will ever succeed in artificially producing life,

it is because the artificial reproduction of the circumstances under

which life commences (if it ever does commence) will be always out of

the reach of humanity. How can we bring back a state of the planet

which has disappeared for thousands of years? How are we to try an

experiment which will occupy centuries? The diversity of the moans and

the centuries of slow evolution--these are the things that are

forgotten when we speak of the phenomena of old times, which do not

happen to-day as miracles. In some celestial body at the present moment

things are perhaps being done which have ceased upon this earth for an

infinite period of time. Surely the formation of humanity is the most

shocking and absurd thing in the world, if it is supposed to be sudden,

instantaneous. It reverts to general analogies (without ceasing to be

mysterious) if we see in it the result of a slow progress continued

during incalculable periods. We must not apply the laws of maturity to

embryonic life. The embryo develops all its organs one after another;

the adult man, on the contrary, creates no more organs. He creates no

more because he is no longer of an age to create; he does not even

invent language because he is not called upon to invent it. But what is

the use of meeting adversaries who continually evade the question? We

ask for an authenticated historical miracle; we are told that there

were such things before history existed. Assuredly, if a proof were

required of the necessity for supernatural beliefs in certain states of

the soul, it might be found in the fact that minds penetrating enough

in every other respect have been able to rest the edifice of their

faith on such a desperate argument.

Others, abandoning miracles of the physical order, entrench themselves

behind moral miracles, without which they maintain that these events

cannot be explained. Certainly the formation of Christianity is the

greatest event in the religious history of the world. But it is not a

miracle for all that. Buddhism, Babism have had martyrs as numerous, as

exalted, as resigned as Christianity. The miracles of the foundation of

Islam are of a wholly different character, and I confess that they

affect me little. It must, however, be remarked that the Mussulman

doctors base upon the establishment of Islam, upon its diffusion as by

a train of fire, upon its rapid conquests, upon the force which gives

it everywhere an absolute reign, the same reasonings which the

Christian apologists base upon the establishment of Christianity, and

assert that they clearly behold there the finger of God. Let us allow,

if it is desired, that the foundation of Christianity is a unique fact.

Hellenism is another absolutely unique fact, understanding by that word

the ideal perfection in literature, in art, in philosophy, which Greece

has achieved. Greek art surpasses all other art, as Christianity

surpasses all other religions, and the Acropolis at Athens--a

collection of masterpieces by the side of which everything else is no

bettor than clumsy fumbling, or more or less successful imitation--is

perhaps that which in its way most successfully defies comparison.

Hellenism, in other words, is as much a miracle of beauty as

Christianity is a miracle of sanctity. A unique thing is not a

miraculous thing. God is in varying degrees in all that is beautiful,

good, and true. But he is never in one of his manifestations in so

exclusive a fashion that the presence of his breath in a religious or a

philosophical movement ought to be deemed a privilege or exception.

I hope that the interval of two years and a half passed since the

publication of the Life of Jesus will lead some of my readers to

consider these problems with greater calmness. Religious controversy is

always one of bad faith, without any intention or desire that it should

be so. There is no independent discussion; no anxious seeking for the

truth; it is the defence of a position already taken up to prove that

the dissident is ignorant or dishonest. Calumnies, misinterpretations,

falsifications of ideas and of texts, triumphant reasonings over things

that an opponent has never said, cries of victory over mistakes which

he has not made, nothing appears disloyal to the man who would hold in

his hand the interests of absolute truth. I should have ignored history

if I had not expected all that. I am cool enough to be almost

insensible to it, and I have a sufficiently lively taste for matters of

faith to be able to understand in a kindly spirit what there is that is

often touching in the sentiment which inspired those who contradicted

me. Often, in seeing so much simplicity, such a pious assurance, a

wrath coming so frankly from good and pure souls, I have said, with

John Huss, at the sight of an old woman who sweated under a faggot for

his burning: Oh, sancta simplicitas! I have regretted certain emotions,

which could only be profitless. According to the beautiful expression

of the Scriptures, "God is not in the tempest." Ah! without doubt, if

this trouble led to the discovery of the truth, we should be consoled

for many agitations. But it is not thus: truth does not exist for the

passionate man. It is reserved for the minds of those who seek for it

without prejudice, without persistent love, without lasting hatred,

with an absolute liberty, and without any after intention of acting in

the business of humanity. These problems are only some of the

innumerable questions of which the world is full, and which the curious

examine. No one is offended by the enunciation of a theoretical

opinion. Those who hold to their faith as to a treasure have a very

simple method of defending it--that of taking no note of works written

in a sense different from their own. The timid do better not to read

them.

There are practical persons who, with regard to a work of science, ask

what political party the author proposes to satisfy, and who are

anxious that every poem should convey a moral lesson. Such persons do

not admit that it is possible to write for something else besides a

propaganda. The idea of art and of science aspiring only to find the

true, and to realize the beautiful, outside of all politics, is to them

incomprehensible. Between us and such persons misunderstandings are

inevitable. "These people," as the Greek philosopher said, "take back

with their left hand what they give with their right." A host of

letters, dictated by a worthy sentiment, which I have received, may be

summed up thus:--"What do you want? What end do you propose?" Good God!

the same that every one proposes in writing history. If I had many

lives at my disposal I would devote one to writing the history of

Alexander, another to writing the history of Athens, a third, it may

be, to writing a history of the French Revolution, or a history of the

Order of St. Francis. What end should I propose to myself in writing

those works? One only, to find the truth and to make it live, to work

so that the great things of the past may be known with the greatest

possible exactitude, and expounded in a manner worthy of them. The

notion of overthrowing the faith of anyone is far removed from me.

These works ought to be executed with a supreme indifference, as if one

were writing for a deserted planet. Every concession to scruples of an

inferior order is a failure in the worship of art and of truth. Who

does not admit that the absence of the proselytising spirit is at once

the quality and the defect of a work composed in this spirit?

The first principle of the critical school in effect is that in matters

of faith everyone admits what he wants to admit, and, as it were, makes

the bed of his belief in proportion to his own stature. Why should we

be so senseless as to mix ourselves up with what depends upon

circumstances concerning which no one knows anything? If anyone accepts

our principles, it is because he possesses the turn of mind and the

necessary education for them; all our efforts would give neither, did

one not already possess those qualities. Philosophy differs from faith,

inasmuch as faith operates by itself, independently of the

understanding that we have of the dogmas. We believe, on the contrary,

that a truth has no value, save when it is reached by itself, when one

sees the whole order of ideas to which it belongs. We do not force

ourselves to silence such of our opinions as are not in harmony with

the belief of a portion of our fellow-man; we make no sacrifice to the

exigencies of divergent orthodoxies; but on the other hand we do not

dream of attacking or provoking them; we act as though they did not

exist. For myself, the day when I may be convicted of an effort to

convert to my views a single adherent who did not come of himself would

cause me the most acute pain. I should conclude from it, either that my

mind had lost its freedom and calmness, or that something was

oppressing me so that I could not content myself any longer with the

free and joyous contemplation of the universe.

If, moreover, my aim had been to make war upon established religions, I

should have worked in another way, undertaking only to point out the

impossibilities and the contradictions of the texts and dogmas held as

sacred. That minute task has been done a thousand times, and done well.

In 1856, I wrote as follows:--"I protest once for all against the false

interpretation which would be put upon my labours, if the various

essays upon the history of religions which I have or may publish in the

future, be treated as polemical works. Looked at as such, I should be

the first to admit that these essays were very weak. Controversy

requires tactics to which I am a stranger; it is necessary to know the

weak side of one's adversary, to hold to it, never to touch doubtful

questions, to avoid all concession, that is to say, to renounce the

very essence of the scientific spirit. Such is not my method. The

fundamental question upon which religious discussion must turn, that is

to say, the question of revelation and of the supernatural, I never

touch, not that that question may not be resolved for me with entire

certainty, but because the discussion of such a question is not

scientific, or rather because independent science supposes it to be

resolved beforehand. Assuredly if I had any polemical or proselytising

object in view, this would be a cardinal fault, it would be to

transport into the region of delicate and obscure problems a question

which is usually treated in the coarsest terms by controversialists and

apologists. So far from regretting the advantages which I should thus

give my opponent, I rejoice in them, if thereby I might convince the

theologians that my writings are of another order than theirs, that in

them they must look only for pure researches of study, open to attack

as such, wherein an attempt is sometimes made to apply to the Jewish

religion and to the Christian the principles of criticism which are

followed in other branches of history and philology. I intend at no

time to enter into the discussion of questions of pure theology any

more than M.M. Burnouf, Creuzer, Guigniaut, and so many other critical

historians of the religions of antiquity have thought themselves

obliged to undertake the reputation of, or the apology for, the forms

of worship with which they were occupied, The history of humanity is

for me a vast whole, where everything is essentially unequal and

diverse, but where everything of the same order arises from the same

causes and obeys the same laws. These laws I inquire into with no other

intention than that of discovering the exact tint of what really is.

Nothing will make the change an obscure position, but one which is

fruitful for science for the part of controversialist, an easy fact,

inasmuch as it wins for the writer an assured favour amongst people who

think it their duty to oppose war to war. In that polemic, the

necessity for which I am far from disputing, but which is neither to my

taste nor to my abilities, Voltaire is enough. One cannot be at the

same time a good controversialist and a good historian. Voltaire, weak

in scholarship; Voltaire, who appears so devoid of the sentiment of

antiquity to us who are initiated into a better method; Voltaire is

twenty times victorious over those who are even more innocent of

criticism than he is himself. A new edition of the works of this great

man would satisfy the want which appears to be felt at the present

moment of answering the encroachments of theology; an answer bad in

itself, but worthy of what it has to fight against; an old-fashioned

answer to a science that is out of date. Let us do better, we who

possess love of truth and a vast curiosity; let us leave these disputes

to those whom they please; let us labour for the small number of those

who march in the front rank of the human mind. Popularity, I know,

belongs by preference to writers who, instead of pursuing the most

elevated form of truth, apply themselves to struggling against the

opinion of their times; but by a just revenge they have no value so

soon as the opinion they have contested has ceased to exist. Those who

refuted the magic and judicial astrology in the XVIth and XVIIth

centuries, rendered an immense service to reason, yet their writings

are unknown at the present day; their very victory has caused them to

be forgotten.

I intend to hold invariably to this rule of conduct--the only one

worthy of a scholar. I know that the researches of religious history

touch upon living questions which appear to demand a solution. Persons

familiar with free speculation do not understand the calm deliberation

of thought; practical minds grow impatient with science, which does not

answer to their eagerness. Let us avoid these vain excitements. Let us

avoid finding anything. Let us rest in our respective Churches,

profiting by their daily worship and their tradition of virtue,

participating in their good work, and rejoicing in the poetry of their

past. Nor should their intolerance repel us, We may even forgive that

intolerance, for it is like egotism, one of the necessities of human

nature. To suppose that it will henceforward form now religious

families, or that the proportion amongst those which now exist will

ever greatly change is to go against all appearances. There will soon

be great schism in the Catholic Church; the days of Avignon, of the

anti-popes, of the Clementists and the Urbanists will probably return.

The Catholic Church may have its fourteenth Century again, but,

notwithstanding her divisions, she will still remain the Catholic

Church. It is probable that within a hundred years the relations

between the number of Protestants, of Catholics, and of Jews will not

have sensibly changed. But a great alteration will be made, or, rather,

will have become apparent to the eyes of all. Each of these religious

families will have two sorts of faithful ones; some believing

absolutely as in the Middle Ages; others sacrificing the letter and

holding only to the spirit. This second fraction will grow in every

communion, and as the spirit agrees as much as the letter divides, the

spiritualists of each communion will have reached such a point of

agreement that they will altogether neglect to amalgamate. Fanaticism

will be lost in a general tolerance. Dogma will become a mysterious ark

which no one will ever want to open. If the ark is empty, then what

matters it. One single religion will, I fear, resist this dogmatic

softening; that is Islamism. There are amongst certain Mussulmans of

the old school and amongst certain eminent men in Constantinople, there

are in Persia, especially, forms of a large and conciliatory spirit. If

these good forms are suffocated by the fanaticism of the ulemas,

Islamism will perish, for two things are evident: the first, that

modern civilization does not desire that the ancient religions should

die out altogether; the second is, that it will not allow itself to be

hampered in its work by old religious institutions. These last have the

choice between submission and death.

As for pure religion, the pretension of which is not to be a sect or a

Church apart, why should it submit to the inconveniences of a position

of which it has none of the advantages? Why should it raise flag

against flag when it knows that salvation is possible everywhere and to

everybody; that it depends on the degree of nobility which each carries

in himself? We can understand how Protestantism in the sixteenth

century brought about an open rupture. Protestantism began with a very

absolute faith. Far from corresponding to a weakening of dogmatism, the

Reformation marked a renaissance of the most rigid Christian spirit.

The movement of the nineteenth century, on the contrary, springs from a

sentiment which is the very reverse of dogmatism; it arises not in

sects or separate Churches, but in a general softening of all the

Churches. The marked divisions increase the fanaticism of orthodoxy and

provoke reactions. The Luthers and Calvins made the Caraffa, the

Ghislieri, the Loyolas, the Philip II.'s. If our Church rejects them

let us not recriminate; let us learn to appreciate the sweetness of

modern manners, which has rendered those hatreds powerless; let us

console ourselves by dreaming of that invisible Church which takes in

the excommunicated saints, the best souls of every century. The

banished of a Church are always its best men; they are in advance of

their times; the heretic of to-day is the orthodox of to-morrow. What

besides is the excommunication of men? Our Heavenly Father

excommunicates only dry souls and narrow hearts. If the priest refuses

to admit us to the cemetery, let us forbid our families to cry out. God

is the Judge; the earth is a good mother who makes no differences; the

corpse of a good man entering the unconsecrated corner carries

consecration with it.

Undoubtedly there are circumstances in which the application of these

principles is difficult. The spirit breathes where it will; the spirit

is liberty. Now it is to persons who are as it were chained to absolute

faith I would speak; of men in holy orders or clothed with some

ministerial authority. Even then a fine soul knows how to find the ways

of issue. A worthy country priest, by his solitary studies and by the

purity of his his, comes to see the impossibility of literal dogmatism;

must he sadden those whom he has hitherto consoled by explaining to

them simple changes which they cannot understand? God forbid! There are

not two men in the world who have exactly the same duties. The good

Bishop Colenso accomplished an act of honesty such as the Church has

not seen since its origin, in writing his doubts as soon as they came

to him. But the humble Catholic priest, in a country of narrow and

timid minds, ought to hold his tongue. How many discreet tombs around

our village churches hide in this way poetic reserves--angelic

silences! Will those whose duty it has been to speak equal the merit of

those secrets known to God alone?

Theory is not practice. The ideal must remain the ideal; it must fear

lest it soil itself by contact with reality. Thoughts which are good

for those who are preserved by their nobility from all moral danger may

not be, if they are, applied without their inconveniences for those who

are surrounded with baseness. Great things are achieved only with ideas

strictly defined; the man absolutely without prejudice would be

powerless. Let us enjoy the liberty of the sons of God; but let us take

care lest we become accomplices in the diminution of virtue which would

menace society if Christianity were to grow weak. What should we be

without it? What could replace the great schools of seriousness and

respect, such as St. Sulpice, or the devoted ministry of the Sisters of

Charity? How can we avoid being affrighted by the pettiness and the

cold heartedness which have invaded the world? Our disagreement with

persons who believe in positive religions is, after all, purely

scientific; at heart we are with them! We have only one enemy who is

theirs also--vulgar materialism, the baseness of the interested man.

Peace then, in God's name! Let the various orders of humanity live side

by side, not falsifying their own intelligence in order to make

reciprocal concessions which will lessen them, but in naturally

supporting each other. Nothing ought to reign here below to the

exclusion of its opposite. No one force ought to be able to suppress

the others. The harmony of humanity results from the free emission of

the most discordant notes. If orthodoxy should succeed in killing

science we know what would happen. The Mussulman world of Spain died

from having too conscientiously performed that task. If Rationalism

wishes to govern the world without regard to the religious needs of the

soul, the experience of the French Revolution is there to teach us the

consequences of such a blunder. The instincts of art, carried to the

highest point of refinement, but without honesty, made of the Italy of

the Renaissance a den of thieves, an evil abode. Weariness, stupidity,

mediocrity are the punishment of certain Protestant countries where,

under the pretence of good sense and Christian spirit, art has been

suppressed and science reduced to something paltry. Lucretius and St.

Theresa, Aristophanes and Socrates, Voltaire and Francis of Assisi,

Raphael and Vincent, St. Paul have an equal right to exist, and

humanity would be the less if one of the elements which compose it were

wanting.

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THE APOSTLES.

CHAPTER I.

FORMATION OF BELIEFS RELATIVE TO THE RESURRECT1ON OF JESUS--THE APPARITIONS AT

JERUSALEM.

Jesus, although speaking constantly of resurrection, of new life, never

stated distinctly that he would rise again in the flesh. The disciples,

in the hours immediately following his death, had not, in this respect,

any settled expectations. The sentiments, in which they have so

unaffectedly taken us into their confidence, implied even that they

believed all was finished. They wept, and interred their friend, if not

as they would at the death of a common person, at least as a person

whose loss was irreparable. They were sad and cast down. The hope that

they had cherished of seeing him realise the salvation of Israel is now

proved to have been vanity. They were spoken of as men who had been

robbed of a grand and dear illusion.

But enthusiasm and love do not recognise conditions barren of results.

They dallied with the impossible, and, rather than abdicate hope, they

did violence to all reality. Several phrases of the Master, which were

recalled, especially those in which he predicted his future advent,

might be interpreted in the sense that he would leave the tomb. Such a

belief was, besides, so natural that the faith of the disciples would

have sufficed to create it in every part. The great prophets, Enoch and

Elijah, had not tasted death. They began even is believe that the

patriarchs and the men of the first order in the old law, were not

really dead, and that their bodies were in their sepulchres at Hebron,

alive and animated. It was to happen to Jesus, what had happened to all

men who have captivated the attention of their fellow-men. The world,

accustomed to attribute to them superhuman virtues, cannot admit that

they would have to undergo the unjust, revolting and iniquitous law, to

wit, a common death. At the moment when Mahomet expired, Omar issued

from the tent, sabre in hand, and declared that he would strike off the

head of anyone who dared to say that the prophet was no more. Death is

a thing so absurd--when it strikes down a man of genius, or the

large-hearted man--that people will not believe in the possibility of

such an error in nature. Heroes do not die. Is not true existence that

which is implanted in the hearts of those whom we love? This adored

Master had filled for some years the little world which pressed around

him with joy and with hope; would people consent to leave him to rot in

the tomb? No; he had lived too much in those who surrounded him for

people not to declare after his death that he still lived.

The day which followed the burial of Jesus (Saturday, 15th April) was

crowded with these thoughts. People were interdicted from all manner of

manual labour, because of the Sabbath. But never was repose more

fruitful. The Christian conscience had on that day but one object--the

Master laid low in the tomb. The women, in particular, embalmed him in

ointment with their most tender caresses. Not for a moment did their

thoughts abandon that sweet friend, reposing in his myrrh, whom the

wicked had killed! Ah! the angels are doubtless surrounding him,

veiling their faces in his shroud! He, indeed, did say that he should

die, that his death would be the salvation of the sinner, and that he

should rise in the kingdom of his Father. Yes; he shall live again; God

will not leave his Son to be a prey to hell; He will not suffer his

chosen one to see corruption. What is this tombstone which weighs upon

him? He will raise it up; he will reascend to the right hand of his

Father, whence he descended. And we shall see him again; we shall hear

his charming voice; we shall enjoy anew his conversations, and it is in

vain that they have crucified him.

The belief in the immortality of the soul, which, through the influence

of the Grecian philosophy, has become a dogma of Christianity, readily

permits of one resigning oneself to death, inasmuch as the dissolution

of the body in that hypothesis was only a deliverance of the soul,

freed henceforth from vexatious bonds, without which it can exist. But

that theory of man, considered as a being composed of two substances,

did not appear very clear to the Jews. To them the reign of God and the

reign of Spirit consisted in a complete transformation of the world and

in the annihilation of death. To acknowledge that death could be

victorious over Jesus, over him who came to extinguish its empire, was

the height of absurdity. The very idea that he could suffer had

previously disgusted his disciples. The latter, then, had no choice

between despair or heroic affirmation. A man of penetration might have

announced on that Saturday that Jesus would rise again; the little

Christian Society on that day wrought the veritable miracle; it

resurrected Jesus in its heart, because of the intense love that it

bore for him. It decided that Jesus had not died. The love of these

passionate souls was, in truth, stronger than death; and, as the

property of passion is to be communicative, to light like a torch a

sentiment which resembles itself, and, consequently, to be indefinitely

propagated; Jesus, in a sense, at the moment of which we speak, is

already risen from the dead. Let but one material fact, insignificant

itself, permit the belief that his body is no longer here below, and

the dogma of the resurrection will be established for eternity.

It was that which happened in the circumstances which, though part

obscured, because of the incoherency of the traditions, and especially

because of the contradictions which they presented, can, nevertheless,

be grasped with a sufficient degree of probability.

Early on Sunday morning, the Galilean women who on Friday evening had

hastily embalmed the body, visited the tomb in which he had been

temporarily deposited. These were Mary Magdalene, Mary Cleophas,

Salome, Joanna, wife of Kouza, and others. They came, probably, each on

her own account, for it is difficult to call in question the tradition

of the three synoptical gospels, according to which several women came

to the tomb; on the other hand, it is certain that in the two most

authentic narratives which we possess of the resurrection, Mary

Magdalene alone played a part. In any case she had, at that solemn

moment, taken a part altogether out of line. It is she whom we must

follow step by step, for she bore on that day, for an hour, all the

burden of a Christian conscience; her testimony decided the faith of

the future.

Let us not forget that the vault in which the body of Jesus had been

enclosed, was a vault which had been recently cut in the rock, and was

situated in a garden near the place of execution. It had, for the

latter reason been specially taken, seeing that it was late in the day

and that they were desirous of not desecrating the Sabbath. The first

gospel alone adds one circumstance, to wit, that the vault belonged to

Joseph of Arimath�a. But, in general, the anecdotical circumstances

annexed by the first gospel to the common fund of the tradition, are

without any value, especially when the matter in hand is the last days

of the life of Jesus. The same gospel mentions another detail which, in

view of the silence of the others, has not any probability; we refer to

the public seals and a guard being placed at the tomb. We must also

remember that the mortuary vaults were low chambers, cut into an

inclining rock, in which was contrived a vertical cutting. The door,

ordinarily downwards, was closed by a very heavy stone, fitted into a

groove. These chambers had not a lock and key, the weight of the stone

was the sole safeguard that one had against thieves or profaners of

tombs; it was likewise so arranged that, to remove it, either a machine

or the combined efforts of several persons were required. All the

traditions agree on that point, that the stone had been put at the

mouth of the vault on the Friday evening.

But when Mary Magdalene arrived on the Sunday morning, the stone was

not in its place. The vault was open. The body was no longer there. In

her mind the idea of the resurrection was as yet little developed. That

which filled her soul was a tender regret and the desire to render

funeral honours to the body of her divine friend. Her first sentiments,

moreover, were those of surprise and of sadness. The disappearance of

the cherished body had stripped her of the last joy upon which she had

calculated. She could not touch him again with her hands! And what had

become of him? The idea of a desecration was present to her and she was

shocked at it. Perhaps, at the same time, a glimmer of hope crossed her

mind. Without losing a moment, she ran to a house in which Peter and

John were together. "They have taken away the body of our Master," said

she, "and I know not where they have laid him."

The two disciples got up hastily and ran with all their might to see.

John, the younger, arrived first. He stooped down to look into the

interior. Mary was right. The tomb was empty. The linen which had

served to enshroud him was scattered about the sepulchre. They both

entered, examined the linen, which was no doubt stained with blood, and

remarked in particular the napkin, which had enveloped his head, rolled

up in a corner apart. Peter and John returned home extremely perplexed.

If they did not now pronounce the decisive words: "He is risen!" we may

be sure that such a consequence was the irrevocable conclusion, and

that the generating dogma of Christianity was already established.

Peter and John departed from the garden; Mary remained alone at the

mouth of the sepulchre. She wept profusely. One single thought engaged

her: Where have they put the body? Her woman's heart did not go beyond

the desire of holding the well-beloved body again in her arms. Suddenly

she heard a slight noise behind her. A man is standing near her. She

thinks at first it is the gardener. "Sir," said she, "if thou have

borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him

away." In response, she heard herself called by her name, "Mary!" It

was the voice which had so often before thrilled her. It was the voice

of Jesus. "Oh, my master!" she exclaimed. She made as if to touch him.

A sort of instinctive movement induced her to kneel down and kiss his

feet. The vision gently receded, and said to her: "Touch me not!"

Gradually the shadow disappeared. But the miracle of love was

accomplished. What Cephas was not able to do, Mary had done. She knew

how to extract life, sweet and penetrating words, from the empty tomb.

It was no longer a question of deducing consequences or of framing

conjectures. Mary had seen and heard. The resurrection had its first

immediate witness.

Frantic with love, inebriated with joy, Mary returned to the city and

said to the first disciples whom she met: "I have seen him; he has

spoken to me." Her greatly troubled imagination, her broken and

incoherent discourse, made her to be taken by some as mad. Peter and

John, in their turn, related what they had seen. Other disciples went

to the tomb and saw likewise. The conviction reached by the whole of

this first group was that Jesus had risen. Many doubts still existed.

But the assurances of Mary, of Peter and of John, imposed upon the

others. Subsequently, this was called "the vision of Peter." Paul, in

particular, does not speak of the vision of Mary, and awards all the

honour of the first apparition to Peter. But that statement was very

inexact. Peter only saw the empty sepulchre, the napkin and the winding

sheet. Mary alone loved enough to dispense with nature and to have

revived the phantom of the perfect master. In these sorts of marvellous

crises, to see after others have seen--goes for nothing; all the merit

consists in being the first to see; for others afterwards model their

visions on the received type. It is the characteristic of good

organisations to perceive the image promptly, accurately, and as if by

a sort of innate sense of design. The glory, then, of the resurrection

belongs to Mary Magdalene. Next to Jesus, it is Mary who has done the

most for the establishment of Christianity. The image created by the

delicate sensibility of Mary Magdalene hovers over the world still.

Queen and patroness of idealists, Magdalene knew better than any other

person how to verify her dream, how to impose upon all the holy vision

of her passionate soul. Her great woman's affirmation, "He is risen!"

has been the basis of the faith of humanity. Begone hence, powerless

reason! Seek not to apply cold analysis to this masterpiece of idealism

and of love. If wisdom renounces the part of consoling that poor human

race, betrayed by fate, let folly attempt the enterprise. Where is the

sage who has given to the world so much joy as Mary Magdalene, the

possessed of devils?

The other women who had been to the tomb spread meanwhile the news

abroad. They had not seen Jesus; but they spoke of a man in white, whom

they had seen in the sepulchre, and who had said to them: "He is not

here; return into Galilee; he will go before you there; there shall ye

see him." Perhaps it was these white linen clothes which had originated

this hallucination. Perhaps, again, they saw nothing, and only

commenced to speak of their vision when Mary Magdalene had related

hers. Indeed, according to one of the most authentic texts, they kept

silence for some time--a silence which was afterwards attributed to

terror. However this may be, these recitals increased every hour, and

underwent some singular transformations. The man in white became the

angel of God; it was told that his garments shone like the snow; that

his face seemed like lightning. Others spoke of two angels; one of whom

appeared at the head, the other at the foot of the sepulchre. By

evening, many, perhaps, already believed that the women had seen this

angel descend from heaven, move away the stone, and Jesus issue forth

with a great noise. Doubtless they varied in their depositions;

suffering from the effect of the imagination of others, as is always

the case with common people; they borrowed every embellishment, and

thus participated in the creation of the legend which grew up around

them and suited their ideas.

The day was stormy and decisive. The little company was greatly

dispersed. Some had already departed for Galilee; others hid themselves

for fear. The deplorable scene of the Friday; the afflicting spectacle

which they had had before their eyes, in seeing him of whom they had

expected so much expire upon the gibbet, without his Father coming to

deliver him, had, moreover, extinguished the faith of many. The news

imparted by the women and Peter was received on every side with

scarcely dissembled credulity. Of the diverse stories, some were

believed; the women went hither and thither with singular and

inconsistent stories, enriching them as they went. Statements, the most

opposed, were put forth. Some still wept over the sad event of the day

before; others were already triumphant; all were disposed to entertain

the most extraordinary accounts. Nevertheless, the distrust which the

excitement of Mary Magdalene inspired, the little authority which the

women had, the incoherency of their narratives, produced grave doubts.

People were living in the expectation of seeing new visions, and which

could not fail but come. The state of the sect was altogether

favourable to the propagation of strange rumours. If all the members of

the little church had been assembled, the legendary creation would have

been impossible; those who knew the secret of the disappearance of the

body, would probably have reclaimed against the error. But in the

confusion which prevailed, the door was opened for the most prolific

misapprehensions.

It is the characteristic of those states of the soul, in which

originate ecstasy and apparitions, to be contagious. The history of all

the great religious crises, proves that these sort of visions are

infectious. In an assembly of persons, entertaining the same beliefs,

it is sufficient for one member of the body to affirm having seen or

heard something supernatural for others to see and to hear also.

Amongst the persecuted Protestants, a report was spread that people had

heard the angels singing psalms upon a recently destroyed temple: They

all went there and heard the same psalm. In cases of this kind, it is

the most excited who give law, and who regulate the temperature of the

common atmosphere. The exaltation of a few is transmitted to all; no

one desires to be left behind, or likes to confess that he is less

favoured than the others. Those who see nothing, are carried away, and

finish by believing either that they are less clear-sighted, or that

they do not take proper account of their sensations. In any case, they

take care not to avow it; they would be disturbers of the common joy,

would cause sadness to others, and would be playing a disagreeable

part. When, therefore, one apparition is brought forward in such

assemblies, it is customary for everyone to see it, or believe he has

seen it. It is necessary to remember, however, what was the degree of

intellectual culture possessed by the disciples of Jesus. What is

called a weak head, very often, is associated with infinite goodness of

heart. The disciples believed in phantoms; they imagined themselves to

be compassed about with miracles; they participated in nothing which

had relation to the positive science of the times. This science existed

amongst some hundreds of men, scattered over those countries alone

where Grecian culture had penetrated. But the commonality, in every

country, participated very little in it. Palestine was, in this

respect, one of the most backward countries. The Galileans were the

most ignorant people of Palestine, and the disciples of Jesus might be

counted amongst the persons the most simple of Galilee. It was to this

very simplicity that they were indebted for their heavenly election.

Among such people, belief in marvellous deeds found the most

extraordinary facilities for propagating itself. Once the opinion on

the resurrection of Jesus had been noised abroad, numerous visions were

sure to follow. And so in fact they did follow.

On the same Sabbath day, at an advanced hour of the morning, when the

tales of the women had already been circulated, two disciples, one of

whom was named Cleopatros or Cleopas, set out on a short journey to a

village named Emmaus, situated a short distance from Jerusalem. They

talked together of recent events, and were filled with sadness On the

way, an unknown companion joined them, and inquired as to the cause of

their sorrow. "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem?" said they, "And

hast not known the things which are come to pass in these days?" And he

said unto them, "What things?" And they said unto him, "Concerning

Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before

God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers

delivered him to be condemned to death and have crucified him. But we

trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and

besides all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done.

Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which

were early at the sepulchre: and when they found not his body, they

came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said

that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the

sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw

not." The unknown individual was a pious man, well versed in the

Scriptures, citing Moses and the prophets. These three good people

became friendly. Approaching Emmaus, the stranger was making as if he

would continue his journey, the two disciples begged him to come and

break bread with them. The day was far spent; the recollections of the

two disciples became then more vivid. This hour of the evening for

refreshments, was the one which they looked back to as being at once

the most charming and most melancholy. How many times had they not

seen, during that hour, their beloved Master forget the burden of the

day, in the abandon of gay conversation, and enlivened by several sips

of excellent wine, spoke to them of the fruit of the vine, which he

would drink anew with them in the Kingdom of his Father. The gesture

which he made in the breaking of bread, and in offering it to them,

according to the custom of the heads of Jewish families, was deeply

engraven on their memories. Filled with a tender sadness, they forgot

the stranger: it was Jesus they saw holding the bread, then breaking

and offering it to them. These recollections engrossed them to such an

extent, that they scarcely perceived that their companion, anxious to

continue his journey, had quitted them. And when they had awakened out

of their reverie: "Did we not perceive," they said, "something strange?

Do you not remember how our hearts burned while he talked with us by

the way? And the prophecies which he cited, proved clearly that Messiah

must suffer before entering into his glory." "Did you not recognize him

at the breaking of bread?" "Yes: up to that time our eyes were closed;

they were only opened when he vanished." The conviction of the two

disciples was that they had seen Jesus. They returned with all haste to

Jerusalem.

The main body of the disciples were, just at that moment, assembled at

the house of Peter. Night had completely set in. Each was relating his

impressions, and what he had seen and heard. The general belief already

willed that Jesus had risen. At the entrance of the two disciples, the

brethren hastened to speak to them of that which was called, "the

vision of Peter." They, on their side, told what had befallen them on

the way to Emmaus, and how that they had recognized him in the breaking

of bread. The imaginations of everyone became quite excited. The doors

were shut; for they feared the Jews. Oriental cities are silent after

sunset. The silence, hence, for some moments in the interior was

frequently profound. Every slight sound which was accidentally produced

was interpreted in the sense of the common expectation. Expectation, as

is usual, was the progenitor of its object. During a moment of silence,

a slight breath of wind passed over the face of the assembly. At these

decisive times, a current of air, a creaking window, a casual murmur,

suffices to fix the beliefs of people for centuries. At the same moment

the breath of air was felt, they believed that they heard sounds. Some

declared that they had seen the word schalom, "happiness" or "peace."

This was the ordinary salutation of Jesus, and the word by which he

signalized his presence. It was impossible to doubt; Jesus was present;

he was there, in the assembly. It was his dear voice; everyone

recognized it. This idea was the more easily accepted, inasmuch as

Jesus had said to them, that as often as they came together in his

name, he would be in the midst of them. It was then an accepted fact,

that on Sunday evening, Jesus had appeared before his assembled

disciples. Some of them pretended to have distinguished the marks of

the nails in his hands and his feet, and in his side the trace of the

spear thrust. According to a widely-spread tradition, this was the

self-same evening that he breathed upon his disciples the holy spirit.

The idea, at least, that his breath had passed over them on

re-assembling, was generally admitted.

Such were the incidents of that day, which has decided the fate of

humanity. The opinion that Jesus had risen was, on that day,

established in an irrevocable manner. The sect, which was believed to

be extinguished by the death of the Master, was, from that instant,

assured of a great future.

Some doubts were, nevertheless, ventilated. The apostle, Thomas, who

was not present at the meeting on Sunday evening, avowed that he envied

those who had seen the marks of the spear and of the nails. Eight days

after, this envy, it is said, was allayed. But there has attached to

him, in consequence, some slight blame and a mild reproach. By an

instinctive feeling of exquisite justness, they understood that the

ideal was not to be touched with hands, and that it must not be

subjected to the test of experience. Noli, me tangere (touch me not) is

the motto of all great affection. The sense of touch leaves nothing to

faith; the eye, a purer and more noble organ than the hand, which

nothing can sully, and by which nothing is sullied, became very soon a

superfluous witness. A singular sentiment began to grow up; any

hesitation was held to be a mark of disloyalty and lack of love; one

was ashamed to remain behind hand, and one interdicted oneself from

desiring to sec. The dictum: "Blessed are they who have not seen and

yet believed," became the key-note of the situation. It was thought to

be a thing so much more generous to believe without proof. The really

sincere friends denied having seen any vision. Just as, in later times,

Saint Louis refused to be a witness to an eucharistic miracle, so as

not to detract from the merits of faith. From that time, credulity

became a hideous emulation, and a kind of out-bidding one another. The

merit consisted in believing without having seen; faith at any cost;

gratuitous faith; the faith which went as far as folly--was exalted, as

if it were the first of the gifts of the soul. The credo quia absurdum

(I believe because I cannot understand) was established. The law of

Christian dogmas was to be a strange progression, which no

impossibility should be able to prevent. A sort of chivalrous sentiment

prevented one from even looking back. The dogmas, the most dear to

piety, those to which it was to attach itself with the most heedless

frenzy, were the most repugnant to reason, in consequence of that

touching idea, which the moral value of faith augments in proportion to

the difficulty in believing, the reason of man not being compelled to

prove any love when he admits that which is clear.

The first days were hence a period of intense feverishness, in which

the faithful, infatuated with one another, and imposing one's fancies

each upon the other, mutually carried away, and imparting to each other

the most exalted notions. Visions were multiplied without number. The

evening assemblies were the most common occasions when they were

produced. When the doors were closed, and when each was beset with his

fixed idea, the first who was believed to hear the sweet word, schalom,

"salutation," or "peace," would give the signal. All would then listen,

and would soon hear the very same thing. It was hence a great joy to

those unsophisticated souls to know that Jesus was in the midst of

them. Each tasted of the sweetness of that thought, and believed

himself to be favoured with some inward colloquy. Other visions were

noised abroad of a different description, and recalled those of the

sojourners to Emmaus. During meal time, Jesus was seen to appear,

taking the bread, blessing it, breaking it, and offering it to him who

had been honoured with a vision of himself. In a few days, a whole

string of stories, greatly differing in details, but inspired by the

same spirit of love, and of absolute faith, was invented and spread

abroad. It is the gravest of errors to suppose that legends require any

length of time to be formed. Legend is sometimes born in a day. On

Sunday evening (16 of Nisan, 5th April), the resurrection of Jesus was

held to be a reality. Eight days after, the character of the life of

the risen one, which had been conceived for him, was determined in

regard at least to three essentials.

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CHAPTER II.

DEPARTURE OF THE DISCIPLES FROM JERUSALEM--SECOND GALILEAN LIFE OF JESUS.

THE most eager desire of those who have lost a dear friend, is to

revisit the places where they have lived with them. It was, doubtless,

this sentiment which, a few days after the events of the Passover,

induced the disciples to return into Galilee. From the moment of the

arrest of Jesus, and immediately after his death, it is probable that

many of the disciples had already found their way to the northern

provinces. At the time of the resurrection, a rumour was spread abroad,

according to which, it was in Galilee that he would be seen again. Some

of the women who had been to the sepulchre came back with the report

that the angel had said to them that Jesus had already preceded them

into Galilee. Others said that it was Jesus himself who had ordered

them to go there. Now and then some people said that they themselves

remembered that he had said so during his life time. What is certain

is, that at the end of a few days, probably after the Paschal Feast of

the Pass-over had been quite over, the disciples believed they had a

command to return into their own country, and to it accordingly they

returned. Perhaps the visions began to abate at Jerusalem. A species of

melancholy seized them. The brief appearances of Jesus were not

sufficient to compensate for the enormous void left by his absence. In

a melancholy mood, they thought of the lake and of the beautiful

mountains where they had received a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

The women, especially, wished, at any cost, to return to the country

where they had enjoyed so much happiness. It must be observed that the

order to depart cane especially from them. That odious city weighed

them down. They longed to see once more the ground where they had

possessed him whom they loved, well assured in advance of meeting him

again there.

The majority of the disciples then departed, full of joy and hope,

perhaps in the company of the caravan, which took back the pilgrims

from the Feast of the Passover. What they hoped to find in Galilee,

were not only transient visions, but Jesus himself to continue with

them, as he had done before his death. An intense expectation filled

their souls. Was he going to restore the Kingdom of Israel, to found

definitely the Kingdom of God, and, as was said, "Reveal his justice?"

Everything was possible. They already called to mind the smiling

landscapes where they had enjoyed his presence. Many believed that he

had given to them a rendezvous upon a mountain, probably the same to

which with them there clung so many sweet recollections. Never, it is

certain, had there been a more pleasant journey. All their dreams of

happiness were on the point of being realized. They were going to see

him once more! And, in fact, they did see him again. Hardly restored to

their harmless chimeras, they believed themselves to be in the midst of

the Gospel dispensation period. It was now drawing near to the end of

April. The ground is then strewn with red anemones, which were probably

those "lilies of the fields" from which Jesus delighted to draw his

similes. At each step, his words were brought to mind, adhering, as it

were, to the thousand accidental objects they met by the way. Here was

the tree, the flower, the seed, from which he had taken his parables;

there was the hill on which he delivered his most touching discourses;

here was the little ship from which he taught. It was like the

recommencement of a beautiful dream. Like a vanished illusion which had

reappeared. The enchantment seemed to revive. The sweet Galilean

"Kingdom of God" had recovered its sway. The clear atmosphere, the

mornings upon the shore or upon the mountain, the nights passed on the

lakes watching the nets, all these returned again to them in distinct

visions. They saw him everywhere where they had lived with him. Of

course it was not the joy of the first enjoyment. Sometimes the lake

had to them the appearance of being very solitary. But a great love is

satisfied with little, if all of us, while we are alive, could

surreptitiously, once a year, and during a moment long enough to

exchange but a few words, behold again those loved ones whom we have

lost--death would not be death!

Such was the state of mind of this faithful band, in this short period

when Christianity seemed to return for a moment to his cradle and bid

to him an eternal adieu. The principal disciples, Peter, Thomas,

Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee, met again on the shores of the lake,

and henceforth lived together; they had taken up again their former

calling of fishermen, at Bethsaida or at Capernaum. The Galilean women

were no doubt with them. They had insisted more than the others on that

return, which was to them a heartfelt love. This was their last act in

the establishment of Christianity. From that moment, they disappear.

Faithful to their love, their wish was to quit no more the country in

which they had tasted their greatest delight. They were quickly

forgotten, and, as the Galilean Christianity possessed but little of

futurity, the remembrance of them was completely lost in certain

ramifications of the tradition. These touching demoniacs, these

converted fisherwomen, these actual founders of Christianity, Mary

Magdalene, Mary Cleophas, Joanna, Susanna, all passed into the

condition of forgotten saints. St. Paul knew them not. The faith which

they had created almost consigned them to oblivion. We must come down

to the middle ages before we find justice done them; then, one of them,

Mary Magdalene, takes her proper place in the Christian hierarchy.

The visions, at first, on the lake appear to have been pretty frequent

On board these crafts where they had come in contact with God, how many

times had the disciples not seen again their Divine Friend? The

simplest circumstances brought him back to them. Once they had toiled

all night without taking a single fish; suddenly the nets were filled;

this was a miracle. It appeared that some one from the land had said to

them: "Cast your nets to the right." Peter and John regarded one

another. "It is the Lord," said John. Peter, who was naked, covered

himself hastily with his fisher's coat, and cast himself into the sea,

in order to go to the invisible councillor. At other times Jesus came

and partook of their simple repasts. One day, when they had done

fishing, they were surprised to find lighted coals, with fish placed

upon them, and bread near by. A lively sense of their feasts of past

times crossed their minds, since bread and fish had been always an

essential part of their diet. Jesus was in the habit of offering these

to them. After the meal they were persuaded that Jesus himself had sat

by their side, and had presented to them those victuals which hail

already become to them eucharistic and sacred, John and Peter were the

ones who were specially favoured with those private conversations with

the well-beloved phantom. One day, Peter, dreaming, perhaps (but what

am I saying! their life on the shore was it not a perpetual dream?)

believed that he heard Jesus ask him: "Lovest thou Me?" The question

was repeated three times. Peter, wholly possessed by a tender and sad

sentiment, imagined that he responded, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I

love thee," and each time the apparition said: "Feed my sheep." On

another occasion Peter told John, in confidence, a strange dream. He

had dreamt he had been walking with the Master, John was following a

few steps behind. Jesus said to him, in terms most obscure, which

seemed to announce to him a prison or a violent death, and repeated to

him at different times: "Follow me." Peter, thereupon, pointing his

finger to John, who was following them, asked: "Lord, and this man?"

"If I will," said Jesus, "that he tarry till I come, what is that to

thee? Follow thou me." After the execution of Peter, John remembered

that dream, and saw in it a prediction of the manner of death his

friend had died. He recounted it to his disciples; the latter believed

to discover in it the assurance that their master would not die before

the final advent of Jesus.

These grand and melancholy dreams, these never ceasing conversations,

broken off and recommenced with the death of the cherished one,

occupied the days and months. The sympathy of Galilee for the prophet

that the Hierosolymites of Jerusalem had put to death was re-awakened.

More than five hundred persons were already devoted to the memory of

Jesus. In default of the lost master, they obeyed the disciples, the

most authoritative--Peter--in particular. One day, when following in

the suite of their spiritual chiefs, the faithful Galileans had

ascended one of those mountains whither Jesus had often conducted them,

and they imagined that they saw him again. The atmosphere of these

heights is full of strange mirages. The same vision which formerly had

occurred to the most intimate disciples was once more produced. The

whole assembly believed that they saw the divine spectre displayed in

the clouds; all fell on their faces and worshipped. The sentiment which

the clear horizon of those mountains inspires is the idea of the extent

of the world, and the desire of conquering it. On one of the

neighbouring peaks Satan, pointing out to Jesus with his finger the

kingdoms of the world and all their glory, offered to give them to him,

it is stated, if he would only fall down and worship him On this

occasion, it was Jesus who, from the tops of these sacred summits,

showed to his disciples the whole world, and assured them of the

future. They descended from the mountain, persuaded that the son of God

had given to them the command to convert the whole human race, and

promised to be with them till the end of time. A strange ardour, a

divine fire, pervaded them at the close of these conversations. They

regarded themselves as the missionaries of the world, capable of

performing supernatural deeds. St. Paul saw several of those who had

assisted at that extraordinary scene. At the end of twenty-five years

the impression they left was still as strong and as lively as on the

first day.

Nearly a year rolled on, during which they led this life, suspended

between heaven and earth. The charm, far from diminishing, increased.

It is a property of great and holy things, always to become grander and

more pure of themselves. The sentiment in regard to a loved one who has

been lost, is certainly keener at a distance of time, than on the

morrow after the death. The greater the distance, the more the

sentiment gains strength. The sorrow, which at first is a part of it

and, in a sense, lessens it, is changed into a serene piety. The image

of the defunct one is transfigured, idealized, becomes the soul of

life, the principle of all action, the source of all joy, the oracle

which is consulted, the consolation which is sought in moments of

despondency. Death is a necessary, condition of every apotheosis.

Jesus, so beloved during his life, was in this way more so after his

last breath, or rather his last breath was the commencement of his

actual life in the bosom of the church. He became the intimate friend,

the confidant, the travelling companion, the one who, at the turning

point of the route, joins you, follows you, sits down at table with

you, and reveals himself at the moment of disappearance. The absolute

lack of scientific exactitude in the minds of these new believers, made

it that one could not weigh any question in regard to the nature of

one's existence. They represented him as impassible, endowed with a

subtle body, passing through opaque walks, now visible, now invisible,

but always living. Sometimes they imagined that his body was not

composed of matter; that it was pure shadow or apparition. At other

times there was attributed to him a material body, with flesh and

bones; through a na�ve scrupulousness, as though the hallucination had

inclined to take precautions against himself, he was made to drink and

eat; nay, it was maintained that some of them had touched his body

gently with their hands. Their ideas on this point were extremely vague

and uncertain. We have not until now dreamt of putting a frivolous

question; at the same time the present is one not easily of solution.

Whilst Jesus had risen in this real manner, that is to say, in the

hearts of those who loved him; whilst the immovable conviction of the

apostles was being formed, and the faith of the world prepared, in what

place did the worms consume the inanimate body which on the Saturday

evening had been deposited in the tomb? People ignore always this

point, for, naturally, the Christian traditions can do nothing to clear

up the subject. It is the spirit which quickeneth; the flesh is

nothing. The resurrection was the triumph of the idea over the reality.

Now that the idea had entered upon its immortality, what mattered the

body?

About the years 80 or 83, when the actual text of the first Gospel

received its final additions, the Jews already had on this matter a

settled opinion. If they are to be believed, the disciples might have

come by night and stolen away his body. The Christian conscience was

alarmed at this rumour, and in order to cut short such an objection,

they invented the circumstance of the military guard, and of the seal

put on the sepulchre. That circumstance, to be found only in the first

gospel, mixed up with legends of doubtful authority, is wholly

inadmissible. But the explanation of the Jews, although irrefutable, is

far from being altogether satisfactory. It can hardly be admitted that

those who had so firmly believed Jesus had risen from the dead, were

the same persons who had taken away his body. Little accustomed as

these men were to reflection, one can hardly imagine so singular an

illusion. It must be remembered that the little church at that moment

was completely dispersed. It had no expectation, no centralisation, no

regular method of procedure. Beliefs sprang up on every hand, and were

then amalgamated as best they might. The contradictions between the

narratives, upon which we base the incidents of the Sabbath morning,

prove that the rumours were spread through the most diverse channels,

and that they did not care much about bringing them into accord. It is

possible that the body may have been taken away by some of the

disciples, and transported by them into Galilee. The others, who

remained at Jerusalem, may not have been cognizant of the fact. On the

other hand, the disciples, who may have carried the body into Galilee,

could not at first have any knowledge of the stories which were current

at Jerusalem, so that the belief in the resurrection may have been

invented after they went away, and must, therefore, have surprised

them. They did not reclaim, and, even had they done so, it would have

unsettled nothing. When it is a question of miracles a tardy correction

is not feared. No material difficulty ever impedes a sentiment from

being developed and of creating the fictions it has need of. In the

recent history of the miracle of Salette, the error was demonstrated by

the clearest of evidence, but that did not hinder the belief from

springing up, and the faith from spreading. It is allowable also to

suppose that the disappearance of the body was the work of the Jews.

Probably they thought by that to prevent the tumultuous scenes which

might be enacted over the body of a man so popular as Jesus. Probably

they wished to prevent people from making a noisy funeral display, or

from raising a tomb to that just man. Finally, who knows that the

disappearance of the corpse was not the work of the proprietor of the

garden, or of the gardener. The proprietor, according to all accounts,

was a stranger to the sect. His sepulchre was chosen because it was the

nearest to Golgotha, and because they were pressed for time. Probably

he was dissatisfied with the mode of taking possession of his property,

and had the body removed. In good truth, the details reported in the

fourth gospel, of the linen left in the sepulchre, and the napkin

folded carefully away in the corner, does not accord with such an

hypothesis.

This last circumstance would lead one to suppose that a woman's hand

had crept in there. The five narratives of the visit of the women to

the tomb are so confused and embarrassing, that it is certainly quite

allowable for us to suppose that they contained some misapprehension.

The female conscience, when dominated by passion, is capable of the

most extravagant illusions. Often it becomes the abettor of its own

dreams. To these sort of incidents, for the purpose of having them

considered as marvellous, nobody deliberately deceives; but everybody,

without thinking of it, is led to connive at them. Mary Magdalene,

according to the language of the times, had been "possessed of seven

devils." In all this it is necessary to take account of the lack of the

precision of mind of the women of the East, of their absolute want of

education, and of the peculiar shade of their sincerity. Exalted

conviction renders any return upon herself impossible. When the sky is

seen everywhere, one is led to put oneself at times in the place of the

sky.

Let us draw a veil over these mysteries. In states nt religious crises,

everything being regarded as divine, the greatest effects may be the

results of the most trifling causes. If we were witnesses of the

strange facts which are at the origin of all the works of faith, we

should discover circumstances which to us would not appear proportioned

to the importance of the results, and others which would make us smile.

Our old cathedrals are reckoned among the most beautiful objects in the

world; one cannot enter them without being in some sort inebriated with

the infinite. Yet these splendid marvels are almost always the fruit of

some little conceit. And what does it matter definitively. The result

alone counts in such matters. Faith purifies all. The material incident

which has induced belief in the resurrection was not the true cause of

the resurrection. That which raised Jesus from the dead was love. That

love was so powerful that a petty accident sufficed to erect the

edifice of a universal faith. If Jesus had been less loved, if faith in

the resurrection had had less reason for its establishment, these kind

of accidents would have occurred in vain, nothing would have come out

of them. A grain of sand causes the fall of a mountain, when the moment

for the fall of the mountain has come. The greatest things proceed at

once from the greatest and smallest causes. Great causes alone are

real; little ones only serve to determine the production of an effect

which has for a long time been in preparation.

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CHAPTER III.

RETURN OF THE APOSTLES TO JERUSALEM.--END OF THE PERIOD OF APPARITIONS.

THE apparitions, in the meanwhile, as happens always in movements of

credulous enthusiasm, began to abate. Popular chimeras resemble

contagious maladies; they grow stale quickly and change their form. The

activity of these ardent souls had already turned in another direction.

What they believed to have heard from the lips of the dear risen one,

was the order to go forth and preach, and to convert the world. But

where should they commence? Naturally, at Jerusalem. The return to

Jerusalem was then resolved upon by those who at that time had the

direction of the sect. As these journeys were ordinarily made by

caravan at the time of the feasts, we now suppose with all manner of

likelihood, that the return in question took place at the Feast of

Tabernacles at the close of the year 33, or the Paschal Feast of the

year 34. Galilee was thus abandoned by Christianity, and abandoned for

ever. The little church which remained there continued, no doubt, to

exist; but we hear it no more spoken of. It was probably broken up,

like all the rest, by the frightful disaster which then overtook the

country during the war of Vespasian; the wreck of the dispersed

community sought refuge beyond Jordan. After the war it was not

Christianity which was brought back into Galilee; it was Judaism. In

the ii., iii., and iv. centuries, Galilee was a country wholly Jewish;

the centre of Judaism, the country of the Talmud. Galilee thus counted

but an hour in the history of Christianity; but it was the sacred hour,

par excellence; it gave to the new religion that which has made it

endure--its poetry, its penetrating charms. "The Gospel," after the

manner of the synoptics, was a Galilean work. But we shall attempt

further on to show that "The Gospel" thus extended, has been the

principal cause of the success of Christianity, and continues to be the

surest guarantee of its future. It is probable that a fraction of the

little school which surrounded Jesus in his last days remained at

Jerusalem. At the moment of separation the belief in the resurrection

was already established. That belief was thus developed from two points

of view, each having a perceptibly different aspect; and such is, no

doubt, the cause of the complete divergencies which are remarked in the

narratives of the apparitions. Two traditions, the one Galilean, the

other Hierosolymitish, were formed; according to the first, all the

apparitions (except those of the first period) had taken place in

Galilee; according to the second, all had taken place at Jerusalem. The

accord of the two fractions of the little church on the fundamental

dogma, naturally only served to confirm the common belief. They

embraced each other effusively; they repeated with the same faith, "He

is risen." Perhaps the joy and the enthusiasm which were the

consequences of this agreement, led to some other visions. It is about

this period that we can place the vision of James, mentioned by Saint

Paul. James was the brother, or at least, a relation of Jesus. We do

not find that he had accompanied Jesus on his last sojourn to

Jerusalem. He probably went there with the apostles, when the latter

gritted Galilee. All the chief apostles had had their visions; it was

hard that this "brother of the Lord," should not also have his. It was,

it seems, an eucharistic vision, that is to say, in which Jesus

appeared taking and breaking the bread. Later, those portions of the

Christian family who attached themselves to James, those that were

called the Hebrews, changed this vision to the same day as the

resurrection, and wanted it to be looked upon as the first of all.

In fact, it is very remarkable that the family of Jesus, some of whose

members during his life had been incredulous and hostile to his

mission, constituted now a part of the Church, and held in it a very

exalted position. One is led to suppose that the reconciliation took

place during the sojourn of the apostles in Galilee. The celebrity

which had attached itself to the name of their relative, those five

thousand persons who believed in him, and were assured of having seen

him after he had arisen, served to make an impression on their minds.

From the time of the definite establishment of the apostles at

Jerusalem, we find with them Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the

brothers of Jesus. In what concerns Mary, it appears that John,

thinking in this to obey a recommendation of the Master, had adopted

and taken her to his own home. He perhaps took her back to Jerusalem.

This woman, whose personal history and character have remained veiled

in obscurity, assumed hence great importance. The words that the

evangelist put into the mouth of some unknown women: "Blessed is the

womb that bare thee, and the babes which thou has sucked," began to be

verified. It is probable that Mary survived her son a few years. As for

the brothers of Jesus, their history is wrapped in obscurity. Jesus had

several brothers and sisters. It seemed probable, however, that in the

class of persons which were called "Brothers of the Lord," there were

included relations in the second degree. The question is only of moment

so far as it concerns James. This James the Just, or "brother of the

Lord," whom we shall see playing a great part in the first thirty years

of Christianity, was the James, the son of Alph�us, who appears to have

been a cousin germain of Jesus, or a whole brother of Jesus? The data

in respect of him are altogether uncertain and contradictory. What we

do know of this James represents him to be such a different person from

Jesus, that we refuse to believe that two men so dissimilar were born

of the same mother. If Jesus was the true founder of Christianity,

James was its most dangerous enemy; he nearly ruined everything by his

narrow-mindedness. Later, it was certainly believed that James the Just

was a whole brother of Jesus. But perhaps some confusion was mixed up

with the subject.

Be that as it may, the apostles henceforth separated no more, except to

make temporary journeys. Jerusalem became their head-quarters; they

seemed to be afraid to disperse, while certain acts served to reveal in

them the prepossession of being opposed to return again into Galilee,

which latter had dissolved its little society. An express order of

Jesus is supposed to have interdicted their quitting Jerusalem, before,

at least, the great manifestations which were to take place.

Apparitions became more and more rare. They were spoken much less of,

and people began to believe that they would not see the Master again

until His grand appearance in the clouds. Peoples' thoughts were turned

with great force towards a promise which it was supposed Jesus had

made. During his life-time, Jesus, it was said, had often spoken of the

Holy Spirit, which was understood to mean a personification of divine

wisdom. He had promised his disciples that the Spirit would nerve them

in the combats that they would have to engage in, would be their

inspirer in difficulties, and their advocate, if they had to speak in

public. When the visions became rare, the brethren found compensation

in this Spirit, which they looked upon as a consoler, as another self

which Jesus had bequeathed to his friends. Sometimes it was supposed

that Jesus suddenly presented himself in the midst of his disciples

assembled, and breathed on them out of his own mouth a current of

vivifying air. At other times the disappearance of Jesus was regarded

as a premonition of the coming of the Spirit. It was believed that in

the apparitions he had promised the descent of this Spirit. Many people

established an intimate connection between this descent and the

restoration of the kingdom of Israel. All the fervency of imagination

which the sect had displayed in inventing the legend of Jesus risen

again, was now about to be employed to create an assemblage of pious

believers, in regard to the descent of the Spirit and its marvellous

gilts. It seems, however, that a grand apparition of Jesus had taken

place at Bethany or upon the Mount of Olives. Certain traditions

annexed it to that vision of the final recommendations of Jesus, and

the reiterated promise of the sending down of the Holy Spirit, the act

which was to invest the disciples with the power of remitting sins. The

features of these apparitions became more and more vague; they were

confounded one with another; and people came not to think much about

them. It was an accepted fact that Jesus was living; that he manifested

himself by a number of apparitions, sufficient to prove his existence;

that he would again be manifested in some partial visions, until the

grand final revelation which would be the consummation of all. Thus,

Saint Paul presents the vision he had on the way to Damascus, as of the

same order as those we have just been speaking of. At all events, it

was admitted. in an idealistic sense, that the Master was to be with

his disciples and he would remain with them unto the end. In the first

period the apparitions were very frequent. Jesus was conceived as

dwelling permanently on the earth and fulfilling more or less the

functions of terrestrial life. When the visions became rare, they were

made to conform to another idea. Jesus was represented as having

entered into his glory, and as being seated at the right hand of his

Father. "He is ascended to Heaven," it was said. This statement rested

mainly on a vague conception of the idea, or on an induction. But it

was converted by many into a material scene. It was desired that it

should follow the last vision common to all the apostles, and in which

he gave them his supreme recommendations. Jesus was received up into

Heaven. Later, the scene was developed and became a complete legend. It

was recounted that some heavenly messengers, agreeably to the divine

manifestations, most brilliant, appeared at the moment when a cloud

enveloped him, and consoled his disciples by the assurance of his

return in the clouds, resembling wholly the scene of which they had

just been witnesses. The death of Moses had been surrounded in the

popular imagination with circumstances of the same kind. Perhaps they

also called to mind the ascension of Elias. A tradition placed the

locality of this scene near Bethany, upon the summit of the Mount of

Olives. That quarter remained very dear to his disciples, doubtless

because Jesus had lived there.

The legend would make it appear that the disciples, after that

marvellous scene, re-entered Jerusalem "with joy." For ourselves, it is

with sadness that we have to say to Jesus a final adieu. To have found

him living again his shadow life, has been to us a great consolation.

That second life of Jesus, a pale image of the first, is yet full of

charm. Now, all scent of him is lost. Raised on a cloud to the right

hand of his Father, he has left us with men, but, oh, Heaven! the fall

is terrible! The reign of poetry is past. Mary Magdalene, retired to

her native village, buried there her recollections. In consequence of

that eternal injustice which ordains that man appropriates to himself

alone the work in which woman has had as great a share as he, Cephas

eclipsed her, and made her to be forgotten! No more sermons on the

Mount; no more of the possessed of devils healed; no more courtesans

touched; no more of those strange female fellow workers in the work of

redemption whom Jesus had not repelled! God has verily disappeared. No;

history of the church is to be most often henceforth the history of

treasons to blot out the name of Jesus. But such as it is, that history

is still a hymn to his glory. The wools and the image of the

illustrious Nazarene shall remain in the midst of infinite miseries as

a sublime ideal. We shall comprehend better how great it was when we

have seen how little were his disciples.

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CHAPTER IV.

DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT--ECSTATICAL, AND PROPHETICAL PHENOMENA.

Mean, narrow, ignorant, inexperienced they were, as completely so as it

was possible to be. Their simplicity of mind was extreme; their

credulity had no limits. But they had one quality: they loved their

Master to foolishness. The recollection of Jesus was the only moving

power of their lives; it was perpetually with them, and it was clear

that they lived only for him, who, during two or three years, had so

strangely attached and seduced them. For souls of a secondary standard,

who cannot love God directly, that is to say, discover truth, create

the beautiful, do right of themselves, salvation consists in loving

some one in whom there shines a reflection of the true, the beautiful,

and the good. The great majority of mankind require a worship of two

degrees. The multitude of worshippers desire an intermediary between it

and God.

When a person has succeeded in attracting to himself, by an elevated

moral bond, several other persons, when he dies, it always happens that

the survivors, who, up to that time are often divided by rivalries and

dissensions, beget a strong friendship the one for the other. A

thousand cherished images of the past, which they regret, become to

them a common treasure. There is .a manner of loving the dead, which

consists in loving those with whom we have known him. We are anxious to

meet one another, in order to re-call the happy times which are no

more. A profound saying of Jesus is found then to be true to the

letter: The dead one is present in the midst of those who are united

again by his memory.

The affection that the disciples had the one for the other, while Jesus

was alive, was thus enhanced tenfold after his death. They formed a

very small and very retired society, and lived exclusively by

themselves. At Jerusalem they numbered about one-hundred-and-twenty.

Their piety was active, and, as yet, completely restrained by the forms

of Jewish piety. The temple was then the chief place of devotion. They

worked, no doubt, for a living; but at that time, manual labour in

Jewish society engaged very few. Everyone had a trade, but that trade

by no means hindered a man from being educated and well-bred. With us,

material wants are so difficult to satisfy, that the man living by his

hands is obliged to work twelve or fifteen hours a day; the man of

leisure alone can follow intellectual pursuits; the acquisition of

instruction is a rare and costly affair. But in those old societies (of

which the East of our days gives still an idea), in those climates,

where nature is so prodigal to man and so little exacting, in the life

of the labourer there was plenty of leisure. A sort of common

instruction puts every man au courant of the ideas of the times. Mere

food and clothing satisfied their wants; a few hours of moderate labour

provided these. The rest was given up to day dreaming, and to passion.

Passion had attained in the minds of those people a decree of energy

which is to us inconceivable. The Jews of that time appear to us to be

in truth possessed, each pursuing with a blind fatality the idea with

which he had been seized.

The dominant idea in the Christian community, at the moment at which we

are now arrived, and when apparitions had ceased, was the coming of the

Holy Spirit. People were believed to receive it in the form of a

mysterious breath, which passed over the assembly. Mary pretended that

it was the breath of Jesus himself. Every inward consolation, every

bold movement, every flush of enthusiasm, every feeling of lively, and

pleasant gaiety, which was experienced without knowing whence it came,

was the work of the Spirit. These simple con-sciences referred, as

usual, to some exterior cause the exquisite sentiments which were being

created in them. It was in the assemblies, particularly, that these

fantastic phenomena of illumination were produced. When all were

assembled, and when they awaited in silence, inspiration from on high,

a murmur, any noise whatever, was believed to be the coming of the

Spirit. In the early times, it was the apparitions of Jesus which were

produced in this manner. Now the turn of ideas had changed. It was the

divine breath which passed over the little church, and filled it with a

celestial effluvia.

These beliefs were strengthened by notions drawn from the Old

Testament. The prophetic spirit is represented in the Hebrew books as a

breathing which penetrates man and inspires him. In the beautiful

vision of Elijah, God passes by in the form of a gentle wind, which

produces a slight rustling noise. This ancient imagery had handed down

to later ages beliefs analogous to those of the Spiritualists of our

days. In the ascension of Isaiah, the coming of the Spirit is

accompanied by a certain rustling at the doors. More often, however,

people regarded this coming as another baptism, to wit, the "baptism of

the Spirit," far superior to that of John. The hallucinations of touch

being very frequent among persons so nervous and so excited, the least

current of air, accompanied by a shuddering in the midst of the

silence, was considered as the passage of the Spirit. One conceived

that he felt it; soon everybody felt it; and the enthusiasm was

communicated from one to another. The correspondence of these phenomena

with those which are to be found amongst the visionaries of all times

is easily apprehended. They are produced daily, partly under the

influence of the Acts of the Apostles, in the English or American sects

of Quakers, Jumpers, Shakers, Irvingites; amongst the Mormons; in the

camp-meetings and revivals of America; we have seen them reproduced

amongst ourselves in the sect called the Spiritualists. But an immense

difference ought to be made between aberrations, which are without

bounds, and without a future, and the illusions which have accompanied

the establishment of a new religious code for humanity.

Amongst all these "descents of the Spirit," which appear to have been

frequent enough, there was one which left a profound impression on the

nascent Church. One day, when the brethren were assembled, a

thunder-storm burst forth. A violent wind threw open the windows: the

heavens were on fire. Thunderstorms, in these countries, are

accompanied by prodigious sheets of lightning; the atmosphere is, as it

were, everywhere furrowed with ridges of flame. Whether the electric

fluid had penetrated the room itself, or whether a dazzling flash of

lightning had suddenly illuminated the faces of all, everyone was

convinced that the Spirit had entered, and that it had alighted on the

head of each in the form of tongues of fire. It was a prevalent opinion

in the theurgic schools of Syria, that the communication of the Spirit

was produced by a divine fire, and under the form of a mysterious

glare. People fancied themselves to be present at the splendours of

Sinai, at a divine manifestation analogous to those of former days. The

baptism of the Spirit thenceforth became also a baptism of fire. The

baptism of the Spirit and of fire was opposed to, and greatly preferred

to, the baptism of water, the only baptism which John had known. The

baptism of fire, was only prepared on rare occasions. Thy apostles and

the disciples of the first guest-chamber alone were reputed to have

received it. But the idea that the Spirit had alighted on them in the

form of jets of Ilene, resembling tongues of fire, gave rise to a

series of singular ideas, which took a foremost place in the thought of

the period.

The tongue of the inspired man was supposed to receive a kind of

sacrament. It was pretended that many prophets, before their mission,

had been stammerers; that the Son of God had passed a coal over their

lips, which purified them and conferred on them the gift of eloquence.

In preaching, the man was supposed not to speak of his own volition.

His tongue was considered as the organ of divinity which inspired it.

These tongues of fire appeared a striking symbol. People were convinced

that God desired to signify in this manner that he poured out upon the

apostles his most precious gifts of eloquence, and of inspiration. But

they did not stop there. Jerusalem was, like the majority of the large

cities of the East, a city in which many languages were spoken. The

diversity of tongues was one of the difficulties which one found there

in the way of propagating a universal form of faith. One of the things,

moreover, which alarmed the apostles, at the commencement of a ministry

destined to embrace the world, was the number of languages which was

spoken there: they were asking themselves incessantly how they could

learn so many tongues. "The gift of tongues" became thus a marvellous

privilege. It was believed that the preaching of the Gospel would clear

away the obstacle which was created by the diversity of idioms. It was

imagined that, in some solemn circumstances, the auditors had heard the

apostle preaching each in his own tongue: in other words, that the

apostolic preaching translated itself to each of the listeners. At

other times, this was understood in a somewhat different manner. To the

apostles was attributed the gift of knowing, by divine inspiration, all

tongues, and of speaking them at will. There was in this a liberal

idea; they meant to imply that the Gospel should have no language of

its own; that it should be translatable into every tongue; and that the

translation should be of the came value as the original. Such was not

the sentiment of orthodox Judaism. Hebrew was for the Jews of Jerusalem

the holy tongue; no language could be compared to it. Translations of

the Bible were lightly esteemed, whilst the Hebrew text was

scrupulously guarded. In translations, changes and modifications were

permitted. The Jews of Egypt, and the Hellenists of Palestine,

practised, it is true, a more tolerant system. They employed Greek in

prayer, and perused constantly Greek translations of the Bible. But the

first Christian idea was even broader. According to that idea the word

of God has no language of its own: it is free and unhampered by

idiomatic fetters; it is delivered to all spontaneously, and needs no

interpreter. The facility with which Christianity was detached from the

Semetic tongue which Jesus had spoken, the liberty which it left at

first each nation to create its own liturgy, and its versions of the

Bible in its natural tongue, served as a sort of emancipation of

tongues. It was generally admitted that the Messiah would gather into

one all tongues as well as all peoples. Common usage and the

promiscuity of languages were the first steps towards that great era of

universal pacification.

For the rest, the gift of tongues soon underwent a considerable

transformation, and resulted in more extraordinary effects. Brain

excitement led to ecstacy and prophecy. In these ecstatic moments the

faithful, impelled by the Spirit, uttered inarticulate and incoherent

sounds, which were taken for the words of a foreign language, and which

they innocently sought to interpret. At other times it was believed

that the ecstatically possessed spoke new and hitherto unknown

languages, or even the language of the angels. These extravagant

scenes, which led to abuses, did not become habitual until a later

period. Yet it is probable that from the earliest years of Christianity

they were produced. The visions of the ancient prophets had often been

accompanied by phenomena of nervous excitation. The dythyrambic state

amongst the Greeks produced the same kind of occurrences; the Pythia

used by preference foreign or obsolete words, which were called, as in

the apostolic phenomena, glosses. Many of the passwords of primitive

Christianity, which were properly bilingual, or formed by anagrams,

such as Abba pater, anathema, maran-atha, were probably derived from

these strange paroxysms, intermingled with sighs, stifled groans,

ejaculations, prayers, and sudden transports, which were taken for

prophecies. It resembled a vague music of the soul, uttered in

indistinct sounds, and which the auditors sought to transform into

images and determinate words, or rather as the prayers of the Spirit

addressed to God, in a language known to God only, and which God knew

how to interpret. No ecstatic person, in short, understood anything of

what he uttered, and had not even any cognizance of it. People listened

with eagerness and attributed to the incoherent utterances the thoughts

which there and then occurred to them. Each referred to his own tongue

and ingenuously sought to explain the unintelligible sounds by what

little he actually knew of languages. In this they always more or less

succeeded, the auditor filling in between the broken sentences the

thoughts he had in mind.

The history of fanatical sects is fruitful in instances of the same

kmd. The preachers of the Cevennes displayed similar instances of

"glossolaly." The most striking instance, however, is that of the

"readers" of Sweden, about the years 1841-43. Involuntary utterances,

enunciations, having no meaning to those who uttered them, and

accompanied by convulsions and fainting fits, were for a long time

practised daily in that little sect. The thing became perfectly

contagious, and occasioned a considerable popular movement. Amongst the

Irvingites the phenomenon of tongues has been produced with features

which reproduce in the most striking manner the stories of the Acts and

of Saint Paul. Our own century has witnessed illusive scenes of the

same kind, which we will not recount here; for it is always unjust to

compare the inseparable credulity of a great religious movement with

the credulity which results from dulness of intellect.

These strange phenomena were sometimes produced out of doors. The

ecstatic persons, at the very moment when they were a prey to their

extravagant illuminations, had the hardihood to go out and show

themselves to the multitude. They were taken for drunken persons.

Although sober-minded in point of mysticism, Jesus had more than once

presented in his own person the ordinary phenomena of the ecstatic

state. The disciples, for two or three years, were beset with these

ideas. Prophesying was frequent and considered as a gift analogous to

that of tongues. Prayers, accompanied by convulsions, rhythmic

modulations, mystic sighs, lyrical enthusiasm, songs with graceful

attitudes, were a daily exercise. A rich vein of "canticles," "psalms,"

"hymns," in imitation of those of the Old Testament, was thus found to

be open to them. Sometimes the mouth and heart mutually accompanied one

another; sometimes the heart sang alone, accompanied inwardly by grace.

No language being able to render the new sensations which were

produced, they indulged in an indistinct muttering, at once sublime and

puerile, in which what one might call "the Christian language," was

wafted in a state of embryo. Christianity, not finding in the ancient

languages an appropriate instrument for its needs, has shattered them.

But whilst the new religion was forming a language suited to its use,

centuries of obscure effort and, so to speak, of childish prattle, were

required. The style of Saint Paul, and, in general, that of the authors

of the New Testament, what is its characteristic, if it be not stifled,

halting, informal, improvisation of the "glossolalist"? Language failed

them. Like the prophets, they aped the a, a, a, of the infant. They did

not know how to speak. The Greek and the Semetic tongues equally

betrayed them. Hence that shocking violence which nascent Christianity

inflicted on language. It might be compared to a stutterer, in whose

mouth the tones being stifled, clash with and against each other, and

terminate in a confused medley, but yet marvellously expressive.

All this was very far from the sentiment of Jesus; but for minds

penetrated with a belief in the supernatural, these phenomena possessed

great importance. The gift of tongues, in particular, was considered as

an essential sign of the new religion, and as a proof of its truth. In

any case, there resulted from it much fruit for edification. Many

Pagans were converted in this way. Up to the third century "glossolaly"

was manifested in a manner analogous to that described by St. Paul, and

was considered as a perpetual miracle. Many of the sublime words of

Christianity are derived from these incoherent sighs. The general

effect was touching and penetrating. Their manner of offering in common

their inspirations and of handing them over to the community for

interpretation established in time amongst the faithful a strong bond

of fraternity.

As in the case of all mvstics, the new sectaries led fasting and

austere lives. Like the majority of Orientals, they ate little, which

contributed to maintain them in a state of excitement. The sobriety of

the Syrian, the cause of his physical weakness, keeps him in a

perpetual state of fever and of nervous susceptibility. Our severe,

continuous, intellectual efforts, are impossible under such a regimen.

But this cerebal debility and muscular laxity, produces, apparently

without cause, lively alternations of sorrow and joy, and puts the soul

in constant relationship with God. That which was called "Godly sorrow"

passed for a Heavenly gift. All the teachings of the Fathers concerning

the life spiritual, such as John Climacus, as Basil, as Nilus, as

Arsenius,--all the secrets of the grand art of the inward life, one of

the most glorious creations of Christianity--were in germ in the

peculiar state of mind which possessed, in their mouths of ecstatic

expectation, those illustrious ancestors of all "The men of longings."

Their moral condition was peculiar; they lived in the supernatural.

They acted only upon visions, dreams, and the most insignificant

circumstances appeared to them to be admonitions from heaven. Under the

name of gifts of the Holy Spirit were thus concealed the rarest and

most exquisite effusions of soul, love, piety, respectful fears,

objectless sighings, sudden languors, and spontaneous tenderness. All

the good that is born in man, without man having any part in it, was

attributed to a breathing from on high. Tears, above all, were regarded

as a heavenly favour. This charming gift, the exclusive privilege of

souls most good and most pure, was produced with infinite sweetness. We

know what power, delicate natures, especially in women, find in the

divine faculty of being able to weep much. It is to them prayer, and,

assuredly, the most holy of prayers. We must come down quite to the

middle ages to that piety, drenched with the tears of St. Bruno, St.

Bernard and St. Francis de Assisi, to find again the chaste melancholy

of those early days, when they truly sowed in tears in order that they

might reap with joy. To weep became a pious act. Those who were not

qualified to preach, work, speak languages, nor to perform miracles,

wept. It might, indeed, be said that their souls were melted, and that

they desired, in the absence of a language which would interpret their

sentiments, to display themselves outwardly, by a vivid and brief

expression of their whole inner being.

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CHAPTER V.

FIRST CHURCH OF JERUSALEM; IT IS ENTIRELY CENOBITICAL.

The custom of living together, holding the same faith, and indulging

the same expectation, necessarily produced many common habits. Very

soon rules were framed, which made that primitive church resemble, to

some extent, the establishments of the cenobitical life, rules with

which Christianity subsequently became acquainted. Many of the precepts

of Jesus conduced to this; the true ideal of evangelical life is a

monastery, not a monastery enclosed with iron bars, a prison after the

type of the Middle Ages, with the separation of the sexes, but an

asylum in the midst of the world, a place set apart for spiritual life,

a free association or little private confraternity, surrounded by a

barrier, which may serve to ward off the cares which are prejudicial to

the liberty of the Kingdom of God.

All, then, lived in common, having but one heart and one mind. No one

possessed anything which was his own. On becoming a disciple of Jesus,

one sold one's goods and made a gift of the proceeds to the society.

The chiefs of the society then distributed the common possessions to

each, according to his needs. They lived in the same quarter, They took

their meals together, and continued to attach to them the mystic sense

that Jesus had prescribed. They passed long hours in prayers. Their

prayers were sometimes improvised aloud, but more often meditated in

silence. Trances were frequent, and each one believed oneself to be

constantly favoured with divine inspiration. The concord was perfect;

no dogmatic quarrels, no disputes in regard to precedence. The tender

recollection of Jesus effaced all dissensions. Joy, lively and

deep-seated, was in every heart. Their morals were austere, but

pervaded by a soft and tender sentiment. They assembled in houses to

pray, and to devote themselves to ecstatic exercises. The recollection

of these two or three first years remained and seemed to them like a

terrestrial paradise, which Christianity will pursue henceforth in all

its dreams and to which it will vainly endeavour to return. Who does

not see, in fact, that such an organisation could only be applicable to

a very small church? But, subsequently, the monastic life will resume

on its own account that primitive ideal which the church universal will

hardly dream of realising.

That the author of the Acts, to whom we are indebted for the picture of

this primitive Christianity at Jerusalem, has laid on his colours a

little too thickly, and, in particular, exaggerated the community of

goods which obtained in the sect, is certainly possible. The author of

the Acts is the same as the author of the third gospel, who, in his

life of Jesus, had the habit of adapting his facts to suit his

theories, and with whom a tendency to the doctrine of ebonism, that is

to say, of absolute poverty, is very perceptible. Nevertheless, the

narrative of the Acts cannot here be destitute of some foundation.

Although Jesus himself would not have given utterance to any of the

communistic axioms which one reads in the third gospel, it is certain

that a renunciation of worldly goods and of the giving of alms pushed

to the length of self-despoilment, were perfectly conformable to the

spirit of his preaching. The belief that the world is coming to an end

has always produced a distaste for worldly goods, and a leaning to the

communistic life. The narrative of the Acts is, however, perfectly

conformable to that which we know of the origin of other ascetic

religions--of Buddhism for example. These sorts of religion commence

always with monastical life. Their first adepts are some species of

mendicant monks. The layman does not appear in them until later, and

when these religions have conquered entire societies, in which monastic

life can only exist under exceptional circumstances.

We admit, then, in the Church of Jerusalem a period of cenobitical

life. Two centuries later Christianity produced still on the Pagans the

effect of a communistic sect. It must be remembered that the Essenians

or Therapeutians had already given the model of this species of life,

which sprang very legitimately from Mosaism. The Mosaic code being

essentially moral and not political, its natural product was a social

Utopia (church, synagogue and convent) not a civil state, nation or

city. Egypt had had for many centuries recluses, both male and female,

maintained by the state, probably in fulfilment of charitable legacies,

near the Serapeum at Memphis. It must especially be remembered that

such a life in the East is by no means what it has been in our West. In

the East, one can very well enjoy nature and existence without

possessing anything. Man, in these countries, is always free, because

he has few wants; the slavery of toil is there unknown. We readily

admit that the communism of the primitive church was neither so

rigorous nor so universal as the author of the Acts would have. What is

certain is, that there was at Jerusalem a large community of poor,

governed by the apostles, and to whom were sent gifts from every

quarter of Christendom. This community was obliged, no doubt, to

establish some rather seven rules, and some years later, it was even

necessary, in order to enforce these rules, to employ terror. Some

frightful legends were circulated, according to which the mere fact of

having retained anything beyond that which one gave to the community,

was looked upon as a capital crime and punished by death.

The porticoes of the temple, especially the portico of Solomon, which

looked down on the Valley of Cedron, was the place where the disciples

usually met during the day. There they could recall the hours Jesus had

spent in the same place. In the midst of the extreme activity which

reigned all about the Temple, they were little noticed. The galleries,

which formed a part of the edifice, were the resort of numerous schools

and sects, the theatre of endless disputations. The faithful followers

of Jesus were, however, regarded as extreme devotees; for they still,

without scruple, observed the Jewish customs, praying at the appointed

hours, and observing all the precepts of the Law. They were Jews,

differing only from others in believing that the Messiah had already

come. The common people who were not informed as to their concerns, and

they were an immense majority, regarded them as a sect of Hasidim, or

pious people. One needed not to be either a schismatic or a heretic, in

order to affiliate oneself with them, any more than one need cease to

be a Protestant in order to be a disciple of Spencer, or a Catholic, in

order to belong to the sect of Saint Francis or of Saint Bruno. The

people loved them, because of their piety, their simplicity, their

kindly disposition. The aristocrats of the Temple looked upon them, no

doubt, with displeasure. But the sect made little noise; it was

tranquil, thanks to its obscurity.

At eventide, the brethren returned to their quarters, and partook of

the meal, being divided into groups, in sign of paternity, and in

remembrance of Jesus, whom they always believed to be present in the

midst of them. The one at the head of the table broke the bread,

blessed the cup, and sent them round as a symbol of union in Jesus. The

most common act of life became in this way the most sacred and the most

holy. These meals en famille, which were always enjoyed by the Jews,

were accompanied by prayers, pious raptures, and pervaded by a sweet

cheerfulness. They believed themselves once more to be in the time when

Jesus animated them by his presence: they imagined they saw him, and it

was not long before the rumour went abroad that Jesus had said: "As

often as ye break the bread, do it in remembrance of Me." The bread

itself became in some sort Jesus, conceived to be the only source of

strength for those who had loved him, and who still lived by him. These

repasts, which were always the chief symbol of Christianity, and the

soul of its mysteries, took place at first every evening. Usage,

however, soon restricted them to Sunday evenings. Later on, the mystic

repast was changed to the morning. It is probable that at the period of

the history which we have now reached, the holy day of each week was

still, with the Christians, the Saturday.

The apostles chosen by Jesus, and who were supposed to have received

from him a special mandate to announce to the world the Kingdom of God,

had, in the little community, an incontestable superiority. One of the

first cares, as soon as they saw the sect settle quietly down at

Jerusalem, was to fill the vacancy that Judas of Kerioth had left in

its ranks. The opinion that the latter had betrayed his master, and had

been the cause of his death, became more and more general. The legend

was mixed up with him, and every day one heard of some new circumstance

which enhanced the black-heartedness of his deed. He had bought a field

near the old necropolis of Hakeldama, to the south of Jerusalem, and

there he lived retired. Such was the state of artless excitation in

which the little Church found itself, that, in order to replace him, it

was resolved to have recourse to a vote of some sort. In general, in

great religious agitations we decide upon this method of coming to a

determination, since it is admitted on principle that nothing is

fortuitous, that the question in point is the chief object of divine

attention, and that God's part in an action is so much the more greater

in proportion as that of man's is the more feeble. The sole condition

was, that the candidate should be chosen from the groups of the oldest

disciples, who had been witnesses of the whole series of events, from

the time of the baptism of John. This reduced considerably the number

of those eligible. Two only were found in the ranks, Joseph Bar-Saba,

who bore the name of Justus, and Matthias. The lot fell upon Matthias,

who was accounted as one of the Twelve. But this was the sole instance

of such a replacing. The apostles were hitherto regarded as having been

nominated, once for all, by Jesus, and not as having successors. The

danger of a permanent college, reserving to itself all the life and the

strength of the association, was, with extraordinary instinct,

discarded for a time. The concentration of the Church into an oligarchy

did not happen until later.

For the rest, it is necessary to guard against the misunderstandings,

which the name of "apostle" might provoke, and which it has not failed

to occasion. From a very early period, people were led by some passages

in the Gospel, and, above all, by the analogy of the life of Saint

Paul, to regard the apostles as essentially wandering missionaries,

distributing in a kind of way the world in advance, and traversing as

conquerors all the kingdoms of the earth. A cycle of legends was

founded upon that data, and imposed upon ecclesiastical history.

Nothing could be more contrary to the truth. The body of Twelve lived,

generally, permanently at Jerusalem. Till about the year 60 the

apostles did not leave the holy city except upon temporary missions.

This explains the obscurity in which the majority of the members of the

central council remained. Very few of them had a r�le. This council was

a kind of sacred college or senate, destined only to represent

tradition, and a spirit of conservatism. It finished by being relieved

of every active function, so that its members had nothing to do but to

preach and pray; but as yet the brilliant feats of preaching had not

fallen to their lot. Their names were hardly known outside Jerusalem,

and about the year 70 or 80 the lists which were given of these chosen

Twelve, agreed only in the principal names.

The "brothers of the Lord" appear often by the side of the "apostles,"

although they were distinct from them. Their authority, however, was

equal to that of the apostles. Here two groups constituted, in the

nascent Church, a sort of aristocracy, founded solely on the more or

less intimate relations that their members had had with the Master.

These were the men whom Paul denominated "the pillars" of the Church at

Jerusalem. For the rest, we see that no distinctions in the

ecclesiastical hierarchy yet existed. The title was nothing; the

personal authority was everything. The principle of ecclesiastical

celibacy was already established, but it required time to bring all

these germs to their complete development. Peter and Philip were

married, and had sons and daughters.

The term used to designate the assembly of the faithful was the Hebrew

Kahal, which was rendered by the essentially democratic word Ecclesia,

which is the convocation of the people in the ancient Grecian cities,

the summons to the Pnyx or the Agora. Commencing with the second or the

third century before Jesus Christ, the words of the Athenian democracy

became a sort of common law in Hellenic language; many of these terms,

on account of their having been used in the Greek confraternities,

entered into the Christian vocabulary. It was, in reality, the popular

life, which; restrained for centuries, resumed its power under forms

altogether different. The Primitive Church was, in its way, a little

democracy. Even election by lot, a method an dear to the ancient

Republics, had sometimes found its way into it. Less harsh, and less

suspicious, however, than the ancient cities, the Church voluntarily

delegated its authority. Like all theocratic societies, it inclined to

abdicate its functions into the hands of a clergy, and it was easy to

foresee that one or two centuries would not roll over before all this

democracy would resolve itself into an oligarchy.

The power which was ascribed to the Church assembled and to its chiefs

was enormous. The Church conferred every mission, and was guided solely

in its choice by the signs given by the Spirit. Its authority went as

far as decreeing death. It is recorded that at the voice of Peter,

several delinquents had fallen back and expired immediately. Saint

Paul, a little later, was not afraid, in excommunicating a fornicator

"to deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the

spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor., v. vii.).

Excommunication was held to be equivalent to a sentence of death. It

was not doubted that any person whom the apostles or the elders of the

Church had cut off from the body of the Saints, and delivered over to

the power of evil, was not lost. Satan was considered as the author of

diseases. To deliver over to him the corrupted member was to deliver

over the latter to the natural executor of the sentence. A premature

death was ordinarily held to be the result of these occult sentences,

which, according to the expressive Hebrew phrase, "cut off a soul from

Israel." The apostles were believed to be invested with supernatural

powers. In pronouncing such condemnations, they thought that their

anathemas could not fail but be effectual. The terrible impression

which their excommunications produced, and the hatred manifested by the

brethren against all the members thus cut off, were sufficient, in

fact, in many cases, to bring about death, or at least to compel the

culprit to expatriate himself. The same terrible ambiguity was found in

the ancient law. "Extirpation" implied at once death, expulsion from

the community, exile, and a solitary and mysterious demise. So with the

apostate, or blasphemer. To destroy his body in order to save his soul

came to be looked on as legitimate. It must be remembered that we are

treating of the times of zealots, who regarded it as an act of virtue

to poignard anyone who failed to obey the Law; and it must not be

forgotten that certain Christians were or had been zealots. Accounts

like those of the death of Ananias and Saphira did not excite any

scruple. The idea of the civil power was so foreign to all that world

placed without the pale of the Roman law, people were so persuaded that

the Church was a complete society, sufficient in itself, that no person

saw, in a miracle leading to death or the mutilation of an individual,

an outrage punishable by the civil law. Enthusiasm and faith covered

all, excused everything. But the frightful danger which these

theocratic maxims laid up in store for the future is readily perceived.

The Church is armed with a sword; excommunication is a sentence of

death. There was henceforth in the world a power outside that of the

state, which disposed of the life of citizens. Certainly, if the Roman

authority had limited itself to repressing amongst the Jews precepts so

condemnatory, it would have been a thousand times in the right. Only,

in its brutality, it confounded the most legitimate of liberties, that

of worshipping in one's own manner, with abuses which no society has

ever been able to support with impunity.

Peter had amongst the apostles a certain precedence, derived directly

from his zeal and his activity. In these first years, he was hardly

ever separate from John, son of Zebedee. They went almost always

together, and their amity was doubtless the corner stone of the new

faith. James, the brother of the Lord, almost equalled them in

authority, at least amongst a fraction of the Church. In regard to

certain intimate friends of Jesus, like the Galilean women, and the

family of Bethany, we have already remarked that no more mention is

made of them. Less solicitous of organizing and of establishing a

society, the faithful companions of Jesus were content with loving in

death him whom they had loved in life. Absorbed in their expectation,

these noble women, who have formed the faith of the world, were almost

unknown to the important men of Jerusalem. When they died, the most

important elements of the history of nascent Christianity were put into

the tomb with them. Only those who played active parts earned renown.

Those who were content to love in secret, remained obscure but

assuredly they chose the better part.

It is needless to remark that this little group of simple people had no

speculative theology. Jesus wisely kept himself far removed from all

metaphysics. He had only one dogma, his own divine sonship and the

divinity of his mission. The whole symbol of the primitive church might

be embraced in one line: "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God." This

belief rested upon a peremptory argument--the fact of the resurrection,

of which the disciples claimed to be witnesses. In reality nobody (not

even the Galilean women) said they had seen the resurrection. But the

absence of the body and the apparitions which had followed, appeared to

be equivalent to the fact itself. To attest the resurrection of Jesus

was the task which all considered as being specially imposed upon them.

It was, however, very soon put forth that the master had predicted this

event. Different sayings of his were recalled, which were represented

as having not been well understood, and in which was seen, on second

thoughts, an announcement of the resurrection. The belief in the near

glorious manifestation of Jesus was universal. The secret word which

the brethren used amongst themselves, in order to be recognized and

confirmed, was maran-atha, the "Lord is at hand." They believed to

remember a declaration of Jesus, according to which their preaching

would not have time to go over all the cities of Israel, before that

the Son of Man appeared in his majesty. In the meanwhile the risen

Jesus had seated himself at the right hand of his Father. Here he is to

remain until the solemn day on which he shall conic, seated upon the

clouds, to judge the quick and the dead.

The idea which they had of Jesus was the one which Jesus had given them

of himself. Jesus had been "a prophet, mighty in deed and word," a man

chosen of God, having received a special mission on behalf of humanity,

a mission which he had proved by his miracles, and especially by his

resurrection. God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and had clothed

him with power; he passed his time in doing good, and in healing those

who were under the power of the devil, for God was with him He is the

Son of God; that is to say, a perfect man of God, a representation of

God upon earth; he is the Messiah, the Saviour of Israel, announced by

the prophets (Acts x. 38). The reading of the books of the Old

Testament, especially of the Prophets and the Psalms, was habitual in

the sect. They carried into that reading a fixed idea--that of

discovering everywhere the type of Jesus. They were persuaded that the

ancient Hebrew books were full of him, and from the very first years

they formed a collection of texts drawn from the Prophets, the Psalms,

and from certain apocryphal books, wherein they were convinced that the

life of Jesus was predicted and described in advance. This method of

arbitrary interpretation belonged at that time to all the Jewish

schools. The Messianic missions were a sort of jeu d'esprit, analogous

to the allusions which the ancient preachers made of passages of the

Bible, diverted from their natural sense and accepted as the simple

ornaments of sacred rhetoric.

Jesus with his exquisite tact in religious matters had instituted no

new ritual. The new sect had not yet any special ceremonies. The

practices of piety were Jewish. The assemblies had, in a strict sense,

nothing liturgic. They were the meetings of confraternities, at which

prayers were offered up, devoted themselves to glossolaly or prophecy,

and the reading of correspondence. There was nothing yet of

sacerdotalism. There was no priest (cohen); the presbyter was the

"elder," nothing more. The only priest was Jesus: in another sense, all

the faithful were priests. Fasting was considered a very meritorious

practice. Baptism was the token of admission to the sect. The rite was

the same as administered by John, but it was administered in the name

of Jesus. Baptism was, however, considered an insufficient initiation.

It had to be followed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which were

effected by means of a prayer, offered up by the apostles, upon the

head of the new convert, accompanied by the imposition of hands.

This imposition of hands, already as familiar to Jesus, was the

sacramental act par excellence. It conferred inspiration, universal

illumination, the power to produce prodigies, prophesying, and the

speaking of languages. It was what was called the Baptism of the

Spirit. It was supposed to recall a saying of Jesus: "John baptised you

with water, but as for you, you shall be baptised by the Spirit."

Gradually, all these ideas became amalgamated, and baptism was

conferred "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy

Ghost." But it is not probable that this formula, in the early days in

which we now are, was yet employed. We see the simplicity of this

primitive Christian worship. Neither Jesus nor the apostles had

invented it. Certain Jewish sects had adopted, before them, these grave

and solemn ceremonies, which appeared to have come in part from

Chaldea, where they are still practised with special liturgies by the

Sab�ans or Menda�tes. The religion of Persia embraced also many rites

of the same description.

The beliefs in popular medicine, which constituted a part of the force

of Jesus, were continued in his disciples. The power of healing was one

of the marvellous gifts conferred by the Spirit. The first Christians,

like almost all the Jews of the time, looked upon diseases as the

punishment of a transgression, or the work of a malignant demon. The

apostles passed, just as Jesus did, for powerful exorcists. People

imagined that the anointings of oil administered by the apostles, with

imposition of hands, and invocation of the name of Jesus, were all

powerful to wash away the sins which were the cause of disease, and to

heal the afflicted one. Oil has always been in the East the medicine

par excellence. For the rest, the simple imposition of the hands of the

apostles was reputed to have the same effect. This imposition was made

by immediate contact. Nor is it impossible that, in certain cases, the

heat of the hands, being communicated suddenly to the head, insured to

the sick person a little relief.

The sect being young and not numerous, the question of deaths was not

taken into account until later on. The effect caused by the first

demises which took place in the ranks of the brethren was strange.

People were troubled by the manner of the deaths. It was asked whether

they were less favoured than those who were reserved to see with their

eyes the advent of the Son of Man. They came generally to consider the

interval between death and the resurrection as a kind of blank in the

consciousness of the defunct. The idea set forth in the Ph�don, that

the soul existed before and after death, that death was a boon, that it

was the philosophical state par excellence, inasmuch as the soul was

then free and disengaged; this idea, I say, was by no means settled in

the minds of the first Christians. More often it would seem that man,

to them, could not exist without the body. This conception endured for

a long time, and was only given up when the doctrine of the immortality

of the soul, in the sense of the Greek philosophy, made its entry into

the Church, and united in itself so much good and bad with the

Christian dogma of the resurrection and with the universal renovation.

At the time of which we speak, belief in the resurrection almost alone

prevailed. The funeral rite was undoubtedly the Jewish rite. No

importance was attached to it; no inscription indicated the name of the

dead. The great resurrection was near; the bodies of the faithful had

only to make in the rock a very short sojourn. It did not require much

persuasion to put people in accord on the question as to whether the

resurrection was to be universal, that is to say, whether it would

embrace the good and the bad, or whether it would apply to the elect

only. One of the most remarkable phenomena of the new religion was the

reappearance of prophecy. For a long time people had spoken but little

of prophets in Israel. That particular species of inspiration seemed to

revive in the little sect. The primitive Church had several prophets

and prophetesses analogous to those of the Old Testament. The psalmists

also reappeared. The model of our Christian psalms is without doubt

given in the canticles which Luke loved to disseminate in his gospel,

and which were copied from the canticles of the Old Testament. These

psalms and prophesies are, as regards form, destitute of originality,

but an admirable spirit of gentleness and of piety animates and

pervades them. It is like a faint echo of the last productions of the

sacred lyre of Israel. The Book of Psalms was in a measure the calyx

from which the Christian bee sucked its first juice. The Pentateuch, on

the contrary, was, as it would seem, little read and little studied;

there was substituted for it allegories after the manner of the Jewish

midraschim in which all the historic sense of the books was suppressed.

The music which was sung to the new hymns was probably that species of

sobbing, without distinct notes, which is still the music of the Greek

Church, of the Maronites, and in general of the Christians of the East.

It is less a musical modulation than a manner of forcing the voice and

of emitting by the nose a sort of moaning in which all the inflexions

follow each other with rapidity. That odd melopoeia was executed

standing, with the eyes fixed, the eyebrows crumpled, the brow knit,

and with an appearance of effort. The word amen, in particular, was

given out in a quivering, trembling voice. That word played a great

part in the liturgy. In imitation of the Jews, the new adherents

employed it to mark the assent of the multitude to the words of the

prophet or the precentor. People, perhaps, already attributed to it

some secret virtues and pronounced it with a certain emphasis. We do

not know whether that primitive ecclesiastical song was accompanied by

instruments. As to the inward chant, by which the faithful "made melody

in their hearts," and which was but the overflowing of those tender,

ardent, pensive souls, it was doubtless executed like the catilenes of

the Lollards of the middle ages, in medium voice. In general, it was

joyousness which was poured out in these hymns. One of the maxims of

the sages of the sect was: "Is any afflicted among you, let him pray.

Is any merry, let him sing psalms" (James v. 13). Moreover, this

Christian literature being destined purely for the edification of the

assembled brethren, was not written down. To compose books was an idea

which had occurred to nobody. Jesus had spoken; people remembered his

words. Had he not promised that the generation to whom he had spoken

should not pass away, until he appeared again?

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CHAPTER VI.

THE CONVERSION OF HELLENISTIC JEWS AND OF PROSELYTES.

Till now, the Church of Jerusalem presents itself to the outside world

as a little Galilean colony. The friends whom Jesus had made at

Jerusalem, and in its environs, such as Lazarus, Martha, Mary of

Bethany, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, had disappeared from the

scene. The Galilean group, who pressed around the Twelve, alone

remained compact and active. The preachings of these zealous disciples

were incessant, and subsequently, after the destruction of Jerusalem,

and far away from Judea, the sermons of the apostles were represented

as public occasions, being delivered in presence of assembled

multitudes. Such a construction appears to have been put upon a number

of those convenient images of which legend is so prodigal. The

authorities who had caused Jesus to be put to death would not have

permitted the renewal of such scandals. The proselytism of the faithful

was chiefly carried on by means of struggling conversions, in which the

fervour of their souls was communicated to their neighbours. Their

preachings under the porticoes of Solomon were addressed to circles,

not at all numerous. But the effect of this was only the more profound.

Their discourses consisted principally of quotations from the Old

Testament, by which it was sought to prove that Jesus was the Messiah.

The reasoning was at once subtle and feeble, but the entire exegesis of

the Jews of that time was of the same kind, while the deductions which

the doctors of the Mischna drew from the texts of the Bible were no

more convincing.

More feeble still was the proof invoked in support of their arguments,

which was drawn from pretended prodigies. It was impossible to doubt

that the apostles did not believe that they could work miracles.

Miracles were regarded as the sign of every divine mission. Saint Paul,

imbued with much of the spirit the most ripe of the first Christian

school, believed he wrought them. It was held as certain that Jesus had

performed them. It was but natural that the series of these divine

manifestations should be continued. In fact, thaumaturgy was a

privilege of the apostles until the end of the first century. The

miracles of the apostles were of the same character as those of Jesus,

and consisted principally, but not exclusively, in the healing of the

sick, and in exorcising the possessed of devils. It was pretended that

their shadows alone sufficed to operate these marvellous cures. These

prodigies were accounted to be the regular gifts of the Holy Spirit,

and held the same rank as the gifts of knowledge, preaching and

prophesy. In the third century the Church believed itself still to be

in possession of the same privileges, and to exercise as a sort of

right the power of healing diseases, of casting out devils, and of

predicting the future. Ignorance rendered everything possible in this

respect. Do we not see in our day, honest men, who, however, lack

scientific knowledge, deceived in an enduring manner by the chimeras of

magnetism and other illusions?

It is not by reason of innocent errors, or by the pitiful discourses we

read in the Acts, by which we are to judge of the means of conversion

which laid the foundations of Christianity. The real preaching was the

private conversations of these good and sincere men; it was the

reflection always noticeable in their discourses, of the words of

Jesus; it was above all their piety, their gentleness. The attraction

of communistic life carried with it also a great deal of force. Their

houses were a sort of hospitals, in which all the poor and the forsaken

found asylum and succour.

One of the first to affiliate himself with the rising society was a

Cypriote, named Joseph Hallevi, or the Levite. Like the others, he sold

his land and carried the price of it to the feet of the Twelve. He was

an intelligent man, with a devotion proof against everything, and a

fluent speaker. The apostles attached him closely to themselves and

called him Bar-naba, that is to say, "the son of prophesy," or of

"preaching." He was accounted, in fact, of the number of the prophets,

that is to say, of the inspired preachers. Later on we shall see him

play a capital part. Next to Saint Paul, he was the most active

missionary of the first century. A certain Mnason, his countryman, was

converted about the same time. Cyprus possessed many Jews. Barnabas and

Mnasou were undoubtedly Jewish by race. The intimate and prolonged

relations of Barnabas with the Church at Jerusalem, induces the belief

that Syro-Chaldaic was familiar to him.

A conquest, almost as important as that of Barnabas was that of one

John, who bore the Roman surname of Marcus. He was a cousin of

Barnabas, and was circumcised. His mother, Mary, enjoyed an easy

competency; she, was likewise converted, and her dwelling was more than

once made the rendezvous of the apostles. These two conversions appear

to have been the work of Peter. In any case, Peter was very intimate

with mother and son; he regarded himself as at home in their house.

Even admitting the hypothesis that John-Mark was not identical with the

real or supposed author of the second Gospel, his r�le was,

nevertheless, a very considerable one. Later, we shall see him

accompanying Paul, Barnabas, and even Peter himself, in their apostolic

journeys.

The first flame was thus spread with great rapidity. The men, the most

celebrated of the apostolic century, were almost all gained over to the

cause in two or three years, by a sort of simultaneous attraction. It

was a second Christian generation, similar to that which had been

formed five or six years previously, upon the shores of Lake Tiberias.

This second generation had not seen Jesus, and could not equal the

first in authority. But it was destined to surpass it in activity and

in its love for distant missions. One of the best known among the new

converts was Stephen, who, before his conversion, appears to have been

only a simple proselyte. He was a man full of ardour and of passion.

His faith was of the most fervent, and he was considered to be favoured

with all the gifts of the Spirit. Philip, who, like Stephen, was a

zealous deacon and evangelist, attached himself to the community abort

the sane time. He was often confounded with his namesake, the apostle.

Finally, there were converted it this epoch, Andronicus and Junia,

probably husband and wife, who, like Aquila and Priscilla, later on,

were the model of an apostolic couple, devoted to all the duties of

missionary work. They were of the blood of Israel, and were in the

closest relations with the apostles.

The new converts, when touched by grace, were all Jews by religion, but

they belonged to two very different classes of Jews. The one class was

the Hebrews; that is to say, the Jews of Palestine, speaking Hebrew or

rather Armenian, reading the Bible in the Hebrew text; the other class

was "Hellenists," that is to say, Jews speaking Greek, and reading the

Bible in Greek. These last were further sub-divided into two classes,

the one being of Jewish blood, the other being proselytes, that is to

say, people of non-Israelitish origin, allied in divers degrees to

Judaism. These Hellenists, who almost all came from Syria, Asia Minor,

Egypt, or Cyrene, lived at Jerusalem in distinct quarters. They had

their separate synagogues, and formed thus little communities apart.

Jerusalem contained a great number of these special synagogues. It was

in these that the words of Jesus found the soil prepared to receive it

and to make it fructify.

The primitive nucleus of the Church at Jerusalem had been composed

wholly and exclusively of Hebrews; the Aramaic dialect, which was the

language of Jesus, was alone known and employed there. But we see that

from the second or third years after the death of Jesus, Greek was

introduced into the little community, where it soon became dominant. In

consequence of their daily relations with the new brethren, Peter,

John, James, Jude, and in general the Galilean disciples, acquired the

Greek with much more facility than if they had already known something

of it. An incident, of which we are soon to speak, shows that this

diversity of tongues caused at first some divisions in the community,

and that the relations of the two factions were not of the most

agreeable kind. After the destruction of Jerusalem, we shall see the

"Hebrews," retire to beyond Jordan, to the heights of Lake Tiberias,

and form a separate Church, which had a separate destiny. But in the

interval, between these two events, it does not appear that the

diversity of languages was of any consequence in the Church. The

Orientals have a great facility for learning languages; in the cities

everybody invariably speaks two or three tongues. It is then probable

that those of the Galilean apostles who played an active part, acquired

the practise of speaking Greek; and came even to make use of it in

preference to the Syro-Chaldaic, when the faithful, speaking Greek,

became the much more numerous. The Palestinian dialect came, therefore,

to be abandoned from the day in which people dreamed of a wide-spread

propaganda. A provincial patois, which was rarely written, and which

was not spoken beyond Syria, was as little adapted as could be to such

an object. Greek, on the contrary, was necessarily imposed on

Christianity. It was at the time the universal language, at least for

the eastern basin of the Mediterranean. It was, in particular, the

language of the Jews who were dispersed over the Roman empire. At that

time, as in our day, the Jews adopted with great facility the tongues

of the countries in which they resided. They did not pique themselves

on purism; and this is the reason that the Greek of primitive

Christianity is so bad. The Jews, even the most instructed, pronounced

badly the classic tongue. Their sentences were always modelled upon the

Syriac; they never got rid of the unwieldiness of the gross dialects

which the Macedonian conquest had imported.

The conversions to Christianity became soon much more numerous amongst

the "Hellenists" than amongst the "Hebrews." The old Jews at Jerusalem

were but little drawn towards a sect of provincials, moderately

advanced in the single science that a Pharisee appreciated--the science

of the law. The position of the little Church in regard to Judaism was,

as with Jesus himself, rather equivocal. But every religious or

political party carries in itself a force that dominates it, and

obliges it, despite itself, to revolve in its own orbit. The first

Christians, whatever their apparent respect for Judaism was, were in

reality only Jews by birth or by exterior customs. The true spirit of

the sect came from another source. That which grew out of official

Judaism was the Talmud; but Christianity has no affinity with the

Talmudic school. This is why Christianity found special favour amongst

the parties, the least Jewish belonging to Judaism. The rigid

orthodoxists took to it but little; it was the new corners, people

scarcely catechised, who had not been to any of the great schools, free

from routine, and not initiated into the holy tongue, which lent an ear

to the apostles and the disciples. Lightly considered by the

aristocracy of Jerusalem, these parvenues of Judaism took in this way a

sort of revenge. It is always the young and newly formed portions of a

community that have the least respect for tradition, and who are the

most carried away by novelties.

In these classes so little subject to the doctors of the law, credulity

was also, it seems, more naive and more complete. That which

distinguished the Talmudic Jews was not credulity. The credulous Jew,

the lover of the marvellous, whom the Latin satirists knew, was not the

Jew of Jerusalem; he was the Hellenist Jew, at once very religious and

little instructed, and, consequently, very superstitious. Neither the

half-incredulous Sadducee, nor the rigorous Pharisee, could be much

affected by the theurgy popular in the apostolic circle. But the Jud�us

Apella, at whom the epicurean Horace laughed, was easy to convince.

Social questions, besides, interested particularly those not benefited

by the wealth which the temple and the central institutions of the

nation caused to flow into Jerusalem. Yet it was in allying itself to

the desires so very analogous to what is now called "socialism" that

the new sect laid the solid foundation upon which was to be reared the

edifice of its future.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE CHURCH CONSIDERED AS AN ASSOCIATION OF POOR PEOPLE.--INSTITUTION OF THE

DIACONATE--DEACONESSES AND WIDOWS.

A general truth is revealed to us in the comparative history of

religions; to wit: all those which have had a beginning, and have not

been contemporary with the origin of language itself, were established

rather on account of social than theological reasons. This was

assuredly the case with Buddhism. That which was the cause of the

enormous success of that religion was not the nihilistic philosophy

which served it as a basis; it was its social element. It was in

proclaiming the abolition of castes, in establishing, to use his own

words, "a law of grace for all," that Cakya-Mouni and his disciples

drew after them first India, then the greater part of Asia. Like

Christianity, Buddhism was a movement proceeding from the common

people. The great attraction which it had was the facility it afforded

the disinherited classes to rehabilitate themselves by the profession

of a religion which bettered their condition, and offered infinite

resources of assistance and sympathy.

The number of the poor, at the beginning of the first century of our

era, was very considerable in Judea. The country is materially

destitute of the resources which procure luxury. In these countries,

where there is no industry, fortunes almost always originate either in

richly endowed religious institutions, or in favours shown by She

Government. The wealth of the temple had for a long time been the

exclusive appanage of a limited number of nobles. The Asmoneans had

formed around their dynasty a circle of rich families; the Herods

augmented lunch the luxury and well-being of a certain class of

society. But the true theocratic Jew, when turning his back on the

Roman civilization, became only the poorer. There was formed a class of

holy rocs, pious, fanatical, rigid observers of the Law, and outwardly

altogether miserable. It was from this class that the sects and the

fanatical parties, so numerous at this period, were recruited. The

universal dream was the reign of the proletariat Jew, who remained

faithful, and the humiliation of the rich, who were esteemed as

renegades and traitors, given up to a profane life, and to a foreign

civilization. Never did hatred equal that of these poor children of God

against the splendid edifices which began to cover the country, and

against the works of the Romans. Being obliged, so as not to die of

hunger, to toil at these edifices, which appeared to them monuments of

pride and of forbidden luxury, they believed themselves to be the

victims of wicked, rich, corrupt men, and infidels, before the Law.

We can conceive how, in such a social state, an association for mutual

assistance would be eagerly welcomed. The small Christian Church must

have seemed a paradise. This family of simple and united brethren drew

associates from every quarter. In return for that which these brought,

they obtained an assured future, the society of a congenial

brotherhood, and precious hopes. The general custom, before entering

the sect, was for each one to convert his fortune into specie. These

fortunes ordinarily consisted of small rural, semi-barren properties,

and difficult of cultivation. It had one advantage, especially for

unmarried people; it enabled them to exchange these plots of land

against funds sunk in an assurance society, with a view to the Kingdom

of God. Even some married people came to the fore in that arrangement;

and precautions were taken to insure that the associates brought all

that they really possessed, and did not retain anything outside the

common fund. Indeed, seeing that each one received out of the latter a

share, not in proportion to what one put in, but in proportion to one's

needs, every reservation of property was actually a theft made upon the

community. We see in such attempts at organisation on the part of the

proletariat, a wonderful resemblance to certain Utopias, which have

been introduced at a period not very distant from the present. Yet

there is an important difference, arising out of the fact that the

Christian communism had religion for a basis, whilst modern socialism

has nothing of the kind. It is clear that an association in which the

dividend was made in virtue of the needs of each person, and not by

reason of the capital put in, could only rest upon a very exalted

sentiment of self-abnegation, and upon an ardent faith in a religious

ideal.

Under such a social constitution, the administrative difficulties were

necessarily very numerous, whatever might be the degree of fraternal

feeling which prevailed. Between two factions of a community, whose

language was not the same, misapprehensions were inevitable. It was

difficult for well-descended Jews not to entertain some contempt for

their co-religionists, who were less noble. In fact, it was not long

before murmurs began to be heard. The "Hellenists," who each day became

more numerous, complained because their widows were not so well-treated

at the distributions as those of the "Hebrews." Till now, the apostles

had presided over the affairs of the treasury. But in face of these

protestations, they felt the necessity of delegating to others this

part of their powers. They proposed to the community to confide these

administrative cares to seven experienced and considerate men. The

proposition was accepted. The seven chosen were Stephanas, or Stephen,

Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas. The last was

from Antioch, and was a simple proselyte. Stephen was perhaps of the

same condition. It appears that contrary to the method employed in the

election of the apostle Matthiasit was decided not to choose the seven

administrators from the group of primitive disciples, but from amongst

the new converts, and especially from amongst the Hellenists. Every one

of them, indeed, bore purely Greek names. Stephen was the most

important of the seven, and, in a sense, their chief. The seven were

presented to the apostles, who, in accordance with a rite already

consecrated, prayed over them, while imposing their hands upon their

heads.

To the administrators thus designated were given the Syriac name of

Schammaschin. They were also sometimes called "The Seven," to

distinguish them from "The Twelve." Such, then, was the origin of the

Diaconate, which is found to be the most ancient ecclesiastical

function, the most ancient of sacred orders. Later, all the organised

churches, in imitation of that of Jerusalem, had deacons. The growth of

such an institution was marvellous. It placed the claims of the poor on

an equality with religious services. It was a proclamation of the truth

that social problems are the first which should occupy the attention of

mankind. It was the foundation of political economy in the religious

sense. The deacons were the first preachers of Christianity. We shall

see presently what part they played as evangelists. As organisers,

financiers, and administrators, they filled a yet more important part.

These practical men, is constant contact with the poor, the sick, the

women, went everywhere, observed everything, exhorted, and were most

efficacious in converting people. They accomplished more than the

apostles, who remained on their seats of honour at Jerusalem. They were

the founders of Christianity, in respect of that which it possessed

which was most solid and enduring.

At an early period, women were admitted to this office. They were

designated, as in our day, by the name of "sisters." At first widows

were selected; later, virgins were preferred. The tact which guided the

primitive church in all this was admirable. These simple and good men,

with the most profound skill, because it proceeded only from the heart,

laid the basis of that grand Christian feature, par

excellence--charity. They had no models of similar institutions to go

upon. A vast ministry of benevolence and reciprocal succour, into which

the two sexes threw their diverse talents and concentrated their

efforts with a view to the alleviation of human misery, was the holy

creation which resulted from the labour of these two or three first

years--years the most fruitful in the history of Christianity. We feel

that the thoughts of Jesus still lived in the bosoms of his disciples,

and directed them, with marvellous lucidity, in all their acts. To be

just, it is indeed to Jesus to whom must be referred the honour of that

which the apostles did which was great. It is probable that, during his

life, he had laid the basis of these establishments which were

developed with such marvellous success immediately after his death.

The women were naturally drawn towards a community in which the weak

were surrounded by so many guarantees. Their position in the society

was then humble and precarious; the widow in particular, despite

several protective laws, was the most often abandoned to misery, and

the least respected. Many of the doctors advocated the not giving of

any religious education to women. The Talmud placed in the same

category with the pests of the world the gossiping and inquisitive

widow, who passed her life in chattering with her neighbours, and the

virgin who wasted her time in praying. The new religion created for

these disinherited unfortunates an honourable and sure asylum. Some

women held most important places in the church, and their houses served

as places for meeting. As for those women who had no houses, they were

formed into a species of order, or feminine presbyterial body, which

also comprised virgins, who played so capital a role in the collection

of alms. Institutions, which are regarded as the later fruit of

Christianity--congregations of women, nuns, and sisters of

charity--were its first creations, the basis of its strength, the most

perfect expression of its spirit. In particular, the grand idea of

consecrating by a sort of religious character and of subjecting to a

regular discipline the women who were not in the bonds of marriage, is

wholly Christian. The term "widow" became synonymous with religious

person, consecrated to God, and, by consequence, a "deaconess." In

those countries where the wife, at the age of twenty-four, is already

faded, where there is no middle state between the infant and the old

woman, it was a kind of new life, which was created for that portion of

the human species, the most capable of devotion.

The times of the Seleucid� had been a terrible epoch for female

depravity. Never were so many domestic dramas seen, or such a series of

poisonings and adulteries. The sages of that time came to consider

woman as a pest to humanity, as the origin of baseness, and of shame,

as an evil genius, whose only object in life was to destroy every noble

germ in the opposite sex. Christianity changed all this. At that age

which seems to us still youth, but at which the life of Oriental woman

is so gloomy, so fatally prone to evil suggestions, the widow could, by

covering her head with a black shawl, become a respectable person, be

worthily employed, a deaconess, the equal of men, the most highly

esteemed. This position, so distressing for a childless widow,

Christianity elevated, rendered it holy. The widow became almost the

equal of the maiden. She was calogrie, "beautiful in old age,

venerated, useful, treated as a mother." These women, constantly going

to and fro, were admirable missionaries of the new religion.

Protestants are mistaken in carrying into the recognition of these

facts our modern ideas of individuality. As a mere question of

Christian history, socialism and cenobitism are its primitive features.

The bishop and the priest, as we now know them, did not yet exist.

Still, the pastoral ministry, that intimate familiarity of souls, not

bound by ties of blood, had already been established. This latter has

ever been the special gift of Jesus, and a kind of heritage from him.

Jesus had often said, that to everyone he was more than a father and a

mother, and that in order to follow him, it was necessary to forsake

those the most dear to us. Christianity placed soma things above

family; it instituted brotherhood, and spiritual marriage. The ancient

form of marriage, which placed the wife unreservedly in the power of

the husband, was pure slavery. The moral liberty of the woman began

when the Church gave to her in Jesus a guide and a confidant, who

should advise and console her, listen always to her, and on occasion,

council resistance on her part. Woman needs to be governed, and is

happy in so being; but it is necessary that she should love him who

governs her. This is what neither ancient societies, nor Judaism, nor

Islamism, have been able to do. Woman has never had, up to the present

time, a religious conscience, a moral individuality, an opinion of her

own, except in Christianity. Thanks to the bishops and monastic life,

Radegonda could find means to escape from the arms of a barbarous

husband. The life of the soul being all which is of account, it is just

and reasonable that the pastor who knows how to make the divine chords

of the heart vibrate, the secret counsellor who holds the key of

consciences, should be more than father, more than husband.

In a sense, Christianity was a re-action against the too narrow

domestic economy of the Aryan race. The old Aryan societies did not

only admit but few besides married men, but also interpreted marriage

in the strictest sense. It was something analogous to an English

family, a narrow, exclusive, contracted circle, an egotism of several,

as withering for the soul, as the egotism of the individual.

Christianity, with its divine conception of the liberty of the Kingdom

of God, corrected these exaggerations. It first guarded itself against

imposing upon everyone the duties of the generality of mankind. It

discovered that family was not the sole thing in life, that the duty of

reproducing the species did not devolve on everyone, and that there

should be persons freed front these duties--duties undoubtedly sacred

but not designed for all.

The exception which Greek society made in favour of the het�rae, like

Aspasia, and of the cortigiana, like Imperia, in consequence of the

necessities of polite society, Christianity made for the priest, the

nun and the deaconess, with a view to the general good. It recognised

different classes in society. There are souls who find more sweetness

in the love of five or six hundred people than in that of five or six;

for such the ordinary conditions of family seem insufficient, cold and

wearisome. Why extend to all, the exigences of our dull and mediocre

societies? The temporal family suffices not for man. He requires

brothers and sisters not of the flesh.

By its hierarchy of different social functions, the primitive church

appeared to conciliate these opposing requirements. We shall never

comprehend how happy these people were, under these holy restrictions,

which maintained liberty, without restraining it, rendering at once

possible the pleasures of communistic life, and those of private life.

It was altogether different from the hurly-burly of our modern

societies, artificial, and without love, in which the sensitive soul is

sometimes so cruelly isolated. In these little refuges, which are

called churches, the atmosphere was genial and sweet. People lived

together in the same faith and in the same hope. But it is clear also

that these conditions would be inapplicable to a large society. When

entire countries embraced Christianity, the rules of the first churches

became a Utopian idea, and sought refuge in monasteries. The monastic

life is, in this sense, but the continuation of the primitive churches.

The convent is the necessary consequence of the Christian spirit. There

is no perfect Christianity without the convent, seeing that the

evangelical idea can be realized there only.

A large allowance of credit, ought certainly to be made to Judaism in

these great creations. Each of the Jewish communities scattered along

the coasts of the Mediterranean, was already a sort of church,

possessing its funds for mutual succour. Almsgiving, always recommended

by the sages, had become a precept: it was done in the Temple, and in

the synagogues: it was regarded as the first duty of the proselyte. In

all times Judaism has been distinguished by its care for its poor, and

for the fraternal sentiment of charity which it inspires.

There is a supreme injustice in opposing Christianity to Judaism by way

of reproach, since all which Primitive Christianity possesses came

bodily from Judaism. It is while thinking of the Roman world that one

is struck by the miracles of charity and free association undertaken by

the Church. Never did profane society, recognizing reason alone for its

basis, produce such admirable results. The law of every profane, or, if

I may say so, philosophical society, is liberty, sometimes equality;

never fraternity. Charity, viewed from the point of right, has nothing

about it obligatory; it concerns only individuals; it is even found to

possess certain inconveniences, on which account it is distrusted.

Every attempt to apply the public funds for the benefit of the poor

savours of communism. When a man dies of hunger, when entire classes

languish in misery, profane policy limits itself to finding out the

cause of the misfortune. It points out at once that there can be no

civil or political order without liberty; but the consequence of that

liberty is that he who has nothing, and can earn nothing, must die of

hunger. That is logical: but nothing can withstand the abuse of logic.

The wants of the most numerous class always prevail in the long run.

Institutions purely political and civil do not suffice; social and

religious aspirations have also a right to a legitimate satisfaction.

The glory of the Jewish people is that they have loudly proclaimed this

principle, from which emanated the ruin of the ancient empires, but

which will never be eradicated. The Jewish law is social and

non-political; the prophets, the authors of the apocalypses, were the

promoters of social revolutions. In the first half of the first

century, in the presence of profane civilization, the Jews had but one

idea, which was to refuse the benefits of the Roman law, that

philosophical and Atheistic law, which placed everyone on an equality,

and to proclaim the excellence of their theocratic law, which formed a

religious and moral society. "The Law is Happiness": this was the idea

of all Jewish thinkers, such as Philo and Josephus. The laws of other

peoples were designed that justice should have its course; it mattered

little whether men were good or happy. The Jewish law took account of

the minutest details of moral education. Christianity is due to the

development of the same idea. Each church is a monastery, in which all

possess equal rights, in which there ought to be neither poor nor

wicked, in which, consequently, each watches over and commands each

other. Primitive Christianity may be defined as a great association of

poor people, a heroic struggle against egotism, based upon the idea

that each has a right to no more than is necessary for him, that all

superfluity belongs to those who have nothing. We can at once see that

between such a spirit and the Roman spirit, would be established a war

to the death, and that Christianity, on its part, will never attain to

dominating over the world, except on the condition of making important

modifications in its inherent tendencies and in its original programme.

But the wants which it represents will always endure. The communistic

life, commencing with the second half of the Middle Ages, having served

for the abuses of an intolerant Church, the monastery having too often

become but a feudal fief, or the barracks of a dangerous and fanatical

military, the modern mind evinced a most bitter opposition in regard to

cenobitism. But we forget that it was in the communistic life that the

soul of man tasted its fullest joy. The canticle, "Behold, how good and

joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," has

ceased to be our refrain. But when modern individualism shall have

borne its latest fruits; when humanity, shrunken, saddened, and become

impotent, will return to these grand institutions, and stern

disciplines; when our pitiful bourgeois society--I speak unadvisedly,

our world of pigmies--shall have been scourged with whips by the heroic

and idealistic portions of mankind, then the communistic life will

regain all its value. Many great things, science, for example, will be

organized under a monastic form, with hereditary rights, but not those

of blood. The importance which our century attributes to family will

diminish. Egotism, the essential rule of civil society, will not be

sufficient for great minds. All, proceeding from the most opposite

points of view, will league themselves against vulgarity. We shall

return again to the words of Jesus, and the ideas of the Middle Ages in

regard to poverty. We will comprehend how that to possess anything

could have been regarded as a mark of inferiority, and how that the

founders of the mystic life could have disputed for centuries in order

to discover whether Jesus owned even so much as the things which were

necessary for his daily wants. These Franciscan subtleties will become

once more great social problems. The splendid ideal, traced by the

author of the Acts, will be inscribed as a prophetic revelation on the

gates of the paradise of humanity. "And the multitude of them that

believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them,

that the things which he possessed were his own, but they had all

things in common, neither was there any of them that lacked; fur as

many as were possessors of land or houses sold them, and brought the

price of things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles

feet, and distribution was made to every man according as he had need.

And they, continuing with one daily accord in the temple, and breaking

bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and

singleness of heart." (Acts ii., 44-47.)

But let us not anticipate events. It was now about the year 36.

Tiberius, at Caprea, has little idea of the enemy to the empire which

is growing up. In two or three years the sect had made surprising

progress. It numbered several thousand of the faithful. It was already

easy to forsee that its conquests would be effected chiefly amongst the

Hellenists and proselytes. The Galilean group which had listened to the

master, though preserving always its precedence, seemed as if swamped

by the floods of new corners speaking Greek. One could already perceive

that the principal parts were to be played by the latter. At the time

at which we are arrived, no Pagan, that is to say, no man without some

anterior connection with Judaism, had entered into the Church.

Proselytes, however, performed very important functions in it. The

circle de provenance of the disciples had likewise largely extended; it

is no longer a simple little college of Palestineans; we can count in

it people from Cyprus, Antioch, and Cyrene, and from almost all the

points of the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean, where Jewish

colonies had been established. Egypt alone was wanting in the primitive

Church, and for a long time continued to be so. The Jews of that

country were almost in a state of schism with Judea. They lived after

their own fashion, which was superior in many respects to the life in

Palestine, and scarcely felt the shock of the religious movements at

Jerusalem

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CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST PERSECUTION.--DEATH OF STEPHEN.--DESTRUCTION OF THE FIRST CHURCH OF

JERUSALEM.

It was inevitable that the preachings of the new sect, although

delivered with so much reserve, should revive the animosities which had

accumulated against its founder, and eventually brought about his

death. The Sadducee family of Hanan, who had caused the death of Jesus,

was still reigning. Joseph Caiaphas occupied, up to 36, the sovereign

Pontificate, the effective power of which he gave over to his

father-in-law Hanan, and to his relatives, John and Alexander. These

arrogant and pitiless men viewed with impatience a troop of good and

holy people, without official title, winning the favour of the

multitude. Once or twice, Peter, John, and the principal members of the

apostolic college, were put in prison and condemned to flagellation.

This was the chastisement inflicted on heretics. The authorization of

the Romans was not necessary in order to apply it. As we might indeed

suppose, these brutalities only served to inflame the ardour of the

apostles. They came forth from the Sanhedrim where they had just

undergone flagellation, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to

suffer shame for him whom they loved. Eternal puerility of penal

repressions applied to things of the soul! They were regarded, no

doubt, as men of order, as models of prudence and wisdom; these

blunderers, who seriously believed in the year 36, to gain the upper

hand of Christianity by means of a few strokes of a whip!

These outrages proceeded chiefly from the Sadducees, that is to say,

from the upper clergy, who crowded the Temple and derived from it

immense profits. We do not find that the Pharisees exhibited towards

the sect the animosity they displayed to Jesus. The new believers were

strict and pious people, somewhat resembling in their manner of life

the Pharisees themselves. The rage which the latter manifested against

the founder arose from the superiority of Jesus--a superiority which he

was at no pains to dissimulate. His delicate railleries, his wit, his

charm, his contempt for hypocrites, had kindled a ferocious hatred. The

apostles, on the contrary, were devoid of wit; they never employed

irony. The Pharisees were at times favourable to them; many Pharisees

had even become Christians. The terrible anathemas of Jesus against

Pharisaism had not yet been written, and the accounts of the words of

the Master were neither general nor uniform. These first Christians

were, besides, people so inoffensive, that many persons of the Jewish

aristocracy, who did not exactly form part of the sect, were well

disposed towards them. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who had known

Jesus, remained no doubt with the Church in the bonds of brotherhood.

The most celebrated Jewish doctor of the age, Rabbi Gamaliel the elder,

grandson of Hillel, a man of broad and very tolerant ideas, spoke, it

is said, in the Sanhedrim in favour of permitting gospel preaching. The

author of the Acts credits him with some excellent reasoning, which

ought to be the rule of conduct of governments, on all occasions when

they find themselves confronted with novelties of an intellectual or

moral order. "If this work is frivolous," said he, "leave it alone, it

will fall of itself; if it is serious, how dare you resist the work of

God? In any case, you will not succeed in stopping it." Gamaliel's

words were hardly listened to. Liberal minds in the midst of opposing

fanaticisms have no chance of succeeding. A terrible commotion was

produced by the deacon Stephen. His preaching had, as it would appear,

great success. Multitudes flocked around him, and these gatherings

resulted in acrimonious quarrels. It was chiefly Hellenists, or

proselytes, habitues of the synagogue, called Libertini, people of

Cyrene, of Alexandria, of Cilicia, of Ephesus, who took an active part

in these disputes. Stephen passionately maintained that Jesus was the

Messiah, that the priests had committed a crime in putting him to

death, that the Jews were rebels, sons of rebels, people who rejected

evidence. The authorities resolved to dispatch this audacious preacher.

Several witnesses were suborned to seize upon some words in his

discourses against Moses. Naturally they found that for which they

sought. Stephen was arrested and led into the presence of the

Sanhedrim. The sentence with which they reproached him was almost

identical with the one which led to the condemnation of Jesus. They

accused him of saying that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the Temple

and change the traditions attributed to Moses. It is quite possible,

indeed, that Stephen had used such language. A Christian of that epoch

could not have had the idea of speaking directly against the Law,

inasmuch as all still observed it; as for traditions, however, Stephen

might combat them as Jesus had himself done; nevertheless, these

traditions were foolishly ascribed by the orthodox to Moses, and people

attributed to them a value, equal to that of the written Law.

Stephen defended himself by expounding the Christian thesis, with a

wealth of citations from the written Law, from the Psalms, from the

Prophets, and wound up by reproaching the members of the Sanhedrim with

the murder of Jesus. "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart," said

he to them, "you will then ever resist the Holy Ghost as your fathers

also have done. Which of the prophets have not your fathers prosecuted?

They have slain those who announced the coming of the Just One, whom

you have betrayed, and of whom you have been the murderers. This law

that you have received from the mouth of angels you have not kept." At

these words a scream of rage interrupted him. Stephen, his excitement

increasing more and more, fell into one of those transports of

enthusiasm which were called the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His

eyes were fixed on high; he witnessed the glory of God and Jesus by the

side of his Father, and cried out: "Behold, I see the heavens opened,

and the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God." The whole

assembly stopped their ears, and threw themselves upon him, gnashing

their teeth. He was dragged outside the city and stoned. The witnesses,

who, according to the law, had to cast the first stones, divested

themselves of their garments and laid them at the feet of a young

fanatic named Saul, or Paul, who was thinking with secret joy of the

renown he was acquiring in participating in the death of a blasphemer.

In all this there was an observance to the letter of the prescriptions

of Deuteronomy, chapter xiii. But viewed from a civil law point, this

tumultuous execution, carried out without the sanction of the Romans,

was not regular. In the case of Jesus, we have seen that it was

necessary to obtain the ratification of the Procurator. It may he that

this ratification was obtained in the case of Stephen and that the

execution did not follow his sentence quite so closely as the narrator

of the Acts would have us believe. It may have happened also that the

Roman authority was at this time somewhat relaxed. Pilate had been, or

was about to be, suspended from his functions. The cause of this

disgrace was simply the too great firmness which he had shown in his

administration. Jewish fanaticism had rendered his life insupportable.

Possibly he was tired of refusing the outrages these frantic people

demanded of him, and the proud family of Hanan had reached the point

that they no longer required the sanction of the Procurator to

pronounce sentences of death. Lucius Vetellius (the father of him who

was emperor) was then imperial legate at Syria. He sought to win the

good graces of the population; and he restored to the Jews the

pontificial vestments, which, since the time of Herod the Great, had

been deposited in the tower of Antonia. Instead of sustaining the

rigorous acts of Pilate, he lent an ear to the complaints of the

natives and sent Pilate back to Rome, to answer the accusations of his

subordinates (commencement of the year 36). The chief grievance of the

latter was that the Procurator would not lend himself with sufficient

complacency to their intolerant behests. Vitellius replaced him

provisionally by his friend Marcellus, who was undoubtedly more careful

not to displease the Jews, and, consequently, more willing to indulge

them in their religious murders. The death of Liberius (16 March, 37)

only encouraged Vitellius in this policy. The two first years of the

reign of Caligula was an epoch of general relaxation of the Roman

authority in Syria. The policy of that prince, before he lost his

reason, was to restore to the peoples of the East their autonomy and

their native chiefs. It was thus that he established the kingdoms or

principalities of Comagene, of Herod Agrippa, of Soheym, of Cotys, of

Polemon II., and permitted that of Har�th to aggrandise itself. When

Pilate arrived at Rome, the new reign had already begun. It is probable

that Caligula held him to be in the wrong, inasmuch as he confided the

government of Jerusalem to a new functionary, Marcellus, who appears

not to have excited, on the part of the Jews, the violent

recriminations which overwhelmed poor Pilate with embarrassment, and

filled him with disgust.

At all events, that which is important to remark is, that in that epoch

the persecutors of Christianity were not Romans; they were orthodox

Jews. The Romans preserved in the midst of this fanaticism a principle

of tolerance and of reason. If we can reproach the imperial authority

with anything, it is with being too lenient, and with not having cut

short with a stroke the civil consequences of a sanguinary law which

visited with death religious derelictions. But as yet the Roman

domination was not so complete as it became later; it was only a sort

of protectorate or suzerainty. Its condescension even went the length

of not putting the head of the emperor on the coins struck during the

rule of procurators, so as not to shock Jewish ideas. Rome did not yet,

in the East at least, seek to impose upon vanquished peoples her laws,

her gods, her manners; she left them, outside the Roman laws, their

local customs. Their semi-independence was simply a further indication

of their inferiority. The imperial power in the East, at that epoch,

resembled somewhat the Turkish authority, and the condition of the

native population, that under the Rajahs. The notion of equal rights

and equal protection for all did not exist. Each provincial group had

its jurisdiction, just as at this day the various Christian Churches

and the Jews have in the Ottoman Empire, In Turkey, a few years ago,

the patriarchs of the different communities of Rajahs, provided that

they had some sort of understanding with the Porte, were sovereigns as

far as their subordinates were concerned, and could sentence them to

the most cruel punishments.

As Stephen's death may have taken place at any time during the years

36, 37, 38, we cannot, therefore, affirm whether Caiaphas ought to be

held responsible for it. Caiaphas was deposed by Lucius Vitellius, in

the year 36, shortly after the time of Pilate; but the change was

inconsiderable. He had for a successor his brother-in-law, Jonathan,

son of Hanan. The latter, in turn, was succeeded by his brother

Theophilus, son of Hanan, who continued the Pontificate in the house of

Hanan till the year 42. Hanna was still alive, and, possessed of the

real power, maintained in his family the principles of pride, severity,

hatred against innovators which were, so to speak, hereditary.

The death of Stephen produced a great impression. The proselytes

solemnized his funeral with tears and groanings. The separation of the

new secretaries from Judaism was not yet absolute. The proselytes and

the Hellenists, leas strict in regard to orthodoxy than the pure Jews,

considered that they ought to render public homage to a man who

respected their constitution, and whose peculiar beliefs did not put

him without the pale of the Law.

Thus began the era of Christian martyrs. Martyrdom was not an entirely

new thing. Not to mention John the Baptist and Jesus, Judaism at the

time of Antiochus Epiphanus, had had its witnesses, faithful even to

the death. But the series of courageous victims, beginning with Saint

Stephen, has exercised a peculiar influence upon the history of the

human mind. It introduced into the western world an element which it

lacked, to wit, absolute and exclusive faith, the idea that there is

but one good and true religion. In this sense, the martyrs began the

era of intolerance. It may be avouched with great assurance, that he

who can give his life for his faith would, if he were master, be

intolerant. Christianity, when it had passed through three centuries of

persecution, and became, in its turn, dominant, was more persecuting

than any religion had ever been. When people have shed their blood for

a cause they are too prone to shed the blood of others, so as to

conserve the treasure they have gained.

The murder of Stephen, moreover, was not an isolated event. Taking

advantage of the weakness of the Roman functionaries, the Jews brought

to bear upon the Church a real persecution. It seems that the vexations

pressed chiefly on the Hellenists and the proselytes whose free

behaviour exasperated the orthodox. The Church of Jerusalem, which

though already strongly organized, was compelled to disperse. The

apostles, according to a principle which seems to have seized strong

hold of their minds, did not quit the city. It was probably so, too,

with the whole purely Jewish group, those who were denominated the

"Hebrews." But the great community with its common table, its diaconal

services, its varied exercises, ceased from that time, and was never

re-formed upon its first model. It had endured for three or four years.

It was for nascent Christianity an unequalled good fortune that its

first attempts at association, essentially communistic, were so soon

broken up. Essays of this kind engender such shocking abuses, that

communistic establishments are condemned to crumble away in a very

short time, or to ignore very soon the principle upon which they are

founded. Thanks to the persecution of the year 37 the cenobitic Church

of Jerusalem was saved from the test of time. It was nipped in the bud,

before interior difficulties had undermined it. It remained like a

splendid dream, the memory of which animated in their life of trial all

those who had formed part of it, like an ideal to which Christianity

incessantly aspires without ever succeeding in reaching its goal. Those

who know what an inestimable treasure the memory of Menilmontant is to

the members still alive of the St. Simonian Church, what friendship it

creates between them, what joy kindles in their eyes, when they speak

of it, will comprehend the powerful bond which was established between

the new brethren, from the fact of having first loved and then suffered

together. It is almost always a principle of great lives, that during

several months they have realised God, and the recollection of this

suffices to fill up the entire after-years with strength and sweetness.

The leading part in the persecution we have just related belonged to

that young Saul, whom we have above found abetting, as far as in him

lay, the murder of Stephen. This hot-headed youth, furnished with a

permission from the priests, entered houses suspected of harbouring

Christians, laid violent hold on men and women and dragged them to

prison, or before the tribunals. Saul boasted that there was no one of

his generation so zealous as himself for the traditions. True it is,

that often the gentleness and the resignation of his victims astonished

him; he experienced a kind of remorse; he fancied he heard these pious

women, whom, hoping for the Kingdom of God, he had cast into prison,

saying during the night, in a sweet voice: "Why persecutest thou us?"

The blood of Stephen, which had almost smothered him, sometimes

troubled his vision. Many things that he had heard said of Jesus went

to his heart. This superhuman being, in his ethereal life, whence he

sometimes emerged, revealing himself in brief apparitions, haunted him

like a spectre. But Saul shrunk with horror from such thoughts; he

confirmed himself with a sort of frenzy in the faith of his traditions,

and meditated new cruelties against those who attacked him. His name

had become a terror to the faithful; they dreaded at his hands the most

atrocious outrages, and the most sanguinary treacheries.

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CHAPTER IX.

FIRST MISSIONS.--PHILIP THE DEACON.

The persecution of the year 37 had for its result, as is always the

case, the spread of the doctrine which it was wished to arrest. Till

now, the Christian preaching had not extended far beyond Jerusalem; no

mission had been undertaken; enclosed within its exalted but narrow

communison, the mother Church had spread no haloes around herself, or

formed any branches. The dispersion of the little circle scattered the

good seed to the four winds of heaven. The members of the Church of

Jerusalem, driven violently from their quarters, spread themselves over

every part of Jud� and Samaria, and preached everywhere the Kingdom of

God. The deacons, in particular, freed from their administrative

functions by the destruction of the community, became excellent

evangelists. They constituted the young and active element of the sect,

in contradistinction to the somewhat heavy element formed by the

apostles, and the "Hebrews." One single circumstance, that of language,

would have sufficed to create in the latter an inferiority as regards

preaching. They spoke, at least as their habitual tongue, a dialect

which was not used by the Jews themselves more than a few leagues from

Jerusalem. It was to the Hellenists that belonged all the honour of the

great conquest, the account of which is to be now our main purpose.

The scene of the first of these missions, which was soon to embrace the

whole basin of the Mediterranean, was the region about Jerusalem,

within a radius of two or three days' journey. Philip, the Deacon, was

the hero of this first holy expedition. He evangelized Samaria most

successfully. The Samaritans were schismatics; but the young sect,

following the example of the Master, was less susceptible than the

rigorous Jews in regard to questions of orthodoxy. Jesus, it was said,

had shown himself at different times to be quite favourable to the

Samaritans. Philip appeared to have been one of the apostolical men

most pre-occupied with theurgy. The accounts which relate to him

transport us into a strange and fantastic world. The conversions which

he made in Samaria, and in particular in the capital, Sebaste, are

explained by prodigies. This country was itself wholly given up to

superstitious ideas in regard to magic. In the year 36, that is to say,

two or three years before the arrival of the Christian preachers, a

fanatic had excited among the Samaritans quite a serious commotion by

preaching the necessity of a return to primitive Mosaism, the sacred

utensils of which he pretended to have found. A certain Simon, of the

village of Gitta or Gitton, who obtained later a great reputation,

began about that time to gain notoriety by means of his enchantments.

One feels at seeing the gospel finding a preparation and a support in

such chimeras. Quite a large multitude were baptized in the name of

Jesus. Philip had the power of baptizing, but not that of conferring

the Holy Ghost. That privilege was reserved to the apostles. When

people learned at Jerusalem of the formation of a group of believers at

Sebaste, it was resolved to send Peter and John to complete their

initiation. The two apostles came, laid their hands on the new

converts, prayed over their heads; the latter were immediately endowed

with the marvellous powers attached to the conferring of the Holy

Spirit. Miracles, prophecy, all the phenomena of illusionism were

produced, and the Church of Sebaste had nothing in this respect to envy

the Church of Jerusalem for.

If the tradition about it is to be credited, Simon of Gitton found

himself from that time in relations with the Christians. According to

their accounts, he, being converted by the preaching and miracles of

Philip, was baptized, and attached himself to this evangelist. Then

when the apostles Peter and John had arrived, and when he saw the

supernatural powers procured by the imposition of hands, he came, it is

said, and offered them money, in order that they might impart to him

the faculty of conferring the Holy Spirit. Peter is then reported to

have made to him this admirable response: "Thy money perish with thee,

because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be bought! Thou hast

neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the

sight of God."

Whether these words were or were not pronounced, they seem to picture

exactly the situation of Simon regard to the nascent sect. We shall

see, in fact, that according to all appearances, Simon of Gitton was

the chief of a religious movement, similar to that of Christianity,

which might be regarded as a sort of Samaritan counterfeit of the work

of Jesus. Had Simon already commenced to dogmatize and to perform

prodigies when Philip arrived at Sebaste? Did he enter thereupon into

relations with the Christian Church? Has the anecdote, which made of

him the father of all "Simony," any reality? Must it be admitted that

the world one day saw face to face two thaumaturgists, one of which was

a charlatan, the other the "corner-stone," which has been made the base

of the faith of humanity? Was a sorcerer able to counter-balance the

destinies of Christianity? This is what, for lack of documentary

evidence, we do not know; for the narrative of the Acts is here but a

feeble authority; and, from the first century, Simon became for the

Christian church a subject of legends. In history, the general idea

alone is pure. It would be unjust to dwell on that, which is shocking

in this sad page of the origin of Christianity. To vulgar auditors, the

miracle proves the doctrine; to us, the doctrine makes us forget the

miracle. When a belief has consoled and ameliorated humanity, it is

excusable to employ proofs proportioned to the weakness of the public

to which it is addressed. But when error after error has been proved,

what excuse can be alleged? This is not a condemnation which we intend

to pro. pounce against Simon of Gitton. We shall have to explain later

on his doctrine, and the part he played which was only made manifest

under the reign of Claudius. It is of moment only to remark here, that

an important principle seems to have been introduced by him into the

Christian theurgy. Compelled to admit that some impostors could also

perform miracles, orthodox theology attributed these miracles to the

Evil One. For the purpose of conserving some demonstrative value in

prodigies, it was necessary to invent rules for distinguishing the true

from the false miracles. In order to this, they descended to a species

of ideas utterly childish.

Peter and John, after confirming the Church of Sebaste, departed again

for Jerusalem, evangelizing on their tray the villages of the country

of Samaria. Philip the Deacon, continued his evangelizing journeys,

directing his steps towards the south, into the ancient country of the

Philistines. This country, since the advent of the Maccabees had been

much encroached upon by the Jews; Judaism, however, had not succeeded

in becoming dominant there. During this journey Philip accomplished a

conversion which made some noise and which was much talked about

because of a singular circumstance. One day, as he was journeying along

the route, a very lonely route, from Jerusalem to Gaza, he encountered

a rich traveller, evidently a foreigner, for he was riding in a

chariot, which was a mode of locomotion that has at all times been

unknown to the inhabitants of Syria and of Palestine. He was returning

from Jerusalem, and, gravely seated, was reading the Bible in a loud

voice, according to a custom quite common at that time. Philip, who in

everything was believed to act on inspiration from on high, felt

himself drawn towards the chariot. He came up alongside of it, and

quietly entered into conversation with the opulent personage, offering

to explain to him the passages, which the latter did not comprehend.

This was a rare occasion for the evangelist to develop the Christian

thesis upon the figures employed in the Old Testament. He proved that

in the books of prophecy everything there related to Jesus; that Jesus

was the solution of the great enigma; that it was of him in particular

that the All-Seeing had spoken in this beautiful passage: "He was led

as a sheep to the slaughter; as a lamb that is dumb before its

shearers, he opened not his mouth." The traveller listened, and at the

first water to which they came he said: "Behold, here is water, why

could I not be baptized." The chariot was stopped: Philip and the

traveller descended into the water, and the latter was baptized.

Now this traveller was a powerful personage. He was a eunuch of the

Candace of Ethiopia, her finance minister, the keeper of her treasures,

who had come to worship at Jerusalem, and was now returning to Napata

by the Egyptian route. Candace or Condaoce was the title of feminine

royalty in Ethiopia, about the period of which we are now speaking.

Judiasm had already penetrated into Nubia and Abyssinia; many of the

natives had been converted, or at least were counted among those

proselytes, who, without being circumcised, worshipped the one God. The

eunuch probably be-longed to the latter class, a simple pious Pagan,

like the centurion Cornelius who will figure presently in this history.

In any case, it is impossible to suppose that he was completely

initiated into Judaism. From this time we hear no more said about the

eunuch. But Philip recounted the incident, and at a later period much

importance was attached to it. When the question of admitting Pagans

into the Christian Church became an affair of moment, there was found

here a precedent of great weight. In all this affair, Philip was

believed to have acted under divine inspiration. This baptism,

administered by order of the Holy Spirit to a man scarcely a Jew.

assuredly not circumcised, who had believed in Christianity, only for a

few hours, possessed a high dogmatic value. It was an argument for

those who thought that the doors of the new church should be open to

all.

Philip, after that adventure, betook himself to Ashdod or Azote. Such

was the artless state of enthusiasm in which these missionaries lived,

that at each step they believed they heard the voice of Heaven, and

received directions from the Spirit. Each of their steps seemed to them

to be regulated by a superior power, and when they went from one city

to another, they thought they were obeying a supernatural inspiration.

Sometimes they fancied they made �rial trips. Philip was in this

respect one of the most privileged. It was, as he believed, on the

indication of an angel, that he had come from Samaria to the place

where he had encountered the eunuch; after the baptism of the latter he

was persuaded that the Spirit had lifted him bodily, and transported

him with one swoop to Azote.

Azote and the Gaza route were the limits of the first evangelical

preachings towards the south. Beyond were the desert and the nomadic

life upon which Christianity has never taken much hold. From Azote,

Philip the Deacon turned towards the north and evangelized all the

coast as far as Cesarea. It is probable that the Church of Joppa and of

Gydda, which we shall soon find flourishing, were founded by him. At

Cesarea he settled and founded an important Church. We shall encounter

him there again twenty years later. Cesarea was a new city and the most

considerable of Judea. It had been built on the site of a Sidonian

fortress, called Abdastartes or Shato's Tower, by Herod the Great, who

gave to it, in honour of Augustus, the name which its ruins bear still

to-day. Cesarea was much the best part in all Palestine, and tended day

by day to become its capital. Tired of living at Jerusalem, the Judean

Procurators were soon to repair thence, to make it their permanent

residence. It was principally peopled by Pagans; the Jews, however,

were somewhat numerous there; cruel strifes had often taken place

between the two classes of the population. The Greek language was alone

spoken there, and the Jews themselves had come to recite certain parts

of their liturgy in Greek. The austere Rabbis of Jerusalem regarded

Cesarea as a dangerous and profane abode, and in which one became

nearly a Pagan. From all the facts which have just been cited, this

city will occupy an important place in the sequel of this history. It

was in a kind of way the port of Christianity, the point by which the

Church of Jerusalem communicated with all the Mediterranean.

Many other missions, the history of which is unknown to us, were

conducted simultaneously with that of Philip. The very rapidity with

which this first preaching was done, was the reason of its success. In

the year 38, five years after the death of Jesus, and probably one year

after the death of Stephen, all this side of Jordan had heard the glad

tidings from the mouths of missionaries hailing from Jerusalem.

Galilee, on its part, guarded the holy seed and probably scattered it

around her, although we know of no missions issuing from that quarter.

Perhaps the city of Damascus, from the period at which we now are, had

also some Christians, who received the faith from Galilean preachers.

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CHAPTER X.

CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.--RIDICULOUS TO PUT PAUL'S CONVERSION A.D. 38--ARETAS

SETTLES THE DATE AS ABOUT 34.

The year 38 is marked in the history of the nascent Church by a much

more important conquest. During that year we may safely place the

conversion of that Saul whom we witnessed participating in the stoning

of Stephen, and as a principal agent in the persecution of 37, but who

now, by a mysterious act of grace, becomes the most ardent of the

disciples of Jesus.

Saul was born at Tarsus, in Cilicia, in the year 10 or 12 of our era.

Following the custom of the times, his name was latinized into that of

Paul; he did not, however, regularly adopt this last name until he

became the apostle of the Gentiles. Paul was of the purest Jewish

blood. His family, who probably hailed originally from the town of

Gischala, in Galilee, pretended to belong to the tribe of Benjamin;

while his father enjoyed the title of a Roman citizen, a title no doubt

inherited from ancestors who had obtained that honour, either by

purchase or by services rendered to the state. His grandfather may have

obtained it for aid given to Pompey during the Roman conquest (63 B.C.)

His family, like most of the good old Jewish houses, belonged to the

sect of Pharisees. Paul was brought up according to the strictest

principles of this sect, and though he afterwards repudiated its narrow

dogmas, he always retained its exaltation, its asperity, and its ardent

faith.

During the epoch of Augustus, Tartus was a very flourishing city. The

population, though composed chiefly of the Greek and Aramaic races,

included, as was common in all the commercial towns, a large number of

Jews. A taste for letters and the sciences was a marked characteristic

of the place; and no city in the world, not even excepting Athens and

Alexandria, had so many scientific institutions and schools. The number

of learned men which Tarsus produced, or who prosecuted their studies

there, was truly extraordinary; but it must not hence be imagined that

Paul received a careful Greek education. The Jews rarely frequented the

institutions of secular instruction. The most celebrated schools of

Tarsus were those of rhetoric, where the Greek classics received the

first attention. It seems hardly probable that a man who had taken even

elementary lessons in grammar and rhetoric, could have written in the

incorrect non-Hellenistic style of that of the Epistles of St. Paul. He

talked constantly and even fluently in Greek, and wrote or rather

dictated in that language; but his Greek was that of the Hellenistic

Jews, bristling with Hebraisms and Syriacisms, scarcely intelligible to

a lettered man of that period, and which can only be understood by

trying to discover the Syriac turn of mind which influenced Paul, at

the time he was dictating his epistles. He was himself cognizant of the

vulgar and detective character of his style. Whenever it was possible

he spoke Hebrew--that is to say, the Syro-Chaldaic of his time. It was

in this language that he thought, it was in this language he was

addressed by the mysterious voice on the way to Damascus.

His doctrine, moreover, shows us no direct adaptation from Greek

philosophy. The verse quoted from the Thais of Menander, which occurs

in his writings, is one of those monostich-proverbs that were familiar

to the public, and could easily have been quoted by one who was not

acquainted with the original. Two other quotation--one from Epimenides,

the other from Aratus--which appear under his name, though it is by no

means certain that he used them, may also be understood as having been

borrowed at second-hand. The literary training of Paul was almost

exclusively Jewish, and it is in the Talmud rather than in the Greek

classics that the analogies of his modes of thought must be sought. A

few general ideas of popular philosophy, which one could learn without

opening a single book of the philosophers, alone reached him. His

manner of reasoning is most singular. He knew nothing certainly of the

peripatetic logic. His syllogism is not that of Aristotle; on the

contrary, his dialectics greatly resemble those of the Talmud. Paul, in

general is carried away by words rather than by thought. When a word

took possession of his mind it suggested a train of thought wholly

irrelevant to the subject in hand. His transitions were sudden, his

treatment disjointed, his periods frequently suspended. No writer could

be more unequal. We would seek in vain throughout the realm of

literature for a phenomenon as capricious as that of the sublime

passage in the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the

Corinthians, placed by the side of such feeble arguments, painful

repetitions, and fastidious subtleties.

His father at the outset intended that he should be a rabbi; and

following the general custom, gave him a trade. Paul was an

upholsterer, or rather a manufacturer of the heavy cloths of Cilicia,

called Cilicium. At various times he had to work at this trade, having

no patrimonial fortune. It seems quite certain that he had a sister,

whose son lived at Jerusalem. As regards a brother and other relatives,

who it is said embraced Christianity, the testimony is vague and

uncertain.

Refinement of manners being, according to the modern ideas of the

middle-classes, in direct proportion to personal wealth, it might be

imagined, from what has just been said that Paul was badly brought up

and undistinguished amongst the proletariat. This idea would, however,

be quite erroneous. His politeness, when he chose, was extreme, and his

manners, exquisite. Despite the defects in his style, his letters show

that he was a man of uncommon intelligence, who could find for the

expression of his lofty sentiments, language of rare felicity; and no

correspondence displays more careful attention, finer shades of

meaning, and more charming hesitancy and timidity. Some of his

pleasantries shock us. But what animation! What a fund of charming

sayings! What simplicity! One can easily see that his character, when

his passions did not make him irascible and fierce, was that of a

polite, earnest, and affectionate man, susceptible at times, and a

trifle jealous. Inferior as such men are in the eyes of the general

public, they yet possess within small Churches, immense advantages,

because of the attachments they inspire, their practical aptitude, and

their skill in escaping from the greatest difficulties.

Paul had a sickly appearance, which did not correspond with the

greatness of his soul. He was uncomely, short, squat, and stooping, his

broad shoulders awkwardly sustaining a little bald pate. His sallow

countenance was half concealed in a thick beard; his nose was aquiline,

his eyes piercing, while his black, heavy eye-brows met across his

forehead. Nor was there anything imposing about his speech; his timid

and embarassed air, and incorrect language, gave at first but a poor

idea of his eloquence. He gloried, however, in his exterior defects,

and even shrewdly extracted advantage from them. The Jewish rare

possesses the peculiarity of presenting at once types of the greatest

beauty, and of the most utter ugliness; but this Jewish ugliness is

something quite unique. Some of the strange visages which at first

excite a smile, assume, when lighted up by emotion, a rare brilliance

and majesty.

The temperament of Paul was not less peculiar than his exterior. His

constitution was sickly, yet its singular endurance was tested by the

way in which he supported an existence full of fatigues and sufferings.

He makes constant allusions to his bodily weakness. He speaks of

himself as a sick man, exhausted, and nigh unto death; add to this,

that he was timid, without any appearance or prestige, without any of

those personal advantages, calculated to produce an impression, so much

so, that it was a marvel people were not repelled by such uninviting an

exterior. Elsewhere, he mysteriously hints at a secret affliction, "a

thorn in the flesh," which he compares to a messenger of Satan sent,

with God's permission, to buffet him, "lest he should be exalted above

measure." Thrice he besought the Lord to deliver him, and thrice the

Lord replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee." This was evidently

some bodily infirmity; for it is not to be supposed that he refers to

the allurements of carnal delights, since he himself informs us in

another place that he was insensible to these. It would seem he was

never married: the thorough coldness of his temperament, the result of

the intense ardour of his brain, manifests itself throughout his life,

and he boasts of it with an assurance savouring of affectation, to an

extent which is disagreeable.

At an early age he came to Jerusalem, and entered, as it is said, the

school of Gamaliel the Elder. This Gamaliel was the most cultured man

in Jerusalem. As the name of Pharisee was applied to every prominent

Jew who was not of a priestly family, Gamaliel was taken for a member

of that sect. Yet he had none of its narrow and exclusive spirit. He

was a liberal, intelligent man, acquainted with Greek, and understood

the heathen. It is possible that the broad ideas professed by Paul

after he received Christianity, were a reminiscence of the teachings of

his first master; yet it must be admitted that at first he had not

learned much moderation from him. Breathing the heated atmosphere of

Jerusalem, he became an ardent fanatic. He was the leader of a young,

unbending, and enthusiastic Pharisee party, which carried to extremes

their keen attachment for the national traditions of the past. He had

not known Jesus, and was not present at the bloody scene of Golgotha;

but we have seen him take an active part in the murder of Stephen, and

among the foremost of the persecutors of the Church. He breathed only

threatenings and slaughter, and went up and down Jerusalem bearing a

mandate which authorized and legalized all his brutalities. He went

from synagogue to synagogue, compelling the more timid to deny the name

of Jesus, and subjecting others to scourging or imprisonment. When the

Church of Jerusalem was dispersed, his persecutions were extended to

the neighbouring cities. Exasperated by the progress of the new faith,

and learning that there was a group of the faithful at Damascus, he

obtained from the high-priest Theophilus, son of Hanan, letters to the

synagogue of that city, which conferred on him the power of arresting

all evil-thinking persons, and of bringing them bound to Jerusalem.

The confusion of Roman authority in Judea, explains these arbitrary

vexations. The insane Caligula was in power, and the administrative

service was everywhere distracted. Fanaticism had gained all that the

civil power had lost. After the dismissal of Pilate, and the

concessions made to the natives by Lucius Vitellius, the country was

permitted to govern itself according to its own laws. A thousand local

tyrannies profited by the weakness of an indifferent authority. In

addition , Damascus had just passed into the hands of Hartat, or

H�reth, whose capital was at Petra. This bold and powerful prince,

having beaten Herod Antipas, and withstood the Roman forces, commanded

by the imperial legate, Lucius Vitellius, had been marvellously aided

by fortune. The news of the death of Tiberius (16th March, 37), had

suddenly arrested the march of Vitellius. H�reth seized Damascus, and

established there an ethnarch or governor. The Jews at the time of this

new occupation formed a numerous party at Damascus, where they carried

on an extensive system of proselytizing, especially among the females.

It was thought advisable to seek to make them contented; and the best

method of doing so was to grant concessions to their autonomy, and

every concession was simply a permission to commit further religious

violences. To punish and even kill those who did not think with them,

was their idea of independence and liberty.

Paul, in leaving Jerusalem, followed doubtless the usual road, and

crossed the Jordan at the "Bridge of the Daughters of Jacob." His

mental excitement was now at its greatest height, and he was at times

troubled and shaken in his faith. Passion is not a rule of faith. The

passionate man flies from one extreme creed to another, but always

retains the same impetuosity. Now, like all strong minds, Paul almost

loved that which he hated. Was he sure, after all, that he was not

thwarting the designs of God? Perhaps he remembered the calm,

dispassionate views of his master Gamaliel. Often these ardent souls

experienced terrible revulsions. He felt a liking for those whom ho had

tortured. The more these excellent sectarians were known, the better

they were liked; and none had greater opportunities of knowing them

better than their persecutor. At times he fancied he saw the sweet face

of the Master who inspired his disciples with no much patience,

regarding him with an air of pity and tender reproach. He was also much

impressed by the accounts of the apparitions of Jesus, describing him

as an ariel being who was at times visible; for at the epochs and in

the countries when and where there is a tendency to the marvellous,

miraculous recitals influence equally each opposing party. The

Mahommedans, for instance, are afraid of the miracles of Elias; and,

like the Christians, pray to St. George and St. Anthony for

supernatural cures.

Having crossed Ithuria, and while in the great plain of Damascus, Paul,

with several companions, all, as it appears, journeying on foot,

approached the city, and had probably already reached the beautiful

gardens which surrounded it The time was noon. The road from Jerusalem

to Damascus has in nowise changed. It is the one, which, leaving

Damascus in a south-westerly direction, crosses the beautiful plain

watered by the streams flowing into the Abana and the Pharpar, and upon

which are now marshalled the villages of Dareya, Kaukab, and Sasa. The

exact locality of which we speak, which was the scene of one of the

most important facts in the history of humanity, could not have been

beyond Kaukab (four hours from Damascus). It is even probable that the

point in question was much nearer the city, perhaps about Dareya (an

hour and a half from Damascus), or between Dareya and Meidan. The great

city lay before Paul, and the outlines of several of its edifices could

be dimly traced through the thick foliage: behind him towered the

majestic dome of Hermon, with its ridges of snow, making it resemble

the bald head of an old man; upon his right were the Hauran, the two

little parallel chains which enclose the lower course of the Pharpar,

and the tumuli of the region of the lakes; and upon his left were the

outer spurs of the Anti-Libanus stretching out to Mt Hermon. The

impression produced by these richly-cultivated fields and beautiful

orchards, separated from one another by trenches and laden with the

most delicious fruits, is that of peace and happiness. Let one imagine

to himself a shady road, passing through rich soil, crossed at

intervals by irrigating canals, bordered by declivities and

serpentining through forests of olives, walnuts, apricots, and prunes;

trees draped by graceful festoons of vines; and then will be presented

to the mind the image of the scene of that remarkable event which has

exerted so great an influence upon the faith of the world. In the

environs of Damascus one can scarcely believe oneself in the East;

especially after leaving the arid and burning regions of the

Gaulonitide and of Ithuria. It is joy indeed to meet once more the

works of man and the blessings of Heaven. From the most remote

antiquity until the present time this zone, which surrounds Damascus

with freshness and health, has had but one name, has inspired but one

dream,--that of the "Paradise of God."

if Paul experienced these terrible visions, it was because he carried

them in his heart. Every step in his journey towards Damascus awakened

in him painful perplexities. The odious part of executioner, which he

was about to undertake, became insupportable. The houses which he saw

through the trees were, perhaps, those of his victims. This thought

beset him and delayed his steps; he did not wish to advance; he seemed

to be resisting a mysterious impulse which pressed him forward. The

fatigue of the journey, joined to this pre-occupation of mind,

overwhelmed him. He had, it would seem, inflamed eyes, probably the

beginning of ophthalmia. In these prolonged journeys, the last hours

are the most trying. All the debilitating effects of the days just past

accumulate, the nerves relax their power, and a re-action sets in.

Perhaps, also, the sudden passage from the sun-smitten clam to the cool

shades of the gardens enhanced his suffering condition and seriously

excited the fanatical traveller. Dangerous fevers, accompanied by

delirium, are quite sudden in these latitudes, and in a few minutes the

victim is prostrated as by a thunder-stroke. When the crisis is over,

the sufferer retains only the impression of a period of profound

darkness, relieved at intervals by dashes of light in which he has seen

images outlined against a dark background. It is quite certain that a

sudden stroke instantly deprived Paul of his remaining consciousness,

and threw him senseless on the ground. From the accounts which we have

of this singular event, it is impossible to say whether any exterior

fact led to the crisis to which Christianity owes its most ardent

apostle. But in such cases, the exterior fact is of little importance.

It was the state of St. Paul's mind; it was his remorse on his approach

to the city in which he was to commit the most signal of his misdeeds,

which were the true causes of his conversion. For my part, I much

prefer the hypothesis of an affair personal to Paul, and experienced by

him alone. It is not, however, improbable that a thunder-storm suddenly

burst forth. The flanks of Mount Hermon are the point of formation for

thunder-showers which are unequalled in violence. The most

unimpressionable person cannot observe without emotion these terrible

hurricanes of fire. It ought to be remembered that in ancient times

accidents from lightning were considered divine revelations; that with

the ideas regarding providential interference then prevalent, nothing

was fortuitous; and that every man was accustomed to view the natural

phenomena around him as having a direct relation to himself. The Jews

in particular always considered that thunder was the voice of God, and

that lightning was the fire of God. Paul at this juncture was in a

state of great excitement, and it was but natural that he should

interpret as the voice of the storm the thoughts which were passing in

his mind. That a delirious fever, resulting from a sun-stroke or an

attack of ophthalmia, had suddenly seized him; that a flash of

lightning blinded him for a time; that a peal of thunder had produced a

cerebral commotion, temporarily depriving him of sight--it matters

little. The recollections of the apostle on this point appear to be

rather confused; he was persuaded that the incident was supernatural,

and such a conviction would not permit him to entertain any clear

consciousness of material circumstances. Such cerebral commotions

produce sometimes a sort of retroactive effect, and completely perturb

the recollections of the moments immediately preceding the crisis.

Paul, moreover, elsewhere informs us that he was subject to visions;

and a circumstance, insignificant as it might appear to others, was

sufficient to make him beside himself.

And what did he see, what did he hear, while he was a prey to these

hallucinations? He saw the countenance which had haunted him for

several days; he saw the phantom of which so much had been told. He saw

Jesus himself, who spoke to him in Hebrew, saying, "Saul, Saul, why

persecutest thou me? "Impetuous natures pass instantaneously from one

extreme to the other. For them there exists solemn moments which change

the course of a lifetime, which colder natures never experience.

Reflective men do not change, but are transformed; ardent men, on the

contrary, change and are not transformed. Dogmatism is a shirt of

Nessus which they cannot tear off. They must have a pretext for loving

and hating. Our western races alone have been able to produce those

minds--large yet delicate, strong yet flexible--which no empty

affirmation can mislead, no momentary illusion carry away. The East has

never produced men of this stamp. Instantly, the most thrilling

thoughts rushed in upon the soul of Paul. Awakened to the enormity of

his conduct, he saw himself stained with the blood of Stephen, and this

martyr appeared to him as his father, his initiator into the new faith.

Touched to the quick, his sentiments experienced a revulsion as

complete as it was sudden; still, all this was but a new phase of

fanaticism. His sincerity and his need of an absolute faith precluded

any middle course; it was already clear that he would one day exhibit

in the cause of Jesus the same fiery zeal he had shown in persecuting

him.

With the assistance of his companions, who led him by the hand, Paul

entered Damascus. His friends took him to the house of a certain Judas,

who lived in the street called Straight, a grand colonnaded avenue over

a mile long and a hundred feet broad, which crossed the city from east

to west, and the line of which yet forms, with a few deviations, the

principal artery of Damascus. The blindness and delirium had not yet

subsided. For three days Paul, a prey to fever, neither ate nor drank.

It is easy to imagine what passed during this crisis in that burning

brain maddened by violent disease. Mention was made in his hearing of

the Christians of Damascus, and in particular of a certain Ananias, who

appeared to be the chief of the community. Paul had often heard of the

miraculous powers of new believers over maladies, and he became

impressed by the idea that the imposition of hands would cure him of

his disease. His eyes all this time were highly inflamed, and in his

delirious imaginings he thought he saw Ananias enter the room and make

to him the sign familiar to Christians. From that moment he felt

convinced he should owe his recovery to Ananias. The latter, informed

of this, visited the sick man, spoke kindly, addressed him as his

"brother," and laid his hands upon his head; and from that hour peace

returned to the soul of Paul. He believed himself cured; and as his

ailment had been purely nervous, he was indeed cured. Little crusts or

scales, it is said, fell from his eyes; he partook of food and

recovered his strength.

Almost immediately after this he was baptized. The doctrines of the

Church were so simple that he had nothing new to learn, and became at

once a Christian and a perfect one., And from whom else did he need

instruction? Had not Jesus himself appeared to him? He too, like James

and Peter, had had his vision of the risen Jesus. He had learned

everything by direct revelation. Here the fierce and unconquerable

nature of Paul was again made manifest. Smitten down on the public

highway, he was willing to submit, but only to Jesus, to that Jesus who

had left the right hand of the Father to convert and instruct him. Such

was the foundation of his faith; and such will be the starting point of

his pretensions. He will maintain that it was by design that he did not

go to Jerusalem immediately after his conversion, and place himself in

relations with those who had been apostles before him; he will main-tam

that he has received a special revelation, for which he is indebted to

no human agency; that, like the Twelve, he is an apostle by divine

institution and by direct commission from Jesus; that his doctrine is

the true one, although an angel from heaven should say to the contrary.

An immense danger found entrance through this proud man into the little

society of the poor in spirit who until now had constituted

Christianity. It will be a real miracle if his violence and his

inflexible personality do not overthrow everything. But at the same

time his boldness, his initiative force, his prompt decision, will be

precious elements when brought into contact with the narrow, timid, and

indecisive spirit of the saints of Jerusalem! Certainly, if

Christianity had remained confined to these good people, shut up in a

conventicle of elect, leading a communistic life, it would, like

Essenism, have faded away, leaving scarcely a trace behind. It is this

ungovernable Paul who will secure its success, and who at the risk of

every peril will boldly launch it on the high seas. By the side of the

obedient faithful, accepting his creed from his superior without

questioning him, there will be a Christian disengaged from all

authority who will believe only from personal conviction. Protestantism

thus existed five years after the death of Jesus, and St. Paul was its

illustrious founder. Surely Jesus had not anticipated such disciples;

and it was such as these who would most largely contribute to the

vitality of his work and insure its eternity.

Violent natures disposed to proselytism only change the object of their

passion. As ardent for the new faith as he had been for the old, St.

Paul, like Omar, dropped in one day his part of persecutor for that of

apostle. He did not return to Jerusalem, where his position towards the

Twelve would have been peculiar and delicate. He tarried at Damascus

and in the Hauran for three years (38-41), preaching that Jesus was the

Son of God. Herod Agrippa I. held the sovereignty of the Hauran and of

the neighbouring countries; but his power was at several points

superseded by that of a Nabatian king, H�reth. The decay of the Roman

power in Syria had delivered to the ambitious Arab the great and rich

city of Damascus, besides a part of the countries beyond Jordan and

Mount Hermon, then just being opened up to civilization. Another emir,

Soheyn, perhaps a relative or lieutenant of H�reth, had received from

Caligula the command of Ithuria. It was in the midst of this great

awakening of the Arab nation, upon this strange soil, where an

energetic race manifested with great success its feverish activity,

that Paul first displayed the ardour of his apostolic soul. Perhaps the

material and so remarkable a movement which revolutionized the country

was prejudicial to a theory and to a preaching wholly idealistic, and

founded on a belief of a near approach of the end of the world. Indeed,

there exists no traces of an Arabian Church founded by St. Paul. If the

region of the Hauran became, towards the year 70, one of the most

important centres of Christianity, it was owing to the emigration of

Christians from Palestine; and it was the Ebonites, the enemies of St.

Paul, who had in this region their principal establishment.

At Damascus, where there were many Jews, the teachings of Paul received

more attention. In the synagogues of that city he entered into warm

arguments to prove that Jesus was the Christ. Great indeed was the

astonishment of the faithful on beholding him who had persecuted their

brethren at Jerusalem, and who had come to Damascus "to bring

themselves bound unto the chief-priests," now appearing as their chief

defender. His audacity and personal peculiarities almost alarmed them.

He was alone; he sought no counsel; he established no school; and the

emotions he excited were those of curiosity rather than those of

sympathy. The faithful felt that he was a brother, but a brother

distinguished by singular peculiarities. They believed him to be

incapable of treachery; but amiable and mediocre natures always

experience sentiments of mistrust and alarm when brought in contact

with powerful and original minds, who they know must one day supersede

them.

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CHAPTER XI.

PEACE AND INTERIOR DEVELOPMENTS OF THE CHURCH OF JUDEA.

From the year 38 to the year 44 no persecution seems to have been

directed against the Church. The faithful were, no doubt, far more

prudent than before the death of Stephen, and avoided speaking in

public. Perhaps, too, the troubles of the Jews who, during all the

second part of the reign of Caligula, were at variance with that

prince, contributed to favour the nascent sect. The Jews, in fact,

became active persecutors in proportion to the good understanding they

maintained with the Romans. To buy or to recompense their tranquility,

the latter were led to augment their privileges, and in particular the

one to which they clung most closely--the right of killing persons whom

they regarded as inimical to their law. But the period at which we have

arrived was one of the most stormy in the turbulent history of this

singular people.

The antipathy which the Jews, in consequence of their moral

superiority, their odd customs, as well as their harshness, excited in

the populations among which they lived, was at its height, especially

at Alexandria. This accumulated hatred, for its own satisfaction, took

advantage of the coming to the imperial throne of one of the most

dangerous lunatics that ever wore a crown. Caligula, at least after the

malady which completed his mental derangement (October, 37), presented

the frightful spectacle of a maniac governing the world endowed with

the most enormous powers ever put into the hands of any man. The

atrocious law of C�sarism rendered such horrors possible, and left the

governed without remedy. This lasted three years and three mouths. One

cannot without shame set down in a serious history that which is now to

follow. Before entering upon the recital of these saturnalia we cannot

but exclaim with Suetonius: Reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt.

The most inoffensive pastime of this madman was the care of his own

divinity. In order to do this he used a sort of bitter irony, a mixture

of the serious and the comic (for the monster was not wanting in wit),

a sort of profound derision of the human race. The enemies of the Jews

were not slow to perceive the advantage they might gain from this

mania. The religious abasement of the world was such that not a protest

was heard against the sacrilege of the C�sar; every cult hastened to

bestow upon him the titles and the honours which it had reserved for

its gods. It is to the eternal glory of the Jews that, amidst this

ignoble idolatry, they uttered the cry of outraged conscience. The

principle of intolerance which was in them, and which led them to so

many cruel acts, exhibited here its bright side. Alone in affirming

their religion to be the absolute religion, they would not bend to the

odious caprice of the tyrant. This was the source of endless troubles

for them. It needed only that there should be in a city some person

discontented with the synagogue, spiteful, or simply mischievous, to

bring about frightful consequences. At one time people would insist on

erecting an altar to Caligula in the very place where the Jews could

least of all suffer it? At another, a troupe of the rag-tags would

collect, and cry out against the Jews for being the only people who

refused to place the statue of the emperor in their houses of prayer.

Anon, people would run to the synagogues and the oratories; they would

install there the bust of Caligula; and the unfortunate Jews were

placed in the alternative of either renouncing their religion, or be

guilty of high treason. Thence followed frightful vexations.

Such pleasantries had been several times repeated when a still more

diabolical idea was suggested to the emperor. This was to place a

colossal golden statue of himself in the sanctuary of the temple at

Jerusalem, and to have the temple itself dedicated to his own divinity.

This odious design very nearly hastened by thirty years the revolt and

the ruin of the Jewish nation. The moderation of the imperial legate,

Publius Petronius, and the intervention of King Herod Agrippa, a

favourite of Caligula, averted the catastrophe. But until the moment in

which the sword of Ch�r�a delivered the earth from the most execrable

tyrant it had as yet endured, the Jews lived everywhere in terror.

Philo has preserved for us the monstrous scene which occurred when the

deputation of which he was the chief was admitted to see the emperor.

Caligula received them during a visit he was paying to the villas of

M�cenas and of Lamia, near the sea, in the environs of Pozzuoli. On

that day he was in a vein of gaiety. Helicon, his favourite joker, had

been relating to him all sorts of buffooneries about the Jews. "Ah,

then, it is you," said he to them, with a bitter smile, and showing his

teeth, "who alone will not recognize me for a god, and who prefer to

adore one whose name you cannot even utter!" He accompanied these words

with a horrible blasphemy. The Jews trembled; their Alexandrian enemies

were the first to take up speech: "You would still more, O Sire, detest

these people and all their nation, if you knew the aversion they have

for you; for they alone have refused to offer sacrifices for your

health when all the other peoples have done so!" At these words, the

Jews exclaimed that it was a calumny, and that they had three times

offered for the prosperity of the emperor the most solemn sacrifices

their religion would allow. "Yes," said Caligula, with comical

seriousness, "you have sacrificed; so far, good; but it was not to me

that you sacrificed. What advantage do I derive therefrom?" Thereupon,

turning his back upon them, he strode through the apartments, giving

orders for repairs, going up and down stairs incessantly. The

unfortunate deputies, and among them Philo, eighty years of age, the

most venerable man of the time, perhaps--Jesus being no longer

living--followed him up and down, trembling and out of breath, the

object of derision to the assembled company. Caligula turning suddenly,

said to them: "By the by, why will you not eat pork?" The flatterers

burst into laughter! some of the officers, in a severe tone, reminded

them that in laughing immoderately they offended the majesty of the

emperor. The Jews were stunned; one of them awkwardly said: "There are

some persons who do not eat lamb." "Ah!" said the emperor, "such people

are right; lamb is insipid." Some time after, he made a show of

inquiring into their business; then, when they had just begun to inform

him of it, he left them and went off to give orders about the

decorations of a hall which he wanted to have adorned with specular

stones. Returning, he affected an air of moderation, and asked the

deputation if they had anything to add; and as the latter resumed their

interrupted discourse, he turned his back upon them to go and see

another hall which he was ornamenting with paintings. This game of

tiger sporting with its prey lasted for hours. The Jews were expecting

death; but at the last moment the monster withdrew his fangs. "Well,"

said Caligula, while repassing "these folks are decidedly less guilty

than pitiable for not believing in my divinity." Thus could the gravest

questions be treated under the horrible regime created by the baseness

of the world, cherished by a soldiery and a populace about equally

vile, and maintained by the dissoluteness of nearly all.

We can easily understand how so painful a situation must have taken

from the Jews of the time of Marullus much of that audacity which made

them speak so boldly to Pilate. Already almost entirely detached from

the temple, the Christians must have been much less alarmed than the

Jews at the sacrilegious projects of Caligula. Their numbers were,

moreover, too few for their existence to be known at Rome. The storm at

the time of Caligula, like that which resulted in the taking of

Jerusalem by Titus, passed over their heads, and was in many regards

serviceable to them. Everything which weakened Jewish independence was

favourable to them, since it was so much taken away from the power of a

suspicious orthodoxy, which maintained its pretensions by severe

penalties.

This period of peace was fruitful in interior developments. The nascent

church was divided into three provinces; Judea, Samaria, Galilee, to

which Damascus was no doubt attached. The primacy of Jerusalem was

uncontested. The church of this city, which had been dispersed after

the death of Stephen, was quickly reconstituted. The apostles had never

quitted the city. The brothers of the Lord continued to reside there,

and to wield a great authority. It does not seem that this new church

of Jerusalem was organized in so strict a manner as the first: the

community of goods was not strictly re-established in it. But there was

founded a large fund for the poor, to which was added the contributions

sent by minor churches to the mother church, which latter was the

origin and permanent source of their faith.

Peter undertook frequent apostolical journeys in the environs of

Jerusalem. He had always a great reputation as a thaumaturgist. At

Lydda in particular he was reputed to have cured a paralytic named

�neas, a miracle which is said to have led to numerous conversions in

the plain of Saron. From Lydda he repaired to Joppa, a city which

appears to have been a centre for Christianity. Cities of workmen, of

sailors, of poor people, where the orthodox Jews were not dominant,

were those in which the new sect found people the best disposed towards

them. Peter made a long sojourn at Joppa, at the house of a tanner

named Simon, who dwelt near the sea. Working in leather was an industry

regarded as unclean, according to the Mosaic code; it was not lawful to

associate with those who carried it on, so that the curriers had to

reside in a district by themselves. Peter, in selecting such a host,

gave a proof of his indifference to Jewish prejudices, and worked for

that ennoblement of petty callings which constitutes a grand feature of

the Christian spirit.

The organization of works of charity was soon actively entered upon.

The church of Joppa possessed a woman most appropriately named in

Aramaic, Tabitha (gazelle), and in Greek, Dorcas, who consecrated all

her time to the poor. She was rich, it seems, and distributed her

wealth in alms. This worthy lady had formed a society of pious widows,

who passed their days with her in weaving clothes for the poor. As the

schism between Christianity and Judaism was not yet consummated, it is

probable that the Jews participated in the benefit of these acts of

charity. The "saints and widows" were thus pious persons, doing good to

all, a sort of friars and nuns, whom only the most austere devotees of

a pedantic orthodoxy could suspect, fraticelli, loved by the people,

devout, charitable, full of pity.

The germ of those associations of women, which are one of the glories

of Christianity, thus existed in the first churches of Judea. At Jaffa

commenced those societies of veiled women, clothed in linen, who were

destined to continue through centuries the tradition of charitable

secrets. Tabitha was the mother of a family which will have no end as

long as there are miseries to be relieved and feminine instincts to be

gratified. It is related further on, that Peter raised her from the

dead. Alas! death, however unmindful and revolting, in such a case, is

inflexible. When the most exquisite soul has sped, the decree is

irrevocable; the most excellent woman can no more respond to the

invitation of the friendly voices which would fain recall her, than can

the vulgar and frivolous. But ideas are not subject to the conditions

of matter. Virtue and goodness escape the fangs of death. Tabitha had

no need to be resuscitated. For the sake of a few days more of this sad

life, why disturb her sweet and eternal repose? Let her sleep in peace;

the day of the just will come!

In these very mixed cities, the problem of the admission of Pagans to

baptism was propounded with much persistency. Peter was strongly

pre-occupied by it. One day while he was praying at Joppa, on the

terrace of the tanner's house, having before him the sea that was soon

going to bear the new faith to all the empire, he had a prophetic

ecstasy. Plunged into a state of reverie, he thought he experienced a

sensation of hunger, and asked for something to eat. And while they

were making it ready for him, he saw the heavens opened, and a cloth

tied at the four corners descend. Looking inside the cloth he saw there

all sorts of animals, and thought he heard a voice saying to him: "Kill

and eat" On his objecting that many of these animals were impure, he

was answered: "Call not that unclean which God has cleansed." This, as

it appears, was repeated three times. Peter was persuaded that these

animals represented the mass of the Gentiles, which God himself had

just rendered fit for the holy communion of the Kingdom of God.

An occasion was soon presented for applying these principles. From

Joppa, Peter went to Cesarea. There he came in contact with a centurion

named Cornelius. The garrison of Cesarea was formed, at least in part,

of one of those cohorts composed of Italian volunteers which were

called Italic�. The complete name which this term represented may have

been cohors prima Augustus Italica civium Romamorum. Cornelius was a

centurion of this cohort, consequently an Italian and a Roman citizen.

He was a man of probity, who had long felt himself drawn towards the

monotheistic worship of the Jews. He prayed; gave alms; practised, in a

word, those precepts of natural religion which are taken for granted by

Judaism; but he was not circumcised; he was not a proselyte in any

sense whatever; he was a pious Pagan, an Israelite in heart, nothing

more. His whole household and some soldiers of his command were, it is

said, in the same state of mind. Cornelius applied for admission into

the new Church. Peter, whose nature was open and benevolent, granted it

to him, and the centurion was baptized.

Perhaps Peter at first saw no difficulty in this; but on his return to

Jerusalem he was severely reproached for it. He had openly violated the

Law; he had gone amongst the uncircumcized and had eaten with them. The

question was an important one; it was no other than whether the Law was

abolished; whether it was permissible to violate it in proselytism;

whether Gentiles could be freely received into the Church. Peter

related in self defence the vision he had at Joppa. Subsequently the

fact of the centurion served as an argument in the great question of

the baptism of the uncircumcized. To give it more importance it was

pretended that each phase of this important business had been marked by

a revelation from heaven. It was related that after long prayers

Cornelius had seen an angel who ordered him to go and inquire for Peter

at Joppa; that the symbolical vision of Peter took place at the very

hour of the arrival of the messengers from Cornelius; that, moreover,

God himself had undertaken to legitimize all that had been done, seeing

that the Holy Ghost had descended upon Cornelius, and upon his

household the latter having spoken strange tongues and sung psalms

after the fashion of the other believers. Was it natural to refuse

baptism to persons who had received the Holy Ghost?

The Church of Jerusalem was still exclusively composed of Jews and of

proselytes. The Holy Ghost being shed upon the uncircumcized before

baptism, appeared an extraordinary fact. It is probable that there

existed thenceforward a party opposed in principle to the admission of

Gentiles, and that all did not accept the explanations of Peter. The

author of the Acts would have us believe that the approbation was

unanimous. But in a few years we shall see the question revived with

much greater intensity. This matter of the good centurion was, perhaps,

like that of the Ethiopian eunuch, accepted as an exceptional case,

justified by a revelation and an express order from God. Still the

matter was far from being settled. This was the first controversy which

had taken place in the bosom of the Church; the paradise of interior

peace had lasted for six or seven years.

About the year 40, the great question upon which depended all the

future of Christianity appears thus to have been propounded. Peter and

Philip took a very just view of what was the true solution, and

baptized Pagans. It is difficult, no doubt, in the two accounts given

us by the author of the Acts on this subject, and which are partly

borrowed one from the other, not to recognize an argument. The author

of the Acts belonged to a party of conciliation, favourable to the

introduction of Pagans into the Church, and who was not willing to

confess the violence of the divisions to which the affair gave rise.

One feels strongly that in writing the account of the eunuch, of the

centurion, and even of the conversion of the Samaritans, this author

means not only to narrate facts, but also seeks special precedents for

an opinion. On the other hand, we cannot admit that he invents the

facts which he narrates. The conversions of the eunuch of Candace, and

of the centurion Cornelius, are probably real facts, which are

presented and transformed according to the needs of the thesis in view

of which the book of the Acts was composed.

Paul, who was destined, some ten or twelve years later, to give to this

discussion so decisive a bearing, had not yet meddled with it. He was

in the Hauran, or at Damascus, preaching, refuting the Jews, placing at

the service of the new faith the same ardour he had shown in combatting

it. The fanaticism, of which he had once been the instrument, was not

long in pursuing him in turn. The Jews resolved to kill him. They

obtained from the ethnarch, who governed Damascus in the name of

H�reth, an order to arrest him. Paul hid himself. It was known that he

was to leave the city; the ethnarch, who wanted to please the Jews,

placed detachments at the gates to seize his person; but the brethren

secured his escape by night, letting him down in a basket from the

window of a house which over-looked the ramparts.

Having escaped this danger, Paul turned his eyes towards Jerusalem. He

had been a Christian for three years, and had not yet seen the

apostles. His stern, unyielding character, prone to isolation, had made

him at first turn his back as it were upon the great family into which

he had just entered in spite of himself, and prefer for his first

apostolate a new country, in which he would find no colleague. There

was awakened in him, how. ever, a desire to see Peter. He recognized

his authority, and designated him, as every one did, by the name of

Cephas, "the stone." He repaired then to Jerusalem, taking the same

road, whence he had come three years before in a state of mind so

different.

His position at Jerusalem was extremely false and embarrassing. It had,

no doubt, been understood there that the persecutor had become the most

zealous of evangelists, and one of the first defenders of the faith

which he had formerly sought to destroy. But there remained great

prejudices against him. Many dreaded on his part some horrible plot.

They had seen him so enraged, so cruel, so zealous in entering houses

and tearing open family secrets in order to find victims, that he was

believed capable of playing an odious farce in order to destroy those

whom he hated. He resided, as it seems, in the house of Peter. Many

disciples remained deaf to his advances, and shrank from him. Barnabas,

a man of courage and will, took at this moment a decisive part. As a

Cypriote and a new convert, he understood better than the Galilean

disciples the position of Paul. He came to meet him, took him by the

hand, introduced him to the most suspicious, and became his surety. By

this sagacious and far-seeing act, Barnabas earned at the hands of the

Christian worlds the highest degree of merit. It was he who appreciated

Paul; it is to him that the Church owes the most extraordinary of her

founders. The advantageous friendship of these two apostolic men, a

friendship that no cloud ever tarnished, notwithstanding many

differences in opinion, afterwards led to their association in the work

of missions to the Gentiles. This grand association dates, in one

sense, from Paul's first sojourn at Jerusalem. Amongst the sources of

the faith of the world, we must count the generous movement of

Barnabas, who stretched out his hand to the suspected and forsaken

Paul; the profound intuition which led him to discover the soul of an

apostle under that downcast mien; the frankness with which be broke the

ice and levelled the obstacles raised between the convert and his new

brethren by the unfortunate antecedents of the former, and perhaps,

also, by certain traits in his character.

Paul, however, systematically avoided seeing the apostles. He himself

says so, and he takes the trouble to affirm it with an oath; he saw

only Peter, and James the brother of the Lord. His sojourn lasted but

two weeks. It is certainly possible that at the time in which he wrote

the Epistle to the Galatians (towards 56), Paul may have found himself

constrained by the exigencies of the moment, to alter a little the

nature of his relations with the apostles; to represent them as more

harsh, more imperious, than they were in reality. Towards 56 the

essential point for him to prove was that he had received nothing from

Jerusalem--that he was in no wise the mandatory of the Council of the

Twelve established in this city. His attitude at Jerusalem would have

been the proud and lofty bearing of a master, who avoids relations with

other masters in order not to have the air of subordinating himself to

them, and not the humble and repentant mien of a sinner ashamed of the

past, as the author of the Acts represents. We cannot believe that from

the year 41 Paul was animated by this jealous care to preserve his own

individuality, which he showed at a later day. The few interviews he

had with the apostles, and the briefness of his sojourn at Jerusalem,

arose probably from his embarrassment in the presence of people, whose

nature was different from his own, and who were full of prejudices

against him, rather than from a refined policy, which would have

revealed to him fifteen years in advance the disadvantages there might

be in his frequenting their society.

In reality, that which must have erected a sort of wall between the

apostles and Paul, was the difference of their character and of their

education. The apostles were all Galileans; they had not been at the

great Jewish school; they had seen Jesus; they remembered his words;

they were good and pious folk, at times a little solemn and

simple-hearted. Paul was a man of action, full of fire, only moderately

mystical, enrolled, as by a superior power, in a sect which was not

that of his first adoption. Revolt, protestation, were his habitual

sentiments. His Jewish education was much superior to that of all his

new brethren. But not having heard Jesus, not having been appointed by

him, he was, according to Christian ideas, greatly inferior.

Now Paul was not the man to accept a secondary place. His haughty

temperament required a position for itself. It was probably about this

time that there sprang up in him the singular idea that after all he

had nothing to envy those who had known Jesus, and had been chosen by

him, since he also had seen Jesus, and had received from Jesus a direct

revelation and the commission of his apostleship. Even those who had

been honoured by the personal appearance of the risen Christ were no

better than he was. Although the last apostle, his vision had been none

the less remarkable. It had taken place under circumstances which gave

it a peculiar stamp of importance and of distinction. A signal error!

The echo of the voice of Jesus was found in the discourses of the

humblest of his disciples. With all his Jewish science, Paul could not

make up for the immense disadvantage under which he was placed in

consequence of his tardy initiation. The Christ whom he had seen on the

road to Damascus was not, whatever he might say, the Christ of Galilee;

it was the Christ of his imagination, of his own conception. Although

he may have been most industrious in learning the words of the Master,

it is clear that he was only a disciple at second-hand. If Paul had met

Jesus during his life, it is doubtful whether he would have attached

himself to him. His doctrine must be his own, not that of Jesus; the

revelations of which he was so proud were the fruit of his own brain.

These ideas, which he dared not as yet communicate, rendered his stay

at Jerusalem disagreeable. At the end of a fortnight he took leave of

Peter, and went away. He had seen so few people that he ventured to say

that no one in the Churches of Judea knew him by sight, or knew aught

of him, save by hearsay. At a subsequent period he attributed this

sudden departure to a revelation. He related that being one day in the

temple praying, he was in an ecstasy, and saw Jesus in person, and

received from him the order to quit Jerusalem immediately, "because

they were not inclined to receive his testimony." As a compensation for

these hard hearts, Jesus had promised him the Apostolate of distant

nations, and an auditory who would listen more willingly to his words.

Those who would fain hide the traces of the many ruptures caused by the

coming of this intractable disciple into the church, pretended that

Paul remained a long while at Jerusalem, living with the brethren on a

footing of the most complete amity; but that, having begun to preach to

the Hellenic Jews, he was nearly killed by them, so that the brethren

had to protect him, and to send him safely to C�sarea.

It is probable, indeed, that from Jerusalem he did repair to C�sarea.

But he stayed there only a short time, and then set out to traverse

Syria, and afterwards Cilicia. He was, no doubt, already preaching, but

it was on his own account, and without any understanding with anybody.

Tarsus, his native place, was his habitual sojourn during this period

of his apostolic life, which we may reckon as having lasted about two

years. It is possible that the Churches of Cilicia owed their origin to

him. Still, the life of Paul was not at this epoch that which we see it

to be subsequently. He did not assume the title of an apostle, which

latter was then strictly reserved to the Twelve. It was only from the

time of his association with Barnabas (in 45) that he entered upon that

career of sacred peregrinations and preachings which were to make of

him the typical travelling missionary.

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CHAPTER XII.

FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH.

The new faith was spread from place to place with marvellous rapidity.

The members of the church of Jerusalem, who had been dispersed

immediately after the death of Stephen, pushing their conquests along

the coast of Phoenicia, reached Cyprus and Antioch. They were at first

guided by the sole principle of preaching the Gospel to the Jews only.

Antioch, "the metropolis of the East," the third city of the world, was

the centre of this Christian movement in northern Syria. It was a city

with a population of more than 500,000 souls, almost as large as Paris

before its recent extensions, and the residence of the Imperial Legate

of Syria. Suddenly advanced to a high degree of splendour by the

Seleucid�, it reaped great benefit from the Roman occupation. In

general, the Seleucid� were in advance of the Romans in the taste for

theatrical decorations, as applied to great cities. Temples, aqueducts,

baths, basilicas, nothing was wanting at Antioch in what constituted a

grand Syrian city of that period. The streets, flanked by colonnades,

their cross-roads being decorated with statues, had more of symmetry

and regularity than anywhere else. A Corso, ornamented with four rows

of columns, forming two covered galleries, with a wide avenue in the

midst, traversed the city from one side to the other, the length of

which was thirty-six stadia (more than a league). But Antioch not only

possessed immense edifices of public utility; it had also that which

few of the Syrian cities possessed--the noblest specimens of Grecian

art, beautiful statues, classical works of a delicacy of detail which

the age was no longer capable of imitating. Antioch, from its

foundation, had been wholly a Grecian city. The Macedonians of Antigone

and Seleucus had brought with them into that country of the Lower

Orontes their most lively recollections, their worship, and the names

of their country. The Grecian mythology was there adopted as it were in

a second home; they pretended to show in the country a crowd of "holy

places" forming part of this mythology. The city was full of the

worship of Apollo and of the nymphs. Daphne, an enchanting place two

short hours from the city, reminded the conquerors of the pleasantest

fictions. It was a sort of plagiarism, a counterfeit of the myths of

the mother country, analogous to that which the primitive tribes

carried with them in their travels--their mythical geography, their

Berecyntha, their Arvanda, their Ida, their Olympus. These Greek fables

was for them an antiquated religion, scarcely more serious than the

Metamorphoses of Ovid. The ancient religions of the country,

particularly that of Mount Cassius, contributed a little seriousness to

it. But Syrian levity, Babylonian charlatanism, and all the impostures

of Asia, mingling at this border of the two worlds, had made Antioch

the capital of all lies, and the sink of every description of infamy.

In fact, besides the Greek population, which in no part of the East

(with the exception of Alexandria) was as numerous as here, Antioch

counted amongst its population a considerable number of native Syrians,

speaking Syriac. These natives were a low class, inhabiting the suburbs

of the great city, and the populous villages which formed a vast suburb

all around it--Charandama, Ghisira, Gandigura, and Apate (chiefly

Syrian names). Marriages between the Syrians and the Greeks were

common: Seleucus had made naturalization a legal obligation binding on

every stranger establishing himself in the city, so that Antioch, at

the end of three centuries and a half of its existence, became one of

the places in the world where race was most blended with race. The

degradation of the people was awful. The peculiarity of these centres

of moral putrefaction is to reduce all the race of mankind to the same

level. The depravity of certain Levantine cities, which are dominated

by the spirit of intrigue and delivered up entirely to low cunning, can

scarcely give us an idea of the degree of corruption reached by the

human race at Antioch. It was an inconceivable medley of mountebanks,

quacks, buffoons, magicians, miracle-mongers, sorcerers, false priests;

a city of races, games, dances, processions, fetes, revels, of

unbridled luxury, of all the follies of the East, of the most unhealthy

superstitions and of the fanaticism of the orgy. By turns servile and

ungrateful, cowardly and insolent, the people of Antioch were the

perfect model of peoples devoted to C�sarism, without fatherland,

without nationality, without family honour, without a name to guard.

The great Corso which traversed the city was like a theatre, where

rolled, day after day, the waves of a trifling, light-headed,

changeable, insurrection-loving populace--a populace sometimes witty,

occupied with songs, parodies, squibs, impertinence of all kinds. The

city was very literary, but literary only in the literature of

rhetoricians. The sights were strange; there were some games in which

bands of naked young girls took part, with nothing but a mere fillet

around them; at the celebrated festival of Maiouma, troops of

courtesans swam in public in basins filled with limpid water. It was

like an intoxication, like a dream of Sardanapalus, where all the

pleasures, all the debaucheries, not excluding, however, some of a most

delicate kind, were unrolled pell-mell. The river of filth, which,

making its exit by the mouth of the Orontes, was invading Rome, had

here its principal source. Two hundred decurions were employed in

regulating the religious ceremonies and celebrations. The municipality

possessed great public domains, the rents of which the decemvirs

divided amongst the poor citizens. Like all cities of pleasure, Antioch

had a lowest class living on the public or on sordid gains.

The beauty of works of art, and the infinite charm of nature, prevented

this moral degradation from sinking entirely into hideousness and

vulgarity. The site of Antioch is one of the most picturesque in the

world. The city occupied the space between the Orontes and the slopes

of Mount Silpius, one of the spurs of Mount Cassius. Nothing could

equal the abundance and limpidness of the waters. The fortified

portion, climbing up perpendicular rocks, by a master-piece of military

architecture, enclosed the summit of the mountains, and formed, with

the rocks at a tremendous height, an indented crown of marvellous

effect. This disposition of ramparts, uniting the advantages of the

ancient acropolis with those of the great walled cities, was in general

preferred by the generals of Alexander, as one sees in the Pierian

Seleucia, in Ephesus, in Smyrna, in Thessalonica. The result was

astonishing perspectives. Antioch had within its walls mountains seven

hundred feet in height, perpendicular rocks, torrents, precipices, deep

ravines, cascades, inaccessible caves; and, in the midst of all these,

delightful gardens. A thick wood of myrtles, of flowering box, of

laurels, of evergreen plants --and of the richest green--rocks carpeted

with pinks, with hyacinths, and cyclamens, gave to these wild heights

the aspect of gardens suspended in the air. The variety of the flowers,

the freshness of the turf, composed of an incredible number of delicate

grasses, the beauty of the plane trees which border the Orontes,

inspire the gaiety, the tinge of sweet odour, with which the fine

genius of Chrysostom, Libanius, and Julian was, as it were,

intoxicated. On the right bank of the river stretches a vast plain

bounded on one side by the Amanus, and the oddly-shaped mountains of

Pieria; on the other side by the plateaus of Cyrrhestica, behind which

is concealed the dangerous neighbourhood of the Arab and the desert.

The valley of the Orontes, which opens to the west, puts this interior

basin into communication with the sea, or rather with the vast world,

in the bosom of which the Mediterranean has constituted from all time a

sort neutral highway and federal bond.

Amongst the different colonies which the liberal ordinances of the

Seleucid� had attracted to the capital of Syria, that of the Jews was

one of the most numerous; it dated from the time of Seleucus Nicator,

and enjoyed the same rights as the Greeks. Although the Jews had an

ethnarch of their own, their relations with the Pagans were very

frequent. Here, as at Alexandria, these relations often degenerated

into quarrels and aggressions. On the other hand, they afforded a field

for an active religious propagandism. The official polytheism becoming

more and more insufficient to meet the wants of serious minds, the

Grecian philosophy and Judaism attracted all those whom the vain pomps

of Paganism could not satisfy. The number of proselytes was

considerable. From the first days of Christianity, Antioch had

furnished to the Church of Jerusalem one of its most influential

members, viz. Nicholas, one of the deacons. There existed there

promising germs, which only waited for a ray of grace to cause thorn to

burst forth into bloom and to bear the most excellent fruits which had

hitherto been produced.

The Church of Antioch owed its foundation to some believers originally

from Cyprus and Cyrene, who had already been much engaged in preaching.

Up to this time they had only addressed themselves to the Jews. But in

a city where pure Jews--Jews who were proselytes, "people fearing

God"--or half-Jewish Pagans and pure Pagans, lived together, exclusive

preaching restricted to a group of houses, became impossible. That

feeling of religious aristocracy on which the Jews of Jerusalem so much

prided themselves, did not exist in those large cities, where

civilization was altogether of the profane sort, where the scope was

greater, and where prejudices were less firmly rooted The Cypriot and

Cyrenian missionaries were then constrained to depart from their rule.

They preached to the Jews and to the Greeks indifferently.

The dispositions of the Jewish and of the Pagan population appeared at

this time to have been very unsatisfactory. But circumstances of

another kind probably subserved the new ideas. The earthquake, which

had done serious damage to the city on 23rd March, of the year 37,

still occupied their minds. The whole city was talking about an

impostor named Debborius, who pretended to be able to prevent the

recurrence of such accidents by silly talismans. This sufficed to

direct preoccupied minds towards supernatural matters. But, be this as

it may, the success of the Christian preaching was great. A young,

innovating, and ardent Church, full of the future, because it was

composed of the most diverse elements, was quickly founded. All the

gifts of the Holy Spirit were there poured out, and it was easy to

perceive that this new church, emancipated from the strict Mosaism

which erected an insuperable barrier around Jerusalem, would become the

second cradle of Christianity. Assuredly, Jerusalem must remain for

ever the capital of the Christian world; nevertheless, the point of

departure of the Church of the Gentiles, the primordial focus of

Christian missions, was, in truth, Antioch. It was there that for the

first time, a Christian Church was established, freed from the bonds of

Judaism; it was there that the great propaganda of the Apostolic age

was established; it was there that St. Paul assumed a definite

character. Antioch marks the second halting-place of the progress of

Christianity and in respect of Christian nobility, neither Rome, nor

Alexandria, nor Constantinople can be at all compared with it.

The topography of ancient Antioch is so effaced that we should search

in vain over its site, nearly destitute as it is of any vestiges of the

antique, for the spot to which to attach such grand recollections.

Here, as everywhere, Christianity was, doubtless, established in the

poor quarters of the city and among the petty tradespeople. The

basilica, which is called "the old" and "apostolic" in the fourth

century, was situated in the street called Singon, near the Pantheon.

But no one knows where this Pantheon was. Tradition and certain vague

analogies would induce us to search the primitive Christian quarter

near the gate, which even to-day is still called Paul's gate,

B�b-bolos, and at the foot of the mountain, named by Procopius Stavrin,

on which stands the south-east side of the ramparts of Antioch. It was

one of the quarters of the town which least abounded in Pagan

monuments. There, are still to be seen the remains of ancient

sanctuaries dedicated to St. Peter, St. Paul and St. John. These appear

to have been the quarter where Christianity was longest maintained

after the Mohammedan conquest. There, too, as it appeared, was the

quarter of "the saints," in opposition to the profane Antioch. The rock

is honey-combed, like a beehive, with grottoes which seem to have been

used by the Anchorites. When one walks on these sharp-cut declivities,

where, about the fourth century, the good Stylites, disciples at once

of India and of Galilee, of Jesus and of Cakya-Mouni, disdainfully

contemplated the voluptuous city from the summit of their pillar or

from their flower-adorned cavern, it is probable that one is not far

from the very spot where Peter and Paul dwelt. The Church of Antioch is

the one whose history is most authentic, and least encumbered with

fables. Christian tradition, in a city where Christianity was

perpetuated with so much vigour, must possess some value.

The prevailing language of the Church of Antioch was the Greek. It is,

however, very probable that the suburbs where Syriac was spoken,

furnished a great number of converts to the sect. Hence, Antioch

already contained the germ of two rival, and, at a later, period,

hostile Churches; the one speaking Greek, and now represented by the

Syrian Greeks, whether orthodox or Catholics; the other, whose actual

representatives are the Maronites, who previously spoke Syriac and

guard it still as if it were a sacred tongue. The Maronites, who under

their entirely modern Catholicism conceal a high antiquity, are

probably the last descendants of those Syrians anterior to Seleucus, of

those suburbans, pagani of Ghisra, Charandama, &c., who from the first

ages became a separate church, were persecuted by the orthodox emperors

as heretics, and escaped into the Libanus, where, from hatred of the

Grecian Church and in consequence of deeper sympathies, they allied

themselves with the Latins.

As for the converted Jews at Antioch, they too were very numerous. But

we are bound to believe that they accepted from the very first a

fraternal alliance with the Gentiles. It was then on the shores of the

Orontes that the religious fusion of races, dreamed of by Jesus, or to

speak more fully, by six centuries of prophets, became a reality.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE IDEA OF AN APOSTOLATE TO THE GENTILES.--SAINT BARNABAS.

Great was the excitement at Jerusalem when it was learned what had

taken place at Antioch. Notwithstanding the kindly wishes of some of

the principal members of the Church of Jerusalem, Peter in particular,

the Apostolic College continued to be influenced by the meanest ideas.

On every occasion when it was told that the glad tidings had been

announced to the heathen, some of the elders manifested signs of

disappointment. The man who at this time triumphed over this miserable

jealously, and who prevented the narrow exclusiveness of the "Hebrews"

from ruining the future of Christianity, was Barnabas. He was the most

enlightened member of the Church at Jerusalem. He was the chief of the

liberal party, which desired progress, and wished the Church to be open

to all. He had already powerfully contributed towards removing the

mistrust with which Paul was regarded; and he now, also, exercised a

marked influence. Sent as a delegate of the apostolical body to

Antioch, he inquired into and approved of all that had been done, and

declared that the new Church had only to continue in the course upon

which it had entered. Conversions were effected in great numbers. The

vital and creative force of Christianity appeared to be centred at

Antioch. Barnabas, whose zeal sought every occasion to display itself

with the utmost vigour, remained there. Antioch thenceforth was his

Church, and it was there that he exercised his most influential and

important ministry. Christianity has always done injustice to this

great man in not placing him in the first rank of her founders.

Barnabas was the patron of all good and liberal ideas. His

discriminating boldness often served to counterbalance the obstinacy of

the narrow-minded Jews who formed the conservative party of Jerusalem.

A magnificent idea sprung up in this noble heart at Antioch. Paul was

at Tarsus in forced repose, which, to an active man like him, must have

been perfect torture. His false position, his haughtiness, and his

exaggerated pretensions, were sapping many of his other and better

qualities. He was fretting himself, and remained almost useless.

Barnabas knew how to apply to its true work that force which was

wasting away in this unhealthy and dangerous solitude. For the second

time, Barnabas held out the hand of friendship to Paul, and led this

intractable character into the society of those brethren whom he wished

to avoid. He went himself to Tarsus, sought him out, and brought him to

Antioch. He did that which those obstinate old brethren of Jerusalem

would never have brought themselves to do. To win over this great

shrinking and susceptible soul; to accommodate oneself to the caprices

and whims of a man full of ardour, and at the same time most personal;

to take a secondary place to him, and forgetful of oneself, to prepare

the field of operations for the most favourable display of his

abilities--all this is certainly the very climax of virtue; and this is

what Barnabas did for Paul. Most of the glory, which has accrued to the

latter, is really due to the modest man, who excelled him in

everything, brought his merits to light, prevented more than once his

faults from resulting deplorably to himself and his cause, and the

illiberal views of others from exciting him to revolt; and also

prevented mean personalities from interfering with the work of God.

During an entire year Barnabas and Paul worked together. This was a

most brilliant, and, without doubt, the most happy year in the life of

Paul. The prolific originality of these two great men raised the Church

of Antioch to a degree of grandeur to which no Christian Church had

previously attained. Few places in the world had experienced more

intellectual activity than the capital of Syria. During the Roman

epoch, as in our time, social and religious questions were brought to

the surface principally at the centres of population. A sort of

reaction against the general immorality, which made Antioch later, the

special abode of Stylites and hermits, was already felt; and the true

doctrine thus found in this city, more favourable conditions for

success than it had yet met.

An important circumstance proves, besides, that it was at Antioch that

the sect for the first time felt the full consciousness of its

existence; for it was in this city that it received a distinct name.

Hitherto its adherents had called themselves "believers," "the

faithful," "saints," "brothers," "the disciples;" but the sect had no

public and official name. It was at Antioch that the title of

Christianus was devised. The termination of the work is Latin, not

Greek, which would indicate that it was selected by the Roman authority

as a police designation, like Herodiani, Pompeiana, C�sariani. In any

event it is certain that such a name was formed by the heathen

population. It included an error, for it implied that Christus, a

translation of the Hebrew Maschiah (the Messiah), was a proper name.

Not a few of those who were unfamiliar with Jewish or Christian ideas,

were by this name led to believe that Christus or Chrestus was a

sectarian leader yet living. The vulgar pronunciation of the name

indeed was Chrestiani.

The Jews did not adopt, in a regular manner, at least, the name given

by the Romans to their schismatic co-religionist. They continued to

call the new converts "Nazarenes" or "Nazorenes," because no doubt they

were accustomed to call Jesus Han-nasri or Han-nosri, "the Nazarene;"

and even unto the present day, this name is still applied to them

throughout the entire East.

This was a most important moment. Solemn indeed is the hour when the

new creation receives its name, for that name is the direct symbol of

its existence. It is by its name that a being, individual or

collective, really becomes itself, and is distinct from others. The

formation of the word "Christian" marks thus the precise date of the

separation from Judaism of the Church of Jesus. For a long time to come

the two religions were still confounded; but this confusion could only

take place in those countries where the spread of Christianity was slow

and backward. The sect quickly accepted the appelation which was

applied to it, and viewed it as a title of honour. It is really

astonishing to reflect that ten years after the death of Jesus, his

religion had already, in the capital of Syria, a name in the Greek and

Latin tongues. Christianity was now completely weaned from its mother;

the true sentiments of Jesus had triumphed over the indecision of his

first disciples; the Church of Jerusalem was left behind; the Aramaic

language, in which Jesus spoke, was unknown to a portion of his

followers; Christianity spoke Greek, and was finally launched into that

great vortex of the Greek and Roman world, whence it has never

departed.

The feverish activity of ideas manifested by this young Church must

have been truly extraordinary. Great spiritual manifestations were

frequent. All believed themselves to be inspired in various ways. Some

were "prophets," others "teachers." Barnabas, as his name indicates,

was no doubt among the prophets. Paul had no special title. Among the

leaders of the Church at Antioch are also mentioned Simeon, surnamed

Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Menahem, who had been the foster-brother

of Herod Antipas, and was consequently rather old. All these personages

were Jews. Among the converted heathen was, perhaps, already that

Evhode, who, at a certain period, seems to have occupied the first

place in the church of Antioch. Undoubtedly the heathen who heard the

first preaching were slightly inferior, and did not shine in the public

exercises of using unknown tongues, of preaching, and prophecy.

In the midst of the congenial society of Antioch, Paul quickly adapted

himself to the order of things. Later, he manifested opposition to the

use of tongues, and it is probable that he never practised it; but he

had many visions and immediate revelations. It was apparently at

Antioch where occurred that ecstatic trance which he describes in these

terms: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the

body I cannot tell; or whether out of the body I cannot tell--God

knoweth); such an one was caught up to the third heaven. And I knew

such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell--God

knoweth); how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard

unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Paul,

though in general, prudent and practical, shared the prevalent ideas of

the day in regard to the supernatural. Like so many others, he believed

that he was working miracles, like everybody; it was impossible that

the gifts of the Holy Sprit, which were acknowledged to be the common

right of the church, should be denied to him.

But men permeated with so lively a faith could not content themselves

with merely exuberant piety, so they panted soon for action. The idea

of great missions, destined to convert the heathen, beginning in Asia

Minor, seized hold of the public mind. Had such an idea been formed at

Jerusalem, it could not have been realized, because the church there

was without pecuniary resources. An extensive undertaking of

propagandism requires a certain capital to work on. Now, the common

treasury at Jerusalem was entirely devoted to the support of the poor,

and was frequently insufficient for that purpose; and to save these

noble mendicants from dying from hunger, it was necessary to obtain

help from all quarters. Communism had created at Jerusalem an

irremediable poverty and a total incapacity for great enterprises. The

church at Antioch was exempt from such a calamity. The Jews in these

profane cities had attained to affluence, and in some cases had

accumulated vast fortunes. The faithful were wealthy when they entered

the church. Antioch furnished the capital for the founding of

Christianity, and it is easy to imagine the total difference in manner

and spirit which this circumstance alone would create between the two

churches. Jerusalem remained the city of the poor of God, of the

ebionim, of those simple Galilean dreamers, intoxicated, as it were,

with the expectation of the kingdom of Heaven. Antioch, almost a

stranger to the words of Jesus, whom it had never heard, was the church

of action and of progress. Antioch was the city of Paul; Jerusalem was

the seat of the old apostolic college, wrapped up in its dreamy

fantasies, and unequal to the new problems which were opening, but

dazzled by its incomparable privileges, and rich in its unsurpassed

events.

A certain circumstance soon brought all these traits into bold relief.

So great was the lack of forethought in this half-starved Church of

Jerusalem, that the least accident threw the community into distress.

Now, in a country destitute of economic organization, where commerce

was but little developed, and where the sources of welfare were

limited, famines were inevitable. A terrible famine occurred in the

reign of Claudius, in the year 44. When its threatening symptoms became

apparent, the elders of Jerusalem decided to seek succour from the

members of the richer churches of Syria. An embassy of prophets was

sent from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agab, who was in

high repute for his prophetic powers, was suddenly inspired, and

announced that the famine was now at hand. The faithful were deeply

moved at the evils which menanced the mother Church, to which they

still deemed themselves tributary. A collection was made, at which

every one gave according to his means, and Barnabas was selected to

carry the funds thus obtained to the brethren in Judea. Jerusalem for a

long time remained the capital of Christianity. There were centred the

objects peculiar to the faith, and there only were the apostles. But a

great forward step had been taken. For several years there had been

only one completely organised Church, that of Jerusalem--the absolute

centre of the faith, the heart from which all life proceeded and to

which it flowed back again; such was no longer the case. The Church at

Antioch was now a perfect Church. It possessed all the hierarchy of the

gifts of the Holy Ghost. It was the starting-point of the missions, and

their head-quarters. It was a second capital, or rather a second heart,

which had its own proper action, exercising its force and influence in

every direction.

It was now easy to forsee that the second capital must soon eclipse the

first. The decay of the Church at Jerusalem was, indeed, rapid. It is

natural that institutions founded on communism should enjoy at the

beginning a period of brilliancy, for communism involves always high

mental exaltation; but it is equally natural that such institutions

should very quickly degenerate, because communism is contrary to the

instincts of human nature. In his virtuous fits, man readily believes

that he can entirely sacrifice his selfish instincts and his peculiar

interests; but egotism has its revenge, by proving that absolute

disinterestedness engenders evils more serious than those it is hoped

to avoid by the renunciation of personal rights to property.

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CHAPTER XIV.

PERSECUTION BY HEROD AGRIPPA THE FIRST.

Barnabas found the church of Jerusalem in great trouble. The year 44

was perilous to it. Besides the famine, the fires of persecution, which

had been smothered since the death of Stephen, were rekindled.

Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, had succeeded, since the

year 41, in reconstructing the kingdom of his grandfather. Thanks to

the favour of Caligula, he had reunited under his sway Batanea,

Trachonitis a part of the Hauran, Abilene, Galilee, and the Perea. The

ignoble part he played in the tragi-comedy which raised Claudius to the

empire, completed his fortune. This vile Oriental, in return for the

lessons of baseness and perfidy he had given at Rome, obtained for

himself Samaria and Judea, and for his brother Herod, the kingdom of

Chalcis. He had left at Rome the worst memories, and the cruelties of

Caligula were in part attributed to his counsels. His army, and the

Pagan cities of Sebaste and Cesarea, which he sacrificed to Jerusalem,

were averse to him. But the Jews found him generous, munificient, and

sympathetic. He sought to make himself popular with them, and pursued a

policy quite different from that of Herod the Great. The latter was

much more mindful of the Greek and Roman world than of the Jewish.

Herod Agrippa, on the contrary, loved Jerusalem, rigorously observed

the Jewish religion, affected scrupulousness, and never let a day pass

without attending to his devotions. He went so far as to receive good

naturedly the advice of the rigorists, and was at the pains to justify

himself against their reproaches. He returned to the inhabitants of

Jerusalem the tribute which each family owed him. The orthodox, in a

word had in him a king after their own heart.

It was inevitable that a prince of this character should persecute the

Christians. Sincere or not, Herod Agrippa was, in the strictest sense

of the word, a Jewish Sovereign. The house of Herod, as it became

weaker, took to devotion. It held no longer to that broad profane idea

of the founder of the dynasty, which sought to make the most diverse

religions live together under the common empire of civilization. When

Herod Agrippa, for the first time after he had become king, set foot in

Alexandria, it was as a King of the Jews that he was received: it was

this title which irritated the population and gave rise to endless

buffooneries. Now what was a King of the Jews, if he did not become the

guardians of the laws and the traditions, a sovereign theocrat and

persecutor? From the time of Herod the Great, under whom fanaticism was

entirely suppressed, until the breaking out of the war which led to the

destruction of Jerusalem, there was thus a constantly increasing

process of religious ardour. The death of Caligula (24th Jan., 41) had

produced a reaction favourable to the Jews. Claudius was generally

benevolent towards them, as a result of the favourable ear he lent to

Herod Agrippa and Herod King of Chalcis. Not only did he decide in

favour of the Jews of Alexandria in their quarrels with the inhabitants

and allow them the right of choosing an ethnarch, but he published, it

is said, an edict by which he granted to the Jews, throughout the whole

empire, that which he had granted to those of Alexandria; that is to

say, the freedom of living according to their own laws, on the sole

condition of not abusing other worships. Some attempts at vexations,

analagous to those which were inflicted under Caligula, were repressed.

Jerusalem was greatly enlarged: the suburb of Bezetha was added to the

city. The Roman authority scarcely made itself felt, although Vibius

Marsus, a prudent man, of wide public experience, and of a very

cultivated mind, who had succeeded Publius Petronius in the function of

imperial legate of Syria, drew the attention of the authorities at Rome

from time to time to the danger of these semi-independent Eastern

Kingdoms.

The species of feudality which, since the death of Tiberius, tended to

establish itself in Syria and the neighbouring countries, was in fact

an interruption in the imperial policy and had almost uniformly

injurious results. The "Kings" coming to Rome were great personages,

and exercised there a detestable influence. The corruption and

abasement of the people, especially under Caligula, proceeded in great

part from the spectacle furnished by these wretches, who were seen

successively dragging their purple at the theatre, at the palace of the

C�sar, and in the prisons. So far as concerns the Jews, we have seen

that autonomy meant intolerance. The Sovereign Pontificate quitted for

a moment the family of Hanan, only to enter that of Bo�thus, a family

no less haughty and cruel. A sovereign anxious to please the Jews could

not fail, but to grant them what they most desired; that is to say,

severities against everything which diverged from rigorous orthodoxy.

Herod Agrippa, in fact, became towards the end of his reign a violent

persecutor. Some time before the Passover of the year 44, he cut off

the head of one of the principal members of the apostolical college,

James, son of Zebedee, brother of John. The offence was not

re-presented as a religious one; there was no inquisitorial trial

before the Sanhedrim: the sentence, as in the case of John the Baptist,

was pronounced by virtue of the arbitrary power of the sovereign.

Encouraged by the good effect which this execution produced upon the

Jews, Herod Agrippa was unwilling to stop upon so easy a road to

popularity. It was the first days of the Feast of the Passover, which

were ordinarily marked by redoubled fanaticism. Agrippa ordered the

imprisonment of Peter in the Tower of Antonia, and sought to have him

judged and put to death in the most ostentations manner before the

multitude of people then assembled.

A circumstance with which we are unacquainted, and which was regarded

as miraculous, opened Peter's prison. One evening, as many of the

disciples were assembled in the house of Mary, mother of John-Mark,

where Peter constantly resided, there was suddenly a knock heard at the

door. The servant, named Rhoda, went to listen. She recognised Peter's

voice. Transported with delight, instead of opening the door she ran

back to announce that Peter was there. They regarded her as mad. She

avowed she spoke the truth. "It is his angel," said some of them. The

knocking was continued; it was indeed he. Their delight was infinite.

Peter immediately announced his deliverance to James, brother of the

Lord, and to the other disciples. It was believed that the angel of God

had entered into the prison of the apostle and made the chains drop

from his hands, and the bolts of the doors fall. Peter related, in

fact, all that had passed while he was in a sort of ecstasy; that after

he had passed the first and second guard, and gone through the iron

gate which led into the city, the angel accompanied him the distance of

a street, then quitted him; that then he came to himself and recognized

the hand of God, who had sent a celestial messenger to deliver him.

Agrippa survived these violences but a short time. In the course of the

year 44, he went to Cesarea to celebrate games in honour of Claudius.

The concourse of people was very great; and many from Tyre and Sidon,

who had difficulties with him, came thither to sue for pardon. These

festivals were very displeasing to the Jews, both because they took

place in the city of C�sarea, and because they were held in the

theatre. Previously, on one occasion, the king having quitted Jerusalem

under similar circumstances, a certain rabbi Simeon had proposed to

declare him an alien to Judaism, and to exclude him from the temple.

Herod Agrippa had carried his condescension so far as to place the

rabbi beside him in the theatre in order to prove to him that nothing

passed there contrary to the law, and thinking he had thus satisfied

the most austere, he allowed himself to indulge his taste for profane

pomps. The second day of the festival he entered the theatre very early

in the morning, clothed in a tunic of silver fabric, of marvellous

brilliancy. The effect of this tunic, glittering in the rays of the

rising sun, was extraordinary. The Phoenicians who surrounded the king

lavished upon him adulations borrowed from Paganism. "It is a god,"

they cried, "and not a man." The king did not testify his indignation,

and did not blame this expression. He died five days afterwards; and

Jews and Christians believed that he was struck dead for not having

repelled with horror a blasphemous flattery. Christian tradition

represents that he died of a vermicular malady, the punishment reserved

for the enemies of God. The symptoms related by Josephus would lead

rather to the belief that he was poisoned; and what is said in the Acts

of the equivocal conduct of the Phoenicians, and of the care they took

to gain over Blastus, valet of the king, would strengthen this

hypothesis.

The death of Herod Agrippa I. led to the end of all independence for

Jerusalem. The administration by procurators was resumed, and this

r�gime lasted until the great revolt. This was fortunate for

Christianity; for it is very remarkable that this religion, which was

des-tined to sustain subsequently so terrible a struggle against the

Roman empire, grew up in the shadow of the Roman rule, under its

protection. It was Rome, as we have already several times remarked,

which hindered Judaism from giving itself up fully to its intolerant

instincts, and stifling the free instincts which were stirred within

its bosom. Every diminution of Jewish authority was a benefit to the

nascent sect. Cuspius Fadus, the first of this new series of

procurators, was another Pilate, full of firmness, or at least of

good-will. But Claudius continued to show himself favourable to Jewish

pretensions, chiefly at the instigation of the young Herod Agrippa, son

of Herod Agrippa I., whom he kept near to his person, and whom he

greatly loved. After the short administration of Cuspius Fadus, we find

the functions of procurator confided to a Jew, to that Tiberius

Alexander, nephew of Philo, and son of the alabarque of the Alexandrian

Jews who attained to high position, and played a great part in the

political affairs of that century. It is true that the Jews did not

like him; and regarded him, not without reason, as an apostate.

To put an end to these incessantly renewed disputes, recourse was had

to an expedient based on sound principles. A sort of separation was

made between the spiritual and temporal. The political power remained

with the procurators; but Herod, king of Chalcis, brother of Agrippa

I., was named prefect of the temple, guardian of the pontifical habits,

treasurer of the sacred fund, and invested with the right of nominating

the high-priests. At his death, in 48, Herod Agrippa II., son of Herod

Agrippa I., succeeded his uncle in his offices, which he retained until

the great war. Claudius, in all this, manifested the greatest kindness.

The high Roman functionaries in Syria, although not so strongly

disposed as the emperor to concessions, acted also with great

moderation. The procurator, Ventidius Cumanus, carried condescension so

far as to have a soldier beheaded in the midst of the Jews, drawn up in

line, for having torn a copy of the Pentateuch. But all was in vain;

Josephus, with good reason, dates from the administration of Cumanus

the disorders which ended only with the destruction of Jerusalem.

Christianity took no part in these troubles. But these troubles, like

Christianity itself, were one of the symptoms of the extraordinary

fever which devoured the Jewish people, and the Divine work which was

being accomplished in its midst. Never had the Jewish faith made such

progress. The temple of Jerusalem was one of the sanctuaries of the

world, the reputation of which was most widely extended, and in which

the offerings were the most liberal. Judaism had become the dominant

religion of several portions of Syria. The Asmonean princes had

forcibly converted entire populations to it (Idumeans, Itureans, &c.).

There were many instances of circumcision having been imposed by force;

the ardour for making proselytes was very great. Even the house of

Herod aided powerfully the Jewish propaganda. In order to marry

princesses of this family, whose wealth was immense, the princes of the

little dynasties of Emese, of Pontus, and of Cilicia, vassals of the

Romans, became Jews. Arabia and Ethiopia contained also a great number

of converts. The royal families of Mesene and of Adiabene, tributaries

of the Parthians, were gained over, especially by their women. It was

generally admitted that happiness was found in the knowledge and

practice of the Law. Even when circumcision was not practised, religion

was more or less modified in the direction of Judaism; a sort of

monotheism was becoming the general spirit of religion in Syria. At

Damascus, a city which was in nowise of Israelitish origin, nearly all

the women had adopted the Jewish religion. Behind the Pharisaical

Judaism there was thus formed a sort of liberal Judaism containing some

alloy, which did not know all the secrets of the sect, brought only its

goodwill and kind heart, but which had a much greater future. The

situation was, in some respects similar to that of Catholicism of

to-day, where we see, on the one hand, narrow and haughty theologians,

who, of themselves, would gain no more souls for Catholicism than the

Pharisees gained for Judaism; on the other, pious laymen, in many

instances heretics, without knowing it, but full of a touching zeal,

rich in good works and in poetic sentiments, wholly occupied in

dissimulating or in repairing by complaisant excuses the faults of

their doctors.

One of the most extraordinary examples of this pen-chant of religious

souls towards Judaism was that given by the royal family of Adiabene,

upon the Tiger. This house, Persian by origin and in manners, and in a

measure acquainted with Greek culture, became wholly Jewish, and

affected extreme devotion; for, as we have said, those proselytes were

often more pious than Jews by birth. Izate, the head of the family,

embraced Judaism through the preaching of a Jewish merchant named

Ananias, who, having occasion to enter the seraglio of Abennerig, King

of Mesene, to prosecute his pedlar business, had succeeded in

converting all the women, and constituted himself their spiritual

preceptor. The women put Izate into communication with him. Helen, his

mother, had herself instructed in the true religion by another Jew.

Izate, with the zeal of a new convert, desired forthwith to be

circumcised. But his mother and Ananias earnestly dissuaded him against

it. Ananias proved to him that the keeping of the commandments of God

was more important than circumcision, and that one could be a good Jew

without submitting to that ceremony. Tolerance such as this existed

only in the case of a few of the more enlightened minds. Some time

after, a Galilean Jew, named Eleazar, finding the King one day engaged

in reading the Pentateuch, proved to him from texts that he could not

observe the law without being circumcised. Izate was persuaded by him,

and underwent the operation immediately.

The conversion of Izate was followed by that of his brother Monobaze

and almost the whole of his family. About the year 44, Helen

established herself at Jerusalem, where she had erected for the royal

house of Adiabene a palace and a family mausoleum, which still exists.

She made herself to be beloved of the Jews by her affability and her

alms. It was a source of great edification to see her, like a devout

Jewess, frequenting the Temple, consulting the doctors, reading the

Law, and instructing her sons in it. In the plague of the year 44, this

holy woman was a god-send to the city. She bought a large quantity of

wheat in Egypt, and dried figs in Cyprus. Izate, on his part, sent

considerable sums to be distributed amongst the poor. The wealth of

Adiabene was expended in part at Jerusalem. The son of Izate came there

to learn the usages and the language of the Jews. The whole of this

family was thus the resource of the city of mendicants. It acquired

there a sort of citizenship; several of its members were found there at

the time of the siege of Titus; others figure in the Talmudic writings,

and are represented as models of piety and disinterestedness.

It is in this way that the royal family of Adiabene belongs to the

history of Christianity. Without in fact being Christian, as certain

traditions would have it, this family represented, under various

aspects, the promises of the Gentiles. In embracing Judaism, it obeyed

a sentiment which was to eventuate in Christianizing the entire Pagan

world. The true Israelites, according to God, were rather those

foreigners animated by so profoundly sincere a religious sentiment than

the malevolent and roguish Pharisee, to whom religion was but a pretext

for hatred and disdain. These good proselytes, although they were truly

saints, were by no means fanatics. They admitted that true religion

could be practised under the empire of a code of civil laws the most

unduly adverse. They separated completely religion from politics. The

distinction between the seditious sectaries, who were savagely to

defend Jerusalem, and the pacific devotees who on the first rumour of

war were going to flee to the mountains, became more and more manifest.

We see at least that the question of proselytes was put forward in a

similar manner, both in Judaism and in Christianity. On both hands the

necessity for enlarging the door of entrance was felt. For those who

were thus situated, circumcision was a useless or noxious practice; the

Mosaic rite was simply a sign of race, of no value except for the

children of Abraham. Before becoming the universal religion, Judaism

was compelled to reduce itself to a sort of deism, imposing only the

duties of natural religion. There was thus a sublime mission to fulfil,

and a part of Judaism in the first half of the first century lent

itself to it in a very intelligent manner. On one side, Judaism was one

of the innumerable forms of natural worship which filled the world, and

the sanctity of which came only from what its ancestors had worshipped;

on the other, Judaism was the absolute religion made for all and

destined to be adopted by all. The frightful outbreak of fanaticism

which gained the upper hand in Judea, and which brought about the war

of extermination, cut short that future. It was Christianity which

undertook the work which the Synagogue had not known how to accomplish.

Leaving on one side all questions of ritual, Christianity continued the

monotheistic propaganda of Judaism. That which made up the strength of

Judaism amongst the women of Damascus; in the harem of Abennerig, with

Helen, with so many pious proselytes, composed the force of

Christianity in the entire world. In this sense the glory of

Christianity is really confounded with that of Judaism. A generation of

fanatics deprived this last of its reward and prevented it from

gathering the harvest which it had sown.

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CHAPTER XV.

MOVEMENTS PARALLEL TO CHRISTIANITY OR IMITATED FROM IT--SIMON OF GITTON.

Christianity was now really established. In the history of religions it

is always the first years which are most difficult to traverse. When

once a faith has borne up against the hard trials, which every new

institution has to endure, its future is assured. More clever than the

other sectaries of the same date, Epenians, Baptists, partizans of John

the Gaulonite, which simply came out of the Jewish world, and perished

with it, the founders of Christianity, with a singular clearness of

sight, cast themselves very early into the great world, and took their

place in it. The scantiness of the references to the Christians, which

are to be found in Josephus, in the Talmud, and in the Greek and Latin

writers, ought not to be surprising. Josephus has reached us through

Christian copyists, who have suppressed all that was disagreeable to

their faith. It is easy to believe that he spoke at greater length of

Jesus and of the Christians than he does in the version which has come

down to us. The Talmud has in the same way undergone in the Middle Ages

many retrenchments and alterations since its first publication. The

Christian censure was exercised with severity upon its text, and a host

of unhappy Jews were burned for having been found in possession of a

book containing passages which were considered blasphemous. It is not

astonishing that the Greek and Latin writers occupied themselves but

little with a movement which they could not understand, and which took

place in a world which was closed to them, Christianity in their eyes

lost itself in the depths of Judaism; it was a family quarrel in the

bosom of an abject race; what was the use of troubling about it? The

two or three passages in which Tacitus or Suetonius speaks of the

Christians prove that, in spite of being outside the circle of everyday

affairs, the new sect was already a very considerable fact, since, from

one or two glimpses, we see it across the cloud of general inattention,

picture itself with sufficient clearness.

The circumstance that Christianity was not an isolated movement has

contributed not a little towards the effacement of its outlines in the

history of the Jewish world in the first century of our era. Philo, at

the moment at which we have arrived, has finished his career--a career

consecrated to the love of the good. The sect of Judas, the Gaulonite,

still existed. The agitator had for continuers of his idea, his sons

James, Simon, and Menahem, Simon and James were crucified by order of

the renegade procurator, Tiberius Alexander. Menahem will play an

important part in the final catastrophe of the nation. In the year 44

an enthusiast, named Theudas, arose announcing the approaching

deliverance, and invited the mob to follow him into the desert,

promising, like another Joshua, to make them pass dryshod over Jordan,

this passage being, according to his explanation, the true baptism to

initiate his believers into the Kingdom of God. More than four hundred

souls followed him. (Acts v., 36.) The procurator Cuspius Fadius, sent

cavalry against him, dispersed his force, and killed him. Some years

earlier all Samaria had been moved by the voice of a fanatic, who

pretended to have had a revelation of the site of Garizim, where Moses

had hidden the holy instruments of worship. Pilate had repressed this

movement with great vigour. Peace was at an end in Jerusalem. After the

arrival of the procurator Vontidius Cumanus (48), disturbances were

incessant. Excitement was pushed to such a point that life there became

impossible; the most insignificant circumstances brought about an

explosion. Everywhere was felt a strange fermentation, a sort of

mysterious trouble. Imposters multiplied everywhere. The frightful

scourge of the zealots (Kenaim), or assassins, began to appear.

Scoundrels, armed with daggers, glided into the crowds, struck their

victims, and were the first to shriek "Murder." Hardly a day passed

without the report of an assassination of this kind. An extraordinary

terror prevailed. Josephus represents the crimes of the zealots as

sheer wickedness, but it is indubitable that fanaticism mixed itself

with them. It was in defence of the Law that these wretches took up the

dagger. Whoever neglected to fulfil one of its ordinances, found his

sentence pronounced, and immediately executed. They thought in this way

to accomplish a work, the most meritorious and agreeable to God.

Dreams like that of Theudas were everywhere renewed. Persons,

pretending to be inspired, stirred up the people, and led them out into

the desert, under pretence of showing to them, by manifest signs that

God was about to deliver them. The Roman authorities exterminated these

agitators and their dupes by thousands. A Jew of Egypt, who came to

Jerusalem about the year 56, was skilful enough to draw after him

30,000 persons, amongst whom wore 4,000 zealots. From the desert he

wished to take them to Mount Olivet, whence, he said, they might see

the walls of Jerusalem fall at the sound of his voice alone. Felix, who

was then procurator, marched against him, and dispersed his band. The

Egyptian escaped, and was seen no more. But as in an unhealthy body one

malady follows another, we very soon afterwards come upon mixed bodies

of robbers and magicians, who openly urged the people to rebel against

the Romans, threatening those who continued to obey them with death.

Under this pretext they killed the rich, pillaged their goods, burned

the villages, and filled all Jewry with marks of their fury. A

frightful war announced itself. A general spirit of confusion

prevailed, and men's minds were in a state not far removed from

madness.

It is not impossible that Theudas had a certain after-thought of

imitation, as regards Jesus and John the. Baptist. This imitation, at

least, is evidently betrayed in Simon of Gitton, if the Christian

traditions as to this personage are in any way worthy of credence. We

have already met him in connexion with the Apostles apropos of the

first mission of Philip to Samaria. It was under the reign of Claudius

that he arrived at celebrity. His miracles passed as constant, and

everybody in Samaria looked upon him as a supernatural personage.

His miracles, however, were not the only foundation of his reputation.

He added to them a doctrine which we can hardly judge of, since the

work attributed to him, and entitled the Great Exposition, has reached

us only by extracts, and is probably only a very modified expression of

his ideas. Simon, during his stay in Alexandria, appears to have drawn

from his studies of Greek philosophy, a system of syncretic philosophy,

and of allegorical exegesis, resembling that of Philo. The system had

its greatness. Sometimes it recalls the Jewish Cabala, sometimes the

Pantheistic theories of Indian philosophy; looked at from a certain

standpoint it appears to bear the impress of Buddhism and Parseeism. At

the head of all things is "He who is, who has been, and who will be";

that is to say, the Samaritan Jahveh, understood, according to the

etymological value of his name. The Eternal Being, alone,

self-engendered, increasing himself; magnifying himself, finding in

himself father, mother, sister, wife, and son. In the breast of that

infinite being, every power exists from and to eternity; all things

pass into action and reality by the conscience of man, by reason,

language, and science. The world explains itself, it may be by a

hierarchy of abstract principles, analogous to the �ons of gnosticism

and the sephirotic tree of the Cabala, or by an angelic system, which

appears to have been borrowed from the beliefs of Persia Sometimes

these abstractions are presented as translations of physical and

physiological facts. At other times the "Divine powers," considered as

separate substances, are realized as successive incarnations, sometimes

feminine, sometimes masculine, whose end is the deliverance of the

persons concerned from the bondage of matter. The first of these powers

is that which is called, by way of especial distinction, "the Great,"

and which is the intelligence of this world, the universal Providence.

It is masculine, and Simon passed as being its incarnation. By its side

is the feminine Syzygy, "the Great Thought." Accustomed to clothe its

theories with a strange symbolism, and to imagine allegorical

interpretations for the ancient, sacred, and profane texts, Simon, or

the author of the Great Exposition, gave to that Divine virtue the name

of "Helen," signifying thereby that it was the object of universal

pursuit, the eternal cause of dispute amongst men, she who avenges

herself on her enemies by blinding them, just at the moment when they

consent to sing the Palinode; a grotesque theme which, ill-understood

or distorted by design, gave rise amongst the Fathers of the Church to

the most puerile legends. The knowledge of Greek literature which the

author of the Great Exposition possessed, is in any case very

remarkable. He maintained that, when properly understood, the Pagan

writings sufficed for the knowledge of all things. His large

eclecticism embraced all the revelations, and sought to establish all

truth in a single order.

At the basis of his system there is much analogy with that of Valentin,

and with the doctrines as to the Divine persons which are found in the

fourth Gospel, in Philo and on the Targums. The "Metatr�ne," which the

Jews placed by the side of the Divinity, and almost in its breast, has

a strong resemblance to the "Great Power." In the theology of the

Samaritans may be found a "Great Angel," chief of the others, and of

the class of manifestations or "divine virtues," like those which the

Jewish Cabala figures on its side. It appears certain then that Simon,

of Gitton, was a kind of theosophist of the race of Philo and the

Cabalists. It is possible that he approached Christianity for the

moment, but he certainly did not definitely embrace it.

Whether he really borrowed something from the disciples of Jesus is

very difficult to decide. If the Great Exposition is his in any degree,

it must be admitted that in many points he went beyond Christian ideas,

and that upon others he adopted them very freely. It would seem that he

attempted eclecticism like that which Mahomet practised later on, and

that he endeavoured to found his religious character upon the

preliminary acceptance of the divine mission of John and of Jesus. He

wanted to be in a mystical communion with them. He maintained, it is

said, that it was he, Simon, who appeared to the Samaritans as Father,

to the Jews the visible crucifixion of the Son, to the Gentiles, by the

infusion of the Holy Ghost. He thus prepared the way, it would seem,

for the doctrines of the docetes. He said that it was he who had

suffered in Judea in the person of Jesus, but that that suffering had

only been apparent. His pretension to be the Divinity itself, and to

cause himself to be adored as such had probably been exaggerated by the

Christians who sought only to render him hateful.

It will be seen besides that the doctrine of the Great Exposition is

that of almost all the Gnostic writers; if Simon really professed the

doctrines, it was with good reason that the fathers of the Church made

him the founder of Gnosticism. We believe that the Great Exposition has

only a relative authenticity, and that it really is to the doctrine of

Simon--to compare small things with great--what the Fourth Gospel is to

the mind of Jesus; that it goes back to the first years of the second

century, that is to say, to the period when the theosophic ideas of the

Logos definitely gained the ascendency. These ideas, the germ of which

we shall find in the Christian Church about the year 60, might however

have been known to Simon, whose career we may reason-ably extend to the

end of the century.

The idea which we form to ourselves of this enigmatical personage is

then that of a kind of plagiarist of Christianity. Counterfeiting

appears to have been a constant habit amongst the Samaritans. Just as

they had always imitated the Judaism of Jerusalem, their sectaries had

also copied Christianity in their ways, their gnoxis, their theosophic

speculations, their Cabala. But was Simon a respectable imitator, who

only failed of success, or an immoral and profligate conjuror using for

his own advantage a doctrine of shreds and patches picked up here and

there? This is a question which will probably never be answered. Simon

thus maintains in history an utterly false position; he walks upon a

light rope where hesitation is impossible; in this order, there is no

middle path between a ridiculous fall and the most miraculous success.

We shall again have to occupy ourselves with Simon, and to enquire if

the legends as to his stay in Rome are in any way founded on truth. It

is certain that the Samarian sect lasted until the third century; that

it had churches at Antioch, perhaps even at Rome, that Menanda, and

Capharatea, and Cleobius, continued the doctrine of Simon, or rather

imitated his part of theurgist with a more or less present remembrance

of Jesus and of his apostles. Simon and his disciples were greatly

esteemed amongst their co-religionists. Sects of the same time,

parallel to Christianity and more or less borrowed from Gnosticism, did

not cease to spring up amongst the Samaritans until their quasi

destruction by Justinian. The fate of that sort of little religion was

to receive the rebound of everything that went on around it, without

producing anything at all original.

Amongst the Christians, the memory of Simon of Gitton was an

abomination. These illusions, which were so much like their own,

irritated them. To have successfully rivalled the apostles was

unpardonable. It was asserted that the miracles of Simon and of his

disciples were the work of the devil, and they applied to the Samaritan

theosophist the title of the "Magician," which the faithful took in

very bad part. All the Christian legends of Simon bear the marks of a

concentrated wrath. He was credited with the maxims of quietisms, and

with the excess which are usually supposed to be its consequence. He

was considered to be the father of every error, the first heresiarch.

Christians amused themselves by telling laughable stories of him and of

his defeats by the apostle Peter. They attributed his approach towards

Christianity to the vilest of motives. They were so preoccupied with

his name that they fancied they read It in inscriptions which he had

not written. The symbolism in which he had enveloped his ideas was

interpreted in the most grotesque fashion. The "Helen," whom he

identified with the "Highest Intelligence," became a prostitute whom he

had bought in the market at Tyre. His very name was hated almost as

much as that of Judas, and, taken as synonym of "anti-apostle," became

the last insult and as it were a proverbial word to describe a

professional impostor, an adversary of the the truth whom it was

desirable to indicate with mystery. He was the first enemy of

Christianity, or rather the first personage whom Christianity treated

as such. It is enough to say that neither pious frauds nor calumnies

were spared to defame it. Criticism in such a case will hardly attempt

a rehabilitation, the contradictory documents are wanting. All that can

be done is to point out the similarity of the traditions, and the

determined disparagement which is to be remarked in them.

But criticism, at least, should not forget to mention in connexion with

the Samaritan theurgist a coincidence which is perhaps not altogether

fortuitous. In a story of the historian Josephus, a Jewish magician

named Simon, born in Cyprus, plays the part of pander to Felix. The

circumstances of this tale do not fit in with those of Simon of Gitton

well enough for him to be made responsible for the acts of a person who

could have nothing in common with him, but a name then borne by

thousands of men, and a pretension to supernatural powers, which he

unhappily shared with a host of his contemporaries.

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CHAPTER XVI.

GENERAL PROGRESS OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS.

We have seen Barnabas depart from Antioch to carry to the faithful of

Jerusalem the alms of their brethren in Syria. We have seen him share

in some of the emotions which the persecutions of Herod Agrippa I.

caused the Church at Jerusalem. Let us return with him to Antioch where

all the creative activity of the sect appears at that moment to have

been concentrated.

Barnabas brought with him a zealous collaborator, his cousin John-Mark,

the favourite disciple of Peter, and the son of that Mary with whom the

first of the apostles loved to dwell. Without doubt in taking with him

this new co-operator, he was already thinking of the new enterprise

with which he intended to associate him. Perhaps he even foresaw the

divisions which that new enterprise would raise up, and was by no means

unwilling to mix up with them a man whom he knew to be Peters right

hand, that is to say, the right hand of that one of the apostles who

had the greatest authority in general matters.

This enterprise was nothing less than a series of great missions,

starting from Antioch and having for programme the conversion of the

whole world. Like all resolutions taken by the Church, this was

attributed to the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost. A special

vocation, a supernatural choice, was believed to have been communicated

to the Church of Antioch whilst she was fasting and praying. Perhaps

one of the prophets of the Church, Menaham or Lucius, in one of his

fits of speaking with tongues, uttered words from which it was

concluded that Paul and Barnabas had been selected for this mission.

Paul himself was convinced that God had chosen him from his mother's

womb for the work to which he was henceforward wholly to devote

himself.

The two apostles took as coadjutor, under the name of subordinate, to

attend to the material cares of their enterprise, this John-Mark, whom

Barnabas had brought with him from Jerusalem. When the preparations

were finished there were fastings and prayer; it is said that hands

were laid upon the apostles, in sign of a mission conferred by the

Church herself; they were commended to the grace of God and they

departed. Whither would they go? What world would they evangelize? That

is what we have now to inquire.

All the great primitive Christian missions turned towards the West, or

in other words, took the Roman Empire for their stage and framework. If

we except some small portions of territory tributary to the Arsacides,

comprehended between the Tigris and the Euphrates, the Empire of the

Parthians received no Christian missions in the first century. The

Tigris was on the Eastern side, a boundary which Christianity did not

overpass until under the Sapanides. Two great causes, the Mediterranean

and the Roman Empire, decided this cardinal fact.

The Mediterranean had been for a thousand years the great route where

all civilization and all ideas intermingled. The Romans, having

delivered it from piracy, had made it an unequalled means of

communication. A numerous fleet of coasters made travelling on the

shores of this great lake very easy. The relative security which the

routes of the Empire afforded, the guarantees which were found in the

public powers, the diffusions of the Jews on all the coasts of the

Mediterranean, the use of the Greek language in the Eastern part of

that sea, the unity of civilization which the Greeks first, and then

the Romans had created there, made the map of the Empire the very map

of the countries reserved for Christian missions, and destined to

become Christian. The Roman orbis became the Christian orbis, and in

this sense it may be said that the founders of the Empire were the

founders of the Christian monarchy, or at least, that they sketched its

outlines. Every province conquered by the Roman Empire has been a

province conquered by Christianity. If we figure to ourselves the

apostles in the presence of an Asia Minor, of a Greece, of an Italy

divided into a hundred petty republics, of a Spain, an Africa, an Egypt

in possession of ancient national institutions, we cannot imagine them

as successful, or rather we cannot imagine how the project of them

could ever have been conceived. The unity of the Empire was the

preliminary condition of every great scheme of religious proselytism

setting itself above nationalities. The Empire felt it strongly in the

fourth century. It became Christian; it saw that Christianity was the

religion which it had made without knowing it, the religion bounded by

its frontiers, identified with it, and capable of securing for it a

second term of life. The Church on her side made herself altogether

Roman, and has remained to our days as a relic of the Empire. Paul

might have been told that Claudius was his first coadjutor; Claudius

might have been told that this Jew, who set out from Antioch, was about

to found the most solid part of the Imperial edifice. Both would no

doubt have been infinitely astonished, but the saying would have been

true all the same.

Of all the countries outside Judea, the first in which Christianity

established itself was naturally Syria. The neighbourhood of Palestine

and the great number of Jews established in that country rendered such

a thing inevitable. Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, and Italy,

were visited by the apostolic messengers after some years. The south of

Gaul, Spain, the coast of Africa, though they may have been evangelized

sufficiently early, may be considered as forming a more recent course

in the substructure of Christianity.

It was the same in Egypt. Egypt plays scarcely any part in apostolic

history. Christian missionaries appear to have systematically turned

their backs upon it. This country, which from the beginning of the

third century became the scene of such important events in the history

of religion, was at first greatly behind hand in its Christianity.

Apollos is the only Christian doctor produced by the school of

Alexandria, and even he learned Christianity in his travels. The cause

of this remarkable phenomenon must be sought in the little

communication which then existed between the Jews of Egypt and those of

Palestine, and above all, in the fact that Jewish Egypt had in some

sort its separate religious development. Egypt had Philo and the

Therapeutics; that was its Christianity which deterred it from lending

an attentive ear to the other. Pagan Egypt possessed religious

institutions much more definite than those of Gr�co-Roman Paganism the

Egyptian religion was still in all its strength; it was almost at this

very time that the great temples of Enoch and of Ombos were built, and

that the hope of having in the little C�sarion a last king Ptolemy, a

national Messiah, raised from the earth those sanctuaries of Dendereh,

of Hermonthis, comparable to the finest Pharaohnic work. Christianity

seated itself everywhere on the ruins of national sentiment and local

religions. The spiritual degradation of Egypt besides caused there a

variety of aspirations which elsewhere opened an easy way to

Christianity.

A rapid flash, coming out of Syria, illuminating almost simultaneously

the three great peninsulas of Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, and soon

followed by a second reflection which embraced almost all the coasts of

the Mediterranean, such was the first apparition of Christianity. The

journey of the apostolic ship is almost always the same. Christian

preaching appears to follow almost invariably in the wake of the Jewish

emigration. As an infection which, taking its point of departure from

the bottom of the Mediterranean, appears at the same moment at a

certain number of points on the littoral by a secret correspondence, so

Christianity had its ports of arrival as it were settled beforehand.

These ports were almost all marked by Jewish colonies. A synagogue

preceded in general the establishment of the Church. One might say a

train of powder, or better still a sort of electric chain along which

the new idea ran in an almost instantaneous fashion.

For five hundred years, in effect, Judaism, until then confined to the

East and to Egypt, had taken its flight towards the West. Cyrene,

Cyprus, Asia Minor, certain cities of Macedonia and of Greece and

Italy, had important Jewries. The Jews gave the first example of that

species of patriotism, that the Parsees, the Armenians, and up to a

certain point the modern Greeks were to exhibit later: a patriotism

which was extremely energetic although not attached to a definite soil;

a patriotism of merchants scattered everywhere; recognizing one another

as brothers everywhere; a patriotism aiming at the formation not of

great compact states but of little autonomous communities in the bosoms

of other states. Strongly associated together, the Jews of the

dispersion constituted in the cities, congregations almost independent

having their own magistrates and their own council. In certain cities

they had an ethnarch or alabarch, invested with almost sovereign

rights. They inhabited separate districts, withdrawn from the ordinary

jurisdiction, much despised by the rest of the world, but very happy in

themselves. They were rather poor than rich. The time of the great

Jewish fortunes had not yet come; they began in Spain under the

Visigoths. The monopoly of finance by the Jews was the effect of the

administrative incapacity of the barbarians, of the hatred which the

Church conceived for monetary science, and its superficial ideas on the

subject of usury. Under the Roman Empire there was nothing of this

kind. Now when the Jew is not rich his pour, easy middleclass life is

not to his taste. In any case he well knows how to support poverty.

What he knows even better is how to ally religious preoccupation of the

most exalted kind with the rarest commercial ability. Theological

eccentricites by no means exclude good sense in business. In England,

in America, in Russia, the most eccentric sectaries (Irvingites,

Latter-day Saints, Raskolniks) are exceedingly good merchants.

It has always been the peculiarity of the Jewish life, piously

practiced, to produce great gaiety and cordiality. There was love in

that little world; they love a past, and the same past; the religious

ceremonies surrounded life very gently. Something analogous to these

communities exist to this day in every great Turkish city; for example

Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Smyrniots, communities, close brotherhoods in

which every member knows every other, live together and--intrigue

together. In these little republics, religious questions always prevail

over questions of politics, or rather make up for the want of them. A

heresy is there an affair of the State; a schism is always a personal

question at bottom. The Romans, with but few exceptions, never

penetrated these reserved quarters. The synagogues promulgated their

decrees, decreed honours, and acted like living municipalities. The

influence of the corporations was very great. At Alexandria it was of

the first order and governed the whole internal history of the city. At

Rome the Jews were numerous and formed an element which was not to be

despised. Cicero represents having dared to resist them as an act of

courage. C�sar favoured them, and found them faithful. Tiberius, in

order to restrain them, resorted to the severest measures. Caligula,

whose reign was a mournful one for them in the East, gave them their

liberty of association in Rome. Claudius, who favoured them in Judea,

found himself obliged to drive them out of the city. They were to be

met with everywhere, and it was openly said of them, as of the Greeks,

that though conquered they had imposed their laws upon their

conquerors.

The disposition of the native populations towards these strangers

varied greatly. On the one hand the sentiment of revulsion and of

antipathy, that the Jews by their spirit of jealous isolation, their

rancorous temper and unsociable habits, produced around them everywhere

where they were numerous and organised, manifested itself most

strongly. When they were free, they were in reality privileged; since

they enjoyed the advantages of society without bearing its cost.

Impostors profited by the movement of curiosity which their worship

excited, and under the pretence of exposing its secrets delivered

themselves to friends of every kind. Violent and half-burlesque

pamphlets like that of Apion, pamphlets from which profane writers have

too often drawn their inspiration, were circulated and served as food

for the wrath of the Pagan public. The Jews seem to have been generally

niggardly and given to complaining. They were believed to be a secret

society, bearing no good will to the rest of the world, whose members

advanced themselves at any cost to the injury of others. Their strange

customs, their aversion to certain meats, their dirtiness, their want

of distinction, the fetid odour which they exhaled, their religious

scruples, their minuteness in the observance of the Sabbath, were found

ridiculous. Placed under the ban of society, the Jews by a natural

consequence, took no pains to figure as gentle people. They were met

everywhere travelling in clothes shining with filth, an awkward air, a

fatigued demeanour, a pale complexion, large diseased eyes, a

sanctimonious expression, shutting themselves apart with their wives,

their children, their bundles of bedding, and the basket which

contained all their goods. In the cities they carried on the meanest

trades; they were beggars, rag-pickers, dealers in second-hand goods,

sellers of tinder boxes. Their law and their history were unjustly

depreciated. At one time they were found to be superstitious and cruel;

at another, atheists and despisers of the gods. Their aversion to

images was looked upon as sheer impiety. Circumcision especially

furnished the theme for interminable raillery.

But those superficial judgments were not those of all. The Jews had as

many friends as detractors. Their gravity, their good morals, the

simplicity of their worship, charmed a crowd of people. Something

superior was felt in them. A vast monotheistic and Mosaic propaganda

was organised; a sort of singular whirlwind formed itself around this

singular little people. The poor Jewish pedlar of the Transtevere,

going out in the morning with his flat basket of haberdashery, often

returned in the evening rich with the alms of a pious brother. Women

were especially attracted by these missionaries in tatters. Juvenal

reckons this love for the Jewish religion amongst the vices with which

he reproaches the women of his time. Those who were converted boasted

of the treasure which they had found, and the happiness which they

enjoyed. Only the Greek and the Roman spirit resisted energetically;

contempt and hatred of the Jews are the sign of all cultivated minds:

Cicero, Horace, Seneca, Juvenal, Tacitus, Quintilian, Suetonius. On the

contrary that enormous mass of mixed populations which the empire had

subjugated, populations to which the Roman spirit and the Greek wisdom

were foreign or indifferent, attached themselves in crowds to a society

in which they found touching examples of concord, of charity, of mutual

help, of clannish attachment, of a taste for work, of a proud poverty.

Mendicity, which was at a late date an exclusively Christian business,

was then a Jewish trade. The beggar by trade, "born to it," presented

himself to the poets of the time as a Jew.

The exemption from certain civil charges, particularly the military,

helped also to cause the fate of the Jews to be regarded as enviable.

The State then demanded many sacrifices and gave little moral

satisfaction. Everything was icily cold as on a flat plain without

shelter. Life, so sad in the midst of Paganism regained its charm and

its value in the warm atmosphere of synagogue and church. It was not

liberty which was to be found there. The brethren spied much upon each

other, everyone worrying himself about the affairs of everyone else.

But although the interior life of these little communities was greatly

agitated, they were happy enough; no one quitted them; there were no

apostasies. The poor were content in them; they regarded the rich

without envy, with the tranquility of a good conscience. The really

democratic sentiment of the folly of the world, of the vanity of riches

and of earthly grandeur finely expressed itself there. Little was known

about the Pagan world and it was judged with an outrageous severity;

Roman civilization was regarded as a mass of impurities and of odious

vices, just as the honest workman of our own days, saturated with

socialistic declamations, pictures the "aristocrats" to himself in the

darkest colours. But there was then life, gaiety and interest just as

there is to-day in the poorest synagogues of Poland and Galicia. The

want of delicacy and of elegance in the habits of the people was atoned

for by the family spirit and patriarchal good feeling. In high society,

on the contrary, egotism and isolation of soul had borne their last

fruits.

The word of Zachariah was verified: that men "shall take hold of the

skirt of him that is a Jew, saying we will go with you, for we perceive

that God is with you." There was no great town where the Sabbath fasts

and other ceremonies of Judaism were not observed. Josephus dares to

provoke those who doubted it, to consider their country and even their

own house to see if there were not confirmation of what he said. The

presence in Rome and near the Emperor of many members of the family of

the Herods, who practised their worship ostentatiously in the face of

all, contributed much to this publicity. The Sabbath besides imposed

itself by a sort of necessity in the quarters where there were Jews.

Their obstinate determination not to open their shops on that day

forced their neighbours to modify their habits. It is thus that at

Salonica one might say that the Sabbath is still observed, the Jewish

population there being rich enough and numerous enough to make the law

and to order the day of rest by closing its places of business. Almost

the equal of the Jew, often in company with him, the Syrian was an

active instrument in the conquest of the West by the East. They were

confounded occasionally, and Cicero thought he had found the common

feature which united them, when he called them "the nations born for

servitude." It was by that, that their future was assured, for the

future was then for the slaves. A not less essential characteristic of

the Syrian was his facility, his suppleness, the superficial clearness

of his mind. The Syrian nature is like a fugitive image in the clouds

of Heaven. From time to time we see certain lines traced there with

grace, but those lines never form a complete design. In the shade, by

the undecided light of a lamp, the Syrian woman under her veil, with

her vague eyes and her infinite softness, produces some instants of

illusion. But when we wish to analyse that beauty it vanishes; it will

not bear examination. All that besides lasts but three or four years.

That which is charming in the Syrian race is the child of five or six

years of age; the universe of Greece where the child is nothing, the

young man inferior to the mature man, the mature man to the old. Syrian

intelligence attracts by an air of promptitude and lightness, but it

wants firmness and solidity; something like the golden wine of the

Lebanon which is very pleasant at first but of which one tires very

soon. The true gifts of God have in them something at once fine and

strong, something intoxicating, yet lasting. Greece is more appreciated

to-day than she has ever been and she will be appreciated more and

more.

Many of the Syrian emigrants whom the desire of making their fortunes

had drawn westwards, were more or less attached to Judaism. Those who

were not, remained faithful to the worship of their villages; that is

to say to the memory of some temple dedicated to a local "Jupiter," who

was usually simply the supreme being, differentiated by a particular

title. It was at bottom a species of monotheism, which these Syrians

brought under cover of their strange gods. Compared at least with the

profoundly distinct divine personalities, which Greek and Roman

polytheism offered, the gods whom they worshipped, for the most part

synonyms of the Sun, were almost the brothers of the One God. Like long

enervating chants these Syrian rites, might appear less dry than the

Latin worship, less empty than the Greek. The Syrian women found in

them something at once voluptuous and exalted. These women were at all

times eccentric beings, disputing between the devil and God, floating

between saintliness and demoniacal possession. The saint of serious

virtues, of heroic renunciations, of steadfast resolutions, belongs to

other races, and other climates: the saint of strong imagination,

absolute enthusiasm, of ready love, is the saint of Syria. The witch of

our middle ages is the slave of Satan by vulgarity or by sin; the

"possessed" of Syria, is the mad-woman of the ideal world, the woman

whose sentiment has been wounded, who avenges herself by frenzy or

shuts herself up in silence, who only needs a gentle word or a

benignant look to cure her. Transported to the Western World, these

Syrians acquired influence, sometimes by the evil arts of woman, more

often by a certain moral superiority and a real capacity. Fifty years

later this will be specially seen, when the most important persons in

Rome married Syrian women, who immediately acquired a great ascendency

in affairs. The Mussulman woman of our days, a clamorous, Meg�ra,

stupidly fanatical, scarcely existing save for evil, almost incapable

of virtue, ought not to make us forget the Julia Domna, the Julia M�sa,

the Julia Ma�msa, the Julia Soemia, who upheld in Rome in the matter of

religion mystical instincts, and a tolerance, hitherto unknown. What is

very remark-able, also, is that the Syrian dynasty, conducted by fate,

showed itself favourable to Christianity, that Mamacus, and later, the

Emperor Philippus, the Arabian, passed for Christians. Christianity in

the third and fourth centuries was especially the religion of Syria.

After Palestine, Syria had the greatest share in its foundation.

It was especially at Rome that the Syrian in the first century

exercised his penetrating activity. Charged with almost all the minor

trades, guide, messenger; letterbearer, the Syrus entered everywhere,

introducing with himself the language and the manners of his country.

He had neither the pride nor the philosophical hauteur of the European.

Still less their bodily strength: weak of body, pale, often nervous,

not knowing how to eat or to sleep at regular hours after the fashion

of our heavy and solid races, eating little meat, living upon onions

and pumpkins, sleeping but little and lightly, the Syrian died young,

and was habitually ill. What were peculiar to him, were his humility,

his gentleness, his affability, and a certain goodness; no solidity of

mind, but an infinite charm; little good sense, except in matters of

business, but an astonishing ardour, and a seductiveness altogether

feminine. The Syrian, having never had any political life, has an

altogether special aptitude for religious movements. This poor

Maronite, humble, ragged as he is, has made the greatest of

revolutions. His ancestor, the Syrus of Rome, was the most zealous

bearer of the good news to all the afflicted. Every year brought to

Greece, to Italy, to Gaul, colonies of these Syrians, urged by the

natural taste which they had for small business. They were recognized

on the ships by their numerous families, by their troops of pretty

children almost of the same age, who followed them: the mother, with

the childish air of a little girl of fourteen, holding herself by the

side of her husband, submissive, gently smiling, scarcely bigger than

her elder sons. The heads in these little groups are not strikingly

marked; there is certainly no Archimedes, Plato or Phidias amongst

them. But the Syrian merchant arrived in Rome, will be a man, good and

pitiful, charitable to his fellow countrymen, loving the poor. He will

talk with the slaves, revealing to them an asylum, where those unhappy

wretches, reduced by Roman harshness to the most desolating solitude

may find a little consolation. The Greek and Latin races of masters did

not know how to profit by a humble position. The slave of these races

passed his life in rebellion, and the desire of evil. The ideal slave

of antiquity has all the defects; he is gluttonous, a liar, malicious,

the natural enemy of his master. In this way he proved his nobility in

a sort of way; he protested against an unnatural position. The good

Syrian did not protest; he accepted his ignominy and sought to profit

by it as much as possible. He conciliated the good-will of his master,

dared to speak to him; knew how to please his mistress. This great

agent of democracy went thus unpicking, stitch by stitch, the knot of

antique civilization. The old societies founded upon disdain, upon the

inequality of races, upon military courage, were lost. Weakness and

humility were now to become an advantage for the perfecting of virtue.

Roman aristocracy and Greek wisdom, will keep up the struggle for three

centuries. Tacitus will find it good that thousands of these

unfortunates should be transported: Si interissent, vile damnum. The

Roman aristocracy will grow angry, will find it bad that such scum

should have their gods, their institutions. But the victory is written

beforehand. The Syrian, the poor man who loves his kind, who shares

with them, who associates with them, will win the day. The Roman

aristocracy will perish for want of mercy.

To explain the revolution which is about to be accomplished, we must

take into account the political, social, moral, intellectual, and

religious state of the countries, where Jewish proselytism had opened

the soil for Christian preaching to fertilize. That study will show, I

hope, convincingly that the conversion of the world to Jewish and

Christian ideas was inevitable, and will leave room for astonishment,

only upon one point, which is, that conversion should be effected so

slowly and so late.

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CHAPTER XVII.

STATE OF THE WORLD AT THE MIDDLE OF THE FIRST CENTURY.

The political state of the world was of the saddest kind. All authority

was concentrated at Rome and in the legions. There occurred the most

shameful and degrading scenes. The Roman aristocracy, which had

conquered the world, and which, in short, had alone governed under the

C�sars, delivered itself up to the most frightful Saturnalia of grime

which the world has ever seen. C�sar and Augustus, in establishing the

aristocracy, had seen with perfect accuracy the necessities of their

times. The world was so low in the political sense that no other

government was possible. Since Rome had conquered provinces

innumerable, the ancient constitution, founded on the privileges of

patrician families, a species of obstinate and malevolent Tories, could

not subsist. But Augustus had failed in all the duties of true policy

in that he left the future to chance. Without regular hereditary

succession, without fixed rules of adoption, without electoral laws,

without constitutional limitations, C�sarism was like a colossal weight

on the deck of a ship without ballast. The most terrible shocks were

inevitable. Thrice in a century, under Caligula, under Nero, and under

Domitian, the greatest power which had ever existed fell into the hands

of execrable or extravagant men. Hence, horrors, which have scarcely

been exceeded by the monsters of the Mongal dynasties. In that fatal

series of sovereigns we are reduced almost to excusing a Tiberius, who

was absolutely wicked only towards the close of his life! a Claudius,

who was simply eccentric, awkward and surrounded by evil advisers. Rome

became a school of vice and cruelty. It must be added that the evil

came especially from the East, from those flatterers of low rank, from

these infamous men whom Egypt and Syria sent to Rome, where profiting

by the oppression of the true Romans, they felt themselves all powerful

with the scoundrels who governed them. The most shocking ignominies of

the Empire, such as the apotheosis of the Emperor, his deification,

when alive, came from the East, and especially from Egypt which was

then one of the most corrupt countries in the universe.

The true Roman spirit, in effect, still survived. Human nobility was

far from being extinct. A great tradition of pride and of virtue was

kept up in some families, which came to power with Nerva, and made the

splendour of the century of the Antonines of which Tacitus has been the

eloquent interpreter. A time, which was that of minds so profoundly

honest as Quintilian, Pliny the younger and Tacitus, is not a time of

which we need despair. The disturbance of the surface did not affect

the great basis of honesty and of seriousness which underlay good

society in Rome; some families still afforded models of valour, of

devotion to duty, of concord, of solid virtue. There were in the noble

houses admirable wives, admirable sisters. Was there ever a more

touching fate than that of the young and chaste Octavia, daughter of

Claudius, and wife of Nero, pure amidst so many infamies, killed at

twenty-two years of age, before she had had time to enjoy her life? The

women described in the inscriptions as Castissim�, univir� are not

rare. Wives accompanied their husbands in exile; others shared their

noble deaths. The old Roman simplicity was not lost; the education of

children was grave and careful. The noblest women laboured with their

hands at woolwork; the cares of the toilette were almost unknown in

good families.

The excellent statesmen who sprang up under Trajan were not improvised.

They had served under preceding reigns; only they had had little

influence, cast into the shade as they were by the freedmen and the

basest favourites of the Emperor. Men of the highest character thus

occupied exalted positions under Nero. The skeleton was good, the

accession of the bad Emperors to power, disastrous though it was, did

not suffice to change the general course of affairs and the principles

of the State. The Empire, far from being in decadence, was in all the

force of the most robust youth. The decadence was coming, but that

would be two centuries later, and, strange to say, under the least evil

of the sovereigns. Looked at from the political point of view, the

situation was analogous to that of France, which, for want of an

invariable rule since the Revolution as to the succession of powers,

has gone through the most perilous adventures, without its internal

organisation and national force suffering too much. From the moral

point of view we may compare the time of which we speak with the

eighteenth century, an epoch which we might fancy to be altogether

corrupt, if we judged by the memories, the manuscript literature, the

collection of anecdotes of the times, yet, in which houses maintained a

great severity of morals.

Philosophy had allied itself with the honest Roman families, and

resisted nobly. The Stoic school produced the great characters of

Cremastius Cordus, of Thraseas, of Arria, of Helvidius Priscus, of

Ann�us Cornelius, of Musonius Rufus--admirable masters of aristocratic

virtue. The stiffness and the exaggerations of this school, arose from

the horrible cruelty of the government of the C�sars. The perpetual

thought of the good man was how he might best endure tortures and

prepare for death. Lucan, with bad taste, Persius, with greater

talents, expressed the highest sentiments of a great soul. Seneca the

philosopher, Pliny the elder, Papirius Fabianus, maintained an elevated

tradition of science and philosophy. Everyone did not yield, there were

still wise men. But, too often, they had no other resource than death.

The ignoble parts of humanity were at times in the ascendent. The

spirit of vertigo and cruelty then overflowed and turned Rome into a

veritable hell.

This government, so frightfully unequal at Rome, was much better in the

provinces. Few of the disorders which shocked the capital were felt

there. In spite of its defects the Roman administration was much better

than the royalties and republics which the conquest had suppressed. The

time of the sovereign municipalities had gone by for centuries. These

little states had destroyed themselves by their egotism, their jealous

spirit, their ignorance, or their little care for private liberties.

The ancient Greek life, all struggles, all exterior, satisfied no one.

It had been charming in its day, but this brilliant Olympus of a

democracy of demi-gods having lost its freshness, had become something

dry, cold, insignificant, vain, superficial, for want of goodness and

of solid honesty. This, it was, which constituted the legitimacy of the

Macedonian domination, then of the Roman administration. The Empire did

not yet know the excess of centralization. Until the time of

Diocletian, it left much liberty to the provinces and cities. Kingdoms,

almost independent, existed in Palestine, in Syria, in Asia Minor, in

little Armenia, in Thrace under the protection of Rome. These kingdoms

became dangers only in the days of Caligula, because the rules of the

great and profound political policy of Augustus were neglected. The

free cities, and they were numerous, governed themselves according to

their own laws; they had the legislative power and all the magistracy

of an autonomous state, until the third century, municipal decrees

began with the formula, "The senate and the people . . ." The theatres

served, not only for the pleasures of the stage, they were the centres

of opinion and of movement. The majority of the towns were under

various names, little republics. The municipal spirit was very strong

in them; they had not lost the right of declaring war--a melancholy

right which had turned the world into a field of carnage. "The benefits

conferred by the Roman people on the human race," were the theme of

declamations which were sometimes adulatory, but the sincerity of which

cannot always be denied with justice. The worship of the "Roman peace,"

the idea of a great democracy organised under the protection of Rome

was at the bottom of all thoughts. A Greek orator exhibited vast

erudition in proving that the glory of Rome ought to be gathered

amongst all the branches of the Hellenic race as a sort of common

patrimony. In what concerned Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, it may be said

that the Roman conquest destroyed no liberty. These countries had long

been dead to the political life which they had never had.

In short, notwithstanding the exactions of the governors, and the

violence, inseparable from an absolute government the world in many

respects had never yet been so happy. An administration coming from a

distant centre was so great an advantage that even the plunderings of

the Pr�tors in the last days of the Republic had not been sufficient to

make it odious. The Julian law, besides, had greatly narrowed the field

of abuse and of collusions. The follies or the cruelties of the

Emperor, except under Nero, affected only the Roman aristocracy and the

immediate surroundings of the Prince. There never was a time when a man

who did not meddle in politics could live more comfortably. The

republics of antiquity, in which everyone was forced to occupy himself

with the quarrels of parties, were exceedingly uncomfortable places of

abode. People were incessantly upset or proscribed. Now the time seemed

expressly fitted for large proselytisms above the quarrels of the

little towns and the rivalries of dynasties. Such attempts against

liberty as there were, arose out of what was still left of independence

in provinces or communities much more than from the Roman

administration. We have had, and we shall still have, numerous

instances of this kind of thing to remark.

In those of the conquered countries in which political necessities had

not existed for centuries, and where the people were deprived only of

the right to tear each other to pieces by continual wars, the Empire

was a period of prosperity and of well-being, such as had never been

known, we may even add without paradox, of liberty, On the one hand,

freedom of trade and of industry, of which the Greek Republics had no

idea, became possible. On the other, liberty of thought could only gain

by the new system. That liberty is always stronger when it has to deal

with a king or a prince, than when it has to negotiate with a narrow

and jealous citizen. The ancient republics did not possess it. The

Greeks did without it in great things, thanks to the incomparable

strength of their genius, but it ought not to be forgotten that Athens

had her inquisition. The inquisition was the archon king; the holy

office was the Royal Porch, whither were taken accusations of

"impiety." Accusations of that kind were very numerous; it is

concerning cases of this description that most of the great Attic

orations were delivered. Not merely philosophical crimes, such as

denying God or providence, but the slightest blow struck at the

municipal worship, the preaching of foreign religions, the most

childish infractions of the scrupulous legislation of the mysteries,

were crimes which might be punished with death. The gods whom

Aristophanes mocked at on the stage, killed sometimes. They killed

Socrates, they wanted to kill Alcibiades. Anaxagoras, Protagoras,

Theodorus the Atheist, Diagoras of Melos, Prodicus of Ceos, Stilpo,

Aristotle, Theophrastus, Aspasia, Euripides, were more or less

seriously disquieted. Liberty of thought was, in short, the fruit of

the royalties which sprang out of the Macedonian conquest. It was the

Attali, the Ptolemies, who first gave to thinkers the facilities that

none of the old republics had ever offered to them. The Roman Empire

continued the same tradition. There was, under the empire, more than

one arbitrary act against the philosophers, but they arose always,

through their interfering with politics. We may seek in vain in the

list of Roman laws before Constantine for a text against the liberty of

thought, in the history of the emperors for a process against abstract

doctrine. Not one scholar was disturbed. Men who would have been burned

in the middle ages, such as Galen, Lucian, Plotinus, lived on in peace,

protected by the law. The empire inaugurated a period of liberty,

inasmuch as it extinguished the absolute sovereignty of the family, of

the city, of the tribe, and replaced or tempered these sovereignties by

that of the state. Now an absolute power becomes more vexatious in

proportion to the narrowness of the limits within which it is

exercised. The ancient republics, feudality, tyrannized over the

individual much more than the State did. We must admit that the Roman

Empire at certain periods persecuted Christianity cruelly, but, at

least, it did not stop it. Now the republics would have rendered it

impossible; Judaism, if it had not submitted to the pressure of Roman

authority, would have been sufficient to stifle it. The Pharisees were

prevented from crushing out Christianity only by the Roman magistrates.

Large ideas of universal brotherhood springing for the most part out of

stoicism, a sort of general sentiment of humanity, were the fruits of

the less narrow system and of the less exclusive education to which the

individual was subjected. There were dreams of a new era and of new

worlds. The public wealth was great, and, notwithstanding the

imperfection of the economic doctrines of the times, wealth was widely

spread. Morals were not what they have often been imagined to be. At

Rome, it is true, all the vices were displayed with a revolting

cynicism; the spectacles, especially, had introduced a frightful

corruption. Certain countries, like Egypt, have thus sunk into the

lowest depths. But there was, in most of the provinces, a middle class,

where goodness, conjugal faith, the domestic virtues, probity, were

sufficiently spread out. Is there anywhere an idea of family life in a

world of honest citizens of small towns, more charming than that which

Plutarch has left us? What bonhomie! What gentleness of manners! What

chaste and amiable simplicity! Ch�ronea was evidently not the only

place where life was so pure and so innocent.

Customs even outside Rome were still to a certain ex-tent cruel, it may

be through the memory of antique manners, everywhere rather sanguinary,

it may be through the special influence of Roman hardness. But there

was progress even in this respect. What soft and pure sentiment, what

impression of tender melancholy had not found its tenderest expression

by the pen of Virgil or Tibullus? The world grew more yielding, lost

its antique rigour, acquired gentleness and susceptibility. Maxims of

humanity grew common; equality, the abstract idea of the rights of man,

were loudly preached by stoicism. Woman, thanks to the dowry system of

the Roman law, became more and more her own mistress; precepts on the

manner of treating slaves improved; Seneca ate with his. The slave was

no longer of necessity that grotesque and malicious being, whom Latin

comedy introduced to provoke outbursts of laughter, and whom Cato

recommended to be treated as a beast of burden. The times have now

greatly changed. The slave is morally the equal of his master; it is

admitted that he is capable of virtue, of fidelity, of devotion, and he

has given proofs that he is so. Prejudices as to nobility of birth are

dying out. Many very humane and very just laws are enacted even under

the worst of the Emperors. Tiberius was an able financier; he founded

upon an excellent basis an establishment of the nature of a land-bank.

Nero brought to the system of taxation, until then iniquitous and

barbarous, improvements which put our own times to the blush. The

progress of legislation was considerable, though the punishment of

death was stupidly frequent. Love of the poor, sympathy for all,

alms-giving, became virtues.

The theatre was one of the most insupportable scandals to honest

people, and was one of the first causes of the antipathy of Jews and

Judaizers of every class against the profane civilization of the time.

These gigantic circles appeared to them the sewer in which all the

vices festered. Whilst the front ranks applauded, repulsion and horror

alone were produced on the upper benches. The spectacles of gladiators

were established in the provinces only with difficulty. The Greek

countries at least objected to them, and clung more often to their

ancient Greek exercises. The sanguinary games preserved always in the

East a very pronounced mark of their Roman origin. The Athenians in

emulation of the Corinthians having, one day deliberated as to

imitating these barbarous games, a philosopher is said to have risen

and moved that before this was done, the altar of Pity should be

overthrown. The horror of the theatre, of the stadium, of the

gymnasium, that is to say, of the public places, and of what

constituted essentially a Greek or a Roman city, was thus one of the

deepest sentiments of the Christian, and one of those which produced

the greatest results. Ancient civilization was a public civilization;

everything was done in the open air, before the assembled citizens. It

was the reverse of our societies, where life is altogether private and

closed within the compass of the house. The theatre was the heir of the

agora and of the forum. The anathema uttered against the theatre

rebounded upon all society. A profound rivalry was established between

the Church on the one hand, the public games on the other. The slave,

driven from the games, betook himself to the Church. I never sit down

in these mournful arenas, which are always the best preserved ruins of

an ancient city, without seeing there in the spirit the struggle of the

two worlds--here the honest poor man, already half a Christian, sitting

in the last rank, veiling his face, and going out indignant--there a

philosopher rising suddenly and reproaching the crowd with its

baseness. These examples were rare in the first century, but the

protest began to make itself heard. The theatre began to fall into evil

repute.

Legislation and the administrative rules of the Empire were still a

veritable chaos. The central despotism, the municipal and provincial

franchises, the caprice of the governors, the violences of the

independent communities clashed in the strangest manner. But religious

liberty gained by these conflicts. The splendid unitary administration

of Trajan will be more fatal to the rising worship than the irregular

state, full of the unforeseen, without rigorous police of the time of

the C�sars.

The institutions of public assistance, founded on the principle that

the State has paternal duties towards its members, developed themselves

extensively only after the period of Nerva and Trajan. Some traces of

them are, however, found in the first century. There were already

charities for children, distributions of food to the poor, an assize of

bread, with indemnities to the corn merchants, precautions about

provisions, premiums and assurances for ship owners, bread bonds, which

permitted corn to be bought at a reduced price. All the emperors,

without exception, showed the greatest solicitude about these

questions, minor ones, if you like, but on certain occasions of primary

importance. In the earliest ages it is possible that the world had no

need of charity. The world was young and valiant, the hospital was

useless. The good and simple Homeric moral, according to which the host

and the beggar alike come from Jupiter, is the moral of robust and

cheerful youth. Greece, in her classic age, enunciated the most

exquisite maxims of pity, of benevolence, of humanity, without mixing

up with them any after-thought of social inquietude, or of melancholy.

Man, at this time, was still healthy and happy; he could not take evil

into account. In connection with institutions of mutual succour, the

Greeks had besides, a great priority over the Romans. Never did a

liberal or benevolent disposition spring from that cruel nobility, who

exercised during the period of the Republic, so oppressive a power. At

the time of which we speak, the colossal fortunes of the aristocracy,

luxury, the great agglomerations of men at certain points, and above

all, the hard-heartedness peculiar to the Romans, their aversion to

pity had given birth to pauperism. The civilities of certain Emperors

to the Roman canaille had only served to aggravate the evil. The

sportula, the tesser� frumentari� encouraged vice and idleness, but

brought no remedy to misery. Here, as in many other matters, the East

had a great superiority over the Western world. The Jews possessed real

charitable institutions. The temples of Egypt appear sometimes to have

had a poor box. The college of recluses, male and female, in the

Serapeum, at Memphis, was also in a way, a charitable establishment.

The terrible crisis, through which humanity passed in the capital of

the Empire, was but little felt in distant countries, where life

remained more simple. The reproach of having poisoned the earth, the

comparison of Rome with a courtezan, who has poured forth upon the

world the dregs of her immorality, was just in many ways. The provinces

were better than Rome, or rather the impure elements from all parts,

which were collected at Rome, as in a sewer, had formed there a centre

of infection where the old Roman virtues were stifled, and where the

good seed from elsewhere developed itself but slowly.

The intellectual state of various parts of the Empire was not very

satisfactory. In this respect there was a real falling off. The higher

culture of the mind is not as independent of political circumstances as

is private morality, though the progress of the two may be on parallel

lines. Marcus Aurelius was certainly a more honest man than all the old

Greek philosophers, yet his positive notions of the realities of the

universe are inferior to those of Aristotle or of Epicurus; for he

believed at times in the gods as finished and distinct personages, in

dreams and in omens. The world at the Roman period made progress in

morality, and suffered a scientific decline. From Tiberius to Nerva,

the decline is altogether sensible. The Greek genius, with an

originality, a force, a richness, which have never been equalled, had

created in the course of centuries, the national encyclop�dia, the

normal discipline of the mind. This marvellous movement dating from

Thales, and from the first schools of Ionia (six hundred years before

Jesus Christ) had almost stopped about the year 120 B.C. The last

survivors of these five centuries of genius, Apollonius of Perga,

Eratosthenes, Aristarchus, Hero, Archimedes, Hipparchus, Chrysippus,

Carneades, Panetius, had died without leaving successors. I see only

Posidonius and some astronomers who continued still the old traditions

of Alexandria, of Rhodes, of Pergamus. Greece, so able in creating, had

not known how to extract from her science, or her philosophy, a popular

teaching, a remedy against superstition. Whilst possessing in their

bosom admirable scientific institutions, Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece

itself, were given over to the most foolish beliefs. Now, when science

cannot control superstition, superstition chokes science. Between these

two opposed forces, the duel is to the death.

Italy, in adopting Greek science, had learned for a moment to animate

it with a new sentiment. Lucretius had furnished the model of the great

philosophical poem, at once hymn and blasphemy, inspiring in turn,

serenity and despair, penetrated with that profound sentiment of human

destiny, which was always wanting to the Greeks. They, like true

children, as they were, took life in so gay a fashion, that they never

dreamed of cursing the gods, or of finding nature unjust or perfidious

towards man. Graver thoughts arose amongst the Latin philosophers. But

Rome knew no better than Greece how to make science the basis of

popular education. Whilst Cicero gave with an exquisite tact, a

finished form to the ideas which he borrowed from the Greeks; whilst

Lucretius wrote his astonishing poem; whilst Horace avowed to Augustus,

who was in no way moved by it, his frank incredulity; whilst Ovid, one

of the most charming poets of the time, treated the most respectable

fables like an elegant literature; whilst the great Stoics drew

practical consequences from the Greek philosophy, the maddest chimeras

found believers, the faith in the marvellous was unbounded. Never was

the world more occupied with prophecies and prodigies. The fine

eclectic deism of Cicero, continued and perfected still more by Seneca,

remained the belief of a small number of lofty minds exercising no

influence whatever upon their age.

The Empire until the time of Vespasian had nothing which could be

called public instruction. What there was of this kind at a later date

was confined almost exclusively to the insipid exercises of the

grammarians; the general decadence was rather pressed on than delayed.

The last days of the republican government, and the reign of Augustus,

were witnesses to one of the finest literary movements that ever took

place. But after the death of the great Emperor the decadence is rapid,

or, more correctly, altogether sudden. The intelligent and cultivated

society of Cicero, Atticus, C�ar, M�cenas, Agrippa, Pollio, had

disappeared like a dream. Without doubt there were still enlightened

men, men abreast of the science of their time, occupying high social

positions, such as Seneca and the literary society of which he was the

centre, Lucilius, Gallio, Pliny. The body of Roman law, which is

philosophy itself in the form of a code, the putting in practice of

Greek rationalism, continued its majestic growth. The great Roman

families had preserved a bottom of elevated religion, and a great

horror of superstition. The geographers, Strabo and Pomponius Mela, the

doctor and encyclop�dist, Celsus, the botanist, Dioscorides, the

jurisconsult Sempronius Proculus, were very able men. But they were the

exceptions. Except for some thousands of enlightened men, the world was

plunged into the most complete ignorance of the laws of nature.

Credulity was a general disease. Literary culture was reduced to hollow

rhetoric, which taught nothing. The essentially moral and practical

direction which philosophy has taken banished grand speculations. Human

knowledge, if we except geography, made no progress. The instructed and

well-read amateur replaced the creative scholar. The supreme defect of

the Romans here made its fatal influence felt. This people so great for

empire were second-rate in mind. The best educated Romans, Lucretius,

Vitruvius, Celsus, Pliny, Seneca, were in positive knowledge the pupils

of the Greeks. Too often even it was the most mediocre Greek science

that they copied indifferently. The city of Rome had never had a great

scientific school. Charlatanism reigned there almost without control.

In short, the Latin literature which certainly had admirable parts,

flourished but a short time and did not go out of the Western world.

Greece happily remained faithful to her genius. The prodigious blaze of

the Roman power had dazzled her, crushed her down, but had not

destroyed her. In fifty years she will have reconquered the world, she

will again be the mistress of all who think, she will sit on the throne

with the Antonines. But now Greece herself is in one of her hours of

lassitude. Genius is rare there; original science inferior to what it

had been in the six preceding centuries and to what it will be in the

pet, The school of Alexandria, decaying for nearly two centuries but

which however in the time of C�sar still possessed Sosigenes, is now

mute.

From the death of Augustus to the accession of Trajan must be reckoned

as a period of momentary abasement of the human mind. The antique world

was far from having said its last word; but the cruel trial through

which it had passed, had robbed it of voice and heart. Better days are

dawning, and the mind relieved from the desolating rule of the C�sars

will appear to revive. Epictetus, Plutarch, Dionysius, the

golden-mouthed, Chrysostom, Tacitus, Quintilian, Pliny, the younger,

Juvenal, Rufus of Ephesus, Aret�us, Galen, Ptolemy, Hypsicles, Theon,

Lucian, will recall the best days of Greece, not of that inimitable

Greece which existed but once for the despair and the charm of those

who love the beautiful, but a Greece rich and flourishing yet, which

whilst confounding her gifts with those of the Roman spirit will

produce new fruits full of originality.

The general taste was very bad. There are no great Greek writers. The

Latin authors whom we know, with the exception of the satirist Persius,

are mediocre and without genius. Declamation spoiled everything. The

principle by which the public judged the works of the mind was pretty

much the same as in our own day. They only looked for the brilliant

strokes. The word was no longer the simple vesture of the thought,

drawing all its elegance from its perfect proportion to the idea it

expressed. Words were cultivated for their own sake. The object of an

author in writing was to show his talent. The excellence of a

recitation or public lecture was measured by the number of applauded

words with which it was sown. The great principle that in matters of

art everything ought to serve for ornament, but that all that is put in

expressly as ornament is bad, this principle, I say, was profoundly

forgotten. The time was if you will, very literary. They only spoke of

eloquence, of good style, and at bottom almost all the world wrote ill;

there was not a single orator, for the good orator, and the good writer

are men who make a trade of neither one nor the other. At the theatre

the principal actor absorbed attention; plays were suppressed that

showy pieces might be recited--the cantica. The spirit of literature

was a silly dilettantism which seized even upon the Emperors, a foolish

vanity which led everybody to try to prove that he had wit. Hence an

extreme insipidity, interminable "Theseids," dramas written to be read

in society, a whole poetic banality which can only be compared to the

classic tragedies and epics of sixty years ago.

Stoicism itself could not escape this defect, or at least did not know

before Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, how to find a graceful form to

envelope its doctrines. The tragedies of Seneca are really

extraordinary monuments where the loftiest sentiments are expressed in

the tone of a literary charlatanism, wholly fatiguing and indicative at

once of moral progress and an irredeemable decadence of taste. The same

maybe said of Lucan. The tension of soul, the natural effect of the

eminently tragic character of the situation gave birth to an inflated

style, where the only care was to shine by fine sentences. Something of

the same kind happened amongst us under the Revolution; the severest

crisis that had ever been known produced scarcely anything but a

literature of rhetoricians, full of declamation. We must not stop at

that. The new thoughts were sometimes expressed with a great deal of

pretension. The style of Seneca is sober, simple, and pure compared

with that of S. Augustine. But we forgive S. Augustine his, detestable

though it often is, and his insipid concetti, for the sake of his fine

sentiments.

In any case that education, noble and distinguished as it was in many

ways, never reached the people. That would have been a comparatively

slight inconvenience, if the people had had at least a religious

training analogous in some sort to that which the most disinherited

portions of our societies receive in the Church. But religion in all

parts of the Empire was at the lowest ebb. Rome with good reason had

left the ancient worships undisturbed, cutting away only those things

which were inhuman, seditious, or injurious to others. She had extended

over all a sort of official varnish which made them all very much

alike, and after a fashion melted them down together. Unfortunately

these old worships, of very diverse origin, had one feature in common;

it was equally impossible to arrive at theological instruction; at an

applied morality; at an edifying preaching; at a pastoral ministry

really fruitful for the people. The Pagan temple was in no way what the

synagogue and the church were in their palmy days. I mean that common

house, school, hostelry, hospital, shelter, where the poor may find an

asylum. It was a cold cella, where one scarcely entered, and where one

learned nothing. The Roman worship was perhaps the least bad of those

which were still practised. Purity of heart and of body were there

considered as making part of real religion. By its gravity, its

decency, its austerity, this worship, but for some farces like those of

our carnival, was superior to the bizarre and often ridiculous

ceremonies which persons afflicted with Oriental notions secretly

introduced. The affectation which led the Roman patricians to

distinguish "religion" --that is to say their own worship, from

"superstition," that is to say foreign modes of worship, appears to us

sufficiently puerile. All Pagan worship was essentially superstitious.

The peasant who in our days puts a halfpenny into the box of some

miracle-chapel, who invokes such a saint for his oxen or his horses,

who drinks a certain water for certain diseases, is in those matters

distinctly Pagan. Almost all our superstitions are the relics of a

religion anterior to Christianity, which the latter has not been able

entirely to root out. If one desired to find in our days the image of

Paganism, it is in some secluded village at the bottom of the most

backward country, that it is to be looked for.

Having for guardians only a vacillating popular tradition and

interested sacristan, the worship could not but fall back into

adulation. Augustus, although with hesitation, suffered himself to be

worshipped in the provinces while yet alive. Tiberius allowed that

ignoble meeting of the Asiatic townsmen, who disputed the honour of

erecting a temple to him, to be held under his eyes. The extravagant

impieties of Caligula produced no re-action; outside Judaism there was

not a single priest to resist such follies, Sprung for the most part

from a primitive worship of natural forces, ten times transformed by

mixtures of all kinds, and by the imagination of the people, Pagan

worship was limited by its past. It was impossible to extract from them

what they did not contain--deism, edification. The Fathers of the

Church make us smile when they talk of the misdeeds of Saturn as of

those of the father of a family, and Jupiter as a husband. And surely

it was much more ridiculous still to erect Jupiter (that is to say the

atmosphere) into a moral god who commands, forbids, rewards, punishes.

In a world which aspired to possess a catechism, which can be done with

a worship like that of Venus, which arose out of an old social

necessity of the first Phoenecian navigators in the Mediterranean, but

became with time an outrage to those who looked up to it more and more

as the essence of religion?

In all quarters, in short, the need of a monotheistic religion, having

the morality of the divine prescriptions for its basis, was felt more

and more. There thus came a time when natural religion, reduced to pure

childishness, to the grimaces of sorcerers, would not suffice for

society where humanity wanted a moral and philosophical religion.

Buddhism, Zoroasterism answered to that need in India, in Persia.

Orpheism and the Mysteries had attempted the same thing in the Greek

world, with-out succeeding in a durable manner. At this epoch the

problem presented itself to the whole of the world with a sort of

solemn unanimity and imperious grandeur.

Greece, it is true, formed an exception in this respect. Hellenism was

much less used than other religions of the empire. Plutarch in his

little Boeotian town lived by Hellenism, tranquil, happy, contented as

a child with the calmest religious conscience. With him, not a trace of

crisis, of rending, of disquiet, of imminent revolution. But it was

only the Greek spirit which was capable of so infantine a serenity.

Always satisfied with herself; proud of her past and of that brilliant

mythology of which she possessed all the holy places, Greece did not

share all the internal torments, which worried the rest of the world.

Only she did not call for Christianity; only she wished to pass it by;

only she thought to do better. She held to that eternal youth, to that

patriotism, to that gaiety which have always characterised the

veritable Hellene, and which to-day cause the Greek to be a stranger to

the profound cares which eat us up. Hellenism thus found itself in a

position to attempt a renaissance which no other of the religions of

the empire would have been able to attempt. In the second, third, and

fourth centuries of our era, Hellenism will constitute itself an

organised religion by a sort of fusion of the Greek mythology and

philosophy, and with its wonder-working philosophers, its ancient sages

promoted to the rank of prophets, its legends of Pythagoras and of

Apollonius, will enter into a rivalry with Christianity, which, though

it remained powerless, was none the less the most dangerous obstacle

which the religion of Jesus found in its path.

That attempt was not made so early as the time of the C�sars. The first

philosophers who attempted a species of alliance between philosophy and

Paganism--Euphrates of Tyre, Apollonius of Tyana, and Plutarch, are of

the end of the century. Euphrates of Tyre is but little known to us.

Legend has so covered up the warp and woof of the real biography of

Apollonius that it is difficult to say, whether he is to be reckoned

amongst the sages, amongst the founders of religions, or amongst the

charlatans. Plutarch is less a thinker, an innovator than a man of

moderate mind who wishes to make all the world agree by rendering

philosophy timid and religion half reasonable. There is nothing in him

of Porphyry or of Julian. The attempts at allegorical exegesis by the

Stoics are very weak. The mysteries like those of Bacchus, where the

immortality of the soul was taught by graceful symbols, were limited to

certain countries and had no extended influence. The unbelief in the

official religion was general in the enlightened class. The politicians

who most affected to sustain the worship of the State made a jest of it

with much wit. They openly put forward the immoral system that

religious fables are good only for the people and ought to be

maintained for them. The precaution was wholly useless, for the faith

of the people was itself profoundly shattered.

After the accession of Tiberius, it is true, a religious reaction made

itself felt. It appears that the world was frightened by the avowed

incredulity of the times of C�sar and Augustus; the unlucky attempt of

Julian was anticipated; all the superstitions found themselves

revivified for reasons of State. Valerius Maximus gives us the first

example of a writer of the lower class, making himself the auxiliary of

the theologians at bay; of a venal or prostituted pen put at the

service of religion. But it is the foreign religions which profit most

by this return. The serious reaction in favour of the Gr�co-Roman cult

will only be produced in the second century. Now the classes which have

been seized with religious disquiet turn towards the religions, come

from the East. Isis and Serapis find more favour than ever. Importers

of every species, miracle-mongers, magicians, profit by the demand, and

as usually happens at periods when and in countries where the religion

of the State is weak, increased on every side, recalling the real or

fictitious types of Apollonius of Tyana, Alexander of Abonoticus, of

Peregrinus, of Simon of Gitton. These very errors and chimeras were as

a prayer of the travailing earth, like the unfruitful efforts of a

world seeking its rule and arriving sometimes in its convulsive efforts

at monstrous creations destined to oblivion.

To sum up:--the middle of the first century is one of the worst epochs

of ancient history. Greek and Roman society show themselves in

decadence after what has gone before, and much behind hand with respect

to what is to follow But the grandeur of the crisis revealed clearly

some strange and sacred formation. Life appeared to have lost its

motive: suicides were multiplied. Never had a century presented such a

struggle between good and evil. The evil was a powerful despotism,

which put the world into the hands of men, who were either criminals or

lunatics; it was the corruption of morals, the result of introducing

into Rome the vices of the East; it was the absence of a good religion,

and of a serious public instruction. The good was on one side,

philosophy fighting with uncovered breast, against the tyrants, defying

the monsters, three or four times proscribed in in half a century

(under Nero, Vespasian and Domitian) it was on another side the efforts

after popular virtue these legitimate aspirations after a better

religious state, this tendency towards confraternities, towards

mono-theistic worship; this rehabilitation of the poor, which was

principally produced under cover of Judaism, or Christianity. These two

great protestations were far from being in agreement. The philosophical

party and the Christian party did not know each other, and they had so

little idea of the community of their efforts, that the philosophical

party, having come to power by the advent of Nerva, was far from being

favourable to Christianity Truth to tell, the design of the Christian

was much more radical. The stoic masters of the Empire, reformed it and

presided over it during the hundred best years in the history of

humanity The Christian Masters of the Empire, after Constantine,

succeeded in ruining it. The heroism of some ought not to make us

forget that of others. Christianity, so unjust to Pagan virtues, took

up the task of depreciating those who had fought against the same

enemies that it had. There was in the resistance of philosophy as much

grandeur as in that of Christianity, but the rewards have been unequal.

The martyr who turned away from the feet of the idols has his legend:

why should not Ann�us Cornutus, who declared before Nero, that his

books would never be worth those of Chrysippus; why should not

Helvidius Priscus, who told Vespasian to his face, It is for you to

kill, and for me to die"; why should not Demetrius, the cynic, who

answered the angry Nero "You threaten me with death but nature

threatens you,"--why should not these men have their place amongst the

popular heroes whom all men love and salute? Does humanity dispose of

so many forces against vice and baseness, that every school of virtue

should be allowed to reject the aid of others, and to maintain that it

only has the right to be courageous, proud, resigned?

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CHAPTER XVIII.

RELIGIOUS LEGISLATION AT THIS PERIOD.

The Empire in the first century, even whilst showing itself hostile to

the religious innovations which came from the East, did not offer a

constant resistance to them. The principle of the religion of the State

was but moderately maintained. Under the Republic at various intervals,

foreign religions had been forbidden, in particular the worship of

Sabazius, of Isis, of Serapis. The people were impelled towards these

religions by an irresistible force. When the demolition of the temple

of Isis and Serapis, was decreed at Rome, in the year 535, not a

workman was found who would put a hand to the work, and the Consul

himself was obliged to break in the door with the blows of an axe It is

clear that the Latin rite was not sufficient for the mob. Not

unreasonably it has been supposed, that it was to gratify the popular

instinct that C�sar re-established the worship of Isis and Serapis.

With the profound and liberal intention characteristic of him, this

great man showed himself favourable to a complete liberty of

conscience. Augustus was more attached to the national religion. He had

antipathy for the Oriental religions; he forbade even the propagation

of Egyptian ceremonies in Italy; but he wished that every religion,

that of the Jews especially, should be supreme at home. He exempted the

Jews from every-thing that might distress their consciences, especially

from secular work on the Sabbath. Some persons of his court were less

tolerant, and would willingly have made him a persecutor for the

benefit of the Latin religion. He does not appear to have yielded to

these wretched counsels. Josephus, who is suspected of exaggeration in

this matter, will even have it that he made gifts of sacred vessels to

the temple at Jerusalem.

It was Tiberius who first laid down the principle of the religion of

the State, with clearness, and took serious precautions against the

Jewish and Oriental propaganda. It must be remembered that the Emperor

was "Grand Pontiff," that in protecting the old Roman religion he did

but execute a duty laid upon him. Caligula withdrew the edicts of

Tiberius, but his madness prevented anything further from being done.

Claudius appears to have imitated the policy of Augustus. At Rome he

strengthened the Latin religion, showed himself interested in the

progress made by foreign religion, displayed harshness to the Jews, and

pursued the confraternities with fury. In Judea, on the contrary, he

showed himself well disposed towards the natives. The favour which the

Agrippas displayed at Rome under these two last reigns, assured to

their co-religionists a powerful protection, except in those cases when

the police of Rome required measures of safety.

Nero concerned himself but little with religion. His odious treatment

of the Christians came from native ferocity and not from legislative

disposition. The examples of persecution which were quoted in Roman

society at this time sprang rather from family than public authority.

Such things still happened only in the noble houses of Rome, which

preserved the old traditions. The provinces were perfectly free to

follow their own religions on the single condition that they did not

insult the religions of other countries. The provincials of Rome had

the same right, provided they made no scandal. The only two religions

against which the Empire made war in the first century, Druidism and

Judaism, were fortresses where nationalities defended themselves. All

the world was convinced that the profession of Judaism implied contempt

for the civil law, and indifference to the prosperity of the State.

When Judaism was content to be a simple personal religion, it was not

persecuted. The severities against the worship of Serapis, arose

perhaps from the mono-theistic character which it presented, and which

already caused it to be confounded with the Jewish and the Christian

religion.

No fixed law then forbade in the time of the apostles the profession of

monotheistic religion. These religions, until the accession of the

Syrian Emperors, were always watched, but it was not until the time of

Trajan that the Empire began to prosecute them systematically as

hostile to others, as intolerant, and as implying the negation of the

State. In short, the only thing against which the Roman Empire declared

war in the matter of religion was theocracy. Its principle was that of

the lay state; it did not admit that a religion had civil or political

consequence in any degree; above all it did not allow of any

association within the State for objects outside of it. This last point

is essential, seeing that it really was at the root of all the

persecutions. The law upon confraternities, much more than religious

intolerance, was the fatal cause of the violences which dishonoured the

reigns of the best sovereigns.

The Greek countries, associated as they were with all things good and

delicate, had had the priority over the Romans. The Greek Eranes or

Thiases of Athens, Rhodes, of the inlands of the Archipelago, had been

excellent societies for mutual help, credit, assurance in case of fire,

piety, honest pleasures. Every Erane had its decisions engraved upon

the arches (stelos), its archives, its common chest, fed by voluntary

gifts and assessments. The Eranites or Thiastes celebrated together

certain festivals and met for banquets, where cordiality reigned. A

member, embarassed for money, might borrow from the chest on condition

of repayment. Women formed part of these Eranes, and had their separate

President (pro�ranistria). The meetings were absolutely secret; a rigid

order was maintained in them; they took place, it would seem, in closed

gardens, surrounded by porches or small buildings, in the midst of

which rose the altar of sacrifice. Finally, every congregation had a

body of dignitaries, drawn by lot for a year (Clerotes), according to

the custom of ancient Greek democracies, from whom the Christian

"clergy" may have taken their name. The president alone was elected.

These officers caused the new members to submit to a species of

examination, and were bound to certify that he was "holy, pious and

good." There was in these little confraternities, during the two or

three centuries which preceded our era, a movement almost as varied as

that which in the middle ages produced so many religious orders and

subdivisions of these orders. In the single island of Rhodes there were

computed to be as many as nineteen, many of which bore the names of

their founders or their reformers. Some of these Thiastes, especially

those of Bacchus, held elevated doctrines, and sought to give some

consolation to men of good will. If there still remained in the Greek

world a little love, pity, religious morality, it was due to the

liberty of such private religions. These religions were in a sort of

way associated with the official religion, the abandonment of which

became every day more and more marked.

At Rome association of the same kind encountered greater difficulties

and not less favour amongst the proscribed classes. The principles of

the Roman policy concerning confraternities had been promulgated for

the first time under the Republic (186 B.C.) apropos of the Bacchanals.

The Romans by their natural taste were greatly inclined to

associations, especially to religious associations; but permanent

congregations of this kind displeased the patricians, guardians of

public powers, who, in their narrow and dry conception of life,

admitted only the Family of the State as the social group. The most

minute precautions were taken; a preliminary authorization was made a

necessity, the number of members was limited; it was forbidden to have

a permanent magister sacrorum, and to create a common fund by means of

subscriptions. The same solicitude was manifested on various occasions

in the history of the empire. The laws contained texts for repressions

of every kind. But it was for the authorities to say, if they should or

should not be used. The proscribed religions often appeared a very few

years after their proscription. The foreign emigration, besides,

especially that of the Syrians, perpetually renewed the funds from

which the beliefs were nourished, which it was vainly sought to

extirpate.

It is remarkable to note, to how great a degree a subject in appearance

so wholly secondary occupied the strongest heads. One of the principal

cares of C�sar and of Augustus was to prevent the formation of new

societies and to destroy those which had already been established. It

appears that a decree was issued under Augustus, in which an attempt

was made to define with clearness the limits of the law of union and

association. These limits were extremely narrow. The societies were to

be exclusively burial clubs. They were not permitted to meet more often

than once a month; they might occupy themselves only with the funerals

of deceased members; under no pretext might they extend their powers.

The Emperor strove after the impossible. He wished out of his

exaggerated idea of the state to isolate the individual, to destroy

every moral tie between man, to repress a legitimate desire of the

poor, that of crowding together in a small space to keep each other

warm. In ancient Greece the city was very tyrannical, but it gave in

exchange for its vexations so much pleasure, so much light, so much

glory, that no one dreamed of complaining. Men would have died for her

with joy; her most unjust caprices were submitted to without murmuring.

The Roman Empire was too large for patriotism. It offered to all

immense material advantages; it gave nothing to love. The insupportable

sadness inseparable from such a life appeared worse than death.

Thus, notwithstanding all the efforts of the politicians, the

confraternities developed themselves enormously. They were exactly

analogous to our middle age confraternities with their patron saints

and their corporation meals. The great families were careful of their

name, of their country, of their tradition; the humble, the small, had

only their collegium. There they found all their pleasures. All the

texts show us collegia or coetus, as formed of slaves, of veterans, of

small people (tenuiores). Equality reigned there among the freemen,

emancipated slaves and servile persons. The women in them were

numerous. At the risk of a thousand cavils, sometimes of the most

severe punishments, men became members of these collegia, where they

lived in the bonds of an agreeable confraternity, where they found

mutual help, where they contracted relations which lasted after death.

The place of meeting, or schola collegii, had usually a tetrastyle (a

four sided porch), where was put up the rules of the college, by the

side of the altar of the tutelary deity and a triclinium for meals. The

meals were, in fact, impatiently expected; they took place on the feast

days of the patron (God), and on the anniversaries of certain brethren

who had founded benefactions. Every one carried thither his little

basket (sportula); one of the brethren in turn furnished the

accessories of the feast, the beds, the plate, bread, wine, sardines

and hot water. The slave, who had been enfranchised gave his comrades

an amphora of good wine. A gentle joy animated the festival; it was

expressly stipulated that there should be no discussion of the business

of the college, so that nothing should trouble the quarter of an hour

of joy and rest which these poor people reserved to themselves. Every

act of turbulence and every ill-natured word was punished with a fine.

To all appearance, these colleges were only burial societies, to use

the modern phrase. But that alone would not have sufficed to give them

a moral character. In the Roman period, as in our time, and at all

periods when religion is weakened, the piety of the tombs was almost

the only one which the people retained. They liked to believe that they

would not be thrown into the horrible common trench, that the college

would provide for their funerals, that the brethren would come on foot

to the funeral pile to receive a little honorarium of twenty centimes.

Slaves especially wished to hope that if their masters caused their

bodies to be thrown into the sewers, there would be some friends to

make for them "imaginary funerals." The poor man put his half-penny per

month into the common fund, to provide for himself, after his death, a

little urn in a Columbarium, with a slab of marble, on which his name

might be engraved. Sepulture amongst the Romans being intimately bound

up with the sacra gentilitia, or family rites, had an extreme

importance. The persons, intending to be buried together, contracted a

species of intimate brotherhood and relationship.

It thus came about that Christianity presented itself for a long time

in Rome as a kind of funeral collegium, and that the first Christian

sanctuaries were the tombs of the martyrs. If Christianity had been

that one, however, it would not have provoked so many severities; but

it was besides quite another thing; it had common treasuries; it

boasted of being a complete city; it believed itself assured of the

future. When, on a Saturday evening, one enters the limits of a Greek

Church in Turkey, for example that of S. Photinus in Smyrna, he is

struck with the strength of these associated religions, in the midst of

a persecuting and malevolent society. This irregular accumulation of

buildings (church, presbytery, schools, prison), those faithful ones

coming and going in their enclosed city, those lately opened tombs, on

each of which a lamp is burning, the corpse-like odour, the impression

of damp mustiness, the murmur of prayers, the appeals for charity, from

a soft and warm atmosphere, that a stranger at times must find

sufficiently sickening, but that is to the initiated eminently

grateful.

These societies, once provided with a special authorization, had in

Rome all the rights of civil persons; but such an authorization was

granted only with infinite reserves, as soon as the societies had funds

in hand, and other matters than funerals might occupy them. The pretext

of religion, or of the accomplishment of vows in common is foreseen,

and formally pointed out as being amongst the circumstances, which give

to a meeting the character of au offence; and this offence was no other

than that of treason, at least for the person who hail called the

assembly together. Claudius went so far as to close the inns where the

confraternities met, and even to interdict the little eating-houses,

where these poor people could get soup and hot water cheaply. Trajan

and the best Emperors defied all the associations. The extreme humility

of the persons was an essential condition that the right of religious

meeting should be accorded, and even then, only with many restrictions.

The legists, who put together the Roman law, eminent though they were

as jurisconsults, afforded a measure of their ignorance of human nature

by pursuing in every way, even by threats of capital punishment, in

restraining by every kind of odious and puerile precaution, an eternal

need of the soul. Like the authors of our Civil Code, they figured life

to themselves with a mortal coldness. If life consisted in amusing

oneself by superior orders, in eating a morsel of bread, in tasting

pleasure in one's rank and under the eye of a chief, everything would

be well imagined. But the punishment of societies which abandoned that

false and limited direction, is first weariness, then the violent

triumph of religious parties. Never will man consent to breathe that

glacial air; he wants the little enclosure, the confraternity in which

men live and die together. Our great abstract societies are not

sufficient to answer to all the instincts of sociability which are in

man. Let him put his heart into anything, seek consolation where it may

be found, create brethren for himself, contract ties of the heart. Let

not the cold hand of the State interfere in this kingdom of the soul,

which is the kingdom of liberty. Life and joy will not re-enter the

world until our defiance of the collegia, that sad inheritance from the

Roman law, shall have disappeared. Association outside the State,

without destroying the State, is the capital question of the future.

The future law as to associations will decide if modern society shall

or shall not share the fate of ancient society. One example may

suffice: the Roman Empire had bound up its destiny with the law upon

the coetus illiciti, the illicita collegia. Christians and barbarians

accomplishing in this the work of the human conscience, have broken the

law; the empire to which that law was attached has foundered with it.

The Greek and Roman world; the lay world; the profane world, which did

not know what a priest is, which had neither divine law nor revealed

book, touched here upon problems which it could not solve. We may add

that if there had been priests, a severe theology, a strongly organized

religion, it would not have created the lay State, inaugurated the idea

of a rational society, of a society founded upon simple human

necessities, and upon the natural relations of individuals. The

religious inferiority of the Greeks and Romans was the consequence of

their political and intellectual superiority. The religious superiority

of the Jewish people, on the contrary, was the cause of their political

and philosophical inferiority. Judaism and primitive Christianity

embodied the negation, or rather the subjection of the civil State.

Like Islamism, they established society upon religion. When human

affairs are taken up in this way, great universal proselytisms are

founded, apostles run about from one end of the world to another

converting it; but political institutions, national independence, a

dynasty, a code, a people--none of these are founded.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE FUTURE OF MISSIONS.

Such was the world which Christian missionaries undertook to convert.

It appears to me, however, that we may here see that such an enterprise

was not a madness, and that no miracle was required to insure its

success. The world was troubled with moral necessities, to which the

new religion answered admirably. Manners were growing softer; a purer

worship was required; the notion of the rights of man, the ideas of

social ameliorations were everywhere gaining ground. On the other hand

there was extreme credulity; the number of educated persons

inconsiderable. Let ardent apostles, Jews, that is to say, monotheists,

disciples of Jesus, that is to say, men penetrated with the sweetest

moral teaching that the ears of man have yet heard, present themselves

to such a world, and they will assuredly be listened to. The dreams,

which mingle with their teaching, will not be an obstacle to their

success; the number of those who do not believe in the supernatural, in

miracles, is very small If they are humble and poor, so much the

better. Humanity, at its present point, can be saved only by an effort

coming from the people. The ancient Pagan religions cannot be reformed;

the Roman State is what the State always will be, harsh, dry, just, and

hard. In this world, which is perishing for want of love, the future

belongs to him, who will touch the living source of popular piety.

Greek liberalism, the old Roman gravity, are altogether impotent for

that.

The foundation of Christianity, from this point of view, is the

greatest work that the men of the people have ever achieved. Very

quickly, without doubt, men and women of the high Roman nobility joined

themselves to the Church. At the end of the first century, Flavius

Clemens and Flavia Domitilla, show us Christianity penetrating almost

into the palace of the C�sars. In the time of the first Antonines,

there are rich people in the community. Towards the end of the second

century, it embraces some of the most considerable persons in the

Empire. But in the beginning all, or almost all, were humble. In the

most ancient churches, nobles and powerful men were no more to be found

than in Galilee about Jesus. Now, in these great creations, it is the

first hour which is decisive. The glory of religions belongs wholly to

their founders. Religion is, in fact, a matter of faith. To believe is

something vulgar; the great thing to do is to inspire faith.

When we attempt to delineate these marvellous beginnings, we usually

represent things on the model of our own times, and are thus brought to

grave errors. The man of the people in the first century of our era,

especially in Greek and Oriental countries, in no way resembled what he

is to-day. Education did not then mark out between the classes a

barrier as strong as now. These races of the Mediterranean, if we

except the population of Latium, which had disappeared, or had lost all

their importance since the Roman Empire, in conquering the world, had

become the heritage of the conquered peoples--these races, I say, were

less solid than ours, but lighter, more lively, more spiritual, more

idealistic. The heavy materialism of our disinherited classes, that

something mournful and burnt out, the effect of our climate, and the

fatal legacy of the middle ages, which gives to our poor so wretched a

countenance, was not the defect of the poor of those earlier days.

Though very ignorant and very credulous, they were scarcely more so

than rich and powerful men. We ought therefore not to represent the

establishment of Christianity as analogous in any way to a movement

amongst ourselves, starting from the lower classes (a thing in our eyes

impossible) by obtaining the assent of educated men. The founders of

Christianity were men of the people, in the sense that they were

dressed in a common fashion, that they lived simply, that they spoke

ill, or rather sought in speaking only to express their ideas with

vivacity. But they were inferior in intelligence to only a very small

number of men, the survivors who were becoming every day more rare,

from the great world of C�sar and of Augustus. Compared with the elite

of the philosophers, who formed the bond between the century of

Augustus and that of the Antonines the first Christians were feeble.

Compared with the mass of the subjects of the Empire, they were

enlightened. Sometimes they were treated as freethinkers; the cry of

the populace against them was, "Death to the atheists!" And this is not

surprising. The world was making frightful progress in superstition.

The two first capitals of the Christianity of the Gentiles, Antioch and

Ephesus, were the two cities of the Empire, the most addicted to

supernatural beliefs. The second and third centuries pushed even to

insanity, credulity, and the thirst for the marvellous.

Christianity was born outside the official world, but not precisely

below it. It is in appearance, and according to earthly prejudices that

the disciples of Jesus were unimportant persons. The worldly man loves

what is proud and strong; he speaks without affability to the humble

man; honour as he understands it, consists in not allowing himself to

be insulted; he despises those who avow themselves weak, who suffer

everything, yield to everything, who give up their coat to him who

would take their cloak, who turn their cheeks to the smiters. There

lies his error, for the weak, whom he despises, are usually superior to

him; the highest virtue is amongst those who obey (servants,

work-people, soldiers, sailors, etc.)--higher than amongst those who

command and enjoy. And that is almost in order, since to command and to

enjoy, far from aiding virtue, make virtue difficult.

Jesus marvellously comprehended that the people carry in their bosoms

the great reserve of devotion and of resignation which will save the

world. This is why he proclaimed the blessedness of the poor, judging

that they find it more easy than other people to be good. The primitive

Christians were essentially poor. "Poor" (Ebionim) was their name. Even

when the Christian was rich, in the second and third centuries, he was

in spirit a tenuior; he escaped, thanks to the law of the Collegia

tenuiorum. Christians were certainly not all slaves and people of low

condition; but the social equivalent of a Christian was a slave; what

was said of a slave was said of a Christian also. On both sides they

honoured the same virtues, goodness, humility, resignation, sweetness.

The judgment of Pagan authors is unanimous on that point. All, without

exception, recognize in the Christian, the features of the servile

character; indifference to great affairs, a sad and contrite air,

morose judgments upon the age, aversion to games, theatres, gymnasia,

baths.

In a word, the Pagans were the world; Christians were not of the world.

They were a little flock apart, hated by the world, finding the world

evil, seeking "to keep themselves unspotted from the world." The ideal

of Christianity will be the reverse of that of the worldly man. The

perfect Christian will love abjection; he will have the virtues of the

poor and the simple, of him who does not seek to exalt himself. But he

will also have the defect of his virtues; he will declare many things

to be vain and frivolous, which are not so at all; he will depreciate

the universe; he will be the enemy of the admirer of beauty. A system

where the Venus of Milo is but an idol is a system, partial, it not

false for beauty, is almost as valuable as the good and the true. A

decadence of art is in any case inevitable with such ideas. The

Christian will not care to build well, nor to sculpture well, nor to

design well; he is too idealistic. He will care little for knowledge;

curiosity seems a vain thing to him. Confounding the great

voluptuousness of the soul, which is one of the methods of reaching the

infinite, with vulgar pleasure, he will for-bid himself to enjoy it. He

is too virtuous.

Another law shows itself as dominating this history. The establishment

of Christianity corresponds to the suppression of political life in the

world of the Mediterranean. Christianity was born and expanded itself

at a period when there was no such thing as patriotism. If anything is

wholly wanting to the founders of the Church it is that quality. They

are not Cosmopolitan; for, the whole planet is for them, but a place of

exile, they are idealistic in the most absolute sense. Our country is

composed of body and soul. The soul: its memories, images, legends,

misfortunes, hopes, common regrets; the body: the soil, race, language,

mountains, rivers, characteristic products. Now, never were people more

detached from all that than the primitive Christians. They did not hold

to Judea; at the end of a few years they had forgotten Galilee; the

glory of Greece and Rome was indifferent to them. The countries where

Christianity first established itself, Syria, Cyprus, Asia Minor, no

longer remembered the time when they had been free; Greece and Rome had

still a great national sentiment. But in Rome patriotism was confined

to the army and to some families; in Greece, Christianity fructified

only in Corinth, a city, which since its destruction by Mummius and its

reconstruction by C�sar, was a collection of people of all sorts. The

true Greek countries then, as now, very jealous, much absorbed by the

memory of their past, paid little attention to the new preaching; they

were always indifferently Christian. On the contrary, those soft, gay,

voluptuous countries of Asia, countries of pleasure, of free manners,

of easy indifference, habituated to take life and government from

others, had nothing to abdicate in the matter of pride and of

traditions. The ancient metropolitan cities of Christianity, Antioch,

Ephesus, Thessalonica, Corinth, Rome, were common cities, if I may dare

to say so, cities after the fashion of modern Alexandria, into which

poured men of all races, and in which the marriage between man and the

soil, which constitutes a nation, was absolutely broken through.

The importance given to social questions is always in an inverse ratio

to political pre-occupations. Socialism rises when patriotism grows

weak. Christianity was the explosion of social and religious ideas for

which the world had been waiting, since Augustus put an end to

political conflicts. As with Islamism, Christianity being a universal

religion, will be at bottom the enemy of nationalities. It will require

many centuries and many schisms before the idea takes root of forming

national churches with a religion, which was at first the negation of

all earthly countries, which was born at a period when there were no

cities and citizens in the world, and when the old rough and strong

republics of Italy and of Greece would surely have been expelled from

the State as a mortal poison.

And this was one of the causes of the greatness of the new religion.

Humanity is a varying, changeable thing at the mercy of contradictory

desires. Great is the country; its saints are the heroes of Marathon,

of Thermopyl�, of Valmy, and of Fleurus. Country, however, is not

everything here below. One is man and Son of God before being Frenchman

or German. The Kingdom of God, eternal dream which will never be torn

from the heart of man, is a protest against a too exclusive patriotism.

The thought of an organization of humanity in view of its greatest

happiness and its moral amelioration is Christian and legitimate. The

State knows but one thing--how to organise egotism. That is not

indifferent, for egotism is the most powerful and the most assailable

of human motives. But that is not sufficient. Governments which have

started with the belief that man is swayed only by his instincts of

cupidity, are deceived. Devotion is as natural as egotism to the man of

a noble race, and the organization of devotion, is religion. Let no one

hope then to get away from religion or from religious associations.

Every step in the progress of modern society has made the need for them

more imperious.

It is in this way that these accounts of strange events may be for us

full of both teaching and of example. There is no need for delay over

certain details which the difference of time renders strange and

eccentric. When it is a question of popular beliefs there is always an

immense disproportion between the grandeur of the idealism, which faith

pursues, and the triviality of the material circumstances, which we are

called upon to accept. Hence the particularity, with which in religious

history shocking details and acts like those of madness may be mixed up

with everything that is really sublime. The monk who invented the holy

ampulla was one of the founders of the kingdom of France. Who would

efface from the life of Jesus the episode of the demoniac in the

country of the Gergesenes? Never has man in cold blood done the things

that were done by Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, Peter the Hermit,

Ignatius Loyola. Nothing is of more relative application than the word

"madness" as applied to the past of the human mind. If we carried out

the ideas which are current in our own times there is not a prophet,

not an apostle, not a saint, who would not be locked up. The human

conscience is very unstable at times when reflection has not advanced;

in these conditions of the soul it is by insensible transitions that

good becomes evil, that the beautiful borders upon the ugly, and that

the ugly becomes the beautiful. There is no possible justice towards

the past if so much is not admitted. A single divine breath penetrates

all history, and makes an admirable whole of it; but the variety of the

combinations which the human faculties may produce is infinite. The

apostles differ less from us than the founders of Buddhism, who were,

however, nearer to us by language. and perhaps by race. Our age has

seen religious movements quite as extraordinary as those of old times,

movements which have excited quite as much enthusiasm, which have had

already--proportion being kept in view--more martyrs, and the future of

which is still uncertain.

I do not speak of the Mormons, a sect which is in some respects so

silly and so abject that it is hard to speak of it seriously. It is,

however, instructive to see in the middle of the nineteenth century,

thousands of men living by miracle, believing with a blind faith in the

marvels, which, they say, they have seen and handled. There is already

a whole literature devoted to the agreement between Mormonism and

science; what is better, that religion, founded as it is upon the most

silly impostures, has been able to accomplish miracles of patience and

self-abnegation? In five hundred years learned men will prove its

divine origin by the miracles of its establishment. Babism, in Persia

was a phenomenon otherwise considerable. A gentle and unpretentious

man, a sort of modest and pious Spinoza, has found himself almost

against his own will raised to the rank of miracle worker, of

incarnation of the divine, and has become the leader of a numerous,

ardent and fanatical sect, which has very nearly brought about a

revolution comparable to that of Islam. Thousands of martyrs have run

to him with joy before death. A day unequalled perhaps in the history

of the world was that of the day of the great butchery which was made

of the babis of Teheran. "On that day were seen in the streets and

bazaars of Teheran," says a writer of undoubted authority, "a spectacle

which it would seem as if the population were likely never to forget.

When the conversation even yesterday turned upon that matter, you may

judge of the admiration mixed with horror, which the crowd felt and

which years have not diminished. We saw advancing amongst the

executioners women and children, their flesh gashed all over their

bodies, with lighted and flaming wicks fixed in their wounds. The

victims were hauled along with cords and forced to walk by strokes of

the whip. Children and women advanced singing a verse which said:--Of a

truth we come from God and return to Him.' Their voices rose loudly

above the profound silence of the crowd. When one of the victims fell

and was forced to rise by blows from the whip or thrusts of the

bayonet, though the loss of blood, which ran over all his limbs, left

him yet a little strength, he began to dance and to cry with an

increase of enthusiasm, Of a truth we come from God and we return to

Him.' Some of the children died during the journey. The executioners

cast their corpses under the feet of their fathers and their sisters,

who walked proudly over them and did not glance twice at them. When

they arrived at the place of execution, the victims were offered their

lives on condition of abjuration. One executioner took the fancy of

saying to a father that if he did not yield he would cut the throats of

his two sons upon his breast. They were two little lads, the eldest of

whom might have been about fourteen and who, red with their own blood

and with calcined flesh, listened coolly to this dialogue. The father

answered, crouching on the ground, that he was ready, and the elder of

the boys, claiming with some importance his right of seniority,

demanded to be slaughtered the first. At last all was finished; night

fell upon a mass of mangled flesh; heads were hung in baskets to the

scaffold of justice and the dogs of the suburbs met in troops on that

side of the city."

That happened in 1852. The sect of Mazdak under Chosroes Nouschirvan,

was suffocated in a similar bath of blood. Absolute devotion is, for

simple natures, the most exquisite of joys and a species of necessity.

In the affair of the Bab, people who were hardly members of the sect,

came forward to denounce themselves, so that they might be joined with

the sufferers. It is so sweet for man to suffer for something, that in

many cases the thirst for martydom causes men to believe. A disciple

who was companion of Bab at his execution, hanged by his side on the

ramparts of Tabriz and momentarily expecting death, had only one word

in his mouth:--"Are you satisfied with me, master?"

The persons who consider as miraculous or chimerical all that in

history surpasses the calculations of ordinary good sense, find such

things inexplicable. The fundamental condition of criticism is to know

how to understand the varying conditions of the human mind. Absolute

faith is for us wholly out of the question. Outside of the positive

sciences, of a certainty in some degree material, every opinion is in

our eyes only approximate, implying partial truth and partial error.

The proportion of error may be as small as you will; it is never

reduced to zero when morals implying a question of art, of language, of

literary form, or of persons are concerned. Such is not the manner of

seeing things which narrow and obstinate spirits adopt--Orientals for

example. The eye of those people is not like ours; it is the glassy eye

of men in mosaics--dull and fixed. They can see only only a single

thing at a time; that thing besets them, takes possession of them; they

are not then masters of their beliefs or their unbeliefs; there is no

room for a reflective after-thought. For an opinion thus embraced a man

will allow himself to be killed. The martyrs in religion are what the

party man is in politics. Not many very intelligent men have been made

martyrs. The confessors of the time of Diocletian would have been,

after the peace of the Church, wearisome and imperious personages. Men

are never very tolerant when they believe that they are altogether

right and the rest of the world altogether wrong.

The great conflagrations of religion, being the results of a too

definite manner of seeing things, thus became enigmas for an age like

ours, when the rigour of conviction is weakened. With us the sincere

man constantly modifies his opinions; in the first place, because the

world changes, in the second, because the observer changes also. We

believe more things at the same time. We love justice and truth; for

them we would risk our lives; but we do not admit that justice and

truth belong to a sect or a party. We are good French-men, but we admit

that the Germans and the English are superior to us in many ways. It is

not thus at the periods and in the countries where everyone belongs

with his whole nature to his communion, race, or political school; and

this is why all great religious creations have taken place in

societies, the general spirit of which was more or less analogous to

that of the East. Until now, in short, absolute faith only has

succeeded in imposing itself upon others. A good serving maid of Lyons,

named Blandina, who caused herself to be killed for her faith at

seventeen years of age, caused a brutal brigand chief, Clovis, who

found her to his taste fourteen centuries ago, to embrace Catholicism,

makes laws for us to this day.

Who is there who has not, while passing through our ancient towns which

have become modem, stopped at the feet of gigantic monuments of the

faith of olden times? All is externally renewed; there is not a vestige

of ancient habits; the cathedral remains, a little lowered in height

may be by the hand of man, but profoundly rooted in the soil. Mole sua

stat! Its massiveness is its law. It has resisted the deluge, which

swept away everything else around it; not one of the men of old times

returning to visit the places where he lived would find his home again;

the crow alone, who has fixed his nest in the heights of the sacred

edifice, has not seen the hammer threatening his dwelling. Strange

prescription! These honest martyrs, these rude converts, these pirate

church builders, rule us still. We are Christians because it pleased

them to be so. As in politics it is the barbarous foundations only that

live, so in religion there are only spontaneous, and, if I may dare to

say so, fanatical affirmations that can be contagious. This is because

religions are wholly popular works. Their success does not depend upon

the more or less convincing proofs of their divinity which they bring

forward; their success is in proportion to what they say to the heart

of the people.

Does it follow from thence that religion is destined to diminish little

by little, and to disappear like popular errors concerning magic,

sorcery, spirits? Certainly not. Religion is not a popular error; it is

a great instinctive truth, imperfectly seen by the people, expressed by

the people. All the symbols which serve to give a form to the religious

sentiment are incomplete, and it is their fate to be rejected one after

another. But nothing is more false than the dream of certain persons,

who, seeking to conceive a perfect humanity, conceive it without

religion. It is the very reverse which ought to be said. China is a

very inferior species of humanity, and China has almost no religion. On

the other hand, let us suppose a planet inhabited by a humanity whose

intellectual, moral and physical power are double those of terrestrial

humanity, that humanity would be, at least, twice as religious as ours.

I say, at least, for it is probable that the augmentation of the

religious faculties would take place in a more rapid progression than

the augmentation of the intellectual capacity, and would not be done in

a simple direct proportion. Let us so suppose a humanity ten times as

strong as ours, that humanity would be infinitely more religious. It is

even probable, that in that degree of sublimity, disengaged from all

material cares and from all egotism, gifted with perfect tact, and a

divinely delicate taste, seeing the baseness and the nothingness of all

that is not true, good, or beautiful, man would be exclusively

religious, plunged in a perpetual adoration, rolling from ecstasies to

ecstasies, being born, living and dying, in a torrent of bliss.

Egotism, in short, which gives a measure of the inferiority of being,

diminishes in proportion, as the animal is got rid of. A perfect being

would be no longer an egotist; he would be altogether religious.

Progress then will have for its effect the increase of religion and

neither its destruction nor its diminution.

But it is time to return to our three missionaries, Paul, Barnabas and

John--Mark, whom we left at the moment when they went out of Antioch by

the gate, which led to Seleucia. In my third volume I will endeavour to

trace these messages of good news by land and by sea, through calm and

tempest, through good and evils days. I am in haste to retell that

unequalled epic, to describe those infinite routes of Asia and of

Europe by the side of which the seed of the gospel was sown, those seas

which they traversed so many times under circumstances so diverse. The

great Christian Odyssey is about to commence. Already the apostolic

barque has spread its sails; the wind sighs and aspires only to carry

upon its wings the words of Jesus.

THE END.

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191. file://localhost/ccel/r/renan/apostles/cache/apostles.html3#xii-Page\_83

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