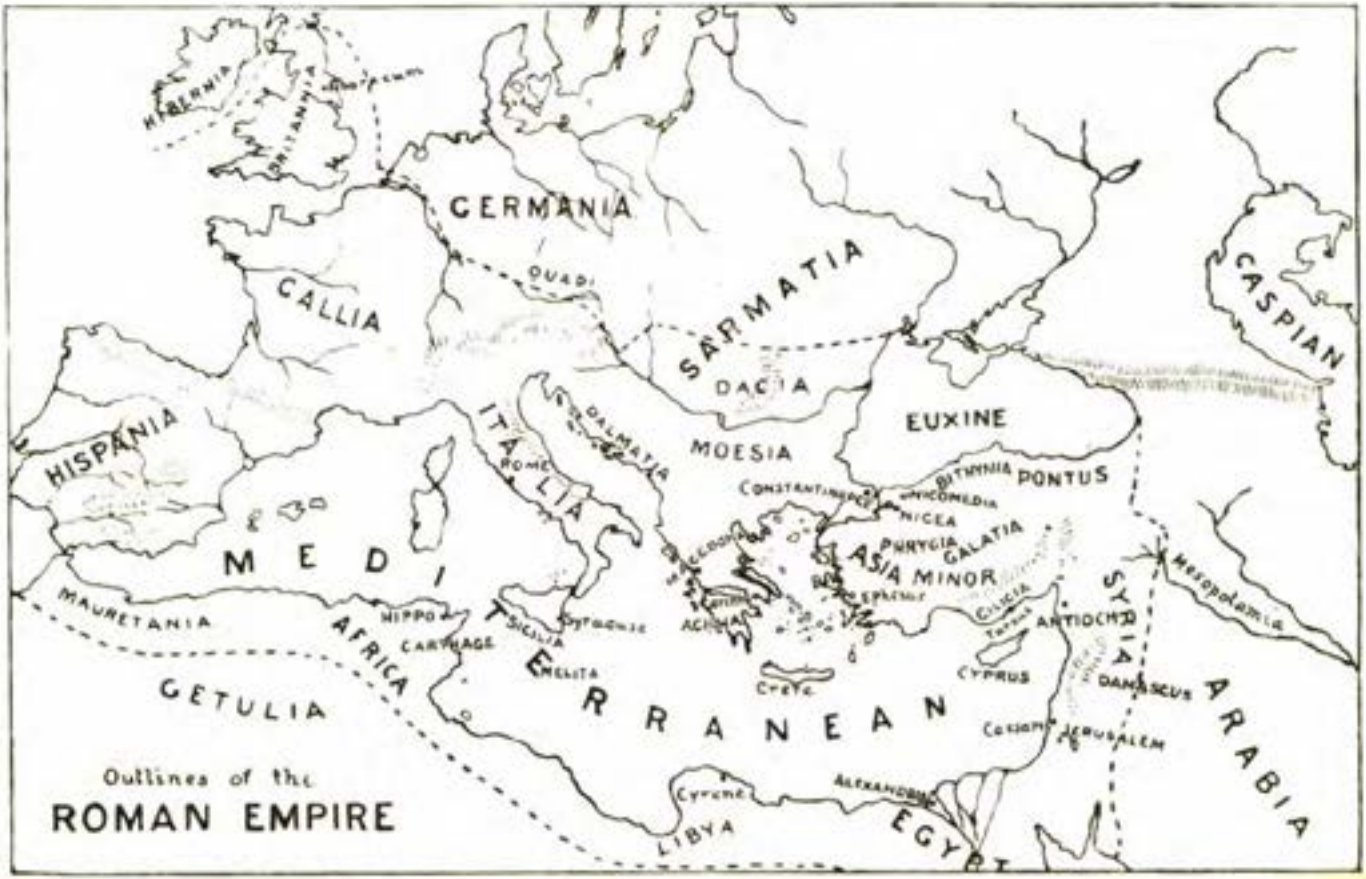
The Beginnings of Christendom

Tarrant



Outlines of the
ROMAN EMPIRE

THE

Beginnings of Christendom

A Popular Sketch

BY

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PREFACE

So much interest was displayed in the subject of these chapters by the popular audiences to whom they were first given as lectures that it is hoped their perusal will be found helpful to many, who, having little time to study larger volumes, are nevertheless anxious to learn the chief points in the history of early Christianity. The author has endeavoured to distinguish between the facts enumerated and the opinions which are based on them; and, while the views expressed may be questioned, he believes the statements made can be amply verified.

The reader who desires further information on the subject is strongly advised to consult the manual issued, since these pages were written, by the Rev. W. E. Addis, M.A., under the title, *Christianity and the Roman Empire*, and published by the Sunday School Association, Essex Hall, London.

W. G. T.

London, June, 1893.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

B.C.

63 Romans under Pompey take Jerusalem.

37–4 Herod the Great, King of Judæa.

27 **Augustus,** Emperor.

A.D.

14 **Tiberius,** Emperor.

25–36 Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judæa.

36 *Stephen martyred* (?).

64 **Nero** persecutes Christianity at Rome. *Paul died* (?).

70 Titus takes Jerusalem.

98 **Trajan,** Emperor.

102 *Clement of Rome died* (?).

112–114 Pliny, Governor of Bithynia.

117 **Hadrian,** Emperor.

125 (?) *Apologies of Quadratus and Aristides.*

135 Bar Cochba's Revolt crushed.

138 **Antoninus Pius,** Emperor.

140–150 *Marcion flourished.*
150 *Montanus flourished.*
150–165 *Justin Martyr flourished.*
161 **Marcus Aurelius,** Emperor.
163 *Papias died* (?).
165 (?) *Tatian composed the* '*Diatessaron.*'
170 (?) *Hegesippus, historian.*
178 (?) *Celsus wrote against Christianity.*
118–200 *Irenæus flourished.*
180 **Commodus,** Emperor.
193 **Septimius Severus,** Emperor.
193–220 *Clement of Alexandria flourished.*
197–220 *Tertullian flourished.*
205–254 *Origen flourished.*
222 **Alexander Severus,** Emperor.
249 **Decius,** Emperor.
249–258 *Cyprian flourished.*
250 (?) *Sabellius flourished.*
260–270 *Paul of Samosata flourished.*
284 **Diocletian,** Emperor.
303–305 Great Persecution.
306 Constantine Cæsar in the West.
310–336 *Arius flourished.*
313 *Edict of Milan in favour of Christians.*
320–350 *Athanasius flourished*
324 **Constantine,** Emperor.
325 *Council of Nicea.*

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTENDOM

CHAPTER I.

THE WORLD IN THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CENTURY.

TAKE your map of Europe and fix your attention upon the Mediterranean Sea. Nineteen centuries ago the world's busiest and strongest life lay in the lands that border that sea. The three peninsulas that jut southward from the great mainland of Europe were all under the sway of one great Power, as were also the countries that lie along the African shores of the Mediterranean, and those that fill up the mass of Asia Minor. This great Power was the Roman Empire, the capital of which occupied a fairly central position upon the Italian peninsula; and by means of a well-organised system of government its officers were able to control effectively the strangely diverse people inhabiting its vast dominions. Even the barbarians to the north of the Alps and to the east and west of Central Europe were forced to acknowledge Rome's over-lordship. She had no rival within the circle of

nations thus sketched out. For a very long period there were no great wars between the subject races. The Empire enjoyed comparative peace, and riches abounded in the seats of government.

Not that there was no poverty. On the contrary, the luxury of the ruling caste was purchased at the expense of much hardship among the subject races. In the course of conquest many thousands had been taken captive by the Roman armies, and were sold into slavery. The slave element was so large that a proposal to require bondmen to wear a distinctive dress was negatived, we are told, lest they should themselves perceive their numerical strength. Gibbon supposes that more than half the inhabitants of the Empire (at a somewhat later period) were slaves; and he roundly estimates the total population at one hundred and twenty millions. This huge proportion of slaves must indicate a miserable state of society; and although many who were of this class acquired eminence for skill and learning, it cannot be doubted that the greater part suffered enormous wrongs, and formed a fit element for the growth of the wildest dreams. By far the highest among the subjected races stood the Greeks, and as their books and arts were beyond anything the Romans had produced, they naturally gained an intellectual supremacy over their political masters. The Latin tongue was adhered to as the language of government, but the Greek became the general medium of polite communication; and the uniform administration of law helped to bind the Empire into a closer unity. Thus, while each

tribe and race had its own speech and customs, there were common links between all.

The religious situation was peculiar. Although a good deal of reverence was paid to the deities of Rome, its people were far from desiring to impose their own conceptions and rites upon those whom they conquered. On the contrary, a well-known story would make it appear that when, in the early days of the Roman people, they subdued their northern neighbours, the Etruscans, they were glad to receive religious notions and practices from their captives. A sentiment of vague respect seems to have guided their dealings with the 'gods' of the peoples around them, and with but few exceptions, and those explainable on grounds of political suspicion, the various races of the Empire were allowed freedom of worship. We shall see, later, some of the remarkable developments of ritual that took place in connection with the Greek 'mysteries.' At present it must suffice to remark that, practically, all the varieties of religion in the Empire agreed in two things. They all included the offering of *sacrifices* to the deities, and, with one exception, they all presented *visible embodiments* of the deities to the worshippers. So much swayed were the Romans by the latter tendency that it was with little difficulty, if any, that they received the notion of deified humanity, and though, for the most part, they reserved divine honours for the emperors when dead, instances were not wanting of such honours being given to the living.

The one signal exception among the religions of

the Empire was that of Judaism. Glancing at the map again, we see a little strip of coastland at the remote south-east of the Mediterranean, well-known to us now as Palestine. In this insignificant country, comparable in size to Wales, a remarkable race had its home. There were many Jews, it is true, scattered over the Empire; many of them thriving, others reckoned, justly or otherwise it is difficult to say, among the scum of the population. But that little strip of Syrian coastland had been for centuries the home of the race, and at the rise of the Empire a large population, very mixed in the north, less so in the south, inhabited its cities and villages. The story of the nation's past went far beyond the beginnings of Rome. We may roughly compare its antiquity to that of our own English race, with its fourteen centuries and more of growth since the first Saxon invasions. As in our history there is much that rests only on tradition of the slenderest kind, so we may discern a legendary air about the primitive history of the Hebrews. They pointed to an origin among the fellow-Semites of the Mesopotamian plains and valleys. A sojourn in Egypt under the grinding yoke of the Pharaohs and a migration into Palestine were among the great events recorded of their forefathers. By slow and painful degrees, the people came to be united under a monarchy; but after a brief period of prosperity, about 1000 B.C., to which men in after-times looked back with pride and longing, the monarchy split, and a Northern Kingdom existed side by side with a Southern. In the course

of three or four centuries, first the Northern, and finally the Southern Kingdom succumbed to invading armies from the Mesopotamian region, and the best part of the people were carried off by the conquerors. From this much-bewailed captivity several detachments of exiles and their descendants were permitted to return; and once more the nation 'made history' in its own way. Unfortunately the records of the centuries immediately following the return from captivity are but scanty, and we may well suppose that the fortunes of the people were long at a low ebb. Under one over-lordship after another the race struggled on, suffering many a buffet amid the contests of rivals to north and south, but tenaciously holding to their own religious ideas and practices. Their pride was not in any territorial dominion, but in their ritual and literature. They guarded both with much jealousy, and while they gave of their substance to enrich the services of the sanctuary at Jerusalem, their keenest intellects devoted themselves to the explanation and expansion of the traditional 'Law,' which regulated things civil as well as religious.

Thus, two centuries before our era begins, this singular race had at last acquired settled convictions of such strength that when a Syrian monarch, Antiochus Epiphanes, sought to win or compel them to the observance of customs similar to those in use around them, they burst into passionate revolt. The rest of mankind might be as they pleased; but for themselves they were 'Yahveh's people,' chosen from of old to teach the truths revealed specially to them

by their God, to live as his servants, and to offer him acceptable worship in his own holy place. The result of the revolt, aided as it was by the growing Roman power, was the establishment of a Jewish Prince at Jerusalem under Roman protection. Unhappily, a spirit of turbulence among the Jews, which proved most disastrous in the end, led to a growing interference by the Roman authorities. About sixty years before our era, the great general Pompey took Jerusalem, and inflicted great suffering on its inhabitants. In the course of his inspection of the reduced capital, he went through the temple, inspecting its treasures, but, to his surprise, finding no 'god' similar to the figures which were frequently borne away to Rome from despoiled cities as a mark of triumph. There was, of course, no such 'god' to be found—not even in the innermost 'Holy of Holies,' which, with ruthless disregard of the entreaties of the Jews, he persisted in entering. This absence of a visible deity was inexplicable to the ordinary Roman mind, and it accounts for the common charge of 'impiety' brought against the Jews by the ancient writers. But, as we know, their religious system culminated in the prohibition of idolatry in any form. Sacrifices were still offered by them, and in this they resembled others around them. But an image of God appeared to them not simply ridiculous; it was the grossest abomination. Here was a sufficient ground of offence between them and all other nations, and when we remember their extreme exclusiveness and habitual tone of spiritual pride we can see how readily they drew upon themselves the hottest hatred.

There were sects among the Jews themselves, corresponding roughly to different degrees of Jewishness. The Pharisees cherished the national customs and pretensions most jealously, and insisted upon the minutest ceremonialism. The Sadducees were less devoted to external pieties and, indeed, admitted closer relationships with the general culture of the age, including the fashionable scepticism. The Essenes went farther than the Pharisees in their desire to be a peculiar people; they lived apart from ordinary communities in a kind of monasticism, and admitted but a minimum of earthly interests. Besides these, other groups and tendencies are discernible, the most noticeable being the 'Zealots,' whose religion often acquired political significance, and who were ready to follow any 'Anointed one' ('Christ,' in the Hebrew 'Messiah') who promised in any way to revive the fallen fortunes of the people and set up a kingdom of Yahveh's people in accordance with long cherished dreams and prophecies. It is said that from the rise of Judas the Gaulonite (referred to in *Luke* and the *Acts*), to the fall of Bar-Cochba in the early part of the second century, at least fifty 'Messiahs' presented themselves, some of them with a considerable degree of acceptance by the people, and even by those in authority.

One 'Christ' at least has left his mark upon succeeding ages, not by founding anew the Jewish Kingdom, for his kingdom is 'not of this world.' Jesus of Nazareth is now a name so widely known that it is with difficulty we can realise the conditions of his brief career. We have to remember afresh

his position, as a wandering teacher among a despised people in an obscure corner of the great Empire, in order to understand the slendernesss of all literary testimony to his career beyond the Christian writings. The great historians of our day have copious means of becoming speedily acquainted with all sorts of movements in all parts of the world. Not so with the Roman writers. Unless the subject were of immediate political importance they could have little inducement to pursue inquiries respecting obscure individuals. Apparently such as heard of Christ did so amid the confusion of rumours that conveyed little, indeed, of historical virtue. The one classical passage of importance on the subject is found in the 'Annals' of Tacitus (15.44), and this historian, we must remember, flourished at the close of the first century and the opening of the second. His statement occurs in a narrative of the events connected with the burning of Rome in A.D. 64, the blame of which the Emperor Nero laid upon 'the Christians,' who were accordingly punished with frightful tortures. Tacitus says:—

'Christ, the author of this name [Christians], was put to death under Pontius Pilate, the Procurator, in the reign of Tiberius. This dire superstition temporarily repressed broke out again and spread, not only throughout Judæa, the source of the evil, but throughout the City [Rome] also.'

Another and later reference by Suetonius does not yield even so much as this, which, at any rate, confirms the fact and approximate date of Christ's death.

Suetonius (if, indeed, his record applies to Jesus at all) supposed 'Chrestus' to have been an instigator of a riot at Rome, for which he was executed. If we turn to the works of Josephus, a voluminous Jewish writer, born certainly after the date of Christ's death, we are tantalized by a fresh element of perplexity. The Roman writers may have been grossly misinformed or even prejudiced, but we have little doubt that their works are substantially as they wrote them. There are two passages relating to Christ in the 'Antiquities' of Josephus, of one of which nothing is more certain than that he could not have written it as it stands, even if any of it is original; and the other passage is but a brief reference to 'James, the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ.' At most this yields us very little, and it may be as corrupt a passage as the other. Singular as it may appear, the history of the first centuries is rendered most difficult by the false dealings of Christian copyists. Seeking to fortify their case they succeeded in everywhere raising suspicions. One passage in Josephus relating to the career of John the Baptist seems, however, to be deserving of respect as original and independent testimony to an important piece of Gospel history. But for the earliest evidence as to the 'beginnings of Christendom,' we must turn to what is, after all, the natural source of such information—the literature that grew up among the Christian communities. Scanty at first, and often faulty (but, therefore, less open to the suspicion of ingenious fraud), the Christian writings began speedily to multiply. By

careful study they yield clues which enable us to trace the course of events and the growth of opinions from the time when the disciples of Jesus were added to the sects of Judaism, to the establishment of Christianity as the State-religion by the Emperor Constantine. Those clues we shall now try to present.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES.

As has been said, the natural source of information about the rise of so obscure a sect as the disciples of Jesus formed at the first is to be found in the literature produced by the earliest writers among them. At first the sect showed no signs of political importance, and any religious or philosophical significance in their movement and teachings was not likely to strike the minds of contemporary historians of the world's life in general. But a further consideration is necessary. If we try to realise the conditions in which the followers of Jesus found themselves at his death we see that there was little to induce them to begin a regular chronicle. Whatever else they believed they certainly expected a speedy 'end of the age' with the reappearance of Christ. It was not likely that with this expectation uppermost they should at once, or even for a long time, set to work to preserve exact memorials for the benefit of undreamed-of future ages. When at last some of them saw the advantage of writing down what was to be said, it was still with no idea of composing a history.

The letters ('Epistles') preserved in the New Testament, and professing to be works of the leaders in the First Christian Communities, tell us but little in a direct way concerning their outward fortunes. Yet these include probably the earliest writings in the book, and when something like a definite history was begun the earliest events were already remote. This professedly historical work, *The Acts*, is almost our only guide to a knowledge of the First Generation, and it has to be confessed that its date is hotly disputed. Even those who claim an early date for it must admit that its opening chapters present many difficulties and leave much unexplained. It does not profess to tell about the disciples at large so much as about their leaders, and of these it chiefly deals with but few. Thus, at best, we are left very much to conjecture and inference, and we must endeavour faithfully to distinguish between the tolerably certain and the extremely doubtful.

The immediate followers of Jesus, then, being linked into a fellowship of love to him and desire for his reappearing are represented to us as being chiefly of the humbler classes. No names of prominence among the Jews at large belong to them. As was said at a later date, 'not many wise, not many noble,' were reckoned among them. 'The Brethren,' as they called themselves, were led by 'Galilean' apostles. We are informed that the number of the leaders was just twelve, and that this number had been specially chosen by Jesus. One of the twelve having been the means of Jesus'

crucifixion disappears amid a gloom of confused legend, and a record is given of an election of a substitute by lot. We do not find the trace of any idea of keeping the number at twelve thereafter. When James the apostle is killed there is no suggestion of filling his place. Of the great majority of the apostles we hear little or nothing. A variety of legends may be found elsewhere concerning them, but these earliest writings tell us almost nothing of them. The exceptions are Peter, John, and two named James, of whom one appears to be 'the Lord's brother,' and not one of the 'Twelve.' By far the greatest prominence is given to the first of these. The latter part of the book deals almost exclusively with the doings of one who was not of the Twelve, viz., Paul, and we shall see that there was good reason for giving him a large place in the primitive records. But let us first gather up what indications we may of the state of things before this great man came among the Brethren. Very briefly we may speak of their place and circumstances, social and religious.

Although their Master came from Galilee, and though they were chiefly men of Galilee, the immediate followers of Jesus appear to have taken up their abode in Jerusalem, where he met his death. Some of the stories connected with his appearances after death point to a return to Galilee on the part of some, including their leader, Peter; but *Acts* has none but the vaguest reference to any Galilean community—(ix. 31). All centres at

first, and apparently for some years, in Jerusalem. It is difficult to account for this settlement in the turbulent capital except on the supposition that the first aim of the disciples was to testify their belief in the *Messiahship* of the crucified Jesus; and where could they do so with greater point than at the very heart of Judaism? Elsewhere the theme would have little importance; the 'universal' character of Christianity was as yet unperceived. As far as we can gather the Messianic argument formed the bulk of their teaching. They are reported to have won a large number of adherents. When we read, however, that 'a great company of [Jewish] priests were obedient to the faith'—(*Acts* vi. 7)—it is difficult to avoid suspecting the legend as exaggerated, to say the least. Certainly no further trace of the converted priests can be found. On the other hand, we may infer that the absence of any record of very serious persecution during this earliest period shows that the practices of the brethren were not such as to provoke immediate hostilities. At a much later period there is still a good deal of Jewishness about them, and we can easily imagine that it took some time for them to discern the really revolutionary character of the principles which they had learned. Their clinging about the temple was significant of a tendency at first to minimise the gap between themselves and the pious Jews around them. It was reserved for a 'new man,' not one of the Twelve, to snap the strings that bound the new faith.

We come upon the name of this 'new man' in

connection with the social aspect of the growing community. Conformable to ideas which are deeply marked upon the early Gospel records, an attempt was made, we are told, to knit the brethren into a commonwealth. The poor were succoured; the rich gave their possessions for the common good. So runs the story, and we can suppose at least that this great experiment was tried among the Jerusalem disciples. It was not the first experiment of the kind, as the Essene communities witnessed. It was not the last, as the world's history has amply shown. But like all others, so far, it failed to satisfy all parties. Murmurings arose as to the partition of goods; and the new name arises in this connection. It was among the 'Hellenists,' we are told, Jews born or educated in Greek-speaking lands, that the dissatisfaction rose to a head. For a moment the Twelve emerge as a sort of governing board, and the appointment is made, (by *popular choice*, it should be observed) of Seven 'men of good report' to attend to the purely social concerns of the community of disciples. It is remarkable that the Seven all have Greek names—the case with two only of the Twelve, Philip and Andrew. It is further remarkable that, instead of confining their attention to matters of business and charity, we find at least two of the Seven (who, by the by, are never called 'Deacons' in *Acts*) at once stepped into a leading place among the speakers and teachers. All were men of high repute, being 'full of faith and of holy Spirit'; but rising pre-eminent among them, Stephen is specially

named not only as being 'full of grace and power,' but as a worker of 'wonders and signs' among the people. As to this feature in the history of Christendom, we have to remind ourselves that whatever significance belongs to it, there has never been a generation when 'wonders and signs' have been wanting. Even at this time we hear constantly of 'miracles' of healing occurring, now at some Catholic shrine, again under the hand of some 'faith-doctor' of the West. But a discussion of this particular subject would lead us too far from the main lines of our study. We must be content with reminding ourselves that the connection between disease and mental influence is still far from being clearly understood; and in those days, not only among the Jews, but throughout the Empire, people were prone to accept the marvellous on slight examination.

It was Stephen's fate that brought about a revolution in the community of the 'Brethren.' Urged by zeal for the new faith he hotly pursued his arguments (we are told) to practical issues. Finally, he was accused of speaking against the general Jewish system, including the Temple worship and ceremonial law. Remembering the doubt as to the date of the composition of *Acts*, we must not press details too far; but, reading the speech ('Apologia') attributed to Stephen, and apparently considered appropriate in the mouth of a typical disciple of the period, we can hardly wonder that a violent issue resulted. Stephen was clearly not a temporiser with established customs, nor one who restrained his invective against

opponents. To sum up in a word, his bitter taunts provoked the fiercest wrath, and he was put to death, the story says, by stoning, the ancient method of the Jews. His death was not enough for the enraged party of sacerdotal Judaism. It would seem that they had become aware at last of the ultimate meaning of the new ideas, and the spirit that would not bear the tyrannical innovations attempted by Antiochus two centuries before broke out afresh at the discovery of this insidious danger springing up in their very midst. Men 'very zealous for the law' set themselves to work to root out the heretics, and we have Paul's confession that he, for one, 'made havock' of the Church of God, in his blind enthusiasm for the faith of his fathers. A picturesque touch in *Acts* shows him an approving spectator of Stephen's death.

It may be imagined that this outbreak of violent opposition, coming after a period of comparative security, completely changed the outlook of the community of disciples. A little while before, it seemed, for all that could be guessed, as if the community of believers in Jesus as the Messiah would be permanently settled in Jerusalem, making what terms it could with those who despised its strange interpretation of prophecy and history. Having borne its testimony, it might wait, with ever-heightening hopes, for the coming again of Christ and the 'end of the age.' But suddenly the Brethren were scattered, 'except the Apostles,' says *Acts*. *They* clung to the fatal city, still, and Peter apparently continued his gospel to the circumcision, without seriously con-

templating a wider field of work. Even among those who fled from Jerusalem there were but a section who, in their zeal for the Gospel, addressed themselves to other than Jews. It is evidently a great point with the author of *Acts* to show how very gradually the wider view of Christianity found place in the minds of the disciples. Without entering upon a subject too difficult for brief treatment, we must content ourselves here with a guarded reference to the hints he gives of the several stages in this process. He tells us of the dispersion of disciples, not only throughout Judæa and Samaria (a subsequent passage adds Galilee, but this is the only reference to that district), but also in places beyond the borders of Palestine. Detailed accounts are given of the zeal of Philip, one of the Seven, who baptised an African proselyte, and finally settled at Cæsarea, on the coast; and of Peter himself, who admitted to baptism an uncircumcised Roman officer at the same city. These narratives, however, belong to the more debatable part of the book, and must be passed over here. It is more important for our present purpose to note that a community of disciples was soon founded at Damascus, and that along the Phœnician coast, and as far as Antioch, and the island of Cyprus, the story of the new faith was carried. No doubt men whose homes lay in these districts were among the first to retreat from the dangers of Jerusalem; we are told expressly that Barnabas, who was among the earliest converts, and who became a leader along with Paul, was of Cyprus. We may also surmise that it would be the

'advanced' men, those who shared Stephen's outspoken contempt for the old Jewish customs, who would be marked by the orthodox Jews, and who would be urged by the more moderate section to get out of the way. It is certainly noteworthy that the first appearance of a regular movement among Gentiles, who were not even Jewish proselytes, is found at Antioch, a city long to be famed in the history of the Church (see *Acts* xi. 20, and note the various readings). The reading adopted in the Authorised Version is 'Grecians,' *i.e.* 'Greek speaking Jews.' The Revised Version, on better documentary evidence, gives the word 'Greeks,' *i.e.* the ordinary non-Jewish people. Although some of the copyists of the book evidently shrank from the admission that so great a departure was begun by converts whose names have not survived, and who seem to have been free from the scruples which long afterwards still troubled the Jerusalem disciples, there seems good reason to believe that Stephen's uncalculating thoroughness was infectious, and that some Hellenists (among whom may have been 'Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch,' one of 'the Seven'), pushed forward into the idea of a system wide enough to hold both Jew and Gentile.

A word or two is desirable about Antioch, which for several reasons began to be a most important place in the history of Christendom. It was a famous city situated upon the Orontes, near to the sudden bend westward of the coast of Northern Syria. It possessed great advantages, and its inhabitants included many of influence and wealth. For centuries it was the

seat of the Syrian monarchs, and under the Empire it retained its importance as the residence of the Prefect of Syria. Its situation gave easy access to Cyprus and adjacent ports. This circumstance doubtless aided in the missionary activities for which the Antioch community soon became famous. Here for the first time, we are told, the disciples received the name, formed on a regular Latin principle, of 'Christians,' though in their own literature they continued to speak of themselves as 'the Brethren,' 'the Disciples,' or (by an odd yet easily understood name) 'the Way' (compare the modern 'Method-ists'). By whatever name they were known they were far from realising anything like the long future which lay before their movement. Later historians naturally, but erroneously, pictured them too much after an ideal borrowed from later growths. Such organisation as they had was of the loosest. Creeds were absent. Of ritual, apart from modified Judaism, we see little or nothing. A later generation, for the study of which we have more copious authorities, Christian and non-Christian, is still marked by exceeding simplicity in many ways. Bound together by a sympathy of hope and aspiration, the tenacity with which they held together in spite of obloquy and suffering marks the strength of the influence left by Jesus on the minds of his age. At first they seem to have thought more of *what he was* than of *what he said;* and while they gradually shaped their theories of his nature, they proceeded still more gradually in the collection of the sayings and stories that

were associated with his memory. We have already seen some indications of the very natural rise of differences of opinion among them. The story of Paul's life and teachings, a factor of the highest significance in Christian history, to which we now turn, will reveal further steps in this process.

CHAPTER III.

PARTIES IN THE EARLY CHURCH.

It is sometimes thought, and the ideal is most beautiful, that in the early days of Christianity all within the Church was peaceful and harmonious. If that ideal was ever realised it was but for a very brief period indeed. The brethren were men of like passions with others. Even the Twelve, we are told, disputed questions of precedence in the life-time of the Master. We have seen how quickly murmurings arose in the Jerusalem community, and the appointment of the Seven marks an attempt to meet the fresh necessities of the hour. That is characteristic of progress generally, in states as well as in religious institutions. Things that live must change, and the attempt to bind life with rigid fetters results in disaster. The section of history which lies before us illustrates the conflict between those who stood for the old ways, and those who strove to reach the new. This conflict has always gone on in human society, and we cannot easily imagine the time when it will cease. As long as there are needs to be satisfied, and different methods present themselves, there must be a certain

amount of striving and competition of ideas. Where men feel most intensely the strife will be sternest. We have no reason to suppose the early Christians were exempt from the law of variety which is illustrated in other living and growing societies. On the contrary, the evidence is strongly and clearly the other way.

It has been said that a 'new man'—Stephen—brought about the first great change in the life of the Jerusalem community. Another 'new man'—present at Stephen's death, we are told, and confessedly among the persecutors that began thereupon to harry the Church—led the way to a still more important development. This was Paul, whose Hebrew name, Saul, was dropped in Christian narrative early in his missionary career. Respecting Paul's influence on the course of Christian thought and practice it is difficult to say too much. A great deal that is taught for Christian doctrine rests almost wholly on his words. It is upon his testimony chiefly that the institution of the Lord's Supper is held to be binding upon successive generations of Christians, and he was the leader in those missions which prepared the way for the diffusion of Christianity throughout the Empire. It is worth noticing, therefore, who and what manner of man he was. We shall then be enabled to account for some of the features which mark his writings, and which through his writings have stamped themselves on Christian thought and history.

Paul was a Jew, born in Tarsus, in Cilicia, not very far across the sea from that city of Antioch which

was to become famous largely through him. He showed a special aptitude for religious studies and practices from early days, and his zeal for the faith of his fathers outran that of his youthful contemporaries. He was trained in the school of Gamaliel, a Jerusalem Rabbi, we are told; and we must remember what such training meant. At that time there had accumulated, and was still accumulating, a vast mass of commentary on the Old Testament writings and cognate treatises. This commentary answers to nothing in modern literature. It was now pithy and practical; by and by fanciful and grotesque. Sayings of the most reputed teachers were stored up, to be expanded, supplemented, compared, and explained almost *ad infinitum*. This curious and complicated literature is now preserved in the Talmud. It exists in two forms, one being attributed to the Babylonian Jews, the other and earlier to those of Jerusalem. To read it now is not very profitable, so dead and gone are its fine-spun theories and word-jugglings; but it is not without many suggestive thoughts, quaint allegories, touching stories, and noble maxims. A modern Jewish scholar, Dr. Cassel, thus describes the Talmud:—

'The most astonishing keenness of intellect is displayed in finding points of similarity between the most unlike, and points of difference between the most similar subjects, in order to discover and then to remove apparent contradictions, and to draw a series of conclusions from these delicate distinctions, the result of which is compared with others obtained

in the same manner. The leading principle in all this is, that in the Bible, especially in the preceptive parts of the Pentateuch, not a word, not a letter, is superfluous or unnecessary—that even later ordinances and arrangements are to be found, or at least hinted at, in the sacred book.'

Paul was trained in this teaching, and its effect is traceable in his writings, although the new energy developed by his vivid perception of Christian thought bore him into a field unknown to the laborious Jewish commentators.

Respecting Paul's personal characteristics, it is evident that he was of ardent temperament, capable of the extremes of tenderness and sternness. Unmarried and little of a family man, apparently, he took sides strongly against the public prominence of women, and a tone of something like contempt occasionally breaks out concerning them. On the other hand, many graceful and gentle expressions may be found, extolling the virtues of individual women of his acquaintance. Physically, he had some defects, of which he was peculiarly sensitive; but his travels show that he was capable of enduring much fatigue. According to the warning of the Rabbinical maxim, 'He who does not teach his son a trade makes him a thief,' Paul had learned the art of 'tent-making,' apparently weaving the cloth coverings; and he prided himself on having earned his own livelihood independently of the gifts of his disciples. He was a man susceptible of experiences beyond the common range, and his writings tell us of strange visions which he had, and 'signs

and powers' which he exhibited. So far, however, is he from resting his claims for a hearing simply or chiefly upon the marvellous and abnormal in his experience that he frequently proceeds by a simple appeal to the conscience of his readers. When we are disposed to think his life and work lies too near the 'miraculous' to be congenial to our own, it is well to remember the shrewd commonsense with which he brushed aside the singular phenomenon of 'unknown tongues.' This manifestation, whatever its origin, was evidently regarded by many as *the* sign of divine approval and inspiration. *Acts* constantly refers to it as a public testimony that conversion has had its perfect work. Despite the very remarkable misconception of its nature which lies at the root of the Pentecost marvel, it does not seem to have been anything like speaking in 'foreign tongues.' Paul saw a good deal of it, and probably saw through it pretty well; for, on the breaking out of this symptom among his Corinthian disciples, he roughly depreciated it in words that could hardly be exceeded by the most 'rational' of modern teachers. Though subject to it himself—'I speak with tongues more than ye all,' he says—he plainly assures them he would rather speak in the church 'five words with his understanding than ten thousand in a tongue.' If we do not remember this trait in his character, we miss a most important consideration in the general estimate.

Thirteen letters, addressed to groups or individuals in various parts of the Empire, are attributed to Paul in the New Testament, and, whether or not we include

that to the Hebrews as also his, these would credit him with by far the greater part in the Canonical Christian Scriptures apart from the records of the life and sayings of Jesus. But not only is the Epistle to the Hebrews confidently asserted by critics of all shades of opinion to be *not* Paul's, but of the others which still pass under his name a large number have been stoutly questioned. Into the details of the criticism of the Epistles we cannot enter. It will suffice for our present purpose to accept as substantially genuine the four which are most generally accepted as his, viz., those to the Romans, the Corinthians (two), and the Galatians. Although these are not histories they give us much information as to the state of opinion and feeling in Paul's time. In the opening chapters of the first letter to the Corinthians, and of the short letter to the Galatians, the evidence is clearly against the theory of a perfectly unanimous Christendom. On the one hand, we discern a distinctly *Jewish* party, closely connected with the Jerusalem community, and looking to James, 'the Lord's brother,' as their head. They numbered among them some of the more zealous Pharisee converts, who, in accepting the Messiahship of Jesus, by no means relinquished the established ritual of their nation. We must not suppose that this, or any group which is discernible, was at that early date organised into a separate body. Whatever attractions and repulsions were already evident in the Church, the time had not come for very definitely constituted parties, and the action of Peter, nay, of Paul himself,

illustrates the swaying this way and that which marks the time before settled policies and practices are adopted. Nevertheless there were 'divisions,' and the antagonism at times grew bitter. Paul's contact with Hellenism from youth had doubtless disposed him, despite his early enthusiasm for the Mosaic traditions, to recognise the difficulty of approaching the polytheism and vice of the Gentile races with a pure monotheism in one hand and a huge load of ceremonialism in the other. When the conception of a more spiritual Israel dawned upon his mind, the externals of Judaism faded more and more; and he roused the violent suspicions of the narrow-minded Jewish converts by the liberality of practice permitted by him and his fellow-missionaries among their Gentile followers. Peter—spoken of by Paul by his Hebrew (or rather Aramaic) name, Cephas—seems to have occupied a dubious position, leaning, however, to the side of the Jerusalem school. On the other hand, it is not impossible that Apollos, who is mentioned as the third leader chosen by some of the divided Corinthians, was more 'advanced,' as we should say, than Paul himself, who, if he became a Greek to the Greeks, seems to have remained a Jew to the Jews. Nor do these tendencies exhaust the list of varieties observable in those early days, if we may reckon the followers of John the Baptist (spoken of in *Acts* xix.) as sufficiently allied to the Brethren to be practically part of their movement. In any case, it is sufficiently clear that neither in practice nor in opinion were the first generation at all unanimous; though it

is easy to exaggerate the strife that went on in their midst, and to leave out of sight the deeper sympathies, trust, and hope that bound them in the common Christian fellowship and work.

The extent of Paul's share in this work is indicated by the travels attributed to him, and referred to in the Epistles before us. He was evidently a born missionary, and though at first his zeal was shown in repressing what he held to be mischievous error, it developed afterwards in positive forms, and made him the advocate of what he conceived to be the truth. Taking up his residence at Antioch, shortly after his conversion, it was natural that circumstances should render him dissatisfied with the limits apparently accepted by the Twelve. Antioch was full of life, and its commercial and political varieties must have impressed the mind of a man on fire with a new faith. The presence of visitors to the city brought by ship from distant lands suggested thoughts of those they left behind. The port, Seleucia, was near at hand; and Paul, now accompanied with one companion, now another—Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timotheus, and others are named at various times—set forth to carry the news of the crucified Messiah to the Jews, who, 'in every city,' had 'Moses' read to them, and practised, as well as they could, the customs of their race. Paul's idea was to address the Jew first, and then the Greek, and gradually he came to see that whatever Cephas might do for those 'of the circumcision,' his own work lay among 'the uncircumcision.' Thus the story goes that through a vast region in Asia

Minor, in remote parts as well as in its chief cities, across the sea to Macedonia, and southward to Athens and Corinth, and finally to Rome itself (though this last was hardly a voluntary journey), the intrepid pioneer made his way. Occasions arose for writing to one or other of the groups of hearers who accepted the strange teaching of this unheard-of wonder—a non-exclusive Jew, whose Gospel was one of a world-wide salvation, and of tender mercies no longer arrogated as the peculiar heritage of a chosen race. These writings, or some of them, are Paul's chief legacy to us, and when we read them we have to remember his circumstances and education. He had never seen Jesus Christ, excepting, indeed, by way of 'vision,' and he tells us little about his words. But accepting the one great testimony that many others had seen him alive after his death, and this in no 'vision,' he meditated upon this unique personality, and in his own way sought to verify in him the fulfilment of the national hopes, and to discern the principles of a wider and more spiritual system. We must admit that there are many things in his Epistles (as a New Testament writer observes) 'hard to be understood.' The Rabbinical student shows through the Christian mystic, and those who now seek to follow him through his arguments concerning God's plans and the soul's redemption from sin must gird themselves for effort. His identification of Jesus Christ as the typical 'heavenly man,' in contradistinction to the 'earthy man,' the first Adam, introduces a new conception into Christendom; and many a

speculation concerning Christ's 'pre-existence,' when and whence and how he pre-existed, and a great deal more of the kind, traces back to this germinal thought of the pupil of Gamaliel. We may doubt the value of these speculations, and lament the loss of time and temper they have caused, but for Paul's share in effectually breaking the Mosaic bondage in which early Christendom struggled everyone who values religious freedom must honour his name. It is easy to say that once the teachings of Jesus were carried far and wide through the Empire, by whatever means, a new impulse would have quickened the religious life of men, and in the effort to live the life enjoined by him they would have inevitably broken loose from externalism, and aimed at a simple piety each in his own way. But, in fact, there is nothing more certain than that the disposition of people in general is to accept what bears the stamp of authority and of antiquity; and Christendom itself showed too soon how fatally easy it is to seek refuge from the searching claims of a spiritual law in the multitude of observances not less futile than the Pharisaic customs denounced by Jesus. It needs a Paul to arise in every century to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eatings and drinkings, dressings and ablutions, attitudes and formulas, but 'righteousness and peace and joy in the holy spirit.'

Of Paul's end we know nothing surely. As in the case of the other Apostles legends tell of his martyrdom, and there is every probability that he fell a victim at Rome—not having seen the coming

again of the Christ for whom he taught his followers to look. But he had done his work. Largely through his labours, though there were other teachers, writers, and theorists in the Church, a great number of Christian communities were now in existence, however feeble and contemptible to outside observers. The missions had not begun too soon. In the year 70 A.D., shortly after Paul's death apparently, Jerusalem was destroyed. The 'impossible' people, unable to govern themselves and revolting against their Roman governors, were rooted out, never again in these eighteen centuries to form a nation, though still for a time to cherish wild hopes of the Messiah that should come, and right onwards to our own time to preserve much of the old traditions and customs of their fathers, and to remain a 'peculiar people.' The seething city became a desolation. Its sects and communities became a confused history. The Christian community, we are told by Eusebius, fled to Pella, on the east of Jordan, and there for a time kept up a quasi-orthodoxy, while Christendom at large pursued its way into the strange developments that lie immediately before us for inquiry.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND GENERATION OF CHRISTIANS.

The broad line which divides the first from the second generation of Christians marks for most English people the bound between what is apparently an age fairly well known and the dimmest twilight. The Bible is said to be for Protestants the sufficient rule of faith; but the inquiring student cannot be content with the history supplied within its limits. Everyone can see that there is a vast difference between the Christendom of the first generation and that of the fourth century, when Imperial patronage favoured the Church; a difference of thought and method, as well as of fortune. It is our duty to find such traces as we can of the steps by which these great changes were effected. The Roman Catholic —if we could implicitly trust him—could supply us with a long cherished tradition of the original supremacy of Rome, beginning with the twenty-five years of Peter's bishopric. That tradition, however, is so obviously shaped to serve the ends of the Papacy, and is, moreover, so much at variance with the testimony of the Scriptures which all Christendom

takes as authoritative, that we must decline to be led by it. Definite history is still wanting. Remember the prevailing expectation of the end of all things, and the slow growth of the idea that Christendom, instead of rushing into the speedy consummation of things, was really only beginning. Then you will be less surprised to find that the first considered attempt at a regular history of the movement after the days of the Apostles is that of Hegesippus, who wrote after the middle of the second century. What he has to tell is confessedly imperfect, being found as preserved fragmentarily in the well-known Ecclesiastical History by Eusebius.

The New Testament, however, clearly bears witness to the second generation. It shows us the traces of bitter disappointment that 'the end' had not come so quickly as had been fondly hoped. 'In the last days,' writes the author of the so-called Second Epistle of Peter, a document which can with confidence be placed much later than Peter's date, 'mockers shall come with mockery . . . . saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" For from the day that the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' The author says in reply that the bewildered Christian must remember that 'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day;' they must take the postponement of the end as a token of extended mercy. It is not that the Lord is slack in his promise, but long-suffering, wishing *all* to come to repentance. Nevertheless, the day of

the Lord will speedily come. In like manner writes the author of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, another questionable document. In the First Epistle, the writer expresses his conviction that some of them will be still alive to meet the Lord descending. In the Second the Christians are bidden defer their hopes, pending the further manifestation of the 'man of sin,' 'the lawless one,' who shall set himself forth as God, sitting in the sanctuary of God. By such reflections they sought to buoy each other up, while their hearts echoed that most pathetic cry of the Apocalypse in answer to the word, 'I come quickly,' —'*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*' One by one the leaders were cut off. Paul and Peter, whatever differences of principle they stood for, were probably united in the common fate of death dealt out with fearful severities by Nero to large numbers of Christians after the burning of Rome in 64 A.D. Of the other apostles small trace or none can be found. Hegesippus tells a quaint story of the survivors of the Jerusalem community, which, as we have seen, fled east of Jordan to Pella before Jerusalem was destroyed. There, the more Jewish branch of Christendom took fresh root, but without much result. Their compromise might suit Jews, but had no attraction for Gentiles; and though traces of their influence appear much later in the history of the Church the pre-eminence of their community was gone. A touch of romance clings to the story that 'the kindred of the Lord' associated closely with this exiled church, and that the fame of the Christ reflected upon them till they

came to be looked upon as a possible 'royal family' of Davidic descent. Upon the news of this kingly stock coming to the ear of the Emperor Domitian he had inquiries made respecting them; but finding them lowly enough, as their toil-hardened hands testified, he let them alone. However that may be, it is certain that in centres far away from the seat of its earliest beginnings the Christian ideas and practices were becoming rooted. Of Antioch as a new and flourishing metropolis of the faith mention has been made already. We must add Alexandria on the south, and remember Ephesus and the great cities of Asia Minor, as well as Corinth and Rome, as we cast about for the effects of the early mission movements. The importance of the Churches in these cities is unmistakable a little later, and if extensive evidence of their growth and condition at this date is wanting, we have a piece of singularly illustrative testimony to the progress of affairs in a district not at first sight likely to be the most favourable to the diffusion of Christianity.

Before passing to this particular point it may be useful to refresh the memory with a brief glance at the course of affairs in the Roman Empire—that Empire which was destined to come into closer relationships with the new faith in each succeeding generation. Founded upon the ancient Republic the Imperial Government was for about a century in the hands of the Julian and Claudian dynasties, the members of which all claimed a sort of relationship with Julius Cæsar, through his nephew Octavian, who as Augustus

became the first Emperor. The series ended with Nero, whose name has become proverbial for mad cruelty, and against whom it appears the prophetic rage of the Apocalypse is directed. He came to a violent end in 68 A.D., and after the rise and fall of three 'emperors' in quick succession, Vespasian, a rude but able man, ascended the throne, about the same time as his son Titus took and destroyed Jerusalem. Vespasian was in turn succeeded by Titus, whose younger brother Domitian succeeded him. Some very doubtful stories connect Domitian with Christianity through his punishment of high-placed persons at Rome who were accused of 'atheism' and 'Jewish notions.' Nerva succeeded Domitian, and was in two years followed by Trajan, whose reign began 98 A.D. Trajan was one of the four great Roman Emperors whose strength and ability made the second century famous in the history of mankind. We shall see that each of them was brought into close contact with Christianity. Trajan's connection came about through the action of an Imperial governor to whom he entrusted, in the year 112 A.D. the province of Bithynia, the district bordering the south of the Black Sea. This governor was Pliny the younger, his father, famous as a naturalist, having perished in the terrible eruption of Vesuvius, 79 A.D. when it seemed that nature conspired with the human scourges of the time to overawe the popular mind and prepare it for the reception of the wildest dreams of approaching convulsion. Pliny did not stay in his province more than two years,

said to be official attendants (*ministræ*). But I found no more than a perverse and boundless superstition; and so, after prolonged inquiry, I have determined to seek your advice. For the matter seemed to me worthy of your notice, especially on account of the number of those involved, since many of every age and of both sexes are accused, and will be. For the contagion of this superstition has flooded city, and village, and rural district alike, though this it seems possible to put a stop to and remedy. It is certainly clear that the temples formerly almost deserted have begun to be frequented again, and the sacred ceremonies, long broken, are renewed, and everywhere sacrifices are sold, which hitherto hardly found a buyer. Whence it is easy to judge what a multitude of people can be reclaimed if there is opportunity given of recanting.'

Pliny had the satisfaction of being approved by his imperial master, who directed him not to pursue any elaborate inquiries. The test of worshipping the gods was easily applied, and he could act according to the result in each case. Anonymous charges, however, were to be disregarded, an injunction to which appeal was frequently made by persecuted Christians in subsequent years. It is fairly allowable to draw several inferences from this document. First we observe that forty or fifty years after the journeys of Paul and his companions through Asia Minor there was a wide diffusion of the name of Christian, if not of Christian principles. As yet there were no distinct laws against Christianity, and they were proceeded against under

provisions of long standing with regard to 'secret societies.' That the profession of Christianity sat lightly enough on the multitude is evident from the ease with which they returned to the old ways under official pressure, but some at least were found faithful. And those who abandoned the name had no violent accusations to make respecting the faith from which they were so readily perverted. They expressly defended themselves from the charge of partaking of noxious banquets, mere cannibalism in fact, a charge which (in conformity with the malevolent disposition which, in our own day, levels the 'blood accusation' against Jews in some parts of Europe) became a favourite one with the opponents of Christianity in the second century. Then, again, we have a glimpse of a very simple ritual, strongly contrasting with the elaborate ceremonies of later times, and we are enabled, by the help of other evidences of the same period, to confirm and deepen the impressions afforded by Pliny's letter.

For instance, in the document known by the Greek name 'Didachê,' or the 'Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,' we have apparently a Christian adaptation of a Jewish work intended to edify. After reciting the characteristics of the good and the evil way respectively some additional sections supply directions for the meetings of Christians. The difficulty as to eating of meats sacrificed to idols is alluded to, and rules are laid down for baptism and fastings, and for the repetition thrice a day of the Lord's Prayer. A formula is given for use at the 'Eucharist' or thank-

offering, in which the prevailing ideas are those of gratitude for 'the holy vine of David,' the knowledge whereof has come through 'Jesus thy servant;' of desire for the reunion of the scattered Church even as scattered elements were united into the piece of bread broken at the meal; and the prayer, 'Come grace, and pass this world away.' Beyond these suggestions the conduct of the meeting is to be in the hands of the itinerant 'prophets' and 'apostles,' who appear to be a well-known feature of the times. So customary is their coming and going among the Christian communities that it appears crafty impostors had no great difficulty in making a living out of their visits from place to place; and the 'Didachê' suggests that 'Christmongers' of this sort should be put to the test by being made to work at some useful calling during their visits. Worship is assigned to every 'Lord's day,' and overseers are to be chosen by show of hands to conduct the service. These 'bishops'—'episcopi' are so far from being generally recognised as authorities supreme over the whole church that the 'Didachê' expressly warns its readers against despising them, and says they ought to be honoured along with the itinerant 'prophets' already described. This document is accepted by scholars as belonging to the first quarter of the second century; and it is fairly in keeping with the writings of the New Testament on the one hand, and with the testimony of Justin, who wrote about the middle of the second century, on the other. Thus we may pretty confidently picture those ancient communities on the lines suggested.

They have their solemn gatherings for religious exercises, at which their vows of consecration are made; and they have their 'love-feasts'—'agapae'—at which the bonds of social fellowship are strengthened, though at some risk of scandal arising from the excesses of the evil-minded and intemperate. That the meetings should be held by night is easily explicable. However prosperous the movement may have been in some districts and as a whole, its beginnings were necessarily modest and tentative. The force of public custom and opinion was against those whose system seemed to partake of the Jewishness everywhere hated by Gentiles and of a 'superstition' peculiarly its own. There were few wise, few noble, called among them; and the poor maids tortured by Pliny represented typically the lowly condition of the majority. But we must also remember that there were other forms of religious propaganda in those days, among the peculiarities of which was that of hiding the more solemn observances from public gaze. The Greek 'Mysteries' and the 'Mithraism,' or nature-worship of the East, were alike marked by this habit of secrecy. The former movement had much prestige in some parts of the empire, and it is not difficult to trace its influence on the development of the Christian ritual. Of 'Mithraism' little is known, but sufficient to show that it prevailed very widely in the Eastern empire, and that its mythology bore a suspiciously strong resemblance to that which grew up in Christendom. If the simple rites of early Christianity were hidden

from the vulgar eye there was evidently sufficient warrant and excuse for the practice.

There are many points upon which it would be interesting to dwell, but it is of the greatest importance that we should mark most clearly some of the very significant differences between Christendom at the end of the first century and Christendom in subsequent ages. We have good reason to believe that nominal Christians were surprisingly numerous. The fervour of the first missionaries and their successors was not without result; and the tendencies of the age were in favour of a simpler and more vivifying system of faith than a long discredited polytheism could offer. The majority of those who professed to be Christians may have been very far from a clear apprehension of the principles set forth by such teachers as Paul, and may have been largely under the influence of the emotions of fear and hope roused by the proclamation of the coming end of the world. In such cases there was a disposition to yield to adverse circumstances, and, as external pressure was applied and 'the end' was deferred, to resume the old habits. But that some were ardently tenacious of their faith is clear. Terrible tortures were not able to shake their constancy. Some of the noble army of martyrs may have been of the type of the Mahommedans who rushed on death to gain heaven at one bound; but others must have been of wiser temper. Their blood was the seed of the Church. But observe when we speak of 'the Church' of that age we are only summing up in a convenient phrase a multitude

of scattered communities, varying largely in type, destitute of definite organisation into anything like national groups, and but loosely organised within. The development of a distinct hierarchy came later. At the close of the first century, although the death of the first leaders had made necessary an approach to supplying their place, the expectation of 'the end' was still too vivid and the experience of the Church was still too limited to admit of the close knitting together which afterwards took place. It was sufficient if popularly chosen 'elders' directed affairs in their several districts. The word of instruction and exhortation was carried from place to place by men whose strange combination of religious zeal and mystical interpretation is illustrated, *e.g.*, in the Epistle of Barnabas or in the 'Shepherd' of Hermas, works long read as of authority in the churches. Of course they had as yet no definite body of Scriptures of their own to which appeal could be made by all Christians. Letters from the apostles, whether of the first or second generation, were handed about—not, it would seem, without editing for special needs. The stories and sayings connected with Jesus were current in various forms, and as his age receded the gospels grew under successive hands. But as yet the process was not complete. The time was to arrive when the leaders perceived that limits must be assigned to the literature which claimed authority as teaching faith and practice. Being thus without (a) a definite organisation, or (b) an authoritative and completed sacred literature, it may be easily conceived that

Christendom had as yet (c) no fixed creed. Our further studies will show some of the steps by which the Church became organised with the capital city, Rome, as its head; by which the New Testament was formed; and by which the creeds were developed from the elementary formulas to be found in the earliest Christian writings.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE GREAT ROMAN EMPERORS.

It has been said that if you entrust a child to a priest in its earlier years he may rest comparatively indifferent as to the effect of later training. The formation of the first impressions is the important thing. It is indeed true that in the earliest stages of the mind's growth it is much more receptive than subsequently. It is 'wax to receive, marble to retain.' We may permit ourselves to draw a parallel between the infant mind and the infant church. Its first emotions and conceptions were never to be swept wholly away. A passionate belief that God would sooner or later vindicate his servants against the wickedness of the world; the glowing attachment of the Brethren to the memory of the Master; and their ideal of a world-wide religion inclusive of every race and nation making Brethren at last of all—such were among the deepest impressions on the mind of the infant Church. Others there were of equal importance in their day, but these were elements destined to survive the changes of many centuries and to remain in our own day an integral part of the living faith of

secutions endured by Christians in their days, and have left out of consideration the benefits secured to Christians, as to all within the Empire, by the prevalence of peace and order.

As regards the connection of the Christians with the ruling powers at this period we may fairly take the rescript of Trajan in response to Pliny's letter as summing up the imperial policy. Without adding to their duties the task of tracking out the Christians, the officials were responsible for securing the due observance of the 'established' forms and ceremonies. If accused persons would conform so far as to reverence the symbols of the popular religion they would be let off. If not, they were dealt with in the spirit which has persecuted 'Nonconformity' in all ages. The Christians with their secret meetings and their open defiance of the customary rites of the day were inevitably suspected. Their close association with the Jews, so long and so heartily hated at Rome, brought them into further ill-odour. In the year 132, when Hadrian was Emperor, the last fire of Jewish patriotism blazed out. 'Bar-Cochba,' 'son of a star,' asserted that he was the Messiah of prophecy. For a time his exploits lent brilliance to his pretensions. Large numbers of his race flocked to his standard, only to make the final downfall the more complete. In 135 the fortress of Bitther (in Sharon) was captured by the Romans, and the insurrection was effectually stamped out. It is said that Hadrian endeavoured to secure the extinction of the Jewish religion by forbidding their distinctive rite of circumcision. The

suspended, naturally provoked protest; and the Christian literature of the century is rich in 'Apologies,' addressed chiefly to the Emperors. Thus we hear that Quadratus of Athens and Aristides (whose 'Apology' has been recently discovered) addressed Hadrian in this way; while Justin Martyr is said to have addressed one Apology to Antoninus Pius and one to Marcus Aurelius. Many others are recorded, but they may be summed up in the following sentences from Gieseler's Text-Book of Ecclesiastical History (§48):—'The aim of all these writers is to prove that there is no ground for the various accusations brought against Christianity, whilst they contrast its reasonableness with the inconsistency and immorality of Paganism. They show that its precepts correspond with the wisest amongst the philosophers, arguing, at the same time, that these have drawn their wisdom from the Old Testament. In proving its divine origin, they lay most stress on the prophecies of the Old Testament, the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, the rapid spread of its doctrines, and the constancy of its followers; and end by demanding for the Christians the same protection which is extended to all other philsophical sects.'

It is not surprising that along with this activity of Christian writers in self-defence there should be a deeper study of their own principles. They were confronted by many able and cultured minds, who demanded a reason for the faith that was offered them. In order to meet their objections the apologists went to considerable lengths in adopting the current

philosophy. Some exceeded the bounds of speculation admissible by the majority; and diatribes against heresy began to assume an important place in the literature of the day. It would weary the most patient of readers to toil through the records of those first heresies; and had not theological controversy too often teemed with violent language we might well be amazed at the vehemence of denunciation poured forth by one and another of the defenders of the faith in that century. Oddly enough, as well as strangely pathetic, we find some of the bitterest zealots for the purity of the faith by and by condemned in their turn as heretics accursed. The fact is that there was not as yet even a semblance of an authoritative standard of belief. The question as to which was authoritative Scripture was still under discussion. There were no decrees of Council or of supreme bishop to which appeal could be made. The canon, creeds, and decrees were all matters for the future; though it is possible to trace without much difficulty the stages of growth toward these things. The seething world of opinions and speculations was not wholly without a main drift and current; very speedily some notions were spurned aside by the majority of their leaders, and it may be instructive to point out the significance of some of these.

The mixture of Oriental thought with Greek had led to a curious train of ideas respecting the making and sustaining of the universe. The order and 'intelligibility' observable in the world came to be explained as the result of divine agency. But how

did the Divine Being operate upon the matter of the universe? The Eastern philosophy shrank from admitting that the gross elements around them, whence it was conceived evil sprang, were attributable to the ineffable spirit. In the Platonic schools it had become popular to describe the 'intelligibility' of the world, its qualities and orderly action, as the evidence of the work of the divine 'Logos'—a term meaning both the 'reason' and its utterance as a 'word.' The interposition, though but figuratively, of a subordinate agent between the One Supreme and the created world, fell in with the conceptions of those speculators to whom reference has been made. The distinctive feature of their 'gnosticism,' or pretended secret knowledge, was the conception of a series of interposing emanations from the Supreme Being, who was himself remote from the world. The 'Logos' was looked upon as one of the highest of these emanations; and those Christians who sought to be philosophical, boldly identified Jesus Christ with the 'Logos.' Paul's conception of him as the typical heavenly man and the special manifestation of the divine fulness, had already prepared the way for this identification, and in the introduction to the Fourth Gospel it is unequivocally taught that the 'Logos took flesh' in Christ. It may be imagined that these notions assumed crude shapes in some minds. The delight which some appear to find in this kind of speculation even in our day, and in our prosaic country, fairly suggests the extravagance of the early Christians. They readily adopted suggestions like

those offered by the Jewish apologist Philo, that the appearances, utterances, and general *human* actions attributed in the Old Testament legends to God were manifestations, as it were, by deputy; and where they could they fixed on the Christ as the intervener between God and man, even before the incarnation. Here was a wide field for roaming thought. One class, of whom the writer of the First Epistle of John is evidently thinking, taught that the divine in Christ so far absorbed all that was human as to practically annihilate it. Thus his body was only apparently corporeal; his death on the cross was only a 'seeming.' The writer referred to, passionately maintains that they had seen and heard and handled the Christ, and that the spirit of anti-Christ, the very quintessence of evil, was that which denied that Christ had come in the flesh! But we may leave this class of speculation for the present, only remarking that something akin to it has broken out repeatedly in the history of Christian thought, and must do so as long as the doctrine of the 'two natures' in one person is taught.

In contradistinction to these theologians we have to mark the tendency, especially among the Jewish Christians, to recede from the conception of Christ's superhuman eminence set up in the Pauline writings. There is a remarkable set of writings falsely ascribed to Clement of Rome, and belonging to far on in the second century, in which Paul is clearly pointed at in terms of utter opprobrium. These pseudo-Clementine 'Recognitions' bear witness to the Jewish zeal that

resented Paul's universalism, and no less repudiated his Christology. Several names are attached to the branches of this Jewish-Christian development; but it is enough to mention that although the Ebionites (one of the sects) stood for the purely human birth and career of Jesus they were, according to Justin Martyr, not excluded from the Church as heretics in his day. The fact illustrates the prevailing looseness of doctrine; and at the same time much is suggested by the intimation that a type of thought which was probably closest to the original Christianity of the first generation was, in the middle of the second century, at best only a tolerated exception to the general rule. It survived, indeed, till the fourth century, but was by that time an intolerable heresy.

One other curious development is noteworthy. About the middle of the century an enthusiast (formerly a heathen priest), named Montanus, of Pepuza in Phrygia, announced a new descent of the holy spirit, and adherents were soon found whose ecstatic manifestations recalled the stories of the marvels of the first age. 'Prophecy,' and other supernatural 'gifts,' were claimed to be poured out upon these 'spiritual' Christians, who looked upon all others as 'carnal.' At the same time the expectation of the coming of 'the end,' which had considerably waned as the decades grew, was revived; and though the extravagances of this school were soon condemned, the movement was not without its influence in stimulating the ardour of Christians generally, and at least one of the greatest writers at the close of the

second century, Tertullian, threw in his lot unreservedly with these ultra-fervent brethren. It would seem that, whatever such revivals might effect, a sober disposition manifested itself among those who took the lead. 'The end' had been so long delayed that some shrewdly perceived the necessity of being prepared for an indefinite delay. The more open atmosphere of the cultured world, into which Christianity was rapidly emerging, tended to chill the exuberance of their emotions. They believed, indeed, that to an earlier generation a special out-pouring had been granted, and in a limited degree they still expected divine witness in marvels of one kind or other. But the general feeling seemed to be that the Apostles were wholly exceptional men, and that their times were specially favoured. Some early rationalists went so far as to doubt whether any value at all attached to the Apocalypse, the prophecies of which were always about to be fulfilled, yet never came to fulfilment. They also repudiated the Fourth Gospel, with its 'Logos' philosophy, and otherwise took up an extreme position which never commended itself to the churches as a whole.

Mention has been made several times of Justin Martyr. This writer occupies such a prominent position in the history of Christendom in the second century that a further reference is desirable. A considerable body of literature is attributed to him, including the two Apologies already mentioned, and a Dialogue with an apparently imaginary Jewish opponent Trypho, as well as other writings. Taking

as genuine those which are usually unquestioned we have in them a remarkable witness to the state of Christianity in his day as regards opinion and practice. Deferring the latter point it may be suggestive to observe Justin's connection with the growing opinions of Christianity in his day. In the first place, it has to be noted that he came into Christianity as a man in full maturity. He was of Pagan extraction, resident at Neapolis (Nablûs) in Samaria. Seeking instruction in various schools of Greek philosophy he imbibed successively the opinions of Platonic, Aristotelian and Pythagorean teachers. Still unsatisfied, he was led to study the Hebrew writings, and ultimately accepted the Messiahship of Jesus, and in his own way became a Christian teacher. His philosophical training, however unsatisfying to him, at least supplied him with materials by which to add his quota to the constantly increasing exaltation of Christ above humanity at large. On the one hand he adapted the fact of the crucifixion of Christ to the current ideas of the necessity of sacrifice; and some of the grosser ideas of the Jewish writers of the New Testament, men accustomed to the sacrifices of the Temple ritual, received marked emphasis at Justin's hands. But speculations as to the nature of the Atonement received less attention than those which resulted in the deification of Christ. Justin warmly defended the identification of the 'Logos' with Jesus, and entered upon a good deal of discussion as to the relations between the Logos-Christ and the Supreme Being. There was room here for wide vacillation,

and it cannot be said that Justin's thought is very steady and self-consistent. But considering the importance which afterwards attached to the doctrine of the Trinity it is worthy of notice that Justin expressly contends for 'two Gods' or 'Lords,' of whom the second is distinctly subordinate to the first. His language as to the begetting of the Son by the Father is naturally vague; but it implies (as evidently as Milton's expressions in the fifth book of *Paradise Lost*) that the Son was begotten only prior to and as the agent in the creation of the universe. Whatever variety of interpretation may be given to Justin's words on this point, however, there is no doubt at all respecting his conception of the 'Logos-Christ' as a 'second God.' This second God is one in will with the Supreme, but is distinct numerically, he says. The Son is 'next in rank' to 'God the Father and Sovereign Lord.' He is reverenced by Christians 'next after God.' He is honoured by them even as they honour the Father, but also as they honour 'the host of other good angels, who follow and resemble him, and the prophetic spirit.' Without unnecessarily extending such quotations it is clear that, while the Christian writers were by this time (say 150-160 A.D.) well on the way to formulating a doctrine of the deity of their founder, they were far from the settlement to which they afterwards came by many an odd and crooked turn. One of the noteworthy steps made in those days was the employment of the term 'trias,'—'trinity'—a word found first in the writings of a Greek convert, Theophilus of Antioch, of about

the year 170. The term, however, was applied by him to include God, His 'Logos,' and His 'Wisdom.' It was afterwards employed by Clement of Alexandria to denote the three supreme virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity. Tertullian boldly and explicitly declared that 'There was a time when the Son was not,' and evidently regarded the Son and Spirit as subordinate to the Father. This, however, did not save him from being accused by the so-called Christian 'Monarchists,' who in their simplicity could not reconcile such teaching with the doctrine of the strict unity of God.

But this must suffice to illustrate the inchoate state of opinion on such matters. The more conscious the Christians became of the wide divergences of thought in their ranks, the more ardently they looked for authoritative utterances from their leaders. Thus we see the naturalness of the tendency towards a more rigid examination of the foundations of the faith, and a stricter supervision of the Churches. This tendency was all the stronger because, both numerically and otherwise, Christendom had become a most important factor in society by the end of the second century. Deducting a considerable amount from the enthusiastic terms employed by the Christian writers of the day, there is clear evidence that their numbers had wonderfully extended. As the old order waned, and the Empire began to feel the throes that preceded its ultimate 'decline and fall,' this new faith competed so successfully with the more ancient systems that it soon became a matter of Imperial concern; and before long we find the Emperors Elegabalus

(218-222 A.D.) and Alexander Severus (222-235 A.D.) deliberately assuming the rôle of patron of Christianity, in combination with other religions. This, however, was far from being the ideal of the Church, and the 'establishment' of Christianity alone as the Imperial religion was still far off. The Christians were at this time in a curiously unsettled state. It is quite certain that their methods of worship and teaching, originally based on the lines of the Jewish synagogues, were changing under the influence of Gentile example, especially Greek, no less than their docrine. The simpler age was gone, the age of the priests and ritualistic symbolism was dawning. The pretentious system of Catholicism, in many respects wonderful and in some admirable, was growing up slowly but surely. Even at that early stage Christendom presents a striking contrast with its first beginnings, when a little company attended the words and works of the Master, or when bereft of his presence they hung upon the hopes of his coming again, and shaped their course from day to day as men to whom this world was but as a vapour, soon to vanish away. Now, the sound of their words had gone out into all lands, a strangely blended sound, in which the accents of the primitive gospel were often lost amid the echoes of far other teachings. Yet, with all its defects, no other gospel had so much power over the minds and consciences of men. The little seed was becoming a mighty tree.

CHAPTER VI.

READINGS FROM THE 'EARLY FATHERS.'

Two kinds of mistake may be made respecting the leaders of early Christianity, just as in regard to modern religious teachers. To take the case of those of our own day; if a student of modern religious life looked chiefly for blunders, false science, objectionable sentiments, and faulty interpretation of Scripture, he would find them in plenty; but no one who has had practical experience can support a conclusion based wholly on evidence of this kind. We might, for instance, quote passages from Charles Spurgeon, Canon Liddon, Dr. Parker, and Archdeacon Denison which would give a wholly exaggerated and therefore false view of English Christianity. If we leave out of sight the many good words and works said and done unobtrusively by all sorts and by all sects we shall act foolishly, and our judgments will be mistaken. On the other hand, it would be useless to pretend that ministers are immaculate and that preachers or writers are infallible. Undue veneration is as absurd as extravagant disparagement. The 'Early Fathers' were men like their successors. They made mistakes,

both in thinking and in conduct; if they are venerated it must be with an open eye to their share in the frailties of humanity and their limitations in knowledge. But it would be unjust in the extreme to fasten on their worst mistakes, and judge them by such a standard. In perusing their works we are like students at an archæological museum. We know that while many rough and crude relics survive, the thousand softer witnesses of happy domestic life have perished. The flints and potteries remain, the delicate tissues are gone. But they *were* there, and if we are to conceive what the life of past generations was like we must try to build up these skeleton fragments and clothe them with flesh and blood.

When, however, we survey the volumes of patristic literature we may well ask ourselves, 'Can these dry bones live?' And some may doubt the profit of trying to get good out of them. Certainly the profit will be small unless we have been in some degree prepared for the attempt. But those who have followed these studies so far will not be wholly at fault, as we now proceed to illustrate the life and thought of the Christians of the latter part of the second and the opening of the third century. Remember the simple beginnings of their history; how they only gradually became aware that the world was to go on indefinitely, and that they must define their principles and methods. Remember, too, that they were a scattered, if numerous, class in the Roman Empire; that they had to defend themselves against all sorts of enemies, false accusers, and stern official oppressors. And bear in mind their

dependence upon the general teachings of the age for facts of history and of natural history, and for many of the ideas of their philosophy as well as suggestions of practice. We must be strangely conceited if we think that in this we are superior to them. A thousand years hence there will probably be much smiling and contempt for theories and false 'facts' which are held in high repute by learned men to-day.

The following 'Readings,' then, are chosen chiefly to help us to form some idea of the practices and teachings of the period named. In the first place, we quote a sentence or two to illustrate the heightened opinion those Christians had as to their diffusion through the Empire. Justin Martyr (d. about 165 A.D.) declares:—

'There is not one single race of men, whether barbarians or Greeks, or whatever they may be called, nomads, or vagrants, or herdmen living in tents, among whom prayers are not offered through the name of the crucified Jesus.' (*Dial. Trypho* c. cxvii.)

And Tertullian, a very famous man, the earliest of the Latin writers, who lived from about 150 to 220 A.D., sets no limit to his imagination in this matter. Naming the places where Christians have spread, after recounting the peoples referred to in *Acts* ii. 9, 10, he proceeds:—

'The varieties of the Getuli also, and many districts of the Mauri [African tribes]; all the bounds of Hispania [Spain], and diverse tribes of Gaul [France]; and parts of Britain inaccessible to the Romans, but subdued by Christ, as of the Sarmatians,

universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. . . . And for this we have received from the Apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe: he who leads to the laver the person that is to be washed, calling him by this name alone; for no one can utter the name of the ineffable God; and if any one dare to say there is a a name he raves with a hopeless madness. And this washing is called "illumination," because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings. But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called Brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the illuminated person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Having ended the prayers we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the Brethren

bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he, taking them gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and offers thanks at some length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at his hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying "Amen." This word "Amen" answers in the Hebrew language to γένοιτο [*i.e.*, "so be it"]. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called deacons by us give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water, over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion. [The writer says this food is called the "Eucharist," *i.e.*, "thanksgiving," and after reference to the symbolism of "the flesh and blood" of Jesus, proceeds], which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithras, commanding the same thing to be done. For that bread and that a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn. And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things; and the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied we bless the Maker of all through his Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. And on the day called "Sun-day" all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the

prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayer and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying "Amen"; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well-to-do and willing give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows, and those who, for any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us; and in a word takes care of all who are in need.' (*First Apology*, chaps. lxi., lxv., lxvi., lxvii.)

Observe here the use of the term 'illuminated,' precisely as used in connection with the Greek mysteries to describe one who is admitted to the secret doctrine. Also note the absence of ceremonial restraint as to 'consuming' the bread and wine-and-water; absentees have their portion sent them.

If we advance by fifty years or so to the time of Clement of Alexandria we shall see that primitive Christianity was not all that an earnest pastor of souls could desire. Clement was a Greek student of philosophy, who came into Christianity bringing a great stock of literary knowledge to its service. He became the head of the catechetical school at

Alexandria, and seems to have been a thoroughly worthy man of his time. Among his works is one which might be called the 'Whole Duty of Man,' and in which his Christian disciples might look for guidance in all the affairs of life. It is very curious in its minute directions, extending to the most private life of Christians, but the temper is honest and serious throughout. The following is suggestive; it seems that the half-century has made a difference both in the outward fortunes and inner life of Christians, or of some of them:—

'Woman and man are to go to church decently attired, with natural step, embracing silence, possessing unfeigned love, pure in body, pure in heart, fit to pray to God. . . . Such ought those to appear who are consecrated to Christ, and so to frame themselves in their whole life, as they fashion themselves in church for the sake of gravity; and to be, not to seem, such—so meek, so pious, so loving. But now I know not how, people change their fashions and manners with the place. As they say that polypi, assimilated to the rocks to which they adhere, are in colour such as they; so laying aside the inspiration of the assembly, after their departure from it, they become like others with whom they associate. Nay, in laying aside the artificial mask of solemnity, they are proved to be what they secretly were. After having paid reverence to the discourse about God, they leave inside what they have heard; and outside they foolishly amuse themselves with impious music and amatory quavering, occupied with flute-playing,

and dancing, and intoxication and all kinds of trash. They who sing thus, and sing in response, are those who before hymned immortality; being found at last wicked and wickedly singing this most pernicious recantation. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But not to-morrow, in truth, but already are these dead to God; burying their dead, that is, sinking themselves down to death.' (*Instructor* iii.)[1]

Here also may be quoted a portion of a hymn, which, if not by Clement, is very ancient, and is generally put along with his writings:—

'Bridle of colts untamed, Wing of birds unwandering, Sure Helm of ships, Shepherd of royal lambs, Assemble thou thy simple children to holily praise, to guilelessly hymn with innocent mouths, Christ the children's guide. O King of saints, all-subduing Logos of the most high Father, wisdom's ruler, sorrow's stay, in eternity rejoicing, Jesus Saviour of humankind, Shepherd, Husbandman, Helm, Bridle, Wing celestial of the all-holy flock, Fisher of men who are saved, catching with sweet life the pure fishes from the hateful wave of a sea of vices,—Guide, Shepherd of rational sheep, guide children unharmed; O holy King, O footsteps of Christ, O heavenly way, Logos eternal, immeasurable Age, Eternal Light, Mercy's Fount, performer of virtue, noble life of those who hymn God, O Christ Jesus. . . . Let us sing together simple praises, true hymns to Christ our King, holy fee for the teaching of life; let us in

[1] It is worthy of note that Clement borrowed a good deal in this work from the teachings of the Stoic philosophers.

simplicity sing the potent Child. O choir of peace, the Christ-begotten, O people pure, let us together sing the God of peace.'

Clement had a famous pupil, Origen, a man who from childhood devoted himself ardently to the Christian cause. His industry was prodigious, and thousands of writings were attributed to him. Among the most noteworthy is one in which he seeks to rebut, one by one, the sneers and objections of one Celsus, a famous and distinctly able opponent of Christianity. Origen quotes passages from the work he is rebutting. The following is a suggestive passage :—

'He [Celsus] asserts: "We see, indeed, in private houses workers in wool and leather, and fullers, and persons of the most uninstructed and rustic character, not venturing to utter a word in the presence of their elder and wiser masters: but when they get hold of the children privately, and certain women as ignorant as themselves, they pour forth wonderful statements, to the effect that they ought not to give heed to their father and to their teachers, but should obey *them;* that the former are foolish and stupid, and neither know nor can know anything that is really good, being preoccupied with empty trifles; that *they* alone know how men ought to live, and that, if the children obey them, they will both be happy themselves, and will make their home happy also. And while thus speaking, if they see one of the instructors of youth approaching, or one of the more intelligent class, or even the father himself, the more timid among them become afraid, while the more forward incite the

children to throw off the yoke, whispering that in the presence of the father and teachers they neither will nor can explain to them any good thing, ... but that if they wish to learn they must leave their father and their instructors, and go with the women and their playfellows to the women's apartments, or to the leather shop, or to the fuller's shop, that they may be perfected. And by words like these they gain them over."' (*Against Celsus*, III. lv.)

From such accusations it seems probable that notwithstanding Origen's boast that well-to-do and respectable, even high-born, persons, are espousing Christianity, the ferment spread, as it has often done, among the humbler members of society. In Origen's time the movement did, indeed, attain great notoriety, and the mother of the Emperor Alexander Severus consulted with this writer at Antioch, and distinctly favoured Christian institutions.

Theological Speculation.

It is necessary, at whatever risk of tediousness, to quote some passages indicating the ideas current in the Church. A belief in 'demons' (not 'devils' in the later sense, but approximating to the worse sense as time went on) was everywhere current. The Christians declare that all the divinities of the heathen religions were demons. How absolutely Origen, *e.g.*, believed in their malign activities may be seen from this passage:—

'If he [Celsus] had been acquainted with the

nature of demons and with their several operations, whether led on to them by the conjurations of those who are skilled in the art, or urged on by their own inclination to act according to their power and inclination; if, I say, he had thoroughly understood this subject, which is both wide in extent and difficult for human comprehension, he would not have condemned us for saying that those who worship the Supreme Being should not serve demons. For ourselves, so far are we from wishing to serve demons, that by the use of prayers and other means which we learn from Scripture, we drive them out of the souls of men, out of places where they have established themselves, and even sometimes from the bodies of animals, for even these creatures often suffer from injuries inflicted upon them by demons,' (*Against Celsus*, VII. lxvii.)

Another famous opponent of the early orthodoxy was the Gnostic Marcion (about 140-150 A.D.), whom Tertullian singled out for attack. Marcion seems to have held the opinion that there were three sources of the universe—a good deity, a just deity, and the ὕλη, or matter. Christ was manifested to proclaim the good Deity and save men from the sternness of the just Deity. It was a curious and childish system, but Marcion does not seem to have been so bad as the passionate and gloomy Tertullian made him out to be.

Deriding Marcion's notion of a 'good' God, who appeared to Tertullian to be simply a weakly benevolent Deity, he says:—

the principle and applied it on behalf of Christianity, with how much harm it is impossible to estimate. It may be more profitable to be reminded that some Christian writers, mindful of their early training in Greek philosophy and appreciating many a noble utterance in Greek literature, sought to conciliate non-Christian thinkers by the admission that Divine inspiration was not wholly withheld from their teachers. Clement of Alexandria, evidently conversant with the contents of the famous library in that city (a library which was most disastrously burned by a fanatical Mahommedan officer in 651 A.D.), thus represents this conciliatory mood:—

'Since truth is one (for falsehood has ten thousand by-paths), just as the Bacchantes tore aside the limbs of Pentheus, so the sects both of barbarian and Hellenic philosophy have done with truth, and each vaunts as the whole truth the portion which has fallen to its lot. But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of light. Let all, therefore, both Greeks and barbarians, who have aspired after the truth—both those who possess not a little, and those who have any portion—produce whatever they have of the Logos of truth. . . . . Though the highest note is different from the lowest note, yet both compose one harmony. And in numbers an even number differs from an odd number, but both suit in arithmetic; as also is the case with figure, the circle, the triangle, and the square, and whatever figures differ from one another. Also, in the whole universe, all the parts, though differing one from another, preserve their relation to the whole. So, then,

the barbarian and Hellenic philosophy has torn off a fragment of eternal truth, not from the mythology of Dionysus, but from the theology of the ever-living Logos. And he who brings again together the separate fragments and makes them one, will, without peril be assured, contemplate the perfect Logos, the truth. . . . . He who is conversant with all kinds of wisdom will be pre-eminently a Gnostic. (*Miscell.* xiii.)

The last sentence reminds us of that ever-recurring claim to a divinely imparted 'knowledge,'—γνῶσις—which each sect made for itself and denied to others.

One memorable passage may be quoted to further illustrate the many speculations concerning deity which under the influence of Greek philosophy, were coming to occupy a very large place in Christian literature. Tertullian is fruitlessly endeavouring to discuss the mysteries of the divine nature; and, it will be seen, he makes a very bad slip as regards the co-eternal nature of the Second Person of the Trinity. But there was another century of such slipping before the doctrine got properly voted.

'We affirm that the name of *God* always existed within Himself and in Himself; and, but not always so, [the name] *Lord;* because the condition of the one is not the condition of the other. God is the designation of the substance itself, *i.e.*, of the Divinity; but Lord is [the name] not of substance but of power. I [hold] that the substance always existed with its own name, which is God; Lord was afterwards added, as the indication, indeed, of something accruing. For, from the moment when those things began to exist, over

which the power of a Lord was to act, by the accession of that power He both became Lord and received the name thereof. Because God is in like manner a Father, and He is also a Judge; but He has not always been Father and Judge merely on the ground of His having always been God. For He could not have been the Father previous to the Son, nor a Judge previous to sin. There was, however, a time when neither sin existed with Him, nor the Son; the former of which was to constitute the Lord and Judge, and the latter a Father. In this way He was not Lord previous to those things of which He was to be Lord.' (*Against Hermogenes* iii.)

Religious Teaching.

Perhaps more than enough, however, has been quoted to illustrate the polemical aspect of Christendom at this period. It would be unfair to conclude this section of our study without once more reminding ourselves that, while the leaders argued, the mass of the people looked to them for moral support also. Surrounded as they were by the most degrading social conditions—the shamefulness of which is but too amply witnessed by the Pompeian relics, as well as gathered from such writers as Clement of Alexandria—the early Christians had to fight hard to keep themselves unspotted from the world, and to cherish those great ideals of duty and immortality which add the highest significance to human life. It is not without sympathy that a reflective mind peruses such a page

as the following, in which Tertullian, hampered as he is by doubtful legend and scripture, turns his gaze upon the mystery of nature and seeks suggestions, if not arguments, to support a belief in the resurrection. He says :—

'Day dies into night and is buried everywhere in darkness. The glory of the world is obscured in the shadow of death; its whole substance is sullied with blackness; all things become sordid, silent, stupid; business everywhere ceases and occupations rest. And thus there is mourning over the loss of light. But yet it again revives, with its own beauty, its own dowry, its own sun, the same as ever, whole and entire, over all the world; slaying its own death, night; opening its own sepulchre, the darkness; coming forth heir to itself—until the night, too, revives; it also, accompanied with a retinue of its own. For the starry rays are rekindled which had been quenched in the morning glow; the distant groups of the constellations are again brought back to view, which the temporary interval had removed out of sight. Re-adorned also are the mirrors of the moon, which her monthly course had worn away. Winters and summers return, as do springtime and autumn, with their resources, their routines, their fruits; forasmuch as earth receives its instruction from heaven to clothe the trees which had been stripped, to colour the flowers afresh, to spread the grass again, to reproduce the seed which had been consumed, and not to reproduce them until consumed. Wondrous method! From a defrauder to be a preserver; in

order to restore, it takes away; in order to guard, it destroys; that it may make whole, it injures; and that it may enlarge, it first makes less. . . . In a word, I would say, all creation is instinct with renewal. Whatever you may chance upon has already existed; whatever you have lost returns without fail. . . . Nothing perishes but with a view to salvation.' (*On the Resurrection*, xiii.)

And, finally, Clement shall utter once more the appeal of Christendom to the world—an appeal in which the real heathen of to-day may hear a profitable warning.

'A noble hymn of God is an immortal man, established in righteousness, in whom the oracles of truth are engraved. For where can you write truth but in a soul that is wise? Where love, reverence, meekness? Those who have had these divine characters impressed on them ought methinks, to regard wisdom as a fair port whence to embark to whatever lot in life they turn, and likewise to deem it the calm haven of salvation; wisdom, by which those who have betaken themselves to the Father have proved good fathers to their children, and good parents to their sons, those who have known the Son; and good husbands to their wives, those who remember the Bridegroom; and good masters to their servants, those who have been redeemed from utter slavery. Oh happier far the beasts than men involved in error! They live in ignorance as you, but do not counterfeit the truth. There are no tribes of flatterers among them. Fishes have no superstition; the birds

worship not a single image, only they look with admiration on heaven since, irrational as they are, they are unable to know God. So are not you ashamed to live through so many periods of life in impiety, making yourselves more irrational than the irrational creatures? You were boys, then striplings, then youths, then men; but never as yet were you good. If you have respect for old age be wise now that you have reached life's sunset; and, though at the close of life, acquire the knowledge of God, that the end of life may to you prove the beginning of salvation. You have become old in superstition; as young, enter on the practice of piety. God will regard you as innocent children. Let, then, the Athenian follow the laws of Solon, and the Argive those of Phoroneus, and the Spartan those of Lycurgus; but if thou enrol thyself as one of God's people heaven is thy country, God is thy lawgiver.' (*Exhortation* x.)

CHAPTER VII.

THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE New Testament is a priceless treasure to Christians, and among those especially who have been brought up in Protestant England it is regarded with feelings impossible towards any other literature. It not only contains the record of the earliest thought of Christianity, but also of the life story and the teachings of Jesus. We should look in vain for any sources of similar value. The greater number of religious people in this country have come to regard it as a divine oracle. They quote its words as authoritative, making little or no distinction between its parts, and ignoring the circumstances and purposes of the writers, known or unknown. Some honest souls were painfully disturbed by the publication of the Revised Translation in 1881. The English version in use since James I. was to them the veritable 'Word of God.' It is the first step towards getting a truer idea respecting the New Testament to learn, from the fact that new translations have had to be made in different ages, that the English reader is dealing with its literature at least at second hand, if no farther from the original. Next the student observes that the New

Testament is a collection of writings, and not one book complete in itself. He has been led, probably, to look with awe upon the injunction given on its closing page, where the writer of *Revelation* solemnly warns everyone against adding to or taking from 'the words of this book;' and to suppose the reference to be to the New Testament as a whole, if not, indeed, to the entire Bible. There was long current a notion that John, the author of *Revelation*, did verily collect the books of the New Testament, and set the apostolic seal upon them in this manner. How utterly groundless such a notion was will be evident as we look upon the facts which attended the formation of the New Testament. It will be seen that this process was a long one; that much doubt and wavering took place before any settlement was arrived at; and that the men under whose influence a settlement was gradually achieved were not free from the usual infirmities of human judgment. An honest study of the writings themselves will show that the authors were by no means secured against errors, and we need feel no surprise at this when we remember the confessedly humble origin of most of the early Christians. But the present inquiry is not as to the authors and dates of the respective books in the New Testament. Such an inquiry is much too large a subject to be dealt with in a summary manner. However fascinating and important, that subject must be left for special study while we here take up the less difficult (though not perfectly simple) question of the collection of these writings into an authoritative, sacred Scripture for Christendom.

It will be well in approaching this question to remind ourselves of the circumstances of the age with which we are dealing. Obviously the first generation of Christians had no New Testament; for its writings, on any supposition, were not completed till the Fourth Gospel was written, and the most favourable tradition attributes this to the extreme old age of John, the last survivor of the Twelve. In the earliest Christian writings not now included in the New Testament, *e.g.*, the Epistle of Clement of Rome and the Epistle of Barnabas, there is no appeal to a definite body of authoritative Christian Scripture, such as we get in the works of eighty or a hundred years later. Thus the most important stages of the history of its formation begin in the second century. We have kept our eyes fixed upon that period for some time. It is necessary to do so still, and to use every aid towards forming a fair conception of the life of the age. Remember that from 117 to 180 A.D., *i.e.*, from the accession of Hadrian till the death of Marcus Aurelius, the Empire was, on the whole, at peace. Disturbances occurred here and there, and fighting went on at the frontiers; but the vast multitudes that looked to Rome for government and protection were, speaking generally, enabled to work and trade, and to thrive accordingly. The abundant prosperity brought time and means for mental culture. The Antonines, themselves studious men, assisted the foundations of schools in various parts of the Empire, but especially in the East, whither students betook themselves in large numbers. Books multiplied with readers, and although no con-

spicuously great works of genius belong to that age, the mass of second-rate literature was enormous. Learners and teachers were found everywhere, and the disposition to inquire on religious matters was very marked. There were many 'philosophers,' ranging from the cultivated heads of the schools, who taught hundreds and even thousands of young men at the different centres of learning, to the vagrant who lived by his wits, imparting a little knowledge, or tickling the palate of his patrons with a taste of the arguments and rhetoric in vogue among the learned. Lucian, the most eminent Latin author of the period, spent his wit in ridiculing these pretentious itinerants. Some of the more distinguished Christian converts were of the vaguely-defined class of 'philosophers,' and the names of Justin and the gentle Clement of Alexandria suggest that it was no inferior type that espoused the new faith. Such men, accustomed to the discussions of the schools, and doubtless anxious to defend themselves against the misconceptions of former associates, took their full share in the prevailing literary activity. We have not much left of their productions, but there is enough for our present purpose. We find that at first they dealt with Christian writings in a selective way, choosing from the mass what suited their needs; afterwards, by slow degrees, acceptance was given to a selection which included the books approved by different sections in the Church. At first, when they made appeal to Scripture in support of their theory respecting the Messiahship of Jesus or other doctrine, it was to the Jewish Scripture, *i.e.*, the Old Testament, that

they pointed. Afterwards the earlier Christian writings, or some of them, were elevated into a similar position of authority, and were distinctly spoken of as Scripture.

In Justin's works there is abundant reference to some sources of gospel history, but the New Testament as a definite body of literature is a conception quite foreign to him. He has nothing to say about the Pauline epistles which now constitute so large and so significant a part of the volume. The practice of reading 'the memoirs of the Apostles' at the Sunday meetings of Christians is mentioned by him; but what they were is left doubtful. From quotations given by him it is inferred that the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, or their originals, were certainly known by him; while his knowledge of the Fourth Gospel is disputed. On the other hand, there are quotations of gospel history not assignable to the gospels now found in our Testament, and it is fairly conjecturable that he used sources no longer at our disposal. That there were other gospels is undoubted; how many, where compiled, and by whom, are matters that cannot be settled. In the preface to the Third Gospel, the author distinctly says that by the time of his writing 'many had taken in hand to draw up a narrative' of gospel history. It is impossible to suppose he referred to two, or even three gospels as 'many.' Where, then, are those not now read by Christians, but once in vogue among them to a greater or less extent? Some so-called 'apocryphal gospels,' partly curious and partly tedious, are still extant; but

they are probably of comparatively late date. The names of thirty or more 'gospels' have come down to us; but some of them appear to have been modifications of those now known to us or of their originals, and others seem to have been referred to under duplicate names. The usage of leading men in regard to the gospels generally at an early date is illustrated in the case of Papias, who, in spite of Eusebius's disparagement, was of sufficient repute in his own time (about 160) to be made head of the church of Hierapolis in Phrygia. Although he knew of written memoirs, he preferred gleaning what he could from those who had heard the 'Apostles and Elders.' No doubt this was the general disposition of those who lived earlier in the century. Hegesippus, a writer of nearly the same date as Papias, and one who suffered no discredit at the hands of Eusebius, confessedly used the 'Gospel of the Hebrews,' whatever that was; and he described the authorities for Christian doctrine as 'the law and the prophets' (*i.e.*, the Old Testament), and 'the Lord,' but what precisely he meant by the latter we cannot determine. Tatian, born in 'the land of the Assyrians,' as he says, and educated in Greek philosophy before he became a Christian, wrote voluminously towards the close of the third quarter of the second century. We have but little of his works left, but one of them is very significant. It is called 'Dia-Tessaron,' *i.e.*, 'Of Four,' and is a harmony of the four Gospels known to us, a fact that reveals his conviction that in them was to be found the most trustworthy evidence as to the Gospel

history. At the same time, his attempt to combine them, a task involving selection and rejection of particulars, shows that he felt no restraining veneration for the documents themselves.

Marcion, the gnostic, whose heresy was so severely handled by Tertullian, had twenty years or more before the dates just cited made a decisive step in the direction of fixing a 'Canon' of New Testament Scripture for his followers. He chose one gospel, modified either from Luke's or a similar work, and ten Pauline epistles. These were the only writings accepted as a foundation for his teachings. That a heretic should have led the way towards fixing the number of authoritative books is noteworthy, though the step was natural and apparently inevitable. As soon as the Christians perceived that the stream of their literature was widening indefinitely, and that new springs broke out along its course, some of them of a very questionable character, they felt the desirability of guarding the most ancient fountain-heads, if only these could be fixed upon. A valuable fragment of manuscript, now named after the Italian Muratori (who discovered it at Milan and published it in the early part of last century), and originally referable apparently to a date between 160 A.D. and the end of the second century, shows how some leaders of the day treated the claims of the various books then before the Churches. The fragment allows (it appears) the authority of the four gospels, Acts, thirteen Pauline Epistles, the Book of Wisdom, and the Apocalypses of John and of Peter. It rejects

a pseudo-Pauline epistle to the *Laodiceans* and one to *the Alexandrians;* but it does not include among the received books *the two Epistles of Peter, one of John,* and that *to the Hebrews.* With this list may be compared several others by men with whose names we are familiar. Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons about 190 A.D., used the term 'Scripture' in speaking of the accepted Christian writings just as it was employed in speaking of the Jewish sacred literature; and this usage became general about the close of the century. But the question as to which were to be accepted was not by any means settled as yet. Irenæus, for example, accepted as genuine scripture the Four Gospels (giving some very fanciful reasons for the limit to four), Acts, thirteen Pauline Epistles, one Epistle of John, and the Book of Revelation. He regarded as *doubtful* the second Epistle of John, the first of Peter, and *the Shepherd of Hermas;* and rejected or ignored *the Epistle to the Hebrews, the second of Peter, the third of John,* and those *of Jude* and *James.* Tertullian, whose influence over Western Christendom at the beginning of the third century can hardly be overrated, made the most distinct appeals to the *accepted* writings as authoritative scripture; but he appears to have allotted only a secondary place to the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jude, *the Shepherd of Hermas,* the first of Peter, and the second of John; while he rejected *the second of Peter, the third of John,* and *James.* After his conversion to the extreme spiritualistic form of doctrine known as Montanism, he repudiated *the Shepherd* with contumely. The

fate of this curious (and tiresome) book is always hanging in the balance in those times. Clement of Alexandria regarded it as a 'divine' work. He also treated with much honour the 'apostolic' epistles of Clement of Rome and of Barnabas. Clement's famous pupil, Origen, who survived till 240 A.D., appears to have had a lingering respect for gospel sources other than the Four; and while he looked upon the Epistles of Barnabas and of Clement of Rome as useful, and was inclined to say the Shepherd of Hermas was 'inspired,' he included in the class of doubtful books the epistles of *James*, *Jude*, *second of Peter*, and *second and third of John*. Passing by the evidence of versions in use in different parts of the Empire in the third century we may come at a stride to the very important writer, Eusebius, the great historian of the time of Constantine. Eusebius, who died about 340 A.D., gives a striking statement respecting the books accepted and those disputed or rejected. The books still disputed in his day include the epistles just named, as well as the Book of Revelation. Some in his day still used the 'Gospel of the Hebrews.' A number of books subsequently rejected were at least *sub judice* in his time, such as the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd. The earliest existing manuscript of the New Testament is probably one of fifty that were prepared by Constantine's direction under the supervision of Eusebius. It is known to scholars by the name of the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (א 'Aleph'), and was discovered by Tischendorf, as recently as 1859, in the monastery of St.

Catherine in Mount Sinai,[1] and is hence known also as the Sinaitic Codex. This manuscript, which may be assigned to a date shortly before 350 A.D., gives the books of the New Testament as known to us, but also gives as apparently of equal authority the book of the Shepherd and the Epistle of Barnabas. If we consult the famous old manuscript known as A (the Alexandrine Codex) now in the British Museum, we find that even as late as the time it was written (*i.e.* most probably after 400 A.D.) the first Epistle of Clement of Rome, and part of the spurious second Epistle attributed to the same writer, were copied along with the ordinary books of the New Testament.

But by this time, owing to the greater social importance of Christianity, it had become impossible to leave such questions as the authoritative canon of sacred Scripture to the judgment of individual leaders, however eminent. Great representative meetings were held to settle this and other difficult problems, being attended by the heads of Churches in various parts of the empire. Thus at Laodicea, in Phrygia, a council was held, where it was decided not to include the Book of Revelation in the New Testament; and this determination is significant. The Eastern Churches, which for a long time contained the men of subtlest intellect in Christendom, began to develop a policy of their own, and in course of time broke completely away from the Roman system of Church government. The story of this great cleavage of Christendom into

[1] Tischendorf caught a glimpse of this manuscript as early as 1844.

East and West is a long one, and cannot be compassed in a paragraph. But it is memorable that while the West incorporated the Book of Revelation with the sacred Scripture, the East for the most part rejected it for something like a thousand years. In the West, under the guidance of Augustine, the most influential of Christian teachers after Paul, the canon of the New Testament was voted at councils held in 'Africa,' in the closing decade of the fourth century; and the list of books remained as we have it. When at last, in the later Middle Ages, there was in both sections of the Church a general acceptance of the New Testament canon as we know it, Christendom was yet to be reminded at the Reformation that its sacred Scriptures were severally of very different rank and worth. Luther and Zwingli and other great Protestants, contrary to the habit of many letter-bound followers who think themselves true to the principles of the Reformation, boldly declared their judgment on some of the books of the New Testament. The Epistle of James, that representative of the earlier Jewish Christianity, was scornfully regarded by Luther, who had but a modified respect for the Epistle to the Hebrews also, and very little indeed for the Book of Revelation. This attitude of honest criticism of the contents of the New Testament was the first sign of the awaking consciousness of Christendom, after long slumber, to the fact that its Scriptures were no miraculously guaranteed oracle, but a collection of writings representing various forms of early teaching gathered up into one volume amid many fluctuations.

of opinion respecting their authority, and finally accepted after the lapse of centuries from the time of their production.

It is thus abundantly proved that the formation of the New Testament arose naturally enough, but with all the difficulties attending natural developments. We may to a great extent sympathise with men like Irenæus, Clement, Tertullian, and Augustine in their endeavours to preserve what they honestly believed to be the most authentic writings connected with the earliest period of Christian history, and with their desire to prevent the minds of their adherents from being imposed upon by worthless imitations. But every process of the kind must be attended by dangers such as had been already illustrated in the history of the Jewish Scriptures. It was to these Scriptures that the defenders of Christianity looked as to a model, and by the side of these sacred books they ultimately placed their own as a second and as they fondly thought a completing message from God to men. Had they been able to look without prepossessions on the earlier Scriptures they would have seen how futile was the endeavour to elevate them collectively into the position of a sacred oracle. The contradictions, immaturities, and childish conceptions, represented along with the finer thoughts of Judaism, and similar to those which pertain to all primitive literature, should have been apparent to them; but are they apparent even in our own day? That they are not has arisen very largely from the habit of unnatural interpretation which has been practised

since the first dawn of Christian comment upon the Hebrew writings. Paul (as Origen was not slow to observe) allegorizes the old stories for the purposes of his argument. Philo, the great Jewish commentator, challenged the attention of philosophic Greece on the very grounds that the Scriptures of his people were so full of subtle and inwoven teaching, the mysteries of which he unfolded with much dexterity. What wonder if, as soon as the earlier Christian writings began to assume the dignity of Scripture, they should also become the subject of similar conceptions and treatment? We must remember, also, that the idea of hidden wisdom in ancient writings, where 'more is meant than meets the eye,' was familiar no less to the Greek 'philosophers' of the second century than it was to the Jews. Plato, writing four hundred years before Christ, protested against the disposition which had already led admirers of the Homeric poems to apologise for their crudities by explaining them as allegories. Despite such protests the habit prevailed, it being much more attractive to the ambitious expounder than that of sober inquiry as the exact truth of the case. In the second Christian Century 'the habit of trying to find an *arrière pensée* beneath a man's actual words had become so inveterate that all great writers without distinction were treated as writers of riddles. The literary class insisted that their functions were needed as interpreters, and that a plain man could not know what a great writer meant. . . . It tended to become a fixed idea in the minds of many men that religious truth especially must be wrapped

up in a symbol, and that symbol must contain religious truth.'[1] Origen, in his work *Against Celsus* (IV. xlviii. and xlix.), alludes to this habit among the Greeks, naming, for instance, Chrysippus, 'who is considered to be an ornament of the Stoic sect,' who was eminent for his skilful interpretation of the grossest stories respecting gods and goddesses. Origen proceeds:—

'If Celsus had read the Scriptures in an impartial spirit, he would not have said that "our writings are incapable of admitting an allegorical meaning." For from the prophetic Scriptures, in which historical events are recorded (not from the historical) it is possible to be convinced that the historical portions also were written with an allegorical purpose, and were most skilfully adapted, not only to the multitude of the simpler believers, but also to the few who are able or willing to investigate the matters in an intelligent spirit.'

This copious writer left an indelible impress on Christian literature, and his hint that 'three senses' might be found in Scripture, or in some of it, was not lost upon subsequent commentators. He distinguished between the literal, the mystical, and the spiritual meanings of a passage, and thus opened the way for unending and ever-elusive speculations as to the purport of the divine oracles. We may, perhaps, be sorry that a man so remarkable as Origen should have been ill-treated by orthodox Christians who have debated whether after all his efforts and treatises he may not be now in hell for his heresies; but it must

[1] Hatch. *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 65.

be regretted by every candid mind that he did so much to mystify the minds of Christians, and to lead them away from the earlier simplicity. The blame does not rest wholly on him. As we have seen, the disposition to allegorize was prevalent. In this, as in other ways, the temper and example of the age wrought disastrously upon the Christian movement. Each generation took on some fresh mark of change, and generally change for the worse. We have seen something of the way in which the 'bondage of the letter' began. The establishment of the priesthood and the formulation of the creeds are the most significant further developments, and these finally we have to consider.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RISE OF THE PRIESTHOOD AND FORMATION OF THE CREEDS.

AFTER the death of the good Emperor Marcus Aurelius in 180 A.D. the Roman Empire began to experience great changes. His son Commodus, who succeeded him in the government, was a worthless prince, and met with a violent death in the year 193. Then began a series of struggles and intrigues, broken only at intervals by the ascendancy of a really strong and able ruler. The old form of Roman society, with its well-defined classes, gave way before two tendencies that were irresistible. One was the ambition of the soldiery that considered itself the most important factor in the State, and appointed its own nominees to the sovereignty. The other was the breaking down of special privileges, signalised by granting the title of Roman citizen to all free men in the Empire. This was done under the Emperor Caracalla (211-217 A.D.) The upheaval of society cannot be more vividly suggested than by observing that among the many Emperors of the third century one was a Herculean peasant, Maximin (235-238 A.D.), who owed his popularity with the soldiers chiefly to his personal strength;

and another, by far the most memorable of the list, was Diocletian (284-305 A.D.), the son of a slave. While within the Empire there was this decadence of the noble families and the development of a new social feeling among the subject peoples, all round its borders there were foes, barbaric or more civilised, who at intervals attacked the provinces nearest to them. Marcus Aurelius had written his celebrated 'Meditations' while at the head of the army that was mustered to repel an invasion on the banks of the Danube. Septimius Severus, the next strong ruler, after brilliant campaigns in the East, had to go to the defence of Britain against the wild Highland tribes, who threatened to overwhelm the garrison towns in the central and southern parts of this island; and Severus, we may remember, died at Eboracum, the modern York. Shortly afterwards the Imperial Government was challenged by the sudden resuscitation of the Persian monarchy; and the speedy growth of this rival power, long reckoned practically extinct, had important bearings on the fate of the Roman Empire. The pressure of the races of Central and Northern Europe in the direction of the Empire's more attractive southern lands, and the necessity of defending the thriving and populous Asiatic provinces from Oriental invasion, led ultimately to the shifting of the centre of government from the West of Europe to the East. One result was that the Imperial Court assumed more of an Asiatic character, while the culture of the governing classes became more decidedly Greek than ever, and soon began to be deeply coloured by

contact with eastern manners and speculations; and the western Empire began to develop a rude life of its own, in which the barbaric vigour of the North blended with the more permanent elements of the Roman legal system.

The social ferment had its parallel in religious thought. While the local worships went on with but little change from generation to generation, every large centre was visited by fresh ideas and novel rites. The Christians preserved their missionary zeal, and were constantly engaging public attention. It was soon perceived that their teachings were not the only noticeable feature about them. They were evidently organising into a powerful social machine. There was nothing in the Empire comparable to their system as a whole. The local priesthoods of paganism were but loosely linked together; the philosophic schools had comparatively little contact with the practical work of the world. In the East, indeed, a strong movement, known as Neo-Platonism, threatened to compete with Christendom for awhile. But though many of its arrangements and some of its teachings were similar to those of the Christians, it had not like them a body of Scripture and a tradition of faithful generations to serve as a constant rallying point amid all the dissipating tendencies of speculation. Mithraism, with its worship of the Sun-god, had a lengthened period of success, and appears to have left its mark upon Christian ritual. But the Christian system ultimately outpaced all competitors. Alexander Severus (222–235 A.D.), one of the worthiest of the

Emperors of the third century, following the example of Elagabalus, one of the most foolish, conceived the policy of welding into a whole the various elements of religious thought of his day. Such attempts brought the competing systems into close comparison; and neither the Christians nor their enemies were slow to perceive the differences between them. One of these differences related to the clergy, a body of men who came to the front in this century, and whose mark has been broad and deep upon Christendom ever since.

When we remember the conditions under which the first Christian communities were formed, it will be seen that a regularly organised clergy was about the last institution to be contemplated by them. The whole work of the first missionaries was fired with the expectation of the speedy return of Jesus Christ. They had no thought of laying the foundations for a system that should last for thousands of years. Some sort of order was necessary, and provisional arrangements were made to meet them; but it was enough that those who were fittest, by age and experience, or in exceptional cases by religious aptness though young, should preside over affairs and look after such business as arose. These were the πρεσβύτεροι, 'Presbyters,' or 'Elders,' of whom the 'Alder-men' of our early English communities afford a political parallel. They appear to have been spoken of also as 'overseers' (ἐπίσκοποι, 'Episcopi,' the Greek name being hardly recognisable in our Saxonised form, 'Bishop'). Although we may readily believe that some of these overseers and elders exerted their

powers in a masterful way, there is evidence enough that they, like the communities who elected them to their posts, were at first of humble rank and style. Naturally, the more capable of leading a man appeared to be, the more the uneducated mass of converts reposed on his authority; and the writers of the Ignatian Epistles, whether few or many, had learned by the middle of the second century that the more boldly the claim of authority is made, the more likely it is to impose on the common mind. When, as the custom is, the respect paid to the dead leaders found unstinted expression of love and admiration, a share of this reverence passed on to their office as such, and their successors shone by a borrowed glory. It must be remembered, too, that in their search for proofs of the Messiahship of their Master the followers of Jesus were brought face to face with the whole Jewish system; and, though its codes of ritual had been lifted from their shoulders owing to the vigorous common-sense of Paul and the Hellenists, that system had features which commended themselves to acceptance. Its sacred Scriptures, for instance, were taken over bodily; and as men began to surmise that 'the end was not yet,' and would not be for an indefinite time, the Levitical priesthood, as an institution for carrying on the religious life and education of God's people, acquired peculiar significance. What if a new order of priests, separate as the tribe of Levi, were intended to be a similar means of religious culture in the Second Dispensation? Besides, all round them were cults, each with its hierarchy more or less defined.

The tendency of the age was to entrust religious observances to the management of select persons, and to attach peculiar dignity to the possessor of special theological or philosophic training. To these forces operating upon them we may fairly add one more consideration, and that not an insignificant one. Taking men as they are, it must be admitted that where there are some who are so gifted and disposed as to be original leaders and inspirers, there are many more who take, indeed, real interest in religious exercises, but whose capacities fit them best for duties fixed by official routine. The fervour of the first age had waned; and when the extending communities of Christians demanded fresh supplies of leading men, it was undoubtedly easier to find priests than prophets.

Towards the close of the second century, the authority of the presiding governors was clearly increasing. We find, as time went on, and the necessity and opportunity for conference arose, the leading men met in local 'synods,' yearly or half-yearly; and as the third century advanced great 'councils' came to be held, being attended by the bishops of the local dioceses. It was largely due to the efforts of Cyprian, an African writer, who died about 259 A.D., that the theory of the priesthood took the great advance that marked the age. The episcopacy, or 'overseership,' became a sort of ideal institution, and obedience to the rule of the Church authorities was passionately insisted upon. The tendency which had resulted in the elevation of one bishop in a district above all the others, had not as yet reached its development in the theory

that one such bishop had authority over the whole Church. The bishops in the three great cities, Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria, were naturally pre-eminent as having the largest dioceses; but Cyprian himself, while evidently looking to Rome as his natural head, maintained that each sharer in the Episcopacy had equal dignity and power with the rest; and though the strongest bishops chiefly used the right, they all felt they had authority to rebuke an erring brother. We observe, too, that the local communities began to hold property, in church-buildings or lands, or of other kinds; and very soon the difficulties inevitable to the possession of wealth were manifested. It needs only to be hinted here that grave evils crept in as the theory of a *celibate* priesthood came to be mooted. The 'Gospel net' not only enclosed all sorts of fishes, good and bad, but the fishers themselves were very mixed, and their net was made of strangely diverse cords. The primitive Christian customs were changed into imposing ceremonies. Greek and Syrian converts did not forget their former rites, and those who passed into Christendom from the side of the Oriental nature-worships and mysticisms could not leave off at once the habits of years of thought and practice. It had become a fashion, innocent enough at first, to speak of the Christian meetings as 'mysteries,' using the same term as that employed in the more considerable religions around them. But the element of secrecy was now much emphasised and paraded. Other terms were similarly borrowed, and there is no doubt that the

gorgeous ritual which developed in the Church found its exemplar in the practices of Paganism. That development was not yet complete, but it had taken a great stride. To add two further lines to our sketch we must note that it was in this third century, when, under the influence of pious sentiment no doubt, the tombs of the martyrs came to be looked upon as places of peculiar sanctity; and the whole mind of Christendom reverted with apparent ease to the conception that makes consecrated ground of one spot and secular soil of another. Nay, as we have seen from Origen's writings, the sacred influences of the blessed sites were counterbalanced in Christian thought by the conception of haunting devils, to cast out which was a clearly recognised function of the priests. And, in the second place, as the century advanced, the foundations of Christian monasticism were laid by those Egyptian believers who, fleeing from persecution or revolting against the increasing worldliness of the Church, fell into the custom of hermit life, which had been practised in those parts long before Christendom began.

A brief reference is necessary here as to the further progress of the Church in its relations with the State. Coerced by Septimius Severus, it was coquetted with by Elagabalus and Alexander; but in the middle of the century the Emperors recognised very clearly that here was an *imperium in imperio* whose pretensions must be put down. Under Decius (249-251 A.D.) and succeeding rulers a determined attempt was made to reduce the Christians into conformity

with the law. The most active steps were taken (or threatened) against the clergy, and not only did large numbers of the general body of Christians yield under the pressure (just as in Pliny's days at the beginning of the second century), but the clergy themselves showed a considerable falling away. A good deal of time was spent by the Christians in discussing on what terms, if any, such lapsed persons might be re-admitted into fellowship; and when we learn that in Alexandria, for example, even young converts fresh to Christianity had to undergo a course of several years before complete initiation, we may conclude the way of these traitors was not made easy. When the great Diocletian came to the throne the difficulty increased. This ruler, recognising the impossibility of holding the heterogeneous Empire in one pair of hands, shared with another Emperor, Maximian, the supreme power, and they associated with them two subordinate 'Cæsars,' of whom the more memorable to us is Constantius. Diocletian fixed his seat of power at Nicomedia, on the Asiatic coast of the Propontic (the Sea of Marmora). Here was a magnificent church, which had been erected by Christians, and he might well be moved as he saw how the new faith was prospering at the expense of the old. The eastern Cæsar, Galerius, had long stirred him in the direction of violent measures, and, after a long period of comparative repose the Christians were harassed by a series of severe edicts, beginning from the year 303 A.D., when the Church at Nicomedia was demolished. The persecuting

measures were applicable to Christians in all parts of the Empire, and, excepting in the extreme West—Spain, Gaul, and Britain—the suffering endured was really great, though probably less so than some Christian historians have represented. The sacred books were especially sought for to be burnt, and *traditores* ('surrenderers,' 'traitors') abounded. The evil time was cut short by the abdication of Diocletian in 305, upon which began a fresh period of struggle for imperial power. Constantius died in 306, having protected the Christians to some extent, and his son Constantine, who set forth from this island to win his way to the emperorship, continued the policy of clemency. It was given out, indeed, that at an important crisis in his struggle Constantine beheld a Christian cipher in the sky with the words *In hoc signo vinces*. Such stories are common, and merit little attention. What is clear is that he and Licinius issued, in the year 312, an edict protecting Christians by a declaration of absolute toleration towards all religions; that he then proceeded in 313 and onwards to give substantial favour and wealth to the Church; and that though he warily postponed baptism as long as he could, he declared himself a Christian in the year 324, when he became undisputed Emperor; and in 325 he showed the world the unwonted spectacle of a Roman Emperor assisting at the making of a Christian creed.

For by this time Christendom was laboriously fashioning its second great version of the 'rule of faith,' the standard to which its teachers must shape

their teachings. Early in the second century the Christians had used the formula of 'the Father, the Son, and the Spirit' as a sacred password, their 'symbol' common to all in the true faith. In Tertullian's time there came to be, as he says, 'an ampler pledge' required of the candidate for baptism, and the confession of faith was made to include not only 'the Father, the Son, and the Spirit,' but 'the holy Church.' This writer has left several forms of the 'rule of faith,' and it is easy to see their resemblance to the so-called 'Apostles' Creed.' Nothing can be more certain than that the Twelve never dreamed of such a creed; though a fanciful legend of the fourth century told how they had met after the ascension and each in turn had contributed his clause—doubting Thomas adding as his quota 'the third day he rose again from the dead.' But in reality we observe in successive writers the formula expanding under the necessity of guarding the true faith against heresies; and a little study will enable us to trace in one clause after another the reply of the Catholic theologians to the various speculators of the early age. But this 'symbol,' amplified as it is, was not enough to guard against the inroads of heresy. It speaks of God the Father, but says nothing about the Son being also God, and the mention of the Spirit is left absolutely without comment. As we have seen, the latter part of the second century abounded in theories respecting the Logos, which was supposed to be incarnated in Jesus. The third century saw a wonderful spread of this discussion. Was the Logos also God, and in

what sense? Did the Logos exist from all eternity or from some period anterior to the creation of which it was the agent? Profitless as these discussions seem to us, they greatly excited those third-century Christians. Among the many theories on the subject we should notice two or three. One was that associated with Sabellius, a presbyter at Ptolemais 250 A.D., who, like some of the most eminent men in the Church, believed that it was the Father himself who tabernacled in the form of Jesus, and that there was really only one Deity presenting itself under three different *personæ*, or 'masks.' But this implied that the Father suffered on the cross, an intolerable anomaly. Another theory was that of Paul of Samosata, Bishop of the famous Church of Antioch 260 A.D., who regarded Jesus as a man divinely begotten and inspired, but not God. And one more was that which is linked with the memory of Arius, an Alexandrian Presbyter, but which was very widely held by leading men, In this theory the supremacy of the Logos-Christ over all other created things is acknowledged; but he is held to be inferor to the God the Father, who is the true sole Deity. Long after the date to which we have come these debates went on, and at one time Arianism obtained the ascendency. At the great Council of Nicea (near Nicomedia), however, in 325, the vote was against the Arians, and in favour of the conceptions represented by Athanasius, an Alexandrian deacon. The so-called 'Nicene Creed' was issued by imperial decree, and banishment was threatened to those who refused to sign it. It declared

that Jesus Christ was 'begotten of his Father before all worlds'; that he was 'true God of (or from) true God'; 'begotten not made' (in contradistinction to those who held him to be the first of created things); and that he was 'of one substance with the Father' (in contradistinction to the contention of some that he was only of 'similar substance'). The subject of the Spirit received no further comment till nearly sixty years later, when at the Council of Constantinople—the rebuilt Byzantium, henceforward to be the centre of the Empire—it was declared among other things that the spirit 'proceeded from the Father.' Two centuries later another council, at Toledo (589 A.D.) added 'and the Son,' but this was rejected by the Eastern Church, and it would be difficult to say even now what is the correct doctrine as to the procession of the Spirit.

Into these speculations the mind of Christendom went wandering far and long. Had Christ two natures? If so, had he two wills? Such were the questions of succeeding ages. Later still came the discussion of the Sacraments, and the exact nature of the Atonement. But having reminded ourselves that each 'symbol' of faith, each creed repeated unquestioningly as a token of right opinion, is in reality like a pile of architecture built in various ages out of various materials—and built, too, with much hammering and dust—we must be content with this glimpse into the history of self-styled 'orthodoxy.' As for the so-called Athanasian Creed, in which entire confidence is expressed that those who do not accept it will 'perish everlastingly,

it may be enough to say that most certainly Athanasius did not compose it, but it is much later in date; no Council has authorised it; the Eastern Church rejected it; and in the Romish Church it is not used in public. Its spirit, however, has spread through Christendom, and in spite of many a protest it is recited in our English Episcopal churches under direction of the law of the land.

Thus Christianity became organised into the Holy Catholic Church, with its separate clergy, its sacred scriptures, its rituals, and its creeds. As a teaching institution the conception of a specially trained body of men seems reasonable enough; but the priesthood has too often been marked by utter stagnation of thought, while its authority has stiffened into the grossest tyranny. The help of noble words and solemnising sights and sounds was offered to simple souls by its liturgies and ceremonies; but simple souls have greatly suffered by this materialising of religion in which, under the thinnest Christian veneer, old Pagan festivals and local deities reappeared, and spiritual devotion was lost amid external observances. The definition of common beliefs looked like a necessity if Christians were to work together; but in the shadow by the side of orthodoxy we see the interminable file of anathematised hetorodoxies which, to say the least of them, were once no farther from common acceptance than Christianity itself was in the early Roman Empire. In those days of bitter suffering the Christians pleaded for simple toleration on equal terms with other faiths. But

forgetful of the lessons of its infancy, the Church has turned a deaf ear to a similar plea from independent thinkers. No story of Imperial persecution can exceed the terrible record of wars and hatreds between the sects of Christendom. As the first thousand years of its history advanced the breach grew wider between East and West. Practices and opinions differed. The old Greek culture dwindled away in the ancient seats of learning, while the young nations of Western Europe slowly developed into a culture of their own. After a long period of comparative quiescence under the tutelage of the Roman Church, Christendom in the West was rent by another breach at the Reformation, the completed issues of which have still to be seen.

In its first days Christendom cherished the vivid hope that Jesus would come again speedily. If those that cherished that hope could come again, if Paul could see the sacerdotalism and ritualism, the worldly splendour and unspirituality of Christendom, he might well say, 'O foolish Christians, who has bewitched you? Ye have not stood fast in your liberty. Is not the Kingdom of God righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit?' And if *he*, indeed, came again, the Master who taught that not by priestly ceremonies man knows the mercy of God, but by being himself merciful; that not in correctness of creed, but in purity of heart men shall behold God; *what would he say?*

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but during his brief spell of office he had a notable experience with the Christians. The letter addressed to Trajan on the subject is probably more heard of than read, and the following translation may be therefore of interest to many. Pliny's letters fill ten books; this particular letter is numbered ninety-six in the tenth book. Pliny says:—

'It is my custom, my Lord, to refer to you all matters in which I am doubtful, for who can better direct my hesitation or instruct my ignorance?

'I have never attended judicial inquiries concerning Christians; I know not, therefore, how far it is customary to punish them or to try them. I have considerably doubted as to making any distinction on account of age, or whether the tender and the stronger should be treated alike; whether pardon should be granted to the penitent, or whether it should be no avail for anyone who was ever a Christian to have ceased to be so; and even if the name itself should be regarded as inoffensive, whether the offences attaching to the name should be punished. Meanwhile, I have dealt as follows with those who were brought up before me as Christians:—I have questioned them as to whether they were Christians; if they acknowledged themselves to be so, I put the question a second and third time with threats of punishment, and those who still persisted, I ordered off to prison. For I was in no doubt that, whatever their confession might mean, their stubborn and unyielding obstinacy should be punished. There were some of this foolish character

whom, being Roman citizens, I marked to be sent to the capital. Shortly after, the charge being spread about, as usual, by this course of action, further cases presented themselves. An anonymous accusation was put forth containing the names of many who denied that they were Christians, or had been, since in my presence they invoked the gods, and, with wine and incense, worshipped your image, which I had ordered to be brought for the purpose, along with the statues of the gods, besides cursing Christ; none of which things they are said to be got to do who are truly Christians. These, then, I thought should be released. Others named in this document at first admitted themselves to be Christians, and then denied it; saying they had been, but had ceased to be so, some three years before, some more, some as many as twenty. They all adored your image and the statues of the gods, and they also cursed Christ. They declared, however, that the height of their offence or error was that they used at a stated day to meet before daybreak, and chant a hymn together to Christ as to a god. They bound themselves by a vow for no evil purpose, but that they should not commit thefts, robberies, nor adulteries, nor break faith, nor, when asked, refuse what was intrusted to them; that they separated at the end of this ceremony, and met again to partake of food of a harmless kind: and this they had ceased doing after my edict putting in force your injunctions against secret societies. I thought it the more necessary, therefore, to inquire by torture what was the truth from two young women, who were