

When the empire in a military and political sense had reached its culmination, in a religious and social aspect it had attained its height of immorality. It had become thoroughly epicurean; its maxim was, that life should be made a feast, that virtue is only the seasoning of pleasure, and temperance the means of prolonging it. Dining-rooms glittering with gold and incrustated with gems, slaves in superb apparel, the fascinations of female society where all the women were dissolute, magnificent baths, theatres, gladiators, such were the objects of Roman desire. The conquerors of the world had discovered that the only thing worth worshipping is Force. By it all things might be secured, all that toil and trade had laboriously obtained. The confiscation of goods and lands, the taxation of provinces, were the reward of successful warfare; and the emperor was the symbol of force. There was a social splendor, but it was the phosphorescent corruption of the ancient Mediterranean world.

In one of the Eastern provinces, Syria, some persons in very humble life had associated themselves together for benevolent and religious purposes. The doctrines they held were in harmony with that sentiment of universal brotherhood arising from the coalescence of the conquered kingdoms. They were doctrines inculcated by Jesus.

The Jewish people at that time entertained a belief, founded on old traditions, that a deliverer would arise among them, who would restore them to their ancient splendor. The disciples of Jesus regarded him as this long-expected Messiah. But the priesthood, believing that the doctrines he taught were prejudicial to their interests, denounced him to the Roman governor, who, to satisfy their clamors, reluctantly delivered him over to death.

His doctrines of benevolence and human brotherhood outlasted that event. The disciples, instead of scattering, organized. They associated themselves on a principle of communism, each throwing into the common stock whatever property he possessed, and all his gains. The widows and orphans of the community were thus supported, the poor and the sick sustained. From this germ was developed a new, and as the events proved, all-powerful society—the Church; new, for nothing of the kind had existed in antiquity; powerful, for the local churches, at first isolated, soon began to confederate for their common interest. Through this organization Christianity achieved all her political triumphs.

As we have said, the military domination of Rome had brought about universal peace, and had generated a sentiment of brotherhood among the vanquished nations. Things were, therefore, propitious for the rapid diffusion of the newly-established—the Christian—principle throughout the empire. It spread from Syria through all Asia Minor, and successively reached Cyprus, Greece, Italy, eventually extending westward as far as Gaul and Britain.

Its propagation was hastened by missionaries who made it known in all directions. None of the ancient classical philosophies had ever taken advantage of such a means.

Political conditions determined the boundaries of the new religion. Its limits were eventually those of the Roman Empire; Rome, doubtfully the place of death of Peter, not Jerusalem, indisputably the place of the death of our Savior, became the religious capital. It was better to have possession of the imperial seven-hilled city, than of Gethsemane and Calvary with all their holy souvenirs.

For many years Christianity manifested itself as a system enjoining three things—toward God veneration, in personal life purity, in social life benevolence. In its early days of feebleness it made proselytes only by persuasion, but, as it increased in numbers and influence, it began to exhibit political tendencies, a disposition to form a government within the government, an empire within the empire. These tendencies it has never since lost. They are, in truth, the logical result of its development. The Roman emperors, discovering that it was absolutely incompatible with the imperial system, tried to put it down by force. This was in accordance with the spirit of their military maxims, which had no other means but force for the establishment of conformity.

In the winter A. D. 302-'3, the Christian soldiers in some of the legions refused to join in the time-honored solemnities for propitiating the gods. The mutiny spread so quickly, the emergency became so pressing, that the Emperor Diocletian was compelled to hold a council for the purpose of determining what should be done. The difficulty of the position may perhaps be appreciated when it is understood that the wife and the daughter of Diocletian himself were Christians. He was a man of great capacity and large political views; he recognized in the opposition that must be made to the new party a political necessity, yet he expressly enjoined that there should be no bloodshed. But who can control an infuriated civil commotion? The church of Nicomedia was razed to the ground; in retaliation the imperial palace was set on fire, an edict was openly insulted and torn down. The Christian officers in the army were cashiered; in all directions, martyrdoms and massacres were taking place. So resistless was the

march of events, that not even the emperor himself could stop the persecution.

It had now become evident that the Christians constituted a powerful party in the state, animated with indignation at the atrocities they had suffered, and determined to endure them no longer. After the abdication of Diocletian (A. D. 305), Constantine, one of the competitors for the purple, perceiving the advantages that would accrue to him from such a policy, put himself forth as the head of the Christian party. This gave him, in every part of the empire, men and women ready to encounter fire and sword in his behalf; it gave him unwavering adherents in every legion of the armies. In a decisive battle, near the Milvian bridge, victory crowned his schemes. The death of Maximin, and subsequently that of Licinius, removed all obstacles. He ascended the throne of the Cæsars—the first Christian emperor.

Place, profit, power—these were in view of whoever now joined the conquering sect. Crowds of worldly persons, who cared nothing about its religious ideas, became its warmest supporters. Pagans at heart, their influence was soon manifested in the paganization of Christianity that forthwith ensued. The emperor, no better than they, did nothing to check their proceedings. But he did not personally conform to the ceremonial requirements of the Church until the close of his evil life, A. D. 337.

That we may clearly appreciate the modifications now impressed on Christianity—modifications which eventually brought it in conflict with science—we must have, as a means of comparison, a statement of what it was in its purer days. Such, fortunately, we find in the "Apology or Defense of the Christians against the

Accusations of the Gentiles," written by Tertullian, at Rome, during the persecution of Severus. He addressed it, not to the emperor, but to the magistrates who sat in judgment on the accused. It is a solemn and most earnest expostulation, setting forth all that could be said in explanation of the subject, a representation of the belief and cause of the Christians made in the imperial city in the face of the whole world, not a querulous or passionate ecclesiastical appeal, but a grave historical document. It has ever been looked upon as one of the ablest of the early Christian works. Its date is about A. D. 200.

With no inconsiderable skill Tertullian opens his argument. He tells the magistrates that Christianity is a stranger upon earth, and that she expects to meet with enemies in a country which is not her own. She only asks that she may not be condemned unheard, and that Roman magistrates will permit her to defend herself; that the laws of the empire will gather lustre, if judgment be passed upon her after she has been tried, but not if she is sentenced without a hearing of her cause; that it is unjust to hate a thing of which we are ignorant, even though it may be a thing worthy of hate; that the laws of Rome deal with actions, not with mere names; but that, notwithstanding this, persons have been punished because they were called Christians, and that without any accusation of crime.

He then advances to an exposition of the origin, the nature, and the effects of Christianity, stating that it is founded on the Hebrew Scriptures, which are the most venerable of all books. He says to the magistrates: "The books of Moses, in which God has inclosed, as in a treasure, all the religion of the Jews, and consequently all the Christian religion, reach far beyond the oldest

you have, even beyond all your public monuments, the establishment of your state, the foundation of many great cities—all that is most advanced by you in all ages of history, and memory of times; the invention of letters, which are the interpreters of sciences and the guardians of all excellent things. I think I may say more—beyond your gods, your temples, your oracles and sacrifices. The author of those books lived a thousand years before the siege of Troy, and more than fifteen hundred before Homer." Time is the ally of truth, and wise men believe nothing but what is certain, and what has been verified by time. The principal authority of these Scriptures is derived from their venerable antiquity. The most learned of the Ptolemies, who was surnamed Philadelphus, an accomplished prince, by the advice of Demetrius Phalareus, obtained a copy of these holy books. It may be found at this day in his library. The divinity of these Scriptures is proved by this, that all that is done in our days may be found predicted in them; they contain all that has since passed in the view of men.

Is not the accomplishment of a prophecy a testimony to its truth? Seeing that events which are past have vindicated these prophecies, shall we be blamed for trusting them in events that are to come? Now, as we believe things that have been prophesied and have come to pass, so we believe things that have been told us, but not yet come to pass, because they have all been foretold by the same Scriptures, as well those that are verified every day as those that still remain to be fulfilled.

These Holy Scriptures teach us that there is one God, who made the world out of nothing, who, though daily seen, is invisible; his infiniteness is known only

to himself; his immensity conceals, but at the same time discovers him. He has ordained for men, according to their lives, rewards and punishments; he will raise all the dead that have ever lived from the creation of the world, will command them to reassume their bodies, and thereupon adjudge them to felicity that has no end, or to eternal flames. The fires of hell are those hidden flames which the earth shuts up in her bosom. He has in past times sent into the world preachers or prophets. The prophets of those old times were Jews; they addressed their oracles, for such they were, to the Jews, who have stored them up in the Scriptures. On them, as has been said, Christianity is founded, though the Christian differs in his ceremonies from the Jew. We are accused of worshiping a man, and not the God of the Jews. Not so. The honor we bear to Christ does not derogate from the honor we bear to God.

On account of the merit of these ancient patriarchs, the Jews were the only beloved people of God; he delighted to be in communication with them by his own mouth. By him they were raised to admirable greatness. But with perversity they wickedly ceased to regard him; they changed his laws into a profane worship. He warned them that he would take to himself servants more faithful than they, and, for their crime, punished them by driving them forth from their country. They are now spread all over the world; they wander in all parts; they cannot enjoy the air they breathed at their birth; they have neither man nor God for their king. As he threatened them, so he has done. He has taken, in all nations and countries of the earth, people more faithful than they. Through his prophets he had declared that these should have greater favors, and that a Messiah should come, to publish a new law

among them. This Messiah was Jesus, who is also God. For God may be derived from God, as the light of a candle may be derived from the light of another candle. God and his Son are the self-same God—a light is the same light as that from which it was taken.

The Scriptures make known two comings of the Son of God; the first in humility, the second at the day of judgment, in power. The Jews might have known all this from the prophets, but their sins have so blinded them that they did not recognize him at his first coming, and are still vainly expecting him. They believed that all the miracles wrought by him were the work of magic. The doctors of the law and the chief priests were envious of him; they denounced him to Pilate. He was crucified, died, was buried, and after three days rose again. For forty days he remained among his disciples. Then he was environed in a cloud, and rose up to heaven—a truth far more certain than any human testimonies touching the ascension of Romulus or of any other Roman prince mounting up to the same place.

Tertullian then describes the origin and nature of devils, who, under Satan, their prince, produce diseases, irregularities of the air, plagues, and the blighting of the blossoms of the earth, who seduce men to offer sacrifices, that they may have the blood of the victims, which is their food. They are as nimble as the birds, and hence know every thing that is passing upon earth; they live in the air, and hence can spy what is going on in heaven; for this reason they can impose on men feigned prophecies, and deliver oracles. Thus they announced in Rome that a victory would be obtained over King Perseus, when in truth they knew that the battle was already won. They falsely cure diseases;

for, taking possession of the body of a man, they produce in him a distemper, and then ordaining some remedy to be used, they cease to afflict him, and men think that a cure has taken place.

Though Christians deny that the emperor is a god, they nevertheless pray for his prosperity, because the general dissolution that threatens the universe, the conflagration of the world, is retarded so long as the glorious majesty of the triumphant Roman Empire shall last. They desire not to be present at the subversion of all Nature. They acknowledge only one republic, but it is the whole world; they constitute one body, worship one God, and all look forward to eternal happiness. Not only do they pray for the emperor and the magistrates, but also for peace. They read the Scriptures to nourish their faith, lift up their hope, and strengthen the confidence they have in God. They assemble to exhort one another; they remove sinners from their societies; they have bishops who preside over them, approved by the suffrages of those whom they are to conduct. At the end of each month every one contributes if he will, but no one is constrained to give; the money gathered in this manner is the pledge of piety; it is not consumed in eating and drinking, but in feeding the poor, and burying them, in comforting children that are destitute of parents and goods, in helping old men who have spent the best of their days in the service of the faithful, in assisting those who have lost by shipwreck what they had, and those who are condemned to the mines, or have been banished to islands, or shut up in prisons, because they professed the religion of the true God. There is but one thing that Christians have not in common, and that one thing is their wives. They do not feast as if they should die to-morrow, nor build as if they

should never die. The objects of their life are innocence, justice, patience, temperance, chastity.

To this noble exposition of Christian belief and life in his day, Tertullian does not hesitate to add an ominous warning to the magistrates he is addressing—ominous, for it was a forecast of a great event soon to come to pass: "Our origin is but recent, yet already we fill all that your power acknowledges—cities, fortresses, islands, provinces, the assemblies of the people, the wards of Rome, the palace, the senate, the public places, and especially the armies. We have left you nothing but your temples. Reflect what wars we are able to undertake! With what promptitude might we not arm ourselves were we not restrained by our religion, which teaches us that it is better to be killed than to kill!"

Before he closes his defense, Tertullian renews an assertion which, carried into practice, as it subsequently was, affected the intellectual development of all Europe. He declares that the Holy Scriptures are a treasure from which all the true wisdom in the world has been drawn; that every philosopher and every poet is indebted to them. He labors to show that they are the standard and measure of all truth, and that whatever is inconsistent with them must necessarily be false.

From Tertullian's able work we see what Christianity was while it was suffering persecution and struggling for existence. We have now to see what it became when in possession of imperial power. Great is the difference between Christianity under Severus and Christianity after Constantine. Many of the doctrines which at the latter period were preëminent, in the former were unknown.

Two causes led to the amalgamation of Christianity with paganism: 1. The political necessities of the new

dynasty; 2. The policy adopted by the new religion to insure its spread.

1. Though the Christian party had proved itself sufficiently strong to give a master to the empire, it was never sufficiently strong to destroy its antagonist, paganism. The issue of the struggle between them was an amalgamation of the principles of both. In this, Christianity differed from Mohammedanism, which absolutely annihilated its antagonist, and spread its own doctrines without adulteration.

Constantine continually showed by his acts that he felt he must be the impartial sovereign of all his people, not merely the representative of a successful faction. Hence, if he built Christian churches, he also restored pagan temples; if he listened to the clergy, he also consulted the haruspices; if he summoned the Council of Nicea, he also honored the statue of Fortune; if he accepted the rite of baptism, he also struck a medal bearing his title of "God." His statue, on the top of the great porphyry pillar at Constantinople, consisted of an ancient image of Apollo, whose features were replaced by those of the emperor, and its head surrounded by the nails feigned to have been used at the crucifixion of Christ, arranged so as to form a crown of glory.

Feeling that there must be concessions to the defeated pagan party, in accordance with its ideas, he looked with favor on the idolatrous movements of his court. In fact, the leaders of these movements were persons of his own family.

2. To the emperor—a mere worldling—a man without any religious convictions, doubtless it appeared best for himself, best for the empire, and best for the contending parties, Christian and pagan, to promote their

union or amalgamation as much as possible. Even sincere Christians do not seem to have been averse to this; perhaps they believed that the new doctrines would diffuse most thoroughly by incorporating in themselves ideas borrowed from the old, that Truth would assert herself in the end, and the impurity be cast off. In accomplishing this amalgamation, Helena, the empress-mother, aided by the court ladies, led the way. For her gratification there were discovered, in a cavern at Jerusalem, wherein they had lain buried for more than three centuries, the Savior's cross, and those of the two thieves, the inscription, and the nails that had been used. They were identified by miracle. A true relic-worship set in. The superstition of the old Greek times reappeared; the times when the tools with which the Trojan horse was made might still be seen at Metapontum, the sceptre of Pelops at Chæroneia, the spear of Achilles at Phaselis, the sword of Memnon at Nicomedia, when the Tegeates could show the hide of the Calydonian boar and very many cities boasted their possession of the true pælladium of Troy; when there were statues of Minerva that could brandish spears, paintings that could blush, images that could sweat, and endless shrines and sanctuaries at which miracle-cures could be performed.

As years passed on, the faith described by Tertulian was transmuted into one more fashionable and more debased. It was incorporated with the old Greek mythology. Olympus was restored, but the divinities passed under other names. The more powerful provinces insisted on the adoption of their time-honored conceptions. Views of the Trinity, in accordance with Egyptian traditions, were established. Not only was the adoration of Isis under a new name restored, but even her image, standing on the crescent moon, reap-