

at the time of which we are speaking, all the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire exhibited an intellectual anarchy. There were fierce quarrels respecting the Trinity, the essence of God, the position of the Son, the nature of the Holy Spirit, the influences of the Virgin Mary. The triumphant clamor first of one then of another sect was confirmed, sometimes by miracle-proof, sometimes by bloodshed. No attempt was ever made to submit the rival opinions to logical examination. All parties, however, agreed in this, that the imposture of the old classical pagan forms of faith was demonstrated by the facility with which they had been overthrown. The triumphant ecclesiastics proclaimed that the images of the gods had failed to defend themselves when the time of trial came.

Polytheistic ideas have always been held in repute by the southern European races, the Semitic have maintained the unity of God. Perhaps this is due to the fact, as a recent author has suggested, that a diversified landscape of mountains and valleys, islands, and rivers, and gulfs, predisposes man to a belief in a multitude of divinities. A vast sandy desert, the illimitable ocean, impresses him with an idea of the oneness of God.

Political reasons had led the emperors to look with favor on the admixture of Christianity and paganism, and doubtless by this means the bitterness of the rivalry between those antagonists was somewhat abated. The heaven of the popular, the fashionable Christianity was the old Olympus, from which the venerable Greek divinities had been removed. There, on a great white throne, sat God the Father, on his right the Son, and then the blessed Virgin, clad in a golden robe, and "covered with various female adornments;" on the left sat God the Holy Ghost. Surrounding these

thrones were hosts of angels with their harps. The vast expanse beyond was filled with tables, seated at which the happy spirits of the just enjoyed a perpetual banquet.

If, satisfied with this picture of happiness, illiterate persons never inquired how the details of such a heaven were carried out, or how much pleasure there could be in the ennui of such an eternally unchanging, unmoving scene, it was not so with the intelligent. As we are soon to see, there were among the higher ecclesiastics those who rejected with sentiments of horror these carnal, these materialistic conceptions, and raised their protesting voices in vindication of the attributes of the Omnipresent, the Almighty God.

In the paganization of religion, now in all directions taking place, it became the interest of every bishop to procure an adoption of the ideas which, time out of mind, had been current in the community under his charge. The Egyptians had already thus forced on the Church their peculiar Trinitarian views; and now they were resolved that, under the form of the adoration of the Virgin Mary, the worship of Isis should be restored.

It so happened that Nestor, the Bishop of Antioch, who entertained the philosophical views of Theodore of Mopsuestia, had been called by the Emperor Theodosius the Younger to the Episcopate of Constantinople (A. D. 427). Nestor rejected the base popular anthropomorphism, looking upon it as little better than blasphemous, and pictured to himself an awful eternal Divinity, who pervaded the universe, and had none of the aspects or attributes of man. Nestor was deeply imbued with the doctrines of Aristotle, and attempted to coordinate them with what he considered to be orthodox

Christian tenets. Between him and Cyril, the Bishop or Patriarch of Alexandria, a quarrel accordingly arose. Cyril represented the paganizing, Nestor the philosophizing party of the Church. This was that Cyril who had murdered Hypatia. Cyril was determined that the worship of the Virgin as the Mother of God should be recognized, Nestor was determined that it should not. In a sermon delivered in the metropolitan church at Constantinople, he vindicated the attributes of the Eternal, the Almighty God. "And can this God have a mother?" he exclaimed. In other sermons and writings, he set forth with more precision his ideas that the Virgin should be considered not as the Mother of God, but as the mother of the human portion of Christ, that portion being as essentially distinct from the divine as is a temple from its contained deity.

Instigated by the monks of Alexandria, the monks of Constantinople took up arms in behalf of "the Mother of God." The quarrel rose to such a pitch that the emperor was constrained to summon a council to meet at Ephesus. In the mean time Cyril had given a bribe of many pounds of gold to the chief eunuch of the imperial court, and had thereby obtained the influence of the emperor's sister. "The holy virgin of the court of heaven thus found an ally of her own sex in the holy virgin of the emperor's court." Cyril hastened to the council, attended by a mob of men and women of the baser sort. He at once assumed the presidency, and in the midst of a tumult had the emperor's rescript read before the Syrian bishops could arrive. A single day served to complete his triumph. All offers of accommodation on the part of Nestor were refused, his explanations were not read, he was condemned unheard. On the arrival of the Syrian ecclesiastics, a meeting of

protest was held by them. A riot, with much bloodshed, ensued in the cathedral of St. John. Nestor was abandoned by the court, and eventually exiled to an Egyptian oasis. His persecutors tormented him as long as he lived, by every means in their power, and at his death gave out that "his blasphemous tongue had been devoured by worms, and that from the heats of an Egyptian desert he had escaped only into the hotter torments of hell!"

The overthrow and punishment of Nestor, however, by no means destroyed his opinions. He and his followers, insisting on the plain inference of the last verse of the first chapter of St. Matthew, together with the fifty-fifth and fifty-sixth verses of the thirteenth of the same gospel, could never be brought to an acknowledgment of the perpetual virginity of the new queen of heaven. Their philosophical tendencies were soon indicated by their actions. While their leader was tormented in an African oasis, many of them emigrated to the Euphrates, and established the Chaldean Church. Under their auspices the college of Edessa was founded. From the college of Nisibis issued those doctors who spread Nestor's tenets through Syria, Arabia, India, Tartary, China, Egypt. The Nestorians, of course, adopted the philosophy of Aristotle, and translated the works of that great writer into Syriac and Persian. They also made similar translations of later works, such as those of Pliny. In connection with the Jews they founded the medical college of Djondesabour. Their missionaries disseminated the Nestorian form of Christianity to such an extent over Asia, that its worshipers eventually outnumbered all the European Christians of the Greek and Roman Churches combined. It may be particularly remarked that in Arabia they had a bishop.

The dissensions between Constantinople and Alexandria had thus filled all Western Asia with sectaries, ferocious in their contests with each other, and many of them burning with hatred against the imperial power, for the persecutions it had inflicted on them. A religious revolution, the consequences of which are felt in our own times, was the result. It affected the whole world.

We shall gain a clear view of this great event, if we consider separately the two acts into which it may be decomposed: 1. The temporary overthrow of Asiatic Christianity by the Persians; 2. The decisive and final reformation under the Arabians.

1. It happened (A. D. 590) that, by one of those revolutions so frequent in Oriental courts, Chosroes, the lawful heir to the Persian throne, was compelled to seek refuge in the Byzantine Empire, and implore the aid of the Emperor Maurice. That aid was cheerfully given. A brief and successful campaign restored Chosroes to the throne of his ancestors.

But the glories of this generous campaign could not preserve Maurice himself. A mutiny broke out in the Roman army, headed by Phocas, a centurion. The statues of the emperor were overthrown. The Patriarch of Constantinople, having declared that he had assured himself of the orthodoxy of Phocas, consecrated him emperor. The unfortunate Maurice was dragged from a sanctuary, in which he had sought refuge; his five sons were beheaded before his eyes, and then he was put to death. His empress was inveigled from the church of St. Sophia, tortured, and with her three young daughters beheaded. The adherents of the massacred family were pursued with ferocious vindictiveness; of some the eyes were blinded, of others the tongues were

torn out, or the feet and hands cut off, some were whipped to death, others were burnt.

When the news reached Rome, Pope Gregory received it with exultation, praying that the hands of Phocas might be strengthened against all his enemies. As an equivalent for this subserviency, he was greeted with the title of "Universal Bishop." The cause of his action, as well as of that of the Patriarch of Constantinople, was doubtless the fact that Maurice was suspected of Magian tendencies, into which he had been lured by the Persians. The mob of Constantinople had hooted after him in the streets, branding him as a Marcionite, a sect which believed in the Magian doctrine of two conflicting principles.

With very different sentiments Chosroes heard of the murder of his friend. Phocas had sent him the heads of Maurice and his sons. The Persian king turned from the ghastly spectacle with horror, and at once made ready to avenge the wrongs of his benefactor by war.

The Exarch of Africa, Heraclius, one of the chief officers of the state, also received the shocking tidings with indignation. He was determined that the imperial purple should not be usurped by an obscure centurion of disgusting aspect. "The person of this Phocas was diminutive and deformed; the closeness of his shaggy eyebrows, his red hair, his beardless chin, were in keeping with his cheek, disfigured and discolored by a formidable scar. Ignorant of letters, of laws, and even of arms, he indulged in an ample privilege of lust and drunkenness." At first Heraclius refused tribute and obedience to him; then, admonished by age and infirmities, he committed the dangerous enterprise of resistance to his son of the same name. A prosperous voyage

from Carthage soon brought the younger Heraclius in front of Constantinople. The inconstant clergy, senate, and people of the city joined him, the usurper was seized in his palace and beheaded.

But the revolution that had taken place in Constantinople did not arrest the movements of the Persian king. His Magian priests had warned him to act independently of the Greeks, whose superstition, they declared, was devoid of all truth and justice. Chosroes, therefore, crossed the Euphrates; his army was received with transport by the Syrian sectaries, insurrections in his favor everywhere breaking out. In succession, Antioch, Cæsarea, Damascus fell; Jerusalem itself was taken by storm; the sepulchre of Christ, the churches of Constantine and of Helena were given to the flames; the Savior's cross was sent as a trophy to Persia; the churches were rifled of their riches; the sacred relics, collected by superstition, were dispersed. Egypt was invaded, conquered, and annexed to the Persian Empire; the Patriarch of Alexandria escaped by flight to Cyprus; the African coast to Tripoli was seized. On the north, Asia Minor was subdued, and for ten years the Persian forces encamped on the shores of the Bosphorus, in front of Constantinople.

In his extremity Heraclius begged for peace. "I will never give peace to the Emperor of Rome," replied the proud Persian, "till he has abjured his crucified God, and embraced the worship of the sun." After a long delay terms were, however, secured, and the Roman Empire was ransomed at the price of "a thousand talents of gold, a thousand talents of silver, a thousand silk robes, a thousand horses, and a thousand virgins."

But Heraclius submitted only for a moment. He found means not only to restore his affairs but to retali-

ate on the Persian Empire. The operations by which he achieved this result were worthy of the most brilliant days of Rome.

Though her military renown was thus recovered, though her territory was regained, there was something that the Roman Empire had irrecoverably lost. Religious faith could never be restored. In face of the world Magianism had insulted Christianity, by profaning her most sacred places—Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Calvary—by burning the sepulchre of Christ, by rifling and destroying the churches, by scattering to the winds priceless relics, by carrying off, with shouts of laughter, the cross.

Miracles had once abounded in Syria, in Egypt, in Asia Minor; there was not a church which had not its long catalogue of them. Very often they were displayed on unimportant occasions and in insignificant cases. In this supreme moment, when such aid was most urgently demanded, not a miracle was worked.

Amazement filled the Christian populations of the East when they witnessed these Persian sacrileges perpetrated with impunity. The heavens should have rolled asunder, the earth should have opened her abysses, the sword of the Almighty should have flashed in the sky, the fate of Sennacherib should have been repeated. But it was not so. In the land of miracles, amazement was followed by consternation—consternation died out in disbelief.

2. But, dreadful as it was, the Persian conquest was but a prelude to the great event, the story of which we have now to relate—the Southern revolt against Christianity. Its issue was the loss of nine-tenths of her geographical possessions—Asia, Africa, and part of Europe.

In the summer of 581 of the Christian era, there came to Bozrah, a town on the confines of Syria, south of Damascus, a caravan of camels. It was from Mecca, and was laden with the costly products of South Arabia—Arabia the Happy. The conductor of the caravan, one Abou Taleb, and his nephew, a lad of twelve years, were hospitably received and entertained at the Nestorian convent of the town.

The monks of this convent soon found that their young visitor, Halibi or Mohammed, was the nephew of the guardian of the Caaba, the sacred temple of the Arabs. One of them, by name Bahira, spared no pains to secure his conversion from the idolatry in which he had been brought up. He found the boy not only precociously intelligent, but eagerly desirous of information, especially on matters relating to religion.

In Mohammed's own country the chief object of Meccan worship was a black meteoric stone, kept in the Caaba, with three hundred and sixty subordinate idols, representing the days of the year, as the year was then counted.

At this time, as we have seen, the Christian Church, through the ambition and wickedness of its clergy, had been brought into a condition of anarchy. Councils had been held on various pretenses, while the real motives were concealed. Too often they were scenes of violence, bribery, corruption. In the West, such were the temptations of riches, luxury, and power, presented by the episcopates, that the election of a bishop was often disgraced by frightful murders. In the East, in consequence of the policy of the court of Constantinople, the Church had been torn in pieces by contentions and schisms. Among a countless host of disputants may be mentioned Arians, Basilidians, Carpocratians,

Collyridians, Eutychians, Gnostics, Jacobites, Marcionites, Marionites, Nestorians, Sabellians, Valentinians. Of these, the Marionites regarded the Trinity as consisting of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Virgin Mary; the Collyridians worshiped the Virgin as a divinity, offering her sacrifices of cakes; the Nestorians, as we have seen, denied that God had "a mother." They prided themselves on being the inheritors, the possessors of the science of old Greece.

But, though they were irreconcilable in matters of faith, there was one point in which all these sects agreed—ferocious hatred and persecution of each other. Arabia, an unconquered land of liberty, stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Desert of Syria, gave them all, as the tide of fortune successively turned, a refuge. It had been so from the old times. Thither, after the Roman conquest of Palestine, vast numbers of Jews escaped; thither, immediately after his conversion, St. Paul tells the Galatians that he retired. The deserts were now filled with Christian anchorites, and among the chief tribes of the Arabs many proselytes had been made. Here and there churches had been built. The Christian princes of Abyssinia, who were Nestorians, held the southern province of Arabia—Yemen—in possession.

By the monk Bahira, in the convent at Bozrah, Mohammed was taught the tenets of the Nestorians; from them the young Arab learned the story of their persecutions. It was these interviews which engendered in him a hatred of the idolatrous practices of the Eastern Church, and indeed of all idolatry; that taught him, in his wonderful career, never to speak of Jesus as the Son of God, but always as "Jesus, the son of Mary." His untutored but active mind could not fail to be profoundly impressed not only with the religious but also with

the philosophical ideas of his instructors, who gloried in being the living representatives of Aristotelian science. His subsequent career shows how completely their religious thoughts had taken possession of him, and repeated acts manifest his affectionate regard for them. His own life was devoted to the expansion and extension of their theological doctrine, and, that once effectually established, his successors energetically adopted and diffused their scientific, their Aristotelian opinions.

As Mohammed grew to manhood, he made other expeditions to Syria. Perhaps, we may suppose, that on these occasions the convent and its hospitable inmates were not forgotten. He had a mysterious reverence for that country. A wealthy Meccan widow, Chadizah, had intrusted him with the care of her Syrian trade. She was charmed with his capacity and fidelity, and (since he is said to have been characterized by the possession of singular manly beauty and a most courteous demeanor) charmed with his person. The female heart in all ages and countries is the same. She caused a slave to intimate to him what was passing in her mind, and, for the remaining twenty-four years of her life, Mohammed was her faithful husband. In a land of polygamy, he never insulted her by the presence of a rival. Many years subsequently, in the height of his power, Ayesha, who was one of the most beautiful women in Arabia, said to him: "Was she not old? Did not God give you in me a better wife in her place?" "No, by God!" exclaimed Mohammed, and with a burst of honest gratitude, "there never can be a better. She believed in me when men despised me, she relieved me when I was poor and persecuted by the world."

His marriage with Chadizah placed him in circumstances of ease, and gave him an opportunity of indulging

his inclination to religious meditation. It so happened that her cousin Waraka, who was a Jew, had turned Christian. He was the first to translate the Bible into Arabic. By his conversation Mohammed's detestation of idolatry was confirmed.

After the example of the Christian anchorites in their hermitages in the desert, Mohammed retired to a grotto in Mount Hera, a few miles from Mecca, giving himself up to meditation and prayer. In this seclusion, contemplating the awful attributes of the Omnipotent and Eternal God, he addressed to his conscience the solemn inquiry, whether he could adopt the dogmas then held in Asiatic Christendom respecting the Trinity, the sonship of Jesus as begotten by the Almighty, the character of Mary as at once a virgin, a mother, and the queen of heaven, without incurring the guilt and the peril of blasphemy.

By his solitary meditations in the grotto Mohammed was drawn to the conclusion that, through the cloud of dogmas and disputations around him, one great truth might be discerned—the unity of God. Leaning against the stem of a palm-tree, he unfolded his views on this subject to his neighbors and friends, and announced to them that he should dedicate his life to the preaching of that truth. Again and again, in his sermons and in the Koran, he declared: "I am nothing but a public preacher. . . . I preach the oneness of God." Such was his own conception of his so-called apostleship. Henceforth, to the day of his death, he wore on his finger a seal-ring on which was engraved, "Mohammed, the messenger of God."

It is well known among physicians that prolonged fasting and mental anxiety inevitably give rise to hallucination. Perhaps there never has been any religious

system introduced by self-denying, earnest men that did not offer examples of supernatural temptations and supernatural commands. Mysterious voices encouraged the Arabian preacher to persist in his determination; shadows of strange forms passed before him. He heard sounds in the air like those of a distant bell. In a nocturnal dream he was carried by Gabriel from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence in succession through the six heavens. Into the seventh the angel feared to intrude, and Mohammed alone passed into the dread cloud that forever enshrouds the Almighty. "A shiver thrilled his heart as he felt upon his shoulder the touch of the cold hand of God."

His public ministrations met with much resistance, and little success at first. Expelled from Mecca by the upholders of the prevalent idolatry, he sought refuge in Medina, a town in which there were many Jews and Nestorians; the latter at once became proselytes to his faith. He had already been compelled to send his daughter and others of his disciples to Abyssinia, the king of which was a Nestorian Christian. At the end of six years he had made only fifteen hundred converts. But in three little skirmishes, magnified in subsequent times by the designation of the battles of Beder, of Ohud, and of the Nations, Mohammed discovered that his most convincing argument was his sword. Afterward, with Oriental eloquence, he said, "Paradise will be found in the shadow of the crossing of swords." By a series of well-conducted military operations, his enemies were completely overthrown. Arabian idolatry was absolutely exterminated; the doctrine he proclaimed, that "there is but one God," was universally adopted by his countrymen, and his own apostleship accepted.

Let us pass over his stormy life, and hear what he

says when, on the pinnacle of earthly power and glory, he was approaching its close.

Steadfast in his declaration of the unity of God, he departed from Medina on his last pilgrimage to Mecca, at the head of one hundred and fourteen thousand devotees, with camels decorated with garlands of flowers and fluttering streamers. When he approached the holy city, he uttered the solemn invocation: "Here am I in thy service, O God! Thou hast no companion. To thee alone belongeth worship. Thine alone is the kingdom. There is none to share it with thee."

With his own hand he offered up the camels in sacrifice. He considered that primeval institution to be equally sacred as prayer, and that no reason can be alleged in support of the one which is not equally strong in support of the other.

From the pulpit of the Caaba he reiterated, "O my hearers, I am only a man like yourselves." They remembered that he had once said to one who approached him with timid steps: "Of what dost thou stand in awe? I am no king. I am nothing but the son of an Arab woman, who ate flesh dried in the sun."

He returned to Medina to die. In his farewell to his congregation, he said: "Every thing happens according to the will of God, and has its appointed time, which can neither be hastened nor avoided. I return to him who sent me, and my last command to you is, that ye love, honor, and uphold each other, that ye exhort each other to faith and constancy in belief, and to the performance of pious deeds. My life has been for your good, and so will be my death."

In his dying agony, his head was reclined on the lap of Ayesha. From time to time he had dipped his hand in a vase of water, and moistened his face. At last he

ceased, and, gazing steadfastly upward, said, in broken accents: "O God—forgive my sins—be it so. I come."

Shall we speak of this man with disrespect? His precepts are, at this day, the religious guide of one-third of the human race.

In Mohammed, who had already broken away from the ancient idolatrous worship of his native country, preparation had been made for the rejection of those tenets which his Nestorian teachers had communicated to him, inconsistent with reason and conscience. And, though, in the first pages of the Koran, he declares his belief in what was delivered to Moses and Jesus, and his reverence for them personally, his veneration for the Almighty is perpetually displayed. He is horror-stricken at the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus, the worship of Mary as the mother of God, the adoration of images and paintings, in his eyes a base idolatry. He absolutely rejects the Trinity, of which he seems to have entertained the idea that it could not be interpreted otherwise than as presenting three distinct Gods.

His first and ruling idea was simply religious reform—to overthrow Arabian idolatry, and put an end to the wild sectarianism of Christianity. That he proposed to set up a new religion was a calumny invented against him in Constantinople, where he was looked upon with detestation, like that with which in after ages Luther was regarded in Rome.

But, though he rejected with indignation whatever might seem to disparage the doctrine of the unity of God, he was not able to emancipate himself from anthropomorphic conceptions. The God of the Koran is altogether human, both corporeally and mentally, if such expressions may with propriety be used. Very soon,

however, the followers of Mohammed divested themselves of these base ideas and rose to nobler ones.

The view here presented of the primitive character of Mohammedanism has long been adopted by many competent authorities. Sir William Jones, following Locke, regards the main point in the divergence of Mohammedanism from Christianity to consist "in denying vehemently the character of our Savior as the Son, and his equality as God with the Father, of whose unity and attributes the Mohammedans entertain and express the most awful ideas." This opinion has been largely entertained in Italy. Dante regarded Mohammed only as the author of a schism, and saw in Islamism only an Arian sect. In England, Whately views it as a corruption of Christianity. It was an offshoot of Nestorianism, and not until it had overthrown Greek Christianity in many great battles, was spreading rapidly over Asia and Africa, and had become intoxicated with its wonderful successes, did it repudiate its primitive limited intentions, and assert itself to be founded on a separate and distinct revelation.

Mohammed's life had been almost entirely consumed in the conversion or conquest of his native country. Toward its close, however, he felt himself strong enough to threaten the invasion of Syria and Persia. He had made no provision for the perpetuation of his own dominion, and hence it was not without a struggle that a successor was appointed. At length Abubeker, the father of Ayesha, was selected. He was proclaimed the first khalif, or successor of the Prophet.

There is a very important difference between the spread of Mohammedanism and the spread of Christianity. The latter was never sufficiently strong to overthrow and extirpate idolatry in the Roman Empire. As