

CHAPTER I.

THE WORLD-RELIGIONS.

1. THE present work treats of a subject of outstanding interest in the literature which is associated with the history of the Roman State, and which is expressed partly in Hellenistic Greek, partly in Latin. In the generations preceding our own, classical study has, to a large extent, attended to form rather than to matter, to expression rather than to content. To-day it is beginning to take a wider outlook. We are learning to look on literature as an unveiling of the human mind in its various stages of development, and as a key to the true meaning of history. The literature of Greece proper does not cease to attract us by its originality, charm, and variety; but the new interest may yet find its fullest satisfaction in Roman literature; for of all ancient peoples the Romans achieved most, and their achievements have been the most enduring. It was the Roman who joined the ends of the world by his roads and his bridges, poured into crowded towns unfailling supplies of corn and perennial streams of pure water, cleared the countryside of highwaymen, converted enemies into neighbours, created ideals of brotherhood under which the nations were united by common laws and unfettered marriage relations, and so shaped a new religion that if it shattered an empire it yet became the mother of many nations. We are the inheritors of Roman civilization; and if we have far surpassed it in scientific knowledge and material plenty, we are not equally confident that we possess better mental balance, or more complete social harmony. In this direction the problems of Roman life are the problems of Western life to-day; and the methods

by which they were approached in the Roman world deserve more than ever to be studied by us. Such a study, if it is to be in any true sense historical, must break through the convention by which ancient Greece and Rome have come to be treated as a world apart; it must seek its starting point in the distant past, and count that of chief importance which will bear fruit in the ages that follow.

2. Great achievements are born of strong convictions; and Roman statesmen, jurists, soldiers, and engineers did not learn to 'scorn delights and live laborious days' without some strong impulse from within. These inner convictions do not come to the surface everywhere in the Latin literature with which we are most familiar. The Roman orator or poet is generally content to express a conventional view of religion and morals, whilst he conceals his real thoughts in a spirit of reticence and almost of shame. Yet here and there every attentive reader will catch the accent of sincerity, sometimes in the less restrained conversation of the lower classes, sometimes in flights of poetic imagination, or again in instruction designed for the young. In this way we learn that the Romans of the last century of the republic and of the first century of the principate were profoundly concerned, not so much with questions connected with the safety of their empire or the justice of their form of government, as with problems in which all mankind has a common interest. What is truth, and how can it be ascertained? What is this universe in which we dwell, and by whom and how was it made? What are the beings called gods, and do they concern themselves with the affairs of men? What is man's nature, his duty, and his destiny? These the Romans called the problems of philosophy, and they eagerly sought for definite and practical solutions to them¹. Such solutions when embodied in theoretical systems we still call 'philosophies'; but when such systems are developed in a practical form and claim the obedience of large bodies of men they become religions. Stoicism is in the first instance a philosophy, and amongst its many competitors that one which

¹ See below, § 441.

appealed most successfully to the judgment of men who played a leading part in the Roman world; but as its acceptance becomes more general, it begins to assume all the features of a religion. All Latin literature is thickly strewn with allusions to Stoicism and the systems which were its rivals, and thus bears witness to the widespread interest which they excited.

3. The Romans learnt philosophy from Greek teachers; and they were not free from a sense of shame in thus sitting at the feet of the children of a conquered race. But they acknowledged their obligations in a generous spirit; and from Roman literature an impression has arisen, which is still widespread, that Greece was the birthplace of philosophy, and that its triumphs must be placed to the credit of Hellenic culture. But to the Hellenes themselves philosophy equally appeared as a foreign fashion, assailing their national beliefs and dangerous to their established morality; and of its teachers many of the most distinguished were immigrants from Asia Minor. Thus Greece itself appears only as a halting-place in the movement of philosophy; and we are carried more and more to the East as we seek to discover its origin. Yet at the time with which we are concerned it had also spread to the extreme West. 'The Magi,' says Aristotle, 'taught the Persians philosophy; the Chaldaeans taught it to the Babylonians and Assyrians; the Gymnosophists to the Indians; the Druids and Semnothei to the Gauls and Celts.'² It was a world-wide stirring of the human intellect, and we must attempt to outline its meaning more completely.

4. Philosophy, in the sense in which Aristotle uses the term, appears to be a general name for a great change in man's intellectual attitude towards his environment, corresponding to a definite era in the history of civilization. Before philosophy came nationalism, the habit of thinking according to clan and race; and nationalism remains on record for us in the numerous national religions in which each people does reverence to the deity which lives within its borders and goes forth to fight with its armies. Philosophy

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² Diog. L. Prooem. 1.

is at once broader in its outlook and more intimate in its appeal. It breaks down the barriers of race, and includes the whole world in its survey; but on the other hand it justifies the individual in asserting his own thoughts and choosing his own way of life. Thus philosophy on its arrival appears in each particular country as a disintegrating force; it strikes at the roots of patriotism and piety, and challenges equally the authority of king and of priest. But everywhere in turn philosophy, as it gains ground, begins to construct a new patriotism and a new piety, and gradually takes concrete shape as a new religion. To us, as we look backwards to the past, the track of philosophy is recorded by a series of religions, all alike marked with the note of world-wide outlook, reverence for reason, and the sentiment of human sympathy. The era of philosophy is the era of the world-religions. It belongs to that millennium when from China to Ireland men of good will and bold spirit realized that they all looked up toward one sky, breathed one air, and travelled on one all-encircling sea; when they dreamed that before long all men should be united in one kingdom, converse in one language, and obey the one unchanging law of reason.

5. The general importance and direction of this movement will best be seen if we select for consideration a certain number of the world-religions in which it was from time to time embodied. Aristotle has already called our attention to the 'philosophies' of the Chaldaeans, the Persians, and the Indians; amongst these last Buddhism at least was a movement which had shaken off limitations of race and class. To these he has added the Druids, whom we may well keep in mind if only because they are representatives of Western Europe. Stoicism best represents the part played by the Greco-Roman world, and Judaism and Christianity come under consideration as forces with which Stoicism in the course of its history came into close contact. The Greeks little realized that they were being carried along in so mighty a stream. Regarding themselves as isolated and elevated, the sole pioneers of civilization in a 'barbarian' world, the beliefs of neighbouring peoples seemed to them beneath their notice. To this prejudice they clung in spite

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of the protests of their own men of learning³; the Romans inherited it from them; and though the Europe of the Middle Ages and of to-day professes an Oriental faith, its religious survey is still limited and its critical power impaired by the same assumption of superior wisdom. Our information is however wider than that of the ancient world, and our sympathies are beginning to be quickened; and we are thus in a position to trace generally the history of these seven religions. In this work we shall use, as far as possible, the classical authorities, supplementing them (where deficient) from other sources.

6. The oldest of these philosophical or religious systems is that of the Chaldaeans, as the Romans termed a **Chaldaism.** pastoral, star-gazing folk⁴ presumably identical with the people which, in or about the year 2800 B.C.⁵, mapped out the constellations as we now know them, traced the orbits of the planets⁶, and predicted their future movements. This work was not carried out entirely in the spirit of modern science; it was further stimulated by the belief that the skies displayed a written message to mankind. But the nature of that message, of which fragments are possibly embodied in the names of the constellations, was not preserved to the Romans by any tradition. Two principles seem to have survived, those of the inexorable tie between cause and effect called 'fate',⁷ and of the interdependence of events in heaven and on earth⁸. Hence arose the hope of prophetic insight into the future; and the people of Babylon, under Chaldaean influence, are said to have spent

³ Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers*, ii p. 161; and below, § 94.

⁴ 'principes Chaldaei, qui in patentibus campis colebant, stellarum motus et vias et coetus intuentes, quid ex his efficeretur observaverunt' Gellius, *N. A.* xiv 1, 8.

⁵ Sir E. Walter Maunder, in the *Nineteenth Century* for September 1900.

⁶ 'quinque stellarum potestates Chaldaeorum observatio exceptit' Seneca, *N. Q.* ii 32, 6.

⁷ This is well described by Cicero, translating from a Stoic source: 'cum fato omnia fiant, si quis mortalis possit esse, qui colligationem causarum omnium perscipiat animo, nihil eum profecto fallat. qui enim teneat causas rerum futurarum, idem necesse est omnia teneat quae futura sint' *Div.* i 56, 127. It seems reasonable to suppose that this general conception of 'fate' or 'destiny' is deduced from the unchanging movements of the heavenly bodies.

⁸ 'videbis quinque sidera diversas agentia vias; ex horum levissimis motibus fortunae populorum dependent' Sen. *Dial.* vi 18, 3.

four hundred and seventy years in collecting observations of the history of boys born under particular combinations of the heavenly bodies⁹. We are not acquainted with the results of these observations; but undoubtedly they established a profession of astrologers, whose craft it was to observe the position of sun, moon and stars at a man's birth or at some other critical hour, and thence to deduce his future character or career. These wanderers, called by the Romans 'Chaldaei' or 'Mathematici,' spread over all Europe, and founded a lucrative trade on men's fears and ambitions. Philosophers studied their methods, and did not always entirely deny their validity¹⁰. In society the astrologer is a common figure¹¹; he found his way to the chambers of princes¹², and was regularly consulted by conspirators. The dramatic scene in Walter Scott's *Betrothed* is as true in character to Roman times as to the Middle Ages. Roman literature is full of allusions to the horoscope¹³. But whether we attribute these practices to fraud or to self-deception, there is every reason to believe that they only form a diseased outgrowth from a system which at an earlier time was of much wider import.

7. The popular expression 'magic' still recalls to us the system of which the Magi of Persia were the professed exponents, and of which the Romans had a knowledge which is to a large extent confirmed from other sources. This system we shall here call 'Persism,' in order to

Persism.

⁹ 'aiunt quadringenta septuaginta milia annorum in periclitandis experiundisque pueris, quicumque essent nati, Babylonios posuisse' Cic. *Div.* ii 46, 97. I assume that the original tradition named the smaller number suggested above.

¹⁰ 'duo apud Chaldaeos studeisse se dicunt, Epigenes et Apollonius Myndius' Sen. *N. Q.* vii 4, 1; 'Diogenes Stoicus [Chaldaeis] concedit, aliquid ut praedicere possint' Cic. *Div.* ii 43, 90. Seneca concludes against their authority, observing (i) that a proper horoscope should include all the stars in the heaven at the moment of birth, and (ii) that twins should always have the same fortune, which is obviously untrue; see *N. Q.* ii 32, 6 to 8, *Ben.* vii 1, 5.

¹¹ 'tu ne quaesieris (scire nefas), quem mihi, quem tibi | finem di dederint, Leuconoe, nec Babylonios | temptaris numeros' Hor. *C.* i 11, 1-3.

¹² See the interesting tale of Thrasylus and Tiberius in Tac. *Ann.* vi 21, to which the author affects to give some credit.

¹³ e.g., 'seu Libra seu me Scorpios adspicit | formidulosus, pars violentior | natalis horae, seu tyrannus | Hesperiae Capricornus undae, | utrumque nostrum incredibili modo | consentit astrum' Hor. *C.* ii 17, 17-22.

free ourselves of the popular associations still connected with such terms as Magism, Parsee-ism, and so forth ; meaning by 'Persism' the teaching of Zarathustra (the Latin Zoroastres) as it affected the Greek and Latin world. Persism has its roots in the older nationalism, inasmuch as its deity is one who takes sides with his believer and brings him victory in war ; but on the other hand it grows into a world-religion because that which begins as a conflict between races gradually changes into a struggle between right and wrong. It is based also on the Chaldaean system, in so far as it looks up to the heaven as the object of human reverence and to the sun, moon and planets as at least the symbols of human destiny ; but here again the outlook is transformed, for in the place of impersonal and inexorable forces we find a company of celestial beings, intimately concerned in the affairs of men, and engaged in an ardent struggle for the victory of the better side. The meaning of Persism and its immense influence on the Greco-Roman world are still so little realized that it is necessary here to deal with the subject with some fulness.

8. The Greeks and Romans refer to the teachings of Zarathustra as of immemorial antiquity¹⁴; whilst on the other hand the direct Persian tradition (existing in a written form from about the year 800 A.D.) ascribes them to a date 258 years before the era of Alexander's invasion of Persia¹⁵. The best modern authorities incline to the Persian view, thus giving the date of about 600 B.C. to Zarathustra, and making him roughly a contemporary of the Buddha and Confucius¹⁶. On the other hand considerations, partly of the general history of religion, partly of the linguistic and metrical character of such fragments of Zarathustra's writings as still remain, indicate a date earlier than this by many hundred years¹⁷. Zarathustra belonged to the tribe of the Magi, who maintained religious practices of which the

¹⁴ 'Eudoxus, qui inter sapientiae sectas clarissimam utilissimamque [artem magicam] intellegi voluit, Zoroastrem hunc sex millibus annorum ante Platonis mortem fuisse prodidit: sic et Aristoteles' Pliny, *N. H.* xxx 2, 1; cf. Diog. L. Prooem. 2 and 8.

¹⁵ Williams-Jackson, *Zoroaster*, p. 161.

¹⁶ *ib.* p. 174.

¹⁷ K. Geldner, *Encycl. Brit.* ed. x, article 'Zoroaster.'

nature can only be inferred from such of them as survived the prophet's reforms¹⁸; in their general character they cannot have differed widely from those recorded in the Rigveda. In the midst of this system Zarathustra came forward as a reformer. He was deeply learned in the doctrines of the Chaldaeans¹⁹, and was an ardent student of astronomy²⁰. In a period of solitary contemplation in the desert²¹, it was revealed to him that a great and wise being, named Ahura Mazdā, was the creator and ruler of heaven and earth²². Upon him attend Angels who do him service; whilst the spirit of Mischief and his attendants ceaselessly work to oppose his purposes. Ahura is the light, his enemy is the darkness²³. The struggle between them is that between right and wrong, and in it every man must take one or the other side. His soul will survive what men call death, and receive an everlasting reward according to his deeds. After quitting the mortal body, the soul will pass over the Bridge of Judgment, and will there be turned aside to the right or to the left; if it has been virtuous, to enter Paradise, but if vicious, the House of Falsehood. Full of this doctrine, Zarathustra enters the court of King Vishtāspa, and converts him and his court. The monarch in turn sets out to convert the unbelieving world by the sword, and the War of Religion begins.

9. We cannot trace the long history of the War of Religion through its whole course, but in the end we find that the Religion has welded together the great kingdom of Persia, and its warlike zeal is directed towards establishing throughout the world the worship of the 'God of heaven,' and the destruction of all images, whether in the shape

¹⁸ Williams-Jackson, p. 7.

¹⁹ 'Magiam...cuius scientiae saeculis priscis multa ex Chaldaeorum arcanis Bactrianus addidit Zoroastres' Amm. Marc. xxiii 6, 32.

²⁰ [Zoroastres] 'primus dicitur mundi principia siderumque motus diligentissime spectasse' Justinus, *Hist. Phil.* i 1, 9 (Williams-Jackson, p. 237): 'astris multum et frequenter intentus' Clem. Rom. *Recogn.* iv 27.

²¹ 'tradunt Zoroastrem in desertis caseo vixisse' Pliny, *N. H.* xi 97.

²² '[Ahura Mazdā] created the paths of the sun and the stars; he made the moon to wax and wane' (*Yasna* 43, 3); 'he made the light and the darkness' (*ib.* 5); 'he is the father of the good' (*ib.* 46, 2).

²³ 'Ζωροάστρης ὁ μάγος...προσαπεφαινετο, τὸν μὲν εὐκέναι φωτὶ μάλιστα τῶν αἰσθητῶν, τὸν δ' ἔμπαλιν σκότῳ καὶ ἀγνοίᾳ' Plut. *Isid. et Osir.* 46.

of men or of beasts, as dishonouring to the divine nature. In the sixth century B.C. Babylon opposed the Religion in the east, and Lydia in the west; both fell before Cyrus the Great. The fall of Babylon set free the Jews, who accepted the king's commission to establish the Religion in Jerusalem²⁴, and (at a rather later date) in Egypt²⁵; on the other hand that of Lydia exposed the Hellenes, a people devoted to idol-worship, to the fury of the image-breakers²⁶. The battles of Marathon and Salamis checked the warlike advance of Persism, and the victories of Alexander suppressed its outward observance and destroyed its literature and its priesthood. But in this period of apparent depression some at least of its doctrines were winning still wider acceptance than before.

10. The departure of the Persians from Europe was the signal for an outburst of enthusiasm in Greece for the old gods and their worship with the aid of images. Yet, unfavourable as the time might seem, a monotheistic sentiment developed apace in Hellas, which we shall follow more closely in the next chapter²⁷. Even Herodotus, writing as a fair-minded historian, no longer regards the Persians as impious, but realizes that they are actuated by conviction²⁸.

²⁴ 'Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia:—all the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord, the God of heaven, given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem' *Ezra* i 2.

²⁵ See the interesting papyri records recently discovered in Elephantine, and published by Dr Sachau of Berlin. A general account of them is given by Prof. Driver in the London *Guardian* for Nov. 6, 1907.

²⁶ Cicero rightly appreciated the religious character of the Persian invasions: 'delubra humanis consecrata simulacris Persae nefaria putaverunt; eamque unam ob causam Xerxes inflammar Atheniensium fana iussisse dicitur, quod deos, quorum domus esset omnis hic mundus, inclusos parietibus contineri nefas esse duceret' *Rep.* iii 9, 14. So Themistocles as represented by Herodotus: 'the gods and heroes grudged that one man should become king both of Asia and of Europe, and he a man unholy and presumptuous, one who made no difference between things sacred and things profane, burning and casting down the images of the gods' *History* viii 109 (Macaulay's translation).

²⁷ See below, § 41.

²⁸ 'Images and temples and altars they do not account it lawful to erect, nay, they even charge with folly those who do these things; and this, as it seems to me, because they do not account the gods to be in the likeness of men, as do the Hellenes. But it is their wont to perform sacrifices to Zeus, going up to the most lofty of the mountains, and the whole circle of the heavens they call Zeus: and they sacrifice to the Sun and the Moon and the Earth, to Fire and to Water and to the

Socrates was an outspoken defender of all the main articles of the Religion, to the horror of nationalists like Aristophanes, who not unjustly accused him of corrupting the loyalty of the youth of Athens to the institutions of their mother city. Xenophon, the most intimate of his disciples, translated this bias into action, and joined with the 10,000 Greeks in a vain effort to re-establish the strength of Persia: he did not even hesitate to engage in war against his native land. To him Cyrus the Persian was a greater hero than any Homeric warrior or Greek sage; and from Cyrus he drew the belief in the immortality of the soul which from this time on is one of the chief subjects of philosophic speculation.

11. The Romans had not the same national motives as the Greeks to feel an antipathy to Persism. For the doctrine of monotheism they had probably been prepared by their Etruscan sovereigns, and the temple of Capitoline Jove kept before their eyes a symbol of this sentiment. But in the Roman period Persian sovereignty had receded to the far distance, and the doctrines of Persism only reached Rome through the Greek language and in Greek form. Thus of the doctrines of the Evil Spirit, the war between Good and Evil, and the future punishment of the wicked, only faint echoes ever reached the Roman ear. On the other hand the doctrines of the divine government of the world and of the immortality of the soul made a deep impression; and Cicero in a well-known passage repeats and amplifies the account Xenophon gives in his *Cyropaedia* of the dying words of Cyrus, which is doubtless to some extent coloured by recollections of the death of Socrates:

‘We read in Xenophon that Cyrus the elder on his death-bed spoke as follows—“Do not think, my very dear children, that when I quit you I shall no longer be in existence. So long as I was with you, you never saw my soul, but you realized from my actions that it dwelt in this my body. Believe then that it will still exist, even if you see nothing of it. Honours would not continue to be paid to great men after death, did not their souls assist us to maintain their memory in freshness. I have never been able to persuade myself that souls live whilst they are enclosed in mortal bodies,

Winds; these are the only gods to whom they have sacrificed ever from the first’
History i 131 (Macaulay’s translation).