

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.¹

From the westernmost shore of Asia, Christianity had turned at once to the opposite one of Europe. The wide soil of the continent which had given it birth could not supply it long with nourishment; neither did it strike deep root in the north of Africa. Europe soon became, and remained, its proper dwelling-place and home.

It is worthy of notice, that the direction in which the new faith worked its way, from South to North, is contrary to the current of migration which was then driving the nations from the East and North to the West and South. As spiritual light penetrated from the one quarter, life itself was to be reinvigorated from the other.

¹ In a book that deals so much with Heathenism, the meaning of the term ought not to be passed over. The Greeks and Romans had no special name for nations of another faith (for *ἑτερόδοξοι*, *βάρβαροι* were not used in that sense); but with the Jews and Christians of the N.T. are contrasted *ἔθνος*, *ἔθνεα*, *ἔθνη*, *ἔθνη*, Lat. *gentes*, *gentiles*; Ulphilas uses the pl. *thiudōs*, and by preference in the gen. after a pronoun, *thái thiudō*, *sumái thiudō* (gramm. 4, 441, 457), while *thiudiskōs* translates *ἔθνη* Gal. 2, 14. As it was mainly the Greek religion that stood opposed to the Judæo-Christian, the word *Ἕλλην* also assumed the meaning *ἔθνη*, and we meet with *Ἕλληνικῶς* = *ἔθνη*, which the Goth would still have rendered *thiudiskōs*, as he does render *Ἕλληνας thiudōs*, John 7, 35. 12, 20. 1 Cor. 1, 24. 12, 13; only in 1 Cor. 1, 22 he prefers *Krēkōs*. This *Ἕλλην* = *gentilis* bears also the meaning of giant, which has developed itself out of more than one national name (Hun, Avar, Tchudi); so the Hellenic walls came to be heathenish, gigantic (see ch. XVIII). In Old High German, Notker still uses the pl. *diēte* for gentiles (Graff 5, 128). In the meanwhile *pagus* had expanded its narrow meaning of *κόμη* into the wider one of *ager*, *campus*, in which sense it still lives on in It. *paese*, Fr. *pays*; while *paganus* began to push out *gentilis*, which was lapsing into the sense of *nobilis*. All the Romance languages have their *paganus*, *payen*, &c., nay, it has penetrated into Bohem. *pohan*, Pol. *poganin*, Lith. *pagonas* [but Russ. *pogan* = *unclean*]. The Gothic *háiithi* *campus* early developed an adj. *háiithms* *agrestis*, *campestris* = *paganus* (Ulph. in Mark 7, 26 renders *Ἕλληνας* by *háiithnō*), the Old H.G. *heida* an adj. *heidan*, Mid. H.G. and Dutch *heide heiden*, A.S. *hæð hæðin*, Engl. *heath heathen*, Old Norse *heiði heiðinn*; Swed. and Dan. use *hedning*. The O.H.G. word retains its adj. nature, and forms its gen. pl. *heidanēro*. Our present *heide*, gen. *heiden* (for *heiden*, gen. *heidens*) is erroneous, but current ever since Luther. Full confirmation is afforded by Mid. Lat. *agrestis* = *paganus*, e.g. in the passage quoted in ch. IV from Vita S. Agili; and the 'wilde heiden' in our Heldenbuch is an evident pleonasm (see Supplement).

The worn out empire of the Romans saw both its interior convulsed, and its frontier overstept. Yet, by the same mighty doctrine which had just overthrown her ancient gods, subjugated Rome was able to subdue her conquerors anew. By this means the flood-tide of invasion was gradually checked, the newly converted lands began to gather strength and to turn their arms against the heathen left in their rear.

Slowly, step by step, Heathendom gave way to Christendom. Five hundred years after Christ, but few nations of Europe believed in him; after a thousand years the majority did, and those the most important, yet not all (see Suppl.).

From Greece and Italy the Christian faith passed into Gaul first of all, in the second and third centuries. About the year 300, or soon after, we find here and there a christian among the Germans on the Rhine, especially the Alamanni; and about the same time or a little earlier¹ among the Goths. The Goths were the first Teutonic people amongst whom christianity gained a firm footing; this occurred in the course of the fourth century, the West-goths leading the way and the East-goths following; and after them the Vandals, Gepidæ and Rugii were converted. All these races held by the Arian doctrine. The Burgundians in Gaul became Catholic at the beginning of the fifth century, then Arian under their Visigoth rulers, and Catholic again at the commencement of the sixth century. The Suevi in Spain were at first Catholic, then Arian (about 469), until in the sixth century they, with all the West-goths, went over likewise to the Catholic church. Not till the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth did christianity win the Franks, soon after that the Alamanni, and after them the Langobardi. The Bavarians were converted in the seventh and eighth centuries, the Frisians, Hessians and Thuringians in the eighth, the Saxons about the ninth.

Christianity had early found entrance into Britain, but was checked by the irruption of the heathen Anglo-Saxons. Towards the close of the sixth and in the course of the seventh century, they also went over to the new faith.

The Danes became christians in the tenth century, the Norwegians at the beginning of the eleventh, the Swedes not completely

¹ Waitz's *Ulfila*, p. 35.

till the second half of the same century. About the same time christianity made its way to Iceland.

Of the Slavic nations the South Slavs were the first to adopt the christian faith: the Carentani, and under Heraclius (d. 640) the Croatians, then, 150 years after the former, the Moravians in the eighth and ninth centuries. Among the North Slavs, the Obotritæ in the ninth, Bohemians¹ and Poles in the tenth, Sorbs in the eleventh, and Russians at the end of the tenth.

Then the Hungarians at the beginning of the eleventh, Livonians and Lettons in the twelfth, Esthonians and Finns in the twelfth and thirteenth, Lithuanians not even till the commencement of the fifteenth.

All these data are only to be taken as true in the main; they neither exclude some earlier conversions, nor a longer and later adherence to heathenism in limited areas. Remoteness and independence might protect the time-honoured religion of a tribe. Apostates too would often attempt at least a partial reaction. Christianity would sometimes lead captive the minds of the rich and great, by whose example the common people were carried away; sometimes it affected first the poor and lowly.

When Chlodowig (Clovis) received baptism, and the Salian Franks followed his lead, individuals out of all the Frankish tribes had already set the example. Intercourse with Burgundians and West-goths had inclined them to the Arian doctrine, while the Catholic found adherents in other parts of Gaul. Here the two came into collision. One sister of Chlodowig, Lanthild, had become an Arian christian before his conversion, the other, Albofed, had remained a heathen; the latter was now baptized with him, and the former was also won over to the Catholic communion.² But even in the sixth and seventh centuries heathenism was not yet uprooted in certain districts of the Frankish kingdom. Neustria

¹ Fourteen Bohemian princes baptized 845; see Palacky 1, 110. The Middle North-slavs—Riaderi, Tolenzi, Kycini, Circipani—still heathen in the latter half of the 11th century; see Helmold 1, 21. 23 (an. 1066). The Rugians not till 1168; Helm. 2, 12. 13.

² *baptizata* est Albofedis. . . . Lanthildis *chrismata* est, Greg. Tur. 2, 31. So among the Goths, *chrismation* is administered to Sigibert's wife Brunchild (4, 27), and to Ingund's husband Herminichild (5, 38, who assumes the new name of Joannes. The Arians appear to have *re-baptized* converts from Catholicism; Ingund herself was compelled by her grandmother-mother in law Goisuintha 'ut rebaptizaretur'. *Rebaptizare* catholicos, Eugippii vita Severini, cap. 8.

had heathen inhabitants on the Loire and Seine, Burgundy in the Vosges, Austrasia in the Ardennes; and heathens seem still to have been living in the present Flanders, especially northwards towards Friesland.¹ Vestiges of heathenism lingered on among the Frisians into the ninth century, among the Saxons into the tenth, and in like manner among the Normans and Swedes into the eleventh and twelfth.² Here and there among the northern Slavs idolatry was not extinct in the twelfth century, and not universally so among the Finns and Lithuanians in the sixteenth and seventeenth³; nay, the remotest Laplanders cling to it still.

Christianity was not popular. It came from abroad, it aimed at supplanting the time-honoured indigenous gods whom the country revered and loved. These gods and their worship were part and parcel of the people's traditions, customs and constitution. Their names had their roots in the people's language, and were hallowed by antiquity; kings and princes traced their lineage back to individual gods; forests, mountains, lakes had received a living consecration from their presence. All this the people was now to renounce; and what is elsewhere commended as truth and loyalty was denounced and persecuted by the heralds of the new faith as a sin and a crime. The source and seat of all sacred lore was shifted away to far-off regions for ever, and only a fainter borrowed glory could henceforth be shed on places in one's native land.

The new faith came in escorted by a foreign language, which the missionaries imparted to their disciples and thus exalted into a sacred language, which excluded the slighted mother-tongue from almost all share in public worship. This does not apply to the Greek-speaking countries, which could follow the original text of the christian revelation, but it does to the far wider area over which the Latin church-language was spread, even among Romance populations, whose ordinary dialect was rapidly emancipating itself from the rules of ancient Latin. Still more violent was the contrast in the remaining kingdoms.

The converters of the heathen, sternly devout, abstemious, mortifying the flesh, occasionally peddling, headstrong, and in

¹ Authorities given in Ch. IV.—Conf. *lex Frisionum*, ed. Gaupp, p. xxiv, 19, 47. Heathenism lasted the longest between Laubach and the Weser.

² *Fornmanna sögur* 4, 116. 7, 151.

³ Wedekind's notes 2, 275, 276. *Rhesa dainos*, p. 333. The Lithuanians proper converted 1387, the Samogits 1413.

slavish subjection to distant Rome, could not fail in many ways to offend the national feeling. Not only the rude bloody sacrifices, but the sensuous pleasure-loving side of heathenism was to them an abomination (see Suppl.). And what their words or their wonder-working gifts could not effect, was often to be executed against obdurate pagans by placing fire and sword in the hands of christian proselytes.

The triumph of Christianity was that of a mild, simple, spiritual doctrine over sensuous, cruel, barbarizing Paganism. In exchange for peace of spirit and the promise of heaven, a man gave his earthly joys and the memory of his ancestors. Many followed the inner prompting of their spirit, others the example of the crowd, and not a few the pressure of irresistible force.

Although expiring heathenism is studiously thrown into the shade by the narrators, there breaks out at times a touching lament over the loss of the ancient gods, or an excusable protest against innovations imposed from without¹ (see Suppl.).

The missionaries did not disdain to work upon the senses of the heathen by anything that could impart a higher dignity to the Christian cultus as compared with the pagan: by white robes for subjects of baptism, by curtains, peals of bells (see Suppl.), the lighting of tapers and the burning of incense.² It was also a wise or politic measure to preserve many heathen sites and temples by simply turning them, when suitable, into Christian ones, and assigning to them another and equally sacred meaning. The heathen gods even, though represented as feeble in comparison with the true God, were not always pictured as powerless in themselves; they were perverted into hostile malignant powers, into demons, sorcerers and giants, who had to be put down, but were nevertheless credited with a certain mischievous activity and influence. Here and there a heathen tradition or a superstitious custom lived on by merely changing the names, and applying to Christ, Mary and the saints what had formerly been related and believed of idols (see Suppl.). On the other hand, the piety of christian priests suppressed and destroyed a multitude of heathen monuments, poems and beliefs, whose annihilation history can hardly cease to

¹ Fornmanna sögur 1, 31-35. Laxdæla, p. 170. Kralodvorsky rukopis, 72.74.

² Greg. Tur. 2, 31. Fornm. sög. 1, 260. 2, 200.

lament, though the sentiment which deprived us of them is not to be blamed. The practice of a pure Christianity, the extinction of all trace of heathenism was of infinitely more concern than the advantage that might some day accrue to history from their longer preservation. Boniface and Willibrord, in felling the sacred oak, in polluting the sacred spring, and the image-breaking Calvinists long after them, thought only of the idolatry that was practised by such means (see Suppl.). As those pioneers 'purged their floor' a first time, it is not to be denied that the Reformation eradicated aftergrowths of heathenism, and loosing the burden of the Romish ban, rendered our faith at once freer, more inward and more domestic. God is near us everywhere, and consecrates for us every country, from which the fixing of our gaze beyond the Alps would alienate us.

Probably some sects and parties, non-conformity here and there among the heathen themselves, nay, in individual minds a precocious elevation of sentiment and morals, came half-way to meet the introduction of Christianity, as afterwards its purification (see Suppl.). It is remarkable that Old Norse legend occasionally mentions certain men who, turning away in utter disgust and doubt from the heathen faith, placed their reliance on their own strength and virtue. Thus in the *Sólar lioð* 17 we read of *Vêbogi* and *Râdey* 'â sik þau trúðu,' in themselves they trusted; of king *Hâkon* (Fornm. sög. 1, 35) 'konúngr gerir sem allir aðrir, þeir sem trúá â mátt sinn ok megin,' the king does like all others who trust in their own might and main; of *Barðr* (*ibid.* 2, 151) 'ek trúi ekki â skurðgoð eðr fiandr, hefi ek því lengi trúat â mátt minn ok megin,' I trust not in idols and fiends, I have this long while, &c.; of *Hjörleifr* 'vildi aldri blóta,' would never sacrifice (*Landn.* 1, 5.7); of *Hallr* and *Thôrir* *goðlauss* 'vildu eigi blóta, ok trúðu â mátt sinn' (*Landn.* 1, 11); of king *Hrólfr* (Fornm. sög. 1, 98) 'ekki er þess getit at Hrólfir konúngr ok kappar hans hafi nokkurn tíma blótat goð, heldr trúðu â mátt sinn ok megin,' it is not thought that king H. and his champions have at any time, &c.; of *Örvaroddr* (Fornald. sög. 2, 165; cf. 505) 'ekki vandist blötum, því hann trúði â mátt sinn ok megin'; of *Finnbogi* (p. 272) 'ek trúi â sialfan mik.' This is the mood that still finds utterance in a Danish folk-song (*D.V.* 4, 27), though without a reference to religion:

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Först troer jeg mit gode svärd.
 Og saa min gode hest,
 Dernäst troer jeg mine dannesvenne,
 Jeg troer mig self allerbedst;

and it is Christian sentiment besides, which strives to elevate and consecrate the inner man (see Suppl.).

We may assume, that, even if Paganism could have lived and luxuriated a while longer, and brought out in sharper relief and more spontaneously some characteristics of the nations that obeyed it, yet it bore within itself a germ of disorganisation and disruption, which, even without the intervention of Christian teaching, would have shattered and dissolved it.¹ I liken heathenism to a strange plant whose brilliant fragrant blossom we regard with wonder; Christianity to the crop of nourishing grain that covers wide expanses. To the heathen too was germinating the true God, who to the Christians had matured into fruit.

At the time when Christianity began to press forward, many of the heathen seem to have entertained the notion, which the missionaries did all in their power to resist, of combining the new doctrine with their ancient faith, and even of fusing them into one. Of Norsemen as well as of Anglo-Saxons we are told, that some believed *at the same time* in Christ and in heathen gods, or at least continued to invoke the latter in particular cases in which they

¹ Old Norse sagas and songs have remarkable passages in which the gods are coarsely derided. A good deal in Lokasenna and Harbard's song may pass for rough joking, which still leaves the holiest things unshaken (see Suppl.). But faith has certainly grown fainter, when a daring poet can compare Óðinn and Freyja to dogs (Fornm. sög. 2, 207. Islend. sög. 1, 11. ed. nov. 372. Nialss. 160); when another calls the gods *rängeyg* (squint-eyed, unfair) and *rokindusta* (Fornm. sög. 2, 154). When we come to Freyr, I shall quote a story manifestly tending to lessen the reverence for him; but here is a passage from Oswald 2913: 'din got der ist ein junger tór (fool), ich wil glouben an den alten.'—If we had a list of old and favourite *dogs'-names*, I believe we should find that the designations of several deities were bestowed upon the brute by way of degradation. *Vilk. saga*, cap. 230. 235, has handed down *Thor* (but cf. ed. nov., cap. 263) and *Paron*, one being the O.N., the other the Slav name in the Slovak form *Parom* = *Perun* ch. VIII. With the Saxon herdsmen or hunters *Thunar* was doubtless in use for dogs, as perhaps *Donner* is to this day. One sort of dog is called by the Poles *Grzmilas* (Linde 1, 779a. 2, 798), by the Bohemians *Hřmiles* (Jungm. 1, 759) = Thunder, Forest-thunder. In Helbling 4, 441 seq. I find a dog *Wunsch* (not Wünsch). Similar to this is the transference of national names to dogs: the Bohemian *Bodrok* is a dog's name, but signifies an Obotrite (Jungm. 1, 150); *Sámr* in the Nialssaga seems to mean a Same, Sabme=Lapp; Helbling 4, 458 has a *Frank* (see Suppl.).

had formerly proved helpful to them. So even by christians much later, the old deities seem to have been named and their aid invoked in enchantments and spells. Landnámabók 3, 12 says of Helgi: 'hann trúði á Krist, en þó hét hann á Thór til sæfara ok harðræða ok alls þess, er honum þótti mestu varða'; he believed in Christ, and yet he called upon Thor in voyages and difficulties, &c. Hence the poets too transferred heathen epithets to Christ. Bede 1, 15 relates of Redwald, an East-Anglian king in the beginning of the 7th century: 'rediens domum ab uxore sua, a quibusdam perversis doctoribus seductus est, atque a sinceritate fidei depravatus, habuit posteriora pejora prioribus, ita ut in morem antiquorum Samaritanorum, et Christo servire videretur et diis quibus antea serviebat, atque in eodem fano et altare habebat in sacrificium Christi et arulam ad victimas daemoniorum' (see Suppl.). This helps to explain the relapses into paganism.

The history of heathen doctrines and ideas is easier to write, according as particular races remained longer outside the pale of baptism. Our more intimate acquaintance with the Greek and Roman religion rests upon writings which existed before the rise of Christianity; we are oftener at fault for information as to the altered shape which that religion had assumed among the common people in Greece and Italy during the first centuries of our era. Research has yet to penetrate, even deeper than it has done, into the old Celtic faith; we must not shrink from recognizing and examining Celtic monuments and customs on ground now occupied by Germans. Leo's important discovery on the real bearings of the Malberg glossary may lead to much. The religion of the Slavs and Lithuanians would be far more accurately known to us, if these nations, in the centuries immediately following their conversion, had more carefully preserved the memory of their antiquities; as it is, much scattered detail only wants collecting, and traditions still alive in many districts afford rich material. On the Finnish mythology we possess somewhat fuller information.

Germany holds a middle place, peculiar to herself and not unfavourable. While the conversion of Gaul and that of Slavland were each as a whole decided and finished in the course of a very few centuries, the Teutonic races forsook the faith of their fathers very gradually and slowly, from the 4th to the 11th century. Remains of their language too have been preserved more fully and

from the successive periods. Besides which we possess in the works of Roman writers, and especially Tacitus, accounts of the earlier undisturbed time of Teutonic heathenism, which, though scanty and from a foreign source, are yet exceedingly important, nay invaluable.

The religion of the East and South German races, which were converted first, is more obscure to us than that of the Saxons; about the Saxons again we know incomparably less than about the Scandinavians. What a far different insight we should get into the character and contents of the suppressed doctrine, how vastly the picture we are able to form of it would gain in clearness, if some clerk at Fulda, Regensburg, Reichenau or St. Gall, or one at Bremen, Corvei or Magdeburg, had in the eighth, ninth or tenth century, hit upon the plan of collecting and setting before us, after the manner of Saxo Grammaticus, the still extant traditions of his tribe on the beliefs and superstitions of their forefathers! Let no one tell me, that by that time there was nothing more to be had; here and there a footmark plainly shows that such recollections could not really have died out.¹ And who will show me in Sweden, which clung to heathenism longer and more tenaciously, such a composition as actually appeared in Denmark during the twelfth century? But for this fact, would not the doubters declare such a thing impossible in Sweden? In truth, the first eight books of Saxo are to me the most welcome monument of the Norse mythology, not only for their intrinsic worth, but because they show in what an altered light the ancient faith of the people had to be placed before the recent converts. I especially remark, that Saxo suppresses all mention of some prominent gods; what right have we then to infer from the non-mention of many deities in the far scantier records of inland Germany, that they had never been heard of there?

Then, apart from Saxo, we find a purer authority for the Norse religion preserved for us in the remotest corner of the North, whither it had fled as it were for more perfect safety,—namely, in Iceland. It is preserved not only in the two Eddas, but in a multitude of Sagas of various shape, which, but for that emigration

¹ As late as the tenth century the heroic tale of Walther and Hildegund was poetized in Latin at St. Gall, and a relie of heathen poetry was written down in German [deutlich, a misprint for deutsch?], probably at Merseburg.

coming to the rescue, would probably have perished in Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

To assail the genuineness of the Norse mythology is as much as to cast doubt on the genuineness and independence of the Norse language. That it has been handed down to us both in a clearer and an obscurer shape, through older and more modern authorities, makes it all the easier to study it from many sides and more historically.

Just as little can we fail to perceive the kinship and close connexion of the Norse mythology with the rest of Teutonic mythology. I have undertaken to collect and set forth all that can now be known of German heathenism, and that exclusively of the complete system of Norse mythology. By such limitation I hope to gain clearness and space, and to 'sharpen our vision for a criticism of the Old German faith, so far as it stands opposed to the Norse, or aloof from it; so that we need only concern ourselves with the latter, where in substance or tendency it coincides with that of inland Germany.

The antiquity, originality and affinity of the German and Norse mythologies rest on the following grounds :

1. The undisputed and very close affinity of speech between the two races, and the now irrefutably demonstrated identity of form in their oldest poetry. It is impossible that nations speaking languages which had sprung from the same stock, whose songs all wore the badge of an alliteration either unknown or quite differently applied by their neighbours, should have differed materially in their religious belief. Alliteration seems to give place to christian rhyme, first in Upper Germany, and then in Saxony, precisely because it had been the characteristic of heathen songs then still existing. Without prejudice to their original affinity, it is quite true that the German and the Norse dialects and poetries have their peculiarities of form and finish; but it would seem incredible that the one race should have had gods and the other none, or that the chief divinities of the two should have been really different from one another. There were marked differences no doubt, but not otherwise than in their language; and as the Gothic, Anglo-Saxon and Old High German dialects have their several points of superiority over the Old Norse, so may the faith of inland Germany have in many points its claims to distinction and individuality.