

that the successful building of both required. The achievements and fame of both are his eulogy, and though they are only a small part of it—for other lands lay claim to him—no man could desire more. Happy the day for England and the human race that his footsteps tended to the Roman forum, where the loveliness of countenance and figure entranced his vision and inspired his soul with a noble, a heroic purpose. No incident in history has led to more glorious results, to more lasting conquests for God and humanity, and with them the name of Gregory must be forever associated.

MICHAEL HENNESSY.

THE CHURCH AND THE EMPIRE A.D. 250-312.

WHAT was the actual condition of the Christian Church when, early in the fourth century, the Edicts of Nicomedia were issued against her? The question is an extremely important one, for in the succeeding age imperial favor, subtlest heresies, multitudes of semi-Christians and decrease of charity gave quite another physiognomy to the Christian body. On the other hand, the sources of our information for the later period flow so fully that we cannot mistake the essential outlines of faith, discipline and organization, while there remain only fragmentary evidences for the heroic age of Christianity, over every one of which a jealous and interested criticism maintains the strictest watch. It is the intention of the writer to draw an outline of Christianity in those early ages, not precisely from the genetic point of view, but rather to present the religion of Christ as it must have seemed to an intelligent and impartial observer in the closing years of the third century—such, perhaps, as it may have appeared to the son of Constantius Chlorus while he travelled in the body-guard of the Illyrian Cæsar through Egypt and Syria, or hastened in memorable flight across the heart of the empire from Byzantium to York. The moment is a propitious one, for both within and without the Church certain lines of evolution had then reached their last term. The subtle, poisonous influence of the Orient, conveyed through a hundred forms of Docetism and Gnosticism, had been dissipated by the united and intelligent efforts of the Christian episcopate and the writings of learned Christians. The episcopate itself, now a mighty network, frequently co-ordinate with

the municipal system of the empire, was fully conscious of its own nature and mission. An immense sympathy, wide as the world and supremely intense, pulsed throughout the whole body from the humblest *episcopi gentium* on the borders of Scythia or Arabia to the successor of the Fisherman. Conflict and contradiction had drawn out all the latent energies of the Christian system, and as the mind wanders over the contents of the Christian literature of the period, the thinker is astonished at seeing that all the domestic and mixed questions which will eventually convulse Christendom, and even yet disturb the peace of mankind, were in those dim days troubling the minds of our predecessors. Whoever will turn over the voluminous index of a book as remarkable as dangerous¹ may convince himself that within the first three centuries the Christian Church had been called on to face, at least in embryonic form, the most painful internal and external problems, and that she solved them with a firmness and accuracy that betray a rounded and plenary consciousness of her sublime mission and her supreme authority. Among the thousand scattered communities of Christians there was a strong sense of mutual fraternity, of solidary fellowship—the outcome of the common teachings and sufferings of ten generations. Never since then has there been so little jealousy, so little mutual distrust, so loving, frequent and intimate communication, ignoring all the local and transitory interests of earthly politics. Antioch and Alexandria recognized without demur the spiritual hegemony of Rome, and with maternal affection the latter sheltered in her bosom the multitudinous Christian visitors whom business or curiosity or piety led to the Golden Queen.²

On the other hand, the relations of the Roman state to Christianity, after much uncertainty and tergiversation, had at last reached a crucial point, when the opposing claims of Christ and Cæsar must be settled, either by peaceful means or by the dread

¹ Renan: *Les Origines du Christianisme*. 8 vols. Paris, 1891. On the Christian side there is, as yet, no such brilliant and comprehensive synthesis of a multitude of excellent monographs. But the *Origines Chrétiennes* of the learned Abbé Duchesne; the works of Professor Probst of Breslau, on doctrine, prayer, liturgy, the sacraments and discipline in the first three centuries; the *Histoire des Persécutions*, by Allard; the *Geschichte der Roemischen Kirche* by Hagemann; the *Hippolytus und Callistus* of Doellinger, contain valuable antidotes to the Renanesque virus. Priceless material is stored up in the *Bulletino di archeologia Cristiana* of De Rossi.

² Cf. Eusebius H. E., viii., 7. St. Athanasius: *On the Opinion of Dionysius*, c. 13. *De Synodis*, c. 43. Euseb. H. E., vii. 30; iv. 23; v. 24. Fresh light has been thrown on the ecclesiastical supremacy of Rome by the discovery of the second century Epitaph of Abercius. See Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, SS. Ignatius and Polycarp, vol. i., pp. 493-501, and the *Catholic Times* of Philadelphia, April 29, 1893, p. 4: *The Inscription of Abercius*. The proofs of the Roman supremacy are gathered in the first volume of Harnack's *Dogmengeschichte*, and illustrated by Hagemann in *Die Roemische Kirche* (Freiburg, 1864) and Schroedl, *Papstgeschichte* (Mainz, 1883.)

and dangerous arbitrament of blood. Perhaps it was the clear sense of the finality of his act which made the politic son of Diocles hesitate so long on the eve of the combat, and exhaust every weaker makeshift before opening the last campaign of ethnicism against the sweet and humble law of Christ. It was surely this conviction which caused the warfare to be carried on against the Christians not as offending citizens of a common state, but as hostile belligerents.¹ The supreme hour had come for the death struggle between Christian monotheism and the motley polytheism of the Gentile world, between the principles of individual spiritual liberty of conscience and absolute civic omnipotence, between the City of God and the City of Man. The Roman State of the first century looked upon the Christians with a supercilious contempt, scarcely distinguishing them from the vile herd that congregated in the Jewries of the Suburra and the Trastevere. As the evil grew, and the sensual mongrel populations of the great cities began to suspect what Christianity meant, sedition and uproar so filled the empire that the governors were forced to intervene in the interests of public order, and usually, with a fine Roman arbitrariness, punished in the interest of peace the first visible cause, however innocent. But it was not alone the sensuous, soft life of the mob that Christianity threatened; the new religion was a constantly increasing peril for the old ethnic state based upon a vast and intricate system of idolatry, on which it had grown to universal supremacy, and for which it felt that clinging sympathy which exists between institutions that have grown up on the same soil, under the same influences and with the same scope. Between that state and Christianity there could be no alliance, and the lawyer's mind of Tertullian saw deeper into the true position than that of the scholarly apologist Melito.² So it came about in the third century that those in whom the true Roman consciousness was liveliest, and who clung with the most idolatrous passion to the invincible and eternal Majesty of the City, were firmly persuaded that the progress of the Christian idea meant the surrender of the old urban supremacy and the abdication of her secular glories before a mean and nameless multitude, obedient in every city to irresponsible heads, and actuated by ideals utterly strange, if not directly hostile to the ends of the Roman state. This ever-growing mass had in all large centres an *episcopus* and an *ecclesia*,

¹ "The divine martyrs throughout the world . . . were dealt with no longer by common law, but attacked like enemies of war."—Eus. H. E., viii., 10.

² Sed et Caesares credidissent Christo si, aut Caesares non essent necessarii saeculo, aut si et *Christiani potuissent esse Caesares*, *Apologeticum*, c. 21. Compare the vague fear of Celsus that the Christians will ruin the state, *Origen adv. Celsum*, viii., 68, and Athenagoras, *Legatio*, ii., 3.

and avoided the *capitolium* and the *fora*. It held, with a strange unanimity, doctrines most unintelligible to the Roman statesmen. Its teachings concerning the poor, celibacy, woman and slavery, affected the existing framework of society at a hundred points. The profound ineradicable devotion to their chiefs, whether dead or alive, excited the sombre jealousy of the emperor, who claimed for the Roman Majesty, in him incorporate, all the devotion and sympathy of every citizen.

Frequent invasion, successful insurrection, blighting pests, and rapid internal decay, added to the gravity of the situation, and we need not wonder that, in such a frame of mind, an otherwise good emperor like Decius, blind in his devotion to the tottering state, and urged on by the jealous philosophers and the interested temple-priesthoods, undertook the eradication of the hated sect. But he came too late to the task. The *pusillus grex* had been shielded for over two centuries from a systematic onslaught that, humanly speaking, might have utterly scattered it at an earlier date and Decius died, confessing that the cosmopolitan Christian association, with its centre beneath the shadow of the Palatine, was a graver danger to the empire than any change of dynasty.¹ Henceforward, Christianity is, in a sense, on a political level with the empire. In the long series of irregular successions and counter-revolutions that fill the period subsequent to the brave death of Decius, the only united body in the empire seems to be the Christians, and their influence is felt and accepted in opposing camps, in the stress of public misfortune, and even at the tribunal of Cæsar. Henceforth they fill the armies, and the highest offices of the empire are entrusted to them. They are in the councils of the Illyrian emperors, and the conversion of Cæsar is no longer looked on as impossible or improbable. The females of the imperial court are won over to a religion, of all others the most sympathetic and favorable to their sex. The very camps are redolent with an atmosphere of Christianity, and it is already in possession of the highest fruits of a perfect society among men—varied literature, native art and architecture, written legislation, representative assemblies, domestic annals, and an enlightened public opinion based on the ancient traditions and the historic evolution of the Christian world.²

It is at this period of transition, in the lull that follows the events of A. D. 250–251, and before the outbreak of the final hur-

¹ Cum multo patientius et tolerabilius audiret leviri adversus se æmulum principem quam constitui Romæ Dei Sacerdotem. St. Cyprian, Ep. 55, 9 (ed. Hartel) p. 630).

² De Broglie, *L'Eglise et L'Etat au IVième siècle*, 6 vols., Paris, 1860–66, vol. i., c. i. Mason, *The Persecution of Diocletian*, Cambridge, 1876. Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantins* (2d ed.), Leipzig, 1880.

ricane, that we desire to sketch the Christian society, its numbers, the causes of its rapid progress, its system of government, its bonds of unity, and its external life and action.

No domain of history has been scrutinized by more sharp eyes, or has been subjected to more diverse appreciations. No field of historical research counts to-day more patient, well-equipped scholars. For these reasons a summary retrospect of the true condition of Christianity at this time may interest the general reader, and awaken in him fresh sympathy for those great men who upbore its banner in the darkest hour of conflict, confiding only on the justice of their cause and the right arm of the Almighty—we mean the Dionysii, the Cornelii, the Sixti, the Cyprians, the Lucii, the Eusebii, the Fabiani, and however else may have been called the leaders of that glorious militia which lifted the walls of Sion amid the smoking carnage of battle and the horrid din of infernal opposition.

I.

(a) *In the West.*

The Number of the Christians.—The rapid spread of Christianity in the West is evident from the testimony of Tacitus, who speaks of a *multitudo ingens* as existing at Rome in the time of Nero.¹ It was thence that the faith was carried, at uncertain epochs of the first or second centuries, to Gaul, Africa, Spain, Britain, and the islands of the Mediterranean. The language of Tertullian, in his apologetic writings,² though somewhat rhetorical, must yet be substantially reliable, and his statement concerning the *Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca Christo vero subdita*, is borne out by the well-known phrase of St. Irenæus anent the barbarian nations who had the law written in their hearts without ink or paper.³

We have no means of calculating exactly the proportion of the Western Christians to the pagan population at the close of the third century. The number of bishops would afford some clew if

¹ Igitur primo correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens, haud perinde crimine incendii quam odio humani generis convicti sunt, *Annales* xv., 44.

² Obsessam vociferantur civitatem: in agris, in castellis, in insulis Christianos; omnem sexum, ætatem, conditionem, etiam dignitatem transgredi ad hoc nomen quasi detrimento maerent. *Apologeticum*, c. 1. Hesterni sumus et vestra omnia implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, castra ipsa, tribus, decurias, palatium, senatum, forum: sola vobis relinquimus templa, c. 37.

³ Cui ordinationi assentiant multæ gentes barbarorum, eorum qui in Christum credunt, sine charta et atramento scriptam habentes per spiritum in cordibus salutem, et veterem traditionem custodientes, *Adv. haer.*, iii., 4, 2. Taking these words together with the reference of Tertullian to British Christians, it seems to us that there is much more than modern critics allow in the story of the conversion of the British king (chieftain?) Lucius in the latter half of the second century. See *Liber Pontificalis* (ed. Duchesne), vol i., pp. cii. 59, 136, and the articles "LUCIUS" and "ELEUTHERIUS," in Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Biography*.

it were known. The Acts of the pseudo Synod of Sinuessa, compiled toward the end of the fifth century, relate that in the year 303 there were three hundred Italian bishops gathered near that city to condemn the Roman bishop Marcellinus for his supposed fall.¹ If these acts represented any local traditions, the above number would indicate a large Christian population in Italy at this time. We have yet the episcopal lists of the Councils of Arles (314) and Nice (325), but in faulty condition. While the number of bishops present at the latter is usually put down at 318, the ancient authorities variously estimate the number at Arles from 33, surely too small for a synod called by St. Augustine *plenarium universæ ecclesiæ concilium*, to 600, too great a number for the united churches of Italy, Gaul, and Africa, to furnish at that time. About the year 250, the Roman Church counted nearly one hundred and fifty clerics, and supported from common funds fifteen hundred widows and orphans.² We learn from Eusebius, that at a Roman synod, in 251, there were present sixty bishops, and many more priests and deacons, while a Carthaginian synod of the same year, was visited by "very many bishops." St. Cyprian likewise informs us that, several years earlier a Numidian synod held in the *Lam-besitana Colonia* counted ninety bishops among its members.³

The Roman Synod, of 313, in the affair of Donatus, counted among the judges fifteen Italian bishops, and three from Gaul, while Cæcilius and Donatus brought each ten African bishops with him.⁴ We may imagine that these bishops did not represent any small or insignificant places, since as early as 343, the sixth canon of the council of Sardica forbade, as an abuse, the location of bishops in small sees, *ne vilescat nomen episcopi et auctoritas*. The *Liber Pontificalis* mentions forty-six episcopal ordinations at Rome, during six and a half years, in the very troublous and interrupted pontificates of Marcellus, Eusebius, and Miltiades.

The latter figures argue a very large Christian population at Rome before the persecutions of Diocletian began. Eusebius even tells us that Maxentius stopped the persecutions to please the people, and his famous words in the eighth book of his history on the extraordinary increase of the Christians must be taken to include the city of Rome, which had ever been the chief centre of Christian interests.⁵

A very large part of the Roman lower classes at this time may have been Christians, as they were able to fill the city with sedi-

¹ Hefele, *History of the Councils*, i., 143. Mansi, *Coll. Amplissima Conc.*, i., 1250.

² Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.*, vi., 43. Letter of Cornelius of Rome to Fabius of Antioch.

³ Euseb., *ibid.* Cyprian, ep. 59 (ed. Hartel).

⁴ Optatus, *De Schismate Donatist*, lib. i.

⁵ H. E. viii., cc. 1, 14.

tion and uproar because of internal dissensions and disputed papal elections.¹ The inscriptions of the catacombs justify the inference that many of the middle classes had accepted the teachings of Christ, though but few of the Roman aristocracy had openly professed the faith. At the beginning of the fourth century the Roman Church had twenty-five titles or quasi-parishes for the purposes of baptism and penance, and some twenty cemeteries for the burial of the dead.² All this argues a large Christian element, and we cannot be far wrong in putting down the contemporary Christians of Rome at about one hundred thousand in a population variously estimated from eight hundred thousand to a million and a half.

There were certainly as many more in the rest of Italy. At this period Africa had about two hundred bishops,³ and though the bishoprics of Spain were fewer, there was perhaps the same proportion of Christians in each province—about one hundred thousand, if we take the small scale of five hundred souls for each bishop of Africa. In Africa, the rapid spread of the Donatist heresy proves the great number of Christians early in the fourth century. In 330, the Donatists had two hundred and seventy bishops at a synod, *i.e.*, one for every Catholic diocese. The Spanish synod of Elvira (about 300) speaks as though Christians were to be found in every walk of life. There is in its utterances a consciousness of long-established authority. It speaks of the *copia puellarum* among the Christians, and the danger of marrying outside the faith. The insistence on the frequentation of the Mass might indicate a great increase in numbers, and consequent lukewarmness on the part of the faithful.⁴

The number of Christians in Gaul cannot have been very great at this time, and they were perhaps confined chiefly to the valley of the Rhone, the southern sea-coast, and the Roman stations on the Rhine. Sulpicius Severus, himself a Gallo Roman, tells us that Christianity was slow in penetrating into Gaul. "*Religione Dei scrius trans Alpes suscepta.*" The similar testimony of Gregory of Tours is borne out by the inscriptions and the study of the ancient episcopal lists of Gaul.⁵ There were bishops of Treves and Cologne

¹ In the famous case of the disputed election between Eusebius and Heraclius, the epitaph of St. Eusebius, recovered by De Rossi, tells us: "Hinc furor, hinc odium sequitur, discordia, lites, seditio, caedes, solvuntur foedera pacis," etc. See Northcote and Brownlow, *Roma Sotteranea*, I., p. 343.

² *Liber Pontificalis* (ed. Duchesne), i., 164. "Hic (Marcellus) XXV. titulos in urbe Roma constituit, quasi dioeceses, propter baptismum et poenitentiam multorum qui convertebantur ex paganis, et propter sepulturas martyrum."

³ Munter, *Primordia Ecclesiae Africanae*. Hafniae, 1829, p. 24.

⁴ Hefele, I., 145. In the *Mélanges Renier* the Abbé Duchesne has shown that this important synod was held about the year 300.

⁵ See Duchesne, *Mémoire sur l'origine des diocèses épiscopaux en Gaule*, Paris, 1890.

at Arles (314), as well as three bishops from Britain, but a half-century later, the latter country had only three at the synod of Rimini (359). We hear of persecutions under Diocletian at St. Albans and Caerleon in Britain, but the scanty references to them do not justify us in supposing a considerable Christian population.

The Apostolic Churches of Greece and Macedonia seem to have held their own during the third century. We do not hear of any notable increase, but this may be owing to the gradual disappearance of Greek influences from Roman public life, as well as to the stubborn resistance of Hellenism on its own natal soil. It was only in the ninth century that paganism was eventually extirpated in the remote parts of the Peloponnesus.¹ The churches of Corinth and Byzantium were flourishing at the end of the second century, and Christianity had already been well established in many of the islands, as in Crete and Melos.

(b) *In the Orient.*

The diffusion of Christianity was naturally much greater in the Orient. It was long looked on as an eastern cult, scarcely distinguishable from Judaism. Its professors were usually from the east, where its first communities were established, and where it acquired its distinctive name. In the west the barbarian lands were an almost impassable barrier, but the entire east was the seat of ancient culture and refinement—precisely the field for a religion which appealed to all the higher and purer instincts of humanity. A letter of Pliny to Trajan early in the second century shows what astonishing progress the new religion had made in Bithynia and Pontus, and casts a strong light on the missions of Paul and Barnabas in Asia Minor.² Fifty years later, the magician, Alexander of Abonuteichos, found the same provinces full of atheists and Christians, and in the Easter controversy several bishops of this region took a notable part. In the latter half of the third century Gregory Thaumaturgus is said to have almost entirely converted the pagan population in certain parts of Pontus, and his *Epistola Canonica*, one of the earliest and most venerable documents of diocesan legislation, supposes many well established Christian communities. We learn from Philostorgius⁴ that at this time the Goths captured many Christian ecclesiastics on the occasion of their inroads into Cappadocia and Galatia.

¹ Constantine Porphyrogen. *De Adm. regni*, c. 50. For the details of the gradual extirpation of paganism after Constantine, see Schultze, *Der Untergang des Heidentums*. Jena, 1892.

² Pliny, *Epp.*, Lib. X., 93.

³ Lucian, *Pseudomantis*, c. 25.

⁴ Philostorgius, *H. E.*, ii., 15. Routh, *Reliquiæ Sacræ*, iii., p. 256.

The cities of the western seaboard of Asia Minor, Ephesus, Smyrna, Tralles, Sardes, Rhodes and others, contained a very large Christian population. Already, in the middle of the third century the city of Apamæa in Phrygia¹ was thoroughly Christian, and used a Christian seal. The Acts of St. Pionius of Smyrna (middle of third century) reveal a city largely Christian, in which prejudice had nearly died out. The Apostolic activity of St. John, St. Paul, and of St. Timothy; the multitude of Jews who dwelt in these towns; the peculiar susceptibility to Christian influence of the numerous Greek artists who inhabited this region, contributed greatly to the increase of the Christians.

In the first three centuries we learn the names of only about thirty episcopal sees in this quarter; but that they were much more numerous is evident from the fact that about one hundred bishops of Asia Minor took part at the Council of Nice (325). It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that one-tenth of the twenty millions of Asia Minor were Christians at the beginning of the persecution of Diocletian.

The Christian population of Syria must have been proportionately as large as that of Asia Minor. It was the first land into which the Jewish proselytes penetrated; its cities, notably Damascus and Antioch, were filled with Jews. Here, too, a very large share of the early Christian literature arose. The early Syriac translation of the sacred books of the Christians (the Peschito), the compilation of such episcopal manuals as the Apostolic Constitution, and such romances as the Recognitions of Clement, the tireless activity of Pamphilus and his school of transcribers in copying the Scriptures—prove that there were many communities of wealthy and intelligent Christians. From the end of the first century Antioch was recognized by them as the head of all the churches of Syria, a position to which her size, situation and history fully entitled her. Syria was the highway of Christian missionaries going east or west or north, and the number of its sea-ports made it an excellent field for proselytism; on the other hand the coarse and sensuous character of its idolatry furnished the

¹ "Thenceforward (from A.D. 112) for three hundred years Phrygia was essentially a Christian land. There began the public profession of Christianity; there are found, from the third century, on monuments exposed to the public gaze, the terms *Christianos* or *Christianos*; there the formulas of epitaphs convey veiled references to Christian dogmas; there, from the days of Septimius Severus, great cities adopt biblical symbols for their coins, or rather adapt their old traditions to biblical narrations. A great number of the Christians of Ephesus and Rome came from Phrygia. The names most frequently met with on the monuments of Phrygia are the antique Christian names (Trophimus, Tychicus, Tryphenus, Papias, etc.), the names special to the apostolic times and of which the martyrologies are full."—Renan, *Origines du Christianisme*, iii, pp. 363-364.

Christians the most tangible of arguments in favor of monotheism. The discoveries of M. De Vogüé in Northern and Central Syria have put it beyond a doubt that at the beginning of the fourth century there was a very large percentage of Christians of rank and wealth in the splendid capital of the Orient.¹ The small kingdoms of Osrhoene, Adiabene and Edessa were in great measure Christian at the end of the second century. In fact the first national conversion to Christianity that we know was that of the Abgars of Edessa, a line of kings whose Jewish sympathies go back more than a century earlier.²

The entire population of Palestine was much reduced in the early imperial period, and perhaps it did not amount to more than six hundred and fifty thousand. Among them there existed yet, and for many years after, the small church of the Nazarene Christians.³ But the vast majority belonged to the Universal Church. The Jews preserved for a long time a peculiar autonomy, especially on their native soil. The Rabbinical schools nurtured the vague hope of a glorious temporal Messiah, and their patriarchs were clothed with a mixed temporal and spiritual power, which was so great in the time of Origen that the Jews pointed to it to show that the sceptre had not yet passed from Judah.⁴ Still, from the beginning of the third century we notice that there is a kind of renaissance in Christian proselytism. The death of the Bishop Narcissus removed a venerable but aged administrator. Alexander, a Greek, who had come on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, succeeded him. He seems to have been a man of great literary activity, and the earliest public library of Christendom was his creation. There is reason to believe that from this time many pilgrims came yearly to Jerusalem, which some ancient Christians looked on as the centre of the earth. Their number may have been one of the reasons why the city arose about this time, even before the victory of Constantine, to a greater influence than it had enjoyed as a colony of Hadrian.⁵

The frequent and bloody persecutions of the Alexandrine Christians are clear evidence that they were numerous. The cosmopolitan character of the city, the Paris of antiquity, with its multitudinous traders and travellers from Britain to India, furthered the

¹ De Vogüé. *La Syrie Centrale, Architecture civile et religieuse, du I. au VII. siècle.* Paris, 1865.

² *Chronicon Edessenum* in the *Bibliotheca Orientalis* of Assemani. For the many interesting questions connected with the origin of Christianity in these regions, see Tixeront, *Les Origines de l'Eglise d'Edesse*, Paris, 1888.

³ St. Jerome, Ep. 74 (89) ad Augustinum.

⁴ See Schuerer, *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, vol. i., part ii., p. 276.

⁵ Euseb., *Hist. Ecc.*, vi., 8, 20; vi., 14, 19, 32.

Christian proselytism in a city of philosophers, students and inquirers. We find here, from the latter half of the second century, a kind of Christian university, the famous catechetical school, which drew many pagans to its lectures. The history of the Arian heresy in its incipient stage shows a very large body of Christians at Alexandria early in the fourth century, where, at the same time, we hear of parishes (as at Rome), of hundreds of consecrated virgins, and similar indications of a flourishing community. The Egypto-Meletian schism is proof that the Coptic church was widespread throughout the Delta and along the Nile, and the same conviction results from the reading of the acts of the Coptic martyrs.

Early in the fourth century Alexander, of Alexandria, was able to gather a hundred bishops in the preliminary synod that condemned the teachings of Arius. Altogether it has been calculated that Egypt contained, in the time of Diocletian, about the same percentage of Christians as Asia Minor, *i.e.*, about one million, or the eighth part of the population. In this may rightly be included the long strip of Libyan territory and the Pentapolis. Ancient Christian catacombs have been discovered in the territory of Cyrenaica, which betray the presence of numerous Christians.¹

Beyond the limits of the empire, Armenia, the first of the great kingdoms to accept Christianity as the religion of the state, was thoroughly Christian before the victory of Saxa Rubra (A.D. 312). The work of Gregory the Illuminator was then going on over the whole plateau of this vast border-land, where Roman and Parthian, Byzantine and Persian, fought so long and so fiercely for absolute dominion. Its sparse population of three millions lived in somewhat feudal relations with the great nobles and the king. The aristocracy must have become Christian at the same time, since we learn from Eusebius that Maximinus Daza made war against Armenia (312) for having embraced Christianity, and an ancient tradition says that Gregory ordained four hundred bishops before his death.²

Persia is the country to which the apocryphal but very ancient Acts of the Apostles Simon and Jude, Thomas and Matthew,

¹ Eusebius (H. E., viii., 8) speaks of "multitudes of Christian martyrs" in Egypt during the last persecution. One group condemned to the copper-mines of Palestine included seventy, and another one hundred and thirty men. The language and conduct of Dionysius of Alexandria, in the previous generation, show a very large Christian population, not only at Alexandria, but throughout the Delta of the Nile. On the catacombs of Egypt and Cyrenaica, see Kraus, *Real-Encyclopadie*, ii., 136.

² Agathangelos and Moses of Khorene (Langlois, *Historiens de l'Arménie*, Paris, 1867.) See also *Acta SS* Sept. viii., 295-413, and Le Quien, *Oriens Christianus*, vol. i. Eusebius (H. E., ix., 8) speaks of the whole Armenian people as being "Christians, and zealous in their piety toward the Deity."

point as "the dark and bloody ground" of their apostolate. The Jews were there in larger numbers than elsewhere in the world outside of Judæa.¹ The border-lands of Mesopotamia and the small Syro-Greek kingdoms were filled with Christian communities, and Greek and Roman influences prevailed largely at the court of the last kings of the Parthian dynasty.² The great persecution begun by the new national dynasty of the Persians under Schapur (Sapor) II. reveals a sense of fear on the part of the Magians, and the number of the martyrs, variously calculated from sixteen to one hundred and ninety thousand, shows how the Christian faith had already honey-combed the Zoroastrian cult. John, a bishop of the Persian Church, assisted at the Council of Nice, and some years later the Persian Christians were numerous enough to induce Constantine to intercede for them with Schapur.³

In antiquity the limits of the territory known as Arabia were only vaguely known, and the success of the Roman arms was never complete enough to warrant the establishment of colonies. The nomadic manners of the Arabs or Saracens, and the fanatic Jewries on the border, were great obstacles to the spread of the Christian religion, yet we find about the middle of the third century "very many bishops" assembled at Bostra, a fortified Roman camp on the plateau of the Hauran, to try the case of the bishop Beryllus in presence of Origen. A Roman general, stationed in this neighborhood, sought the instruction of that great Christian teacher, as did Julia Mammæa, the mother of Alexander Severus. Finally, a contemporary Roman Emperor, Philip the Arab, came from the vicinity of Bostra, and we know by the testimony of Eusebius that he was commonly reputed a Christian. The doctrines of Judaism had long since made some progress among the tribes of the desert, as we learn from Sozomen, and they were the usual leverage for Christian proselytism. That the monks and ascetics who fled to these remote regions made deep impressions on the children of the desert, is evidenced by the strange story of Queen Mania and the solitary Moses.

Isolated Christian captives there were among the Saracens, as among the Goths, in the middle of the third century. Eusebius relates the tender charity and concern of the Roman See in

¹ The statistics of the Jewish Diaspora in the early imperial period are collected in the above-cited work of Schuerer. On the apostolic missions in Persia, see Lipsius, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, 4 vols.

² The origins of these national churches in the border lands of Rome and Persia are ably discussed in the above-cited work of Tixeront, and the polemic reply of the Abbé Martin.

³ See Hefele, *History of the Councils*, vol. i., and Tillemont, *Mem. p. servir à l'hist. ecclésiastique*, vii., 76.

regard to these unfortunates.¹ It is very probable that there were communities of Christians in the Malabar peninsula before the time of Constantine, and the history and teachings of Manes reveal the presence of Christianity on the outermost limits of Persia.²

Trade and war, travel and lettered curiosity, must have scattered a sporadic knowledge of its tenets in every part of the world which was in any way known to the peoples of Greco-Roman culture. It is literally true that *in omnem terram exiit sonus eorum*. The pages of Eusebius are full of the conviction that Christianity had already become numerically a huge power on the earth, with which henceforth all rulers must count. He quotes for us the Edict of Maximinus Daza in which he admits that "nearly all men" had deserted the service of the gods (H. E. ix., 9). He tells us of the incredible increase of Christianity in the days immediately preceding the persecution of Diocletian. He paints the public rejoicings in every city at the release of the martyrs and the great activity in church-building and works of benevolence consequent on the cessation of the persecution.³ It is impossible to read these pages and not feel that what the genius of Melito of Sardes and Origen had foreseen, was now come to pass:⁴ the empire had become Christian, in this sense, that the religion of Christ now stood out the only compact, united, vigorous and aggressive religious power in the empire. It had not yet the majority. The religious philosophies and the ethnic cults lasted on, but without hope, or cohesion, or balance, or distinct aim. The battle was won, and the division of the spoils might be left till the morrow.⁵

¹ Euseb., H. E., vi., 33, 21, 34. Sozomen, Hist. Ecc., vi., 38. "Why need I speak of the multitude that wandered in the deserts and mountains (of Arabia), and perished by hunger, and thirst, and cold, and sickness, and robbers, and wild beasts?" *Dionysius of Alexandria*, in Euseb., H. E., vi., 42. The Roman Church redeemed many of these unfortunates from the captivity of the Saracens, Euseb., vii., 5.

² See "The Christians of St. Thomas," in *The Catholic Times* of Philadelphia, April 15, 1893, and the articles on MANES and MANICHAEANS, in Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Biography*.

³ "How can any one describe those vast assemblies, and the multitude that crowded together in every city, and the famous gatherings in the house of prayer, on whose account, not being satisfied with the ancient buildings, they erected from the foundations large churches in all the cities."—Euseb., H. E., viii., 1.

⁴ Melito boldly parallels the rapid spread of Christianity with the contemporary growth of the Roman name and power, and insinuates that they are related as cause and effect, Euseb., H. E., iv., 26; Otto, *Corpus Apologetarum*, ix., p. 412. The number and influence of the Christians in the Orient might easily justify the vague conviction of Origen that the religion of Christians would one day be mistress of the empire, "since it was daily winning a multitude of souls," *Adv. Celsum*, viii., 68 (Migne, P. G., xi., 1620.) On the character and opinions of this very remarkable bishop of the second century, see *Melito von Sardes*, by C. Thomas, Osnabreck, 1893.

⁵ The details of the gradual extirpation of Paganism are given in the rare and

From the above or similar data, Gibbon reckons the Christian population of the empire before the conversion of Constantine at about five millions or one twentieth of the population; Keim, Zöckler and Chastel at about sixteen millions, while Schultze puts ten millions as the minimum figure in a population of about one hundred millions.¹ The Christians were surely more numerous than the Jews who numbered some four millions within the empire at this period; hence the figures of Gibbon must be looked on as too low, especially as the Orient alone would easily furnish, from modern calculations, a greater number.

(c) *Constituents of the Christian Society.*

The Christian society of the third century was made up of many elements. No doubt, the poor and the humble were in a great majority. But it would be as much of an error to think that slaves were very numerous in it, as to imagine that any large portion of the Roman aristocracy had accepted the teachings of Christ. The legal position of the former made it difficult and dangerous to practice a religion which their masters did not approve, and the public duties and ambitions of the latter found in Christianity a most embarrassing obstacle. In the higher classes, especially, the neglect of the Roman religion was less easily tolerated than in the motley multitude.

The bulk of the Christian population seems usually to have been made up of the middle classes—the free poor, the small tradesman or patron, artisans, workers in metal and marble, Greek and Oriental foreigners,² etc.

costly work of Beugnot, *Histoire de la Destruction du Paganisme en Occident*, Paris, 1835, and Chastel, *Histoire de la Destruction du Paganisme dans l'Empire d'Orient*, Paris, 1850. The works of M. Boissier, *La Fin du Paganisme*, Paris, 1891, and V. Schultze, *Der Untergang des griechisch-voemischen Heidentums*, Jena, 1887, are written from different view-points, but are both valuable.

¹ Schultze, *op. cit.*, i., p. 22.

² See Allard, *Les Esclaves Chrétiens*, Paris, 1876. It is the impression which the Acts of the Martyrs, *e.g.*, those of St. Justin, and the complexion of the Roman Church before Constantine make upon us. The Acts of St. Pionius of Smyrna show a large and free Christian population in that city about A. D. 250. And the wealth of the Roman Church came neither from slaves nor entirely from her noble members. On the percentage of the nobility in the primitive Church see the Bulletins of De Rossi, *s.v.* NOBILITAS, the work of Dom Guéranger, *Sainte Cécile et la Société Romaine aux deux premiers siècles* (3d ed.), Paris, 1890, and Lanciani, *Pagan and Christian Rome*. The Kings of Elessa were Christian from the end of the second century at least. Those of Armenia were converted a century later, and in the meantime the little Greek state of the Bosphorus (Crimea) had become largely Christian. It was commonly believed that the Emperor Philip the Arab and his family, were Christian, and such too, seem to have been Julia Mamaea, the distinguished mother of Alexander Severus, and Salonina the wife of Gallienus. The wife and daughter of Diocletian were Christians before the outbreak of the persecution. When "Cæsar's

There was a great deal of travel in the early imperial epoch,¹ and every large church counted on its feast-days men of many nationalities within its walls. At Alexandria and Antioch, at Nicomedia and Trier the great offices of state were frequently filled by Christians. They had a splendid church at Nicomedia, built upon an elevation, and the Old Basilica at Antioch was not without a certain magnificence. St. Optatus of Milevi informs us that early in the fourth century they had over forty churches at Rome, and Eusebius tells us that before the last persecution there was a very great activity in church-building throughout the empire. The churches began already to possess the cemeteries in their own right, and they formed corporations, capable of holding property from the time of Gallienus. The little "house churches" had long since given way to a peculiarly Christian style, for the basilica form was not first adopted by the Christians after the downfall of paganism—it is considerably older, and some maintain that it is the product of Christian architectural progress in the third century, the outcome of a combination of "house-church," catacomb-chapel, and private domestic hall.² Yet, while it is clear that Christianity was very widespread in the last quarter of the third century, we must make due reservations; it was met with chiefly in the cities, much less in the open country; its votaries were far more numerous in the East than in the West; their public status was in a transition crisis from the primitive period when the powerful and contemptuous state scarcely distinguished them from the mob of Jews to the hour when the terrified administration recognized that the whole world was honeycombed with the new doctrines and the hour of final conflict was at hand. The latter point is very clear from the history of Paul of Samosata, and the opening reflections of Eusebius in the eighth book of his Church History, as well as from the Epitaph of Pope Eusebius and certain remarks of St. Cyprian in the golden booklet *De Lapsis*.

II.

Causes of the Rapid Spread of Christianity—(a) *Froselytism*.—The words of Christ (Luke iv., 18, 19; ix., 2) could leave no doubt in the minds of the Apostles as to the chief means by which

household" did not escape, we need not wonder that many Caecili, Valerii, Anicii, Glabrones, Annii, Probi, Bassi, Graecini and like families were won over to Christianity.

¹ See *Weltverkehr und Kirche in den drei ersten Jahrhunderten*, by Theo. Zahn, Hanover, 1877.

² See the article on BASILICAS in the *Encyclopaedia* of Kraus.

³ The writer takes for granted the co-operation of supernatural agencies, and the impossibility of explaining by natural causes alone the long and successful resistance, and the ultimate survival of Christianity.

they were to found the kingdom of God in the hearts of men. It was by oral preaching, by personal appeal and instruction. They understood from the beginning that they were above all "ministers and captains" of the Word (Acts v., 12). The earliest Christian writers present the *εὐαγγέλιον*, the *κήρυγμα*, the public official proclamation of the history and the teachings of Jesus Christ as the ordinary means of propagating faith in Him. The earliest bits of Christian biography, the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, are usually styled preachings or circuits, and in the Christian literature of the first three centuries the inculcation of Christianity is called a teaching, a bearing of witness.¹ In the days of the first vivid enthusiasm the Christians saw many quasi inspired men, called prophets, who wandered up and down the world, filled with a holy zeal, discoursing with more than human eloquence, often rapt beyond themselves, omnipresent, tireless, aggressive, well fitted to introduce the leaven of truth into a timorous or hesitating community, and to confirm in the accepted faith the dubious and wavering. The generation of these ardent souls did not pass away with the apostolic times; they lived on into the second century. There are echoes of their missions in Papias, Polycarp, Ignatius and Hermas. "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" shows them yet active in the service of the Catholic Church,² and a valuable passage of Eusebius leads us to believe that they were still numerous in the middle of the second Christian century.³ The Apostles left, indeed, a regularly constituted hierarchy,⁴ but in the pioneer days of Christianity every convert was a preacher, devoured with the desire of compelling all men to enter the Kingdom of God ere the fatal hour of the Second Coming of the Son of Man.⁵

¹ Mark xvi., 15; II. Tim., iv., 17; Titus, i., 3. The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles are collected and examined in the great work of Lipsius, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*.

² See Funk *Opera Patrum Apostolorum*, 2 vols., 8vo. Tuebingen, 1881.

³ "For, indeed, most of the disciples of that time, animated by the divine word with a more ardent love for philosophy (*i.e.*, the perfect Christian life), had already fulfilled the commands of the Saviour and had distributed their goods to the needy. Then starting out upon long journeys, they performed the office of evangelists, being filled with the desire to preach Christ to those that had not yet heard the word of faith, and to deliver to them the divine gospels. And when they had only laid the foundations of the faith in foreign places, they appointed others as pastors, and entrusted them with the nurture of those that had recently been brought in, while they themselves went on again to other countries and nations with the grace and co-operation of God. For a great many wonderful works were done by them through the power of the divine Spirit, so that at the first hearing whole multitudes of men eagerly embraced the religion of the Creator of the Universe."—Euseb., H. E., vii., 38.

⁴ Epistle of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, c. 42, and the Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch. Cf. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, London, 1890.

⁵ This is well expressed by St. Hilary of Poitiers: "Ut cresceret plebs et multiplicaretur, omnibus inter initia concessum et evangelizare et baptizare . . . at ubi omnia loca circumplexa est ecclesia, conventicula constituta sunt, et rectores, et caetera officia in ecclesia sunt ordinata. Comm. in Ephes. 4.

The duty of preaching rested chiefly upon the bishop,¹ and the pages of Eusebius show us that in the second and third centuries they were men of great eloquence and address, and extremely active in disseminating the Christian teachings. The Catholic Church counts to-day among her brightest glories such pioneer preachers and administrators of the divine *mandatum* as Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Melito of Sardes, Abircius Marcellus, Dionysius of Corinth and his namesake of Alexandria, Alexander of Jerusalem, Theophilus of Antioch, Apollinarius of Hierapolis, the Roman bishops Victor, Cornelius, Dionysius, and a host of others whose names and missionary work Eusebius either ignored or did not see fit to hand down. We see in Saint Justin a second century type of the Christian proselytizer, clothed in the coarse cloak of the philosopher, holding open school in the upper rooms of a friend's house, disputing with Cynics and Jews in the streets of Rome or the porticos of Ephesus—bland, insinuating, supple in argument, broken to all the dialectic exercise of the time, conciliating and adapting, explaining with fullest freedom the most holy *arcana* of the society, at once Jew, Greek and Roman, that he might gain all to Christ.² Not only the bishops, but the priests and deacons, had a special mission to teach and instruct, to guide the catechumens, to console the confessors and prepare them for martyrdom, to collect their last words, describe the scenes of their holy deaths, and form in the faith of Christ the new converts that every execution led into the church.³

Perhaps there is in all ecclesiastical history no more striking example of proselyting zeal than the great Origen. From his youth he burned to spread the law of Christ, and took up the public catechetical schools of Alexandria when they stood in grave peril of suppression or decay. He formed in this earliest of Christian seminaries the greatest Christians of the age; he attracted multitudes of pagans; by word and example he stirred up the sluggish depths of men's natures, and revealed to the astonished gaze of Christians and pagans the endless adaptability of the new religion to the most manifold relations of society, literature, civil government and human progress. He travelled many a weary mile across the sands of Arabia to convert a Roman general, and crossed the sea to expound Christianity to Julia Mammæa, the empress mother of the most noble and sympathetic of the pagan line of emperors. His predecessor, Pantaenus, had gone on a

¹ *Recognitions of Clement*, iii., 67. *Apostolic Constitutions*, ii., 26.

² Acts of the Martyrdom of St. Justin and his companions. Ruinart, *Acta Martyrum Sincera* (ed. Ratisbon 1859), p. 105. See his Apology and Dialogue with Trypho in Otto, *Corpus Apologetarum* (vols. i.-ii.).

³ Cruciate, torquete, dammate, atterite nos . . . Pluries efficimur quoties metimur a vobis. Semen est sanguis martyrum, Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, c. 5.

similar mission to India; in fact, the school of Alexandria was a centre of the most intelligent proselytism up to the time of Constantine. We could not ask for any better proof of it than the famous letter of Bishop Theonas of Alexandria to Lucian the Christian provost of the imperial chamberlains of Diocletian.¹

But it was not only the church authorities who carried on the proselytism for Christ. All the faithful were soldiers of the Lord, and their life was looked on as a *militia*—an existence of defensive and offensive warfare.² The most frequent scene of these holy combats was the family. The influence of a converted mother or sister was enormous. The change in the female conduct, the suavity and devotion of their lives, the increasing tenderness and pity in their dealings with the slave, the poor and the unfortunate, the moral elevation and refinement of their whole being could not escape the notice of the other members of the family circle. We may gather from the pages of Tacitus the impression that the conversion of a woman like Pomponia Græcia made on Roman society.³ That of Priscilla, Lucina, Cæcilia, the Flaviæ Domitillæ and the Aciliæ Glabrones could scarcely do less.

Yet, not unfrequently, the most bitter opposition came precisely from the family of the convert; it was so in the time of Tertullian, and somewhat later, Origen classes parents among the chief persecutors of the new religion.⁴ The proselytism of the Christians is one of the chief objections that Celsus raises against the faith,

¹ See Routh, *Reliquiæ Sacrae*, iii., 439. It contains the proof that a great many of the chief officers of Diocletian's household were Christians, but its chief interest lies in the directions given for gradually turning the attention of the emperor to the Christian faith. "Ille tamen præcipuus inter vos erit et diligentissimus cui libros servandos princeps mandaverit . . . si igitur ex credentibus in Christum ad hoc ipsum officium advocari contingat, non spernat et ipse litteras seculares et gentilium ingenia, quæ principem oblectant. Laudandi oratores . . . laudandi historici . . . Interdum et divinas scripturas laudari conabitur, . . . laudabitur et interim evangelium, apostolusque (*i. e.*, St. Paul). pro divinis oraculis: insurgere poterit Christi mentio, explicabitur paulatim ejus sola divinitas: omnia hæc cum Christi adjutorio provenire possent."

² *Jesu Christo regi eterno milito*, says the martyr Marcellus to the judge. Ruinart, *Acta Sincera*, etc. Maturus is called *generosissimus pugil Christi* in the Acts of the Martyrs of Vienne, *Militia Dei* sumus, Tert., *De Oratione*, c. 19. *Exhorti ad Martyres*, c. 3. Compare II. Tim., ii., 3; I. Cor. ix., 24; I. Tim., i., 18; II. Cor., x., 3

³ Longa huic Pomponiæ aetas, et continua tristitia fuit, . . . per quadraginta annos, non cultu nisi lugubri, non animo nisi moesto egit. Idque illi, imperitante Claudio impune, mox ad gloriam vertit. *Annales*, xiii., 32. Before this she had been traduced as *superstitious externa rea*, and acquitted by the domestic council. This superstition was Christianity, the *exitabilis superstitio* of Tacitus (*Ann.* xiv., 44), the *superstitio nova et malefica* of Suetonius (*Nero* 16), and the *superstitio prava et immodica* of Pliny (*Epp.* x., 96).

⁴ Sed ad Christianos quod spectat, senatum Romanum, imperatores diversis temporibus, milites, populos, ipsos eorum qui crediderunt parentes, in eorum doctrinam conspicias, *Contra Celsum*, i., 3.

and in his replies Origen manifests much pride in the persistent devotion to Christ of poor and humble people of all nations and classes. He points out that many Christians gave themselves up entirely to missionary work.¹ And when the pagan philosopher insists that they are only the refuse of the population, the apologist does not take any pains to deny it, other than to point out that the Christians are not without some wealthy and noble members, especially among the female sex.²

This domestic apostolate was greatly furthered by the Christian slaves. The Acts of the Martyrs contain numerous evidences of the religious activity of slaves, and the lives of St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Monica and St. Paulinus of Nola, offer evidence of their devotion and authority. We know that at one period they exercised much influence in the household of Septimius Severus, that the wet-nurse of his son Caracalla was a Christian,³ and that a certain Christian, Proculus, probably a freedman, cured the emperor by the application of oil.

"Would that we could know," says M. Allard, "the secret of those domestic missions which so vexed the pagan soul of Celsus! We would stand by the loom of the weaver and hear some uncultured tongue expound the divine truths; we would see young working-girls gathered about some venerable toiler and listening to her encomia on the sweets of purity; we might even push aside the great doors of bronze, and lifting the heavy tapestries, see the child at the knee of a Christian nurse, the youth listening to his pedagogue, the master learning from the overseer of his property, the judge instructed by the martyr. What intimate confidings! What touching revelations! What sweetly-burning tears! We would see then the pure and divine side of that awful institution of slavery, of which history has shown us only the cruel and infamous reverse. One day it is a noble, rich, illustrious family that enters the Church; again, a young girl suddenly declares her intention of leading a life of virginity; on another occasion love and peace descend with the faith into a household where hitherto reigned a

¹ *Inde liquet quod Christiani, quantum in se est, curent ut quo terrarum cunque sua doctrina spargatur quo fit ut quidam id sibi negotium desumpserint, ut non solum urbes, sed etiam vicos et villas obambulant, quo alios ad pium Dei cultum adducerent.*—*Ibid.*, iii., 9.

² *Ibid.*, iii., 44, 55. In privatis ædibus videre est lanifices, sutores, fullones, imperitissimum quemque et rusticissimum coram senioribus . . . nihil audere proloqui; ubi vero seorsum nacti fuerint pueros et mulierculas aequæ ac ipsi imperitas, mira quædam disserunt, etc.—*Cf. ibid.*, i., 27, vi., 14, and *Peri Archon*, iv, 1, 2.

³ Cruel as Caracalla was, there are several reasons for believing that he was favorable to the Christians: his early education, his aversion to sacrifices, his recalling of all those banished to the islands, his vexation at the punishment of his Christian playmate, the comparative peace of the faithful during his reign.—(*Cf. CARACALLA in Dictionary of Christian Biography.*)

horrid rivalry in vice; elsewhere a magistrate lays aside the trappings of office to live an humble and charitable life: all the while the world looks on and knows not the secret springs of such strange resolutions, but somewhere and always there is a poor slave who divides with the Lord a secret that causes his heart to overflow with heavenly gladness."¹

(b) *Corporate Union of Christians*.—In spite of the most active proselytism, the Christian religion would have made but slow progress if its members had not established some system of frequent assembly, enabling them to meet regularly for mutual edification and consolation. That they did so is amply proved by the Acts of the Martyrs, the repressive imperial legislation, the literary remains, and the venerable monuments of the pre-Constantinian period. But how was it possible for such numerous bodies of men to meet in the midst of great cities, when the very name of the Christians was outlawed? From the time of Nero, Christianity was an illicit religion. *Non licet esse vos* was the watchword of heathen society, and might have been written over the door of every meeting-place of the Christians. To the traditional Roman statesman the Christian appeared as one who violated fundamental laws of the state. He introduced a foreign superstition and a new cult without the permission of the senate or the emperor. He was guilty of high treason by refusing even the simplest act of worship to the genius of perenduring Rome. He manifested an obstinacy against the sacred state, which was absolutely incomprehensible to the magistrates, when they only asked an outward compliance, and cared little or nothing for his intimate convictions. He belonged to a forbidden society, and actions for sacrilege and the practice of criminal magic could, in the opinion of Roman lawyers, be brought against him. In a word, he lived in a time when all the civil and religious elements of society were inextricably interwoven, and a new, exclusive, proselytizing, universal religion could not help offending at every step a civil order which was at once the outgrowth and solid proof of idolatry.² It is true that there

¹ Paul Allard, *Les Esclaves Chrétiens*, p. 300. An interesting verification of the above is furnished by the sarcophagus of Proxenes in the Villa Borghese at Rome. The original decoration and the epitaph are purely pagan, but one of his Christian freedmen, absent from Rome at the time of his death, has left us the secret of his conversion in the following mutilated words which he scratched on the tomb: PROXENES RECEPTUS AD DEUM . . . REGREDIENS IN URBE SCRIPSIT AMPELIUS LIBERTUS. De Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christiane Urbis Romæ*, vol. i., n. 5 (an. 217), p. 9.

² The legal position of Christianity in the early imperial period is the subject of an exhaustive study by the Christian epigraphist Le Blant: *Sur les bases juridiques des poursuites dirigées contre les Martyres*, in the proceedings of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres, vol. ii., Paris, 1868, pp. 358-373. See also the article CHRISTENVERFOLGUNGEN in Kraus' *Real-Encyclopædie*, i., p. 215. According to Lactantius (Div. Inst., v., ii.), the great jurist Ulpian went so far as to codify the numerous laws directed against the Christians in a work entitled *De officio proconsulis*.

were long periods of peace for the Christians under emperors like Commodus and Caracalla, Alexander Severus and Gallienus, and in the forty years preceding the last persecution the laws were on the statute-books, but were not enforced. Fanaticism was wearied and silent. The emperors discouraged or forbade pursuit of Christians, who, on the other hand, were becoming so numerous that nothing short of wholesale extermination could uproot the evil.

Nevertheless, there was a period especially during the second century when Christianity had not yet wearied its persecutors, and when the laws were regularly applied to work its eradication.¹ How did the vast network of Christian associations manage to exist during this latter period without being constantly broken up and forced to abandon the strong leverage which they had in their regular reunions on stated days and in fixed places? Much light has been thrown upon this question within the last half century by the researches of archæologists and illustrators of the civil law. In the ancient world scarcely any institution was dearer to the masses of the people than the right of association. While the democratic or republican spirit enlured in Greece and Rome, this natural right was held sacred, and we have a multitude of epigraphic evidences to show that there existed a vast network of societies for every imaginable purpose—trade guilds, religious sodalities, confraternities, *collegia* for every grade and avocation among the bourgeois and the poor, while the Roman patriciate found in its traditions its wealth, its business, and political franchises, the consolation and strength that the poor sought in their association or college.² It was a result of the Greek's aversion to quiet family life, that he threw himself with ardor into external associations. Long before the coming of Christ, men united at Athens, Rhodes, and on the islands for purposes of business, or pleasure, to insure against loss by fire, and to honor some particular deity. The meetings were held in some retired garden, surrounded with porticos, and provided with a central altar of sacrifice. Dignitaries chosen by lot, and an elective president carried on the government of the little state, for such it was in many cases, the members being passionately attached to this second and artificial family. There was a common treasury, and mutual benevolence played a large share in the transactions of these curious forerunners of our modern social re-

¹ Cf. Renan, *Marc-Aurèle*, pp. 53, 302, and Allard, *Hist. des persécutions pendant les deux premiers siècles*, i., 329-388.

² Mommsen, *De Collegiis et Sodalitiis Romanorum*, Killae, 1843. Boissier, *La Religion Romaine aux temps des Antonins*, Paris, 1884, vol. ii., p. 238, *Les Classes Inférieures et les Associations populaires*. Doucet, *Rapports de l'Église et de l'État aux trois premiers siècles*, Paris, 1883, pp. 152-164; Boissier *Fromenades Archéologiques*, Paris, 1887 (*Rome et Pompéii*, p. 183.)

unions. They were a kind of harmless freemasonry, in which were preserved some of the better traits of the old Hellenic life.¹ Whether the Romans adopted these associations from the Greeks, or formed them from natural inclination, they existed in great numbers in the period immediately before and after Christ. In the earlier times they had a religious character, but became eventually, in the last days of the republic the prey of political demagogues, and were thenceforward, under the dictators and the emperors of the first two Christian centuries, the object of much repressive legislation.² They were either completely forbidden, or allowed only with the greatest difficulty.

Whereas originally every trade and industry, every god indigenous or foreign, every nation or city or great family had its special body of associates bearing its name and serving its interests, the military rulers of the city allow henceforth only the very poorest and the most wretched to unite, and then only for purposes of mutual burial.³ The men of antiquity held very dear a proper burial among their own, and scarcely anything is more touching than the pains which they took to secure it. The Cæsars, therefore, could not take from the poor man or the slave the only chance they had of obtaining decent sepulture, and the post-mortem honors of flowers, libations and anniversary banquets. They were permitted to combine for this purpose, and this is the origin of the famous *collegia tenuiorum* or the *collegia funeraticia*, which suggested to the outlawed members of the Christian religion a legal issue from their proscribed condition, or at least the securing of a legal right to meet publicly, under cover of attending to the business of a mutual burial association.

¹ Fouquet, *Des Associations religieuses chez les Grecs*.

² Trajan was so severe on the *collegia* that he would not allow the citizens of a Bithynian city to unite in forming a fire brigade, Pliny, Epp x., 93. It is worth noting, as an index of the profound democratic current in the Church that in every century she has encouraged the formation and protected the rights of a multitude of particular societies, confraternities, institutes, associations, guilds, sodalities, etc. The more absolute the sway and influence of Christianity, the deeper the respect of individual rights and the larger the freedom of the citizen. On this score the much maligned Middle Ages, with their rich and beneficent pululation of private associations may challenge the golden days of the military despotism of the old and the new Cæsars, or the blighting and crushing bureaucracy of New Rome or modern Europe. See the eloquent admission of Renan, *Les Apôtres* (vol. ii. of *Les Origines du Christianisme*), p. 363:

"Nos grandes sociétés abstraites ne sont pas suffisantes pour répondre à tous les instincts de sociabilité qui sont dans l'homme. Laissez le mettre son coeur à quel que chose, chercher la consolation où il la trouve, se créer des frères, contracter des liens de coeur. Que la main froide de l'état n'intervienne pas dans ce royaume de la liberté. La vie, la joie ne renaîtront dans le monde que quand notre défiance contre les *collegia*, ce triste héritage du droit romain, aura disparu."

³ See some remnants of the ancient legislation in the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, xvii., 22. *De collegiis et corporibus*.

Such colleges had a constitution or *lex collegii*, a regular election of officers, a treasury or *arca communis*, a *schola* or place of meeting. They collected from each new member a fixed sum on entering, and at the death of a member a small tax was levied on the survivors. On the other hand, they looked about for rich friends and patrons, from whose gifts and legacies they might pay a fixed sum to all who attended the funeral, and offer to the *sociétaires* frequent anniversary feasts. They were supposed to meet monthly. They buried their dead, sometimes in *columbaria* or square chambers filled up on all four sides with small niches for the urns containing the ashes, sometimes in their own small cemeteries. Where the body was lost or irrecoverable, they gave an imaginary funeral (*funus imaginarium*). These humble associations furnished the needed framework for the public life of the Christians, who could not be ignorant of them, as thousands of their proselytes came from just such societies. The Christians desired very much to bury their dead apart, when possible, not only from the corporate affection they bore to one another, but because they did not burn the remains of their dead as did most pagans. Moreover, the gatherings of these societies were often large; they included both sexes, and men of all classes; there were many of them in the city, and in time the laws were so softened as to permit their meeting for religious purposes as often as they wished. Later on there sprang up beside them, tolerated societies of *Cultores Deorum*, or votaries of some particular god or goddess, and in the third century, during the relaxation of persecution, the latter societies became quite numerous. *A priori*, therefore, it is not improbable that the Christians could associate in this manner, the only legal outlet left to them, as far as we know.¹ That they actually did is insinuated by a text of Tertullian in the thirty-ninth chapter of his Apology. He is speaking precisely of licit and illicit asso-

¹ M. Gaston Boissier sums up satisfactorily the points of contact between the pagan and the Christian burial clubs: "Les ressemblances sont en effet très nombreuses entre les associations des deux cultes. Les Chrétiens possèdent aussi une caisse commune, alimentée par les contributions des fidèles; chez eux aussi les contributions se payent tous les mois; ils n'ont par moins de souci de la sépulture de leurs morts, et l'Église a dû dépenser une grande partie de ses revenus à construire ses immenses cimetières. Des deux côtés le respect de la hiérarchie sociale se mêle à un grand esprit d'égalité; les morts de toute condition sont confondus dans les *columbaria* comme dans les catacombes. C'est le suffrage de tour qui nomme les chefs, et il va quelquefois chercher le plus humble pour le mettre à la première place. Au moment où de pauvres affranchis arrivent aux dignités des plus élevées des collèges, un ancien esclave, le banquier Calliste, s'assoit sur la chaise de Pierre que devait occuper un Cornélius. Enfin, les repas communs ont autant d'importance dans les réunions des Chrétiens que dans les associations païennes; l'Église célèbre dans toutes ses fêtes le festin fraternel des agapes, et, pour honorer des martyrs, les fidèles dînent sur leurs tombeaux à l'anniversaire de leur mort."—*La Religion Romaine*, ii., p. 300.

ciations, and is trying to prove that the Christians belong to the first category. "Our treasure," says he, "when we have one, is not made up of the large contributions of ambitious persons who seek honor; it is not by putting up our religion at auction that we increase our wealth. Each one brings monthly a modest contribution. He pays if he wishes to, and as he wishes, or rather, as he can; no one is compelled to give. The contributions are voluntary. We look upon that money as a pious fund which we do not spend in eating or drinking nor in indecent orgies. It helps to feed the poor and to bury them, to rear the orphans of both sexes, and to support the aged." When we compare these apposite words of Tertullian with one of the *textus classici* on the burial societies, we cannot help feeling that he is referring to a similar organization of the Christian body.¹ It is true that the Christians were not afraid to proclaim their numbers openly. Tertullian himself, in a famous passage already cited (*Apol.*, c. 37), vaunts their multitude, and the imperial police could not be ignorant of the frequent councils held in the latter quarter of the second century. But at the beginning of the third century the Church became the possessor of landed estates in the shape of cemeteries, once the property of individuals, but which a series of circumstances threw into her hands. Her increasing wealth demanded some secure title by which it might be protected from the unfaithful steward² as well as from the pagan informer or the apostate. This title was at hand in the character of a burial association, which form of reunion became extremely popular at this very juncture, and was extended by imperial rescript from Rome to the provinces. Such a privilege was of the highest importance for the propagation of Christianity. It gave the religion, in times of peace, a working legality, to say the least. It permitted public meetings, the excavation of catacombs, election of officers, mutual consultation, enrolment of nobles, women, foreigners, slaves, etc. Her wealthy members might easily assume the rôle of patrons that others of the same class played in the pagan corporations.

The regular distributions of the Church to the clergy, the widows, the poor and the strangers could easily be carried on at these semi-legal meetings, for the pagans were wont to give out special rations and even money on such occasions. It is worth noticing that

¹ Mandatis principalibus præcipitur præsidibus provinciarum ne patiantur esse collegia sodalicia, neve milites in castris collegia habeant. Sed permittitur tenuioribus stipem mensuram conferre dum tamen semel in mense coeant, ne sub prætextu hujus modi illicitum collegium coeat, quod non tantum in urbe sed et in Italia et in provinciis locum habere divus quoque Severus rescripsit.—*Digests*, XXXXVII., 22, 1.

² Nicostratum multorum criminum reum Ecclesiae deposita non modica abstulisse. . . . Spoliati ab illo pupilli, fraudate viduæ, pecuniæ quoque ecclesie denegata.—*S. Cyprian, Epp.* 50-52 (ed. Hartel.)

the *Liber Pontificalis* attributes to this period and to Callixtus, the deacon of Zephyrin, the establishment or renovation of THE CEMETERY *par excellence*, to which his name was afterwards attached.¹ And the mentions of ecclesiastical property at Rome and elsewhere become henceforth more numerous, yet so that the *areae* and *cemeteria* form the nucleus of the growing estates of the infant churches. Thus, when Gallienus restores the confiscated property of the Christians, the cemeteries figure at the head of the list, and when Maxentius does the same, forty years later, the burial places are still the solid block of ecclesiastical wealth. De Rossi conjectures that the bishop was always inscribed as syndic or agent of these associations, in accordance with a prescription of the civil law, and he elucidates with much skill, by the aid of this supposition, the very tangled chronology of the Roman episcopal succession in the first decade of the fourth century.²

In a future article the writer proposes to treat more exhaustively the other causes which co-operated at this period in the dissemination of Christianity.

T. J. SHAHAN.

¹ *Liber Pontificalis* (Ed. Duchesne), i., 141.

² The arguments of De Rossi are neatly summed up by Northcote and Brownlow in their *Roma Sotterranea*, i., pp. 103-9. On the interesting question of the Roman confraternities cf. Mommsen and Marquardt, *Römische Staatsverwaltung*, iii., 131-142; and Boissier, *La Religion Romaine aux temps des Antonins*: Paris, 1884; vol. ii., pp. 239-304. Loening in his *Geschichte des deutschen Kirchenrechts*, and Alard in his *Histoire des Persecutions pendant la première moitié du III^e siècle*, give valuable details on the use of the civil right of association among the Christians. See also Cagnat, *L'Armée Romaine d'Afrique*, Paris, 1892, p. 457, for the military colleges and savings associations.