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THE CHURCH AND THE EMPIRE IN THE FIRST CENTURY.

IF I venture to add some remarks on Prof. Mommsen's paper, it is purely from the desire to arrive at that general understanding, which he is hopeful of attaining. As is mentioned in the preface, my book is an attempt to apply historical principles that I have learned chiefly from his writings to a subject which he has not yet treated sytematically or completely. His paper, which is now printed in THE EXPOSITOR, is, in some respects his most important utterance on the subject. Although in width of scope and minuteness of treatment it does not rank with the masterly paper on *Religionsfrevel nach römischem Recht*, to which I am glad once more to profess my great debt; yet it states in brief, clear, unmistakable terms his views on several critical points on which, so far as I know, he had not previously expressed himself. I do not wish to give to my remarks the appearance of a reply to him, for their chief aim is to bring out the amount of agreement that is implied in his words. His paper will, I believe, put an end for ever to several of the fallacies against which, widespread and popular as they were, I was obliged to argue in detail. Now that Prof. Mommsen has intervened, and brushed them aside into the dustbin of history without wasting a word upon them, who will be bold enough to rake them out again?

I know scarcely anything in historical literature so blind and perverse as several of the popular fallacies on this subject, which now, we may hope, have disappeared from our minds, and will gradually disappear from our books. In defiance of the clear evidence of both Pagan and Christian authorities, it has been maintained in voluminous works by many great scholars that Christians and

Jews were confused and classed together by the Roman government until the second century. Even Neumann, who in most respects stands on a higher platform, declares that it was the investigations of Domitian's officials while collecting the Jewish poll-tax that opened the eyes of the government to the distinction between Jews and Christians. Tacitus and Suetonius indeed declare that proceedings against Christians as Christians, not as Jews, were taken by Nero, who from certain reasons showed considerable favour to the Jews in Rome; but the fixed idea that the Christians were too humble and insignificant a lot to have attracted the attention of government as a peculiar and separate sect, was so strong that the evidence of these two irreproachable authorities was discounted and disregarded on the arbitrary assumption that they were thrusting into the past the ideas of their own time. It is against this habit of judging in accordance with certain views and theories instead of following where the evidence leads that I have throughout my book directed my argument. The credibility of positive statements, the authenticity of documents which are otherwise indisputable, have been denied simply and solely because they were fatal to prejudices and hastily formed theories.

But, if the Christians were clearly distinguished from the Jews by the Roman imperial administration as early as A.D. 64, we must infer from this that the Christians were already a body of a certain consequence and size, and of determinate, individualized character. Either it was the Christians of Rome who attracted notice as being a body of this character—in which case we must infer that the Church in Rome was considerable in point of numbers and organization—or it was the existence in various parts of the empire of Christian communities, similar to each other in character that impressed the central government—which also would be an important fact, as implying a certain bulk

and consistence in each of these scattered communities—or (as I believe) both facts must have come under the knowledge of the imperial administration. It was to avoid these inferences that so many scholars denied the imperial cognizance of the Christians. Now that the cognizance is admitted, we must draw the inferences, and note their immense significance.

Prof. Mommsen fixes no exact date when the Roman government and populace began to distinguish clearly between Jews and Christians; it was "probably . . . under the second dynasty, as Nero's measures show it fully developed." From non-Christian authorities alone no more than this can be inferred; and it is specially important that Prof. Mommsen has based his opinion solely on that evidence. But when we take into account Acts xviii. 15 as a trustworthy contemporary authority (as I have tried from archæological facts, and Spitta from critical theory, to prove that it is), we can reach a more precise conclusion. As late as A.D. 53–4, the imperial officials regarded questions affecting Christians as a mere matter of Jewish law, and not coming under the imperial cognizance. In the decade that followed, the imperial view had grown clearer. May we not infer, as in the highest degree probable, that it was the trial of the Roman citizen, Paul, that led to more thorough investigation into the whole subject? He was the first Roman sent for trial on this charge before the central authority. As a Roman citizen he had a claim to a full investigation, such as would not in any circumstances have been granted to a mere provincial. He was treated with distinction, kept not under constraint but in *custodia libera*,[1] and two years elapsed before his trial was completed.

It is both justifiable and necessary to lay great stress on the trial of Paul. With the legal constructiveness and

[1] See p. 399 of my book.

obedience to precedent that characterised the Romans, this case, tried before the supreme court, must have been regarded as a test case and a binding precedent, until some act of the supreme imperial authority occurred to override it. If such a case came for trial before the highest tribunal in Rome (and so much I suppose is universally admitted), there must have been given an authoritative and, for the time, final judgment on the issues involved.

Those who accept the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles must go further. They must hold that the result of the enquiry was that Paul was liberated; in short, that the preaching of the new religion was permitted after a careful trial before the supreme authority. They are not likely to be wrong if they attribute this to the influence of the Spaniard Seneca, who, though about the end of 62 he fell from favour and from the supreme influence that he had previously enjoyed, had probably not wholly ceased to have some share in the guidance of government in such matters in 63,[1] when Paul's trial must have taken place. The wider and more generous policy of Seneca, like that of the Spaniards Trajan and Hadrian after him, was truer to the imperial destinies and more favourable to free development of thought.

Now Tacitus is in perfect agreement with this view. He distinctly attributes the beginning of imperial action against the Christians in A.D. 64 to accident, viz. the desire of Nero to divert public attention from himself. But, if the result of a full and formal trial of a Roman for teaching this new philosophy had been to declare his action illegal and the philosophy treasonable, we should have to treat Tacitus's account of Nero's action in 64 as essentially untrue and

[1] Nero, though he disliked Seneca, was not quite ready to dispense with his great experience and skill in the management of government business, which had been carried on with extraordinary activity and success while Seneca was at the head of affairs.

mere picturesque word-painting. We come to the conclusion that, if Tacitus is trustworthy, Paul was acquitted in 63, and allowed to continue his former course of life. It is needless to point out what an important bearing this has on the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles.

We come now to another important point. A few years ago opinion was almost unanimous that punishment of Christians for the Name was a fact of the second century, and that consequently any document which referred to the persecution for the Name must be a composition of the second century. So late as in 1883, M. Doulcet could declare that Wieseler was the only scholar who did not accept the view that this developed type of persecution was inaugurated by Trajan (see my note on p. 213). But when in my book a date thirty-five years earlier is assigned to the inauguration of such persecution, the only criticism that Prof. Mommsen makes is that I fix the date ten years too late.

Consider what judgment this implies in regard to all that class of arguments which inferred a date later than Trajan for documents mentioning persecution! But, far beyond that, consider what a total change of attitude this implies in regard to the whole position of the new religion in the state and the world! How false must have been the view on this subject entertained by those who fancied that Christians were not distinguished from Jews till about the beginning of the second century, and that Christianity had not been prominent enough to attract the attention of the government until A.D. 112.

Now the fundamental principle of historical criticism as applied to the facts of Christianity—a principle that I fully accept—is that the Christian writings must stand in close relation with the historical facts of the time. But when such a fundamental error is made about the position of the new religion in the Empire during the first century,

the necessary consequence is that the relation of every first-century Christian document to its historical surroundings is distorted and confused. Then, if he is logical in carrying out his principles, the critic who makes that fundamental error is bound to infer that these documents do not stand in the close, vital relation of genuine works to their period, and that therefore they are not genuine. True, the critic did not carry out his principle to its extremest consequences; he spared some, or many, or all of the first-century documents, sometimes from his catching, in spite of preoccupation by a false historical view, the ring of genuineness in them, sometimes from acceptance of tradition and external authority in their favour. But even if he left some documents in the first century, their historical relations were distorted, and the critic's view was necessarily confused. Nothing was visible to him in its true historical proportions; and every theory which he framed was bound to show traces of the distortion. So true is it that a serious error in respect to a fundamental point must vitiate the whole view of the historical critic about the period in question.

Again, if a considerable number of the first-century documents are brought down into the second century, what must be the inference about the second-century documents? If the critic is consistent and logical, he must argue from the obvious differences in style that the latter also are forgeries. Here, again, no critic has been thoroughly consistent. Some have come nearer "that bad eminence" than others, but none have shown complete disregard for the distinction between the genuine and the spurious in historical literature.

This distinction must be the foundation of all study of ancient history; and ability to distinguish—an ability which results from critical familiarity with the style and facts of the period—is one of the first qualities of the critic. The cases

vary in difficulty. In some the spuriousness can be recognised by the beginner; in some it is a very delicate and difficult matter to judge; and in some the genuineness is so clear and marked, that the person who disputes it merely attests his own inability to recognise style and quality. We find a case in point in Keim's arguments about the Letter of the Church in Smyrna to the Church in Philomelion. Here we have a test example. The man who cannot here discern the second-century character, and who makes it a later forgery, is lost; nothing can save him as a historical critic; his judgment is hopelessly warped and untrustworthy. This final step Keim has taken. In reading his arguments I found it difficult to believe that he was serious. I could hardly shake off the impression that he was writ ng an elaborate *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole theory which I am now criticising. He has reduced the theory to the absurd; but he has, I fear, done so unconsciously.

Prof. Mommsen mentions two points in my book, from which he dissents. The first is a sentence criticising part of a paragraph in his article on *Religionsfrevel.* I must now apologize for the sentence which he has quoted: it is badly expressed, and does not state correctly either his position or mine. As he remarks, my book is not so much at variance with his view as the sentence which he quotes would indicate. There remains a certain difference between our points of view; but, as he evidently considers the difference as a matter of detail rather than of principle, I shall gladly pass over it.

The second point of difference between Prof. Mommsen and myself—as it would appear the only difference of a serious character—is nominally about the date when the State consciously and deliberately resolved that Christians should be treated as outlaws; but really it is not a mere question of ten years that divides us. We differ as to the

attitude of the State towards the Christians during the first century. The view which I have taken, and which I feel driven by the evidence still to maintain, is that there was a marked difference between the action of the Flavian emperors and the wider and more generous policy adopted —though in a very hesitating and tentative way—by the second-century emperors. So far as my judgment reaches, I think that this difference is merely one point in the general contrast between the Flavian policy and that of the New Empire of the second century. This is too wide a subject to enter on; but every one must be struck with the superior strength and security of the New Empire. This was not due simply to superiority in the men, but to a radical change in the spirit of their policy. The New Empire carried out far more truly the natural tendencies of the Roman destiny. It was wider and freer in its conception of the task before it. It did not fear the current of the times, as the older Empire had done; it went with it, whether with full consciousness or not we need not ask. The education and the thought of the period were with it, whereas they had been against the first-century Empire (at least since Augustus); and the first-century emperors (especially the Flavian emperors) had feared them, and sought to coerce them (p. 272). It was part of the policy of the New Empire to give scope, so far as could safely be done, to all movements in the popular thought; it was part of the policy of the old Empire to distrust and impede such movements. This change in the Imperial policy strongly affected its attitude towards Christianity.

But other reasons—not merely general considerations, but positive evidence—attest the change of attitude and policy on the part of the State. The change of attitude and spirit on the part of the Christians cannot, I think, be explained in any other way. Prof. Mommsen, on this point, appears to me, if I may venture to express myself so

in presence of such a master, not to have weighed with due care the evidence of the first-century Christian documents. I shall confine myself to the Apocalypse, about whose first-century origin he has no doubt,[1] but it is far from the only witness (see my Chap. XIII.). He speaks of "the complaints uttered in the Apocalypse." In that phrase is summed up the whole difference between us. I find complaints uttered in the Apologists of the second century; I find no complaints in the Apocalypse. Complaint is the language of the man who is dissatisfied with the existing conditions, and who desires to reform and to improve them. In the Apocalypse there is no wish or thought of reforming or improving the Empire; in the Apologists that desire is the dominant note. The Apocalypse rules out the Empire as absolutely bad, absolutely unimprovable, as on the eve of inevitable destruction. The Apocalypse is not a complaint, but a vision of triumph over a cruel and bitter but impotent adversary. The spirit of such a work is, in my estimation, utterly inconsistent with its having been produced under emperors whose action was similar in character to the procedure of the second century, or at a time when the policy of the State was such that, in Prof. Mommsen's words, "the system of ignoring and of leniency prevailed." It is the spirit of the Scottish Cameronians towards the Government about 1680–88; and such a deep, intense, all-powerful emotion could arise only in a similar situation.

Moreover, the Apologists in the following century lay stress on the contrast between the policy of the second-century emperors and those of the first. How could they do so, if the policy was precisely the same? It is quite true that, as they are advocates pleading a cause, their testimony must be discounted. But they were advocates of ability, some of very high ability; and they must surely have recog-

[1] He assigns its composition to about A.D. 70. See his *Provinces of the Roman Empire*, ii. p. 199.

nised that their cause would not be advanced by misstating the whole current of imperial action when they were addressing the emperors. They appeal so pointedly to the change in policy effected by Trajan, that it is for me impossible to believe that they were appealing to a groundless fiction (see p. 341 f.).

About 112–120 the whole tone of the Church and of its writers towards the State altered, Ignatius being the last example of the old spirit. The change is comprehensible only as the result of a change in the actual situation. Such, briefly put, is the view which I hold and have tried to state, and herein lies the essential difference in which I find myplaced with respect to Prof. Mommsen.

I come now to the question — at what time did the imperial government come to the conclusion that the profession of Christianity was dangerous and treasonable—*i.e.*, when did it accept the principle that the Name must be proscribed and the Christians treated as outlaws? Prof. Mommsen unreservedly holds the view that this was the accepted principle in 111, when Pliny entered his province : " The persecution of the Christians was a standing matter, as was that of robbers " : such are his words (quoted on my p. 269). Further, he has expressly accepted the general fact of a distinct persecution by Domitian, reserving opinion on details. Now we have seen that the State began during the reign of Nero to recognise that there existed a distinct and separate body of persons, bearing the name of Christians. There is therefore no doubt that the " Name " must have been proscribed at some period between this recognition of the existence of the Christian sect and the persecution of Domitian.

Again, as has just been said, the State did not forthwith come to the conclusion that the principles professed by this body were dangerous and treasonable ; but, on the contrary, the first great case where the question was tried

before the supreme state tribunal ended in the acquittal of the accused person, Paul. This brings us down to A.D. 63; and the evidence is otherwise clear, and the opinion universally accepted, that until A.D. 64 no state persecution took place.[1] It is established by the full narrative of Tacitus, confirmed by the brief and undated, but very precise, words of Suetonius, that in A.D. 64 the state began to punish the Christians. This fact has been, indeed, keenly controverted, and an extraordinary amount of ingenious and learned special-pleading has been used to throw doubt on it; but there is nothing in ancient history that is better attested, and probably, after Prof. Mommsen's emphatic statement in THE EXPOSITOR, this subtle and elaborate argumentation will be discarded, and historical reasoning will be substituted for it.

There remains a question—which has been put as clearly as I can put it in my p. 242—whether the action taken in A.D. 64 was the same in character as that which Pliny accepted as the established procedure when he entered his province. Prof. Mommsen is not quite so explicit on this point as he is in all the other matters that he touches on; but he apparently holds that it was the same. I have argued that it was not, and have pointed out the essential difference. Pliny punished the Christians for the Name, without asking any question about actual crimes committed by them, or calling for any evidence beyond their bare acknowledgment that they were Christians: Nero punished them for the crimes that they committed, and evidence was required[2] that they did commit the crimes. Prof. Momm-

[1] I use the argument from the Christian evidence in order to press on the reader's attention the importance of using Christian and non-Christian documents side by side, and making each throw light on the other. If we accept the Pastoral Epistles, the harmony of the two classes of evidence is striking if we deny their authenticity, it is not easy to discover harmony.

[2] The evidence was indeed very poor, accepted at first in the blindness of panic-struck fury, but after a time discredited by the popular opinion (p. 235); but still the form of charge demanded something in the shape of evidence.

sen replies that the fact "that practically in the administrative treatment of the new sectaries, the special crimes attributed to them were much more urged than their ideal disrespect to the Roman divinities, is applicable to every stage of the persecution." Here I am, to my great regret, forced absolutely to differ. In the later stages of the persecution, wherever we have sufficient information, in 112, in 177, neither special crimes nor ideal disrespect to the Roman divinities are insisted on in case of confession. If the accused person, in answer to Pliny's question, denied that he was a Christian, he was required to prove his sincerity by complying with the test of loyalty—*i.e.*, showing in act his respect to the Roman divinities; but if he confessed the Name, he was on the bare confession subject to the penalty of death, and no question was asked, or proof brought, about his crimes. On the other hand, if he confessed to have once been a Christian, but now abjured the faith and denied Christ, Pliny in 112, and the Governor of Gall Lugdunensis, in 177, then began to inquire into the question of crimes which he was supposed to have committed as a Christian. In fact, the Christians that abjured were in these cases put in the same position in which the Christians that confessed were put under Nero. There seems to be here implied an essential difference in the procedure; and this was the ground on which I have asserted that there must have been a change in procedure between the time of Nero and that of Trajan.

Now occurs another question. Tacitus distinctly implies (see my p. 234) that there were two stages in the proceedings under Nero, the first being concerned with the charge of incendiarism, the second being of a wider type. Was the second stage the same as the latter procedure, described by Pliny? This question also was answered by me in the negative. Dr. Sanday, in THE EXPOSITOR for June, answers it in the affirmative. It is with great regret that I

find myself compelled to differ from him; and I hope that the difference of opinion on one or two points in this period of history will not hide the amount of agreement between us. To his conversation and suggestions, above all to his encouragement, anything that is of value in my book is to a great extent due. He will, I know, be glad if I mention that the late Dr. Hort, when talking with me in June, 1892, maintained the same view which he has now expressed as to the character of the second stage in Nero's action. I was fully impressed with the strong array of opinion on this side when I was writing; for I felt no doubt that Bishop Lightfoot, from what he has said, would have agreed on this point with Dr. Hort; and their opinion weighs so much with me, that it was only because I could not help it that I took the opposite view.

Too much stress must not be laid on the difference on this point. After all, it is merely a question of ten years:—is the date about 65 or 75? It is indeed in several respects very important; but after all we are not divided in opinion on any principle, but only in the application to details.

I have on pp. 243 f, 258, 276, fully conceded the point, on which Dr. Sanday quite correctly insists, that the brief, weighty words of Suetonius rather tell against me; and that Sulpicius Severus is absolutely unfavourable. But the words of the latter are inaccurate in a legal point of view, and cannot be insisted on as an authority of any value. They have none of the character of those passages where Sulpicius takes Tacitus as his standard and repeats him in a remodelled form. He is conveying his own general impression; and his ideas about first-century facts were so vague and bad, that his general impressions are valueless in conflict with older evidence. It is admitted as a principle of modern historical investigation, that a statement made by this late chronicler has no value in such a question, except where express reason can be shown to hold

that he is repeating a statement of some good authority. This statement differs widely in tone from the sentences preceding, which were based on Tacitus ; and I have tried to show that it is quite inconsistent with him (p. 244).

It appears to me that the really weighty evidence in this case is the striking agreement between the detailed and carefully weighed account given by Tacitus and the evidence of those Christian documents which have the best claim to be dated between A.D. 64 and 80, especially the Pastoral Epistles. Their authority agrees, and it far outweighs everything else in my estimation. And to this critical point I shall address myself, in the belief that, if it can be clearly proved, it will be considered by Dr. Sanday to justify and reward our friendly controversy.

W. M. RAMSAY.

(To be continued.)

ST. PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

VII. THE DOCTRINE OF SIN.

THE topical consideration of Paulinism on which we now enter may fitly begin with St. Paul's negative doctrine concerning justification, viz., that it is not attainable by the method of legalism. The proof of this position resolves itself practically into the Pauline doctrine of sin, which embraces four particulars. These are (1) the statement concerning the general prevalence of sin in the "sin section" of the Epistle to the Romans; (2) the statement respecting the effect of the first man's sin in *Romans* v. 12–21; (3) the statement concerning the sinful proclivity of the flesh in *Romans* vii.; (4) the statement concerning the action of the law on the sinful proclivity of the flesh in the same chapter. From all these taken together it follows that salvation by the works of the law is absolutely impossible.[1]

[1] Ménégoz truly remarks that to understand St. Paul's notion of sin we must