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'I would I had some flowers o' the spring that might
Become your time of day; and yours, and yours,
. . . . O Proserpina!
For the flowers now that frighted thou let'st fall
From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath; pale prime-roses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one. O! these I lack
To make you garlands of, and my sweet friend,
To strew him o'er and o'er.'[1]

And then take this, from one of the Sonnets, The poet pictures himself in a state of deep depression and melancholy:

'Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee,—and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising,
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate.'

That tiny speck lost in its 'privacy of glorious light': what music! and what rapture!

I go back to the Gospels. And just one more touch I will ask you to notice of which—if it had been a disciple who was speaking, and not the Master—we should have said, How Shakespearian—How more than Shakespearian! For there is a lofty serenity and divine authority about it which goes beyond Shakespeare:

'Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you;

'That ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.

. . . . . .

'Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

'He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust!'

Of course there is a problem in the very existence of Evil; and these words certainly have a bearing on that problem. Perhaps they even in part suggest a solution of it. But at all events they—and Shakespeare with them—help us to understand how—in spite of evil—God could yet look round upon the world that He had made and pronounce it 'very good.'

[1] It is worth while to observe the wonderful ease and freedom with which Shakespeare handles the old pagan mythology—the element which came to him through the Renaissance. We can appreciate the special quality in this if we compare it—let us say, with Titian's 'Bacchus and Ariadne' in the National Gallery, a picture which derives part of its beauty from the flowers: the rich warm glow of the latter, and the cool glancing lightness and delicacy of the former, a very miracle of grace and charm. The phrase about the daffodils is, I must needs think, the *ne plus ultra* of purest poetry.

Eastern Religions in the West.

By Professor the Rev. J. S. Banks, D.D., Headingley College, Leeds.

One of the most interesting and yet least generally known passages of history is the one concerning the invasion of the West by Oriental religions in the early centuries of our era. The religions of Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria, Persia carried on a vigorous missionary crusade in Rome and countries under Roman influence with considerable temporary success. This supposes a vacuum to be filled, a want to be supplied; and such was the case. The old religion of myth and legend which had reigned so long in Rome and Greece held its ground among the masses, but among the higher classes it was utterly discredited; there its value was only symbolical. Philosophy had taken its place, and philosophy can never be a substitute for religion. There are needs of human nature which it does not even profess to satisfy. It did not even in Greece, where it was carried to such a height of

perfection; and still less did it do this in Rome, which borrowed its philosophy from Greece. Philosophy's message is to the intellect, not to the heart and soul. Even were it otherwise it is out of the reach of the millions everywhere. It was this great crisis in the Roman empire which the Eastern systems of faith sought to meet on a large scale. Juvenal describes the movement as the flowing of the Orontes (in Syria) into the Tiber, and he might have added the Nile and the Halys. The story is graphically told by F. Cumont in lectures delivered at the Collège de France.[1] The lecturer's task is a difficult one. The third century, when the Eastern cults were at their zenith in the West, is one about which history gives us little information. Our knowledge has to be picked up from allusions, fragments, medals, papyri; and it is remarkable what success modern students have had in the search. The greatest difficulty has been in the complete loss of the old pagan liturgies. 'We know not how the ancients prayed; we cannot penetrate the secret of their religious life, and certain deeps of the ancient soul remain unknown to us.'

A point of great interest is that, in invading the West at that time, Oriental systems became open rivals of Christianity in its first missionary campaigns. Those systems had been at work a considerable time and had gained some hold on the soil. They spread in the same way as Christianity, not only by appointed agencies, but also by the spontaneous work of traders and merchants from the East. Oriental traders swarmed in the countries bordering on the Mediterranean. Just so the gospel was brought to Rome and Gaul and Carthage by private Christians.

Another important point is that the West owed a great debt to the East in other spheres than religion. This holds good of Rome even more than of Greece. M. Cumont limits his account to 'Roman' paganism. Roman science, art, literature, law had received abundant stimulus and rich endowment from Eastern sources. We know how Roman law has stamped itself on the world for centuries. But the general principles underlying that wonderful jurisprudence came largely from the Levant. Ulpian and Papinian, leading jurists, hailed from Syria; a famous legal school was established at Berytus. Stoicism, Epicureanism, Neo-Platonism, which dominated the educated classes at Rome, had their roots in the East. The Romans were great soldiers and administrators, but originality of ideas was not their forte. Even the armies came to consist largely of foreigners. 'The great astronomers, the great mathematicians, the great physicians, like the great creators or advocates of metaphysical systems, were mostly Orientals.' These were the predecessors and companions of pagan missionaries from the East.

Another question is, What was it in the Oriental faiths which attracted or appealed to the Roman world? What enabled them in any degree to supply the want that had arisen? Without any attempt at depreciation it may be safely said that religion was not Rome's strong point. Professor Cumont says that there was never another religion so 'cold and prosaic' as the Roman. It had a certain dignity and stateliness. It was friendly to the domestic and civic virtues. It was a devoted servant of the State. But it had no sentiment, and little human sympathy; it was 'cold and prosaic.' It had not grown. We need not refer to its moral inadequacy and faults as set forth in Paul's epistle to Roman Christians. Chapters 12 and 13 of that epistle were the revelation of a new ethic. The invading systems from the East were imperfect enough from the moral standpoint. But they were rich in attractions which Roman religion lacked. Their temples and services abounded in life, movement, colour, in gorgeous vestments and processions, in imposing ritual and elaborate doctrines about man and God, about questions of good and evil which deeply stir human feeling. We do not wonder that 'the deities of Egypt and Asia soon crossed the seas, began to gather worshippers in all Latin provinces, and were worshipped up to the farthest limits of Britain and Germany.' The pagan mysteries, a sort of sacramental service, to which only elect initiates were admitted, were a strong attraction to Romans.

The invading faiths came from Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Persia. The first two were the least worthy; the other two were the most worthy and the most successful. India, which could have made the best contribution, had not yet risen above the horizon for the West. Alexander is said to have reached the north-west of India, but he left no sign of his visit.

The chief deities of Asia Minor—Cybele, the great Mother of the gods, and her consort Attis—absorbed in themselves all the functions divided

[1] *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain.*

elsewhere among many gods. Cybele had precedence above her husband, and had lions harnessed to her chariot. Attis among other things symbolized the annual decay and revival of vegetation. This was the death of Attis, which Cybele and the worshippers mourned with paroxysms of grief, which again were followed by paroxysms of joy when spring returned. Resurrection was part of the popular creed. The passionate temperament of the people gave way to wild excesses on these occasions—frantic cries and dances and self-mutilations. The wonder is that a system so contrary to the sober Roman spirit was allowed to settle in Rome. This was due to the belief that Cybele had helped Rome in the war with Hannibal, when a temple was built in her honour. For a long time the wild extravagances were restrained by law; but these fell into disuse. The faith grew and spread in all Latin lands. A repulsive part of the ritual was the sacrifice of the Taurobolium, which was simply a blood-bath—a sort of sacrament supposed to regenerate its subject. The existence of the cult in Rome can be traced through six centuries.

Little need be said respecting the Syrian cults in the West, as they existed almost entirely for the Syrian traders who were to be found all over Europe, but exerted little influence on others. The Syrians were skilful in the arts of trade in every form. Carthage was founded and peopled by them, and they had settlements in every European country, with temples, priests, and rich equipments. An inscription in honour of the goddess of Hierapolis was found near the wall of Hadrian in the north of England. The Syrian worshippers were divided into many sects, who carried on bitter controversies with each other. The cult was of a low religious type, as seen in the frequency of human sacrifice and temple prostitution. Of course there were better elements in the case. Cumont writes: 'These traders always occupied themselves with the concerns of heaven as with those of earth. At all times Syria was the home of a fervent piety, and its children in the first century applied themselves zealously to establish the worship of their barbaric gods in the West.'

If Syria had little success in proselytism, Egypt—the land of mystery and charm of many kinds—was foremost of all. This was to be expected from its natural resources of every kind, the skill of its people, and its achievements in art and science and religion. As a Roman province it was the granary of Rome. Its religion, with splendid temples, a cultured priesthood, elaborate doctrine and ritual, was one of the greatest religions of the world. Its doctrine of the future life was unique in its definite and complete character. It was bound to be a missionary religion. 'Of all religions of antiquity none is so well known to us as that of the Egyptians. One can follow its development through three or four millenniums, read the sacred texts, mythical narratives, hymns, rituals, the Book of the Dead in its original form, and distinguish the different conceptions which it gives of the higher powers and the future life.' Not that we know all we wish to know about Egypt and its religion. Much is still obscure. Thus we do not know where the word Serapis comes from, although it is the name by which the Egyptian god Osiris is generally known. Sinope, Seleucia, and Babylon are variously advocated as its place of origin, and the name itself is variously derived from Egyptian and Chaldaic. Osiris was the Egyptian sun-god, the consort of Isis. He was the judge of the dead. It was the custom for a new dynasty to add a new god to the pantheon or to give a privileged position to the god of the district from which the dynasty sprang. Serapis was introduced by the first Ptolemies in Alexandria. The Serapium, his great temple in Alexandria, contained a colossal statue of the god, the work of an Athenian sculptor. The object of the Ptolemies in establishing the worship of Serapis was not so much to add a new deity as to establish a form of worship in which Egyptians and Greeks, who were numerous in Egypt, might join; and this was the case, Greek was the language of the new liturgy, and the statues of the gods appeared with the Greek features. This syncretism in religion was the fashion of the age. Then began a vigorous missionary propaganda for the new form of faith. There is no need to describe the methods of propaganda, which in the case of a country as famous as Egypt could scarcely fail of effect. Suffice it to say that the new faith spread rapidly, and was well established in the islands and on the shores of the middle sea before it approached Rome.

It seems strange that the introduction into Rome was long and stoutly resisted both by the civil and religious authorities on moral and political grounds. Roman priests charged the Egyptian faith with

moral laxity and with deadly hostility to the old faith of Rome. The civil authorities, including the emperors, opposed it as the faith of an old enemy at Rome. Temples built for its service were destroyed. But the opposition was outweighed by the great popularity of the new religion. One after another of the Roman colonies admitted the stranger; the capital could resist no longer. In 38 A.D. Caligula erected a great temple of Isis on the field of Mars, which Domitian enlarged in splendid style. About 215 A.D. Caracalla erected a still more elaborate temple in the heart of the city on the Quirinal. The gods of Egypt had become Roman. The hold of the religion on the empire continued in strength until the close of the fourth century.

It is not difficult to discover some of the features in the Egyptian religion which impressed other peoples. They were struck, as we are, by the contrast between the imposing splendours of its temples and rites on the one hand and the objects of worship on the other. Animal-worship—the worship of bulls, cats, beetles, crocodiles, etc., and of vegetables, as leeks and onions—was universal. Juvenal exclaims: 'O holy nation, whose gods are born in its gardens!' This feature doubtless repelled rather than attracted, and the reason underlying it is matter of discussion.

A more important point is the knowledge ostensibly displayed on subjects of interest to man. This knowledge has been preserved to us by the dry climate and soil of Egypt, which keep the records intact. The order and administration of the world in earth, air, and sky are mapped out like the details of a human government, names of the deities, high and low, being catalogued at length. We are supposed to see the secret springs and causes of all changes and movements in heaven and earth as we see the material objects around us. Such profession of knowledge of the mysterious must have impressed many.

Not only the present but the future life is opened out with the same minute detail; the veil is stripped from the whole scene. The devotion of Egyptians to the future world is unique. The tombs were furnished as 'homes,' the houses in which people lived were 'lodgings.' Food was provided for the departed, ornaments and decorations gave them pleasure. The embalming of the dead was common. The movements of the soul were described. The judgment after death, when the individual gave account of himself to Osiris, is reported in full. In this way the desire of friends to know the state of the departed was supposed to be definitely met.

Religious services, twice a day in the temples, were conducted by a trained and organized priesthood, as in the temple of Jerusalem—a most unusual course in antiquity; congregational worship was rare. The rites performed were supposed to act mechanically, magically; the intention of priest and worshipper was indifferent. The gods were bound to comply. Porphyry relates with astonishment that Egyptian worshippers ventured to threaten their gods. This was probably exceptional. 'Even in Rome adherents of the Alexandrian gods often write the wish on their graves: "Osiris give thee cool water." This water soon became figuratively the spring of life, conferring immortality on the thirsty souls. The metaphor became so common that the Latin *refrigerium* finally signified the same as refreshing and blessedness. In this sense the expression passed into the liturgy of the Christian Church; and this is the reason why still to-day, although the Christian Church scarcely resembles the Elysian fields, men pray for the "rafraîchissement" of the departed.'

Feasts and processions were common parts of religious observance. In the daily service the statues of the gods were dressed and adorned. There were many points in common between religious tradition in Egypt and other countries. According to one story, Osiris was torn to pieces by the evil being, Set; and Isis traversed the country to collect the scattered fragments, the result being that Osiris was restored to life. Similar legends are found elsewhere. As to the conception of God among the educated classes, thought tended to heathenism and monotheism, but scarcely went beyond the tendency.

The last Oriental religion to make a raid on the West was the Persian, known as Parsism or Mazdaism. The ancient Persians were renowned for intellectual force and military prowess, and their religion displayed similar qualities. Parsism did not appear in its pure, simple form, but as a syncretist system under the name of Mithraism,[1] which was strongly leavened by Semitic and Babylonian ideas. Cumont calls it 'Mazdaism impregnated with Chaldæan ideas.' The leavening had taken place in the Persian settlements in other

[1] *Mitra* is Sanscrit for sun. Persia and India were closely associated. Mitra is a sun-god.

countries, especially in Asia Minor. Mithra occurs often in names in Asia Minor, as Mithridates. From Asia Minor, Mithraism passed to Italy without touching Greece, which could not forget Persia as an old enemy. There was a Mithra community in Rome in Pompey's days, 67 A.D. When Rome began to make conquests in Mesopotamia it came nearer to Parsism. The army kindled with enthusiasm for a faith which favoured strength and valour. Mithra added to his functions that of God of War, *Sol invictus*. The enthusiasm quickly spread. The imperial court shared it. There was a moment when the empire seemed near to adopting the new faith. M. Cumont says: 'Never, even in the epoch of the Mohammedan invasions, was Europe more exposed to the danger of becoming Asiatic than in the moment when Diocletian officially recognized Mithra as the protector of the restored empire.' Renan writes: 'If Christianity had been arrested in its growth by any mortal malady, the world would have been Mithraist.' Heaven forbid!

Of all pagan religions, Mazdaism (Ahura-Mazda, Ormuzd) approached nearest to monotheism.' 'It puts at the head of the divine hierarchy an abstraction which it regards as the first cause, Zeruan Akarana.' But this abstraction does not seem to be identical with Ahura-Mazda, high as the latter is placed 'above all other heavenly spirits.' A prime doctrine of Mithraism was Dualism, Ahura-Mazda = the good Being, and Ahriman or Angro-Mainyu = the evil Being. Mithraism must have got this principle from Persia, as has been generally supposed. M. Cumont writes, 'Persia introduced into religion a weighty principle—Dualism. It was this which distinguished Mithraism from the other sects, and animated its theology as well as its morality, lending to them a strictness and compactness hitherto unknown in Roman paganism.'

Dualism commended itself to the Roman spirit, as it furnished a simple explanation of the existence of evil. One of the Fathers calls Ahriman Satan. Plutarch was disposed to look on the idea with favour, and in modern days it has found support in some speculations. To this principle or power all the calamities of life are traced. Yezidis or devil-worshippers are still found in the East.

A better recommendation of Mithraism was its stern, austere morality. Its adherents were to be always at war with evil, as an apostle speaks of fighting 'against principalities, powers, the world-rulers of darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness.' The idea appealed strongly to the Roman temper; hence the rapid spread and wide triumph of the new religion. 'Ahriman was the king of the gloomy kingdom of the underworld.' 'It was above all this morality, which in the Roman society of the second and third centuries, with its unsatisfied longing for perfect righteousness and holiness, secured the success of the Mithra mysteries.' In Zoroastrianism, Mithra, the old genius of light, became the God of truth and righteousness and remained so in the West. The cardinal virtue in Persia was truth, an instinctive horror of lying. Mithra was always appealed to as the witness to the pledged word and the security for the fulfilment of accepted obligations. When Mithraism was finally defeated and driven from Christian Rome, Dualism was taken up by Manichæism, whose history was less happy than that of Mithraism. Whether the followers of Mithraism realized that the best way of fighting evil is to preach and practise goodness, we are not told. 'The wording of the Mithraic decalogue is not preserved to us.' At least religion was not for it mere contemplative mysticism but practical virtue. Perfect purity was its goal. It sought to avoid defiling the divine elements, such as water and fire, and the worshipper's own person. So far, at least, it has Paul by its side (2 Co 7^1).

It is remarkable that, when Christianity went forth on its universal mission, rivals appeared on the field bent on the same errand. We are far from supposing that they contained no elements of good. They were better in many respects than the systems already in possession. Christianity swept the field because it contained all the good its rivals promised and much more of which they had never heard. There were other competitors besides those we have noticed—philosophical theories like Stoicism, Epicureanism, Neo-Platonism, which had considerable vogue in the Roman world, to say nothing of the different Gnostic schools of which we know so little. In our own day we have seen similar attempts, from which much was expected, end in blight. 'No man having drunk old wine desireth new; for he saith, The old is good.'