# ANNO DOMINI

A GLIMPSE AT THE WORLD INTO WHICH MESSIAS WAS BORN.

J. D. CRAIG HOUSTON, B.D

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## A GLIMPSE AT THE WORLD INTO WHICH MESSIAS WAS BORN.

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# PREFACE.

THIS little volume is not at all designed for the 'learned and wise.' Neither is it meant for such as have time and opportunity to consult the standard works, wherein may be found all the information it contains in better form and greater fulness. It has been written solely for the benefit of those—and they are the majority—who, through lack of leisure or from infelicity of circumstance, are unable to drink of the stream of knowledge nearer to the fountain-head, or who, to vary the metaphor a little, are obliged to content themselves with the rivulet rather than the river.

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PART I.

# THE GENTILES.

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Page 6, in Table of Contents, *before* 'CONCLUSION' *insert*—
'II.—RELIGIOUS CONSTITUTION OF JUDÆA IN B.C. 4. *page* 149.'

,, 43, 4th line from bottom, *for* 'ascendant' *read* 'in the ascendant.'

,, 104, 6th line from bottom, *for* 'But this time' *read* 'At this time.'

,, 133, 7th line from top, *for* 'their' *read* 'our.'

,, 159, last line, *for* 'thought' *read* 'thoughts.'

,, 163, last line of Index, *for* 'victory' *read* 'defeat.'

,, 164, third line from top, *for* 'victory' *read* 'defeat.'

# PART I.

# THE GENTILES.

## I.—INTRODUCTION.

SIXTY ships of war are running before a fair wind and under full sail along the shores of Greece, southward, towards the ancient land of the Pharaohs. They are escaping from the scene of a desperate conflict between the fleet of Octavian Cæsar and that of Mark Antony, the two rulers of the Roman world. In the foremost of the fleeing ships—the one with the purple sails—is the Queen of Egypt, the celebrated Cleopatra, who, terrified by the din of battle, seeks safety in flight. Antony, catching a glimpse of the retreating squadron, and impelled by an amorous impulse, springs from his war-ship into a light galley, and hastens away after the queen. Thus does he ingloriously relinquish to his rival the laurels that might possibly have been his own; for up till the time of his defection and for some hours afterwards the victory was valiantly disputed. However, before the evening stars appear,

The Battle of Actium.

Antony's entire fleet has either been destroyed by fire or is fallen into the hands of the enemy.

So ended the famous sea-fight known in history as the Battle of Actium. It is especially noteworthy from the circumstance that it forms an epoch in the history of the world, and inaugurates a new era. As a result of it, Octavian became sole master of the entire civilized world, and the Republic of Rome, which had lasted for well nigh five centuries, was practically brought to a close. Republican names and forms, no doubt, still continued to exist, but even when most ostentatiously paraded they had no real significance. In all but name Octavian became absolute monarch, a position which he continued to hold for the long period of four-and-forty years. His reign was remarkable in many ways, but especially in this regard, that it was during his term of sovereignty, and seventeen years before its close, that in a distant Roman dependency, and in one of the least of the cities of Juda, the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst men, and they beheld His glory.

Aim of this book.

The aim of the following pages is to carry the reader back in thought to this particular period of time, and to help him in some measure to realize the condition and circumstances of that ancient world over which the first Roman emperor ruled, and into which the Saviour of mankind was born.

## 2.—Augustus Cæsar.

Caius Octavianus, known in history as Augustus Cæsar, being by far the most conspicuous figure on the world's stage at the time of our Lord's nativity, claims our notice at the outset. He was grand-nephew of Julius Cæsar, and by adoption his son and heir. After his uncle's assassination, in addition to his own name, he assumed that of his illustrious relative.

Augustus Cæsar.

Owing to the state of matters after the tragedy of the Ides of March, there was great difficulty in getting Cæsar's will carried into effect. Mark Antony, who was then one of the Consuls, and in the enjoyment of almost absolute authority, took up a decidedly hostile attitude towards Octavian, as he secretly aimed at appropriating the entire property of Cæsar to his own use, and but for the efforts put forth by the friends and partisans of the young heir, he certainly would have carried out his designs. However, even greater injuries than this can be forgiven and forgotten when ambitious projects are in contemplation, and selfish schemes are to be carried out. It was so in the case of Antony and Octavian.

Antony having been declared an enemy by the Senate at the expiration of his term of office, Octavian led an army against him and defeated him, and not long afterwards was himself made Consul. Subsequently he sought

The Second Triumvirate.

a reconciliation with Antony, with whom and Lepidus (another chief man in the state) he entered into an agreement to govern jointly for a term of five years. Thus was formed the Second Triumvirate. One of the first acts of the new rulers was to publish a cruel proscription, in which hundreds of senators were condemned to death, Marcus Tullius Cicero amongst the number. By the massacre of all who were unfriendly to them in Italy, and by the complete victory gained at Philippi over the Republican forces led by Brutus and Cassius, they made their power absolute. However, the harmony which appeared to subsist between the triumvirs was not destined to be perpetual. The self-seeking spirit which had helped to establish it began in course of time to operate in a contrary way, and was one of the most potent forces in finally destroying it.

Mark Antony in Asia.

After the victory at Philippi, Antony went to Asia (the eastern portion of the Empire having fallen to his lot), where he lived in regal splendour, deposing and setting up princes at his will, and levying taxes on the people. Meanwhile, Lepidus having become very unpopular both with the soldiers and the people generally, Octavian went to his tent and obliged him to resign the power which, from his position as triumvir, he was entitled to exercise. No sooner was he got rid of than there began a contest for the supreme authority between the two remaining triumvirs. The mutual hatred

and distrust with which these two men regarded each other had been for a long time mollified and restrained by the good offices of Octavia, the wife of Antony and sister of his colleague. Ultimately, however, such salutary influences ceased to operate. Unfortunately for himself, Antony preferred to the endearments of his Roman spouse the unlawful embraces of Egypt's peerless queen; and, basking in the sunshine of Cleopatra's smile, he forgot the kisses of Octavia. But while Antony is spending his time and exhausting his energies amidst the effeminate indulgences and luxurious vices of the Egyptian court, 'while he fishes, and drinks, and wastes the lamps of night in revel,' his rival is assiduously striving to gain the affection and esteem of the Roman people, and to lower Antony as much as possible in popular favour. In neither object was he unsuccessful. He therefore embraced the earliest opportunity of avenging the insult offered to his sister, and of carrying out his own ambitious aims, and with the consent of the Senate he made war upon Antony and his bewitching ally. On the side of Octavian was arrayed the whole power of the West, while Antony was supported by all the forces that the East could furnish. The contest was decided, as indicated above, off the town of Actium, on the coast of Epirus. In less than a year afterwards Octavian followed up his victory, and besieged and took Alexandria, the Egyptian capital, whereupon Antony and Cleopatra both committed suicide.

Egypt was now reduced to a Roman province, and Octavian became undisputed master of the world. All the power and honour the Roman Senate had to bestow were lavished upon him, and he was henceforth styled by the magnificent title of *Augustus*,—a name by which he has become known to posterity.

Death of Augustus Cæsar.

Though thrice married he had no son, and he made his step-son Tiberius (in whose reign Christ was crucified) his heir. He died at the age of seventy-seven. According to tradition, when dying he called for a mirror, and having adjusted his hair carefully, he turned to his attendants and said, 'Have I played my part well? If so, applaud me!' As to how the great emperor played his part opinions will differ. He certainly was not free from some of the gross vices of his age; but he attained the highest pinnacle of fame and earthly glory accessible to mortals, and during his reign the Roman Empire reached the climax of material prosperity and intellectual splendour. The most illustrious names known to Latin literature were his contemporaries, and some of them—Virgil and Horace, for instance—found in him a generous friend and beneficent patron. When he died a shadow fell on the entire Roman world: the sorrowing people erected temples to his memory, and he was numbered amongst the gods.

## 3.—Extent of the Roman Empire, and the Means of Intercourse between the divers Nationalities.

As we have seen, at the time of Christ's birth the Roman world had but one master, whose sway extended over all the civilized portions of the earth, as well as over many portions of it not yet civilized. The countries now known as England, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Syria, Egypt and many other African states, were all embraced within the wide boundaries of one colossal Empire. The city of Rome was regarded as the central point of these vast dominions, and this fact was somewhat ostentatiously symbolized by a golden milestone, which, at the command of Augustus, was erected in the Roman Forum; from which point well-constructed highways radiated to the utmost limits of the most distant province.

Extent of the Roman Empire.

These great highways formed a marked feature in the political programme both of Republican and Imperial Rome. They were composed of massive stones bound together by cement, and by this means peoples and nations that otherwise must have remained comparatively isolated were brought near to one another, and to Rome the mighty lawgiver and mistress of them all. On them

Roman highways.

the legions marched from province to province; now to guard the frontiers from the attacks of the Barbarians; now to hold in subjection the nations already conquered. By this means, too, the ever-growing traffic in merchandise between Rome and her various dependencies was increased and facilitated.

Previous to the Roman ascendency, travel, in anything like the modern sense of the term, was entirely unknown. The various national communities that inhabited the world had up till that time lived for the most part confined within their own borders, and never overstepped them except to wage war against an enemy or to pursue an invader. However, national landmarks and antagonisms of race rapidly effaced themselves in the presence of Universal Empire: loyalty to a national prince was found to be compatible with allegiance to a common lord; and the dignity of Roman citizen soon came to be an honour coveted by all. The results that followed this general commingling and amalgamation of the nations were many and various. The more important of them will appear as we proceed.

Roman language and literature.

For the first five or six hundred years of their existence as a nation, whether as a Kingdom or a Republic, the Romans may be said to have had no literature, and their language was too rude for literary purposes. War and conquest they made the business of their lives; and their virtues as well as their vices were those of a

military society. After the conquest of Greece, however, and the fusion of the two peoples that ensued, the softening influence of Greek thought and manners was everywhere felt throughout the Roman world; and in the Augustan period it became paramount. The Greek language had by this time attained a position throughout the world similar to that which French had in Europe during the last century; and towards the close of the Republic all who claimed to be educated men could read it with ease, and in many cases speak it with fluency. Greek had in fact become, even more than Latin, a universal speech. With a knowledge of the language of Greece came also a knowledge of its philosophy, the tendency of which was on the whole atheistic.

## 4.—Roman Religious Beliefs and Practices.

Roman religion.

THROUGHOUT a very long period of their history the Romans were essentially a religious people. Patrician and plebeian, soldier and civilian emulated each other in the devout observance of the rites of their religion, and rivalled each other in the assiduity of their devotions. In every important business of state the gods were consulted; every assembly of the people was constituted by prayer; and no Roman general would have ventured to take the field against an enemy without first offering sacrifices to the ancestral deities, and paying them

homage by various prescribed observances. To enumerate all the divinities to whom worship was rendered throughout the Roman world, and who had shrines and temples erected in their honour, were a tedious task. Suffice it to say, that as national divinities, Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus held the first and foremost place; and after them came of lesser gods and goddesses, an innumerable multitude. There was no town or village without its shrine to some tutelar deity; no event in domestic or family life that was not associated with some presiding genius, and hallowed by some religious ceremonial. The various ranks and conditions of men had also their special supernatural protectors. Sailors prayed to Neptune for a safe voyage, merchants to Mercury for good returns in trade, farmers to Ceres for a plentiful harvest. But Jupiter of the Capitol, being the god who was regarded as especially representing the State, received of course the highest honour. For with the Romans the State was everything; and the religion of the Romans was pre-eminently a State religion. In fact, while the Republic lasted, the State, or Rome itself, was honoured as the highest divinity. Afterwards, when the Republic had passed away, the same patriotic feeling continued to be manifested in the apotheosis of the emperors, who, as the representatives of the State, were fairly entitled, in the opinion of the Romans, to share the honours of the Capitolian god.

A true Roman considered himself as existing chiefly for his country, the gods of which he believed himself bound to honour, just as much as to obey the national government; and the neglect of either duty was deemed an equally culpable offence. Indeed, both obligations were regarded as in essence the same, and to have originated in the same source, viz., the desire to safeguard the interests of the State. The welfare of the individual, whether as regards this world or the next, was not at all the *raison d'être* of the Roman religion. It did not claim to minister to the inward and spiritual needs of the worshipper, or in any way to advance his prospects of future happiness. In fact, it left out the future altogether; and as for the individual soul, no account was taken of it whatsoever: its value and importance were not recognized, and religion made no provision for satisfying its aspirations.

Roman patriotism.

Thus it would appear that the brightest prospects of the Pagan world and its highest hopes were all confined to the present life, and strictly circumscribed by time's narrow limits. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that this state of feeling was necessarily the result of a disbelief in or a denial of a world to come. On the contrary, such a world was commonly believed in by the ancients; but it was imagined to be a dim and 'joyless region,' whose unsubstantial denizens were tormented by a ceaseless longing to reanimate a

Belief about the world to come.

human form, and to engage anew in the toils and activities of earthly existence. And so we read that the hero of the *Odyssey*, amongst his other experiences in Hades, sees the disembodied spirits eagerly drinking 'the black blood' of the slain victims, in order to be restored to something like real life again, even for a fleeting moment; and he also hears himself addressed by the son of Peleus in the plaintive words, 'Seek not to comfort me, O illustrious Ulysses, respecting death. I would rather be a tiller of the soil, and serve as a hireling in the employ of the humblest of mortals, than possess the sovereign dignity in the realm of the dead.'

Divination.

Inseparably associated with the religion and worship of the ancients was the art of divination or soothsaying. If, as we suppose, there be, indeed, supernatural beings, and if they be favourably disposed towards mortals, and possess the power of making known to them the divine mind, then—so reasoned the ancients—then from such a quarter counsel may be fairly sought and guidance reasonably expected by those whose human nature makes them liable to err, and whose limited faculties expose them to deception. Such a conclusion necessarily gave rise to all manner of expedients for determining the will and intentions of the deities—some of which were, of course, most frivolous and absurd.

Divination was of two kinds, *artificial* and *natural*.

Artificial divination consisted chiefly in the observing and interpreting of certain signs, by which the gods were supposed to make known to men future events. Such signs and tokens were either made matters of previous prayer and supplication on the part of men, or else vouchsafed to them unasked by a propitious divinity. The interpretation of such heaven-sent omens was, as a general rule, the special duty of the augurs.

Augurs.

The office of augur amongst the Romans was a most honourable one, and implied divine gifts; but a special education and discipline were also considered necessary, and hence a 'College of Augurs' was early established at Rome. The members of this fraternity were held in such esteem that, even if convicted of a crime, the augur was not degraded or deprived of his privileges—an indulgence accorded to no other priestly class.

Flight of birds.

The things from which auguries were drawn were of various kinds. The flight and noise of birds, for instance, were supposed to be a favourite method with the deities for communicating to men celestial decrees. Only certain birds, however, were regarded as true heaven-sent messengers, and of this class, birds of prey were the most important. The eagle especially, as the chief of the feathered tribe, was looked upon as the special herald of Jove, the king of the gods; and according as this bird was seen soaring through space on the right

hand or on the left, was his appearance considered auspicious or the reverse. So we find, in the *Iliad* of Homer, the wife of the Trojan king thus addressing her lord, when against her wish he was about to set out for the tent of Achilles to claim the body of his slain son :—

> Pray to that God, who, high on Ida's brow,
> Surveys thy desolated realm below,
> His winged messenger to send from high
> And lead thy way with heavenly augury :
> Let the strong sovereign of the plumy race
> Tower to the right of yon ethereal space,
> That sign behold, and strengthened from above
> Boldly pursue the journey marked by Jove ;
> But if the god his augury denies,
> Suppress thine impulse, nor reject advice.

Whereupon the aged Priam thus addresses the divinity :—

> O first and greatest, heaven's imperial lord,
> On lofty Ida's holy hill adored !
> To stern Achilles now direct my ways,
> And teach him mercy when a father prays.
> If such thy will, despatch from yonder sky
> Thy sacred bird, celestial augury.

Next to the flight of the eagle, that of the vulture was considered the most significant. Other birds, such as the raven, the owl, and the hen, were supposed, by their respective cries, to reveal the divine purposes.

Scarcely inferior to birds as divine prognostics were the meteorological phenomena. The reason of this is obvious. To the popular mind a lightning flash appeared to come down direct from the far-off celestial heights where the ancients imagined their gods 'to sit beside their nectar,' and whence, too, they also believed (Epicurus notwithstanding) that the gods themselves 'hurled their bolts far below them in the valleys.' Accordingly, when such events took place immediately before the commencement of any important undertaking, they were believed to be pregnant with meaning, and to contain a message from the skies. Among the Greeks, if the lightning appeared on the right hand a happy issue of the thing contemplated might confidently be expected; if, however, the omen appeared on the left hand nothing but failure could be looked for. Among the Romans this order seems to have been reversed, and lightning, when it shone on the left hand, was regarded as an auspicious event, but not otherwise. It was supposed especially to menace great personages, and nothing terrified a Roman magnate so much as a thunderstorm. We are told that the Emperor Augustus clad himself in the skin of a sea-calf as a protection in such emergencies; and that Tiberius employed laurel leaves for a similar purpose; while Caligula is said to have habitually crept under his bed when a thunderstorm was approaching, that being the safest

Celestial phenomena

retreat he could think of. Eclipses of the sun and moon were also looked upon as the worst possible omens; and drum-beating and other loud noises, being popularly supposed to have a great influence in restoring the luminary affected to its normal condition, were generally resorted to on such occasions.

Astrology.

In this connexion the important and widespread science of astrology, naturally, claims our notice. Though but little known amongst the early Greeks and Romans, this particular kind of divination had become quite common at the commencement of the Christian era. Throughout the length and breadth of the Empire astrologers were everywhere to be met with, who professed to be able to foretell the whole current of a man's future destiny by simply observing the position of the constellations at the hour of his birth. Each day of the month was supposed to be under the influence of some special god; and whether an individual's life was to be a happy one or the contrary, whether to be a success or a failure, depended entirely on what day in the calendar he saw the light, and on the particular star that presided over his nativity.

Taking the auspices.

Taking the auspices from the entrails of animals about to be offered as sacrifices on the altars of the gods, was another method of divination also very generally practised throughout the entire heathen world. The explanation of this

particular kind of superstition is to be found in the circumstance that the gods were only content when they received offerings that were entirely without flaw or blemish. Outward appearances, therefore, were not a sufficient guide in determining whether or not an animal was in a condition to be acceptable to the Immortals, since soundness of limb and symmetrical proportions were often to be found united with an unsound organism and an unhealthy constitution. Accordingly, if it were discovered, on a careful scrutiny of the entrails, that the animal destined as a sacrifice not only looked well outwardly, but was also in its internal organs perfectly sound, this was regarded as a clear indication that the offering was acceptable to the divinity (who was then supposed to have aided in the happy selection), and that the undertaking contemplated by the worshipper, and with reference to which the sacrifice was presented, would be crowned with success.

This particular method of seeking counsel from the gods was especially resorted to by the ancients in time of war. If they were about to give battle to an enemy, or to march across a frontier into a new country, or to pass a river, the auspices were invariably taken by the general in command, or were only omitted at the risk of raising a mutiny.

There were certain parts of the entrails that were regarded as specially important in these examinations —the liver, for instance, and the lungs and heart,

which were justly considered to be the chief organs of the body.

It must not be supposed, however, from anything that has been said, that on every occasion when sacrifices were offered to the gods the internals of the victims were examined. That was not at all the case. If the deities were being propitiated for some supposed offence, it was quite unusual to go through such a ceremony. Indeed, when the offering was entirely of an expiatory nature, such a thing would have been quite meaningless.

Besides the customary auspices obtained in the manner just mentioned there were other important signs which were supposed to forecast the future with scarcely less accuracy. For instance, when the animal advanced to the altar unwillingly, or had to be dragged thither by force, it was judged an unhappy omen; and the matter was still worse if it broke away altogether, and ran back to the herd. On the other hand, if the victim went to the slaughter without resistance, if, as occasionally happened, it seemed to lead the way rather than be led, then the augury was deemed a very favourable one.

Another matter of anxious observation on the part of those concerned, was the manner in which the sacrifice burned when placed on the altar: if the fire blazed clear and bright, and the smoke rose straight into the air, it betokened good fortune; otherwise, the signs were not considered auspicious. Indeed, in-

stances are on record in which the motions made by the tail of the victim during the process of burning were regarded with much solicitude and concern—a different fortune being augured, according as the tail was turned upwards or downwards or stood out straight under the influence of the fire.

Auguries drawn from unexpected events.

Most of the omens hitherto mentioned had this characteristic in common—they were looked for and expected, and made the subject of prayer and supplication beforehand. However, auguries were very frequently drawn from things of which this could not be said. Numberless events were happening every day, and every hour in the day, to all appearance wholly accidental, and yet which were of such a character as to awaken anxiety, and to leave the impression on the popular mind that they were visible monitions from the supernatural world. To such a category belonged all unusual or remarkable occurrences; every departure from the customary course of events; each unexpected break in the even tenour of life's daily routine. What is the significance of this or that emergency? Of what explanation is such and such an occurrence susceptible? were questions heard on all hands, and with regard to the merest trivialities. Thus there naturally arose a school of soothsayers, supposed to be divinely gifted, who expended their wit and ingenuity exclusively on such matters, and endeavoured after due meditation thereon to unfold their meaning.

Comets and eclipses, to which reference has already been made, belonged, of course, to this class of omens, and were amongst the most dreaded; and, considering the great ignorance of natural laws that then prevailed, this was not remarkable. But what are we to think of the judgment and intelligence of the man who is thrown into a state of terror and consternation because a mouse has eaten a hole in his meal-sack? This folly is, however, actually laid to the charge of a great philosopher, who, we are told, believed the incident inevitably presaged some terrific calamity. It was considered, if a strange black dog happened to stray into one's house, that the circumstance was most unlucky, and marked the day as one on which no business of importance should be entered upon. If the beams of the house creaked; if salt were spilled on the table, or wine on one's clothes, dismal forebodings were the inevitable consequence. And it is especially worthy of notice, that the very persons who derided most the idea of the existence and activity of the gods, were not unfrequently the most blindly superstitious as regards omens and portents, and with respect to the occult significance of such things, credulous in the last degree.

Natural divination.

We shall now briefly glance at the so-called natural divination, in which the soul, either in dreams or while in an abnormal state of ecstacy, was supposed to become the recipient of a divine revelation respecting future events. In every

age and in all countries dreams have been implicitly believed in, and regarded either as the direct doing of some celestial messenger, or as a result of the temporary accession of a supernatural degree of mental energy. That dreams descend from Jove, ranked as a proverb amongst the ancients. Some, however, held the theory that the soul during waking hours, being distributed over the various members of the body, was enfeebled and embarrassed thereby, and had not the energy and force that resulted from concentration: that in sleep this obstacle was in some measure removed, and hence the great mental activity which so often resulted in dream-given forecasts of the future. Ancient literature abounds with records of dreams and their interpretation, and their remarkable fulfilment. Cicero mentions a great many such in his work on divination; and as some of them had reference to current events, he might have verified his own records had he wished to do so. He does, indeed, mention a dream of his own which he confesses surprised him greatly, but with his usual scepticism on all such matters, he adds, 'Excepting that, I do not remember having experienced one worth mentioning. I must therefore have wasted to no purpose as many nights as I have slept during my long life.' However, Cicero's scepticism regarding this kind of divination was but little shared even by some of his learned contemporaries, and by the populace not at all. It is related of no less a per-

sonage than the great Emperor Augustus, that in obedience to a dream which he had, he betook himself on a certain day of each year to a particular spot in Rome, and there stood like a beggar, supplicating, with outstretched hand, the coppers of the passers-by.

Dreams.

Speaking of the belief in dreams which existed about this period, Friedlaender says:[1] 'No one who is even superficially acquainted with the literature, especially the historical literature of the first century, can have any doubts on the subject. Seldom is any great event mentioned without being associated with at least one dream by which it was foretold. The most illustrious men allowed dreams to exercise the greatest influence on their actions, and their undertakings of every kind were frequently determined thereby. It was in consequence of a dream that Galen wrote his mathematical treatises, and the elder Pliny's *History of the Roman War in Germany* is attributed to the same cause.'

As we have said, Pagan literature abounds with such records, and the statement is no less true regarding the Hebrew Scriptures. Every student of the Bible will at once recall, in this connexion, the many dreams and visions which are recorded by the inspired historians. The dream of Jacob, for instance, and of Pharaoh, of Nebuchadnezzar, and last but not least, the dream of Joseph, in which he was com-

[1] The writer desires once for all to acknowledge his great indebtedness to Friedlaender's *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms.*

manded to take the young Child and His mother, and flee into Egypt.

With such examples before us, we are precluded from placing dreams on the same level with the auguries and auspices and some other modes of divination familiar to the heathen world; and more than that, we are positively compelled to recognize them as in some cases supplying a veritable *nexus*, however subtle and mysterious, between the human soul and the unseen. Such an admission does not involve the necessity of our endorsing the many speculative notions and fanciful surroundings which, in the Pagan mind, were commonly associated with dreams.

Homer tells us that the dream-heralds issue from the shadowy world by two doors: one made of shining ivory, the other of simple horn. From the former invariably emerge the messengers which are mendacious and misleading; from the latter only such as are trustworthy and true. Virgil makes a similar statement, which Dryden translates as follows:—

> Two gates the silent house of sleep adorn:
> Of polished ivory this, that of transparent horn:
> True visions thro' transparent horn arise:
> Through polished ivory pass deluding lies.

Such a passage may be regarded as merely a poetic expression of the universally acknowledged truth, that gorgeous things frequently contain a spurious ingredient; whereas what is plain and unpretentious is but seldom associated with deception. But taken

literally the words undoubtedly embody a deeply-rooted conviction of the Pagan world.

Genii.

The genii by whom dreams were given were, of course, considered to be inferior to the gods themselves, and to be subject to their mandates; and they were indifferently designated *Children of the Night*, or *Sons of Sleep*. The shades of the departed were also commonly supposed to have the privilege of acting as celestial messengers, and of bringing back to the world that they had left the secrets of the silent land.

Consulting the Oracle.

Another famous method whereby the divinities were supposed to make known their will to men, and to grant useful information to those who sincerely invoked them, was the Oracle. From a very early period of the world's history, the Oracle was a renowned institution. Oracles were consulted and implicitly believed in by all the great nations of antiquity. Their deliverances were supposed to be among the most direct of all communications from the supernatural world, and they were constantly questioned both in relation to national and private affairs; and he who acted in harmony with the oracular response firmly believed that his conduct had the sanction and approval of heaven. A great number of places were sacred to oracular purposes. The augur had the privilege of inquiring the mind of the god in any place whatsoever; with the oracle it was different. It was con-

fined to one particular spot, whither all who wished to consult it must needs repair, either in person or by proxy. Such places were numerous. The three most celebrated oracles of the ancient world were those of Jupiter Ammon, Dodona, and Delphi—the two latter maintaining their reputation and being more or less visited up till the third or fourth century of the Christian era.

The Oracle at Delphi.

The oracle at Delphi, a town of Achaia, built on one of the slopes of Mount Parnassus, was the most celebrated of all. It was an oracle of the god Apollo, and the medium through which its deliverances were given was a prophetess, or Pythia, as she was generally called. She was a maiden chosen out of a respectable family, but it was not necessary that her parents should be either noble or wealthy. The Pythia delivered her prophecies seated on a tripod, in the temple of the god. This tripod was placed over a cavity within the precincts of the temple, whence arose a certain exhalation which had an intoxicating effect, and under the influence of which the Pythia soon began to manifest symptoms of distraction and frenzy. Her hair stood upright; her looks grew wild; she foamed at the mouth; a violent trembling seized her in every limb; she ejaculated at intervals certain words—coherent sometimes, sometimes not. In either case, however, her words were carefully taken down by her attendants, the prophets, who gave

the answers to the inquirers either verbally or in writing, after they had turned them into a kind of verse.

There were certain so-called unlucky days, on which the Pythia dared not on any account ascend the tripod; and even on other days she could only do so after the auspices had been taken, and if they turned out favourably. The entrails of the offerings presented to the god furnished the chief signs to be consulted as to whether the Pythia should give responses or not on a given day; and therefore, with a view to discovering the will of the deity in this regard, the entrails of the goats and oxen and wild boars which the devotees brought as sacrifices, underwent the most minute and careful scrutiny at the hands of the sacerdotal attendants of the prophetess. An instance is on record in which the most serious consequences followed when the Pythia ascended the tripod in obedience to a mistaken interpretation of the auspices—either through over-zeal, or for some other cause. As it would appear, she soon made it manifest to those about her, by the unusually fierce tones of her voice, that she was in a state of ecstasy or frenzy not at all of the ordinary kind. She at last leaped from the tripod with a bound, and rushed towards the door of the oracular chamber with such an unearthly yell, that not only the strangers present but even her familiar attendants fled in dismay. When the latter had sufficiently recovered from their

fright, they returned to where she was, but found her utterly bereft of reason, and a day or two afterwards she expired. This melancholy result, the narrator clearly attributed to the unfortunate attempt on the part of the Pythia to prophesy on a day on which the auspices were really not favourable, though made to seem so through the carelessness or ignorance of those whose duty it was to interpret them.

The Oracle at Dodona.

The oracle of Zeus or Jupiter, at Dodona in Epirus, was distinguished from the above, and indeed from all the oracles of Apollo, in this respect, that its deliverances were mostly given by signs, and not in articulate speech. In the rustling of the sacred oaks which surrounded his temple, Jupiter was supposed to make known his will to mortals. However, to interpret the mysterious voices of the grove, and to translate them into human speech, was possible only for those who had fitted themselves for their important duties by a careful observance of the preparatory rites, and who, through divine inflatus, had reached the necessary state of ecstasy. For it was a fixed opinion amongst the ancients that 'inspiration and true divination is not attained by any one when in his full senses, but only when the power of thought is fettered by sleep or disease or some paroxysm of frenzy.' We read of a wonderful spring, called the Fountain of Jupiter, which existed in this locality, and which, though the water was quite cold and extinguished burning torches

when dipped therein, nevertheless possessed the marvellous virtue of rekindling the same when they were again brought into proximity with it. It is quite possible that by drinking of this fountain an effect resulted similar to that produced by the exhalation from the cave at Delphi, and that thus the ecstasy of the Dodonaic priestesses might perhaps be accounted for.

Another medium commonly employed by the divinity of Dodona for communicating his behests, was a brazen vessel, beside which stood the statue of a youth, holding in his hand a sort of lash or whip formed of three brass chains, to which solid balls of the same metal were attached. These hung in such close proximity to the vessel that the gentlest action of the wind sufficed to produce the tinkling sound which was supposed to reveal the will of Jupiter, and on which the predictions of the priestesses were based.

Drawing lots.

There is also an instance on record, one, doubtless, of many such, in which this oracle was consulted by the drawing of lots—the significance of the lot drawn being of course interpreted by a priestess.

Oracle of Trophonius.

The oracle of Trophonius, in Bœotia, being scarcely less celebrated than the above-mentioned, and in some respects peculiar, it may be worth while to glance at it in passing. Trophonius was not a god proper; he belonged to the class of

glorified heroes. Whether the circumstance of his having been a mortal had anything to do with the unusual number of preparatory rites to be observed by his votaries or not, we cannot tell, but certainly the preliminary ceremonies to be gone through seem to have been numberless. It would be wearisome to mention them all. As in the case of the Delphic oracle, the entrails of the victims offered (in this case mostly a ram) had first to be examined. The auspices being propitious, the person about to interrogate the oracle was taken to a certain spring, wherein he was washed and then anointed with oil; which service two youths about thirteen years of age were appointed to perform. This ceremony being completed, the devotee was then conducted to two streams which flowed side by side, called respectively the river of Memory, and the river of Forgetfulness. From these he was made to drink, as a token, on the one hand, that his whole past experience was to be banished from his mind, and, on the other, that he was carefully to fix in his remembrance all that might transpire when he was within the sanctuary of the hero. A picture was then shown to him, which those, and those only, were permitted to behold who were on the point of descending into the mystic chamber of the oracle. Before this picture he presented his prayers; and then having been clothed in a peculiar robe and furnished with a certain kind of shoes worn in the locality, and also with cakes of honey, which he was

to hold firmly clasped in his hands, he was led to a high elevation in the wood where the sanctuary of the hero was situated. Having entered through a door into the ante-chamber, he was required to descend into a deep cavity in the earth, by a small ladder through a narrow passage; at the bottom of this opening was the cave proper. Having laid himself down on his back, and inserted his feet into the mouth of the cave, as far as the knee, he was forthwith borne by some strange and irresistible force into the interior with great velocity. There he had the future revealed to him. Sometimes he saw, sometimes he heard wonderful things. Often he found himself surrounded by all manner of loathsome animals, reptiles and demons; against their threatened violence, however, the cakes of honey always seem to have acted as an effective charm. On emerging from the cave—feet foremost as he had entered it—he was quite stupefied, and various expedients had to be resorted to in order to revive his faculties, wearied out by the ordeal through which he had passed.

The Oracles of the Dead.

We shall pass from this subject by briefly noticing just one other much-frequented class of oracles, viz., the Oracles of the Dead. These were situated for the most part in the midst of deep woods or on solitary shores—in places marked out by their gloomy and dismal aspect as suitable entrances to Pluto's dark abode. Hither

those who desired to consult the oracles betook themselves. After the usual offerings and libations the spirits of the dead were called up, and when interrogated they gave their responses; but they never spoke except in reply to a question. This kind of divination, however, was not confined to oracular temples or to any particular locality; nor did it always maintain a religious and reverent aspect. There were people who claimed to act independently of the oracle altogether, and to possess the power of calling up the dead in any place, or at any time, or for any purpose whatsoever, whether good or bad. Such were the wizards and witches of antiquity—men and women who invariably rested their claims to be heard by the gods of the lower world on some appalling wickedness or atrocious crime. Explain it how we may, there can be no denying the fact that scenes similar to that recorded in 1 Samuel xxviii. 7–20, and which happened more than a thousand years before Christ came, were, or at least are said to have been, of daily occurrence throughout the empire in which Christ paid tribute.

Ambiguity of the oracular utterance.

Ambiguity and obscurity were general characteristics of the deliverances of the oracle, so that whatever eventuated, the oracular response would generally be made to harmonize therewith. As an instance in point we may mention the case of Crœsus, who, when about to attack the Medes, consulted the oracle of Apollo at

Delphi as to whether or not he would be successful in the contemplated war. The answer he received was that by passing the river Halys he would ruin a great empire. What empire the oracle did not say. Crœsus assumed it to be that of the Medes; it turned out, however, to be his own. In either event, it is clear the oracle could not have been convicted of falsehood.

Another case of such ambiguity is that of Pyrrhus, who, on consulting the oracle as to whether he would be victorious in his war against the Romans or not, got, as a reply, the words—*Credo te Æacida Romanos vincere posse.* The obscurity is more apparent in Latin than it could be made in good English. But the ambiguity might be shown, even in English, by the clumsy and imperfect translation—'I believe Æacides the Romans can conquer.' The question is to determine the nominative in the sentence. Cicero sets aside this case altogether, and gives as his reason that Apollo never gave a response in the language of the Romans: yet if we believe that the god gave responses at all, we may surely admit that he aired his Latin occasionally.

Crœsus.

It must be acknowledged that sometimes the answers said to have been given by the oracles were amazingly clear and circumstantial. The history of Crœsus furnishes us with an example of this kind also. When about to engage in war with the Persians, we are told that he sent messengers to

all the oracles of Africa and Greece to assure himself of their veracity, and that he might know which one was the most deserving of his confidence. With this view his messengers were to inquire, each at his appointed oracle, what Crœsus was doing on such a day and at such an hour previously agreed upon. The king, having racked his brain to think of something that could not possibly be guessed at, employed himself at the appointed time in boiling a tortoise and a lamb in a brass vessel with a brass cover. None of the oracles gave a correct answer except that of Delphi. Its answer was as follows: 'I know the number of the grains of sand on the seashore and the measure of the ocean's vast extent: I can hear the dumb and him that has not yet learned to speak. A strong smell of tortoise boiled in brass, together with sheep's flesh, has reached my nostrils: brass beneath, brass above.'

Trajan at Heliopolis.

The Emperor Trajan made a similar trial of Apollo's veracity at Heliopolis, a city of Lower Egypt, where the god had also an oracle. The emperor sent a letter carefully sealed to which he demanded an answer. In reply the oracle commanded a blank sheet of paper to be folded up, sealed, and delivered to the imperial messenger. Trajan, it is said, was greatly amazed on receipt of the letter, as it corresponded exactly with his own, and was a most fitting reply to a letter in which, in fact, nothing whatever had been written.

Explanatory theories.

Now the question naturally presents itself: How are such correspondences to be explained? In the opinion of Tertullian and other early fathers of the Church, the answers of the pagan oracles were inspired by demons or fallen angels, who, they assumed, could transfer themselves in a moment of time from place to place, and so might easily tell in the shrine at Delphi what the King of Lydia was doing in his palace. At present, however, it is not our purpose to attempt a satisfactory solution of this problem, or, indeed, any solution at all; what we wish specially to point out is, that, during the reign of the Emperor Augustus, and for long afterwards, a belief in oracular responses was still a potent moral force in the pagan world, and that, in the time of our Saviour, not only in the localities above referred to, but in many other places throughout the empire as well, oracles were still busy in imposing upon the ignorance and in trading upon the credulity of mankind. The many frauds and impostures detected and exposed at Delphi and elsewhere had indeed diminished, but by no means destroyed their credit among the masses of the people; though the cultivated classes, as a rule, had, even before the time of Augustus, taken up, if not an unbelieving, at any rate a doubting attitude.

## 5.—Influence of Greek learning and philosophy in Rome.

We have already observed that, several generations before the Christian era, the influence of Greek learning and philosophy had produced a vast effect throughout the Roman world; and in the time of Augustus, if the political ascendency of Rome was universal, it is not less true that the intellectual ascendency of Greece was complete. Roman virtue found its highest expression in the doctrine of Zeno the Stoic, and Roman vice made bold to propagate itself under the authority of Epicurus. These two philosophies occupy a vast place in the moral history of mankind; but at no time was their influence greater than just at the dawn of the Christian era, when the teachers and adherents of the two systems divided between them the whole wisdom and culture of the world, and were to be found in every nook and corner of the empire.

Stoicism.

Stoicism was the school of thought to which the noblest spirits of the pagan world belonged towards the close of the Republic and at the commencement of the imperial *régime*. In an age in which vice was conspicuously ascendant, the Stoic stood forth as the champion of virtue, and taught the lofty and severe doctrine that duty and virtue are the only motives that should influence men. No prospect

of reward in the shape of coming glory was allowed to influence their judgment. Even a belief in immortality was never suffered to furnish a motive for action. Those of the Stoics who did believe in a future life wavered greatly in their belief, and even when they accepted it as a fact, they did not venture to propose it as a motive. The Stoical system was able to propagate itself without any aid from the doctrine of a life to come, and to maintain itself without the assistance of such influences as the praise of mortals.

Stoical aphorisms.

The following aphorisms of leading Stoics will serve to illustrate some of the lofty and sublime doctrines of the school:—'Commit thyself cheerfully to destiny, allowing her to weave thy thread into what tissue she will.'—'Be like the promontory, against which the waves go on breaking unceasingly, while it stands firm and lulls the angry surge to rest around it.'—'Run always the shortest way; the shortest way is the natural way, and thus be thoroughly honest in every word and deed.'—'When anything occurs that would cause thee to repine, have recourse to the maxim, The thing itself is not a misfortune, whereas the bearing of it bravely is a gain.'—'Whatever is in anyway beautiful is beautiful in itself, and with itself its beauty ends. Praise forms no part of it.'—'Never forget that it is possible to be a divine man, and yet a man unknown to all the world.'—'He who wishes his virtue to be blazed abroad is not labouring

for virtue, but for fame.'—'A great man is none the less great when he lies vanquished and prostrate in the dust.'—'No one has attained to true philosophy who has not learned that all vice should be avoided, though it were concealed from the eyes of gods and men; and no deeds are more praiseworthy than those which are done without parade, and far from human observation.' Such sentences, and they might be multiplied indefinitely, give us a pretty fair idea of the moral leaven which did its appointed work in the pagan world under the name of Stoicism.

Beliefs of the Stoics.

To be consistent with themselves, the Stoics were obliged to hold, and did hold, that nationality, rank, country, or fortune, were the mere accidents of life, and that virtue alone makes one man better than another. They also held and taught that the Deity was a spirit pervading and animating the entire universe, that all men were members of a single body united in fellowship with the same divine spirit. In fact, the theory of universal brotherhood was upheld and propagated by the Stoics almost as distinctly as it afterwards was by Christ and His apostles. 'This whole world,' Cicero says, 'is to be regarded as the common city of gods and men;' and Marcus Aurelius calls upon us to 'reflect on the conclusion that all rational creatures were born for one another's sake.'

What a marked contrast such teaching presents to the petty national jealousies and narrow ethnical

prejudices of former times! How utterly detestable such sentiments would have sounded in the ears of the old Republican heroes, who had been chiefly instrumental in laying the foundations of Roman power and greatness! But the world was moving towards its goal, and Stoicism was contributing its share in preparing it for something far better.

Epicureanism.

The system of which Epicurus was the founder was, for the most part, the direct opposite of Stoicism. It was based on the doctrine that happiness was the chief good, and that the end and aim of all philosophy was to help men to attain thereto. As an apology for their vices, it was eagerly embraced by multitudes. We are often told by those who wish to defend Epicureanism from the charge of being a vicious system, that its founder was a man of blameless character; that his teaching was utterly opposed to coarse sensuality, and that almost every form of virtue might be arrived at by carrying out his principles. Granting this to be true, the fact remains and cannot be denied, that it is only one man in ten thousand who is capable of drawing nice distinctions between various kinds of enjoyment, or to whom elevated conceptions of what constitutes the true happiness of man are intelligible. Ease, pleasure, and sensuality, in one form or another, have always been synonymous with happiness in the opinion of the majority; and therefore, in most cases, for a man to embrace the tenets of Epicurus was tantamount to

resigning himself, with all his will, to a life of luxury and vicious indulgence.

And this he could do with the less compunction, since neither a belief in avenging gods, nor in an existence after death formed an essential part of the philosophy he had adopted. The latter belief, indeed, was repudiated absolutely by the Epicureans, as their writings testify. And when we turn from the literature of the school to their grave-stones and monumental tablets we find the same doctrine of utter annihilation epigrammatically recorded. The following are examples of this kind—'I lived and believed in nothing beyond the grave.'—'There is no boat in Hades and no boatman: for door-keeper there is neither an Æacus nor a Cerberus. All we who lie in the cold embrace of death are rotten bones and ashes—nothing more.'—'I was not, and came into being; I existed, and now I exist no longer—this much is true; whoever speaks otherwise lies.'—'I was nothing, I am nothing; and thou who art alive, eat, drink, and make merry—and come.'—'I once lived, and now life is past; I know nothing about it; it affects me not.'—'Thou, my comrade, who readest this, rejoice in thy life; for after death there is neither mirth nor laughter, nor any other joy.'

Disbelief in immortality.

As to the existence or non-existence of the gods, it was left an open question in the Epicurean system. This much, however, was

The gods.

taught as a certainty, that if divinities did exist, they interested themselves in no degree in the affairs of humanity:

> 'Far, far from mortals and their vain concerns,
> In peace perpetual dwell the immortal gods:
> Each self-dependent, and from human wants
> Estranged for ever.'

Thus writes Lucretius, one of the most devoted disciples of Epicurus. And in another part of the great work from which our quotation is taken we find him intimating, or seeming to intimate, that the gods are merely the creations of fear and superstition. Unlike the Stoics, who believed in an all-pervading soul of nature, in the doctrine of a divine providence, and in the self-consciousness of the deity, the Epicureans were for the most part avowed atheists. They attributed the existence of the world to a fortuitous concurrence of atoms, and life to spontaneous generation. Both philosophies, however, held the popular religion in contempt, and treated with scorn the current legends regarding the pagan divinities, but not always openly. Very few, like Lucretius, had the courage of their convictions, and dared to speak of the religion of the multitude as 'the tyrant power of superstition.'

> 'Uplifting proud
> Her head to heaven, and with horrific limbs
> Brooding o'er earth; till he the man of Greece
> Auspicious rose, who first the combat dared,
> And broke in twain the monster's iron rod.'

Few, we repeat, ventured to express their sentiments so freely. Many of those who were themselves utter atheists clung to the belief that it was for the advantage of society, and profitable for the State that the people should continue to believe in the ancestral divinities. They therefore refrained from stating their opinions openly, and in most cases even continued to observe the outward forms of religion, and to offer sacrifices publicly in the temples—partly, as already remarked, for the sake of expediency, and partly, no doubt, from the force of long-established custom. But that attachment to the ancient cult and reverence for the immortal gods, were feelings fast dying out amongst the Romans of the time of Augustus is unmistakably witnessed to by the fact, that it had become almost impossible to fill up the vacancies occasioned by death or otherwise amongst the vestal virgins, from free Roman families.

The Vestal Virgins.

The Vestales, or Priestesses of Vesta, were a very ancient and very honourable virgin class amongst the Romans. It was required that they should be born of good family, and their duties were considered most important. They were to see that the sacred fire on the altar of Vesta was not extinguished, since such a circumstance was supposed to presage some terrible calamity to the State. Another equally important duty which the vestals had to discharge was to act as custodians of a sacred relic, on the safety of which the very

existence of Rome was said to depend, and which was popularly supposed to be the statue of Minerva, which had been brought from Troy to Italy by Æneas.

The privileges of the vestals were very great. They had the place of honour at all public games and festivals; they could ride in chariots when they pleased, and if by accident they met a criminal on the way to execution, they had the power to pardon him. To insult them was a capital offence, and whoever attempted to dishonour them was scourged to death.

That such an office as this should go begging, and that it should be necessary to have recourse to the families of manumitted slaves to furnish the due complement of vestals, is, we think, a striking proof of the decadence of the ancient religion.

Suicide.

One important point on which the Epicureans and Stoics were agreed, we must not omit to notice, viz., the question of suicide. Both schools held suicide under certain circumstances to be a meritorious act. *Patet exitus!* The way out of this life is open! was a boldly proclaimed dictum of pagan philosophy, and one too with which Roman law had no faults to find. It must be admitted that perfect unanimity amongst the ancient sages on this point there was not. Pythagoras, for instance, is said to have taught that it was wrong for men to depart from their guard or station in life, without the order of their Commander, that is, of God.

A similar view was held by Socrates, and in a modified form by Plato. Aristotle also condemned suicide, but on civic grounds, as doing an injury to the State. These great names, however, belong to an earlier era. It still remains true that *patet exitus* expresses the opinion regarding self-slaughter, which in the time of Augustus may be said to have been all but unanimous. Epicurus advises men to weigh carefully whether they would prefer death to come to them or would themselves go to death. Many amongst his followers chose the last-named alternative, Lucretius, for instance, and Petronius, the master of ceremonies at the court of Nero. The latter, we are told, having opened his veins, began discoursing in his last moments about the gay songs and licentious epigrams of the hour, and actually regaled himself with a sumptuous banquet whilst bleeding to death. With regard to the Stoical doctrine respecting suicide, one of its most eloquent exponents is responsible for the following teaching: 'Against all the ills of life I have the refuge of death.' —'See that yawning precipice—you can go over it to liberty. Behold that sea, that river, that well, liberty sits at the bottom. Do you seek the way to freedom? You may find it in every vein of your body.'—'Depart from life as your impulse leads you, whether it be by the sword, or the rope, or the poison: go your way, and break the chains of slavery. . . The eternal law has decreed nothing better than this, that life

should have but one entrance, and many exits. . . . If life please you, live: if not, you have a right to return whence you came.'

These systems did not touch the multitude.

In passing away from this subject we may observe that while the systems of philosophy referred to exercised a vast influence over the learned and cultured classes of society, either for good or evil, the multitude remained, at least so far as the Stoical system was concerned, altogether unaffected thereby. In grand moral theorizing and sublime philosophical conceptions, the mass of the people took no interest whatsoever. How, indeed, could they? What had the suffering millions —the weary and heavy laden—the bruised and heart-broken to do with a doctrine that had no balm for their wounds, and whose only response to the cry of the helpless and distressed was the inflexible mandate: Do thy duty! The high standard of self-control exacted by Stoicism, its imperious impatience with human infirmities, and its utter contempt for the emotional part of man's nature, rendered its adoption practically impossible for ordinary mortals. It was

'No lantern for erring feet, but a glare on a white straight road,
Where life struggled its weary day, to sink before night with its load.'

As a school of heroes it was admirable; but it had no attraction at all for the vulgar mind, and was absolutely incapable of accommodating itself to

unheroic lives. How different from the doctrine of Jesus!

'The pure teaching, the passionate love, taking thought for the humble and weak,
The pitiful scorn of wrong which His Scriptures everywhere speak.

Not writ for the sage in his cell, but preached mid turmoil and strife,
And touched with a living brand from the fire of the Altar of Life.

* * * * * *

—the brotherhood that He loved is more than a saintly thought,
And the wars and the strifes which we mourn are lost in the peace He taught.'

## 6.—State of the Popular Religious Belief at the time of Christ.

In moral and religious matters generally, it may be truly said the philosophers were not at all in accord with the popular faith, and the people on their part had no sympathy with them. It must not be supposed, however, that the popular views on religious subjects, in the midst of so many changes, had remained changeless, and that they had suffered no modification from the influences that were at work and the events that had taken place. If, at the commencement of the Christian era, the ancient peoples of the world had not become less superstitious,

they had, at all events, grown vastly more tolerant in matters of faith; and religious fanaticism had visibly diminished.

The toleration policy of Rome.

This change was the necessary outcome of the policy of Rome. It was and had been for a long period a maxim of Roman statecraft to exercise toleration towards all religions. Whenever a town or province was conquered, the local or national deities were forthwith respectfully and solemnly invited to take up their abode at Rome, in the following terms, 'If there be a god or goddess who has taken this people or this town under his care, I supplicate thee, O divinity! whosoever thou mayest be, to forsake this people, to withdraw from this city and this temple, and to come to Rome to me and mine. Let our city, our temple and sacrifices, be acceptable unto thee. If thou wilt do this, I, on my part, shall dedicate a temple and offerings to thy divinity.' The Roman theory of conquest might be summed up in the brief sentence: All that belongs to the vanquished belongs to victors, except their gods. These were to be reverently acknowledged, and never to be alienated by force.

Roman gods always introduced into conquered countries.

But while the Romans refrained from depriving the conquered peoples of their religion, they always carried their own gods with them into the provinces, and required the inhabitants to treat them with that reverence which they, on their part, accorded to the

local deities. Such an arrangement seems, at first sight, reasonable and tolerant enough; and yet what a fruitful source of heart-burning and rebellion it must have been to the devout Hebrews, who were scattered everywhere throughout the empire, and whose religion not only required them to worship the one living and true God, but likewise forbade them to do homage to any other god besides! The same grievance was of course felt by the Christians at a somewhat later period. However, in the great majority of cases, no difficulty whatever was experienced, and the arrangement worked smoothly enough on the whole. The Romans took their gods to the provinces, and the provincials brought their gods to the capital, where, on the Palatine Hill, the divinities of the whole earth were able to salute each other. It may be truly said, that in the time of Augustus, the rites and observances of every religion under heaven were freely practised within the walls of the imperial city. In the very bosom of a community which had dedicated temples to Jupiter, Mars, Fortune, and Apollo, were to be found a synagogue of the Hebrews, a shrine of the Egyptian Isis, and a grove of Cybele, the Syrian goddess.

Thus, through the forces which were at work, not only did the nationalities of the ancient world become fused together, but its religions as well came to have a mixed character; and the opinion began to prevail amongst the masses, that the gods did not

differ much; that promiscuous worship was, on the whole, a safe thing, seeing that if one divinity happened to fail the worshipper, another might perchance be able to befriend him. The ancient religion of the Roman State had, in fact, been supplanted, both in Rome and throughout her provinces, by a religious chaos, which was, however, in the good providence of the Almighty and Omniscient Controller of human destiny, but a preparatory step to the creation of a new world.

We read that, in the beginning, when the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, the Lord said, Let there be light, and light was. So, in like manner, when the faith of humanity had become formless and confused in a degree without parallel in the world's annals, and when darkness impenetrable had settled down on the spirit of our race, then it was that He came in whom was life, 'and the life was the light of men.'

## 7.—The Social Life of the Roman Empire.

Having given at least a faint idea of the religious state of the world when our Saviour appeared, we shall now proceed to describe as clearly and as concisely as we can the world's social condition at the same period.

We shall begin with the domestic life of the ancients. In Greece, from a very early period, woman occupied a position very inferior to man, and the sale of wives was quite customary. In later times, this arrangement was altered somewhat, and the legal position of women slightly improved, so that a wife became less the slave and more the help-meet of her lord. Unlike the Jews and some other Eastern peoples, the Greeks condemned polygamy, and monogamy was an institution early established amongst them; though, it is true, departures from the general rule occasionally occurred. The wives of the Greeks lived a life of great retirement and seclusion. Weaving, spinning, embroidery, and the care of their families and households, were their sole employments. The most retired portion of the house was set apart for their use. They walked out but seldom, and then always in the company of a female slave. They were never to be seen at public games or spectacles. Male visitors were never received by them except in the presence of their husbands; and if such remained for any meal, the seat of the mistress of the house was always empty. The consequences of such a mode of existence were inevitable. Living almost exclusively amongst slaves, and being deprived of the educating influence of male society (such as it was), and of the public shows, which were one of the chief means of culture amongst the Greeks, the mental powers of the

The social state of women in Greece.

Grecian matron remained dormant, and her nobler faculties decayed, through want of the exercise necessary for their health and development. On the whole, the position of virtuous women amongst the Greeks was far from a desirable one, though, it must be admitted that the combined force of custom and of habit saved it from being altogether unhappy. The Greek matron possessed in a pre-eminent degree the grace of modesty and the virtue of chastity, but she was not the stuff out of which the world's heroines are made, and as such she seldom appears on the page of history.

The Hetairæ.

In marked contrast with Greek wives and mothers as a class, stand the women of easy virtue and licentious lives. Courtesans were the real heroines of Greek society, and, strange though it may appear, even filled the office of priestesses in some of their temples. Being under no restrictions whatever as to their manner of life, they freely availed themselves of those means of mental culture denied to their more virtuous sisters. Thus they added to the charms of surpassing beauty, which they generally possessed, the intellectual fascinations of cultivated genius and brilliant accomplishments. Their wealth, too, was in some cases enormous. It is related of Phryne, the celebrated paramour of Praxiteles, that when Thebes was overthrown by the Macedonian army, she offered to restore it at her own cost, provided only the inhabitants would consent to inscribe upon its walls, in

golden letters, the words—'Alexander destroyed this city, Phryne rebuilt it.' Doubtless courtesans, as a class, were subject to some slight legal disqualifications. However, though less respected than Greek wives, they were more admired, and extra-matrimonial connexions were formed with them quite openly and without the slightest shame or compunction. The national misfortunes of later times deteriorated still more the morals of the Greeks, and after the loss of their independence things went from bad to worse.

The position of women in Rome.

Turning to the Roman civilization we find that the position of women was also an inferior one, but scarcely so much so as among the Greeks. A host of legends exist which testify to the high moral estimation in which women were held by the Romans, the important part they played in social life, and the share they had in their country's glories. Matrimonial purity was very strict, and for the first five hundred years of Rome's existence as a nation such a thing as a divorce was unknown. Gibbon, it is true, somewhat minimizes this virtue by the remark that 'the same fact evinces the unequal terms of a connexion in which the slave was unable to renounce her tyrant, and the tyrant was unwilling to relinquish his slave.' The Roman led his wife about with him, a place was assigned to her at the public games, and she always took her seat at the head of her own table. The courtesan class, though

largely enough represented, no doubt, among the Romans, as elsewhere, was thoroughly despised, and to belong to it was considered an indelible disgrace.

The influence of the East.

But with the widening of the bounds of empire, and the rapid and enormous influx of wealth, great changes for the worse took place. Rome, unhappily, was heir, not only of the learning and philosophy of the Greeks, but of their vices as well, and to these were soon added the debasing effeminacies and loathsome lusts of the Oriental nations, representatives of which daily thronged, in ever-increasing numbers, the thoroughfares of the world's capital. Before the luxury and voluptuousness of the Empire republican simplicity soon disappeared; and female modesty and virtue hopelessly succumbed in the presence of the unblushing licence of a generation which laughed at conjugal fidelity, and looked on the marriage bond as only a preliminary step to divorcement. In circumstances such as these it was not strange that men preferred to remain in a state of 'single blessedness.'

To such an extent, indeed, did this preference prevail, that it was feared injury to the State might result; and the Emperor Augustus found himself compelled to pass a law whereby many special privileges were conferred on the fathers of three or more children; and at the same time a heavy tax

was imposed on men who, after a certain age, persisted in remaining bachelors. This tax, however, very many elected to pay rather than risk their fortune in a matrimonial lottery, in which, for every man who won a prize, hundreds won nothing that was worth winning, and became, in the end, responsible for a much heavier tax than that imposed by Augustus. For, during the first years of the empire, even very rich men found the expenses of female vanity a burden almost greater than they could bear. With fashionable Roman ladies, and their many imitators throughout the empire, it had become a common practice, before retiring for the night, to cover their faces with an artificial paste, in order to preserve their complexion. In the morning they took a bath in asses' milk (the services of fifty or sixty asses being required for this purpose), also for the sake of their beauty. Sweet-scented oil, perfumes, ointments, and paints of many colours and of every description, were indispensable requisites to the proper performance of their toilette. The skill of the best artists was employed in dressing and frizzing their hair, which was often dyed red, in compliance with the fashionable craze of the period. Frequently, however, they had it cut off altogether, and false hair substituted in its stead. The shorn-off locks of the red-haired barbarians of Germany were much in demand for such purposes; and we are told that those who trafficked in the commodity had the

Tax imposed on men who did not marry.

greatest difficulty in obtaining it in sufficient quantities to meet the requirements of the fashion. Fabulous sums were also expended on gorgeous wardrobes and jewelled ornaments. And the most distressing aspect of the matter was, that the unfortunate husband who was being impoverished by such lavish outlay, was constantly learning, from bitter experience, that the costlier a woman's tastes are as regards outward adornment, the less is her moral value and the more trifling her intrinsic worth.

Relation of parents to children.

There is another feature of the domestic life of the ancients which is especially worthy of our notice, viz., the parent's relation to and treatment of his offspring. Of all the historic personages of antiquity perhaps none has been regarded with greater abhorrence and detestation throughout the ages of Christendom, than Herod the Idumean, who was King of Judæa when our Saviour was born. He may be said to have attained a 'bad eminence' little below that of Judas Iscariot himself. The reason is not far to seek. It is to be found in the sixteenth verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, where we read that 'Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had carefully learned of the wise men.' Such a deed certainly does appear

to us a crime of the very first magnitude, and yet, when measured by the moral standard of the time, it can scarcely be looked upon as an offence at all. And this explains how it was that Josephus, the historian of the period, while chronicling many of the other crimes and cruelties of Herod, never once refers to this circumstance—the cold-blooded massacre of some score of innocents being considered an event so trivial as to be beneath the dignity of historic record.

Infanticide.

A very slight acquaintance with the practices of the pagan world (Herod, though King of Judæa, was at heart a pagan, and Josephus, though a Jew, was familiar with and accustomed to pagan ways) will explain the otherwise inexplicable phenomenon. It is no exaggeration to say that the empire over which Augustus ruled was literally crimsoned with the blood of infants murdered, not by fearful and ambitious tyrants, but by their own parents. A Roman father had the undisputed right to destroy his new-born child if it so pleased him, without being at all answerable to any court or tribunal of justice. This parental prerogative was unhappily as often exercised as not; and in the case of children who were born in a sickly or deformed condition infanticide was the uniform practice. Such remorseless cruelty is to be attributed to a variety of causes —sometimes to the destitution of the parents—sometimes to mere motives of economy; but, whatever the

ostensible reason was, it unmistakably indicated an utter absence of all natural affection and a complete ignorance of the child's capacity for immortality.

As an alternative to destroying infants by violent means, the practice of exposing them in some public place was much resorted to. 'Exposing of children,' says Gibbon, 'was the prevailing and stubborn vice of antiquity; it was sometimes prescribed, often permitted, almost always practised with impunity!' And an eminent writer of the present day, referring to the same custom, remarks, 'Often, no doubt, the exposed infants perished, but more frequently the very extent of the practice saved the lives of the victims. They were brought systematically to a column near Velabrum, and there taken by speculators, who educated them as slaves or very frequently as prostitutes.'

To a world that looked without loathing on such brutality, and whose eyes had become familiar with such scenes, how startling, how incongruous must have sounded the words of the dear Lord, when He said, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven!'

Absolute authority of the father.

The authority the parent possessed over his infant was not less absolute when the child became a youth, and the youth grew to manhood. It was quite within the right of a Roman father to punish his adult son for any fault whatsoever, or for no fault, by any form of cruelty that

happened at the moment to suggest itself. He might at his pleasure beat him with stripes, imprison him, or even transport him to the plantations to work in irons like a slave. From the laws that were subsequently enacted, whereby the unlimited and arbitrary power of the parent was first reduced to the authority of a judge, and finally to the simple duty of an accuser, we may reasonably infer that parental privilege was frequently abused. Indeed, in the reign of Augustus, more than one case is recorded in which a father cruelly took away the life of his son, if not without some censure, at least without the smallest punishment. It is obvious, therefore, that the child of the family occupied more the position of a servile dependant than an equal; and his feeling towards his parent was frequently that of a slave rather than of a son.

How pleasant to turn the weary eye from all this to the relationship which subsists between parent and child under the dispensation of Christ! What a contrast presents itself when we look on that picture and on this! Christian parents love their children, and manifest the tenderest care and solicitude on their behalf. Christian children esteem and honour their parents as long as they are alive, and cherish their memory and their counsels with the most tenacious veneration, when death's pale messenger has summoned them hence out of their sight. What a wondrous charm lingers about the words that fall

upon the ear from the sanctified lips of a parent; they remain fresh and green in the memory when the tongue that uttered them is for ever silent in the grave, and the loving looks that accompanied them have long since been mantled in the deep darkness of death. Though uttered in the ear of childhood, they remain fixed in the remembrance of the man, and reverberate like the sound of far-off music through the lonely years of age. They are present with us in all our joys, and they help to soften all our sorrows; they exercise a harmonizing influence on the jarring and discordant noises of this earth, and float around us in the quiet hours like echoes of the songs of heaven!

Public aspect of social life.

Turning to the social life of the ancients in its more public aspect, we observe the same luxury and extravagance everywhere prevailing which we have already noticed in connexion with private life. The pursuit of expensive pastimes and costly pleasures characterized in a pre-eminent degree the Augustan period. Indeed, Tacitus assures us that the century from the Battle of Actium till the commencement of the reign of Vespasian was the period of the greatest luxury in Rome. In the old republican days, men found employment for their energies and reward for their exertions in the ardent pursuit of power and place; but under the imperial *régime*, when all the offices of state were concentrated in one man, and that man absolute, the prizes open

to honourable ambition and attainable by individual effort were very few, and of a kind not much to be coveted. As for work, in the ordinary sense of that term, it was considered utterly incompatible with the self-respect of freemen, and treated with scorn as the vocation of a slave. Thus it came to pass that in the ancient world no middle class arose, such as exists in the present day in all civilized countries. Among the cultivated Greeks all work which demanded physical exertion was held in contempt, and the Romans deemed any employment whereby money was earned beneath the dignity of a respectable Roman citizen, except the professions of medicine and architecture. The business of a merchant was also exempt from opprobrium, if carried on in an extensive way.

Influence of the civil wars.

It is true that before the civil wars there had existed throughout the rural districts a kind of yeomanry, who tilled their own lands, and formed a sort of middle class between the very rich and the very poor. During the civil disturbances, however, many of these people lost their holdings, and the legions were rewarded with vast districts of land by the victorious generals whose fortunes they had followed. But it was obviously an impossibility for a Roman veteran to settle down to the peaceful pursuits of husbandry, and consequently he soon parted with his portion of the spoil to the highest bidder. This afforded a fine

opportunity, which wealthy men readily embraced, of buying up numbers of small farms, and consolidating them into extensive estates. The people who had been driven from their homes naturally made their way to the large cities, and of course vast multitudes flocked to the capital itself. Thus we find that during the reign of Augustus the population of Rome was about two millions—half as large as London. Of these ten thousand, or one out of every two hundred, were of the patrician class; abouty fifty thousand were strangers in Rome from all parts of the world; one million, or about half the entire population, were slaves; the rest belonged to the proletariat. For the last-mentioned class employment in Rome was by no means plentiful, and for the very obvious reason that the wealthy citizens had their needs amply supplied and their requirements adequately met by the ministrations of their own slaves. Free labour, therefore, had to seek its patrons chiefly amongst those who were not rich, and in many cases not much removed in station from those whom they employed. Multitudes of the people passed their time in utter idleness, and were dependent for the very necessaries of life on the bounty of the State.

State pauperization.

It was an old civic custom to give grain to the people at a very moderate price; but a law was subsequently passed which authorized the distribution of that commodity without any

charge whatever to all who required it,—no question being asked as to moral character. On a certain day in each month five sacks of grain were duly delivered to every citizen whose name was on a certain list, and who came to the granary furnished with the necessary order from the magistrate. Money was also given sometimes to those who were entitled to receive grain, as alms. Sometimes, however, it was bestowed as a present, in which case all citizens came in for a share. It is on record that as much as £3 per head has at times been expended in this way, the entire outlay costing the State some two million pounds sterling. Such was the method devised by ancient Rome for making every citizen a participator in the spoils of conquest, and a sharer in the advantages of universal empire. On the part of the populace these promiscuous benefactions soon came to be looked upon as a right, while on the part of the rulers they assumed the dignity and importance of a State duty. The multitude thus subsisted for the most part on eleemosynary donations, the tendency of which in every age and country is to demoralize and degrade.

Condition of the upper classes.

The upper ten thousand meanwhile lived in the enjoyment of every conceivable luxury, and indulged in all manner of extravagant pleasures and vicious delights. Vast fortunes were expended in the erection of marble palaces, which were converted into 'sties of sense,' wherein wallowed their voluptuous possessors, surrounded by

every variety of obscene sight and unchaste decoration. No expedient was omitted, no device ignored, that could minister in any way to carnal lust or stimulate fleshly passion. Every zone was laid under tribute to furnish delicacies for their sumptuous feasts—indeed, such panderers to appetite were they, that, by way of giving the fishes in their reservoirs a more delicate flavour, they not unfrequently flung them the body of one of their healthiest and fattest slaves. And when they walked abroad they were always accompanied by troops of retainers, as a vainglorious token of their social importance.

The slaves.

But in every deep there is a lower deep still, and the condition of the slave class as it existed in the time of Augustus represents the ultimate grade in the social degeneracy of the pagan world. Both amongst the Greeks and Romans slaves and cattle were placed in the same category; the only difference recognized between them being that the one was dumb and the other could speak.

At the dawn of our era a traveller to or from Rome must have noticed at intervals, as he passed along the great high road, huge ugly structures lying away in the hazy distance, on his right hand or on his left. These were the *ergastula*, or slave prisons, wherein were lodged the slaves employed upon the several estates on which the *ergastula* respectively stood. Horrible and repulsive dungeons they were, built partly underground, filthy beyond all description, and

unhealthy to the last degree. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, seeing that therein were nightly housed, like so many oxen, thousands of unhappy creatures who were often compelled to toil and sweat, from youth till age, their lives through, in cultivating the fields of their cruel taskmasters! To prevent a slave from trying to escape, and to facilitate his capture, should such an attempt be made, his flesh was branded with a red-hot iron. When he happened to die, his body was tossed into the nearest ditch with as little ceremony as if it were the carcase of a dead dog. The aged and infirm, and all who could not work, were either driven forth to starve, or simply despatched at once, as something that had served its day, and was done with. Even those in the enjoyment of perfect health were often put to death for the most trivial offences, and in the cruellest way. It is a matter of history that a Roman prætor actually ordered one of his slaves to be crucified—and for what? Simply because, during a hunt, the unfortunate wretch happened to kill a wild boar prematurely, or with greater expedition than pleased the humour of his imperious lord.

Domestic slavery.

As a rule domestic slaves were more mercifully treated than those doomed to labour on the plantations. But the rule had numerous exceptions. To the house-slave was often assigned the duty of keeping watch at the entrance of his master's mansion, chained to a post, as we are accus-

tomed to chain dogs. In his case, too, scourging and even death was frequently inflicted as the penalty of the slightest indiscretion. We read of at least one Roman who had a slave killed for no weightier reason than that the curiosity of a guest might be gratified by the dying agonies of the sufferer. Roman ladies, not one whit behind their lords in the matter of inhumanity, inflicted all kinds of cruelties on their servants in moments of passion, dealing them heavy blows with whatever came nearest to their hand, and sometimes actually burying their long hair-pins in their quivering flesh. And, what was worse than all, to indulge a fiendish caprice, and for mere pastime, they not unfrequently subjected their unoffending slaves to the most excruciating tortures. And, strange as it may seem, the Roman law, which boasted of its equity, dealt just as pitilessly with the members of the servile class as did their remorseless masters. A cruel enactment, intended of course to safeguard the lives of citizens, required that if a man were murdered, and the perpetrator of the crime not discovered, all the slaves in the household should forthwith be put to death,—except, of course, such as were in chains at the time, or who were helpless through age or infirmity. And we read of an instance in which no less than four hundred slaves of both sexes and of all ages were ruthlessly executed, in conformity with the provisions of this harsh law.

When in connection with such facts we call to mind

that a large proportion of the slaves were captives taken in war, who, in the midst of all this cruelty, and hardship, and oppression, still cherished the remembrance of a free and happy past, and of a home beside a pleasant river, or in a sylvan vale, in some sunny land far away, we can imagine how their grief and misery were intensified, and how they experienced to the full the bitter truth embodied in the words of the great Italian poet:—

> 'Nessun maggior dolore
> Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
> Nella miseria;'

and which our own Tennyson so well anglicises when he says:—

> 'This is true, the poet sings,
> That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.'

At such a melancholy juncture in the world's history it was that the glorious prophecy of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was fulfilled, and the Lord's Anointed was 'sent to preach good tidings unto the meek: to bind up the broken-hearted: to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound: to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn.'

Sports and Pastimes.

We now turn to that particular aspect of the social life of the pagan world which we find so fully illustrated in their sports and pastimes.

With reference to the Grecian games, practised from time immemorial throughout the Greek peninsula, we must speak very briefly. They were talked about over the entire civilized world, and were considered most important events in the national life of the Greeks. These games, which were four in number, were known as the Olympic, Isthmian, Nemean, and Pythian games, and were so called either from the locality in which they took place, or, as in the case of the last-mentioned, from the god in whose honour they were held. They were celebrated with great pomp and splendour, and every effort was put forth in order that the various members of the Pan-Hellenic community might be able to attend them with security and convenience. At the appointed times, and in the presence of innumerable spectators, the competitors for the prize engaged in all manner of athletic sports, such as running, wrestling, throwing of the quoit, boxing, horse and chariot races, etc.—the victor receiving as his reward a simple wreath of olive, or of laurel, or of parsley! The prize was, from a pecuniary point of view, worthless, and designedly so, for it was intended thus to signify that honour, not interest, should be the principle actuating men in the performance of illustrious deeds. It is of course from these games that the Apostle Paul, in writing to the various Churches, draws some of his happiest illustrations: as, for instance, in his first letter to the Church at Corinth, when he says, 'Know ye not that they which

run in a racecourse run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games is temperate in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown: but we an incorruptible.'

The Olympic games.

Of the said games the Olympic were unquestionably the most important and imposing. They were sacred to Zeus, the greatest of the gods, and took place at Olympia, a small town in the Peloponnesus, at the expiration of every four years, and they lasted for five days. The portion of time which elapsed between two successive celebrations of these games was called an Olympiad —a method of chronological reckoning employed by the Greeks from pre-historic times down till the end of the fourth century of the Christian era. The year in which Christ was born corresponds with the close of the 194th Olympiad and the beginning of the one following. We must not omit in this connexion to point out a further honour with which the successful competitor in the Olympic contests was rewarded, viz., that his name was henceforth used to designate the particular Olympiad or four-year-cycle in which he was winner of the olive crown. Thus did the Greeks immortalize their most illustrious compatriots, and keep in perpetual remembrance their glorious achievements,—for to conquer at Olympia was, in the estimation of the Greeks, the highest distinction attainable by mortals; in fact, it was supposed to exalt the victor

above humanity altogether, and to place him on an equality with the immortals.

For a very long time only those of Hellenic origin were allowed to contend in these games; but after the conquest of Greece by the Romans, this law was relaxed, and the latter also obtained the privilege. It is worthy of notice, as an example of the high estimation in which these games were held, that some of the Roman emperors—Tiberius and Nero, for instance—did not think it beneath their dignity to enter the lists as competitors; and the latter is said to have contended in the games with such success, that he was able to carry back with him to Rome (which he entered in triumph) no less than one thousand eight hundred and eight victor's wreaths.

In striking contrast with the bloodless and comparatively harmless games of the Greeks, were the cruel and atrocious sports in which the Romans were wont to engage. Of these, the entertainments of the circus, though often revolting and bloody enough, were, on the whole, the least objectionable.

The Circus Maximus.

If we picture to ourselves a monster edifice composed of wood, oblong in shape, furnished with seats all round, rising one above the other, and capable of accommodating 250,000 people, we shall have at least a faint idea of the Circus Maximus at Rome in the time of Augustus. There were also in the same city seven or eight other structures of a like kind, and used for similar purposes,

but they were not nearly so extensive. In the centre of the circus was a wide open space, set apart for all manner of games and athletic sports, resembling very much the Grecian games of which we have been speaking, and of which indeed they were in a great measure an imitation. At the period under consideration, however, chariot races were the chief feature in the circensian amusements. As the stated time for the annual celebration of these games came round, and for weeks previously, Rome was thrown into a perfect fever of excitement, and all minds were occupied with anxious speculations as to the probable results of the approaching contests. Blue, green, white, and red were the colours worn by the respective charioteers. Four chariots, as a general rule, formed the complement at each start; seven times round the course determined the issue of the contest, and four-and-twenty races exhausted the programme for one day. The excitement caused by these contests it is very difficult to imagine, and yet more difficult to describe. The entire population were split up into factions, each patronizing one or other of the colours mentioned, and in most cases wearing it as a party badge. Fights and brawls were continually occurring; and in connexion with a matter which appears to us so trivial, blood was often freely shed and lives not unfrequently sacrificed. A religious service and a procession from the temple of the Capitolian Jupiter, in which those bearing the images

of the Roman deities led the way, inaugurated these festivities.

Gladiatorial Combats.

We now pass to that entirely unique phase of Roman holiday-making which is without parallel either amongst the Greeks or any other ancient people, and which has furnished matter for some of the darkest and most dreadful pages in the whole history of the pagan world. We mean the gladiatorial combats in Roman amphitheatres. The amphitheatres, like the circus, were constructed of wood up till the time of Augustus. They were of an oval or elliptical shape, and like the circuses were provided with sitting accommodation all round for tens of thousands of spectators. We read, indeed, of as many as fifty thousand people being actually killed or wounded by the collapse of a suburban amphitheatre when Tiberius was emperor.

In the reign of Augustus, and at his request, the first amphitheatre of stone was built. Let us imagine ourselves in Rome at the time of its completion. Bills announcing its approaching dedication are being everywhere circulated. The games are to begin on a certain day, and they will last for weeks. All Rome is looking forward to the event. Nothing else is talked about in the baths and inns, and wheresoever men congregate. At length the longed-for day has arrived, and, thanks to our foresight in making an early start, we find ourselves in the amphitheatre securely seated in the place alloted to the respectable

citizens, a class to which of course we claim to belong. The rows of cushioned seats immediately below us are still empty; they are reserved for the Roman grandees and officers of state, and the world of wealth and fashion generally. The sloping space behind us is already packed full by a countless multitude, composed chiefly of the Roman rabble and of slaves. As the hour for the 'commencement' approaches, we notice the seats below beginning to fill up rapidly. Senators and knights enter in quick succession. The vestal virgins, clad in their white and purple robes, now make their appearance, and advance to the place of honour assigned to them by an ancient and sacred custom. The Emperor himself, amid the sound of martial music and deafening rounds of applause, has at length taken his seat. A momentary lull follows. Then suddenly a loud and prolonged flourish of trumpets is heard, and an imposing procession of gladiators marches into the arena. Some are on horseback; some on foot; all are well armed. They walk round the place with much pomp and solemnity. Opposite to where the Emperor is seated they halt, and lowering their weapons in token of their homage, vociferate, '*Ave, Imperator, morituri te salutant!*' 'Hail, great Emperor, we who are about to die salute thee!' This ceremony being over, they are matched in pairs. At first they fence with wooden swords for a limited time; then the trumpets again sound, which is the signal for the conflict to begin in real earnest.

There is no longer any pretence about the business. The weapons used by the athletes are very dissimilar, and various are the methods of combat, but the ardent desire to inflict a mortal wound is in every case the same. That the fight is now a deadly one soon becomes very evident, for it has scarcely well begun before at least one of the combatants is lying prostrate in the arena. No sooner does he touch the ground than a dark spot shows itself on the sand beside him, and every moment seems to add to its dimensions. We can guess its significance—it is the life-blood of the wounded gladiator. His successful assailant, standing over him with exultant mien, and eyes directed towards the applauding throng, awaits the mandate, either instantly to despatch his disabled adversary or to spare his life, if life be still in him. The unfortunate man, we notice, is holding up his index finger—the usual mode of imploring mercy—and tries, as much as his failing strength will permit, to attract the attention and excite the pity of the Emperor. The latter, however, allows the decision to rest with the people; and they are in no merciful mood. They indignantly spurn the request of the helpless suppliant, as though he were seeking to filch from them a sacred right; and instead of waving their handkerchiefs, as a sign that his life is to be spared, with wrathful looks and angry imprecations they turn their thumbs downwards. This is the unmistakable death-signal. Such a command brooks no

delay; and forthwith the triumphant gladiator sends his sword home to the very hilt in the prostrate body of his defenceless foe. The moment the fatal blow has fallen, and almost before life is extinct, a slave clad in the costume and wearing the mask of the god of the nether world advances, and striking an iron grapple into the bleeding corpse, drags it away, through the gate of death, into the receptacle for the slain.

Such are the incidents which go on repeating themselves hour after hour the long day through. The victorious gladiator, if he belonged to the slave class (the gladiators were mostly captives taken in war,) received as a reward his freedom. If he were a freeman, as not unfrequently happened, he was recompensed by large gifts of money and other tokens of popular and imperial favour. Sometimes, however, victor was pitted against victor; and so it occasionally came to pass that of the hundreds who had contended only one or two survived when the terrible day's work was done.

Fights with wild beasts.

The programme for the next day's sport being perhaps even more interesting than the foregoing, the multitudes that crowd the amphitheatre increase rather than diminish. We suppose ourselves among the number, as before. At the appointed time the trumpeters give the usual signal to begin; whereupon a band of heavy armed gladiators, some carrying swords, some spears, appear

upon the scene, and march round in the customary way. This preliminary being over, a massive iron grating is flung open, and half as many wild lions as there are of armed men bound into the arena. A tremendous yell of delight goes up from the assembled multitude. The unequal contest between man and savage beast at once begins; the inevitable issue being that one by one the gladiators succumb before their wild and infuriated assailants, their heavy armour serving only to prolong their death-struggles, and to hinder the ravenous animals from enjoying their meal with the ordinary expedition.

Again the scene changes. While the surviving lions (for several of them have been killed) are engaged in feeding on their victims, an equal number of starving tigers are let loose amongst them. Another outburst of enthusiastic applause greets the new arrivals. This, however, is instantly drowned by the growling of the angry beasts, who at once enter on a life-and-death struggle for the bones of the already half-devoured gladiators. And so the hideous carnage goes on, day after day, for weeks, in the great metropolis of the universe, and before the delighted gaze of the conquerors of the world! Meanwhile, nothing is omitted that can in any way contribute to the pleasure and convenience of the spectators. The air is charged with the most delightful odours, and the graceful play of sparkling fountains keeps it deliciously fresh and cool.

Let no one suppose for a moment that in what has been said imagination has been allowed to run riot, or that we have drawn a caricature rather than a true picture of what took place at the dedication of a Roman amphitheatre, or at the sports of the amphitheatre generally. The details often varied, no doubt, and the order of events was constantly changing; but the atrocity of the scenes enacted, so far from being exaggerated, is, we believe, presented in a subdued form, and in a way that the actual facts of history fully justify. It is historic fact, for instance, that criminals were clad in the skins of wild beasts, and thrown to bulls when maddened by red-hot irons, or by darts tipped with burning pitch. It is historic fact that more than three hundred couples fought at a gladiatorial show given by Julius Cæsar, and that five thousand wild animals were slaughtered at the dedication of the Colosseum by Titus. It is historic fact that under Trajan the games lasted for one hundred and twenty-three successive days, during which time as many as ten thousand gladiators fought with and killed one another, or contended to the death with savage beasts, for the amusement of the Roman people.

We must also bear in mind that such scenes were by no means confined to the arena of the amphitheatre. At the banquets of the nobles gladiatorial combats were quite common, and in the public baths they were of daily occurrence. Though Augustus himself was

of course superior to any such charge, some of his immediate successors on the imperial throne are accused of having had constant recourse to the sight of criminals torn by wild beasts, as an antidote against *ennui;* and of at least one wearer of the purple it is said that 'he never supped without human blood.'

Sea fights.

Perhaps we should not omit to mention another kind of show of which the amphitheatre was sometimes the scene, viz.:—Naval engagements, or sea fights. Speaking of the Colosseum, Gibbon observes, 'Subterraneous pipes conveyed an inexhaustible supply of water, and what had just before appeared a level plain might be suddenly converted into a wide lake covered with armed vessels and replenished with monsters of the deep.' Julius Cæsar had introduced a similar system of canals into the Circus Maximus, which, in his time, was used for such spectacles. We may feel quite sure an arrangement of this kind was not wanting in the new amphitheatre built by the command of Augustus, and we can well believe a grand sea fight formed part of the programme carried out at its dedication. Artificial lakes, however, were sometimes constructed for such occasions. It was on a lake thus formed that we read of as many as 19,000 men engaging in a naval combat, when thousands fell by the hand of their assailants, and not a few were drowned; each horrible incident in the fight being the signal for renewed outbursts of applause

from the beholders. Such was the outcome of mere human wisdom, such the boasted civilization of a city 'whose houses were palaces, whose citizens were princes, and whose provinces were empires.'

Effect on the public mind.

That a lamentable effect must have been produced on the public mind by such incessant carnage goes without saying. The people became so demoralized and debased that sober and humane amusements lost all charm for them, and were looked upon as wearisome and altogether intolerable. The ordinary theatrical entertainments customary amongst the Greeks, and borrowed from them by the Romans, were far inferior in the estimation of the public to the thrilling and tragic incidents of the arena. And the fierce conflicts, in which at least one of the combatants must actually die, were sources of popular enjoyment, compared with which the simulated calamities of the stage seemed utterly tame and insipid. But 'necessity is the mother of invention.' This proverb is, we presume, nearly as old as the world; at any rate it verified itself, we make bold to say, pretty early in human history. Driven by a hard necessity, the managers of theatres resorted to a plan whereby they were enabled, in some degree, to recover their lost *prestige*, and to rival, with at least a moderate measure of success, the bloody spectacles of the amphitheatres. Their plan was this: They secured slaves, or more frequently criminals, for the tragic scenes. Death on the stage

was henceforth no longer a sham or make-believe, but the very thing itself in all its dreadful reality. We read, for instance, of one criminal, who, in the character of a robber, is first nailed to a cross, and then a bear appears on the stage and actually tears him limb from limb. Of another, who, while personifying a well-known hero of history, is compelled to hold his hand in a flame till it is entirely consumed. Of another, who, in acting the part of Hercules, is forced to mount the funeral pile and be burned alive. We are also told of certain characters in a play appearing on the stage gorgeously attired, and with gay wreaths adorning their brows, when lo! fire is suddenly seen to issue from their garments, and they fall down enveloped in devouring flames.

All this, and worse than this, if worse could be, was being perpetrated, not in the dark places of the earth merely, which were proverbially 'full of the habitations of cruelty,' but perpetrated in the very centre of light and learning and culture,—even in the imperial capital of the world itself,—when far away in an obscure village of Palestina, and in a stable in that village, a Babe was born, who was destined to alter all that, and to be the longed and looked-for pioneer of a golden age, and the heaven-sent herald of unspeakably glorious things: whose birth year was henceforth to be the beginning of years for Christendom, and to run down through the centuries till the end of all time as ANNUS DOMINI.

PART II.

# THE JEWS.

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# THE JEWS.

## I.—The Time of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah governor at Jerusalem.

NEHEMIAH, the Hebrew cupbearer of Artaxerxes Longimanus, King of Persia, having appeared in the royal presence with a sad countenance, is asked the reason. 'Let the king live for ever,' he replied, 'why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?' Then said the king unto him, 'For what dost thou make request?' and he answered, 'That thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.' The request is promptly granted: whereupon Nehemiah at once avails himself of the king's grace, and, furnished with the royal decree, necessary for the accomplishment of his undertaking, starts on his important mission.

Few days elapsed after his arrival in the holy city, before he set about the work which the Lord had

put it into his heart to do. Having made a moonlight inspection of the dilapidated walls, in company with a few faithful companions, he next day summoned together the priests and rulers and people, told them the purpose for which he had come amongst them, and revealed to them his dignity as 'Tirshatha,' or viceroy of the Persian king. The sympathy of the people was at once secured, and they and their leaders eagerly began the work of restoring the city walls; which task, in spite of much harassing and obstructive opposition on the part of hostile neighbours, was soon successfully accomplished. The newly-erected walls were dedicated in due course, with much ceremony, so that 'the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.'

Public reading of the Law.

It was about this time also that the practice of reading the law in some public place, for the benefit of the people, was begun and established by Ezra, the priest and scribe; and hence originated the renowned institution of the Synagogue—an institution which played such an important part in the religious life of the Jews in all subsequent ages, no matter in what clime they sojourned or in what country they found a home.

Nehemiah remained for twelve years at Jerusalem, exercising his functions as Persian governor, and encouraging by every means in his power the building up of the interior of the city. At the end of this period, and in accordance with the terms of his leave

of absence, he returned to the court of Artaxerxes (B.C. 433), where he remained for an interval of time, the duration of which we are unable definitely to determine. All we know is that 'at the end of days' (Neh. xiii. 6) he obtained the king's permission to renew his visit to Jerusalem, with a view to reforming abuses which had begun to prevail there. However, the phrase 'all this time,' taken in connexion with the fact that during his absence the said abuses had grown to immense proportions, leads us to infer that at least ten years must have elapsed from his departure from the holy city till his return to it again. This reckoning brings us to the last year of the reign of Artaxerxes (B.C. 423).

Nehemiah's second administration.

During the second period of Nehemiah's administration, we find him maintaining the rules of discipline which he, in conjunction with Ezra, had formerly drawn up and introduced, and in punishing in the sternest way all law-breakers. He himself tells us that he 'contended with them and reviled them, and smote certain of them and plucked off their hair.'

It was at this time an incident occurred which intensified the hostility already existing beween the Jews and the Samaritans, and by which the irregular worship of the latter was enabled to form itself into an organized schism, which lasted down till our Lord's

Erecting a rival temple on Mount Gerizim.

day. It would appear that Manasseh, the son of Joiada the high-priest, had, in violation of the rules of discipline, married a daughter of Sanballat, the Samaritan chief, and that rather than part with his wife at the bidding of Nehemiah, he fled with her to his father-in-law in Samaria, where he became high-priest. A temple was in due course erected on Mount Gerizim, and a system of worship established closely resembling that of the Jewish sanctuary. The example of Manasseh was soon followed by numerous priests and Levites who had also married heathen wives, and by disaffected Jews generally, so that Samaria became a recognized place of refuge for all transgressors. It is, of course, to the temple and worship thus established that the Samaritan woman refers in her conversation with Christ at the well, when she says, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.'

With a record of most of the events above mentioned, and the incidents connected therewith, the narrative of Old Testament history comes to a close. Malachi, it is true, survived Nehemiah, and was the last of the Old Testament writers, but he supplies us with no new facts; his aim chiefly being to carry on the important work in which we find Nehemiah engaged when his name is last mentioned, that, namely, of insisting on the observance of discipline, and in rebuking its non-observance.

Between the last of the historic events narrated by

Nehemiah and the birth of our Saviour there elapsed, at the very least, a period of four hundred years. Regarding what transpired during this interval in Hebrew history, the Canonical Scriptures furnish us with no information. And yet an intelligent understanding of the many important occurrences which fill up that period, and link together by an unbroken chain of cause and effect its beginning and its end, is necessary to a clear and satisfactory apprehension of the condition of Palestine and its people at the time of our Lord's advent.

Close of Old Testament Canon.

## 2.—The Interval from Nehemiah to the close of the Persian Dominion.

When we pass, as it were, by turning one leaf in our Bible, from the scenes and surroundings in the midst of which Nehemiah, Ezra, and Malachi lived and laboured, into the Jewish State of Christ's day, what striking changes present themselves to our notice, whether we have regard to the religious life of the nation, or to its civil constitution, or to its political relations! At the time of our Lord's nativity, Herod, surnamed the Great, was King of Judæa; and he exercised his authority, not through the favour of a Persian king, but by the grace of Augustus Cæsar, whose minion and tributary he was. An Idumean adventurer, supported on the throne of David by the

power of Pagan Rome, was the most recent outcome of a long series of wars and revolutions and revolts which had taken place since the days of Nehemiah the 'Tirshatha.'

End of the Persian Dominion.

Less than a century passed from the return of Nehemiah to Jerusalem, till the end of the Persian dominion; which dominion, it will be remembered, began on that terrible night when the mysterious *mene mene tekel upharsin* appeared inscribed on the walls of the banqueting hall of the palace in Babylon. During these years the Jews lived in the midst of ever-changing circumstances. At one time, their fortune was tolerably happy; at another time, quite the reverse.

After the death of Nehemiah an important change in the government of the Jews took place. Judæa then came under the power and jurisdiction of the Persian governors of Syria, who generally delegated the administration of the country to the Jewish high-priest for the time being. This arrangement, though convenient enough from the point of view of the governors, became, as far as the Jewish people were concerned, a prolific source of calamity and crime; since the men who occupied the sacerdotal office were ofttimes animated by the basest motives, and their actions were more frequently dictated by greed and vainglory than by the aspirations of piety or the promptings of patriotism.

Finally, in the reign of the Persian king Darius

Codomanus, there occurred one of those mighty upheavals in the midst of which empires disappear and thrones are demolished, and by means of which the currents of human destiny are turned aside from their wonted course, and made to flow henceforth in new channels.

## 3.—Conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great.

Alexander, the Macedonian warrior and king, one of the mightiest actors that ever played a part on this world's stage, was the instrument in the hands of Divine Providence whereby this transformation was effected. In the spring of the year B.C. 334, the second year of the reign of the Persian sovereign Darius, the King of Macedon crossed the Hellespont, with about 45,000 followers. Five days afterwards, he defeated a Persian army numbering not less than 200,000 men; and by a series of subsequent victories, each more splendid than the preceding, he soon made himself master of the whole of Syria. He thereupon summoned all the cities of that region, Jerusalem amongst the rest, to pay him the customary tribute, and a written order to that effect was despatched by Alexander to the Jewish high-priest Jaddua. The latter demurred, and sent back word to the conqueror that he had sworn fealty to Darius, and could not violate his

Alexander demands tribute from the Jews.

oath, so long as that prince was alive. Alexander was much incensed by this reply, and threatened to come speedily and make such an example of the high-priest as would teach a lesson to others. Faithful to his promise, he soon advanced on Jerusalem. Jaddua and all the inhabitants were terror-stricken, and earnestly besought the Almighty to send deliverance. Thereupon, we are told, God warned the high-priest in a dream to take courage, to adorn the city gaily, and then to go out and meet the king, clad in his sacerdotal robes, and accompanied by the rest of the citizens arrayed in white garments. In obedience to the heavenly vision, all the inhabitants marched out in solemn procession, with the high-priest at their head, to meet the conqueror. No sooner did Alexander fix his eyes on the leader of the approaching throng, than he advanced towards him, and adored the name of God, which was inscribed on the golden plate of his turban, and then saluted the high-priest himself. All the Greeks were amazed at such conduct on the part of their leader, and Parmenio, one of his officers, asked him how it was that he, to whom all payed homage, should himself adore the high-priest of the Jews. The king replied, 'I did not adore him, but that God who hath honoured him with his high-priesthood; for,' he added, 'I saw this very person in a dream in this very habit, when I was at Dios, in Macedonia. I was considering with myself how I might obtain the

Alexander's Dream.

dominion of Asia, and this very man exhorted me to make no delay, but boldly to pass over the sea hither, for that he would conduct my army, and would give me dominion over the Persians. Hence it is, that having seen no other in this habit, and now seeing him in it, and remembering that vision and the exhortation I had in my dream, I believe that I bring this army under the Divine protection, and shall therewith conquer Darius, and destroy the power of the Persians, and that all things will succeed according to my wish.'

Afterwards, we are told, Alexander was shown the prophecies in the Book of Daniel (Daniel viii. 21 ; xi. 3) which had reference to himself, at which he was so highly gratified that he willingly granted the request of the high-priest, that the Jews should be exempted from paying tribute on the Sabbatical year, and everywhere have liberty to live according to their own laws.

Alexander in Egypt.

Having thus arranged matters in Judæa, the conqueror proceeded to Egypt, where he was received with open arms by the Egyptian nobles. The Persian officers were compelled to surrender without once giving battle, and he entered Memphis, the capital of the country, in triumph. Shortly afterwards he gave orders for the building of the famous city which, after its founder, was named Alexandria. Thither many Jews immigrated, on the invitation of the king, and formed a colony, which

enjoyed equal rights and privileges with his other subjects.

Battle of Arbela.

The following spring he crossed the Tigris at the head of about 50,000 warriors, and, in a decisive battle, defeated Darius, who commanded an army of not less than one million one hundred thousand men! In other words, the odds against the conqueror was twenty to one. This famous battle is known in history as the Battle of Arbela, from the name of the city near which it was fought. Alexander was now complete master of Asia, and the commencement of the Grecian monarchy dates from this time (B.C. 331). During the next two years he succeeded in bringing the entire Persian empire under his control. A series of such rapid marches and uninterrupted victories is altogether unparalleled in the whole history of conquest. Seven years afterwards the King died (B.C. 323), in the very noonday of his life, and in the plenitude of his power.

## 4.—The Successors of Alexander.

Division of Alexander's Empire.

The death of Alexander was followed by much confusion and bloodshed. Violent quarrels broke out amongst his generals and chief officers, to whom the various governments were assigned, and who, after the lawful heirs to the throne had been all murdered, constituted themselves

independent sovereigns. Cassander exercised authority over Macedonia and Greece; Lysimachus over Thrace and Bithynia, and some of the adjoining provinces; Ptolemy Lagi over Lybia, Egypt, Arabia, Petræa, Palestine, and Cœle-Syria; Seleucus over Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia, Babylon, and the far East. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy recorded in Daniel xi. 2-4, 'Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and by his strength through his riches he shall stir up all against the realm of Grecia. And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will; and when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven, and not to his posterity.'

It is only with the doings of the two kings last named, that is to say, of the King of Egypt and the King of Syria, that we need now concern ourselves, inasmuch as it was by them or their successors that the ultimate destiny of the Jewish nation was mainly determined.

Relatively to Palestine, the Græco-Egyptian kingdom lay on the south, and the Græco-Syrian kingdom on the north. Palestine was thus situated exactly between the two; a circumstance which involved the most important consequences for the Hebrew race. For, as the sequel of their history shows, their country became a perpetual cause of quarrel between the two

kingdoms, the respective monarchs of which were always eager to secure it, either as a sort of advance post for warlike operations, or as a means of territorial aggrandisement. And, as is always the case in such circumstances, the Jews were the greatest sufferers in the end.

Ptolemy Lagi.

Ptolemy Lagi was on the whole a beneficent ruler, and treated the Jews with kindness and consideration. When he first took possession of the country, he no doubt acted towards them with some degree of harshness, and carried away a hundred thousand of them as prisoners into Egypt. Afterwards, however, these very same Jews, as well as those brought thither by Alexander, were most considerately dealt with; and they multiplied greatly, spreading themselves over the adjoining districts of Lybia and Cyrene. It was by some of these Egyptian Jews that the Old Testament Scriptures were afterwards translated into the Greek language,—a work which was carried out partly under the auspices of Ptolemy Philadelphus, the son of the last-mentioned king, and partly at a somewhat later date. The object of this translation, which is commonly called the Septuagint version, was to afford the Jews who were growing up in Egypt an opportunity of reading the Scriptures in the language with which they were most familiar.

In the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus a war, which lasted for eight years, broke out between Egypt and

Syria—Antiochus Theos being then ruler in the latter kingdom. It ended in a peace, of which one of the conditions was, that Antiochus should divorce his wife Laodice, and marry Ptolemy's daughter, the Princess Bernice. The condition was indeed complied with; but the forced union did not last long, for on the death of Ptolemy, two years afterwards, Antiochus took back his former wife, by whom, however, he was subsequently murdered, and his son Seleucus Callinicus raised to the vacant throne.

War between Ptolemy Philadelphus and Antiochus Theos.

Amongst the first acts of the new king's reign was to decree the death of Bernice. This violent measure naturally aroused the wrath of her brother, Ptolemy Euergetes, who had succeeded his father on the throne of Egypt. He vigorously set about avenging the death of his sister, and, marching into Syria, slew the queen-mother Laodice, and possessed himself of the whole country as far as the boundary river of India. In the midst of his triumphs, however, and in consequence of a sedition that had broken out in Egypt, he was obliged to hasten back to that country, carrying thither much spoil and about 2500 images, which had on a former occasion been taken away from the Egyptians. And thus another prophecy of Daniel was literally fulfilled (Daniel xi. 6–8).

The greed of Onias.

It was in this king's reign that Onias, the son of Simon the Just, and one of his successors in the sacerdotal office, well nigh brought

ruin on the Jews through his greed and avarice. For many years he withheld the tribute of twenty talents of silver, which had been annually paid by his predecessors to the kings of Egypt, on behalf of the Jewish people. At length, when the arrears amounted to some 480 talents, the alternative was placed before the high-priest, either to pay at once the amount due, or to have the whole country confiscated and colonized by Egyptian soldiers. This appalling threat terrified the people beyond measure; and there is no manner of doubt but that their darkest forebodings would have been fully realized, had not Joseph, the nephew of the high-priest, promptly repaired to Alexandria, and effected such arrangements as satisfied the king.

After a reign of five and twenty years, Ptolemy Euergetes, the last good King of Egypt, died, or rather was poisoned by his son, Ptolemy Philopator, who succeeded him on the throne (B.C. 221). This was in the second year of Antiochus the Great, King of Syria.

Ptolemy Philopator.

Ptolemy Philopator seems to have been a very monster of wickedness. Committing parricide to secure the throne, he successively murdered, during his term of sovereignty, his mother, and his brother, and his wife. Hostilities soon broke out between him and Antiochus, to whom he was compelled to relinquish all the possessions which his father had gained by his valour, and Palestine also passed into the hands of the conqueror. However,

the fortune of war suddenly turned in favour of the Egyptian arms, and in the great battle of Raphia the Syrians were totally defeated. The two kings afterwards signed a treaty, by which Antiochus relinquished all claims on Palestine and Cœle-Syria. Ptolemy was much congratulated by the Jews on his victory; and, as a sort of acknowledgment of their loyalty and devotion, he subsequently paid a personal visit to Jerusalem. He inspected the temple, offered numerous sacrifices, and bestowed many costly gifts. But his desire to profane the Holy of Holies threw the whole city into a state of consternation and alarm. In spite of the tears and entreaties of the people, he was in the very act of carrying out his design, when suddenly he became paralyzed by fear, his mental faculties seemed to forsake him, and he was carried from the temple quite insensible by his terrified attendants. Strange to say, this incident, which one would have expected to act in quite a contrary way, stirred up in his heart an intense hatred against the Jews, and no sooner had he returned to his capital than he gave vent to his spleen by a most cruel persecution of his Hebrew subjects. If we are to accept as historic fact the record in the Third Book of the Maccabees, it would appear that on his return to Alexandria, Ptolemy devised a scheme for exterminating, by a wholesale massacre, every member of the Jewish race on whom he could lay hands. Those who were willing to renounce the

Persecution of the Jews.

worship of Jehovah, and serve idols, he permitted to live; but the vast multitude who remained faithful to their God he shut up in the hippodrome, to be destroyed by infuriated elephants trained for the purpose. When the appointed morning arrived, the king surrounded by his guards repaired to the scene of the contemplated slaughter. But how great were his terror and amazement when the elephants, on being brought forth, rushed, not on the defenceless Jews, but on the soldiers and spectators, on whom they vented their fury to the uttermost! The king trembled before the God of Israel. The faithful Jews were pardoned, and had all their privileges restored, while their false co-religionists were put to death.

Ptolemy Philopator died at the early age of thirty-seven years, worn out and enfeebled by every form of vice and dissipation. He was succeeded by his son Ptolemy Epiphanes, who was then only five years of age.

Antiochus invades Palestine.

Antiochus the Great, taking advantage of the Egyptian king's minority, revenged himself for the signal defeat at Raphia, by seizing upon Phœnicia and Palestine (B.C. 202). But this time new actors made their appearance in the Eastern world. The Romans, this same year, became famous by the victory gained by Scipio over Hannibal in Africa—a victory which brought the Second Punic War to a brilliant termination. The Egyptians in their difficulty turned

to the victors for aid, and offered them the guardianship of their young king, which offer was most gladly accepted by the Roman Senate. The immediate result of this arrangement did not amount to much. Antiochus soon made good his claim to Judæa by force of arms; but, with a view to preventing the Egyptians from having any further dealings with the Romans as allies, he arranged to give his daughter Cleopatra in marriage to the young Pompey, as soon as the youthful couple had arrived at an age suitable for such an alliance. And he promised, at the same time, that Palestine should be part of his daughter's dowry.

The Jews favour his cause.

Meanwhile, the Jews having favoured the cause of Antiochus in the last war, and supplied his army with provisions, and even assisted him in expelling their Egyptian masters from the country, were liberally rewarded by the Syrian king, who published in their favour more than one edict, whereby taxes were remitted and privileges conferred. As a further proof of his confidence and good will, Antiochus, at a time when disturbances were rife in Lydia and Phrygia, caused about 2,000 Jewish families to be transported thither, from Babylon and Mesopotamia, and placed in the fortified towns; so that they might act as the guardians of peace and order, and by their fidelity secure the safety of the country. He at the same time assigned to them the most fertile lands, and

exempted them from taxation for the space of ten years. And there is no doubt but that the vast number of Jews who were scattered over the whole of Asia Minor in our Lord's day were the descendants of these immigrants.

Reversion of Palestine to Egypt.

The time at length arrived when Antiochus was called upon to ratify the agreement with regard to the marriage of his daughter with Ptolemy, and the bestowal of Palestine and Cœle-Syria as her wedding portion. The Syrian monarch kept his promise; and he did so with the less reluctance, because he thought by this means, and through his daughter's instrumentality, he might be able to add Egypt itself to his dominions. However, he erred in his calculations in this regard, for Cleopatra remained true to her husband's interest, a circumstance that would seem to have been foretold by the prophet (Dan. xi. 17). Fraud having failed, Antiochus determined to employ force to realize his designs, and accordingly he marched with a great army into the west. He thus came into hostile conflict with the warlike Romans, who at last completely vanquished him in his own country, and imposed an enormous war indemnity on his much curtailed kingdom.

Seleucus Philopator.

Palestine having reverted to Egypt, in accordance with the aforesaid agreement, was after a brief period again annexed to Syria, by the son and successor of Antiochus, Seleucus Philo-

pator. This prince, in order to pay the yearly instalments of the debt due to the Romans, fixed his covetous eyes on the temple of Jerusalem, and determined by its plunder to replenish his empty coffers. The same thing is said to have happened to the Syrian delegate whom he sent to execute his commission, as formerly occurred to the King of Egypt, Ptolemy Philopator. He received such a fright by an awful manifestation of Divine power, when he was entering the sanctuary of Jehovah, that his life was despaired of, and the high-priest actually offered sacrifices for his restoration. On his return home, he was consulted by the king as to whom he judged the most suitable person to carry out the design which he had himself failed to accomplish. Heliodorus, for that was his name, made answer, 'If the king has any enemy whom he desires to punish in a very signal way, he should send him on this errand, for assuredly the result will be such as to gratify the most cruel and vindictive feelings.' It was this same Heliodorus who afterwards poisoned his sovereign, thinking thereby to raise himself to the royal dignity. His aims were, however, frustrated by the late king's brother, who managed to secure the throne for himself, his brother's son and lawful heir being then detained at Rome as a hostage.

## 5.—Accession of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Thus began the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes—a very monster of cruelty and crime, whose character, stained by unspeakable vices, is one of the darkest in all history. During this king's reign, which lasted for eleven years, the Jews, like his other subjects, and more than his other subjects, experienced terrible calamities. But it was the proverbially darkest hour before the dawn. At the time of Antiochus' accession to supreme power, there was a man dwelling in obscurity at Jerusalem, destined to make the throne of the Syrian tyrant reel under him, a man who was one day to rival by his exploits the most renowned of Hebrew heroes—to dazzle the eyes of all men by the splendour of his achievements, and to make the whole world ring with the fame of Judas Maccabeus!

Antiochus massacres the Jews and pollutes the Temple.

Antiochus, having gone to Egypt in a semi-warlike expedition to settle the rival claims of his two nephews, sons of Ptolemy Epiphanes and his sister Cleopatra, was reported to have been killed. Certain tumults which arose in Judæa in consequence of this rumour, gave him the impression that the Jewish people were in revolt. He forthwith marched against Jerusalem, and slew eighty thousand persons, including women and children. Forty thousand were

taken prisoners, and an equal number sold into slavery. Moreover, he impiously entered the Holy of Holies, and carried off all the gold and silver he could find there, as well as the golden table, altar, and candlesticks, and all the precious vessels, the whole amounting to eighteen hundred talents of gold. He then sacrificed swine upon the altar, boiled some of the flesh, and sprinkled the liquid over the temple. Menelaus, the high-priest, 'that traitor to the laws and to his country, being his guide' and abettor in all this sacrilege.

Foiled in his attempt to seize Egypt.

The two Egyptian princes having agreed together to settle their own disputes, and distrusting the friendly proposals of their uncle, combined their forces to resist further meddling on his part with Egyptian affairs. This compelled Antiochus to declare himself in his true character as the enemy of the two brothers. He led an army into Egypt, and would certainly have annexed the whole country to his dominions, had not ambassadors, sent from Rome for the purpose, commanded him to withdraw from the kingdom. We are told that when the demands of the Roman Senate were put into his hands, he replied, with a view to gaining time, that he would consult his council on the matter. Whereupon one of the ambassadors, making a circle with his staff round the king where he stood, said, 'Before you leave this circle you must give me an answer that I can report to the Senate.'

Second massacre of the Jews.

Foiled in his attempts against Egypt, and compelled to withdraw from that country humiliated, the diabolic idea suggested itself to him of renewing his attack on the Jews, as a convenient way of venting his rage, and of restoring his tranquillity of mind. Accordingly, he despatched one of his generals with twenty-two thousand men to Jerusalem. On the first Sabbath after their arrival, the general commanded his soldiers to go forth and slay every man they met, and to make slaves of all the women and children. Blood now flowed like water: the houses were plundered and the walls of the city demolished, 'and they built the city of David with a great and strong wall, and with strong towers, and made it a fortress for them.' This fortress was so situated that its garrison had complete control over the Sanctuary, which now became 'desolate like a wilderness,' the Jews being no longer able to enter it to perform religious services. And thus in the month of June, B.C. 167, in fulfilment of prophecy, the daily sacrifice ceased. All this is graphically described in the first chapter of the First Book of Maccabees, where an account is also given of the depredations of Antiochus himself two years before.

All his subjects commanded to worship his gods.

As soon as the king returned to Antioch from his Egyptian expedition, he issued an edict, whereby all his subjects were commanded to adopt the religion of their sovereign, and to worship no gods but his. To the

Jews he 'forbad burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the temple,' and commanded them to 'set up altars and groves and chapels of idols, and to sacrifice swine's flesh and unclean beasts, and also that they should leave their children uncircumcised, to the end that they might forget the law and change all the ordinances.' As we have seen, the high-priest was quite in sympathy with the king in this matter; indeed, both he and his adherents had already deliberately abjured the Jewish religion, and solemnly pledged themselves to bring the whole nation to substitute the cult of paganism for the worship of the living God.

## 6.—The Maccabees.

It was at this time, when subject to the fiercest persecution that had ever befallen them, that the faithful Jews took heart under the leadership of Mattathias, an aged priest, and great-grandson of that Hasmon who gave the appellative Hasmonean to the whole race of his descendants.

Mattathias resists the decree.

Apelles, a Syrian officer, was sent to a town called Modin, lying west of Jerusalem and not far from the sea-coast, to carry out the commands of the king his master. He endeavoured, by promises of enrichment and kingly favour, to persuade Mattathias, who was one of the

principal inhabitants of the place, to set the rest an example, and by offering sacrifices to an idol to comply with the requirements of the king's decree. The venerable man indignantly refused to do so, and proclaimed his refusal aloud, so that all might hear it. And when an obsequious Jew dared, in violation of the Divine law, to approach the altar for the purpose of offering sacrifices, he dealt him such a blow as laid him lifeless on the earth. He then attacked the royal officer himself, and supported by his sons and a few compatriots who were encouraged by his heroic example, slew both him and his retinue, and demolished the idolatrous altar. This work being completed, he addressed himself to the multitude around him, crying with a loud voice, 'Whosoever is zealous for the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me.' Many of his fellow countrymen, 'who sought after justice and judgment, flocked to his standard in the Wilderness of Judæa.' At first the Jews refused to fight, even in self-defence, on the Sabbath; but as their enemies made a point of profiting by their religious scruples, and massacred many of them without meeting with any resistance, they felt it their duty to give up the principle, believing it to be the outcome of a too literal interpretation of the law. Mattathias and his followers then marched victoriously from place to place, their numbers increasing daily, so that they soon attained the dimensions of a formidable army. Wherever they

went through the cities of Judæa they pulled down the heathen altars, circumcised the children, and slew all apostate Jews and royal officers.

Death of Mattathias.

In the midst of this career of conquest, the aged and venerable Mattathias died. Before his death he summoned to his side his five sons—John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan—and charged them, in a few fervent words, to be faithful to the God of Israel. 'My sons,' said the old man, his voice feeble from decaying vitality and trembling with emotion, 'My sons, be zealous for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers. Call to remembrance what acts your fathers did in their time, so shall ye receive great honour and an everlasting name.' Simon, being a man of counsel and sagacity, was appointed general adviser to the others; and Judas Maccabeus, who was 'valiant and strong from his youth up,' was made leader of the army, and captain in the field.

Origin of the name Maccabeus.

The origin of the name Maccabeus has been explained in two different ways. The one most generally accepted is that the Hebrew word *makabi*, which signifies hammer, was given to Judas as a surname on account of the heroic and successful way in which he beat down the enemies of Israel. The other explanation traces the origin of the word to the circumstance that Judas bore inscribed upon his ensign the eleventh verse of the fifteenth chapter of Exodus, 'Who is like unto Thee, O

Lord, among the gods?' The initial letters of which in the Hebrew are M. C. B. I.

Success of the Jews under Judas Maccabeus.

The truly marvellous exploits done by the Jewish host under the leadership of Judas fully justified his father's choice in giving him the command. Alarmed by his great success, nearly 50,000 men, under two of the most trusted and experienced generals of Antiochus, march against him. Of course they are confident of victory; and so, too, are about a thousand slave-dealers who accompany the army, with a view to purchasing the Jews, who, they believe, are certain to be taken prisoners in great numbers. And doubtless there is nothing in appearances to discourage such expectations; for Judas can scarcely muster 6,000 men to oppose the overwhelming hosts of his adversaries. And even of this small force only 3,000 remain, when, in accordance with the Mosaic custom, he gives permission to those who are 'fearful and faint-hearted' to return to their homes. But the Lord of Hosts was on their side, and they triumphed gloriously. About 12,000 of the enemy were slain, many wounded, and a great number taken prisoners—amongst whom were not a few of the slave-dealers.

Judas purifies the Temple.

Having become master of the whole country by this victory, Judas repaired to Jerusalem for the purpose of restoring and purifying the temple, which, as we have seen, had suffered much during the persecution. The old altar,

polluted as it was with heathen sacrifices, was removed, a new one erected, and the daily sacrifices recommenced; and on the very same day on which, three years before, the temple had been dedicated to Jupiter Olympus, it was consecrated anew to Jehovah. The services on the occasion continued for eight successive days; and it was unanimously resolved to commemorate the auspicious event by an annual festival at Jerusalem. Hence we have the 'feast of the dedication,' mentioned in John x. 22.

Deaths of Antiochus and Judas Maccabeus.

Four years after this time, Antiochus died of a most painful disease, and the reproaches of his conscience aggravated his bodily malady. His successor, or rather those who governed the kingdom in his name, for he was a minor, maintained the same relations of hostility towards the Jews. However, their great captain, Judas, supported his reputation as an invincible conqueror for three years longer. He at last fell at the head of 800 men, when leading an attack on an army of 22,000 Syrians. His brother Jonathan took up the sword that had fallen from the hand of the slain hero, and vigorously prosecuted the work which their common ancestor had so gloriously begun. He succeeded in driving the Syrians out of the country; and profiting by the disputes which arose between Demetrius Soter and Alexander Balas, regarding the succession to the Syrian throne, he managed to secure for himself the important dignity of the high-priesthood,

which office remained hereditary in his family till the reign of Herod.

Temple built in Egypt by Onias.

It was about this time that a temple after the model of the temple at Jerusalem was built in Egypt, by Onias, a Jew of sacerdotal lineage, who having obtained great influence with Ptolemy Philometor and his queen, was made commander and chief of the Egyptian army, and became possessor of immense influence and authority. He represented to his royal patrons that it would be a source of great advantage to their kingdom, if the numerous inhabitants of Egypt and Cyrene had a temple of their own, where they could perform their religious services without being under the necessity of repairing for such purposes to Jerusalem, which was under the dominion of a foreign prince, and constantly exposed to the ravages of war. He obtained the permission asked for, and having erected a temple, was himself invested with the high-priesthood, the subordinate priestly offices being filled by members of the family of Aaron. Levites were also employed in the temple services, and the whole system of worship was regulated exactly after the Jerusalem model. This temple became the centre or rallying-point of all those Jews who had migrated to Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, and whom Luke styles Grecians, or Hellenists, in the Acts of the Apostles; and it continued until A.D. 76.

After the death of Jonathan, which was brought

about by an act of the most cruel treachery on the part of Tryphon, a Syrian general, Simon, his only surviving brother, assumed the high-priesthood and the command of the army. One of his first official acts was to send ambassadors to Rome, to acquaint the Senate with the fate of his brother, and of his own accession to office, and to renew the alliance with the Romans, which had been first entered into by Judas Maccabeus. He was subsequently created a sovereign prince of Judæa by a treaty with the Syrian king, Demetrius II. Thus the country became entirely independent, and the heathen garrison in the castle on Mount Zion, which had so long resisted every effort to reduce it, was at length required to withdraw (B.C. 138). The two dignities of high-priest and prince of Judæa, conferred on Simon by the Syrian king, were confirmed by the unanimous voice of the people. He valiantly and successfully defended himself against all his assailants; but after governing for eight years he was murdered at Jericho, along with two of his sons, by his son-in-law, who aimed at usurping the principality.

Simon sends an embassy to Rome.

This design was, however, frustrated by the surviving son of Simon, John Hyrcanus, who, on the death of his father, was unanimously acknowledged his successor in the high-priesthood and princedom. This prince greatly extended the boundaries of the country, conquering the Samaritans, whose temple on Mount Gerizim he completely de-

John Hyrcanus

stroyed, and subjugating the Idumeans, to whom he gave the choice either to be circumcised according to the law of Moses or to leave the country. They chose the former alternative, and became one people with the Jews. John Hyrcanus was a zealous Pharisee, and a man distinguished by his virtues. Towards the close of his reign, however, he seriously quarrelled with the religious party to which he belonged, and joined the Sadducees, thus exposing himself and his house to the bitterest Pharisaic animosity. And owing to the great influence the Pharisees exercised over the common people, they were able to cause him much trouble and annoyance. After governing Judæa for some thirty years, he died (B.C. 106).

Aristobulus.

He left the principality to his wife; but his eldest son, Aristobulus, soon seized the reins of government; and his mother, refusing to relinquish the authority, was cast into prison, where she died of starvation. No sooner had he secured the high-priesthood and princely dignity, than he also assumed the diadem and the regal title; and thus the Jews had again a king of their own, after an interval of more than four centuries. He only reigned for one year, and was succeeded by his brother, Alexander Janneus.

Alexander Janneus

This prince, like his father, regarded the Pharisees with feelings of aversion; and they on their part embarrassed him as much as possible in his government, and even broke out in open violence

against him; so much so, indeed, that when he was dying, and foresaw the troubles that were in store for his family, he asked his wife Salome to deliver over his corpse to them, in order that they might dispose of it in what manner they pleased. He also advised her to put herself entirely in their hands, and to promise to govern the kingdom in accordance with their wishes. Salome faithfully followed her husband's counsels, and appeased by this means the enmity of the Pharisees, who forthwith began to speak of the late monarch in terms of the greatest respect, and gave him a splendid burial. Hyrcanus, the eldest son of the deceased king, succeeded his father in the high-priesthood; but after the queen's death his younger brother, Aristobulus, usurped both the priestly and monarchical powers. His reign was a troubled one, and various means were employed by his enemies to restore the sovereignty to Hyrcanus.

## 7.—Rise of the Herodian Family.

Pre-eminent among those who took part in these intrigues was one crafty and designing man, who, amid the bloodshed and commotion of the time, suffered no opportunity to slip whereby his own personal interests might be served, and himself and his family advanced another step in place and power. This was Antipater the Idumean, father of Herod, the future King of Judæa. During

Antipater the Idumean.

the reign of Salome Alexandra, this person had exercised great influence at the Jewish court, an influence which he in a great measure lost when Aristobulus II. became king; and hence his bitter hostility towards him, and his ardent championship of the claims of his brother. In pursuance of his own plans, he persuaded Hyrcanus to enter into a secret treaty with Aretas, the neighbouring King of Arabia. Accordingly, after making due preparation, and enlisting as many Jews as possible in his cause, Hyrcanus fled, accompanied by his Idumean adviser, to Aretas, who conducted them back to Jerusalem with a great army, defeated Aristobulus, and took possession of the holy city. The king, in his distress, appealed for aid to the Romans, who at that time had possessed themselves of Damascus. The Arabian invader was ordered to leave Judæa without delay, and to return to his own dominions. And having no choice left but either to comply with the demand or to bring down upon himself the wrath of a powerful people, he prudently chose the former alternative, and withdrew to his own land.

Pompey the Great.

Ultimately the two brothers, Aristobulus and Hyrcanus, appeared before Pompey the Great, with a view to his arbitrating on their respective claims to the sovereignty of Judæa. Pompey declined to give an immediate decision; and Aristobulus, having good grounds for believing that he would ultimately decide against him, prepared for

war. Pompey, becoming aware of these hostile preparations, led an army against Jerusalem, the gates of which were at once opened to him by the partizans of Hyrcanus, who were now the most numerous. The party of Aristobulus, to which most of the priests belonged, retired to the temple, and there stood a siege. They held out for three months, when a breach was at length made in the walls of the sacred edifice, and the Romans rushed in and took possession (B.C. 63). Great carnage followed, not less than 12,000 people being slaughtered, many of whom were priests.

His visit to the Temple.

Pompey, attended by his suit, inspected the temple, and even penetrated into the Holy of Holies. The sacred treasures of the sanctuary, which were of great value, the proud conqueror left untouched, but he caused the city walls to be demolished. He appointed Hyrcanus high-priest and prince of the country, on the condition that he would pay tribute to the Republic, and refrain from assuming the diadem. Thus began the supremacy of the Romans over a people who had once enjoyed the honour of being their allies (B.C. 62).

Aristobulus II. continued to oppose, as opportunity offered, the existing state of affairs. But all his efforts to recover the throne were in vain; and after he had been twice a prisoner in Rome, he at last perished by Roman poison. He had two sons, Alexander and Antigonus. The former vigorously imitated his father's example, and sought by every means at his command to

regain the power of which his family had been deprived, but without success. He was at length beheaded for having embraced the cause of Cæsar against Pompey.

Change of government in Judæa.

Meanwhile the form of government in Judæa was changed to an aristocracy by Gabinius, proconsul of Syria, Hyrcanus being confirmed in the high-priesthood (B.C. 54). This arrangement lasted for some ten years, at the end of which time Cæsar visited Judæa. Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus II. and brother of Alexander, then met him, and complained that he was still deprived of his kingdom, though both his father and his brother had lost their lives in endeavouring to further Cæsar's cause. However, the wily Antipater so represented matters to the dictator, that Antigonus not only got no redress, but was ignominiously dismissed as a seditious person; while his uncle Hyrcanus was once more reinstated in authority, and Antipater made procurator of Judæa under him. As an acknowledgment of the favour that had been conferred upon him, and as a token of his gratitude for being permitted to restore the walls of Jerusalem, which Pompey had thrown down, Hyrcanus sent a golden shield to Rome of immense value; whereupon the Jews were again publicly recognized, by a decree of the Senate, as allies of the Roman people. Thus the aristocracy which had been set up by Gabinius was brought to an end, and the principality re-established. Antipater now settled the affairs

Antipater made procurator.

of the country as directed by Cæsar, and reduced the inhabitants everywhere to obedience. He made his eldest son, Phasael, governor of Jerusalem, and Herod, his second son, he appointed governor of Galilee (B.C. 43). About two years afterwards, at the request of Hyrcanus (who was in truth a mere tool in the hands of his crafty minister), the two brothers were raised to the dignity of tetrarchs of Palestine by Mark Antony.

## 8.—Herod the Great.

Invasion of Syria by the Parthians.

About this time the Parthians, being invited hither by the oppressed peoples, invaded Syria and Palestine, and made themselves masters of the country. They placed Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus II., on the throne of Judæa, and delivered both Hyrcanus and Phasael into his power. Antipater, the father of the latter, had a short time previously met with a violent death. Phasael, rather than die by the hands of his enemies, committed suicide; while the ears of Hyrcanus were cropped by Antigonus, so as to render him for ever ineligible for the office of high-priest. Thus mutilated he was sent back to the Parthians, who carried him away captive.

Herod at Rome.

Herod had also been marked out for destruction, but he managed to effect his escape to Rome. When there he requested that Aristobulus, a grandson of Hyrcanus and brother of his

betrothed wife Mariamne, might be appointed King of Judæa, and that he might be made governor under him, as he had been under Hyrcanus. Owing to his friendly relations with Mark Antony, who recommended him to Octavian as the son of Antipater, who had rendered important services to Cæsar in Egypt at a most critical moment, he got, if not more than he wanted, at least, more than he ventured to ask; for he was himself appointed king by a decree of the Roman Senate. He was afterwards conducted to the Capitol by Antony and Octavian, and consecrated to his new office with idolatrous sacrifices (B.C. 37).

Herod made King of Judæa.

A few days later Herod set out on his return to Judæa, where he arrived again after the lapse of just three months from the time of his hasty flight. Meanwhile, the Parthians had been compelled to leave the country, and the Romans were again masters of Syria. Herod at once set about raising an army, with a view to making himself king, not in name merely, but in reality. However, notwithstanding his best exertions, and the aid afforded to him by the Romans, fully three years elapsed before he obtained complete possession of the kingdom. After standing a lengthened siege, Jerusalem at last capitulated; but the besiegers, more particularly the Roman section of them, were so enraged by the obstinate defence of the city, that they continued to slay and pillage the

helpless inhabitants long after all resistance had ceased. Indeed, to such a degree was this the case, that in order to put an end to the carnage, and save his capital from total destruction, Herod was obliged to pay large sums of money to his companions-in-arms.

Death of Antigonus.

Antigonus, being taken prisoner, was loaded with chains and carried to Antioch, where he was condemned to die by Antony, Herod having represented to the latter that if the king's life were spared new disturbances would be sure to arise, owing to the people's affection for the Hasmonean race. He was accordingly executed, and that, too, like a common malefactor, by the sword of the lictor. Thus came to a tragic and ignominious close the dominion of the illustrious Maccabees; and thus began, amid bloodshed and desolation, the reign of the son of Antipater, Herod the Idumean (B.C. 34).

Measures taken by Herod to establish his rule.

As soon as Herod had obtained the kingdom, he adopted the most extreme measures to secure himself in its possession. The entire Sanhedrin, with but two exceptions, was put to death because it ventured to inform the usurper that, in accordance with Deut. xvii. 15, a stranger could not lawfully be acknowledged as king. Fearing to make any illustrious person high-priest, because of the dignity and power the office conferred, and the danger that might thereby result to his own authority, Herod sent for an obscure

priest out of Babylon, Ananel by name, whom he placed in the pontifical chair, to the great disgust of the entire community.

Aristobulus made high-priest.

He was soon afterwards persuaded, much against his will, to depose the high-priest of his own selection, and to bestow the office on Aristobulus, his wife's brother, and son of the late King Alexander by the daughter of Hyrcanus. Though he was only seventeen years of age, this young man had, of course, very strong claims on the office, being of Hasmonean lineage through both his parents. When Aristobulus appeared before the people, clad in his pontifical robes, they were greatly struck with the beauty of his person, the dignity of his mien, and the solemnity and grace of his whole behaviour. Reverence for his royal ancestry was awakened in their breasts, and they called to remembrance his right, not merely to the priestly, but also to the royal dignity. His praises were on every tongue; and Herod, the better to disguise his dark thoughts, and to conceal his diabolic designs, swelled the general rejoicings with his own feigned applause, laying his plans, the while, for the destruction of a youth whom he in his heart detested, and of whose rivalry he was nervously afraid.

Murder of Aristobulus.

The opportunity for carrying out his fell purpose soon presented itself. Herod, being a guest of Alexandra at Jericho, where the recently-appointed high-priest also was on a visit

to his mother, enticed the youth away to a lonely place, where there were large fish ponds. The weather being very hot, the king persuaded his companion to enjoy the luxury of a bath. Some of Herod's servants were bathing at the same time, and instigated by their master they plunged Aristobulus under the water, in the dusk of the evening, and kept him there until he was quite lifeless. His death was, of course, attributed to pure accident, and Herod, the better to prevent any suspicion to the contrary, mingled his own feigned regrets with the universal lamentation of the people. However, Alexandra, the queen-mother, was not at all deceived by the assumed sorrow of the homicide, and owing to her representations of the affair to Cleopatra, with whom she was on intimate terms, and through her to Antony himself, Herod got into serious trouble, out of which he with difficulty extricated himself by the large presents which he made to his patron.

Herod aids Antony.

Herod had reigned about seven years, when the final struggle for the supremacy of the world took place between Octavian and Antony. With the fortunes of the latter those of Herod were inseparably bound up; and in the great conflict which ensued we find the king aiding Antony to the utmost of his power, both by his counsels and his sword. After the Battle of Actium, however, when his services were no longer of any avail, and when, indeed, they were no longer asked for, he

hastened to make his peace with Octavian. Having made all arrangements in view of possible contingencies during his absence, he set out for Rhodes, where Augustus was settling the affairs of the empire. The interview that then took place between these two remarkable men illustrates, in a very striking way, some of the best features in Herod's character, and forms a bright episode in the otherwise dark and dismal record of his life. On being admitted to the presence of the emperor, the king wore all his regal decorations except the diadem. The many services he had rendered to Antony he candidly confessed, and avowed his sincere attachment to him, an attachment, he added, which was not in the least diminished by his friend's misfortunes, but which, owing to the strange obstinacy and perversity of the man, could no longer be of any advantage to him. The services which Antony no longer needed he then offered to Augustus, intimating at the same time that fidelity to a vanquished friend should not disqualify him for receiving the favour and confidence of a new patron, when he professed his readiness to serve him with the same zeal and loyalty which he had displayed in maintaining the cause of the benefactor he had lost. The courage and dignity displayed by Herod on this occasion produced a most favourable impression on Augustus, who forthwith acknowledged the king as his friend, and confirmed him on his throne.

Offers his services to Augustus.

Before starting on the above-mentioned errand, Herod had added another dreadful murder to the many of which he was already guilty. The aged Hyrcanus, having returned from captivity some time previously, was looked upon by the usurper with a feeling of uneasiness similar to that with which he had regarded his grandson, Aristobulus; and he judged it prudent to remove out of the way a man who had such strong claims on the crown, though the mutilation he had experienced at the hands of Antigonus had destroyed all prospect of his ever becoming high-priest. A seditious charge was accordingly trumped up against him, and he was judicially murdered at the ripe age of fourscore years.

Murder of Hyrcanus.

The appearance of a possible king of the Jews who might legally claim the throne he had unlawfully usurped, seems to have been the ruling fear of Herod's life. Neither youth nor age nor infancy was any protection to the individual who was credited with such pretensions. As we have seen, it was this fear that caused him first to murder the young Aristobulus, and then to put to death the venerable Hyrcanus; and actuated by a similar feeling of anxiety, he subsequently 'sent forth and slew all the male children in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under.'

But Herod's cruelty towards the Hasmonean race did not confine itself to the male members thereof. He caused his own wife,

Herod's cruelties.

Mariamne, to be executed on a false charge of adultery; and his mother-in-law, Alexandra, because of a rebellion in which she was concerned, was visited with the same fate.

Herod's innovations.

One by one every possible claimant to the crown having been removed, Herod began to breathe more freely, and set about introducing some very grave innovations amongst the Jews. For example, he erected a theatre and amphitheatre at Jerusalem, and instituted the usual heathen games; among others, the gladiatorial combats and contests with wild beasts, which we have already noticed as being so popular at Rome and elsewhere throughout the pagan world. This gave great offence to the people; and in connexion with such outrages on Jewish susceptibilities Herod on one occasion nearly lost his life. Ten indignant Jews, having formed a conspiracy against him, assembled with daggers concealed under their garments, determined to assassinate the king on his entering the theatre. The plot was, however, discovered, and the would-be regicides were put to death with the most cruel tortures. The informer who revealed the plot was afterwards attacked by a band of men, and murdered without mercy. These offenders, in their turn, were put to the rack by the king's command, and then executed together with their families.

But Herod's disregard for the opinion of his subjects did not manifest itself merely by the introduction of

heathen games. He outraged their feelings still more by the erection of heathen temples, in which divine honours were rendered to Augustus. The indignation of the people at length rose to such a pitch that he was obliged to prohibit all public gatherings under heavy penalties. He also sent spies in great numbers amongst the people to discover the disaffected, and if possible bring them to punishment. It is even said that the king himself spent many a night in going about disguised through the thoroughfares of Jerusalem, for the purpose of learning the sentiments of the crowd. The results of these nocturnal rambles were not encouraging. Their tendency was rather to disturb and distress him; for instead of the breathings of loyalty and devotion which out of pure selfishness he longed so much to hear, he found that the mere mention of his name was always the signal 'for curses, not loud but deep.'

Heathen temples.

As a safeguard against this disaffection, Herod felt himself constrained to build fortified places throughout his kingdom, wherein he placed heathen garrisons, in order that any seditious outbreak might be promptly quelled. Among the most important of these were Strato's Tower and Samaria, which he named respectively Cæsarea and Sebastè, in honour of the emperor. The latter city, it is true, had, after its destruction by John Hyrcanus, been rebuilt by the pro-consul Gabinius, but not fortified.

Cæsarea and Sebaste.

Rebuilding of the Temple.

Feeling that these precautionary measures of intimidation scarcely met all the requirements of the case, Herod, with the view of gaining the affection of the Jews, conceived the design of erecting a new temple in Jerusalem, much larger and more magnificent than the old one. Having summoned the people together in the temple, he laid his scheme before them in the following artful address: 'I think I need not speak to you, my countrymen, about such works as I have done since I came to the kingdom, although I may say they have been performed in such a manner as to bring more security to you than glory to myself: for I have neither been negligent in the most difficult times about what tended to ease your necessities, nor have the buildings I have made been so proper to preserve me as yourselves from injuries: and I imagine that, with God's assistance, I have advanced the nation of the Jews to a degree of happiness which they never had before: and for the particular edifices belonging to your own country and to your own cities, as also to those cities which we have lately acquired, which we have erected and greatly adorned, and thereby augmented the dignity of your nation, it seems to me a needless task to enumerate them to you, since you well know them yourselves; but as to that undertaking which I have a mind to set about at present, and which will be a work of the greatest piety and excellence that can possibly be undertaken by us, I will now declare it

to you. Our fathers, indeed, when they were returned from Babylon, built this temple to God Almighty, yet does it want sixty cubits of its largeness in altitude, for so much did that first temple which Solomon built exceed this temple: nor let any one condemn our fathers for their negligence or want of piety herein, for it was not their fault that the temple was no higher: for they were Cyrus, and Darius, the son of Hystaspes, who determined the measures for its rebuilding: and it hath been by reason of the subjection of those fathers of ours to them and to their posterity, and after them to the Macedonians, that they had not the opportunity to follow the original model of this pious edifice, nor could raise it to its ancient altitude: but since I am now, by God's will, your governor, and I have had peace a long time, and have gained great riches and large revenues, and, what is the principal thing of all, I am at unity with and well regarded by the Romans, who, if I may so say, are the rulers of the whole world, I will do my endeavour to correct that imperfection, which hath arisen from the necessity of their affairs, and the slavery we have been under formerly, and to make a thankful return after the most pious manner to God, for what blessings I have received from Him, by giving me this kingdom, and that by rendering His temple as complete as I am able.'

Much to Herod's disappointment and disgust, the Jews were not at all satisfied with his proposal.

Indeed, they were alarmed rather than delighted thereby; for they greatly distrusted the motives which prompted the undertaking, and feared, lest after pulling down their temple, he might find some excuse for not replacing it, and so leave them without any sanctuary at all. However, the king promised not to disturb the old structure till all the material for the new one should be ready. He kept his word; and after two years—the stipulated condition being complied with—the work was commenced (B.C. 14), and the old walls were taken down; but only by degrees, and no faster than they could be replaced by new masonry. The main body of the temple was completed in less than ten years; but the whole was not finished for long afterwards—'Forty and six years was this temple in building,' said the Jews to Jesus (John ii. 20), and the end of the work had not even then been reached.

Herod breaks open the royal tombs.

The vast sums expended by Herod in carrying out his architectural schemes, not only in Jerusalem, but elsewhere throughout his kingdom, necessarily exhausted his treasury. With the object of replenishing his empty coffers, he perpetrated a deed of sacrilege, which, had it been generally known at the time, would not only have effaced any feeling of gratitude which existed amongst the people on account of the rebuilding of the temple, but would also have greatly intensified their former hatred and hostility towards him. A report had

reached the ears of Herod that Hyrcanus II., when in straits for money, had opened the sepulchre of David and abstracted therefrom some three thousand talents of silver, and that he had left behind untouched a much larger sum. Herod determined to possess himself of this money, and accompanied by a few faithful companions, to whom he had imparted the secret, he broke into David's tomb at dead of night, to seize the coveted treasure. However, no trace of money was anywhere to be found. He then determined to prosecute his search into the most sacred recesses of the vault, even to where the ashes of David and Solomon reposed. But just as he approached the hallowed spot two of his guards were slain by a flame of fire that suddenly issued from the chamber they were about to desecrate. The king was greatly alarmed thereat, and rushed from the place closely followed by his terrified attendants. He lost no time in erecting a costly monument at the entrance of the tomb as a propitiatory offering, and with a view to averting further calamity.

But it was in vain. Further calamity was not thereby averted. We may not, of course, presume with our creature wisdom to divine the counsels of the Creator, or confidently to determine the precise cause wherefore any human being suffers: we can only state the historic fact, that from this time forward, during the remaining years of Herod's life, misfortunes and troubles continued to gather closer and thicker

around him. His domestic relationships, never happy at the best, became the unhappiest possible. His household developed into a very hell of mutual jealousies and intrigues. 'The tumult was like a civil war in his palace; and their hatred towards one another was like that where each strove to exceed another in calumnies.' As an outcome of these family feuds, the two sons of his murdered wife Mariamne, Alexander and Aristobulus, having fallen under the king's displeasure, were strangled by his orders. And among his last utterances in this world was a command to execute Antipater, another of his sons. Well might the Emperor Augustus exclaim, with regard to his Judæan tributary, that he would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son.

## 9.—The Birth of the Messiah.

The Magi.

Not many weeks before the king was seized by the fatal malady from which he never recovered, a small band of foreign-looking pilgrims, dressed in the garb of Eastern Magi, might have been seen wending their way through one of its gates into the city of Jerusalem. They are no sooner within the walls than they enter into earnest conversation with some of the citizens, and, as a result, immediately become the centre of an excited crowd. And no wonder; for they declare the object of their visit to be nothing less than to pay homage

to a newly-born King of the Jews, whose star, they say, appeared to them when making their customary observation of the midnight heavens, and that by it they have been directed hither. The wonderful tidings, witnessed to as they were by the implicitly-believed-in-science of astrology, and sanctioned by the lively expectation which then prevailed the world over, that a great prince was about to arise amongst the Jewish people, threw all Jerusalem into an uproar.[1] The news soon reached the royal palace on Mount Zion, and at length came to the ears of Herod himself, who was thereby greatly troubled. 'And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come forth

[1] The Roman historian Suetonius, in his Life of the Emperor Vespasian, thus writes: 'There had been for a long time all over the East a firm persuasion that it was in the fates, that at that time some who should come of Judæa should obtain universal dominion. It appeared by the event that this prediction referred to the Roman emperor; but the Jews, referring it to themselves, rebelled.' And the language of Tacitus is even more remarkable: 'The generality had a strong persuasion that it was contained in the ancient writings of the priests, that at that very time the East should prevail, and that some who should come out of Judæa should obtain the empire of the world. Which ambiguities foretold Vespasian and Titus. But the common people (of the Jews), according to the usual influence of human desires, appropriated to themselves by their interpretation the vast grandeur foretold by the fates, nor could be brought to change their opinions for the true by all their adversaries' (*Hist.* V. xiii. 3). Josephus confirms this testimony in almost identical phrase. *Wars*, Book VI., chap. v. § 4.

a Governor, which shall be shepherd of My people Israel. Then Herod privily called the wise men, and learned of them carefully what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search out carefully concerning the young child; and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship Him. And they, having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. . . . . And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshipped Him; and opening their treasures they offered unto Him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.'

This supposed slight on the part of the Magi was speedily followed by a retaliatory measure on the part of the king, who forthwith issued an order for the massacre of the children at Bethlehem.

The sedition about the eagle.

Probably not many days after this tragedy, and when the author of it, having entered on the first stage of his fatal malady, was already confined to his couch, a sedition broke out amongst the people, in connexion with a golden eagle, which, in obedience to the king's orders, had been erected over the great gate of the temple, and which was regarded by many as an unlawful and

a heathenish thing. Urged on by some of their leaders, a number of young men pulled down the image and cut it into pieces, and that too in broad day, and while many people were in the temple. Herod was greatly incensed by this behaviour, and ordered those who had been taken in the act to be bound and carried to Jericho, where, along with their two leaders, Judas and Matthias, they were burned alive. 'And that very night,' says Josephus, 'there was an eclipse of the moon.' This incidental remark of the Jewish writer has been of vast use to scholars in helping them to approximate to the exact time at which our Saviour was born. The current chronology, which came into use in the sixth century, is, as every one knows, erroneous. Astronomers, profiting by the hint of the historian, have made their calculations, and are agreed that the eclipse mentioned took place on the night of March 12th, or in the evening of March 13th, B.C. 4. The death of Herod must have occurred within three weeks from this date; and we think the Gospel narrative suggests the conclusion that the birth of our Lord happened certainly not less than six weeks, and probably not more than three months, previous to the demise of the king.

Death of Herod.

The account given by Josephus of the tyrant's death, at the age of seventy years, and after a reign signalized by all manner of wanton cruelties and capricious crimes, is one of the saddest and most revolting records in the whole

annals of the human race. It would appear that a few days before he expired, and when racked by the agonies of a most loathsome disease, the king sent out and summoned to Jericho, where he then was, all the principal men of the nation. In obedience to the royal mandate, the Jewish leaders assembled in great numbers. Herod at once gave an order for their confinement in the Hippodrome; and that too without assigning any reason for such an arbitrary and violent proceeding. He then sent for his sister Salome (one of the few of his relatives whom he had allowed to live) and her husband Alexas, and enjoined them, as soon as he had given up the ghost, to slaughter the entire party. His reason being that he might have 'a great mourning at his funeral, and such as never any king had before him, for then the whole nation would mourn from their very soul, which otherwise would be done in sport and mockery only.' Salome and her partner were judicious enough, after Herod's death, to disobey his commands; and instead of slaying those who were shut up in the Hippodrome, they dismissed them to their homes, and told them, moreover, that in doing so they were carrying out the wish of the late king.

Herod's son Archelaus succeeded him on the throne; but after a tyrannical and troubled reign of ten years he was accused before Augustus, and banished from the kingdom; whereupon Judæa and Samaria were declared a part of the Roman province of Syria.

## 10.—Civil Constitution of Judæa in B.C. 4.

With regard to the civil constitution of the Jewish state at the commencement of our era, it had obviously modified itself very considerably since Old Testament times. We have already noticed as amongst the last recorded events in the Hebrew Scriptures, the mutual co-operation of the civil and spiritual officers, in arranging and managing the affairs of the recently re-established Jewish commonwealth. We have seen Nehemiah 'the Tirshatha' and Ezra the priest standing side by side, and sharing between them the cares and responsibilities of national leadership. Nehemiah charged himself not only with matters of state, but he likewise arranged the externals of Divine worship, and formulated the rules for ecclesiastical life; while Ezra applied himself more especially to the exposition of the law, and the inculcation of doctrine and duty. The priesthood and the civil power thus maintained towards each other a relation of equapoise.

The Priesthood.

Under the Mosaic economy precedency was undoubtedly assigned to the sacerdotal office, for besides conducting Divine service and expounding the law, it was also the priests' duty to act as judges in the more important cases: and as late as the days of Eli the offices of high-priest and judge were united in the same person. Even in the time of the Kings, priests were occasionally appointed

to the judicial office (2 Chron. xix. 6). Cases of this kind were, however, the exception rather than the rule. While the kingdom lasted, the priests confined their activities for the most part to the temple and its sacred services, and meddled but little in civil or political affairs.

After the death of Nehemiah the priesthood again rose into prominence, owing to the high-priest being made the governor under the various powers which successively ruled over the Jews from the period of the Persian dominion till the time of the Maccabees, when, as we have already seen, the sacerdotal and the kingly dignities were united in the same person. And though, at the accession of Herod, the influence of the priesthood was once more considerably curtailed, it still continued to make itself strongly felt in the Sanhedrin, or supreme council of the nation. The presence of the high-priest in this council, as its president, was without doubt a secularization of his sacred office, for which there was no Divine authority, inasmuch as the exercise of judicial functions, and the consulting of the will of the Lord by means of the Urim and Thummim, were the only divinely sanctioned duties of the high-priest unconnected with the worship of Jehovah.

The Scribes.

Besides the priesthood proper, and the civil magistracy or eldership, there developed itself amongst the Jews, after their return from exile, a third most important estate, viz., the Scribes,

or doctors of the law. Ezra himself is already spoken of as a 'ready scribe.' Respecting this body history furnishes us with but little information before New Testament times. But from the prominent part they play in Jewish affairs during our Lord's ministry, as shown by the Evangelists, we are forced to infer that they represent a system which is the growth of ages.

If we take into consideration the condition of the Hebrew community during the exile, as well as immediately afterwards, satisfactory and sufficient reasons for the rise of such a class cannot fail to suggest themselves. Let us bear in mind that during the captivity Divine service was limited to a simple study of the law of Moses. Far from the holy city, its temple and altar, the pious Israelite could in no other way lawfully do homage to Jehovah; nor by any other means nourish his theocratic hopes or keep in remembrance the covenant of his God. And so it came to pass, after the return from Babylon, when the inspired books were collected into a whole, there was a class already prepared in some measure, by their previous training and habits, to take up the important duty of investigating and expounding the sacred records. And the almost simultaneous establishment of the synagogues or schools, wherein the law was read and explained, rendered the perpetuation of such a class an indispensable condition of sound national development. The Scribes in a measure took the place of the old prophets, and occupied with regard

to the latter a position precisely similar to the relation which modern divines hold to the apostles.

'Who were the scribes, and what were their aims?' asks the learned Professor of Theology at Greifswald, and he answers his own question as follows:—'They were the champions of the law, *i.e.*, the book of the Thorah, whose authority they aimed at making paramount in Israel. If the Thorah was the soul of the Second Theocracy, the Scribes were the nerves of that soul. When, during the captivity, the sacrifices had ceased, and therewith the sacred usages and duties which could only be rightly observed within the boundaries of the Holy Land; and when both, having fallen into desuetude, were in danger of being forgotten, the Scribes, who sprang up in the first instance from among the class of former priests, rescued from oblivion the sacred practices of former days, by making them the subject of study and provisional theoretic endeavours.'

Tradition.

Unhappily, the Scribes did not rest content with merely expounding the written law and giving its true meaning. They kept adding thereto, from time to time, a mass of unprofitable and absurd matter. Thus the law ultimately came to be lost in the heap of commentary and tradition under which it lay buried, and which, according to the teaching of the Scribes, was quite as important as the law itself, and in some cases even more so.

'The traditions of the elders,' to which our Lord so

often refers in terms of disapproval and reproach, were just the additions made to the law by the Scribes, and which passed out of the region of theory into that of practice by the application which the magistrates or elders made of them in their judicial decisions. For it is to be remembered that the Scribes were not theologians merely, but jurisconsults as well.

The standard of righteousness.

From the Scribes' point of view the only true standard of righteousness was the law in all its length and breadth—oral as well as written. But to reach this standard was, of course, only possible for those who possessed the requisite knowledge. That, under such circumstances, vast influence attached to the party who were preeminently and by profession the custodians of knowledge, goes without saying. As has been truly observed, while 'the authority of the law was the object avowedly aimed at by the Scribes, their own personal ascendency over the community was the result actually arrived at.'

It will be obvious to the reader from what has been said, that, in the opinion of the Jewish doctors, 'righteousness' was a thing inseparably bound up with strong intelligence and large attainments, and therefore, from the very nature of the case, a monopoly of the learned. Indeed, Hillel, one of the best and wisest of the Scribes, who died B.C. 10, explicitly says 'The uneducated man cannot avoid sin, nor can a common person be truly pious.' And in John vii. 49

we find the same sentiment re-echoed in still harsher phrase, 'This multitude who know not the law are accursed.' With such facts before us it is not difficult to understand how, when the Divine Teacher came, 'the common people heard Him gladly.'

Though eminent for scholarship, the Scribes as a class were sadly lacking in vital godliness, and merited, too often, the severe reproach, 'Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.' Yet, notwithstanding the formality and worldliness of the majority, there occasionally arose amongst them some who, like the remarkable man to whom reference has just been made, were distinguished as much by deep piety as by great erudition. Certain modern admirers of these truly admirable men carry their enthusiasm so far as to make comparisons between them and Jesus Christ; and while, perhaps, allowing the superiority of the latter on the whole, they are wont to insist that our Lord loved virtue only a little more,—that He countenanced sin and selfishness only a little less than did the best of the Rabbins; but

> '——The little more, and how much it is!
> And the little less, and what worlds away!'

The priests, the civil magistracy, or elders, and the Scribes, were the three estates from which the members of the sanhedrin or supreme council of the Jews were drawn. The idea of the

The Sanhedrin.

formation of such a council doubtless originated as far back as the time when the Book of Numbers was written. At any rate, the eleventh chapter would seem to warrant such a conclusion. But that there is great obscurity about the whole question as to when and how the Jewish sanhedrin originated, the conflicting statements of the foremost authorities on the subject furnish ample proof. Canon Farrar, for instance, says, 'The sanhedrin was the successor of the great synagogue, the last member of which died in the person of Simon the Just.' Dr. Robertson Smith, on the other hand, observes, 'We now know that the whole idea that there ever was a body called the great synagogue holding rule in the Jewish nation is pure fiction.' This much, however, may be safely said, that whenever and wherever the idea of the sanhedrin may have originated, the ultimate realization of the idea dates after the return from exile, and was the outcome of the social forces which began to work at that time.

As regards the institution itself, there is less room for diversity of opinion. The great sanhedrin—so-called in contradistinction to the local sanhedrins of the various provincial towns, and also to distinguish it from its own committees, formed of twenty-three members—sat at Jerusalem, and was composed of seventy-one worthies, of venerable age and conspicuous amongst their contemporaries for character and ability. It determined the most important affairs

of the nation, and exercised both judicial and administrative functions, and, when in possession of its full rights, had the power of enforcing its decisions by the penalty of death. The president of the council was the high-priest, who was styled the *Nasî*, and he had a deputy called *Ab-Bêth-Din* (father of the house of judgment), and also, as some say, a sub-deputy, named *Chacam* (wise man).

Their meetings.

The ordinary meetings of the court were held in a hall or chamber within the precincts of the temple, while extraordinary meetings generally took 'place in the official residence of the high-priest. The members of the assemby usually sat in a semicircle before the president, who occupied a kind of throne, with his deputy seated on his right hand, and his sub-deputy on his left. The council met daily, Sabbath days and feast days being of course excepted.

The fact, however, is not to be overlooked, that from the time of Herod's elevation to the throne, the old independent spirit which characterized the Jewish council during the Hasmonean period almost entirely disappeared. After the terrible massacre by which the tyrant signalized his accession to power, the minions and adherents of the alien king, forming themselves into a spurious and obsequious council, usurped the prerogatives and exercised the functions of the lawful national assembly they had superseded, but to which they were far inferior both in character

and independence. It is, indeed, a question, whether from the commencement of Herod's reign onward, during the whole period of the Roman dominion, anything that could be called a sanhedrin, in the original sense of the word, ever once existed amongst the Jewish people. Not a few writers maintain the negative; and it has even been suggested that the various harsh measures from time to time adopted by the so-called council of the Jews against our Lord and His apostles, were merely the arbitrary decrees of a 'lynch-tribunal,' and not the sober decisions of a deliberative and dignified assembly. But, however that may be, this much at least is clear, that during the entire Roman period the high-priest or president of the council was himself a mere creature of the civil power, now degraded from his office, and again reinstated, according as the caprices of the moment happened to prompt, or the exigencies of government seemed to require.

## II.—Religious Constitution of Judæa in B.C. 4.

The three religious parties.

Having glanced at the three civil estates amongst the Jews, we shall now proceed to notice the three religious parties from which the former are to be carefully distinguished. These were the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. The relations between these latter and the so-called civil estates were not such as involved the necessity of

the membership and interests of any one party and any one estate being commensurate and identical. Still it is, in point of fact, true, that the members of the Pharisaic party were mostly allies and followers of the Scribes; while the Sadducees belonged chiefly to the priestly class. It was so, at least, from Herod's time onward.

What was the origin of these religious parties? and what their respective characteristics? are the questions to which we now address ourselves.

The Pharisees.

Pharisaism was a direct outcome of the teaching of the Scribes; the clear tendency of which, as we have already seen, was to make the most scrupulous observance of the requirements of the law an indispensable condition of the attainment of righteousness. But it will be asked, Were not the Scribes the teachers of the law and the custodians of saving knowledge for the entire community? and how then could their teaching result in producing a party of 'separatists,' who prided themselves in being distinct from the Jewish people as a whole? To this it may be answered, That between the aim of the Jewish nation as a whole and that of the Pharisees in particular, there was no radical difference. The aim of the latter was righteousness; but such likewise was the aim of the entire Abrahamic race. The means, moreover, by which it was sought to arrive at this desired end was the very same in both cases, viz., by living in conformity with the law. The

difference, therefore, between the two parties was one, not of kind, but of degree, and lay wholly in the intensity and zeal with which the work was set about, and in the thoroughness with which it was performed. To state it otherwise, the demands of the Rabbins were acquiesced in by the whole nation as the proper expression of the theocratic principle. But the mass of the people were altogether unable to objectify in their conduct the doctrines and dogmas in which they professed to believe. Indeed, perfectly to master even in theory a collection of injunctions so comprehensive and confused, was in itself a task which but few could accomplish; while the carrying them into practice was for the majority an utter impossibility. And so it came to pass, as time went on, that from the majority of weaker brethren there separated themselves a minority, superior in mental endowments, and gifted with a moral force and fortitude above the rest, who voluntarily undertook to exemplify in their own persons the Rabbinical ideal of a true Israelite, and who, with this end in view, made the study of the law the serious business of their lives. Such were the Pharisees.

Their religious views.

In religion, the Pharisees were the orthodox party, and as such possessed the confidence and won the admiration of the multitude, whom they secretly despised. In politics they were patriots or nationalists; and whenever a favourable opportunity presented itself, they were,

as a general rule, always ready to spend their fortunes, and, if necessary, risk their lives on behalf of their country. It was from their ranks arose the valiant Maccabees and their devoted adherents, 'who struck to the earth the power of the Seleucidæ, and planted anew the flag of freedom on the walls of Sion.' They believed in the existence of angels and spirits; and it was amongst the Pharisees that the doctrine of the resurrection fully developed itself as the necessary outcome of their Messianic hopes and aspirations, and as a natural consequence of the traditional teaching which had come down to them from the days of Moses.

Their faults.

However, while Pharisaism could boast of some very commendable qualities, it was also chargeable with serious faults. And from the picture of it presented to us in the pages of the New Testament it is clear that, in our Lord's day, the more imperfect side of the system had largely developed itself. Forms more or less accidental had obtained undue prominence; the spirit had been sacrified to the letter; the law had been put in the place of the Law-giver; and the mind, too much occupied with the mere ceremonial of the national religion, had become forgetful of the worship which is 'in spirit and in truth.'

The Sadducees.

The Sadducees, as a party, were utterly opposed to the Pharisees. In principle, Sadduceeism was nothing else than a protest against the exaggerations of ritualistic and ascetic formalism,

and a denial of the pretensions of cant. While the Pharisees, as became such ardent followers of the Scribes, based their particular doctrines, for the most part, on the additions made to the law, the Sadducees held exclusively to the law itself, putting aside all tradition, and rejecting the dogma of the resurrection and of the soul's existence after death. 'The Pharisees,' so writes Josephus, 'have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written Word, but are not to observe what are derived from the traditions of our forefathers.'

Their political position.

In matters political the latter accommodated themselves more easily than did the former to the circumstances in which they found themselves placed, and were able to contemplate the misfortunes of their country with philosophic equanimity. When they were unable to expel the invader, they made up their minds to live at peace with him, and freely availed themselves of whatever in foreign learning and foreign law they found good and profitable. While acknowledging the forms and principles of Judaism, as developed in the two first centuries after the exile, they did not, like the Pharisees, seek to meet the ever-increasing needs of civil society and the requirements

of progressive thought by a mere national development. They acted on the assumption that an indispensable condition of all true progress, whether in the social or the intellectual world, was not the imposition of narrow and antiquated forms, but a free exchange of ideas. In contradistinction to the Pharisees, who were the popular party, the Sadducees constituted the aristocratic and governing section of the nation.

Reuss' contrast.

Professor Edouard Reuss, of Strasburg, sums up an admirable contrast of the two parties in the following sentences: 'The Sadducees happily avoided the formalism, at once hollow and oppressive, of the Pharisees; the narrow and over-scrupulous spirit of the latter was foreign to them. Still, in matters of greater moment, they made a much wider departure from the spirit of the prophets. Along with faith in the Jewish nationality, they had also lost a great part of the religious convictions of their fellow-citizens; with as much error they had less superstition and more indifference; with equal selfishness they had more prudence and less nobility; with as many faults they had more success and less merit. Thus were the Sadducees, as a party, distinguished from the Pharisees, who were their most direct, most persistent, and most frequently defeated adversaries; but who, though cruelly crushed, remained in the end incontestably victorious. The former ended in a shameful impoverishment of

Judaism; the latter transformed it into a miserable petrification.'[1]

The Essenes.

With regard to the third religious party, viz., the Essenes, no information is to be obtained from an inspired source. Though the Pharisees and the Sadducees are frequently mentioned in the New Testament, the Essenes are not once referred to; and all knowledge of them has to be derived from Josephus and other historians. Like the Pharisees, the Essenes seem to have aimed at cultivating a special holiness; but the holiness of the latter was a far higher and nobler kind than that with which the former were identified. In so far as they did not pretend to adhere strictly to every jot and tittle of the Jewish law, the Essenes agreed with the Sadducees.

Their religious views.

Their religion was essentially of the mystic type, and led them to seek retirement from the world, and to forswear all social relationships. It is said that the blighted and cheerless shores of the Dead Sea were voluntarily chosen by many of them as a fitting and favourite abode. They put aside pleasure as an evil, and regarded mastery over their passions as a prime virtue. As a general rule they did not marry; but they brought up other people's children, and watched over their moral and mental development with as much solicitude as if they had been their own flesh

[1] *Histoire de la Theologie Chretienne au Siècle Apostolique.* Tome I., chap. v., p. 75.

and blood. Riches they despised, and had all things in common. In their relations towards the Deity they sought to cultivate the utmost sincerity and singlemindedness. Their piety was, indeed, extraordinary. Till after sunrise they never discussed secular affairs, but invariably occupied the time before dawn in prayer and devotional exercises. A single plate of one kind of food satisfied at once the temperate cravings of appetite and the modest requirements of an unpampered palate. Before partaking of any meal grace was always said by a priest, who also returned thanks when the repast was finished. They were remarkable for fidelity, and their word was as good as their oath. Indeed, the taking of an oath they abhorred, and, except on the most solemn occasions, such a thing was regarded as quite unlawful. When any of their number was guilty of heinous sin, he was expelled from their society; and only after giving the most satisfactory evidence of repentance, by suffering and penance, was he readmitted into fellowship.

Their gift of prophecy.

There were always found amongst them some who claimed to possess the gift of prophecy, which they diligently cultivated by reading the sacred books and by prayer and purifications. Josephus relates a remarkable instance of the fulfilment of a prophecy of one Manahem, a member of the fraternity. It appears that when Herod the Great was a mere schoolboy, this man one

day saluted him as the future King of the Jews. Afterwards, when the thing predicted had actually come to pass, Manahem being sent for by Herod, not only foretold the duration of his reign, but also the Divine punishments that were in store for him on account of crimes as yet uncommitted.

Their good influence.

Without claiming for the Essenes an immunity from blame on every point—for doubtless they were not without faults, and in their pious zeal they entirely overlooked the necessity for the forgiveness of sins—we, nevertheless, cannot but feel that the tendency of their teaching was to prepare the moral soil of Israel for the 'good seed of the Word;' and to dispose such of the people as had come under their influence to give an attentive hearing to Him who said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.' And, although we are not explicitly informed that any of this sect became followers of Christ or of His apostles, it were strange indeed if, with their principles, some of them at least did not hail the appearance of the Prophet of Nazareth, and become disciples of a Master who required all who came after Him to deny themselves, and to take up their cross daily, and who, to inflame His followers' zeal, offered no greater inducement than the plaintive declaration, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.'

## 12.—Conclusion.

In conclusion we would invite the reader to consider the facts which have been brought under his notice in the foregoing pages, not merely as illustrative of the state of the world about the time of our Lord's advent, but likewise in their preparative relationship to the advent itself, and very especially as an evidence of the overruling Providence of Almighty God, in making the activity of the ages conducive to the furtherance of the Divine scheme of redemption.

The fulness of time.

In the national misfortunes of the Jews, for instance, as well as in the prosperity and imperial sway of Rome, we cannot fail to recognize the co-operation of forces, the result of which clearly was to usher in that momentous epoch in world-history spoken of by the apostle as 'the fulness of time,' when 'God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.'

The dispersion.

In their dispersion over the whole earth, consequent on the vicissitudes of their nation, the Jews carried with them their synagogue, which served a twofold purpose. It shone as a light in the midst of Pagan darkness, and, in spite of the mists of polytheistic superstition with which it was surrounded, stedfastly witnessed for the one living and true God. But it did more than that: it was the Jewish synagogues, one or two or several of which existed in all

the great cities and centres of life throughout the world, that furnished a pulpit and also provided an audience for the first preachers of Christianity.

Influence of pagan Rome.

And Pagan Rome, while she was paving the world with her highways, little dreamed she was at the same time accomplishing the plans of the unknown, or at least the unacknowledged Jehovah. Thinking merely of facilitating the march of her legions from province to province throughout her vast dominions, she was in truth, all the while, literally preparing the way of the Lord, and making straight in the desert a highway for our God. Roads built, primarily, for military purposes, and as a means of encouraging commerce and consolidating Roman power and dominion, were really designed by Divine Providence to promote the world's spiritual conquest, and to subserve the purposes of the King whose kingdom is not of this world. The Gospel-heralds of Immanuel were to find a way prepared for their feet, so that unrestrained and untrammelled, either by physical landmarks or ethnical barriers, they might carry into every land the glad tidings of salvation.

The influence. of Greece.

Greece, too, all unconsciously, contributed her share towards advancing the merciful designs of the Eternal. For she gave the beautiful language of the Hellenes to be the repository of truths surpassing any that Socrates or Plato or Aristotle ever taught or dreamed of, and to be a vehicle for thought infinitely transcending the sub-

limest that Grecian bard ever embodied in Muse-inspired song.

'This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.' Greece and Rome were not only pressed into the service of Messiah's kingdom as its handmaids, but the greatest achievements of heathen genius were effectively utilized for the complete overthrow of the corrupt religion of heathendom. The star which stood over the cradle of the Christ at Bethlehem was symbolical of the guiding light that was one day to fill all lands, and before whose heaven-derived brilliance all mere earthly lights were to die away. Where are pagan Rome and Greece now? where the cult of their gods? All are buried beneath the ruins of the 'immemorial centuries.' The name of Jupiter Maximus is long since forgotten; but the name of Jesus of Nazareth is adored by thousands and millions to-day. Darkness and oblivion have settled for ever on Ida and Olympus, while eternal glory gilds with a splendour that can never fade, with a lustre that can never grow dim, Bethlehem Ephratah —for there Mary, the virgin mother, 'brought forth her first-born Son; and she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.'

We have now, however imperfectly, performed the task we set ourselves at the commencement; and we have tried to do so within the briefest space possible.

But in taking leave of our readers, we would venture to add, even at the risk of being accused of irrelevancy, that, however necessary and right it be to acquaint oneself with the circumstances and conditions of the world into which the Saviour was born, it is infinitely more important to have a clear idea as to the object of our Lord's mission. This object, as we have more than once hinted in passing, was none other than to raise up a world sunk in darkness and death and misery into light and life and blessedness.

Jesus Christ came into our world as the divinely appointed and Divine Redeemer of Jew and of Gentile, of bond and of free; and He has secured by His death on the cross the benefits of an eternal salvation to every one who by the help of the Holy Spirit believes on His name. And other way of salvation there is not; for 'there is none other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved.'

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