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## EARLY CHRISTIAN GEOGRAPHY.

By C. RAYMOND BEAZLEY, M.A.

PRACTICAL and theoretical geography were at a low ebb between the conversion of the Empire and the Crusades ; but they had in themselves great possibilities. The time of sowing must not disappoint us if it fail to give a crop : in the age of the making of the modern nations we cannot expect the discovering instinct to show much activity. But if we wish to gain a proper understanding of the development of European Christendom upon the surface of the earth, we must begin with the origins. And these we find, as far as are necessary for our purpose, in the pilgrim-travellers and convent-maps and religious science of the centuries between Constantine and our own English Alfred.

For the sake of clearness, it is perhaps well not to go further back. From the conversion of the Empire to the sixteenth century the story of Christendom is unbroken ; the later Roman Empire is the Church-state of a Christian Prince, as much as the France of St. Louis, the England of Henry VII., the Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella. Mediæval Europe delighted to think of itself as the old world-state under religion ; the two main elements in our higher civilization were the same in the days of Constantine and of Columbus—the classical tradition and the Christian Church. And so, throughout this time, the expansion of European life, in discovery, exploration, and geographical knowledge, has a continuous history. But before the time of Constantine one of the main conditions of mediæval and modern life is unfulfilled, and it is open to question whether this religious difference alone does not constitute a real separation between

ancient and modern history. In exploration the mediæval Christian world certainly did not carry on the work of the ancient without a break ; much of that work had been partially forgotten or obscured in the century of pagan decline before Diocletian ; and in the break-up of the fifth and seventh centuries the whole matter was altered, the problem was re-cast, and the greater part of what was known to Augustus or to Trajan had to be learnt over again. The ancient mistakes of premature science, of reflection which had outrun observation, were lost in the general confusion, along with much of the ground really won. We do not find Europeans of the earlier Middle Ages following in the steps of Ptolemy—correcting his miscalculations, or dominated by his theories. Their geography is turned off upon a different path, and occupied with very different problems ; and it is not the lineal descendant of Greek thought in the same way as Arabic physics and metaphysics are the lineal descendants of Aristotle. The great names of ancient science have a vague, but not a very exact or penetrating influence upon Christian geography and exploration until the fourteenth century.

In any account, therefore, of mediæval travel, at least before the Crusades, it may be safe to treat the classical geography as a deposit rarely used, a legacy generally forgotten, though realised by some. From the modern point of view, it belongs rather to the literature than to the life of exploration in its slow development between the collapse of the old pagan society and the emergence of the Christendom which replaced it into a universal energy.

It was with the conversion of Constantine that Christian travel, in pilgrimage, really began. And this activity was largely unlike anything to be found in the pagan world of Greece and Rome, and different in many important respects from all similar movements in the pre-Christian Oriental religions, and in all those other forms of faith which have moved in a different orbit from the Roman Empire. Only in the greatest of the imitations or adaptations of Chris-

tianity, in Mohammedanism, does Christian pilgrimage find a real parallel. The journeys of pious Greeks to their oracles must be placed on quite a different platform—they went to get advice, rather than to worship relics of a divine visit to their world or to awaken a fuller appreciation of their faith, a fuller insight into the meaning of their sacred writings. The Jewish habit of going up to Jerusalem was undoubtedly one of the precursors of the Christian sentiment, and is in some ways a parallel to the Christian custom as settled in the fourth century. For the Hebrew idea of visiting the capital of a religious empire is also clearly seen in the travels of Western Catholics to Rome, in which relic worship was combined with more practical reasons. But the Palestine and other Levantine pilgrimages (like the Galician to Compostella) were mainly sentimental, and accordingly more liable to decay. As the practical interests encroached upon the ideal, the Eastern pilgrimages became of less and less importance; they were performed by a humbler and more ignorant and superstitious class: in the fifteenth century the 'Information for Pilgrims' and similar works cater for the lowest of the people, and in the sixteenth century the habit became comparatively rare. Columbus is rather a late case of a great man who makes the thought of pilgrimage practically important in his life. Yet the pilgrimages of pure sentiment lasted in considerable vigour for nearly twelve hundred years. They served as a powerful motive force, a very persuasive surface reason for the Crusades, whose real causes lay deep down in the life of the nations of the West. And during six centuries (A.D. 300–900), as we have always to remember, these religious travels represented the most active enterprise of Latin Christendom; they were performed, sometimes at least, by men with comparatively enlarged experience and knowledge; they were at bottom, whatever their incidental extravagances, evidences of energy rather than of superstition or folly; and their literature forms an eminently suggestive chapter in that great mass of writing which is, after all, the expression in speech, however incoherent, or

the coming races of the world, during a long period of their development.

Christian pilgrimage, like Christian preaching, was to a great extent a new thing ; and in it we must recognize, as we so often have to do in other developments, both earlier and later, that the secret of its strength was also the secret of its weakness. It was, above all things, due to a devotional impulse ; but the religious feeling which drove men from such great distances closed their senses to much of human life, to most things that lay not exactly in the path of their devotion, when they got so far. Thus what they tell us, of interest to our subject, is incidental and often, so to say, almost unintentional. The first pilgrims serve us as a sufficient type of all, and in their ranks are to be found the most enterprising of their class. The amount of secular information contained in their records is usually small : they had great opportunities for observation and material discovery, but they let them slip by mostly unheeded ; they were interested in a different kind of learning, and they did not relate what did not offer food for their theological meditation. For the same reason, pilgrim-travel is not progressive ; the ninth century finds us and leaves us worse off for extensive and systematic religious journeyings than we were in the sixth or in the fourth ; and the value of these enterprises is really comparative, and rests upon their being the principal geographical records of their time. Once, therefore, that the old aggressive instincts, of commerce, of conquest, or of colonization, are awakened afresh, and begin to send out their shoots, the religious travels lose all except a theological interest.

So confined, indeed, is the outlook of many of our pilgrims, and of nearly all our professed geographers of the pilgrim-age, that we find an interest even in the extent, the variety, and the daring of their absurdities. For these have a special place as illustrating the mental habits of the time. They help to show us how difficult material progress must have been when such were the thoughts and words of the travelled and learned Christian ; they throw a good deal of

light on the development of that geographical mythology which offered so obstinate and tangled a hindrance to scientific discovery ; and they point to the underlying truth in the story of the world's exploration. And that seems to be, that for material progress—of this kind, as of others—material and not sentimental ambitions are needed. It is the love and the hope of material gain, partly political or imperial, partly scientific, but, above all, commercial, which has been the motive power of our geographical, as of our industrial, revolution. The secrets of the present world have been disclosed to those who lived in the present ; they have naturally been hidden from those who did not value the actual world around them. For the religious emotions, in their essence, however valuable to civilization in certain other fields, such as art, were not of a kind to promote the exploration of the physical universe, either upon the surface of our earth, or beneath it, or in the world of space outside its atmosphere. And so the religious age of Christian travel was of necessity unprogressive and unproductive. Devotional travel was as little in sympathy with exploration for the sake of knowledge, as the theological doctrines of a scriptural geography (as we have them in Cosmas or in some of the more elaborate mediæval maps) were in sympathy with the formation of a scientific theory of the world's shape, as expressed in modern atlases and treatises.

At the end of this long and difficult chapter of history—the early Middle Ages—we come face to face with a new people and a new energy. The Northmen supply the spirit to the body, the fire to the powder. It is the impulse given by them which is seen in the upheaval of the Crusades, when all Christendom rises to that new and ever-increasing activity which has continued to produce fresh results till now. From the crusading movement spring the overland and commercial explorations, the maritime ventures, and the scientific discoveries of the later Middle Age, of the now recivilized West ; from these, again, result the plans, the theories, the attempts which, in their success, reveal the prime secrets of

the unknown. The age of our victory over nature, or rather of our initiation into nature, beginning with the unveiling of the earth surface, is thus connected with the first groping of our Western world after a wider room and a broader life. Dim at first is the light, staggering and uncertain are the steps; false and deceitful ambitions, disappointing hopes, superstitious fears are ever checking the onward course: but from the time that pilgrimage first led to conquest (in the eleventh century), that course has been steadily onward and outward. Yet not always as it had been planned. The Franks came to smite the Moslem unbelievers, but they stayed to trade with them and to learn of them. The incidental gain proved to be even greater than the first object.<sup>1</sup> The Mohammedan world had more to give to Christendom by commerce and friendship than was to be won by stamping out the worshippers of the God of the Koran. By the religious wars was gradually recovered that secret which the pre-Christian world had found out and abused, which for centuries remained inarticulate, felt but unexpressed—the secret that the religious feeling by itself was inadequate for material prosperity, that the present was an unmistakable and fundamental fact, and that progress could not be made in this life by renouncing it.

But this revelation was not yet. In the time with which we have here to deal, religion, sometimes fanatical and ignorant religion, governs the men who are representative of literature and of science. So exclusively theological is their outlook, that we are often in danger of forgetting that the modern world, with all its splendour and its variety, can be traced back on one side to their work. Christianity, of a type very unlike the present, has indeed been one of the factors of our civilization. And in our particular subject we have especially to take this into account. In ages when the only kind of exploring and geographical interest was

<sup>1</sup> So in Columbus's discovery, the incidental success—the finding of America *en route*—proved to be even more important than his original aim, the reaching of India from the West, by the West.

theological, we must beware of ignoring this phase, or of treating it as a symptom of decay or weakness. We cannot pass by the fact that the theological interest, in the hands of the Church organization, mastered that Empire, or political society, which possessed the intellectual heritage of Aristotle and Plato, of Ptolemy and Strabo, of Lucretius and Tacitus, of Cicero and the Roman jurists. Neither can we deny that the barbarians from beyond the Rhine and Danube gradually subdued and settled themselves upon that same Empire, which seemed so final. Least of all can it be disputed that those conquering barbarians, without doubt the strongest physical force in the Western world, bowed to the faith and the religious system of the Empire, and moulded their states, and directed their progress from barbarism to civilization, by its teaching. The Church, therefore, in its various expressions, must be treated with respect by any one who respects the facts of life. It had triumphed over civilized refinement and uncivilized, or semi-civilized strength. It had taken possession of the best minds of the European races.

So much may be allowed, and yet it may be said that a certain element of weakness and lowered strength was responsible for its victory. The later or 'lower' Roman Empire, in which the Church saw all things put under its feet, certainly had not the strength of the first Cæsars. They could have repelled the Teutonic invasions, just as they came near to the conquest of all Germany, and left that conquest unfinished rather from choice than from necessity. Almost as certainly, they could have stood the shock of the Saracen invasions, which, indeed, were rendered possible by the theological phase that had passed over the Roman world. Christianity and Judaism inspired Islam to be their own rival, and its place in men's hearts was prepared for by their work. The whole appeal of Mohammed would have fallen flat upon the Agnostic world of Augustus.

Yet, if the new era of world-religions, controlling the political and social life of nations, was associated with a cer-

tain decline of intellectual vigour among the more advanced peoples, it certainly went along with a great increase of mental activity and social progress among the more rude and brutal nations. For both Christendom and Islam raised the average of the society they respectively conquered, taken as a whole. The check inflicted on the seventh-century prosperity of Syria and Egypt by the Arab invaders, or the repression exercised by Catholicism on the philosophy of Porphyry or the poetry of Claudian, was not to be weighed against the impulse towards better things which the one communicated to the Berbers and the Arabs themselves, or which the other inspired in Germans, English, and Russians.

Up to a certain point. For here comes the difficulty. In the face of the natural philosophy, or the classical revival of the twelfth century, and still more of the fourteenth,<sup>1</sup> fifteenth, and sixteenth, the religious spirit in Christendom, as in Islam, declared itself, to a large extent, obscurantist. And when this attitude seemed to be passing away in the papacy and the curia, the cause of non-reasoning faith was revived in the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic reaction; the science which this double movement could not suppress was forced back into its old attitude of hostility, and religion became terrible to many as the principal opponent of advancement and knowledge.

In the case of Islam, on the other hand, the great 'Unitarian' religion, as a less dogmatic, intricate, and systematized faith, without priesthood, or sacraments, and without even a mystic ritual, except of a simple kind, seemed for a time more fortunate. It found the conflict with science much less searching, and more easily evaded or postponed; but in the end the same struggle loomed before the future of the civilized Caliphate, when further danger was averted by the ruin of theologians and scientists alike in a common doom. On the one

<sup>1</sup> In the thirteenth century the Catholic theologians attempted, with some success, to absorb as much of the new and revived learning as appeared in any way compatible with their inherited dogmas. When this broke down, the Church had only the choice of war with science, or a subject-alliance with it.

side, in the Levant, the utter and irredeemable barbarism of the Turks covered all. Incapable of any form of science or of art,<sup>1</sup> except the war-like, they spread like a blight over the fairest portions of that field where the first intellectual harvest of the Middle Ages had been reaped. On the other side in the West, the Moslems of Spain fell a prey to anarchy within, and as the crusading spirit rose higher in Christendom, the Emirate of Cordova perished altogether. But at first, after the old culture and the old government of Rome had been submerged, there was no question whether the science of the time was to be friend or foe of religion. The theological forces were then wholly on the side of order, of peace, and of learning; they were among the most powerful allies of the good, and among the most influential enemies of the bad, tendencies in society. So it was largely due to Churchmen that certain parts of ancient civilization were preserved, and that the political unity of the Empire was replaced by the spiritual community of a religious federation which was constantly struggling to express itself in political forms.

And in our particular inquiry, it was through the writings and the travels of Churchmen that geographical conceptions were kept before the world of Bede, of Charles the Great, or of Gerbert. Even Cosmas, though sinning against light and apparently taking a more superstitious and unnatural view of the world than the 'sceptical' Christians whom he denounces, still preserves a good number of scientific needles in the midst of the intolerable deal of hay which he called his 'Topography.' In other and more barbarous places and times, writings such as those of Dicuil, of the Ravennese geographer, or of Guido—maps such as those of Beatus or of Albi—are valuable for their monopoly of the subject, if for nothing else. They are the only reachers of geography in their age and among their people. And in the light of what their countrymen afterwards be-

<sup>1</sup> And except to a certain extent in architecture, as may be seen from the Mameluke buildings in Cairo. But it is only in a very qualified sense that the Mameluke rulers of Egypt can be called 'Turkish.'

came—masters of the world—these teachings, however grotesque, are suggestive. The absurdities of Dark Age map-making are the precursors of the first accurate charts and of modern atlases ; the creeping ventures of the pilgrims are the first movements of an ultimately invincible race-expansion.

Now, many of the monuments of early Christian travel have scarcely been treated yet in their proper relation to progress in general, or to the special kind of progress they illustrate, which is geographical. They have had, perhaps, a fair amount of attention from the theologians and the philologists ; they have certainly been neglected by the historians. They have shared in the effects of the vicious tendency which puts religion and all its works on one side, and tries to isolate them from ordinary life ; they have been relegated to the theological shelves of the library. But just as the main importance of the writings of the Christian apostles and fathers is in relation to the general life of their time, and the general progress, or retrogression, of the race, so the essential value of these early travel-documents<sup>1</sup> lies in their bearing upon the history of civilization, then and afterwards. There are certain ages of the world which are quite unintelligible except through the proper understanding of their theological literature. Even so late as the Tudor period in England, not a little of our political philosophy has its origin in works of divinity ; in the age of Justinian the chief geographers and travellers seem to have been priests and monks of the Church. An endeavour to connect and interrelate the sacred and the secular in the story of exploration could hardly fail to throw an additional, even if sometimes a flickering, light on certain parts of history.

It has often been pointed out that human progress is far from being always continuous, and that its course is more like the confused movements of a crowd, whose advance is only to be clearly seen after many swayings and stoppages, than the orderly forward motion of an army along a military

<sup>1</sup> *Geographical Essays.*

road. Early Christian geography is a good illustration of this. For centuries the new religious interest seems to exercise little or no effect in the advancement of the science. Rather the reverse. Yet, under the Christian civilization, was at last awakened an interest both in practical and theoretical geography greatly transcending that of the pagan world. We must therefore look behind the literature for the vitalising facts, for the progress which certainly was now being made possible. The early Christian period was, after all, a time, not of harvest, but of planting. European life and manhood were regenerated, but the European mind seemed almost to lie fallow for a time.

The growth of the geographical myth during this period points to the same conclusion as the poverty of results from religious travel. In the course of these centuries were elaborated or popularised most of those travellers' tales which we think so pleasant in Solinus or in Mandeville, and wonder at on the maps of St. Sever or of Hereford, but which were a real and formidable hindrance to enterprise. The terror and ignorance of nature that they reflected was the prime cause of the isolation, poverty, and barbarism of the earlier Middle Ages. The imagination of folly and of pseudo-science peopled the world with monsters, curtained the seas with impenetrable darkness, and travestied every known fact of geography by an attendant fiction which tended to supplant the original.

Again, in examining the reasons for the prolonged backwardness and even occasional retrogression of Christendom, our attention is recalled to some particular influences of a general anti-Christian and anti-European movement, to which we have already alluded. First, the Spanish Caliphate cut off all access to the Western sea beyond the Bay of Biscay, from the eighth to the twelfth centuries; similarly the communication of Christendom with the far East and South — with Abyssinia, or India, or China — was fatally interrupted by the intrusion of the new rulers of the Levant and of North Africa. The geographical outlook of Christian

Europe was thus materially contracted. And as Moslem traders and pirates shut up or abstracted Western commerce, so Moslem schools stole away some of the ablest of Western thinkers, till in the ninth and tenth centuries the triumph of the Prophet's followers in every art of life, in every comfort, in every science, over their older rivals seemed complete.

The pilgrim-travellers last for our purpose up to the time of the extinction of the Frankish Empire on the continent, and the reign of our own Alfred in Wessex. In other words, it is only during the first nine centuries of the Christian era, or, more exactly, from the opening of the fourth to the close of the ninth, that the work of exploration, such as it is, falls to their share. And in this time, we may find, if we look a little more closely, that the more important of our pilgrim-records fall into certain groups, and are associated with certain prominent persons and events. Thus we have the travellers of the first period grouped, as it were, round the work of the Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena in Palestine; those of the second age, around Jerome in Bethlehem or in Rome; those of the third, round the Imperial and Catholic Majesty of Justinian, whose buildings in Jerusalem, like those of Constantine, mark an epoch in the topography of the Holy City. Lastly, the leading pilgrims of the fourth age, as we may call it, though more scattered, are nearly all associated with the conversion of the Franks or the English, and with the joint movement of these two great races for the further conversion of heathen Germany.

Again, in the history of pilgrim-travel, we have to deal with two main classes of records, those made by the travellers themselves, and those contained in the writings of others, such as Gregory of Tours, who allude to or describe in some detail the journeys of pilgrims who have or have not left any account of themselves. With a very few exceptions, the former class holds all that is important for us. As to the merely allusive notices, even the more valuable of these are

generally so vague, as in Gregory's accounts of travellers to India from the West, that little can be gathered from them.

The case of Cosmas, 'the man who sailed to India,' presents an especial difficulty. He is more known as a theorist who set himself to disprove the roundness of the earth, but he is also a practical explorer, of an unusually ambitious type. He journeyed to Malabar and Ceylon, it would appear, from the head of the Red Sea, and returned to Egypt, probably visiting Palestine as well, before he left his old profession of a trader, settled down in his monastery, and wrote his 'Topography.' Preposterous as a philosopher, he was no contemptible observer; and his book has a place of its own, standing as it does halfway between contemporary works, such as those of Procopius and Gregory of Tours, between comparative reason and comparative credulity. And the case of Cosmas is an exception which justifies a rule. It may be said, speaking broadly, that the only travel which need be attended to, in those centuries which coincide with the first six hundred years of the Byzantine Empire, is Latin, is from the lands west of the Adriatic, from the Christendom which is conveniently called Roman. The Byzantine provinces, it is true, carry on a not inconsiderable trade with the further East, though this is of ever-decreasing importance and extent from the time of Justinian; but they show no discovering spirit, except what we may find better represented in Britain, Gaul, Italy or Spain. The Byzantine influence on Western or Latin Europe was surprisingly slight, from the days of Heraclius to the Crusades, and as its power waned within its more immediate surroundings it was not natural that it should exercise a very stimulating effect in distant lands that had practically renounced its authority long before they formally did so. The importance of the Eastern Empire, in checking the progress of the Saracens<sup>1</sup> at their most dangerous period, cannot easily be overrated. It saved Europe from the Asiatic deluge at a time when resistance to such a double attack as was then in progress (through

<sup>1</sup> As well as of barbarians, like the Avars.

the Balkans as well as through the Pyrenees) could hardly have been successful ; but, after all, the place of the Byzantine civilization in history was rather passive than active, and its travel enterprise has but little to do with the rest of Christendom.

What slight proof do our Latin travellers give us of any overshadowing influence of the Byzantine world on the West they came from ! Though Arculf and Willibald, for example, both have a good deal to tell us about the Constantinople of their day, and allude to it as the greatest city, and the 'metropolis' of the whole Roman empire, they seem little touched by its spirit. The whole literature of our Latin geography in the Dark Ages is inconsistent with any deep knowledge of the Greek Christendom whose very language was becoming forgotten in the West. When the Roman Church carries out the religious exploration of central Europe in the eighth and ninth centuries, it is allowed to push its conquests within the limits of the original Eastern Empire, and even to dispute with St. Sophia for the allegiance of Bulgaria, which, if once given, in spirituals, to the Lateran, would not be easily rendered, in temporals, to the palace on the Bosphorus. The Greek missionaries, whose travels into Moravia are of some interest to our subject, went in the service of the old Rome and not of the New ; in the same way Hungary and all the North Danube tracts became adherents to the faith of the more distant power, which by the winning of Scandinavia completed its religious exploration of unknown Europe. Only in the case of Russia did Byzantine orthodoxy show any expansive force, and this, a success of the eleventh century, was rather due to dynastic ambitions and Norse adaptability than to Greek missionary zeal. As time went on, the superior energy of Latin Catholicism was seen in its conquests, though temporary, of Syria and of Constantinople itself, as well as of so many islands and outlying points of the Levant. East and West were really severed long before the dogmatic schism of the Churches, and it is not, after all, of great moment whether or

no Byzantine merchants at certain times travelled to India or to the Wall of China, or penetrated into Abyssinia, unless they handed on their work to successors or influenced a more persistent and virile race than their own. As a rule—Cosmas is a partial exception—they did not do this; their labours were so far from permanent that they were, on the contrary, continually receding, and we must not overrate the importance of such an unfruitful and disappointing 'expansion.'

I. Before the conversion of Constantine, Christian pilgrimage is just existent, and that is all; before the close of the Diocletian persecution, the number of credible journeys of this sort, from the West to the Levant, may be counted on the fingers of one hand—the two Placentian travellers of A.D. 303, John and Antonine the Elder, are perhaps the chief of these; and their travels include Sinai as well as Jerusalem.

But the example set by the empress-mother, Helena, and the buildings erected by the bounty of Constantine and her own piety, on the holiest sites of Palestine, coupled with her discovery of the true cross, was the beginning of a new age. Her pilgrimage seems to have been independent of any expectation of such discovery. She sought out Jerusalem, Rufinus tells us, and inquired the spot—not where the cross was to be found, but only 'where the body of Christ was fixed to the tree.' The search, it is admitted, was difficult; and this proves that to earlier pilgrims there could not have been available that exact cult of particular sites which became established from the time of Helena's 'inventions.' From A.D. 136, when the last revolt of the Jews under Bar-Cochab was suppressed, Jerusalem had been forbidden ground to the Hebrew race, and the city of the famous Semitic priests and kings had become the Roman garrison town of Ælia Capitolina. A statue of Venus, too, in one tradition, had been erected over the site of the Crucifixion by the persecutors of the Church.

What Helena really discovered it is impossible now to determine; all that concerns us here is that with her visit

Christian pilgrim-travel really begins. Yet we may notice how greatly the original story is amplified by later writers. To the simple statement that she discovered the sign of the cross at Jerusalem, Rufinus adds the healing of the sick by the new-found relics ; in Gregory of Tours, the nails have the power of quieting storms ; fragments of the wood could save a city besieged. And so on, and better still, in infinite progression ; for there is scarcely a book, a tract, or a sermon of the mediæval time, in any way referring to the Holy Land, which does not mention Helena's pilgrimage and its results.

The effect of this journey on the Latin West is seen at once<sup>1</sup> in the 'Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem,' the earliest work of Christian travel—a witness alike of the recent triumph of the Church, the restored peace and order of the Empire, and the resettlement of politics and society with fresh religious interests.

Our itinerary follows the main roads of Southern Gaul and North Italy to Aquileia ; thence it goes through Sirmium and Belgrade to Constantinople, and across Asia Minor by the military highway to Antioch and Palestine, returning along a more southerly route from the Bosphorus to Albania and Otranto. Composed in the year 333, or at any rate giving the journal of certain pilgrims in that summer, this tract, which roughly and inaccurately adapted for the use of Christian travellers a portion of the old imperial surveys, remained for a long time the principal handbook of the class whose needs it met. Its course is usually followed ; and its relics form the staple of every account. Yet it has little claim to originality. It simply reproduces—in all except its more detailed notes on the sacred sites themselves—the road-books of the Cæsars : to its tables of pagan place-names it adds a Christian tour in Judæa and the Syrian coast ; but it has been doubted by some, from the state of the St. Gall and Paris manuscripts, whether this last is not a later insertion. While this diffi-

<sup>1</sup> Within ten years (325–333).

culty may be dismissed, on the strength of the oldest text at Verona, we still have to consider the curious fact that the objects of devotion herein mentioned, as in the case of the crypt of Solomon for the torture of the devils, are in most cases of a rather extravagant kind, and argue a high development of superstition and credulity at an age fondly supposed by many to be too early for such corruptions. Those who imagine an ideal Church, before its establishment by the State, and derive all its abuses from this source, would perhaps find it hard to explain how it is that in a tract dated within ten years after the 'establishment' of Constantine, so large a number of highly apocryphal relics occur among the few which are mentioned at all.

The Bordeaux itinerary throws an interesting side-light upon the question whether the primitive Christian intelligence was or was not more enlightened than that of later ages; but here we cannot notice this point, except as illustrated by our subject. And as a record of travel or exploration, this pilgrimage certainly holds an obscure place. It never leaves the well-known roads, except for a few *détours* in Palestine. It tells us of only one site beyond Jordan, and of none of the famous spots in Galilee; the more distant fields of Egypt, Sinai, and Mesopotamia are entirely beyond its ken. In all these respects it contrasts curiously with the journey of Silvia, our next important record. After the Bordeaux pilgrim, we get no other memorial of Christian travel so nearly related to, and so suggestive of, the classical and official geography; but we get many more important and extensive journeys from Western Christendom. In the next generation the fashion of pilgrimage spread apace; it was recognized by the Church of Rome as an act of advanced piety, meriting considerable indulgence or a heavy cheque upon the treasury of merits; and the leading men of the Catholic world found their way to Palestine in ever-increasing numbers. Julian's attempt to re-establish paganism and restore the Jews to their old home (361-363) seems to have retarded the new movement for a time—as a certain

peace and prosperity was necessary for the development of such an external activity ; but after the reaction has collapsed it is seen again in full swing.

Constantine and Helena close one age of this movement and begin another. They end the period of a simply historical pilgrimage, unaided or nearly unaided by relics, shrines, privileges, and visible memorials of the Bible story. The Bordeaux guide-book, again, ends the unrecorded and begins the self-recording age of the same. Jerome's visit to Palestine in 372, still more his second coming for a residence of five-and-thirty years in 385, is a third landmark, commencing the most fashionable age of pilgrim-travel. In the interval, seemingly, between his two journeys (and without any immediate summons from him, or influence exerted by him), occurred the visit of the traveller whose narrative, recently discovered,<sup>1</sup> goes by the name of Silvia of Aquitaine. The questions of authorship, and of the writer's country, date, sex, and station, cannot here be discussed at length ; but it will be safe to assume here that this work was written by a Roman lady of rank, a Christian of Southern Gaul, belonging to some sisterhood, to whom the narrative is addressed, and that she journeyed in the Levant between 378-9 and 384-5. What is of more importance to us is the extent of her wanderings, and the interest of her occasional remarks. She not only travels through Syria: she visits Lower Egypt and Stony or Sinaitic Arabia, and even Edessa in Northern Mesopotamia and on the very borders of hostile and heathen Persia. The torrent of the Euphrates she compares to the Rhone, the greater to the less, a foreign to a native example ; and, on the way home by the military high-road between Tarsus and the Bosphorus, likens, with unconscious historical irony, the brigand habits of the Isaurian mountaineers, who endangered this part of her route, with the similar failings of the Arabian Saracens, who were one day to be driven back by those very Isaurians from the city of Constantine. The future subverters and saviours of Christendom were then alike outcasts from civilization.

<sup>1</sup> In 1883.

In this letter we have described for us the most far-reaching and enlightened Latin pilgrimage of the first five centuries. Its entire omission of Jerome's name, and various incidental notices in the course of its story, can leave but little doubt that it is of a date earlier than 385. It also gives us evidence, parallel to that supplied by Jerome, of the growing importance and fashionableness of its understanding; for the author, whoever it be, is clearly a person of importance, and it is difficult to picture such a one undertaking the toil and danger of so distant a journey in earlier times. Lastly, while from her example it is clear that the monastic organization of Syria and Egypt was now a powerful attraction to Western devotees, and allowing for a natural preference for objects of religious interest, Silvia's casual remarks, historical, geographical, or social, are of quite unusual breadth and value, and suggest by contrast the probability that most of our pilgrim records have been composed by persons of no very high education or employment.

After St. Silvia, our memoirs for some time are of a strictly devotional character, such as the notices of Paula or Eustochium, or the two Melanias; and though Jerome boasts that men came to see him from India and Ethiopia, our Latin travel-documents of this age have scarcely any bearing on geography.

Between the death of Jerome and the accession of Justinian we have, indeed, occasional notices of the journeys of Westerns to the holy places, not only of Syria and Egypt, but of Malabar; but it is nearly impossible to make much out of them. They serve, however, to emphasise the fact, confirmed by so many different witnesses, that Christianity reached its most complete and deep-rooted extension in the Old World before the rise of Islam. It is true that the Churches of the far East have little or no connection with Europe; that their prosperity is now only to be seen, by us who look back over so many centuries, through a haze as tantalising as the mist that conceals their decline and fall; but the vision, though dim, is not a mirage.

Between Constantine and Heraclius, between the fourth and the seventh centuries, the gospel, though for the most part in heretical forms, came to dominate not only the world of the Roman Empire, but vast districts of Africa and of Asia, beyond the limits of the Cæsars' power. Even in Europe it won Ireland and the Caledonia of Northern Britain, which the legions had never quite subdued; south of Egypt it conquered Nubia and Abyssinia; across the Red Sea it won Yemen to itself; in the Erythrean Ocean it made the Island of Socotra a centre of its activity; as early as the Bordeaux pilgrim its missionaries planted a bishopric at Merv in Khorasan; in the time of Justinian, Nestorians preached the faith among the mountains of Herat and in the Garden of Samarcand; in the lifetime of Mohammed the name of Jesus was first proclaimed in China; and at the same time Ceylon, Persia, and the Deccan contained an 'infinite number of Christians, both priests, monks, solitaries, women vowed to the religious life, and laymen.' Yet almost none of these offshoots were Catholic. With strange perversity, the sun appeared to shine upon the followers of Patrick, who used the tonsure of Simon Magus, and upon the communion of the 'Wolfish' Nestorius, who denied the claims of the Mother of God, even more than upon those who preferred soundness of belief to that heretical restlessness which travelled so far and compassed sea and land to make one proselyte.<sup>1</sup>

The most important of our travel-documents in this intermediate time—the tract of Bishop Eucherius of Lyons (c. 440), 'On Certain of the Holy Places,' the 'Descriptio Parrochiæ Hierusalem' (c. 460), or the 'Notitia Antiochæ ac Ierosolymæ Patriarchatum' of the early sixth century—are, as Ptolemy would have said, topographical rather than geographical; and the notices of such adventurers as David of Wales are clouded with miracle, and only the bare fact of a

<sup>1</sup> Before Gregory the Great, indeed, the Catholic Church for the most part seemed content with dominion inside the Empire, and left outside enterprise to the heretics.

journey to Syria can be recovered from the ideal world which has coloured all the details.

During the reign of Justinian, Cosmas Indicopleustes journeyed and wrote. In the same reign the first Christian description of the Holy City in any detail was composed under the name of 'The Breviary of Jerusalem'; and the two curious pilgrims, Theodosius and Antoninus of Placentia, recorded their impressions 'concerning the situation of the Holy Land.' These remarkably credulous, careless, and imaginative writers add a good deal of myth to the already unreal pilgrim-geography, and present the Palestine legends in a thoroughly formed and hardened state. They preserve, however, some notices of a more extended kind. Theodosius, indeed, only indulges in a few flights of fancy beyond his known ground of Palestine, as when he refers to countries 'where no one can live for the serpents and hippo-centaurs'; but for the rest his knowledge is not extensive or peculiar, and his narrative, like the Bordeaux pilgrim's, has rather the appearance of a journal or time-table than of a guide-book. Antoninus, on the other hand, is an even more travelled pilgrim than Silvia; he goes beyond her into Upper Egypt, and traverses all the usual ground of Sinai and Palestine, penetrating into Mesopotamia and visiting Edessa. In his narrative he appears as a sort of older Mandeville, who mixes truth and fiction in pretty equal proportions, but with a resolute partiality to favourite legends. Along with his marvels, such as the yearly stoppage of the Jordan at the Epiphany, the devils to be seen by night on Mount Gilboa, or the salt pillar of Lot's wife, lessened, as had been falsely reported, by the licking of animals—with all this he gives us every now and then glimpses of a larger world, rarely noticed at all by our pilgrim-travellers. He tells us of the effects of the recent earthquakes (of 526 and 551) along the coast of Phœnicia; he notices the splendour and civilization of Tyre, Gaza, and Alexandria; he describes the hospice of Justinian in Jerusalem, and the Ethiopians whom he met in the Holy City. In the Sinai desert he speaks of Saracen

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beggars and idolaters; in the Red Sea ports he thrice records the appearance of ships from India laden with aromatics. He travels up the Nile to the cataracts, and describes the Nilometer of Assouan and the crocodiles in the river; lower down, the Pyramids become for him the twelve barns of Joseph—a number which later pilgrims altered to fit the text of the seven years of plenty.

But far more wonderful than the practical jumble of Antoninus is the systematic nonsense of Cosmas, whose 'Christian Topography' is among the most important works of early Christian theory or science. Yet, as a traveller, his journey is deserving of especial attention. Unfortunately the references to it in his writings are only incidental, as his main purpose was to set forth a system of the universe. But his travels to Western India, to Abyssinia, the coasts of the Red Sea, and probably to Ceylon and Palestine, compose a very exceptional record; and, naturally enough, it is as a trader that he makes these extensive wanderings.

And whatever the absurdities of Cosmas and his dogmas 'evolved out of Holy Scripture,' he is of interest to us as the last of the old Christian geographers, and in a sense, too, the first of the mediæval. He closes one age of civilization which had slowly declined from the self-satisfied completeness of the classical world, and he prepares us to enter another that, in comparison, is literally dark. From the age of Mohammed the geographical knowledge of Christendom is on a par with its practical contraction and apparent decline. Even more than actual exploration, theoretical knowledge seemed on its death-bed for the next five hundred years.

Yet our last group of pilgrim-travellers between Cosmas and the Viking Age, between the creation of the Empire of the Caliphs and the fall of the Empire of Charles the Great, however limited and unprogressive, has a special interest to us through its association with the conversion of England and the beginnings of English science and letters in the age of Bede.

It is difficult to imagine that the Europe of Bernard the Wise

(c. 860) was destined ever to witness such a turn of the tide as that Christian armies would carry war into the heart of the Caliphate ; still more difficult to conceive of the same Europe as once again controlling, as in the days of the Cæsars, the best parts of the world ; most difficult of all to think of the children of our pilgrims as the discoverers, settlers, and conquerors of the then unknown three-quarters of the earth which lay shrouded in mist beyond the limits of the known or half-known world. The new time needed new forces, a fresh inspiration of virility and daring. But here, with the Empire of Charles and his Franks all in ruins, and but little promise of revival, with heathen Northmen and Moslem Saracens seemingly allied for the destruction of Christendom, this section of our story must be left—where the secret of the future seems most impenetrable, and the dark hours have deepened into that intenser blackness that comes before the dawn.

II. The Levantine pilgrimages are the principal, but not the only examples of early Christian travel. There was a good deal of Roman missionary exploration in Northern and Central Europe from the sixth century onwards. In the same time, and to a large extent in the same countries, the Irish monks were busy with their work, pursuing it even to such outlying parts of the world as Iceland, whose first discovery (in 795) is due to them. The Byzantine conversion of Russia afterwards (in the eleventh century) extended this work of religious enterprise to a field but slightly known to the older Empire ; and Byzantine trade in distant quarters of Asia and Africa, though declining, continued to struggle along the old caravan routes.

But here, in the further East and South, the Moslem ousted the Christian merchant more and more till the Crusades ; while in the North-east, as late as the close of the ninth century, and long after the appearance of the Northmen upon the theatre of the world, the limits of Christendom and of civilization might be said to follow the courses of the Elbe and the Danube. In some places Slav and Teutonic

heathendom had crossed these boundaries; but in other districts, as in Moravia and Bohemia, it had been driven back far beyond them.

The Irish missions, meantime, recovered Northern and Central England for Christendom, added Ireland itself to the Catholic world, and combated barbarism with no small courage and success in France, in Switzerland, in North Italy and in still more distant fields. With their religious work they helped forward the progress of social order, knowledge, and art. In other words, they did real and manful service to civilization, in arresting a further decline, and in commencing a revival of culture; parallel with their crusade against heathendom went their struggle with anarchy.

III. Geographical theory or science in Christendom, between the conversion of the Pagan Empire and the coming of the Vikings, is in a state scarcely less rudimentary than travel.

Much of the advance made by the heathen world is now abandoned; part of the knowledge once gained has been forgotten, part seems to lie in a sort of limbo not altogether out of sight, but, as it were, out of touch of the new time, uncared for, unattended to. The word seems reversed—'Let us *not* now remember our fathers, and the actions of famous men.' As Bacon said in another connection, everything of value seemed to sink, and only the light and worthless rubbish came floating on down the stream of time. Ptolemy and Strabo, Herodotus and Hipparchus, passed almost wholly away from Christian memory, and the only works of the pagan period which held much attention were compilations of marvels such as those of Solinus, or the list of place-names which Orosius, Guido, or the anonymous geographer of Ravenna put under contribution.

Lastly, the maps of this time, as far as they have survived to us, barely show even the commencement of mediæval cartography. True, we have the scheme of Cosmas himself, probably designed about 550; the *mappe monde* of Albi seems to have been executed about 730; and the original plan of

the Spanish theologian Beatus was probably composed in 776 ; but of the last named we only possess the later derivatives of 'St. Sever' (c. 1028-1072), 'Turin' (c. 1080), 'London' (1109), and 'Ashburnham' (tenth century), with six others of the eleventh, the twelfth, and the later thirteenth centuries.

As we look back upon the course of a movement which, through so many centuries, appears often stationary or even retrograde, in the midst of our disappointment and weariness we may find some comfort in the comparative value even of such devotional enterprise. And as comparison is the only test of any age or of any man therein, the very blunders and limitations of the past have a constant as well as an historical value to us. For they remind us not only how we have come to our present mastery over the world, but also how imperfect the work even of our time must be in the light of the ultimately possible.

So, if our pilgrim-travellers have interests the very reverse of ours, thoughts which to us seem unthinkable, or fancies that repel us as rather absurd than poetic, it will not be for us to pity or to despise men who, in a true sense, were making their times ready for better things.

And especially we must remember this in our mournful and threatening close. A half-barbarised world had entered upon the inheritance of a splendid past, but it took centuries before that inheritance was realised by the so altered present. In this time of change, we have men writing in the language of Cæsar and Virgil, of Alexander and Sophocles, who had been themselves, or whose fathers had been, mere 'whelps from the kennel of barbarism,' to Greeks and Romans of the Old Empire.

We have been passing through the time of the reconstruction of society, the only apparent reaction which our Western world has known, and that only apparent, when savage and strong men who had conquered were set down beside the overworked and outworn masters of France, and Italy, and Spain, and Britain, to learn from them, and to make of them a more enduring race.