

Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity: Being Studies in Religious History from 330 B. C. to 330 A. D. By F. LEGGE, F.S.A. Two vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1915.)

'ALL great religious movements', says Dean Stanley, 'which run parallel, even though counter to Christianity, form a necessary part of Ecclesiastical History.' The religions contemporary with any period of the history of Christianity form not merely a background against which the Church acts and reacts, but are intimately interwoven with the story of its development. This is especially true of the religious movements contemporary with the infancy of Christianity, and therefore, though it scarcely touches on the relation of Graeco-Oriental paganism to Catholic Christianity, the title of this book is justified. Perhaps the history of the religions, which prepared for and competed with early Christianity, is the best apology that could be written for the Catholic Church. Mr Legge concludes his studies with the thought that the final victory of Christianity in her conflict with these religions, which mingled confusedly the sublime with the puerile and the morbid, could only be 'because she was better fitted to the needs of the world than any of her predecessors or contemporaries'.

One outstanding merit of the book is the framework of general history within which its story is unfolded. Not only does Mr Legge prefix a table of the dates of the chief events from Alexander the Great to Constantine, and appreciate in an introductory chapter the importance of the former in the history of Religions, but also he sketches the general tendencies of which each religion he describes was the particular outcome. Moreover, his horizon is not bounded by the limits of his work: for instance, the religion of the Manichaeans is illustrated from the records of the Inquisition. The great bulk of the book is devoted to the Gnostic systems, their precursors and allied developments, but the book begins with an account of the religion of Isis and ends with an account of Mithraism, the two mystery cults which predominated respectively in the first and the last half of this period. In his treatment of the latter the author departs somewhat from Cumont's classical presentment, not on very substantial grounds.¹

¹ He rejects Cumont's identification of the lion-headed monster found in the Mithraic crypts with Zervan Acerana and equates him with Ahriman cast out from Paradise and 'the chief of the rulers of this world'. A comparison of Mithraism with Freemasonry is illuminating and helps to explain the exclusion of women and the absence of any organized hierarchy, which contrasted the Persian with the Egyptian mysteries. Mr Legge rightly emphasizes the tendency of all paganism in these centuries 'towards a religion which should include and conciliate all others', though he scarcely appreciates its importance in the history of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism represents partly a reaction against, partly an exploitation of, magic and astrology. The Fathers were probably right in referring its invention as a coherent system to Simon Magus. Mr Legge selects for detailed treatment two typical systems, the Ophite and the Valentinian, which adequately represent all the characteristics of Gnosticism in its lower and higher forms, and perhaps actually absorbed all the lesser sects. Valentinus appears deliberately to have amended and given coherence to the vague mythology of the Ophites.¹

Both systems in different degrees acted as a bridge from paganism to Christianity. The Ophites were separatists who frequented without scruple the mysteries of the Great Mother, and inevitably split up into innumerable sects named after their founders: the Ophite system appealed to the uneducated. Valentinus, on the other hand, was rather the founder of a school and attracted the rich and educated, not only by his more reflective doctrines and the pastoral teaching of himself and his disciples, which often attained great beauty, but also by his recommendation of compliance with the demands of the pagan authorities rather than submission to persecution: he himself, perhaps, never separated from the Church, and later his followers in Egypt attempted to found a church within the church, which anticipates the semi-independence of the monks of the Thebaid.

Mr Legge rightly refuses to refer the manifold phenomena of Gnosticism to a single origin. The Ophites seem to have borrowed their characteristic ideas from the religions of Asia Minor: the cosmogony of Valentinus approximates to that of the Orphics. The contemporary Stoic theory of the origin of the world and the soul deviates little in essentials from Gnosticism. Valentinianism underwent a gradually increasing influence from the religion of Egypt, which is illustrated from the literary history of the *Pistis Sophia* and its related texts, the only primary sources we possess for the history of Gnosticism. Since it is quoted by Tertullian, the *Pistis Sophia* was probably an authentic work of Valentinus, into which Egyptian elements were interpolated: the later books are completely overshadowed by the gloomy terrorism of the Egyptian topography of Hades. Nevertheless there is an Ariadne's thread to guide us through the labyrinth of the Gnostic mythologies: the central doctrine of salvation, the ascent of the soul through the seven planets and the frustration of the tyranny of the planetary spirits, can be traced to the reaction of the conquering

¹ He attributes the creation of the world by the fall of Sophia not to an accident, but to an emanation: syzygies, or pairs of male and female aeons, are substituted for the bisexual aeons of the Ophites. Jesus becomes the product of the joint contribution of all the powers of the pleroma: the possibility of progress from the material to the spiritual is replaced by a rigid predestinarianism.

Persians against the astral religion of Babylon. The Gnostic hierarchy of personified attributes of God has its prototype in the Amshaspands of Zoroaster. Orphicism and Essenism, the forerunners of Gnosticism, were both exposed to Persian influences.

With the problem of the influence of the Mystery Religions upon the Earliest Christianity the author does not deal, since it hardly comes within the scope of his work. But a consideration of the closely related question, to what extent Gnosticism was a Christian heresy, might have assisted his argument and corrected certain errors. Did the Gnostics simply adopt a few elements of Christianity with the object of supporting their alien doctrines by the organization of the Christian Church? Or did they recognize an affinity and harmony of thought in Christianity, and especially Paulinism, which enabled them to reinterpret and exaggerate the Christian theory of salvation? The conception of the powers of evil in Jewish Apocalyptic differed little from the Gnostic conception, and Mr Legge emphasizes the priority of the idea of ἀποκατάστασις or 'the completion of this Aeon' to the redemption of individual souls in all post-Christian Gnostic systems. But an anti-Semitic bias disfigures his account of the Jewish Messianic hope—he attributes Jewish Apocalyptic almost entirely to the Essenes—and renders it the most superficial part of his book. The hostility of the Jews to the Gentiles was dictated not by a desire for national aggrandizement, but by jealousy for the honour of God and a sense that the material civilization of the Greek world was an offence against it. Secondly, the counter-arguments which the Christian controversialists opposed to Gnosticism, are a good criterion of the trustworthiness of their testimony. Irenaeus alone erected a theory of salvation which vindicated Christianity as a historical religion and safeguarded it against the dangers of Gnosticism, and he alone seems to have understood the systems he controverts.

Marcionism and Manichaeism, with studies of which the book concludes, are extremes which meet. Both are characterized by an absolute dualism and its consequent, puritanism. But the puritanism of the former was an antiseptic of paganism, whereas the motive of Manichaeism was a pagan myth of the imprisonment of light. The Manichaeans in Turfan accommodated themselves to the dominant Buddhism, just as in Europe they conciliated their system to Christianity. By an irony of history, the Marcionites, when their church was suppressed by the successors of Constantine, recognized their affinity and went over to the Manichaeans. Mr Legge's account of Manichaeism, embodying the results of recent research and the discoveries in Turkestan, the most notable of which is a penitential confession, is perhaps the most valuable portion of his book.

Since the plan of the book is well conceived, it is unfortunate that the execution is so unequal. Perhaps the bewildering mythologies of the Gnostics do not lend themselves to a graceful presentment, but this is no excuse for ugly neologisms and occasional solecisms. 'Homophagous' (vol. ii p. 63), apparently an adjective formed from the ὁμοφαγία of the Orphics, is an example of both faults. In spite of this defect of style, which improves towards the end, the excellent index and the elaborate footnotes render the book a valuable work of reference. The Germans are curiously absent from an otherwise exhaustive bibliography.

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Commentarius in Symbolum Apostolorum auctore Tyrannio Rufino.

Edited by ERNEST F. MORISON, D.D. (Methuen, 1916.)

A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed by Tyrannius Rufinus. Translated by the same. (Methuen, 1916.)

IF candidates for ordination are to have their learnedness in the Latin tongue tested by an examination in the Commentary of Rufinus on the Apostle's Creed, it is well that they should have in their hands a carefully edited and annotated text and a good translation. These Dr Morison has supplied. There was Heurtley, to be sure, who printed the text in his (at the time) invaluable *De Fide et Symbolo* in 1866, and twenty years later translated the contents of that little manual; but Heurtley did not annotate. He sometimes expostulated. Dr Morison's notes give much that will be helpful. In a few instances they are lacking. For example, there is no note on the extraordinarily interesting word *sacramentum*, which would have been welcome on iv 12; the astronomical origin of the phoenix fable, and a word or two about the Egyptian hieroglyph (also a phoenix, but a palm-tree) which stood for the world-era ushering in a 'resurrection', or 'restitution of all things', might have been inserted on xi 13; *servata virginitate* is scantily treated on x 25; and the same remark applies to the symbolism of the water and the blood from the pierced side on xxiii 1; nothing is said about Rufinus's false exegesis of the Baptist's question, xxiii 6; nor of the influence of heresy in aiding in the formation of the Canon, xxxvi 23; nor of the meaning of the word 'Canon' itself, and its manifold uses, xxxvii 17. A caution should have been given as to Rufinus's rather confused explanations of the 'resurrection of this flesh'; and on the use of the sign of the cross a reference to Tertullian *de corona* 3 should be added, xliii 21. On page 13 (ix 14) read 'Evangeliis': on page 76 (xxviii 12) read 'derelinques'; and on page 84 in the note on 17, line 3, some word has dropped out between 'little' and 'Amphilochius'.

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