THE PERMANENT INFLUENCE OF NEOPLATONISM UPON CHRISTIANITY.

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THERE is a fine saying in Clement of Alexandria, that the truth is like a river, which receives tributaries from every side. But the river of speculative theology at Alexandria was like the Nile delta in which it flourished: the main channels communicated with each other by a network of streams flowing out and flowing in; so that he would be a very learned or a very confident man who should attempt to define precisely the obligations of Jew, Christian, and Greek to each other. We have not here to deal with rival sects of fanatics, who, to borrow a simile from Numenius, tear the truth asunder as the Mænads tore Pentheus, each hugging a limb and thinking it the whole body; at Alexandria there was too much interchange of thought for it to be possible to label each doctrine with the name of a nationality or creed. I, at any rate, do not mean to attempt anything of the kind. I shall be content if I can disentangle some of the most characteristic strands of Alexandrian thought, and trace their influence in the later church. And the advantages of choosing Plotinus (for when I say Neoplatonism I mean Plotinus) as the representative of Alexandria are obvious. He was incomparably the greatest of the pagan philosophers of the empire, and he was an independent thinker, not fettered, like Clement and Origen, by membership in a religious society which aimed at converting the masses. He at least believed himself to be a Greek and a Platonist; and if Alexandrianism was the last effort of Greek philosophy, it is in Plotinus that we can best study the last message of Greek philosophy to the world. As for the pagan successors of Plotinus, I shall make no apology for disregarding them. They called themselves Platonists, but they were not so. Augustine rightly says to Porphyry:

"Thou didst learn these things, not from Plato, but from thy Chaldæan masters."

A peculiar difficulty besets us at the outset of our task. It may be objected that most of the ideas which the church is said to have borrowed from Neoplatonism are to be found already in the apostle John, and even in Paul. Most gladly I acknowledge that this is true. The prologue of the fourth gospel is a guarantee that the later Greek philosophy can never be extruded from Christianity either by Jewish formalism or Roman institutionalism. It is, indeed, a providential boon to the Christian church that she came into conflict with Gnosticism before the New Testament canon was closed. For the Gnostic movement of the first and second centuries anticipated in a very remarkable manner the later course of Alexandrian thought, and this remark applies as much to the Gnostics within the church as to those outside of it, though we have only meager fragments of the literature to tell us of this. Plotinus hated Gnosticism, but he was himself the greatest of the Gnostics; and exactly as the Christians carried off his honey to their hive, so they had already, a hundred years before, rifled what was valuable from the stores of his intellectual ancestors. But this admission does not alter the fact that the influence of Neoplatonic thought upon Christianity was direct and far-reaching. The peculiar mysticism of the apostles Paul and John was less intelligible to the early Middle Ages than the Christianized Neoplatonism of Dionysius the Areopagite; and even before Dionysius, Augustine, as we shall see presently, conveys the *Enneads* by handfuls into his theological treaties. I shall not, therefore, feel myself debarred from finding Neoplatonic influence in tendencies of thought which might, quite legitimately, be justified out of certain books of the New Testament.

The struggle between Christianity and Neoplatonism is one of the most curious and interesting chapters in the history of religion. The two systems had so much in common that at first sight we should wonder why they quarreled, if it were not a matter of common observation that no people hate and distrust each other more than those who like to express the same ideas

in slightly different language. Neoplatonism and Christianity are at one in preaching detachment from the world, the method of "inwardness"—"*introrsum ascendere*"—and communion with God, as the highest good. "They have," says Vacherot, "the same metaphysic—idealism; the same psychology—spiritualism; the same attitude toward life—a sober mysticism." And yet there are important differences, which not only prevented the two from combining as organizations, but caused Platonism to hold a somewhat precarious place within the fold of the church, after it had ceased to exist as a rival system. What these differences are may be best considered in the form of an answer to the question: Why did Christianity win and Neoplatonism lose in the battle between them?

1. In the first place, Neoplatonism was too spiritual to be effective as a popular religion (perhaps it hardly tried to be intelligible to the masses), and not spiritual enough to be true as a philosophy. Too spiritual, because it refused to condescend to the materialistic eschatology which to this day is the creed of the uneducated—the creed which conceives of eternity as a series of moments summed to infinity, and time as a piece snipped off from one end of the series; which insists on the literal grammatical truth of the *resurrectio huius carnis*, and regards heaven and hell as geographical expressions. Not spiritual enough, because, in spite of all its efforts to get rid of matter, it interpreted emancipation from the sensible world materialistically, and left us with an unsolved and insoluble dualism. Of course, the ideal world—the *κόσμος νοητὸς*—was meant to be the reality of which the sensible world is the appearance. But in the endeavor to give substance to this conception of reality, the world of ideas became a second sensuous, almost material, world, unrelated to the world of experience, or at all events unaffected by it. The universe thus conceived becomes like the swan "on St. Mary's lake" in Wordsworth, which "floats double, swan and shadow"—and the shadow is the world which we know. This hardening of what was meant to be a principle of unity into a new opposition was inevitable when Neoplatonism tried to be a religion; and I am far from saying that Plotinus regarded his *κόσμος νοητὸς*

as a second sensible world, any more than Dante regarded his Paradiso and Inferno as geographical expressions; but even Plotinus does not escape from the misleading associations of the words "here" and "yonder." When he says that the philosopher will regard public calamities as stage-plays (*παίγνια*); when he speaks of action as "a shadow of contemplation" (just as the *κόσμος αἰσθητὸς* is the shadow of the ideal world); above all when he enunciates that the man himself cannot sin (*ὁ νοῦς ἀναμάρτητος*), so that the worst that can befall the soul in its terrestrial exile is to get its boots a little muddy,[1] we feel that for him the life in time is really external to the *ego*, and that he fails to show any rational object that is served by the time-process, even as appearance. It has no result in the world of reality, and is therefore void of existence and nugatory. There is thus a fatal chasm between the two worlds, and we can see why ecstasy — a supra-rational faculty — must be invoked to give us news of the higher.[2] The error seems to me to lie, not only in the necessity of popularizing an idealistic philosophy, and thereby spoiling it, but in a real fallacy which has misled many speculative theologians much nearer our own times than Plotinus. It is assumed that since change and motion characterize the world of becoming, immutability and stationariness must be attributes of the world of being, or true existence. They do not perceive that these also, as much as their opposites, belong to space and time, and are therefore unreal; and thus, in attempting to rise above the limitations of sense, they only succeed in investing reality with the properties of *dead* matter. I cannot help thinking that this fallacy is at the root of the two great errors of philosophical mysticism — the emptiness of its highest category on the one hand, and its acosmistic tendency on the other. I suppose that reality — however we may try to

[1] This notion has been lately revived by MAETERLINCK, in his curious work, *Le Trésor des Humbles*, which is said to have taken Paris by storm. But there is no antinomianism in Plotinus.

[2] This does not mean that the belief in ecstasy is false, but that, so soon as the conception of reality is hardened and materialized in the way I have described, mystical facts begin to be regarded as data for transcendental physics; and this is a delusion.

conceive it—must somehow contain within itself both the cosmic process and the completed result of the process, and our condition as immortal spirits must in some incomprehensible way be determined by our lives in time. It is this notion—one of immense practical importance—that Neoplatonism could not admit, while every scheme of Christianity insisted upon it. And therefore, though the popular Christianity treated the kingdom of heaven precisely as the popular Platonism treated Plato's ideas, transforming a state of bliss into a place of enjoyment, it escaped the most serious consequences of the misunderstanding. Preach Neoplatonism to the man in the street, and if you convert him you will spoil him as a grocer, for he will become an idle dreamer, and you will not make him a philosopher, for he will not understand you. But experience has proved that the same grocer, when Christianity is presented to him even in its crudest form, will mind his shop with even increased diligence, while he will practice sundry virtues under the conviction that he will some day or other have to face an audit at which sanded sugar and bills sent in twice will not appear on the profit side of the account. To speak more seriously, the doctrine of rewards and punishments in a future state, though it may strictly be only a symbol of a truth which at present is too high for us, is the only hypothesis which does not land us in a very quagmire of contradictions, equally disastrous to theory and practice.

2. Neoplatonism had not learned the secret of working upon the *affections*. The love of beauty is a poor substitute for sympathy. The process of *κάθαρσις* by industrious practice of the social virtues is rather different from John's, "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren;" and the love of God as conceived by Neoplatonism is more like "the desire of the moth for the star"—the attraction of the clear white light that "forever shines"—than the devotion which "draws" the disciple of Christ to a human, as well as divine, Redeemer.

3. Neoplatonism, as a philosophical school, was inextricably entangled with the moribund Græco-Roman civilization. The reign of Julian is a sufficient commentary on this statement.

Some will say that Julian is a good example of the folly of trying to mix religion and philosophy; I should say rather, of the sad fate of a good philosophy grafted on a bad religion. The Christian church was wide enough to hold Julian's philosophy; the pathos of his career lies in the fact that he was a patriot when it was too late to be patriotic, and a conservative when there was nothing left to preserve.

4. Christianity had, as I have already said, passed through the conflict with Gnosticism, and in the course of it had absorbed and sanctioned, by admitting within the canon of the New Testament, much of what was best in Neoplatonism. This made it easy to convey the rest of the treasure, without acknowledging any compromise. Neoplatonism was at last plundered so completely that she had nothing to fall back upon but theurgy and sentimental sympathy over the death of "Great Pan."

But could the church assimilate what she took? That is the main question which I wish to consider in this paper. It appears to me that the biological law of reversion to type is exemplified in a very striking way in the history of religion. Neoplatonism and Christianity both furnish instances of its operation. The former was, I venture to think, purely Greek in its origin, but its emancipation from pagan myth was complete. In its vigorous youth polytheism might have been dropped out of it as easily as Platonism might have been dropped out of the systems of Iamblichus and Proclus. And yet in its decay it reverts to the old mythology, and expires amid the corpses of hecatombs of oxen. As to Christianity, it appears to me that the same mysterious attraction toward the cradle where it was nursed has been operating throughout church history. There has, I believe, been an influence constantly at work in all Christian bodies, an influence which tries to cast out the Hellenic element, and with it all the rich gains of Alexandrian thought, and endeavors to assimilate Christianity, not, assuredly, to the religion of the New Testament—to the apostles Paul and John—but to the Jewish legalism which Christ came to abrogate. The position of Christian Platonism within the church has always been somewhat precarious, and its influence spasmodic and intermittent, like that of an imperfectly assimilated force.

In the brief space at my disposal I can only attempt to indicate very cursorily at what times and in what manners the influence of Plotinus is apparent in Christian thought. And I must here repeat that I choose Plotinus as the best representative of a certain mode or tendency of speculative theism, and that I am well aware that there is a catena of Christian Platonists before Plotinus—Justin, who counts Socrates and Plato as Christians; Athenagoras, who attributes quasi-inspiration to Plato, and teaches that the Logos is the being in whom the ideas—the archetypes of all things—consist; Theophilus, who refutes patripassionism by distinguishing between God and the reason of God, till he trembles on the verge of acosmic pantheism; and Clement, who regards Christianity as perfected Platonism, insists on the solidarity of all life, and identifies God the Father with the unknown ground of existence, while Christ is the light that broods over all history.

But the Platonism of these early Fathers was eclectic, unsystematic, and unphilosophical; it was reserved for Plotinus to build a noble and coherent system out of these airy speculations; and their true bearing on dogma and on life became much more apparent after he had lived. Origen, with Plotinus before him, plants his foot much more firmly than Clement had done. Tertullian believed that God is corporeal; Neoplatonism, through the mouth of Origen, banishes anthropomorphism forever from Christianity. The generation of the Son (Origen teaches confidently) implies neither a temporal act nor a local division; it is a continuous process, like the effluence of light from a lamp (the figure of effulgence is dear to all Platonists and mystics). What the next centuries thought on the obligations of Christianity to Hellenism here may be seen from the bold statement of John Damascene (in the eighth century): "We owe to Judaism the unity of the divine nature; our trinitarian doctrine comes from the Greeks."

But since Origen was always suspect, the permanent influence of Neoplatonism may be best considered in connection with Augustine, who, though a Latin, is deeply imbued with it. I propose to enumerate in detail the chief doctrines in which

Augustine shows a close correspondence with Neoplatonism. It will not be necessary to repeat the process in dealing with later writers, for we shall then have ascertained what Christian Neoplatonism means, and in what branches of religious speculation we may expect to find traces of its influence.

We will take first the *doctrine of God.*

God, says Augustine, is beyond comprehension and ineffable: he is best described by negatives; best known by nescience; best adored in silence. "*Ne ineffabilis quidem dicendus (est) quia et hoc cum dicatur aliquid dicatur.*" So the First Person of the Neoplatonic trinity is "beyond being. We can say what he is not; but we cannot say what he is."

God has no qualities; he is above all distinctions, and neither thinks nor feels. "*Aeternitas ipsa Dei substantia est.*" The resemblances to Plotinus here are obvious. The "One" is beyond everything, even beyond the most exalted intelligence. If God were self-conscious, he would be *double;* "we must therefore deny him consciousness."

God is absolutely immutable, according to Augustine and Plotinus. This doctrine, as I have just argued, seems to rest on a fallacy, and to lead either to denying objectivity to phenomena or to deism. The crucial question, for those who identify reality with the ideas or thoughts of God, seems to be: Does the cosmic process in any way determine ideas, or is it only determined by them? Those who, with Scotus Erigena, one of the last philosophers in direct succession from Plotinus, can say, "*Certius cognoscas Verbum naturam omnium esse,*" or, in a less pantheistic form, "The Word of God is the life of the universe," may hold that the cosmic process as a whole bears a relation to the eternal Being of the divine Logos, analogous to that which Christianity teaches that our lives in time bear to our eternal being, so that the Logos has in a sense to work out his own salvation. This, at any rate, maintains the reality of the conflict between good and evil, and the eternal significance of what happens in time. But absolute immutability, as understood by Plotinus and Augustine, leaves no room for this conception; when Augustine says, "Since the Word of God is One, by whom all things were made,

and all things exist together and immutably in him, and all things are one," the world-plan seems to lose itself altogether in the Being of the Logos.

On the *beauty of God*, and on the grades of beauty, corporal, spiritual, and divine, the lower grades being shadows and symbols of the higher, Plotinus and Augustine are at one: "*Deus pulchritudo pulchrorum omnium;*" "*omne pulchrum a summa pulchritudine quod Deus est.*" *Cf.* τὸ καλὸν σῶμα γίγνεται λόγου ἀπὸ θείου ἐλθόντος κοινωνίᾳ; and the beautiful passage, *Ennead*, I, 6, 7, 8.

On the *nature of man* Plotinus says, "Our object in life is not to be without sin, but to be God," and Augustine is no more afraid of the word *deificari* than Athanasius is of θεοποεῖσθαι. And the process of "deifying" is by something like interpenetration of essence. And here I cannot resist entering a humble protest against Professor Seth's attack upon the mystical doctrine of personality in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. He says that mystics cannot distinguish between what is metaphorical and what is literal; that they treat a relation of ethical harmony as if it were one of substantial identity or chemical fusion, whereas the *ego* is really "impenetrable." This is no doubt a fair criticism of the commonest aberration of mysticism. I am not defending either esoteric Buddhism or the arrogance of Emerson, or the grotesque materialism of the Spanish mystics; but surely one may answer: "I know well that 'interpenetration' and 'absorption' are words which belong to space, and that is why I am not a pantheist; but 'separateness' and 'impenetrability,' which you affirm of the *ego*, belong to the same category; and I regard love, whatever may be the object of it, as the phenomenal form of a real identity, which I can only represent to myself under the metaphors of 'fusion' or 'membership.' The phrase 'ethical harmony' is a metaphor too, and a very inadequate one." However this may be, Plotinus and Augustine believe that they can save personality while insisting upon unity. The true sign of individuality is not separation, but distinction; but the obstacle to union between beings is separation, not distinction. Plotinus is no Buddhist; he asserts

personality — *δεῖ ἕκαστον ἕκαστον εἶναι*; but we have other relations besides those which make up our individuality. We have a double life — *οἷον ἀμφίβιοι* — inasmuch as we share in the life of the cosmos, in the half-personal World-Soul which works as a whole in individual part-souls. All that lives has fellowship and membership together; whence comes that dim sympathy which binds us to the animal creation and to all the works of God. Augustine has much in common with these thoughts. He seldom speaks of the communion of the individual with Christ, but often of Christ and the church as "*unus Christus.*" And in the *De Civitate* he regards the universe as a living organism, a view which carries with it the mystical doctrine of life within life, and interpenetration of essence.

On the difficult question of emanation *versus* evolution I can only say now that the antithesis seems to me to be a false one; that Plotinus, with his doctrine of *ἐπιστροφὴ* and his *ζωὴ ἐξελιττομένη*, was no enemy to evolution; and support myself by the authority of B. Bosanquet, who says: "The Homoousian dispute settled the conflict in favor of evolution, and marks the climax to which Platonism and Neoplatonism had long been approximating."[3] The fundamental principles of Plotinus have, I think, little to say for or against evolution. The real deep significance of his doctrine that all things radiate forth from God is the mystical faith that everything visible is the symbol of something invisible, the connection being, not arbitrary, accidental, and subjective, but based on real correspondences and affinities.

Augustine takes from Plotinus his *doctrine of evil* as mere privation, "*malum nihil est nisi privatio boni*": *τὸ κακὸν ἔλλειψιν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θετέον.* "God shows his power better by using evil than by stopping it" (this is verbatim from Plotinus); the punishment of the bad "must be part of the general order of nature," says Plotinus; "*supplicia peccatorum de iustitiae pulchritudine veniunt;*" "*etiam illud quod malum dicitur bene ordinatum est loco suo positum: eminentius commendat bona.*" This is surely an æsthetic, not a religious, conception, and a very heartless one. Sin and misery

[3] *History of Æsthetic*, pp. 132, 133.

are the shadows which enhance the beauty of the picture; or the intractable material which calls out the ingenuity of the artist! It is worse in Augustine than in Plotinus, who believed that the soul of man is exempt from stain, and that evil is only the necessary lowest term in a series, the all but non-existent. This enables Plotinus to say: "Vice is, at worst, still human, and so is never without an admixture of an opposite quality." But the Neoplatonic view of sin is apt to produce a rather shallow and facile optimism, as we see not only in Emerson, but in Robert Browning, and to paralyze zeal for the saving of souls.

The *upward path*—ἀναγωγή—is the same for Plotinus and Augustine. First comes "purification," the main element in which is the energetic practice of the social virtues, which show us the value of πέρας and τάξις, and make the life ἀγαθοειδὲς, though not yet ἀγαθόν. Some can never get farther than this, owing to the feebleness of their intellects; and so their lives are wholly occupied with a fussy activity, which only acquaints them with a pale reflection of the life or reason. So much for our good friend, the "practical man," who generally takes himself so seriously! Self-discipline must be practiced concurrently with good works; but neither Plotinus nor Augustine advocates the extreme asceticism which appears in Porphyry and in the mediæval mystics. The second stage, contemplation, which has been foolishly supposed to mean day-dreaming, is the deliberate concentration of all the faculties—the will, the intellect, the imagination, and the affections—upon the highest of all conceivable objects; it is a wrestling like that of Jacob with the angel, when he said: "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me and tell me thy name." Thus is gained that intellectual enlightenment without which good works are, in the language of the New Testament, "dead." The serene happiness which attends this stage is described in very similar language by Plotinus and Augustine, though the two passages have not, so far as I know, been brought together before. Augustine, while yet a pagan, was struck, he tells us, by the "holy dignity that comes of self-discipline, serene and quietly cheerful," which marked the Christian saint; and Plotinus, in language of equal beauty, says

"the good man is always cheerful, steady, calm, and genial. If anyone hopes to gain any other sort of pleasure than this from the good life, it is not the good life that he desires."

The last stage is that which conducts us to the inmost shrine —the famous vision (ὄψις) of the Neoplatonists, the "unitive life" of Christian mystics. It is the fashion to represent these experiences as belonging only to pathological states of the consciousness, in which hallucinations are induced by bodily austerities, religious excitement, and protracted solitude. But it would be easy to prove by evidence that this kind of trance, in which the mental vision is rather enhanced than impaired, is common in minds of unquestioned sanity and unusual power (the new life of Lord Tennyson contains two most interesting records of such experiences); so that "ecstasy," however liable to abuse, is a psychological fact with which we have to reckon. And it would be equally easy to show that the belief in such visions fits in with the rest of Plotinus' system. But since I am not now holding a brief for Neoplatonism, but attempting to trace its influence on the Christian church, it will be more to the point to show how Augustine follows Plotinus, very nearly, if not quite all the way, in his language about ὄψις. "A holy life," he says, "will even lead us up to the vision, where pure and perfect hearts behold that ineffable beauty, to see which is the consummation of bliss." "When our vision of God is perfected, then will our resemblance to God be also perfected" (so John says: "We shall be like him, *for* we shall see him as he is"). And in a noble passage of the *Confessions* we read: "What is this light which now and again breaks in upon me, and thrills through my heart without a wound? I tremble and I burn: I tremble, because I am unlike Him; I burn, because I am like Him. It is Wisdom, Wisdom's own self, which thus shines upon me." The language of Plotinus seldom or never rises to such beauty; but the thoughts are all to be found in his book.[4]

[4] It has not been sufficiently noticed how thoroughly Augustine was saturated with Plotinus when he wrote the *Confessions*. The Master of Balliol has kindly called my attention to a striking instance. Compare *Conf.*, ix, 10 (the celebrated account of the last conversation between Augustine and Monica) with PLOTINUS, *Enn.*, v, 1, 2. The resemblance is far too close to be a mere coincidence.

I must now leave Augustine, and, passing over, for lack of space, Basil, and the two Gregorys (he of Nyssa is saturated with Neoplatonism), and the hymn-writer Synesius, who apostrophizes the Deity as ἑνοτήτων ἑνὰς ἀγνὴ, μοναδων μονάς τε πρώτη, and so forth, we come to the prince of mystics, the father of a long line of contemplative ascetics, the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

In the writings of Dionysius we find great prominence given to the notion of a "hierarchy," a system of grades or ranks in the ladder of being, each of which ministers to the rank below, and aspires to the rank above. This conception is taken from Proclus, not from Plotinus, and is in sympathy with that belief in the agency of angels and demons which characterizes the later Neoplatonism. But there is very much in Dionysius that recalls Plotinus. In his doctrine of God he tries to outdo all that have gone before him. God is not only superessential, but he transcends unity, goodness, and divinity: he transcends himself! Evil does not exist: "God knows evil as good, and in his sight the powers of evil are powers which work good." The ideas of justice, of responsibility, of atonement, are equally foreign to him. He was, perhaps, the first to show how mischievous Neoplatonism may be, if it is misunderstood. Plotinus safeguarded personality, while holding out unification with God as the final goal. "The soul comes to herself," he says, "when she comes to God, and then only possesses herself when God possesses her." But Dionysius abolishes personality; he dehumanizes man in order to deify him. Plotinus escapes pantheism; Dionysius sometimes falls into it. "God is the being," he says, "in things that are."[5] Plotinus shows how what began as a sensuous love of the beautiful may be exalted into a love of the All-beautiful who is also the All-good. "Those who continue to gaze on the visible symbols end like Hylas; they fall into deep waters and are drowned." Here, of course, he is a true disciple of Plato. "The Divine Beauty," we read in the *Symposium*, "is not like face or hands or any bodily thing; it is not word

[5] We should, however, do justice to Dionysius' attempts to escape the pantheistic conclusion. When he says ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ εἶναι, he is nearer to what Krause was the first to call panentheism than to pantheism.

or thought; it is not in something else, neither living thing, nor earth nor heaven; only by itself in its own way in one form it is forever." But Dionysius uses erotic language in describing the love of God; he deliberately chooses ἔρως instead of ἀγάπη to express this emotion, and justifies himself by an ambiguous passage from Ignatius, which was possibly meant to bear a totally different sense; and opens the gate to endless unwholesome dreams by applying the Song of Solomon to the relations between the soul and its Lord. Worst of all, he isolates the individual from his fellows—the solitary monk is his highest ideal of saintliness. And yet it was through this impure channel that Neoplatonism entered the cloister, and flourished there in the lives of countless mystics.

Bernard gives us the three stages of the upward path, with sudden ecstasy as a fourth. He regards deification as destruction of the personality. "*A teipso exinaniri et paene annullari, caelestis est conversationis. Sic affici deificari est.*" "For how shall God be all in all if anything of man remains in man?" He advocates extreme asceticism, and extols the monkish life.

A more worthy successor of Plotinus was Scotus Erigena, who by his profound conception of the Logos as the living nature of things, in whom all created things have always preëxisted, and in whom all the history of the universe will be gathered up into one, only transformed and perfected ("*naturae manebit proprietas et earum erit unitas*": nothing will be lost but miseries and imperfections), reproduced some of the finest parts of Plotinus' system, while avoiding, it seems to me, his acosmistic tendency. His condemnation was the end of Christian Neoplatonism in direct descent from Plotinus; Erigena may be called the first scholastic and the last Neoplatonist. In Aquinas the influence of Aristotle is, on the whole, paramount; and the tendency is rather toward deism than pantheism.

In Eckhart, Böhme, and Bruno the stream again comes to the surface. Once more we find the familiar teaching about God the Father as the abyss, the super-essential; and the Son as the *Ens*, reality, the becoming, of the abyss; of the visible world as an effluence and shadow of the spiritual; of emancipation from

selfhood as the goal of effort; of the world as a living organism, formed and developed by means of an inner principle; of evil as negative, or as the contradiction of the particular to the idea of the whole. But we breathe a freer air here than in reading the church mystics of the cloister;[6] these men are less fettered by dogma, and know more of life, than the monks.

The last, and certainly not the least interesting, efflorescence of Neoplatonism was at Cambridge in the seventeenth century. The Cambridge Platonists, or "Latitude men" as they were called, avowed their intention of bringing back Christian theology "to her old loving nurse, the Platonic philosophy," in which they hoped to find a bulwark against the detested theories of Hobbes, in whom they saw a reincarnation of the old enemy of all Platonists—the Epicurean Lucretius! I think my best chance of conveying some idea of their teaching in a few words will be by quoting a few sentences and aphorisms from the sermons of Whichcote, provost of King's, and John Smith, fellow of Emmanuel, the latter of whom, though he died at the age of thirty-four, left behind him a collection of sermons which I think have never been surpassed for depth of thought, ardor of piety, and beauty of expression:

"Heaven is first a temper, then a place. Heaven is our resemblance and imitation of God."

"As the eye cannot behold the sun unless it be ἡλιοειδὴς [he quotes Plotinus here], so neither can the soul behold God unless it be θεοειδής. Systems and models furnish but a poor wan light. To seek our Divinity merely in writings is to seek the living among the dead. ἔστι δὲ ψυχῆς αἴσθησίς τις. Such as men themselves are, such will God seem to them to be."

"Who can tell the delights of those mysterious converses with the Deity? who but those who have tasted them? When *Reason is turned into Sense*, and *Faith becomes Vision*."

"The contemplative life is nothing else but an infant-Christ born in the soul." "But we must not mistake: this knowledge is here but in its infancy."

"All true happiness consists in a participation of God: we cannot enjoy God by any external conjunction with him."

"The only way to unite man firmly to himself is to unite him to God."

"As we cannot truly love the highest good, while we serve a design upon it and subordinate it to ourselves, so neither is our own salvation consistent with such sordid, pinching, and particular love."

[6] Eckhart was a Dominican, but he was an independent thinker and observer, and would probably have been burned, like Bruno, if he had not died prematurely.

"Religion is no sullen stoicism or oppressing melancholy; it is full of a vigorous and masculine delight and joy."

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, lighted by God, and lighting men to God." "Reason is the Divine Governor of man's life; it is the very voice of God." "Work for the mind: awaken your intellectuals, or else you shall come to nothing."

The Cambridge Platonists show admirably the form which Christianity takes when it is associated with Neoplatonic philosophy. We are struck at once by their courageous confidence in reason; by the importance which they attach to cultivation of the intellect as a factor in the religious life; by the completeness with which the Jewish notion of God as a taskmaster and man as a *fellah* working for wages disappears from their teaching; by the deep spirituality of their language about heaven and immortality; and by their brave protest against the forensic scheme of salvation with its doctrine of imputed righteousness. "They deceive and flatter themselves extremely," writes Whichcote in answer to Tuckney's strictures, "who think of reconciliation with God by means of a Savior acting upon God on their behalf, and not also working in or upon them to make them God-like." And Smith from the pulpit denounces those who "profanely make the righteousness of Christ a covering wherein to wrap their foul deformities, which when they have done, they think that they have become heaven's darlings as much as they are their own." The source of their distinctive tenets they admit freely. "The time I have spent on Plato and his scholars," says Whichcote, "I have no cause to repent, and the use I have made of them I dare not disown. I thank God for what I have found in them."

I know that in the position which I have taken up I cannot hope for the sympathy of those who, like Ritschl, Harnack, and Hatch, seem to regard Christianity as a kind of primitive Kantianism overlaid by alien accretions. The austere rigorism and hard individualism of this school have little in common with the temper of Plotinus, Tauler, the *Theologia Germanica*, and the English Platonists. But to those whose temperament is not alien to a sober mysticism I would suggest the question: May not Johannine or Platonic Christianity, which has so often proved

itself a regenerative principle in times of deadness and formality, and a reconciling principle in times of conflict and division, be destined to play the same beneficent part in the new century which is now close upon us? Christian Platonism has no quarrel with art, for it worships the beautiful as well as the good, and affirms their ultimate identity in God. It has no quarrel with science, for while in its ethical scheme it enjoins a thorough and honest pursuit of knowledge as an integral part of the good life, on its metaphysical side it keeps to its own province, and leaves science undisturbed in its proper work, which is *not* the discovery of ultimate truth, but the investigation of the relations which prevail within the world of phenomena. I could show by a whole catena of authorities that the belief in the "miraculous," in the anti-scientific sense as a breach of the laws of nature, is discountenanced by nearly all Christian Platonists. The real enemy of science is that religious materialism which, unless it sees signs and wonders, will not believe. Neither has it any quarrel with dogmatic theology, provided always that dogma is understood to be what it is, "a raft on which to sail through the waters of life." "To affirm confidently that these narratives are literally true in every detail," says Socrates in the *Phædo*, "becomes no reasonable man; yet it becomes us to believe that they are *near* the truth." Religious symbols are not arbitrary: they have a real and vital connection with the thing symbolized; and he who thinks he can do without them falls either into gross anthropomorphism and materialism, or into the perverse and insane form of mysticism against which Tauler and Ruysbroek are always warning us.

We cannot afford to throw away any part of our intellectual inheritance, or to be misled by those who would have us strip Christianity of all that she has learned from Greece, and "return to the historical Christ." We worship "the historical Christ," because we see in him the Word made flesh; the Word, in whom dwells, and from whom flows, all the light that has been or ever will be granted to the sons of men; and it is in this faith that I say with Eunapius: "The fire still burns on the altars of Plotinus."