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A PRIMITIVE MYSTIC HYMN.

A Study

of the Gnostic and Christian Elements in

the Syriac, "Hymn of the Soul."

A Thesis for the Degree, Bachelor of Divinity.

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A PRIMITIVE MYSTIC HYMN.

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"Hymn of the Soul."

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

The Syriac "Hymn of the Soul," though not widely known, cannot fail to possess an absorbing interest to all who are concerned in the reconstruction of that period of history in which Christianity struggled, not less strenuously than successfully, to force its way through the conflict-currents of philosophical speculation during the first four centuries of our era.

It will be of interest, then, in this introductory section to enquire first of all concerning the history of the "Hymn of the Soul" as a piece of literature, and secondly to enquire briefly concerning the probable date of its composition. This latter enquiry must as yet be merely tentative and based on certain allusions in the Hymn itself, and be regarded merely as a working hypothesis, which will assist us to relate the Hymn to the thought of those early centuries. Our final judgment as to the source and date of the poem must be arrived at in view of the results of our entire enquiry.

The "Hymn of the Soul" may be found in a Syriac

manuscript in the British Museum. The manuscript of which it forms a part contains a collection of Lives of Saints and bears the date A. Gr. 1247 which is equal to A.D. 936. The first "life" in the series is entitled "The Acts of Judas Thomas the Apostle," and in this story the poem under consideration is incorporated. In relating the story of St. Thomas the writer tells of his coming into conflict with a certain Indian king named Mazdai, who caused the apostle to be arrested and thrown into prison. In prison St. Thomas has recourse to prayer, and it is recorded that after his prayer he sat down and began to chant the Hymn which is now known as the "Hymn of the Soul."

A very cursory examination of the Hymn will at once reveal that although it might be interpreted as in some way symbolical of the circumstances of the apostle at the time, it nevertheless is not such a Hymn as would be composed by the apostle, or by anyone writing his biography, because it contains no reference, explicit or implicit, to the circumstances of the case. Indeed, when read in its context, it immediately gives the impression that it is essentially extraneous to the narrative and to the style of the author.

This very definite impression is further strengthened by certain facts of external evidence. For the "Acts of Judas Thomas" are extant, not only in Syriac, but also in Greek and in the Greek version this Hymn is omitted.

Not only so, but in another Syriac manuscript of the "Acts of Judas Thomas," to be found in the Berlin Museum, this Hymn is also omitted. It has not yet been determined whether the Greek or the Syriac version of this story is the original. But it is quite evident that the style and metrical character of the Hymn itself stamps it as of Syriac origin, and very probably much older than the narrative in which it is found incorporated.

As to this question of the date of the Hymn, we may at present point out two references in the work itself which would seem to require the assumption of the early date of its authorship. The writer speaks of the Parthians as the ruling race in the east.

"And a proclamation was made in our kingdom,  
That all should speed to our gate,  
Kings and princes of Parthia,  
And all the nobles of the East."

The Parthian dynasty was overthrown in 224 A.D. The writer of the Hymn also twice refers to Maishan, once as "the meeting-place of the merchants of the East," and again as, "The haven of the merchants." Maishan is a district near the mouth of the Euphrates and Tigris, and it, during the Parthian supremacy, formed a separate though more or less dependent kingdom."

Unless, then, these references have been skillfully inserted by one who wished to communicate the appear-

ance of antiquity to the Hymn, it may be regarded as having been composed before 224 A.D. St. Thomas must have completed his life before 224 A.D. And it would seem more than likely that had the author of the "Acts" been also the author of this Hymn he would rather have been anxious to indicate the date of the hymn as very much earlier than is allowable by the references quoted therefrom.

It would therefore seem reasonable to conclude that the "Hymn of the Soul" is at least as early as 224 A.D. and that it was taken at some unknown time by some unknown hand and incorporated in the way we have seen in the "Acts of Thomas Judas the Apostle."

CHAPTER II.

A Translation of the Hymn.

In order to facilitate the study of this interesting and ancient document, I herewith give a translation. The translation is from the Syriac version and is based on the translation given by Prof. Benan in his edition of the "Hymn of the Soul." Lack of time has prevented any careful study of the text with the aim of offering original emendations and suggestions for the clearing up of textual difficulties.

But an honest effort has been made to interpret the real meaning of the text.

Before proceeding with the translation it may be well to remark that the prevailing structure of the poem is that of couplets of hexameter verse. The verses of each couplet are nearly always closely connected in thought by a kind of complementary parallelism; that is to say, the thought of the second line of a couplet seems to be implicit on the thought of the first. But there is always a transition in thought, however slight, between each couplet, and the movement of the poem is thus rather irregular and jerky.

"The Hymn of the Soul."

1. When I was a suckling babe  
Sojourning in my kingdom in my father's house
2. And in the opulence and in the magnificence  
of my nurturers was resting
3. From the East, our native place,

- My parents, having equipped me, sent me forth.  
4. And from the wealth of our treasure house  
Already had they tied up for me a considerable load.  
5. Large it was, yet light  
That I might bear it alone.  
6. Gold of the (Geloï)  
And silver of Gazzak the great,  
7. And rubies of India  
And agates from the land of Kushan.  
8. And they girded me with adamant  
Which of iron is the crusher.  
9. And they took off the shining robe,  
Which in their love they had woven for me,  
10. And my purple toga  
Which to my form was measured and woven,  
11. And they made a compass with me  
And wrote it in my heart that it should not be forgotten:  
12. "If thou goest down into Egypt  
And bringest the one pearl  
13. Which is in the midst of the sea  
Hard by the snorting serpent,  
14. Thou shalt then put on thy bright robe  
And thy toga which over it is laid  
15. And with thy Brother, our second in rank  
Thou shalt be heir in our kingdom."  
16. I quitted the East; I went down,  
There being with me two messengers,  
17. For the path was dangerous and difficult,  
And as for me, I was an infant to tread it.  
18. I passed the borders of Maishan  
The rendezvous of the merchants of the East,  
19. And I reached the land of Babylon  
And entered the walls of (Hierapolis).  
20. I went down to the midst of Egypt  
And my companions from me separated.  
21. I made straight for the serpent;  
Hard by his lodging I encamped;  
22. Until he should slumber and sleep  
And I, my pearl, from him might take.  
23. And when I was alone, solitary,  
A stranger to the inmates of my dwelling,  
24. A son of my race, a son of nobles,  
From among the Easterns, there I beheld.  
25. A youth comely and kindly  
A son of anointing.  
26. ....  
And to me he came and attached himself.  
27. And I made him my intimate,  
A comrade, whom I made a partaker of my merchandise,  
28. I warned him against the Egyptians  
And against consorting with the unclean,  
29. And I clothed myself with clothes like theirs,  
That they might not insult me because I had come from  
beyond.



30. That I might take away the pearl,  
And (lest) they should arouse the serpent against me.
31. But in some way or other  
They perceived that I was not of their land,
32. So they dealt with me treacherously,  
Also they caused me to eat their food,
33. I forgot that I was a son of kings.  
And I served their king.
34. And I forgot the pearl  
for which my parents had sent me,
35. And by reason of the burden of their foods,  
I lay in a deep sleep.
36. But all these things which happened to me,  
My parents perceived and suffered with me,
37. And it was proclaimed in our kingdom  
That all to our gate should speed,
38. Kings and princes of Parthia  
And all the nobles of the East.
39. So they contrived a stratagem on my behalf  
That in Egypt I might not be left,
40. And they wrote me a letter  
To which every noble signed his name,
41. "From thy father, the King of kings,  
And thy Mother, the mistress of the East,
42. And from thy Brother, our vice-Regent  
To thee, our Son, who are in Egypt. -Greeting!
43. Quiver, and rise from thy sleep,  
And hear the words of our letter!
44. Remember that thou art the son of kings!  
See the slavery - whom thou servest!
45. Remember the pearl  
For which thou didst speed to Egypt!
46. Think of thy brilliant robe  
And remember thy glorious toga,
47. Which putting on, thou shalt adorn thyself  
When in the list of the valiant ones is read thy name,
48. And with thy brother our (chief noble,)  
Thou shalt be in our kingdom."
49. And as for my letter, it was a letter  
Which the king had sealed with his right hand,
50. From the wicked ones, the children of Babylon  
And from the savage demons of Sarbug.
51. It flew in the likeness of an eagle  
The king of all birds.
52. It flew and alighted beside me  
And it became all speech.
53. At its voice and the sound of its rustling,  
I quivered and arose from my sleep,
54. I took it up and I kissed it,  
And loosed its seal. I read:

55. And according to what was traced on my heart,  
Were the words of my letter written.
56. I remembered that I was a son of Kings,  
And my nobility was seeking its essence.
57. I remembered the pearl  
For which I was sent to Egypt,
58. And I began charming him  
The terrible snorting serpent.
59. I caused him to sleep and lie down,  
For I named my father's name over him,
60. And the name of our vice-regent,  
And of my mother the Queen of the East,
61. And I seized the pearl  
And turned that I might return to my father's house,
62. And their filthy and polluted clothing  
I stripped off and left on their country,
63. And I made straight my course that I might arrive  
At the light of our home, the East
64. And my letter, my awakener.  
Before me in the road I found.
65. And as with its voice it had awakened me,  
Also with its light it was leading me.
66. That which was shot from the royal palaces (2) m. s.)  
Before me with its form was shining,
67. And with its voice and its guidance,  
It moreover encouraged my speed.
68. ....  
And with his love was persuading me.
69. I went forth, passed by Sarbug.  
I left Babylon on my left hand,
70. And I reached Maishan the great,  
The haven of the merchants,
71. That sitteth on the shore of the sea,  
.....
72. And my bright robe which I had stripped off,  
And my toga in which it was wrapped,
73. From the heights of Hyrcania  
Thither my parents sent,
74. By the hand of their treasurers  
Who in their faithfulness were to be trusted therein.
75. And because I did not remember its fashion -  
For in my infancy I had left it in the house of my father +
76. Suddenly as I faced it,  
The garment seemed to me like a mirror of myself,
77. All of it in my whole self I saw,  
And also I faced my whole self in it.
78. For two were we in distinction,  
And one again were we in one likeness.
79. And the treasurers also,  
Who brought it to me, I saw in like manner.

80. Two were they (yet) one likeness were they  
For one kingly sign was graven on them,  
81. Of his hands that restored to me  
My treasure and my wealth by means of them,  
82. My bright embroidered robe  
Which is adorned with glorious colors,  
83. With gold and with beryls,  
And carnelians and agates,  
84. And sardonyxes divided in color,  
It also, in its home on high, was prepared.  
85. And with stones of adamant  
All its seams were fastened;  
86. And the image of the King of kings  
Was depicted in full all over it,  
87. And like the sapphire stones also  
Were its manifold hues.  
88. Again I saw that all over it  
The motions of knowledge were stirring,  
89. And as if to speak  
I saw it also making itself ready,  
90. I heard the sound of its tones,  
Which it uttered to those who brought it down,  
91. "I am the active in deeds,"  
Which they raised in my behalf in the presence of my father,  
92. And I also perceived in myself  
That my stature was growing according to His labors,  
93. And in its kingly motions  
It was spreading itself out towards me,  
94. And in the hand of its givers  
It hastened that I might take it,  
95. And me too, my love urged on  
That I should run to meet it and receive it,  
96. And I stretched forth and received it,  
With the beauty of its colours I adorned myself,  
97. And my toga of brilliant colours  
I cast around me, in its whole breadth,  
98. I clothed myself therewith, and ascended  
To the gate of salutation and homage;  
99. I bowed my head, and did homage  
To the Majesty of my father who had sent it to me,  
100. For I had done his commandments,  
And he too had done what he promised,  
101. And at the gate of his princes  
I mingled with his nobles;  
102. For he rejoiced in me and received me,  
And I was with him in his kingdom.  
103. And with the voice of praise  
All his servants glorify him.  
104. And he promised that also to the gate  
Of the King of kings I should speed with him,  
105. And bringing my gift and my pearl,  
I should appear with him before our King.

CHAPTER III.

The Ideas and Doctrines of the Hymn.

We now have before us this primitive mystic Hymn, which as far as we yet know was composed not later than during the first quarter of the third century of our era.

Plainly then, the next step in our investigation must be an attempt to analyze the poem that we may have clearly in our mind its most outstanding ideas, and the specific doctrines, which it appears to inculcate.

Before proceeding with the investigation, notice should be taken of the fact that I have throughout this enquiry adopted the viewpoint that this Hymn is a Hymn of the "soul," or in other words that the individual soul is the narrator of the story given in the Hymn.

It must be acknowledged that this viewpoint is by no means an indisputable one as it is possible that the Hymn may be a speculation concerning the celestial Aeons and that the narrator might be the heavenly aeon Christ.

For various reasons which it is not convenient to state in this place, I do not accept this latter theory. And as, in this, I follow Noldeke and if I mistake not, Prof. Bevan also, I would ask that my viewpoint be accepted for this paper, and the proof of it left for further studies.

From the viewpoint, then, I have made a careful examination of the Hymn and I venture to give herewith a topical analysis of its structure.

- I 1-15. The Pre-natal State of the Soul and the Influences of the Pre-natal State on the soul.
- 1-2. The Pre-Natal kingdom of the soul.
- 3-10. The soul's equipment for post-natal life.
- 11-15. The soul's compact with the heavenly triad.
- II 16-35. The Life of the Soul in Sin.
- 16-20. The birth of the soul - its journey to Egypt.
- 21-22. The effect of pre-natal influences - a start in the right direction.
- 23-28. The soul's search for congenial companionship - the recognition and attachment of a celestial compatriot - the companion is warned against the Egyptians.
- 29-31. The souls attempt to escape sin by disguise. The disguise is penetrated.
- 32-35. The soul is betrayed by the cunning of the unclean Egyptians.
- III 36-71. The Process of the Soul's Redemption.
- 36-38. The conference of the celestial powers over the sinful sleep of the soul.
- 39-48. The stratagem for rescue - a letter.
- 49-52. The flight of the letter.
- 53-60. The effect of the letter on the soul - realization and action.
- 61-63. The seizure of the pearl and the soul's commencement of the return journey.

- 64-68. The letter becomes a guide.
- 69-71. The return journey progresses.
- IV. 72-79. The Robe of Light Signifying the Sanctification and Glorification of the Soul.
- 72-74. The robe of light sent by the heavenly powers to meet the soul.
- 75-78. The robe of light the mirror of the soul.
- 79-81. The custodian of the robe - a soul with its robe of light.
- 82-87. A description of the beauty of the robe.
- 88-91. The robe declares its accomplishments and is raised as a justification of the soul in the presence of the King.
- 92-97. The union of the soul with the robe.
- V. 98-105. The Consummation.
- 98-102. The ascent to the Father and his reception of the soul.
103. The praise of the Father.
- 104-105. The Father's promise to present the soul before the King of kings.

From an examination of the above analysis we may distinguish certain definite doctrines which seem to have composed the writer's philosophy of life and his philosophy of religion.

Let me therefore attempt to state these doctrines, and to amplify them somewhat by quotation or paraphrase.

1. The first doctrine is that of the source of the soul which is clearly regarded as being sprung from celestial or divine parents; the father is conceived of as "the King of kings," and the mother as "Queen of the East."

2. Again, we notice at once that the soul is not straightway born into the world but has a certain period of life in its "father's house." During this period the robe of light and the toga are woven for it "in the love" of its celestial parents. This, it would seem, signifies that the true beauty and character of the soul are given form before it is projected on its journey to earth. The soul is thus not sent unfurnished into its conflict with evil, but during its pre-natal sojourn in celestial regions comes into a realization of its ideal character. And to compensate for the temporary loss of the robe it is provided with a large but light and easily transported bundle of heavenly characteristics, symbolized by the "gold of the Celoi, and the silver of Gazzak the great, and rubies of India and agates from the land of Kushan."

3. The doctrine above indicated carries with it the implication that the life of celestial felicity into which the soul is born, is of such a nature that its uninterrupted enjoyment of that state of beatitude, is not congenial to the complete development and final consummation of the soul's true destiny. A price is exacted of the soul by its heavenly progenitors for its final and secure realization of its

highest good. The price exacted is stated quite clearly in verses 12-15:

If thou goest down into Egypt  
And bringest the one pearl,  
Which is in the midst of the sea  
Held by the snorting serpent,  
Thou shalt then put on thy bright robe,  
And thy toga, which over it is laid,  
And with thy Brother, our vice-regent  
Thou shalt be heir in our kingdom."

There is, then, some excellence, some pearl of price, which the soul may gain only by a sojourn on earth and a struggle with "the snorting serpent", who is conceived as the guardian of the pearl. This conception is of intense interest to us, since it can be readily perceived that the writer's philosophy of life is in some measure expressed in these stanzas. Not only so, but this conception may prove of even greater interest to us when we approach the definite problem of relating the doctrines of this hymn to the various doctrines which played a part in the notable struggle of religions which took place during the first centuries of our era. For I do not feel that I read into the poem anything which is not there plainly implied, when I venture to assert that at least "the Brother" is conceived as having also passed through this period of testing and trial. For while that for which the soul is sent to earth is spoken of as "the one pearl", yet if this hymn was to have any spiritual significance for anyone other than the writer, it must be obvious that there is a "pearl" for every soul sent in quest of it by the divine impulse of the heavenly parents.



4. It is, of course, a topic of great interest to speculate upon what is the nature of this pearl. And such an enquiry leads us to what would appear as another definite doctrine of the Hymn. For it would seem obvious that the writer had in his mind a fundamental dualism, in that he thinks of the world as evil, and of human life, as will be later shown, as being bound up in this evil. Egypt symbolizes the world. The inhabitants of Egypt are thought of as unclean. The soul warns its celestial companion against the Egyptians. And when, after victory, it casts aside the Egyptian garments which it assumed as a disguise, it speaks of these garments as "filthy rags." Surely then it is no mere flight of fancy to recognize in these allusions a dualism which considers the world, the men of the world, and the human body itself as being essentially evil and presided over by an evil spirit. This trend of thought can be plainly seen if we interpret the symbolism of the hymn as follows, namely- that Egypt represents the world, that the Egyptians represent the world's inhabitants as a class, that the "clothes like theirs" represent the human body, and that the serpent represents the evil and ruling principle of human life with which the soul must battle for its "pearl."

As to what the "pearl" itself is, no definite indication is given. But it would seem entirely in harmony with the thought of the poem to regard this "pearl" as representing a certain moral and spiritual exercise, strength, and excellence which is itself the fruit of struggle with and

victory over the principle of evil. If this be so this idea is of absorbing interest in view of the conceptions of the modern idealists as to the nature and function of evil.

5. A fifth distinctive idea is found in the rather vague and seemingly inconclusive reference to the soul's recognition on earth of a celestial compatriot:

"A son of my race, a son of nobles,  
From among the easterns, there I beheld,  
A son of anointing

.....  
And to me he came and attached himself,  
And I made him my intimate,  
A comrade whom I made a partaker of my merchandise,  
I warned him against the Egyptians  
And against consorting with the unclean,

These few lines constitute the only reference we have to this companion, and we are at once struck by two facts regarding this "son of nobles", first, that nothing further is told us of his fate at the hands of the Egyptians. And second that this mention of him is in such close juxtaposition to the record of the soul's fall into sin.

If mere speculation were of any use one might be interested in enquiring whether or not the "comrade" plays any part in the soul's subjection to evil. For we read that the soul after warning the "comrade" against the Egyptians did itself don their garb as a disguise. The inference might be that this social instinct coupled with concern for the congenial companion proved the undoing of the soul. On closer examination, however, the Hymn is found to abound in abrupt transitions of thought, so that I would conclude

that that is what we have here.

However, that may be, the reference to the "son of my race" can surely be nothing else than the symbolization of the fact that in this life the heaven-born soul may meet and will be able to recognize other souls having the same divine instincts. And further, not only is recognition possible but also communion and fellowship.

6. The doctrine above stated, however, is obviously co-ordinated with a plain belief that not all men are sprung from heavenly parents. The Egyptians, who, I should suppose, represent the vast majority of mankind, appear to have no part or lot in the heavenly advantages of the soul, or no communion with it upon earth. They are conceived of as evil, and as bent upon the soul's destruction. So that redemption, as thought of by the writer, is by no means universal. On the contrary, it is reserved for those heaven-born souls who have within them the "compact engraven on the heart, that they may not forget" from whence they are sprung and what is the aim and purpose of their life on earth.

7. We may distinguish another very interesting idea in the writer's philosophy of life by observing that he regards the soul, even with the aid of the device furnishings imparted to it during its pre-natal life in "the East", as utterly unable, of itself, to cope with the evil of the world. The soul is represented as starting out with the firm intention to fight with evil. But its good intentions are overcome by the wiles of the Egyptians, who penetrate

its disguise with ease, and circumvent its good intentions.

"So they dealt with me treacherously,  
Also they caused me to eat their food,  
I forgot that I was a son of kings,  
And I served their king."

The divine impulses are drugged and rendered dormant by "their food", and the soul is laid in bondage to an alien master.

8. There is, perhaps, no more gracious and helpful doctrine found in the hymn than that found in stanza 36.

"But all these things which appened to me  
My parents perceived and suffered with me."

Though this doctrine is expressed in one brief couplet, nevertheless it is pregnant with rich possibilities, and strongly suggestive of the highest form of religion. This likeness will be discussed in a later portion of this essay, but it may be here remarked that the personal conception of the celestial powers, the feeling that they take an active interest in the welfare of the soul on earth, is one of no ordinary significance.

9. The doctrine just indicated is further logically developed by the plainly expressed belief of the writer that redemption comes through the interest of the heavenly powers and by their interference with the world order. There is no hint here of a doctrine of moral evolution by which the soul of itself attains redemption. For even though "the pearl" be regarded, as above suggested, as the moral benefit accruing from a realization of and a struggle with evil, still

the conference of the "kings and princes of Parthia, and all the nobles of the east" is necessary. And the redemption of the soul is not accomplished without the aid of the stratagem which they devised. The soul indeed may possess those qualities which finally enable it to triumph over evil. But it cannot consummate the triumph without the divine quickening vouchsafed by the celestial powers. It is true that the part played by the soul and by the heavenly powers is not stated without some confusion. Yet it appears clear, to me at least, that both are regarded as having a part in the process of redemption.

10. The manner and nature of the stratagem employed by the heavenly powers in conference is a doctrine of essential interest to this enquiry. The philosophical interpretation of the doctrine I will attempt to give later. Here it will suffice to state that in the conception of the writer, redemption is effected through the mind and by the quickening of the reminiscient faculty of the soul. The letter must of necessity make its appeal through the mental faculties, and its appeal is an attempt to arouse an appreciation by the soul, of the contrast between its present state and its pre-natal glory. The appeal is essentially utilitarian in nature. The soul is asked to consider its own good, and it is urged to think of its own redemption as the good for which it ought to struggle. There is here no suggestion that the motive for the struggle of the soul with evil, is that such a struggle with evil because it is evil, is the

true function of the soul. Nor is there any suggestion that the function of the soul is to feel any general responsibility for the redemption of the race. Redemption is for the chosen heaven-born. And it is to be sought from a motive which is in its essence of a selfish nature.

11. Redemption then is of the heavenly powers through the mind. But this, as above suggested is not the limit of the writer's conception. He pursues his thought into the depths of human consciousness in an effort to fix upon some deep-lying dynamic of the soul to effect the practical effort required for the victory over evil, the seizure of the pearl. And this brings him to the explicit statement of a doctrine of reminiscence. It is the innate reminiscent power of the soul that provides the dynamic for action and victory.

"According to what was traced in my heart  
were the words of my letter written."

This was the strength of the heavenly stratagem. First, that the divine compact had been engraven on the hear, and second that the letter was of such a nature as to commend itself to the divine message thus communicate to the soul in its pre-natal days. It would appear plain then that the writer's philosophy of religion was that redemption was the result of the action of the heavenly powers, through the mind, upon the conscience, and that conscience was to provide the dynamic for the victory over sin. And further, that in some mysterious way such victory was rendered certain by the mystical co-operation of the celestial powers with the soul.

12. We come now to a very distinctive doctrine of the Hymn which may be described as the doctrine of the "robe of light." From the references made during the first stanzas of the Hymn to this robe of light, and "the toga which over it is laid," we concluded that the idea expressed was that the robe and toga signify that "the true beauty and character of the soul are given form and expression before it is projected on its journey to earth." The robe then may be regarded as the soul's ideal counterpart.

"Suddenly as I faced it  
The garment seemed to me like a mirror of myself."

Thus while the soul is absent upon earth it has a representative in its original home. For indeed the robe is represented, if I rightly read the text, as progressively reflecting the earthly activities of the soul. I am led to this opinion by an examination of the text of stanzas 89-91 which I have rendered as follows:-

- "And as if to speak  
I saw it also making itself ready.  
I hear the sound of its tones  
Which it uttered to those who brought it down.  
91. "I am the active in deeds  
Which they raised in my behalf in the presence  
of my father.  
92. And I also perceived in myself  
That my stature was growing according to his  
labors."

There may be some room for question as to just where the speech of the noble ends. As will be noticed I have translated it as ending at the second line of stanza 92, and have accepted Wright's translation of as meaning "the active in deeds." Prof. Bevan points out in his notes that this translation "is very suspicious

since the robe is elsewhere treated as feminine," and he further adds that the same difficulty arises in 92 b. if we regard stanza 92 as a continuance of the robe's speech.

This difficulty, however, is not so insurmountable as at first sight it might appear. For while the robe, when spoken of is undoubtedly regarded as feminine, yet when the robe speaks, as it does in stanzas 91 and 92, it speaks as a person and it is therefore allowable that it should take the masculine gender.

This idea of the robe's being the heavenly counterpart of the soul, also gains likelihood from an examination of the following lines:-

78. For two were we in distinction  
And one again were we in one likeness.  
79. And the treasurers also  
Who brought it to me, I saw in like manner.  
80. Two were they (yet) one likeness were they  
For one kingly sign was graven on them.

which seem to suggest a theory of dual personality as if the soul had in the robe a celestial counterpart.

If then my interpretation be correct the robe of light is the soul's representative in the celestial kingdom, reflecting the earthly accomplishments of the soul, which is reared for the soul's justification in the presence of its father, and which declares to the father the soul's activity "in deeds," and which thus opens the way for its own approach to the soul and for the soul's approach to it. It is a continual attraction for the soul, drawing it ever onward. It is in fact the ideal soul which may be truly said to attract the growth of the real soul. As then this



process of growth towards each other becomes realized there arrives a moment of consummation when the soul attains the robe and, secure in its beautiful folds, resides in a state of unchanging felicity.

As for the "toga of brilliant colors" which the soul appears to have "cast around him in its whole breadth," before it "ascended to the gate of homage and salutation," I have been somewhat puzzled to find an explanation of its significance. It appears as the possession of the soul before its journey to earth and is then conceived as being laid over the robe. This pre-natal possession of the toga however, is for the purpose of education, that is, that in life the soul may remember its pre-natal glory and dignity. Neither the robe nor the toga are regarded as by right, the soul's possessions. Both are conditional upon the soul's gaining the pearl. If then the robe represents the beautiful ideal to which the soul grows and to which it lays claim because it has won "the pearl", is it not possible that the toga is some way regarded as the official sign of the dignity of the soul which has won its robe. It is well-known that in Roman life the toga was emblematic of manhood and responsible dignity. Such an idea is found also in Hebrew life where the long and flowing robe which aroused the ire of Joseph's brethren, was regarded as a sign and seal of dignity and honor. It is an interesting coincidence in view of the fact that  has been translated even by the Septuagint translation as

that is, "a coat of many colors," to note that the toga is described in one instance as of "brilliant colors," while earlier in the poem it is described as purple.

13. But there still remains for the soul the one highest attainment, namely, that of appearing before the King of kings with its gift and with its hard-won pearl. And here we have to charge the author of the Hymn with a very notable confusion in thought, since from a careful reading of the text we can come to no other conclusion than this, that if the text is to be literally interpreted there are two distinct kings, each of whom may be designed as "the King of kings."

The greeting on the letter sent by the heavenly parents to arouse the soul is given in verses 42 and 42 as follows:-

"From thy father, the King of kings,  
And thy Mother, the Mistress of the East,  
And from thy Brother, our vice-Regent,  
To thee, our son who are in Egypt - Greeting!"

It is here quite plain that the soul's father is regarded as the "King of kings," and himself lays claim to that rank.

Again, in describing the robe in verse 86 the writer says:-

"And the image of the King of kings  
Was depicted in full all over it."

Since the robe is elsewhere described as being made for the soul by the heavenly parents' love, and since it is at the Father's request that the robe is conveyed to the victorious

soul, we might naturally conclude that the "image of the King of kings" is no other than the image of the Father.

But such a conclusion is rather rudely shaken when we come to consider the third and final reference to "The King of kings," found in the 104 verse. For here the title can by no means be regarded as referring to the soul's Father, and this will be seen by a glance at the context. After the union of the soul with the robe and the assumption of the toga the soul pays homage to the "Majesty of the Father." The Father receives the soul and rejoices in it and as a mark of his favor, promises,

" that also to the gate  
Of the King of kings, I should speed with him,  
And bringing my gift and my pearl  
I should appear with him before our King."

Evidently then the Father is not the King of kings in the most absolute sense of the term at least. But that he is, is precisely the impression the writer has conveyed to us up to this moment.

The charge of inconsistency is then justified. But to dismiss the matter thus is to make no attempt to find the consistency behind the inconsistency. For after all there must be some such unity in the writer's thought unless indeed we may conclude that he was irrational. For in all rational life or thought there is of necessity a consistency behind each apparent inconsistency, an immutable behind all superficial mutability, an eternal behind

all that is temporal. And mere consistency, in the superficial sense of the term is no jewel. A brick wall is perhaps the most consistent thing in the world, and there are few things less interesting and significant.

Granting then that the writer of the Hymn is here guilty of an apparent inconsistency it is for us to attempt to penetrate to the core of his thought. Turning the problem over in my mind, I have concluded that the solution of the difficulty lies in the writer's feeling that his very depiction of the Father as being surrounded by family and court, and as being actively concerned with the world and with the soul in the world, is so intimate and familiar as to prevent the ascribing to him of a nature and power sufficiently transcendental to be congruous with the proper conception of a "King of kings."

Is it not a truth well attested by experience that each new height attained renders possible a new and more perfect vision? And this, as it appears to me, is what has taken place here. When the writer has carried out his theory with perfect consistency he finds that even that which he thought would be the soul's highest felicity, is not enough. And this feeling finds expression in his final reference to the "King of kings" - expression, marred indeed by a certain obscurity in statement, yet revealing greater depths in the writer's thought.

The points above noted constitute what I would consider the principal doctrines of the Hymn. But there are a

few lesser ideas which it would be well to point out. It is not my intention to make any attempt to explain these ideas or ascribe them to the influence of any particular school of thought, just as this place. Nevertheless attention should be drawn to them before we attempt to realize the historical background of the period under discussion, because by keeping these points in mind we may chance to be able to detect the influences at work on the author's mind.

1. The first point of interest among these minor ideas is the reference to the two guardians (V.16) who accompanied the soul to earth. When the soul reaches earth these guardians separate from it. This may, however, merely mean that though the soul takes on bodily form the guardians remain invisible in the world of spirits.

2. In Verse 25 we have the reference to the "youth comely and kindly, a son of anointing." The "anointing" may have reference to the union of the celestial soul with the body. The point is worthy to be kept in mind.

3. In Verse 28 the Egyptians are described as "unclean". This seems to identify evil with an idea of uncleanness. It will be easily seen that the word "unclean" has a sufficiently interesting history in oriental thought to make it worth while our consideration.

4. In Verse 44 occurs this phrase - "See the slavery whom thou servest." The fact that this "slavery" is under-

gone in Egypt is enough to make us keep our thoughts upon this idea.

5. Another idea worthy of consideration is that the letter sent to the soul was sealed "from the wicked ones, the children of Babylon. Vv.49-50.

6. In V. 59 we have an idea worthy of note, namely, the charming of the serpent by the incantation of the name of the Father, Brother and Mother of the soul.

7. In Verse 65 the letter which had awakened the soul becomes also a light to lighten his way.

8. In Verse 66 occurs the idea that the letter was shot from the "royal palaces." This finds a very interesting parallel in another work - a parallel which will be exhibited in a later stage of this essay.

9. Another idea which should be noted is that of the "Kingly sign" graven on the treasurers.V.80.

10. In Verse 100 we read, -

"For I had done his commandments  
And he too had done what he promised."

It appears to me that this thought may be worthy of our keeping it in mind.

11. In Verse 102 occurs a phrase which it would seem should be noticed.

"And I was with him in his kingdom."

These points have been here merely suggested as being worthy of thought. My proposal is that they should be, as far as possible, kept in mind as we further pursue this enquiry, with the hope that they may assist us in determining what are the sources of this Hymn.

With the hope that this chapter has at least served to stimulate an interest in the "Hymn of the Soul" itself, and to give at least some understanding of the ideas to which he tried to give expression, I make bold to ask the reader to proceed with me in the next chapter to the consideration of the historical situation of the early centuries of our era, with special reference to the history of thought.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HISTORICAL SITUATION.

There is undoubtedly no period of history which offers such a fascinating and promising field as that which includes the two centuries preceding and succeeding the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The field is promising because so little is yet actually known of it. It is fascinating because there one studies the play of forces which fought a tremendous battle before the course of history was decided.

It will be impossible in this essay to give anything like an adequate treatment of this subject. Let us attempt however, in this chapter, to treat of the nature of the forces above mentioned.

A study of the history of the two centuries preceding and succeeding the birth of Jesus reveals to us the presence of three great forces at work in moulding human thought and shaping human belief and faith.

The elemental force which first attracts our attention in the study of this period is that which for want of a better name, I shall call "The Greek Spirit" or if one prefers, "The Spirit of Hellenism." This is the spirit that in that ancient rude and barbaric world signified self-knowledge and self-control; love of ordered freedom; and belief in reason and in the supremacy of the spirit over



the senses. It is the spirit that found the earth a wilderness and transformed it into a home by supplying the lacking elements, art, science, secular poetry, philosophy, political life and social intercourse. For indeed the genius of the Greek spirit is its ability to combine harmoniously diverse and even opposite qualities.

Such a genius then naturally presupposes in the Greek spirit the presence of a love of knowledge, not merely as the mastering of so many facts, but as the power of penetration to the great underlying principles of life. It is the scientific spirit manifested in an age of mystery and oppressive secrets. This freedom of the intellect, this bold launching from the rock-bound shore of custom into the great unknown sea of reason is seen in all the Greek poets from Homer down. Not only so but we have in the Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and so down the great succession, a further development of this original tendency, inasmuch as these men looked slightly on "that multifarious learning which holds together a mass of unrelated facts, but never reaches the central truth of things." But, delving more deeply into truth they sought, in mathematics, in the study of nature, in logic, and in psychology, to detect causes and discover laws in the universe. This tendency is well expressed in the words of Democritus - "Rather would I discover the cause of one fact than become king of the Persians." Nevertheless, this tendency to scientific research must not be construed as signifying that the Greek spirit was wanting

in reverence. For indeed it had a quality of reverence deep-seated and based not on fear but on that self-knowledge which teaches the limits of the human intellect. "But the whole - man boasts that he has found it: all idly: for these things no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, neither may they be grasped by the mind."

Of this nature then was the Greek Spirit in its original purity. It took up the accumulated lore of earlier civilizations - but not to accept it blindly. On the contrary, tradition, even religious cosmogonies, in fact all things were subjected to the free play of unbiased thought. And this activity of the Greek spirit, this mental secularization of all knowledge, was its most destructive element.

The Greek Spirit, however, did not maintain its original purity, but in the course of time it became impregnated with the mysticism of the Orient, for before this new force, not only did the formal Greek and Roman religions give way, but also there crept into Greek philosophy a feeling that whereas the search for knowledge had of itself been so disappointing, it might be that the truth about life would be found in the mysteries of the Barbarians. This new force began its action on ancient philosophy about the beginning of the period under discussion and brought its work to a completion in the universal Neoplatonic Philosophy. The beginning of this movement was a period of important crisis for philosophy. For Philosophy was now placed between religion and ethic on the one hand, and the knowledge of nature or empirical science on the other. Philosophy chose

to ally itself with religion and ethic. And so we have the rise of the Oriental mystery religions, as the second great force in the struggle of the human mind in those eventful centuries.

It has always been the ground of speculation as to what was the particular strength of these Oriental cults which enabled them so to overthrow the religions of Greece and Rome, and to command the interest and assimilate the speculations of the philosophers. Renan undertook to explain this by stating that it was "inevitable that the oldest and most worn out civilization should by its corruption subjugate the younger." If however, it be remembered that Rome got her industry and her riches from the Orient, we may well feel that Renan's explanation is perhaps superficial, and that these older eastern civilizations may well be regarded as far from essential corruption. For indeed Rome imitated the Orient in many things and drew from her some of her most useful enrichments. It was the Orient which gave to Roman polity the form of a strongly centralized state. And it was the Orient which gave to the occidental world a new conception of religion.

If then we would search for that which enabled the religions of the Orient to make their great conquests, we must determine what was the nature of these religions which could first of all attract the Greek spirit, and then overcome the Latin Spirit of formality and austerity

in manners and morals.

It was that very rationalism, that tendency to secularization, which had freed Greece from the folds of a superannuated mythology, and in doing so had removed the possibility of a continuance of any vitality in its own religion. For religion cannot exist without reflection. And since the gods were mere myths of fancy, mere exploded phantasmagoria of the childhood of the race, why ponder on them, why try to see anything divine in them? The Greek Spirit then killed the Greek religion. But as time went on, the Greek spirit found that it must have something upon which to exercise its wonderful powers of reflection and insight. It sought for some statement of a mighty truth that would afford it opportunity to exercise its genius for research and systematization. And the fact remains that at this juncture the Greek Spirit fastened on the mystery cults. What then, was that great new truth found in the mystery cults which aroused afresh the assimilative and reflective powers of the Greek Spirit?

To answer this question properly, is, to be sure, a rather weighty task, and one cannot but be sensible of the risk he assumes in making the attempt. It may be suggested that the reason the Greek Spirit took up with these Oriental cults was that it was in a state of decadence, and having forsaken the path of empirical science sought for truth in feeling and speculation. And this is, in a measure, the truth. Nevertheless, it must

not be forgotten that when the mystery cults were first introduced into the occident Greek philosophy was tinged with mysticism to a very slight extent in comparison to what it became in the schools of the Neo-Platonists. It had succeeded in devitalizing its own religion by the very action of the rationalistic tendency in the Greek Spirit. But inso doing, it had only aroused in itself a deeper longing after those mystical qualities found wanting in the discredited "Immortals". The Greek Spirit at this juncture was finite humanity in search of something infinite yet possessing attributes for which the human heart yearned. Can we wonder then that in the intensely personal aspect of the mystery cults the impersonality of the rationalistic Greek Spirit found, or thought it had found, the complement of which it was in search.

The result of this movement then was the Hellenizing of the Orient, and it is a well known fact that the Hellenized Orient imposed itself everywhere through its men and its works, in politics, in astronomy, in mathematics, in medicine, in metaphysics, in philosophy, in literature, and in art. But its greatest victory, as elsewhere indicated was in religion, where it utterly destroyed the Graeco-Latin paganism, and thus made way for the third great force in this momentous struggle of religions.

Before proceeding, however, to discuss this third element, it will be necessary to show how and why

the Greek Spirit, coalescing with the Oriental mysticism, overcame the last stronghold of occidental paganism, Rome. And we cannot forbear to wonder how the austere and formal system of pontifical law and augural science, which had imposed itself upon the native religions of the West, should fall so readily before the native religions of the East. Here too, we must deny the apparently obvious but in reality superficial and incorrect estimate which attributes this victory to the overwhelming corruption of an older civilization reacting upon a younger civilization, wanting in moral stamina.

The immediate cause for the triumph of Oriental cults, whether Hellenized or not, may be found in the very obvious pre-ponderance of the Orient in industry and commerce. For from these eastern lands Rome drew the princely cargoes of an incredibly vast and busy shipping. And the emissaries of the economic world, merchants, soldiers, servants, slaves, and civil servants, became active and ardent in the extension of that particular propaganda to which they gave their allegiance. The safety and ease of travel furthered the movement as they later offered their aid in the same way to Christianity. In order to reproduce for ourselves the historical background of the period we must imagine the mighty and increasing organism of Roman polity, and picture the teeming thousands of men from every quarter of that Eastern world, some of them fresh from the crude and superstitious

rites of cults as yet untouched by the refining influence of philosophic thought, others trained in schools where the Oriental mysteries were most subtly blended with the refined speculations and the aesthetic adornments of the Greek Spirit, who passed, by economic necessity, in increasing procession up and down the roads of the Roman world, and who, all the time, consciously or unconsciously were instilling Roman life with the ideas and ideals so real and dear to themselves.

But economic necessity was not the ultimate cause of the victory of the Oriental cults over the last stronghold of the Graeco-Roman paganism. Nor can that ultimate cause be found in the explanation sometimes given that social conditions had killed off the best of the Italic and Celtic stock, leaving the remainder in such a state of deterioration that they were unable to resist the insidious enslavements of the East. For this explanation also pre-supposes the essential inferiority of the Oriental peoples, which, as already pointed out, is a theory that cannot be maintained.

The truth of the matter is that these Oriental cults appealed more strongly to the emotions, the intellect, and to the conscience than did the traditional paganism of the Graeco-Roman world.

The Roman religion was subjected to politics and was therefore cold and prosaic. Its ceremony, ritual, and liturgy were formal, dry, and legal. While the Oriental

religions were seductive, evoking terror and hope in turn, charming the people by the pomp and magnificence of their ceremonies and processions, and fascinating them with languishing songs, intoxicating melodies, and other appeals of a decidedly sensuous, even sensual nature. The Roman gods were Immortals and their chief distinction was an impassive, imperturbable and artificial character. The Oriental gods had a closer personal relation to man. They suffered and died, but only to revive and with their revivification they aroused the hopes of their devotees.

Reflection had ceased to operate on the Graeco-Roman religion. But in the priesthood of many of the Oriental cults erudition was coupled with faith. The belief grew "that redemption, and salvation depended on the revelation of certain truths, and through this revelation, on a knowledge of the gods, the world and of our own persons - and piety became gnosis." This then as I understand it, is the real genesis of that tendency known as gnosticism, the union of the idea of revelation as imparted in the mystery cults, with the secularizing, rationalizing element of the Greek Spirit. There was, then, undoubtedly, more food for thought in these cults than in the traditional official paganism of the period.

That these Oriental cults should appeal more strongly to consciences nourished on the lofty precepts of a Plato or a Cicero seems strange. But it is, nevertheless, true. For paganism lacked the elasticity required



for growth in any system of thought. It was fixed. It did not keep pace with the evolution of new ethical standards which went on around it by the efforts of the philosophers. It was designed for a state, not for the individual. But not only did the Oriental cults, by reason of their essentially syncretistic nature seize on the speculations of the philosophers and pour them into their own moulds, but they held these doctrines up to men as individuals and urged them to seek satisfaction for their individual needs in the exoteric ceremonies and esoteric mysteries of the cult. And further, the Oriental cults brought two new ideas to the Roman world, namely, the purification of the impurities of the soul by mysterious ceremonies, and the promise of a blessed immortality as the reward of piety.

Such then was the situation at the time of the rise of the third great force in the battle of religions. The Greek Spirit, with its rationalising and secularizing tendency had from the time of Socrates been devitalizing the paganism of Greece and Rome. In so doing, however, it had not satisfied its own intense longing for the absolute truth of the universe - a longing imparted to it by Plato and Aristotle, who had declared knowledge to be the summum bonum for mankind. In the latter part of the third century B.C. in the advent of the Goddess Cybele to the West, the Greek Spirit found the needed propaganda, the new food for thought, in the idea of revelation. Undoubtedly, Hellenism had experienced its influence on many of the Oriental cults

previous to this date. But the westward movement of Oriental cults, which now began, gave an incalculable impulse to the new development of speculation. This union of the Greek Spirit with Oriental ideas of mysterious revelation must not be regarded as immediate. But it must be thought of as gradual and as continually evolving over a period of over two hundred years, until there arose a new star in the East, the star that signalized the coming of Him who was to do battle with seemingly triumphant gnostic cults, and emerge victorious sovereign over a kingdom that should grow, like the mustard seed, till it shelter all the sons of men.

To Israel belongs the credit of being the birth-place of Jesus and the scene of that ministry from which grew the third power that played so momentous a part in the struggle of religions. And whatever we may believe and know of the divine origin and nature of Jesus we must agree that on His human side He was the son of His race, the one personality who gathered up into Himself all the spiritual wealth of a people who, it is agreed, possessed a unique and unequalled genius for God. It is indeed true that this genius of the Jewish people debarred them from such a complete and harmonious development of the human personality as was attained by the Greeks in the period of their highest glory. And it is, a significant fact that these two peoples each possessed what the other lacked. Greece, with its genius for the harmonious development of human personality, lacked

a true conception of the divine. Israel with its creed that the fear of Jehovah is the beginning - and end, of wisdom, lacked the undoubtedly excellent qualities of Greek culture.

"Thus the sharp contrasts of the sculptor's plan  
Showed the two primal paths our race has trod;-  
Hell as the nurse of man complete as man,  
Judaea pregnant with the living God."

Jesus the Christ, then, for such is our belief, was the culmination of this genius for God which had inspired in some measure, a long succession of priests, prophets and kings, and had steadily lighted the arduous pathway of a long suffering and essentially sincere people. For He was God translated into terms of flesh and blood. He was the living answer to the prayer that for centuries ascended from the throbbing, well-nigh broken heart of Israel to the throne of the Majesty on high.

It is then with intense interest that we watch the advent of this new power upon the arena of the conflict of religions, and observe its increasing growth in the Apostolic age. The story of the growth of Christianity is well-known and need not here be told. But it gains fresh significance for our enquiry when we observe its contact with the great Graeco-Oriental world of that day. And indeed we must investigate the result. Did the rationalising, secularising, Orientalized Greek Spirit remain firm in its alliance with the Oriental cults, and did the coalition present a united front against the new intruder? Or did they seek to assimilate

it and so destroy its unique significance? Or did the Orientalized Greek Spirit pour its speculations into this new world, and attempt to treat Christianity as it had the Eastern cults?

To the first of these three questions we may safely answer in the negative. For the Greek Spirit itself precluded all possibility of any such hard and fast alliance. It was constantly in search of some new thing. Its essence was the free play of thought. Its thoughts were never confined to hieratic channels, and never finally crystallized into dogma. If then it had failed to take note of this new religion it would have ceased to be the Greek Spirit. And the Greek Spirit has not yet ceased to be. It is present in our own age patiently trying out every new manifestation of life, whether or not it be truth.

But believe that history will show that when Christianity ventured forth into the world it received a two fold reception from the forces then at work. For it was met on the one hand by the Oriental-Greek combination in which I include the great school of fantastic syncretism which culminated in Philo to transform and assimilate it, while on the other hand, it was met by a more acute secularization the activity of Greek minds tinged by Oriental ideas, which sought to provide it with a systematic dogmatic, to present it as the guarantee of perfect knowledge, and to make it the absolute and universal religion. To these two tendencies Christianity opposed at first the simple faith of its founder

as interpreted by the New Testament writers and by the leaders of the church. And it was the significant and stupendous task of these leaders to keep the mind of the church fixed on Christ and the teaching of the Apostles. In this connection, the work of Irenaeus, the bishop of the chief Christian Church in Gaul, must be specially mentioned. For he it was, in this grave crisis when all parties were claiming the gospel as their own, who formulated a standard of Christian teaching which is stated by Mr. Edwin Hatch as follows:-

"He maintained that the standard of Christian teaching was the teaching of the churches which the Apostles had founded, - which teaching he held to be on all essential points the same. He maintained the existence, and he asserted the authority, of a *fides catholica* - the general belief of the Christian Churches - which was also the *fides apostolica* - the belief which the Apostles had taught."

We have, then, a three-fold struggle between Gnosticism, or the Greek Spirit, Gnostic-Oriental syncretism, and Catholic-Apostolic Christianity. How then did this struggle issue?

Undoubtedly it issued in favor of the Catholic Apostolic forces. For the Oriental cults were themselves based largely on fictitious nature myths and however adomed, were at bottom conceptions of a very low order, as will be seen by such rites as the taurobolium, and the vertigo-inspired

ectasies of the followers of Dionysus, Isis and Serapis. It is true that by the speculative genius of the Greek Spirit they had been raised to a power capable of destroying the presence of a new religion of redemption based on a historical Redeemer and on spiritual and moral conception infinitely higher than their own, they could not but be vanquished.

The Greek Spirit, too, failed in its aim to capture Christianity for Greek culture, by reason of the fact that the unlimited speculation of the Gnostics worked out into the most fantastic and incongruous conceptions which could not be reconciled to the historical Christ and the Catholic-Apostolic standard. This imaginative fancifulness is seen in the systems of Basilides and Valentinus. But while it is true that Gnosticism, for thus we may designate the activity of the Greek Spirit in this age, had to give way before the Catholic-Apostolic Church, it must be pointed out that ultimately Gnosticism gained half the battle inasmuch as many of the tendencies it represented later found acceptance in the Church. For in fact the Gnostics were the theologians of the first century who sought to provide Christianity with a system of dogma and with a philosophy of religion; and many of the dogmas, and much of the philosophy which they enunciated, was later accepted. Not only so, but early Christianity shows abundant of gnosticism, namely, speculation, mysticism, and asceticism.

To sum up our discussion of the historical situation,

then, we may state it briefly as follows: The Greek Spirit by its rationalizing and secularizing tendencies devitalized Graeco-Roman paganism. It sought, then a field for its activities in the revelations of the Oriental mystery cults. This combination triumphed over Graeco-Roman paganism. But in doing so it but prepared the way for Christianity. For Christianity, based on a historical sub-stratum, on the one hand discredited by its very reality the unreality of the Oriental cults, and on the other hand successfully rebuffed, by its essential sanity the fanciful extravagances of gnosticism. While to Gnosticism must be conceded a partial and beneficial victory in the later development of the Church.

CHAPTER V.

DOCTRINES STATED FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMPARISON,  
IN THE ATTEMPT TO DISTINGUISH THE ELEMENTS OF THE HYMN.

In the previous chapter I have attempted merely an interpretation of the historical situation in the two centuries preceding and succeeding the entrance of Christianity on to the world-scene. The actual history cannot be adequately given in a work of this scope. Nor is it necessary to write the detail of history for the purposes of our investigation.

Nevertheless, it is obviously necessary that the particular characteristics and dogmas of two of these forces should be as briefly as possible stated, namely, those of the chief Oriental cults, and those of the chief gnostic systems. Space does not permit of any adequate statement of Catholic belief at this period. But I shall rely on the more familiar knowledge of this type of thought, to assist us in attempting to determine whether or not there are Christian elements in the "Hymn of the Soul," and to what extent they bear influence on its conceptions.

In the introductory remarks it was pointed out that there are certain references in the Hymn which would lead us to believe that it was written before the fall of the Parthian supremacy in 224 A.D. It will be of interest to attempt to test this judgment by reference to the internal evidence offered in the thought of the author. It has therefore occurred to me that there is a way in which we may



attempt to define, at least, the period of the Hymn's composition and pin down the date of its authorship to the span of a few years, which approximation is, after all, about as near to it as we might expect to arrive by this method. If then, we find there are unmistakable Christian elements in it we may say that it was not written before at least 50 A.D. If, on the other hand, we find that its conceptions do not show the influence of Neo-Platonish it may be regarded as being not later than early in the third century of our era.

In carrying out this method then, we will find it necessary, first, to present the chief ideas of the most important Oriental cults; second, to give a short account of the general dogmas of Gnostic Christianity and the particular doctrines of its chief schools; third, to give some account of Jewish Christianity; and fourth, to state the chief views of Neo-Platonish.

The first Oriental religion to gain access to the Rome was that of the Goddess of Phrezgia, known as the Magna Mater deum Idea. It was originally a primitive religion of nature. To the Greek Spirit, below, it owes the spiritualization that raised it to the rank of a religion of redemption.

It owes its admission to the Latin world to the fact that when Hannibal was making his last stand in the mountains of Bruttium, the Romans became frightened by showers of stones. They sought advice from the Sybils

who were, themselves, from Asia Minor. They recommended the introduction of the new goddess, who, in the shape of a meteor, arrived in Rome 204 B.C. Upon her arrival victory rested with the Roman arms, and a yearly festival was decreed in her honor, to be celebrated April 4th, to 10th.

This religion had its origin on the Uplands of Anatolia where on Mt. Ida and Mt. Berecyntus resided the goddess Cybele. She was the goddess of the earth, the fecund mother of all things, and the anatolians worshipped her on the summits of wooded mountains, and venerated trees, stones, meteors, and certain animals. The husband of Cybele was Attis, but he dwelt apart in sullen dishumor.

Amongst the Anatolians came the Phrygians from Thrace who by a process of identification adopted Cybele and Attis as their own, adding, however, new elements to the cult. Attis became Dionysis. He now was conceived of as living in close union with the goddess of the earth. The cessation of vegetable life in Autumn became associated with the death of Dionysus, and the moaning of the winter winds signified the mourning of Cybele for the departed Dionysus. With Spring, however, the god revived. All these phases of nature the Phrygians celebrated with extreme and revolting mutilations and the wildest orgies of indulgence. Here is seen the tendency to asceticism which has since been so enormously developed in the history of religion.

These orgies were inevitably repugnant to the

Roman authorities, who, to prevent their propagation, isolated the cult, which however, did not die out. But during the Mithridatic wars Roman soldiers learned to worship Ma. whose rites were similar but even more sanguinary and warlike. They brought the new worship to Rome, but it was there subjected once more to Cybele and Attis, for the name Dionysus seems to have fallen into disuse.

Caligula authorized the worship of Isis which soon became so popular that his successor, Claudius, in order to offset this popularity withdrew the original restrictions against Cybele and Attis. He introduced a new cycle of holidays in their honor, in which the tragedy of the death of Attis was enacted.

Its official recognition gave the cult prestige and on account of this it rapidly spread. This rapid propagation was also aided by a belief in immortality founded on the legend of Attis. So powerful did it become that other foreign religions on transferring to Rome sought alliance with it. The Persian cult of Mithra is an example of this. It admitted only men into its mysteries but their wives and daughters found reception in the cult of Attis and Cybele. To this union was due also, the introduction into the cult of the taurobolium, a bath in the blood of a steer, which was believed to purify the initiate and make him partake of the essence of the deity. This tendency to spiritualization was further manifested in the original revels and

feasts, which now became brotherhood banquets signifying the brotherhood of the initiates, and towards the end of the empire moral ideas were connected with the assimilation of liquor and meats taken from the tambourine and cymbal of Attis.

The syncretistic nature of the cult showed itself in its acceptance of each new view involved in every modification of the conception of the world and of man. Attis, for example, became the sun under the influence of the solar henotheism of the astrological semitic cults. Later, the Phrygian fable "became the mould into which subtle Neo-Platonic exegetes boldly poured their philosophic speculations."

The next great religion to enter the Latin world was the cult of Serapis and Isis, which came from Alexandria. It was founded by Ptolemy Soter with the political object of uniting the Greeks and Egyptians in his domains. Serapis was identified with the ancient Egyptian Osiris, lord of the underworld. The creed was a combination of Greek mysteries with the ancient beliefs of the Pharaohs. Its liturgy, ritual, and art were rendered very attractive by the Greek for aesthetics. Osirus or Serapis was the God who governed vegetation and the underworld.

This syncretistic cult came to Italy early in the first century B.C. It was met with a hostile reception since the authorities feared anything that emanated from Alexandria. It was first adopted on the southern part of the peninsula and the authorities tried vainly, in the Senate, to oppose its progress, in 59, 56 and 48 B.C.

In the year 19 A.D. Tiberius instituted a most blood-thirsty persecution against its priesthood. This persecution, however, the cult successfully withstood, and after the death of Tiberius it gained great ascendancy which culminated early in the third century.

This cult never formulated a coherent-system of belief. In fact, its beliefs were so hazy, so elastic, that all men might read into them whatever they wished to believe. This elasticity is shown by the fact that although at her entrance into Italy, Isis was of such an unexacting nature that she was identified with Venus and stigmatized by Juvenal as a procuress, she nevertheless, when the evolution of morality demanded virtue as a fruit of religion, offered also to supply this demand. And the medium for this new moral development was found in the sacramental acts of purification which had always existed in the cult without any moral significance.

The two chief attractions of the cult were its ritual and its doctrine of immortality. For with them, ritual had an efficacy independent of the priest. It was a sacred incantation which the celestial powers could not but obey. With the thought of the future life the life of this cult was dominated. And their specific belief, which descended from the ancient worship of Osiris, was very similar to the theory of the cult of Mithra, namely, that immortality could be secured by the identification of the deceased with Serapis. Unlike the Mithra cult however, this assimilation

was not to be gained by sacrificial meals or blood baptisms, but by faithful attendance on the feeding and clothing of the statues of the gods, by mastery of the ritual, and by sacramental purification.

From Syria came the next influx of Oriental cults. These, however, were not unified in one organization. This discussion was the result and reflection of the disunion of Syria herself. And the semitic stock from whence their devotees sprang provided the loyalty and pertinacity which enabled these several cults to exist side by side without union.

It is impossible to give an account of each of these various cults. But it will be possible to outline the movement by which they were disseminated throughout the Latin world.

And here may be remembered a point already referred to in the previous chapter that the immediate cause of this dissemination was an economic one. Beginning about two hundred years before Christ, Western merchants began to import Syrian slaves, and this class at first preponderated in the ranks of the devotees of the Syrian cults. The Syrians possess a genius for commerce and in time outrivalled even their original masters in this field.

Under this economic impulse this diffusion of semitic cults in the West continually increased and after the accession of the Severi in the second century of our era it became exceptionally rapid. For now they had the favor and support of a court itself half Syrian. Two attempts were

made, one by Heliogabalus and one by Aurelian, to establish Syrian cults in absolute supremacy in the Latin world, - but without complete success.

The reason for the success of these cults has been generally pointed out in the previous chapter. But the specific excellence of the Syrian cults must be here alluded to. Over their crude and primitive nature beliefs had grown a new and less rudimentary set of ideas, which, despite many obvious blemishes of an immoral or un-moral nature, gave new strength and attraction to these cults. Cumont ascribes this development to two causes:- First, the evolution of the ancient idea of "tabu" from which was developed in many of these cults an idea of holiness, and a constant anxiety to remain in that state, or to regain it when lost; and second, to the influence of the reflective schools of the Babylonian people who, even in the period when the Parthians gained the valley of the Euphrates from the Seleucides continued to discuss "cosmology and first principles in the rival schools of Borsippa and Orchoe."

This latter point is of very considerable importance. For the Babylonian influence effected many changes in the Syrian cults and through them exercised a considerable influence on occidental thought. The Babylonian influence introduced new gods, as for example Bel. To it is also due the arrangement of duties in triads, a characteristic of Babylonian theology, and one which permitted an enrichment of thought in the cults. Astrology moreover gave new characters to the deities, imposing itself on the old

agrarian myths and raising those rather low conceptions to a higher plane of thought and speculation. The influence of the Chaldeans, then, through the Syrian cults, although it cannot be strictly defined, may be said at least to have been philosophic and religious, literary and popular.

A further influence of Babylon on the Syrian cults was their gradual extinction of the rudimentary Syrian eschatology, which was so sad, dull and hopeless as to afford little comfort to souls yearning for a recompense for the ills of this life in a world to come. The new eschatology communicated from the Chaldeans was that after death the soul returned to heaven to live among the stars, thus escaping all the bitter necessities of a life lived under the determination of the stars, and sharing equally in the immortality of the sidereal gods. Some of these theories should be more specially mentioned and I shall give them as stated by Cumont. "In the opinion of some, the soul was attracted by the rays of the sun, and after passing by the moon where it was purified, it lost itself in the shining star of day. Another more purely astrological theory, that was undoubtedly a development of the former, taught that the soul descended to earth from the heights of heaven by passing through the spheres of the seven planets. During its passage it secured the dispositions and qualities proper to each planet. After death it returned to its original abode by the same route. To get from one sphere to another it had to pass a door guarded by a commandant. Only the souls of initiates knew the password that made those incorruptible guardians



yield, and under the conduct of a psychopompus they ascended safely from zone to zone. As the soul rose it divested itself of the passions and qualities it had acquired on its descent to the earth as though they were garments, and, free from sensuality, it penetrated into the eighth heaven to enjoy everlasting happiness as a subtle essence."

Not only did the Syrian cults offer to man this doctrine of immortality, but they built up a very complete and effective theology. The conception of the duty had, perforce, to grow, in order to keep up with these new conceptions. The result was the conception of a supreme god of the heavens. To him was applied the term "Most-High", and in some measure, he, with his colleagues in this solar henotheism, was regarded as almighty. This conception is supposed to have developed from the ancient conception of the Baal as being autocratic. So that the Syrian Baal cults may be regarded as having propagated, in the Latin world, the conception of the absolute and illimitable sovereignty of God over the earth.

The observation of the changeless constancy in the heavenly bodies also developed in the Chaldeans, and so in the Syrian cults, a notion of a divine eternity. So Baal, "Lord of the heavens" became in time Master of eternity."

It will be seen from these remarks that the Syrian cults indirectly played a very considerable part in developing the religious conceptions of the Occident.

A fourth important religion came to the Occident

late in the first century of our era. It was the Persian cults of Mithra. Its ceremonies were first performed before some soldiers of Pompey in 67 A.D. by a band of pirates which they had captured. The cult is thus believed to have passed from the Persians to the Phrygians and from the Phrygians to the Romans.

During the reign of the Achemenides Persia colonized Asia Minor. And through all the vicissitudes of political change these Persian chieftains remained the real masters of the soil. In the time of Mithridates Eupator these people acted as a buffer against Rome, and also, at a later date defended the autonomy of Armenia against the same foe. The god of this warlike race was Mithra, who became the tutelary deity of armies.

The magi, the clergy of the cult, were also scattered over the Levant. They were, we know, extremely zealous in the maintenance of their own rites and traditions which from the observations of Strabo, can be regarded as being identical with the rites of Persian Mazdaism their original source. Upon this basis the learned astrological theology of the Chaldeans super-imposed itself upon the ancient Persian myths just as it had done in the case of the Syrian cults, and indeed so close is the connection that we cannot but believe that certain of these Syrian cults possessed a strong element gained from this source.

The Greeks and the Persians as history shows were mortal enemies, and for this reason Mithraism passed directly

from Asia into the Latin World.

From the moment of its introduction into this new field, late in the first century of our era, it spread with great rapidity and finally gained the favor of high officials and eventually of the sovereign. Commodus, near the end of the second century was the first sovereign to be initiated into its mysteries.

When it is pointed out that this new religion was composed of a ritual and a mythology received from Persia (for it was by no means identical with genuine Zoroastrianism,) and that to this was added the erudite Chaldean theology which had advanced the supremacy of the Syrian cults, it will be unnecessary to point out explicitly that in a society already acquainted with these beliefs through the Syrian cults it did not owe its rapid success to these elements.

Nor could its liturgy compare with that inspired by the poignant grief of Cybele mourning over the death of Attis, or with her jubilation over his revival.

But the chief attraction of this new cult was its fundamental dualism. This it was that gave strength and consistency to its theology and ethics. Now this dualism of Mithraism was by no means identical with the philosophical dualism which had appeared much earlier in Greek speculation, and which may be described as the antithesis of mind and matter, and reason and intention. But Mithraism defied the evil principle, and declared war between the two duties, the good and the evil, and urged the worship of both (the worship of the evil being to placate, in order to overcome it.)

thus presenting an apparently reasonable and simple solution of the problem of evil.

This belief commended itself to all classes. Plutarch was inclined to accept it. The early Neo-Platonists admitted Persian demonology into their systems. It is also suggested that Judaism drew its idea of the adversary of God, as found in Job from a Mazdean source. And it is said that the conception strongly tinged the teaching of the medieval church.

This fundamental dualism became the foundation of an ethical system in which was the chief attraction of Mithraism in the Roman world which for so long had vainly sought for that which its original genius demanded, a practical religion.

Mithra was regarded as the spirit of light, the god of truth and justice. Ahriman the evil spirit was the personification or defection of deceit.

Mithra, the warrior god, demanded absolute fidelity to oath. He exalted loyalty. He urged fraternity. He nourished verility. He attached little importance to compassion and gentleness. The whole conception of Mithraism then was dominated by the antithesis of purity and impurity, and these qualities were regarded as spiritual, and its ceremonies had a spiritual import. This purity, then, is what marks the conceptions of Mithraism as distinct from all other cults.

This high conception was further strengthened by the fact that the devotees of Mithra were men of action. They did not lose themselves in the speculations of mysticism. Life

was objective. It was a continual battle between spiritual good and spiritual evil. All creation was ranged upon one side or the other. The followers of Mithra were on the side of the good. The evil man suffers and the evil man does - all are the manifestations of Ahriman. And the believer was the assistant of Mithra. It was his highly esteemed privilege to fight on the side of the right.

The eschatological conceptions of Mithraism were also of a very high order. Mithra not only fought for his followers here, but watched over their welfare hereafter. After death he sent celestial messengers to struggle with the messengers of Ahriman for the possession of the soul. The soul is tried before Mithra and if its good deeds outweigh its evil deeds it is defended against the infernal messengers. Now begins a purifying progress of the soul through the planetary spheres to the world of light and the throne of Mithra. It was also believed that Mithra at the end of the world would raise the bodies of the faithful to the enjoyment of the realms of light while the bodies of the followers of Ahriman will be consumed with fire.

This concludes the account of the nature of the Oriental cults. And at this point it is expedient to remind ourselves that these are the systems from the East which presented themselves in the period under discussion, for the action of the Western mind. They all came under the secularizing and rationalizing tendency of the Greek Spirit, and the process, with the exception of Mithraism, was in

active operation at the advent of Christianity. The Greek or gnostic spirit attacked Christianity as it did these various cults, but we must now remember that it was not the Hellenic spirit in its purity but the Hellenic spirit influenced by the conceptions of the cults above described. The history of Gnosticism is the story of the application of Hellenism or as Harnack calls it "the acute secularizing tendency", to the religious phenomena here indicated.

It will be sufficient then to state here a rather bare outline of the general gnostic principles and the particular beliefs of its great systems, as the reader will recognize in them any elements of the Oriental cults which they may have appropriated.

Before proceeding to such a statement, however, we must remember that trend given to late Judaism by its union with the Greek spirit, a school of thought which culminated in Philo, and which prepared the way in some measure, for Neo-Platonism. Pharisaic Judaism retained its traditional imperviousness to foreign innovations and does not come into the scope of our subject. But a few words about Philo and his school may be inserted here before we proceed with the discussion of the Gnostic systems.

Philo gives us the clearest conception of that "Jewish Alexandrian philosophy of religion" which arose in protest against the flattening of the Jewish religion, among Jews resident in foreign colonies, to a mere moralism.

Philo declared his system to be the Mosaic system as revealed by God and proved by the interpretation of the

Old Testament according to the favorite allegorical method of the schools of Alexandria.

Upon examination, however, fundamental idea is found to rest on the philosophic dualism of Plato, the antithesis of God and the world, spirit and matter. God is an abstract reality. The world is unreality. How then does God act on the world? To explain this difficulty Philo made use of the Stoic "logoi," the Platonic doctrine of archetypal ideas, the Jewish doctrine of angels and the Greek doctrine of demons. From these elements Philo conjured "a mediator who was, and yet was not, God as well as the world," and thus attempted to overcome the fundamental antithesis between God and the world. He taught that the human spirit was divine and its proper home was the heavenly world. The body was the prison house of the soul. The highest good was conceived by Plato to be knowledge of truth, and to be accessible to the human mind. With Philo the highest good was God and He is beyond the comprehension of the human intellect. The important result of this new principle was that "a place was now for the first time provided in philosophy for a mythology to be regarded as revelation." For Philo this highest good was attainable only through ecstasy produced by the highest good. Redemption begins with reflection on self and the world. Complete asceticism and mystic ecstasy lead to the loss of self and the gaining of the divine. This state is however but a foretaste of the blessedness the soul will enjoy when

freed from the body. Philo's school then is responsible for the injection of mysticism into the Greek Spirit, and for a very considerable emphasis of asceticism.

Speculation, mysticism, asceticism - these are fundamental tendencies in gnosticism. Applied to the great Oriental cults and to Christianity what wonderful combinations will they inspire. Let us attempt to answer this question by a glance at the chief systems and dogmas of Gnosticism.

Briefly stated, the fundamental philosophic doctrines of Christian Gnosticism according to the researches of Harnack are -

1. The indefinable, infinite nature of the divine primeval being, exalted above all thought.
2. Matter as opposed to the divine Being, and therefore having no real being, is regarded as the ground of evil.
3. The fulness of divine potencies, Aeons, which are thought of as partly powers, partly as real ideas, partly as relatively independent beings, presenting in gradation the unfolding and revelation of the Godhead, but at the same time rendering possible the transition of the higher to the lower.
4. The Cosmos as a mixture of matter with divine sparks, which mixture has arisen from a descent of the latter



into the former, or as some say from either the perverse or permitted undertaking of a subordinate spirit. The Demiurge, the agent employed by God in creation, is an evil, intermediate, or weak but penitent being. The best thing, therefore, in the world is aspiration.

5. The deliverance of the spiritual element from its union with matter, or the separation of the good from the world of sensuality by the Spirit of Christ which operates through knowledge, asceticism, and holy consecration: thus originates the perfect Gnostic, the man who is free from the world and master of himself, who lives in God and prepares himself for eternity.

The above statement of gnostic dogma deals with gnosticism, as found in the great systems of Basilides and Valentinus, whose systems were accompanied by lesser sects some of which leaned very much to Christianity, others to Hellenism.

Of the former, there was a sect called the Encratites who laid all stress on asceticism and fell into dualism. Again there were others who entertained docetic views of the person of Christ.

Of the latter there were sects like the Carpocratians who taught philosophy, practiced the communism of Plato, and worshipped Christ along with Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle. Again there were sects who were mere magicians, deceivers, and utter hypocrites.

In addition to the statement of the five fundamental philosophic doctrines of Gnosticism given above it will be necessary to state some of its specific dogmas which seem to be of interest to this enquiry, and which are not explicitly covered by the principles above mentioned.

These dogmas are -

1. Christ is the revealer of knowledge, but only in his historical person. His essential divinity and any notion of His pre-existence are flatly denied.
2. The heavenly Aeon Christ and the personal Jesus in whom it made its appearance are to be distinguished. Basilides looked on Jesus as a man. Valentinus taught that the body of Jesus was a heavenly psychical formation and sprang from Mary's womb in appearance only. Saturninus declared the whole physical appearance to be a phantom and denied the birth of Jesus.
3. The Church was regarded as an Aeon, and its members were distinguished as follows:-
  - (a) Pneumatic, who in virtue of their mental endowments were capable of gnosis and divine life.
  - (b) Psychic, who were capable of a limited blessedness and a limited knowledge of the things that transcend sense.
  - (c) Hylie, that is material, who in virtue of their constitution perish.

There can be no doubt that Christianity is founded on the Jewish faith. And the followers of Jesus regard Christianity as the perfection of that faith. The Jewish

Christians themselves, no doubt, regarded it in much the same way. But they became separated from the main body of Christians by reason of the fact that their hopes and aspirations to closely adhered to the old national lives. When Christianity burst the bonds of these old national ideals, and under Paul became in fact a universal religion, they failed to follow the new development. Hence they became a distinct sect eventually disowned on the one hand by the church and persecuted by the heads of the Jewish faith. They may be truly said, then, to have suffered "the reproach of Christ."

The Jewish Christians were distinguished in two parties - extreme and liberal. The extremists sought to force the Mosaic law on the gentiles and would have no communion with those who did not observe the ceremonial code. The liberals were those who regarded the ceremonial code as for Jews alone and who permitted communion with the gentiles.

The spirit of Gnosticism was at work amongst the Jewish Christians so that there were groups who attempted by this method to make their religion universal and yet maintain its peculiar significance for the Jews. Their activities were centred in three sects, the Elkesaites, the Ebronites, and the followers of Symmachus. These sects evolved a religion showing strong traces of Asiatic influence and quite far removed both from Judaism and Christianity. It was almost a new religion, founded, they held, by Christ,

but carried on by another who claimed to have a new book in which was revealed to him additional teaching from heaven.

The chief views of these sects were as follows:

1. They required circumcision and the keeping of the Sabbath.
2. They repudiated Paul.
3. They criticized the Old Testament and rejected part of it.
4. They believed the "great and most High God," in the Son of God who was called by them "the Great King", and in the Holy Spirit who was thought of as female.
5. They believed that Christ was a mere man, who had however been frequently born and manifested.
6. They proclaimed a new forgiveness of sin to all who believed in their "book," which forgiveness could be gained repeatedly, as often as needed, on the same ground.

These sects form the most notable manifestation of the development of Jewish Christianity and the only one of any importance for our investigation.

Neo-Platonism was founded by Ammonius Saccas who died about 245 A.D. The chief disciple of the school which he founded was Plotinus who died in lower Italy about 270 A.D. From the Enneads of Plotinus we may draw a brief resume of the chief doctrines of this school.

The system divides itself into three classes of speculation which are quite mystical in nature, as follows:-

II. The Supersensible World, in which may be found the

following conceptions:

1.           The Original Essence. It is the Infinite and Unlimited in contrast to the finite. It is the absolute first cause. It is good. But it is so unlimited that moral attributes can not be assigned to it, because these would limit it. It is operative force and is continually begetting something else, without however being itself diminished. This process is emanation. The law of decreasing perfection prevails in the emanations. The wider the circle of creation extends the less their share in the Original essence. All things derived from the essence contain an innate desire for a return to it.

2.           The world of ideas is the first emanation. It is a complete image, or the Nous of the original essence. It is the archetype of all existing things. It is pure thought and is the highest sphere to which the soul can attain.

3.           The soul is the next emanation. It is the image and product of the immovable Nous. It stands between the Nous and the world of phenomena. It may preserve its unity and abide in the Nous, but it has also the power of uniting itself with the material world. If it decides on the latter course it may still preserve its identity with the soul of the world, by allowing itself to be ruled by the Nous. Or if not, it may be lost in the finite.

II. The World of Phenomena is the emanation of the Soul of the world. The world of phenomena is regarded as beautiful and as capable of being ruled by the soul. There is not a

fundamental dualism in Neo-Platonism.

III. The practical philosophy of the system is as follows:-

1. The soul must rise to the highest first of all by returning to itself. This is mysticism.
2. This takes place first of all through aspiration.
3. Aspiration is possible through asceticism because while the natural world is not evil it is obscure, indefinite, and negative. The unreal existence of worldliness must be left through awakening the soul by asceticism.

Such in outline was the system of Plotinus and his followers.

We now have before us the great sources of thought and speculation of the period we are studying, with the exception of the doctrines of the church. These are too difficult to treat in this place. But a cursory examination of the Hymn of the Soul will show that it is not essentially Christian, although it may have been influenced by Christian ideas. These we may pick out and identify from our general knowledge, but the statement of these less known beliefs should assist us materially in determining the sources of the "Hymn of the soul."

Let us then devote the following chapter to such an effort.

CHAPTER VI.

THE APPLICATION.

We now come to the point of our enquiry, and there remains but to test the "Hymn of the Soul" by the standards outlined in the preceding chapter.

In pursuing our enquiry let us first remember that even the unrestrained syncretism of the period under discussion could not evolve a system unless it had some considerable basis to which to add new elements. We may start then with the assumption that the system of which the "Hymn of the Soul" is a product must have had some such basis, in some particular religion or school of thought.

Our first duty then is to seek for this basis. In our treatment of the subject, then, let us adopt the following plan :-

1. Is the basis of the thought of this Hymn Catholic Christianity? If not, does it reveal any elements drawn from this source?
2. Is the basis Jewish Christianity? If not, does it reveal any elements drawn from this source?
3. Is the basis Neo-Platonism? If not, does it reveal any elements drawn from this source?
4. If these three questions may be answered in the negative, there then remain two alternatives.

- (a) Either it is Christian Gnosticism.
- (b) Or it is syncretistic Oriental Gnosticism.

Some such process of thought then we must pursue

in order to thoroughly apply the tests, and if we make any change in this programme it will be because of unforeseen exigencies.

1. Can, then, Catholic Christianity be regarded, in any degree, as the basis of the system from which this Hymn emanates?

An examination of its doctrines will, I believe, suffice to permit us to answer this question in the negative.

The idea of the "Queen of the East" as one of the heavenly parents of the soul is foreign to Catholic theology which is based on the rigid monotheism of the Jews. For even at an early date when it became necessary to explain the divinity of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit, the solution adopted by Catholic Theologians was that of the three persons in unity. And even before that solution was adopted it is absolutely certain that no Catholic person ever thought of God as having a "Queen." It may be pointed out that in the third chapter I have referred to the fact that the writer's final conception of the King raises him as one above the celestial King and Queen of the east, with which idea the poem commences. This is true, and it is also true that this second "King" is conceived of in a very much more transcendental fashion. But this only makes the possibility of the origin of this Hymn in Catholic thought, more remote than ever, since from the first there was no such conception in Christianity as that of intermediate deities, nor could the Christian mind conceive of a deity in the intimate intercourse with a female deity.



Again, the doctrine of a pre-natal preparation for the soul's life on earth can find no parallel in the New Testament writings.

There is certainly a suggestion of Catholic doctrine in the idea of the soul's forsaking its heavenly glory to come to earth to seek the pearl. For the Christian theologians and New Testament writers, especially Paul, speak of the work of Christ in exactly this way. He did possess heavenly glory and left it to become sinful man, "that He might overcome sin in the flesh." The resemblance is, however, nothing more than a resemblance. For Christian theologians did not conceive of Christ as a soul begotten in celestial reasons and sent to earth to combat moral evil that He might prove Himself worthy to wear His glory. But according to John "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God -" and he came, not to prove his right to glory, but primarily "to seek and to save that which was lost."

There is, moreover, as pointed out previously, a fundamental dualism in the conceptions of the writer of the Hymn. There never was any such thing in the conceptions of Catholic Christianity.

The doctrine of the recognition and fellowship of believers in life is also a little suggestive of the conception found in the story of the Apostolic Church as related in Acts. But in the Hymn, beyond sharing its good things and warning its compatriot, the soul appears to take little interest in him. It is a formal and mental companionship. It is far from

the idea of brotherhood that forms such a golden thread in the whole texture of the New Testament.

Another sharp contrast to Christianity is found in the fact that while Christianity is undoubtedly a Catholic or Universal religion - the religion on which this Hymn is based is far from having any such comprehensive aspiration. It is for the heaven born who have on their hearts the engraved compact with the father, and who consequently can understand his letter. The poor Egyptians are left in their filth.

The doctrine implied in the Hymn of the inevitability of sin for the soul, is suggestive of Paul. But we find that Paul's conception was even a stronger one. For him humanity was born in sin, with an innate bias toward it derived from Adam. To the writer of the Hymn the soul starts free from sin. Modern Christianity would almost accept the conception of the Hymn rather than that of Paul - and in this they profess Jesus who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

The idea of the sympathy of the heavenly parents with the soul in its trials is strongly suggestive of the Christian conception of the loving Fatherhood of God. It is exactly the Christian idea of the Personal Spirit, watching over his children with tender love. But the interest of the heavenly "parents" of the Hymn is not universal. It is only active for an elect. It may be said that this reflects Paul's conception of the election and the absoluteness of God. But to this may be answered that the "Father" in this Hymn is far from an

absolute conception. Hence his interest in an elect cannot spring from the same source as did the sovereign choice of the absolute God.

That redemption comes through the intervention of the highest power is a Christian dogma. But this idea was in some degree common to all the mystic cults, so that its presence in the Hymn is no indication of Christian influence.

In Christianity redemption is through faith in a personal historical Redeemer, Jesus the Christ. In this Hymn redemption is through faith, not in a Redeemer, but in one's own soul as aspiring to higher and better things. This faculty of aspiration is aroused by the letter and quickened by the faculty of reminiscence. There is no idea of a personal Saviour, or even of a Redeemer in the Hymn.

The doctrine of the robe of light can find no considerable parallel in Christian literature.

The reference in verse 65 in which the awakening letter is described as becoming a light to lighten the upward journey of the soul, is slightly suggestive of passages in John where Christ is regarded as "The light." Such passages are - "In him was life and the life was the light of men, " "This was the true light that lighteth every man coming into the world;" "I am the way, the truth, and the light." Such phraseology however must have been common in the Syrian Baal cults and in Mithraism.

The idea in Verse 66 that the letter was "shot" from the "royal palaces" finds an interesting parallel in Ode 23 of the recently discovered Odes and Psalms of Solomon.

The passage where the parallel occurs reads as follows:

"And His thought was like a letter; His will descended from on high, and it was sent like an arrow which is violently short from the bow; and many hands rushed to the letter to seize it and to take it and read it; and it escaped their fingers and they were affrighted at it and at the seal that was upon it." A similar conception is found in the Apokalypse in the little sealed book which no one can open but the triumphant lamb.

Now the Odes and Psalms of Solomon are adjudged by Harnack as Jewish with Christian interpolations. Rendel Harris thinks they are Christian with Jewish interpolations. Bernard is of the opinion that they are Christian baptismal hymns. All these authorities recognize a very notable Christian element in them. Now the parallel between the Odes and the Hymn is in this case so clear that it would seem certain that there was some conception of the sort common to both. As to whether the influence was of Christian modes of thought on the writer of the Hymn or vice-versa, it is hard to say. In view of my own feeling with regard to the date of the Hymn, which feeling is later in this chapter disclosed, and in view of the fact that Bernard to whose interpretation of the Odes and Psalms I incline, places the date of the Odes as sometimes in the first century A.D. I would be inclined to believe that the influence was exercised by the modes of thought found in the Odes on the writer of the Hymn. It cannot be denied however, that the conception of the letter as being "shot" from the royal

palaces" may have been common to both modes of thought.

The lines -

"For I had done his commandments  
And he too had done what he had promised."

are slightly suggestive of the Old Testament idea of the covenant, which was carried by Paul into the New Testament, and which was referred to by John in his Epistles and in his Gospels. The suggestion is, however, very slight.

So also the line

"And I was with him in his kingdom"

suggests very obvious Christian modes of thought.

My comparison of the Hymn with Catholic Christianity then, would lead me to the conclusion that that source does not form the basis of the thought of its writer. My reasons for this conclusion are, first, the writer has no Christian conception of God; second, the writer makes no place in his system for the person and activity of Christ; third, his idea of fellowship lacks the Christian conception of universal brotherhood, and redemption is not for all; fourth, there is a dualism in the thought of the writer, which is never present in Christianity; and fifth, there are many lesser ideas present in the mind of the writer such as the existence of a female principle in the celestial world, the idea of the pre-existence of the soul as such, the doctrine of reminiscence, and many other notions, which are utterly absent from Catholic Christian teaching.

There are some suggestions which would indicate,

perhaps, the presence of Christian modes of thought in the Hymn. But these, even with the parallel adduced from the "Odes and Psalms" are very slight and it is hard to determine the relationship. Personally, I do not believe that Christian thought exercised any very considerable influence on the system or the individual from whence this Hymn originated.

2. Nor is the basis of this Hymn to be found in syncretistic Jewish Christianity. For many of the reasons which differentiate it from Christianity will have the same effect in relation to any system of beliefs which retained any of the principal Jewish ideals of God.

There is in this Hymn no suggestion of the existence of any body of ceremonial law by the observance of which redemption is possible. Redemption in this Hymn is by knowledge and aspiration.

There is, however, one point about these Jewish Christian sects which should be remembered. They arranged their divinities in a triad, in which was included the Most High God, The Son of God called the Great King and the Holy Spirit who was thought of as a female. It has therefore occurred to me that such a conception may have had influence in some way or other on the writer of the Hymn, especially if he adhered to a syncretistic system. The Most High God might be transferred into the "King of Kings" who was at last conceived by the writer of the Hymn to transcend the soul's Heavenly Parents. The Son of God, the Great King might have been conceived as the soul's father, and the Holy Spirit

thought of as a female, might have been the soul's mother, the Queen of the East. This would still leave unaccounted for the Brother. This idea, however, might have been gained from the view which these sects had that Christ was a mere man, who, however, had been frequently born and manifested, and thus would be regarded as of greater rank and experience than the soul.

I know that the above hypothesis is quite unlikely. But we must attempt to account for the idea of the female deity, and this is a possible solution thought not so likely as some we may present. Nevertheless, gnosticism working on such conceptions might find them attractive and incorporate these ideas into its system, and it will be already recognized that the gnostic principle has been at work in this Hymn. This hypothesis, moreover, accounts for the four celestial Beings.

3. An examination of neo-Platonism and a comparison of its doctrines with the ideas of the Hymn will also show that this system of Plotinus and his followers had no effect on the writer of the Hymn. There is nothing in the Hymn to correspond to the views of the neo-Platonists with reference to the supersensible world. There is no conception of an original essence, nor of any other kind of an essence. The deities are conceived of as in some measure personal. In neo-Platonism the union of the soul with the material world is optional. In the Hymn it is necessary and inevitable. The view of the world is essentially different, for in the Hymn

there is a clearly marked dualism, a dualism not merely philosophical, but which conceives the world as active in evil, under the influence of its deity, the serpent. But in neo-Platonism the world is not so regarded. Its dualism is but philosophical dualism at the most, and we know that Plotinus regarded the world as beautiful and as capable of being ruled by the Nous.

The practical philosophy of neo-Platonism affords the closest approach to the thought of the Hymn. The neo-Platonic doctrine of aspiration is somewhat like the view that the awakened soul aspires to attain its former blessedness. It needs but a moment's reflection, however, to remind us that similar doctrines are found in Greek Philosophy from Plato down, and it has been shown that the Christian gnostics held the same view.

If these observations be correct then, we may safely say that the Hymn does not show neo-Platonic influences, and we may further conclude that it was not written later than the time of Plotinus, and possibly, very much earlier.

Having then disposed of the Catholic Christian, Jewish Christian, and neo-Platonic possibilities, there remains the two alternatives previously mentioned.

Is the chief basis of the Hymn Gnostic Christianity? if the first question we must ask, and for this enquiry we must turn to the great principles and doctrines of the schools of Basilides and Valentinus as outlined in the preceding chapter.

And here we meet with greater difficulties for we



now discern some striking resemblances as well as some very marked differences.

The Christian Gnostic conception of God is very transcendent. It is so transcendent as to be almost identical with the mystic neo-Platonic idea. But in the latter there is really no God, there is only an Essence. The conception is a perfect abstraction. The Gnostics gave reality to the idea by conceiving of God as a Being. It will be at once seen that here is a marked difference from the conception of the divine beings as found in the Hymn.

The Christian Gnostics also held a dualism. But it was a mere antithesis between spirit and matter. Matter was regarded as having no real existence, and the world of evil was not viewed as an active evil principle. The dualism of the Hymn is quite different. The world is a manifestation of an active evil spirit with which the good soul must battle for the pearl.

But the Christian Gnostic view that the Cosmos is a mixture of matter with divine sparks and that the best thing in the world is aspiration, finds at least a partial parallel in the Hymn which so regards some souls.

The gnostic view that the deliverance of the soul was by the spirit of Christ through knowledge asceticism, and holy consecration, also suggests the letter, the struggle, and the victory of the soul as portrayed in the Hymn. But in the Hymn the struggle, if I rightly interpret it, it with an active evil principle in the world - not in oneself, as is the real case in Christian Gnosticism. For asceticism presupposes

an evil principle within which must be besieged and literally beaten into surrender. The Hymn views the soul as essentially sound, and doing strong and valiant battle with an objective evil principle.

The Christian Gnostics flatly denied any notion of the pre-Existence of Christ. They have, then, little place in their system for the pre-existence of the soul. Yet this doctrine is given prominence in the Hymn.

The Gnostics did not conceive redemption as universal. They divided mankind into pneumatic, psychic, and hylic. This idea appears in the Hymn where evidently redemption is not for all. The letter is kept from the Babylonians and Egyptians. The parallel is then quite striking. And indeed it may be more so if we are permitted to interpret the Hymn as demonstrating the three Gnostic divisions of mankind. It has occurred to me that this is perhaps done in the Hymn as follows:

The soul represents the pneumatic. The companion whom the soul met on earth represents the psychic. It will be remembered that the Soul shares his riches with his companion. This may symbolize the imparting of gnosis to the psychic by the pneumatic. The Egyptians represent the hylic. This parallelism is perhaps rather fanciful. Still, the Hymn certainly gives some ground for such a view, and I am more than half convinced that there is some truth in it. The principle of the limitation of redemption at least, is clearly discernible in Gnosticism and in the Hymn.

From these remarks it will appear evident that, if my judgments be correct, the principle basis of the system from which emanated the "Hymn of the Soul" was not Gnostic Christianity

For despite the fact that the contact is close on two or three points there is a very marked divergence in the most essential and important points, such as the conception of the deity, dualism, and pre-existence - all cardinal doctrines of the Hymn.

Prof. Bevan in his notes suggests that the Hymn may have come from Bardesanes (A.D. 154-222) and gives as his reasons that Bardesanes held the three views given herewith, which he suggests are somewhat similar to the views of the Hymn.

1. He denied the resurrection and regarded the separation of the soul from the body as a blessing.
2. He held the theory of a divine "Mother" who in conjunction with the "Father of Life" gave birth to a being called the "Son of the Living."
3. He believed in a number of lesser "gods," that is to say, eternal beings subordinate to the supreme God.

At first sight these appear to suggest the Hymn very strongly. Let us, however, examine them and I think we will conclude, in view also of what has already been said, that Bardesanes had little to do with the inspiration of this Hymn.

First of all, then, the fact that the writer denied the resurrection proves absolutely nothing. The gnostics all denied the resurrection of the body. There were thousands who had never heard of it. Why then should not the Hymn equally emanate from any of these as well as from Bardesanes, on this ground? Not only so, but the

principal interest of the writer is not centred in the resurrection. It is centred in gaining the pearl and returning with it to the celestial kingdom. He kicks off his body as a man kicks off old cloths - without much thought about them. They will stay where they fall, with the Egyptians, who will remain there also, body and soul - if they have one. Unless the writer is writing a subtle polemic against Christianity we may not construe these words about "the rags" as of such importance. And the Hymn is surely not a polemic but a devotional utterance which might be uttered by a man who never heard of Christianity or the resurrection - which, in fact, is more than likely.

With regard to the second point, that of "The Divine Mother," the suggestion is certainly most interesting. If, however, my interpretation of the Hymn previously given in which I see four principal deities in the writer's thought, is not most grievously astray, then Bardesanes' view is not adequate here, for as far as we know, he makes no provision for such a possibility.

In answer to the third point, that Bardesanes believed in a number of lesser Beings subordinate to the Supreme God, we might suggest that Jewish angelology, Greek and Roman mythology, neo-Platonism, and Gnosticism have all similar conceptions. Why then choose Bardesanes out of such an imposing array?

To repeat, then, I am of the opinion that not Bardesanes nor any other Christian Gnostic (if such he was)

nor anyone whose mind was dominated by the conceptions of Christian Gnostic schools, was the writer of the Syriac "Hymn of the Soul." Its essential basis, to which all other elements were added, was not Christian Gnosticism.

We have now exhausted all our sources of comparison save the Oriental Mystery cults, and must ask, is the essential basis of the Hymn to be found in syncretistic Oriental Gnosticism and if so, what particular cult is at the bottom of the system which colored the writer's mind?

It needs but a slight examination of the cult of Attis and Cybele to convince us that it is not at the base of the thought of our Hymn. Its mysteries were too crude, even when refined by its well known syncretism. It possessed no such idea as the strongly marked dualism which we see in the Hymn. And its eschatology was far more rudimentary than that of the Hymn. Late in its history it may have acquired such form as to closely resemble the system of ideas which colors the mind of our writer. But we may with certainty cast it aside as having no real reflection in the thought of the "Hymn of the Soul."

Nor can the politico-syncretistic cult of Ptolemy Soter be said to have left its impress on the writer's mind. The god and goddess of vegetation and the underworld is a very different conception from that the "King of Kings", and "Queen of the East" who dwell in a celestial kingdom of light. The only notable parallel between this cult and the Hymn may be found in Line 59 where we are told how the soul charms the serpent by an incantation. Incantations were highly thought

of by the devotees of the cult of Isis and Serapis, and it was considered that if they were properly used the gods could not resist them. But in the Hymn the incantation is used not to gain admission to heaven but to defeat the serpent. This cult's conception of immortality was also more rudimentary than is the idea of the writer of the Hymn. In fact the priests of Isis and Serapis never formulated any complete system of teaching so that they can hardly be said to have influenced our writer.

In comparing our Hymn with the Syrian cults we are compelled to admit that the possibilities are greater of some connection between the two. The Syrian Baals were each always accompanied by a Baalati and were generally thought of in a more anthropomorphic, intimate and personal way. The conception of the Brother might easily find its way into a Syrian Baal Cult from a re-interpretation of the Jewish idea of the "Son of God," and the apparent progression of deities, as noted in our Hymn, may be due to gnostic influences. Then too, the Syrian cults were distinguished by an anxiety for holiness, which as we saw was based on tabu. The doctrine of aspiration found in the Hymn cannot, however, proceed from this, since it is evidently based on the idea of reminiscence, which is a conception of another order.

The Syrian eschatology is worthy of our careful attention for a moment. We know that they are due to Chaldean influences, and to my mind they afford the best explanation of the eschatology of the Hymn. The stars are gods, greater and lesser, male and female. The soul had descended from

earth and by passing through the spheres of the seven planets had acquired the peculiar virtue of each. These conceptions suggest the heavenly court and the bundle of wealth given to the soul before its departure. After death the soul passed through the same process on the return journey divesting itself as it rose of its passions and qualities. In the Hymn the souls presentation before the highest king is not accomplished until he has been met, by the two treasurers, the robe, the Heavenly triad and the King of Kings - seven in all. Can these represent the seven planets of Chaldean astrology? Again, only the souls of initiates could safely pass through this procession, and they were led by a psychopompus. Could the letter symbolize this guide. We know that it went before the soul as a light to guide his pathway to the celestial regions. The Syrian henotheism conceived of one God as "Most High" thought surrounded by other lesser deities. This looks like the situation we find in the Hymn. At all events, the whole celestial scene finds a closer parallel in the chaldean eschatology of the Syrian cults than we have yet been able to find for it.

We now come to the cult of Mithra, and it is of prime importance that we should remember that the Chaldean theology which had superimposed itself on the Baal cults had also done so on the cult of Mithra. If therefore the scene of the Hymn agrees rather closely with the ideas of the Baal cults we may say that it corresponds with equal closeness to the cult of Mithra. It may be thought that the fact that Mithra has no Queen militates against the parallel. It

will be remembered however, that the ultimate "King of Kings" in the Hymn has no Queen either. The cult of Mithra then, had speculations or ideas about the deities very similar to the ideas of this Hymn for what can represent the multitude of lesser "King and Princes of Parthia" so well as this sidereal theory.

Not only is the parallel close in this respect but in the reference to the Parthians there is some additional ground for the likelihood of this hypothesis. It will be remembered that the cult of Mithra originated in Phrygian Mazdaism and that throughout Phrygia many of the landed classes were Persian. What more natural than that they should remember with pride the ancient east, now so well represented by the conquering Parthians?

Again, the dualism of the Hymn, which is a fundamental element of it, makes me almost certain of the influence of Mithraism on the writer of the Hymn. For the Hymn makes the evil principle personal in the serpent. This is precisely Mithraistic dualism rather than philosophic dualism. The world is ruled by an active evil principle and the Egyptians are animated by its spirit. Like the serpent they beguile and play falsely.

So the duty of the soul is to fight the serpent. Mithra was the God of battles. The ethic of the Mithraistic system was that men should battle with evil because it was evil. This a little transcends the idea of the Hymn which makes the motive of the struggle selfish. This, however, may be due to the mind of the author. The fact remains that there



must be this struggle. The soul cannot escape it, and it must get the pearl in order to win happiness. This is its trial. The soul is the "active in deeds." In this connection it may be well to note that the soul, after death, was tried before Mithra as to whether good or evil had preponderated in his life.

The Mithraites believed moreover that the bodies of believers would at the end of the world be raised by Mithra to the realms of light. This is contrary to the view of the Hymn. It, however, may have been a late development of Mithraism, or it may have been a belief which the gnosticism of the writer caused him to reject.

Regarding the robe of light, it may find a place in the system of Mithra as the star of the believer which becomes his celestial body - and the toga may represent the fact that the star is darkened at the approach of day. These are wild suggestions. But still they are suggestions.

It will now be fitting to close this rather long and tedious paper with a concise statement of what I believe concerning this Hymn.

First of all then, I believe that it was written about one hundred and seventy-five years after the beginning of our era. For it does not show traces of the later developments of Mithraism and speaks of the Parthians as though they were in the hey-day of their glory. And at the same time it was written before the union of Catholic Apostolic Churches had gained sufficient headway to commend itself or its system

to any notable extent, to the syncretistic mind of the writer of the Hymn.

Finally, I believe that the thirteen principal ideas of the Hymn stated in Chapter III may be said to show the presence of different elements as shown in the table below.

1. Gnostic; Jewish Christian or Mithraistic.
2. Gnostic.
3. Mithraistic with perhaps a slight element of Christianity.
4. Mithraistic.
5. Gnostic.
6. Gnostic.
7. Gnostic and Mithraistic.
8. Christian or Jewish, probably Christian.
9. Mithraistic.
10. Gnostic.
11. Gnostic and Mithraistic (Appeal to conscience.)
12. Chaldaic Mithraism.
13. Mithraistic (progress to the throne of Mithra.)

From the above table it will be apparent that according to my estimate the "Hymn of the Soul" is the work of a Gnostic who had adopted the religion of Mithra, but who amended his system by a recourse to syncretism and the admission of various elements and modes of thought, some of which are Christian. I further believe that the writer knew of Christianity and adopted some of its language and phraseology, but that his mind was not influenced by it to any great extent.

According to my opinion then, the Hymn of the Soul, is perhaps a Hymn that was used in the celebration of the mysteries of Mithra in the last half of the second century of our Era. And if it is so its peculiar beauty and attractiveness will help explain to us, how this the last creed of

Oriental paganism was able for so long to do battle with Him who in bitterest conflict with evil has proved Himself the "King of Kings" indeed, and the son of God with Power.