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FICTION

HYPATIA: OR NEW FOES WITH AN OLD FACE

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LONDON: J. M. DENT & SONS LTD. New YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.

INTRODUCTION

WE hardly realize Charles Kingsley to-day as a professor of history, but in reading "Hypatia" we are driven again to his Cambridge and Edinburgh lectures. There we have both the evidence that the book requires of his lasting interest in its real argument, and a clue to his method, very personal to himself, of calling antiquity to life. In his course upon Alexandria and her schools, he has a lecture upon Neoplatonism in which he discusses Philo and Plotinus with a sympathetic mind, alludes to Hypatia briefly in passing (this was several years after his writing of the novel), and dismisses Proclus with a certain robust Christian disdain. These pages of his are the natural commentary upon many that follow; but for the moment perhaps a still clearer sign of his irresistible tendency in dealing with the remote past may be had in the Cambridge volume which he called "The Roman and the Teuton," and to which, after his death, Max Müller contributed a preface of appreciation and criticism, well worth note. There we see. even more plainly than in his other deliverances, whether he spoke as a lecturer, or wrote as a romancer, or poet, that "Parson Lot" could only bring home Alexandria or Rome to his hearty English imagination, by putting them in a sense, into his own parish. or if this seems extravagant, by setting the classical perspective no further off than the Cambridge or London of this own day. So it was, he thought of the troubles of those old peoples and empires, remembering that he too lived in a state of ferment. We perceive this contemporizing habit of his everywhere in these Cambridge lectures; one of them, on "The Dying Empire," recurs significantly to mind as we read the second chapter of the romance. There too the lecturer extends the historical parallel fictitiously, and very much as a Devonshire man might, by bidding his hearers imagine "that the Devonshire Wesleyans have just sacked Exeter Cathedral and murdered the Bishop at the altar, while the Bishop of London . . . has just commanded all Dissenters to leave the Metropolis within three days under pain of death."

These lectures belonged to the years 1860-1, while "Hypatia" was

first begun ten years earlier. Writing to Friderick Dension Maurice (Jan. 16, 1851) he says: "My present notion is to write a historical romance of the beginning of the fifth century, which has been breeding in my head these two years." In it he wished "to set forth Christianity as the only really democratic creed, and philosophy, above all spiritualism, as the most exclusively aristocratic creed. . . . Even Synesius the 'philosophic' bishop is an aristocrat by the side of Cyril." He was tired of English subjects, and preferred to exploit some new field where there was a "richer and more picturesque life, and where the elements were less confused and could be handled more in the mass than the English ones. . . . I have long wished to do something antique, and set out my thoughts about the connection of the old world and the new."

We could hardly have a better instance of his lightening of history than his treatment of Synesius of Cyrene affords. It would be natural to conclude that his sketch of that personage as the "Squire Bishop" were freely coloured from fancy, if we did not know that he "spent one whole day in searching the four folio volumes of Synesius" for a single fact which he thought was there and which he found there, and if we had not his lectures too to guide us. As it is, we cannot help suspecting that Kingsley, unconsciously or not. drew one aspect of himself in the "Squire Bishop." Certainly in Kingsley's page, Synesius is more like a Hampshire parson than an African: and when we are told that he was "a true son of the saddle," we rapidly complete the sketch for ourselves, make him into the first muscular Christian, and see him riding to hounds by the side of the Rector of Eversley. We must do neither the bishop nor the English parson an injustice, however. Both of them have suffered from their critics; both were men of an incalculable and versatile intelligence, who were destined to mitror the ideas of others intellectually greater than themselves, but who nevertheless attract us by the individual enthusiasm which they added to their different philosophy. If not master thinkers, they were shining disciples of other masters in whom they recognized the divine flame.

One passage alone there is of Synesius, which illuminates wonderfully his relationship to Hypatia. It occurs in one of the most striking of the letters referred to by Kingsley in the preface

and the text of the romance :-

"Time was when I could be useful to my friends, and when you, Hypatia, were wont to call me 'Others' Good,' as using for the good of others my influence with men in great authority, men whom

I made to serve me as so many hands. Now I am left destitute of all, unless you have any power for good. You, and Virtue with you, I count a good indeed, of which none can rob me. For you have, and always will have power, by reason of the wise use you make of your credit."

'And again, writing in the shadow of misfortune, and near his own end, Synesius spoke of his great bereavement,—the loss of his children following that of his wife, and reproached Hypatia for her silence.

"This, too," he says, "I must now add to my misfortunes. For I am not only left without children but without friends. I am deprived not only of their kindness, but, hardest loss of all, of your most divine soul, which only thing I thought would continue steadfast to me in spite of the ills of fortune and the storms of fate."

Synesius sent his "Dion" and his book of "Dreams" to Hypatia and she aided him in designing a silver astrolabe. In the chapter of the story which describes her as "seeking after a sign," the account of her, as she laid herself on her couch, crossing her hands and inviting the dreamer's ecstasy, is one to arouse a profound curiosity in the second of these works, "De Insomniis," This work (written in a single night) may be commended to all serious dreamers. An extract from Mr. J. C. Nicol's summary, in his Hulsean Essay on Synesius, will show its character, whose real aim is to establish the value of divination by dreams. To obtain the power, and so to divine the future and enter into communion with the eternal, "a man must banish all evil thoughts and passions from his mind and treat his bed as it were the Pythian tripod." But no ritual is needed; no spell is to be worked, every man can use it: he has only to take advantage of his natural sleep in which he may become the passive recipient of the divine message.

It is true that Synesius sometimes used his divining powers for trivial ends enough—how to snare wild beasts, for instance; but occult philosophy, especially in the East, never disdained small things. If we have already strayed further than Kingsley's own writings warrant us in pursuit of Synesius of Cyrene, it is because, owing to his relation to Hypatia and to the two schools of Alexandria, the Neoplatonist and the Christian, Synesius stands out, a dividing object in the picture. He reflects the end and the beginning of these philosophies, and their transition, as no greater thinker could, being in himself impressionable and susceptible of

¹ Cambridge: E. Johnson, 1887.

change; more affected by the charm than the stern logic of philosophy. We hear in him the last echoes of Plotinus and the earliest dim anticipations of Spinoza. He leads us back now, in our brief record, to Kingsley's account of the twin-schools of Alexandria, and the effect of Plotinus, in his Edinburgh lectures of 1862-3:—

"While," he says, "these two schools had so many grounds in common, where was their point of divergence? We shall find it, I believe, fairly expressed in the dying words of Plotinus, the great father of Neoplatonism. 'I am striving to bring the God which is in us into harmony with the God which is in the universe. . . .'

"Whether or not Plotinus actually so spoke, that was what his disciples not only said that he spoke, but what they would have wished him to speak. That one sentence expresses the whole object of their philosophy. But to that Pantænus, Origen, Clement, and Augustine would have answered: 'And we, on the other hand, assert that the God which is in the universe, is the same as the God which is in you, and is striving to bring you into harmony with himself.' There is the experimentum crucis. There is the vast gulf between the Christian and the heathen schools, which when any man had overleaped, the whole problem of the universe was from that moment inverted. With Plotinus and his school, man is seeking for God; with Clement and his, God is seeking for man."

We turn the page for another tell-tale passage from the lecture-room, on the quarrel which arose between the two schools.

"The Neoplatonists said that there is a divine element in man. The Christian philosophers assented fervently, and raised the old disagreeable question: 'Is it in every man? In the publicans and harlots as well as in the philosophers? We say that it is.' And there again the Nooplatonist finds it over hard to assent to a doctrine, equally contrary to outward appearance, and galling to Pharisaic pride; and enters into a hundred honest, self-puzzles and self-contradictions; which seem to justify him at last in saying, No. It is in the philosopher who is ready by nature, as Plotinus has it, and as it were furnished with wings, and not needing to sever himself from matter like the rest, but disposed already to ascend to that which is above. And in a degree, too, it is in the 'lover,' who. according to Plotinus, has a certain innate recollection of beauty, and hovers round it, and desires it, wherever he sees it. Him you may raise to the apprehension of the one incorporeal beauty, by teaching him to separate beauty from the various objects in which

it appears scattered and tlivided, as it is even in the third class, the lowest of whom there is hope, namely, the musical man, capable of being passively affected by beauty, without having any active appetite for it; the sentimentalist, in short, as we should call him now-a-days. But for the herd, Plotinus cannot say that there is anything divine in them. And thus it gradually comes out in all Neoplatonist writings which I have yet examined, that the Divine only exists in a man, in proportion as he is conscious of its existence in him. From which spring two conceptions of the Divine in man. First, is it a part of him, if it is dependent for its existence on his consciousness of it? Or is it, as Philo, Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius would have held, as the Christians held, something independent of him, without him, a Logos or Word speaking to his reason and conscience? With this question Plotinus grapples earnestly. shrewdly, fairly. If you wish to see how he does it you should read the fourth and fifth books of the Sixth Ennead, especially in vou be lucky enough to light on a copy of that rare book, Taylor's faithful though crabbed translation."

If Kingsley tends to depreciate in these Edinburgh lectures the ideal philosophy of these schools, in which Greek thought took on some of the deepest hues of Oriental mysticism, it must be recollected that he had earned much hostile criticism ten years earlier, because of his treatment of Christian and pagan in "Hamatia" (which, indeed, cost him his D.C.L. at Oxford in 1857). He had, then, to be very guarded in this latter return to the subject, knowing that his words would be misinterpreted by the orthodox critics, if he gave them an opening. But it is significant that he reserves what is perhaps the most eloquent passage of these studies in the schools of thought which produced "Hypatia" for his summing up of the ideal belief of "both Christian and heathen Alexandrians." This belief was, he says, that "the things which we see-nature and all her phenomena-are temporal, and born only to die; mere shadows of some unseen realities, from whom their laws and life are derived; while the eternal things which subsist without growth, decay or change, the only real, only truly existing things, in short, are certain things which are not seen: inappreciable by sense, or understanding, or imagination, perceived only by the conscience and the reason. And that again, the problem of philosophy, the highest good for man, that for the sake of which death were a gain, without which life is worthless, a drudgery, a degradation, a failure, and a ruin, is to discover what those unseen

eternal things are, to know them, possess them, be in harmony with them, and thereby alone to rise to any real and solid power, or

safety, or nobleness. It is a strange dream."

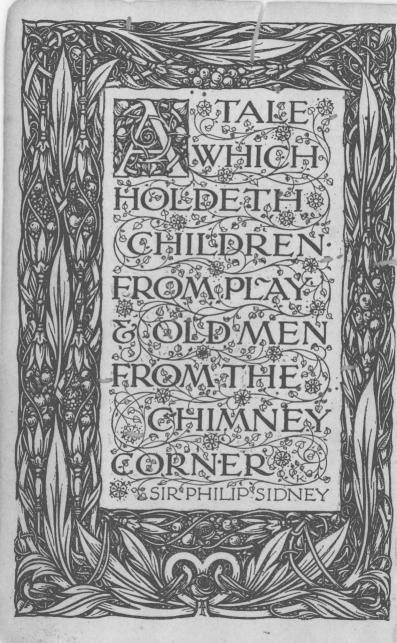
"Hypatia" is one among the few romances which open the way into the serene regions of philosophy, as well as into the troubled material life of a city and its conflicting peoples that shone in ancient history. Perhaps the best tribute to the book, if one is to consider it as in any sense a prelude to the study of those times, and on the side which Kingsley would himself have liked it to be of value, is that of his friend Dean Stanley. He said of "Hypatia": "If you would learn some of the most impressive lessons of ecclesiastical history, read and inwardly digest those pages—perhaps the most powerful Charles Kingsley ever wrote—which close that wonderful story, discriminating the destinies which awaited each of its characters as they passed, one after another, 'each to his own place.'"

E. R.

The following is a list of the works of Charles Kingsley:-

The Saint's Tragedy, 1848; Twenty-five Village Sermons, 1849; Alton Locke, 1850; Yeast, a Problem, 1851 (from "Fraser's Magazine," 1848); Phaethon, or Loose Thoughts for Loose Thinkers, 1852; Sermons on National Subjects, 1854; Hypatia, 1853 (from "Fraser's Magazine"); Alexandria and her Schools (Lectures), 1854; Who causes Pestilence; (four Sermons), 1854; Sermons for the Times, 1855; Westward Holes, 1855; Glaucus, or the Wonders of the Shore, 1855; The Horoes, or Greek Fairy Tales, 1856; Two Years Ago, 1857; Andromeda, and Other Poems, 1858; The Good News of God (Sermons), 1859; Miscellanies, 1859; Limits of Exact Science as applied to History (Inaugural Address, Cambridge), 1860; Town and Country Sermons; 1861; Sermons on the Pentateuch, 1863; The Water Babies, 1863; David (four Sermons), 1865; Hereward the Wake, 1866; The Ameien Régime (Lectures), 1867; The Water of Life and Other Sermons, 1867; The Hermits, 1868; Discipline and Other Sermons, 1868; Madam How and Lady Why, 1869 (from "Good Words for the Young"); At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies, 1871; Town Geology (Lectures at Chester), 1872; Prose Idylls, 1873; Plays and Puritans, 1873; Health and Education, 1874; Westminster Sermons, 1874; Lectures delivered in America, 1875; All Saints' Day and Other Sermons (ed. W. Harrison), 1878.

Letters and Memories of his Life (ed. by Mrs. Kingsley), 2 vols., 1876; 1 vol., 1883.



19.77 #5-140 First issue of this Edition 1907. Reprinted 1910, 1913, 1919, 1925

Medication

TO MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER

MY DEAR PARENTS,

WHEN you shall have read this book, and considered the view of human relationships which is set forth in it, you will be at no loss to discover why I have dedicated it to you, as one paltry witness of an union and of a debt which, though they may seem to have begun with birth, and to have grown with your most loving education, yet cannot die with death: but are spiritual, indefeasible, eternal in the heavens with that God from whom every fatherhood in heaven and earth is named.

sught.

C. K.

PREFACE

A PICTURE of life in the fifth century must needs contain much which will be painful to any reader and which the young and innocent will do well to leave altogether unread. It has to represent a very hideous, though a very great, age; one of those critical and cardinal eras in the history of the human race, in which virtues and vices manifest themselves side by side—even, at times, in the same person—with the most startling openness and power. One who writes of such an era labours under a troublesome disadvantage. He dare not tell how evil people were; he will not be believed if he tells how good they were. In the present case that disadvantage is doubled; for while the sins of the Church, however heinous, were still such as admit of being expressed in words, the sins of the heathen world, against which she fought, were utterly indescribable; and the Christian apologist is thus compelled, for the sake of decency, to state the Church's case far more weakly than the facts deserve.

Not, be it ever remembered, that the slightest suspicion of immorality attaches either to the heroine of this book, or to the leading philosophers of her school, for several centuries. Howsoever base and profligate their disciples, or the Manichees, may have been, the great Neo-Platonists were, as Manes himself was.

persons of the most rigid and ascetic virtue.

For a time had arrived, in which no teacher who did not put forth the most lofty pretensions to righteousness could expect a hearing. That Divine Word, who is "The Light who lighteth every man which cometh into the world," had awakened in the heart of mankind a moral craving never before felt in any strength, except by a few isolated philosophers or prophets. The Spirit had been poured out on all flesh; and from one end of the Empire to the other, from the slave in the mill to the emperor on his throne, all hearts were either hungering and thirsting after righteousness, or learning to do homage to those who did so. And He who excited the craving, was also furnishing that which would satisfy it; and was teaching mankind, by a long and painful education, to distinguish the truth from its innumerable counterfeits, and to find, for the first time in the world's life, a good news not merely

for the select few, but for all mankind without respect of rank or race.

For somewhat more than four hundred years, the Roman Empire and the Christian Church, born into the world almost at the same moment, had been developing themselves side by side as two great rival powers, in deadly struggle for the possession of the human race. The weapons of the Empire had been not merely an overwhelming physical force, and a ruthless lust of aggressive conquest: but, even more powerful still, an unequalled genius for organization, and an uniform system of external law and order. This was generally a real boon to conquered nations, because it substituted a fixed and regular spoliation for the fortuitous and arbitrary miseries of savage warfare: but it arrayed, meanwhile, on the side of the Empire the wealthier citizens of every province, by allowing them their share in the plunder of the labouring masses below them. These, in the country districts, were utterly enslaved; while in the cities, nominal freedom was of little use to masses kept from starvation by the alms of the government, and drugged into brutish good-humour by a vast system of public spectacles, in which the realms of nature and of art were ransacked to glut the wonder, lust, and ferocity of a degraded populace.

Against this vast organization the Church had been fighting for now four hundred years, armed only with its own mighty and all-embracing message, and with the manifestation of a spirit of purity and virtue, of love and self-sacrifice, which had proved itself mightier to melt and weld together the hearts of men, than all the force and terror, all the mechanical organization, all the sensual baits with which the Empire had been contending against that Gospel in which it had recognized instinctively and at first sight,

its internecine foe.

And now the Church had conquered. The weak things of this world had confounded the strong. In spite of the devilish cruelties of persecutors; in spite of the contaminating atmosphere of sin which surrounded her; in spite of having to form herself, not out of a race of pure and separate creatures, but by a most literal "new birth" out of those very fallen masses who insulted and persecuted her; in spite of having to endure within herself continual outbursts of the evil passions in which her members had once indulged without check; in spite of a thousand counterfeits which sprung up around her and within her, claiming to be parts of her, and alluring men to themselves by that very

exclusiveness and party arrogance which disproved their claim; in spite of all, she had conquered. The very emperors had arrayed themselves on her side. Julian's last attempt to restore paganism by imperial influence had only proved that the old faith had lost all hold upon the hearts of the masses; at his death the great tide-wave of new opinion rolled on unchecked, and the rulers of earth were fain to swim with the stream; to accept, in words at least, the Church's laws as theirs; to acknowledge a King of kings to whom even they owed homage and obedience; and to call their own slaves their "poorer brethren," and often, too, their

"spiritual superiors."

But if the emperors had become Christian, the Empire had not. Here and there an abuse was lopped off; or an edict was passed for the visitation of prisons and for the welfare of prisoners; or a Theodosius was recalled to justice and humanity for a while by the stern rebukes of an Ambrose. But the Empire was still the same: still a great tyranny, enslaving the masses, crushing national life, fattening itself and its officials on a system of world-wide robbery; and while it was paramount, there could be no hope for the human race. Nay, there were even those among the Christians who saw, like Dante afterwards, in the "fatal gift of Constantine," and the truce between the Church and the Empire, fresh and more deadly danger. Was not the Empire trying to extend over the Church itself that upas shadow with which it had withered up every other form of human existence; to make her, too, its stipendiary slave-official, to be pampered when obedient, and scourged whenever she dare assert a free will of her own, a law beyond that of her styrants; to throw on her, by a refined hypocrisy, the care and support of the masses on whose lifeblood it was feeding? So thought many then, and, as I believe, not unwisely.

But if the social condition of the civilized world was anomalous at the beginning of the fifth century, its spiritual state was still more so. The universal fusion of races, languages, and customs, which had gone on for four centuries under the Roman rule, had produced a corresponding fusion of creeds, an universal fermentation of human thought and faith. All honest belief in the old local superstitions of paganism had been long dying out before the more palpable and material idolatry of Emperor-worship; and the gods of the nations, unable to deliver those who had trusted in them, became one by one the vassals of the "Divus Cæsar," neglected by the philosophic rich, and only worshipped by the

lower classes, where the old rites still pandered to their grosser appetites, or subserved the wealth and importance of some

particular locality.

In the meanwhile, the minds of men, cut adrift from their ancient moorings, wandered wildly over pathless seas of speculative doubt, and especially in the more metaphysical and contemplative East, attempted to solve for themselves the questions of man's relation to the unseen by those thousand schisms, heresies, and theosophies (it is a disgrace to the word philosophy to call them by it), on the records of which the student now gazes bewildered. unable alike to count or to explain their fantasies.

Yet even these, like every outburst of free human thought, had their use and their fruit. They brought before the minds of churchmen a thousand new questions which must be solved, unless the Church was to relinquish for ever her claims as the great teacher and satisfier of the human soul. To study these bubbles, as they formed and burst on every wave of human life; to feel, too often by sad experience, as Augustine felt, the charm of their allurements: to divide the truths at which they aimed from the falsehood which they offered as its substitute: to exhibit the Catholic Church as possessing, in the great facts which she proclaimed, full satisfaction, even for the most subtle metaphysical cravings of a diseased age :- that was the work of the time; and men were sent to do it, and aided in their labour by the very causes which had produced the intellectual revolution. The general intermixture of ideas, creeds, and races, even the mere physical facilities for intercourse between different parts of the Empire, helped to give the great Christian fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries a breadth of observation, a depth of thought, a large-hearted and large-minded patience and tolerance, such as, we may say boldly, the Church has since beheld but rarely, and the world nevere; at least, if we are to judge those great men by what they had, and not by what they had not, and to believe, as we are bound, that had they lived now, and not then, they would have towered as far above the heads of this generation as they did above the heads of their own. And thus an age, which, to the shallow insight of a sneerer like Gibbon, seems only a rotting and aimless chaos of sensuality and anarchy, fanaticism and hypocrisy, produced a Clement and an Athanase, a Chrysostom and an Augustine: absorbed into the sphere of Christianity all which was most valuable in the philosophies of Greece and Egypt, and in the social organization of Rome, as an heir-loom for nations vet unborn; and laid in foreign lands, by unconscious agents, the

foundations of all European thought and ethics.

But the health of a Church depends, not merely on the creed which it professes, not even on the wisdom and holiness of a few great ecclesiastics, but on the faith and virtue of its individual members. The mens sana must have a corpus sanum to inhabit. And even for the Western Church, the lofty future which was in store for it would have been impossible, without some infusion of new and healthier blood into the veins of a world drained and tainted by the influence of Rome.

And the new blood, at the era of this story, was at hand. The great tide of those Gothic nations, of which the Norwegian and the German are the purest remaining types, though every nation of Europe, from Gibraltar to St. Petersburg, owes to them the most precious elements of strength, was sweeping onward, wave over wave, in a steady south-western current, across the whole Roman territory, and only stopping and recoiling when it reached the shores of the Mediterranean. Those wild tribes were bringing with them into the magic circle of the Western Church's influence the very materials which she required for the building up of a future Christendom, and which she could find as little in the Western Empire, as in the Eastern : comparative purity of morals ; sacred respect for woman, for family life, law, equal justice, individual freedom, and, above all, for honesty in word and deed; bodies untainted by hereditary effeminacy, hearts earnest though genial, and blest with a strange willingness to learn, even from those whom they despised; a brain equal to that of the Roman in practical power, and not too far behind that of the Eastern in imaginative and speculative acuteness.

And their strength was felt at once. Their vanguard, confined with difficulty for three centuries beyond the Eastern Alps, at the expense of sanguinary wars, had been adopted, wherever it was practicable, into the service of the Empire; and the heart's core of the Roman legions was composed of Gothic officers and soldiers. But now the main body had arrived. Tribe after tribe was crowding down to the Alps, and trampling upon each other on the frontiers of the Empire. The Huns, singly their inferiors, pressed them from behind with the irresistible weight of numbers; Italy, with her rich cities and fertile lowlands, beckoned them on to plunder; as auxiliaries, they had learned their own strength and Roman weakness; a casus belli was soon found. How iniquitous was the conduct of the sons of Theodosius, in refusing the usual