

THE EXPANSION OF
CHRISTIANITY IN THE
FIRST THREE CENTURIES

-THEOLOGICAL TRANSLATION LIBRARY

BY

ADOLF HARNACK

PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN, AND
MEMBER OF THE ROYAL PRUSSIAN ACADEMY

Translated and edited by

JAMES MOFFATT, B.D., D.D. (ST ANDREWS)

VOL. I.

VOL. SIX.

HARNACK'S THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY
IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES
VOL. I.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE

14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

NEW YORK: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

1904

EXCURSUS.

THE CONFLICT WITH DEMONS.¹

DURING the early centuries a belief in demons, and in the power they exercised throughout the world, was current far and wide. There was also a corresponding belief in demon possession, in consequence of which insanity frequently took the form of a conviction, on the part of the patients, that they were possessed by one or more evil spirits. Though this form of insanity still occurs at the present day, cases of it are rare, owing to the fact that wide circles of people have lost all belief in the existence and activity of demons. But the forms and phases in which insanity manifests itself always depend upon the general state of culture and the ideas current in the social environment, so that whenever the religious life is in a state of agitation, and a firm belief prevails in the sinister activity of evil spirits, "demon-possession" still breaks out sporadically. Recent instances have even shown that a convinced exorcist, especially if he is a religious man, is able to produce the phenomena of "possession" in a company of people

¹ Based on the essay from which the previous section has largely borrowed. Cp. on this point Weinel, *die Wirkungen des Geistes und der Geister im nachapost. Zeitalter* (1899), pp. 1 f., and the article "Dämonische" in the *Protest. Real-Encycl.*, iv.⁽³⁾

against their will, in order subsequently to cure them. "Possession" is also infectious. Supposing that one case of this kind occurs in a church, and that it is connected by the sufferer himself, or even by the priest, with sin in general or with some special form of sin; supposing that he preaches upon it, addressing the church in stirring language, and declaring that this is really devil's play, then the first case will soon be followed by a second and by a third.¹ The most astounding phenomena occur, many of whose details are still inexplicable. Everything is doubled — the consciousness of the sufferer, his will, his sphere of action. With perfect sincerity on his own part (although it is always easy for frauds to creep in here), the man is at once conscious of himself and also of another being who constrains and controls him from within. He thinks and feels and acts, now as the one, now as the other; and in the grasp of a conviction that he is a double being, he confirms himself and his neighbours in this belief by means of actions which are at once the product of reflection and of an inward compulsion. Inevitable self-deceptions, cunning actions, and the most abject passivity, form a sinister combination. But they complete our idea of a psychical disease which usually betrays

¹ Tertullian (*de anima*, ix.) furnishes an excellent example of the way in which morbid spiritual states (especially visions) which befel Christians in the church assemblies depended upon the preaching to which they had just listened. One sister, says Tertullian, had a vision of a soul in bodily form, just after Tertullian had preached on the soul (probably, in fact, upon the corporeal nature of the soul). He adds quite ingenuously that the content of a vision was usually derived from the scriptures which had just been read aloud, from the psalms, or from the sermons.

extreme susceptibility to "suggestion," and, therefore, for the time being often defies any scientific analysis, leaving it open to anyone to think of special and mysterious forces in operation. In this region there are facts which we cannot deny, but which we are unable to explain.' Furthermore, there are "diseases" in this region which only attack super-human individuals, who draw from this "disease" a new life hitherto undreamt of, an energy which triumphs over every obstacle, and a prophetic or apostolic zeal. We do not speak here of this kind of "possession"; it exists merely for faith-or unbelief.

In the case of ordinary people, when disease emerges in connection with religion, no unfavourable issue need be anticipated. As a general rule, the religion which brings the disease to a head has also the power of curing it, and this power resides in Christianity above all other religions. Wherever an empty or a sinful life, which has almost parted with its vitality, is suddenly aroused by the preaching of the Christian religion, until dread of evil and its bondage passes into the idea of actual "possession," the soul again is freed from the latter bondage by the message of the grace of God which has appeared in Jesus Christ. Evidence of this lies on the pages of church history, from the very beginning down to the

¹ Cp. the biography of Blumhard by Zündel (1881); Ribot's *Les maladies de la personnalité* (Paris, 1885), *Les maladies de la mémoire* (Paris, 1881), and *Les maladies de la volonté* (Paris, 1883) [English translations of the second in the International Scientific Series, and of the first and third in the Religion of Science Library, Chicago]; see also Junod's work, *Rulman Mersvin : un problème de psychologie religieuse* (Paris, 1890), especially pp. 96 f.; also the investigations of Forel and Krafft-Ebing.

present day. During the first three centuries the description of such cases flowed over into the margin of the page, whereas nowadays they are dismissed in a line or two. But the reason for this change is to be found in the less frequent occurrence, not of the cure, but of the disease.

The mere message or preaching of Christianity was not of course enough to cure the sick. It had to be backed by a convinced belief or by some person who was sustained by this belief. The cure was wrought by the praying man and not by prayer, by the Spirit and not by the formula, by the exorcist and not by exorcism. Conventional means were of no use except in cases where the disease became an epidemic and almost general, or in fact a conventional thing itself, as we must assume it often to have been during the second century. The exorcist then became a mesmerist, probably also a deluded impostor. But wherever a strong individuality was victimized by the demon of fear, wherever the soul was literally convulsed by the grip of that power of darkness from which it was now fain to flee, the will could only be freed from its bondage by some strong, holy, outside will. Here and there cases occur of what modern observers, in their perplexity, term "suggestion." But "suggestion" was one thing to a prophet, and another thing to a professional exorcist.

In the form in which we meet it throughout the later books of the Septuagint; or in the New Testament, or in the Jewish literature of the Imperial age, belief in the activity of demons was a comparatively late development in Judaism. But during

that period it was in full bloom.¹ And it was about this time that it also began to spread apace among the Greeks and Romans. How the latter came by it, is a question to which no answer has yet been given. It is impossible to refer the form of belief in demons which was current throughout the empire, in and after the second century, *solely* to Jewish or even to Christian sources. But the naturalizing of this belief, or, more correctly, the development along quite definite lines of that early Greek belief in spirits, which even the subsequent philosophers (e.g., Plato) had supported—all this was a process to which Judaism and Christianity may have contributed, no less than other Oriental religions, including especially the Egyptian, whose priests had been at all times famous for exorcism. In the second century a regular class of exorcists existed, just as at the present day in Germany there are “Naturärzte,” or Nature-physicians, side by side with skilled doctors. Still, sensible people remained sceptical, while the great jurist Ulpian refused (at a time when, as now,

¹ Cp. the interesting passage in Joseph., *Ant.*, viii. 2. 5 : Παρέσχε Σολομῶνι μαθεῖν ὁ θεὸς καὶ τὴν κατὰ τῶν δαιμόνων τέχνην εἰς ὠφέλειαν καὶ θεραπείαν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις • ἐπιφθὰς τε συνταξάμενος αἷς παρηγορεῖται τὰ νοσήματα καὶ τρόπους ἐξορκώσεων κατέλιπεν, οἷς οἱ ἐνδοῦμενοι τὰ δαιμόνια ὡς μήκετ' ἐπανελεθῆν ἐκδιώξουσι • καὶ αὕτη μέχρι νῦν παρ' ἡμῶν ἡθεραπεία πλείστον ἰσχύει (“ God enabled Solomon to learn the arts valid against demons, in order to aid and heal mankind. He composed incantations for the alleviation of disease, and left behind him methods of exorcism by which demons can be finally expelled from people. A method of healing which *is* extremely effective even in our own day”). Compare also the story that follows this remark. The Jews must have been well known as exorcists throughout the Roman empire.

² And also the Persian.

this was a burning question) to recognize such practitioners as members of the order of physicians. He was even doubtful, of course, whether “specialists” were physicians in the legal sense of the term.¹

The characteristic features of belief in demons during the second century were as follows. In the first place, the belief made its way upwards *from the obscurity of the lower classes into the upper classes of society*, and became far more important than it had hitherto been ; in the second place, it was no longer accompanied by a *vigorous, naïve, and open religion* which kept it within bounds ; furthermore, the power of the demons, which had hitherto been regarded as morally indifferent, now came to represent their *wickedness* ; and finally, when the new belief was applied to the life of *individuals*, its consequences embraced *psychical* diseases as well as physical. In view of all these considerations, the extraordinary spread of belief in demons, and the numerous outbursts of demonic disease, are to be referred to the combined influence of such well-known factors as the dwindling of faith in the old religions, which characterized the Imperial age, to-

¹ Cp. the remarkable passage in *Dig. Leg.*, xiii. c. 1, § 3 : Medicos fortassis quis accipiet etiam eos qui alicuius partis corporis vel certi doloris sanitatem pollicentur : ut puta si auricularis, si fistulæ vel dentium, non tamen si incantavit, si inprecatus est si ut vulgari verbo impostorum utar, exorcizavit : non sunt ista medicinae genera, tametsi sint, qui hos sibi profuisse cum praedicatione adfirmant (“Perchance we should admit as physicians those also who undertake to cure special parts of the body or particular diseases, as, for example, the ear, ulcers, or the teeth ; yet not if they employ incantations or spells, or to use the term current among such impostors -if they ‘ exorcise.’ Though there are people who loudly maintain that they have been helped thereby”).

gether with the rise of a feeling on the part of the individual that he was free and independent, and therefore flung upon his inmost nature and his own responsibility. Free now from any control or restraint of tradition, the individual wandered here and there amid the lifeless, fragmentary, and chaotic débris of traditions belonging to a world in process of dissolution ; now he would pick up this, now that, only to discover himself at last driven, often by fear and hope, to find a deceptive support or a new disease in the absurdest of them all.¹

Such was the situation of affairs encountered by the gospel. It has been scoffingly remarked that the gospel produced the very diseases which it professed itself able to cure. The scoff is justified in certain cases, but in the main it recoils upon the scoffer. The gospel did bring to a head the diseases which it proceeded to cure. It found them already in existence, and intensified them in the course of its mission. But it also cured them, and no flight of the imagination can form any idea of what would have come over the ancient world or the Roman empire during the third century, had it not been for the church. Professors like Libanius or his colleagues in the academy at Athens, are of course among the immortals ; people like that could maintain themselves, without any serious change, from century to century. But no nation thrives upon the food of rhetoricians and philosophers. At the close of the fourth century Rome had only one Symmachus, and the East had only one Synesius. But then, Synesius was a Christian.

¹ Jas. iii. 15 speaks of a σοφία δαιμονιώδης.

In what follows I propose to set down, without note or comment, one or two important notices of demon-possession and its cure from the early history of the church. In the case of one passage I shall sketch the spread and shape of belief in demons. This Tertullian has described, and it is a mistake to pass Tertullian by. -In order to estimate the significance of exorcism for primitive Christianity, one must remember that according to the belief of Christians the Son of God came into the world to combat Satan and his kingdom. The evangelists, especially Luke, have depicted the life of Jesus from the temptation onwards as an uninterrupted conflict with the devil ; what he came forth to destroy the works of the devil. In Mark (i. 32) we read how many that were possessed were brought to Jesus, and healed by him, as he cast out the demons (i. 34). "He suffered not the demons to speak, for they knew him" (see also Luke iv. 34, 41). In i. 39 there is the general statement : "He preached throughout all Galilee in the synagogues and cast out the demons." When he sent forth the twelve disciples, he conferred on them the power of exorcising (iii. 15), a power which they forthwith proceeded to exercise (vi. 13; for the Seventy, see Luke x. 17); whilst the scribes at Jerusalem declared he had Beelzebub,¹ and that he cast out demons with the aid of their prince." The tale of the "unclean

¹ John the Baptist was also said to have been possessed (cp. Matt. xi. 18).

² Jesus himself explains that he casts out demons by aid of the spirit of God (Matt. xii. 28), but he seems to have been repeatedly charged with possessing the devil and with madness (cp. John vii. 20, viii. 48 f., x. 20).

spirits" who entered a herd of swine is quite familiar (v. 2), forming, as it does, one of the most curious fragments of the sacred story, which has vainly taxed the powers of believing and of rationalistic criticism. Another story which more immediately concerns our present purpose is that of the Canaanite woman and her possessed daughter (vii. 25 f.). Matt. vii. 15 f. (Luke ix. 38) shows that epileptic fits, as well as other nervous disorders (e.g., dumbness, Matt. xii. 22, Luke xi. 14), were also included under demon-possession. It is further remarkable that even during the lifetime of Jesus exorcists, who were not authorized by him, exorcised devils in his name. This gave rise to a significant conversation between Jesus and John (Mark ix. 38). John said to Jesus, "Master, we saw a man casting out demons in thy name, and we forbade him, because he did not follow us." But Jesus answered, "Forbid him not. No one shall work a deed of might in my name and then deny me presently; for he who is not against us, is for us." On the other hand, another saying of our Lord numbers people who have never known him (Matt. vii. 22) among those who cast out devils in his name. From one woman among his followers Jesus was known afterwards to have cast out "seven demons" (Mark xvi. 9, Luke viii. 2), and among the mighty deeds of which all believers were to be made capable, the unauthentic conclusion of Mark's gospel enumerates exorcism (xvi. 17).¹

It was as exorcisers that Christians went out into the great world, and *exorcism formed one very powerful method of their mission and propaganda.* *It was a*

¹ Indeed it is put first of all.

question not simply of exorcising and vanquishing the demons that dwelt in individuals, but also of purifying all public life from them. For the age was ruled by the black one and his hordes (Barnabas); it "lieth in the evil one," κείται ἐν πονηρῷ (John). Nor was this mere theory; it was a most vital conception of existence. The whole world and the circumambient atmosphere were filled with devils; not merely idolatry, but every phase and form of life was ruled by them. They sat on thrones, they hovered around cradles. The earth was literally a hell, though it was and continued to be a creation of God. To encounter this hell and all its devils, Christians had command of weapons that were invincible. Besides the evidence drawn from the age of their holy scriptures, they pointed to the power of exorcism committed to them, which routed evil spirits, and even forced them to bear witness to the truth of Christianity. "We," says Tertullian towards the close of his *Apology* (ch. 'xlvi.), "we have stated our case fully, as well as the evidence for the correctness of our statement—that is, the trustworthiness and antiquity of our sacred writings, and also the testimony borne by the demonic powers themselves (in our favour)." Such was the stress laid on the activity of the exorcists.¹

In Paul's epistles,² in Pliny's letter, and in the

¹ In the pseudo-Clementine epistle "on Virginité" (i. 10), the reading of Scripture, exorcism, and teaching are grouped as the most important functions in religion.

² See, however, Eph. vi. 12; 2 Cor. xii. 7, etc.

Didachê, they are never mentioned.¹ But from Justin downwards, Christian literature is crowded with allusions to exorcisms, and every large church at any rate had exorcists. Originally these men were honoured as persons endowed with special grace, but afterwards they constituted a class by themselves, in the lower hierarchy, like lectors and sub-deacons. By this change they lost their pristine standing.² The church sharply distinguished between exorcists who employed the name of Christ, and pagan sorcerers, magicians, etc.;³ but she could not protect herself adequately against mercurial impostors, and several of her exorcists were just as dubious characters as her "prophets." The hotbed of religious frauds was in Egypt, as we learn from Lucian's *Peregrinus Proteus*, from Celsus, and from Hadrian's letter to Servian.⁴ At a very early

¹ No explanation has yet been given of the absence of exorcism in Paul. His doctrine of sin, however, was unfavourable to such phenomena.

² The history of exorcism (as practised at baptism, and elsewhere on its own account) and of exorcists is far too extensive to be discussed here; besides, in some departments, it has not yet been sufficiently investigated. Much information may still be anticipated from the magical papyri, of which an ever-increasing number are coming to light. So far as exorcism and exorcists entered into the public life of the church, see Probst's *Sakramente und Sakramentalien*, pp. 39 f., and *Kirchliche Disziplin*, pp. 116 f.

³ Cp. the apologists, Origen's reply to Celsus, and the injunction in the Canons of Hippolytus (*Texte u. Unters.*, vi. 4, pp. 83 f.): "Ὀλωτορρῆς vel magus vel astrologus, hariolus, somniorum interpret, praestigiator vel qui phylacteria conficit hi omnes et qui sunt similes his neque instruendi neque baptizandi sunt." Observe also the polemic against the magical arts of the Gnostics.

⁴ Vopiscus, *Saturn.*, 8: "Nemo illic archisynagogus Judaeorum, nemo Samarites, nemo Christianorum presbyter, non mathematicus, non haruspex, non aliptes."

period pagan exorcists appropriated the names of the patriarchs (cp. Orig., c. *Cels.*, I. xxii.), of Solomon, and even of Jesus Christ, in their magical formulæ; even Jewish exorcists soon began to introduce the name of Jesus in their incantations.¹ The church, on the contrary, had to warn her own exorcists not to imitate the heathen. In the pseudo-Clementine epistles *de virginitate* we read (i. 12) :-- "For those who are brethren in Christ it is fitting and right and comely to visit people who are vexed with evil spirits, and to pray and utter exorcisms over them, in the rational language of prayer acceptable to God, not with a host of fine words neatly arranged and studied in order to win the reputation among men of being eloquent and possessed of a good memory. Such folk are just like a sounding pipe, or a tinkling cymbal, of not the least use to those over whom they pronounce their exorcisms. They simply utter terrible words and scare people with them, but never act according to a true faith such as that enjoined by the Lord when he taught that 'this kind goeth not out save by fasting and prayer offered unceasingly, and by a mind earnestly bent (on God).' Let them make holy requests and entreaties to God, cheerfully, circumspectly, and purely, without hatred or malice. For such is the manner in which we are to visit a sick (possessed) brother or a sister

¹ Compare the story of the Jewish exorcists in Acts xix. 13: "Now certain of the itinerant Jewish exorcists also undertook to Pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were possessed by evil spirits. 'I adjure you,' they said, 'by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.'" It is admitted, in the pseudo-Cypr. *de rebapt.*, vii., that even non-Christians were frequently able to drive out demons by using the name of Christ.

without guile or covetousness or noise or talkativeness or pride or any behaviour alien to piety, but with the meek and lowly spirit of Christ. Let them exorcise the sick with fasting and with prayer ; instead of using elegant phrases, neatly arranged and ordered, let them act frankly like men who have received the gift of healing from God, to God's glory. By your fastings and prayers and constant watching, together with all the rest of your good works, mortify the works of the flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit. He who acts thus is a temple of the Holy Spirit of God. Let him cast out demons, and God will aid him therein. ... The Lord has given the command to ' cast out demons' and also enjoined the duty of healing in other ways, adding, ' Freely ye have received, freely give.' A great reward from God awaits those who serve their brethren with the gifts which God has bestowed upon themselves." Justin writes (*Apol.*, II. vi.) :- (" The Son of God became man in order to destroy the demons.) This 'you can now learn from what transpires under your own eyes. For many of our Christian people have healed a large number of demoniacs throughout the whole world, and also in your own city, exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ who was crucified under Pontius Pilate ; yet all other exorcists, magicians, and dealers in drugs failed to heal such people. Yea, and such Christians continue still to heal them, by rendering the demons impotent and expelling them from the men whom they possessed." In his dialogue against the Jews (lxxxv.), Justin also writes:--"Every demon exorcised in the name of the Son of God, the First-

born of all creatures, who was born of a virgin and endured human suffering, who was crucified by your nation under Pontius Pilate, who died and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven-every demon exorcised in this name is mastered and subdued. Whereas if you exorcise in the name of any king or righteous man, or prophet, or patriarch, who has been *one* of yourselves, no demon will be subject to you. ... Your exorcists, I have already said, are like the Gentiles in using special arts, employing fumigation and magic incantations." From this passage we infer that the Christian formulæ of exorcism contained the leading facts of the story of Christ.' And Origen says as much, quite unmistakably, in his reply to Celsus (I. vi.) :—" The power of exorcism lies in the name of Jesus, which is uttered as the stories of his life are being narrated." ²

Naturally one feels very sceptical in reading how various parties in Christianity denied each other the power of exorcism, explaining cures as due either to mistakes or to deception. So Irenæus (II. xxxi. 2) : "The adherents of Simon and Carpocrates and the other so-called workers of miracles were convicted of acting, as they acted, not by the power of God, nor in truth, nor for the good of men, but to destroy and deceive men by means of magical illusions and universal deceit. They do more injury than good to those who believe in them, inasmuch as they are deceivers. For neither can they give sight

¹In the formula of exorcism the most important part was the mention of the crucifixion ; cp. Justin's *Dial.*, xxx., xlix., lxxvi.

² Ἰσχύειν δοκοῦσι . . . τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ μετὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν ἱστοριῶν.

to the blind or hearing to the deaf, nor can they rout any demons save those sent by themselves— if they can do even that.”¹ With regard to his own church, Irenæus (cp. below, ch. iv.) was convinced that the very dead were brought back to life by its members. In this, he maintains, there was neither feint, nor error, nor deception, but astounding fact, as in the case of our Lord himself. “In the name of Jesus, his true disciples, who have received grace from him, do fulfil a healing ministry in aid of other men, even as each has received the free gift of grace from him. Some surely and certainly drive out demons, so that it frequently happens that those thus purged from demons also believe and become members of the church.”² Others, again, possess a

¹ Cp. the sorry and unsuccessful attempts of the church in Asia to treat the Montanist prophetesses as *demoniacs* who required exorcism. Compare with this Firmilian’s account (Cyprian, *epist.*, lxxv. 10) of a Christian woman who felt herself to be a prophetess, and “deceived” many people: *Subito apparuit illi unus de exorcistis, vir probatus et circa religiosam disciplinam bene semper conversatus, qui exhortatione quoque fratrum plurimorum qui et ipsi fortes ac laudabiles in fide aderant excitatus erexit se contra illum spiritum nequam revincendum . . . ille exorcista inspiratus dei gratia fortiter restitit et esse illum nequissimum spiritum qui prius sanctus putabatur ostendit* (“Suddenly there appeared before her one of the exorcists, a tried man, of irreproachable conduct in the matter of religious discipline. At the urgent appeal of many brethren present, themselves as courageous and praiseworthy in the faith, he roused himself to meet and master that wicked spirit. . . . Inspired by the grace of God, that exorcist made a brave resistance, and showed that the spirit which had previously been deemed holy, was in reality most evil”).

² Still it seems to have been made a matter of reproach, in the third century, if any one had suffered from possession. Cornelius *taxes* Novatian (cp. Euseb., *H.E.*, vi. 43) with having been possessed by a demon before his baptism, and having been healed by an exorcist.

fore-knowledge of the future, with visions and prophetic utterances. . . . And what shall I more say? For it is impossible to enumerate the spiritual gifts and blessings which, all over the world, the church has received from God in the name of Jesus Christ, *who was crucified under Pontius Pilate*, and which she exercises day by day for the healing of the pagan world, without deceiving or taking money from any person. For as she has freely received them from God, so also does she freely give” (*ἰατροὶ ἀνάργυροι*).

The popular notion prevalent among the early Christians, as among the later Jews, was that, apart from the innumerable hosts of demons who disported themselves unabashed throughout history and nature, every individual had beside him a good angel who watched over him, and an evil spirit who lay in wait for him (cp., e.g., the ‘Shepherd’ of Hermas). If he allowed himself to be controlled by the latter, he was thereby “possessed,” in the strict sense of the word; i.e., sin itself was possession. This brings out admirably the slavish dependence to which *any man* is reduced who abandons himself to his own impulses, though the explanation is naïvely simple. In the belief in demons, as that belief dominated the Christian world in the second and third centuries, it is easy to detect features which stamp it as a reactionary movement hostile to contemporary culture. Yet it must not be forgotten that in the heart of it lay hid a moral and consequently a spiritual advance, viz., in a quickened sense of evil, as well as in a recognition of the power of sin and of its dominion in the world. Hence it was that a mind of such high culture as

Tertullian's could abandon itself to this belief in demons. It is interesting to notice how the Greek and Roman elements are bound up with the Jewish Christian in his detailed statement of the belief (in the *Apology*), and I shall now quote this passage in full. It occurs in connection with the statement that while demons are ensconced behind the dead gods of wood and stone, they are forced by Christians to confess what they are, viz., not gods at all, but unclean spirits. At several points we catch even here the tone of irony and sarcasm over these "poor devils," which grew so loud in the Middle Ages, and yet never shook belief in them. But, on the whole, the description is extremely serious. People who fancy at this time of day that they would possess primitive Christianity if they only enforced certain primitive rules of faith, may perhaps discover from what follows the sort of coefficients with which that Christianity was burdened.¹

"We Christians," says Tertullian (ch. xxii. f.), "affirm the existence of certain spiritual beings.

¹ Next to Tertullian, it is his predecessor Tatian who has given the most exact description of the Christian doctrine of demons (in his *Oratio ad Graecos*, vii.-xviii.). The demons introduced "Fatum" and polytheism. To believers, i.e., to men of the Spirit (*πνευματικοί*) they are visible, but psychic men (*ψυχικοί*) are either unable to see them, or only see them at rare intervals (xv.-xvi.). Illnesses arise from the body, but demons assume the final responsibility for them. "Sometimes, indeed, they convulse our physical state with a storm of their incorrigible wickedness; but smitten by a powerful word of God they depart in terror, and the sick man is cured." Tatian does not deny, as a rule, that possessed persons are often healed, even apart from the aid of Christians. In the pseudo-Clementine Homilies (ix. 10. 16-18) there is also important information upon demons.

Nor is their name new. The philosophers recognize demons; Socrates himself waited on a demon's impulse, and no wonder-for a demon is said to have been his companion from childhood, detaching his mind, I have no doubt, from what was good! The poets, too, recognize demons, and even the ignorant masses use them often in their oaths. In fact, they appeal in their curses to Satan, the prince of this evil gang, with a sort of instinctive knowledge of him in their very souls. Plato himself does not deny the existence of angels, and even the magicians attest both kinds of spiritual beings. But it is our sacred scriptures which record how certain angels, who fell of their own free will, produced a still more fallen race of demons, who were condemned by God together with their progenitors and with that prince to whom we have already alluded. Here we cannot do more than merely describe their doings. The ruin of man was their sole aim. From the outset man's overthrow was essayed by these spirits in their wickedness. Accordingly they proceed to inflict diseases and evil accidents of all kinds on our bodies, while by means of violent assaults they produce sudden and extraordinary excesses of the soul. Both to soul and to body they have access by their subtle and extremely fine substance. Invisible and intangible, those spirits are not visible in the act; it is in their effects that they are frequently observed, as when, for example, some mysterious poison in the breeze blights the blossom of fruit trees and the grain, or nips them in the bud, or destroys the ripened fruit, the poisoned atmosphere exhaling, as it were, some noxious breath. With like obscurity

the breath of demons and of angels stirs up many a corruption in the soul by furious passions, vile excesses, or cruel lusts accompanied by varied errors, *the worst of which is that these deities commend themselves to the ensnared and deluded soub of men,*¹ in order to get their favourite food of flesh-fumes and of blood offered up to the images and statues of the gods. And what more exquisite food could be theirs than to divert men from the thought of the true God by means of false illusions ? How these illusions are managed, I shall now explain. Every spirit is winged, angel and demon alike. Hence in an instant they are everywhere. The whole world is just one place to them. 'Tis as easy for them to know as to announce any occurrence ; and as people are ignorant of their nature, their velocity is taken for divinity. Thus they would have themselves sometimes thought to be the authors of the events which they merely report-and authors, indeed, they are, not of good, but occasionally of evil events. The purposes of Divine providence were also caught up by them of old from the lips of the prophets, and at present from the public reading of their works. So picking up in this way a partial knowledge of the future, they set up a rival divinity for themselves by purloining prophecy. But well do your Cræsus and Pyrrhus know the clever ambiguity with which these oracles were framed in view of the future. ... As they dwell in the air, close to the stars, and in touch

¹This ranks as the *chef-d'œuvre* of iniquity on the part of the demons ; they are **responsible for introducing polytheism, i.e.,** they get worshipped under the images of dead gods, and profit by the sacrifices, whose odour they enjoy.

with the clouds, they can discern the preliminary processes in the sky, and thus are able to promise the rain, whose coming they already feel. Truly they are most kind in their concern for health ! First of all, they make you ill ; then, to produce the impression of a miracle, they enjoin the use of remedies which are either unheard of or have quite an opposite effect ; lastly, by withdrawing their injurious influence, they get the credit of having worked a cure. Why, then, should I speak further of their other tricks, or even of their powers of deception as spirits -- of the Castor apparitions, of water carried in a sieve, of a ship towed by a girdle, of a beard reddened at a touch-things done to get men to believe in stones as gods, instead of seeking after the true God ?

“Moreover, if magicians call up ghosts and even bring forward the souls of the dead, if they strangle boys in order to make the oracle speak, if they pretend to perform many a miracle by means of their quackery and juggling, if they even send dreams by aid of those angels and demons whose power they have invoked (and, thanks to them, it has become quite a common thing for the very goats and tables to divine), how much more keen will be this evil power in employing all its energies to do, of its own accord and for its own ends, what serves another's purpose ? Or, if the deeds of angels and demons are exactly the same as those of your gods, where is the pre-eminence of the latter, which must surely be reckoned superior in might to all else ? Is it not a more worthy conception that the former make themselves gods by exhibiting the very

credentials of the gods, than that the gods are on a level with angels and demons? . Locality, I suppose you will say, locality makes a difference ; in a temple you consider beings to be gods whom elsewhere you would not recognize as such !...

“ But hitherto it has been merely a question of words. Now for facts, now for a proof that ‘ gods ’ and ‘ demons ’ are but different names for one and the same substance. Place before your tribunals any one plainly possessed by a demon. *Bidden speak by any Christian whatsoever, that spirit will confess he is a demon, just as frankly as elsewhere he will falsely pretend to be a god.*¹ Or, if you like, bring forward any one of those who are supposed to be divinely possessed, who conceive divinity from the fumes which they inhale bending over an altar, and (“ ructando curantur ”) are delivered of it by retching, giving vent to it in gasps. Let the heavenly virgin herself, who promises rain, let that teacher of healing arts, Æsculapius, ever ready to prolong the life of those who are on the point of death, with Socordium, Tenatium (?), and Asclepiadotum ; let them then and there shed the blood of that daring Christian, if-in terror of lying to a Christian- they fail to admit they are demons. Could any action be more plain? Any proof more cogent? Truth in its simplicity stands here before your eyes; its own worth supports it ; suspicion there can be none. Say you, it is a piece of magic or a trick of some sort? ... What objection can be brought

¹ In this, as in some other passages of the *Apology*, Tertullian's talk is too big.

against something exhibited in its bare reality ? If, on the one hand, they (the demons) are really gods, why do they pretend (at our challenge) to be demons? From fear of us ? Then your so-called ‘ Godhead ’ is subordinated to us, and surely no divinity can be attributed to what lies under the control of men. . . . So that ‘ Godhead ’ of yours proves to be no godhead at all ; for if it were, demons would not pretend to it, nor would gods deny it. ... Acknowledge that there is but **one** species of such beings, namely, demons, and that the gods are nothing else. Look out, then, for gods ! For now you find those that whom you formerly took for such, are demons.”

In what follows, Tertullian declares that the demons, on being questioned by Christians, not only confess they are themselves demons, but also confess the Christian's God as the true God. “ Fearing God in Christ, and Christ in God, they become subject to the servants of God and Christ. Thus at our touch and breath, overpowered by the consideration and contemplation of the (future) fire, they leave human bodies at our command, reluctantly and sadly, and-in your presence-shamefacedly. You believe their lies ; then believe them when they tell the truth about themselves. When anyone lies, it is not to disgrace but to glorify himself. ... *Such testimonies from your so-called deities usually result in making people Christians.*”

In ch. xxvii. Tertullian meets the obvious retort that if demons were actually subject to Christians, the latter could not possibly succumb

helplessly to the persecutions directed against them. Tertullian contradicts this. The demons, he declares, are certainly like slaves under the control of the Christians, but like good -for-nothing slaves they sometimes blend fear and contumacy, eager to injure those of whom they stand in awe. “ At a distance they oppose us, but at close quarters they beg for mercy. Hence, like slaves that have broken loose from workhouses, or prisons, or mines, or any form of penal servitude, they break out against us, though they are in our power, well aware of their impotence, and yet rendered the more abandoned thereby. We resist this horde unwillingly, the same as if they were still unvanquished, stoutly maintaining the very position which they attack, nor is our triumph over them ever more complete than when we are condemned for our persistent faith.”

In ch. xxxvii. Tertullian once more sums up the service which Christians render to pagans by means of their exorcists. “ Were it not for us, who would free you from those hidden foes that are ever making havoc of your health in soul and body—from those raids of the demons, I mean, which we repel from you without reward or hire ?” He says the same thing in his address to the magistrate Scapula (ii.) : “ We do more than repudiate the demons : we overcome them, we expose them daily to contempt, and exorcise them from their victims, *as is well known to many people.*” This endowment of Christians must therefore have been really acknowledged far and wide, and in a number of passages Tertullian

¹ See also the interesting observations in *de anima*, i.

speaks as if every Christian possessed it.¹ It would be interesting if we could only ascertain how far these cures of psychical diseases were permanent. Unfortunately nothing is known upon the point, and yet this is a province where nothing is more common than a merely temporary success.

Like Tertullian, Minucius Felix in his “ Octavius ” has also treated this subject, partly in the same words as Tertullian (ch. xxvii.).² The apologist Theophilus (ad *Autolye.*, ii. 8) writes : “ The Greek poets spoke under the inspiration, not of a pure, but of a lying spirit, as is quite obvious from the fact that even in our own day possessed people are sometimes still exorcised in the name of the true God, whereupon their lying spirits themselves confess that they are demons, the actual demons who formerly were at work in the poets.” This leads us to assume that the possessed frequently cried out the name of “ Apollo ” or of the Muses at the moment of exorcising. As late as the middle of the third century Cyprian also speaks, like earlier authors, of demonic

¹ Cp., for example, *de corona*, xi. Other Christian writers also express themselves to the same effect, e.g., the speech of Peter in the pseudo-Clementine Homilies (ix. 19), which declares that Christians at baptism obtain the gift of healing other people by means of exorcisms : “ Sometimes the demons will flee if you but look on them, for they know those who have surrendered themselves to God, and flee in terror because they honour such people ” (ἐνίοτε δὲ οἱ δαίμονες μόνον ἐνιδόντων ὑμῶν φεύγονται ἵσασι γὰρ τοὺς ἀποδεδωκότας ἑαυτοὺς τῷ θεῷ, διὸ τιμῶντες αὐτοὺς πεφοβημένοι φεύγουσιν).

² “Adjurati (daemones) per deum verum et solum inviti miseris corporibus inhorrescunt, et vel exiliunt statim vel evanescent gradatim, prout fides patientis adiuvat aut gratia curantis adspirat. Sic Christianos de proximo fugitant, quos longe in coetibus per vos lacessebant,” etc.

cures wrought by Christians (*ad Demetr.*, xv.). “O if thou wouldst but hear and see the demons when they are adjured by us, tormented by spiritual scourges, and driven from the possessed bodies by racking words ; when howling and groaning with human voices (!), and feeling by the power of God the stripes and blows, they have to confess the judgment to come ! Come and see that what we say is true. And forasmuch as thou sayest thou dost worship the gods, then believe even those whom thou dost worship. . . . Thou wilt see how those whom thou implorest, implore us ; how those of whom thou art in awe, stand in awe of us. Thou wilt see how they stand bound under our hands, trembling like prisoners-they to whom thou dost look up with veneration as thy lords. Verily thou wilt be made ashamed in these errors of thine, when thou seest and hearest how thy gods, when cross-questioned by us, at once yield up the secret of their being, unable even before you to conceal those tricks and frauds of theirs.”¹ Similarly in the treatise *To*

¹ See also *Quod idola dei non sint* (vii.), and *Cypr.*, ep., lxi. 15 : *Hodie etiam geritur, ut per exorcistas voce humana et potestate divina flagelletur et uratur et torqueatur diabolus, et cum exire se et homines dei dimittere saepe dicat, in eo tamen quod dixerit fallat cum tamen ad aquam salutarem adque ad baptismi sanctificationem venitur, scire debemus et fidere [which sounds rather hesitating], quia illic diabolus opprimitur* (“This goes on to-day as well, in the scourging and burning and torturing of the devil at the hands of exorcists, by means of the human voice and the divine power, and in his declaring that he will go out and leave the men of God alone, yet proving untrue in what he says. . . . However, when the water of salvation and the sanctification of baptism is reached, we ought to know and trust that the devil is crushed there”).

Donatus (ch.v.): “In Christianity there is conferred (upon pure chastity, upon a pure mind, upon pure speech) the gift of healing the sick by rendering poisonous potions harmless, by restoring the deranged to health, and thus purifying them from ignominious pains, by commanding peace for the hostile, rest for the violent, and gentleness for the unruly, by forcing -under stress of threats and invective-a confession from unclean and roving spirits who have come to dwell within mankind, by roughly ordering them out, and stretching them out with struggles, howls, and groans, as their sufferings on the rack increase, by lashing them with scourges, and burning them with fire. This is what goes on, though no one sees it ; the punishments are hidden, but the penalty is open. Thus what we have already begun to be, that is, the Spirit we have received, comes into its kingdom.” The Christian already rules with regal power over the entire host of his raging adversary.¹

Most interesting of all are the discussions between Celsus and Origen on demons and possessed persons, since the debate here is between two men who occupied the highest level of contemporary culture. Celsus declared that Christians owed the power they seemed to possess, to their invocation and adjuration of certain demons.² Origen retorted that the power of banishing demons was actually vested in the name

¹ Compare with this Lactantius, *Divin. Instit.*, ii. 15, iv. 27, who repeats in part the description of Cyprian, but lays special emphasis on the sign of the cross as a means of salvation from demons.

² The ethical principles of Christianity, says Celsus (i. iv. f.), are common to Christians and philosophers alike, while the apparent strength of the former lies in the names of a few demons and in incantations.

of Jesus and the witness of his life, and that the name of Jesus was so powerful that it operated by itself even when uttered by immoral persons (c. *Cels.*, I. vi.). Both Origen and Celsus, then, believed in demons ; and elsewhere (e.g., I. xxiv. f.) Origen adduces the old idea of the power exercised by the utterance of certain " names " ; in fact, he indicates a secret " science of names," which confers power on the initiated, although of course one had to be very careful to recite the names in the proper language. " When recited in the Egyptian tongue, the one class is specially efficacious in the case of certain spirits whose power does not extend beyond such things and such a sphere, whilst the other class is effective with some spirits, if recited in Persian, and so forth." " The name of Jesus also comes under this science of names, as it has already expelled numerous spirits from the souls and bodies of mankind and shown its power over those who have thus been freed from possession." Origen several times cites the fact of successful exorcism (I. xlvi., lxvii.), and the fact is not denied by Celsus, who admits even the " miracles" of Jesus. Only,

¹ Περὶ ὀνομάτων τὰ ἐν ἀπορρήτοις φιλοσοφεῖν.

² See on this point the statement of Origen's pupil Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (in Euseb., *H.E.*, vii. 10. 4), for the reason why the Valerian persecution broke out. Here pagan and Christian exorcisers opposed each other. Of the latter Dionysius says: " There are and were among them many persons whose very presence and look, though they merely breathed and spoke, were able to scatter the delusive counsels of the sinful demons." Local persecution of Christians elsewhere, and indeed the great persecution under Diocletian, arose in this way, pagan priests affirming that the presence of Christians who attended the sacrifices hindered their saving influence, etc.

his explanation was very different (Ixviii.). " The magicians," he said, " undertake still greater marvels, and men trained in the schools of Egypt profess like exploits, people who for a few pence will sell their reverend arts in the open market-place, expelling demons from people, blowing diseases away with their breath, calling up the spirits of the heroes, exhibiting expensive viands, with tables, cakes, and dainties, which are really non-existent, and setting inanimate things in motion as if they really possessed life, whereas they have but the semblance of animals. If any juggler is able to perform feats of this kind, must we on that account regard him as ' God's son ' ? Must we not rather declare that such accomplishments are merely the contrivances of knaves possessed by evil demons?" Christians are jugglers or sorcerers or both ; Christ also was a master of demonic arts—such was the real opinion of Celsus.¹ Origen was at great pains to controvert this very grievous charge (see, e.g., I. lxviii.). And he succeeded. He could appeal to the unquestionable fact that all Christ's works were wrought with the object of benefiting men.² Was it so with magicians ? Still, in this reproach of Celsus there lay a serious monition for the church and for Christians, a monition which more than Celsus canvassed. As early as the middle of the second century a Christian preacher had declared, " The name of the true God is blasphemed among the heathen by reason of us Christians ; for if we fulfil not the commands of

¹ He gives his opinion upon the gnostic exorcisers in particular in VI. xxxix. f.

² Cp., e.g., III. xxviii., and I. lxviii.

God, but lead an unworthy life, they turn away and blaspheme, saying that our teaching is merely a fresh myth and error.” From the middle of the second century onwards the cry was often raised against Christians, that they were jugglers and necromancers, and not a few of them were certainly to blame for such a charge.² Cures of demon-possession, practised by unspiritual men as a profession, must have produced a repellent impression on more serious people, despite the attractive power which they did exercise (Tert., *Apol.*, xxiii., “Christianos facere consuerunt”). But there was really no chance of the matter being cleared up in the third century. Christians and pagans alike were getting more and more entangled in the belief in demons. In their dogmatic and their philosophy of religion, polytheism certainly became more and more attenuated as a sublime monotheism was evolved ; but in their practical life they plunged more helplessly than ever into the abysses of an imaginary world of spirits.

¹ 2 Clem. xiii. 3, μῦθόν τινα καὶ πλάνην.

² Origen, who himself admits that Christian exorcists were usually uneducated people, asserts deliberately and repeatedly that they employed neither magic nor sorcery but prayer alone and “formulae of exorcism which are so plain that even the plainest man can make use of them” (c. *Cels.*, VII. iv. : σὺν οὐδενὶ περιέργῳ καὶ μαγικῷ ἢ φαρμακευτικῷ πράγματι, ἀλλὰ μόνῃ εὐχῇ καὶ ὀρκώσεσιν ἀπλουστέραις καὶ ὅσα ἂν δύναίτο προσάγειν ἀπλούστερος ἄνθρωπος. Cp. *Comm. in Matth.*, xiii. 7, vol. iii. p. 224, ed. Lommatzsch).