ciliate the Papacy and to strengthen the union between Con-
stantinople and the West, the attraction of the East gradually
taasserted itself. It was represented in the palace and in his
own life by Theodora, the dark and subtle woman who fasci-
nated and subdued the simpler and more hesitant mind of her
Illyrian husband. She was a Monophysite both by conviction
and policy, and under her protection the palace itself became
a refuge for the Monophysite leaders and a centre for their
intrigues. It was through her influence that Justinian returned
to the old Byzantine policy of reunion by compromise, to
which he continued faithful even after her death. In spite of
the unexpected resistance of Theodora’s protégé, Pope Vigilius,
Justinian succeeded in getting his solution endorsed by a Gen-
eral Council in 553 and in imposing his will on the Papacy.
But, as on so many other occasions, a compromise imposed by
force afforded no real solution. It gave rise to a new schism
in the West, which endured long after Justinian’s death, and
it failed to conciliate the Monophysites, who from this time
develop an organised existence outside the Church of the
Empire. The tendency towards religious disunion which had
been growing since the fifth century had become realised in
the permanent alienation of the Eastern provinces from the
state church and the religion of the Empire. And this reli-
gious disaffection was the symptom of the great social and
spiritual changes which were taking place in the oriental
world and from which a new civilisation of world-wide im-
portance was soon to emerge.
THE AWAKENING OF THE EAST
AND THE REVOLT OF THE
SUBJECT NATIONALITIES

The coming of Islam is the great fact which dominates the history of the seventh and eighth centuries and affects the whole subsequent development of mediaeval civilisation, in the West as well as in the East. To the mind which regards history from an exclusively secular and occidental standpoint the appearance of Islam must always remain an inexplicable problem, since it seems to mark a complete breach in historical development and to have no relation with anything that has gone before. It is only when we look under the surface of political history and study the subterranean activity of the oriental underworld that the existence of the new forces which were to determine the future of oriental culture becomes visible.

For the ecclesiastical and theological disputes of the fifth century, which have so little meaning for the ordinary secular historian, involve a crisis in the life of the Eastern Empire that was no less far-reaching in its results than the barbarian invasions in the West. They imply the revival of the subject nationalities and the passing of the Hellenistic culture which had dominated the Levant since the age of Alexander. It is true that this culture had been practically confined to the cities, and the great mass of the peasant population had remained unaffected by it. But throughout the Hellenistic and imperial age the citizen class was the ruling element in culture, and the native population had passively accepted its domi-
nation. But the coming of Christianity, coinciding, as it did, with a decline in the importance of the city and the urban bourgeoisie, was accompanied with a great revival of cultural activity on the part of the subject peoples. It saw the rise of a vernacular literature and the awakening of a national consciousness among the oriental peoples. In the West Christianity had spread through the cities, and it was assumed that a peasant (paganus) would necessarily be a heathen. But in the East this was not the case, and Christianity seems to have spread as rapidly among the peasants as among the townsmen.

This was particularly the case among the Syrians, who formed a solid block of Aramaic-speaking peoples, extending from the Mediterranean to Kurdistan and the Persian highlands and from Mt. Taurus to the Persian Gulf. In the West, Hellenistic influences were dominant and the rich cities of the coast lands, Antioch, Berytus, Caesarea and Gaza, were strongholds of Greek culture, but east of the Euphrates the city of Edessa, on the frontiers of the Roman and the Persian Empires, was the centre of a native Syrian state which became the starting point of oriental Christianity and the cradle of Syriac literature. Long before the conversion of the Roman Empire, as early as the beginning of the third century A.D., Osrhoene became a Christian state, and from there Christianity spread eastward into the Persian Empire and northwards to Armenia, which also became a Christian kingdom at the beginning of the fourth century. To the Syrian people, thus torn asunder by rival empires and dominated by alien culture, Christianity became a vehicle for national traditions and ideals.

We see in Syrian literature, for example in the poetry of James of Sarug, how intense was the pride in the antiquity and purity of their national church. While the chosen people had proved faithless and the heathen empires had persecuted the name of Christ, Edessa, "the daughter of the Parthians exposed to the Cross," had always been found faithful. "Edessa sent to Christ by an epistle to come and enlighten her. On behalf of all the peoples did she make intercession to Him that He would leave Zion which hated Him and come to the peoples who loved Him." 1 "Not from common scribes did she learn the faith: her King taught her, her martyrs taught her and she firmly believed them."

"This truth has Edessa held fast from her youth and in her old age she will not barter it away, as a daughter of the
poor. Her religious King became to her a scribe and from him she learnt concerning our Lord—that He is the Son of God, yea God. Addaen, who brought the bridegroom's ring and put it on her finger, betrothed her thus to the Son of God, Who is the Only Begotten.”

Syrian Christianity was the religion of a subject people who found in it their justification against the pride of the dominant culture.

“Shamuna, our riches, richer art thou than the rich:
For lo! the rich stand at thy door that thou mayest relieve
them.
Small thy village, poor thy country: who then gave thee
That lords of villages and cities should court thy favour?
Lo! judges in their robes and vestments
Take dust from their threshold, as though it were the
medicine of life
The cross is rich, and to its worshippers increaseth riches;
And its poverty despiseth all the riches of the world.
Shamuna and Guria, sons of the poor, lo! at your doors
Bow down the rich that they may receive from you their
wants.

The Son of God in poverty and want
Showed to the world that all its riches are as nothing.
His disciples, all fishermen, all poor, all weak,
All men of little note, became illustrious through its faith.
One fisherman, whose village was a home of fishermen,
He made chief over the twelve, yea head of the house.
One a tent-maker who was aforetime a persecutor,
He seized upon and made him a chosen vessel for the
faith.”

This autochthonous Syrian Christianity, which had its humble beginnings at Edessa in the third century, was the starting-point of a vast oriental expansion which, during the Middle Ages, was destined to extend to India and China and the Turkish peoples of inner Asia. But owing, perhaps, to its geographical remoteness, it did not come into immediate conflict with the Church of the Empire. The great religious crisis of the fifth century had its origin in the very heart of the Hellenistic world, at Alexandria itself.

For in Egypt, no less than in Syria, the ancient traditions of oriental culture were asserting themselves under a Christian form. Throughout the Ptolemaic and the Roman periods the people of Egypt had preserved its ancient religion and culture. While Alexandria was the most brilliant centre of Hel-
The Awakening of the East

Ptolemaic civilisation, in the valley of the Nile the immemorial routine of Egyptian life still went on unchanged. The two currents of civilisation ran side by side without mingling with one another, because the native culture was still confined in the strict hieratic forms of Egyptian religious tradition. The conversion of Egypt to Christianity changed all this. It destroyed the religious barriers which kept the native population artificially segregated in a world of its own and brought them into contact with the rest of the population of the Empire. It did not, however, weaken the forces of nationalism or lead to the assimilation of Egypt by Graeco-Byzantine culture. On the contrary, from this moment the importance of the Greek element in Egypt steadily declined and the use of the Greek language was gradually replaced by Coptic, i.e., the old Egyptian tongue written in Greek characters. The Church naturally took the place of the old state religion as the organ of Egyptian nationality, but, whereas the head of the old hierarchy had been the foreign rulers who had usurped the place of Pharaoh, the head of the new Church was the Egyptian Patriarch. As, in the days of the decline of ancient Egypt, the High Priest of Amon Ra at Thebes had become the leader of the nation, so now all the forces of Egyptian nationalism rallied round the Patriarch. He was "the most Divine and all Holy Lord, Pope and Patriarch of the great city of Alexandria, of Libya, Pentapolis, Ethiopia, and all the land of Egypt, Father of Fathers, Bishop of Bishops, Thirteenth Apostle and Judge of the World." His control over the Egyptian Church was absolute—far greater, in fact, than that of the Pope over the churches of the West, since all the bishops of Egypt were consecrated by him and were directly dependent on his will. The only power to be compared with his was that of the monks, who were, to a far greater extent than the bishops, the natural leaders of the people.

Egyptian monasticism was the supreme achievement of oriental Christianity, and it expresses all that is best and worst in the national temperament, from the wisdom and spirituality of a Macarius or a Pachomius to the fanaticism of the mobs who murdered Hypatia and filled the streets of Alexandria with tumult and bloodshed. But even this fanaticism was a further source of strength to the Patriarchate, which found in the monks an army of fearless and passionate partisans. When the Patriarch of Alexandria attended a general council he was accompanied by a bodyguard of monks and parabolani, who
sometimes terrorised the whole assembly by their clamour and violence. So great was the power of the Egyptian Patriarch that he aspired to be the religious dictator of the whole Eastern Empire. Athanasius had stood alone against Constantius II and the whole Eastern episcopate, and his successors were not prepared to accept the superiority of the upstart Patriarchate of Constantinople. During the first half of the fifth century Alexandria, led by her great Patriarchs, Theophilus and Cyril, was uniformly victorious, and on three occasions she succeeded in humbling her rivals of Constantinople and Antioch. But the third occasion—the condemnation of Flavian at Ephesus in 449—was her undoing, for it led to a breach with Rome and the West, on whose co-operation she had hitherto depended. At Chalcedon, in 451, the combined forces of Rome and Constantinople, of Pope Leo and the Emperor Marcian, succeeded in defeating the great See which had so long dominated the churches of the East.

Of all the councils that of Chalcedon is the most remarkable for its dramatic interest and its historical results. For in the church of St. Euphemia at Chalcedon there were gathered all the forces which were henceforward to divide the Christian world. The rival forces of Egypt and the East shouted defiance and abuse at one another from either side of the nave, while the great officers of the Empire, seated in front of the chancel rails, with the Roman legates by their side, impiously dominated the turbulent assembly and guided it with inflexible persistence towards a final decision in accordance with the wishes of the Emperor and the Pope. This decision was not reached without a struggle. In fact, it was not until the Roman legates had demanded that they should be given their passports and that a new council should be summoned in the West, and the Emperor had supported their ultimatum, that the majority were brought to accept the Western definition of the two natures of Christ in one person. The decision thus reached was, however, of incalculable importance for the history of Christendom, both Eastern and Western. If the issue of the Council of Chalcedon had been different, the schisms between the East and the West would have taken place in the fifth century instead of the eleventh, and the alliance between the Empire and the Western Church, which was an essential element in the formation of Western Christendom, would have been impossible.

But, on the other hand, this rapprochement with the West
widened the breach between the Empire and its oriental subjects. The solution which had been imposed by the imperious will of a great Pope and a strong Emperor could not remove the underlying causes of national disunion. Already, in the presence of the Council, the Egyptian bishops had declared that they dared not return home with the news that the Patriarch had been deposed, lest they should be murdered by their infuriated countrymen. And their fears were not imaginary, for when the news reached Alexandria the populace rose in revolt and massacred the imperial garrison. The vigorous measures of the government succeeded for a time in imposing a Chalcedonian Patriarch on Alexandria, but as soon as the strong hand of Marcian was removed, he too, fell a victim to the fury of the mob, and was torn to pieces on Good Friday in his own church. Henceforward Monophysitism became the national religion of Egypt, and the minority, which remained faithful to orthodoxy and the Church of the Empire, were contemptuously named Melchites or Basilici, "the King's Men." The real power in Egypt lay in the hands, not of the imperial governor, but of the schismatic Patriarch, and Justinian seems to have recognised this by his reputed offer to unite the prefecture and the Patriarchate in a single office, on condition that the schismatics should return to orthodoxy.

Thus it is impossible to deny the importance of the political element in the rise of the great oriental heresies of the fifth century. If the Church of the Eastern Empire had not become identified with the imperial government the whole history of Monophysitism and the other oriental sects would have been different. Nevertheless, there were deeper causes at work than any nationalist or local separatism. Underlying everything there was the fundamental opposition between the two spiritual elements in the Byzantine world. As the Empire lay on the frontiers of Asia and Europe, so, too, its culture embodied an eastern and a western tradition. To us the oriental element may seem to predominate, but to the native oriental the Empire still appeared Greek. It still represented the old Hellenistic tradition. Indeed, it was the last stage of that mutual interpenetration of East and West which had begun in the days of Alexander. The last expansion of Hellenism took place in the Byzantine age; for it was only then, through the influence of the Orthodox Church, that the native peoples and languages of Asia Minor were absorbed in the unity of Hellenic speech. Although Christianity itself was of oriental origin,
it had increasingly incorporated itself into large elements of Greek culture, just as Greek religion and philosophy were, at the same time, assimilating oriental elements; so that by the fourth century the struggle between Christianity and paganism was no longer a struggle between East and West, but one between two rival syntheses of Hellenism and orientalism. The pure oriental spirit, as represented by Gnosticism, was no less opposed to the theology of Origen than to the philosophy of Plotinus, and, in the same way, the Fathers of the Latin Church carried on a double warfare with Roman paganism and with oriental Montanism and Manichaeism. The religion of the Emperor Julian and his Neoplatonist teachers, in spite of their devotion to the Hellenistic past, was, on the whole, more impregnated with oriental elements than that of the great Cappadocians, Basil and the two Gregorys, who were the Fathers of the Byzantine Church. Moreover, the Greeks had carried over into the new religion their traditional love of disputa-
tion and logical definition, and it was here that they aroused the strongest resistance in the mind of the oriental world. The poetry of the great leader of the native Syrian Church, Ephrem of Nisibis, is one long diatribe against the Disputers, “the children of strife,” the men who seek “to taste fire, to see the air, to handle the light.” “The hateful sight of the image of four faces” (Gnosticism or Manichaeanism), says he, “is from the Hittites. Accursed disputatio, that hidden moth, is from the Greeks.” To him faith is not a thing to be rea-
soned about or investigated, it is the hidden mystery which he calls the pearl, translucent, but incomprehensible, “whose wall is its own beauty.” “The daughter of the sea am I, the il-
limitable sea. And from the sea whence I came up it is that there is a mighty treasury of mysteries in my bosom. Search thou out the sea, but search not out the Lord of the sea.”

The same spirit characterises the greatest of the Byzantine mystics, the fifth-century Syrian, who wrote under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, and whose influence is so impor-
tant in the whole history of mediaeval thought. In spite of his debt to the Neoplatonists, above all to Proclus, his essential teaching is the oriental idea of the absolute inaccessibility of the Godhead to human thought and reasoning. It is “the Divine Darkness that is beyond light,” the super-essential Some-
thing, which has neither mind nor virtue nor personality nor existence, which is neither deity nor goodness nor unity, which is beyond being and eternity, and transcends every con-
receivable category of human thought. These two writers are orthodox, but it is easy to see how the same temper of mind would naturally tend to lose itself in the religion of pure spirit and to deny the reality of the body and the material world. This explains the success of Manichaeanism and Gnosticism, but it also found a less radical expression in Monophysitism, which saw in the Incarnation the appearance upon earth of the divinity in bodily form, and denied the orthodox doctrine of the human nature of Christ. Thus it was not mere national sentiment which caused the Eastern provinces to revolt from the Church of the Empire on this question, while the West followed the doctrine of the co-existence of the two natures and the full humanity of Jesus.

Under the influence of these forces the Eastern peoples in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries all fell away from union with the Church of the Empire: Egypt, Western Syria and Armenia became Monophysite, while the East Syrians of Mesopotamia and the Persian Empire, who remained faithful to the theological traditions which they had received from Antioch, became Nestorian. Both parties agreed in their rejection of Chalcedon and in their alienation from the religious policy of the imperial government. The sixth century saw the conversion of the Monophysites from a party into an organised Church and the development of Monophysite monasticism and literature. It was the classical age of Monophysite culture—the age of the Fathers and Doctors of the Monophysite Church. Two of the greatest of these—Severus of Antioch and Julian of Halicarnassus—were Greeks from Asia Minor, but the majority—Philoxenus of Mabug, James of Sarug and the historian, John of Asia, wrote in Syriac, while the great physician and scholar, Sergius of Reschaina, used his mastery of both languages in order to translate Aristotle and Galen into the vernacular. Thus the foundations were laid of the great work of transmitting Greek science to the oriental world, which had so far-reaching an influence on the history of mediæval thought.

Both Nestorians and Monophysites did all in their power to spread their teachings among foreign peoples, and the expansion of Christianity in Asia and Africa from the fifth century onwards was almost entirely due to their activity. By the sixth century the Nestorian missions had reached Ceylon and the Turks of Central Asia, and in the following century they penetrated as far as China. Abyssinia, in which the origins of
Christianity go back to the fourth century, adopted Mono-
physitism through the influence of Alexandria, and in the sixth
century the Nubians and the neighbouring tribes of the desert
were converted to Christianity by Monophysite missionaries.
At the same time Christianity was penetrating into Arabia by
many different channels. In the far south of Arabia, the coun-
try of the Himyarites, there was a native Arab church in rela-
tions with Abyssinia, which had been founded in the fourth
century, and which in the sixth century passed through a ter-
rible persecution. From Mesopotamia the Nestorians founded
churches among the Arabs of the Persian Gulf and in the in-
dependent state of Hira, while the Monophysites and the
Church of the Empire were in relation with the tribes of the
Syrian Desert and North Arabia, and found powerful protec-
tors in the Ghassanid princes, Harith ibn Jabalah and al
Mandhir. The contact between the new religion and the old
pagan society had a profound effect on Arabic culture. Its in-
fuence is seen in the rise of Arabian literature, which sud-
denly sprang into vigorous life in the sixth century. Several of
the earliest poets were Christians, such as, an Nahigha, Adi
ibn Zaid of Hira, and, above all, the greatest of the pre-Islam-
ic poets, Imru'ul-Qays, the son of the ruler of Nejd, who
entered the Byzantine service under Justinian.

But this is a comparatively superficial manifestation of the
deep movement of spiritual fermentation and social change
that was passing over the Arab world. A spiritual crisis was
imminent which was to transform the scattered warring barba-
rous tribes of the Arabian peninsula into a united power that
in the seventh century swept over the East in an irresistible
wave of religious enthusiasm.