

LECTURE IV. *Theology*

Posidonius defined man as "the beholder and expounder of heaven."¹ Nature itself—the ancients vied with each other in insisting on this point—destined him to contemplate the sky and to observe its perpetual motions. Other animals bend towards the earth, but man proudly raises his eyes to the stars,—this is an idea which we find repeated time after time. His eye, the marvel of the human body, tiny mirror in which immensity is reflected, gateway of the soul open towards the infinite, follows from here below the distant evolutions of the celestial armies. The old astronomers, who did not use the telescope, marvelled at the power of the eye, and the ancients expressed their astonishment at the range of vision which reached the remotest constellations. They give it the pre-eminence over all the other senses, for the eyes are to them the intermediaries between the sidereal gods and human reason. Struck by the light from on high, the power of sight devotes itself to following the motions of these radiant bodies, which move above us. It ascertains that the course of the sun, which occasions the changes of the seasons, the phases of the moon, the rising and the setting of the fixed stars, even the march of the planets which appear to be wandering stars, are all regulated by immutable laws, and are reproduced in accordance with invariable periods of time. In heaven there are never derangements or errors, there nothing moves without design. Reason, reflecting on the marvellous phenomena which are perceived by the eye, realises that they cannot be due to chance or to the action of a blind force, but recognises that they are ruled by a divine intelligence. The ceaseless harmony of movements so diverse is inconceivable without the intervention of a guiding Providence. The stars themselves prove to us

¹ Capelle, *Die Schrift von der Welt*, Leipzig, 1895, p. 6 [534], n. 4. "*Contemplatorem caeli.*" "Οὐ μόνον θεατὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξηγητήν."

their divinity so clearly that to fail to see it is to be incapable of seeing anything. Nobody could deny to the heavenly bodies the possession of reason without being himself destitute of it: that at least is the opinion of Cicero.¹ The view of the starry heaven thus led to astronomy and to philosophy, which are the queens of the sciences, the one in the domain of the visible, the other in the domain of ideas; and the study of these is the noblest employment to which man can put his faculties.

We have seen that since the days of Plato and Aristotle, and even earlier,² Greek thinkers proved the divinity of the stars by the character of their movements, and in a general way all metaphysicians point to the order of nature as proving the existence of God. Voltaire himself in the *Philosophical Dictionary* uses expressions on this subject which would not have been disowned by the ancients. But what characterises ancient ideas is the fact that they closely connect belief in the gods with observation of the sky. Astronomy here serves as an introduction to theology. This sidereal religion, developed by an erudite clergy, has always retained the stamp of its learned origin.



The essential quality of these sidereal gods, the one most frequently insisted upon, is that they are everlasting. We have seen that astronomy had led the old Chaldeans to this notion.³ The invariability of the revolutions of the heavenly bodies led to the conclusion that they were eternal. The stars unceasingly pursue their never-ending course; arrived at the limit of their path, they resume without pause the race already run, and the cycles of years, in accordance with which their movements take place, are prolonged to infinity in the past, and continue to infinity in the future. Thus a clergy of astronomers necessarily conceived the gods of heaven, as being "the masters of eternity," or "those whose name is praised to all eternity,"—these titles are constantly bestowed in inscriptions on the Syrian Baals. The stars which the Syrians worshipped did not die, like

¹ Cic., *Nat. Deorum*, ii, 21, § 56.

² See above, Lecture II, p. 23.

³ See above, Lecture I, p. 18.

Osiris in Egypt, or Attis in Asia Minor: each time they seemed to sink, they were born again to a new life, always unconquerable. This theological notion penetrated with astrology into Roman paganism. As often as a dedication is found to a *deus Aeternus*, it refers to a sidereal, most frequently a Syrian, god. The epithet *aeternus* completes and explains that of *invictus*, which, like the former, is applied to the stars in general, and specially to the Sun. These celestial powers always issue triumphantly from their strife with darkness; unceasingly menaced, they have been, are, and shall be ever victorious.

It is a remarkable fact that it is not until the second century of our era that this qualifying epithet *aeternus* comes into use in ritual at the same time as the cult of the god Heaven (*Caelus*) spreads. In vain had philosophers long set the First Cause beyond the limitations of time: their theories had not made impression on the popular mind, nor had they succeeded in modifying the traditional formulæ of liturgies. For the multitude, divinities remained beings more beautiful, more vigorous, more powerful than men, but born like them and preserved only from decay and death. Semitic priests popularised throughout the Roman world the idea that God is without beginning and without end, and so contributed, side by side with Jewish proselytism, to invest with the authority of a religious dogma what had hitherto been but a metaphysical theory.

The importance attached to this idea enables us to understand that it was applied even to gods living upon the earth, in whom an image or manifestation of the sun was seen. The emperors, whose soul has descended to earth from heaven above, and is to re-ascend thither after death, are called, from the second century onwards, not only *invicti* but *aeterni*, like the stars to which they are united by identity of nature. This expression was introduced into the official vocabulary, and ultimately a sovereign was addressed as "Your Eternity," almost as naturally as we say "Your Majesty," although that epithet, applied to the short-lived princes who, in the third century, flit across the throne like shadows across a screen, seems almost cruelly ironical.

This, however, is but a political caricature of a great religious idea,—an idea which appealed to the imagination, and which poetry also adopted. Manilius¹ contrasts the permanence of the heavens with the frailty of earthly things:

Thrones have perished, peoples passed from dominion to slavery, from captivity to empire, but the same months of the year have always brought up on the horizon the same stars. All things that are subject to death are also subject to change, the years glide away, and lands become unrecognisable, each century transforms the features of nations, but Heaven remains invariable, and preserves all its parts; the flight of time adds nothing to them, nor does age take aught from them. It will remain the same for ever, because for ever it has been the same. Thus it appeared to the eyes of our forefathers, thus will our descendants behold it. It is God, for it is unchangeable throughout the ages.

Men did not stop there, but separating eternity from the stars and from heaven, whose loftiest quality it was, they adored that eternity itself as a divinity. Here is not a mere abstraction, like Equity or Clemency or one of the many other abstractions which the Romans had conceived and fervently worshipped, notwithstanding the fact that they figured *Aeternitas* on their coins. The path which led to this worship is more intricate, and its beginnings go back to a very early stage of thought. Time, when this notion, which is lacking among many savages, appeared, was not defined as a conception of the reason, or in Kant's phrase, "*a priori* form of conception." This is a being who has an existence *per se*, who is even regarded sometimes as a material body, and who is endowed with an activity of his own. "Zeno," says Cicero,² "attributed a divine power (*vis divina*) to the stars, but also to the years, the months, and the seasons." We have here a very ancient belief, which is found for instance in Egypt. The magic idea of a power superior to man is connected, from the very beginning, with the notation of time. Calendars had a religious before acquiring a secular significance: their original object was not to secure the measurement of the gliding moments, but to indicate the

¹ Manil., *Astron.*, i, 495 sqq.

² Cic., *Nat. Deor.*, ii, 63 (= Zenon. fr. 165 von Arnim).

recurrence of propitious or unpropitious dates separated by periodic intervals. It is an empirical fact that the return of fixed moments is associated with the appearance of certain phenomena: it is easy to believe that the one is the cause of the other. They have therefore a peculiar efficacy, a sacred character.¹ Astronomy fixed the duration of these periods with an ever-increasing accuracy: it not only distinguished the sequence of days and nights, but also that of the months, corresponding to the revolutions of the moon, and that of the years, corresponding to those of the sun. Its progress led to a division of the day into two periods of twelve hours each. All these durations continued to be regarded as having a definite influence, as being endowed with a magic potency, and astrology sought to codify these activities, by placing each division of time under the protection of a star in its system of "chronocratories."

When the idea of an Eternity arose, more vast than the sum-total of years and centuries, it was regarded likewise as a divinity. "General opinion," says Proclus,² "makes the Hours goddesses and the Month a god, and their worship has been handed on to us: we say also that the Day and the Night are deities, and the gods themselves have taught us how to call upon them. Does it not necessarily follow that Time also should be a god, seeing that it includes at once months and hours, days and nights?"

In fact infinity of Time was elevated to the dignity of Supreme Cause not only by individual thinkers, but by Oriental cults. You all know by name Zervan Akarana, "Time Unlimited," which a sect of Persian Magi regarded as the First Principle. This doctrine, which was developed in Mesopotamia, was adopted by the mysteries of Mithra and passed with them into the West, where this god was represented in the form of a monster with the head of a lion, to indicate that he devours all things. As might have been expected, the worship of Time was there closely combined with that of "the eternal Heaven" (*Caelus aeternus*), whose revolutions marked its

¹ See above, Lecture I, p. 19.

² Proclus, *In Timæum*, 248 D.

everlasting course, and, as the master of all things, it was sometimes identified with Destiny, whose irresistible activity was exerted to produce the endless motion of the stars.

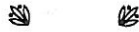
Each portion of Infinity brings on some propitious or unpropitious movement of the heavens, which is anxiously watched, and these motions incessantly modify the earthly world. The Centuries and the Years, each subject to the influence of a star or a constellation, the Seasons which are related to the four winds and to the four cardinal points, the twelve Months over which the signs of the zodiac preside, the Day and the Night, the twelve Hours, are all personified and deified, as being the authors of all the changes of the universe.

The allegorical figures invented by astrological cults to represent these abstractions came into common use under the Empire. This symbolism did not even die out with idolatry: it was adopted by Christianity, in spite of the fact that it was in reality contrary to its spirit, and up to the Middle Ages these symbols of the fallen gods were reproduced *ad infinitum* in sculpture, mosaics, and miniatures, and it may be said that the old superstitions of the Chaldeans are still perpetuated by modern art.

Like the divisions of Time, numbers were divine for a similar reason. The ancients said that they had been revealed to mankind by the motions of the stars.¹ In fact the progress of mathematics must often have been a result of the progress of astronomy, and the former participated in the sacred character of the latter. Certain numerals were thus considered for astronomical reasons as endowed with an especial potency: seven and nine, which are the fourth and the third part of the month, seven again and twelve, because they correspond to the planets and to the signs of the zodiac, three hundred and sixty, because that was the—approximate—number of days in the year. To these figures was attributed a peculiar efficacy; thus it was necessary in magical incantations to repeat the operative formula for a given number of times in order that it might produce the desired effect. Mathematics also entered

¹ See above, Lecture I, p. 18; II, p. 29.

largely into astrological divination,—*mathematici* is in Latin a synonym of *Chaldaei*,—and they served as a foundation or a pretext for a subtle and extravagant symbolism. Thus very often a name is replaced by a numerical equivalent, that is, by the sum-total of its letters considered as figures and added together. But despite these uses and abuses, connected with sidereal religion or, at least, superstition, there is a great difference between numbers and the divisions of Time: the former might be sacred, they could never be deified, they were not worshipped, nor were artistic representations of them imagined.



What has been said brings out the importance attached by the adepts of star-worship to the idea of divine eternity,—an importance shown by the fact that some had actually made it the supreme principle of their religion. But there was another divine attribute correlative to the former. The stars are not only eternal gods, but also universal, their power is unlimited in space as in time. Already in Syria the Baals, who had become solar deities, bore the title of *Mar'olam*, which may be translated "Lord of the Universe" as well as "Lord of Eternity," and men undoubtedly liked to claim for them this double quality.¹ With earthly *genii* or demons, who protected definite spots, were contrasted the celestial gods, who are "catholic." This word, which was to have such a great destiny, was at first merely an astrological term: it denoted activities which are not limited to individuals, nor to particular events, but apply to the whole human race and to the entire earth.

Everything is, in fact, subject to the changes brought about by the revolutions of the stars. All the events of this world are determined by sidereal influences. The transformations of nature, like the dispositions and actions of man, are due to the fatal energies which reside in the sky. Hence necessarily follows not only the idea of the universality, but also that of the omnipotence, of the sidereal deities. The Semitic cults

¹ *Religions orientales*, 2d edition, Paris, 1909, p. 375, n. 80 (Engl. translation, p. 258, n. 80).

spread throughout the Latin world the conception of the absolute, unlimited sovereignty of God over the earth. Apuleius of Madaura calls the Syrian goddess "*omnipotens et omniparens*," all-powerful and all-producing.

But here we must make a distinction: if all the gods are equally everlasting, all cannot be universal and omnipotent in the same degree. Undoubtedly Destiny holds sovereign sway over the whole world, and the celestial orbs by their combined movements are the authors of all that was, and is, and is to come. But this unlimited power only belongs properly to the *ensemble* of the cosmic harmony. It resides in the Whole regarded as divine, it manifests itself to a greater or less degree in its different parts. Perhaps you remember the opening of Dante's *Il Paradiso*:

La gloria di colui che tutto muove
Per l' universo penetra e risplende
In una parte più e meno altrove.
Nel ciel che più della sua luce prende,
Fu' io . . .

The poet of the Middle Ages is only expressing here an astrological notion. The starry heaven is the principal seat of the divine energy and light which are spread throughout the world. But all the stars have not an equal share of its power: only some among them, or even one among them, can properly be called "catholic" and omnipotent (*παντοκράτωρ*). We proceed to pass in review these various divinities.



The highest of these gods is Heaven (*Οὐρανός*, *Caelus*), "*Summus ipse deus*," says Cicero,¹ "*arcens et continens ceteros*," that is to say, the heaven of the fixed stars, which embraces all the other spheres. The divine Power which there resides, and which causes it to move, was sometimes in the West identified with Bel,—that is to say, with Zeus,—and in Latin lands was invoked under the title of "*Optimus Maximus Caelus Aeternus Iupiter*." The movement of this heaven was a continuous

¹ Cicero, *Somn. Scipionis*, c. 4.

revolution, not a motion forwards and backwards like that of the planets, and, assigning a moral sense to the word ἀπλανής, men said that since it did not *wander* or *err*, therefore it was not subject to error, and that this infallibility was a proof of its divinity. Certain theologians, associating this with infinite Time, represented Heaven as the supreme power of the world.

The vast orb of the sky was deified in its whole, and in its parts. Its two portions, alternately dark and luminous, were worshipped under the form of the Dioscuri. The sons of Tyndareus, according to the Greek legend, shared in turn life and death, and they became in the eyes of theologians the personification of the two hemispheres.

But each of the constellations, each star which glittered in the eternal vault, was equally divine. Each had its myth. As we have already said,¹ the traditional figures which we reproduce on our celestial charts, are the fossil remains of a luxuriant mythological vegetation. The sidereal monsters, to which potent virtues were attributed, were the residuum of a number of forgotten beliefs. Worship of animals had been abandoned in temples, but the Lion, the Bull, the Eagle, the Fishes, which Oriental imagination had recognised in the capricious grouping of the stars, continued to be considered sacred. Old totems of Semitic tribes or of Egyptian nomes survived in the form of constellations. Heterogeneous elements, borrowed from all the religions of the East, were combined in ancient uranography, and in the power attributed to the phantoms which it conjured up was repeated the echo of old-fashioned worships, which frequently remain unknown to us.

Then came the Greeks, who professed to piece these celestial beings on to their national religion. They succeeded in adorning the sky without troubling themselves very much to distinguish their own inventions from those which they received from a foreign tradition. "Catasterism," that is "translation to the stars," was a convenient method of giving an astronomical termination to ancient fables. Thus poetical tales, which were only half believed, represented fabulous heroes and even members of human society as living on high in the form of

¹ See above, Lecture I, p. 11.

glittering constellations. There Perseus found Andromeda again, and the centaur Chiron, who is none other than the Archer, fraternised with Orion, the gigantic hunter. "The Ram was the famous ram with the Golden Fleece which had carried off Phrixus and Helle over the sea and had let the maiden fall into the waves of the Hellespont. It might also be that which was the subject of the dispute between Atreus and Thyestes, or again it might be the ram which guided the thirsty company of Bacchus to the wells of the oasis of Ammon."¹

But this patch-work assemblage of heroes, animals, and sacred objects was scarcely worshipped save *en bloc*. Particular veneration was bestowed on twelve constellations to which the most potent influence over destiny was attributed, namely, the twelve signs of the zodiac. Astrological treatises are full of details concerning their qualities; and their influence, which results sometimes from their astronomic nature, sometimes from the mythical character which was bestowed upon them, was exerted especially during the month over which each presided, and their images figure in large numbers on the monuments of pagan worship, particularly on those of the mysteries of Mithra. Further even than this, since each sign of the zodiac was divided into three decans, a god was imagined for each of these thirty-six compartments of the heaven.

Not only were the stars of heaven an object of worship, but also the subtle substance which lit their fires, the Ether which filled the lofty spaces of the heavens. Sacrifices were offered to it, or it was celebrated in hymns as the source of all brightness, and the worshippers even dedicated inscriptions to this pure and serene air that it might chase away the devastating hail.

Into the sphere of the fixed stars, which marks the bounds of the world, are fitted seven other spheres, those of the planets, which are, in order, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. The qualities and influences which are attributed to them are due sometimes to astronomical motives. They are deduced from their apparent movements as discovered by observation. Saturn makes people apathetic and vacillating, because, being farthest from the earth, it appears

¹ Bouché-Leclercq, *Astrologie grecque*, p. 131.

to move most deliberately. But most frequently the reasons assigned are purely mythological. The planets, being identified with the divinities of Olympus, have borrowed their nature. Mars, Venus, Mercury, have a history known to all: the mere mention of their names is enough to explain their action: Venus needs must favour lovers, and Mercury assure success in business and swindling. This double conception of planetary divinities, of whom now one, now the other, displays the activities, favourable or destructive, which are attributed to them, corresponds to the hybrid origin of astrology, which pretends to be a science but always remained a creed, and is found again also, to a lesser degree, in the doctrines concerning fixed stars.

But, like the Olympians who were identified with them, the planetary gods are much the most powerful of all. Their positions in the sky, their reciprocal relations or, to use the technical term, *aspects*, have a decisive influence on all physical and moral phenomena of this world. They exercise a manifold patronage, more diverse and more extensive than that of the gods of Olympus and the saints of Paradise. They are the tutelary deities not only of the series of days,¹ but of that of the hours, and even of centuries and millenaries. To each was attached a plant, a metal, a stone, which derived miraculous powers from this special protection. Each presided over a period of life, a portion of the body, and a faculty of the soul, possessed a colour and a taste, corresponded to one of the vowels. These various relations in which they were supposed to stand to the whole of nature, afforded numerous opportunities for paying them worship. As we shall see in another lecture,² their worship was much more popular than that of the other sidereal gods, and their images are reproduced on monuments with much greater frequency.

Beneath the lowest sphere, that of the moon, the zones of the elements, are placed in tiers: the zones of fire, air, water, and earth. To these four principles, as well as to the constellations, the Greeks gave the name of *στοιχεῖα*, and the Chaldeans

¹ See below, Lecture V, p. 91.

² See Lecture V, p. 90.

already worshipped the one as well as the other. The influence of Oriental religions, like that of Stoic cosmology, spread throughout the West the worship of these four bodies, believed to be elements, whose infinite variety of combinations gave rise to all perceptible phenomena. In the mysteries of Mithra, a group, frequently reproduced, in which a lion represented fire, a bowl water, and a serpent the earth, figured emblematically the strife of these gods, at the same time kindly and hostile, which constantly devoured each other, and whose perpetual opposition and transmutation brought about all the changes of nature. By the end of the pagan period, the divinity of these physical agents was a religious principle accepted by all heathendom. Consequently, by a piquant contrast, the conventional representations of these polymorphous substances, which antique sculpture had rarely chiselled, were multiplied at the very moment when Christianity was robbing them of their sacred character.

These elements were not only deified: they were themselves haunted by formidable powers; especially the zone of air, which envelops the earth, was the chosen home of demons, kindly or malignant beings, who occupied the middle space and served as intermediaries between gods and men, superior to the latter, inferior to the former.

There is, however, an essential difference between the powers of this sublunary world—elements and demons—and the stars. The former are subject to the activity of the latter, their various manifestations are caused by the combined influence of the heavenly bodies; to the latter alone belong constancy and regularity; they alone serve for the purposes of scientific divination.



To sum up, then, this long catalogue, astrological paganism deified the active principles which move all celestial and terrestrial bodies. Water, fire, earth, the sea, and the blast of the winds, but above all the luminous heavens of the fixed stars and planets revealed the boundless power of the God who filled all nature. But this pantheism no longer naïvely regarded this

nature as peopled by capricious spirits and unregulated powers. Having become scientific, it conceived the gods as cosmic energies, the providential action of which is ordered in a harmonious system.

Oriental theologians developed the idea that the world forms a trinity; it is three in one and one in three; it is made up of the sphere of the fixed stars, regarded as not resolvable into parts, of the seven spheres of the planets and of the earth, starting from the moon. According to some of these theologians, each of the inferior worlds received a portion of its power from the superior worlds and shared in their energy, and the source of all force and all virtue resided in the highest sphere, one and indivisible, which regulated the movements of all the other parts of the universe.

But this is not the theory which triumphed in the Roman empire. Rather it was supposed that the motive power, which set in motion all the cosmic organism, came from the Sun, and thus the Sun was raised to the rank of a Supreme God.¹ This Sun-worship was the logical result of a paganism steeped in erudition, which had become a religious form of cosmology. Renan² once observed: "The life of our planet has its real source in the sun. All force is a transformation of the sun. Before religion had gone so far as to proclaim that God must be placed in the absolute and the ideal, that is to say, outside of the world, one cult only was reasonable and scientific, and that was the cult of the Sun." The worship of Sun and Moon preceded that of the other planets, and even when the system of "the Seven" was constructed by astronomy, a distinction was made between the great luminaries which preside over day and night and the five other wandering stars. But it is a remarkable fact that at first the primacy was assigned to the Moon. It was only by slow degrees that the ancients discovered the unequalled importance in the cosmic system as a whole of the heavenly body which gives us light and, to say the truth, they never attained to the fulness of the idea. Thus it is that, if we

¹ See my paper, *La Théologie solaire du Paganisme romain* (Mém. Acad. Inscr., xii). Paris, 1909.

² Renan, *Dialogues et Fragments philosophiques*, 1876, p. 168.

go back to the earliest historical times, we see that in Babylonia the principal god—for he was endowed with the male sex,—was the Moon, Sin, which regularly precedes Shamash, the Sun. This god preserved the chief place at Carrhæ in Osroëne and throughout a large part of Anatolia up to the time of the Roman Empire. The predominance of the worship of Men, as he was called in Asia Minor, is due to the persistence in this remote country of ancient ideas, elsewhere out of date.

In hot countries the sun is, above all, an enemy, against which men protect themselves, and the dwellers in the scorching plains of Mesopotamia preferred to the star whose burning heat inflamed the air, parched the land, and exhausted the body, that star whose gentle light illumined, without menacing, them. In the freshness of the night the Moon shed the wholesome dews, and her brightness, then as now, guided caravans across the desert. Everywhere her phases, obvious to all eyes, served to measure time before the duration of the year was known, and sacred calendars regulated religious ceremonies and civil life according to her course. When her face was hidden, a fearful portent was seen in this eclipse, and there was attributed to this powerful divinity a multitude of mysterious influences, the recollection of which survived in astrology and was indefinitely perpetuated in popular superstitions. To it also were attributed strange effects on the growth of plants and on the health of women. As is often the case, the goddess retained in common belief the power of which theology had robbed her. However, she was never entirely deprived of her authority. In Egypt in spite of very early attempts to establish the undivided sovereignty of the Sun Ra, in the end, in heaven as on earth, preference was given over single sovereignty to the joint power of sister and brother, of wife and husband, of Isis and Osiris. This dualism still inspires the Alexandrine mysteries of the epoch of the Ptolemies, and is reaffirmed in the theories of Egyptian astrologers who divided the supremacy over the other five planets between the "two eyes of heaven."

But among the Semitic peoples an erudite clergy, hereditarily devoted to the study of the starry sky, drew more boldly the religious conclusions of their scientific discoveries. Little by little

they established the primary importance of the sun in the celestial mechanism, and they asserted its pre-eminence more confidently in proportion as they understood it better.

Continually placing it farther and farther off in space, these priests acquired a more and more correct idea of its formidable dimensions. When they had studied its revolutions, they realised what relations connected it with physical phenomena and with the succession of the seasons. The final blow was struck at the ancient prestige of the moon when it was discovered that she shines with a borrowed or, as they said, a bastard light. Sun-worship is essentially a learned cult: it grew with science itself, and was definitely established at the period when the latter attained its zenith in antiquity. At no other point does one perceive more clearly the ties which, in the religions of the East, united intellectual research with the evolution of belief.

According to the so-called "Chaldean" system, the sun, as we have seen,¹ occupies the fourth rank in the series of planets. Three are above it, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, and three below it, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. In other words, the Sun moves in the midst of the heavenly spheres. It occupies the central position among the seven circles of the universe.

The other planets appeared to revolve round it, or rather to escort it, and astrologers delighted to point to the Royal Sun (*Βασιλεὺς Ἥλιος*) advancing in the midst of his satellites, as earthly princes, whose tutelar star he is, march encircled by their guards.

Further, the "Chaldeans" had thought out an original solution of a problem which caused much perplexity to ancient astronomers, namely, that presented by the irregular courses of the planets. They had observed that the apparent advances, stoppages, and regressions of these latter were connected with the revolutions of the sun,—in reality of the earth,—and they had come to the conclusion that the sun governed their movements: the sun was as it were the chorus-leader who directed the rhythmic evolutions of the wandering stars. It not only drew in its course Mercury and Venus which, as had been ascertained, were never more than a short distance from it, but

¹ See above, this Lecture, p. 66.

it also regulated the movements of the three superior planets, and acted upon them by the force of its heat in much the same way as upon terrestrial vapours, which it caused to ascend or descend. According to the position which it occupies relatively to them, it impels them forwards, arrests them, or drives them backwards; and this it does mechanically, exerting its power, like every astrological influence, according to certain angles or "aspects."

Berosus made a particular application of this same theory to the phases of the moon, and other Chaldeans extended this explanation to the movements of comets. They even went so far as to make the revolutions of the fixed stars depend upon the sun. The essential idea on which all these doctrines were based is that the sun in virtue of its intense heat possesses a power of alternate repulsion and attraction, which according to its distance, or the direction of its rays, now drives the heavenly bodies away from it, and now draws them towards it,—unique focus of energy which causes them all to move. This mechanical theory, which contains a sort of anticipation of the doctrine of universal gravitation and of the heliocentric system, was bound to serve as the basis of a whole learned theology.

For, as we have said, in the eyes of Chaldean astronomers the fixed stars, and above all the planets, are the authors of all the phenomena of the universe, and nothing here below is produced save in virtue of their combined activities. That, then, which rules the complicated play of their revolutions and their aspects, will be the arbiter of destiny, the master of all nature. Placed at the centre of the great cosmic organism, it animates the whole of it, as the heart supports human life, and both in scientific treatises and in mystic hymns men delighted to term it "the heart of the world" (*καρδία τοῦ κόσμου*).

Thus the bright star of day, set in the midst of the celestial spheres, by the power of its heat vivifies the immense macrocosm through which its fires radiate. Henceforth it will no longer be celebrated, in verse and in prose, merely as the power which, besides light, brings to the world below warmth, fertility, and joy; the ancient conception is amplified and rendered more precise by the touch of science: the sun will

become the conductor of the cosmic harmony, the master of the four elements and the four seasons, the heavenly power which, by the invariable changes of its annual course, produces, nourishes, and destroys animals and plants, and by the alternation of day and night warms and cools, dries or moistens the earth and the atmosphere. But, above all, in sidereal religion it will be that supreme regulator of the movements of the stars which at every moment inspires their ever-changing motions, that to which they owe all their qualities and perhaps even (as some believed) their light. Pliny already recognised it as the sovereign divinity which governed nature, *principale naturae regimen ac numen*.¹

But this universe, so well ordered, cannot be driven by a blind force. The sun, which directs the harmonious movements of the cosmic organism, will, then, be a fire endowed with reason, an intelligent light (*φῶς νοερόν*). It will be regarded by heathen theologians as the reason which controls the world, *mens mundi et temperatio*.² The most important corollaries will be drawn from this, for the sun, the reason of the world, will become the creator of the particular reason which directs the human microcosm. To it is attributed the formation of souls. Its glowing disk, darting its rays upon the earth, constantly sent particles of fire into the bodies which it called to life, and after death, as we shall see,³ it caused them to reascend to it. Such, in its broad outlines, is the scientific theology which provided both a foundation and a justification for Roman Sun-worship.

From astronomical speculations the Chaldeans had deduced a whole system of religious dogmas. The sun, set in the midst of the superimposed planets, regulates their harmonious movements. As its heat impels them forward, then draws them back, it is constantly influencing, according to its various aspects, the direction of their course and their action upon the earth. Fiery heart of the world, it vivifies the whole of this great organism, and as the stars obey its commands, it reigns supreme

¹ Plin., *Nat. Hist.*, ii, 5, § 13.

² Cic., *Somn. Scip.*, 4.

³ See below, Lecture VI, p. 103.

over the universe. The radiance of its splendour illumines the divine immensity of the heavens, but at the same time in its brilliance there is intelligence; it is the origin of all reason, and, as a tireless sower, it scatters unceasingly on the world below the seeds of a harvest of souls. Our brief life is but a particular form of the universal life. Physical theories, applied to the movements of the planets to and fro, will be extended to the relations of the King of the stars with the psychic essences which are subject to him. By a succession of emissions and absorptions he will alternately cause these fiery emanations to descend into the bodies which they animate, and after death will gather them up and make them reascend into his bosom. This coherent and magnificent theology, founded upon the discoveries of ancient astronomy in its zenith, gradually imposed on mankind the cult of the "Invincible Sun" as the master of all nature, creator and preserver of men.

This Sun-worship was the final form which Roman paganism assumed. In 274 the emperor Aurelian, as we have seen,¹ conferred on it official recognition when, on his return from Syria, inspired by what he had seen at Palmyra, he founded a gorgeous temple in honour of *Sol invictus*, served by priests who had precedence even over the members of the ancient *Collegium pontificum*; and in the following century, the Claudian emperors worshipped the almighty star not only as the patron but also as the author of its race. The invincible Sun, raised to the supreme position in the divine hierarchy, peculiar protector of sovereigns and of the Empire, tends to absorb or subordinate to himself all the other divinities of ancient Olympus.

These Emperors thus recognised the superiority over Roman idolatry of this cosmic religion of the East, which the speculations of theologians had elevated to a kind of monotheism. A still closer approach to the Christian conception was obtained. This astronomic pantheism, which deified the world, having the Sun for its centre, readily agreed with Stoic hylozoism. Without much difficulty it was harmonised with the ancient theory which placed the seat of divinity in the highest sphere, that of the fixed stars; but from the time of its expansion it was

¹ See above, Lecture IV, p. 55.

engaged in a struggle against those who, following Plato and Aristotle, set God outside the limits of all the universe, representing him as a Being no longer immanent, but transcendent, distinct from all matter. Philo the Jew was not the only man to reproach the Chaldeans with worshipping the creation instead of the creator. Oriental cults were bound to make early concessions to this idealism, and from the second century, even among the Syrian priests, the doctrine is found to prevail that a Jupiter "Most High" sits in the ether which spreads above the vault of the highest heaven (*Jupiter summus exsuperantissimus*). The Sun henceforth becomes a subordinate power, a reflexion or sensible expression of a superior divinity. But in order to avoid breaking with tradition, from the luminary which gives us light was detached that universal "Reason," of which the Sun had hitherto been the focus, and the existence of another purely spiritual sun was postulated, which shone and reigned in the world of intelligence (*νοερός κόσμος*), and to this were transferred the qualities which henceforth appeared incompatible with matter. We can follow this doctrinal evolution in the works of the Neo-Platonists, and discern its termination in the speculations of Julian the Apostate. The "intelligent" Sun (*νοερός*) becomes the intermediary between the "intelligible" God (*νοητός*) and the visible universe.



We have rapidly sketched the system of theology which was imposed on the Empire. Let us in conclusion attempt to set before ourselves what a revolution these ideas produced in paganism. At the moment when they expanded over the Latin world, the mass of the people still remained almost entirely in the ancient state of idolatry which was contemporary with the Punic wars, and the rustic superstitions of the peasants of Latium still found expression in the pontifical ritual of the Roman people. The learned theology which spread from the East, elevated and enlarged religious thought by holding out an infinitely more lofty conception of divinity. This pantheism stoutly asserted the unity of the world, governed by a supreme intelligence, but in this vast organism, all the parts

of which acted and reacted upon each other, man, a privileged creature, was connected with the sidereal gods by a close relationship. His eye perceived their distant light. His divine reason in virtue of its nature could grasp divine truths. In place of the inhabitants of Olympus a kind of supermen, born in time and exempted only from old age and death, it conceived everlasting beings, unwearied and invincible, who ceaselessly ran their changeless course throughout an endless series of ages; in place of gods bound to a city or to a country and, so to speak, *adscripti glebae*, differing with the diversity of peoples, it revered universal—or, as they were already called, “catholic”—powers, whose activity, regulated by the revolutions of the celestial spheres, extended over all the earth and embraced the whole human race. An almost anarchical society of Immortals, whose feeble and capricious will raised doubts as to their power, was replaced by the idea of a harmonious *ensemble* of sidereal gods, who, irresistibly guided by the Sun, the heart of the world, the source of all movement and all intelligence, imposed everywhere the inevitable laws of omnipotent Destiny,—last but not least in place of the old methods of divination, now fallen into discredit, of deceitful portents and ambiguous oracles, astrology promised to substitute a scientific method, founded on an experience of almost infinite duration; astrology claimed the power of deciphering with certainty the hitherto inscrutable book of the sky, and of determining the destiny of individuals with the same precision as the date of an eclipse.

We can understand how the amplitude of this masterly conception would raise men’s enthusiasm and inspire poets, how it would appear like a complete revelation of the world, and how, in combination at first with Stoic philosophy, then modified by Platonic idealism, the ancient “Chaldean” creed should have been able so long to resist Christianity, the triumph of which it had nevertheless prepared.

The same Semitic race which brought about the fall of paganism is also that which put forth the most powerful effort to save it.