

common superstitions of its day ; as converts multiplied, the circle of its horizon widened, and it gathered into itself and remodelled after its own likeness the prevailing speculations of the times and the prevailing practices. The birth of Christ was fixed at the winter solstice, when already a universal festival was held for the birth of the sun and the beginning of the new year. In place of the heathen mysteries there were the Christian mysteries of the Sacraments. Philosophers said that the root of evil lay in matter ; that the appetites which led to sin were affections of the flesh, which lusted against the spirit. Christianity accepted the theory, explained the fact by Adam's fall, and found a remedy in the virgin-born body of Christ, which, being generated free from the effects of Adam's sin, resumed its purity, became the mystical body of the Church, and the food, through transubstantiation, of the believer. The Trinity was taken over from the Platonists, who had already shaped it into form. A strange and painful opinion had spread out of Phœnicia over the Greek and Roman world, that the gods required, as a condition of any special favour, the sacrifice of some pure and innocent human victim. This dark belief had been the growth of comparatively recent centuries, but it was