

**THE NEO-PLATONISTS:  
A STUDY IN THE  
HISTORY OF HELLENISM**

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The Neo-Platonists: a study in the history of Hellenism by Thomas Whittaker

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**THOMAS WHITTAKER**

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## INTRODUCTION.

**T**HAT the history of ancient culture effectively ends with the second century of the Christian era is an impression not infrequently derived from histories of literature and even of philosophy. The period that still remains of antiquity is obviously on its practical side a period of dissolution, in which every effort is required to maintain the fabric of the Roman State against its external enemies. And, spiritually, a new religious current is evidently beginning to gain the mastery; so that, with the knowledge we have of what followed, we can already see in the third century the break-up of the older form of inner as well as of outer life. In the second century too appeared the last writers who are usually thought of as classical. The end of the Stoical philosophy as a living system coincides with the death of Marcus Aurelius. And with Stoicism, it is often thought, philosophy ceased to have an independent life. It definitely entered the service of polytheism. In its struggle with Christianity it appropriated Oriental superstitions. It lost its scientific character in devotion to the practice of magic. It became a mystical theology instead of a pursuit of reasoned truth. The structure of ancient culture, like the fabric of the Empire, was in process of decay at once in form and content. In its permeation by foreign elements, it already manifests a transition to the new type that was to supersede it.

An argument for this view might be found in a certain "modernness" which has often been noted in the later classical literature. Since the ancient type was dissolved in the end