

fitted to throw any light upon any of the more obscure and difficult portions of the word of God. It does give us some indications of what was the government of the church in the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles; and these are in perfect accordance with the statements of Scripture and the informations of Clement. We learn from the inscription of this epistle, that other presbyters were associated with Polycarp in the government of the church at Smyrna; while we have no indication that he held a different office from theirs, or exercised any jurisdiction over them. We learn from it, also, that at this time the church of Philippi was governed by presbyters and deacons, just as we learn from Paul's epistle to the same church, written about sixty years before, that it was then governed by bishops and deacons. This might be regarded as a confirmation, if a thing so clear required to be confirmed, that in Scripture bishop and presbyter are the same; while it also shows that this identity, which the apostles established and the Scripture sanctions, continued for some time after the inspired rulers of the church had been taken away. The only other thing of any value or interest which we learn from Polycarp's epistle is, that instances occasionally occurred, even in that early period, in which presbyters fell into gross and open immorality, and were in consequence deposed from their office.

*Sec. V.—Epistle to Diognetus.*

There is a very interesting and valuable production now generally classed among those of the apostolical fathers, though formerly—I mean among the older writers on these subjects—it was little attended to or regarded, being hid, as it were, among the works of Justin Martyr, along with which, or rather as a part of which, it has commonly been published. It is in the form of a letter addressed to a person of the name of Diognetus; and the only reason apparently for ascribing it to Justin Martyr, and inserting it among his works, is, that we know that there was a philosopher of that name at the court of the emperor to whom one of Justin's apologies was addressed. We have no external evidence as to its author, or the time at which it was written. It bears *in gremio* to have been written by one who was a disciple of the apostles, and a teacher of the nations; and there is no evidence whatever, external or internal, fitted to throw any doubt upon the truth of this statement.

Some critics, judging from the style of thought and writing by which it is characterized, have pronounced a very confident opinion that it is the production of Justin; while others, judging by the same standard, have been equally confident that it could not have been written by the author of the works which are universally ascribed to him. The following short extract from Bishop Bull's Defence of the Nicene Creed, embodies the opinion upon this point of two very eminent authorities in patristic literature, viz., Bull himself, and Sylburgius, whom he quotes, who has published an edition of the works of Justin, "*Epistolam autem illam ad Diognetum plane Justinum redolere, si cum caeteris ejus scriptis conferatur, et multa cum illis habere communia, recte observavit Fredericus Sylburgius.*"\* On the other hand, one of the latest writers in this country on the subject—Dr Bennet—in a very valuable work, entitled "*The Theology of the Early Christian Church exhibited in quotations from the writers of the first three centuries,*" expresses his opinion in the following terms: "*The styles of Cicero and Tacitus, or those of Addison and Gibbon, are not more dissimilar than the composition of Justin and that of the writer to Diognetus. The sentences of the Martyr are loose, prolix, and inaccurate, with somewhat of a morose tone and a foreign air; while those of the letter writer have all the benevolent grace of the Christian, with all the elegant simplicity, luminous terseness, and logical finish, of a practised author in his native Greek.*"† And, in accordance with this view, Neander says of it, "*Its language and thoughts, as well as the silence of the ancients, prove that the letter does not proceed from Justin.*"‡

I have no great confidence in the judgments even of eminent critics upon questions of this sort, unless there be materials for bringing them to be tested by some pretty definite and palpable standard; and, indeed, I have made these quotations chiefly for the purpose of pointing out how little reliance is to be placed upon decisions of points of this sort, which abound so much in the writings of continental critics, and are by many of them applied very boldly even to the different books of Scripture. In this particular case, however, I think that the internal evidence is in favour of ascribing the letter to Diognetus to a different author from Justin;

\* Bull's Works, vol. v., p. 191. Oxford, 1827.

† Neander, vol. ii., p. 348, Rose's translation.

‡ Bennet, pp. 6, 7.

and, as I have already remarked, there is no proof, nor even any strong probability against the truth of the author's statement, whoever he may have been, that he was a disciple of the apostles, though it has been suspected by some that the part of the epistle where this statement occurs is an interpolation.\*

The letter is an answer to an inquiry which had been addressed to the author as to what was the character of the Christian religion, and what were the reasons why he had embraced it. It is, in point of thought, sentiment, and style, decidedly superior to the works of any of the apostolical fathers, and is deserving of more attention than it has commonly received. It gives a brief but spirited and effective summary of the grounds on which the Christians had abandoned Paganism and Judaism: this is followed by a description of the leading features in the character and personal conduct of the Christians of that period; and then all that is peculiar in their character and conduct is traced to the influence of the doctrines which they had been led upon God's authority to believe, of which a striking and scriptural summary is presented. It does not afford us any historical information about the government or the worship of the church at the time when it was written. It makes known to us nothing but what we know from the canonical Scriptures; but it shows that the doctrines which orthodox churches have generally deduced from Scripture were taught in the church after the apostles left it.

I have introduced here this brief reference to the letter to Diognetus, because it is similar in its character, and in the way in which it should be noticed, to the letters of Clement and Polycarp; and because the mention of it leaves nothing else to be adverted to under the head of the apostolical fathers, except the epistles of Ignatius, which are in many respects peculiar.

#### Sec. VI.—*Ignatius.*

Ignatius certainly lived in the time of the apostles, and occupied a position which led the writers of a subsequent age, when Prelacy had been established, to call him Bishop of Antioch. We know little of his history, except that he was condemned to death by the emperor Trajan for his adherence to Christ; that he

\* Semisch on Justin, i., pp. 193, 195; Neander, ii., p. 348.

was in consequence carried to Rome, where he was exposed to wild beasts, and gained the crown of martyrdom in the year, as some think, 107, but more probably in the year 116. We have several epistles which profess to have been written by Ignatius during his journey from Antioch to Rome to endure the sentence of death which had been pronounced upon him.

The genuineness and integrity of these epistles have given rise to a controversy which is so voluminous, and involves so many points of detail connected with the early history of the church, that it would be no easy matter to give an abstract of it. This would be of no great importance; but what increases the difficulty of saying anything about them is, that it is no easy matter to make up one's mind as to what is really true, or even most probable, in regard to them.

I have no doubt, indeed, that the epistles of Ignatius, as we now have them, even in the purest and most uncorrupted form, did not proceed from his hand; but whether they ought to be regarded as wholly fabricated, or merely as interpolated by some over-zealous defender of the threefold order of bishop, priests, and deacons, it is not easy to decide. Upon the revival of letters, fifteen epistles were published, purporting to be written by Ignatius; but it was soon seen and generally admitted that eight of these, including one addressed by him to the apostle John, and another addressed to the Virgin Mary, were the forgeries of a much later age. A considerable diversity of opinion prevailed as to the genuineness and integrity of the other seven. The Reformers, being Presbyterians, were not likely to think favourably of the genuineness and integrity of these epistles; and their impressions upon this point were confirmed by finding that the Socinians produced from them passages which could not easily be reconciled with orthodox views upon the subject of the Trinity. Calvin, accordingly, did not hesitate to say,\* that there is nothing more senseless than the stuff that has been collected under the name of this martyr. All the earliest defenders of the Church of England—Whitgift, Bancroft, Bilson, Downson†—appealed to them with confidence in favour of Prelacy. At length Archbishop Usher discovered in a MS., and published at Oxford in 1644, a Latin translation of the seven epistles of Ignatius, differ-

\* Instit., B. I., c. xiii., sec. 29.

† Pearson's Introd. to Vindicis.

ing considerably from any edition that was previously known. The epistles in this translation were considerably shorter; they were free from Arianism, and did not by any means exhibit such clear and palpable proofs of fabrication. About the same time, by a remarkable coincidence, the celebrated scholar, Isaac Vossius, discovered and published a Greek MS. of the epistles of Ignatius, which had been preserved at Florence, corresponding fully with Usher's Latin version, so far as it went, but containing only six epistles instead of seven. This greatly encouraged the defenders of Prelacy and Ignatius. They immediately abandoned the old edition, which formerly they had defended as well as they could, admitting now that it had been corrupted and interpolated by a later hand; while they maintained the genuineness of the shorter and more modern edition.

In consequence of this discovery, all the discussions about the epistles of Ignatius, which are more than 200 years old, are deprived of their relevancy and value, since they bear reference to an edition which was then abandoned by Romanists and Prelatists, and has not since been formally defended, so far as I know, except by Whiston, who was an Arian, and by one or two German neologians. It was at once conceded by anti-Prelatic writers, that many of the objections which had been adduced against the older edition of Ignatius did not apply to this shorter and more modern one; but it was not universally admitted that even this more pure edition exhibited the genuine letters of Ignatius, or at least exhibited them without considerable interpolations. Salmasius and Blondell, who have written in opposition to Prelacy with an extent of erudition that has never been surpassed, declared that, after examining the edition of Vossius and Usher, they were still satisfied that we had no genuine epistles of Ignatius; or, at least, that even in their purest form they were grossly corrupted. Hammond defended Ignatius against their attacks; and this produced a controversy on the subject between him and Dr Owen. Daillé, or Dallacus, a very learned divine of the French Protestant Church, soon after wrote a book to prove that the epistles ascribed to Ignatius were forged by some friend of the hierarchy about the end of the third century. Bishop Pearson's celebrated work, "*Vindiciæ Epistolarum S. Ignatii*," of which the Episcopalians have ever since continued to boast as unanswerable, was an answer to this book of Daillé's, and professed to prove that the

epistles of Ignatius, as published by Usher and Vossius, are genuine and uncorrupted. An answer was written to Pearson by another French divine, Larroque, entitled "*Observationes in Ignatianas Pearsonii Vindicias*;" and then the controversy terminated.

Since that time Prelatists have generally continued, upon the ground of what was proved by Hammond and Pearson, to maintain, and Presbyterians, upon the ground of what was proved by Daillé and Larroque, to deny, their genuineness, or at least their integrity. Perhaps it may be said to be the most prevalent opinion among anti-Prelatic writers, that the epistles of Ignatius, in their shorter and purer form, or at least six out of the seven,—for not only Mosheim, but Archbishop Usher, rejected the epistle to Polycarp,—are genuine, *i.e.*, were in substance written by Ignatius, while they have been generally of opinion that some parts of them, especially those on which Prelatists found, were interpolated by a later hand. Neander expresses his opinion of them in the following terms:—"Certainly, these epistles contain passages which at least bear completely upon them the character of antiquity. This is particularly the case with the passages directed against Judaism and Docetism; but even the shorter and more trustworthy edition is very much interpolated."\* A Presbyterian, *i.e.*, one who is convinced that the canonical Scriptures give no countenance to the threefold order in the ministry,—bishops, priests, and deacons,—and that the Scriptures uniformly use the words bishops and presbyters synonymously or indiscriminately, as descriptive of one and the same class of functionaries, can scarcely read the epistles of Ignatius, and Daillé's treatise upon the subject, without being strongly disposed to adopt his theory, *viz.*, that they were forged in the end of the third century by some ardent and unscrupulous supporter of the hierarchy. And yet, I think, it must in fairness be admitted, that Daillé has not thoroughly proved *this*; and that so much that is plausible has been adduced by Pearson in answer to many of his arguments that the proof of an *entire* fabrication of the whole is not brought home very forcibly to one's understanding. After wading through a great deal of very intricate and confused discussion, especially in regard to alleged anachronisms in reference to heresies which Daillé contends were not heard of till after Ignatius' martyrdom, one does feel somewhat at a loss to

\* Neander, vol. ii., p. 334.

lay his hand definitely upon anything, except the distinction between bishops, presbyters, and deacons, in regard to which he would undertake to affirm that Ignatius could not have written it. The external evidence in favour of their genuineness in the gross—*i.e.*, in favour of the position that Ignatius did write some epistles, such as those we now have under his name—must be admitted to be strong. Polycarp, in the conclusion of his epistle, speaks of his having made a collection of the epistles of Ignatius, and sent them to the church of Philippi for their edification. And Daillé's notion, that this was an interpolated addition to Polycarp's letter, has no solid foundation to rest upon. He founds much upon the allegation, that these epistles are not alluded to by any other writer from Polycarp to Eusebius, who wrote in the early part of the fourth century. This would not be quite conclusive, even if true. But it has been alleged, on the other side, that they are referred to and quoted by Irenæus in the second, and Origen in the third century. Daillé maintains that the works ascribed to Origen, in which these references occur, are not his; and it is really not easy to decide whether they are or not. But he certainly is not successful in getting over the testimony of Irenæus. That father made a statement, which is not only found in his own writings, but is also expressly quoted from him by Eusebius, to this effect, that one of our martyrs who was condemned to the wild beasts said—and then he gives a quotation, which we still find in Ignatius' epistle to the Romans. And Daillé's only answer to this is, that there is no express mention of an *epistle*, and that it is not said that he wrote, but that he said this; as if this saying of Ignatius might have been handed down by tradition, without having been committed to writing. But this is forced and strained, as it is evident that Irenæus most probably would have used the word said, and not wrote, as is common in such cases, even if he had been quoting from a writing. Daillé admits that the epistles, as we have them, were extant in the time of Eusebius, and were regarded by him, as well as by Athanasius and Jerome, who flourished in the same century, as genuine; and this must in fairness be admitted to be a pretty strong evidence that they are so.

The ground on which Neander was convinced that the epistles of Ignatius, even in their purest form, were very much interpolated, is the same principle in virtue of which he was convinced that there was an interpolation in the epistle of Clement,—a

principle just and weighty in itself, though as we think misapplied by Neander in the case of Clement. It is in substance this,—that there are statements in Ignatius which plainly assert the existence of a Prelatic hierarchic government in the church, in contradiction at once to the sacred Scriptures, and to *every other* uninspired document of the apostolic, and even of a later age. We cannot defend Ignatius, as we endeavoured to defend Clement, from the application of this sound and important principle of judging. There can be no doubt that Ignatius' epistles are crammed, *usque ad nauseam*, with bishops, presbyters, and deacons, evidently spoken of as three distinct orders or classes of functionaries, and that obedience and submission to them are exacted in a very absolute and imperious style, nay, that they exhibit something of the Popish principle of vicarious priestly responsibility; for he pledges his soul for theirs who are subject to the bishops, presbyters, and deacons; and yet these epistles have been constantly held up by the most learned Episcopalians as the very sheet anchor of their cause.\* They seem now at last to be getting half ashamed of the strength of his statements; and one of the latest Prelatic writers I have seen upon this subject, Conybeare, in his Bampton Lectures for 1839, makes the following candid, and yet very cautious, admission upon this point. After giving some extracts from the epistles of Ignatius, embodying very excellent practical exhortations, he continues in the following words:—"All Christians, of every sect, will agree in admiring these sentiments; but the great point on which in every epistle Ignatius most strenuously and repeatedly insists, is the necessity of a strict conformity to the discipline of the Church, and a devoted submission to Episcopal authority, which he makes to rest on the same principles with our obedience to our Lord Himself. It is needless to remark that such passages have afforded the great reason why so many writers of the Presbyterian party have been so reluctant to admit the authenticity of these remains; and we, while it is most satisfactory to our minds to find so early a testimony in confirmation of the primitive and apostolical origin of the constitution faithfully preserved by our own church, yet even we ourselves shall probably shrink from some of the language

\* Even Milner is able to swallow it all, pp. 55-58. Edit. 1842.

employed in these epistles, as seeming excessive and overstrained. We do trust indeed that our Episcopal authority is in and through the Lord, and most suitable for the edification of His body the Church; and we may hope that this was all that Ignatius meant to imply; but we must regret, that in the somewhat overcharged and inflated style of his rhetoric, he has too often been betrayed into expressions which seem almost to imply a parity of authority over the Church, between its earthly superintendent, and its heavenly Head.\*

At present, however, we have to do, not with the general subject of the government of the early church, but merely with the integrity of Ignatius' epistles; and it is certainly not easy to believe that a pious and devoted minister who was a companion of the apostles could have written as he is represented to have done on this subject. Daillé's leading argument upon this point is this: no other writer of the apostolic age, and indeed no writer during the whole of the second century, has spoken upon this subject in a style similar to that which Ignatius has employed; and, more particularly, no other writer of this period has *uniformly* employed the terms bishop and presbyter, as descriptive of two distinct and separate classes of functionaries,—the bishop being of a higher, and the presbyter of a lower, order; and if so, it follows, that these portions of the epistles ascribed to him did not proceed from his pen, but owed their origin to a later age. Now, this position, we think, Daillé has incontrovertibly established. Pearson has not answered his argument, but, as Larroque has conclusively proved, is chargeable in the whole discussion with practising the sophism called *ignoratio elenchi*, by running off into a general investigation of the whole subject of the government of the church during the second century, instead of meeting fairly the critical and philological argument on which Daillé based his conclusion that these parts of the epistles at least were not written by Ignatius. The argument is a very simple one: No other writer of the first and second centuries, inspired or uninspired, has *uniformly* used the words bishop and presbyter as descriptive of two distinct classes of functionaries, the one higher and the other lower; this distinction is uniformly and systematically made in the epistles of Ignatius; and therefore these epistles, or at least these parts of them, were not written by one

\* Conybeare, Bampton Lectures, I.ect. ii., pp. 83-84.

who lived in the beginning of the second century. The conclusion is inevitable upon all the recognised principles of fair literary criticism, if the premises be established.

It is to be remarked that the main position is this: no other writer of the first two centuries has uniformly observed the distinction between the words bishop and presbyter as Ignatius has done, and as was done generally in the latter part of the third century, and universally afterwards. It is no disproof of this position to show that there are writers of the second century who give some indications of the existence *de facto* of some distinction between bishops and presbyters before the end of that century, for this is not denied by Presbyterians; nor even to show that this distinction was then generally recognised and established,—and yet this is all that Pearson has attempted to prove. All this might be true, and yet the striking and marked peculiarity *in the use of the words* might still afford a satisfactory proof that the epistles ascribed to Ignatius were defective, either in genuineness, or at least in integrity. The common or indiscriminate use of the names bishop and presbyter in the New Testament is now universally conceded by Episcopalians, though many of the older Prelatists denied it, or at least refused to admit it. There is *no* distinction in the use of them to be traced in the apostolical fathers Clement and Polycarp, but the reverse. They were sometimes, if not always, used indiscriminately by *all* the other writers of the second century (who used them at all, for Justin Martyr does not use them),—by Papias, Irenæus, and Pius, Bishop of Rome. There are plain traces of the same indiscriminate use of the words in Clemens Alexandrinus, and Tertullian, who lived partly in the third century, and it has not wholly disappeared even in Origen and Cyprian. But it appears no more thereafter in the ordinary unintentional usage of language during the subsequent history of the church. Now here is the remarkable peculiarity, that while all the inspired writers before him use the words bishop and presbyter synonymously and indiscriminately,—while his only contemporaries whose writings have come down to us, Clement and Polycarp, follow faithfully in their footsteps,—while the same indiscriminate use of the words is exhibited more or less fully, though not uniformly, by all the *subsequent* writers of the second century,—Ignatius, who died at the latest in 116, alone adheres rigidly, uniformly, and without a single exception,

to a distinction in the use and application of these words which grew up in the course of the third century, was not fully established till the fourth, and has continued ever since.

Now, this argument against the integrity at least of the epistles of Ignatius, so obvious and so conclusive, and bearing so directly and influentially upon the precise point which has given to the controversy about the genuineness and integrity of these epistles its chief value and interest, Pearson has not answered, nay, he can scarcely with propriety be said to have attempted to answer it; for he has not professed to produce what alone could constitute an answer,—any one author of the first two centuries, inspired or uninspired, of whom he affirms that he uniformly observes this distinction in the use of the words; and yet there is perhaps no one book of which Episcopalian controversialists are more in the habit of boasting as conclusive and unanswerable than Pearson's "Vindiciæ," while they constantly allege that Presbyterians have no reason for rejecting Ignatius' epistles, or any part of them, except that they are decisive against their views. As Ignatius not only observes this distinction uniformly, wherever he has occasion to use the words, but as he is constantly ringing changes upon the bishops, presbyters, and deacons, and the necessity and advantages of honouring and obeying them,—this may be fairly regarded as a conclusive proof that, as Neander says, "even the shorter and more trustworthy edition is *very much* interpolated."

Ignatius, in his epistle to the Trallians, boasts—though Archbishop Wake, in his translation, endeavours to conceal this—that he was able to write to them about things so exalted that it would choke them if he spoke about them, and that he could describe to them the places of the angels, and the several companies of them under their respective princes. In his letter to the Christians at Rome, while on his way to that city, condemned to be exposed to the wild beasts, he besought them to address no prayers to God, and to use no influence with men, in order to procure a removal of the sentence: he declared that he would coax, and even compel, the wild beasts to devour him; and that he hoped that they would devour him wholly, so that none of his body should be left. When we read such things as these in the epistles ascribed to Ignatius, we are tempted to wish that their spuriousness could be established; or, at least, that the interpolations could be proved to extend beyond his frequent references to bishops, presbyters, and

deacons. But perhaps we are not warranted in saying that it was not possible, though it is certainly very improbable, that an eminently holy and devoted minister, who had conversed with the apostles—and such Ignatius was—when soon to be offered up as a martyr for Christ's sake, could have manifested such palpable proofs of the infirmities of humanity; though, if he did write in this strain, we can attach little weight to his authority, and must rank him, in point of good sense and correct Christian feeling, greatly below his contemporaries, Clement and Polycarp. We are, however, warranted in saying, that no man paced in the circumstances of Ignatius *could* have constantly and uniformly used the words bishop and presbyter as descriptive of two different and separate classes of functionaries, and that this uniform use of them unequivocally indicates a later age.

It is also a very strong confirmation of the position that the epistles of Ignatius are corrupted, if not entirely spurious, that we have some works bearing the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, a convert of Paul's, mentioned in the book of the Acts, which are now universally, by Protestants at least, regarded as having been forged, and not earlier than the fourth century, and which in several points bear a resemblance to the epistles of Ignatius. The pretended Dionysius brings out fully and in detail that minute knowledge of the angels and their ranks which Ignatius possessed, but which in mercy to the Trallians he concealed; and the main scope and objects of his works are to invest with apostolic sanction the threefold order of bishops, priests, and deacons, and the whole mass of rites and ceremonies which disfigured and polluted the church, even in the fourth century. The book of Daillé, to which I have so often referred, is directed equally against the genuineness of the writings ascribed to Dionysius and of those ascribed to Ignatius, and is entitled "De Scriptis, quæ sub Dionysii Areopagitæ et Ignatii Antiocheni nominibus circumferuntur."\*

This is, I think, a fair view of the controversy, as it has been generally conducted until recent times. But Mr Cureton's publication of the Syriac version of these epistles, recently discovered in a monastery in Egypt, and now in the British Museum, materially changes the whole aspect of the controversy, and war-

\* Geneva, 1666.

rants and requires a decision in regard to most of the topics that used to be discussed in it, in opposition to that which the Episcopalians have so long and so strenuously contended for. This MS. of a Syriac version seems to have been written about the sixth century. It contains only the three epistles above mentioned, and exhibits them in a briefer and more compendious form than even the shorter edition of Usher and Vossius, except that some things found in the older editions in the fourth and fifth chapters of the epistle to the Trallians, about his knowledge of the angels, are found in the Syriac, in the tenth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. Mr Cureton, who seems to have discharged his duties with great diligence and learning, judgment and candour, has proved beyond all reasonable doubt, that there is no ground for regarding as genuine anything ascribed to Ignatius, except these three epistles in this Syriac version; that, of course, a large portion of the objections of Daillé and other Presbyterians, at least to the integrity of the epistles, were well founded; that the ground taken by Pearson and other Episcopalians is wholly untenable; and that, therefore, writings were forged in early times in the name of Ignatius, as well as of Clement and Dionysius the Areopagite, to serve the cause of Prelacy. The Episcopalians seem very unwilling to admit these positions. They seem unable to imitate the candour of Mr Cureton; and both the *English* and the *Quarterly Reviews* have endeavoured to answer his arguments, and to maintain the ground occupied by Pearson. But this will not do. The case is clear and hollow, and cannot stand investigation. It has long been a sort of article of faith in the Church of England, handed down by tradition, that Pearson's *Vindiciæ* is unanswerable. Cureton, in the preface to his *Corpus Ignatianum* (p. 14, Note), says: "In the whole course of my inquiry respecting the Ignatian epistles I have never met with one person who professes to have read Bishop Pearson's celebrated book; but I was informed by one of the most learned and eminent of the present Bench of Bishops, that Porson, after having perused the *Vindiciæ*, had expressed to him his opinion that it was a 'very unsatisfactory work.'"

But while it may now be considered settled that there is nothing else of what has been ascribed to Ignatius genuine except these three epistles, according to the Syriac version, the question remains, Are we bound now to receive these as genuine and unin-

terpolated? The existence of this Syriac version, omitting, as it does, most of the things in the older editions which were founded upon by Daillé and other Presbyterians, as militating against their genuineness, or at least their integrity, must in fairness be admitted to give some confirmation to the genuineness of the epistles which it contains. But it does not establish their integrity or entire freedom from interpolations. They still contain the boasting about knowing celestial and angelic matters—the eagerness for martyrdom—the desire that the wild beasts should devour him wholly. This is in the epistle to the Romans; and in the epistle to the Ephesians, there is the statement about Satan being ignorant of the virginity of Mary and the birth of Christ, though they omit here the mention of his death, and the surpassing brightness of the star of Bethlehem, which the former editions had. Of the mass of stuff about bishops, presbyters, and deacons, with which the former editions were crammed, there is only one passage left. It is in the epistle to Polycarp, c. vi., but it is a strong and offensive one. It is this. After having exhorted them not to marry without the counsel of the bishop, he adds this general exhortation, as translated from the Syriac by Mr Cureton: "Look to the bishop, that God may also look upon you. I will be instead of the souls of those who are subject to the Bishop, and the Presbyter, and the Deacons; with them may I have a portion near God." This is quite the same in the longer and shorter of the old editions as in the Syriac, except that the longer has "presbytery" instead of "presbyters." There is certainly nothing in the least resembling this, either in language or in spirit, in the New Testament, or in Clement and Polycarp, and it may be fairly regarded as an interpolation. Ignatius, in the Syriac version, occupies a place very similar to Clement's, in whose epistle Neander pronounced one passage to be a clear interpolation, because of its anti-apostolic, hierarchic tendency. We think the application of the principle wrong as concerns the passage in Clement; but the principle is a sound one, and it seems fairly to apply to this only remaining prelatie passage in Ignatius.\*

\* The last three chapters of the epistle to Polycarp which contains this passage, are alleged to be interpolated by Cooper in his *Free Church* of Ancient Christendom, Appen. K., p. 388. Bunsen's Ignatian Epistles and his Hippolytus.

Such are the apostolical fathers, and such their writings, in so far as God has been pleased to preserve them, and to afford us the means of distinguishing them. And I think this brief survey of them must be quite sufficient to show the truth of the two positions which I laid down in introducing this topic—viz., first, that we have no certain information, nothing on which we can rely with confidence as a mere question of evidence, as to what the inspired apostles taught and ordained, except what is contained in the canonical Scriptures; and, secondly, that there are no men, except the authors of the inspired books of Scripture, to whom there is any plausible pretence for calling upon us to look up as guides or oracles. It was manifestly, as the result proves, not the purpose of God to convey to us, through the instrumentality of the immediate successors of the apostles, any important information as to the substance of the revelation which He made to man, in addition to what, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has been embodied in the sacred Scriptures, and has in His good providence been preserved pure and uncorrupted. The apostolical fathers hold an important place as witnesses to the genuineness, authenticity, and integrity of the Scriptures; but this is their principal value. There is much about them, both in their character and in their writings, which is fitted to confirm our faith in the divine origin of Christianity, and the divine authority of the Scriptures; but there is nothing about them that should tempt us to take them instead of, or even in addition to, the evangelists and apostles as our guides. They exhibit a beautiful manifestation of the practical operation of Christian principle, and especially of ardent love to the Saviour, and entire devotedness to His service, which is well fitted to impress our minds, and to constrain us to imitation; but there is also not a little about them fitted to remind us that we must be followers of them only as they were of Christ, and that it is only the word of God that is fitted to make us perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE HERESIES OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE.

WE have very plain intimations given us in the sacred Scriptures, that even while the apostles lived, errors of various kinds were broached, and disturbed the purity and peace of the church; and we have predictions that these would continue and extend. We have not much explicit information given us in the New Testament as to what these errors or heresies were. But they engaged the attention, and they occupy a prominent place in the works, of the Christian authors who lived after the apostles, and the heresies fill a considerable department in the ecclesiastical history of these early ages. Irenæus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, who flourished during the latter half of the second century, and who has many claims upon our respect, wrote a book against the heresies of the age, which has come down to us, though chiefly in a Latin translation; and this, with the remains of Hippolytus, is the main source of our information as to the doctrines of the earlier heretics. Irenæus was accustomed—and in this he was followed by the generality of the fathers who succeeded him, including both those who have written fully and formally upon heresies, such as Epiphanius and Augustine, and those who have adverted to the subject more incidentally—to use the word heresy, not as we do, to denote an important deviation from sound doctrine made by one who professed to believe in the divine mission of Jesus and the authority of the Scriptures, but any system of error into which any reference to Christ and Christianity was introduced, even though those who maintained it could not with propriety be called Christians, and could not have been members of any Christian church. We find that errors of this sort did, in point of fact, disturb the purity and the peace of the early church, that they are adverted to and condemned by the apostles in their addresses to the churches, and that they engaged much of the atten-

tion of the early fathers; and as *they* called them heresies, they continue to rank under that name in ecclesiastical history, though the word is now commonly used in a more limited sense, and though these early heresies might with more propriety be called forms of infidelity. Many of the notions explained and discussed under the head of the heresies of the first and second centuries are very like the ravings of madmen who followed no definite standard, whether natural or supernatural, whether reason or Scripture, but who gave full scope to their imaginations in the formation of their systems. They did not exert a permanent or extensive direct influence, because they had no plausible foundation to rest upon. An investigation, therefore, into the history and precise tenets of the heretics of the first two centuries,—and this observation applies also in some measure to the third century,—is rather curious, than either very interesting or useful. The monstrous systems of these heretics did not take a very firm hold of men's minds, and cannot be said to have directly influenced to any considerable extent the views of the church in subsequent ages. They were, indeed, connected with some questions which have always occupied and still occupy the minds of reflecting men, such as the origin and cause of evil, and the creation of the world as connected with the subject of the origin of evil. But the early heretics, though they propounded a variety of theories upon these subjects, cannot be said to have thrown any light upon them, or to have materially influenced the views of men who have since investigated these topics, under the guidance either of a sounder philosophy, or of more implicit deference to God's revelation.

Gnosticism, indeed, which may be properly enough used as a general name for the heretical systems of the first two centuries,—and in some measure also of the third, although in the third century Manichæism obtained greater prominence,—forms a curious chapter in the history of the human mind, and may furnish some useful and instructive lessons to the observer of human nature, and to the philosophical expounder of its capacities and tendencies. It strikingly illustrates some of the more simple and obvious doctrines of Scripture about the natural darkness of men's understandings. It is a striking commentary upon the apostle's declaration that the world by wisdom knew not God, and that men professing to be wise became fools. But it is not of any great importance in a purely theological point of view, inasmuch as it

throws little light upon the real system of divine truth, and has had little direct influence upon the subsequent labours of men in investigating, under better auspices, the subjects which it professed to explain. Indeed, the principal practical use of a knowledge of the early heresies is, that an acquaintance with them does throw some light upon some portions of the word of God which refer to them. This is an object which, indeed, is of the highest value, and it may be said to be in some measure the standard by which we should estimate the real value of all knowledge. The highest object at which we can aim, so far as the mere exercise of the understanding is concerned, is to attain to an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the revealed will of God; and whatever contributes to promote this, and just in proportion as it does so, is to be esteemed important and valuable. We should desire to ascertain, as far as possible, the true meaning and application of every portion of God's word; and appropriate and apply aright everything that is fitted to contribute to this result. We can easily conceive that the writings of the apostolical fathers *might* have conveyed to us information which would have thrown much light upon some of the more obscure and difficult passages in the New Testament. They might, for example, have given us information which would have settled some of those chronological questions in the history of Paul, and of his journeys and epistles, which, from the want of any definite materials in Scripture to decide them, have given rise to much discussion. They might have given us information which would have rendered more obvious and certain the interpretation of some passages which are obscure and have been disputed, because we know little of the prevalent customs that may have been referred to, or of the condition and circumstances of the church in general, or of some particular church at the time. They might possibly have conveyed to us information upon many points which, without their so intending it, might have admitted of a useful application in this way, and to these objects. And we might have made this application of the information, and thus have *established* the true meaning of some portions of Scripture, without ascribing to those who conveyed the information to us any authority, or attaching any weight to their opinion, as such. All this might have been; but we have had occasion to show that, in point of fact, God has not been pleased to convey to us, through the early ecclesiastical

writers, much information that admits of a useful practical application in the interpretation of Scripture.

One exception, however, to this remark,—one case in which the information communicated to us by subsequent writers does give us *some* assistance in understanding the meaning and application of some passages of the New Testament, and the propriety and suitability of the words in which they are expressed,—is to be found in this matter of the early heresies, while it is also the chief practical purpose to which a knowledge of the early heresies is to be applied. Of the persons mentioned by *name* in the New Testament, as having in some way set themselves in opposition to the apostles, or as having deserted them, viz., Hermogenes, Phygellus, Demas, Hymenæus, Philetus, Alexander, and Diotrophes, we have no certain or trustworthy information in early writers, in addition to the very brief notices given of them in Scripture; for we cannot regard the explanations given of the passages, when they are mentioned by commentators of the fourth and fifth centuries,\* as of any value or weight, except in so far as they seem to be fairly suggested by the Scripture notices. The most specific indication given us in the New Testament of a heresy, combined with the mention of names, is Paul's statement regarding Hymenæus and Philetus, of whom he tells† that “concerning the truth,”—*i.e.*, in a matter of doctrine,—“they have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some.” Of Hymenæus and Philetus personally we learn nothing from subsequent writers; we have no information throwing any direct light upon the specific statement of Paul as to the nature of the heresy held by them. But, in what we learn generally from subsequent writers as to the views of some of the Gnostic sects, we have materials for explaining it. We know that the Gnostic sects in general denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. The Docetæ, more especially, denying the reality of Christ's body, of course denied the reality of His death and resurrection; and having thus taken out of the way the great pattern and proof of the resurrection, it was an easy step to deny it altogether. Still some explanation must, if possible, be given of statements that seemed to assert or imply a resurrection of the body. Paul tells us that these men said it was past already; and

\* Ittigius, de Hæres., pp. 84–86.

† 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

here the inquiry naturally arises, What past thing was it to which they pointed as being the resurrection? Now Irenæus informs us\* that Menander, one of the leading Gnostics of the first century, taught that Gnostic baptism was the resurrection, and the only resurrection that was to be expected. And when we thus learn that there was a sect of Gnostics in the apostolic age who allegorized away the resurrection into baptism, we can have no difficulty in seeing what Hymenæus and Philetus meant when they said that it was past already.†

In regard to Simon Magus and the Nicolaitanes, who are mentioned in Scripture, we have a good deal of information given us by subsequent writers; but it is not of a kind fitted to throw any light upon the statements made in Scripture concerning them. It is new and additional information regarding them, which there is nothing in Scripture to lead us to expect. It is not inconsistent, indeed, with Scripture, and *may be* all true. As it throws no light upon the statements of Scripture concerning them, but is purely historical in its character and application, and as even historically it is attended with considerable difficulties and no small measure of uncertainty, I shall not further enlarge upon it.

The heresies, however, to which there seem to be the most frequent references in Scripture, and a knowledge of which throws most light upon the interpretation of its statements, are those of Cerinthus and the Docetæ.

As the first century advanced, and the apostles were most of them removed from this world, the Gnostic heresies seem to have become somewhat more prevalent, to have been brought to bear more upon some of the subjects comprehended in the Christian revelation, and to have affected more the state and condition of the church. The Docetæ denied the reality of Christ's body, and of course of His sufferings; and maintained that these were mere phantoms or appearances; and we find that the apostle John repeatedly referred to this heresy, and that an acquaintance with its nature throws some light upon the true import of some of his statements. We find also, both in the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp, and in the Gospel of John, references to the doctrines of Cerinthus. We know that the doctrine of the crucifixion

\* B. i., c. 23.

† Buddei Eccles. Apost., c. v.; Moshemii Inst. Maj., p. 319. Burton's Bampton Lec., p. 135, and note 57.

of the Saviour was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. And, accordingly, we find that very soon some who did not altogether deny Christ's divine mission, began to explain away His crucifixion. These attempts were made even in the apostolic age; and we have pretty full accounts of them as managed by some Gnostic heretics in the second century, such as Saturninus and Valentinus. Some have supposed that Paul referred to them when he spoke of *enemies of the cross of Christ*; but the expression in that passage seems rather to be taken in a wider and less specific sense. But there can be no reasonable doubt that John referred to them in his epistles. Indeed, the very first sentence of his first epistle may be fairly regarded as bearing a reference to the heresy of the Docetæ: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon," or carefully inspected, "and our hands have handled of the Word of life." The apostle was not likely to have added the last clause, "which our hands have handled," but because he had a reference to some such error as that which we know was taught by the Docetæ, or Phantasiastæ, as they were also called, who held that Christ's body was such only in appearance,—that it was a mere phantasm, which appeared indeed a body to the eyes of men, but would not admit of being handled. The heresy of the Docetæ plainly implied a denial of the incarnation of Christ in any proper sense,—a denial that He had taken to Himself a true body; in short, a denial that He had come in the flesh. Hence the apostle says, in the beginning of the fourth chapter, "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world,"—a statement illustrated by one of Jerome's, viz., that even while the apostles were alive, and the blood of Christ still fresh in Judæa, men arose who maintained that His body was a mere phantasm or deceitful appearance. The statement that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is a plain assertion of His incarnation, and clearly implies that He existed previously to His coming, and that contemporaneously with His coming He took flesh, or assumed a true and real body. It is an assertion of His incarnation, in the sense in which we have explained it, against whoever may deny it, and

upon whatever ground the denial may rest, and is equally conclusive against the modern Socinians and the ancient Docetæ; but the knowledge of what were the views of the ancient Docetæ throws light upon the import of the expression, and illustrates the propriety and exact bearing of the words employed.

It is true that, if John here intended more immediately to contradict the heresy of the Docetæ, the declaration that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, cannot be regarded as in itself equivalent to, or co-extensive with, the position that He assumed human nature. It would in that case merely assert that He, having previously existed, took, when He came, a true body, without asserting also that He took likewise a reasonable soul. And indeed the controversy as to the soul of Christ is one of later origin than the apostolic age, or the first century. But there is no difficulty in proving from other parts of Scripture, that Jesus Christ, when He came, took a reasonable human soul, as well as a true body. Incarnation, in the literal meaning of the word—*ἐνσάρκωσις*—is here expressly asserted, implying a previous existence, and an assumption of a true and real body as contemporaneous and identical with His coming or with His appearance in this world. An assertion of the reality of Christ's flesh or body, while He was on earth, was all that was necessary in condemning the Docetæ, and warning the church against them; but under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, it is expressed in words which plainly imply a previous existence, so that the statement is, as we have said, just as conclusive against modern as against ancient heretics.

We have said also that the apostle John referred to the heresy of Cerinthus; and indeed Irenæus tells us that John wrote his gospel principally in order to oppose the doctrines which Cerinthus had been propagating; and we know of no ground, external or internal, for disbelieving this. We learn from the testimony of subsequent writers, that Cerinthus held—and in this he was followed by some other Gnostic heretics of the second century—that Jesus and Christ must be carefully distinguished from each other: that Jesus was a mere man; that Christ, one of the *αἰόνες*, descended upon Him at His baptism, dwelt in Him till He was about to suffer death, and then left Him, and returned to the pleroma. Now, this whole theory is contradicted and exploded by the position, *that Jesus is Christ*. This position, *in terminis*, denies the distinction which the Cerinthians made between them, and it

plainly *implies* that there never was a time when Jesus existed, and was not Christ, which is in direct opposition to what we know the Cerinthians held upon this point. Now John, in the next chapter of his epistle, the fifth, at the beginning lays down this position, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." We have, indeed, similar statements to this in the book of the Acts, in the recorded preaching of the apostles. They laboured to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ; and the meaning of this manifestly is just this, that Jesus was the Messiah promised to the fathers and predicted by the prophets. But when we know, that before John wrote this epistle, men had arisen who were disturbing the purity and peace of the church by making a distinction or separation between Jesus and Christ; when we see that, in the context, John is warning the churches against another branch of the heresy *concerning Christ's person*; and when we know that this heresy, which consisted substantially in a denial that Jesus is Christ, not only existed in John's time, but continued to infest the church for several succeeding generations, we can scarcely refuse to admit that the statement is to be taken here in a more limited and specific sense than that in which it is employed in the book of the Acts, and was intended to be, what it really is, a denial of the heresy of Cerinthus; and moreover, by plain implication, an assertion of the vital or fundamental importance of right views of the person of Christ, as intimately connected with those radical changes of character which bear so directly upon the salvation of men's souls.

I have no doubt that it has been often proved that the introduction of John's gospel is an exposure of the heresies of the Docetæ and the Cerinthians, of those who even at that time denied His incarnation and real humanity, and of those who, while admitting that Christ came down from heaven and was in some sense divine, separated Jesus from Christ,—held that Christ left Jesus before His final sufferings, and, of course, denied anything like the permanent union of the divine and human natures in His one person. But it would be to go out of our way to enter at any length into the illustration of this subject. I have made these observations, not so much for the purpose of explaining those portions of the New Testament which refer to the early heresies,—for I have merely glanced, and very hurriedly, at a few of them,—but rather for the purpose of showing that a knowledge of the ancient here-

sies is not so entirely destitute of all direct utility as at first sight it might appear to be; and that it has some bearing, though neither very extensive nor very influential, upon the great object of opening up the true and exact meaning of some portions of the word of God.

In asserting the comparative unimportance of a knowledge of the early heresies, I must be understood as referring rather to the detailed exposition of the particular views of individuals as formal categorical doctrines, than to the leading effects and results of the Gnostic system as a whole, or in its main features; for though the historical questions as to what were the precise doctrines held by this heretic and by the other in the first or second century, are not of much importance in themselves, besides being often involved in considerable doubt or uncertainty, I have no doubt that the Gnostic system did exert a considerable influence upon the views and condition of the church in early times, especially in regard to two points,—viz., first, the Trinity and the person of Christ; and secondly, what has been called the ascetic institute or discipline, as including celibacy and monasticism, which soon began to prevail so widely in the church, and which exerted so injurious an influence. The earliest heretics upon the subject of the Trinity and the person of Christ were deeply involved in the principles of the Gnostic system; and even those who maintained sound and orthodox views upon these points, in opposition to the heretics, especially in the third century, gave many indications that they were too much entangled in rash and presumptuous speculations about matters connected with the Divine nature, above the comprehension of the human faculties, and not clearly revealed in Scripture. The great body of the church, indeed, preserved in the main a scriptural orthodoxy upon these important questions; and when, in the fourth and fifth centuries, they came to be fully discussed and decided on in the councils of the church, the creeds and decrees adopted were, on the whole, so accordant with Scripture, as to have secured the general concurrence of subsequent generations.

It was not so, however, with the ascetic institute. Upon this subject the leaven of the Gnostic system seems to have insinuated itself into the great body of the church itself, even when its formal doctrines were openly condemned; and to have gradually