

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

succeeded in exerting a most injurious influence upon the general tone of sentiment and practice. The indirect influence of the Gnostic system, absurd and ridiculous as that system was in its more formal and specific doctrines, has been developed with great ingenuity and sagacity, and in a very impressive way, in Mr Isaac Taylor's very valuable and interesting work entitled "Ancient Christianity," written in opposition to Tractarianism,—a work which, though it contains some rather strong and extreme views, naturally enough arising from the zealous prosecution of one important object, ought to be carefully studied by all who wish to understand the true condition of the church, both in regard to doctrine and practice in that period—viz., the latter half of the fourth and the first half of the fifth centuries—which has been held up by the Tractarians as the great model according to which the church should now be regulated.* Celibacy and monasticism were the cases in which Gnostic principles were most clearly and fully developed among those who adhered to the church; but those who are curious in tracing the progress and connection of doctrines profess to discover traces of its operation in other views and notions that prevailed in early times, and were afterwards fully developed in Popery.

Gnosticism, viewed as a general description of a system, and abstracted from the special absurdities and extravagances which particular individuals mixed up with it, is regarded by many, and apparently with justice, as being traceable to a sort of combination of the Oriental theosophy, the Jewish cabbala, and the Platonic philosophy. And in the course of the second century, and still more in the third, we see traces, on the one hand, of this system of philosophical speculation being modified by the influences of the Christian revelation and its contents; and, on the other hand, of the views that prevailed in the church among those who professed a greater respect for the sacred Scriptures being more and more influenced by the prevailing philosophy. The result was the formation of a class of men in regard to whom it remains to this day a subject for controversial discussion, whether or not they were Christians in any sense,—a question which, in the same sense, might be discussed in regard to many modern philosophers. The question practically assumes this form: Did they, or did they not,

* Ancient Christianity, vol. i., p. 145, *et seq.*

admit the authority of the Christian revelation as the ultimate standard in regard to every subject to which its statements apply? Now, there have been many, both in ancient and in modern times, calling themselves philosophers, who would not have liked to have given a categorical answer to this question, but whose conduct in prosecuting their speculations practically answered it in the negative. It is to be regarded as a mere difference in degree, and as not essentially affecting the rectitude of the relation in which men stood to God's revelation,—whether, first, they openly denied its authority; or, secondly, got rid of, or explained away its statements by processes which are manifestly unfair, and which practically render it of no real utility; or, thirdly, just left it out of view altogether, and carried on their speculations about God, and man's relation to Him, and his duties and destiny, without any reference to what the word of God teaches,—without giving any opinion, or committing themselves upon the subject, of the authority of Scripture.

Each of these three modes of casting off the controlling authority of God's word, and leaving full scope for indulging in their own theories and speculations,—*i.e.*, bringing all subjects, even the highest and most exalted, to be tried by the standard of their own understandings or feelings, their fancies and inclinations,—has prevailed at different times, and in different countries, according to diversities of circumstances and influences. The second mode, which consists substantially in arbitrarily rejecting some parts of Scripture, and in explaining away and perverting the rest, prevailed very generally in the early times of the church; and it has prevailed largely in the past and present generations. It was generally adopted by the Gnostics of the second and third, and by the Manichæans of the third and fourth, centuries. Origen, though remaining connected with the church, came very near to it; and it is just that which has been followed by modern rationalists and neologians upon the Continent. Mosheim* gives the following description of the way in which the Gnostics and Manichæans dealt with the books of Scripture,—and it is impossible to read it without being struck with the remarkable and thorough

* *Commentarii*, pp. 748-9. *Vide* Neander, vol. ii., p. 163 of Rose's translation, and pp. 225-6 of Torrey's Norton's Evidence of the Genuineness of the Gospels, vol. iii., pp. 183-213; Part III., c. x.: "Of the manner in which the Gnostics reconciled their doctrines with Christianity." 1st Ed.

similarity of their views and conduct in this matter to those of modern German rationalists:—"Non negabant quidem in plerisque Novi Testamenti libris quædam esse divina et a Christo, ejusque apostolis profecta: verum his intertexta esse plurima falsa contendebant et prorsus impia: ex quo cogebant, ea tantum in libris N. T. fide digna esse, quæ Manichæi, magistri sui, . . . sententiis congruerent . . . Interdum enim dare videntur, immo dant, divinæ originis hæc esse Evangelia: sed quod dant, statim ipsi tollunt et evertunt. Addunt enim, ea misere a dolosis et mendacibus viris corrupta, interpolata, Judaicis fabulis aucta et amplificata esse. Ex quo sequitur; ea, uti nunc sese habent, nullius esse pretii et utilitatis. . . . Aliis vero locis negant disertissime, ea Christi Apostolos auctores habere aut vel a Christo vel ab Apostolis, quorum nomina præ se ferunt, scripta esse: contra pugnant auctores eorum homines fuisse semi-Judæos, credulos, mendaces."*

*"They did not deny that in most of the books of the New Testament there were some things that were divine, and that came from Christ and His apostles; but they contended that there were mixed up with these many things that were false and impious; whence they inferred that those things only in the N. T. were worthy of credit which agreed with the opinions of their master Manichæus;" and again, "Sometimes they seem to grant, nay, they do grant, that these gospels are of divine origin; but what they grant they immediately again withdraw and overturn. For they add that they have been miserably corrupted and interpolated by deceitful and mendacious men, and stuffed with Jewish fables; whence it follows that, as we now have them, they are of no value or utility . . . But in other passages they expressly deny that these books have the apostles of Christ for their authors, or that they were written either by Christ or by the apostles whose names they bear; and, on the contrary, maintain that their authors were half Jews, credulous and deceitful."

Neander gives a similar account of their principles and conduct in this respect:—"In respect to the views of the Manichæans with regard to the sources of religious knowledge, they

considered the revelations of the Paraclete, or Mani, as the highest and only infallible authority, whereby everything was to be judged. They went on the principle, that Mani's doctrine embraced the absolute truths which enlighten the reason;—whatever did not accord with them was contrary to reason, wherever it might be found. They received in part, it is true, the Scriptures of the New Testament. But judging them by that standard principle which we have mentioned, they indulged in the most arbitrary criticism in applying them to points of doctrine or ethics. Sometimes they asserted that the original records of the religion had been falsified by various corruptions of the prince of darkness (tares among the wheat); sometimes, that Jesus and His apostles had accommodated themselves to existing Jewish opinions, with a view to prepare men gradually for the reception of the pure truth; sometimes, that the apostles themselves, when they first appeared in the character of teachers, were entangled in various Jewish errors. Hence they concluded that it was first by the teachings of the Paraclete, men were enabled to distinguish the true from the false matter in the New Testament."—Torrey's translation, vol. ii., pp. 225-6.

This is a most accurate full-length portrait of modern German rationalism, from the Manichæans of the fourth and fifth centuries.

The contemplation of the heresies of the early ages, viewed in connection with the heresies of modern times, is well fitted to remind us of the paramount necessity of our settling clearly and definitively, as the most important of all questions, whether God has really given us a positive supernatural revelation of His will; if so, where, or in what book, that revelation is to be found, and whether it was really intended to be understood by men in general through the ordinary natural processes of interpretation, and is fitted to be a standard of faith and practice; and after having settled this, and made our minds familiar with the grounds on which our judgment on these points rests, of making a constant, honest, and unshrinking application, to every subject of thought and practice, of the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

* Consult Ittigius, Buddæus, Lardner, Mosheim, Burton, Neander.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATHERS OF THE SECOND AND THIRD
CENTURIES.

HAVING adverted to the writings of the apostolical fathers, and endeavoured to estimate their real value and importance, especially in so far as concerns the interpretation of Scripture, and the correct exposition of the scheme of divine truth; and having also attempted to explain the application, and to estimate the value of a knowledge of the heresies of the early ages, I propose to give a brief survey of the principal writers of the second and third centuries, chiefly for the purpose of adverting to the influence they exerted, and the measure of practical importance that may still attach to their writings. For this purpose, I intend to collect together, in one view, those facts connected with the principal fathers of these two centuries, however otherwise simple, and however well known, which it seems to me most important to remember, and which are best fitted to furnish an antidote to some of the notions upon this subject which are zealously advocated in the present day.

Sec. I.—Justin Martyr.

The first writer whose works have come down to us, and who had not lived in the time of the apostles or conversed with them, is Justin, who flourished about the middle of the second century, and who, as well as Polycarp, suffered martyrdom in the persecution under M. Aurelius Antoninus, the philosopher, soon after the year 160; and is commonly called Justin Martyr. Various considerations invest Justin as a writer with peculiar interest and importance in the history of the early church. He is the earliest author who has written much that has come down to us, and the first who wrote defences of Christianity against the attacks of Jews and infidels, his defences being the models of the early

apologies, even of Tertullian's, down till Origen's. He is the earliest Christian author of whom we have any remains still extant, that was versant in Pagan literature and philosophy before his conversion to Christianity; and finally, the modern Socinians have assigned to him the honour of inventing, with the assistance of Plato the Greek and Philo the Jew, the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, and of a trinity of persons in the unity of the Godhead. All these various considerations contribute to invest the writings of Justin with no ordinary importance in the history of the early church. There is no reason to doubt that Justin was a genuine convert to the faith of Christ: that he was not merely convinced intellectually of the divine origin of Christianity, but that he had been enabled to believe to the saving of his soul, and, of course, had been born again of the word of God through the belief of the truth.

In regard to Justin,* as in regard to most of the fathers, there are some preliminary questions to be settled as to the genuineness of the works commonly ascribed to him; and these questions are often attended with extreme difficulty. It is certain that several works which Justin wrote have perished; and of the pieces extant, which have been commonly ascribed to him, and are usually found in the editions of his works, the substance of what seems to approach nearest to truth and certainty is this—that the two Apologies for Christianity, the one written most probably about the year 140, and the other about the year 160; the Dialogue with Trypho the Jew; the Exhortation to the Greeks; and the fragment of a work upon the Resurrection, are genuine, and that the rest are spurious. There is nothing in the writings of Justin, any more than in those of the apostolical fathers, to give the least countenance to the exalted notions that have sometimes been propounded regarding the authority of the fathers upon exegetical or theological subjects. He does not *profess* to communicate to us any information that had been derived from the apostles in addition to what has been conveyed to us through the channel of the sacred Scriptures. He is assuredly no safe guide to follow in the interpretation of Scripture; for nothing can be more certain than that, in his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, in which he discusses fully the argument from prophecy for the Messiahship of Jesus, he has given many interpretations and appli-

* Euseb., Lib. iv., c. 18.

cations of Scripture, and especially of the Old Testament, that are erroneous and ridiculous. He forms, as indeed almost every one of the fathers of the first three centuries does, an important link in the chain of evidence, by which we prove the genuineness and integrity of the books of Scripture, though it is remarkable that he never quotes any of the epistles of Paul, probably to avoid giving offence to the Jews, for whose conversion, being himself a native of Palestine though born of Greek parents, he chiefly laboured, and who were strongly prejudiced against the apostle of the Gentiles.

Justin has been often accused, even by others than Socinians, of corrupting the simplicity of the gospel scheme of doctrine by mere philosophical speculations, derived especially from the works of Plato and his followers. The accusation is certainly not altogether destitute of foundation, though it has been often very much exaggerated. Justin unequivocally professes to hold what we would now call the perfection and sufficiency of the Scriptures as the only rule of faith. He professed to take them as his own rule in the formation of his opinions. He no doubt honestly intended to apply this principle in practice; and in the main he succeeded, though it cannot be denied that in some points he was led astray by his respect for the works of the ancient philosophers. He indulges in some rash and unwarranted speculations about angels. He is the author, so far as we have any means of knowing, of the very absurd interpretation, which was adopted generally by the fathers of the first three centuries, of Gen. vi. 4, and which represents the sons of God who went in to the daughters of men as angels, and their progeny as demons, who became the gods of the pagans. The errors of Justin, however, which probably exerted the most injurious influence, and were, perhaps, the clearest indications of a declension from the purity of scriptural theology, through the influence of false philosophy, were the assertion of the Christianity of the more respectable pagans who lived before Christ, and of the independent freedom of the human will—the *ἀντεξούσιον*. Justin was accustomed to say that Socrates and Plato, and such men, were Christians, and were saved; but it is difficult to discern exactly what were the grounds on which he maintained this position, or what he held to be involved in it. It is certain that he thought that Plato and some other ancient philosophers had had access to the Jewish Scriptures, and derived

some of their views from that source. He does not seem to have gone nearly so far as to maintain that men could be saved by following the light of nature, and the dictates of their own religion, whatever it might be. He had some obscure notion of these men having in some way or other acquired some knowledge of Christ; and perhaps all that we can very explicitly charge against him on this head is an unwillingness to submit absolutely to the teaching of Scripture, to be contented with what God has been pleased to reveal as to the general rules that ordinarily regulate His procedure, and to leave everything else connected with the ultimate destiny of men in the hands of their righteous Judge. It is right that we should give all men all due credit for any valuable or useful qualities which they may have possessed, or for any services which in any department they have rendered to their fellow-men; but when we speak of their relation to God, and of their eternal destiny, we must take care that our views be regulated by God's own revealed will, and not by merely personal feelings or worldly influences; and that we do not under-estimate the importance and necessity, in its bearing upon men's eternal welfare, of *that* knowledge of Himself, of His character, and His plans, which He has been pleased to communicate to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The other error about free will seems more serious; but it is not very easy to say what were the precise views of Justin regarding it. It appears chiefly in exposing the fatalism of some of the Gnostic sects, and in defending the doctrine that God had foretold the future good and bad actions of men, from the charge of overthrowing men's responsibility. And although, in defending what all admit to be in substance true upon these points, he makes some statements about the freedom of the will and the grounds of human responsibility, which, when viewed in the light of modern controversies, Calvinists generally would disapprove of, it is not very certain that he had deliberately adopted any view that was fundamentally erroneous upon these difficult subjects. On the contrary, there is good reason to believe that he continued to hold in substance the scheme of doctrine clearly taught in the writings of the apostles, and universally assumed or asserted in those of the apostolical fathers; though it is not to be denied that, both in regard to this subject of free will, and in regard to the superior sanctity of a life of celibacy, we find in him some traces of that

deviation from scriptural soundness which continued from this time to increase and extend, and exerted subsequently so injurious an influence both on the doctrine and practice of religion. And, of course, the early occurrence of such errors is fitted to show us, that there are no uninspired men, however ancient, however favourable their position may have been, and however deserving they may be of respect and esteem, whom we should follow as guides or oracles.

One of the most interesting and important passages in the works of Justin, is that in which he gives a somewhat detailed account of the ordinary mode of conducting the public worship of the church in his time; an account which proves the non-existence of a liturgy at that period, and presents a picture of Christian worship very different in its simplicity from that which has been usually exhibited by Popish and Prelatic churches.

In regard to the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ, it has been proved that Justin, though, in common with almost all the fathers who flourished before the great Arian controversy in the fourth century, he has made use of some expressions which are very liable to be misunderstood, and stand in need of a favourable interpretation, held in substance the common orthodox doctrine upon this subject; and that he held it upon the authority of Scripture, as a doctrine revealed by God in His word, though he has introduced some Platonic phraseology, and indulged in some unwarranted speculations in trying to explain and illustrate it. Satisfactory evidence has also been produced from the works of Justin, to prove that the doctrine of the divinity of Christ was known and generally received in the church before he undertook the defence of Christianity, and that this fact was well known to the pagans, who were accustomed to adduce it as a charge against Christians, that they believed that a man who had been crucified was God.*

I may mention, before leaving Justin, as a specimen of the difficulty of understanding precisely what was the doctrine of the fathers, and the real import of their statements, that near the end of his first apology there is a short passage about the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, which the Papists have adduced as a proof that

* *Vide* Wilson's Illustration of the method of explaining the New Testament by the early opinions of Jews and Christians concerning Christ, c. xxii., p. 351, and c. xxiii., p. 372.

he held the doctrine of transubstantiation,—the Lutherans, as a proof that he held the doctrine of consubstantiation,—and the generality of Protestants, as a proof that he held neither the one nor the other. An examination of the passage is sufficient, I think, to prove that there is room for an honest difference of opinion as to what Justin's doctrine upon the point really was; and that it is not very easy to say precisely what he held regarding it. There is no difficulty, indeed, in establishing, notwithstanding the obscurity of this passage, the general position, that neither transubstantiation nor consubstantiation was known in the church till long after Justin's time; but the passage certainly affords evidence of what is unquestionably true, viz., that the fathers began very early to talk about the subject of the sacraments in an exalted, mysterious, and unintelligible style, which was very far removed from the simplicity of Scripture, and which issued at length in that monstrous system of absurd and impious extravagance in regard to these ordinances which soon overspread the church, which contributed so largely to the destruction of true religion, and which is still exerting in many quarters its baneful influence.*

Sec. II.—Irenæus.

Irenæus is the next author of eminence whose works have come down to us. He was a disciple of Polycarp, came from the East, settled in France, and became Bishop of Lyons; for in his time there was some distinction between bishops and presbyters, though it was very unlike the modern one, and though he continues, as I formerly had occasion to mention, to use the words in a great measure indiscriminately. He lived till the very end of the second or the beginning of the third century. We have already had occasion to mention that his principal work, which has come down to us, is a full account and confutation of the heresies that had been broached since the introduction of Christianity; and its real value must in a great measure depend upon the importance of acquiring a knowledge of these heresies—a topic which we have already endeavoured to explain. In confuting these heresies, how-

* *Sculteti Medulla Theologiæ Patrum*, P. i., pp. 55-6. Ittigius, *Hist. Eccles.*, sæc. ii., c. iii., sec. iv., p. 210. Semisch on Justin, vol. ii., p. 339. | On Justin generally, Semisch, *Biblical Cabinet*, vols. xli. and xlii., and Bp. Kaye's account of the writings and opinions of Justin Martyr.

ever, Irenæus has made a most abundant use of Scripture; and indeed it has been calculated, that he has quoted or referred to about nine hundred texts, and his work thus forms an important link in the chain of evidence for the authenticity and integrity of the canonical books. It is true, however, of him, as of the rest, that his writings afford us very little assistance in ascertaining and establishing the true meaning of any portion of Scripture, except, as formerly explained, indirectly, through the information they afford as to the precise nature of the heresies to which the apostles referred; and that they contain abundant proof that he could not by any means be safely followed as an expositor of Scripture. Although there are no plausible grounds for charging Irenæus with being led into error by a love of philosophical speculation, or by a predilection for heathen literature, as has been alleged in regard to Justin Martyr; and although there is no reason to doubt that he was a man of true piety, yet he seems to have deviated farther from scriptural doctrine, and to have embraced a larger number of erroneous opinions than Justin did; thus illustrating the almost regularly progressive corruption of the church. He was, like Justin, a believer in the doctrine of the Trinity, though, like him too, he has made some statements which have afforded a handle to the Arians. He has, more explicitly than Justin, asserted the doctrine of free will (*ἀντεξούσιον*), in what would now be called an Arminian or Pelagian sense; while he has also very explicitly contradicted himself upon this subject—*i. e.*, he has laid down scriptural or evangelical principles which oppose it—thus apparently indicating that the great principles of evangelical truth which the inspired apostles taught, were still generally retained in the church, though they were beginning to be somewhat obscured and corrupted; and that the corruption was coming in at that point, or in connection with that topic, which has usually furnished one of the most ready and plausible handles to men whose perception of divine things was weak and feeble, and who have, in consequence, been the great corrupters of scriptural doctrine—*viz.*, the alleged natural power of man, as he is, to do the will of God. Irenæus, like Justin, indulged in some unwarranted speculations about angels, and the state of the souls of men after death; and he has put forth some unintelligible absurdities in the way of comparing Eve, the mother of us all, with Mary, the mother of our Lord, which have afforded to Papists a plausible ground for

alleging that he ascribed to Mary a share in the salvation of sinners, and in consequence thought her entitled to a measure of honour and worship which the Scripture certainly does not sanction.

Irenæus cannot be said, any more than any of the fathers who preceded him, to have conveyed to us any valuable information as to what the apostles taught or ordained, in addition to what is taught or ordained in the canonical Scriptures. He does indeed *profess*, upon several occasions, to communicate to us some information which he had received by oral tradition from the apostles; but it so happens providentially, that in the instances in which he does this most explicitly and most confidently, he alleges in one case what clearly *contradicts* Scripture, and in another what is too absurd to be believed upon almost any testimony. Some Gnostics had asserted that Christ's public ministry lasted only one year. Irenæus is answering this, and after adducing many foolish reasons to prove *à priori* that Christ must have lived longer on earth than thirty years,—such as that He came to save men of all ages, and must therefore have passed through old age as well as childhood,—distinctly avers* that Christ lived on earth till He was nearly fifty years of age, and refers, in proof of this, first to the gospel, and then to the testimony of all the elders who conversed with John, the disciple of our Lord,—and who declared that John told them this; and he adds, that these men had not only seen John, but also others of the apostles, who had told them the same thing. Notwithstanding this somewhat imposing array of hearsay evidence, I am not aware that any of the more respectable worshippers of tradition has adopted Irenæus' opinion as to the duration of our Saviour's sojourn on earth, which the gospel history so clearly refutes.

In the other case, he gives a very childish and ridiculous description of the abundance of luxuries, and of the fertility of the soil, especially in producing grapes and wine, to be enjoyed in the days of the millennium,—a description which he alleges had been handed down from the mouth of our Lord Himself. Of course no one now believes that our Lord or His apostles ever said what Irenæus ascribed to them on this subject; yet he evidently believed that they did. Irenæus was a man quite equal

* Lib. ii., c. 22.

to the generality of the fathers of the first three centuries in point of good principle and good sense; and these facts therefore show, not only how little reliance is to be placed upon any allegations of theirs as to the transmission of doctrines or appointments of the apostles by oral tradition, but also more generally, how unsafe and uncertain a medium of transmission oral tradition is.

The same lesson is taught us very clearly and impressively by the circumstances connected with a discussion which broke out more than once in the course of the second century, in which Irenæus was concerned, and which may be said to have been the first controversy which agitated the church. I refer to the well-known dispute as to the day on which Easter should be kept, in which, on both sides, there was an appeal to the authority of the apostles conveyed by tradition. We find in the book of the Acts plain proofs that the apostles, and the Jewish converts generally, along with other Jewish rites, observed the passover, which is translated (Acts xii. 4) *unfairly Easter*. The keeping of the passover as such, does not seem to have continued after the destruction of Jerusalem, except by the Judaizing sects, the Ebionites and the Nazarenes; but instead of it, or as a sort of substitute for it, there seems to have been gradually introduced the practice of commemorating the event of the institution of the Lord's Supper,—the original institution of this ordinance being identical in point of time with our Lord's last observance of the passover, and the ordinance itself having, in the Christian church, a place and a purpose analogous to those of the passover in the Jewish church. This again seems to have led to the commemoration of our Saviour's resurrection, the great direct subject of the apostolic testimony; and then the commemoration of the institution of the Lord's Supper, identical in point of time with the Jewish passover, in the keeping of which the whole of these days of commemoration manifestly originated, seems to have been transferred to the day of His death, which was still regarded as the passover. It has always been, and indeed still is, a subject of controversial discussion, whether the day on which our Saviour kept the passover and instituted the Lord's Supper, or the following day, on which He was crucified, was the right legal day for observing the passover on that occasion; in other words, whether the Thursday or the Friday of that week was the 14th day of the first month. Many have contended that our Lord, on

that occasion, anticipated by one day the ordinary time for observing it; and that the Friday, the day of His crucifixion, was that on which, according to the law, it ought to have been observed.

At any rate, the 14th of the first month was that on which, in the primitive church, first the Jewish passover as such, then, as coming in its place, the commemoration of the institution of the Lord's Supper, and afterwards the commemoration of His death, was celebrated; and then, of course, the anniversary of His resurrection would fall to be celebrated on the third day thereafter. We find that, about the middle of the second century, a difference obtained in the practice of different churches as to the day on which the commemoration of the resurrection should be celebrated, and that a dispute arose concerning it. From the very imperfect notices which we have of this affair, there is some difficulty in determining precisely what were the points involved in the discussion; and Mosheim has investigated this topic very fully and minutely.*

But the main point of dispute was this, whether the anniversary of our Saviour's death and resurrection should be celebrated upon the 14th day of the first month, and the third day thereafter respectively, on whatever day of the *week* these might fall,—or should be celebrated upon the Friday and the following Lord's day, whatever day of the *month* they might fall upon. The churches in Asia generally adopted the former rule, and the churches of the West the latter. Thus stood matters about the middle of the second century, when some discussion arose concerning the accuracy of the different practices. About that time, Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, came to Rome and discussed the matter with Anicetus, bishop of that city. It could scarcely be alleged that there was anything in Scripture to warrant the observance of such anniversary days in the Christian church, or to determine the time of their observance; and the appeal accordingly was to the alleged *practice* of the apostles,—the Asiatics claiming in support of their rule the practice of the apostles John and Philip, and the Western churches that of Peter and Paul. Polycarp and Anicetus could not come to an agreement upon the question; but as there was still a large measure of brotherly love and forbearance among the churches, and no

* Commentarii, p. 435, *et seq.*

such sense as afterwards obtained of the importance and necessity of perfect uniformity in all outward rites and ceremonies; and as Anicetus, though Bishop of Rome, had no more idea that he was entitled to rule the universal church than Peter had that this prerogative was vested in him, they separated on friendly terms after uniting together in celebrating the Lord's Supper, at which Polycarp presided.

The diversity of practice continued, and about the end of the century gave rise to another dispute, involving the same principles and the same appeals to apostolic practice, but conducted with greater vehemence. Victor, Bishop of Rome, seems to have insisted upon the Eastern churches changing their practice, and agreeing to commemorate Christ's resurrection upon the Lord's day, on whatever day of the month it might fall; and, of course, regulating the keeping of any other days observed about that season of the year by the fixing of what was afterwards called Easter Sunday instead of the 14th day of the month. The Asiatic churches disregarded his interference; and Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, wrote a letter to him in their name, part of which is preserved in Eusebius,* in which, after appealing to the practice of the apostles John and Philip, and of the bishops who had succeeded them, he bases their refusal to adopt the Western practice upon no less sacred a principle than the duty of obeying God rather than men. Victor, who seems to have exhibited in embryo the spirit of pride and usurpation which ultimately produced the full-blown Papacy,—though he did not venture to put forth a claim to supremacy over the church,—issued, in consequence, a sentence of excommunication against the Eastern churches; and here it was that Irenæus became connected with the controversy. Though an Asiatic by birth, and a disciple of Polycarp, he agreed with the Western church, in which he was now settled, about the celebration of Easter; but he wholly disapproved of the arbitrary and insolent conduct of Victor, and addressed to him a letter of earnest remonstrance upon the subject, which is also preserved,† and is one of the most interesting documents that have come down to us bearing upon the history of the second century. It is from this letter that we learn of Polycarp's visit to Rome, and of the fraternal intercourse between him and

* Lib. v., c. 24.

† Lib. v., c. 24.

Anicetus notwithstanding their difference of opinion and practice upon the subject; and the principle object of the letter is to urge Victor to follow the example of forbearance upon this point which his predecessors had set him. As it is certain that Victor's sentence of excommunication was wholly disregarded by the Asiatic churches and by the church in general,—as it was never cancelled,—and as yet the ecclesiastical standing of the Asiatic bishops and their successors was not in the least affected by it,—some Roman Catholic writers, seeing the inauspicious bearing of this fact upon the allegation that the Bishops of Rome have always been recognised as the vicars of Christ and the sources and centres of catholic unity, have maintained that Victor merely *threatened* to excommunicate the Eastern churches, but did not carry his threat into execution.

This question is not altogether free from difficulty, and there are both Protestant and Popish writers who have defended the opposite sides. Bellarmine assumes it as incontrovertible, that Victor excommunicated the Asiatic churches, and adduces it as a proof of the then recognised right of the Bishop of Rome to exercise supremacy over the whole church; and the same use had been previously made of it by Pope Nicholas I., who flourished in the ninth century, and dealt largely in excommunications. But later Popish controversialists, shrinking from the difficulty of having no evidence to produce that the supposed sentence of excommunication was either regarded as valid at the time, or was cancelled afterwards, have thought it more expedient, even with the necessity of throwing Pope Nicholas overboard, to maintain, as is done boldly and learnedly by Natalis Alexander, that Victor merely threatened to excommunicate, but did not issue the sentence. Protestants have no temptation to deal unfairly by the historical evidence upon this point; for, whether the sentence of excommunication was issued or not, the history of this whole matter affords abundant proof that the idea that the Bishop of Rome was the vicar of Christ, or that it was necessary to be in communion with him in order to be in communion with the catholic church, was then wholly unknown. But I have no doubt that there is quite sufficient evidence in statements upon the subject found in Eusebius, Socrates, Nicephorus, and Epiphanius,* that Victor did

* Vide La Placette, p. 88.

excommunicate the Asiatic churches, while the only evidence on the other side is the notorious fact, that the sentence was entirely disregarded, and did not take effect; and for a Romanist to found on this as a proof that the excommunication was never issued, is of course a mere *petitio principii*.*

The bearing of these proceedings and discussions connected with the time of celebrating Easter, occurring as they did soon after the middle, and again near the end of the second century, upon the questions of the reliance that may be placed upon alleged apostolical traditions not recorded in Scripture, and the recognition and exercise of the alleged supremacy of the Pope, is too obvious to need to be pointed out; and it gives to them an importance in the history of the church that bears no proportion to the intrinsic importance of the subject, in itself very insignificant, to which they referred. We are to regard the work, and to notice the design, of God in this, as in all the dispensations of His providence; and we cannot but view these transactions as a great beacon erected near the commencement of the church's history, to warn men, first, that no reliance is to be placed upon any pretended apostolical traditions, unless they are contained in the canonical Scriptures; and, secondly, that the Bishops of Rome are neither qualified nor entitled to govern the church of Christ. The warning on *both* points was disregarded; and the consequence was, that the great body of the professing church ultimately made *almost* entire shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, and became involved in thick darkness and deep degradation.

Sec. III.—Clemens Alexandrinus.

We have seen, in considering Justin Martyr and Irenæus, that even in the second century there was, besides much very inaccurate interpretation of particular passages of Scripture, some tendency manifested to deviate from the simplicity of scriptural doctrine as taught by the apostles, though not yet carried out to any considerable extent. Since there is as much of this tendency

* *Vide* Bellarminus, de Rom. Pont., Lib. ii., c. 19; Mornayi *Mysterium Iniquitatis*, p. 16, *et seq.*; Heideggeri *Historia Papatus*, Period. I., sec. xiv.; Dupin, de *Antiquâ Ecclesiæ Discip-* | *linâ*, p. 145; and especially La Placette, *Observationes Historico Ecclesiasticæ*, P. ii., Obs. i., pp. 83-102; Ittigius, H. E., sæc. ii., c. ii., pp. 78-89; Nat. Alexander, sæc. ii., Diss. v., Art. v.

manifested by Irenæus, who was no philosopher, as by Justin, who was well acquainted with the literature and philosophy of paganism, we cannot trace the incipient corruption of doctrine wholly at least to the influence of philosophical speculation, or indeed to any one specific cause, except what is in some sense the proximate cause of all error and heresy,—viz., the want of due subjection to the authority of God's word, and of due diligence and impartiality in the use of the right means of attaining to a correct knowledge of its meaning.

It was at Alexandria, and through the labours and writings of Clemens Alexandrinus, and of Origen, who successively presided over the catechetical school of that city, that the progress of corruption in the interpretation of Scripture, and in the exposition of the scheme of divine truth, was most extensively promoted through the influence of false philosophy. Alexandria was at this period perhaps the most celebrated school of philosophy in the world; and in consequence of the attention there generally given to philosophical pursuits, and the great number of men of cultivated minds and speculative habits, it seems to have been thought proper, even at an early period in the history of the church, to seek to provide for young men instruction in the doctrines of Christianity of a higher kind,—*i.e.*, of a more literary and philosophical description than was usually furnished in other places;—though there is no sufficient ground for the tradition that the school was established by Mark the Evangelist. In adopting and carrying out this general idea, there was nothing that could be reasonably objected to. There is certainly no reason why Christians should not be just as well acquainted with literature and philosophy, according to their means and circumstances, as the generality of those around them; and there is no reason why their literary and philosophical knowledge should not exert some influence upon the way in which they expound and defend the truths of revelation. The danger arises only from giving to philosophy a place and influence to which it has no well-founded claim, and especially from employing it in such a way as implies, or leads to, a casting down of the word of God from the place of authority, which it ought ever to occupy.* Men who are familiar with philosophical discussions, and who can speculate

* *Vide* Neander's *Hist. of the Christ.* | vol. i., pp. 134-146, Cunningham's
Rel., vol. ii., pp. 195-234, and pp. | translation.
372-416, Rose's translation; Gieseler, |

upon many topics connected with God, and man's duty and destiny, are very apt to think that they have a means of acquiring certain knowledge of these subjects, which is not open to mere readers of the Bible; they are very apt to over-estimate their privileges in this respect, to imagine that they do not need to restrict themselves to the constant application of the same standard as ordinary men; and at length they too often come to place their own speculations in the position of modifying at least, if not superseding, the informations of Scripture. This was what took place at Alexandria in the course of the third century; and this is what, under a variety of aspects, has been exhibited more or less extensively at all times when practical religion was low, and when literature and philosophy were flourishing. Christianity certainly does not discourage men from bringing all the powers of their minds to bear upon what may be called a philosophical examination of all the objects that come under their cognizance, including equally the material universe, and human beings, individually and collectively. The evils which literature and science may have inflicted upon the cause of true religion are to be prevented or cured, not by prohibiting and abandoning literary and philosophical pursuits, but by keeping them in their proper place, and especially by steadily and faithfully applying the great truths that the Bible is the word of God; that all that it contains is true; that it is the only source whence full and *certain* knowledge concerning God, concerning man's relation to his Maker, and his duty and destiny, can be derived. So long as these truths are held and *faithfully acted upon*, literature and philosophy will do no harm to religion; and if it be alleged that an addiction to philosophical pursuits has a *tendency* to prejudice men against these truths, or to prevent them from fully following them out, even when they professedly admit them, we must deny that this tendency is inherent, and still more, that it is irresistible, and maintain that the temptation (for it is nothing more) may be, and should be, guarded against.

The evils to which we have referred were extensively manifested in the school of Alexandria; and Clement and Origen proved great corrupters of the word of God, and of the system of divine truth, and did permanent and extensive injury to the church of Christ. They themselves imbibed largely the principles of the eclectic or neo-Platonic philosophy,—a combination of the doctrines

of Plato with the Oriental theosophy, as it is commonly called; *i.e.*, in other words, they adopted on philosophical grounds views upon many points inconsistent with the doctrines of Scripture, and then sought to accommodate the Scriptures to their preconceived opinions, in place of seeking honestly and impartially for the true meaning of Scripture, and regulating their whole system by that standard. The great problem which the more respectable of the ancient philosophers proposed to themselves was, to show how human nature might be improved and brought to a state of perfection; and this they often did in the way of explaining how a perfect man—a good and wise man—might be formed. Clement took up this idea, and followed it out in its different stages or departments, in the three principal works of his which have come down to our times. He displays, undoubtedly, in these works, a good deal of talent and extensive learning. He has, indeed, presented to us some interesting information upon topics connected with the literature and philosophy of heathen antiquity, which is not now to be learned from any other source; though it may be said with truth that he manifests fully as accurate an acquaintance with profane as with sacred literature. His first work is addressed to the heathen, and is called "*Λογος Προτρεπτικος*,"—a hortatory address; and, being directed to the object of showing that, in order to men being truly wise and good, they must renounce heathenism and embrace Christianity, and that there are quite sufficient grounds why they should do so, it partakes very much of the general character of the apologies written by some of the other fathers of the second or third centuries. Its principal peculiarity is that, while exposing fully and eloquently the heathen mythology and religious worship, it is occupied to some extent in adducing the testimonies of heathen philosophers in favour of some of the great principles of natural religion, which are also embodied in the Christian revelation.* This was very natural in Clement's situation, called as he was to recommend Christianity to men of education, who were versant in the literature and philosophy of heathen antiquity; and there was nothing in itself objectionable about it. There is certainly nothing wrong in noticing the testimonies of ancient philosophers or legislators, so far as they go, in favour of the great principles of natural religion;

* There is something similar in Justin, who especially quotes the poets.

and it is quite obvious how they may be legitimately applied to good and useful purposes. But there is too much reason to fear that, in Clement's case, it indicated too much of a disposition to make advances towards the adherents of the old religions, and to accommodate Christianity, in some measure, to their views and principles. It is, indeed, when viewed in connection with other parts of Clement's system, something not unlike the germ of the notion which has been advocated by some latitudinarian writers of modern times, who have represented Christianity as little else than a more accurate, complete, and authoritative republication of the law or religion of nature.

His second work is called "*Παιδαγωγός*," and professes to unfold the instruction necessary for those who have been led to embrace Christianity, but who are still only in the position of catechumens,—only in the course of preparation for the ordinance of baptism; and in this part there comes out very clearly the lamentable deficiency of Clement's system, both in respect to doctrine and duty. He represents Christ as the "*Pædagogus*,"—the Great Teacher,—but he dwells much more upon the circumstances and manner of His teaching, than upon the matter or substance of it. And while he thus gives a very partial and defective view of Christ's office as a prophet, he almost wholly omits any reference to His offices as a priest and a king. And, thereafter, the greater part of the work is occupied, not with the exposition of truth or doctrine, but with practical directions for the regulation of conduct. The concluding work in the series is entitled "*Στρωματα*," and is devoted to the object of bringing out the character of the confirmed believer—the *γνωστικός*, or wise man, as Clement calls him; and here, too, as in the former work, we have to notice the deplorable deficiency of Clement's system, both of doctrine and duty. His scheme of doctrine is very meagre and latitudinarian, and his system of morality is characterized by very considerable errors and extravagances; and while great prominence is given to many points that are intrinsically insignificant and merely external, there is comparatively little said about those great essential internal principles of right action, on which the inspired writers principally insist. In regard to doctrine, there is no reason to suspect Clement of unsoundness upon the subject of the Trinity; but then it must be remembered that that truth has been always held in soundness so far as intellectual profession goes,

though retained in unrighteousness so far as its proper practical application is concerned, even in the apostate Church of Rome; and that, therefore, however fundamentally important it is in itself, and however well adapted to contribute in its practical applications to the spiritual nourishment and growth in grace of the most advanced believer, a profession of it is no very stringent *test* of men's proficiency either in the faith or in the experience of divine truth.

The other peculiar and fundamental doctrines of the gospel seem to have been less clearly and firmly held by Clement than by Justin and Irenæus; and the traces of deviation from sound doctrine which we had occasion to notice in them are somewhat more fully developed in him. He, more unequivocally than they, asserts the doctrine of free will in a sense which Calvinists in general would condemn. It cannot indeed be said that he denies or overturns the doctrines of grace; and he asserts explicitly, in opposition to some heretics of the period, that faith is not natural—*i.e.*, is not the product of the unaided efforts of men's natural powers—but is something supernatural and divine. Still it seems pretty plain that he had very inadequate views of what was necessary, and of what has been and is done on God's part, in order to the justification and sanctification of sinners; and ascribed to men's own powers a greater amount of influence in acquiring saving knowledge, and attaining to wisdom and righteousness,—in becoming first *πιστοί*, and then *γνωστικοί*,—than either Scripture or experience sanctions. Nay, his views upon this subject were so erroneous and confused, that on one occasion he goes so far as to say, that Christ assumed human nature, and came into the world, in order to show men that their own powers were sufficient to obey the will of God,*—a statement very much resembling the Socinianism or latitudinarianism of modern times, and which scarcely admits of any such explanation or modification as to consist with the possibility of believing that its author rightly understood and apprehended the fundamental principles of the gospel. It is but too evident that Clement, in his anxiety to show to the cultivated and literary youth of Alexandria how, by embracing Christianity, they might become wise and good, accommodated to their preconceived notions the system which he enforced upon

* Sculteti Medulla, p. 152.

them, and represented it as leaving to themselves a larger share of the capacity of producing the desired result than was at all consistent with the reality of the case, as represented to us in Scripture.

Besides this tendency to leave out of view the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and to exalt the natural powers and capacities of man in *virtual* opposition at least to the grace of the gospel, another evil result that flowed from Clement's addiction to philosophical pursuits, and his desire to conciliate men of a similar character, was, that he applied to Christianity the principle or device, common among the old philosophers, of an exoteric and an esoteric doctrine,—the one adapted to beginners, and the other to the more advanced or initiated; and that, in correspondence with this, he advocated the existence of a higher and lower standard of duty as well as knowledge,—the lower binding upon all, and the higher to be applied only to some, and, of course, implying no ordinary share of merit on the part of those who attained it. Both these ideas are substantially implied in the distinction which Clement elaborates between *πίστις* and *γνώσις*. He seems to have been the first among the Christian teachers who gave any countenance to these distinctions, and must therefore be regarded as, to a large extent, responsible for the mischief wrought by them upon the mode in which both doctrine and duty were afterwards inculcated in the church. An allegorizing perversion of Scripture had been practised before this time by Christian writers; but to Clement attaches the responsibility of not only practising it, but of laying it down formally and explicitly, as a right and proper rule for the interpretation of Scripture.

Clement may be regarded as the earliest writer who has discussed in detail the subject of Christian morality; for the epistle to Zenas and Serenus, ascribed to Justin Martyr, is of somewhat dubious origin, though its general character corresponds well enough with the interval between Clement and the apostolical fathers, *i.e.*, with the period at which Justin lived. We have not, in any of the writings of the apostolic fathers, anything like a scheme or system of moral duty. We find in their writings nothing in this department but an earnest and affectionate pressing of the plain precepts of Scripture. Matters, however, were changed, and changed for the worse, before the end of the second century, when Clement wrote. His object and plan naturally

led him to describe pretty fully the system of Christian morality, and to enter into the details of ordinary duty; and it is melancholy to notice what a grievous declension there is from the scriptural mode of treating of this subject. He exhibits plain traces of the operation at once of what have been called the ascetic and the mystic systems of morality. On the one hand, he prohibits indulgences which the Scriptures do not condemn (as second marriages); and, on the other hand, he releases men from obligations which the Scriptures impose,—as, for example, when he denies the necessity for regular times and seasons for prayer and religious exercises, upon the ground that men ought *always* to cultivate a devotional spirit. He maintains, in flat contradiction to Scripture, that Christ was a mere Stoic, who was wholly exempted from, or raised above, all the ordinary feelings and affections of the human heart, and under this fictitious aspect holds Him up as a model for Christians to imitate. One of the worst features of his system of morality is, that his instructions manifest a great neglect of the state of the heart and the affections, and are to a large extent composed of minute rules and directions about external and very trivial things. As he enters with much minuteness of detail into the subjects of eating, drinking, furniture, feasts, perfumes, chaplets, baths, female ornaments, etc., he furnishes some curious enough information about the domestic manners and customs of the period when he lived, while he does not convey a very high idea of the state of morality among the professing Christians of that age and country; and sets before us little or nothing that is at all fitted to promote the cause of genuine Christian holiness of heart and life.

Such was the most eminent and influential Christian teacher of the end of the second, and beginning of the third, century, whose works have come down to us; and when we see what they contain, and what are their general character and tendency, we cannot but be impressed with the conviction that the church had already greatly degenerated, both in doctrine and in character. It is not surprising, and indeed rather creditable to the Church of Rome, that it has been made a matter of discussion among some of her writers whether Clement ever was canonized, *i.e.*, whether he be legally entitled to the designation of a saint, and should in consequence be invoked and supplicated to intercede with God on our behalf. It is rather creditable that doubts