

I R E N Æ U S :

A LEAF OF PRIMITIVE CHURCH HISTORY  
CORRECTED AND RE-WRITTEN.

εἶματα λυγρὰ φέρων σὺν Ἀρίωνι κυανοχάτῃ.

*Homeric Thebais.*



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## P R E F A C E.

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IRENÆUS is one of those names that are generally regarded by writers on the history of the primitive Christian Church as representing real men, who flourished during the first and second centuries of the supposed existence of that Church, at the dates assigned to them by Eusebius. Therefore, the name "Irenæus" may be taken as a fair specimen of the names used by Eusebius to designate the characters that figure in that supposed history during those two centuries.

We know the names of about one hundred and four writings, consisting of gospels, epistles, revelations, acts, etc.—in addition to those contained in our New Testament—which contributed to the formation of the doctrines and narratives relating to the history of the primitive Christian Church. Of these about thirty are extant. These two circumstances are embarrassing. They place us in a position analogous to that of those geographers who tried to explain how the American continent and the islands in the South Pacific Ocean were peopled before those geographers had the least idea how extensively the crust of the earth has been depressed and upheaved. In like manner, Irenæus is supposed to quote from our New Testament, and to have been bishop of Lyons, in Gaul, about A.D. 180.

*Nativitas Mariæ, 1876.*



## E I P H N A I O S .

SO lately as the time of Eusebius, A.D. 315 ("Ecclesiastical History," iv. 14), the first quotation occurs from an extant treatise bearing two titles—namely, "Against Heresies," and "A Refutation and Subversion of Knowledge falsely so Called." This treatise is generally referred to under the shorter title. It is a tract directed chiefly against the Gnostics. The original Greek of it is lost, with the exception of some fragments; but it exists in a half barbarous Latin version. It is attributed to some person called *Eirenaïos*. This word in the Greek language signifies "peaceful." But in connection with the treatise "Against Heresies," whether that word, *Eirenaïos*, or *Irenaeus*, was intended to indicate a real human being, or a mythical personage, whose name, as well as treatise, was supposed to be suitable to the allaying of sectarian discord, is a question to which it is exceedingly difficult to give an answer resting on well-grounded probability.

Among the ancient Jews and Greeks, and among the primitive Christians, there was a propensity to attribute modern writings to ancient authors. In our day this propensity would be regarded as a piece of dishonesty, and its production would be regarded as a literary forgery, and a fit subject for moral disapprobation. But the science of morality is a growth, like that of mathematics, or any other science. This propensity was not regarded as immoral in those ancient times. It was sometimes regarded as an act of

becoming modesty, and those writers, whom we would consider forgers, were even eulogised for having renounced the fame that was their own, and for having attributed their works to the master mind that they revered.

Regarding the prevalence of this propensity among the primitive Christians, the reader will find the proofs of it very fully set forth in "A Treatise on the Right Use of the Fathers," by John Daillé, A.D. 1631, minister of the gospel in the Reformed Church of Paris. Of course, a considerable portion of M. Daillé's treatise is written under the misconception that there is any valid evidence to prove that we are at present in possession of any Christian Scriptures written before A.D. 150. But in the third chapter of his treatise he proves clearly "that those writings which bear the names of the ancient Fathers are not all really such, but a great portion of them supposititious and forged, either long since or at later periods." He says—"It is the complaint of the greatest part of the Fathers that the heretics, to give their own dreams the greater authority, promulgated them under the names of some of the most eminent writers in the Church, and even of the Apostles themselves. . . . But," M. Daillé says, "supposing that this juggling deception of the heretics may have very much corrupted the old books, yet, notwithstanding, had we no other spurious pieces than what had been forged by them, it would be no very hard matter to distinguish the true from the false. But that which renders the evil almost irremediable is that, even in the Church itself, this kind of forgery has both been very common and very ancient. I impute a great part of the cause of this mischief to those men who, before the invention of printing, were the transcribers and copiers of manuscripts : of whose negligence and boldness in the corrupting of books St Hierome very much complained even in his time. 'They write,' saith

he, 'not what they find, but what they understand ; and, whilst they endeavour to correct other men's errors, they show their own.' . . . All the blame, however, is not to be laid upon the transcribers only in this particular : the authors themselves have contributed very much to the promoting of this kind of imposture ; for there have been found *in all ages* some so sottishly ambitious, and so desirous, at all events, to have their conceptions published to the world, that, finding they should never be able to please and get applause abroad of themselves, they have issued their conceptions under the name of some of the Fathers, choosing rather to see them received and honoured under this false guise than neglected and slighted under their own real name. These men, according as their several abilities have been, have imitated the style and sentiments of the Fathers either more or less happily, and have boldly presented these productions of their own brain to the world under their names. The world, of which the greatest part has always been the least reflecting, have very readily collected, preserved, and cherished these fictitious productions, and has by degrees filled all their libraries with them. Others have been induced to adopt the same artifice, not out of ambition, but some other irregular fancy ; as those men have done, who, having a particular affection either to such a person or to such an opinion, have undertaken to write of the same, under the name of some author of good esteem and reputation with the world to make it pass the more currently abroad : exactly as that priest did (Hierome, 'De Script. Eccl.,' tom. i. p. 350 ; *ex* Tertullian, lib. 'De Baptisma,' cap. 17), who published a book entitled 'The Acts of St Paul and of Tecla,' and, being convicted of being the author of it, he plainly confessed that the love that he bare to St Paul was the only cause that incited him to do it." A considerable number of other Christian forgeries are

specified and proved in the same chapter; and M. Daillé concludes that chapter with an inference of great weight, and well worthy of the reader's most serious consideration, namely:—“Our conclusion, therefore, must be that, if any one shall desire to know what the sense and judgment of the primitive Church have been as regards our present controversies, it will be first in a manner necessary for him, as it is difficult, to find out exactly both the name and the age of each of these several authors.”

From this source—namely, the existence “in all ages” of “some so sottishly ambitious,” as described by M. Daillé—it is that there arose that numerous array of treatises, poems, fables, hymns, romances, &c., &c., attributed to Orpheus, Linus, Homer, Solomon, Moses, Hesiod, David, John, Pythagoras, Thomas, Samuel, Paul, Joshua, Phalaris, Clement, Peter, &c., &c. Most of these are considered spurious in the present day, although it is not very easy to perceive why these writings are to be considered spurious rather than the whole collection of writings contained in our Bible, every one of which is spurious. All we know upon this subject is that, if it were shown that Homer asserted that “black is white,” all Christendom would regard it as an absurdity; and if it were shown that Jesus Christ asserted the selfsame proposition all Christendom would receive it as a sacred truth.

So we must deal with the treatise “Against Heresies” just as a skilful critical scholar would deal with our “Iliad” and “Odyssey.” “We” (Paley's Introduction to our “Iliad,” p. xiv.) “must deal with the Homeric poems as a geologist deals with a rock: he takes it as a fact and a material existence, and he knows it must have had *some* physical origin. All he can find out respecting it must be derived from internal evidence. Now, internal evidence applied to the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Odyssey,’ may be said to be both



for and against a remote antiquity." Here there is a difference between the two cases; for internal evidence, applied to the treatise "Against Heresies," is against a remote antiquity entirely.

"AGAINST HERESIES."

With the exception of the epistle ascribed to the mythical apostle Paul, and addressed "Philemon," the epistles of "James," "Jude," and "3d John;" the treatise "Against Heresies" shews an acquaintance with the writings contained in our New Testament. *But it also shows a knowledge of other books which the writer regarded as being of equal authority.* Thus, quoting from Hermas' "Shepherd," bk. ii. commandment 1, the writer says, "Truly, then, *that Scripture* declared which says, 'First of all believe that there is one God, who has established all things, and completed them, and having caused that from what had not any beginning, all things should come into existence.'"

Again, referring to an incident contained in the extant gospel according to Nicodemus, the writer of the treatise "Against Heresies," bk. iv. ch. xxvii., § 2, says, "the Lord descended into the regions beneath the earth, preaching His advent there also, and (declaring) the remission of sins received by those who believe in Him. Now all those believed in Him who had hope towards Him, that is, those who proclaimed His advent and submitted to His dispensations, the righteous men, the prophets, and the patriarchs, to whom He remitted sins in the same way as He did to us, which sins we should not lay to their charge if we would not despise the grace of God." This incident of the Lord's descent into Hades is referred to in the treatise over and over again.

In book ii. chap. 22, there is a considerably protracted argument to prove that Jesus did not suffer in

the twelfth month after his baptism, and that at the time of his death he was more than fifty years old.

Although the writer of the treatise "Against Heresies" tries to overthrow the cosmical system of the Gnostics, yet he does not venture to substitute for it any cosmical system of his own. Concerning the Copernican system of astronomy the writer was quite ignorant; but he writes with all the arrogance of one whose cause was already triumphant, that is to say "orthodox." This circumstance proves the comparatively late date of the treatise. It is corroborated by another circumstance, namely, that in the writer's time the Church at Rome was considered by him to be at the head of all the other Christian churches. He says, bk. ii. chap. iii. sec. 2, "Since it would be very tedious in such a volume as this to reckon the successions of all the churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vain glory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorised meetings; [we do this, I say] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally-known church founded and organised at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every church should agree with this church on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere." Then the writer proceeds to give a list of shadowy *names*, whom he says were bishops of Rome from the time of Peter and Paul down to Eleutherius, who was the bishop in the days of the writer.

From the vast number of heresies and heretics the writer attacks, it is quite plain that the only ecclesi-

astical unity he had to defend was the unity of his own sect, which was then beginning to overpower all the other sects, and which sect ultimately became the Roman Catholic Church.

It is quite plain that the writer of the treatise "Against Heresies" was well acquainted with most of the contents of our New Testament, which were unknown to Tatian, Athenagoras, Hermas, and Theophilus. See "Primitive Church History," 12-15, 54, 55. Consequently he must have been a considerably more modern writer than any of those Fathers. That writer was also one who recognised the primacy of the Christian church established at Rome. This primacy is much more ancient than Protestant controversialists are disposed to admit. It was admitted by Cyprian, who flourished about A.D. 258. Consequently it may be reasonably inferred that before the time of Cyprian that primacy had been established in the Christian Church. Regarding the dates when the early and so-called apostolical Fathers flourished, we really do not know anything accurately. But if we assume that they were scattered over the latter part of the second century, that period would give the Christian Church time to increase to a larger extent than the Mormon Church, which came into existence A.D. 1844, and, consequently is now, 1876, only thirty-two years old. If we further assume that our New Testament was put into its present shape immediately after the time of those early and apostolic Fathers, who never quote from it; and that its supreme authority over all other Christian writings was recognised a short time before Origen, A.D. 220, Tertullian, A.D. 225, and Cyprian; then, we may place the date of the treatise "Against Heresies" at about A.D. 215. Because that treatise does *not* recognise the supreme authority of our New Testament.

These preliminary inquiries enable us to estimate duly the value of the

## ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF IRENAEUS.

Irenaeus is said to have flourished about A.D. 170, while the earliest writer who gives us an account of him is Eusebius, who flourished about A.D. 315. But while the treatise "Against Heresies" shows that the writer of it was well acquainted with almost all the writings contained in our New Testament, the extant writings of all the other Fathers who are supposed to have flourished during our first and second centuries do not show the least knowledge concerning any of the writings contained in that collection. Is it likely that one of those contemporary writers could be well acquainted with that remarkable collection of writings and all the rest ignorant of it? The fact is that the events and times ascribed by ecclesiastical historians to our first and second centuries *are almost entirely mythical*. Of course some of the events may be historical; but who can separate the real from the mythical? When the cook has boiled the hotch-potch, who can restore the ingredients of the decoction to their original form? The dates given by those historians are, if possible, still more uncertain. So surely as any of those historians hazards a date he falls into a palpable mistake. In his "Ecclesiastical History," i. 5, Eusebius, assuming our third gospel to be the genuine and authentic work of a writer who flourished about the middle of our first century, makes the birth of Jesus Christ to have happened "the same year when the first census was taken, and Quirinus was governor of Syria." And Eusebius adds, "this census is mentioned by Flavius Josephus, the distinguished historian among the Hebrews." Certainly ("Antiquities" xviii. 1, sec. 2) Josephus does mention this census; but he says it was "made in the thirty-seventh year after Cæsar's victory over Anthony at Actium." This brings us down to A.D. 7, a date which neither the writer of our third gospel nor Eusebius

could have intended to assign as that of Christ's birth. The date of this event, the most important in ecclesiastical history, namely, the birth of Jesus Christ, has not yet been agreed on in the Christian Church. How, then, can we venture to rely on the dates assigned by ecclesiastical writers to so obscure an individual as the writer of the treatise "Against Heresies?" Regarding the history of the Christian Church, it is remarkable that outside the pages of our New Testament there is not anything implicitly believed in our day regarding the lives, actions, and ultimate fate of the characters who figure prominently in the narratives therein contained. It is not even pretended that we have any further account of those characters that is reliable. Irenaeus is the first writer who was acquainted with our New Testament. At least that *name* has been ascribed to the writer of the treatise "Against Heresies," which is the oldest extant writing that shows the writer of it to have been acquainted with the writings which now constitute the canon of Christian Scripture, and we may reasonably expect that the records of the Church give some account of him.

Irenaeus, ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν, is said to have been bishop of a Christian church in Gaul, at Lyons, during the latter part of our second century. But the evidence relied on for the existence of Irenaeus at any time during that period is Tertullian, A.D. 160 to A.D. 240. Tertullian was a very inaccurate writer. He does not pretend to quote from Irenaeus, nor assign any date to him. In his treatise against the Valentinians, Tertullian refers to Irenaeus merely as "that very exact inquirer into all doctrines." This is all Tertullian says about him; and we cannot say confidently whether Tertullian refers to the writer of the treatise, "Against Heresies," or to some other person who bore the name of Irenaeus. There is not sufficient evidence to prove that there was any branch of the Christian

church in Gaul prior to the persecution of the Christians by Decius, A.D. 249. Of this more hereafter. So, the story that Irenaeus was bishop of a Christian church in Gaul at so early a period as A.D. 180 is, to say the least, most improbable.

Be that as it may, it is important to ascertain when the writer of the tract, "Against Heresies," flourished. Because whatever value we may attach to that work, or to the writings of the other Fathers who are *supposed* to have flourished prior to A.D. 200, it should be borne in mind (1) that those Fathers were the *real* founders of Christianity,\* and (2) that the writer of the tract "Against Heresies," is the first writer whose works are extant that quotes unmistakably from the New Testament.

It does not appear that the existence of Irenaeus, or any particular regarding his life, has yet been ascertained. The date of his birth is not known. Some writers say he was a native of Greece; others say he was born at Smyrna, or some other town on the western coast of Asia Minor. It is said also that in his early youth he was acquainted with Polycarp, the mythical companion of the mythical apostle, St John. This location of Irenaeus at Smyrna is remarkable. Of it more hereafter. It is also said that Polycarp sent Irenaeus to Gaul, as a priest under Bishop Pothinus, *concerning whom we do not know anything whatever*. The date commonly assigned to this mythical event is A.D. 157, when, according to "the best authorities," Irenaeus was only fourteen years old! It is said that Pothinus ruled the Christian church in Gaul as bishop of Lyons, in which city he and Irenaeus were residing when, A.D. 177, the mythical persecution of the Christian church broke out under the Emperor Aurelius, who never really persecuted that church. It is said that during this persecution Pothinus

\* Just as the "Cyclic Poems" contained the real Homeric narrative of the Trojan war.

received the crown of martyrdom. How Irenaeus escaped we are not told ; but it is said that during the following year, 178, he succeeded Pothinus on the episcopal throne of Lyons. Of course, Irenaeus is said to have made in Gaul many converts from Paganism, to have opposed successfully the Gnostics, especially the Valentinians—to have received the crown of martyrdom, A.D. 202, during a mythical persecution of the Christian church by the Emperor Severus, who never persecuted that church—and to have left at his death a flourishing branch of that church in Gaul. But the fact is, that the dates assigned by writers to his birth and to his death are “countless as the leaves and blossoms produced in spring.”

Supposing, however, that there was such a real human being as Irenaeus, and that he wrote the treatise, “Against Heresies,” about A.D. 215, then, that treatise shows the Gnostics to have been so numerous and to have spread into so many branches within the pale of the Christian Church, that they could not have been “creatures of a day.” This circumstance casts a grave doubt on the validity and accuracy of the dates usually assigned by writers on ecclesiastical history to the Gnostic Christians, and the so-called Orthodox party. Those writers generally seek to identify the orthodox party with the Primitive Christians. But the composite character of the writings contained in our New Testament, and the conflicting doctrines held by the numerous sects comprised within the orthodox party, forbid this identification. Of this more hereafter. Let us now proceed to examine

#### THE Gnostics.

It is admitted that the Gnostics were Christians. Their name, *οἱ γνωστικοί*, signifies those who claimed to have a deeper *wisdom* than other men. It is even be-

lieved by some writers (Mosheim's "Institutes," century 1, part ii., chapter v., sec. 3) that the Gnostics flourished at so early a period as our first century. They received the most ancient of the so-called "Apocryphal Gospels," and rejected our New Testament as a spurious and modern production. The writer of "Supernatural Religion," vol. ii., p. 4, says, "Ebionitic Gnosticism had once been the purest form of primitive Christianity." All extant traces of the primitive Christians show that for the most part they were averse to the pleasures of sensual indulgence. That some of the Christians in our third century attempted to introduce sensuality into the Church is evident from what we read in Revelation ii. 14, 20 ; 1 Corinthians v. 1, xi. 21 ; Jude 4, &c., &c. Indeed the sacramental elements of bread and wine were symbols sacred to Demeter and Dionysus, and to Ceres and Bacchus ; while the dove, representing the Holy Ghost, was sacred to Aphrodite and Venus. The elements of bread and wine are symbols of elemental worship involving adoration of the Sun and Moon. Such worship was and is always accompanied by revolting impurities. But the existence of the ascetic principle in Christianity is seen by a reference to Matthew xix. 12, Revelation xiv. 4, and to the much older works of Tatian, Theophilus, and Athenagoras. At all events, in course of time the ascetic principle gained the upper hand in the Church, and gave rise to the order of monks instituted by St Anthony in Egypt, 17th January A.D. 305.

It is well known that the Gnostics were ascetics, and so were all their subsequent developments, such as the Ebionites, Marcionites, Valentinians, &c. So averse were the Gnostics to sensual indulgence that (Mosheim's "Institutes," century 1, part ii., ch. 1, sec. 5), they considered that "matter is to be regarded as the source and origin of all evil and vice;" while, in order to maintain the infinite wisdom, power, and



goodness of the deity, they held "that matter existed as a thing external to the deity, and also existed eternally and independently of the deity." Yet ("Decline and Fall," ch. xv.) "the Gnostics were distinguished as the most polite, the most learned, and the most wealthy of the Christian name, and that general appellation was either assumed by their own pride, or ironically bestowed by the envy of their adversaries." The *Stromata*, "Patchwork," of Clemens Alexandrinus, is chiefly occupied by portraying "the true Gnostic." And to the fact that the Gnostics exercised a powerful influence on the Christian Church our New Testament bears ample testimony. According to Philo, the deity was too pure to touch matter, and consequently He created the Logos or Word, who was an inferior deity [see our fourth Gospel i. 1], and by whom the material universe was fashioned. The work of creation which we think so great, meritorious, and transcendently sublime, Philo considered to be a work involving pollution and consequent humiliation to any perfectly pure Being. Hence also, according to our fourth Gospel i. 1-3, we read that, "In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the word was a god . . . . All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." Consequently if the writer of our fourth Gospel were inspired, he admits the eternity of matter. Then (14) after identifying the Word with Jesus Christ, or the only son of God, the writer takes care that (x. 30), although the Word is one with the Father in the same manner (xvii. 21), that the Word was one with his disciples, yet that the Word (xiv. 28), declares "my Father is greater than I." Again (Colossians i. 15-17), the Word is said to be "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature; for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principali-

ties, or powers [all Gnostic terms], all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

But some of the Gnostics took compassion on the Logos of Philo, and attributed the formation of matter to a number of inferior principles emanating from the Supreme Being, while the Logos merely regulated the universe. These Gnostics filled the interval between the highest heaven (Ephesians vi. 12) and earth, the seat of matter, with Æons, Archons, spirits of evil, and Kosmocraters. These exerted a very pernicious influence on mankind. The men (Ephesians ii. 2) who are not Christians are said "to walk according to the Æon of the earth, according to the Archon of the power of the air, of the Spirit that now energises the children of unbelief." And these Gnostics also said (Hebrews i. 1-2) that "God by his son created the Æons," thereby keeping the hands of the Logos clean, and removing the deity still further from matter. Again, the writer of our Epistle to the Romans, viii. 38-9, tells us that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth [all Gnostic terms], nor any other *creature*, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord." It would be easy to add many more passages to the same effect, but the foregoing quotations are sufficient to prove that, even after the Gnostics had been out-voted and branded as heretics, some of their most peculiar and remarkable doctrines are to be found embedded in our New Testament. This proves also that there must have been a time in the early history of the Christian Church when the Gnostics were a powerful party, and probably considered to be the most orthodox of all the varieties that constituted the republic of primitive Christendom—a republic which, in course of time, was subverted by—

## ORTHODOXY.

Notwithstanding the sneers of Gibbon at the orthodox party in the early Christian Church, yet it is quite evident that he believed in the existence of such a party in that church during our first and second centuries. *This is a cardinal error.* Orthodoxy is simply a numerical majority. It implies the overwhelming preponderance in a church of some particular party. Consequently orthodoxy cannot exist in a church until some party by force of numbers shall have acquired a decisive victory and a permanent triumph over all the other parties in the church in question. Now what was the party in the Christian Church during our first and second centuries that was possessed of such an overwhelming preponderance? The answer to this question is that there was not any such party. The very existence in the church of such powerful parties as those of the Gnostics, the Valentinians, the Petrines, the Paulines, the Ebionites, the Marcionites, the Carpocratians, and the Montanists, proves the exceedingly republican character of the early Christian Church. Moreover, those parties held certain gospels, epistles, and revelations, now called apocryphal, as authoritative to them;\* while it is well-known that the party which ultimately proved orthodox, that is victorious, always rejected those writings, and received only the writings contained in our New Testament. But we know that during our first and second centuries our New Testament had not any existence. Consequently during those two centuries the so-called orthodox party could not have had any existence. The fact is, that if, during that period, such a collection of writings as those contained in our New Testament had been produced as being *the* New Testament, the persons producing it would have

\* Just as the "Cyclic Poems" were the *Homer* of Pindar, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, &c.

been called "heretics," and they would have been easily proved to be such, not only by the scantiness of their numbers, but by the numerous variations, contradictions of narratives and of doctrines, novelties, additions, omissions, substitutions, and metamorphoses that are to be found in our New Testament.

During our first two centuries the various sects in the Christian Church were occupied almost exclusively in spreading what each of them held to be Christianity,\* *and which at first consisted of asceticism and monotheism almost entirely.* Subsequently the doctrines of the trinity and the atonement were introduced. But during that period it is impossible to find among them any trace of that sect which subsequently overpowered all the others, and thus became orthodox. About the end of the second century, or the beginning of the third, there arose in the church two parties which gradually drew into their vortices almost all the others. The party, who claimed Peter for their head, considered Christianity to be a continuation of the moral law contained in the Septuagint, and that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ had abolished the Jewish ceremonial law. The other party, who claimed Paul for their head, considered that, so far as salvation is concerned, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ had abolished both those laws, and while they insisted on the observance of the moral law as an indispensable duty, they represented that as the Jews of old were the arbitrarily favoured people of Jehovah, so salvation was a free gift consequent on his arbitrary selection of certain Christians, who thus became a new and enlarged Israel. After an exceedingly fierce conflict, these two parties entered into that compromise which we find in our New Testament, and of which compromise that collection of writings was one of the results. Of this

\* The writer of the Epistle to the Philippians, i. 15, says, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will."

more will be said hereafter. The other results were (1) the formation of that composite creed, called "The Apostles' creed;" (2) the construction of that system of church government, which was modeled after that of Ezra and the Maccabees; (3) the elimination of the republican element from the Christian Church; and (4) the ultimate growth of that Church into the bloody and tyrannical Church of Rome—a church which, we know, has as many gods in it as the Pagan church of ancient Greece. These gods the Church of Rome calls

#### SAINTS.

When we examine with care and skill the manufacture of ecclesiastical history, we find it to be a curiously silly business. Without written records, without books, without documents, without ancient inscriptions, without evidence of any kind, the writers of Saints' lives, of so-called church histories, the old annalists and chroniclers manufactured out of their fancy incidents, narratives, legends, biographies, dates and epochs almost innumerable. What is particularly remarkable concerning many of these compilations, is the fact that their writers were wholly undeterred by their own ignorance, by the absence of evidence, and by the remoteness of the times concerning which they created. The escape of Æneas from Troy, the departure of Noah from his ark, the expulsion of Adam from Paradise, or the creation of the earth were epochs, the particulars of which they pretended to be as well acquainted with as they were with the matters occurring in their own day and neighbourhood. It would be out of place here to go fully into this subject on which it would be easy to write a volume. It will be sufficient to indicate the principle on which these compilations were founded. As in their doctrines, so also in their so-called histories, these writers imagined that whatever they considered to be edifying and well

written, they might safely accept as genuine and authentic. In short, with those writers, a good hit covered a multitude of falsehoods. This principle they applied not only to entertaining narratives, but also to the driest tables of genealogies and most groundless systems of chronology.

In this manner biographies were manufactured by means of fancy. St John faced the martyr's death, as we learn from Tertullian ("De Praescriptione," ch. 36); but the boiling oil in which he was plunged had not any effect on him. All the rest of the Apostles were said to have suffered martyrdom. For this statement there is not a particle of valid evidence. The writer of "The Twelve Apostles" (published in this series), p. 34, says—"We know that among the Romans a person convicted of sacrilege was burned to death, or given to wild beasts, or strangled and thrown down the gemoniæ into the Tiber. Under the Roman law, any person convicted of being a Christian would be guilty of sacrilege. It is very probable that, in order to account for the absence of all actual graves of Jesus and his twelve apostles, he and many of them have been handed over, by ecclesiastical tradition, to the Roman public executioner; while the rest have been relegated to die in Scythia, Persia, Mauritania, Æthiopia—in short, in 'the uttermost parts of the earth!'"

A name seems to us a contrivance easily invented; but it appears to have been a matter of great difficulty to the early Christian mythologists. Observe with what difficulty they invented names for the twelve apostles, among whom two were styled Judas and two James. Then Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus (Mark x. 3), is substituted for Judas, brother of James, and (Mark iii. 18) Simon the Canaanite is substituted (Luke vi. 15, and Acts i. 13) for Simon Zelotes. With only one exception (John i. 42) throughout our gospels, not less than ninety-seven

times the name of St Peter is given in its Greek form, although, if Jesus and his twelve apostles ever had any real existence, they must have spoken Chaldee, or a patois of Syro-Chaldee, or Aramaic; and, therefore, the apostle in question must always have been addressed by the Chaldee form of his name, Cephas. Even in our second gospel he is invariably called Peter, although in that gospel there are more Chaldee words and phrases than in all the other gospels taken together. (See Dr William Smith's "Dictionary to the Bible," article *Peter*.) It is as if in the English version of our New Testament the name were written "Rock;" yet that word would not be more unintelligible to a Hebrew in the supposed time of Jesus Christ than the word *Petros*. In reference to this matter, it has been remarked that the Greeks were in the habit of translating foreign proper names; but, even if this be admitted, such admission strengthens the argument *against* the Palestine origin of our New Testament.

Observe also the immense number of persecutions which the Christian Church is said to have suffered from A.D. 64 to A.D. 235. For the occurrence of these persecutions there is not a particle of valid evidence (See "Our First Century," p. 52, and "Primitive Church History," p. 66.) The first really ascertained persecution of the Christian Church was that by Decius, A.D. 249. Moreover, if there had been such a number of persecutions, why should there have been such an ardent zeal for "the crown of martyrdom" among the Christians as that which we find in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Revelation, and early Fathers of the Church? If half the number of those alleged persecutions had really taken place, the crown of martyrdom must have been as common as ditch water.

All human mythologies have a strong family likeness. Every pagan temple had its tutelary god, and

a history of his exploits. Every Christian church in Africa, Asia, and Europe (except that of Ireland) had an apostle for its mythical founder, and a history of his exploits; while every flourishing congregation had its tutelary saint, just as every river, mountain, forest, &c., had its guardian totem in ancient Greece—

“ Where each old poetic mountain  
 Inspiration breathed around :  
 Ev’ry shade and hallowed fountain  
 Murmured deep a solemn sound ”—

and was accompanied by that inimitable literature which comprises the works of Æschylus and Homer, and is the only phenomenon approximating to the character of *supernatural* that exists on the records of the human race. In strong contrast to this fact is the circumstance that the Christian Church has not any literature, properly so called. For the Grecian hymns and odes that Church can show only inconclusive reasoning\* embalmed in muddy controversies—for the Grecian drama that Church can show only angry scoldings—for the Grecian epic poems that Church can show only silly allegorical interpretations of Scripture—for Grecian histories that Church can show only nonsensical lives of mythical saints—for Grecian oratory (the finest ever uttered by man) that Church can show only virulent denunciations of independent thinking—and for Grecian mathematics that Church can show only a number of papal bulls.

If in their schools the Christians taught their votaries to cultivate the love of virtue and a spirit of friendship, they did only what the pagans had done in the temples of their oracles. Of course there was

\* A sample of Christian ecclesiastical “reasoning” occurs in Tertullian’s tract “On the Flesh of Christ,” 5th chapter. There Tertullian says—“The Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And he was buried and rose again: he fact is certain, because it is impossible.”



a difference in their conceptions of virtue. This, however, was not very considerable. For instance, in our first Gospel, vii. 12, there is the precept, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Four hundred years before the supposed publication of the Gospel, the Attic orator, Isocrates, wrote to Nicocles, King of Cyprus, a still better precept—namely, "Those things which suffering from others make you angry, do not you do to others."

In his "Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the *Æneid*," referring to the treatise "De Oraculis," of Anthony Vandale, born 1638, died 1708, Gibbon says—"I shall venture to point out a fact, not very agreeable to the favourite notion, that paganism was entirely the religion of the magistrate. The oracles were not less ancient, nor less venerable than the mysteries. Every difficulty, religious or civil, was submitted to the decision of those infallible tribunals. During several ages no war could be undertaken, no colony founded, without the sanction of the Delphic oracle: the first and most celebrated among several hundred others. Here, then, we might expect to perceive the directing hand of the magistrate. Yet, when we study their history with attention, instead of the alliance between Church and State, we can discover only the ancient alliance between the avarice of the priest and the credulity of the people. For my own part, I am very apt to consider the mysteries in the same light as the oracles. An intimate connection subsisted between them: both were preceded and accompanied with fasts, sacrifices, and lustrations, with mystic sights and preternatural sounds: but the most essential preparation for the aspirant was a general confession of his past life, which was exacted of him by the priest. In return for this implicit confidence, the hierophant conferred on the initiated a sacred character, and promised

them a peculiar place of happiness in the Elysian fields, whilst the souls of the profane (however virtuous they had been) were wallowing in the mire. Nor did the priests of the mysteries neglect to recommend to the brethren a spirit of friendship and the love of virtue, so pleasing even to the most corrupt minds, and so requisite to render any society respectable in its own eyes."

Lives of saints, exemplifying particular virtues, and recording their asceticism, thaumaturgies, and superstitions, were easily manufactured. But their name and parentage were matters of difficulty, because they could be ascribed only to extinct families; also the manner of their death was a matter of difficulty, because it naturally suggested their place of burial. To meet this latter difficulty, a story relating that the saint in question had been put to death (as we have seen) by the hands of the public executioner removed the difficulty, and saved the expense of finding a suitable burial place and erecting a cenotaph. Hence in progress of time the invention of a persecution was a convenient device for getting rid of having to seek or manufacture the locality of a saint who never had any objective existence; and hence arose the vast multitude of subjective persecutions which we read of in Christian ecclesiastical history, but regarding which pagan history is completely silent.

Such being the method of manufacturing a saint, it is obvious that the more remote from the place of his manufacture was the pretended locality of the saint, the more likely were the pious frauds of his biographer to escape detection.

But before proceeding further it is necessary here to take a glance at the extraordinary liberties in the department of Saint manufacture which were taken with the mythical apostle John, about A.D. 200.

## COMPROMISE: "JOHN."

There are numerous cases shewing inconsistency of statement and differences of doctrine throughout our New Testament. Thus in Mark xii. 29, we are told that there is only one Deity. In John i. 1-3, we are told of a second and inferior deity. In Romans iii. 28 we are told that man is justified by faith. In James ii. 24, we are told that man is justified by works. In Luke ii. 52, Jesus is represented as having a natural human body. In John xix. 30 and xx. 19, Jesus is represented as having an ethereal body, such as that which the Gnostics attributed to him. According to Matthew v. 17, 18, Jesus did not destroy the law. According (Acts xv. 10, Colossians ii. 14) to Peter and Paul, Jesus did destroy the law. These inconsistencies and differences prove that the collection of writings contained in our New Testament is the production of a *compromise*.

This compromise will more clearly appear in that collection of writings when we contemplate the fact that in our New Testament there are thirteen Petrine documents and fourteen Pauline documents. These documents, commonly known as Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Revelation, two epistles to the Corinthians, Philemon, James, two epistles of Peter, Jude, and Hebrews, belong to the Petrines; while those documents commonly known as John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, two epistles to the Thessalonians, two epistles to Timothy, Titus, and three epistles of John belong to the Paulines. (1) *This division of matter is nearly equal.* (2) There are traces of Gnosticism in some of the documents belonging to the Paulines.

It would be an important addition to the history of the Christian Church if it could be clearly proved when, where, and by whom this compromise was effected. Of course it never was spoken of as such in

the church. Nevertheless, there are manifest traces of this compromise, not only in our New Testament, but in ecclesiastical tradition.

In the "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," chapter xlvii. note 42, Gibbon states that ecclesiastical tradition related that the Virgin Mary and the apostle John were buried within the walls of Ephesus. Gibbon refers to "Concil: tom: III. p. 1102," and in reference to Ephesus, quotes thence a passage, of which the following is a translation: "There are [buried] the theologian John, and the Godbearing virgin, the holy Mary."

It is remarkable that it is from Ephesus (see Revelation i. 4, and iii. 22), that we first hear those denunciations against differences of opinion in the Christian Church, which denunciations afterwards crushed all free thought in that church during many centuries. It was at Ephesus that tradition says the canon of the New Testament was settled. It was at Ephesus that tradition says the last of the apostles closed his earthly career at an extremely protracted period of life, and at a very convenient time.\* And by a remarkable coincidence, that apostle's name is said to have been "John." Let us examine the traditions about that apostle.

With the story regarding the mission of the apostle John (Acts viii. 14-17), to communicate the Holy Ghost to the Samaritans, about A.D. 34, the account of that apostle in our New Testament terminates. But, after a long interval—indeed, an interval suspiciously long, extending over nearly a century—ecclesiastical tradition caused the apostle to re-appear at Ephesus in connection with the churches of Asia Minor, of which that city was the metropolitan. The

\* Hence also we can perceive why Polycarp and Irenaeus were represented as being natives of Smyrna. That town and Ephesus were cities of Lydia. The bishopric of Smyrna was subordinate to that of Ephesus. Thus Polycarp and Irenaeus were connected with the greatest of the Apostles, John.

time is so variously fixed—under Claudius, Nero, and Domitian—as to prove that there was not anything known on the subject. Those same traditions relate a number of thaumaturgies relating to St John, among which may be mentioned here that during the mythical persecution of the church by Domitian, A.D. 95, John, refusing to be a renegade, was put into a cauldron of boiling oil, but as this was not able to hurt him, he was sent to labour at the mines in the island of Patmos, and thus by his boldness, though not by his death, he acquired the crown of martyrdom. At Patmos he is said to have written the book of Revelation, so called, perhaps, from the impenetrable obscurity which envelopes every sentence of it. Liberated on the accession of Nerva, A.D. 96, John arrived at Ephesus, and suppressed heresies that had arisen there in his absence. There he fixed his abode, where he resided until his death. There he settled the canon of the New Testament. There also he is recorded to have had among his disciples the mythical saints Papias, Ignatius, and Polycarp. At Ephesus several heresies arose, but John suppressed them all. As one who was the true high priest of the Lord, John wore on his brow the leaf of gold, or mitre, *πέταλον*, with the sacred name engraved on it, which was the badge of the Jewish high priest. Of course (Eusebius' "Ecclesiastical History," v. 18), he raised a dead man to life, like all true saints. Through his agency the magnificent temple of Artemis was destroyed. He introduced and perpetuated the Jewish mode of celebrating Easter. When too old to work he used to recite aloud, as the chief precept of his Lord and Master, "Little children, love one another;" a formula not to be found in our New Testament. Having had his tomb prepared, he walked into it and died, at so late a period as A.D. 120, in the reign of Hadrian!

These stories are not now believed, although attested by Tertullian, A.D. 225; Eusebius, A.D.

315 ; Victorinus, A.D. 384 ; Jerome, A.D. 420 ; Augustine, A.D. 430 ; Cyril of Alexandria, A.D. 444 ; and Nicephorus, A.D. 828. What is the cause of this unbelief? Merely the fact that they are not related in our New Testament. But that is not a valid reason. It is impossible to prove that we are not to believe anything except the things that are contained in our Old and New Testaments. The miracles related in our New Testament are quite as improbable as those related by ecclesiastical traditions regarding the latter years of St John's life ; and the evidence for the former is by about a century weaker than the evidence for the latter ; because the authorities are in both cases the same, while the miracles related in our New Testament are supposed to be a century older than those related by the above-mentioned authorities.

Consequently, the question now to be examined is, What originated these stories regarding St John ?

A very important purpose lies beneath these stories. Long after Jesus, Peter, Paul, and John (if they ever really existed) must have passed away from this diurnal scene, it was pretended that John had survived to so late a period as A.D. 120, in order to bring him into contact with the later modifications of Gnosticism, as well as with the still later sects of the Petrines and Paulines, according to the mythological chronology of the early Christian Church. In order to gain the favour of the Christian Church located in Rome, and already very influential, it was pretended that John, by fixing his abode in Ephesus, had turned his back on both the Greeks and the Jews —both on Alexandria, where Christianity had originated, and on Jerusalem, the residence of the Alexandrine Jews' ancestors. In addition to these circumstances, it was related that our fourth gospel was composed by John at Ephesus (Eusebius " *Eccl. H.*," iii. 24). Throughout that gospel, John is represented as

being superior to Peter, and, by inference, superior to Paul. There also John is represented (as if by special letters patent), to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Then, by a traditional advancement collateral with this exaltation, John is represented towards the close of his life as the acknowledged head of the Church, and, as such, wearing the symbol of authority—namely, the *petalon*. In short, about A.D. 200, John was represented as having attained an age extending over more than a century—to have been the sole survivor of all his supposed contemporaries, during a period almost mythically protracted—to have been the greatest and most favoured of all the apostles—to have both completed and settled the canon of our New Testament—to have drawn, by divine inspiration, the line of separation between orthodoxy and heresy—and to have been the second founder of orthodox Christianity.

All these incidents were invented on a systematic plan, for the purpose of giving an air of probability to the story that, by his superior authority, John had terminated the disputes between the contending parties in the Christian Church, especially those between the Petrines and Paulines—had approved of their compromise—had established orthodoxy—and had thus laid the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church, which is the oldest form of Christian orthodoxy, although much later than the Christianity of the Gnostics.

At the same time (John i. 3 ; xx. 19, &c.), by the introduction of the Logos, and by representing Jesus as having glided through a wall without disturbing its materials, &c., &c., an opening was left to such Gnostics as wished to conform to the growing orthodoxy of the age. The compromise between the Petrines and Paulines is carefully carried out all through our fourth gospel, especially (xi. 51, 52) in the case of Caiaphas, who is represented as having

prophesied in his capacity of Jewish high priest, and, while doing so, to have unconsciously developed the Pauline doctrine that justification by faith extended to both Jews and Gentiles.

Having thus given reasons for believing in the existence of forgery, mythology, and compromise in the Christian Church of about A.D. 200, let us try to ascertain the date when the Christian Church was really founded in France. Of course, improbable, mythical, and nonsensical stories surround all inquiries on that subject. Still there are some facts which are not wholly concealed beneath those heaps of rubbish, and those facts enable us to perceive a probable and historical

#### DATE OF THE FRENCH CHURCH.

In his "History of Greece," Part I, ch. xv., Mr Grote says—"The return of the Grecian chiefs from Troy furnished matter to the ancient epic [writers] hardly less copious than the siege itself, and susceptible of infinite diversity, inasmuch as those who had before acted in concert were now dispersed and isolated. Moreover, the stormy voyages and compulsory wanderings of the heroes exactly fell in with the common aspirations after an heroic founder, and enabled the most remote Hellenic settlers to connect the origin of their town with this prominent event of their ante-historical and semi-divine world." Further on, Mr Grote adds that "The obscure poem of Lycophron enumerates many of these dispersed and expatriated heroes, whose conquest of Troy was indeed a Kadmeian victory (according to the proverbial phrase of the Greeks), wherein the sufferings of the victor were little inferior to those of the vanquished. It was particularly among the Italian Greeks, where they were worshipped with very



special solemnity, that their presence, as wanderers from Troy, was reported and believed."

In like manner, there was not a Christian community in Africa, Europe, or Asia—with the exception of Ireland—that did not lay claim to its having been founded by an apostle, or by a companion of an apostle. France was very much favoured in this respect. According to Peter de Marca, Natales Alexander, and Henry Valesius, three French writers, who died so lately as A.D. 1662, 1724, and 1726 respectively, St Peter and St Paul were the founders of the Christian Church in France. They say that Paul travelled over nearly all France in his journey to Spain, alluded to in Rom. xv. 24; and that he also sent Luke, and Crescens, 2 Tim. iv. 10, into France. They say that St Peter sent his disciple, Trophimus, into Gaul. The *name*, Trophimus, is mentioned in Acts xx. 4, xxi. 29, and 2 Tim. iv. 20; but not elsewhere in our New Testament, nor even in Eusebius' "Ecclesiastical History"—that vast repertory of *names* "signifying nothing." In fact, concerning Trophimus we do not know anything whatever. These writers also say that Philip laboured in Gaul, and that these apostles sent thither the above-mentioned Trophimus, who became bishop of Arles; Stremonius, bishop of Clermont; Martial, bishop of Limoges; Paul, bishop of Narbonne; Saturninus, bishop of Toulouse; Gratian, bishop of Tours; and Dionysius, bishop of Paris. Verily, the necessary changes having been made, we have here a portion of the adventures achieved by the dispersed Grecian conquerors of Troy and their companions copied to the life! Of course, Dionysius, bishop of Paris, was (Acts xvii. 34) the Athenian Areopagite converted by Paul; and all the rest of those seven bishops' names were clothed with ecclesiastical biographies equally authentic.

A French writer, Theodore Ruinart, 1657-1709, published a work called "True and Select Acts of

Martyrs." Amongst these was an account of the "Acts of Saturninus," a man who was said to have been bishop of Toulouse, and to have suffered in the persecution of the Church by Decius, A.D. 249. The tract on Saturninus is supposed to have been written in the beginning of the fourth century. The writer says:—"Scattered churches of a few Christians arose in some cities of Gaul in the third century." This is the natural and consequently probable account concerning the foundation of the Christian Church in France. The persecution by Decius drove some of the Christians who were residing at Rome to seek a refuge in France and elsewhere. Since Christianity originated at Alexandria, some time after A.D. 70, it is not at all probable that a country so remote from Alexandria as France is, would have a Christian Church in it until after Christianity had spread over the west of Syria and Asia Minor, and over part of Northern Africa, Greece, Italy, and Spain. It is well known that prior to A.D. 313, when Constantine took the Christian Church under his protection, Christianity did not spread rapidly. On this point the rhetorical exaggerations made by Justin, Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Origen have been clearly exposed by Mosheim in his "Commentaries." It has been ascertained by Mr Thomas Wright, in his treatise on "The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon," p. 299-300, that Christianity did not find its way into Britain until subsequently to A.D. 418. So it is easily perceived that the rate of progress made by the early Christian Church must have been immensely slower than that which was imagined by the too fervid invention of those exaggerating partisans.

Although Mosheim did not venture to question the reality of the story which said that the Church in Gaul had been founded by the mythical Pothinus, at so early a period as A.D. 157, yet Mosheim does not give the slightest proof or authority for that story.

Neither does Dr Neander. The story was told by Eusebius, "E. H." v. 1, and by Jerome. The former died about A.D. 340, and the latter about A.D. 420. Neither of these writers gives his proofs, or even his authorities, except so far as Jerome refers to Tertullian, who is not any authority at all. Consequently the story is destitute of contemporary evidence, and has not any perceptible foundation on probability.

Moreover, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Assuredly not merely the blood shed by the executioner, but also the blood that escapes the executioner, and, scampering away with its life, lays the foundations of the Church in lands beyond the reach of persecution. In all such cases the real founders of these Churches die while their congregations are in a state of insignificance and obscurity. Even when those congregations begin to flourish, their attention is occupied by immediate requirements and transitory circumstances. When the history of their Church interests the members of the congregations, their records are too modern to afford any real information regarding their primitive Church history. Then fancy comes into operation. A name is invented, or some distinguished name is appropriated to represent the real founders of the Church. To this rule there is not any exception. Among the invented names may be placed safely that of Irenaeus, or

#### THE SAINT OF PEACE.

In the various calendars of the Christian Church very few of them agree in classing the saints under the same days of the year. This arose from the circumstance that there were far more names canonized than there are days in the year.

In addition to this, several of the canonized names are evidently mere personifications. See "Primitive Church History," p. 30.

Both these coincidences are illustrated in the foregoing mythical account of Irenaeus.

Although in the Latin calendar of the saints the day of the year sacred to Irenaeus is the 28th day of June; yet in the Greek calendar the day assigned to him is the 23d of August. While in other calendars (see De Morgan's "Book of Almanacs") the former day is assigned to Leo, and the latter to Victor. Of these it is at least probable that St Leo represents the lion in the Zodiac, and that the adorers of St Victor worship unconsciously either Hercules or Jupiter!

It is well known that "Christianity came into the world amidst a whirlwind of heresy, insubordination, schism, and controversy." See "Primitive Church History," p. 32. The tract "Against Heresies" was written with an intention to put an end to the controversies existing so lately as about A.D. 210. The early Christians (as well as the ancient Greeks and Jews) were in the habit of ascribing their own writings to the names of ancient sages, bards, kings, or heroes, who were supposed to be suitable guardian saints of the doctrines, sentiments, or party causes advocated in those writings. (See "Our First Century," p. 8, &c., and "Primitive Church History," p. 28, &c.) It does not appear that the writers who committed these literary forgeries thought that they were thereby doing anything morally wrong. Not only was this the case, but if their forgeries proved good hits, their contemporaries would have praised those forgeries. See Daillé's "Right Use of the Fathers," chap. iii. Such forgeries would, as we know, have been regarded as acts of modesty and humility. We also know that in some cases the admission of such forgeries would have been regarded in that same favourable light.

In the case of Irenaeus, that name in Greek *eirenaïos*, means "peaceful." There could not be any

more appropriate name selected to personify the mythical allayer of Christian heresies and controversies than that of "the peaceful one," or "The Saint of Peace," shadowed forth under the name and mythical history of Irenaeus, who, according to that history, derived the very important advantage of learning the true doctrines of Christianity from the lips of Polycarp, who had received that inestimable treasure personally from St. John, the most beloved, favoured, and privileged of the apostles, and the successful mediator who had effected the compromise set forth in our New Testament between the Petrines and Paulines.

Moreover, the Gnostic form of Christianity chiefly prevailed in, and was particularly hated by, those churches of Asia Minor over which that of Ephesus was the Metropolitan. If the tract "Against Heresies" had been written by any member of those churches, he would naturally assert that the mythical author, Irenaeus, had written the tract at some long-past time and in some distant region, just as the plover leaves her nest and rises on wing in some quarter remote from her nest, in order to mislead the enemies of her brood. At the beginning of our third century the Christians of Asia Minor had not any means of knowing what was going on in Gaul generally, or at Lyons in particular. In those days the locality of a man who never had any existence might have been placed as safely at Lyons as in our day it might be placed at the source of the Nile.

So far as evidence is concerned, we do not know anything whatever about Irenaeus. The story which says that Irenaeus wrote the tract "Against Heresies," at Lyons, considerably more than half-a-century before there was a Christian church in Gaul, is not in the least borne out by historical evidence. Regarding that tract, all that can be said with any approximation to probability is that it was written early in the third

century of our era, perhaps a little time before the date usually assigned to Origen, or perhaps still later, and by some writer who at present is utterly unknown.

Be that as it may, the narrative concerning Irenaeus, referred to in the third section of this tract, represents a saint who is as purely mythical as any of the heroes who have been immortalized in the old Greek epic poems and dramas, which are occupied by

“Presenting Thebes, or Pelops’ line,  
Or the tale of Troy divine.”

One of the tales regarding Thebes was related in the old Homeric “Thebais,” which formed one of the Cyclic poems in the days of Pindar. It is known to us chiefly through the tragedy of Æschylus, called “The Seven against Thebes.” The tale in question related the invasion of the Theban territory, and the siege of the city by seven demigod heroes under the leadership of Adrastus, King of Argos, B.C. 1225. The suicide of Menœceus, son of Creon, King of Thebes, secured victory to the Thebans—See 2 Kings iii. 27. With the exception of Adrastus all the seven heroes perished, and the invading army was annihilated. Adrastus owed his life to the swiftness of his immortal and invincible steed Arion, the gift of Poseidon. During centuries this tale was recounted and believed as a genuine historical fact. (See Grote’s “History of Greece,” part I. chap. 14.) The writer of the “Thebais” represented the desolate hero, Adrastus, arriving at Argos—

“Bringing only his garments, all begrimed,  
Together with his dark-maned Arion.”

In like manner, after searching carefully for Irenaeus, all the traces that can be found of him are his name and his treatise “Against Heresies.”