

## P R E F A C E.

WHILE the proof sheets of "Our First Century" (published in this series in July 1873) were being corrected, a stranger drew the writer's attention to a variety of matters connected with documents supposed to belong to the first half of our second century. The stranger in question was William J. Birch, of Florence, Esq., a gentleman and a scholar, who carefully examined, and furnished the writer with notes on the works of the Antenicene Fathers. The mere reduction of those notes into a readable form appeared a Herculean task. For a time despair prevailed. But in a happy moment the writer recollected the admirable plan by which Mr F. A. Paley reduced the Homeric chaos to order, and perceived, that since the publication, in January 1866, of Mr Paley's "Introduction" to his edition of our Iliad, every philological treatise should be modeled in accordance with that "*Principia*" of the philological world. Mr Birch has been the originator of this tract, and the plan of Mr Paley's "Introduction" has been the author's model. The task has been a difficult one, but the subject is important. For many thoughtful readers of Church history have remarked that none of the ecclesiastical historians have given a verified or satisfactory account of the Christian Church during the first two centuries of its supposed existence. Instead of beginning their histories by explaining who constituted the members of the primitive Christian Church,—what they did,—what doctrines they taught,—what became of the original founders,—when they died,—where they were buried,—who were their immediate successors,—and what became of them also, church historians almost invariably commence by

giving an account concerning the systems of Grecian philosophy and religion prevalent in the Roman empire about the 202nd Olympiad, or A.D. 1 to 5,—the ignorance and vice that then prevailed throughout that empire,—the wretched condition of Rome (resembling very much the condition of all large Christian communities in our own day, according to the police reports),—the corrupt and harassed condition of the Jews,—and concluding their commencement with an essay on the assumed urgent necessity for the promulgation of some new form of witchcraft in Christian attire. But the ecclesiastical historians do not give any evidence in support of the romance which they try to dignify by naming it the “history” of the Christian Church during those two centuries. They content themselves with grounding their statements on the first six books of Eusebius’ “Ecclesiastical History,” and on our “New Testament,” although neither of these works, as we have them, can be proved to be older than our fourth century; and although Eusebius expressly avows that he had scarcely any trustworthy materials at all for the early part of his history. In short, those historians treat Eusebius as if he were an almost infallible guide regarding matters for which he himself states he had not any evidence or authority; while they refuse his own honest and explicit declarations that he knew virtually nothing about that part of his history.

In the following pages an attempt has been made to give to any one who may have a desire to write an honest and well-grounded history of the Primitive Christian Church, a suggestion regarding the difficulties of the subject, and a key to a rational method of treating it.

KILFEREST,

*Feast of Assumption of B. V. Mary, 1874.*

## PRIMITIVE CHURCH HISTORY.

---

### EUSEBIUS.

SO well as our materials afford scope for using our judgment, Eusebius, A.D. 315, appears to be not only the earliest historian of the Christian Church, but also almost the only authority we have regarding the persons, documents, events, and chronology relating to that period, from A.D. 1 to A.D. 249, which is commonly regarded as the subject of Primitive Church History. Dr James S. Reid in his edition of Mosheim's "Institutes," p. 132, styles Eusebius, "this chief source of our knowledge of ecclesiastical history." Believers in nearly all the great works which at one time or other, have been considered to be of oracular authority, have claimed for such works divine authority or inspiration. Thus, it was said that Apollo dictated our "Iliad" to "Homer,"—that Jehovah dictated our "Pentateuch" to "Moses,"—that the "Septuagint" version of the Old Testament was written under the influence of divine illumination; ("for," says Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata*, i. 22, "it was the counsel of God carried out for the benefit of Grecian ears,")—that the Holy Spirit dictated to the various writers the various tales and tracts contained in our "New Testament,"—that the Archangel Gabriel assisted Mohammed in the composition of the "Koran,"—and last, not least, that Constantine the Great ("O, what a falling off was there!") assisted Eusebius in the compilation of his "Ecclesiastical History." It is stated (Dr William Smith's "Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology"), by the late Mr George E. L. Cotton, that "when Constantine visited Cæsarea, he offered to give Eusebius

anything which would be beneficial to the Church there ; Eusebius requested him to order an examination to be made of all documents connected with the history of martyrs, so as to get a list of the times, places, manners, and causes of their deaths from the archives of the provinces. On this the history is founded, and of its general trustworthiness, with the limitation necessary from the principle of omission noticed above [referring to "E. H." viii. 2, of which more hereafter,] there can be no doubt whatever !”

Unfortunately, we do not know how far this story is to be depended on,—if at all ; because Mr Cotton has not given his authority, and as he is dead we are not likely to find it. Still less likely are we to find what was Mr Cotton's reason for believing that regarding the general trustworthiness of Eusebius' "Ecclesiastical History," at least as we have it, "there can be no doubt whatever." We do not know even *what means* Constantine had at his disposal for assisting Eusebius. We do not possess any proof whatever that there were documents connected with the history of martyrs stored in the archives of the provinces within the Roman Empire. It is also entirely an assumption to say that Christianity as we have it, possesses a historical existence as old as is commonly supposed ; for we know ('Our First Century,' p. 12), that "All Jewish and heathen writers who flourished during the first seventy years of our first century are completely silent on the existence of the Christian Church, and they appear utterly ignorant of the miracles, doctrines, persons, and events related in the narratives both of the now rejected and the received gospels." Moreover, to assume that the narratives contained in the first six books of Eusebius' "Ecclesiastical History," are substantially authentic and historical would be an equally arbitrary assumption ; for, in fact, we know that the very reverse is the case. For those narratives are stuffed with references to spurious documents, to names of unknown men, with improbable and

ungrounded statements, and stories about miracles. Eusebius' want of sound critical judgment is so painfully manifest throughout his "Ecclesiastical History," that even his good faith has been called in question. His accuser, Gibbon, ("Decline and Fall," ch. xvi.,) says, "The gravest of the ecclesiastical historians, Eusebius himself, indirectly confesses that he has related whatever might redound to the glory, and that he has suppressed all that could tend to the disgrace of religion." But this accusation is scarcely honest. The "confession" referred to occurs in "Ecclesiastical History," bk. viii., ch. ii., and is avowedly applicable only to the last three books of Eusebius' "Ecclesiastical History." Just before relating the persecution that commenced under Diocletian, Eusebius says, "But it is not our part to describe the unsatisfactory results of the inquiry into these matters which meet us at the end, in addition to those which occurred at the outset; nor is it our part to hand down to memory their differences from each other, or their inconsistencies. Therefore, we have resolved not to make any further inquiry about them, than in so far as we are likely to prove the divine judgment to be true. Therefore, we have resolved not to mention even those who have been sorely tried by the inquiry [or persecution], or those who have made a complete shipwreck of their salvation, and have been cast away in the depths of the billows; but we will add to the general inquiry only those points which are likely to prove of use, in the first instance, to ourselves, and in the second, to those who will succeed us." Having regard to the very imperfect literary morality which prevailed among ancient writers, (see "The Iliad of Homer, with English notes," by F. A. Paley, M.A., vol. ii., *Preface*, p. xxxvi.,) this "confession" of Eusebius is entitled to be regarded as a piece of eximious literary honesty. For, having put his readers on their guard, he had a perfect right to shape his history with a view to any object he pleased.

So far as we are concerned, however, a much more important subject is here involved—namely, what materials Eusebius had for compiling his history. As he flourished about A.D. 315, he, by himself, could not be an authority of any value for events supposed to have taken place about A.D. 100, still less could he be an authority for events supposed to have taken place about A.D. 60, or A.D. 30, or A.D. 1. Therefore without the external aid of genuine and authentic documents, Eusebius could not have any better means than we have for writing the primitive history of the Christian Church. On this subject, a rational man might think that Eusebius' own declarations should be sufficient. Yet, strange to say, those declarations have been utterly ignored by writers on Eusebius, and on ecclesiastical history. Nevertheless, they hold a conspicuous place in Eusebius' history; for, in the very first chapter of the first book, he declares that he was the first historian who had undertaken to write a history of the Christian Church,—that it was beyond his power to present that history in a full and continuous state (*ἐντελῆ καὶ ἀπαράλειπτον*),—that in attempting the subject, he was entering on a trackless and unbeaten path,—that he was utterly unable to find even the bare vestiges (*ἴχνη γυμνά*) of those who may have toiled through the way before him,—and that he had not been able to find that any of the Christian Ecclesiastical writers had directed their efforts to present anything carefully in this department of writing.

Now, with this candid and explicit declaration before us, let us ask ourselves honestly, Why are we to suppose that Eusebius had better materials for the compilation of his history than those which he says he had? The answer is not by any means a difficult one. If the trustworthiness of Eusebius be disproved, the history of the Christian Church during our first two centuries, as it is popularly believed, would be at an end. Eusebius is our *only* authority for that period of Church

history, properly so called. Consequently the genuineness and the accuracy of his history have been regarded as written under the influence of all but verbal inspiration. Moreover, Eusebius wrote his history in the very manner calculated to make a history popular among those who take an interest in it. A writer who wishes to flatter the vanities and prejudices of nations, sects, corporations, or families—if he have skill and fluency—can easily attain his object by assigning dates, exploits, and localities to certain names supposed to represent real or imaginary heroes, martyrs, predecessors or ancestors who figure in old legends. Speaking of the legend regarding the settlement of Æneas and his Trojans in Latium, Niebuhr ("History of Rome," Vol. I., p. 188) says: "A belief of this sort does not require a long time to become a national one, in spite of the most obvious facts and the clearest historical proofs; and then thousands would be ready to shed blood for it. They that would introduce it need but tell people roundly that it is what their forefathers knew and believed, only the belief was neglected and sank into oblivion." In like manner, Eusebius has not only assigned dates, exploits, martyrdoms, and localities to various and illustrious names supposed to represent the eponymous founders of Christianity during our supposed first and second centuries; but he has also framed a history of those names which presents to us a perspicuous and harmonious narrative so long as we do not examine the doctrinal development and the philological contradictions and inconsistencies contained in the writings attributed to some of these names. Bacon (*Novum Organum*, I. 88) says: "It is the greatest proof of want of skill to investigate the nature of any object in itself alone; for that same nature, which seems concealed and hidden in some instances, is manifest and almost palpable in others, and excites wonder in the former, whilst it hardly attracts attention in the latter." In like manner, Eusebius' assignment

of dates in ecclesiastical history cannot be relied on as being truly historical any more, for instance, than a similar assignment of dates made by the compilers of classical dictionaries to the Cyclic Poets.

Of course it was easy for Dr John Lempriere to state that Stasinus wrote the "Cypria," B.C. 900; that Arctinus wrote the "Æthiopis" and "Ilioupersis," B.C. 776; that Agias wrote the "Nostoi," B.C. 740; that Lesches wrote the "Little Iliad," B.C. 708; and that Eugammon wrote the "Telegonia," B.C. 566. But there is not any contemporary evidence for these dates. The state of penmanship in Greece prior to the time of Herodotus, B.C. 443, and in the Christian Church prior to the time of Origen, A.D. 220, are matters regarding which we have not any direct evidence. Moreover, what could Lempriere, or Aristotle, or even Herodotus, know or prove regarding the occurrence of events supposed to have taken place in Greece at such remote periods as those assigned to Arctinus and Stasinus? And, in like manner, what could Eusebius or even Origen know regarding the occurrence of events supposed to have taken place among an obscure and insignificant sect, calling themselves "Christians," more than two centuries before their time? At all events, the sort of knowledge Eusebius had on the subject is proved by his utterly uncritical perusal of the writings attributed to names stated to have been contemporary with each other, but which writings must have been written at periods widely distant in time from each other. As the Jews of Eusebius' time regarded our "Pentateuch," finally revised about B.C. 400 (see Kalisch on *Leviticus*, II. 639) as the identical words of Moses, B.C. 1500, and the fountain-source of all Jewish literature; as the Greeks of Eusebius' time regarded our "Iliad" and "Odyssey," really "epitomized and selected from the general mass of 'Homeric' or 'Cyclic' ballad poetry, not very long before Plato's time," or, say, B.C. 420 (see Paley's "Iliad," *Introduction*, Vol. I., p. xxvi.),



as the work of Homer, B.C. 950, and the fountain-source of all Greek literature; so, in like manner, Eusebius took our "New Testament," compiled probably as late as A.D. 200, as the work of men supposed to have flourished about A.D. 40, and the fountain-source of all Christian literature!

To arrive at any clear approximation to the true state of Primitive Church History, we must disregard all mere text-books, since the oldest authority is too modern and too erroneous to be depended on; and we must examine the earliest extant and authentic works of the Christian Fathers, and from the contents of these works we must draw inferences and arrive at conclusions grounded on sound philological principles.

#### LEMMA.

When we find a Christian ecclesiastical writer,\* of our supposed second century, the author of a systematic treatise of admitted genuineness, and which we have ground for believing has been handed down to us without any serious corruption—(1) calling himself a Christian; (2) explaining that he does so because he had been "anointed" (*χριστός*), but without mentioning or giving any other indication that he had ever heard of a person called Christ, or Jesus Christ; and, at the same time, (3) attributing sayings (sometimes resembling, but for the principal part differing from sayings put by the writers of our New Testament into the mouth of Jesus Christ) to the "Logos," as an entirely spiritual being or influence,—we are forced to the conclusion that the writer in question must have been a Christian, without any knowledge regarding the existence of the Jesus Christ mentioned in our ecclesiastical history; and the fact of such an omission by such a writer suggests forcibly the probability (*a*) that there was not any such person as Jesus Christ in existence before that

\* For instance, Tatian.

## *Primitive Church History.*

writer's time; (*b*) that the existence of such a person, and all minute records of his life and career, were the inventions of a later age; because such a writer must have been aware of the existence of Jesus Christ and of our "New Testament," if such a person and such a compilation had been in existence at or before the writer's time; and if the writer had been aware of their existence, and had admitted their authority, he would have referred to them specifically, and not to the vague impersonalities termed "He," "the Son," "the Gospel," and "the Logos." Also (*c*) we should be led to the conclusion that such a writer must likewise be more ancient than the writers of our "New Testament;" because, when examining ancient literary works, we find invariably that a written composition which is vague in expression and scanty in details is older than another written composition, on the same subject, which is definite in expressions and copious in details.

Let us begin by applying these principles to the extant apologies for the Christians by Tatian, Athenagoras, and Theophilus. These writers are generally considered to have flourished during our second century. Their apologies are ominously silent on certain most important matters. And if our philological principles be correct, those apologies are most probably the oldest extant writings produced by the Christian Church.

### TATIAN.

Eusebius ("Ecclesiastical History," IV. 29) tells us that "Tatian having formed a certain collection of gospels, I know not how, has given it the title *diatessarion* ("by four"), which is in the possession of some even now." Of these four gospels we do not know anything. The only work of Tatian which has come down to us is his "Address to the Greeks." In it he frequently mentions the Logos of Philo and "Wisdom." He says (5)—"The Logos, begotten in

the beginning, begat in turn our world, having first created for himself the necessary matter." But Tatian never mentions Jesus or the Christ, or Jesus Christ, or miracles; nor is there anything in his "Address" that shows he knew anything of our New Testament, or of the narratives contained in it.

It is impossible to fix a date for Tatian; but as he does not mention the Christians by name, nor attack the Jews, it is probable that he may have flourished before the destruction of Jerusalem by Hadrian, A.D. 135, prior to which time there does not appear to have been any hostility between the Jews and the Christians.

#### ATHENAGORAS.

Athenagoras calls himself a Christian in his "Plea for the Christians." Yet he never mentions Jesus or the Christ, or miracles. The authorities he quotes are remarkable, namely, Homer, Hesiod, the Greek Tragedies, the Septuagint, and the sayings of the Logos.

In his "Plea," § 32, he quotes, as a precept of the Logos, "He that looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart." And "the Logos again says to us, 'If any one kiss a second time, because it has given him pleasure, he sins,' adding, 'Therefore the kiss, or rather the salutation, should be given with the greatest care, since if there be mixed with it the least defilement of thought, it excludes us from eternal life.'"

Athenagoras does not attack the Jews. Eusebius does not even mention him. His "Plea" is addressed to Aurelius and Commodus. This, however, is a matter of very little weight. What is of much more consequence is the fact that while Tatian does not mention any persecution of the Christians, Athenagoras alludes to persecution, but only in one passage, namely, § 1, and even there he does not speak of persecution unto death; and the style of the passage is different from

that of the rest of the work. He and Tatian seem to have been contemporaries.

#### THEOPHILUS.

Theophilus, of Antioch, has left us a defence of Christianity in three books, addressed to his friend Autolyceus. Although he calls himself a Christian, he never mentions Jesus or the Christ. Like Athenagoras, his authorities are Homer, Hesiod, the Greek Tragic, and the Septuagint, to which he adds prophecies of the Sibyl; but he does not appear to have been acquainted with our New Testament.

His definition of Christianity (I. 12) is remarkable. He says to Autolyceus—"About your laughing at me, and calling me 'Christian,' you know not what you are saying. First, because that which is anointed is sweet and serviceable, and far from contemptible. For what ship can be serviceable and seaworthy, unless it be first anointed with oil? Or what castle or house is beautiful or serviceable when it has not been anointed? And what man, when he enters into this life or into the gymnasium, is not anointed with oil? And what work has either ornament or beauty, unless it be anointed and burnished? Then the air and all that is under heaven is in a certain sort anointed by light and spirit; and are you unwilling to be anointed with the oil of God? Wherefore we are called Christians on this account, because we are anointed with the oil of God."

Theophilus treats the subject of miracles with contempt. Speaking (§ 13) concerning the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, he says—"Then, as to your denying that the dead are raised—for you say, 'Show me even one who has been raised from the dead, that seeing I may believe'—what great thing is it if you believe when you have seen the thing done?"

Eusebius makes Theophilus of Antioch and Irenæus of Lyons contemporaries. But this is most improbable;

because, while Theophilus apparently does not know anything of Jesus, or the Christ, or our New Testament, all these matters are perfectly well known by Irenæus, who, therefore, we may reasonably infer to have been a much later writer than Theophilus. For Christian apologists could not have been ignorant of and silent concerning Jesus Christ, if our New Testament had been in existence and received in the Church when they wrote.

#### SILENCE OF OUR SECOND CENTURY.

But not only are Tatian, Athenagoras, and Theophilus silent regarding Jesus Christ, but all the Pagan writers who flourished during our second century are silent, not only regarding him, but regarding the Christians. Now, is it probable that Josephus, Suetonius, Pliny (junior), and Tacitus really knew more about Jesus Christ than those early apologists for the Christians who never name him? Or is it probable that if "great multitudes of Christians" during our first century attracted the attention of one Jewish and three Pagan writers, who flourished towards the end of that period, that not even one Pagan writer would have taken notice of so remarkable a sect during the whole of our second century? These improbabilities amount to almost an impossibility. And the fact (1) that there is not any Pagan writer of our second century who mentions the Christians, and (2) that those early apologists never mention Jesus or Christ, amount almost to positive proof that the passages regarding the Christians now found in Josephus, Suetonius, Pliny (junior), and Tacitus, *are forgeries*.

To this may be added the consideration that although an uncritical antiquity might not instinctively anticipate the doubts of modern criticism regarding the personality of Jesus Christ, yet it should be borne in mind—(1) That the historical reality of the gospel stories was

assailed at an early period, even before the time of Tertullian; (2) That the early Christians were constantly altering, and frequently adding to, the narratives and doctrines contained in their various and very different gospels; and (3) That during several centuries the Church had uncontrolled possession of all the remains of Pagan literature now extant, and frequently corrupted it for apologetic purposes.

Scarcely less remarkable is the fact that while Tatian, Athenagoras, and Theophilus scarcely ever mention the Jews, and never with any expressions of hostility, and while they are wholly silent regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, the hostility between the Jews and Christians and the destruction of Jerusalem are matters which are perfectly familiar to our Matthew (xxiv. 1, 2), Mark (xiii. 1, 2), and Luke (xix. 44, xxi. 5, 6); while the writer of our first epistle to the Thessalonians (ii. 16), speaking of the Jews, says—"The wrath is come upon them to the uttermost," and thereby shows plainly that he was acquainted with the fact that Jerusalem had been destroyed utterly, A.D. 135, by Hadrian. If these latter writers flourished before the former, then these latter writers could have acquired their knowledge only by means of a miracle, which is a thing that has never yet been proved to have occurred.

These facts (pointed out above) are very important, and yet they do not appear to have attracted the serious attention of the numerous and learned scholars who have written against the supposed truth of Christianity. Can it be that Primitive Christianity was a shadowy system of mere asceticism and monotheism embodied in the collections of sayings attributed to the Logos who is mentioned by Philo and the writer of "The Wisdom of Solomon," xviii. 14-16; that those "sayings" were expanded into the recondite doctrines of baptismal regeneration, justification by faith, the efficacy of the sacraments, electing grace, the final perseverance of the saints, the verbal inspiration of

holy scripture, salvation by means of a human sacrifice, everlasting torments, inherited guilt, priestly remission of sin, and the like ; that, in course of time, this Logos was, by some writers, identified with the Jewish Christ ; that these two ethereal beings were identified with a mythical Jewish carpenter, who, it was pretended, bore the name of Jesus ; that this Jesus, for the purposes of the mythology, was pretended to have flourished at least seventy years before any person heard of him ; that the fabulous and rude exploits attributed to this Jewish carpenter were invented by the writers of the so-called Apocryphal Gospels ;\* that, in course of time, to those rude exploits more benevolent exploits were added ; that to identify the Jesus of the Apocryphal Gospels with the Christ of the Septuagint all the exploits of Jesus were referred subsequently to events, supposed prophecies, laws and imagined allegories contained in the Septuagint ; and that from those expanded doctrines and a selection from those exploits our New Testament has been manufactured—in short, that our New Testament is a growth from the Apocryphal Gospels and the Septuagint ? Startling as this hypothesis may appear to those who see it here for the first time, it is strongly supported by the remains we possess of the writings attributed to those Fathers of the Christian Church, who are supposed to have flourished during the first two centuries of our era.

Among these remains are the writings known as the Clementine “Homilies” and the Clementine “Recognitions,” supposed originally to have been written by the Clement mentioned in Philippians iv. 3. They certainly represent the strong antagonistic views held by the Petrine and Pauline parties in the early Chris-

\* Throughout this tract the word “apocryphal” is used in the conventional sense of ecclesiastical usage. If everything in this world received its strictly just rights, it is *our* four gospels that are entitled to that epithet.

tian Church, and they must be very old productions. By the best authorities they are considered to have been written at a late part of our second century. Others think that they belong to a still later date. Be that as it may, they are very remarkable. The writer quotes freely from Apocryphal Gospels and other sources which have been long extinct, and he never quotes from our New Testament. So, the later the date of these "Homilies" and "Recognitions," the stronger is their evidence of the fact that our New Testament is a collection of writings of much later date than is usually supposed. As the Homilies contain the more remarkable passages, only they shall be examined here.

#### CLEMENTINE HOMILIES.

It is remarkable that in the second apology attributed to Justin there are not any quotations from the sayings of the Logos or from our New Testament. But in the last section it aims a blow at Simon Magus who in the Clementine Homilies xvii. 19, is generally admitted to be identical with Paul. Referring to the opinion in the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria, bk. 1, "It was necessary that Jesus should preach only a year; this also is written (Isaiah lxi. 2; Luke iv. 18, 19), 'He hath sent me to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' This both the prophet spake and the gospel." Peter says to Simon, "If our Jesus appeared to you in a vision, made himself known to you, and spoke to you, it was as one who is enraged with an adversary; and this is the reason why it was through visions and dreams, or through revelations that were from without, that he spoke to you. But can any one be rendered fit for instruction through apparitions? And if you will say 'it is possible,' then I ask, 'Why did our teacher abide and discourse *a whole year*\* to those who were awake?'

\* If the writer knew of our fourth gospel, why did he not say *three years*?



And how are we to believe your word, when you tell us that he appeared to you? And how did he appear to you, when you entertain opinions contrary to his teaching? But if you were seen and taught by him, and became his apostle *for a single hour*, proclaim his utterances, interpret his sayings, love his apostles, contend not with me who companied with him."

There is here evidently an allusion to some version of the legend known as "The Conversion of St Paul," which is related in our book called "The Acts of the Apostles," ix. 1-19, in an improbable manner:—Paul was leading an armed band to Damascus to make havoc of the Christians there. Suddenly there shone about him a light from heaven. He fell to the earth blinded, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! why persecutest thou me?" Paul said, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. *'It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.'*" Paul, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And the Lord said unto him, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." His companions stood by speechless, hearing a voice, but not seeing any man. Paul arose blinded, and was led by his companions into Damascus. After three days the Lord appeared in a vision to a disciple at Damascus, named Ananias, whom he informed that he intended to send Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles, and he directed Ananias to restore eyesight to Paul, who had already seen Ananias in a vision. Ananias, after seeing his vision, went his way, and, putting his hands on Paul, said, "Brother Saul! the Lord hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight." Immediately there fell from Paul's eyes a substance like scales, and he received sight, and was baptized. Then Paul remained some days with the disciples who were at Damascus, and in the synagogues he preached that Jesus is the son of the Deity. The whole of this last clause is at variance

with the story in Galatians i. and ii., especially that part i. 16, where Paul says that when he was converted "immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood," but, 17, "I went into Arabia!"

✓ Taking the foregoing incidents in the order in which they are related in the "Acts," we have (1), a supernatural light from heaven,—(2), among the number who saw it, only one man was blinded by it,—(3), a voice whose words were heard by only that one man,—(4), quoting from Æschylus' *Agamemnon*, 1624, Dindorf, a precept exhorting Paul "not to kick against the goad,"—(5), the immediate recognition of Jesus by Paul, who had never seen or heard Jesus previously,—(6), the immediate conversion of Paul without any reasons or arguments,—(7), the creation of Ananias,—(8), a supernatural vision to Paul introducing him to a knowledge of the yet unseen Ananias,—(9), a vision to Ananias, introducing him to the as yet unseen Paul,—(10), and the restoration of Paul's eyesight by the mere touch of Ananias' hand.

Here we have, firstly, a miracle overdoing its object ; because, by blinding Paul, his conversion was of but little use to any one except himself, and as it was intended that he should become an apostle of Christianity, more than half his worth would have been lost if his eyesight had not been restored.

Then, secondly, we have five miracles converting Paul, but malignantly excluding his companions from a knowledge of the saving truth.

Thirdly, as it seems to be implied, *Galatians* ii. 18, that the Lord could not undo his own work whether it were bad or good, it became necessary to create Ananias (verse 10), a man never heard of before or afterwards !

" Oh ! what a tangled web we weave  
When first we practise to deceive."

Fourthly, we have two visions preparing Ananias and Paul for each other. And the whole is wound up

with the tenth miracle by which Ananias restores sight to Paul! Five miracles to convert Paul, and five to restore his eyesight.

Not to dwell on the idea that, in order to give force to his own language, Divine Providence required to quote from Æschylus, just as if an Englishman were to say he heard him quoting from Shakspeare—can any one for a moment doubt that such a complication of miracles, involving the commission and correction of a blunder, is a positive proof that they did not emanate from Omniscience?

Regarding the age of these "Homilies," there is a remarkable passage, *Homily* iii. 50, which throws some light on the subject:—"Then Peter said: That the true is mixed with the false. I remember on one occasion, that he said, in finding fault with the Sadducees, 'On this account you are in error, because you do not know the true sayings of the Scriptures; for which reason you are ignorant of the power of God.' Now, if he thought they 'did not know the truths of Scripture,' it is clear that he said this on the assumption that there were falsehoods. Indeed, this appears in his saying, 'Be ye well-approved money-changers,'—on the view that there were both genuine and spurious sayings. And by saying, 'Why do ye not perceive the reasonableness of the Scriptures?' he makes the intellect of him who voluntarily exercises sound judgment a surer guide [than that of him who does not.]"

Some writers try to identify the first of the above quotations with our Matthew xxii. 29, and with our Mark xii. 24. But the expression, "the true sayings of the Scriptures," is not to be found in our Matthew or Mark. The writer of the passage above quoted must have had a well known edition of that speech by Jesus containing these words; because otherwise the whole argument which the writer puts into Peter's mouth would not have possessed any weight whatever. From this circumstance, it may be inferred safely, that

when the author of the Clementine Homilies was writing, there was not attributed to our New Testament that exclusive authority which it acquired subsequently : if, in fact, at that time our New Testament, in its present shape, had any existence whatever. The hypothesis that it had not any existence is corroborated by an examination of the *references* to the precepts of Jesus, and to the incidents in his history contained in the extant remains of the Fathers who are supposed to have flourished during our first and second centuries. If those Fathers were acquainted with our New Testament, why do they systematically ignore it? Nay, why do they use invariably the Apocryphal Gospels and other lost sources of Gospel doctrine and history?

#### REFERENCES.

Whatever may be thought concerning the silence of the Pagan world regarding Christianity during our second century, the silence of the earliest Christian Fathers regarding our New Testament, is a matter of undeniable importance. There are extant remains of Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Hermas, Clement the Roman, Barnabas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Papias, Hegippus, Justin Martyr, The Clementine Homilies and Recognitions, the Epistle to Diognetus, Basilides, Valentinus, Marcion, Dionysius, Melito, Claudius, the Epistle of Vienne and Lyons, the Canon of Muratori, Ptolemæus, and Heraclion. These are virtually all the remains we have of Christian literature during our second century, except, perhaps, some quotations from the attack made on Christianity by Celsus, who flourished towards the end of that century. Whether *any* of these remains contains a reference to our New Testament is a question which has been much disputed. But, it is generally admitted, that if they do, then, such references are very few when compared with the vast number of references contained in those remains to other

Gospels, and other now lost and unknown sources regarding the sayings and history of Jesus.

That there were a great number of other Gospels and other now unknown sources in existence during our second century is proved by the direct reference to "many" who had taken in hand the history of Jesus and Christianity prior to the compilation of our third Gospel. See Luke i. 1. The author of "Supernatural Religion," i. 218-9 says, "Looking at the close similarity of large portions of three synoptics, it is almost certain that many of the πολλοί here mentioned bore a close analogy to each other, and to our Gospels; and this is known to have been the case, for instance, amongst the various forms of the 'Gospel according to the Hebrews,' distinct mention of which we meet with long before we hear anything of our Gospels. When therefore, in early writings, we meet with quotations closely resembling, or, we may add, even identical with passages which are found in our Gospels, the source of which, however, is not mentioned, nor is any author's name indicated, the similarity or even identity cannot by any means be admitted as evidence that the quotation is necessarily from our Gospels, and not from some other similar work now no longer extant, and more especially not when in the same writings there are other quotations from apocryphal sources different from our Gospels. Whether regarded as historical records, or as writings embodying the mere tradition of the early Christians, our Gospels cannot for a moment be recognised as the exclusive depositories of the genuine sayings and doings of Jesus; and, so far from the common possession by many works in early times of such words of Jesus in closely similar form being either strange or improbable, the really remarkable phenomenon is, that such material variation in the report of the more important historical teaching should exist amongst them. But while similarity to our Gospels in passages quoted by early writers from unnamed sources cannot

prove the use of our Gospels, variation from them would suggest or prove a different origin, and at least it is obvious that quotations which do not agree with our Gospels, cannot, in any case, indicate their existence. . . . In proportion as we remove from apostolic times without positive evidence of the existence and authenticity of our Gospels, so does the value of their testimony dwindle away." Further on (ii. 248-50), the writer says, "After having exhausted the literature and the testimony bearing on the point, we have not found a single distinct trace of any one of those [synoptic] Gospels during the first century and a-half after the death of Jesus. Only once during the whole of that period do we find any tradition even, that any one of our evangelists composed a Gospel at all, and that tradition, so far from favouring our synoptics, is fatal to the claims of the first and second. About the middle of the second century, Papias, on the occasion to which we refer, records that Matthew composed the Discourses of the Lord in the Hebrew tongue: a statement which totally excludes the claim of our Greek Gospel to apostolic origin. Mark, he said, wrote down from the casual preaching of Peter the sayings and doings of Jesus, but without orderly arrangement, as he was not himself a follower of the Master, and merely recorded what fell from the apostle. This description, likewise, shows that our actual second Gospel could not, in its present form, have been the work of Mark. There is no other reference during the period to any writing of Matthew or Mark, and no mention at all of any work ascribed to Luke. If it be considered that there is any connection between Marcion's Gospel and our third synoptic, any evidence so derived is of an unfavourable character for that Gospel, as it involves a charge against it, of being interpolated and debased by Jewish elements. Any argument for the mere existence of our synoptics based upon their supposed rejection by heretical leaders and sects has the inevitable disadvantage

that the very testimony which would shew their existence would oppose their authenticity. There is no evidence of their use by heretical leaders, however, and no direct reference to them by any writer, heretical or orthodox, whom we have examined. We need scarcely add that no reason whatever has been shown for accepting the testimony of these Gospels as sufficient to establish the reality of miracles and of a direct Divine revelation. It is not pretended that more than one of the synoptic Gospels was written by an eye-witness of the miraculous occurrences reported, and whilst no evidence has been, or can be, produced even of the historical accuracy of the narratives, no testimony as to the correctness of the inferences from the external phenomena exists, or is now even conceivable. The discrepancy between the amount of evidence required, and that which is forthcoming, however, is greater than, under the circumstances, could have been thought possible." And (ii. 387), regarding our fourth Gospel he says, "For some century and a half, after the events recorded in the work, there is not only no testimony whatever connecting the fourth Gospel with the apostle John, but no certain trace even of the existence of the Gospel. There has not been the slightest evidence in any of the writings of the Fathers which we have examined, even of a tradition, that the apostle John had composed any evangelical work at all; and the claim advanced in favour of the Christian miracles of contemporaneous evidence, of extraordinary force and veracity, by undoubted eye-witnesses completely falls to the ground."

Justin Martyr, in his "First Apology," sect. xv., enumerates several doctrines which Jesus Christ taught. Amongst others, Justin says, "And of our love to all, He taught thus: 'If ye love them that love you, what new thing do ye? for even fornicators do this. But I say unto you, pray for your enemies, and love them that hate you, and bless them that curse you, and pray

for them that despitefully use you.'” The apologists for Christianity refer this passage to our Matthew, v. 46, 44; Luke vi. 28. These are fair specimens of patristic quotation and apologetic reference. The resemblances and the variations are patent to any one who is able to read. Some readers will think the differences so slight as to suggest that the passage was a quotation from memory, while other readers will perceive that since the precept “Pray for your enemies” is not to be found in our New Testament, the passage must have been taken from some other source.

In one of the very few fragments which we possess from the Cyclic Poems, and also in our “Iliad,” v. 83, xvi. 334, xx. 477, the following line occurs,—

“Him dark death seized and the strong grasp of fate.”

To assume that the writer of the lost Cyclic borrowed this line from our “Iliad,” or *vice versa*, is to beg the point in dispute. Under existing circumstances, it is impossible to give a decided answer. It may be that the line in question was a well-known formula taken by both writers from some third source.\*

In our New Testament we have distinct references to apocryphal writings, Matthew xxiii. 35, Romans xv. 19, 24, 1 Corinthians xv. 6, Jude 14, 1 Peter iii. 19, Ephesians iv. 9, &c., &c. While the writer of our canonical book of “Acts,” xx. 35, actually quotes from an apocryphal writing when he gives us, as the words of the Lord Jesus, the precept “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Sometimes the references in question exhibit only slight variations from passages in our New Testament. Regarding these variations, the writer of “Supernatural Religion,” with slight correction, ii. 17, 18, says, “The

\* From Jerome’s *Commentary* on Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians we learn that the Apostle John, towards the close of his life, used to quote, as a commandment of Jesus, the words, “Little children, love one another.” Where did the framer of this story find that quotation?



variation in these passages, it may be argued, are not very important. Certainly, if they were the exceptional variations amongst a mass of quotations perfectly agreeing with parallels in our Gospels, it might be exaggeration to base on such divergences a conclusion that they were derived from a different source. When it is considered, however, that the very reverse is the case, and that these are passages selected for their closer agreement out of a multitude of others either more decidedly differing from our Gospels, or not found in them at all, the case entirely changes, and variations being the rule instead of the exception, these, however slight, become evidence of the use of a Gospel different from ours. As an illustration of the importance of slight variations in connection with the question as to the source from which quotations are derived, the following may at random be pointed out. The passage, 'See thou say nothing to any man, but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest,' occurring in a work like the Homilies, would, supposing our second Gospel no longer extant, be referred to Matthew viii. 4, with which it entirely agrees, with the exception of its containing the one extra word 'nothing.' It however actually corresponds with Mark i. 44, though not with our first Gospel. Then again, supposing that our first Gospel had shared the fate of so many others of the πολλοί of Luke (i. 1), and in some early work the following passage were found: 'A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house,' this passage would undoubtedly be claimed by apologists as a quotation from Mark vi. 4, and as proving the existence and use of that Gospel. The omission of the words 'and among his own kin' would, at first, be explained as mere abbreviation, or defect of memory; but on the discovery that part or all of these words are omitted from some MSS., that, for instance, the phrase is erased from the oldest copy known, the Codex Sinaiticus, the derivation from the second Gospel would

be considered as established. The author, notwithstanding, might never have seen that Gospel, for the quotation corresponds with Matthew xiii. 57."

In short, the author of "Supernatural Religion" makes out a good case, which may be taken as proved at least provisionally, for holding that the remains of the Fathers in question (i.) mention incidents in the Gospel history recorded in our New Testament, but describe them differently. That (ii.) they mention incidents which are not recorded in our New Testament. That (iii.) they quote precepts and sayings which partly agree and partly disagree with some of the precepts and sayings contained in our New Testament. That (iv.) they quote precepts similar in sense, but different in words, from some precepts in our New Testament. That (v.) they quote precepts similar in words, but different in context, from some precepts in our New Testament. That (vi.) they quote precepts which are not in our New Testament. And (vii.), that they refer frequently to (a.) other Gospels not now extant; to (b.) other epistles not now extant; to (c.) other revelations different from our Apocalypse; to (d.) other works, now extant, as "scripture," but which works are not now considered to be "scripture;" to (e.) works not now extant, which those Fathers considered to be "scripture," and (f.) they never quote from our New Testament; on the contrary, as the author of "Supernatural Religion," i. 244, observes, "All the early writers avoid our Gospels, if they knew them at all, and systematically use other works." Which "other works" shall now be considered under the title of

#### THE APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS.

So long as a family has been always poor the members of it are indifferent to their genealogy. In like manner nations, so long as they are depressed by ignorance and want of home and foreign commerce, have

not any history. In both cases it happens that when the family or nation become "respectable," which is a euphemism for "rich," they search for their history and origin. But by that time discovery may be virtually impossible. However, kind nature has given man faculties sufficient to provide for all his wants. Where perception fails him fancy consoles him. Hence has arisen the vast mass of clannish, religious, and national legends which exist even in the present day, as well as the countless myriads of them which are extinct. From these, therefore, all that a really veracious historian can achieve is to point out the earliest historical trace he can discover of the family, the religion, or the nation. Unfortunately, this method of proceeding is regarded by the persons interested as disrespectful: so disagreeable is truth to the human mind, even though that mind be illuminated by the light of the Gospel. There are, however, some people who prefer truth to flattery, and *they* will not be shocked to hear that *before the time of Origen, A.D. 220, the Christian Church has not any reliable history.*

Unvarying tradition represents the founders of that Church as "unlettered and unskilful clowns,"—Acts iv. 13, *ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοί και ἰδιῶται*,—men, therefore, who were utterly unable to write. Consequently the original Gospel relating the doctrines, discourses, and exploits of Jesus must have been preserved *orally*. If so, variations in that Gospel must necessarily have arisen, unless they were prevented by a miracle, and we know from our fourth Gospel that such a miracle was not called into existence, by the fact that the writer of that Gospel took the liberty of making his Gospel differ from all the extant Gospels, apocryphal and canonical,—from every lost Gospel of which we have any definite knowledge,—and from every extant quotation from any other Gospel.

Even when reduced to writing, that original Gospel would naturally be in an uncouth state, recording vindic-

tive as well as beneficent exploits. Preaching puerile doctrines (Luke xii. 33), and (Luke xiv. 26) impossibilities. Recording mere thaumaturgies,—Matthew xvii. 2, xxi. 19; Thomas i. 2,—such as the transfiguration of Jesus, his withering of the barren fig tree, and his giving life to twelve sparrows which he made of clay. The utterly useless nature of these miracles renders it highly probable that they are fragments of the primitive Gospel.

Several of the names, given in the Gospels to the heroes and heroines who figure in them, savour strongly of personification. To give a few instances:—Jesus means a “Saviour;” Peter means a “rock;” Paul means a “worker;” St Perpetua is merely the first part of *perpetua felicitas*, “eternal happiness.” She and Potentiana, “power,” figure in the Acts of Peter and Paul. Perpetua is retained in the Church of England calendar (7th March), as are also St Prisca (18th January), which is merely the first part of *prisca fides*, “ancient faith,”—St Faith (6th October) and Lucy (13th December), which is merely *lux*, “light,” speak for themselves. St *Felix*, “fortunate,” the saint that brings good luck, has in some calendars not less than six festival days. (See De Morgan’s “Book of Almanacs.”) The story of St Veronica is told in the Gospel regarding “The Avenging of the Saviour.” The name is really a corruption of Bernice, but was afterwards ignorantly supposed to be a jumble of *vera*, “true,” and *εἰκῶν*, “a likeness,” meaning a true likeness of Jesus, and was given to a holy woman who, it was said, had taken the precaution of preserving the true likeness, miraculously impressed on the handkerchief with which she wiped the perspiration from his face.

Out of such shadows to manufacture anything resembling flesh and blood was a task of the very greatest difficulty, requiring the inventive genius of an Æschylus. Such a genius was not given to the Christian Church, and the construction of the Gospels fell to the lot of

very inferior workmen. Nevertheless, although their task was a very difficult one, their performances are not wholly destitute of merit. On the writers of the oldest Apocryphal Gospels, for instance "The Gospel according to the Hebrews," the task was laid of inventing incidents, combining those incidents with the sayings of the Logos, and weaving them into a self-consistent although very improbable narrative. That their success, and even that of our later four evangelists, was only partial, is a fact that was patent to the perception of Origen, who (*De Principiis*, book iv., chap. i. § 16) tells us repeatedly that the "Scriptures do not contain throughout a pure history of events, but of such as are interwoven indeed according to the letter, but which did not actually occur." And he says, "The Gospels themselves are filled with the same kind of narratives: *v. c.*, the devil leading Jesus into a high mountain, to show him from thence the kingdoms of the whole world, and the glory of them. For who is there among those who do not read such accounts carelessly, that would not condemn those who think that with the eye of the body—which requires a lofty height in order that the parts lying under and adjacent may be seen—the kingdoms of the Persians, and Scythians, and Indians, and Parthians, were beheld, and the manner in which their princes are glorified among men? And the attentive reader may notice in the Gospels innumerable other passages like these, so that he will be convinced that, in the histories that are literally recorded, circumstances that did not occur are inserted."

From the writings of Tatian, Athenagoras, and Theophilus, it is evident that the "sayings" of the Logos preceded the history of Jesus. That history—even as represented in our four Gospels—is so conflicting with itself, and the events related are so improbable, that, among the events related, we strain our sight in vain to distinguish between the false and the true; if, in fact, any of the events be true. That history was related in

a number of Gospels which are now lost. Among these was the above-mentioned "Gospel according to the Hebrews," which is quoted by Ignatius, who never quotes from our Gospels. As before-mentioned, these so-called Apocryphal Gospels were very numerous. We know of Gospels according to Peter, to Thomas, to James, to Judas, to Nicodemus, to Barnabas, to Matthias, to the Egyptians, to the Ebionites, to the Nazarenes, to the Twelve Apostles, &c., &c. In short, every man who thought himself able to write a Gospel cleverly felt himself at liberty to do so, and from what we know regarding some of the incidents contained in them, it is evident that the writers did not feel in the least constrained to follow any particular model. There was not any New Testament canon in existence until a canon was framed by the council of Laodicea, A.D. 362. So that during centuries the Christian Church had not any reliable history of its founders or of itself. This alone was a source of disagreement, uncertainty, doubt, and confusion.

But in addition to this, we know from the Clementine Homilies, and the canonical Acts and Pauline Epistles, that there were two hostile parties in the primitive Church which threatened to exterminate each other. The one party, said to be headed by Peter, considered Christianity a mere continuation of the Jewish law; the other, said to be headed by Paul, represented the glad tidings as the introduction of an entirely new system of salvation, applicable to all mankind, and superseding the dispensation of the law by a dispensation of grace.

By these means Christianity came into the world amidst a whirlwind of heresy, insubordination, schism, and controversy. It may be, but we do not know, that there was a time when the original founder of Christianity, whoever he was, had not any followers. If so, then, there was a time when the whole Christian Church was of one mind. Of course, to this time we

cannot assign any certain date, and it is quite possible that it may not have had any existence. And unless it can be shown that there has been such a time, these controversies prove that there never was in the Church any universally received account of Jesus Christ: the idea of him was a myth from the beginning. The extant remains of the Fathers, supposed to have flourished during our first two centuries, abound with disputation, malignity, superciliousness, and denunciation. It is plain that the writers of those remains were men wholly unacquainted with literary criticism, and with philology as a science. Many of their arguments are extremely puerile. But from these very circumstances they have preserved to us the outline of a Gospel which may be regarded as an *edition*, at least, of the primitive Gospel.

An intelligent, virtuous, zealous, and eminent Christian of his day was one Marcion, said to have been born at Sinope, in Paphlagonia, during the early part of our second century. He belonged to the Pauline school of Christianity. He rejected the teaching of all the apostles except Paul's. This drew on him the hatred of many contemporary writers. But so high was his character, and so well did he support his views that, even in the time of Epiphanius, A.D. 367, the followers of Marcion were said to be found throughout the whole Christian world.

It is said that Marcion regarded as his sources of Christian doctrine a Gospel and ten epistles supposed to have been written by Paul, namely, Galatians, two Corinthians, two Thessalonians, Romans, Laodiceans, answering to our Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians. The writer of "Supernatural Religion," ii. 81, &c., says, "None of the other books which now form part of the canonical New Testament were either mentioned or recognised by Marcion. This is the oldest collection of apostolic writings of which there is any trace, but there was at that time no other 'Holy Scripture' than the Old Testament, and no New Testa-

ment canon had yet been imagined. Marcion neither claimed canonical authority for these writings, nor did he associate with them any idea whatever of inspiration."

Any remains of Marcion's Gospel exist only in the extant writings of his bitter and unphilological opponents. It appears from those writings that Marcion's Gospel resembled our third Gospel, but was considerably shorter. Marcion held that matter is essentially sinful,\* and that although material acts and functions were in his Gospel assigned to Jesus, yet that He was not a material being; a doctrine which has, at least, the merit of accounting for the incident (John xx. 19) that Jesus was able to glide, without causing disturbance, through a wall. Marcion's opponents accused him of having mutilated and adulterated our third Gospel to support his own views. But the fact is, that passages in our Luke, said to have been omitted by Marcion, are often not opposed to his system at all, and sometimes even in favour of it; and, on the other hand, passages which were retained in his Gospel are contradictory to his views. This is not intelligible upon any theory of arbitrary garbling of a Gospel in the interest of a system. It is much more probable that those unphilological Fathers mistook, and, with characteristic assumption, asserted that the shorter, but earlier, Gospel of Marcion was an abbreviation of our much later canonical Gospel, instead of recognising the latter as an extension of the former. It is not only possible but very probable that, in the remote region of Paphlagonia, the Gospel, used by Marcion, had remained unaltered, in sacred quietness, on the outskirts

\* This Gnostic doctrine occurs more than once in our New Testament. (See "The Jesus of History," bk. iii., ch. 2, &c.) It lies at the root of our John i. 3, where the writer (after saying that the Logos was a god) adds, "all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made," in order to keep the Supreme Deity free from the pollution of touching matter, and at the same time to keep the Logos in his proper place of inferiority.



of Christianity; whilst, in the more active religious centres of the Church, into the other Gospels there had been infused fresh matter which had modified and increased their earlier forms. In the time of Irenæus, a comparatively late writer, it was easy to join him in asserting that, because Marcion recognised only one Gospel, he rejected our Gospels. But Irenæus has not even attempted to prove that Marcion was acquainted with our Gospels, or that in Marcion's day they had any existence.\*

During all the controversies and debates, before the time of Irenæus,† we never hear our Gospels quoted. It is to the lost Gospels and the Apocryphal Gospels that those early Fathers appeal as containing "The Gospel." This is an argument of very great weight, and well worthy of the reader's most serious consideration. For, there are writers who seek to disparage the Apocryphal Gospels, and assert our much more modern Gospels to be genuine, original, apostolical, and written under the guidance of divine inspiration. Amongst the number of such writers is Mosheim ("Institutes,"

\* Marcion's so called "heresy," and the slanders heaped on him, form a fair sample of the uncritical manner in which orthodoxy treats mere difference. Marcion's certainly old, and probably genuine, edition of "The Gospel" was asserted to be a garbled novelty, merely because it partly differed from our Luke's Gospel, which avowedly (i. 1) had "many" predecessors!—See the admirable treatise on "Supernatural Religion," part ii., ch. vii. Speaking of "a learned mythologist who had long laboured to rebuild the fallen temple of Jupiter," and who, to some persons, "appeared to be *non compos*," Peacock says, "He has a system of his own, which appears, in the present day, more absurd than other systems, only because it has fewer followers. The manner in which the spirit of system twists everything to its own views is truly wonderful. I believe that in every nation of the earth the system which has most followers will be found the most absurd in the eye of an enlightened philosophy."—*Melincourt*, ch. vi.

† It is impossible to assign an exact date to Irenæus. The stories which make him a contemporary of Tatian, and at the same time relegate him to Gaul, are great nonsense. From his knowledge of the greater part of the writings in our New Testament, it is probable that Irenæus flourished during our third century—a short time before Origen.

century i., Part ii., chap. ii., sec. 17). According to these writers, the Apocryphal Gospels are full of impositions and fables, composed by persons of not any bad intentions, perhaps, but who were superstitious, simple, and addicted to what we should consider pious frauds, although not so considered by those ignorant and simple people. Such writers also inform us, in the words of Mosheim, that the rulers of the Church seasonably interposed, and "caused books which were truly divine, and which came from apostolic hands, to be speedily separated from that mass of trash into a volume by themselves." Such writers are bound to explain how it came to pass that the early Fathers invariably used that "mass of trash," and never noticed those "books which were truly divine, and which came from apostolic hands!" On the contrary, if those "truly divine books" had any existence at that time, those Fathers studiously avoided them. Just as Pindar and the Greek Tragic "avoid" *our* Homer, and use systematically the much older Cyclic Poems, if, in fact, they knew *our* Homer at all, or if *our* Homer, in their day, had any existence.

This omission by the early Fathers is a strong proof that the works we have, purporting to be their remains, are the genuine remains of at least a *time* prior to the existence of the writings contained in *our* New Testament. Because if those remains had been forgeries, invented after the appearance of *our* New Testament, assuredly the quotations found in those remains would have been altered to correspond with the partly similar and partly dissimilar passages in *our* New Testament, while the other quotations would have been obliterated altogether.

Nevertheless the old Apocryphal Gospels were so imperfect in affording materials for proving that their Logos or Jesus was identical with the Christ of the Septuagint, that several of the early apologists for the Christians were compelled to have recourse to the

Greek Tragic, ecclesiastical miracles, Sibylline verses, Hesiod, and even our "Homer," to eke out their theory. In the meantime—until more artistically framed Gospels had been constructed—all writers of a Gospel considered themselves at liberty to write a life of Jesus as best they could, and without feeling themselves in the least restricted by the contents of any previously existing Gospel: just as prior to the time of Plato all the numerous Grecian "Homers" considered themselves at liberty to construct, and, as we know, did construct, just as they pleased, any "Tale of Troy," likely to prove a good hit, without being restricted by the contents of any previously existing "Ajaciad," "Achilliad," or "Iliad."

Subsequently the great point with writers of Gospels became the identification of Jesus, his exploits, and the incidents in his mythical career, with certain incidents, statements, supposed prophecies, and allegories contained in the Septuagint. The absence of all real facts relating to a character so purely mythical as Jesus Christ rendered this a difficult task. All great achievements of the human mind must originate in very rudimentary beginnings. The formation of our Gospels is not an exception to that rule. Their commencement is clearly traceable to a mental phenomenon which next manifested itself in the Church, namely,

#### THE EXALTATION OF PROPHECY.

Trypho, "Dialogue," sec. viii., says to Justin, "But if Christ be come and is anywhere, he is unknown, nor does he know himself, nor can he be endued with any power till Elias shall come and anoint him, and make him manifest to all men. But you having received an idle rumour, shape a Christ for yourselves, and for his sake lose utterly the present time." To this argument Justin does not reply by adducing any miracle attributed to Jesus Christ, or any passage from our New Testament, or the evidence of any

apostle, or of any person supposed to have been a contemporary of Jesus.\* But in reply, sec. xi., Justin quotes Isaiah li. 4, 5, "Hearken to me my people, and give ear unto me, O ye kings: for a law shall proceed from me, and my judgment for a light to the Gentiles. My righteousness approaches speedily, and my salvation shall go forth, and on mine arm shall the Gentiles trust." And Justin quotes Jeremiah xxxi. 31, 32, to

\* It is important to note here the omission of any reference to Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Certainly that incident in the life of Jesus was known to Justin, who relates it, "Dialogue," sec. lxxxviii., and states that on that occasion a fire was kindled in the river Jordan, and that a voice came from heaven and quoted from our second Psalm the words, "Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee." This account of the incident is in conformity with the record of it contained in Marcion's Gospel, Codex Bezae, and from what we know concerning "The Gospel according to the Hebrews," it is extremely probable that Justin quoted his account of that incident from the last-mentioned source. The omission of it here suggests the idea that Justin did not attach any weight to an unction in the administration of which there was not any physical oil used. The neglect, by the primitive Christian mythologists, to cook a story to the effect that some high priest, or other competent functionary, anointed Jesus, created an insuperable difficulty.

It is gravely asserted in Dr Wm. Smith's "New Testament History," p. 222-4, that the difficulty was surmounted (Luke vii. 36-50) by the easy and convenient, but not strictly legal interposition of a prostitute! But all really moral readers will prefer the more dignified attempt to overcome the difficulty made in the "Clementine Recognitions," i. 45, where Peter says that "after God had made the world . . . he set an angel as chief over the angels, a spirit over the spirits, a star over the stars, a demon over the demons, a bird over the birds, a beast over the beasts, a serpent over the serpents, a fish over the fishes, over men a man who is Jesus Christ. But he is called *Christ* by a certain excellent rite of religion; for as there are certain names common to kings, as Arsaces among the Persians, Cæsar among the Romans, Pharaoh among the Egyptians, so among the Jews a king is called *Christ*. And the reason of the appellation is this: although, indeed, he was the Son of God and the beginning of all things, he became Man; him first God anointed with oil which was taken from the wood of the tree of life; therefore, from that anointing he is called *Christ*."—Q. E. D.

A disinterested looker-on may well be excused if he regard the modern rejection of *all* the extant remains of Christian literature that are older than our New Testament, as being virtually a piece of critical suicide.

the like effect. And then from these supposed prophecies Justin draws the following characteristic and inconclusive inference: "Therefore, if God did foretell that he would make a new covenant, and that it should be for a light of the Gentiles, and we plainly see and are fully persuaded that, through the name of that Jesus Christ, who was crucified, men turn from idols and all iniquity to the living God, and continue even unto death in the profession and in the practice of piety; both from the performance of such good works, and also from the mighty miracles that followed, it was easy for all men to perceive that this is the new law and the new covenant, and the expectation of those who, out of all nations, expected to receive blessings from God. For we are the true and spiritual Israel."

In like manner the writer of our second Peter i. 16-19, says, "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty; for he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mountain; also we have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dirty place, until the day dawn, and the light-bringer arise in your hearts." So, according to this writer, supposed prophecies contained in the Septuagint were "more sure" than the evidence of "hearers" and of "eye-witnesses."

Gibbon, "Decline and Fall," ch. xv., observes correctly regarding these apologists, that "when they would demonstrate the divine origin of Christianity, they insist much more strongly on the predictions

which announced than the miracles which accompanied the appearance of the Messiah."

But the very idea of a prediction or prophecy involves a miracle, which, to say the least, is an event the existence of which has never yet been proved. According to the logic of these Christian apologists, passages in the Septuagint, written by persons and under circumstances utterly unknown, are supposed to be supernatural predictions necessarily involving the future occurrence of certain other supernatural events. Thus the former class of miracles prove the latter class of miracles, while the former class of miracles rest on an arbitrary interpretation of old and obscure writings. But the weakness of this system of logic soon became unsatisfactory. And the next development in the Christian Church was a readiness to assert and a willingness to believe that the Christian religion proved its divine origin because it had spread very widely. This development gave rise to

#### ECCLESIASTICAL EXAGGERATION.

Justin in his "Dialogue," sec. cxvii., says, "speaking generally, there is not any race of men—either foreign or Greek—or, in one word, by whatever name called, either living on wains, or without houses at all, or dwelling in huts as breeders of cattle, in which in the name of the crucified Jesus, prayers and thanksgivings are not made to the father and creator of all." This assertion the learned and candid Mosheim, in his "Commentaries," characterises as an "exaggeration."

Tertullian, in his tract, "Against the Jews," says: "In whom but the Christ now come have all nations believed? For in whom do all other nations (except the Jews) confide? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, Armenia, Phrygia, Cappadocia, and inhabitants of Pontus, and Asia, and Pamphylia; the dwellers in Egypt, and inhabitants of

the region beyond Cyrene ; Romans and strangers ; and in Jerusalem,\* both Jews and Proselytes ; so that the various tribes of the Getuli and the numerous hordes of the Moors ; all the Spanish clans, and the different nations of Gauls, and those regions of the Britons inaccessible to the Romans but subject to Christ, and of the Sarmatians, and the Dacians, and Germans, and Scythians, and many unexplored nations and provinces, and islands unknown to us, and which we cannot enumerate : in all which places the name of Christ, who has already come, now reigns."

Commenting on this passage, Mosheim (p. 4) says : "What Tertullian here says of Christianity's having in his time been professed by various nations of the Gauls, is directly contrary to the fact. In the time of Tertullian the church of Gaul had not attained to any degree of strength or size, but was quite in its infancy, and confined within the limits of one individual nation, as the inhabitants of the country themselves acknowledge. What he adds about Christ's being acknowledged in those parts of Britain to which the Roman arms had not penetrated, is still more widely removed from the truth. Finally, his assertion that many unexplored nations and unknown provinces and islands had embraced Christianity, most plainly evinces that he suffered himself to be carried away by the warmth of imagination, and did not sufficiently attend to what he was committing to paper. For how could it be possible that Tertullian should have been made acquainted with what was done in unexplored regions and unknown islands and provinces ? In fact, instead of feeling his way by means of certain and approved testimony, he appears, in this instance, to have become the dupe of vague and indistinct rumour."

So far as Britain is concerned, a very different view from that given by Tertullian is given by Mr Thomas

\* It is a notorious fact that at this time, A.D. 220, there were not any Jews permitted to even *enter* Jerusalem !

Wright in his admirable treatise, "The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon," p. 299, 300. Mr Wright says, "It cannot but excite our astonishment that among such an immense number of altars and inscriptions of temples, and with so many hundreds of Roman sepulchres and graves as have been opened in this country, we find not a single trace of the religion of the Gospel. We must bear in mind, moreover, that a large proportion of these monuments belong to a late period of the Roman occupation ;\* in many of the inscriptions relating to temples, the building is said to have been rebuilt after having fallen into ruin through its antiquity—*vetustate collapsum*—and the examination of more than one of the more magnificent villas has proved that they were erected on the site of an older villa, which had probably been taken down for the same reason. We seem driven by these circumstances to the unavoidable conclusion that Christianity was not established in Roman Britain, although it is a conclusion totally at variance with the preconceived notions into which we have been led by the ecclesiastical historians."

The writer of our epistle to the Colossians, i. 23, says that "the gospel was preached to every creature which is under heaven."

But the writer of our epistle to the Romans combines ecclesiastical exaggeration with the exaltation of prophecy in a unique manner. The writer of the nineteenth "Psalm" says, "The heavens declare the glory of God . . . . their voice is gone forth into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." Meaning thereby that the regular movements and the splendour of the heavenly bodies proved them to be the work of a great and superhuman intelligence. The writer of our Epistle to the Romans, x. 18, quotes this passage to prove that Christianity had been proclaimed all over the earth. He says, "Faith cometh by hear-

\* That occupation terminated A.D. 418.



ing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes, verily, "their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world." This curious and, in fact, childish sort of reasoning was very prevalent among the Jews of Alexandria; and as in our fourth gospel, xix. 36, we have a ceremonial law perverted allegorically into a prophecy concerning an incident in the mythical history of Jesus, so here we have a statement concerning the heavenly bodies perverted allegorically into a prophecy regarding the spread of Christianity. The argument, such as it is, may be stated thus:—The writer of our nineteenth "Psalm" foretold allegorically the spread of Christianity over all the earth; that writer wrote under the influence and with the aid of divine guidance; Christianity has been proclaimed; therefore Christianity has spread over all the earth!

Here, in addition to prophecy and exaggeration, we have that distinguishing characteristic of the Jewish philosophic school in Alexandria, namely, the element of

#### ALLEGORY.

It is difficult to understand how the human mind could ever have thought that a description of one thing under the image of another—that is to say, allegory—could possibly increase knowledge or diminish ignorance. All allegorical interpretations and illustrations are groundless, uncertain, fanciful, and indistinct. The real parallels they contain are mostly few and trifling. They cannot prove anything. And, worst of all, the few similitudes that allegories contain are invariably accompanied by divergences, and in most cases the divergences preponderate. In fact, nothing except extensive acquaintance with the phases of human folly could lead a sensible man to believe that such a system of interpretation ever prevailed anywhere on earth. Nevertheless such has been the case, nor is it yet wholly extinct.

Dr Kalisch ("Leviticus," i. 143, *et seq.*) says: "As in nature, so in history, the same things are often repeated at different times and in different degrees of perfection; the development of nations and of mankind advances in rhythmic cycles, each complete in itself, and each analogous, but superior, to the preceding. The Hebrew mind, in the period of the old canon, had created for itself a certain system of religious thought and public devotion, compact and consistent, and for the time entirely satisfactory. But the Jews advanced; they unfolded the germs of the earlier literature, and they assimilated to their own views ideas borrowed from the creeds of other nations. Yet they had long learnt to look upon the Old Testament as the all-embracing code of wisdom and knowledge, which must contain—it may be in obscure allusions or hidden allegories—all truths that can ever be discovered by the human intellect to the end of time; they acted upon the conviction, 'Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it.' Therefore they strove to corroborate any new conception or opinion by connecting it with some really or apparently kindred passage of the Scriptures; and they introduced that connection by the word, 'As it is written.' For instance, Ben Zoma said, 'Who is wise? He who learns from every body; for it is written, I acquired knowledge from all who taught me' (Psalm cxix. 99), though the words employed have in the Psalms where they occur a very different meaning, viz., 'I have more knowledge than all my teachers.'

"Such midrashic elements began to appear from very early times; in fact, not long after the completion of the second Temple. . . . At first the Jewish doctors were cautious in this method: preserving the consciousness that the combinations were the work of their own judgment, they desired the Scriptural passage to be regarded as no more than a mere 'support' of their own view, or as implying, at best, only a 'hint' in

reference to it; and the Mishna, still sparing in that process, speaks of many new laws that 'fly in the air and have no Biblical foundation;' and of others that are 'like mountains suspended by a hair, as they are little alluded to in the Bible, yet developed into numerous ordinances.' But gradually, though not without opposition from some more sober sects, as the Sadducees and Bæothusians, they pursued the same path with greater boldness and assurance; they considered no opinion safe against later fluctuations unless guarded by Scriptural authority; they deemed it, therefore, necessary to trace *all* the innumerable expansions of the Law to the Bible, which they diligently searched and unscrupulously employed for that object; and they seriously and confidently pointed to their discoveries, no matter how strange soever, as 'proofs' of the doctrines they were anxious to diffuse. In this manner, that which at first was understood merely as a happy and welcome *parallel* was imperceptibly converted into an irrefutable *argument*. . . . Every trace of sound comment vanished, and the Bible was overgrown with the weeds of eccentric paradox. All the conclusions so obtained were endowed with the same authority and holiness as the clear utterances of the Bible. They were regarded not only as justified, but as so excessively genuine and infallible, that Talmudists could propound the surprising rule, 'He who renders a verse according to its plain form (that is, literally) is a falsifier,' although they had the boldness to add, 'He who makes any addition is a blasphemer.'

"The history of the Christian or typical interpretation of the Bible was in many respects analogous to that of the Jewish schools. . . . The New Testament offers numerous instances both of 'the support' and 'the proof:' the former is, as in the Mishnah and Talmud, introduced by 'as it is written' or 'spoken;' the latter usually by 'that it might be fulfilled, what was spoken or written.'

“In narrating the life of Jesus, the Evangelists introduce a series of events which, though they had happened in previous times, occurred again in the [supposed] history of Christ, but in a manner so much more real that they were considered as the ‘fulfilment’ of the former. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, that a corresponding promise given to Isaiah more than seven hundred years before, and at that time literally realised, might be fulfilled (Matthew i. 23, ii. 15; Isaiah vii. 14; Hosea xi. 1). He was taken to Egypt as a child and brought back to Palestine, that he might ‘fulfil’ in a deeper sense the words of the prophet Hosea, originally applied to the Hebrews, ‘out of Egypt have I called my son.’ The child-murder at Bethlehem which he occasioned, was the ‘fulfilment’ of the carnage perpetrated by the Babylonians in Jerusalem at the time of its destruction, about six centuries before; although the former was utterly insignificant compared with the fearful bloodshed of the latter. . . . But the New Testament proceeded even further in this direction. The principle of fulfilment was applied not only to events but to laws. The command to roast the paschal lamb entire, so that no bone of it is broken—to symbolise the unity of the families and the nation—found its true fulfilment (Exodus xii. 9, 46; John xix. 36), when the legs of Christ were not broken after the crucifixion. . . .

“A number of objections against these and all typical views must at once crowd upon the reader’s attention. He will first of all be struck by the uncertainty and indistinctness of the interpretations. Can Christ be at the same time the victim and the mediating priest? If the victim, how can he intercede? If the high-priest, how can his blood be shed for atonement? Yet he is represented both as the one and the other; in either case the parallels are worked out into microscopic details; and the inevitable

result is a most perplexing confusion both in the sacrificial rites and in the attributes of Christ. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews seems indeed to have felt this difficulty; for he represents Christ as the victim on earth, but as the high-priest after his crucifixion in heaven, which is the holy of holies where he performs his ministrations; but if so, where is the analogy between the ordinary sacrifices and that of Christ? That one and chief inaccuracy led naturally to unlimited and almost universal identifications. Christ was contended to be, in his own and sole person (Hebrews v. 9, 10, vi. 19, 20, vii. 26, viii. 4), 'victim, sacrifice, priest, altar, God, man, king, high-priest, sheep, lamb, in fact, all in all, that he may be our life in every respect;' till in this maze of entanglement every landmark disappeared, and all connection with the Old Testament was utterly lost. Occasional similarities may be discoverable, because, as we have above remarked, historical events repeat themselves within certain conditions; but even a cursory examination will generally prove the decided preponderance of the divergences. If Christ be the 'Passover,' how can his life, even by the remotest allegories, be harmonised with the requirements of the paschal lamb, which was to be *roasted*, consumed *entirely*, without the least portion being left, eaten with *bitter herbs*, and killed *annually*? Typical explanations cannot be consistently followed out without leading to absurdities, of which a treatise (*Quadratus quomodo Christus fuerit*, by J. J. Cramer, in his work *De ara exteriori*, xii. 1), entitled 'How Christ—the altar—was square?' is but one specimen in a large class. If their adherents gave due weight to this consideration, they would attempt to test their religious tenets by their own intrinsic merits, rather than by unnaturally grafting them upon the Old Testament. As many theologians, therefore, had not the courage to interpret typically all details, they selected some as

adapted for that method, while they understood the rest literally; but a principle which is not generally applicable is not any principle at all, and reveals its fatal weakness."

#### OUR NEW TESTAMENT CANON.

So well as experience can guide us, and as (p. 37) we have before observed, all great works are the growth of human efforts from very small beginnings. They are the joint production of time, study, perseverance, leisure, and skill. We know from their own avowals that most of the great dramas of Æschylus and of Sophocles were manufactured out of the old Homeric ballads and the Cyclic Poems. We know from the references contained in our "Old Testament" that it is for the most part a work compiled after the return of the Jews from Babylon, and manufactured out of between twenty and thirty old works long since lost, such as "The visions of Iddo the Seer," 2 *Chron.* ix. 29; "The book of the Wars of the Lord," *Numbers* xxi. 14; "The book of Jashur," *Joshua* x. 13, &c. We know that there is not any trace of our "Homer's Iliad" until about the time of Plato. Those who have made Shakspeare their study are generally agreed that his plays are to a very considerable extent manufactured out of previously existing ballads and dramas. Sir Isaac Newton was aided in the composition of his *Principia* by the previous works of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler. And our "New Testament" was compiled out of previously existing compilations, long ago either lost or destroyed, and some still remaining, such as "The Gospel of the Infancy," "The Gospel of Nicodemus," &c.,\* between

\* See "The Book of Days," Dec. 28, where, in an article by the late Mr Wm. Pinkerton, the origin of the noble and unparalleled game of *Whist* is traced, about A.D. 1740, from the puerile and vulgar games called "Whisk" and "Swabbers."

the second and fourth centuries of the Christian era.

Uncouth and worthless old ballads, and marvellous tales, are highly prized, so long as those who read them or listen to them have not anything better. In like manner, during our second and third centuries there existed a considerable quantity of what is *now* called apocryphal ecclesiastical literature, which was then decidedly popular, and at least a portion of it was by many Christians regarded as *scripture*. So lately as our fourth century, Athanasius, in his tract on the "Incarnation of the Word," refers to the downfall of idols in Egypt when Jesus went thither: a story recorded in the gospel of the now called Pseudo Matthew. And in his fourth oration against the Arians also, Athanasius mentions the fear of the keepers in Hades when Jesus descended to the under world: a story recorded in our Gospel of Nicodemus, and referred to clearly in *Ephesians* iv. 9, 10, and *1 Peter* iii. 19, 20.

Of course it may be argued that our "New Testament" was written about A.D. 50,—that it sunk into oblivion,—remained in utter obscurity for upwards of a century and a half, in fact until the time of Irenæus, whatever time that may be,—and rose again *after* the Apocryphal Gospels, &c., had enjoyed their little day of popularity. But there is not any evidence to prove this. There is not any analogous instance of such an occurrence in the history of literature. And as the earliest specimens of apocryphal Christian literature are silent regarding the existence of Christ, this supposed long slumber of our "New Testament" renders all knowledge of him by Pliny junior, and Tacitus virtually impossible. While, on the other hand, there is such a close relationship between parts of our "New Testament," and some sayings of the Logos quoted by the early Fathers and parts of the gospel of Nicodemus, the "Infancy," &c., that reason compels us to infer that as

the great works of Æschylus, Sophocles, Shakspeare, "Homer," our "Old Testament," Newton, &c., arose out of the older and inferior collections of literature above mentioned; so the writings contained in our "New Testament" arose out of the inferior and older apocryphal Christian literature, which had been highly prized by the members of the primitive Christian Church so long as they had not any more skilfully written doctrinal tracts or tales of thaumaturgy to read or listen to. The world's history shows us invariably that ignorance must precede knowledge, that inefficiency must precede skill, and that the human race must be educated before the individual can achieve anything useful or enduring.

Furthermore, the Logos, Jesus, Paul, and the Twelve Apostles are shadowy personages, like all the unreal heroes of the mythological world. Some of them—such as Jesus, Peter, &c.—are made to pass through three or four editions, just as the Homeric heroes Ajax, Achilles, &c., are made to pass. It is admitted by all advocates of Christianity that outside our "New Testament" there is not any genuine and authentic account of the heroes who flourish in that collection of writings. Did those heroes, then, as well as our "New Testament," flourish, sink into oblivion, remain unknown during a century and a half, and rise again *after* the heroes and heroines, Abgarus or Agbarus, Polycarp, Ignatius, Thecla, Perpetua, Papias, Potentiana, Veronica, Felicitas, Lucy, Flora, &c., had enjoyed their little day of notoriety? This supposition is quite as untenable as the former; because several documents, even in the extant remains of the apocryphal Christian literature, mention Jesus, Paul, Thomas, Peter, &c., but the writers of those documents do not appeal to our "New Testament" as being invested with exclusive authority, for the very good reason (as stated before) that there is not any trace of its having been so regarded by the Church prior to the Council of Laodicea, A.D. 362. The apocry-



phal gospels—at least those according to “the Hebrews,” “the Ægyptians,” &c., &c.—were used not only by heretical writers, but they were used by the whole Christian Church down to the end of our second century, and by several orthodox writers after that time. Our four gospels were not able, at their first appearance, to supersede the inferior, but really older, gospels which were already in possession of authority and of the affections of believers. The recognition of merit is a work of time. No doubt so far back in the history of the Church as the times of Irenæus and Origen those eminent writers perceived the great advantage which our gospels gained over the older gospels, by rehabilitating the memoirs of Jesus and his immediate followers, and making the incidents therein contained identical with some incident, prophecy, or allegory contained, or supposed to be contained, in the Septuagint: in short, in proving that “Jesus was the Christ;” that is to say, identifying the Jesus of the apocryphal gospels with the Christ of the Septuagint. But this superiority was not at first recognized by those who had not the ability to perceive it. They were contented with the rude models which our evangelists rehabilitated. So lately as our fourth century Eusebius (“E. H.,” iii. 25) tells us “there are some who number among these [genuine books of our New Testament] the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with which those of the Hebrews that have received Christ are particularly delighted.” That gospel is much the most ancient of which we have any distinct traces. It appears to have been the model, not only of the other old apocryphal gospels, “the Gospel according to Peter,” that “according to the Ægyptians,” that “according to the Nazarenes,” &c., &c.; but it appears to have been the model of our first three gospels. Those gospels are remarkable for traces of ingenuity, rather than originality; for old precepts dressed in new words; for old stories with a new inflexion given to them; personifications, and the like.

When these gospels gained ground, the temptation to make Jesus no longer a man, but a demigod, and to surround him with a dramatic narrative, relating supernatural incidents and nothing else, became irresistible. In short, Jesus was now rendered a fit subject for a romance, a tragedy, or an epic poem. The old "Gospel according to the Hebrews" furnished too tame a model for the writer of our fourth gospel. It is remarkable, moreover, that our fourth evangelist considered himself quite free to clothe Jesus with any narrative he pleased, provided he made a good hit. It is also remarkable that the result verified the anticipation of the evangelist. He appears to have taken as his model "Prometheus Bound," or "Œdipus Coloneus." At all events, in our fourth gospel all history, all realities of every kind, are excluded utterly. And here the question arises, Could such a being as Jesus ever have existed? It is quite plain that even the members of the early Christian Church paused before they ascribed divine authority to any of the numerous gospels that were afloat during our second, third, and the greater part of our fourth centuries. Credulity itself was startled! This is a remarkable fact, and an important one also. It explains why the formation of our New Testament canon was postponed to so late a period as the council held at Laodicea, A.D. 362. Time, and only time, can give an appearance of reality to the supernatural; and, aided by allegory, time can effect wonders. For it does not require any great effort of sagacity to discern in the Jesus of our New Testament the personification of the head of the Jewish nation: \* in the Church, the personification of that nation; in the twelve apostles, the personification of the twelve tribes of Israel; and in the doctrines of our "New Testament," a republication, in a different form, of the doctrines contained in the

\* The members of which nation, during centuries, have been persecuted for putting to death a man of whom they never knew anything, and who never had any objective existence.

Septuagint. Our "New Testament" does not contain any useful moral precept not to be found in Pindar, the Greek Tragics, and the Septuagint; and, consequently, it has not any valid claim to be considered a revelation. It is merely a compilation of writings selected by the Christian Church at various times during the second, third, and fourth centuries, until—as we have it, with the exception of the so-called "Apocalypse"—it was sanctioned as the canon of faith by the Council of Laodicea, about A.D. 362. The "Apocalypse" having found its way into the version known as the Latin Vulgate, obtained by that circumstance a dubious sanctity. From the silence of ecclesiastical history regarding any rational principle of selection used by the Church in council, when arranging our "New Testament" canon, it may be inferred reasonably that the selection was not arrived at by any rational principle, but that the question, in each case, was put to the votes of the Council's members, and carried merely by the vote of the majority.

To say the least, the foregoing explanation is the most probable approximation to the real history of our "New Testament," and the date of its canonical authority. That the compilations of narratives concerning the supposed life of Jesus contained in our "New Testament" canon were in general circulation in the Church during our second century, and more especially that any one of our gospels was known to an apostle and acknowledged by him, has never been proved. The vast mass of Apocryphal gospel narratives, and epistles, and "Acts" from which our "New Testament" has been compiled resemble exactly those masses of old, rude, uncouth, and legendary documents from which the Greek Tragics, our "Old Testament," our "Iliad," Chaucer, and Shakspeare have been compiled. In all those cases the respective compilations can be accounted for and explained in a *natural* manner by treating them as selections, modifications,

adaptations, and reconstructions made skilfully from rude legends. This explanation is complete in itself, and does not leave us any improbability to wonder at, or any miracle to believe. Those who receive that explanation are not required to recognise in our "New Testament" anything except the natural career of myths and legends again and again altered, modified, improved, and reconstructed, until that compilation enabled the Christian Church to model its system of doctrine and Church government agreeably to the Levitical system. That explanation possesses the further merit, namely, that by means of it we can discern the growth of Christianity. Of course we cannot assign particular and specific dates to the various documents we have passed under review; but by means of that explanation we can perceive that between the years A.D. 70 and A.D. 362 there took place in the Christian Church the following

#### DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT.

A glance at the development of doctrine in the Christian Church, as shown in the writings of those Fathers who are supposed to have flourished from Tatian to Origen, will help the student of Primitive Church History to arrive at a true perception regarding the growth of the Christian doctrines.

Firstly, we have Tatian, Hermas, Athenagoras, and Theophilus, who knew of Christians and the Logos, but did not know anything about Jesus, or the Christ, or our New Testament. Their distinguishing doctrines were (1) Monotheism and (2) Asceticism.

Secondly, we have Barnabas, James, the Clementine Homilies and Recognitions, Clement the Roman, the Apocalypse, Jude, Peter, Papias, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Justin, who heard of Jesus Christ, knew the sayings of the Logos and the history of Jesus, as

related in the Apocryphal Gospels, but they had not any narratives of him corresponding with those in our New Testament.

Thirdly, we have the epistles attributed to Paul and our fourth Gospel. The writers of these works knew most of the doctrines held by modern Christians, but they did not know the narratives contained in our first three Gospels.

Fourthly, we have the writings attributed to Nicodemus, Matthew, Luke, the writer of "Acts," and Mark. The writers of these works were in possession of a detailed history concerning the doctrines, preachings, genealogy, and exploits of Jesus. That history was very far from being consistent. It contained as many various reflections as the fragments of a broken mirror. Though these writers knew most of the books contained in our New Testament, yet they considered other works not contained in that collection as equal in authority. Both the history and doctrines of these writers were different from those of the third class.

And, fifthly and lastly, we have the writings of Irenæus and Origen, which show a knowledge of everything contained in our New Testament, and of all the principal doctrines held by modern Christians.

But now arises the question, How were these doctrines and stories invented? The answer is that they were invented partly by zeal and partly by disordered imagination. When they were believed they were modified gradually by increase of labour and by increase of care and skill. We know in the present day that savage tribes have their apostles and prophets, and we know something of the method whereby those worthies manage their affairs. So our next inquiry shall be into

#### CHRISTIAN MYTHOLOGY.

More curiously nonsensical than the principle of

allegory is the principle of mythology. To account for the origin of fire the myth was invented that Prometheus stole it from heaven, a place which has not any existence. To account for the origin of evil the myths of Pandora's box and Eve's forbidden fruit were invented. Whatever satisfies the minds that accept such stories will be received, no matter what may be the differences of time and place.

As we have seen, the "sayings" of the Logos preceded his biography. In Christianity the moral and the philological preceded the historical; the abstract preceded the concrete. This gave rise to endless variations, differences, and contradictions in the history of Jesus after he had been identified with the Logos. Every incident of his life was related variously. Even the date of his supposed crucifixion was disputed; for we know from Eusebius ("E. H.," i., 9) that even in his day some persons denied that Jesus suffered under Pilate. Hence it was that in the so-called "Apostles' Creed," among remarkable and miraculous events, we have the tame circumstance insisted on, namely, that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

But in addition to this, the primitive Christian literature was formed under a combination of circumstances which introduced fresh elements of discord and obscurity. In ancient times, among both the Greeks and the Jews, there was developed very remarkably a tendency to ascribe modern writings to ancient names. (See "Our First Century," pp. 8-11.) Among the early Christians, the self-same tendency was developed. Although all the doctrines contained in the writings of the early Fathers, and, at a later period, in our "New Testament," are to be found in the ancient Septuagint, (see "Our First Century," pp. 19-30), yet, among the early Christians, whenever a writer made what the Church considered to be a good hit, he was allowed to ascribe his effusion to any ancient name he pleased; because the early Christians adopted the very illogical

principle of criticism, that whatever was edifying was true, whatever was true was genuine, whatever was genuine was old, whatever was old was apostolic, whatever was apostolic was authoritative, and whatever was authoritative was considered to be clothed with Divine authority. This fanciful and puerile method of criticism became a fruitful source of error, mysticism, nonsense, fable, fraud, and forgery. The texts of the older Christian writers were thereby corrupted. The corruptors introduced into the works of pagan writers, passages framed by Christians in order to make those pagans, like the thief at the crucifixion, testify to the divine origin of Christianity. (See "Our First Century," pp. 12-19.) And the writings, forming the cycle of ancient "New Testament" literature, were increased without restriction, and were allowed to be ascribed to Jesus and his mythical followers: just as the Greeks attributed any works they pleased to "Hesiod" or "Homer,"—as the compilers of the Septuagint attributed works to "David"\* or "Solomon,"—and as the post-Babylonian Jews, who compiled the Hebrew Testament, attributed works to the very convenient names of "Moses," "Joshua," and "Samuel." In this way spurious writings, attributed to Barnabas, Hermas, Thomas, Clement, &c., &c., were regarded as authoritative, long before our "New Testament" had any existence. And several of those spurious writings were quoted as "Scripture," or "as it is written," down to the time of Irenæus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and even Athanasius. And there was not any attempt made in the Christian Church to fix a canon of "New Testament" Scripture during the first three centuries of our era. As before mentioned: such an attempt was first made at the Council which assembled at Laodicea, A.D. 362.

\* See Psalm cli. in the Septuagint collection: it is there stated that "this is a genuine psalm of David, although supernumerary, when he fought in single combat with Goliath."

But the most difficult thing connected with this business is to understand how these mythologists deceived themselves into a belief in their own myths, inventions, frauds, fables, and forgeries. Yet some of these mythologists did believe their own myths: such is the force of human imagination! For there need not be any doubt that the writer of our second epistle to the Corinthians, xii. 2, 4, was quite sincere when he said that he had been "caught up into the third heaven," and "into paradise." The writer of our "Apocalypse," i. 10, informs us that he was "in the spirit"—that is to say, in a trance—while he received the communications mentioned in that tract. We read in our "Acts," x. 9, 10, that "Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour; and he became very hungry and would have eaten: but, while they made ready, he fell into a trance;" and while he was in that state he learned, 28, "that he should not call any man common or unclean:" a salutary truth, although he learned it while in a state of imperfect consciousness: just as (see Martineau's "Rationale of Religious Inquiry," p. 100) the duty of testifying to the truth was a virtue born of the superstition that all men, who will be saved, will owe their salvation to a certain process of witchcraft known as "justification by faith."

That there were Freemasonlike secrets in the early Christian Church we know from the Clementine Homilies. Arguing against St Paul or Simon Magus, Homily xix. § 20, "Peter said: we remember that our Lord and teacher, commanding us said, 'Keep the mysteries for me and the sons of my house.' Wherefore, also, he explained to his disciples privately the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But to you who do battle with us, and do not examine into anything except our statements, whether they be true or false, it would be impious to explain these." Perhaps the art of falling into a trance was one of these mysteries. If so, the secret was preserved for a considerable time.



Mosheim, "Institutes," century xiv., ch. v., sec. 1, 2, tells us that "the Hesychasts,\* or as they may be called in Latin the Quietists, gave the Greek Church much employment. Barlaam, a native of Calabria, a monk of the order of St Basil, and afterwards bishop of Geraci in Calabria, travelling over Greece to inspect the conduct of the monks, found not a few things among them which were reprehensible; but in none of them more than in the Hesychasts at Mount Athos in Thessaly, who were mystics or more perfect monks, who sought for tranquillity of mind and the extinction of all the passions by means of contemplation. For these Quietists, in accordance with the prescription of their early teachers, who said that there was a divine light hid in the soul, seated themselves daily in some retired corner, and fixed their eyes steadfastly for a considerable time upon the navel of their belly; and in that situation they boasted that a sort of divine light beamed forth upon them from the mind itself, which diffused through their souls wonderful delight. When asked what kind of light this was, they answered that it was the glory of God; and they appealed for illustration to the light which appeared at the transfiguration of Christ. Barlaam, who was ignorant of the customs of mystics, regarded this as absurd and fanatical; and to the monks who followed this practice he applied the names of Massalians and Euchites, and also the new name of Navel-souls. On the other hand, Gregory Palamas, archbishop of Thessalonica, defended the cause of the monks against Barlaam. To put an end to this contest a council was held at Constantinople, A.D. 1314, in which the emperor Andronicus junior, and the patriarch presided. Here the monks, with Palamas at their head, were victorious: Barlaam was condemned, and, leaving Greece, he returned to Italy."

In the case of Peter we perceive there was the element of fasting. From what we know of the habits of

\* From the Greek *ἡσυχία*, "tranquillity."

savage nations, we learn that their sorcerers always fast before doing anything of much importance. And we may infer safely that in all the foregoing cases of falling into a trance, the element of fasting was very powerful. In this manner, then, a man might put himself into a trance, and in that state he might conceive anything, whether useful or nonsensical, and believe it to be a divine revelation. And if the revelation give satisfaction to the companions of the inspired ones, the revelation will have plenty of true believers.

It thus appears that the Christian mythology is essentially like those of all other known religions. It is the offspring of disordered imagination. But it has been said that Christianity is the only religion which yields consolation to the believer. But all religions give consolation to their believers. We do not know of any man who died more firmly and finely than Socrates. And not only is this the case, but even witchcraft yields consolation to those who believe in it. In the "Book of Days," under the date of the 21st of February, the reader may find an elaborate article on "The Folk Lore of Playing Cards," by the late Mr William Pinkerton, F.S.A. Towards the end of the article he says: "A few words must be said on the professional fortune-tellers. That they are, generally speaking, wilful impostors, is perhaps true. Yet, paradoxical though it may appear, the writer feels bound to assert that these 'card-cutters,' whose practice lies among the lowest classes of society, really do a great deal of good. Few know what the lowest classes in our large towns suffer when assailed by mental affliction. They are, in most instances, utterly destitute of the consolations of religion, and incapable of sustained thought. Accustomed to live from hand to mouth, their whole existence is bound in the present, and they have no idea of the healing effects of time. Their ill-regulated passions brook no self-denial, and a predominant element of self rules their confused minds. They know of no future, they think no o her

human being ever suffered as they do ; as they term it themselves, 'they are upset.' They perceive no resource, no other remedy than a leap from the nearest bridge, or a dose of arsenic from the first chemist's shop. Haply some friend or neighbour, one who has already suffered and has been relieved, takes the wretched creature to a fortune-teller. The seeress at once perceives that her client is in distress, and shrewdly guessing the cause, pretends that she sees it all in the cards. Having thus asserted her superior intelligence, she affords her sympathy and consolation, and points to hope and a happy future : blessed hope ! although in the form of a greasy playing card. The sufferer, if not cured, is relieved. The lacerated wounds, if not healed, are at least dressed : and, in all probability, a suicide or a murder is prevented. Scenes of this character occur every day in the meaner parts of London."

It is a well known fact that the much reviled Epicurean philosophy—the only true philosophy that has yet been published—afforded consolation to those who held it. Virgil (*Georgics*, ii., 490-2) says :—

" Happy is he who, searching Nature's laws,  
Through known effects has traced the secret cause ;  
Has trampled on all fears, relentless fate,  
And the idea of a future state."

Aristotle (*Ethics*, x., 9) says :—"He, then, who exercises himself in the way of thought, and does his best to improve it, and has the best mental disposition, seems also to be the most beloved by the gods." Commenting on this passage, an eminent scholar says :—"A very noble and consoling sentiment to those who care little for popular notions, but everything for Truth. It is humiliating to think how immeasurably the Greek philosophers surpassed us of the present day in this best and holiest of all virtues, love of Truth."

But another item of Christian mythology is the assertion that the spread of the Christian religion was so great

that it must have received supernatural aid. Mosheim ("Institutes," century ii., ch. i., sec. 6) says:—"This [supposed] rapid propagation of Christianity is ascribed by the writers of the second century almost exclusively to the efficient will of God, to the energy of divine truth, and to the miracles wrought by Christians." These miracles, as mentioned by Tertullian, Origen, &c., &c., and duly recorded by Dr Augustus Neander, may be briefly explained as follows:—Arrangements were made with certain members of the Christian Church to say that they had died, and had been raised from the dead. On being interrogated in the presence of credulous persons, such as Tertullian and Origen, these "resurrection-men" avowed the truth of that which had been told concerning them. In this way men who never had died, were pointed out, by second, or third century apostles, as being walking testimonies to the miraculous powers of the Christian Church during our second century. But the fact is, that, according to the latest statistics, while the number of Christians on earth number about 353,000,000, the Buddhists number about 483,000,000. There are about 500,000,000 of other sectaries. And, in addition to these facts, there is not anything supernatural in the rise and progress of the Christian sect when we investigate its history and explain its

#### ECCLESIASTICAL ORGANISATION.

As in the Jewish Church, organised after the return from Babylon, and subsequently aided by the compilation of our Pentateuch, the public functions of religion were intrusted solely to the priests and Levites, so in the Primitive Christian Church those functions were intrusted solely to the bishops and presbyters. At an early time the bishops began to preside at the assemblies of the Christians. Each assembly governed itself.

By letters and deputations these assembles maintained a mutual and friendly, but rather loosely connected, intercourse with each other. So early as towards the end of our second century provincial councils were instituted, modeled probably partly on the Jewish synagogues and partly on traditions regarding the Amphictyonic Council, the Achæan League, and the assemblies of the Ionic cities. At these councils or synods decrees were enacted which were styled canons, and which regulated every important controversy regarding faith and discipline. The institution of synods or councils succeeded so well that in a short time their influence spread widely throughout the Christian Church. A regular correspondence was established between the provincial councils, which mutually communicated and approved their respective proceedings; and the Primitive Christian Church assumed the form and acquired the strength of a federative republic. Even a philosopher of the most sceptical school must recognise the vast superiority of Asceticism and Monotheism over uncritical polytheism, and the revolting impurities of nature worship. The Christians who held the former doctrines were inspired with zeal for the promulgation of those tenets. A consciousness of superiority inspires courage. A perception that we are fighting the cause of Virtue against Vice inspires self-sacrifice. And there can be but very little doubt that this union of exalted zeal and skilful church organisation gave the primitive Christians that almost insuperable power which even a comparatively small force of well-trained and courageous volunteers has so frequently exhibited when brought in contact with an undisciplined multitude, ignorant of the subject in dispute, unaware of its importance, and indifferent to the event.

So far the success of the primitive Christian Church must be regarded as having been beneficial to the human race. But "the pulses of ambition may beat as freely

under sleeves of lawn as under an ordinary habit."\* The bishops established gradually a difference among themselves in dignity, and afterwards in authority; and the titles of Metropolitans, and afterwards of Primates, showed the success of individual ambition, and the numerical increase of the Church.

Thus this progress of ecclesiastical organisation showed also the power of the Church to resist any force that might be brought against it either to exterminate or persecute it. *Before the Church was attacked it was strong.* This is the real secret of its success. It resisted successfully the exterminating persecution of it by Decius, A.D. 249-251. The admiration this resistance drew forth increased its strength. It was recognised as a power in the state. The "happy family" whose discordant elements composed the dominions of Rome required daily some bond of union to assist the Imperial Army in keeping together that once mighty empire. The established Paganism was intended to be such a bond of union. But the members of the various religions that passed under the name which we call Paganism, and which were tolerated and recognised at Rome, were, for the most part, destitute of zeal, indifferent to the cause of Truth, without patriotism, and addicted to luxury. Only Roman citizens had a free country. The rest of Rome's subjects were careless of any interests except their own: they were selfish. The Christians, on the other hand, were in the Roman Empire in a position analogous to the primitive Spartans in Laconia. They were an organised, zealous, compact, and united band of warriors in a country whose inhabitants were hostile but disunited, listless, and demoralised. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that when seeking to render the established religion of the Roman Empire conducive and effective to the purposes of imperial union, A.D. 313, Constantine should have

\* Earl Grey, in reply to a bishop during the debates on the Reform Bill of 1832.

substituted Christian zeal and witchcraft for Pagan indifference and idolatry.\* Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the boastings of Tertullian, Justin, Paul, &c., &c., down to the time of Decius, the Christians were not only an obscure but also an unobtrusive sect; and they existed a considerable time before any one in the present day could catch in civil history the

#### FIRST HISTORICAL GLIMPSE OF THE CHRISTIANS.

So much has been written on the history of the Christians, that a student, beginning his inquiries, might well be excused if he supposed that the first mention of them, outside their church, had been accurately ascertained long ago. Yet (strange as it may seem) it would be difficult to mention a subject more enveloped in disagreement, doubt, difficulty, and error. When we attempt to examine it we are unable to see it during the first two centuries of the commonly received Christian era. But while the latter part of our first century is adorned with forgeries introduced into the works of one Jewish and three Pagan writers, the second century is enveloped in a darkness that is more opaque than that of the first. As the writer of our *Odyssey* says of the Cimmerians, so we may say of our second century,

“ There darkness as of death is spread over wretched mortals.”

There does not appear to have been any attempt made to introduce even one forgery into the writings of the pagans who flourished during our second century. This is a serious omission. It was a much greater mistake than tampering with the works of Josephus, Suetonius, Pliny junior, and Tacitus; because the gap that occurs in our second century is more modern than

\* Of course this substitution was effected by means of Constantine's army, the soldiers of which did not much care about any particular form of religion. The Christians were only a very small fraction of his subjects.

the gap in the first seventy years of our first century, and, consequently, is rendered more conspicuous. As we have seen, Eusebius furnishes us with names analogous to the names furnished to us by the biographers and commentators on the Cyclic Poets; but those names are "without form"—they are as unreal as chaos—their times and their places have not any existence—all we have are names which, like the shades in Hades, flit about "with an unearthly squeak." No doubt Eusebius sometimes quotes authorities, but they give us little if any information regarding primitive church history, and we know little if anything about them. All the names assigned to Christians during our first and second centuries, flit about in shade, mist, gloom, and darkness. They are names of persons supposed to have been Christians, because they called themselves by that name. But we know that some of them attached very different meanings to the word "Christian." They are pushed about at the pen points of writers who compile unreal histories. And these names are rocked up and down in the ocean of ignorance, and on the waves of nonsense they are

"Toss'd to and fro with jaculation dire."

Outside the Church we have not any authorities for the supposed persecutions of the Christians by Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Aurelius, Severus, and Maximin. After celebrating the felicity and increase of the church, under good princes, Lactantius, who died A.D. 325, in his work *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, c. 3, 4, says—"After many years that execrable animal appeared, Decius, who persecuted the church." Gibbon says, "Decline and Fall," chap. xvi, "The fall of Philip [A.D. 249, who is represented as being favourable to the Christians] introduced, with the change of masters, a new system of government, so oppressive to the Christians, that their former condition, ever since the time of Domitian, was represented as



a state of perfect freedom and security, if compared with the rigorous treatment which they experienced under the short reign of Decius." Mosheim, *Institutes*, century second, ch. i., and century third, ch. ii., says, "Most of the Roman emperors of this [second] century were of a mild character. . . . Through this lenity of the emperors, Christians living in the Roman empire suffered far less than they would have done if they had been under severer rulers. . . . But when Decius Trajan came to the imperial throne (A.D. 249), war, in all its horrors, burst upon the Christians." Eusebius ("E. H.," vi. 39) says: "Philip, after a reign of seven years, was succeeded by Decius, who, in consequence of his hatred to Philip, raised a persecution against the Church." And he says, "The number and greatness of Origen's sufferings during this persecution . . . the many epistles of the man detail with not less truth than accuracy." And ("Roman History," Vol. V. p. 322) Niebuhr says that Decius "was the first who instituted a vehement persecution of the Christians, for which he is cursed by the ecclesiastical writers as much as he is praised by the Pagan historians [the writers of the 'Historia Augusta' and Zosimus.] The cause of this persecution, I think, must be sought for in the feeling antagonistic to the tendency of his predecessor. The accounts which we have of earlier persecutions are highly exaggerated, as Henry Dodwell has justly pointed out. The persecution by Decius, however, was really a very serious one; it interrupted the peace which the Christian Church had enjoyed for a long time." It may be concluded safely that there was not any persecution of the Church before that by Decius. The Christians had not any existence prior to A.D. 70. See "Our First Century," p. 51. All the writers on Church history admit that prior to the accession of Decius to the throne, A.D. 249, the Church enjoyed a long period of repose. The stories regarding the martyrdoms of

James, Peter, Paul, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Stephen—if, indeed, there ever were any such persons—are stories, and nothing more. They have not any real foundation. Even the martyrdom of Justin, called the martyr, is more than doubtful. Of course he may have been killed; but that circumstance, by itself, would not prove the existence of a persecution directed against the whole Christian Church. The truth is that from A.D. 70 to A.D. 249 the Church was unmolested, and prior to A.D. 135 the Church was unknown to the Pagan world. During that long period, extending over a century and a half, the Christian Church, with its skilfully contrived organization, had ample time to become so strong, that its extirpation, even by a Roman emperor, would be a matter requiring considerable time, expense, and exertion.

Be that as it may, one thing is certain, namely, that outside the Church there does not appear to be any trace of the Christians prior to the persecution of them, A.D. 249, ordered by Decius, with a view to the utter extermination of a sect which, since his time, has survived to cause more bloodshed and misery to the human race than any other sect which exists on the records of history.

