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# ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY,

AND THE

DOCTRINES

OF THE

OXFORD TRACTS.

BY

ISAAC TAYLOR,

AUTHOR OF "SPIRITUAL DESPOTISM," &c.

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Fas est etenim, ut prisca illa cælestis philosophiæ dogmata processu temporis, excurentur, limentur, poliantur; sed nefas est, ut cominutentur; nefas, ut detruncantur, ut mutilentur. Accipiant licet evidentiam, lucem, distinctionem; sed retineant, necesse est, plenitudinem, integritatem, proprietatem.—VINCENTIUS LIRINENSIS.

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TO THE VERY REVEREND

THOMAS BEWLEY MONSELL,

ARCHDEACON OF DERRY,

AND PRECENTOR OF CHRIST'S CHURCH, DUBLIN.

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MY DEAR SIR:

I am already assured of your approval, which has been so kindly and warmly expressed, of my intention to take part in the discussions set on foot by the writers of the Tracts for the Times; but I am very desirous to bespeak, also, your acquiescence in the particular course of inquiry, which, in this first instance, I have thought it best to institute, and which may not be precisely what you would have anticipated.

I have, in fact, taken as my motto on this occasion, the advice—*Festina lente*; and if I appear to have gone about, am yet persuaded that I am following a path which

promises to lead to a satisfactory, and not very remote conclusion. But I will state, as briefly as possible, the general views that have guided me in selecting the subjects; and in arranging the plan of my argument.

Let me say, then, that the mode of repelling the pretensions of the Romish church, recommended by the writers of the Oxford Tracts, seems to me to be at once legitimate and conclusive: it is, in substance, an appeal from the alleged authority of that church, to a catholicity more catholic, and to an antiquity more ancient. On this ground, British protestantism, or, let us say, if the phrase be preferred, British Christianity, stands on a rock, clear of all exception, and, so far as related to popery, is exempt from all peril. Within the well-defined limits which it observes, this line of argument is equally simple and irrefragable.

But having, in this manner, made good the external defences of the British episcopal church, when we come to look within the enclosure which we have thus walled about,

we are instantly met by some startling difficulties, of another kind, and are compelled to confess that, in thus throwing ourselves back upon Christian antiquity, embarrassments attend us from which there appears no easy way of escape.

Men of calm minds, indeed, are painfully conscious of perplexity, while treading the fields of ancient Christian literature; and to this feeling is added some alarm when they witness the fatal infatuations which beset those who loiter there after surrendering themselves to the guidance of a fond antiquarian enthusiasm; for such are often seen to yield their faith and reason to illusions that are not merely unsubstantial, but in the highest degree dangerous. In truth, no notions that have ever prevailed among well-informed men, can have been more utterly destitute of firm support than are those which have been passionately adhered to in relation to the pristine church; nor have any been more fruitful sources of theological and practical errors.

The peculiar difficulties that attend the general subject of ecclesiastical antiquity, are not, however, obtruded upon the notice of the world, during quiescent periods; and, as the documents wherein this species of lore is imbedded are accessible to few, and familiar to still fewer, as well the instruction with which they are fraught, as the evils they may generate, often remain latent for a long course of years, and, therefore, may ordinarily demand no vigilant regard.

But it is otherwise at particular moments, when the dormant antiquarian zeal suddenly awakens, and claims a right of interference with every thing that is professed, believed, and done, in the open and active world. And if, at such a moment, this zeal, sharpened by the prejudices that are its usual characteristics, and animated, or even inflamed, by the illusions which it engenders, takes a bold course, and implicates the religious and civil institutions of the country, there are no limits hardly to the perils to which every thing around us is immediately exposed.

This seems to me precisely what the writers of the Oxford Tracts are now, with the best intentions, and with the most devoted attachment to the episcopal church, actually doing; that is to say, they are fearlessly staking the credit, the influence, and even the very existence of the established church, upon the soundness of notions, regarding ancient Christianity, which, as I am fully persuaded, will not endure an impartial examination; nay, which are miserably contradicted by abundant and unimpeachable evidence.

There is surely reason enough then, for those who rank themselves with the friends of the established episcopal church, to take the alarm, and to follow closely the steps of these chivalrous divines. It is possible, indeed, and not unlikely, that the grounds of the doctrines advocated by these writers may insensibly be shifted; and that, finding their early assumptions to be utterly untenable, they may move off to a better chosen position. But even if it were so, the necessity would not be the less urgent for exploring that first chosen ground. In a word, the time is now mani-

festly come when the Christian community, at large, must be thoroughly and authentically informed concerning the spiritual, and the moral condition of the church during that morning hour of its existence, which, too easily alas! has been surrounded with attributes of celestial splendour, dignity, and purity.

To collect and diffuse this now indispensable information, is then the task I have undertaken; yet neither a very easy one, it must be granted, nor exempt from an invidious aspect. To dissipate fond dreams may be a friendly and useful, but is never an acceptable office. No one, I presume, will imagine that there remain to be adduced facts, or indications of facts, not already well known to those who are conversant with the original documents of ecclesiastical antiquity. But it is nevertheless certain, and the course of the present controversy has strikingly shown it to be so, that, what is familiar to a few, may be altogether unsurmised by the mass, even of well-informed persons. Our modern church histories scarcely lift a cor-

ner of the veil that hides from us the inner recesses of the ancient church. And the fathers may be looked into, here and there, without a suspicion being awakened of a state of things which a more searching examination brings to light.

In commencing, then, these necessary researches, the immediate intention of which is not so much to controvert the particular principles or practices now under discussion, as to lay open the real condition, moral, spiritual, and ecclesiastical, of the ancient church, I have selected that one theme which, as I am fully persuaded, is better adapted than any other to answer the purpose of dissipating many illusions, and of generating a feeling of caution in the minds of those who may just have given in, or may be on the point of giving in, their submission to the Oxford doctrines. Such, and I believe the number is now not small, I would here respectfully advise to suspend, a little, their judgment on the questions in hand, until they may have considered the evidence which I shall have to produce.

As to yourself, my dear sir, you will not

imagine that I am presuming to inform *you* of what you are not already acquainted with; and yet it is possible that the light in which I have placed some of these well-known facts, may seem to you new, and such as to deserve your regard. You will perceive that, while a single class of objects is before me, I have kept a double purpose always in view, namely, in the first instance, to loosen a little that antiquarian enthusiasm which is putting every thing dear to us in peril; and, in the second place, to open a path whereon a *fresh* assault may be made upon the errors of the papacy.

You will see that, as a preliminary to the general argument, I have taken some pains to define and affirm, what some too much overlook—the dependence of the modern church upon the ancient church, lest, in lessening a little the credit of the latter, I should seem to favour an ultra-protestant prejudice, the prevalence of which has, in fact, afforded a handle to the Oxford Tract writers.

And now, my dear sir, will you indulge me a moment while I make good my personal plea to be listened to in the present con-



troversy?—It will be granted then, that, whatever course this wide discussion may take, it has, in all its branches, so intimate a connexion with ecclesiastical antiquity, as that it must, for the most part, be left in the hands of those who have happened to acquire some familiarity with this branch of learning, and who, moreover, possess the indispensable advantage of actually having, under their hands, the body of ancient ecclesiastical literature. But these conditions confine, within rather narrow limits, the choice which the religious public might make (among those, already known to it as writers) of any to stand forward as qualified to deal with the general subject. Then again, among such, few as they may be, some have already ranged themselves on the side of the Oxford writers; and some, perhaps, would admit themselves to be altogether disinclined to the task of dealing severely, with their favourite authors.

On these grounds, then, as actually possessing the Greek and Latin church writers, and as being, in some degree, used to their com-

pany, and moreover, as exempt, in the most complete manner, from the antiquarian enthusiasm, I have felt as if I might, without culpable presumption, take a part in the great controversy of the day.

And farther, as this controversy affects, in a peculiar manner, the welfare of the established episcopal church, it seems as if it should be demanded of those who engage in it, that they can profess a firm conviction in favour of the principle of religious establishments, and of episcopacy; as well as a cordial approval of liturgical worship, and specifically, of that of the established church. On this ground, then, my deliberate opinions are such as to allow of my fairly entering the lists.

There is, however, yet a ground on which I feel that a rather peculiar advantage, in relation to such a controversy, belongs to me; and it is the circumstance of my personal independence of the established church, and of my absolute exemption from the influence of any indirect motive for thinking, or for pro-

fessing, thus or thus, in any question affecting its credit and welfare. As a layman, I have no secular interests at stake in ecclesiastical questions. I have nothing but truth to care for. And, moreover, my actual connexion, by education, and otherwise, with dissenters, may be accepted as giving to my decisive opinion in favour of the established church, the value, whether more or less, that may attach to principles that have resulted altogether from serious reflection. And I will here take leave to remind you, that, in declaring myself some years ago on *this* side, I did so with a freedom of remark, in regard to the church, which precluded my winning any favour from its stanch adherents, or public champions. In fact, and I hope you will allow me on this occasion to make the profession, my convictions, on this subject, have been so powerful and so serious, as to lead me to put out of view every personal and secondary consideration.

None will imagine, my dear sir, that, in addressing these pages to you, I have, in any way, compromised your personal or profes-

and vehemently opposed one to the other. Soon there will be no middle ground left; and every man, and especially every clergyman, will be compelled to make his choice between the two. What practical decision can be more momentous, or demand more deliberation and impartial research?

I indulge the hope, then, my dear sir, that I shall be able to afford some aid to those, especially among the younger clergy, who may actually be halting between the two opinions; and I well know that, while giving myself to my laborious task, I shall have the benefit of your cordial good wishes and prayers that that aid and blessing may be afforded me, apart from which, no endeavours can be fruitful of good.

It is, my dear sir, with every sentiment of respect and esteem, that I subscribe myself  
yours,

THE AUTHOR.

STANFORD RIVERS,  
*Feb.* 20, 1839.

# ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY,

&c. &c.

THE great questions agitated but not determined three hundred years ago, are now coming on to be discussed, and under circumstances as auspicious altogether as they were lately unexpected. The reproach of the reformation, that it did not fully ascertain its own principles, as well as the opprobrium of the church in later times, that little or nothing has been amended since Luther, Cranmer, and Knox went to their rest, are now, at last, very likely to be removed.

While many are looking with terror at the unchecked spread of Romanism around the English church, and with alarm at the prevalence of opinions within its most sacred precincts which apparently contravene the labours of the reformers, there is, as I think, room to admit a very different feeling in relation to these signs of the times, I mean a feeling of exhilaration and hope as to the probable, and almost inevitable result, as well of the busy zeal of the Romish clergy as of the conscientious labours of the authors and favourers of the "Tracts for the Times." I must profess to regard the former, and still more decidedly the latter of these features of our religious condition, when looked at in their remoter, though not distant tendencies, as indicative of good, and such as should awaken to a new activity all who are pi-

ously waiting for the renovation of the influence of Christianity.

And yet, in making this cheering profession, it ought to be acknowledged, lest we should seem to be concealing what it is neither candid nor safe to deny, that there are consequences not very unlikely to be attached to the Oxford Tract controversy which, in their bearing upon the peculiar position of the established church at the present moment, may well excite anxiety in the minds of its devoted friends, and, indeed, in the minds of all who acknowledge that an intimate connexion subsists between the welfare of the established church and the very existence of our most cherished civil institutions. It is not surely to pretend to any extraordinary sagacity to affirm that some of the questions moved by the writers we refer to, affect, not very circuitously, the constitutional influence of the aristocracy, and even the stability of the throne.

In truth, great revolutions, as has been said of some other formidable abstractions, are wont to advance upon us in noiseless slippers, and taking their rise from some quarter which was the last to be watched or suspected, amaze the heedless community with their terrible suddenness, as much as with their destructive force. This, at least, must be admitted by all, that the general scheme of principles and sentiments that has been embodied in the publications referred to, recommends itself by a still depth, a latent power, a momentum, and a consistency in its development, which are the very characteristics of those movements that are to go on, and are to bring with them great changes, whether for the better or the worse. Really to despise this system is, I think, very inconsiderate, and to affect to despise it, very dangerous.

The political condition of the country being such as it is, (if, in fact, we may any longer distinguish between the political and the religious,) and teeming as it does with elements of disorder, there are many, no doubt, who would most gladly remand, to some more convenient season, the agitation of ecclesiastical doctrines which touch the solid structure of the constitution. This desire of tranquillity may be reasonable enough in itself; but it is unavailing, or it comes now too late. Very many minds, and these, not of the despicable populace, or of the poorly informed middle classes, but of the best taught and the best trained, and of those whose personal interests are the most weighty, have already been deeply moved, and are as unwilling to be left to subside into their former state of indolent acquiescence as those who have so wrought upon them are disinclined to remit their labours. What event, in fact, can be more improbable than that men whose success in producing this deep commotion has vastly surpassed their own fondest expectations, should spontaneously relax their exertions, or should begin to despond mid way in a broad triumphant course? Nothing remains, then, whatever perils may impend, but for those who range themselves on an opposite side, to encounter their formidable, accomplished, and flushed antagonists in the best manner they are able.

Yet, even if it were now at the option of any who might wish to do so, to hush, at this particular moment, the controversy which is gathering around us—or even if it might be thought probable that, left to itself, this dreaded system would share the fate of many a portentous wonder that has quickly sunk into oblivion—even in such a case, a true prudence might impel us rather to

promote than to check the rising agitation, and to desire that, once set fairly in movement, as it now is, the question of those great and first principles, apart from the precise adjustment of which our English protestantism has remained weak and vulnerable on every side, should be brought to its close without delay: and better now, than in some darker hour, when political commotions of a still more portentous kind than those which at present disturb the country, would greatly enhance the perils inseparable from such a controversy, while they must, in an equal degree, diminish the probability of bringing it to a happy issue.

The cry of "Popery!" raised by certain of the opponents of the Oxford doctrines, must be granted to do as little credit to the discrimination of those who raise it, as to their candour. Nevertheless, and although the ill-judged attempt to confound these doctrines with Romanism, or to disparage them, unheard, by an implication in the same obloquy, and thus to use an unfair advantage, drawn from popular prejudices, is to be strongly condemned and carefully avoided, it is yet certain that, in argumentative order, these principles and opinions must take the lead, as standing first to be considered, when we have the Romish errors in view; and that the question of Romanism must follow in the track of the present controversy, without an interval.

In truth, modern popery will never be dealt with to any good purpose, on the ground of argument, until the preliminary discussion which is induced by the Tracts for the Times, has been disposed of to the satisfaction, not perhaps of the immediate disputants, but of all honest, reasonable, and intelligent by-standers.

I have used the words controversy, argument, and



discussion, correlatives as they are, and implying two or more parties, visibly in conflict; and yet, in the present instance, while, on the one side, the champions stand forward as a compact band, it is not very easy to name their actual opponents. To confess a humiliating truth, the writers of the *Tracts for the Times* are coolly looking over the field, and asking for those with whom they may engage. I am not uninformed of, nor do I wish to disparage, several able writers who have lately come forward in this controversy; but, as I shall show, there are special reasons why their opposition should be reckoned at less than, intrinsically, it may be worth.

It appears that a peculiar disadvantage attaches to each of the accredited religious parties among us, to whom it is natural to look, as the opponents of the Oxford divines. These incidental difficulties constitute, in fact, the most serious, or, it might be said, ominous circumstance of the present theological crisis. What I mean precisely is this—that, whatever we may privately surmise concerning the unsoundness of the principles assumed in this system, yet that those who maintain it, accomplished and well skilled in argument as they are, when they come to confront any one of our religious parties, manifestly possess, from incidental causes, the vantage ground, as related to that single class of antagonists; and so of each in its turn.

It is only by the sheer necessity of the case, and at the impulse of motives arising from a very unusual occasion, that I could be induced to enter upon so delicate and invidious a subject as the weak points—the wound in the hand, which disables one party and another in their assaults upon the Oxford Tract writers. Let, however, indulgence be given to a calm statement of the

simple facts, and in terms as free as possible from what might justly offend any. To name first those who actually stand foremost, and the description belongs to a large, and every way considerable body in the established church, who, professing the most cordial and unexceptive approbation of the church, as it is, in its constitution, its ritual, and its position as related to the state, and who are accustomed to admire the fathers of the English Reformation on no account more than on that of their wisdom in carrying amendment just to the point where it actually stopped, and no farther, and who deprecate any sort of movement or agitation that tends to change these stanch and well-contented Church-of-England men, when they come to deal, in detail, with the Oxford opinions, may, without much difficulty, be compelled to confess, first, that the church, as settled by Edward VI. and Elizabeth, embraces, or favours principles not as yet fully carried out, either in its offices or in its discipline and working; and secondly, that the church, or the country, or both, has been slowly and imperceptibly moving forward (some will say downward) from the ground whereon it was reared by its founders, and that, to employ the favourite phrase of the Oxford 'Tracts, we, of the present day, have become "far more protestant," than were the English protestants of the sixteenth century. Upon men of this party, therefore, the Oxford writers urge nothing but mere consistency: they wish for nothing that is not involved in the professions of the sound adherents of our protestant episcopacy: what they plead for is not a reform, but a return.

Nor can this appeal be otherwise resisted than by a hardy determination to hear nothing which might trou-

ble the present peace of the church. In fact, as it seems, numbers belonging to the party now referred to, if it should be called a party, have given in their submission to the Oxford leaders, and wait only the aid of a little more concurrence on the part of others, to promote openly what they favour silently.

Consisting often of the very same individuals, and yet needing to be distinguished in regard to our present object, is the body which stands foremost in upholding, and approving of, the POLITICAL constitution of the church, and which is more concerned (or seemingly so) for the establishment than it is for the church, and is zealous for episcopacy, on behalf of prelacy, and is prepared (unless we do them an injustice in so presuming to divine their dispositions) to admit certain changes which might even compromise a little the higher and more spiritual principles of the church, were it manifest that such alterations would tend to strengthen the stakes, and to lengthen the cords of the hierarchical tabernacle.

Between men of this temper and the writers of the Tracts for the Times, there is a fundamental, and, it must be added, an ominous discordance, as well of feeling as of first principles. This discrepancy, although for the present it may be cloaked and hushed by the discreet, cannot but become more and more notorious; nor is it easy to see by what practical expedients the serious political consequences it involves are to be evaded. This capital difference, although men may not be willing to allow it, is nothing less than a rift in the foundations of the ecclesiastical structure: it is a *settlement* more narrowly to be looked to than might be the

broken windows and shattered ornaments that should mark some rude assault of the mob from without.

It is not merely that the authors and promoters of the Oxford divinity are, generally speaking, men of a far more serious temper, and possessed of better digested notions, and are of more religious habits, than their opponents (of the class now referred to,) and are incomparably better prepared to sustain any consequences which their consistency may entail upon them, and are therefore stronger, by a settled courage and a calm forethought of trouble; but they have possessed themselves of lofty principles, in comparison of which the compromising, secular, and heartless maxims of political churchmen will prove, in the collision, as stubble or as sand.

These—that is to say, the political adherents and champions of the ESTABLISHMENT who admire, not so much the tenderness of our English reformers toward popery, as their obsequious discretion in regard to the Tudors, and who, as children of this world, and fond of tinsel, have always looked upon the trammels of church subserviency as trappings of honour—these persons now find themselves suddenly placed in a new and unexpected position of embarrassment; or rather their actual position has been laid bare, with little ceremony, on the very side where they might most wish to avoid exposure. And by whom has this exposure been attempted? Not by sour puritans, or reckless levellers; not by the vulgar and the fanatical; not by the professed enemies of the church, of whatever class, and with any of whom it might have been easy to deal, in the wonted modes of haughty vituperation, or who need not have been listened to at all, so long as they could have been outvoted.

Such are not, at present, the troublers of the peace of the hierarchy; but they are men whose ripe accomplishments as divines, and whose unquestioned attachment to the episcopal church, not merely exempt them from contempt or suspicion, but secure for them, and for whatever they may write, the respectful attention of all portions of the clergy, and of all among the laity whose opinions can, in such a case, have weight. Or if any thing were yet wanting to secure an advantage which the one side might desire, and which the other might fear to see possessed by their opponents, these new champions of church supremacy actually enjoy it, namely, official influence, and the means of moulding the temper of the younger clergy to their will.

As opposed to men thus advantageously placed, and thus furnished—men girding themselves to act the part of confessors, if not of martyrs, political churchmen, whether whigs or tories, cannot but feel their weakness. Fatal concessions were made, and dangerous compromises submitted to by the fathers of the English church, under the despotism of the Tudors, and these very errors (unavoidable, perhaps) are now become the untoward inheritance of the champions of the protestant establishment. These, therefore, can wish for nothing so much as silence and repose:—in serious controversy, whenever it may come on, nothing awaits them but overthrow; and it is a circumstance which none ought to lose sight of, that, how little soever the declared enemies of the established church may themselves personally relish the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts, their instinctive sympathies would at once coalesce with these writers, if seen to be contending, for high and religious principles, with the secular minded and political champions of the estab-

lishment. Obvious motives too, would operate, as well with Romanists, as with dissenters, and with the atheistic party impelling them, one and all, to cheer and aid these bold and learned impugners of church-and-state suberviency.

But we must look to another quarter in quest of those who might come forward, unencumbered, to withstand the advances of the Oxford doctrines; and may it be to that, in every sense, estimable portion of the clergy—call them not a party, which has conventionally been designated—evangelical? It is true that the modern disciples and successors of Romaine, Fletcher, Milner, Cecil, Scott, and Newton, have by the sheer force of the current of church affairs, been carried toward a new position, and have been led greatly to modify and to tighten the ecclesiastical notions professed by their departed leaders. They nevertheless still hold to opinions, and to modes of feeling, which, though, as a matter of fact, springing up within the established church, are not of it, are not its genuine products, or strictly indigenous to its soil; for they were the products of the new religious animation diffused through the country by the apostolic labours of Wesley, Whitefield, and their followers; nor can it well be denied that those who have professed these opinions, and who have felt in this manner, have stood as churchmen, in what is called—a false position; at least a position of difficulty, and of some practical embarrassment.

If this be the case, or just so far as it may be granted to be so, nothing can be less desirable to the evangelical clergy than to be forced into any formal or particular argument with their accomplished and learned brethren, on the very points that have driven some of their most

distinguished predecessors, and of themselves, to the edge of nonconformity, and which chafe many a sensitive conscience. They may, by the aid of peculiar considerations, drawn from the perils of the time, have brought themselves to believe that they seriously disaffect nothing in the ritual or constitution of the church; and they may be satisfied with this or that elaborate explanation of certain difficulties; nevertheless the uneasiness, although assuaged, is not removed, for the difficulty is real, and its reality, and its magnitude, must be brought afresh before them, to the renewal of many painful conflicts of mind, whenever the genuine and original church of England principle and discipline, comes, as now, by the Oxford divines, to be insisted upon, expounded, and carried out to its fair consequences.

What the English reformers had in view, was—ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY, or the doctrine, and discipline, and ritual of the Nicene age, and of the times nearly preceding that age; and so far as the altered condition of the social system, and so far as the secular despotism allowed them to follow their convictions, they realized their idea, and probably would have done so to the extent of a close imitation, had it been possible, of all but the more offensive features of that early system. But how utterly different a notion of Christianity was that which animated the zeal of the founders of methodism, and which, in the main, was caught by the fathers of the evangelical clergy. Holding to the same orthodoxy—the same Nicene and Athanasian doctrine, every thing else in the two systems stands out as a point of distinction. What parallels could be more incongruous, even to absurdity, than such as one might strive to institute, for instance, between Cyprian and Romaine, Tertullian and Milner, Chrysos-

tom and Cecil, Augustine and Scott, Jerom and Newton !

The evangelical clergy, as Christian ministers, and as theologians, when they stand on open ground, may indeed freely and with advantage contend against what they may deem superstitious or papistical in the system of the Oxford writers : but can they do so, precisely as churchmen ? It does not appear how, on this narrower field, they are to make good their footing.

Or, leaving doctrine and ritual out of the question, and looking solely to the ominous topic of church supremacy or subserviency in relation to the state, the evangelical clergy cannot but feel the discussion to be inconvenient and undesirable ; for it is they, more than any others, that must be painfully conscious of what have been the ill practical influences of the usurpations, and the lay interference that were submitted to, as by dire necessity, on the part of the founders of the establishment. So it happens that, in resisting what they regard as the superstitions of the Oxford divines, if driven back, they are driven upon puritanism ; while in withstanding the Oxford church-supremacy doctrine, their retreat, if defeated, can only be toward, either the dead levels of political expediency, or the swamps of dissent. It is with every sentiment of respect and affection toward this portion of the clergy, that I state the fact of their difficult position in regard to the present controversy ; and I do so for the sake of precluding the fallacious hope that the now spreading opinions are to be withstood, much less overthrown, by those who occupy this particular ground.

It is perhaps unnecessary to insist upon the unfitness of any class of dissenters to engage in controversy with the writers of the *Tracts for the Times*, inasmuch as



there seems little probability that such an attempt will be made. Dissenters have had their advantage, and they have reaped their glory, in contending for our religious liberties, and moreover they have found points of easy attack in assailing the loose opinions of political churchmen; they may also have won partial triumphs, in urging the argument of consistency against the evangelical clergy; but they would find themselves, as I am inclined to think, stripped of most of these incidental advantages, and to be dealing altogether with another sort of adversary, were they to close in with the Oxford divines upon the questions now agitated. The time undoubtedly must come, and the increasing learning and intelligence (and candour too, it is hoped) of the dissenting bodies, tend to hasten its approach, when the crude assumptions on which the modern congregational system rests, will be sifted anew, and when the principle of unchecked democracy, in church government, will be brought to the test of scripture. But a controversy with the writers of the Oxford Tracts could not fail to bring on such a scrutiny under circumstances which would render a defeat, even on single points, peculiarly mortifying. These astute and accomplished men—the Oxford writers, clearly rid, as they are, of the many embarrassments that have encumbered the less consistent churchmen, with whom, heretofore, dissenters have had to do, would, in rebutting the arguments of congregationalists, find themselves free to take up aggressive weapons, and might bring the ecclesiastical axioms of dissent into question, in a manner not to be desired by its adherents. It may then be considered as a point of discretion with the dissenting bodies to provoke no controversy in the present instance, and especially as they have no immediate concern in this

great argument, and in fact are more likely to get credit by standing off from the fray, than to reap advantage from taking a part in it.

Moreover, it is clear that the various, but intimately connected subjects, theological and ecclesiastical, at this time likely to be discussed, all come under the common condition of involving laborious researches upon the field of Christian antiquity. But this is a field not much frequented, in our own times, by non-conformists of any class. It is but a few individuals, of these communions, that profess any direct acquaintance with the Greek and Latin divines; nor do the tastes of the dissenting bodies at all favour any reference of the sort.

But granting, as we may, that, when we have to consider the safety and instruction of the uninformed religious classes, in relation to any prevailing errors, the only practicable method is that of a simple adherence to the biblical branch of the argument; it is yet perfectly clear that, when we are turning to those who are themselves to be the sources of instruction, and the guides of the ignorant, theological discussions must include a much wider range of inquiry: and as to questions, such as those with which, in the present instance, we have to do, there can be but one course likely to lead to a final adjustment of the points in dispute; and this only course must embrace a patient and piercing examination of the entire body of ancient Christian literature, so far as now extant. Any method more summary, specious as it may seem, will, as I venture to predict, produce only a momentary impression, and will leave us liable to a speedy return of the very same controversies. But if the great argument be courageously encountered at the first, and entered upon with an immoveable determination to spare

no toil, to evade no difficulty, and to carry the torch of modern intelligence, and modern biblical feeling, into every, and the most intricate recesses of ancient Christianity, there is a reasonable hope that, under the divine blessing, a real and permanent progress may be made in the momentous work of freeing our holy religion, effectually and finally, from the corruptions of many centuries.

There are some, however, who are telling us, and it must be granted, not without an appearance of reason, that our notions of the importance of the present controversy are vastly exaggerated, and that therefore no such laborious courses of argument as those I am now indicating, can be necessary; and on the contrary it is affirmed that, left to itself, this new portent, like many equally alarming, will quickly disappear from our skies. It is indignantly asked—if we are to be disquieted in this degree, and to be moved from our places, at the bidding of a band of recluses, who, accomplished as they may be in worthless lore, and respectable and estimable perhaps, as Christians, or as clergymen, have yet shown themselves so feeble in understanding as to bow to the frivolous superstitions of the darkest times. Are we, it is asked, to be led by those who suffer themselves to be led by the grim spectres of the twilight age of the church's history, and the midnight age of the world's history?

It must be confessed that, on this ground, a reasonable doubt may be entertained concerning the triumph of the particular Oxford confederacy, and of the magnitude of the issue in which the present movement is to terminate. A silent acquiescence in trivial superstitions, or even a forward zeal in maintaining frivolous formalities, affords no criterion of mental strength, in an age universally

superstitious, and grossly ignorant; but it is hard not to consider such compliances, or, such solemn trifling, as genuine indications of an infirm temperament, when they meet us in times of diffused intelligence, and of vigorous mental activity. It is not to be doubted that many a spirit of power, in times gone by, has bowed and cringed, and moulded itself to the pattern of a Cassian's Institute; but can any spirit of power now act the same part? Shall we now any where find strong and sound minds forcing themselves to lisp mummeries, to prate, and whisper, and juggle, and drivel, and play the church puppet, after the fashion of the monkery of the tenth century? Few will believe this to be possible:—it is indeed hard for any to believe it. In an age, not of idle but of solid learning, an age of genuine, not of vain philosophy; in an age (be it of too much license and of irreligious latitude, yet) of real force and manliness; and of rational and steady zeal; in an age when, beside the noisy pretenders to high qualities, there are, on every side, and in the private walks of life, the possessors of high qualities of mind and sentiment; if in such an age, men who have wanted no advantages of culture, are seen, in their imitations of antiquity, not merely to be bringing before us what might justly be venerated on the score of pristine purity, but also what, unless it could boast the hoary recommendations of time, must be ridiculed as simply absurd, in such a case, more than a surmise suggests itself, as to the intellectual stature of the diligent and zealous antiquaries who may be playing the part here supposed.

But whatever estimate may be formed of individuals (and it is unnecessary in this instance, as well as invidious to form any) the opinions in question are to be con-

sidered in their intrinsic weight and permanent validity; and also in their bearing, which is peculiar, upon the relative position of the established church, and of Romanism. In this view no controversy that has been started in modern times, ought to be thought more important, and if, at the present moment it have fallen into feeble hands, (a fact I do not affirm) more sturdy arms, we need not doubt, will ere long snatch the weapons now unsheathed, and will command the respect of their opponents.

The opinions advanced in the *Tracts for the Times*, may die away, for awhile; but they must revive at some time not very remote. Motives of discretion, and the fear of change, natural to men in office, may lead to a gradual and silent retreat from the ground that was taken when the probable consequences of maintaining so advanced a position had not been maturely considered. The CENTRE PRINCIPLE of the *Tracts for the Times*—the unalienable right of the church to an uncontrolled internal government, and its inherent spiritual supremacy in relation to the civil power, generally, and to the temporary administration of that power in particular, this weighty doctrine tends directly, as all must see, to a disruption of the existing connexion between the church and the state, or to a schism, a rending of the texture from the top to the bottom; the state being now under the guardianship of parties utterly adverse to any such elevated notions, and not at all likely to surrender so considerable a means of sustaining, from session to session, its tottering existence, as is afforded by the possession of an undue and irreligious influence over the church. Obvious motives of discretion may therefore, for awhile, restrain the combatants on the one side of this controversy as well as on the other; and if even

the promoters of it have braced their minds to meet all the consequences of the opinions which, with them, are serious matters of religion and conscience, it may not be so with the clergy at large, without whose willing ear and concurrence it would not be possible, even for the most accomplished writers, long to bear up against that tide of public opinion which they have to stem. With the clergy at large it must rest to decide whether, by favouring an agitation that touches the principle of the protestant establishment, they shall bring every thing dear to them into peril—the establishment itself first—then the due influence of the aristocracy, and then the denuded throne; or whether, by promptly withdrawing all support from these agitators, and by turning away their ear, they shall stave off, awhile, the most dire commotion, religious and political, that has ever convulsed this country.

The prediction has often been uttered, and by men of different parties and opposite feelings, that if England is again to undergo revolutionary struggles, the heaving will commence within the church. If then any such course of events be at all probable, the earliest symptoms of its approach should be observed, and the opportunity seized (if it be offered) of so opening the ground, as to give free and timely vent to the volcanic fire that murmurs beneath our feet.

It is therefore on this account especially that, while yet we may do so in tranquillity, a prompt and thorough attention should be paid to such at least of the Oxford opinions, as may be the most readily disposed of; and so, one by one, to extract the perilous ingredients from the mass. And whatever circumstance, of an extrinsic kind, recommends these opinions as they are now ad-

vanced, furnishes a corroboratory reason for dealing with them so as that if dispelled, it shall be for ever.

These extrinsic recommendations are in fact nearly as great as can be imagined; and they are as extraordinary as unlooked for. The solemn and plaintive tones of the ancient church, once heard amid the pangs of martyrdom, or resounding as soft echoes wakening the solitudes of the deserts of Syria, Arabia, and upper Egypt, the very same tones, and the same testimony, at once for great truths and for great errors too—for eternal verities, and for futile superstitions, are now, and after so long a silence, breaking from the cloisters of Oxford.

This revival of the religion, and of the forms, of the principle, and of the costume of the martyr church, has not sprung up in Germany, where the love of mysticism and paradox, recommended by rich erudition, is every day evolving systems destined to enjoy their turn of celebrity, and to be forgotten; but in England, where a characteristic national good sense, and a vigorous practical feeling, and the free interaction of all elements, moral and intellectual, combine to give condensation, and so much the more force, to whatever courts the suffrages of the educated classes. And in England this revival of ancient Christianity has not burst from among the sects where, having less confinement, it would sooner waste its infant strength; but from the very heart of the established church, where salutary corrective influences are as strong and steady as they can be. Farthermore, it has not, as in certain instances which might be mentioned, been fomented among juniors, more zealous than discreet, and with whom the want of judgment, and the unconfessed impulses of hot ambition, might have com-

bined to cherish extravagance of conduct, and opinion—not with such have we now to do, but with men of mature understanding, and of authenticated professional quality, and whose official sentiments, tending more toward repose than agitation, must be supposed to outweigh any irregular desires of notoriety. The writers of the *Tracts for the Times*, generally, have far more, in every sense, to risk, than they are likely to gain by the course they are pursuing. And finally, it is a circumstance worthy of notice, and corroboratory of the general idea of our approaching an extraordinary and peculiar crisis of the church, that, if one of the English universities rather than the other could give sanction to doctrines and practices drawn from Christian antiquity, those maintained in the *Tracts for the Times* are emanating not from Cambridge—but from Oxford.

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## SUBSTANCE OF THE ARGUMENT.

CONCISELY expressed, the argument of the reformation turned upon the alleged difference between the religion of the middle ages, and that of the New Testament. The Romanist generally admitted this diversity, and yet maintained that, whatever constituted the difference, was binding upon the church: the reformers therefore had more to do with the principle of the authority which imposed this difference, than with the difference in its details, and which was confessed on all sides.

Using, for the moment, a similar brevity of description, it may be affirmed that the argument mooted by



the writers of the Oxford Tracts, turns upon the difference (if there be any) between the religion of the New Testament, and that of the pristine and martyr church, which difference, if even it were ascertained, they would represent to be not merely innocent, but imitable.

After exhibiting this discrepancy, there would remain to be discussed the very important question concerning the deference that is due, by the modern church, to the ancient church, on the alleged ground of its having possessed, what we have lost, namely, the unwritten mind, and the practices of the apostolic age; as well as those authoritative decisions, on various points of discipline and worship, to which, in their epistles, the apostles frequently refer, as well known, although not then and there specified. Whatever may be the consequences, or tendency of their modes of thinking, the Oxford writers are not, like Tertullian, labouring to establish the equal authority of a perpetually emanating tradition, or a power of gradual development, granted to the church; but are simply affirming the authority of traditions known, or well surmised to be, strictly apostolical.

Such, as I understand them, are the points we have to consider in the present argument. On all hands, within the protestant pale, the well ascertained usurpations and corruptions of the Romish church are utterly discarded. What have we, in England, to do with the Gregorys, the Sylvesters, the Innocents, the Urbans, of Rome, or with the notions they favoured, or with the practices they enjoined? What part hath the bishop of Rome in these western islands? Prove that he may lawfully command us, as his spiritual children, and we submit.

But it is another thing to insulate ourselves from the

broad continent of ancient and Catholic Christianity: it is another thing to denounce, unexamined, whatever constitutes the glaring difference between our own Christianity, and that of the times when men were living who had received their faith, at one or two removes, from the lips of the twelve. It is another thing to incur the risks of contemptuously discarding all that the Apostles might have recommended, or might have established, although only incidentally (or perhaps not at all) alluded to in their extant writings.

With the indolent hope of evading laborious inquiries, and of escaping from endless discussions, and of effectively cutting every cord that ties us to Romanism, with some such views as these, there may be those who would sink antiquity altogether, well content to reserve, just the canonical writings. But to do this, is, as I think may be proved, as impracticable a course, as it is bold, unwarrantable, and unnecessary. Nothing remains for us, I am persuaded, but to employ all that serious diligence and discrimination which we may be masters of, and which the importance of the occasion calls for, in an extensive research of Christian antiquity.

Admitting the general principle, which, as I now state it, may be easily established, that a deference is actually due to the mind and testimony of the ancient church catholic, there remains to be determined, first—the chronological limits of that church; or the precise period within which it was in fact catholic, and entitled, as such, to respect; and secondly, what are the limitations under which this deference should be yielded, and this testimony listened to. Is reverence due to every thing that was generally believed and practised within the precincts of the ancient church? If not, what are the ac-

tual exceptions; and what the rules that should guide us in making them?

The writers of the Tracts for the Times have not as yet effected the indispensable preliminary work of defining the legitimate authority of the ancient church, and setting it clear of the many perplexities that attach to the subject. Until this be done, they, in asserting this authority, and others in impugning it, are beating the air.

In the following pages an endeavour will be made, and will be repeated from different starting points, so to exhibit the real religious condition, and moral and spiritual characteristics of the ancient church, as may go far in aiding us to draw the line between a due, and an undue deference to this alleged authority. If I should be able to effect my intention, with any degree of success, I shall indulge the hope of relieving many wavering minds from their perplexities.

Whatever analogies may seem to connect the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts with popery, the difference between the two is such as that those must certainly be disappointed who, hastily snatching up the rusty swords and spears of the reformers, rush so accoutred, upon the Oxford divines. To demolish popery (a work, as it has proved, not so easily accomplished as some had imagined) is only to leave the ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY of the Oxford writers in a fairer and loftier position.

Nevertheless, as I have already said, if we can but clearly define and wall about the respect due to the ancient church, and mark the points where suspicion is to come in the place of deference, almost every thing will have been done which mere argument can be supposed to effect in ridding the world of the illusions of the Romish superstition. Our present labours then, arduous

as they may be, are animated by a most cheering hope. We have indeed a single subject in view; but we have a double purpose; and the ulterior intention of what we are proposing, challenges to itself a grandeur and a solemnity which must urge every motive of exertion to the highest pitch. The human mind can indeed admit no impulses more powerful than those which press upon it when, as now, a new hope is presented of aiding in the destined overthrow of the horrid despotism of the papal heresy.

Our subject then is not a biblical argument, or a question of interpretation; nor is it abstractedly theological, much less metaphysical or philosophical; but is purely historical: and—what we have to inquire about is—the actual condition of the Christian church from the apostolic times, and downwards, toward the seventh century.

—The history of Christianity! alas the ominous words, which sink like a mortal chill into the heart. Christianity has absolutely no difficulties, or none that ought for a moment to stagger a sound and well informed mind, none excepting such as attach to its history; but these, although clearly separable from the question of its own divine origin, yet how serious and how disheartening are they! The Christian, if he would enjoy any serenity, should either know nothing of the history of his religion, or he should be acquainted with it so profoundly, as to have satisfied himself that the dark surmises which had tormented his solitary meditations, have no substantial bearing upon the principles of his faith.

In truth these difficulties, whatever they may be, when they come to be accurately examined, are found to press,

not upon Christianity itself, but upon certain too hastily assumed principles of natural theology, which they appear to contradict. The general aspect of the gospel economy suggests expectations, as to the divine purposes toward mankind, at large, which not only have not hitherto been justified by the actual course of human affairs, but which the very explicit predictions of our Lord, and of his apostles, had we properly regarded them, should have taught us not to entertain. After listening, in the first place, to the predictions of the Jewish prophets concerning the reign of the Messiah, and then to the song of the angelic choir, announcing the actual birth of the Prince of Peace, if we turn, either to our Lord's public discourses, or to his private conversations with his disciples, a very remarkable contrast presents itself; and whether or not we may be successful in harmonizing the apparent discrepancy, it presents an alternative strikingly confirmatory of our faith as Christians. For, in the first place, the perfectly unambiguous, and often repeated announcements made by Christ to his followers of persecutions, universal hatred, and cruel deaths which awaited those who were to promulgate his doctrine, were the very reverse of what an uninspired founder of a new faith would either himself have admitted, or would have ventured to hold before his early adherents. Then, and in the second place, these same announcements, when compared with the facts which make up the history of the church, stand forward as prophecies so fulfilled to the letter, as to vindicate the divine prescience of him who uttered them.

In like manner the well known predictions contained in the apostolic epistles, and which speak of the corruptions and the apostacies that should arise within the

church, are available in this same two-fold manner, first, as evidences of reality and sincerity on the part of the apostles, and as opposed to enthusiasm and guile, which would have dictated things more fair and smooth; and, secondly, of a divinely imparted foreknowledge of the course of events.

Let it be granted then, that the history of Christianity painfully contradicts the bright expectations we might have entertained of what the gospel was to be, and to do. But does it in any particle contradict our Lord's own forewarnings, or the apostles' explicit predictions concerning the fate and position of its adherents in this world of evil? Assuredly not.

These general observations, often as they have been advanced by Christian writers, might be considered as impertinent in this place as to their ordinary bearing; but they contain an inference peculiarly significant in relation to our immediate object. Let me say then, that, without prejudging the scheme of ecclesiastical principles which we are now proposing to sift, we may at least affirm that it assumes and supposes a state of things in the early church, much more in accordance with the fond and vague expectations just referred to, than either with the well defined predictions of Paul, Peter, and Jude, or with the pages of church history. Now this difference should be noted, and it should lead those who hitherto have overlooked it, to give the more earnest attention to the details of an inquiry, the intention of which is to discover whether ancient Christianity was, in fact, what we should have rejoiced to find it, or, on the contrary, what the apostolic prophecies would have led us sorrowfully to look for.

If at any time, or if in any particular instance, the au-

thority of the ancient church is to be urged upon the modern church, then surely there is a pertinence in turning to the apostolic prophecies of perversions, corruptions, apostacies, quickly to spring up within the sacred enclosure itself, which meet us at the threshold, and seem to bring us under a most solemn obligation to look to it, lest, amid the fervours of an indiscriminate reverence, we seize for imitation the very things which the apostles foresaw and forewarned the church of, as fatal errors!

No practical caution, as it seems to me, can be much more clear, as to its propriety, or important in itself, than the one I now insist upon. Say, we are about to open the original and authentic records of ancient Christianity, and in doing so, have a specific intention to compare our modern Christianity therewith, and to redress it, if necessary, in accordance with the pristine model. But at this moment the apostolic predictions, like a handwriting on the wall, brighten before our eyes, in characters of terror. We are entering a wide field, upon the skirts of which a friendly hand has posted the—"Beware of pits and swamps, even on the beaten paths of this sacred ground." To addict oneself to the study of ancient Christianity, with a credulous, antiquarian veneration, regardless of the apostolic predictions, is to lay oneself down to sleep upon the campagna, after having been told that the whole region exhales a malignant miasma: the fate of one so infatuated, would not be more sure, than merited.

Nevertheless these cautions, which common discretion not less than piety suggest and confirm, are misunderstood if they are used to discourage any researches which our extant materials afford the means of prosecuting. The scoffer and skeptic, casting a hasty glance

upon church history, and looking, by instinct of his personal tastes, to the scum and the froth, turns away in arrogant disgust: but the Christian may not do the same. On the other side, the unlearned believer, finding, in church history, if he looks into it at all, what revolts his feelings, clasps his bible to his bosom, with a renewed affection, and resolves to know nothing else: and it may be an ill-advised zeal that would disturb such a resolution.

Mean time, Christians of cultivated minds, and peculiarly all who stand forward as the teachers of Christianity, owe it to themselves, and to others, to free themselves from the many perils of ignorance, on this particular ground;—and on no ground is it more dangerous to be ignorant or to be imperfectly informed. It is a happy omen of the present times, that this ignorance, or slender information lately attaching to all but here and there a solitary and secluded antiquary, is now being rapidly dispersed; so that on all sides, those who addict themselves to theological studies, whether exegetical, dogmatic, or ecclesiastical, are turning, with an animated and sedulous zeal, to the remains of ancient Christian literature. Some, perhaps with an overweening reverence, and others with a predetermined contempt; but more than a few, are, with a well directed and intelligent curiosity, turning over the long neglected tomes that embody the history of our religion: and it is a remarkable fact that, at this moment, these laborious inquiries, set on foot by peculiar circumstances, in each instance, are pursued in Germany, in France, and in England. The combined result (for the several results must meet at length in one issue) cannot but effect some momentous changes in each of these countries; nor is it easy to exclude the expecta-



tion of consequences which must affect the religious condition of Europe, and of the world.

Among ourselves, however, there are too many who, whether from motives of indolence, which one must be reluctant to impute, or from a dim forethought of some probable and undesired consequences, hold back from the studies which others are so honourably prosecuting. Looking at the Christian world at large, it is my full conviction, that there is just now a far more urgent need of persuasives to the study of Christian history and literature, than of cautions against the abuse of such studies. Too many feel and speak as if they thought there were no continuity in their religion; or as if there were no universal church; or as if the individual Christian, with his pocket bible in his hand, need fix his eyes upon nothing but the little eddy of his personal emotions; or as if Christianity were not what it is its glory and its characteristic to be—a religion of history.

Christianity, the pledge to man of eternity, is the occupant of all time; and not merely was it, itself, the ripening of the dispensations that had gone before it, but it was to be the home companion of the successive generations of man, until the consummation of all things. Not to know Christianity as the religion of all ages—as that which grasps and interprets the cycles of time, is to be in a condition like that of the man whose gloomy chamber admits only a single pencil of the universal radiance of noon.

The eager, forward-looking temper of these stirring times, has withdrawn Christians, far too much, from the quieting recollection that they themselves are members of a series, and portions of a mass; nor do we, so much or so often as might be well, entertain the solemn me-

dition, that we, individually, are hastening to join the general assembly of those who, from age to age, have stood where we now stand, as the holders and professors of God's truth in the world. Is there no irreligion, no want of faith and fervour, indicated by a voluntary and utter ignorance of those into whose company, within a few months, or years, we are to be thrown?

Our Christianity is not a system of philosophy, or abstract principles, broached, no one cares when, and having no visible attachments to place, time, or persons, and which, as it is pregnant with no hopes, is rich with no records. Again, it stands vividly contrasted with false religions of all names, which, contradicted as they are by genuine history, in what concerns their origin, are throughout every year and century of their continuance, more and more belied by the course of events; and are, as time runs on, loosening their precarious hold of the convictions of their adherents, by illuding, more and more, their expectations. Christianity is the reverse of all this, in its form, and in the mode of its conveyance, and in the sentiments which it generates. Its own constant tendency is to gather, not to scatter; and not merely does it, or would it, bind its true adherents, of each age, in a visible communion; but it knits together, in one, by a retrospective and anticipative feeling, the children of God, who are dispersed through all periods of time.

Because it is of the very essence of TRUTH IN RELIGION, to blend itself with a certain series of events, and to mix itself with history, example more than precept, biography more than abstract doctrine, are made to convey to us, in the scriptures, the various elements of piety. Truth in religion, is something that has been acted and transacted; it is something that has been imbodied in

persons and societies; and so intimately does this condition of CONTINUITY attach to the gospel scheme, that the inspired narrative of the past, runs on without a break, into the announcement of the future; so as that the entire destinies of the human family—a part narrated, and a part foretold, a part brought under the direct beams of history, and a part dimly adumbrated in prophecy, are grasped by it, and claimed as its possession.

One must be really perplexed when one sees the Christian, with an historic bible in his hand, and who, by its aid, commands a prospect over all the fields of time, and far into the regions of eternity, yet thinking that certain intermediate periods of the great cycle of God's dispensations are nothing to him; or that he may as well be utterly ignorant of large tracts of this extensive course, as know them. 'The forming an acquaintance, so far as we possess the means of opening it, with our brethren, and fellow citizens, and precursors, in the Christian commonwealth, we owe to their virtues and sufferings; and we owe it also to their errors and illusions; and if they themselves, we may be sure, could now send us a message of love, it would relate much rather to the errors against which we should be cautioned, than to the virtues of which we may find brighter examples in scripture itself.

But there is even a more serious, and pointed motive, urging upon the ministers of religion, especially, a devout and careful study of church history; and it is a motive which has a very particular bearing upon the difficult inquiries we have now in view. What then is church history (and especially what would it be, if our materials were more ample) but a running commentary upon our Lord's most solemn promise, to be with his

servants always, even to the end of the world? These words, sacred as they are, and peculiar, as having been uttered at the most remarkable moment of all time (if only that of the second advent be expected) can have no meaning, or none that can render them important to ourselves, if we are not to look into church history for their verification.

This promise, so emphatically uttered, with whatever benefits it may seem, was not given without a clear pre-science of the very things that most offend and perplex us in the records of Christianity. Not a heresy that has troubled the church, not any outburst of pride and passion among divines, that has disgraced it, no illusion that has seduced the few, and none that has infatuated the many, or even the church at large, throughout the lapse of ages, was unforeseen by him who thus formally engaged to be with and near his ministers, in the long succession of their office, until he comes again. How is it possible to think less than this? Or how, if we think it, can we be incurious concerning the actual indications of that divine presence from age to age?

But the difficulty is this:—these indications of the Lord's presence with his church, have not been such as we should have expected to find them;—the Lord has not seemed to surround himself with the men whom we should have chosen for his companions: and those captions words are almost on our lips;—"This man keepeth company with publicans and sinners." Now it is precisely in connexion with some such uneasy feelings as these—that many pious persons entertain prejudices which have a very unfavourable influence upon their religious character; and it relates immediately to the great questions now before us to lay the axe to the root

of such notions. Let us then consider our actual position in this instance.

—When in any case, a well known friend, or a teacher and guide, or a prince and patron, acts in the very way which we had anticipated, and when he says and does very nearly what we should have imagined him to say and do, under given circumstances, we stand on one side, with a quiet, incurious acquiescence, just as we watch the rising and the setting of the sun, when his undeviating revolutions bring him, at the wonted moment, to the line of the horizon. But how different are our feelings, and how much more intense and wakeful is our attention if, while we still confidently rely upon what we know of his wisdom, and goodness, he starts aside from the path we had presumed to mark out for him, and holds a course which confounds every notion we had entertained of his character and purposes!—In any such case, we rouse ourselves from our previous listlessness, and, with an eager, anxious, intentness of mind, we watch every movement, listen to every word he utters, and we note, even the least considerable circumstances of his behaviour; his every gesture fixes our eye, and we let nothing escape us which may perhaps afford some indication of those hidden reasons which will at length explain this unlooked for course of conduct. Do we not thoroughly know our friend, patron, prince? May we not hope then, that, sooner or later, we shall find the means of truly interpreting the enigmas of his administration.

The application of such a supposed case is obvious, in this instance. If it be true that the general complexion of church history, through the course of long centuries, is such as to offend our preconceived notions, and to shock our spiritual tastes, and if, while we bend

over the records of those dim eras, the promise of the Lord to be with his servants, still rings in our ears, as a doleful knell of hopes broken; if it be so, or, as far as such may be the fact, the motive becomes more impressive and serious which impels us to acquire an authentic knowledge of this course of events, in all its details,—and if there are any who must acknowledge that they feel a peculiar repugnance in regard to church history, they are the very persons, more than any other, whom it behooves to school themselves in this kind of learning; for it seems more than barely probable, that this distaste springs from some ill affection of their own minds, demanding to be exposed and remedied. Such persons may well admit the supposition that they have hastily assumed certain notions of their Lord's principles of government, which are in fact unlike what, at length, they will find themselves to be subject to; and if so, the sooner they dispel any such false impressions, the better. On the face of the instance supposed, one should say, that any perplexities we may feel in regard to that course of events which constitutes the history of Christianity, probably spring from some deep-seated error of feeling, or of opinion, which, for our own sakes, we should carefully analyze.

Reasons such as these, ought to be enough to engage the ministers of religion, at least, in the labour of obtaining as much familiarity as their more urgent duties will allow, with the records of our faith, from age to age. Other motives, very obvious, and often adverted to, belong rather to individuals, addicting themselves, from personal taste, or professional obligation, to specific studies, and who will not stop short of a thorough knowledge of the subject. To some of these technical

uses of church history, I shall have occasion presently to advert; but these pursuits have yet another, and a general recommendation, which I do not remember to have seen insisted upon, although it is not in itself inconsiderable, and is very proper in this place to be adduced, when our inquiries are to involve some of the most intricate principles of human nature, as wrought upon by religious motives.

In all cases, then, in which the materials of history are copious, as well as authentic, it holds good as a rule, that the practical utility of each portion of it bears a direct proportion to the degree in which, among the people, or within the community so reported, the various elements of human nature have been developed. A low or contracted development of human nature, involves a barren and profitless narrative of events: nothing can be more parched, or destitute of nutriment, than the story of the fortunes and misfortunes of savage, or semi-barbarous nations: a page or two, comprising the broad facts of the social condition of such communities, affords all the instruction we could derive from a volume, were it written. In truth, although there may be *pictures* of the imperfectly civilized races, there can be no *history* of them. It is Greece that may have a history, where the human mind spreads itself out, like a superb flower, fronting the sun, until the most delicate tints, and the finest structure of its inmost recesses are laid open: and the same is true of Rome, and Italy, and modern Europe.

Now on this very principle, although, in comparing church history with that of civil societies, the former must be granted to want, almost entirely, the brilliancy, and movement, that give an untiring charm to the latter, yet has it its prerogative, and a high one (if solid instruc-

tion be sought for) and it is this, that it exhibits men to to our view, as wrought upon by motives at once more profound, and less easily understood, than any other motives. False religions have indeed turned up human nature from its depths, in a manner never effected by interests that were merely secular. But true religion, beside its power in common with the false, to animate the deepest seated emotions, has exhibited these occult elements in combination, and in contrast with, emotions altogether peculiar to itself, and which, without its aid would lay latent and unsuspected, beneath the soil of human nature, from age to age. It is Christianity, and nothing else could do it, that has shown man all that is in his heart. No other stage of human affairs exhibits human nature, as this does, displaying, now the virtues that ally man to God, and now the dark passions that seem to render him the fit associate and minister of fiends. What line of history then can be equal to church history, for instructiveness? Thus it must be ordinarily; but it is peculiarly so, as often as occasions arise in which what may be new to ourselves, who are but of yesterday, may be found, in its type or pattern, on this or that page of the records of the church. On such occasions, more perhaps than in any other, those possess a great advantage over their brethren, whose minds are already richly stored with a well digested mass of instances, applicable to the novelties (or apparent novelties) of whatever kind, which, from time to time, blaze out to alarm the timid, and to allure the simple. A ready recollection of the ancient guise of the very same substantial error or folly, is all that we need, in many cases, for allaying our fears, or for securing us against the infatuation which affects others, or for suggesting the remedies



that are to be employed. Under circumstances more or less strictly analogous, we have the invaluable opportunity of seeing how our predecessors have discharged their duty, or have compromised it.

The canonical adage—"nothing new under the sun," holds good in a peculiar sense within the precincts of the church, and it does so for an obvious reason. What is new, or rather what seems to be new, in the manifold up-turnings of human affairs, springs from some less-usual combination of the thousand lighter impulses that are at work within our bosoms, and these impulses, because they are so many, and because the individual varieties of disposition are indefinitely numerous, will be throwing out, from time to time, rare conjunctions of temper and of circumstance. But now those deeper principles of our moral and intellectual nature to which Christianity addresses itself, are very few, and the elements of truth also are few; and hence, by necessity, the changes of which the two, in combination, are susceptible are comparatively few, and therefore must severally be of more frequent recurrence.

There is little risk in affirming that the first five centuries, or we might say, the first three of the Christian history, comprise a sample of every form and variety of intellectual or moral aberration of which human nature is at all susceptible, under the influence of religious excitement. No great ingenuity therefore can be needed in matching any modern form of error or extravagance, with its like, to be produced from the museum of antique specimens. And how much relief, under any new perplexity, may be derived from such recognitions, those can best tell who are the best furnished with the requisite erudition. If then there were no other recommendation of these studies, the one now referred to would be

enough to repay all the labours which they involve. I venture to add that, in the momentous and intricate questions to which we are now addressing ourselves, a fair use of antiquity, as a *copia instantiarum*, will carry us safely and undoubtingly through every strait.

Or if there are, or have been agitators of the repose of the church, who would resent any recurrence to antiquity, as applicable to themselves, and who would not be afraid to denounce any appeal to it as futile, superstitious, and impertinent, the parties with whom we have now to do, not merely admit the propriety of such a reference, but are the most forward to invite it; making it their boast that the image of what they are, or what they would fain be, may be contemplated in the fair glass of antiquity. Nothing remains then but that they, and their opponents, should together look into that glass.

These indispensable studies, have, in fact, been revived of late, to a great extent, in our own, as well as other countries; while the use and necessity of them are forced anew upon the minds of all by the rapid and unexpected advances of Romanism, whose ministers are taking advantage of that ignorance of antiquity which has too long been the reproach of protestantism.

So much importance attaches, at the present moment, to ecclesiastical learning, that it must not be deemed impertinent, in this place, to exhibit the futility of certain suppositions on the ground of which many excuse their slight acquaintance with it.

In the first place then, it is often roundly affirmed, that we may know as much of the history of our religion as can avail us for any practical purposes, through the medium of some one or more of our modern compilations—called histories of the church. Now to this

assumption it might be taken as a very sufficient reply, that we have at present to do, as well in the instance of the Oxford divines, as in that of the Romanists, with men who know vastly more of Christian antiquity than is to be gathered from such sources. Can we then imagine it to be safe to enter into controversy with our antagonists, less well-informed than they are? Besides, since the time when most of those compilations were given to the world, the views of the best informed persons, on the general subject of historical composition, have undergone a great change; so that even the most able and noted of our writers, in this line, have lost very much of the esteem which they once enjoyed; that is to say, as historians. Who, now-a-days, thinks it is enough to know just as much of history as Hume, or Robertson, may inform him of? History, to subserve its serious practical uses, is not to be conveyed in broad generalities, or in the rounded periods of a philosophical digest: it is not a landscape painting of gay forms, and well-grouped masses; but a sedulous adduction of genuine materials, such as shall enable us, so far as remoteness of time admits, to understand, as well the actual condition of the mass of mankind, at different eras, as the motives and conduct of those who have controlled public events.

And if nothing less than this sort of elaborate preparation can be accepted in the walks of secular history, assuredly we need rather a larger measure than a less, to render ecclesiastical history of much avail; and especially for this reason that, in what relates to religion, the intimate character and motives of men are, relatively, more important, as compared with their overt acts, or public conduct, than in civil affairs; while, at the same time, these interior facts are liable to be more disguised.

Statesmen may be truly estimated, much more easily than churchmen, and yet a just estimation of the latter is much more important for securing the ends of history, than it can be of the former. We cannot therefore stand excused from the task of carefully considering the entire mass of extant materials of church history, if we wish to secure any valuable result of sound wisdom, as the fruit of our labour.

Allowing every merit that can fairly be claimed for our modern church histories, to what immense deductions are they not liable, if considered as mirrors of Christian antiquity? The ecclesiastical and theological prejudices of some of these writers, and their pledged subserviency to particular interests, the utter want of religious feeling in others, the superstition of some, and the active fanaticism of a few, are enough to justify our passing them by, one and all, if what we have in view be a genuine acquaintance with the subject. Besides, if such works embrace the sixteen or eighteen centuries of Christianity, those periods that are in fact the most important,—nay, almost exclusively important, must be confined within limits much too narrow; and even this scanty allotment of pages, has, in most instances, been still farther restricted by the admission of tedious disquisitions, on subsidiary points, of no intrinsic value—as whether a martyrdom occurred in this, or the next year; or whether a senseless heresy included, or did not include, such or such an unintelligible dogma! points which are dismissed at last with the ingenuous confession, that they are neither of much consequence, nor susceptible of any conclusive determination!

But even if we could name a modern history of Christianity, exempt from all such faults and deficiencies, it would still be nothing better than—a statement, *prepared*

and *digested*, and therefore less than what is indispensable, when momentous questions come to hinge upon a true and exact knowledge of antiquity. The reading a modern church history, supposing it to combine every excellence, if compared with the perusal of the entire and original materials whence that history was drawn, and of which it is a digest, might not unfitly be likened to the listening, in chancery, to a body of written affidavits, and statements of facts, carefully and professionally dressed up, and moulded with a special intention; such a body of evidence, compared with the hearing and seeing of the actual witnesses, in a court of law. In the one case the most astute professional sagacity often fails to reach the naked truth; while in the other, an honest and intelligent juryman, conversant with human nature, wants no assistance, ordinarily, in discerning the true from the false.

The point I am now insisting upon I feel to be of great practical importance in relation to the wide range of controversies which we have in view; for it is my firm conviction, that nothing will be brought to a satisfactory conclusion until the moral and spiritual condition of the early church has been fully laid open. But, in innumerable instances, it is found that a just and vivid conception of things or persons, remote, that is to say—the very truth, apart from which all else that we may know is substantially false, comes before us, unlooked for, and while, perhaps, we may have been listlessly threading our way down a lifeless page. And such casual indications, or revelations, as one might call them, of the naked truth, are more likely than not to be passed over by the grave compiler of history, as unworthy of his dignified regard, or as altogether trivial.

It might, indeed, seem as if a judicious selection from

the Greek and Latin church writers, would sufficiently secure the benefits to be derived, even from the perusal of the whole of them, thus saving the time and cost of doing so. But a moment's consideration will expose the fallaciousness of such a supposition; for even allowing the utmost discretion to him who undertakes the task of selection, on what principle, let it be asked, is that selection likely to be made? It must be replied that, at once the pious tastes of the editor, and his solicitude to provide, in the best manner he can, for the combined edification and pleasure of his readers (of the religious public such as it is) will prompt, nay compel him, to cull the *flowers* of sacred literature, as he goes; and to leave, where he finds them, the *weeds*. In a word, he will gather, as most proper for his purpose, whatever an intelligent and pious reader would spontaneously distinguish, with a margin pencil line, as worthy of a second perusal. All this may be well enough, if the mere personal edification of the private Christian be in view; but what sort of provision is it, which is thus made for acquiring a safe and competent knowledge of the merits and character of the actors in church history? Miserably will any one be deluded who trusts himself to any such culled materials! I think more than a few of the passages I shall presently have occasion to cite, how pertinent soever they may be in regard to the questions at issue, are of a kind that would never have found a place in any selection from the fathers. Nay, these passages reveal facts which the compilers of church history have studiously concealed from their readers.

If we are anxious to know what the church was at any time, and what its teachers and masters were, then the more judicious (in one sense) such a selection may be, the more effectively will it lead us astray: the choicest

collection, made on any such principle, would be the most mendacious, regarded as TESTIMONY. Such a collection, considered as a material of history, is a splendid vapour, hovering as a glare of seductive light, over a swamp. Materials so brought together, are just what a body of evidence, produced in court, would be, if an advocate were allowed to bring forward every thing in which the witnesses are agreed, and to suppress every thing in which they differ. Yet it is precisely by the sifting of the discrepancies in testimony that truth is elicited.

So far as Christianity is the same in all ages, and in all hearts, truly admitting its influence, there must be very much, in the writings of all Christian men (whatever system they may have lived under) which, in the highest and best sense of the word, is catholic; and it is just this catholic element, or genuine portion of such writings, that recommends itself to our pious sympathies, meet it where we may, and which therefore will be seized upon by right-minded collectors of the golden sayings of good men. But now it is precisely toward the discordant portions of ancient Christian writings that the keen eye of historic industry should be directed. It is not the choice portions, but the refuse, not the sound, but the unsound, not the symmetrical, but the disfigured, not the wisdom, so much as the folly, that we have need to scrutinize, and to trace to its origin. Without a paradox it may be affirmed that, in labouring to know what the Christian body really was, in any age, it is what is (in a sense) impertinent, that will prove the most pertinent to our purpose. In a word, it is less the sameness, than the difference, which we should be looking for. Do we not well know that, in matters of religion, what appears the fairest, demands often the nicest sifting;

and that, to be credulous, is to be duped, until we are driven to doubt of every thing. Those, therefore, who know, in matters of church history, only what modern writers may please to have reported, stand exposed to a cruel shock, and a sad trial of their principles, should it ever happen to them to learn a little more.

Nor ought any translation to be confided in, as conclusive evidence, in historical disquisitions; for we have not merely to guard against wilful perversions of the sense of ancient authors, and the many oversights to which every translator is liable, but against the constant illusion of attributing, to certain words and phrases, necessarily employed by the translator, a modern instead of an ancient sense. A translation may be literal, or it may be free, and in fact the best possible in its kind, and yet may convey to the modern ear notions substantially differing from those which were attached to the equivalents, by the ancient writer, and his reader. And thus it is, and must be, because the language of every people is not a universal medium of ideas and notions, common to mankind; but is the instrument of a particular set of minds, nicely adapted to its occasions, and whenever employed by energetic writers, is much more specific, than generic; and therefore is insusceptible of translation, in the direct proportion in which it may be worth translating.

The earliest Christian writers, who, most of them, can claim very little regard on account of any excellencies of style, or even of matter, but whose evidence is of the utmost consequence in ecclesiastical discussions, suffer peculiarly in a translation; for a false taste, and a dialect in which the most incongruous elements were mingled—jumbled together, fill them with unpleasing turns of expression, which, when they come to be literally rendered



(and a free version is not in these instances admissible) make them absolutely repulsive, so that the perusal in a translation, is more wearisome than it seems in the original. The writers, inestimable as they are on account of their testimony (the preservation of which ought to be regarded as an instance of providential interposition, for subserving important ends) these writers are not to be known, to any good purpose, otherwise than in their own language. There is no alternative, in the present instance, but that of manfully addressing ourselves to a task of some labour and difficulty. The controversies upon which the church is now entering, are of vital consequence: the doubts propounded are inveterate, and any course that may be taken, at the suggestion of indolence and impatience, and which may seem at first to be summary and sufficient, will prove, as I venture to predict, to be as unavailing as trite and meager. At a time when, in the pursuit of secular interests, men in all professions are making unheard-of efforts, and are undergoing labours which our fathers did not dream of, ought it to be considered as a great thing if those to whom the preservation and defence of sacred truths are committed, should be expected to be fully masters of the subject they have to do with? The perusal, through and through, of the Greek and Latin writers, of the first six centuries, is a labour not to be compared with those undergone, in the course of his education and early practice, by every accomplished lawyer.

Another common, but very unfounded impression, relative to the extant remains of Christian antiquity (the prevalence of which, at the present time, would leave a most dangerous advantage in the hands of those whom we are to withstand) is to this effect: That the Greek and Latin fathers were men of intellect so slender, and

are generally either so inane, or so absurd, or so erroneous, that the perusal of them, except by a few curious antiquaries, is a sheer waste of time; or at least that it can never repay the toil. Or it is affirmed, that, so far as these writers were sound and judicious, the same sentiments, better expressed, may be met with much nearer home, and in our own language. Or, generally, that whatever accomplishments the ministers of religion may possess, they may, in these days of benevolent activity, employ their time to better advantage than in brushing the dust from neglected folios. 'The course of events is hastening to offer a startling refutation of any such frivolous assumptions.

It is not, we may be sure, those who possess much of this indispensable learning, that in any such way set it at naught; and it is an acknowledged rule, in all walks of science and literature, that the scoffs and captious objections of the ignorant need not be seriously replied to—"know what you are speaking of, and then condemn it." Now the mere fact of applying *any* comprehensive terms, either of admiration or contempt, to a body and series of writers, stretching through seven hundred or a thousand years, and these writers, natives as they were of distant countries, some of them simple and rude, while others were erudite and accomplished, may be taken as a proof of heedlessness, regarding the matter in hand, sufficient to excuse a silent disregard of the objection it involves. 'These "fathers," thus grouped as a little band, by the objectors, were some of them men of as brilliant genius as any age has produced; some, commanding a flowing and vigorous eloquence, some, an extensive erudition, some, conversant with the great world, some, whose meditations had been ripened by years of seclusion, some of them the only historians of

the times in which they lived, some, the chiefs of the philosophy of their age; and, if we are to speak of the whole, as a series or body of writers, they are the men who, during a long era of deepening barbarism, still held the lamp of knowledge and learning, and, in fact, afford us almost all that we can now know, intimately, of the condition of the nations surrounding the Mediterranean, from the extinction of the classic fire, to the time of its rekindling in the fourteenth century. The church was the ark of all things that had life, during a deluge of seven hundred years.

Such is the group which is often conveniently dismissed with a concise phrase of contempt by some! It may be suspected that very many of the delighted admirers of the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, are little aware of the extent of Gibbon's obligations to—the fathers. Were it possible to draw off from that seductive work the entire materials derived by the indefatigable author from the ecclesiastical compartment of his library, it is no small proportion of the splendour, the accuracy, the correct drawing, the vivid colouring, which are its charm and praise, that would be found wanting. Well would it have been if some of the professed champions and historians of Christianity, had been as thoroughly conversant with the remains of Christian antiquity as was its most dangerous assailant.

The ignorance of which we are here complaining has once endangered our faith as Christians; and it is now endangering our faith as protestants.

Nearly of the same quality, and usually advanced by the same parties, is the portentous insinuation, or the bold and appalling averment, that there was little or no genuine Christianity in the world from the times of Jus-

tin Martyr to those of Wicliffe, or of Luther! and the inference from this assumption is, that we are far more likely to be led astray than edified by looking into the literature of this vast territory of religious darkness.

I must leave it to those who entertain any such sombre belief as this, to repel, in the best manner they are able, those fiery darts of infidelity which will not fail to be hurled at Christianity itself, as often as the opinion is professed. Such persons, too, must expound as they can, our Lord's parting promise to his servants.

Notions of this sort, and there are many of like kind, all take their rise from some narrow and sectarian hypothesis concerning Christianity. We do not, perhaps, find, during certain cycles of the church's history, that style or dialect, which, by an intimate association of ideas, has combined itself with our religious sentiments; and therefore, it is to us, and our peculiar feelings, as if Christianity itself had actually not been extant at such times. If these are our feelings, it is well that we get rid of them with all speed. Christianity is absolute truth, bearing with various effect, from age to age, upon our distorted and discoloured human nature, but never so powerfully pervading the foreign substance it enters as to undergo no deflections itself, or to take no stains; and as its influence varies, from age to age, in intensity, as well as in the particular direction it may take, so does it exhibit, from age to age, great variations of form and hue. But the men of any one age indulge too much the overweening temper that attaches always to human nature, when they say to themselves—*our* Christianity is absolute Christianity; but that of such or such an age, was a mere shadow of it.

Let Christians, whose characteristic it should be not to think more highly of themselves than is meet, cherish

a very different feeling, and be willing to open, if I may say so, a kindly communion with their brethren of distant times. Surely far too little of this sympathy is felt by many who, because the authority of the early church has been overstrained and perversely employed by Romanists, have almost learned to feel toward their brethren of the early ages, as their adversaries in a controversy, just as a man is apt to harbour a grudge against a good neighbour who happens to have been subpœnaed by his enemy, to give evidence against him in a suit. If the fathers have given a handle to popery, we must remember they little knew what it was to which they were giving a handle.

It will presently be my task—a task not to be evaded, to adduce evidence in proof of the allegation that certain extensive and very mischievous illusions affected the Christianity of the ancient church; nevertheless, the very men whose example must now be held up as a caution, were, many of them, Christians not less than ourselves, nay, some of the most deluded by particular errors, were eminent Christians. Nothing is easier (or more edifying, in the inference it carries) than to adduce instances of exalted virtue, piety, constancy, combined with what all must now admit to have been an infatuated attachment to pernicious errors. Yet may our brethren of the early church well challenge our respect as well as affection: for theirs was the fervour of a steady faith in things unseen and eternal; theirs a meek patience and humility, under the most grievous wrongs; theirs the courage to maintain a good profession before the frowning face of philosophy, of secular tyranny, and of splendid superstition; theirs was abstractedness from the world, and a painful self-denial; theirs the most arduous and costly labours of love; theirs a munificence in charity, altoge-

ther without example; theirs was a reverent and scrupulous care of the sacred writings, and this merit, if they had had no other, is of a superlative degree, and should entitle them to the veneration and grateful regards of the modern church. How little do many readers of the Bible, now-a-days, think of what it cost the Christians of the second and third centuries, merely to rescue and hide the sacred treasure from the rage of the heathen!

While, as yet, every thing in the church, and in the world, was precisely what the Lord had given them reason to look for, while Christians were still a rescued band—sheep among wolves, and were, many of them, literally, pilgrims and strangers upon earth, cast out of the bosom of the state, and driven from the social circle; while, as yet, those unlooked for and inexplicable events had not taken place which have so much staggered the faith of later Christians; while the near coming of their Lord was firmly expected, and while nothing had happened of which he had not given his people an intimation; then, and during that fresh morning hour of the church, there belonged to the followers of Christ, generally, a fulness of faith in the realities of the unseen world, such as, in later ages, has been reached only by a very few eminent and meditative individuals; the thousand then felt a persuasion which now is felt only by the two or three. In later and analogous seasons of persecution, if there may have been a similar confidence in the bosoms of the many, it has been disturbed by some mixed sentiments. Questions of doctrine or points of ecclesiastical right, have ruffled, at least, the spirits, or soured the temper of the suffering party. But the first persecutions were the manifested rage of Satan and of his ministers, against Christ and his people. Later persecutions have been, in some degree, struggles of parties,

alternately ascendant, and both claiming to act for Christ. Nero, Domitian, Galerius, Diocletian, acted in their proper guise; but Ximenes, Ferdinand, Mary, Bonner, glozed their atrocities under colour of evangelic zeal, and, perhaps even the arrogance of their pretensions, and their sophistry, abated the comfort and courage of many a martyr.

Those who, in terror of Rome, and her lying traditions, may wish to lay the axe, as they think, to the root of the tree, and to disclaim, in every sense, and to renounce dependence upon, and appeal to, those extra canonical documents of Christianity which have come down to us from the early and apostolic churches, may make the attempt, if they please, but they must soon find themselves standing upon ground on which still greater difficulties than those they run from, are in their way. We cannot, if we would, cut ourselves off from the benefits which the singular providence of God has secured for later times, in the preservation of the various memorials of the early and intervening ages. On this point I very forcibly feel that the inconsiderate and sweeping measures which some would recommend, must, if adopted, leave us our work to do over again, not only in the present argument, but in our controversy with popery. I cannot, therefore, advance without endeavouring to make good my footing on this particular spot.

All mystification apart, as well as a superstitious and overweening deference to antiquity, nothing can be more simple than the facts on which rests the legitimate use and value of the ancient documents of Christianity, considered as the repositories of those practices and opinions which, obscurely or ambiguously alluded to in the canonical writings, are found, drawn forth and illustrated,

in the records of the times immediately succeeding. These records contain at once a testimony in behalf of the capital articles of our faith, and an exposition of minor sentiments and ecclesiastical usages, neither of which can be surrendered without some serious loss and damage.

How plain is the case before us (putting now aside the momentous testimony of the martyr church in behalf of fundamental truths.) It must be admitted that *all things* are not amply and indubitably laid down in the apostolic writings; and, in a few instances, this indeterminateness, or inconclusiveness of the canonical books, affects particulars in which we fain must make a practical choice, and must adopt either one course or its opposite. Now, what had in fact been done, or recommended, or allowed by the apostles, in the churches they personally founded, or governed, could not but be thoroughly known in those churches during the lapse of a generation or two; say, at the least, forty years. But we possess the various writings of the men of the approximate generation, and therein find, as is natural, diversified statements, and innumerable allusions to practices and to opinions universally admitted, as of apostolic origin. Let us sift this evidence as we may, and it demands, as we shall see, to be severely sifted; and let it be reduced to the smallest possible amount, yet there remains what no man in his senses can deny to be a mass of good historical evidence, touching such or such points of apostolic Christianity. Shall we, then, listen to this evidence, or, at the impulse of some inexplicable qualm, resolve not to hear a word of it? Or, are we, in fact, so destitute of historical acumen, as to render it a hopeless task to discern between the genuine and the spurious, in this body of materials? And so, in



matters of exposition, how lightly soever we may esteem the judgment of the ancient commentators, they possessed, at the least, (or many of them) a vernacular familiarity with the canonical phraseology, to which it is arrogant and absurd not to pay a respectful attention. Shall the men of eighteen hundred years hence—the critics and professors of the universities of Australia and New Zealand—pretend to understand the language and idioms of the divines of the seventeenth century far better than we do, of the nineteenth?

We may, and undoubtedly do, possess a critical apparatus such as gives us, in certain respects, an advantage over even Origen, Jerome, Basil, Theodoret, and Chrysostom; nevertheless they, as actually speaking and writing, or as being familiar with, the language of the New Testament, surely possessed prerogatives that can never be reasonably denied, any more than snatched from them. Origen may have been wrong in a hundred instances, or in more; but he read the gospels and epistles so as we can never do, with the fresh familiarity, and the idiomatic contact proper to the perusal of writings in one's own language, and less than two hundred years old; that is to say, precisely as we are now reading Tiltonson, Jeremy Taylor, Barrow, and Baxter. The modern spirit of self-sufficiency, seems to me to reach its climax in the affected contempt thrown upon those who, endowed with as much learning and acumen as ourselves, read the scriptures while the ink of the apostolic autographs had hardly faded.

To the early church also belongs the signal and unalienable advantage of having expressed its sense of Christian principles, previously to those perturbations of the spiritual atmosphere that arose from the great contro-

versies of the fourth century, and which left nothing altogether in its unsophisticated condition. Whatever of precision or explicitness in doctrine might be the fruit of those controversies, there still attaches, as their characteristic, to the pristine writers, a plain and unimpaired straight-forwardness, which has its peculiar charm, as well as value. Less logical, we grant, and less theological, and less acute, and less subtle, and sometimes, as I shall have occasion to show, involved in worse errors, the earlier writers are more calm and more refreshing than the later, and sooner win our affection, if they do not (which is certain) secure our confidence.

There is, however, a still closer dealing with the uses and claims of the early Christian literature, to which the controversies moved by the Oxford writers make it necessary accurately to attend; and, in fact, it has already become, or must soon become, a duty, in no way to be evaded by the leaders of opinion among the ministers of religion, so to apply their minds to this subject as to attain a well defined and permanent conviction, such as may guide their decisions on trying occasions, which are not very unlikely to arise.

Let us, then, first state the case of those who, taking up the (modern) protestant pass-word, in its utmost extent of meaning—"The Bible and the Bible alone"—would fain cut themselves off from all connexion with every intermediate record, as well as with every remote community of Christians. "If I have the word of God itself in my hands, which is able to make me, and all, wise unto salvation, what is antiquity to me?"—thus speak many; but with how much reason, remains to be inquired.

If it did not frequently happen that vague impressions, the grounds of which have never been examined, are

allowed to exert an influence, not only over the unthinking and the uninformed, but over the educated and the intelligent, there could be no need to dwell for a moment upon a point which, like the one now before us, barely admits of what deserves to be called argument. And yet, even if I might otherwise think myself excused from the seemingly needless task of making good my path in this instance, the peculiar character of the controversy before us would render it proper to do so. Every thing turns upon the clearness and soundness of the rule which is to be established in regard to the extent of the deference due, by the modern church, to the ancient church; and nothing would be so certainly fatal to the principle we hope to substantiate, as to underrate that deference, in any such way as must leave our position liable to just and important exceptions.

With all the brevity possible I will propound the case, which, in fact, has often been appealed to; and will do so in the convenient form of question and rejoinder, the interrogatories being put by a supposed protestant advocate of antiquity, to one whose protestantism appears to be somewhat extreme, or inconsiderate: as thus:—

“We possess, by the divine favour, the word of God, able, as we both allow, and able *by itself*, that is to say, apart from, and independently of, any other writings or traditions, to make men wise unto salvation: but I have two questions to put, and first, whence, proximately, did you receive this inestimable gift?”

“From those who, before me, by the same divine goodness, had possessed and loved it: and, of course, they, in like manner, from their predecessors in the faith and hope of the gospel; and so from the first.”

“The Bible, then, is not sent to us, individually, from heaven; but has been consigned, like all other books,

may, on the very same conditions as profane literature, to the hands of successive generations; that is to say, it has been transmitted from fathers to sons, and is, itself, in this sense, A TRADITION: and, fully agreed, as doubtless we are, as to the mere facts of the mode and circumstances of this continuous delivery of the scriptures, we may well unite, first, in gratitude to God, whose providence has so watched over his written word, as that it has not merely been conserved, through long periods of confusion and ignorance, but has come down to us purer, and more copiously verified, as to the integrity of the text, than any other collection of ancient writings; but we may, also, as I presume, unite in a grateful and affectionate sentiment toward those to whose industry, from age to age, and to whose constancy and courage, at particular seasons, we are immediately indebted for the preservation of the inspired volume. Thus far you will admit, with me, the obligation of the modern church to the ancient church?"

"Assuredly: my feelings towards those who, from age to age, have thus kept and handed down the precious deposit, are precisely analogous to those of a poor believer upon whom a more opulent brother in Christ bestows a Bible: he thanks the charitable donor; but he does not so misunderstand his obligation as to surrender a particle of his Christian liberty and conscience to his benefactor. Come to us whence it may, the word of God is absolutely independent of the medium of its transmission from age to age. The pearl of great price may have traversed some stormy seas, but it has actually reached our shores, and we have acquitted our obligation towards those who, at the peril of their lives, have brought it, when we just thank them, and say good morrow."

“ Thus far, then, there appears no ground of disagreement between us. But I have now to put my second question; and, well-informed as you are on all points of biblical criticism and of literary history, I shall be in no danger of shaking your religious convictions by propounding my difficulty. On what ground, then, do you receive the Bible, collectively, or its prophets, histories, gospels, and epistles, severally, as indeed the word of God? The inspired pages do not shine out with any supernatural splendour, nor do the writers always affirm their own canonicity; or even if they do, there are spurious writings that contain equivalent asseverations of divine authority, to wit, the Clementine Constitutions, and many others, as you need not be told. Or if we think of the collection, as a whole, it is no where made up, and catalogued, within the book itself. Now, I will anticipate all that part of your reply to my question which must refer to the customary, and, as I grant, unimpeachable internal evidences of the genuineness of the books of scripture, severally, and concerning which we should have no difference of opinion. The whole of that critical history of scripture, by which it is proved, beyond possibility of doubt, (concerning most of the books,) that, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, they are genuine, is known to both of us, and is assented to by both; and it is farther admitted, in common, that the proof of the antiquity and genuineness of the books of the canon involves, by a sound historical and logical inference, their divine authority, or inspiration, leaving us in no doubt whether or not they exhibit the will of the Lord, to which we owe absolute and implicit submission, in faith and practice.

“ But now, before I reach my ultimate position, I request you not altogether to overlook the incidental, and

yet ineffably important service that has been rendered to the modern church by the ancient church, or, let us say, the long series of Christian writers, who, in their copious, and, for the most part, exact quotations of scripture, and by their reverent manner of appealing to it, have afforded the amplest means, first, of tracking the very text of scripture, whole and entire, up from age to age, as the very same text (various readings allowed for) which we now read, and so as to exempt us from all reasonable anxiety concerning this text; and, secondly, of ascertaining *particular readings*, with a degree of assurance which, otherwise, would not have been attainable. See, then, as well the extent of our obligations to our Christian predecessors, as the intimacy, and the incalculable importance of that constant correspondence which the church must hold with the extant remains of Christian literature. Will you look at the facts of the case, and then dare to say, as some do, ‘I hold the Bible, and I care nothing for antiquity: the fathers! let them fall, one and all, into the hands of another Omar.’ Does your protestantism go to this length?”

—“Need you ask it? Who that is ever so moderately informed in such matters can deny, or can wish to disparage the *critical* use of the Greek and Latin Church writers? The aids they afford are, I grant, of inestimable value; but I can allow all this, and yet hold them, one and all, very cheap as authorities in doctrine, or as expounders of scripture, or as examples in practice; and you do not forget that, in the sense of which we are now speaking, an heretical father serves us, to the full, as good a turn as an orthodox one, and that the schismatic Novatian is as available an authority for establishing a reading, as the orthodox Athanasius.”

—“This admission does not appear to touch the point

in debate; but would it not sorely grieve many a staunch protestant to hear *you* attribute so much importance, even as this, to those whom they have been taught to think of only as the parents and abettors of popery? They would insinuate, I think, that it might be well to look out for some more thorough-going champion of the good cause. Let this, however, pass: you divine what I next intend. After we have allowed all the force that can be claimed for it, to that method of proof which, looking solely to the text of an ancient author, as it is in itself, and to the literary history of the book, establishes its genuineness, will you affirm that we want nothing more in deciding the all-important questions that arise concerning a particular book, or epistle, whether it be canonical and a part of God's word or not? Let us assume the instance of the second epistle of Peter. The *antiquity* of the writing is, to a certain point, clearly ascertained, and, moreover, a nice examination of its style and recondite peculiarities, well supports the belief that it is what it professes to be; and that it may safely be appealed to in support of doctrines and duties. But is the argument in this particular instance concluded, or is there no other consideration which ought herein to be regarded?"

—"I know what you intend; but rather than make my answer at this point, I request you to state your intention fully. I will then reply so far as may be necessary to save my protestant principle."

—"I affirm then plainly, That, whatever sufficiency and completeness we may attribute to the *critical* proof of the genuineness and integrity of the text of the several books of scripture, there is yet a link in the chain of argument wanting, and this link is supplied by nothing

else but the **JUDGMENT** and the **TESTIMONY** of the ancient church, concerning these books, individually, that they, and not others, (although sustained by specious pretensions,) were the productions of the apostles, and had been, from the first, so received and revered. I say, in deciding the question of genuineness or spuriousness, or in discriminating, for instance, between the gospel of John, and the acts of Peter, or in distinguishing among *genuine* writings, the inspired from the uninspired; the epistles of Paul from those of Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius; we are thrown upon the **JUDGMENT** and **AUTHORITY** of the early church. Notwithstanding all the exceptions that have been urged against this averment, when advanced, as it so often has been, by the advocates of tradition, and notwithstanding the ill use which has been made of the instance, I must profess to think that the plain fact carries with it an unquestionable and important inference to this effect, namely, That, by the mode chosen for consigning the sacred writings to after-times, the divine providence has connected the later with the earlier church, by a link which can never be severed, and which connexion implies a **GENERAL DUTY** of acquainting ourselves with the records of the early church, and of yielding such a specific deference to its testimony and judgment, as is not to be claimed for the church of any later period. Bring the principle to a test in the instance, already named, of the second epistle of Peter: a critical examination of the two epistles affords what the best modern biblists have regarded as full and satisfactory evidence of the genuineness of the latter. But is there any one who, in order to give proof of his confidence in the sufficiency of this mode of argument, would refuse to search for references to the epistle, in



the early writers? None would do so; on the contrary, it is with a lively pleasure that we find this epistle quoted by Clement, Hermas, Justin, Athenagoras. This then is the *second* head of argument, or kind of proof, available in the case; and it is such as to leave no reasonable doubt concerning the fact of the existence of the epistle in the age of those writers, or of its reputed authenticity. But there is yet a *third* argument, proper to the subject, and this consists in that judgment of the whole case which was formed by the learned divines of the fourth century, who, notwithstanding the doubts entertained during an early intermediate period, reviewed the evidence, and admitted the epistle into the canon. Now not only do we assent to this decision as a sound one; but, even if we are not absolutely dependent upon it, for our own opinion, on so important an occasion, we are yet deeply indebted to those who thus anticipated the *critical* decision of modern scholars; for (let it be remembered) had these divines otherwise determined, and had they actually excluded the epistle from the list of inspired writings, even if it had come down to us at all, the task would have been one of great difficulty and anxiety, to have replaced it in the canon by mere force of criticism. And it is very doubtful whether, so sustained, it would have won the assent of the church at large: a much more probable event would have been its resting to the end of time, under a ban, as apocryphal; and thus would the church of all ages have been mulct of much edification, and moreover deprived of certain points of belief which rest exclusively upon affirmations contained in that epistle."

"Be it so: but, without staying to contest the point with you, as to the relative or absolute importance that

attaches to this third branch of the argument, concerning the genuineness and canonicity of the books of scripture, I may easily grant to you the *general utility* of a reference to antiquity, *on this single ground*, without compromising my great principle, the Bible alone."——

—"Nay, you cannot grant so much as this, without, on the one hand, breaking in upon, and offending the self-sufficient presumption of a large and forward class of protestants, and, on the other hand, implying all that I am now careful to secure, namely, A DEFERENCE, as cautious and discriminating as you please, due by the modern church, to the ancient church. I affirm that the Lord himself, by that very arrangement which has thrown so much importance upon the TESTIMONY and JUDGMENT of the pastors and divines of the early ages, in the matter of the discrimination of the inspired writings, has virtually constituted them, to a limited extent, our masters; or, at the least, has virtually forbidden the attempt to sever ourselves from them. Nevertheless, and this I most readily grant you, there are urgent reasons, and more than enough, for exercising the utmost possible caution in yielding this due deference, in each single instance in which it may be challenged."

But I must insist with some strenuousness upon the general inference I am wishing to derive from the plain fact of our dependence, in so momentous an instance, upon the judgment, fidelity, and discretion, of the primitive church. Consequences, affecting every part of the present controversy, flow from the principle which this inference involves, and, as I think, it very clearly excludes the extreme opinions, as well of the upholders,

as of the impugnors of the authority of antiquity. I very well know that indeterminate conclusions, such as the one now in view must be at the best, may easily be spurned by an opponent, as unworthy of his serious regard: be it so: I am not just now thinking of what a determined adversary, or rigorous disputant, may choose to allege; but rather am offering considerations to one whom I suppose to be willing to listen to whatever may appear to deserve the regard of a religious mind; whether or not it may be available in a formal and categorical argument.

Listen, then, to me with a little indulgence; and those need not listen at all who can afford none. All will agree that the settlement of the question of canonicity, or the divine authority of each book, alleged to bear this sacred character, is one of primary and unspeakable importance; it is the preliminary of our faith and duty; nor can it be supposed that we attach more importance to the subject than is attached to it by the Lord himself, who will neither give his honour to another, nor lightly allow the honour belonging to his authentic word to be shared by spurious compositions. It is also clear that such a formal announcement of the canonical writings might have been given (as, for example, in an undoubted final epistle of the last surviving apostle,) as should altogether have superseded either any reference, on our part, to the judgment of the early church, or any exercise of that judgment. On the other side, it might so have been, that several apparently apostolic writings had descended from the apostolic age, having such internal recommendations as would have made the task of discrimination, in later times, hopelessly difficult; in which case, we should have been thrown, without appeal, upon the decisions of antiquity.

But neither of these things has happened to us ; and instead of either, we find ourselves placed under an economy, in this particular respect, which, in a very significant manner, blends the conditions of dependence and independence. We cannot but refer to, and avail ourselves of, the judgment and final decision of the early church, concerning the canonicity of each portion of the New Testament ; and yet this decision is not our only resource. Farthermore, the two lines of proof do (and in the opinion of the best modern scholars) so coincide, as wonderfully to authenticate each other. In each instance the literary, or internal evidence, is such as to win our approval of the judgment of antiquity ; and again the judgment of antiquity has neither presented to us, finally, any book which the internal evidence disallows, nor has it pronounced against any extant book, which that evidence might have allowed. The result is—a rational and firm assurance, more or less entire in each instance, that the New Testament is constituted of, and includes, the divinely inspired apostolic writings.

Thus then are we, and all believers to the end of time, connected with the pristine church, by an indissoluble and vital cord. Yet are we not bound to it servilely. Our relation is that of pupilage, not of bondage. We inherit as sons ; we do not occupy as serfs ; our highest interests have been at the disposal of our predecessors ; but have not been subjected to an unconditional despotism. We can no more shake off our dependence to the extent which it legitimately reaches, than the inheritor of an entail can dispose of his real estate as he may of his personals. In relation to this point, we are neither indulged with the liberty which the wilfulness of our nature so fondly seeks for ; nor are we so fettered as the

sullen advocates of despotism would wish: and, placed as we are, it is equally a fault to spurn authority, or to cringe before it.

Now I must think that our position in this particular instance imbodyes a general principle, applicable to most of the perplexing questions now agitated, or likely to be brought under discussion; and it is in this belief that I so much urge the consideration of it. In many of those cases in which the ambiguous, or incomplete language of the inspired writers, in incidentally alluding to points of discipline or faith, has given rise to schismatic diversities of opinion, we are (as in the question of the canon) by necessity thrown upon the testimony and judgment of the early church; but yet are not thrown thereupon helplessly, or without opportunity of appeal to collateral arguments. Thus, in regard to the principle of the inherited and transmitted clerical authority, there *is* a serious practical meaning in the principle; nevertheless the existence of Christianity in the world, or in any particular country, is by no means so involved in it as that, in the event of an accidental rupture of the chain of ordination, there could be no more faith or holiness on the face of the earth, or in this or that region, until a new investiture had been sent down from heaven, and miraculously attested. A single bible, thrown ashore from a wreck, might, as I will not doubt, become the seed of a true church, in the midst of a heretofore atheistic community. Nevertheless such a new and extraordinary germination of the tree of life would by no means invalidate the general doctrine (rationally held) of the ministerial succession. A real dependence, but not a slavish, or abject, or hopeless dependence, is, as I think, the **LAW** of the spiritual economy.

But whatever demur may be raised against the alleged authority of the ancient church in matters of opinion, and in cases where the first Christians were as liable to error as ourselves, it is clearly impracticable to exclude their testimony as to *matters of fact*; and the operation of this testimony extends, I think, rather farther than some appear willing to admit. It is easy to find illustrations, real and imaginary, of the deference which (all superstitious affection apart) common sense, and the universally admitted principles of historical criticism, compel us to yield in such cases.

The epistles, for example, contain allusions, either very slight, or actually ambiguous, to many matters of usage, some of them altogether unimportant to ourselves, and others so connected with discipline, worship, government, or even doctrine, as to render it, to say the least, highly desirable to know just so much more as may serve to exclude controversy on the subject. Now, and as might have been expected, the very same points are either alluded to, or are explicitly defined by the Christian writers of the next generation, or of the next age. It would have been strange indeed if it had not been so; and equally strange, nay, utterly absurd, were it, if we were to refuse to avail ourselves of the aid of this subsidiary evidence, so far as it may fairly be resorted to. Did Paul preach the gospel in these islands? a question of little or no importance to British Christians of the present times, and yet of some curiosity: and who is there that would not gladly gratify so natural a feeling, if the means of doing so are at hand in the extant written traditions of the early church? Did Peter preach the gospel at Rome; or, if so, did he found and govern the church there? a question this which has hap-

pened to become important, and which we must take the same means, if they be within our reach, for determining.

Now either in the one instance, or the other, nothing can be less pertinent than the preclusive, ultra-protestant outcry—"Oh, the Bible, and the Bible alone: I care nothing for what cannot be proved by texts of scripture." We may easily find occasions more fit, in which our zeal for the honour and sufficiency of the inspired volume may make itself heard. The question is a question of fact; and as such, it is open to all those various methods of proof, or of disproof, which are ordinarily had recourse to in historical inquiries. It might reasonably have been thought that not a word could have been needed in making good so simple and obvious a rule of proceeding.

Other instances, variously affected by this same rule, or coming within its application in different degrees, have a hundred times, and especially of late, been adduced; and some of these will present themselves, which demand all the caution, the acumen, and the diligence that can be brought to bear upon them. They are, however, all governed by a general practical principle, not very difficult to be established or applied (although contested by certain parties) and it is this first, 'That no article of worship, discipline, government, or opinion, which, however well attested as belonging even to the apostolic churches of the first century, is no where alluded to, or enjoined, in the inspired scriptures, can be binding upon the church in after-times; for we adhere to the belief, and on this very ground renounce Romanism, that, whatever our Lord intended to be of permanent observance in his church, he has caused to be included in the canonical writings: and, secondly, that points so

attested as ancient, and yet very slightly or ambiguously alluded to by the inspired writers, are not to be regarded as of prime necessity, or insisted upon as conditions of communion. The reason of the *first part* of our general principle carries with it this *second*; for we may religiously believe that all points, at once of great moment, and of universal application, are so affirmed in scripture as to carry the convictions of every humble and docile mind.

I shall have occasion, once and again, in the following pages, to quote that favourite of the Romanists, and, as it seems, of the Oxford Tract writers, Vincent of Lerins, and therefore will not cite him here, on a merely incidental point; otherwise it would be easy to obtain his explicit sanction to both parts of the rule now stated. In truth, I would not scruple to refer the controversy, as to its principles, between the church of Rome, and ourselves, to the sole arbitration of this very writer. How can Romanists dare appeal to him, except on the presumption that their opponents will never know more of him than is contained in the passages they may please to adduce? I would even venture to argue the present questions before the same arbiter, and abide by his decision, fairly taken. But to return.—

An instance often adduced in this connexion, is that of the religious observance of the first day of the week, which, after we have found it clearly, though not copiously alluded to by the inspired writers, as the practice of the first Christians, is sufficiently proved, by subsequent testimonies, to have been so observed by those who immediately succeeded them. It is (not to mention here the more general grounds of argument) **A WELL CONFIRMED TRADITION**, taking its rise in the apostolic



writings, and thence onward supported by unquestionable evidence. Those must create a difficulty, who find any in this instance, in distinguishing between a proper and necessary appeal to antiquity, and an unwarrantable and dangerous deference to it. The *religious* reason for observing the Lord's day is, that the apostles themselves, as we fully believe, observed it, and sanctioned its observance in all the churches which they founded. The *historic* reason for believing that they did so, is drawn partly from the two or three allusions to this observance in the New Testament; and partly, we might say chiefly, from the incidental and the explicit mention of the observance by the early Christian writers, as well as by Pliny, Plutarch, and others.

If we imagine ourselves entirely deprived of this latter portion of the evidence on this point, it must be admitted that the argument in support of an institution so vitally connected, as it is found to be, with the very existence of religion in the world, would be reduced to a slender and precarious inference, or argument from analogy. Here then we are absolutely compelled, and those especially who are rigid more than others in their regard to the Lord's day, are compelled to resort to the aid of ancient usage, as recorded, not by the inspired, but by uninspired writers: and we may well appeal to the candour of such persons, and ask them, whether, when contending with latitudinarians, on this important subject, they would not eagerly avail themselves of any new, and still more explicit testimony concerning the usage of the churches in the apostolic age, supposing some such evidence, heretofore overlooked, were now suddenly to be discovered. I presume that they would do so, without allowing any qualm, as to "the great protestant principle," to stand in their way. It is in fact a circumstance

worthy to be noticed, that even the most ultra-protestant of ultra-protestants, if it happens to him to meet with a real or apparent confirmation of his peculiar views, within the circle of ecclesiastical antiquity, shows no reluctance whatever in snatching at it, and in turning it to the best account he can, piously quoting Irenæus, or Tertullian, or Ignatius, like any good Romanist! It is—"the Bible, and the Bible alone," just when the evidence afforded, on some disputed point, by the writings of Ignatius, or Irenæus, or Tertullian, happens to tell in the wrong direction; otherwise, these "papistical authorities" are good enough.

The two cases then that have here been adduced, (and I have purposely avoided such as involve controversy) seem, as I think, to establish, beyond a doubt, all that I am concerned for at present; and which, expressed as broadly and *inoffensively* as possible, amounts to this general principle—That it is as impracticable, as it would be undesirable, and even irreligious, to detach ourselves from all dependence upon Christian antiquity; and that, as in the capital and foremost article of the antiquity, and canonicity, and genuineness, of the books of scripture, so in various matters of discipline, worship, government, and doctrine, nothing else can be done by the modern church, but listen (with just so much deference as may be due) to the TESTIMONY and JUDGMENT of the ancient church.

There may indeed be those who would freely avail themselves of the evidence of antiquity in relation to matters of fact, while they would be extremely jealous of it, or totally exclude it, in relation to matters of opinion. Now granting that the distinction between facts and opinions, or doctrines, may be real, and pertinent too, in the present case, yet surely no one can forget

that pure matters of opinion, or doctrines, become, to all intents, matters of fact, whenever they attach to large bodies of men, or communities, for a length of time, and are customarily professed, and perpetually repeated. The Mahometan *doctrines* of the unity of God, and of the pleasures of paradise, are not at all less matters of fact, than are the conquest of Syria, or of Egypt, by the caliphs. And thus it is that the faith of the ancient church may be ascertained, as a matter of fact, not less easily, or less certainly, than its sufferings, or its modes of government, or its spread, in this or that country.

Nor is the ascertaining of such facts, whether of usage, or of doctrine, so perplexing, or so ambiguous as might be imagined; for as Christianity, instead of its having been cooped up in Judea, during two or three generations, instantly pervaded all the countries around the Mediterranean, every one of its most conspicuous elements was laid open to the observation and report of unconnected witnesses, so as to exclude, not merely collusion in regard to the facts so reported, but in regard to the preparation of the evidence which has come down to us. In the most unexceptionable modes of proof, we may know what was the religious system of the Christian societies of the second century, throughout the countries between the Euphrates and the Atlantic, and between the deserts of Lybia and the Danube.

The principle, above stated, (in whatever terms we may choose to embody it) while it consists with the general laws of the social system, and is in harmony with the conditions on which all advancement in knowledge depends, plainly and unavoidably results from that peculiar economy under which the Lord himself has placed the gospel dispensation. He has not allowed his people, in any age, the undesirable liberty of cutting them-

selves off from all dependence upon their predecessors, any more than he has left them free so to act, as if their conduct, as Christians, would not have an influence over the religious well-being of their successors. The church is one church, stretching throughout the ages that are to elapse between the first, and the second advent.

But now this dependence of the modern church upon the ancient Church, has, in fact, been misunderstood, and abused, in an extreme degree; and, moreover, it involves some real and serious difficulties in all occasions of controversy. What then remains to be done? Not to cut the knot by renouncing the dependence:—this we are not free to do; but, and there is no alternative, we are summoned to exercise, although at the cost of painful labours, a necessary discrimination, by the aid of which we may avail ourselves, without abusing it, of the TESTIMONY and JUDGMENT of the ancient church. Some may indeed resent this alleged necessity, and may have recourse to various expedients to evade it; but their struggles will be to no purpose in regard to the cause they wish to serve; while there will be not wanting some, quick to perceive, and prompt to turn to their advantage, the argumentative boon, thus unwisely surrendered to them. It has been nothing so much as this inconsiderate “Bible alone” outcry, that has given modern popery so long a reprieve in the heart of protestant countries; and it is now the very same zeal, without discretion, that opens a fair field for the spread of the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts.

I venture, then, not without diffidence, and yet with a calm confidence in the soundness of the course I am pursuing, to invite those who already feel the moment of the controversy set on foot by the writers of those tracts, and who perceive the double consequence which

it carries, to enter upon such researches, in the field of Christian antiquity, as may be found requisite, whether more or less laborious, for obtaining a well-defined conviction as to the extent and conditions of the deference that is due to the practices and opinions of the early church. May He who giveth liberally, and without upbraiding, as well wisdom as strength, to those who are conscious that both must be given from above, graciously, in this instance, aid our endeavours!

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## A TEST OF THE MORAL CONDITION

### OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH.

So far as we may have in view the usurpations and the lying pretensions of Rome, nothing can be clearer than the course to be pursued by protestants. Such and such practices, or opinions, and in which POPERY consists, may be proved to be of such or such a date; they are, therefore, not apostolic; they are not catholic; they are not even ancient, any more than they are scriptural: why, then, should we receive and submit to them? "I am catholic, not you," may every protestant say to every Romanist, and with as full an assurance as that with which the genuine Cambrian may say to the Fitzwilliams, the Walters, the Villiers, the Godfreys, "I am British, not you; I had turned this soil ages before you Normans had set a foot on the island." We are not compelled, by any logical or argumentative obligation,

to do more than passively to reject, and resolutely to resist, Romanism, that is to say, the false, debauched, and tyrannous superstition of the middle ages. Protestantism, as opposed to popery, is a refusal to accept *innovations*, bearing an ascertained date.

Or, we might confine our protest against popery within the pithy denunciations of the Romanists' own saint, Vincent of Lerins—*Annuntiare ergo aliquid Christianis catholicis, præter id, quod acceperunt, nunquam licuit, nusquam licet, nunquam licebit; et anathematizare eos, qui annunciant aliquid, præterquam quod semel acceptum est, nunquam non oportuit, nusquam non oportet, nunquam non oportebit.*

But, after thus remanding popery until it can show some cause why it should, for a moment, be listened to, serious difficulties meet us in our upward course toward apostolic Christianity; nor does there appear to be any *summary* process by which these difficulties may be surmounted. By the determined opponents of antiquity they will be stated in terms so strong as must, if we listen to them, lead to the conclusion they desire, namely, an utter rejection of whatever comes to us through the contaminated channels of ecclesiastical tradition. Such a one will not fail briskly to put the question—“Why draw a line, where there is no important distinction, between the religion of the tenth century and that of the ninth, or of the eighth, or of the seventh?” or he will demand that we should show that Christianity was in a much purer state in the sixth century than in the seventh; or that it had not become vitally corrupted even in the fifth; or that, in the fourth, it retained its essential purity: and if these questions, put in broad terms, are pushed on toward the earliest years to which our ex-

tant materials extend, a real perplexity will attach to the answer that is to be given to them: in truth, we shall never be able to deal with the subject in the abstract, or in mass; for it means nothing, or nothing as to any practical bearing, either to say, vaguely, the ancient church was in error; or, as vaguely, to deny such a charge. We must descend to the particulars, and must sift the evidence with a minute and impartial scrupulosity, and the result, which we may confidently anticipate, is precisely what a true knowledge of human nature, supported by the evidence of all history, would lead any calm and philosophic mind to expect, namely, that, while the testimony of the pristine church, concerning certain facts and doctrines, remains unimpeached, and is in the highest degree important, and while its faith, its constancy, its courage, its charity, its heavenly-mindedness, are the objects of just admiration and imitation, it had admitted certain specific errors, and had yielded itself to some natural but pernicious impressions, which make a blind obsequiousness toward it, on our part, equally dangerous and absurd. There is, surely, no mystery in all this, nor any miracle; but simply what is in analogy with the uniform course of human affairs, even when benefited by the intervention of heavenly influences. Either to worship the pristine church, or to condemn it, in the mass, would be just as unwise as to treat the church of our own times, or of any other times, in a manner equally indiscriminating. But, although there be neither miracle nor mystery in the facts which an impartial research brings to light, concerning the religious and moral condition of our Christian predecessors of the early ages, how much of mystification has darkened the minds of many, in their notions of anti-

quity, and how much of what must have been, had it had place, really miraculous, has virtually and silently been attributed to the course of events, in the church, from the death of the apostles, to the time when it ceases to be any longer practicable even to imagine any such supernatural control of ecclesiastical affairs!

In truth, there have been, and are, many (and as it seems, some of those that embrace the opinions of the Oxford writers are of the number) who, while they might perhaps deny the claim of the martyr church to the possession of miraculous powers, and disallow the entire series of legends, of the healing the sick, and raising the dead, yet cling to the fond belief that the church, during the early centuries, was favoured by some more immediate divine superintendence than is the church of our own times; or, in a word, that a species of theocracy, with its Urim and Thummim, and its Shekinah, had an existence—vigorous at the first, and gradually fading and melting away, into the merely human hierarchical economy of the papacy. A vague notion, such as this, may indeed appear to be sanctioned by certain of our Lord's expressions; but those who entertain it should not forget that, unless those expressions were intended to be limited to the apostles and first teachers, they are undoubtedly the property of the church in all ages, and without any privilege in behalf of the early ages. And then it will follow that they confer no claim to deference, or general authority, for the ancient church, than what belongs to the modern; and thence also it follows that, if we actually find, within the precincts of the modern church, strange and unsightly combinations of high and sacred truths, and solid virtues, with preposterous errors, and sad delinquencies, so may it have been, and so was



it, in an equal, and, as I think, in even a greater degree, within the enclosure of the ancient church.

I do not wish, in the present argument, to employ at all the phrases—philosophical temper, or philosophical views, lest I should be so far misunderstood, or misrepresented, as to be supposed to favour that modern guise of infidelity, called rationalism. Instead, therefore, in the present instance, of saying we should learn to look at the history of the primitive church with a philosophic eye, I will urge the necessity of regarding the dim objects of those remote times, with the cool and piercing perceptions of an undamaged eye; or, in other words, under the guidance of plain good sense, which, amid all kinds of illusive appearances, adheres to the constant principle, that human nature, however much it may have been raised above its ordinary level in particular instances, has always quickly subsided, and been substantially the same, in every age, and country. There never yet has been, on earth, a community of angels: there have been saints; that is to say, men, in the main, good and wise; but there has been no corporation or entire band of saints, any more than any faultless individuals. Or if it were allowed, which I think it must be, that some periods have very far excelled others in piety and wisdom, I should still demur to the allegation that the era immediately following the death of the apostles can claim any such pre-eminence. Nay, I am compelled to say, that the general impression, made upon my mind by the actual evidence, is altogether of a contrary kind.

On this subject, however, important on so many accounts, as nothing but the plain and simple truth, so far as attainable, can render us any real service, or be accepted by any sound mind; so, any thing else than the

simple truth, will not fail to exaggerate, or to pervert our notions upon most religious subjects; and while entertaining any such illusions, our alternatives will be a servile superstition, or sheer infidelity.

It does not appear that we have as yet, on any side, obtained, a full, clear, and matter-of-fact idea of the moral and religious condition of the ancient church; and I am strongly inclined to believe that, whoever may be successful in eliciting such an idea, and in giving it clearly to the church at large, will, in so doing merely, have gone far toward effecting the silent and final disappearance of many inveterate errors. Nay, I believe that it will be on this side that the fibres of popery itself, will be severed, and so the horrid excrescence disengaged from the religious convictions of the *civilized* world.

So great a work (yet in itself simple, although vast in its consequences) will not be effected by a single hand: indeed, the mere thought that this were possible, would oppress the mind that should address itself to the task. Meaning no more then, than to do my part, however small, I shall attempt, in this line, what the occasion seems to demand. And in doing so, instead of carrying forward a multifarious inquiry, concerning twenty topics of early opinion and practice, I shall select, in this first instance, and confine myself to a particular topic, and shall clear a path, as I go, right onward toward the highest antiquity. But then this selected subject of inquiry must be one, not of an incidental, but of an intrinsically important kind; and it must have intimate alliances with the entire ecclesiastical and religious system of antiquity, and it must, from its peculiar character, be well adapted to the general purpose of bringing, vividly and distinctly, into view, the general, and the special merits and faults of the times in question.

Such a subject, recommending itself to our choice, with singular completeness, by its conformity with the above-named conditions, is found in the ancient, and the universal opinion entertained in the Christian Church, concerning the merits, and the spiritual efficacy of celibacy, and especially of uncontaminated virginity; taken in connexion with the practices thence immediately resulting, and the sanctioned institutions to which, in an early age, it gave rise. With what belongs to Romanism, we have nothing now to do:—nothing with the compulsory celibacy of the clergy, nothing with the penal rigours of the monastic vow; nothing with the corruptions, or the horrors, engendered by this system when its proper influence had come to take effect upon the European commonwealth. These things we altogether remit, or only glance at them in passing, and direct our vigilant regards to the very same system in its young days, and before it had rendered itself execrable; and while it was yet recommended by lofty virtues, and by some substantial fruits, as well as excused by many subsidiary reasons. What we have to do with, touches—the view taken by the church, of Christianity, as a moral economy, or ethical system, from the very earliest times; it touches too the principles whence sprang the most ancient notions concerning the mysterious properties of the sacraments; it touches intimately the position and the power of the clergy; it touches the fundamental doctrines of justification, and sanctification; in a word, it leaves nothing in the theological, or the ecclesiastical system, of ancient Christianity, untouched. I offer no apology then, for the choice I have made in the present instance; for the momentous controversy now before the church justifies any means clearly tending to bring it to a determinate issue, which a religious writer can wish to resort to.

Let it be enough that I pledge myself to respect every pure and manly feeling which should belong to one who is himself a husband and a father. Very much that properly belongs to the subject, and which, if adduced, would powerfully sustain the inference I have in view, can neither be brought forward, nor even alluded to. I shall cite just so much as is indispensable, in regard to the important conclusion toward which we are tending. And at the outset I must profess my serious and deliberate belief that no other element of ancient Christianity so well, as the one which I have chosen, would subserve the purposes of the general argument, or tend so directly to open the way for terminating the controversy which now divides the church.

But a nice question presents itself on the threshold, which perhaps I am barely entitled to put to the writers of the *Tracts for the Times*, and it is this—Why they have hitherto avoided, so scrupulously, a subject which, as they very well know, stands forward as the most prominent characteristic of ancient Christianity? These learned persons do not need to be told that, whenever we turn our eyes toward the dim distance of the pristine ages, there is one glaring spot, the glitter of which dazzles the sight; and that this luminous point of the piety of the early church, is—the celestial, or angelic excellence of virginity. They well know that this opinion, and concomitant practice, was no *accident* of the system; but its very nucleus, the emanating centre of feeling and behaviour; and that, even putting out of view the extravagances of individuals, this opinion comes down to us sanctioned by the authority of all the most illustrious doctors and confessors—the entire *catena patrum*. They well know that *this* at least is no popish innovation; and that the course pursued, from age to age, in reference to

it, by the Romish authorities, was only a necessary following up of universally admitted principles. They well know that, had it been possible, at any moment, during the first five centuries, to have withdrawn this opinion, and these practices, altogether from the ecclesiastical system, the entire structure of polity and worship must have crumbled to the dust, leaving nothing but the rudiments of Christianity—a system how vastly different!

One cannot then but be perplexed with the question, Why this foremost characteristic of ancient Christianity has been overlooked, as yet, by the Oxford divines. Let them, if they will, leave St. Bernard out of their view, for he is a papist; but how can they forget Cyprian and Tertullian? let them be silent concerning the extravagances of St. Francis, or St. Dominic, but why do so little justice to Athanasius, to Chrysostom, to Jerome, to Ambrose, to Augustine, to Theodoret, to Basil, to the four Gregorys, to Leo, to Benedict, to Macarius, and to a host beside, as to say nothing concerning that one highly illuminated theme, upon which these great and good men made it their duty and their glory to expend the prime force of their eloquence, and upon which they strewed, on all occasions, the gayest and most fragrant flowers of their flowery rhetoric? whence has arisen this oversight?

A singular oversight it must surely be regarded; for, while these erudite divines, conversant as they are with Christian antiquity, (more so, perhaps, than with the real conditions of the age they live in,) are, in the tones of a solemn remonstrance, calling upon the church to retrace its heedless steps, and to realize, so far as possible, an imitation of the religious notions and practices

of the second and third centuries, and while they would fain render the apostolic English church a very copy (its sufferings excepted) of the church as we find it under Dionysius and Cyprian, yet exclude from their copy the most characteristic and prominent feature of their venerable pattern! If they reply that, on this one and only point, the doctrine and practices of the ancient church were mistaken, we grant it indeed; but must then go on to say, that the error—theoretic and practical—was of such a depth and magnitude as to bring the whole system, of which it formed so principal a part, under grave suspicion, and to render the utmost circumspection indispensable, when we are called upon to believe, or to do, this or that, because it was believed or done by the ancient church.

Unable to conceive of it as possible, that the Oxford writers can simply have *forgotten* this foremost article of the faith and morals of the early church, I cannot but plainly express my conviction that they are not so devoid of worldly discretion, or so regardless of the temper of the times they live in, as not to have felt that, to protrude the ancient doctrine concerning the merits of virginity, at so early a stage of their proceedings, however “happily omened,” would have been a measure that must have proved instantly fatal to the cause they are promoting. Whatever whims or illusions the well-informed classes in this country may, for a time, give themselves up to, there is among us always a vigorous good sense, and a strong right feeling, in matter of morality—a sense of the fair and honest, such as would not have failed to resent with vehemence any endeavour, even the most cautious, to subvert the first principles of the social economy, and to poison the springs of natural sentiment.

Every just and manly emotion, and every pure feminine emotion, would have been kindled, and would have covered with shame any attempt to bring back upon us the demure abominations, and the horrors of religious celibacy. The Oxford Tract writers have much yet to do—a Herculean task to perform, (not indeed to *cleanse* the stables of monkish pietism, but to deluge the land with their filth,) before they may venture so much as to whisper their desire to revive this great article of ancient Christianity, or to restore to its honours the—illustrior portio gregis Christi. This flos atque decus ecclesiastici germinis, is, let them believe it, withered to the root, and wo and shame to those who may strive to raise a new plant from its pernicious seeds!

And yet it is hard to say, if certain principles be granted, why we should not emulate that which the fathers, one and all, considered as the choicest part of Christianity—the fair, the ripened, and the fragrant fruit of its highest influences: if we are to imitate the subordinate characteristics of the same system, why not its principal? Let us, as good protestants, reject with horror the institutions of St. Dominic; but why abstain from those of St. Benedict? We will not choose to copy St. Cecelia, but why not follow St. Anthony? We loathe, perhaps, the principles of St. Ignatius Loyola, but dare we stop the ear at the soft call of St. Ephrem, and St. Basil, when they invite us to rend every social tie by which we may be connected with the world, and to retire to a vacant cell next to their own?

Our ears have been so much and so long used to the sound (repeated by protestant writers, one after the other, and without any distinct reference to facts, and probably

without any direct knowledge of them,) of the *progressive corruption* of Christianity, and of the slow and steady advances of superstition and spiritual tyranny, that we are little prepared to admit a contrary statement, better sustained by evidence, as well as more practically significant in itself—namely, that, although councils, or the papal authority, from age to age, followed up, embodied and legalized, certain opinions, usages, and practices, which were already prevalent, in an undefined form, it very rarely pushed on far in advance of the feeling and habit of the times; but that, on the contrary, it rather followed in the wake of ancient superstition and contemporary corruption, expressing, in bulls, decretals, and canons, (which were not seldom of a corrective kind,) the will or temper of the ecclesiastical body. Or to state the same general fact, as it is seen from another point of view, it will be found true that, if the opinion and sentiment of the church, at different eras, be regarded apart from the authorized expressions of the same, there will appear to have been far less of *progression* than we have been taught to suppose; and that, on the contrary, the notions and usages of a later, differ extremely little, or not at all, from those of an earlier age; or that, so far as they do differ, the advantage, in respect of morality and piety, is quite as often on the side of the later, as of the earlier ages. Particular points had in view, it might be affirmed, that popery was a practicable form, and a corrected expression, of ancient Christianity.

This is especially the case in reference to the subject which we have now before us; nor do I at all hesitate to affirm, that pages, and pages again, may be adduced from writers of the second and third century, which, suppressing names and incidental allusions, an intelligent



reader might easily suppose to have been taken from those of the twelfth or thirteenth century. What, then, I am peculiarly desirous to place in a conspicuous position, is, the fact that, instead of a regular and slow development of error, there was a very early expansion of false and pernicious notions, in their mature proportions, and these attended by some of their worst fruits. This, then, is the very point and hinge of our argument; and, in making good the weighty allegation, I shall use, not only all requisite diligence of research; but, as I trust, a strict and conscientious impartiality. It may be, indeed, that later writers express themselves in more fulsome terms, or in worse taste than the earlier; and it may be that the popes and saints of the middle ages exhibit less acquaintance with the classic models of style than was the boast of the well-taught doctors of the third and fourth centuries; but, in the substance of their religious system, and in extent of moral obliquity, they do not, I venture to say, a whit surpass them. The inference affecting other and more disputed points of Christian morality, ecclesiastical usage, and theological opinions, will force itself upon every thoughtful reader.

And how well might our vigilance be quickened when highly respectable Romanist writers are heard affirming (and not without an appeal to good evidence,) as much, in behalf of the characteristic corruptions of their own church, as certain protestants among us are now affirming in behalf of other ancient practices and opinions, authenticated in precisely the same mode, and to the same extent!

“The celibacy of the clergy,” says Alban Butler, “is merely an ecclesiastical law, though perfectly conformable to the spirit of the gospel, and doubtless derived from

the apostles.” We have then to see whether the proof of the antiquity and universality of the *opinions* of which this law was merely a formal expression, be not as good as can be adduced in support of practices and principles now urged upon us, because ancient and “apostolic.”

In making good my general allegation, I shall adduce evidence in proof or illustration of the following five propositions, which, if established, may be held to supersede much of the argument, otherwise requisite, in reference to points now actually under discussion; at the same time, the passages to be cited will afford the means of exhibiting, in its true colours, the general condition of the ancient church, moral and religious, and will, therefore, serve to dissipate the illusions that are apt to surround the objects of remote antiquity. My propositions are—

I. That the lapse of eight hundred or a thousand years exhibits very little, if any, progression, in the quality or extravagance of those notions which gave support to the practices of religious celibacy; and that the attendant abuses of this system were nearly, or quite, as flagrant at the earlier, as at the later date.

II. That, at the very earliest time when we find these notions and practices to have been generally prevalent, and accredited, they were no novelties; but had come down from a still earlier era.

III. That, as these notions and practices are of immemorial antiquity, so did they affect the church universal—eastern, western, and African; and that thus they come fully within the terms of the rule—*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*.

IV. That these opinions and practices, in their most

extreme form, received an ample and explicit sanction, and a solemn authentication from ALL the great writers and doctors of the church, during the most prosperous and enlightened age of any preceding the reformation; and that, on this head, popery has no peculiar culpability.

V. That the notions and practices connected with the doctrine of the superlative merit of religious celibacy, were, at once, the causes and the effects of errors in theology, of perverted moral sentiments, of superstitious usages, of hierarchical usurpations; and that they furnish us with a criterion for estimating the GENERAL VALUE OF ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY; and, in a word, afford reason enough for regarding, if not with jealousy, at least with extreme caution, any attempt to induce the modern church to imitate the ancient church.

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### THE FIRST PROPOSITION.

My first thesis, then, is to this effect—

That no essential change, or progressive deterioration, took place during the course of many centuries, dating from what is called the pristine age of the church, in regard to the notions entertained concerning the merit and angelic virtues of celibacy; and that the extreme evils usually considered as inseparable from these notions, attached to them from the earliest times; or in other words, that the vices and absurdities of Romanism, on this

ground, are only the vices and absurdities of ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY.

For the purpose of establishing the position here assumed, and which, if actually made good, will go far toward clearing a path over the ground of the present controversy, I shall study brevity and condensation, as far as may consist with a satisfactory and (if it were possible) a final treatment of this initial portion of the argument. It will manifestly be requisite to adduce passages, first from some two or three of the authenticated writers of the later and mature times of Romanism, by the side of which must be placed analogous, or parallel quotations from the leading Ante-Nicene fathers; and on a comparison of the two, it will be for calm and candid minds to determine whether my first thesis affirms more than ought to have been asserted.

It was not, as I have already said, the authorities of the Romish church—popes, cardinals, councils, that pushed forward the system of spiritual prostitution, superstition and tyranny; but much rather a deeply-working spirit acting from within the church; and this spirit is one and the same, whether uttering itself from the fervid lips of St. Dominic de Guzman, or St. Bernard, or the not less fervid lips of a father of the second and third century. This spirit proved itself in fact to be far more potent than the authority which the popes themselves exerted, even about the walls of the Vatican. A curious instance presents itself, with which I may commence my series of testimonies. So late as the twelfth century many of the monastic institutions continued to be of an open kind; that is to say, some of the religious establishments were merely lodging-houses, for persons professing more assiduity in the offices of piety than their

neighbours; and where the freest access was allowed to the parents and friends of the mis-called, recluses. In other cases, even residence in the nunnery was dispensed with, so that those who had enrolled themselves as members of a certain society, and as intending to adhere to the rules of the order, continued to live with their friends; and to mix pretty freely in general society. This laxity of practice, open as it must have been to abuses, and being as it was a departure from the practices of the early ages, and tending to weaken much the hold which the church might have had over the entire system, had long engaged the zealous endeavours of Innocent III. to redress it; but he, despot as he was, had laboured with little success, even in Rome itself, to effect an absolute incarceration of all who had bound themselves by the monastic rules, and to seclude them effectively, not from the world merely, but from their nearest relatives. The letters of this pope betray, at once, his extreme anxiety to bring about this necessary reform, and the vexation with which he witnessed the small success of his endeavours. But wherein a pope, and such a pope as Innocent III. fails, and confesses himself over-matched, a Dominic easily triumphs, after only a second effort, and without the necessity of exhibiting more than a single and customary miracle. To the vagrant and giddy nuns of Rome, this saint had offered his own newly elected monastery, in that city; with the hope of tempting them to abandon the laxity of their practice; and at length he obtained their reluctant consent to make this sumptuous palace of poverty their abode, and their prison. Their alarmed relatives, however, succeeded in bringing them to renounce their inconsiderate promise; nor was it until after a new and more strenuous exertion of his spiritual

influence, that he finally triumphed over the impulses, as well of their better, as of their worse natures. On Ash-Wednesday, 1218, the abbess, and some of her nuns—the elder sisters probably (of the monastery of St. Mary beyond the Tiber) went to take possession of their new abode; where they found already, the saint, in conference with three cardinals—commissioners, in this instance, with himself. But hardly had the first compliments passed, between these reverend persons, when it was suddenly announced by a messenger, tearing his hair to admiration, that a young nobleman, named Napoleon,\* and who was the *nephew* of one of the said cardinals, had just been thrown from his horse, and—killed on the spot! Forthwith the conference is broken off, and the *lifeless* and lacerated body is, by command of the “thau-maturgus of the age,” brought within doors: mass is said—the saint, in celebrating the divine mysteries, shed a flood of tears, and while elevating the body of Christ in his pure hands, he was himself, in an ecstacy, lifted up a whole cubit from the ground, in the sight, and to the amazement, of all who were present. After awhile, and as might have been expected, while St. Dominic himself continued suspended in the air, he cried, with a loud voice, “Napoleon, I say to thee, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, arise.” That instant, in the sight of the whole multitude, the young man arose, sound and whole! What then could the refractory or reluctant nuns of St. Mary do, but, at the bidding of this

\* This morning-star of the race of Napoleon, could, no doubt, sham *dead* as handsomely, and naturally, as his illustrious namesake, of our times, acted the part of a good musulman, or a good catholic, when needful.

raiser of the dead, rush into the net prepared for them; and pine away the residue of their years, within the gloomy walls of the monastery of St. Sixtus?

But now, you say, all this is mere popery; and what have we to do with its superstitions, or with the impious frauds that were perpetrated to give them credit? What we have to do with these things is this—to retrace the course of time, a thousand years, or nearly as much, and there and then to discover, in the bosom of the pristine and martyr church, not perhaps the very same forms, usages, frauds, follies; but those substantial elements of religious opinion, and of moral sentiment, which gave support to all these abominations, and apart from which they would never have had existence. This then is the gist of our present argument—that there is absolutely nothing in the ripe popery of the times of St. Dominic (certain elaborate modes of proceeding excepted) which is not to be found in the Christianity of the times of Cyprian or of Tertullian.

The last named father I reserve to be placed side by side with a kindred spirit of the middle ages; and at present turn to the mild, pious, and judicious, as well as eloquent, martyr, archbishop of Carthage. Let us then, at a leap of one thousand years, pass the abyss of popery, and imagine ourselves fairly landed upon the terra firma of pristine purity—the realm of the still bleeding and voluntary church, whence may be descried, like a waning twilight, the brightness of the apostolic age. The passages I am to offer are not merely highly significant, in themselves, and indispensable as links in our argument, but they tend directly to lay open what was the real condition, spiritual and ecclesiastical, of the early church. In abridging, so far as may be requisite, my

quotations, and in taking single expressions from paragraphs, I stand pledged (and am open to an easy rebuke if detected in any wilful perversions) to omit nothing which, if adduced, might serve to contravene the inference I have in view; and if, on the other hand, I am compelled to retrench not a little which would most pointedly support that inference, I do so in deference to the propriety which our modern refinement prescribes. Whoever will look into the authors cited will, I am sure, admit that, to have availed myself of the materials before me in a less scrupulous manner, would not a little have strengthened the position I maintain.

You will not tell me that you are already familiar with the passages which you foresee I shall fix upon; and that the general fact which they are adduced to illustrate, is sufficiently understood, and is generally admitted. This may perhaps be true, though one would not think it when one listens to the customary style, either of the favourers of antiquity, or of its impugnors, who, on the one part, seem to be discreetly concealing the real and simple facts, which, on the other side, appear to be but slenderly or confusedly apprehended. The time, however, is come when it is indispensable that we should make ourselves thoroughly and authentically familiar with whatever we have the means of knowing, concerning ancient Christianity.

At a time not more remote from the apostolic age, than we, of this generation, are from the times of Barrow, Tillotson, Taylor, Baxter, we find all the *elements* of the abuses of the twelfth century, and, not the elements only, but most of those abuses in a ripened, nay, in a putrescent condition.

Cyprian, and his presbyters, writes, in reply to Pom-



ponius, a suffragan bishop, who had reported certain scandals, in treating which he needed direction and authoritative support. From this letter it appears that the rash and unwarrantable vow of perpetual celibacy, or virginity, taken, or forced upon multitudes of young women, in some moment of artificial religious excitement, had been too late repented of by many of its victims, who, finding themselves cut off from the virtuous endearments of domestic life, had rushed into irregularities, loading their conscience at once with a real, and a supererogatory guilt, and had, under the colour of spiritual intercourse with the clergy to whose care they had been consigned, and who themselves were galled by the same impious extravagance, admitted the grossest familiarities, and thus had diffused an extreme corruption of manners among the very men to whom were intrusted the moral and religious welfare of the people. So early had this false fervour produced its poisonous fruit, and had ulcerated, in its vitals, the body of the church! “Concerning those,” says Cyprian, “who, after having solemnly devoted themselves to continence, have been found cohabiting with men—*detectæ in eodem lecto pariter mansisse cum masculis*—yet professing themselves inviolate—*cum viris dormisse confessæ sint* . . . you have desired my advice. You well know that we do not recede from the evangelic and apostolic traditions . . . and that, in regard to the welfare of all, church discipline is to be maintained . . . wherefore it is by no means to be allowed that young women should (*non dico simul dormire*) live with men. If indeed they have cordially dedicated themselves to Christ, let them modestly and chastely, and without subterfuge, hold to their purpose, and, thus constant and firm, look for the reward of vir-

ginity—*præmium virginitatis*.—But if in fact they will not (*vel non possunt*) so persevere, let them marry.

Take your Cyprian from the shelf, and tell me whether the passages, and the expressions I have omitted, do not make it certain, that this pretended “Apostolic institution,” namely, of religious celibacy, or, as it was called, dedication or espousals to Christ, had not already, and even amidst the fires of persecution, become the immediate occasion, in a very extensive degree, to licentious practices, which must have been fatal to all piety, as well as frightful in themselves. In truth, if we are thinking of the preservation of morality at large, or of the purity of the church in particular, I could not, for my own part, hesitate to prefer the tremendous irreversible vows, and the dungeon monasteries of later times, to the loose fanatical profligacy of the times of Cyprian. If we are to hear much more of the purity of the early church, there will be no choice left but to quote Cyprian and Tertullian, without retrenchment.

“And if all,” continues this truly faithful pastor, “are bound to observe a necessary discipline, how much more are those bound to do so who should afford an example to others! How shall they, the clergy, *præpositos et diaconos*, be guides in the path of piety and virtue, if, in fact, from them proceeds a contaminating warranty of vice! . . . Thou hast therefore well done in withdrawing from the deacon and others, *qui cum virginibus dormire consueverunt*.”

Nothing could place in a stronger light the absurdity, and the inevitable abuses, inseparable from this ancient practical error, than to mention the ineffably degrading, as well as precarious condition upon which, by Cyprian’s directions, was to depend the restoration of the

guilty, or of the suspected, to the communion of the church—a condition of which he had himself intimated his distrust (*cum . . . . sæpe fallatur*) but this we forego, only remarking the significant fact, as attaching to so early a time, that already a rational solicitude concerning spiritual and moral character, had been displaced by a stupid regard to what was merely external and formal. Did the religious character of these loose ladies gain any real warranty from the report of the obstetrix? Or were their clerical paramours rendered more fit teachers of Christianity by the issue of any such ordeals? Already had the first principles of the social system, as divinely constituted, been so perverted, and the sentiments of real virtue so broken in upon, by this pernicious system of factitious super-human piety, that the sexes could no longer be suffered, with any safety, even to live together under the same roof! and thus, as it regarded the ministers of religion, at least, the whole of that happy and genial influence which is found to result from Christianized domestic relations, was turned aside; and in its place came habits and modes of feeling, which may not be described or contemplated. But all this evil sprang from the desire to make up a loftier sort of religion than that which God had given to the world!

The palliations that may be found for these grievous errors, and the almost inevitable infatuation which held the minds of those who had been trained to support and reverence them, and the relation they bore to the extreme corruptions of the times, and also to the frequent and severe sufferings to which the church, during three centuries, was exposed—these themes of extenuation are not now our subject;—an occasion may perhaps present itself, for offering a general apology in behalf of those

whom now we are arraigning. What we have at present to do with, is the fact of an early and extensive religious illusion; and the inferences this fact involves. Let this, however, be said, that the church, looking abroad upon the universal and frightful dissoluteness of the heathen world, conceived the belief that the enormous evil could never be amended by applying to it the simple, firm, and natural morality of the gospel, as promulgated by Christ, and his apostles; but they thought it could be counteracted, if at all, by nothing but a species of virtue that was exaggerated in a proportionate degree. This artificial purity, was then a violent reaction, ending, as might have been foreseen, and as every convulsive moral struggle must, in a correspondent corruption, as well of manners, as of principles. It is curious, in this point of view, to compare our Cyprian's rhetorical description of the dissoluteness of his times (ad Donatum) with the facts admitted, or indicated, by himself, in his endeavours to repress the spreading plague within the church; not that the practices themselves were equally flagitious; but yet were they rendered the more culpable by those advantages of light in which the heathen had no part.

How much turns often (and it is an observation perpetually offering itself in the perusal of church history) upon an insensible substitution of a *technical*, for the general and genuine sense of an ethical term! It was just by the aid of some of these hardly perceptible substitutions that the eminent men we have now to do with (and Cyprian not less than any) found the ready means of gaining an apparent scriptural warranty for practices flagrantly contravening the spirit and meaning of scriptural morality. Thus it is that he reiterates his quota-

tions from the Psalms, and the Book of Proverbs, in support of that ecclesiastical *discipline* which the vow of celibacy involved, by adducing texts in which the instruction, correction, or reproof recommended by David or Solomon is rendered *disciplina*, in the Latin version of the Old Testament, which he used: as thus—"Those who refuse instruction shall perish;" or, as the Latin has it—"those shall perish," and under the anger of the Lord, who infringe the rules of this artificial *discipline*, enjoined for enforcing the system of factitious purity. Tertullian, long before, had appropriated this term in the same manner. The Greek Church writers employ the word philosophy in a sense nearly equivalent.

But we have yet to see what those generally received and accredited notions were, to which the shepherds of the church ordinarily appealed, when handling the subject of religious celibacy, and which so sober-minded a prelate as Cyprian alleges as the foundation of his commands and exhortations, when labouring to repress the abuses which, at this early period, had come in, like an inundation upon the church. An exposition of these notions and opinions we find placed in the front of the treatise, or dehortation, "concerning the attire of virgins," (nuns) that is to say, of those who had dedicated their bodies, as well as their souls, to the Lord; and who, under the designation of the spouses of Christ, held a distinct place as a visible order, or sodality, in the ecclesiastical system, taking rank above the class of widows, and second only to the confessors, or those who had triumphantly sustained torture from the hand of the heathen.

Now it appears, too plainly, from the stern reprobation

tions, and the indignant, yet repressed flourishes which mark this treatise, that a laxity, nay a licentiousness, hardly to be believed, and little suspected by the general readers of church history, had become common among these religious ladies, of the church of Carthage. In fact, it cannot be doubted that, to indemnify themselves for the abjuration of the virtuous happiness of domestic life, they had become proficient in every meretricious allurements, not merely bestowing extraordinary cares and costs upon the attractions of dress and jewellery, and frequenting scenes of indecent revelry, but inviting and allowing the grossest familiarities on the part of their spiritual guides, to whom they had a too easy access; and even yielding themselves to shameless exposures in the public baths, of which ablutions the good bishop well and smartly says, *such washings* do not cleanse, but pollute the body, and not only the body, but the soul. That the indecencies of the Carthaginian nuns were not a single instance of irregularity, may be gathered from the very express and detailed reference to the same practices made, some years earlier, by Clement of Alexandria, who, in fact, uses expressions which one might believe Cyprian to have read. So much for the boasted purity of the pristine age of the church! How much longer is common sense to be outraged by the repetition of this miserably unmeaning phrase—unmeaning, unless applied with the greatest caution, and a severe limitation, to a very brief period, and to a few bright spots!

“But now,” continues our zealous and upright prelate, “I have to address myself to the virgins, (nuns,) whom, as their reputation is so much the more exalted, we must make the objects of a proportionate care.

These, in truth, are the flowers of the ecclesiastical plant, the grace and ornament of the heavenly grace; a gladsome produce, a work whole and incorrupt of all honour and all praise; the image of God, reflecting the sanctity of the Lord, and the most illustrious portion of Christ's flock. By these (nuns) and in these, is the noble fecundity of mother church recommended, and made copiously to flourish; and just by so much as this plentiful virginity swells its numbers, does the mother herself augment her joys. It is to these, then, that I speak; it is these I proceed to exhort; yet in affection, rather than in the tones of authority."

I must here remark that, already, the constant and inevitable tendency of a system, essentially superstitious, to fix the attention, even of the best men, with more solicitude, upon what is extrinsic and symbolic, than upon what is moral, spiritual, and rational, had fully developed itself in Cyprian's time—indeed it is the general characteristic of the early (as of later) church writers; and it is the capital article of the contrast which so forcibly strikes us in comparing the entire body of ancient religious literature with the scriptures. The apostles, without contemning or forgetting that which is exterior, give all their serious cares to that which is substantial—to the weighty matters of the soul's condition, spiritual and moral. The fathers, on the contrary, without contemning, or altogether forgetting, that which is substantial, are fretting themselves perpetually, (like their modern admirers,) and chafing, about that which is subsidiary only, and visible; the form, the institution, the discipline, the canon; in a word, the husk of religion, fondly thinking that, so long as the rind and shell of piety could be preserved without a flaw, there could

be no doubt of the preservation of the kernel! Alas! these ill-directed anxieties left the adversary, at his leisure, to perforate the shell and to withdraw the kernel, almost to the last atom! Thus our good archbishop, after saying that "the continence and pudicity proper to a nun do not consist merely in the inviolate perfection of the body," leads the modern reader, at least, to surmise that he is about to recommend the inward and spiritual grace of genuine purity of heart; but no, this is not what *he* is thinking of—"True modesty, beside the integrity of the body, consists in—the fair and modest attire and ornament of the person!" Here is excellent quakerism, as well as popery, and both sixteen hundred years old!

"How shall they receive the wages of virginity, which they are looking for from the Lord, unless it be evident that they are labouring to please him, and none other? . . . . What, then, can such have to do with those terrestrial decorations which are attractive to the eyes, not of the Lord, but of men? as Paul says—If I seek to please men, I am no longer the servant of Christ. What do ornaments mean; what means decking of the hair, except to one who either has, or who is seeking a husband? . . . . Peter dehorts *married* women from an excessive ornamenting of their persons, who might plead, in excuse of their fault, the will and taste of their husbands; but what excuse can *virgins* find for a like regard to dress, who are liable to no such interference? . . . Thou, if thou goest abroad, frequenting public places, sumptuously arrayed, alluring the eyes of youth, drawing after thee the sighs of admirers, fomenting lawless passions, and kindling the sparks of desire, and even, if not destroying thyself, destroying others, and presenting



to their bosoms a poisoned dagger, canst not excuse thyself on the pretence of preserving a mind pure and modest. Thy pretext is shamed by thy criminal attire and thy immodest decorations; nor shouldst thou be reckoned among the maids of Christ, who so livest as if wishing to captivate and to be loved by another."

After reprehending, at length, and on various grounds, costly and meretricious decorations of the person—the means and materials of which, says the good bishop, following Tertullian, were given to mankind by the apostate angels, he proceeds to specify and reprove still more criminal excesses which had become matter of scandal, within and without the church, and had afforded too much colour to the calumnies of the heathen. Such were, the being present at weddings, "and hearing and taking part in licentious conversations; hearing what offends good morals, and seeing what must not be spoken of. . . What have the virgins of the church to do at promiscuous baths; and there to violate the commonest dictates of feminine modesty! . . . *Sordidat lavatio ista, non abluit; nec emundat membra, sed maculat. Impudice tu neminem conspicias, sed ipsa conspiceris impudice: oculos tuos turpi oblectatione non polluis, sed dum oblectas alios, ipsa pollueris. . . .* The places (baths) you frequent are more filthy than the theatre itself; all modesty is there laid aside, and with your robes, your personal honour and reserve are cast off. . . Thus it is that the church so often has to weep for her virgins; so does she bewail their infamy, and the horrid tales which get abroad. . . ."

"Listen, then, to him who seeks your true welfare; lest, cast off by the Lord, ye be widows before ye be married; adulteresses, not to husbands, but to Christ,

and, after having been destined to the highest rewards, ye undergo the severest punishments. . . For, consider, while the hundred-fold produce is that of the martyrs, the sixty-fold is yours; and as they (the martyrs) condemn the body and its delights, so should you. Great are the wages which await you, (if faithful;) the high reward of virtue, the great recompense to be conferred upon chastity. Not only shall your lot and portion (in the future life) be equal to that of the other sex; but ye shall be equal to the angels of God!"

So much then for the zealous and upright Cyprian, and his delinquent stew of ecclesiastical virginity, at Carthage, and so much for the venerable sanctity of the pristine age! You will grant, I think, that the urgent controversy which we have now to do with, and which turns so much upon the alleged authority of antiquity, renders this species of evidence, unpleasing as it is in itself, yet very pertinent in reference to the general question. I cannot however proceed to call in my next pair of witnesses, without adverting to a fact which forces itself upon every well informed and reflecting reader of the early Christian writers, I mean the much higher moral condition, and the more effective discipline of the Romish church in later times, than can with any truth be claimed for the ancient church, even during its era of suffering and depression. Our ears are stunned with the outcry against the "corruptions of popery." I boldly say that popery, foul as it is, and has ever been, in the mass, might yet fairly represent itself as a *reform upon early Christianity*. Do not accuse me of the wish to startle you with paradoxes. I will not swell my pages (which will have enough to bear) with quotations from modern books that are in the hands of most religious

readers. In truth, volumes of unimpeachable evidence might be produced, establishing the fact, that the *later* Romish church has had to boast eminent virtues, in connexion with her monastic institutions; and I think virtues, better compacted, and more consistent than belonged to the earlier church. Or, to refer to a single instance, look into the various narratives that have been published relating to the Port-royal institution, as governed by the illustrious Angelica Arnauld. There was popery entire; every element of the system developed, and expanded, under the fervours of the most intense religious excitement! I beg you then, in idea, to place, by the side of this band of virgins of the seventeenth century, Cyprian's dissolute crew, the decus et ornamentum, of the martyr times of the church! If you say these are picked instances, I deny it, so far as my argument is concerned in the comparison; and I affirm the general fact that the measures taken by the Romish church, at different periods, to enforce the celibacy of the clergy, and to bring the monastic institution under the tremendous, but necessary sanctions which at length were resorted to for holding it entire, were in the main, measures of reform, found, by abundant and lengthened experience, to be indispensable as the means of excluding, or repressing the worst abuses;—that is to say, so long as the core of the institution—the immemorial doctrine of religious celibacy, was to be maintained, in the position it had ever held, as an essential element of Christianity. In a word, the plain fact is, that this foremost and hinging article of ancient Christianity, after having, from century to century, been embodied in a milder or less compact form, and its usages enforced with less rigour, and after having in this loose form, ulcerated the church in a frightful manner, was at

length brought into some order by the strenuous hand of authority, aided indeed by the mad fanaticism of certain fiery spirits. The venerable doctrine of the merit of religious celibacy has proved itself to be utterly impracticable under any conditions less severe than those which have, since the middle ages, rendered the religious houses, when vigorously governed, dens of cruelty and despair. But then nothing can be more inequitable than to charge these horrors upon Romanism. The church of Rome has done, in these instances, *the best it could*, to bring the cumbrous abomination bequeathed to it by the saints and doctors and martyrs of the pristine age, into a manageable condition. And if we are to hear much more of the "corruptions of popery," as opposed to "primitive purity," there will be no alternative but freely to lay open the sewers of the early church, and to allow them to disgorge their contents upon the wholesome air.

We must now, however, pursue our proposed chain of evidences a little farther, and for the purpose of substantiating, by more than one or two instances, the general proposition, that the lapse of many centuries, though it might give form and consistency to certain mistaken notions, did not materially, if at all, advance the PRINCIPLES whence the whole system originated. This is the very point which, in my view at least, is more than any other, of importance in relation to the controversy at present agitated, and you must pardon me, if I seem to be taking unnecessary pains in fully establishing it. On these subjects utter misapprehensions have extensively prevailed, which will not easily give way. Before we reprobate popes, councils, and Romanist saints, let us fairly see what sort of system it was which the doctors and martyrs of the highest antiquity had delivered into their care and custody. We protestants are prompt

enough to condemn the pontiffs, or St. Bernard; but let inquiry be made concerning the Christianity imbodyed in the writings of those to whom popes and doctors looked up, as their undoubted masters.

There can hardly be a more pertinent comparison, in relation to our present purpose, than the one I now institute between the illustrious and highly gifted, as well as potent abbot of Clairvaux, and his fiery predecessor in the same field of labour, Tertullian. In such a parallel we find, brought into opposition, not indeed the formal institutions, and the legalized practices of the ancient, and of the later church, which are circumstantial only, variable in themselves, and of no importance in relation to any controversy that can be carried on among protestants; but the intimate character, or, as Lord Bacon would have termed it, the inner form, of the two systems, which in truth are not two, but one and the same. An interval of nine hundred years is surely a sufficient space for showing, in any case, and very distinctly, the gradual operation of time, in modifying opinions, and usages, whether secular or ecclesiastical. If little or no progression be discernible within the compass of almost a thousand years, we may pretty confidently assume that the system in question had reached its maturity at the earliest date. In truth, the period marked off from the entire field of church history, by these two remarkable names, may properly be considered as inclusive of all those characteristics of ancient Christianity, which can have any bearing upon modern controversies. Popery has at no moment of its entire existence, been more *itself*, than it was in the age of St. Bernard, and of his nurseling, Innocent II., nor is ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY, as distinguished from the Christianity of the New Tes-

tament, to be met with any where else (at this early date) so vividly pictured, as in the writings of the African presbyter. Nor can any fair demur be taken against him (so far as my present purpose is concerned) either on the general ground, of the intemperance and extravagance of his dispositions, or the particular ground of his fall into Montanism; inasmuch as I shall avail myself of his expressions only so far as they may safely be considered as indicative of the sentiments of the church at the time, as well as of practices then prevalent, and so far too, as these expressions and sentiments were afterwards caught up, authenticated, and expanded, by the series of catholic writers, beginning with his contemporaries, and onwards. In this instance I foresee and preclude the objection which will be raised against Tertullian's evidence, by confining myself to passages which may be matched, substantially, from the works of the most orthodox and the most esteemed fathers.

But it is necessary to my purpose, first to give a sample of the ripe catholicism (in this particular feature of the ecclesiastical system) of the twelfth century; and then to compare with it the boasted "pristine Christianity," of the second or third century; that is to say, of a period when the immediate successors of the apostles were still personally remembered.

The religious course, character, and writings of St. Bernard are, in a very extraordinary degree, fraught with pertinent and affecting instruction, and I should venture to say that a full and dispassionate statement of what this eminent man felt, and professed to feel, and of what he did, and of what he incited others to do, or permitted them to cloak with his name, would afford as effective a caution as could be found against the lamentable illusions by which fervent religious minds, in every age,

have been endangered. At the present moment, the unexpected appearance, and wide prevalence of a species of religion vividly exemplified in the character and conduct of St. Bernard, mark him as the very instance which young and ardent minds should seriously consider.

The animated, spirit-stirring writings of this father, as entertaining as they are instructive, abound with tender, as well as vehement and vituperative reproofs of the corruptions prevailing in the church, in his times, and especially of the abuses which, in every age, have been connected with the unnatural doctrine and practice of religious celibacy. A volume might be filled with these remonstrant rhapsodies. "Heartily do I wish," says he, addressing the clergy, "that it were more the practice among us, of those who undertake to build a tower, to sit down first, and count the cost, lest haply they find themselves wanting in the means to finish their work. Heartily do I wish that those who, as it seems, have so little command over their passions, and rashly make profession of perfection, would scruple to enrol their names in the lists of celibacy. Costly indeed is this tower, and of great import is that word which all cannot receive. Better far were it to secure salvation on the low level of the faithful commonalty, than, in the loftiness of the clerical dignity, to live worse than they, and to be judged more severely." Expressions these, very nearly resembling those of St. Cyprian, above cited.

One's heart might bleed in following some of St. Bernard's amplifications on this subject. But no proof of the impracticability, or of the pernicious tendency, or of the cruelty of this main article of ancient Christianity, could avail to lead even those who best understood human nature, to call in question either its validity or its

excellence: on the contrary, the worse it was found to be in its working, (and this is an ordinary occurrence in matters of religion,) the more extravagant were the encomiums lavished upon it. I need hardly remind you that, in St. Bernard's sense, the term *chastity* does *not* mean that Christian and rational purity of the heart which the apostles recommend, and which they urge as well upon the married as the unmarried; but that artificial and external purity of the monastic system, to which the married could make no pretensions.

“What so fair as this chastity,—which makes, of a man, an angel? A chaste man and an angel differ indeed as to felicity, but not as to virtue; for, although the purity of the angel be the happier of the two, that of the man must be admitted to be the more energetic. It is chastity, and that alone, which, in this abode of mortality, holds forth the state of immortal glory. This alone, (on earth,) where the rites of marriage are solemnized, vindicates the manners of that blessed region, where they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; offering, as one may say, an example, or experiment, on earth, of that heavenly mode of life. . . In this earthly vessel of ours is contained the fragrant balsam, (of chastity,) by virtue of which the mortal elements are conserved incorrupt. . . . This is the glory of the single life, to live the life of an angel, while occupying the body, as of a beast.”

‘This is the string, harped upon again and again, that the religious cœlebs was “an angel among beings of an inferior order.”

“Who, then, should scruple to call the life of the religious cœlebs a celestial, an angelic life? or what will *all* the elect be in the resurrection, which *ye* are not even



now, as the angels of God in heaven, who abstain from matrimonial connexions? Ye grasp, my beloved brethren, the pearl of great price; ye grasp that sanctity which renders you like to the saints (in glory) and the home servants of God, as saith the scripture—Incorruptness places us next to God. Not by your own merits, are ye what ye are; but by the grace of God: and, as to chastity and sanctity, I may call you—**TERRESTRIAL ANGELS**, or rather citizens of heaven, although still pilgrims upon earth; for, so long as we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord.” In all this, and pages to the same effect might easily be adduced, you will not fail to notice that constant characteristic of the fathers—the appropriation, or usurpation of the Scriptures, in behalf of the *élite* of the church; thus depriving the mass of Christians of almost all their share in its promises and consolations. In a word, the entire system of ancient Christianity, was a monopoly of salvation, leaving, to all but the few, nothing better than a remote and precarious probability of an ultimate and far distant escape from perdition. Was this the **GOSPEL**, preached by the apostles? Yet, as we shall see, it was the natural consequence of the false principle we are now exposing; and it is a consequence inseparable from every similar error in regard to Christian institutions.

While St. Bernard is before me, I must notice a particular, which I may hereafter lose sight of, but which well deserves a passing observation, in connexion with the system of sentiments recommended in the Oxford Tracts. Our author was a most ardent and loquacious, nay, I must really say, a most gallant admirer of the queen of heaven. Very many entire pages of fulsome and florid rhetoric are devoted to her peculiar honour,

and every epithet that the most exorbitant superstition could coin, animated by sundry erotic phrases, is coined, or adapted to the purpose of lifting this "unique being," the "dispensatrix of the universe," and "dowager of creation," above the level of things finite. It is, therefore, only what we might expect, that St. Bernard is a great stickler for that capital article of ancient orthodoxy—the "perpetual virginity of the blessed Mary," a denial of which actually horrified every stanch churchman. But why, it may be asked, was there all this anxiety on a point, apparently so remote from any practical bearing? Why?—because the blessed Virgin—"ALWAYS VIRGIN," as the Oxford writers are now telling us, with a solemn and significant emphasis,—was wanted, as the patroness of celibacy, and the bright example of immaculate chastity. To have admitted the plain sense of the intelligible phrase employed by the inspired evangelist, in reference to this inconsequential point, would have been tantamount to a betrayal of the whole scheme of ecclesiastical celibacy. Only let it be granted that the virtue of the "mother of God" was simply *real virtue*, and that her piety was a principle of the heart, and that her purity was the purity of the affections; and only allow that she was a holy woman, and an exemplary wife and mother, such as the apostles speak of, and commend, only to have done this, would have marred the entire scheme of theology and morals, as fancied, fashioned, and perfected by the ancient church. The perpetual inviolateness of the blessed Virgin was well felt to be the key-stone of the building; or, to change the figure, Mary's unloosened zone was the *tier* of the ecclesiastical dome, the rending of which would have been a universal crash. So firm and fixed are those analogies

which bind systems together, when, from age to age, they reappear, that, by a perhaps unconscious and instinctive tendency, the modern promulgators of ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY are, with a significant sensitiveness, protruding this *great* orthodox verity, of the perpetual virginity of the mother of God: they are just putting it forth, or shoving it forward in advance of their steps, as an indispensable preparative for their after-work, in church reform. Do not imagine that this point is an insignificant one: you will find that it touches the intimate springs of the system; and I venture to predict, that, unless these good men take the alarm in time, and hold back a little, until they feel their success to be better assured, we shall hear something more than we have yet heard, about the “always virgin.” Listen, for one moment, to our zealous advocate of Mary’s honours; and there is the more reason for doing so, because, as we shall find, he only echoes the voice of all antiquity, keeping to the *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, concerning so fundamental a principle of religion.

“She alone,” says St. Bernard, “of all born of women, was born without sin, and preserved sinless throughout her life. Well indeed did become the QUEEN OF VIRGINS, this singular privilege of sanctity, to pass a life absolutely exempt from sin!” Thus, and with equal zeal and confidence, at least as to the “perpetual virginity,” speak the devout Basil, the truly great Athanasius, and fifty others—all inwardly, if not avowedly conscious, that this article of their faith was of vital consequence to their system.

“How are my eyes dazzled by the splendour of the diadem of OUR QUEEN, which illuminates the universe . . . what then are the stars in this refulgent diadem—the chief

honours of virginity, and these prerogatives—to have conceived without corruption—to have been gravid without burden—to have given birth without pain! . . . .”

In fact, this Cybele of the fathers was to be constituted a goddess, in all points, and she became, at length, the real and principal object of the religious sentiments of the (so called) Christian world. But who, let it be asked, were the authors of this unutterable idolatry? Who was it that set these blasphemies a-going?—not the popes, not the later Roman doctors; but none other than the early teachers of Christianity, who, having once assumed a false principle in religion, were thenceforward carried, by a latent and irresistible tendency, to adopt every absurd and impious notion that might favour it. I might, to some good purpose, detain you yet with St. Bernard, on whose pages, and entirely apart from his *Romanism*, we find expanded the gay petals of those buds which already show their colours in the writings of the early fathers. I have gathered a sample only, such as may serve to arrest attention, when brought into comparison with corresponding passages of a thousand years’ earlier date.

“But now, let me ask,” says St. Bernard, addressing the clergy, “how do the bishops and priests of this our age study to preserve that sanctity of continence, in heart and person, without which no man shall see the Lord? Truly hath the Lord, in the gospel, said to bishops, and without doubt it was so in the primitive church, let your loins be girt, thereby not merely approving but commanding chastity (celibacy)—the Holy Spirit this signifying, that no one should come near the table of the Lord, or approach that angels’ food, unless purified in mind and body;—that is, by the observance

of a strict celibacy. But how do *we* regard this injunction?—I think it better, on this head, to dissimulate a little, rather than, by speaking out, to say what might scandalize the innocent and uninformed. And yet why should I scruple to speak of that, which they (the bishops and clergy) do not blush to perpetrate? Brethren, I am become a fool; but ye have compelled me.”

A passage presents itself, in this connexion, which, while it affords a characteristic example of the perverted style of applying scripture, is curious, as a conceit played with by writer after writer, from Tertullian to St. Bernard, and as we have seen, among others by Cyprian.

“I beseech you, my beloved sister, hear with all reverence the word of exhortation. . . . The thirty-fold is the first degree, and it signifies the alliances of the married; the sixty-fold is the second step, and signifies the continence of widows; the hundred-fold is the third step, in this gradation of ranks; and it intends the crown of chastity, destined for virgins. . . . Conjugal virtue is good, the virtue of widows is better; but best is the integrity of absolute virginity. Nevertheless, better is an humble widow, than a haughty virgin; better a widow mourning her sins, than a virgin boasting of her virginity. . . . Nor ought such to condemn, or to glory over, married women, living virtuously. When, therefore, honest wives frequent the monastery, despise them not; they are the handmaidens of the Lord; love them as mothers. And thou, say not that thou art a dry tree, for if thou lovest thy Spouse, Christ, thou hast seven sons; thy first-born, is modesty, thy second, patience, thy third, sobriety, thy fourth, temperance, thy fifth, charity, thy sixth, humility, thy seventh, chastity. Thus hast thou, my venerable sister, by the Holy Ghost, borne

unto Christ, and without pain, seven sons; that the scripture might be fulfilled—the barren hath borne seven.” Once more, and requesting you to turn to a passage already quoted from Cyprian, take the following, which may suffice to show that the sentiment and style of speaking characteristic of ripened Romanism, was nothing but an echo of the sentiments and language of the earliest times; as will farther appear from other evidence I have to produce.

“ We come now to contemplate the lily blossom: and see, O thou, the virgin of Christ! see how much fairer is this thy flower, than any other! look at the special grace which, beyond any other flower of the earth, it hath obtained! Nay, listen to the commendation bestowed upon it by the Spouse himself, when he saith—Consider the lilies of the field (the virgins) how they grow, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these! Read therefore, O virgin, and read again, and often read again, and again, this word of thy Spouse, and understand how, in the commendation of this flower, he commends thy glory! He, the all-wise Creator, and Architect of all things, veils all the glory of this world, just with thy blossom: nor only is the glory equalled by the flower; but he sets the flower above all glory. In the glory of Solomon you are to understand that, whatever is rich and great on earth, and the choicest of all, is prefigured; and in the bloom of thy lily, which is thy likeness, and that of all the virgins of Christ, the glory of virginity is intended. . . . See how, in this song of loves, the Spouse insists upon his fondness for thee—the lily—saying, as the lily among the thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters; and again, my beloved goes up

to his spicy flower beds, and gathers lilies. Admirable lily! the love of the Spouse! lovely lily! which is gathered by the Spouse! Not truly, as I ween, is it gathered that it should wither; but that it should be laid upon the golden altar, which is before the eyes of the Lord. . . . Virginity hath indeed a two-fold prerogative, a virtue which, in others, is single only; for while all the church is virgin in *soul*, having neither spot, nor wrinkle; being incorrupt in faith, hope, and charity, on which account it is called a virgin, and merits the praises of the Spouse, what praise, think you, are our LILIES worthy of, who possess this purity in *body*, as well as in soul, which the church at large has in soul only! In truth, the virgins of Christ are, as we may say, the fat and marrow of the church, and by right of an excellence altogether peculiar to themselves, they enjoy his most familiar embraces.”

A passage already cited from Cyprian, and a passage too, not cited (occurring in his treatise on the attire of nuns) though not so *pretty*, is substantially equivalent to this of St. Bernard; and it goes the whole length of those utterly improper accommodations, which, when addressed to sickly and sensitive feminine imaginations, must have had a most pernicious and degrading tendency.

So sprightly a conceit as this, was not to be hastily thrown aside, and we find the reverend gallant, with the bevy of fair ladies before him, carrying on his pleasant discourse much farther than we have, at present, either leisure or inclination to follow him. We shall soon see in what style the hot and crabbed Tertullian handles similar topics; not nearly indeed so much in the mode of the rosy-lipped, and scented petit maître, but yet so as

to include all the substance of the same system of perverted theology, and of miserably corrupt morality.

But before adducing my next set of evidences, I request you again to notice the instances contained in the above quotations, of what I have called the usurping of scripture, and which is the general characteristic of the early Christian divines—that is, the taking texts in special senses, not simply in the way of misapplication (a fault that has been too common in all ages) but restricting a passage which manifestly bears a broad meaning, to some technical purpose; thus robbing the church at large of its portion; as in an instance above cited, where, whatever is said concerning instruction and correction, is made to mean—the discipline of the monastery: or when, as we find in St. Bernard, purity and sanctity are made to mean—virginity, and an artificial abjuration of the social relationships. Now you may be charitably willing to believe that this was nothing worse than an incidental error of practice, in the interpretation of scripture. For my own part, meeting with it, as I do, every where, or nearly so, in the remains of Christian antiquity; and especially in connexion with the superstitions of the early church, I regard it as the natural result, and the inevitable concomitant, of the adoption of a grand false principle in religion, the support of which absolutely demanded, at every turn, some such introversion of the plain meaning of the inspired writers. But this is a subject of such prime significance, as that it will ask to be more fully considered hereafter.

I am now to bring forward the most vigorous, as well as one of the earliest of the Christian writers, and the contemporary of men who had conversed with the immediate successors of the apostles.



Tertullian, in the first of his epistles to his wife, dissuading her from contracting a second marriage, in the event of his death (a curious affair altogether) says—“against all (specious reasons of a contrary tendency, and which he had enumerated) employ the example of OUR SISTERS (the dedicated virgins) whose names are with the Lord—*penes Dominum* (enrolled as nuns in the church books) and who place sanctity (that is to say, virginity) above all considerations of beauty or of youth, which might induce them to marry: they had rather be married to the Lord; in his eyes fair, on him they wait as his handmaids, with him they live; with him they converse; him, night and day they handle (*tractant*;) their prayers, as their dowry, they render to him, and from him, as pin money, they receive, from time, to time, whatsoever they desire. Thus have they now anticipated that eternal good which is the gift of the Lord, and thus, while on earth, in not marrying, they are reckoned as belonging to the ANGELIC HOUSEHOLD. By using the example of women, such as these, you will incite, in yourself, an emulation of their continence, and by the spiritual taste break down carnal affections, freeing your soul from the stains of the transitory desires belonging to youth and beauty, by the thought of the recompense of immortal benefits.”

You will observe in this passage first, the clear reference to the established custom, at this early time, of vowing perpetual virginity; and then, that identity of principle, and analogy of sentiment, and even correspondence in terms, which all serve to support my proposition, That this principal element of ancient Christianity, was as fully developed, or nearly so, in the second and third century, as in the thirteenth. In what

follows you will readily distinguish the extravagance of Tertullian's personal opinions, from those generally admitted notions, on the ground of which he argues in addressing others. It is with the latter, not the former, that we are at present concerned. In the passage to be cited, our author gives the clue (which may indeed elsewhere be found clearly enough, and of which, hereafter, I must make some use) to the institution of celibacy, as a permanent order in the church. Satan had his devoted widows, and his virgin priestesses, and should not Christ have the like? The well-known heathen practices, in this respect, were looked upon with a sort of jealousy, by the ill-judging leaders of the church, who deemed it a point of honour, not to be outdone in any extravagant act or practice of devotion, by the gentiles, over whom they might have been content to claim the genuine superiority of real virtue. The same fatal ambition, as we shall see hereafter, operated as a principal means of perverting the ritual and system of worship, and of spoiling, in all its parts, the simplicity of the gospel.

"Among the heathen," says Tertullian, "a strictness of discipline, in this respect, is observed, which ours do not submit to. But these restraints the devil imposes on his servants, and he is obeyed; and hereby stimulates the servants of God to reach an equal virtue. The priests of gehenna retain their continence; for the devil knows how to destroy men, even in the practice of the virtues; and he cares not, so that he does but slay them, whether it be by the indulgence of the flesh, or by mortifying it."

Well would it have been for the church, had this double dealing of the adversary been thoroughly understood, and so those devices resisted, which were as fatal to the

serious and fervent as the common baits of sensuality are to the mass of mankind! A false principle once assumed, under strong excitements, has the power to infatuate even the strongest and the best informed minds, and to lead them to any extent of extravagance. Thus we find our author, having firmly attached himself to the then prevalent belief, that there could be no virtue or purity, worth the name, apart from celibacy; or, in other words, that even the lawful matrimonial connexion was, in some degree, of the nature of vice; or was, as some of them did not scruple to term it, *stuprum conjugale*, goes about, with a perverse ingenuity, to prove that God had, under the new dispensation of grace, actually rescinded the constitutions of nature. This instance of audacious exposition is really remarkable.

... "The command—Increase and multiply, is abolished. Yet, as I think (contrary to the gnostic opinion) this command, in the first instance, and now the removal of it, are from one and the same God; who then, and in that early seed-time of the human race, gave the reins to the marrying principle, until the world should be replenished, and until he had prepared the elements of a new scheme of discipline. But now, in this conclusion of the ages, he restrains what once he had let loose, and revokes what he had permitted. The same reason governs the continuance, at first, of that which is to prepare for the future. In a thousand instances, indulgence is granted to the beginnings of things. So it is that a man plants a wood, and allows it to grow, intending, in due time, to use the axe. The wood, then, is the old dispensation, which is done away by the gospel, in which the axe is laid to the root of the tree."

Had Tertullian never read our Lord's solemn re-announcement of the old law—"wherefore a man shall

leave," &c., or Paul's assertion of the apostolic liberty, to "lead about a wife," or his injunction that the ministers of religion should be husbands? But all this took no hold of his mind, inasmuch as he, and the church of his time, had thoroughly substituted for the genuine idea of virtue and purity, an artificial and unnatural institute, having its gradations of excellence, the topmost glory being claimed for the Lord's spotless nuns! Thus was the form of godliness zealously cared for, while the substance of it was forgotten.

"May it not suffice thee to have fallen from that high rank of immaculate virginity, by *once* marrying, and so descending to a second stage of honour? Must thou yet fall farther; even to a third, to a fourth, and, perhaps, yet lower?" . . . .

It was the inevitable consequence (a consequence which, in fact, instantly followed) of the notion that celibacy was a high merit, and matrimony a defilement and a discredit, that this peculiar advantage should attach to the ministers of religion: the natural inference is expressly pointed out by most of the early writers; and thus it came about that the Lord's appointment, declared in so many words, was nullified by the absurd and impious inventions of men. Very early the married clergy were regarded as a degraded class, insulted by their arrogant, and often profligate, or, at least, fanatical colleagues, and held in no esteem by the people. Of what avail is it, then, to inquire at what date, precisely, the celibacy of the clergy was authoritatively enjoined, as if we wished to make good an impeachment of the papal power? This injunction, and the enforcement of it, ought rather to be regarded as acts of mercy, than as instances of tyranny; so long as the ancient principle of the merit of celibacy was to be maintained. For, in fact,

submission to a universally imposed law is far easier than a compliance with a variable custom, or prejudice, which may be broken through. Under painful conditions of any kind, the mind much sooner acquiesces in a stern, irrevocable rule, than in a partial and often relaxed usage. Besides, the *enforcement* of celibacy removed, at once, the invidious distinction that had obtained between the married and the unmarried clergy; and it set the seculars, at least, all on one level. It was an act of mercy, therefore, quite as much as of severity; and, for ourselves, we must not be so inequitable as to throw the blame upon popery. Who was it, but the doctors of the pristine church, that have made themselves answerable for the corruptions and the miseries, the tears, the agonies of remorse, the perversions of nature, the debaucheries, the cruelties, that have directly resulted from the celibacy of the clergy, through a long course of ages (not to include, now, the monkish institutions) who but the sincere and devout, many of them, but deplorably mistaken, men that are now quoted as our masters in Christian ethics and theology?

But I have not quite done with Tertullian. The legal education and dialectic habits of this writer, as well as his natural sagacity, made him perceive more clearly, and, perhaps, sooner than others, that practices such as those involved in the discipline and order of celibacy could not be maintained, or enforced, even after perverse ingenuity and exorbitant rhetoric had done their utmost, in the way of exaggeration, without the aid of some general principle, such as should bear any weight that might be thrown upon it, and which the scriptures could not be made to sustain. We, therefore, find him very deliberately going to work to lay this necessary

foundation, whereon might be reared, and whereon, in fact, has been reared, a vast and ever-growing superstructure of superstition, human devices, and tyrannous canons.

In commencing the present argument with the subject of the ancient doctrine concerning virginity, I have felt that it would open to us the most accessible, and the most direct path, to the principle which is really at issue between the favourers of antiquity and their opponents; and I think you will admit, in the end, that I have not taken up the wrong clue. In the treatise concerning the veiling of nuns—by the way, do not startle at the term as employed by a writer of the pristine age, for at this time the word *virgo* had, among church writers, already acquired its technical sense, and, in fact, conveyed all the meaning afterwards attached to the more peculiar epithet *nonna*; in this elaborate treatise, in which all the subtleties of a special pleader are exhausted upon a theme utterly frivolous, Tertullian, at the outset, having laid down the *immoveable* principles of faith, as summarily expressed in the apostles' creed, affirms that what affects discipline and Christian behaviour, must admit perpetual correction (or alteration) even to the end of time; as it were to adapt the Christian scheme to the incessant opposite agency of the devil. "Wherefore it is that the Lord hath sent the Comforter, that, as the feebleness of human nature could not at once receive the whole truth, it might, by degrees, be directed and regulated, and led on, until the system of discipline had reached perfection, under the vicarious influence of the Holy Spirit of the Lord (*ab illo vicario Domini Spiritu sancto*.) "I have many things yet to say unto you," saith he, "but ye cannot sustain them at present: but when He, the Spirit of truth is come, he will lead you

into all truth, and will declare to you things that are to be superadded," (*supervenientia*, instead of *quæ venturæ sunt*)—concerning which office (of the Spirit) he had above spoken. What, then, is this administration of the Comforter, unless it consist in such things as these—that matters of discipline be ordered, that the (sense of the) scriptures be opened, that the mind (of the church) be restored, and that it should be advanced toward what is better? There is nothing that does not advance by age. All things wait upon time, as the preacher saith, there is a time for every thing. Look at the natural world, and see the plant gradually ripening to its fruit, first a mere grain; from the grain arises the green stalk, and from the stalk shoots up the shrub; then the boughs and branches get strength, and the tree is complete: thence the swelling bud; and from the bud, the blossom; and from the flower the fruit; which, at the first crude and shapeless, by little and little proceeds, and attains its ripe softness and flavour. And so in religion, (*justitia*), for it is the same God of nature, and of religion: at first in its rudiments only, nature surmising something concerning God; then by the law and the prophets advanced to its infant state; then by the gospel it reached the heats of youth; and now, by the Comforter, is moulded to its maturity."

In the tract, *De Corona*, in a passage which has of late been several times quoted, and to which I must hereafter revert, Tertullian expounds the same principle; but farther on, in the same, after going through with his argument on the grounds of nature, scripture, and custom, or the established discipline of the apostolic churches, our author proceeds, "Scripture is of God, nature is of God, discipline (usage) is of God; and whatever contradicts these is not of God. If in any case scripture

be ambiguous, nature is indubitable, and, sustained by its testimony, scripture cannot be uncertain; or if there were yet any doubt concerning the evidence of nature, the discipline, (usage of the churches) which is more directly authenticated by God, shows the way."

With a more important purpose in hand, I refrain from quoting the amusing peroration of this tract. Let us pause then a moment upon the passage quoted, which so appositely concludes the citations already made, under this head of my argument. We have seen, not merely the fact attested, of the early existence of the institution of celibacy, as a standing and prominent part of the ecclesiastical system, but have heard the characteristic sentiments, and the artificial notions which were the strength of this institution, advanced as explicitly by early, as by later writers; and now we find the broad principle formally assumed, and asserted, which might not merely underprop the discipline of celibacy, but sustain all other additions to the Christianity of the scriptures, and in fact give solidity to whatever constitutes the mass of abominations summarily called, popery.

Is then Tertullian's doctrine—his fundamental church axiom, a good one? Is it true, or not, that Christianity, as revealed and verbally expressed in the canonical writings, is a mere sketch, or rough draft, of that mature truth, which, by little and little, was to be granted to the church, through the medium of its doctors, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? If so, then is there any where else we can look for the progressive expansion of this ever-growing truth, but to the church of Rome; or, if we like it better, the Greek church? Where is the tree to be found, laden with its fruit, but where the plant was set? At this rate, protestantism, under whatever pretext, is nothing better than a multifa-



rious blasphemy, and a high sin against the Holy Ghost: and what have its martyrs been, but the justly punished enemies of God and the church?

If Tertullian's principle of a slow development of truth be sound, then every separate item of the Romish superstitions and encroachments, was really a new favour, granted to the church from above;—or if not, or if there are any exceptions, who shall come in, and name these exceptions, or enable us to distinguish between the genuine, and the spurious developments of the great scheme? At this rate, the enormities of the monastic institution, and the compulsory celibacy of the clergy, the superstition of relics, the invocation of saints, the communion in one kind, the mass in Latin, the universal vicarship of the bishop of Rome, the secular powers wielded by the church, and—the denial of the scriptures to the laity, are all so many boons, graciously sent down from on high, as parts and parcels of that adult symmetry which is at length to be the glory of the mature church. But who shall say why, if this principle be assumed, we should make a stand at tridentine Romanism? Has the Spirit withdrawn from the church; has the promise of the Lord been revoked; are the favours of heaven exhausted; are there yet no truths in reserve; is the treasury of divine elements so soon emptied?—on the contrary, we ought to be looking every day for some farther apocalypse, some new and heaven-born institute, or practice: nay, it is only pious to believe, that the progressive manifestation shall go on, until the vast discrepancy between the ripened Christianity of a remote age, and its rude commencement, as consigned to the canonical writings, shall utterly dismiss these as obsolete and void. It is thus, in fact, that,

the church, after she had made so much progress in advance of her first position, as to render the contrast between herself and scriptural Christianity a matter of scandal to the simple, wisely (and indeed of necessity) interdicted the perusal of the Bible; nor can she be accused, in this instance, and if her principle be good, of having deprived the people of any real or important benefit; for why should we wish to revert from a more perfect, to a less perfect exhibition of the divine mind? To look to the scriptures, instead of looking to the church of our own times, is as if those under the theocratic dispensation, had, in contempt of their prerogatives, relapsed to natural religion; or as if the first Christians had sought to reinstate Judaism.

You must not think that, in all this, I either exaggerate the consequences of the doctrine in question, or bestow upon it more regard than it deserves. Nothing can be more clear or direct than is the inference, as it flows from the premises, nor do I know that the essence of the argument with which at the present moment we are concerned, can be much less exceptionably stated than it is by Tertullian, in the passage I have quoted. Was Christianity complete and mature in the hands of the apostles, or was it then in the bud merely, waiting to be expanded and ripened by the suns and showers of many centuries? If we assume the former position, and deny altogether Tertullian's doctrine, then we must not only reject popery and its usurpations, but the immemorial errors also of ancient Christianity.

I do not forget that, in reference to the above-cited principle, it would be easy to refute Tertullian—out of Tertullian, (a mode of treatment to which every intemperate and wayward writer is open) for when he undertakes to deal with heretics, and feels that he must have

ground to stand upon that will afford him support in overturning their foolish novelties, he "*prescribes*" them with stringent references to the unchanging authority of scripture, as sustained by the continuous and concurrent testimony of the apostolic churches. But then, mark the predicament in which we stand.—If we are compelled to make a choice between the two Tertullians, considered as the champions of the notions and practices of the church at that time, it must be the writer of the passage above cited, not the more sound divine whom we find trampling upon the crew of heretics, that will serve our purpose. The *protestant* Tertullian may indeed be the most to our taste of the two; but then he condemns, by a clear implication, all the most favourite practices of that early age. It is, therefore, the tridentine Tertullian of whose rhetoric we must avail ourselves, for the defence of those articles of ancient Christianity which some are now fondly admiring, and would fain restore.

It is thus too with Vincent of Lerins, so often quoted of late. None better than he, bars the church door against heretics, or the broachers of new doctrines; but then, unfortunately, as in some cases, the *bar* of a door is found to be the most potent instrument one can lay hands upon, to employ as a *crow*, or lever, for breaking it open, so are the densely compacted paragraphs of the cogent Vincent, convertible, in the readiest manner, to the purpose of demolishing, not merely Romanism, but the superstitious Christianity of the eastern, and of the western churches, such as it was in the writer's times. Give us but that excellent tract, the *Commonitorium*, and we might defy, single-handed, all the Bellarmines of the papacy, and all the fathers; and, with due modesty be it spoken, the entire band of the Oxford

Tract writers. But of this more perhaps in another place.

The often-repeated opinions to which my first proposition stands opposed, would, if correct, justify the expectation that, in taking so long a period as four or five hundred years, any where out of the sixteen hundred preceding the reformation, one should be able, without any ambiguity, to trace the progress of religious corruption, and that it would be easy to say—such and such false notions, or extravagant sentiments, are characteristic of the later time, from which errors the earlier age is altogether exempt: but in reference to the subject now before us (and I think not to this alone) such an expectation is by no means borne out by the evidence. I must profess to be entirely unable to draw any line of very obvious distinction, marking the advances of folly, error, or corruption, in this particular, during the lapse of fourteen centuries. Some writers, it is true, such as Gregory the Great, or Palladius, are much more extravagant than some others, on this point; but then this difference attaches to the individual, and has no reference whatever to the place he occupies, chronologically, in the series.

To render our notions, in this instance, as definite as possible, I would look at the subject in different lights, and, in doing so, I find only one respect in which the influence of time is clearly to be traced, in rendering the doctrine and practice of religious celibacy of a later age unlike what it had been at an earlier time; and this, which I have already alluded to, relates to those purely ecclesiastical enactments, and points of discipline, which, from time to time, were found to be indispensable, as *corrective* of the abuses whereto the entire system was obnoxious. These changes, or amendments, it would

serve no purpose whatever, as related to our present argument, to specify. Let it be remembered, however, that, although they may have implied some stretches of tyranny, they are not, generally, of the nature of progressive corruptions.

In every other respect, time made nothing essentially worse than it had been almost from the first. To come to instances:—if we are thinking of those abject and frivolous observances that have attached to the monastic modes of life, and to the devotional routine of the monastery, I would request any who may be inclined to demur at my representations, to compare whatever descriptions he may choose to select of the mummeries of the monasticism of the twelfth century, with the Institutes of Cassian, which contain the principles and the minute details of the monastic institution, as it had already been digested, and then *long* practised, in the east, and the west, so early as the fourth century. There may be *variations*, distinguishing the two schemes of life; but will a reasonable man affirm that there is any thing to choose or to prefer in the more ancient model? There is no degradation of the intellect, no bondage of the moral sentiments, no fatal substitution of forms for realities; there is no ineffable drivelling belonging to the middle age monkery, that may not be matched, to the full, in the monkery of the bright times of Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine. I here put the question aloud, to any opponent—“What is it that you precisely mean by the corruptions of popery, in respect to the monastic system?” or, in other words, “can you make it appear, to the satisfaction of thinking men, that this same system had become more frivolous, and therefore, in a religious sense, more pernicious, in the twelfth century, than it was at the opening of the fourth?” I am tempted

here to cite the very words of Cassian, who, in stickling, with great seriousness, for some inanity of the monkish daily ritual, says. . . . *qui modus antiquitus constitutus, ideirco per tot sæcula penes cuncta monasteria intemertus nunc usque perdurat; quid non humana adinventione statutus à senioribus affirmatur, sed cœlitus angeli magisterio patribus fuisse delatus.* These observances then could have been no novelties.

But again; if we think of those enormous follies and impious whims, which, connected as they always were with the monastic life, imposed a mask, sometimes of idiocy, and sometimes of madness, upon the bright face of Christianity, I ask whether *this* sort of corruption was more extreme in a later age, than it had been in an earlier; or, if any think so, I would send them no farther than to the Lausaic history of the pious and really respectable Palladius, a bishop, a man of some learning, and the intimate friend of the illustrious Chrysostom, and the companion of his exile. I am not about to cite any samples of the utter nonsense and the spiritual ribaldry of this book. Let those refer to it, and satisfy themselves, who are still clinging to the fond idea of a golden age of Christianity. The legends, collected by Palladius, relate, for the most part, to an earlier age than his own; and romances of like quality are to be found in Eusebius, Sozomen, and Theodoret, as well as Macarius, and as belonging to the times of the heathen persecutions. No one, I am sure, who really knows what he is talking about, will dare, with such documents before him, to play the Quixote, and break a lance in defence of the honour of the ancient monkery.

Or, if we were to make inquiry concerning the half-confessed, and yet sufficiently attested serious evils and horrors that have disgraced the institute of religious ce-

libacy, I think that those who have been used to look into the fathers will admit there to be reason enough for believing that the natural and inevitable consequences of this institute, when once it came to include promiscuous masses of the religious body, developed themselves fully from the very first. On this point, I will neither make references, nor put the clue into any one's hand; but leave my broad assertion to be contradicted by those who may think it safe and discreet to dare me to the proof. One hint only I will drop: and must do so in anticipation of what it would give me no surprise (whatever disgust) to witness: I mean a gentle, sentimental, plausible endeavour, to feel the religious pulse, in reference to the "celestial and apostolic" practice of "vowing virginity to the Lord." In any such case there would be no room for compromise, or half measures; but evidence must be instantly spread out before all eyes, showing what have, in every age, and from the first, been the deplorable consequences of this pernicious custom. Some may smile at the mere supposition that any such endeavour should be made—out of the pale of the Romish communion. For my own part (unless I may have had the honour of suggesting a little caution to certain parties) it is nothing but what I think we are to look for, as the *next move* in the game.

There yet remains, however, one other point of view, whence the same subject may be regarded, and that is the bearing of the institute of celibacy upon the religious principle, which was appealed to for giving it support: now, without anticipating what will more properly find a place, a little way on, I will state the fact, that, at a very early time, a false maxim of spiritual computation had become so inveterate, as that the most sedate and judicious divines, without hesitation, employ it, in the

estimates they form of the comparative excellence of different religious conditions. That is to say, a rule of spiritual eminence is appealed to, which discards, or overlooks all reference to what is truly spiritual, or, in any genuine sense, moral; and puts in its room what is formal, visible, or ecclesiastical. I will refer, in this instance, to the sober-minded Isidore of Pellusium, also a bishop, and the personal friend of Chrysostom, and whose expositions of scripture are frequently such as to deserve respectful attention. We have seen in what way Tertullian, Cyprian, and, with not more absurdity, St. Bernard, pervert the plain sense of scripture, for the purpose of hitching the virgins of Christ upon the loftiest pinnacle of the ecclesiastical structure. Now for Isidore, who, to do him justice, inserts a frequent *απαγγε*, when there appears to be a danger lest, in his recommendation of celibacy, matrimony should be despoiled of its due honours.

“The warfare of virginity is indeed great, glorious, and divine; yet does it, (when successfully waged,) diminish the arduousness of our conflict with other of our spiritual adversaries . . . . as high as the heaven is above the earth, and as far as the soul excels the body, so does the state of virginity surpass the state of matrimony . . . . Wherefore let the contemners of virginity cease their prating, and henceforward acknowledge, dutifully, its princess-like dignity, and submit themselves to its behests; placing themselves under its protection, and availing themselves of its mediatorial (or intercessory) office. And (if I may employ celestial emblems) I must compare those who embrace the virgin state, to the sun; while those who only observe continence, are to be likened to the moon; and those living in honourable wedlock, to the stars; and so, as the divine Paul reckons up



the degrees of dignity, and says—there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars!”

Now, it is no matter to us, whether Isidore is right or wrong in the relative position which he assigns to the three estates; but it is of real importance, and important to our present argument, to observe the fact that, so utterly fallacious and fatally erroneous a principle of religious feeling had, at this time, come to be universally received, and admitted, by even the most judicious divines; and that, in accordance with this principle, the piety and purity of the heart had come to be subordinated to the visible and ecclesiastical condition, and that continence was regarded as mere moonshine, when placed in the same heavens with the solar effulgence of the virginity of the nun. Mean time, whatever might be the personal godliness, or the purity, or the solid virtues of the Christian matron, all were, at the best, but the faint twinkling of a star! Now, as it seems to me, all this is not mere rodomontade, which one may smile at, and let pass, but it is substantially false doctrine, and of most putrid quality, in regard to piety and morals: it is the indication of an ulcer—a bad condition of the vitals of the Christian system, and a condition which had then become inveterate. Isidore's theology is not popery; nor was it his own scheme of doctrine; but the inheritance which he had come into: it was the boasted apostolic catholicity, which all his contemporaries had assented to, and which was scrupulously watched over, and handed down, to the next age. If Gregory I. may fairly be regarded as the father of *popery*, using the term in its proper sense, I am sure he does not, on the point now before us, advance any thing which may not find

its parallel on the pages of the best writers of the fourth century: but the proof of this assertion cannot be necessary to my immediate argument.

I shall then on the whole assume as not to be denied, the general affirmation imbodyed in my first proposition. That the lapse of many centuries exhibits no essential change, or progression, in reference to the principles, the practices, or the abuses of religious celibacy.

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## THE SECOND PROPOSITION.

I HAVE undertaken to adduce proof of the assertion, not only that the doctrine of the merit of celibacy, and the consequent practices, are found in a mature state at an early age; but also—

That, at the earliest period at which we find this doctrine and these practices distinctly mentioned, they are referred to in such a manner as to make it certain that they were, at that time, no novelties, or recent innovations.

Now I am aware that a statement such as this, if it shall appear to be borne out by evidence, will excite alarm in some minds; The dissipation of erroneous impressions, is always a critical and somewhat perilous operation; nevertheless dangers much more to be feared, are incurred by a refusal to admit the full and simple truth. Yet the alarm that may be felt in this instance, at the first, may soon be removed; for although it were to appear that certain capital errors of feeling, and prac-

tice, had seized the church universal, at the very moment when the personal influence of the apostles was withdrawn, yet such an admission will shake no principle really important to our faith or comfort. In fact, too many have been attaching their faith and comfort to a supposition, concerning pristine Christianity, which is totally illusory, and such as can bear no examination—a supposition which must long ago have been dispelled from all well-informed minds, by the influence of rational modes of dealing with historical materials, if it had not been for the *conservative accident*, that the materials, which belong to this particular department of history, have lain imbedded in repulsive folios of Latin and Greek, to which very few, and those not the most independent, or energetic in their habits of mind, have had access. Certain utterly unfounded generalities, very delightful had they possessed the recommendation of truth, have been a thousand times repeated, and seldom scrutinized.

But the times of this ignorance is now passing away: and I think the zeal of the Oxford writers will have the effect, as an indirect means, of disabusing effectively, and for ever, the religious mind, in this country, and perhaps throughout Europe, of the inveterate illusions that have so long hung over the fields of Christian antiquity. It will be utterly impossible, much longer, to make those things believed which we have been taught to consider as unquestionable; and the result must be, (how desirable a result) the compelling the Christian church, henceforward, to rest its faith and practice on the only solid foundation.

The actual impression, moral and spiritual, made upon the Jewish and pagan world by the preaching of the apostles themselves, and of their personal colleagues, has, I fear, been somewhat overrated by the generality

of Christians; and yet, if it be so, and if we are called upon to surrender a portion of our too hastily assumed belief, on this subject, we directly gain a proportionate enhancement of the collateral argument which proves the divine origin of Christianity, from the fact of its spread, and its eventual triumph, over all opposition; for the less it was, morally and spiritually, in its commencement, the stronger is the inference to be derived from its steady advances.

And then, as to the period immediately following the death of the apostles, and of the men whom they personally appointed to govern the churches, we have too easily, and without any sufficient evidence, assumed the belief that a brightness and purity belonged to it, only a shade or two less than what we have attributed to the apostolic times. This belief, is, in fact, merely the correlative of the common protestant notion concerning the progressive corruptions of popery, it being a natural supposition that the higher we ascend toward the apostolic age, so much the more truth, simplicity, purity, must there have been in the church. Thus it is that we have allowed ourselves to theorize, when what we should have done, was simply to examine our documents.

The opinion that has forced itself upon my own mind, is to this effect, that the period dating its commencement from the death of the last of the apostles, or apostolic men, was, altogether, as little deserving to be selected and proposed *as a pattern*, as any one of the first five of church history;—it had indeed its single points of excellence, and of a high order, but by no means shone in those consistent and exemplary qualities which should entitle it to the honour of being considered as a model to after ages. We need therefore neither feel surprise nor alarm, when we find, in particular instances, that

the grossest errors of theory and practice, are to be traced to their origin in the first century. In such instances, for my own part, I can wonder at nothing but the infatuation of those who, fully informed as they must be of the actual facts, and benefited moreover by modern modes of thinking, can nevertheless so prostrate their understandings before the phantom—venerable antiquity, as to be inflamed with the desire of inducing the Christian world to imitate what really asks for apology and extenuation. Any such endeavour must, however, inevitably fail; nor can it be for more than a moment, after once the subject has attracted general attention, that an illusion, so fantastic, can hold the minds of any except a very few, who are constitutionally disposed to admit it. When the bubble bursts, let the promoters of ancient principles look to it, that they are provided with some other means of keeping their doctrines in credit; and I am far from assuming that the general doctrines of the Oxford writers will disappear along with the ill-founded prejudice they have laboured to support in favour of ancient Christianity.

The actual origination of the Christian doctrine and practice concerning religious celibacy may, I think, be very satisfactorily laid open; but it would carry us too far from our more immediate object to pursue this subject; all that I am now concerned with is the FACT, that an error which, as I shall be able to show, affected every element of the theological and ecclesiastical system, had acquired the stability which time only can confer, at the earliest period when the references to it are explicit and ample.

I am unwilling to tire you with Tertullian, or otherwise might properly bring him forward again, as a wit-

ness, under this second head of my argument. Suffice it then to remind you, that, how extravagant soever may have been the opinions which he adopted, concerning the unlawfulness of second marriages, and their extreme impropriety in the case of the clergy, the principles he assumes, and on which he reasons, as admitted on all hands, imply nothing less than that, within little more than one hundred years after the death of St. John, an obloquy had come to be attached, in the minds of Christians generally, to the matrimonial connexion, as if it involved a degree of impurity, and rendered a man less fit to officiate as a priest, or, as the notion was, as a mediator between God, and the herd of Christians. It is also certain that, as a consequence of these prevailing notions, a voluntary abjuration of the sexual relationship had come to be considered as highly meritorious—next to martyrdom; and farther, that, in imitation of the analogous pagan institutes, an order of dedicated virgins had been established, and that these constituted a distinct band, or choir, a *grex segregatus*, in the church;—to what good purpose let Cyprian say.

Digamus tinguis? Digamus offers? asks the indignant Tertullian; “shall one who has contracted a second marriage baptize; or shall such a one make the eucharistic oblation?” Now let us coolly consider how much is involved, as found in a writer of so early an age, in a question such as this:—for it plainly implies the concurrence of the Christian community in certain feelings—such as that of a false sensitiveness, in regard to exterior purity, and a superstitious feeling toward the sacraments, as if they demanded in the administrator, certain personal qualities, or exemptions, which might be dispensed with in those who conducted the ordinary offices of worship; and a belief too that *degrees of spiritual merit*,

were attached to degrees of separation from the ordinary relationships of life. From such notions, generally prevailing, nothing could in the end result but what we find actually to have resulted, namely—the monastic institute—the enforced celibacy of the clergy, and the superstition of the sacraments. But I now fix upon the mere fact, that such notions had already gained the authentication of time, at the close of the second century.

Looking only to the evidence furnished by Tertullian, we might be led to believe that the cœlibate institution had its origin in the highly culpable ambition of the leaders of the church, to secure for it the glory of possessing whatever, in the heathen system around them, appeared at once heroic, and capable of amalgamation with Christianity. Satan, it was alleged, had too long monopolized certain good things, which it was now high time to snatch from his grasp: and among these, the principal was the sacerdotal celibacy, enjoined upon the ministers of some divinities, and the consecration of the vestal virgins. Unhappily, this same ambition, absolutely impious as it was, took effect upon, and perverted, every other element of visible Christianity.

But this was not all; and if we extend our researches a little farther, and higher, we shall find the indications of the, perhaps, blameless existence of this practice, reaching up to the actual times of the apostles. What then? will it follow that, because certain individuals, who, from temperament, came within the meaning of our Lord's recommendation (Matt. xix. 12) devoted themselves to a single life, in order to be free from all entanglements that might withdraw them from evangelic and charitable labours—does it follow that, therefore, a celestial pre-eminence should have been arrogated by, or for them, or that shoals of young persons, without regard had to their

individual temperament, should have been urged, in moments of factitious excitement, to bind themselves by a rash vow? Here was the false step of the early church; a step which would never have been taken, unless, already, the true purport of the gospel had been misunderstood, and the form of godliness had been put in the place of the power and substance of it.

The good Justin (*second apology*) in recommending to the imperial philosopher and persecutor, the principles and practices of his Christian brethren, makes it his boast that he could point to many, men as well as women, who having followed the Christian institute from their earliest years, had remained, to an advanced age—sixty or seventy years, incorrupt—*αφθαρτοι διαμενουσι*, unmarried, or inviolate. These persons, then, must have so devoted themselves very soon after the martyrdom of Paul and Peter; and the practice having rapidly spread itself throughout the church, in all countries, and being at once promoted and exaggerated by the effect of persecution, soon brought it, that is to say, within the compass of another thirty or forty years, to its mature state, such, in fact, as we find it in the times of Tertullian. In his time, as we have seen, the prevailing practice had generated notions palpably contradictory to the apostolic precepts. Paul had assumed that, ordinarily, both bishops and deacons were to be married men; and he clearly implies that, in the exemplary discharge of the domestic duties, they would find the best opportunities for adorning their ministerial function. A bishop's wife, was, in Paul's idea, a main article in a bishop's qualification for ruling the church of God; and a deacon's children were to furnish, to a deacon, the occasions for exhibiting the influence of Christian principles. Such was APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY—a system of real, not of fictitious



purity; a system of virtue and piety, adapted to the purpose of elevating and blessing man's actual condition, in the present state. Did there attach to the apostle's idea of the matrimonial connexion any, even the remotest idea, of impurity, or of spiritual degradation? Boldly we say not the faintest supposition of moral or religious contamination entered his mind, in relation to this subject. The apostles were intent upon the establishment, not of celibacy, but of VIRTUE!

Such, we say, was APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY; but not such was ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY, even that of the age *immediately* following the death of the apostles. The difference does not reach to the mere amount of a diversity of usage, or of a shade of feeling; but it involves nothing less than the substitution of one principle of virtue and piety for another. The scheme of religious sentiments had shifted its foundations; a different standard of good and evil had come to be appealed to; the commandments of God were displaced, without scruple, by the whims of man; so that, within so short a period as a hundred years, the very practices which Paul had solemnly commended were impiously spoken of as degrading, by Tertullian, who, in this instance, only reflects the general feeling of his times.

At the present moment, the Christian community, and especially the clergy of the episcopal church, are called upon to make their choice between APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY and ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY; and this weighty alternative must soon merge all other distinctions, leaving only the two parties—the adherents of the inspired, and those of the uninspired documents of our religion.

But now I shall be told that I have inferred far too much from the language of the intemperate Tertullian, as to the sentiments of the church at large in his times.

I am provided against this objection, and can rebut it by evidence altogether of another kind.

When a question arises concerning the existence, or prevalence, at a particular era, of certain opinions, the first mode of establishing the alleged fact is that of citing the language of writers who explicitly profess such doctrines; but then this direct evidence may be liable to a demur, inasmuch as it may be imagined that these writers are advancing nothing better than their personal notions, in behalf of which they are assuming much more general acceptance than they were entitled to claim for them. But even this demur is removed, when it can be shown, as in the instance of Tertullian, that a writer himself distinguishes between the common opinion and the one which he is labouring to promote.

But allowing, for a moment, the pertinence of the objection, we then turn to our second class of proofs, which consists of passages from writers who, impelled by a reasonable anxiety for what they consider as endangered truths, vigorously oppose the very opinions in question, as generally prevalent.

Thus, if it were supposed (which cannot be actually granted, the facts being indubitable) that Tertullian, fiery in temper and extravagant in sentiments, had been impelled to speak of the institute of celibacy, by anticipation, or as if it had, in his time, received an authentication which, in truth, was not granted to it until long afterward, what, then, are we to think when we find a writer, *earlier* by some years than Tertullian, and a man of extensive learning, who had visited the churches throughout the east and the west, a man, moreover, of singular good sense, and sobriety of judgment, such a writer, labouring to defend the divine institution of matrimony, against the swelling fanaticism of all around

him? What conclusion are we to adopt when we hear the accomplished master of the Alexandrian school calmly and modestly asserting the great principles of nature, and of genuine piety, which he saw were likely to be swept away, as before a deluge of factitious excitement? The only conclusion, surely, with which such facts will consist, is that which my second proposition imbodyes.

After plunging in Tertullian's turbid stream, it is really a refreshment to walk at ease, and breathing a wholesome atmosphere, in the broad and pleasant garden of Clement of Alexandria. Some dozen of the fathers might be sifted, before we should get together as much plain good sense as may be found, within the compass of a few pages, in this writer.

We have heard Tertullian's doctrine in regard to the gradual development of truth, from age to age; the consequence of which, if sound, is, that the Christians of every age owe a pious deference, not merely to the current orders, or the inventions of the church authorities in their own times, but to all such inventions, of preceding times, which, in fact, as proceeding from the same source, are not a whit less to be regarded than the dictates of written revelation. The writer now before us holds a very different style, and, in various instances, manifests the sense he had of the dangerous tendency of the human mind in matters of religion to throw itself back, indolently, upon antiquity and established custom. On this ground, and with a manly freedom, he expostulates with the adherents of the ancient polytheism; and again, in those parts of his writings in which he addresses Christians, he does an honour to the divinely-inspired scriptures, and dissuades from an indolent deference to usage or mere opinion, in a manner which

distinguishes him among the church writers of his own or of the following ages. As a remedy for that ignorance which is one of the causes of vice, he knows of nothing but "the convincing demonstrations of the testimony of the scripture—the WRITTEN truth;" and here, by the way, he incidentally refers to the defection or delinquencies of "multitudes of the Lord's people," in his times—a fact significant in relation to our general argument. To some such he addresses himself, "not, indeed to the contumacious, who spurn all instruction, and who, nevertheless, are more to be pitied than hated (a style of speaking of heretics very unlike that employed by most of the fathers) but to those whose errors might be treated as remediable. Well would it have been," says he, "for some (certain heretics) had they been able to learn what was at first delivered (by the holy apostles and teachers in the INSPIRED SCRIPTURES) instead of giving heed to human doctrines. He, therefore, and he alone, may be accounted to live aright, who, pursuing his course from year to year, in converse with, and conformity to the scriptures, keeps to the rule of the apostolic and ecclesiastical purity, according to the gospel and those established truths which, as given by the Lord, by the law, and by the prophets, whoever seeks shall find."

Our learned Alexandrian, along with his contemporaries, might err in particular interpretations of scripture; but, at least, he pays homage to their sole and unrivalled authority, in all matters of faith and practice: his errors, therefore, whatever they may be, are not seeds of mischief. How different is the language of Tertullian. In harmony with this simple adherence to the inspired writings, and at the impulse of his native good sense, this writer treats the subject of the Christian

use of riches, and also the rule of martyrdom, on both of which points, even before his time, the mass of Christians had run into absurdities. In relation to the latter subject, let Clement's good sense (*Strom. lib. iv.*) be compared with the extravagance of Ignatius. The comparison will afford a proof, one of many, that the calm reason and genuine dignity which distinguish the conduct and writings of the apostles, did not attach even to their immediate successors.

But we have now to cite the evidence of Clement on the special point in hand, and in proof of our position, that although a dissentient voice might be heard once in a century, the church at large had, from the earliest period to which our documents extend, admitted a pernicious illusion subversive as well of morals as of piety. The evidence of Clement, as I have stated, is of that conclusive kind which results from the struggle of a solitary sound mind, in resisting the inundation of error. I request you, however, especially to remember, that if, in some of the passages now to be adduced, the force of my inference might seem to be lessened by the circumstance that our author is professedly contending with certain heretics, and not opposing himself to the general opinion of the church, I have at hand the instant means of excluding any such exception, by turning to the contemporary orthodox writers, and their immediate successors, who go to the same length of extravagance, saving an impious or indecent phrase or two, which Clement reports as attaching to the opinions of the heretics he names. I adduce him, therefore, as an unexceptionable witness to the alleged fact, that, within considerably less than a hundred years from the death of the last of the apostles, the church, at large, had yielded

itself to a capital and widely extended error of sentiment, practice, and theory.

Clement (Strom. lib. iii.) while refuting, on one side the profligate, and on the other side the fanatical heretics of his time, employs scriptural and rational arguments, of which neither Cyprian, nor Tertullian, could have availed themselves, without condemning the system to which they, and the church, had pledged themselves. He urges, in a tone of *modern* good sense, and in a manner of which very few instances are to be found in the writings of the fathers, the general principle, that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, or a system of formal and visible observances, or of servile abstinences from ordinary enjoyments; but righteousness and peace: and that it is the inner, nor the outer man, which God chiefly looks to." He, moreover, points it out as a characteristic of "antichrist, and of the apostacy of the last times, that there should be those who would forbid to marry, and command to abstain from meats;" and in fact he very nearly approaches a *protestant* style of remonstrance, against the then spreading fanaticism. It appears that, while the church had borrowed the *institute* of religious celibacy from the heathen worship, it unhappily availed itself of the wild errors of heretics in getting up, among the people, the false excitement whence this institute was to gather its victims. Clement's plain good sense, in asserting the honour and sanctity of virtuous matrimony, not only contradicts the particular errors of the heretics whom he names, but it stands opposed to that notion which, every where else, presents itself, of moral or spiritual degradation, as attaching to that state; so as that those who abjured it stood upon a higher platform, whence they might look down, with pity or scorn, upon the mass of their brethren. It was

this very notion that was the seed of mischief, which, at an early period, choked the ecclesiastical field with a rank and poisonous vegetation.

“What,” asks our author, “what, may not self-command be preserved under the conditions of married life? May not marriage be used, and yet continence respected, without our attempting to sever that which the Lord hath joined?” Presently afterwards he touches the principle of real virtue, which the church at large was then losing sight of, in the pursuit of a phantom. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; and in like manner as genuine humility consists in meekness of soul, not in the maceration of the body; so, and in like manner (true) continence, is a virtue of the soul, and relates to that which is hidden (in the heart) not to the outward life.”

Just so much good sense and Christian truth as this, it is hard to meet with, in whole folios of the fathers. What a different story would church history have presented, if principles so manifestly reasonable, had been generally regarded? But now, at a time earlier only by a few years than that in which we hear the fanatic Tertullian, with affected horror, putting the question—“Digamus tinguis, Digamus offers,” Clement demands of those who would fain be holier than the Lord himself, whether they really mean to reprove the apostles, two of whom (at least) Peter and Philip, were fathers, the latter moreover having given his daughters in marriage; or Paul, who asks—“Have we not power to lead about a sister or wife, even as the other apostles?” Farther on, our author, and with much copiousness, offers a eulogium of woman—woman, the helper and companion of man—woman, the wife, and mother; and in all which there is nothing of the fulsome nonsense about

virginity, which renders the perusal of the fathers, generally, so nauseating; and he affirms too the equality of the sexes, in regard to piety and virtue. If, in fact, Cyprian and Tertullian had been writers of the ninth century, we might well, in comparing them with Clement, have pointed to the difference, vast and glaring as it is, and have thereby confirmed ourselves in the common notion, that popery was a gradual departure from the good sense and purity of the early times of the church. But in truth these writers were the actual contemporaries, though younger men, of Clement; and a portraiture of the Christianity of the period is to be found in *their* works, not in his.

It is true that many of the fathers, or most of them, in their headlong course of fanaticism, and while beating the "drum ecclesiastic," to get recruits for the monastery, think it due to their reputation to pull in for a moment, once and again, and in so many words to disclaim the heresy of attributing the matrimonial institute to the devil. Yet the mere fact of their feeling it necessary to do so, is proof enough of the extent to which they were running. But, so far as I know, Clement of Alexandria is the only extant writer, of the early ages, who adheres to common sense, and apostolic Christianity, through and through. Those who, at a later date, ventured to protest against the universal error, were instantly cursed and put down as heretics, by all the great divines of their times; and were, in fact, deprived of the means of transmitting their opinions to be more equitably judged of by posterity.

It appears, or at least we should gather it from the language of Clement, that at Alexandria, the choir of virgins had not, in his time, been regularly constituted, as a standing order in the church; for where this band had



been so sanctioned, it always took precedence of the corps of widows, and is mentioned, when they, as a part of the ecclesiastical system, are mentioned. But (Strom. lib. i.) where our author, in a formal manner, enumerates the three orders of the clergy (as he does once and again) presbyters, bishops, and deacons, he subjoins, “and the widows.” Now in the “Apostolic Constitutions,” in the canons of the Ante-Nicene councils, and generally, in the writers of the same period, where any enumeration of orders occurs, it is—“the virgins and the widows.”

In Clement’s time, as he says, “the wells of martyrdom were flowing daily;” we may therefore presume that as much of general seriousness, and sincerity, attached to the Christian community then, as usually belonged to it; and yet what sort of description does he give us—altogether calm in its style—of the usual appearances, on a Sunday, at the church doors, when the congregation broke up? Why, one might imagine oneself to be loitering about the doors of a fashionable chapel, in London, Bath, or Brighton. A world of illusions is sometimes dispelled by a very few simple sentences; and I think that were certain devout and credulous worshippers of “venerable antiquity,” and of the “holy and ancient church,” by chance to open upon the page of Clement which is now before me, having first been told that it described the breaking up of an assembly of the “martyr church,” within a hundred years after the death of St. John, they would scarcely think themselves the same persons after having read it. Yet there is nothing extraordinary in this passage, there is no solemn lifting of a veil of mystery; absolutely nothing but an incidental allusion to facts, of an ordinary kind;—it is a description which might find its counter-

part in any age, or any country, and is worthy of being noted on no account but because it tends to dissipate the fond, unphilosophical, and, as it now happens, the mischievous fancy about "pristine purity," and a golden age, to which we ungodly moderns should devoutly yield our judgments and conform our practices.

"Those who make profession of Christianity," says Clement, "should be all of a piece—they should, in the entire course of their lives, preserve a decorum and consistency, such as might agree with the exterior gravity to which they fashion themselves, just while at church; and they should strive to be, not merely to appear, what they would pass for;—so meek, so religious, so loving. But now, and how it is I hardly know, our folks, with change of place, change also their guise, and their modes of behaviour; and are something like polypi, which, as they say, resemble the rock on which they chance to fasten, and take their tinge from its colour. So these, the moment they get out of chapel, lay aside the demure and godly colour of sanctity, which they had worn while there; and, mingling in the crowd, are no longer to be distinguished from it. Or, as I ought rather to say, they then put off that well fashioned mask of gravity, which they had assumed, and are found to be such as they had not passed for. After having reverently waited upon God, and heard of him (in the church) they leave him there; and, out of doors, find their pleasure in ungodly fiddling, and love ditties, and what not—stage playing, and gross revelries. Thus, while they sing and respond, these (our people) who just before had been celebrating the glories of immortality, wickedly take their part in the most pernicious canticles;—as if saying, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. They indeed, not to-morrow, but now already, are dead unto God."

Much more, nearly to the same purport, might be cited, were it needful, from the pages of Clement. In a word, his was an unimpassioned mind; and while he calmly and steadily insisted upon (so far as he understood it) the inspired rule of morality, he saw things around him, just as they were, and speaks of them, just as he found them; and his testimony, about which there is nothing cynical, ought to be accepted as of the highest value, in correcting the false impression which is made upon our minds by others, who, as they saw every thing in an artificial glare, so allowed themselves a wide license in describing the illusions of their own distempered sight. There are those, now, I do not doubt, who, determined to retain the fond fancy of a golden pristine age, will turn with resentment from a matter-of-fact writer like Clement, as if he did them a personal wrong in simply speaking the truth. For my own part, I can find no pleasure in any thing, bearing upon religion, but the plainest truth. And the plain truth, in relation to the early church, is just to this effect—That, although possessing, incidentally, certain prerogatives which render its testimony and judgment, on particular points, peculiarly important, it can advance no extraordinary claim to reverence, on the supposed plea of having possessed superior wisdom, discretion, or purity. And farther, I would be bold to express my belief that, if we exclude certain crazed fanatics of our times, the least esteemed community of orthodox Christians, among us—which ever that may be, if taken in the mass, and fairly measured against the church catholic of the first two centuries, would outweigh it decisively in each of these qualities; I mean, in Christian wisdom, in common discretion, in purity of manners, and in purity of creed. Nay, I

am strongly tempted to think that, if our Oxford divines themselves, and those who are used to take the law from their lips, and to learn church history at their feet, could but be blindfolded (if any such precaution, in their case were needed) and were fairly set down in the midst of the pristine church, at Carthage, or at Alexandria, or at Rome, or at Antioch, they would be fain to make their escape, with all possible celerity, toward their own times and country; and that thenceforward we should never hear another word from them about “venerable antiquity,” or the holy catholic church of the first ages. The effect of such a trip would, I think, resemble that produced sometimes by crossing the Atlantic, upon those who have set out, westward, excellent liberals, and have returned eastward, as excellent Tories.

There is one very simple illusion, or as one might call it, chronological fallacy, which it may seem almost an affront to common sense to mention; and yet I believe that more than a few are set wrong a fifty years or even more, in their notions of Christian history in this very way. For instance, when the second century is spoken of, one may, without thought, admit the supposition that a period of something like *two* hundred years, dating from the death of the apostles, is intended; whereas the notions or practices referred to, as belonging to the second century, may have had place within the distance of *one* hundred years from the cessation of the apostolic influence; and in fact they may be as ancient as any thing concerning which we are to derive our information from uninspired Christian writers. It is thus with the practices with which we are now concerned; and which are as ancient as any other characteristics of ancient Christianity.

I have referred, above, to Justin's statement concerning those who had dedicated themselves to the Lord, at a time when some of the apostles yet survived. Ignatius clearly alludes to the same practice as then prevalent; and he does so in terms indicative of the false and inflated sentiments which have in all ages been the attendants of this ill-considered endeavour to be "religious over much." "If any one (Epist. ad Polycarp.) be able to abide in purity (celibacy) in honour of the Lord's flesh, let him do so without boasting. If he boast, he is lost; or if he consider himself, on that account, to be more than the bishop, he perishes."

It is not surmising too much to assume it as probable that, among the means resorted to by the self-willed and contumacious, for resisting the episcopal authority, and of which Ignatius was so zealous an advocate, this setting up for a fakir, was one, and perhaps it was one of the most efficacious. See, on this point, the second section of the epistle to Hero. And as, at a later time, the confessors found themselves possessed of a credit with the populace which enabled them to defy legitimate authority, so, from the very first, whoever could be stark monk enough to make himself the idol of the rabble, became a leader of faction, and overawed the bishops and presbyters. Unhappily these, and the long series of writers, favoured, instead of wisely repressing, the false piety that subverted order as well as morals. I would not, however, omit to mention that Ignatius (ad Heron.) fully and clearly vindicates matrimony, and honours woman.

To the same purport, as in the passage cited above, the same father, (to the Philippians) but in terms just so far diversified as to carry a little more historical meaning, says, after exhorting husbands and wives to love each other, "If any lead the life of purity (that is, pre-

serve virginity) or if any one practise continence (that is, either withdraw from husband or wife, or, being widowed, avoid a second marriage) let him not be lifted up in mind, lest he lose *the* reward." Much is comprehended in these few words; as, first, and in general, a clear allusion to the *then* frequent practice of religious celibacy; next, there is a note of the distinction which we find carefully observed, between the pure, and the continent—terms equivalent, in ecclesiastical import, to the correlatives—nun, and widow, the former occupying a loftier place of honour than the latter. In another place he says—"Guard the virgins, as Christ's jewels," an epithet often afterward applied to them. Ignatius also uses, and perhaps was the author of that favourite phrase, applied to nuns—"the espoused to Christ." Next, there is the necessary caution against that pride which had been found to attend this species of church nobility; and lastly, there is the reference to that definite and peculiar celestial remuneration which was to attach to the band of virgins. Each of these indications, minute as they may seem, is pertinent to an historical inquiry.

The Apostolic Constitutions are manifestly a very early, although a spurious work; and it was evidently put together with the intention of its passing as the production of the apostolic age. So far it may safely be cited as good evidence in our present inquiry; and here we find fully admitted that general feeling of the ancient church upon which Tertullian labours to build a still loftier doctrine. I mean, the feeling that, although a priest *might* be a married man, yet that a degree of degradation attached to that condition, so as that, either to marry after ordination, or to have contracted a second marriage, was a total disqualification for the sacred office; see, on this point, the seventeenth chapter of the sixth

book; and this same canon exhibits the bondage of early Christians to the false principle which puts forms for substances; for, in allowing to the inferior church officers, the singers, readers, and door keepers, a little more license, it assumes first, the absurdity that there could be degrees of holiness, corresponding to the degrees of ecclesiastical dignity; and then, that the circumstance of being married, or single, or the having married once, or twice, had any thing whatever to do with a Christian's real sanctity. This twofold delusion, despicable as we must think it, stands forward as the broad characteristic of the ancient church catholic. I remember, in fact, no one but Clement of Alexandria, for whom an exemption can be claimed in this respect; nor even for him in all instances. These Constitutions name also the two choirs, of nuns and widows, as then permanently constituted. The former, however, are warned against professing rashly; and it is forbidden to employ any means of compulsion in inducing them to do so;—"for, in regard to the virgin state, we have no commandment (as from the Lord) only that, once having professed, such should adorn their profession."

The passages that have been cited, and, if these were not enough, three times the quantity are at hand to be produced, may, I think, be accepted as warranting what is affirmed in my second proposition, concerning the high antiquity of the notions, and of the accompanying practices, of religious celibacy. That is to say, this institute, with all that involves, is as ancient as any other element of ancient Christianity, and may claim from us as much regard as is urged in behalf of any other practice or opinion, on the ground of ANTIQUITY. In one word, religious celibacy comes fully under the *QUOD SEMPER*, or first condition of Vincent's rule of catholicity.

## THE THIRD AND FOURTH PROPOSITIONS, AND CONCLUDING REMARKS.

WE have next to look at the—*quod ubique*, and the—*quod ab omnibus*, in relation to our present subject; that is to show, that this principle, and these practices, belonged to, and were thoroughly approved of by, the ancient church, throughout its whole extent, so far as our historical materials enable us to ascertain the fact; and were explicitly maintained and promoted by ALL the great leaders of the religious commonwealth; and were excepted against by only here and there a solitary voice, which was almost instantly stifled by orthodox zeal.

However warmly the ulterior inferences I have in view may be resented by some, I am sure *they* are not the persons who will come forward to call in question the facts which I here assume. On this ground, therefore, the actual citation of proofs might be waived. But, in truth, as the establishment and illustration of my fifth thesis, and which it is of the utmost importance to make good, will demand a reference, more or less copious, to the extant works of almost every ecclesiastical writer of the first seven centuries, these numerous citations will, of course, embrace whatever would have offered itself as proper for establishing the third and fourth propositions. We may, therefore, save ourselves the labour of going through a mass of duplicate evidences; and I therefore, in this place, and once for all, request you to bear in mind that, if either of these propositions were disputed, an ample confirmation of them is to be found in the series of quotations which are to sustain the fifth.



For the present, then, I assume it as incontrovertible, whatever consequences it may be found to involve, that the doctrine and custom of religious celibacy was an article of ancient Christianity, accepted and followed—semper, ubique, et ab omnibus.

But at this point I am anxious to anticipate, and to preclude, some probable exceptions, by means of which it may be attempted to evade the general inferences I have in view. As, for example, there may be those, although it is certainly not the well-informed, who will say, “‘This notion, and these practices, so far as they might be culpable, were incidental merely, and may easily be separated from the general scheme of ancient Christianity, leaving us free to admire and imitate all the rest.” Now, I must ask, what are the senses in which, in such a connexion, we might fairly apply the term *incidental*, to an error of opinion and practice? The word may mean, then, a notion or practice which gained credit only for awhile, and which, having had its day, was forgotten; or, at most, rose to the surface only at remote intervals. But in no such sense as this was the doctrine of religious celibacy incidental to the ancient church; for there is no period, ever so short, that can be named, during which it lost its place or importance: on the contrary, it steadily held its—we may significantly say—*proud* pre-eminence, from the earliest times to the latest.

Or, *incidental* may mean, in this instance, that, while some one or two of the ancient churches warmly embraced the notion, and carried their admiration of it to an extravagant length, in other departments of the Christian commonwealth, it was little heard of, or was coolly regarded, or actually discountenanced. But in this sense

also the term is excluded, inasmuch as the churches of the east, and the west, the north, and the south, vied with each other in their zeal on this ground; or, if all looked toward the east—Syria and Egypt—for bright patterns of excellence, in this walk of virtue, all showed substantially the same devotion in ascending the arduous path; and many were the pious pilgrimages, of some of which the memorials are on our shelves, that were undertaken expressly for the purpose of importing, into the remotest Christian regions, the spirit and usages of this very institute.

Or, again, the term *incidental*, thus employed, might mean, an opinion or institution, zealously promoted by a party or faction, within or without the church; but by no means favoured by its authorities, or by the mass of its members. In no such sense then can we here employ the word. From age to age it was the church authorities, it was the most illustrious teachers and writers, that made it their glory to magnify this institute, and to extend its influence: nor were they, on this subject, listened to unwillingly by the people.

There is, however, one other sense of the word, in which, if it could in fact be applied to the subject, it might be held either to loosen or to lessen the force of the serious inferences I am intending. That is to say, if it could be affirmed that the theological principle, and the moral sentiment, imbodyed in the institute of religious celibacy, are easily separable from the theological, ethical, and ecclesiastical system of which it was an adjunct; and that it had therewith no such intimate and occult alliances as would render a disjunction difficult, or such as must affect the whole: then, indeed, it would only remain for us to perform the desirable amputation, and so

to restore health and symmetry to the body. But that no such allegation can be sustained, I shall be able incontestably to prove; and, in doing so, shall, as I confidently hope, succeed in affording the most convincing proof of the fact, that the Christian teachers, *from the very first*, and, while they held the formal elements of truth, or, as it is called, orthodoxy, grossly misapprehended the genius and purport of Christianity; and, as a consequence of this misapprehension, turned out of its course every Christian institute, and put on a false foundation every principle of virtue; and thus transmuted the Christian system into a scheme which could find no other fixed form than that of a foul superstition, and a lawless despotism.

I think, moreover, that the intimacy of the connexion between the institute in question and the other elements of ancient Christianity will so appear as will serve to clear up the practical embarrassments that have attached, in modern times, to every endeavour to realize these, apart from the other. Such imitations have always demanded some foreign aid to keep them in existence, and can subsist only so long as they may chance to derive vital force and nutriment from an extraneous body. In this conviction I can think nothing else probable but that, should the scheme of doctrine maintained in the Oxford Tracts become, by any means, actually detached from its present hold on the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of the country, and be exempted also from restraint;—in a word, fairly left to itself, and allowed to follow its innate affinities, it would instantly resume its severed element—the ancient doctrine and practice of celestial virginity. It may seem utterly incredible that Englishmen, and those who have actually stood in the radiance of scriptural illumination, and have read the

lessons of history, should yield themselves to an illusion such as this. To me, all this appears far from incredible; and, unless a timely caution, and the fear of suddenly forfeiting the allegiance of numbers, should avail to retard the course of things, it is what I think may be daily looked for.

But we must meet, in all its strength, a startling difficulty, which will no doubt have occurred to some, in reflecting upon the facts to which, in the preceding pages, I have made reference. Granting, as we must grant, that the institute of celibacy, when it reached its mature state, and involving, as it necessarily did, an open contravention of the apostolic precepts concerning the clergy, was a great and mischievous error, yet did it not take its rise from the language of our Lord himself, and of Paul; and does not the conduct of those who, in the first instance, devoted themselves to celibacy, at the least stand excused from reprehension, if it be not fully justified by the passages of scripture usually cited in this instance?

Now I wish the difficulty thus stated to be felt in its utmost force. Let it be granted, then, that the entire scheme, with all its consequences, and which have constituted, in the end, the vital elements of the Romish superstition, took its commencement, and in a manner barely culpable, from certain expressions (albeit misunderstood) of the inspired writings. Now, this admission, which I think must in candour be made, gives us precisely that connecting link, which renders the instance available for the purpose, with a view to which it has been here adduced. Unless it had appeared that the principle and practice of religious celibacy took their start from the scriptures themselves, neither that high

antiquity which we have proved to attach to them, nor the universal testimony of the church in their favour, would have warranted the use I am making of the instance, as closely analogous to the several points now controverted.

But as it stands, there is absolutely nothing that can be advanced in favour of any one of those now disputed articles of belief, or of usage, which may not, and to the whole extent of the terms, be pleaded in behalf of the institute of celibacy. Are they immemorially ancient?—so is this. Did they receive the assent and warm approbation of the long series of Christian doctors?—so did this. Were they acknowledged and followed out in the practices of the apostolic churches, throughout the world?—so was this; and finally, may they pretend to a colour of support, or more than a colour, from some few expressions of the inspired writers?—so may this. I challenge contradiction in affirming that the monastic system, and the celibacy of the clergy, rest on ground as wide and as solid as that which sustains any one of the doctrines or practices which it has been the peculiar intention of the Oxford Tracts to recommend.

There are, as I presume, very few protestants (it is hard to imagine how there can be one such) or any clergyman of the protestant church, who would profess to think the monkish institute, abstractedly, good, and the celibacy of the clergy a wise and useful provision; or who would wish to see this system, and the notions and sentiments that attend it, brought back upon us, in any form whatever. Although it may have been fondly embraced—semper, ubique, et ab omnibus—it is to be rejected; and although it may have its texts of scripture at hand, nevertheless it is to be rejected. In *this* instance we claim exemption, not merely from the usurpations

and corruptions of Rome, but from the unbroken and loudly uttered authority of the holy catholic church; and when it was in its (supposed) condition of pristine purity. Nor is this all; for we go on calmly to consider the real import of the passages which have been made to bear the weight of this system; and we compare such single passages with the plain import of other passages; and with the general purport of the inspired writings; and we judge of them also by considering the genius and spirit of the gospel; and having done so, we find no real difficulty remaining; but only a very simple case, demanding, just what is demanded always, namely, the exercise of sound good sense and discrimination.

But, alas! the leaders of the early church would exercise no such discrimination: they would give place to no dictates of calm good sense; and having surrendered themselves to a headlong enthusiasm, the opposing import of other portions of scripture was totally overlooked, or perversely evaded; and they followed whither they were led, and they led after them the church universal, until altogether plunged into an abyss of error and of corruption.

Now the course which *every* protestant (as I assume) is absolutely compelled to take, when he is called upon to consider the Romish celibate; namely, to hold in abeyance his reverence for antiquity, and to claim exemption from the decisions of the holy catholic church, and to examine, with care and calmness, the real purport of scripture, taken at large, is neither more nor less than what every sober-minded protestant is, as I think, bound to do, when challenged to yield himself to certain other notions and practices, characteristic of ancient Christianity. To do any thing less than this, is virtually to surrender all that stands between us and the mon-

strous superstitions of the times of Gregory the Great. We may not, perhaps, become Romanists; but we must, in all consistency, become such as that it were better to accept Romanism, whole and entire. A well-defined and authoritative system (involving elements of evil) is, I think, much to be preferred to an undefined system, involving the very same elements; and I firmly believe that it were, on the whole, better for a community to submit itself, without conditions, to the well-known tridentine popery, than to take up the Christianity of Ambrose, Basil, Gregory Nyssen, Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine. Personally, I would rather be a Christian after the fashion of Pascal and Arnold, than after that of Cyprian or Macarius; but how much rather after that of our own protestant worthies, who, although entangled by fond notions about the ancient church, were, in heart, and in the main bent of their lives, followers, not of the fathers, but of the apostles!

The great men I have referred to—the glory of our English protestantism, were, it must be confessed, entangled with ancient Christianity; and they were so in a degree that has involved the church they founded in some serious difficulties: but we may not boast over them; for we are ourselves still labouring with the conceit concerning—venerable antiquity, and the purity of the early ages; nor will it be very soon that this inveterate prejudice will be altogether and finally broken up. Few will either undergo the labour of becoming familiarly conversant with the documents of Christian antiquity, or will severely analyze the notions which this prejudice imbodyes.

In concluding this tract, I beg permission to offer some assistance in instituting this necessary analysis; or rather, plainly to state the case which this prejudice in-

volves: and moreover, will view it, as from the position of those who religiously receive the doctrines of the Oxford Tracts.

The writers of these tracts have, and, as I must humbly think, in a very seasonable as well as able manner, protested against the modern phase of infidelity, called—rationalism, and which, if followed out consistently, can come to nothing but, first unitarianism, and then deism, and then pantheism, and then the purest atheism. They may have taken an unfair advantage of the incautious language of some well meaning writers; but yet have, as I think, truly exhibited the inner quality, and the necessary tendency of this modern scheme of theology. Moreover, they have not merely protested against this prevailing illusion, but have admitted the fact that it has actually become the type of our modern protestant Christianity; and also, have intimated their fears that, unless vigorously repelled, it will, ere long, embrace the protestant world, a few remonstrants excepted, and propel all down the slippery descent toward universal unbelief.

Now let us for a moment suppose that nearly as much as this, melancholy as is the idea, had actually come about in our times; and that (the few remonstrants excepted) there was no other form of genuine belief extant in the world than that of the Romish Church, which, as is admitted, is laden with corruptions. In such a case then, nor does it appear why we may not imagine it as possible, or even as probable, there would prevail, notwithstanding our Lord's promise to be with his church always, an almost universal defection or apostacy—on the one side toward atheism, on the other side toward superstition.



We suppose then such an apostacy to have had place, in the nineteenth century. What then stands in the way of our supposing an analogous defection to have belonged to some preceding age, or even to the first, or to the second? If we say—the extant historical evidence contradicts any such supposition, this is the very point in dispute; nor can I allow the question to be begged so easily. But what general principle is there which forbids our admitting such a proposition? Not any vague belief concerning the divine benevolence toward mankind; for this is unchangeable; and, if it must have prevented an apostacy in the first century, must also have prevented it in the nineteenth; nor by the same rule, can we admit any other contravening principle, as applicable to the one period, which does not equally apply to the other.

Among the predictive promises, or the official instructions addressed by our Lord to his personal followers, some, very clearly, were applicable to themselves individually, and ceased to have any operation or efficacy, at the moment when the functions of these individuals were fulfilled. Other of these promises, not less clearly, are the property of his servants and ministers, in all ages. But is there so much as one of these words of power and comfort, which, while it passes onward beyond the individuals who first heard it, yet does *not* pass forward for the benefit of the church universal; but stays within certain limits, as, for example, the limits of the first, the second, or the third centuries? In other words, was there any promise of guidance, or assistance, or of exemption from error, granted to the ancient church, other than what belongs, in its fullest force, to the church of all ages? I presume it cannot be pretended that the

ancient church had any such advantage over ourselves; or that it was in any sense whatever the occupier of a peculiar benefit "on lease," or "for a term of years."

But if not, then the question concerning the actual condition of the ancient church is entirely open; and after we have dispelled from our minds, the fancy, really childish as it is, about "antiquity," and a "golden age," we then turn, with perfect coolness, to the documents in our possession, and submit its pretensions to a candid, but unsparing analysis.

If the ancient church was benefited by no interpositions more direct than those which, in every age, have maintained truth and piety from utter extinction, then we must believe, and must expect to find our belief verified, that, in coming, as it did, suddenly, and without the aid of any experience, into contact with the most prodigious evils, it at once imparted an impulse, and admitted an impulse:—or, as we say in mechanics, action and reaction, were equal. Did Christianity encounter the rigid, punctilious, and self-righteous pietism of the Jew? In the collision the Judaism of those who, of the Hebrew race, embraced the gospel, gave way to some extent, and was Christianized; and, in return, Christianity at large was Judaized. Or, did it meet the vain philosophy and Platonism of the speculative Greek? it did so; and Platonism and Christianity thenceforward were intimately commingled. Did it impinge upon human society, then debauched in a most extraordinary degree? it did so, and, with a violent revulsion, it distorted its own principles of virtue, in an equally extreme degree. Finally, did the religion of the New Testament, rational, spiritual, pure, confront the degrading superstitions of the pagan world? it did so, and on this ground, while it bore a

clear testimony against the doctrine and the flagitious practices of polytheism, yet merged itself in the boundless superstition of the times, as a system of fear, spiritual servitude, formality, scrupulosity, visible magnificence of worship, mystery, artifice, and juggle. Such were the antagonist principles, in contending with each of which the holy religion of Christ triumphed in each instance, and in each was trampled upon; conquered and was conquered;—diffused light and health, and admitted darkness and corruption.

Nevertheless its utter extinction was prevented:—the external means of its regeneration were preserved, and the times of regeneration actually came. Forgetting the things that were behind, and returning once again to the long buried scriptures, the church has regained its vitality; and, amid a thousand errors, lives, and prepares herself to occupy the world, for her Lord.

But if there be only the most general verisimilitude in the representations above given, in what light are we to view the incredibly strange endeavour to bring back, upon the modern and revived church, the very notions and practices that were the consequences of the struggles of the ancient church with its antagonists? Shall we then indeed be led to reverence and imitate the very articles that are to be pointed out to as marking the admixture of Christianity with Judaism—with Greek philosophy—with pagan corruption—and with polytheistic superstition? Shall we part from our religion, as we find it fixed in the scriptures, and madly follow it, in its first fearful plunge into the bottomless gulf of spiritual darkness and moral pollution? If the phrase—Christian antiquity, can be allowed to convey no idea of pre-eminence beyond what the strict rules of historical logic may,

under all the circumstances, allow to it, then, manifestly, the inexperienced and convulsive struggles of the infant religion with its formidable foes, how well soever they may merit our admiration, are less likely than almost any other cycle of religious events, to secure our cool approval, or to command our submission, as if *then* a pattern of wisdom and order were to be given to the church of all ages.

A religious mind, after having contemplated the changing scene of human error and folly, from age to age, and after admitting, for awhile, some painful sentiments of reprehension, in thinking of the authors and promoters of such errors, gladly turns, first, to those many circumstances of extenuation which may be advanced in behalf of these mistaken men, and which shall allow us, notwithstanding, to think of many of them as brethren in Christ. But then, such a mind seeks a farther solace, in tracing, dimly perhaps, the apparent purposes of Him who, even when most he allows evil to have its course, yet sways the general movement, and urges forward still the development of his mighty scheme of universal government. A religious mind holds to the belief that He who worketh, in all things, according to the counsel of his own will, has, in every age, been evolving a settled plan; whether or not it may be intelligible to the human mind.

Now, in this belief, we are led at once to look, if not with more complacency, at least with less distress, upon particular forms of what we must still regard as capital error, and to think of them as, in some way, temporary adaptations of truth to the circumstances of mankind at such or such a period: in this light considered, the sharpness of our displeasure is a little broken down, and our stern condemnation tempered. There is a real,

and, as I think, a legitimate consolation to be derived from considerations of this sort. But then the very principle whence it is derived, namely, that the Lord has been giving place to accommodations, or appliances of this sort, from age to age, thereby effecting a slow, and often retarded progression, in advancing the religious condition of mankind, this principle, I say, implies an unutterable absurdity in the endeavour, made at any *advanced* period of the great scheme, to revert to a position long ago passed by and obsolete.

If we comfort ourselves with the thought that a vast scheme has been, from the first, in movement, the end of which shall be the universal triumph of truth and peace, then must we be thinking of any thing rather than of a turning back upon the great road of the church's progress, and of forfeiting the toils of centuries; or, in other words, of rendering ourselves, by imitation, such as that which, when it actually existed, was but a low alloy of truth, permitted or winked at for awhile. And if, in any sense, we allow ourselves to be called protestants, our profession must imply the acknowledgment that the great scheme of religious development has, during the last three centuries, made a conspicuous demonstration, and has set us forward far, very far, in advance of the position occupied by our predecessors of the fourteenth century. Who must not acknowledge this? What impiety to deny it!

And what have been the characteristics of this alleged modern advancement? Not the devising of *novelties* in religion, as something that might be added to the apostolic model; not the boldly taking the scriptures in hand, with the endeavour to cut them down to our liking, or to cast them in the mould of our modern philosophy. This has not been the course we have taken; but the

very reverse, namely, an intent reference to the apostolic authority, in all things, and an almost overwrought anxiety to know and to embody the very form of apostolic Christianity. Whereas now, such being the character and specific quality of the course of events in the church, in modern times, the character and the quality of the course of events in the ancient church was the very contrary; namely, a perpetual superposition of materials upon the apostolic foundation, at the capricious bidding of superstition, enthusiasm, fanaticism, spiritual tyranny, craft, and hypocrisy: such, I say, being, when the two periods are broadly regarded, the distinctive and contrasted features of each, no powers of language come to one's aid when one would fain express the sense one has of the folly of the endeavour, to say nothing of its audacity, to induce the church to relinquish its own hopeful characteristic, and to put on that of the long gone-by period of ignorance, decay, delusion! The Lord himself disappoint any such mad attempt!

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#### NOTE.

Lest it should be thought that in affirming pp. 31 and 184, the Nicene church to have been the mark at which our English reformers aimed, and the model of our church polity, I subjoin an extract from Brett, who is adduced by the Oxford Tract writers among their witnesses to the soundness of their principles, and as speaking the sense of the English church.

“As the church never was so strictly and firmly united as in the primitive times, and particularly about the time when the Council of Nice was celebrated; so, if ever the church be as firmly united again, it must be upon the same principles and practices. The church never was united but upon the principles and usages which obtained at the time of the Nicene Council; and we have, therefore, good reason to believe that it never can be united but upon those principles and usages.”

## INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS.

THE course of argument open before us, in the present instance, is straightforward, and the inference it involves is clear and conclusive. I have undertaken to show, by numerous and varied citations, not merely that the doctrine and practice of religious celibacy occupied a prominent place in the theological and ecclesiastical system of the Nicene church, a fact hardly needing to be proved, but that the institute was intimately and inseparably connected with, and that it powerfully affected, every other element of ancient Christianity, whether dogmatic, ethical, ritual, or hierarchical. If, then, such a connexion can be proved to have existed, we must either adopt its notions and usages in this essential particular, or must surrender very much of our veneration for ancient Christianity.

The fact of the intimate connexion here affirmed is really not less obvious or easily established than that of the mere existence of the institute itself. Modern church writers may, indeed, have thrown the unpleasing subject into the back-ground, and so it may have attracted much less attention than its importance deserves; but we no sooner open the patristic folios than we find it confronting us, on almost every page; and if either the general averment were questioned, or the bearing of the celibate upon every part of ancient Christianity were denied, volumes might be filled with the proofs that attest the one as well as the other. Both these facts must be admitted

by all unprejudiced inquirers who shall take the pains to look into the extant remains of Christian antiquity.

But of what sort, then, was the influence which flowed from the notions and usages of the ancient celibacy? Was it beneficial and salubrious, or pernicious; or was it neither the one nor the other—an innoxious ingredient, which might have been withdrawn without either sensible advantage or serious detriment? This question we have the means of bringing to a satisfactory conclusion; or even if the present writer should fail to effect as much as he has undertaken, some other, more competent to the task, would not fail to discern, and to make good use of, so obvious an occasion for winning a signal triumph in a controversy of the highest moment.

There are those who are now telling the Christian world (in so many words, as well as by frequent implications) that the doctrine and discipline which were promulgated in a crude form by the apostles, reached a mature state about the time of the council of Nice; and that it is in the writings of the great divines of that age that we are to look for the finished model of our religion. It is, as I think, a most auspicious circumstance that those who entertain a belief such as this, have done themselves the honour, and the church at large the service, of making themselves so clearly understood; and that thus a multifarious controversy is reduced within narrow limits, and is submitted to the rules of a plain historical inquiry. Only let the Oxford writers adhere to this profession of their faith, and we may hope to see the controversy reach its issue at no distant period.

But then these same writers will feel themselves compelled to dispose of the critical subject of the ancient celibacy in some more definite manner than can be effected by the means of a few timid and ambiguous allu-



sions to it; for it will not long be permitted to the champions and admirers of ancient Christianity to evade a theme which touches, at a hundred points, the general scheme of doctrines and practices they are labouring to recommend. These divines cannot but feel that the credit so generally given them for religious integrity as ministers of the gospel, and for honourable ingenuousness as controvertists, imposes upon them the necessity of frankly stating what their belief is on this cardinal point.

Either the ancient celibacy, with its allied asceticism, was abstractedly good, and its influence was holy and elevating; or the reverse was true; or it was neither the one nor the other, and altogether indifferent; or it was partly beneficial, and partly pernicious. Something definite must needs be said on the subject, and a choice must be made among these suppositions, before we can be free either to accept, or to reject, the Nicene model of Christianity. As well attempt to recommend Mahomet's scheme of religion, and yet say nothing of his doctrine of paradise, as go about to restore ancient Christianity, leaving in the shade—its celibate and its monkery.

The Oxford Tract writers have, no doubt, maturely considered this untoward subject, and will in due time declare themselves plainly concerning it; nor does it appear how they can do otherwise than boldly take up the only position which their pledged adherence to the Nicene church leaves open to them, and toward which indeed they have already opened the way.\* Mean while

\* Dr. Pusey's Letter to the Bishop of Oxford, assumes, as I shall hereafter show, the very ground on which the ancient celibacy rested.

I invite the reader's attention to a mass and series of proofs which, as I think, must exclude every supposition but one, concerning the influence of the notions in question, and the real quality of the religious and ecclesiastical system to which they attached.

The actual influence of particular religious opinions or practices, is not always found to be such as, at a first glance, we might have expected: often it is the very reverse; and when, at length, we discover the error into which we had fallen, we are not unlikely to admit, too hastily, a favourable impression of that which we perceive not to have produced the sort of bad consequences we had hitherto attributed to it. This is a pitfall always to be kept in view. Multitudes have relapsed into popery, and not a few have fallen into Socinianism, simply because, in becoming better acquainted with the one or the other, their original and vague notions concerning it had not been realized.

With the hope then of precluding any such accident in the present instance, and also, in order to exhibit, as plainly as possible, what I mean by the diffused and occult influence which an opinion or practice may extend over the system it belongs to, I will adduce what may seem an extreme example, and yet it is a pertinent one.

—Let it be supposed then that we have in view some religious national system of which the practice of infanticide is a part, and is not merely tolerated, but authorized, and encouraged, commended, extolled, and practised. Now none can imagine that such a doctrine, and such a practice, would be found to have taken no hold of a people's manners and sentiments; rather we should be inclined, without hesitation or due inquiry, to attribute a gross and savage ferocity to a community disgraced by so foul a stain. But herein we might find ourselves al-

together in error, and perhaps, when actually convinced of our mistake, we might almost begin to ask if the practice itself were really so abominable as we had been used to think it.

But a better informed, and a more cautious inquirer, adhering steadily to the immoveable principles of morality, nor ever skeptical concerning the constant elements of human nature, would patiently look about, or would look more narrowly into the system, and beneath its surface, for what he must at length discover,—namely, the deep working, and the universally diffused poison, of this horrid usage. How lofty soever, in style and mien, such a people may seem, and whatever heroism may have often connected itself with the atrocious practice, yet the philosophical moralist, sure of his principles, will go on with his analysis of the people's sentiments and condition, until he has laid bare the ulcer that is at their heart.

And such an analysis would, in the end, make it certain, that there was no single opinion, however apparently insulated, no characteristic of the national temper, no element of the private and domestic economy, actually exempt from the contamination of this cancerous tumour. Within this infanticide-community mothers might perhaps exhibit the highest intensity of the parental affection, and might be seen, to-day submitting to the most extreme privations for the sake of the very babe which, to-morrow, they will coolly offer to the murderous knife of a fanatical priest. There might seem to be no want of moral energy among such a people; and yet assuredly there would be a total want of genuine virtue: and if their morals were vitiated and extravagant, of what sort would be their religion? Nothing better, we may be certain, than a grim demonology—a

worship, not of the author of the human system, but of its destroyer.

Whenever a religious practice, plainly interfering with the common principles of human nature, is not found to be such, in its immediate influence, as we might have supposed, it will be because itself springs from some much deeper or higher principle, touching the human mind more profoundly, and therefore, in so far as it has its origin more toward the centre, it affects every thing else in the heart, temper, behaviour, and understanding. In such a case then, the particular practice in question may either be assumed as a general characteristic of the moral system of which it is a part, or it may be employed more exactly, as a clue, serving us when we would make our way through the intricacies of that system.

It is precisely thus with the celibacy of the ancient church: far too deeply did it touch the most potent impulses of human nature to be in itself of small account. Whatever had the power so to thwart and trample upon the animal and moral constitution, had a power too, to disturb every thing else within the bosom, or the mind of man; nor could it fail to exert this power. It were idle to speak of one who goes about with iron spikes in his shoes, or with a festering hook in his ribs, as if he were, in other respects, just like his fellows; or as if he could retain his hold of the common principles of good sense, and of the gentle domestic affections:—such a being is not in truth a man. The fakir may smile, and talk softly, but all his notions and feelings are such as are burned into the soul by the indwelling of a fiend. Whatever it is, whether doctrine or social usage, that lords it over our physical and moral constitution, will be sure to play the master among things so much more flimsy and plia-

ble as are theological dogmas and ecclesiastical constitutions. What! shall a man's heart be grasped, and wrenched, and torn out of its place by a force which yet will not, or cannot mould and twist the fleeting creations of the brain? This will never happen, or never if the laws of moral and intellectual dynamics are at all to be calculated upon. Craze a man in his affections, and you need not set about to craze him in his understanding; for it is done already. Such a one sees every thing in false proportions, misjudges all magnitudes, misplaces the major and minor of every proposition, and has become a universal sophist, not indeed by ill intention, or want of reason; but by the cruel misfortune that has disjoined his moral symmetry.

This is felt by every sound-minded reader in looking into the ancient church writers:—it is not an error in one place, and an inconclusive argument in another; but it is generally a distorted condition of the moral and religious nature: every thing is as if it had been on the rack. Often one is perplexed in the endeavour to trace to its true cause this derangement of notions, of which, nevertheless, one is constantly and painfully conscious; but on such occasions it is seldom that the mystery is not cleared up by a recurrence to the leading fact of the terrible violence that had been done to human nature by the ascetic system. Here is the fatal secret of very many of the illusions, and the exaggerations, and the corruptions, of ancient Christianity.

The instance I have just adduced, by the way of illustration, namely, the practice of infanticide, I have admitted to be an extreme one; and it is so if we think of its direct *criminality*, as compared with the vow of virginity. But in any other point of view, it is by no means extreme; and I think that those who are the best

acquainted with human nature, will be ready to admit that the one practice indicates the presence of as great a *power of disturbance* (to borrow a phrase) as does the other. In other words, that the practice of celibacy implies as profound, and extensive a derangement of the moral system, as does the practice of infanticide:—the single act was indeed more flagitious; but the motive prompting it was not of a more sovereign kind, nor less likely to shed its influence far and wide.

Now whatever recommendations of fervour or of sephatic heroism might be found to attach to a community practising infanticide, on pretext of religion, it is not conceivable that we should ever consent to go to such a society to be schooled, either in theology, or in morals, or that we should think it safe to borrow from so tainted a source any order of sentiments; for we should feel that, whether or not the poison had always broke out on the surface, every thing thence derived must, in fact, be liable to the gravest suspicions. But the same caution ought not the less to be regarded when it is proposed, as now, by the Oxford divines, to borrow largely and freely from the plague-stricken Nicene church. What can be more unsafe than to listen submissively to those who, themselves, had undergone the moral and the theological mischief, or violence, connected with the celibate doctrine and practice—which practice had already become loaded with the most extreme and offensive abuses! If we dare not take lessons from teachers applauding and practising infanticide, how is it that we can dare to listen to those who applauded and practised a custom which, though not in the same sense a crime, could not have become general, without involving an equal, or even a greater distortion both of natural sentiments and of theoretic principles?

The real history of the ancient church (I do not mean so much of this history as may meet the eye in modern works) plainly shows, not only that the worst enormities (sometimes) and the wildest extravagances (often) attached to the ascetic life, but also, and which is a fact of more significance, that dogmas and modes of devotional sentiment fitting such excesses, were adopted, or were fallen into, by even the wisest and best of the theologians of the times. What violence then must be done to every known principle of analogy, in the moral world, if, after all, it is to be believed that the Nicene church had reached, in doctrine, in ritual, in discipline, and in devotional temper, just that palmy state, bordering on absolute perfection, which should render it the proper object of our veneration and imitation! What may not be true if this be true?

But even if so utterly incredible a supposition were admitted, we should not have made our way through the difficulties of the case, and these are to be surmounted only by a procedure from which, as I suppose, all but a very few would recoil with horror. It is well to look these farther difficulties fully in the face.—The Nicene church-system was ONE SYSTEM, firmly compacted, compacted by energies, within, and by pressure from without: nothing hung loose upon it; nothing was out of harmony within it. We totally deceive ourselves if, carrying our modern notions up to those ages, we think that the Christian community in the fourth century was like the modern religious mass—a heterogeneous aggregate, owing submission to no central power, wrought upon from within, and from without, by a thousand forces, wholly independent one of the other, giving the freest scope to individual impulses, and therefore presenting

many glaring instances of anomaly, and contrariety. The ancient church wore no such many-coloured cloak; and how much soever it might be distracted by particular controversies, it was very nearly of one temper, as to its moral ingredients. This assertion might receive curious illustration by a collation of the style of men the most opposed on points of theology. But it must suffice here to advert to the fact, which will not be disputed, of the homogeneity of the religious system, within the boundaries of the orthodox church, to say no more. What then is the practical inference thence resulting? Plainly this, that, if we go a borrowing from this Nicene church, piece-meal, taking out of it what we may fancy, and leaving behind that which in fact was woven with it, and formed one texture, we shall come off miserably disappointed in the result; for what we have obtained is not, in fact, what we were grasping at.

As well append an amputated limb to a living body, as attempt to set certain detached portions of ancient Christianity agoing, in combination with our modern church notions and practices. What we have adopted will putrefy, but it will not walk. Yielding ourselves to a fond veneration of antiquity, we may ape the sanctimonious carriage of the Nicene age, we may imitate, and punctiliously enact, the sacramental superstitions, as got up in the porphyry-columned basilics of Constantinople, Antioch, and Rome; we may talk in the big phrases of Chrysostom, Gregory, and Ambrose, of the "tremendous mysteries" of the church, and may exhaust all powers of language in setting forth the efficacy and dignity of the sacerdotal functions:—we may strut and swell, we may rave, or be sullen, as we please; but all will not do—our copy



indeed is perfect to a hair, but there is no life or motion in it. The Nicene church, with its pomps and awful rites, embraced a mystery, tremendous indeed—a motive and a doctrine which, after trampling, in tyrannous mockery, upon the most potent forces of human nature, lent its superfluous power to whatever else might seem to need animation or support.

Idle then is the industry of our modern restorers of antiquity, who are copying the Nicene church, but yet scruple (or scruple at present) to adopt the master element of the system—the heart of the body—the keystone of the arch, the cement of the structure. The Romish copyist knew far better what they were about, and their imitation of antiquity has stood on its feet, and spoken, and gone about, and wrought its will, like a living body: the Romish representation of ancient Christianity is a daughter—too like her mother to allow her filial relationship to be for a moment questioned; but what is now in course of finishing, within our protestant church, is nothing better than a wax model, which although it startles us when we come upon it, unprepared, chills us when we touch it, and from which we presently turn away in contempt.

Marvellously indeed have those shown their ignorance of human nature, who have allowed themselves to think of the ancient celibacy and its asceticism, as if they were separable adjuncts of ancient Christianity; and strangely too have they overlooked the entire evidence of history. The philosophy of morals apart, how can we be justified in assuming those things to have been loosely or accidentally conjoined, which, in fact, never existed apart for so long a time as one year, or one day, and were never sundered in any one church, and which never

came to be parted until the time when the apostolic principle of morals, which had been so long superseded, was recovered, and promulgated anew? Let the "well-omened" enterprise of the Oxford divines (so far as at present developed) be crowned with all the success they can desire, let the episcopal clergy generally, or universally (which God forbid) yield themselves to the fond illusion, let the English church be hoisted up to the high mark of Nicene perfection, and, in order to make the experiment as complete as possible, let it repel from itself so much of the interference of the civil power as distinguishes the English church under the Tudors, from the eastern church under Constantine, or Theodosius; all this effected, and the first flush of triumphant feelings subsided, and then every one would become conscious of a want—a fault, which some would not hesitate to name; and there would be a general outcry for the deficient element of ancient Christianity; and a few months would see the "holy virginity" of the Nicene age, freed indeed from its grosser scandals, and sobered down a little by English good sense, fairly set a-going among us, and crowds, of both sexes, high-wrought by this fresh and specious enthusiasm, would profess themselves "the espoused of the Lord." That such things should come about, even in this country, and this age, I cannot think in any degree improbable.—But are we indeed prepared to hail them?

Besides the vehement propensity of all things to reach their deep and true affinities, there is a very obvious tendency in the superstitious feeling and doctrine concerning the sacraments, to bring about the restoration of the celibate. If certain imaginative notions of sacredness and sanctity are but once well lodged in many minds,

and especially in delicately sensitive minds, there comes in, at the same time, or it will soon develope itself, an instinctive necessity for carrying them out in all directions; and in fact, until these morbid notions are so carried out, the conscience is troubled, and the moral sentiments are kept on the rack, or are exposed to frequent and cruel shocks. There would not long be wanting some tender and devout spirits, nor some of more fanatical temper, who would denounce, as insufferable, the desecration of "Holy Baptism," and of the "Holy Eucharist," by the hands of a married priest. Many, and among these, some of the most exemplary members of the church, would declare that their inmost nature revolted at the thought of receiving the consecrated elements from "polluted hands." A married priest! shall such a one touch that altar which archangels tremble even to look upon! (as says the blessed Chrysostom.) This may not be: too long indeed has the church, trampled on by profane protestantism, submitted to these degradations. The time, however, is now come that she should raise herself from the dust, nor ever again permit her "present Lord" to be uplifted by any but hands washen in innocency, nor the steps of her tremendous altar to be trodden by any but those whose "loins are girt about with truth."

All this has actually been seen and heard in the church, and it will inevitably renew itself among ourselves, if only ancient Christianity is to be revived, and if England, abandoned by God for her sins, is to shut up the scriptures, to frown upon the gospel, and to take up, in the stead of it, the heartless "philosophy" of the patristic folios.

The intimate connexion then of the celibate with all

parts of the ancient religious system, presents itself as a subject of urgent practical importance, at a time when the notions, rites, and doctrines, of that system, are recommended as embodying Christianity in its mature and most perfect form; and when, in a word, the Nicene church is solemnly lifted up, as the standard by which every thing ecclesiastical should be estimated.

This alleged connexion, fatal as it must be held to be to the pretensions of ancient Christianity, considered as a MODEL-SYSTEM, is not to be exhibited in generalities merely; but must be traced carefully, and on several lines of inquiry. This inquiry I am now to pursue, and with the hope of combining comprehensiveness and brevity, with a sufficient degree of distinctness in the details, shall arrange the evidences I have to adduce under five heads, and shall consider the ancient religious celibacy, and the ascetic practices therewith connected, as affecting—

I. The notions entertained of the Divine Nature, or the moral attributes of God—

II. The scheme of salvation—its means and end—

III. The system of morals, in its principles, and operation on the church and society at large—

IV. The visible institutions of Christianity, and especially the sacraments—and,

V. The ecclesiastical polity; and particularly the position, influence, and temper of the clergy.

In order to anticipate any objection, bearing upon my general argument, I must state the principle which I bind myself to observe in citing the evidence of writers of different times, embracing a period of four hundred years.—I assume, then, that the moment of the Nicene council is the centre point of historical inquiries, con-

cerning ancient Christianity. It is so, first, because, by general acknowledgment, the church was altogether at that time in a more settled condition than at any other period, whether earlier or later. Secondly, because we are in possession of far more ample materials, relating to that period, than are extant belonging to any other, earlier or later, and, therefore, we may, with more certainty and satisfaction, bring it under discussion; and thirdly, and especially, because this period has been explicitly recognised, in the present controversy, as that wherein was embodied the pure ideal of doctrine and discipline, and which many wish to consider as the model and standard of the English episcopal church. Here, then, is our resting-place; and in quoting earlier authorities, it is only just so far as these preceding writers may be fairly taken as having laid the foundations of the Nicene church; or, on the other hand, if later doctors are brought forward, it will be when they, as plainly, are seen to be completing the building, and laying stone upon stone, after the original plan, and in manifest conformity with the mind and purpose of their predecessors. Thus, for example, if Origen, Irenæus, or the apostolic bishops are produced, it will be so far as they were the fathers of the Nicene Christianity; or, if I come down so low as to the times of Gregory the Great, I shall adduce his evidence, not as the father of popery, but as the child and scholar of the Nicene doctors.

In fact, I think there are very few points of difference, distinguishing the Nicene church, from either the earlier or the later church, within the compass of two hundred years, on either side, which modern controvertists, of any class, would much care to insist upon, as of material consequence to their particular opinions.

It is well, however, to cast anchor at some one point, and manifestly the early years of the fourth century afford the hardest bottom for this purpose. The extant, and principal, writers of the period during which Nicene Christianity may be considered as having remained entire and unchanged, are barely so many as twenty. The works, however, of several of these are voluminous, and they altogether furnish an amount of various and exact information, concerning the opinions and usages of the time, such as is hardly surpassed in copiousness, or exactness, by the historic materials of any but the most recent times. At least it is enough to exclude the apprehension of our being liable to fall into any material error, in representing, either the notions, or the practices, or the spiritual and moral characteristics of the period.

#### I. CONNEXION OF THE ANCIENT CELIBATE WITH THE NOTIONS ENTERTAINED OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

It is affirmed, then, that the fundamental principle and the practices of religious celibacy were at once the product, and the indication, of certain notions concerning the Divine Nature, altogether unlike those conveyed in the scriptures, and which took effect upon every other element of ancient Christianity.

Few, I suppose, will deny that a stanch orthodoxy may consist, and has often in fact consisted, not merely with incidental errors, but with very unworthy and delusive conceptions of the Divine Nature. How many vehement asserters of Athanasian doctrine have appeared on the stage of the church, whose notions of the moral

attributes of God, or of what (with reverence) may be called the divine dispositions, were of no better quality than such as may have been entertained by the visionaries of the Ganges, of the Indus, of the Euphrates, or of the Nile! This fact, instructive as it is, cannot escape the notice of any intelligent reader of church history. An orthodoxy, logically precise, has served, with many an ardent spirit, as the *blind* of a most corrupt theology; and the Athanasian creed has been used as a mantle, wrapping round the illusive principles of the oriental theosophy. But, in such instances, and they have been very numerous, although the concealed error may elude our grasp, while we are in search for it in its dogmatic form, it never fails to betray itself, somewhere, among the characteristics of the ethical or ecclesiastical system of the parties in question.

This is remarkably the case in the instance now before us; and after we have traced the Christian celibate institution, very satisfactorily, as we may think, to this, that, and the other external cause, and have pursued it, historically, up to its several sources, when we come to institute a deeper inquiry regarding its *inner cause*, or primary motive, we have hardly advanced a step before we meet unquestionable indications of its real import as a product of that GNOSTIC SENTIMENT which, even where the gnostic heresies were the most strenuously resisted, held possession of the religious mind, almost universally, along the shores of the Mediterranean, and during a full seven hundred years.

I here anticipate a brisk and resentful retort on the part of the champions of ancient Christianity, who, at the mere mention of any such "calumnious insinuation," will triumphantly appeal to the illustrious catena patrum,

who, from age to age, stood as the bulwarks of the faith, and gave their whole souls to the work of repelling the gnostic heresiarchs. The well-merited eulogium of these worthies on this particular ground, I would be forward to assent to, and to repeat. But, when this justice has been rendered to the anti-gnostic fathers, from Irænaeus to Theodoret, a more exact attention to the facts, and a more calm consideration of them, will lead us to admit the necessity of observing a distinction, often overlooked, between the formal and zealous opposition which men may make to certain definite errors, and the latent and unconfessed entertainment given to the very feelings out of which those errors have sprung. As there is what may be called articulate truth and inarticulate truth, and as multitudes, no doubt, have been saved by their participation of the latter, who have either not known, or who might even have resisted the former; so is it with error, and with its influence over the mind. More than a few, in every age, have stood foremost in the assault upon error, as defined and broadly pronounced by heretics, who, at the same time, have manifestly been themselves the victims of the false sentiment—the intimate illusion, whence that error has taken its rise. Thus, for example, in our own times, has it not happened, and, in some signal instances, that the assailants of skepticism have afforded indications enough of their suffering, themselves, under that ague of the soul? I consider it, therefore, neither as a calumnious imputation, nor as a philosophical refinement, to affirm, that the early church, while employed in meritoriously and successfully repelling the proteus gnosticism by which, from the first, it was beleaguered, did itself admit, and to a much greater extent than has often been



supposed, a deep *gnostic feeling*, which made itself felt in every branch of its doctrinal and ecclesiastical constitution.

Apart from an acquaintance with the history of that awful mistress of the ancient world—the ORIENTAL THEOSOPHY which, under a thousand changeful colours, held the religious mind in thrall during a period of two thousand years—apart from this history, we are neither qualified duly to estimate the divine excellence and purity of the Christian system, nor to render full justice to the orthodox early writers on account of their resistance of this captivating illusion, nor can we resolve the enigma of the superstitions which, even while repelling gnosticism, the ancient church admitted. In this last respect, especially, it is the knowledge of gnosticism, not indeed as a heresy, but as a *feeling*, and as the “tyrant of the cavern”—the lurking witchery of the human spirit, that must afford us the clue we want in clearing a path through the labyrinth of ancient Christianity. It is to this gnostic feeling, preoccupying all minds, religiously disposed, that we must trace most of those peculiarities of sentiment and practice which make up the striking contrast between the apostolic and the Nicene church. This oriental theosophic sentiment consisted in, and produced a fatal misapprehension of, the Divine nature, or moral attributes of God, and its consequence was to give a totally wrong direction to every thing in theology or in worship, that might come within its reach.

ix Gnosticism, repelled by the ancient church, and at length (by fair, as well as foul means) finally extirpated, as a visible heresy, did not expire until after it had deposited myriads of its eggs within the vitals of the church. Gnosticism surviving in principle, and polytheism in ri-

tual, make up together the bastard religion of the middle ages, otherwise called popery. The protestant churches have indignantly shaken off the grosser elements of this superstition, that is to say the polytheism of popery; but they have not, or not all, even to the present day, altogether dispelled the more occult and refined element, namely—the gnosticism of popery: and to speak the plain truth, it is nothing else than this same element, this inveterate gnostic feeling, that is now rising to the surface in the Oxford divinity.

The identity of this occult element, working under so many forms, and during the lapse of so many centuries, and struggling on from east to west, like a pestilence, born in the mud of the Ganges, and spreading death to the shores of the Atlantic, becomes manifest when we keep the eye fixed upon certain of its constant characteristics. These therefore demand our closest attention.

We are much accustomed to think of the ancient gnosticism, in a trivial manner, and only as we find it grotesquely and hastily portrayed in modern books, where it appears as an unintelligible congeries of puerile absurdities, or a mere jargon, saved from contempt, only by that daring impiety of its language which excites our resentment. Not such was it in fact; nor as such did it gather to itself, and fascinate the intellectual masses of the ancient world;—these masses too, led on by minds as vigorous and as lofty as any that have figured in philosophy. In forming our notion of this system we must allow for the disadvantages we labour under, first, as having to collect our materials entirely from among the fragments which its triumphant opponents have chosen to hand down for our inspection; and secondly, as view-

ing the whole in the light of a much better understood Christianity; and thirdly, which is no inconsiderable circumstance, as having ourselves undergone that severe training in the demonstrative and physical sciences, which impels us to regard with cold contempt whatever cannot make good its claims to respect on the ground of direct evidence, or logical inference. But to the mind of antiquity, the mere want of positive proof, far from being regarded as a disparagement, constituted the peculiar charms of a scheme of philosophy. The best praise of a system of theosophy was, that it soared far above the region of cold demonstration, and that it opened a fair field of lofty and delicious speculations, exempt from the impertinent interference of dry dialectic methods of argument. The ancient mind chose its religion, as a voluptuary chooses a mistress, not for her probity, but her beauty, to his eye; and it desired, not what could not be gainsayed, but what was too fair to be rudely questioned. Gnosticism, all gratuitous as it was, and rich in a gorgeous pneumatology, on this very account captivated the meditative, the excursive, and the pensive orders of minds; because it dared to unfold an upper world, which could be conversed with only by a spiritual intuition, disdaining the trammels of reason.

Gnosticism, such as we find it westward of the Syrian deserts, or the Euphrates, and such as it appeared from the apostolic age, and the times of Philo, and four centuries onward, was at once the effort of that instinct of the human mind which impels it to penetrate the mysteries of the invisible world, from mere curiosity; and it was the struggle of the heart, as well as the reason; it was its agony under the pressure of those indefinite surmises that spring from a contemplation of the actual

condition of the human system—its derangement, its anarchy, and its corruption, and which painful emotions seek repose in such a notion of the Supreme Being as compromises the moral, by the means of a refinement of the natural attributes. Gnosticism reaches its end, when it has fashioned a deity allied to the imagination, not to the conscience.

Under many variations which, during the course of several centuries, gave some new aspect to the system, almost every year, these same germinating impulses are always perceptible. But it is to be observed, and the observation affords a clue to many of the perplexities of the subject, that, although the first of these motives, namely, that imaginative curiosity which gave birth to the rich theories of gnosticism, seemed always to lead the way, and to be mistress of the whole, it was in fact the second impulse, less ostensible, but far more potent, namely, the agonizing desire to resolve, or to dismiss the problem of moral and natural evil, as disturbing the government of an Infinite being; it was this impulse which really controlled the apparently lawless speculations that sprung from the first; and in truth, the last and ripened form of gnosticism—Manicheism, was only the outbreak of that force which, during centuries, had been inly heaving the mass. The bold doctrine broached by Manes, of a personal, independent, and an eternal evil principle, waging an interminable war with the good, was only a simplification of the system, brought out, at the last, by that pressure which was threatening its destruction. Gnosticism, less vehemently urged by the catholic church—the politically powerful church, might long have continued, as at first, a splendid speculation; but thus compelled to make a desperate effort, it became

a malignant heresy, and as such, offered itself the more fairly, as a victim, to its triumphant rival.

In the gnosticism of the times of Philo, the brighter and purer element only appeared on the surface; while in the gnosticism of Manes and his successors, the darker and the more foul prevailed; but inasmuch as neither was at any time altogether wanting, so both, while explicitly and earnestly condemned by the church, nevertheless deeply affected its opinions, its moral sentiments, and its practices. It is this unconfessed, and yet extensive and permanent influence of gnosticism upon ancient Christianity,\* that resolves the enigmas of church history, and indeed affords a key to the difficulties which, at the present moment, distract so many minds.

What then was the essence of this oriental theosophy, as distinguished from the genuine theology that had been handed down, through the inspired patriarchs, to the Jewish legislator, and by him sent forward, in the hands of the prophets, and finally given to the world in its perfect form by our Blessed Lord, and his apostles? This theosophy, scarcely less ancient than the patriarchal piety, and much more widely extended, was to this effect—That the visible world, with its material elements, jarring one upon another, and its organized and animated orders, perishable, and corruptible, and inimical, and its intelligent races, degenerate and wretched, is altogether unworthy of the Supreme and Infinite Power, or as he was called—the Father Unknown, who, nevertheless, is the emanative source of minds, human and angelic, or at least of the purer classes of minds.—

\* Matter (*Histoire critique du Gnosticisme*,) is far from being satisfactory on *this* branch of his general subject, and seems barely conscious of its importance.

That this material world was, in fact, the work of inferior and imperfect beings, (or of one such being,) themselves removed by many stages of filiation from the Supreme Deity, and who exercised an ill-fated and precarious empire over this troubled sphere, where man—unhappy man, finds his present lot to be cast, who, nevertheless, if he steadily pursue his better destiny, shall at length, and after long periods of trial and purgation, and under the conduct of the Logos-Redeemer, reascend to his source, and merge his being for ever in the boundless ocean of light and life.

It was a side principle of the gnostic theosophy, a principle at the first advanced for the purpose of opposing the Christian church, and abandoned only when conciliation became necessary, that Jehovah, the god of the Jews, was not the Supreme Deity, but, on the contrary, his foe, and the usurper of his power.

To this system, Christianity opposed itself, not simply by maintaining its orthodoxy, but more specifically, first, by vindicating the constitution of the visible world, whatever partial disorders it might seem to embrace, as the work of the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness—wisely leaving speculative difficulties, or apparent inconsistencies unsolved; secondly, by connecting itself with the Jewish dispensation; and here again, leaving untouched whatever might offend the captious in the Jewish history or poetry; thirdly, by exhibiting the Supreme Being, as standing in an immediate and gracious relationship to man; and as the antagonist, neither of matter, nor of the visible world, nor of what is simply finite and corruptible, but as the enemy of that only which is morally evil. This last was practically the chief point of contrast between Christianity and gnosticism. The one system spoke of God as hating nothing that he had made,

and hating sin only, which he had not made. Nothing therefore intervened between God and man, nothing could intercept the full tide of blessedness, flowing from the Creator toward the creature, nothing but sin: sin removed, and sin renounced, and then the ineffable communion between the Infinite, and the finite, was restored, securing the glory of the former, and the felicity of the latter. But in the other system, the antithesis of the Infinite Perfection was—the finite and corruptible material world, of which one of the mere accidents (and man's sad misfortune) was moral disorder, or sin. The course therefore to be pursued by man, in extricating himself from his luckless position, and in getting clear of its accident—sin, was, by lofty contemplation, by habitual mental abstraction, and by disengaging himself, as far as possible, from the humiliating conditions of animal life, to facilitate, and, in a sense, to anticipate, his relapse into the infinite Nature.

Such were the two confronted religious systems. Need it be asked which is the true, the divine, and which is the illusory, the false? Who can now balance between the two? The catholic church opposed its substantial truths to these baseless and malignant speculations, and triumphed; but alas, it fell in triumphing, and while vigorously repelling the openly pronounced and more distinct forms of the gnostic delusion, it too soon, and at a very early period, yielded itself to the undefined and the more seductive gnostic principle, which made the conditions of animal life, and the common alliances of man in the social system, the antithesis of the divine perfections, and so to be escaped from, and decried, by all who panted after the highest excellence. It was this gnostic leaven, which through the medium of some ardent minds, gained at length a firm hold of the Chris-

tian community, and became the germinating cause of so much of the ascetic institution as was not expiatory, as well as of many of those superstitions which have continued to oppress Christianity, even to the present time.

None, it is true, who retained their connexion with the catholic church, or who were recognised by it as its members, allowed themselves to speak of sin in gnostic language, or ever openly renounced, or altogether overlooked, the characteristic Christian doctrine of holiness, as the end of the Christian life; but at the same time there were exceedingly few who hesitated to surrender themselves to what I have termed the *gnostic feeling*, in relation to the vulgar conditions of man's present state; and while the feeble and flickering enthusiasm of gnosticism itself was found to be availing only with a very small class, in carrying them forward on the thorny path of abstraction and asceticism, and while it left the majority to amuse themselves with the system as a barren speculation, it was far otherwise with the Christian body, among whom there were at work motives far more animating, and better defined, and more than sufficient for giving practical efficacy to the very same principle of abstraction, and which impelled multitudes to abandon their position in society, until, in fact, the wilderness became peopled with solitaries, and the church was converted into a sort of theatre for the athletæ of the higher spiritual economy.

Gnosticism had its *avatar*, its *Æon* deliverer, its Christos, and Logos, who, sent down to this lower sphere by the Unknown Father, to oppose and expel the Demiurge Creator, and god of this world, and the Jehovah of the Jews, was to recall the pneumatici—the purer minds of the human family, to their original place in the intellectual system. But gnosticism had no vicarious



Saviour, no Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world—no propitiatory death on the cross:—its Christos did not suffer when the man, Jesus, was crucified by Pilate. It had no such Saviour, nor wanted one; for it did not recognise sin and guilt as the real obstacles in the way of man's felicity. Only let the human spirit break away from the material thralls of the creator of this gross system, and it would instantly be happy: matter, *ὕλη*, being dropped, sin, its accident, would fall with it.

The ancient church felt the infinite superiority of its own system of belief; and its constancy, in maintaining its ground, beleaguered as it was by errors so insidious and fascinating, may well claim our admiration. But how insidious and how fascinating are those errors that spring up in the human mind as the substitutes for long-lost sacred truths! Moreover, to aim at, and to reach in religion, something better, or something more exalted and refined than that which God himself has granted to us, seems, to fiery and ambitious spirits, not merely innocent, but laudable. Why may we not lift sanctity (at least for the few,) to a higher level than that of the cold avoidance of positive sin? Why may not man aspire to be holy after the fashion of seraphs? Alas! this loftier, or seraphic sanctity, is not sanctity; but a factitious pietism, involving the substitution of principles fundamentally false, in the place of the motives of genuine virtue. So it was, that the unearthly holiness which the ancient church from an early period, made the object of its fond ambition, was not Christian holiness, but mere gnostic abstraction from the innocent conditions of animal life. Christianity teaches that a near approach to the Father of spirits was to be sought for on the path of that virtue which is opposed to vice. Gnosticism held out the hope

of such an approximation by mere disengagement from matter, and from its corruptibility. The ancient church never denied the Christian doctrine of sanctity; but it assumed along with it, and as a useful subsidiary principle, the gnostic doctrine:—hence its asceticism, and especially its doctrine of the angelic excellence of virginity.

When will the church, once for all, convince itself of the great truth, so amply confirmed by its own history, that, to tamper, in any way, with the first principles of religion, or to attempt to exalt and refine them, is an endeavour not more impious, than it is fatal? The endeavour to elevate and rectify Christianity, has, in fact, proved to be of worse, or of more permanent ill consequence, than the endeavour to lower its requirements; for the latter attempt has involved only a relaxation of principles, while the former has demanded a substitution of one principle for another, and has therefore deranged every thing else.

Whenever we are considering the ancient Christian asceticism, it is indispensable that we should keep in view the difference between what was purely abstractive, and what was *penitential* or punitive, in its principles or practices. This distinction, if not always clearly defined in the monastic writings, is always easy to be observed when the sentiments of the ascetics are analyzed. And it is farther to be noted, that, while in some places, and at certain periods, the abstractive principle, prompting to the withdrawment of the spiritual being from the conditions of animal life, was chiefly thought of, in other places, and at other times, the self-tormenting, penance-doing doctrine took most effect, and produced those macerations and inflictions, by means of which sin might be expiated, and the future reckoning rendered so much the less formidable. The fact is, at

least, a curious instance of coincidence, (if it be nothing more,) that the chief centres of gnosticism were also the localities where the abstractive species of asceticism made itself prominent; while in the west, where gnosticism, until a late period, was only an imported doctrine, the penitential, or rather expiatory asceticism, prevailed over the abstractive. Of this alleged fact, it would be easy, if pertinent to our present argument, to adduce many striking illustrations.

Now, keeping in mind the above stated broad distinction, I presume it will be universally admitted *among protestants*, that the existence, at any time, or in any community, of penitential and expiatory ascetic practices, affords a sufficient and unquestionable proof of a corresponding compromise of that first principle of Christianity—the full and free pardon of sin, through the expiatory and vicarious sufferings of Him who was “made a sin-offering for us.” Under whatever subterfuges he may attempt to hide his error, the man who labours to expiate his own sin, by self-inflicted pains of the body, has lost his hold of the gospel of the grace of God: he may be very devout, and very fervent, but the gospel he has framed to himself, is “another gospel,” and, in fact, is no gospel; it is not “glad tidings,” but sad tidings.

Then in adherence to the very same criterion of truth, we at once say, that the existence, and the general prevalence, in any church, of the principles, and practices of abstractive asceticism, and especially of the doctrine concerning the angelic excellence of virginity, is to be held as sufficient proof of a corresponding compromise of the genuine Christian notion of the divine nature, in its moral and spiritual attributes, and plainly indicates the substitution of the gnostic idea of a deity eternally

at war with matter, and abhorring the conditions, and resenting the humiliations of animal life, in the place of the scripture doctrine concerning the divine holiness, and hatred of sin.

If then the serious imputation now thrown upon the ancient church of having, while steadfast in its orthodoxy, admitted the germinating principle of the gnostic theosophy, and of having, so far, compromised the glory of Christian theology, if this imputation were repelled, and if proof in support of it were demanded, nothing more need be done in justification of such an impeachment, than merely to refer to the unquestioned fact, that, from the first, and thence onward through the track of centuries, it adopted, and extensively acted upon, the gnostic principle—That the highest order of sanctity, or in truth the only genuine and perfect sanctity, attainable on earth, is in the possession of those who withdraw themselves, as far as possible, from the conditions of animal life, and especially, who renounce and abrogate, in their own persons, the sexual constitution. Religious celibacy, such as we find it in the ancient church, was not an expiatory sacrifice, it was not a penance; but an act of abstraction, or an abduction of the incarcerated soul from the *ύλη*, the dregs and stuff of the lower world, by means of which separation it placed itself just so much the nearer to God, as it was the more remote from the natural life.

This is the doctrine of gnosticism, of its parent soothsayerism, of its grand-parent buddhism, and of the ascetic institute of the ancient church. Almost in the very language, often in the very language of the gnostic teachers, and even while formally condemning the system, as an Anti-Christian heresy, do the Christian writers, and es-

pecially those of the eastern and Alexandrian churches, recommend virginity, and speak of it as the only near approximation which man can make to the deity, and as a forestalling of the soul's emancipation from the slavery and degradation of its connexion with matter, and with animal life. Whence came the notion *universally prevalent* in the church, and repeated by a thousand tongues, that the virgins of Christ, male and female, constituted a spiritual aristocracy, or a choir of terrestrial angels, and who, as such, were holy by emphasis, holy as a class, and waiting only the kind hand of death, to lift them up to the throne of God? All this, in its various colours of extravagance, came not from the apostles, nor is it to be traced to the scriptures:—it is nothing but sheer gnosticism, and it means nothing less than the removing “the Father” revealed to men “by the Son,” and the putting in his place the *πατήρ ἀγνώστους*, a being approached only by the few—the *πνευματικοί*, who had withdrawn themselves from the laws of the lower world, and had made common cause with him as the enemy of the demiurge creator.

But can it be imagined that a compromise of first principles, so fatal as this, could come to its end simply in originating, and in keeping alive the institute of celibacy? Assuredly not; and it is nothing less than what we are compelled to look for, when we find that the same gnostic feeling, and theosophy, which, in the celibate institution, indicated its presence, and displayed its power, took effect also upon every other element and usage of ancient Christianity. Of this we shall discover evidence enough in the after stages of our inquiry.

I do not, however, wish to stop short where I fairly might, at this mere reference to the ancient abstractive

asceticism, as a sufficient proof of the prevalence of the gnostic theosophy and sentiment, in the ancient church, but will adduce a few passages, which, although they can by no means convey the irresistible impression made upon an unprejudiced mind, by the general tenor of the ancient church divinity, may yet serve as sufficient samples of this sort of compromised Christianity.

Who is to be accounted orthodox, if Athanasius be not so? nor only orthodox, but truly good and great; and, by his wisdom and courage, more worthy, if we may accept the arbitration of Gibbon, to have sat on the throne of the Cæsars, than either of his contemporary imperial enemies. And yet this great Athanasius was himself not more exempt than the craziest fanatic of his times, from that flimsy ascetic notion of sanctity, which sprang from the gnostic notion of the divine nature. The follies of an inferior mind may, in any case, be imputed, if we please, to the individual, but those of eminently powerful minds must rather be thrown back upon the age, and they may safely be assumed as its characteristics. The vigorous and straightforward understanding of this unbending champion of the faith, could hardly have failed to have broken through the illusions of the times, had those illusions been of an incidental kind; but they had arisen steadily and slowly from deep-seated false theological principles, they had pervaded the Christian community, from the east to the west, they had acquired, by long and undisturbed domination, an authority such as none (or very few) dared to call in question, so that the most devout and energetic minds made it their glory to promote, and would have thought it a sacrilege to have examined, the venerable errors. Willingly should we give so estimable a man the benefit of any

doubt that may be thought to attach to certain tracts, usually comprehended in his works; but little or nothing could be gained, for his reputation, by this scrupulosity, inasmuch as those of his writings, the genuineness of which has never been questioned, contain sentiments fully equivalent to what may be found in those which, on this ground, we might hesitate to cite as his. The apology addressed to Constantius may be appealed to confidently, as genuine, and in this piece Athanasius uses a style, when adverting to the subject of religious virginity, which bears out any thing elsewhere occurring in the works imputed to him. The expressions applied to our Lord in this tract are far too much in the gnostic style, and startle the ear by their resemblance to the language of the gnostic leaders in speaking of their "Logos-Redeemer." "The Son of God," says Athanasius, (tom. i. page 698,) "made man for us, and having abolished death, and having liberated our race from the servitude of corruption, hath, besides his other gifts, granted to us to have upon earth an image of the sanctity of angels, namely, virginity. The maids possessing this (sanctity) and whom the church catholic is wont to call the brides of Christ, are admired, even by the gentiles, as being the temple of the Logos, *ὡς ναὸν ἑστέας τοῦ λόγου*. No where, truly, except among us Christians is this holy and heavenly profession fully borne out or perfected; so that we may appeal to this very fact as a convincing proof that it is among us that true religion is to be found."

And thus, in the undoubted tract of the same father, on the Incarnation, we meet the very same prominent doctrine, spoken of as *a characteristic of the Christian system*, and even including the gnostic phrase, applied to

virginity, that it was an excellence obeying a rule "above law." "Who is there, but our Lord and Saviour Christ, that has not deemed this virtue (of virginity) to be utterly impracticable (or unattainable) among men; and yet he has so shown his divine power, as to impel youths, as yet under age, to profess it, a virtue beyond law?" (Tom. i. p. 105.) We cannot, therefore, do Athanasius much wrong in attributing to him sentiments which, even if they did not actually flow from his pen, are entirely in accordance with his opinions, as elsewhere professed. And yet it does not appear that the tract on virginity, or the ascetic life, is, on any sufficient grounds, assumed not to be genuine. Let it, however, be taken only as a sample of the temper and style of the times;—just as we say of the Athanasian creed, that, whether it be the composition of this champion of orthodoxy, or not, it truly expresses his known belief, and that of the church of his times. If the individual reputation of Athanasius were the point now in question, then the genuineness of a particular tract, attributed to him, would be a point essential to our argument; but not so when it is the character of the age, rather than of the man, which we are considering.

Now, looking at the tract I have mentioned, as a whole, and comparing it broadly with the apostolic writings, one cannot but instantly and strongly feel that the writer's notions of Christian sanctity, and those of the apostles, were almost totally dissimilar; but then these notions differ just in the same way as the gnostic idea of a deity abhorring the conditions of animal life, and at war with the visible world, differs from the Christian idea of the true God, the Creator of the world, and hating nothing but sin. I might stop to notice the utterly unapostolic



style in which the author, in this treatise, commends the virtue of fasting. "What doth Christ require of thee, but only a pure heart, and a body unsoiled, and made black and blue with fasting?" How much better were it for us to fall back from Christianity, such as this, upon the Jewish prophets, one of whom gives us a far more Christian-like, as well as a more rational reply to a similar question—"What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but—to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Can we be at any loss in choosing between two systems of morality, as thus summarily expressed? What would not fasting do?—everything, says Athanasius, and "place man near to the throne of God." Yes, to the "god unknown" of gnosticism; but not to the God revealed in the scriptures. Athanasius, and the church of his time, did not altogether overlook, much less did they deny, what was substantial in morals; but they constantly associated with these weighty matters, that factitious sanctity which, whenever so associated, has not failed to draw to itself the attention of ordinary minds, and, in the end, to reduce its companion to a subordinate and almost forgotten place. Tell the mass of men, as solemnly as we please, that they must be "holy in life and heart," and *also*—scrupulous in their external purifications, and we shall soon find them absorbed in the details of this scrupulosity, while they make light of justice, truth, mercy, and purity, as well as piety. It would be of no avail therefore, in relation to our present argument, to cite, from the same tract, the many excellent moral precepts which it embodies:—the question is—With what are these precepts associated, and what are the notions, concerning the divine nature, which must have been suggested by the general tenor of the writer's exhortations?

Now let it for a moment be imagined, that some leading religious writer, of the present day, and one of high reputation for intelligence and personal sanctity, as well as vigour of character, addresses a letter of religious advice and encouragement, to a devout Christian lady of his acquaintance, and that, among other advices, excellent as they may be, and in one and the same tone of serious intentness, this writer presumes to enter her chamber, in the capacity of her spiritual director, and when there, gives her precise and solemn instructions, as to the cautions she should use in performing her ablutions, and the reserves she should adhere to in changing her linen!—no such insufferable impertinence could possibly be fallen into by any one, gifted with a particle of common sense, in these days. No where, scarcely in the Romish communion, could we find a spirit so miserably enthralled by superstition, as to be led to make the ceremonials of the foot-bath an awful matter of piety, or to imagine that He who indignantly contemned the scrupulous ablutions of the pharisee, was to be either propitiated, or offended, by a lady's using, or not using, both her hands in washing her face! (Athan. tom. i. p. 1050.) I scorn to translate this page: Does it most excite contempt or indignation?

How is it then that, at a time when the church had gathered to itself all the intelligence and learning of the age, a venerable archbishop, and a man of strong understanding, and every way of eminent quality, should think it a proper part of his duty, in addressing the Christian ladies of his charge, to descend to topics so degrading, nay, so incredibly offensive? How is it that, in connexion with the changing of an inner vestment, such a man could bring himself to adduce the most solemn motives of piety? No other answer can be given to so perplex-

ing a question but this—that, in the age of the holy Athanasius, the church universal had fallen into notions of the divine nature far more nearly allied to gnosticism than to apostolic Christianity; and in fact, that, while the gnostic heresy was denounced by the lips, the gnostic theosophy had sunk into the heart. With our Lord's pointed reprobation of pharisaic formalism full before their eyes, these fathers of the church nevertheless strenuously taught that Christian piety, of the higher sort, mainly turned upon, or at least could not dispense with, bodily purifications, and external observances!

A contrast has been drawn by several modern protestant writers, between the apostles, and the early fathers, and the difference such a comparison holds out, is striking indeed. There is, however, another comparison which I do not remember to have seen formally instituted, and which offers points of diversity still more marked, as well as highly instructive. What I mean is the vast inferiority of the Christian divines of the first five centuries, compared, as teachers of morals, with the Jewish prophets of five hundred years, reckoning from David onward. A few words may suffice for setting forth this very significant parallel.—The Mosaic law—a national institute, and temporary only, and intended to seclude the Jewish people from the nations around them, comprised various observances of personal ceremonial sanctity, well called “carnal ordinances.” But the Christian law, intended for all nations, and designed for perpetuity, drops every such ritual scrupulosity, and not merely drops the observances, but pointedly condemns any regard to them among Christians. The servile desire to Judaize Christianity, is warmly reprobated, as implying nothing else than a renunciation of the gospel. And yet, while such are the characteristics of the two

systems, respectively, what are the actual characteristics of the teaching of those who stood forward as the expounders of the one, and of the other, in the ages following the two institutions?—most remarkable is the contrasted style of the Jewish prophets, and of the Christian doctors, in this respect! and how irresistible is the confirmation it affords of our faith in the inspiration of the Jewish scriptures!

Every intelligent reader of the Bible must have noticed the general fact, that the writers of the Old Testament, impelled, one and all, by an unconscious onward tendency, toward a brighter and a purer, as well as a more expansive system than the Mosaic, lay very little stress upon the personal and more servile observances of the national law; and, on the contrary, insist, with a manly, rational, and evangelic ardour, upon the great principles, and the unchanging requirements of justice, mercy, temperance, as well as upon the development of the more intimate principles of the spiritual life. What is the book of Psalms? is it a manual of monkery? What are the prophets? are they zealous sticklers for ablutions, and do they chafe and fret on points of the ascetic ritual? Are David and the prophets, as if by the impulse of an involuntary gravitation, working themselves down from the greater to the less, in matters of morality, and descending from the substance to the form, from the spiritual to the ritual? Nay indeed, such are not the characteristics of the inspired writers of the Old Testament; who are manifestly imbued with the spirit and the power, with the truth, the reason, of the apostles, although they did not enjoy the same light.

But how is it with the early, and with the very best expounders of the Christian code—a code (as found in the New Testament) of truth and reality, opposed to

lifeless ceremony, and abject superstition? The very characteristics which we have denied to the Jewish inspired writers, are what present themselves on every page of the early Christian doctors. It is, strange to say, the expounders of Christianity—the teachers of the law of liberty, who are ever passing off from what is momentous, to what is trivial in morality, and who seem, on all occasions, quite as solicitous about the forms, as they are about the substance of piety; and who rarely, if ever, fail to mix, along with solid instructions, bearing upon Christian conduct, some repulsive ingredients of a servile superstition! I would fain ask those who are the best qualified to answer the question—whether it be not so—Is it not, in a certain sense, true, that, if we were to expunge from the fathers the mere phraseology of the gospel, and were to insert these same phrases in the Old Testament scriptures, then every thing would seem to be in its place; as in a system chronologically developing itself? That is to say, the fathers might then appear the fit expounders of the Mosaic carnal institute; while the prophets, Christianized in their language merely, might be accepted as the genuine successors of the apostles. Such an adjustment would seem to give the harmony of regular progression, and of continuity to the series of sacred literature, as it flows forward through fifteen centuries. On this ground I should be inclined to urge an opponent to confess that the very best of the writers of the Nicene age, say Chrysostom, Augustine, Basil, Ambrose, Jerome, and the Gregorys, fall far behind the Jewish prophets, as to the notions they convey of the benignity and the purity of the divine nature; and in the breadth of their moral systems, and in the respective importance attached by them to the forms, and to

the substance of devotion, as well as in the warmth, the expansion, the sublimity, and the energy of the religious sentiment by which they seem personally to have been animated. In a word, this must, I think, be acknowledged, that the writers of the ancient dispensation were such as those should be, who were looking onward toward the bright day of gospel splendour; while the early Christian doctors were just such as one might well expect to find those who were looking onward toward that deep night of superstition which covered Europe during the middle ages. The dawn is seen to be gleaming upon the foreheads of the one class of writers; while a sullen gloom overshadows the brows of the other.

Every feeling of rational piety would be outraged, were those not infrequent passages to be adduced in which the great divines of the fourth century, while labouring to set virginity "above all praise," endeavour to mix up the notions it involves, with the ineffable relationships of the Trinity, and, perhaps, in opposition to the gnostic notion of female æons, or divinities, in pairs, attribute an accident of humanity to God himself. Much of this sort that meets the eye, in the fathers' must be left where it lies—and may it never find a translator! But let those who would be warned of the danger of running into frightful impieties when the reins are given to fanatical impulses, open Gregory Nyssen, *Περὶ Παρθενίας*, and look up and down, and especially at the second chapter, beginning *συνεσεως γὰρ ἡμῖν*. If we shudder, as we must, at the presumption of the gnostics, while they are describing the emanation of the pairs of æons, male and female, from the Supreme Deity, can we regard, without indignant reprobation, the shameless audacity of a Christian writer, and a bishop, who dares to speak as Gregory Nyssen does of the relationship of the Eternal

Father to the Eternal Son? If this be not gnostic theosophy, it is something worse; and assuredly it is not Christian theology. Better renounce Christianity, with the gnostics, than thus insult its most sacred truths, with Gregory Nyssen. In order to secure for the celibate all possible patronage, and the highest authority, this writer, designating our Lord by a phrase of gnostic origin, as *την πηγην της αφθαρσις*, insists upon the fact of his entering the world in a manner implying a tacit disparagement of marriage; and, in another place, (Oration on Christmas day,) he does not scruple to adopt a foolish, but favourite tradition, concerning the Virgin Mary, the import of which is to secure her suffrage in support of the practice of vowing virginity in very childhood, a practice cruel in itself, and the occasion of the worst abuses of the monkish system. Joseph, we are assured, by the authors and retailers of this legend, was pitched upon as a worthy man, who would consent to take charge, for life, of the young virgin, (Mary,) in the ostensible relationship of her husband, but really as the guardian of her innocence. And it is remarkable as an instance of theological infatuation, even with the soundest minds, that the absurd story which Gregory Nyssen introduces, with some apology, as apocryphal, Augustine, a few years later, coolly alludes to, as if it were an authenticated fact; and, in his customary mode of attenuated reasoning, labours to infer as much from the words of scripture. "It is clear," says he, (De Sancta Virginitate,) "that Mary had previously (that is, before the visit of the angel,) devoted herself to God, in inviolable chastity; and, that she had been espoused to Joseph *on this very condition*; desponsata viro justo, non violenter ablaturo, sed potius contra violentos custodituro, quod illa jam voverat." And all this was to be affirmed

and believed, in order that, as he says, Mary might “furnish an example to holy nuns in all time to come!”

But, to return for a moment to Gregory Nyssen, I will refer to the fifth chapter of the tract above mentioned, as furnishing an example of that sort of gnosticated Christianity which was felt to be needed in giving support to the practices and sentiments universally adopted by the church. The contrast, on this point, between apostolic and ancient Christianity is striking. Peter affirms that, “by the promises of scripture we are made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world, *ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ*”—a term which, in its canonical sense, implies always sin, not simple affection. But the writer now before us declares, that the only way of approach to the Deity, is on the path of abstraction from the affections of humanity, as connected with our animal and social state; and that the institute of virginity has this very end in view, that we may the more effectually withdraw ourselves from the entanglement of our mundane existence. Now, all this is sheer gnosticism. The gospel teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; gnosticism taught, or would fain have taught its followers, to deny and to resent those humiliating conditions which the malignant or unwise demiurge—the Creator of this world had imposed upon the human race; and thus, in substance, and often with a very near resemblance of language, speak the ancient promoters of asceticism. If the style of Gregory Nyssen, on subjects of this class, be compared with that of Mahometan dervishes, or of Persian sooffees, or of the Grecian stoics, or Pythagorians, or Platonists, or with that of the gnostics of his own times, it does not appear that any solid advantage can equitably be claimed for him. Call Nyssen a Christian father, and Epictetus



a heathen philosopher, if you please, and let the church pay her homage to the former on the 9th of March, or on any other day, and let her reprobate the latter every day of the year; mean time, this I am sure of, that I could take many entire pages from both, and placing them, in their naked merits, before an acute and intelligent Christian reader, desiring him, from internal evidence alone, to endorse each quotation with the word *Christian* or *Heathen*, and he would as often interchange these designations, as apply them truly. And I think, moreover, that no candid mind would refuse to acknowledge that the praise of good sense, genuine simplicity, and consistency, must, most decisively, be awarded to the dark pagan.

“In order that we may,” says Nyssen, in the tract above referred to, “with a clear eye, gaze upon the light of the intellectual universe, we must disengage ourselves from every mundane affection, and lay aside the feculence of the corporeal condition.” Thus have talked mystics of every sect, and in all ages, and, while dreaming about the “divine nature,” have totally lost sight of real piety and virtue. The mysticism of the fathers is distinguished from that of others by a peculiar slang, which, unconsciously, they caught from the gnostic teachers, their contemporaries.

There can hardly be a more gross illusion than that of supposing that some few Christian phrases, such as—“our Saviour, Christ,” or, “through the grace of the Son of God,” really avail to Christianize a page, a chapter, or a treatise, which, these naked phrases apart, we should never have surmised to have come from Christian lips. Nor are religious writings to be Christianized by the formal insertion, here and there, of a creed, nor by the inlaying of texts of scripture. A Christian writing

is a composition which breathes the spirit, and which is marked throughout by the peculiar principles of the New Testament. Now, judged by this rule, I think several of the most noted of the fathers would be cashiered of their usurped honours, and set down, some way below the level of the better heathen writers. I fear this would be the fate of both the Gregorys—I mean Nyssen, just quoted, and the eloquent Nazianzen.

For propagating their opinions more widely and readily, the gnostic teachers had had recourse to the charms of verse; and, to supplant them on this ground, several of the fathers struck their lyres; among these, Ephraim, Synesius, and Nazianzen; but of what quality was the antidote they provided? Let us take some samples—Synesius by and by, Nazianzen at present. It seems to have been the belief of these writers that, to make the nearest possible approach to gnostic doctrine and language, while orthodoxy was saved, afforded the surest means of excluding the specious heresy. A mistaken notion, surely: but it is thus, that, while their opponents were ranting about the vileness of their body, and the sublimity of the endeavour to break away from its humiliations, a Christian bishop could follow on the same path, and say (*Carmina Iambica*)—

*Ταμος μὲν ἐστὶν ἐννομὸς σαρκῶν δεσις  
Ἡ παρθένηα δ' ἐκβασίς τοῦ σώματος.*

Where did Nazianzen learn any such doctrine as this? We can only reply—Where he learned such as the following, and neither the one nor the other from the inspired writings.

“Happy the course of those, the unmarried-blessed, who, (in this world,) having shaken off the flesh, are nearer to the divine purity.”

What teaching more delusive in its tendency, than the telling a company of persons that, because unmarried, they were "near to God." Gnostics taught nothing more pernicious; nor any thing, practically, unlike this. They, or some of them, discouraged marriage, not merely because it involved distractions incompatible with the contemplative discipline; nor merely because it was an additional tie, connecting the soul with the body; but, because it was the means of carrying on that process of "linking spirits to flesh," which the demiurge had set a-going, despite of the Supreme, and which the Supreme Deity was labouring to bring to an end. Now, such notions being afloat, how does a Christian teacher seek to withstand them? By addressing "a spouse of Christ" in language such as that of the exhortation, *προς παρθενας*, (tom. ii. p. 299,) not merely abounding with the very cant of gnosticism, about the agency or influence of matter, the commixture of natures, the harmony of spirits, with the Supreme Spirit; but presenting, in a distinct form, the gnostic doctrine that the Christos, the Logos, had descended into this world to abrogate the original sexual constitution, and to institute a more spiritual economy. Let the studious reader look to the whole, as it stands; and if he thinks that a florid writer's real opinions ought not to be inferred from his poetic effusions, he may compare, with the composition here mentioned, the following passage from our author's thirty-first oration, which offers the same gnostic jargon, and the same gnostic principles, mixed up, indeed, with a larger proportion of Christian phrases—"She who is under the yoke (of matrimony) is in part Christ's; but the virgin is Christ's wholly. The one, indeed, is not altogether bound to the world; but the other turns from the world altogether. That which is partial in the

married, is entire with the virgin. Thou hast chosen the angelic life, and hast ranged thyself with those who are unyoked, (the angels,) that thou shouldst not be borne downward toward the flesh, that thou shouldst not be borne downward *εις ὑλὴν*, that thou shouldst not, even while remaining unmarried, be wedded *τη ὑλῇ*." This is the very style of the Alexandrian gnostics, and on the ground of this same notion of the wedding of some souls to matter—a humiliation from which others were exempt—Valentinian distributed human spirits into the three classes, of the spiritual, the material, and the physical. In truth, many passages of gnostic teaching, reported by Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenæus, want but a little revision to make them altogether of a piece with the rhapsodies of Christian divines, in recommending the ascetic life.\* "How angelic is it to lead a life, not merely not fleshy, but *far raised above the laws of nature herself!*" Looking at language such as this, by itself, one must rather imagine it to have come from the lips of the enthusiasts of the school of Simon Magus, than from those of a well-informed teacher of Christianity. If the people at large are taught that the highest perfection attainable by man in the present state consists in, and is to be pursued by the means of, a divorce of the heaven-born soul from matter, whatever they may at other times be told to the contrary, they will inevitably form a notion of the divine purity, as being the antithesis rather of *corporeity*, than of *sin*; and this notion, far more agreeable as it is to the unrenewed mind than the other; although it be more abstruse, will, in fact, give law to the whole of the religious system, of

\* Some specimens of this sort will be found in a note at the end of this Number.

which it is an element. The very allusion contained in the epithet applied by the writer now before us to God, whom he calls "the only bridegroom of pure souls," (twentieth oration,) conjoined with the doctrine that absolute purity is to be attained only by those who renounce marriage, could not but have the effect of diverting the minds of ordinary Christians from a genuine and spiritual conception of the divine nature. This substituted notion is the very egg of gnosticism, and it has made itself the parent of all superstition.

Better doctrine than this is met with in a much inferior writer, and one who was himself superstitious enough in his way, I mean Cyril of Jerusalem, who, *περί σαματος*, keeps clear of extravagance on a subject where very few of his contemporaries could observe the bounds of moderation. It must also be admitted that the great man to whose praises Gregory devotes the above cited oration, although the principal mover and patron of the ascetic life, yet abstains from many of the reprehensible sentiments which abound in the writings of the Nicene age. Basil, far surpassing his brother Nyssen, and his friend Nazianzen, in substantial qualities, as well of the intellect as of the heart, may properly be adduced as affording the most impressive example that can be imagined of the fatal tendency of the theology of the age, in perverting minds even of the highest order. Of Basil's superiority to most of his contemporaries—the superiority of sound sense, and right Christian feeling, we might well enough adduce, as instances, those frequent passages in which his papistical editors feel it necessary to attach a *caute legendum* to a paragraph—that is to say, to places where the writer is seen to be rising above the superstitions of his

times. Such an instance we find in the Homily on the Incarnation, where Basil, touching the topic that had been so poorly handled by Nyssen, and that was to be so abused by Augustine, treats, as of little practical importance, the very point which they, and others, laboured to establish as of ineffable moment and solemnity. Nevertheless, and amidst the frequent outbursts of a better reason and of a better faith, this great and devout man yields himself, like others, to that same gnostic notion of the divine character, of which the ascetic doctrine, and, particularly, the institute of celibacy, were the proper expressions. On what warrant of scripture does Basil dare to affirm that virginity is, "that which makes man resemble the incorruptible God?" Neither our Lord, nor the apostles, utter a word that gives even a colour to an anthropomorphous sentiment of this kind. The doctrine is, in fact, pure gnosticism: and the inevitable practical effect of it, is to impel the Christian to pursue an ideal, or Platonic, instead of a genuine and spiritual species of sanctity. I can suppose nothing less than that, while Basil and his contemporaries were treating subjects of this class, the being they were thinking of was not the true God of the scriptures, but the incorporeal First Mind, of the eastern theosophy.

Let us then listen a moment to the bishop of Cæsarea, and say, impartially, whether his style resembles most that of Paul, Peter, John; or that of Saturninus, Basilides, Valentinian. It is not a few sentences, taken apart, that can convey a just impression of the writer's mind and feeling. I indulge the hope therefore that diligent and conscientious students will read for themselves the entire tract I am now referring to, *De Vera Virginitate*, (tom. i.) and satisfy themselves on the question, which has become a very important one, Whether the

Nicene church was, or was not, fatally affected by the oriental poison: I would even stake the present argument upon an examination of this very tract.

“A great (virtue) truly is virginity, which, to say all in a word, renders man like to the incorruptible God. And this (virginity) is not a something that goes forth from (springs from) the corporeal, until it reaches the soul, but belonging to the incorporeal soul, (the gnostic principle expressly) as a choice excellence, avails, by its own incorruptness, for preserving uncorrupt that which is corporeal. For the soul having conceived, and holding to the idea of the true good, is wafted aloft in its approaches toward it, as on the wing of this incorruptness (virginity,) and, as like to like, intently waiting upon the incorruptible God, brings up the virginity of the body as a ready and obsequious servant to assist it ever in the calm contemplation of the divine perfections; and for this purpose, and that it may admit, as in a pure mirror, the divine image, it dispels all those perturbing passions which affect our lower nature.” Farther on, in the same treatise, *De Vera Virginitate*, the nun is said to strive to present herself to the incorporeal deity *γυμνήν*, and unconscious of any pleasures attaching to the body? I can do nothing more, consistently, with the limits within which this branch of the argument must be restricted, than just point to the places where sentiments of this sort are to be met with in their expanded form. In the view of the general reader, who must accept this sort of evidence, as it is laid before him, my inferences may seem to be too slenderly connected with the facts, as adduced. Let them then be contradicted by those who have at command the means of examining this evidence in the mass. Or, let the advocates of ancient Christianity favour the world by including among the “records of the church,”

a translation, *whole and entire*, of this very treatise on the true virginity.

It is of a piece with the false and gnostic notion of the mode of approaching the Deity, as advanced by Basil, that this wise and holy man is found spending his strength upon the observances of factitious sanctity; and that, in a practical composition addressed directly to women, he enters, with the most offensive particularity, into physical disquisitions and speculations of a kind not only totally unbecoming in a minister of religion, and marvellously improper as intended for a lady's oratory, but unconnected, in the remotest way, with the culture of that "true holiness" of which the apostles speak. But the two systems of virtue were wrought out of altogether different elements. Basil, like Nazianzen and others, thinks himself called upon to enter a Christian lady's dressing-room, and there to give her religious rules for the whole of her behaviour at the toilet, gravely enjoining her, among sundry instructions equally important, in pity to the angels who visit her chamber, to use the utmost despatch in the necessary care of her hair, lest they, to their own peril, should look too long upon her dishevelled tresses! Then follows the customary reference to Gen. vi. 2, our author having before warned the nun of preserving her bashfulness, not merely when in the presence of men, but always, and in recollection of the "circumambient angels," from whose regards she could never withdraw herself.—(Tom. i. p. 747, of the Paris edition, 1618.)

Now if we assume that these miserable and pernicious refinements actually took effect, as they were likely to do, on the minds of sensitive and superstitious young women, could the result be any thing else than that of diverting the thoughts from whatever is truly spiritual



and genuine in piety, and putting in its place, a morbid solicitude concerning the person, so imaginative in its objects, and so voluptuous in its style, as to differ very little from the most dangerous species of prurience? A nunnery, fully brought under this sort of management, could become nothing better than a spiritual harem. Shall we then wish for our daughters, that, in place of the rational and truly apostolic instructions which they are receiving from modern Christian pastors, they should be consigned to the influence of divines, such as Basil, Nazianzen, Nyssen! Horrid thought! nevertheless from this utterly vicious system nothing could even now save us, if once we were to resolve to surrender ourselves to what we are taught to reverence as catholic teaching. "Catholic teaching!" Basil's treatise on virginity is catholic teaching, and a perfectly fair specimen of the language and temper of the times. If any thing at all be catholic, that is to say, ancient and universal, the false gnostic theosophy of the ascetic institute is catholic.

A few phrases, as I have said, can convey but a very imperfect impression of the spirit and tendency of a prolix treatise, and yet more copious quotations must embrace what it would be an outrage to every right feeling to adduce. An unreserved translation of Basil—one of the best of the fathers, could it be tolerated, would astound the Christian world. I have affirmed that a religious house of the times now in question, could be little better than a harem; if this imputation be resented, as it probably may, let the facts implied by Basil toward the close of the treatise I have cited, be taken as evidence that a modern Turkish seraglio, might be chosen as a preferable asylum for female virtue. Or if this evidence were not enough, I shall presently have to refer to passages in Chrysostom and in Jerome, the plain import of

which, making every reasonable allowance, will leave a decisive advantage to be claimed for a pacha's palace, if compared with the ancient *κονισβιον*.

To repress and exclude the abuses invariably attendant upon this vicious system, the great writers of the time laboured with indignant animation. But not even one of them, as it appears, set himself to call in question the principle upon which it rested, or inquired in what school that principle had been learned. So thoroughly had the feeling and the notions of what I cannot scruple to call a baptized sooffeeism, pervaded the Christian community, that no suspicion seems to have been entertained of the cheat which so early had put the Buddhist theosophy in the room of Christian theology—leaving to the church its dry orthodoxy indeed, but hiding from it the genuine conception of the divine nature.

In an argument such as the one now before us, it may be well to abstain from citing those writers whose reputation was in any way tarnished, or whose style is not in harmony with that of the age they lived in; or if references of this kind are made, it should be only so far as these less esteemed authorities speak the language that was authenticated by their better reputed contemporaries, and which does but echo prevailing opinions. Now with these cautions in view, and after the most esteemed fathers, such as Basil, and the two Gregories, have been consulted on the subject of the angelic perfection of the ascetic life, let the Hymns of Synesius be referred to. In these beautiful compositions (some of them) the oriental theosophy, under whatever temporary designation it may pass, and whether it be called Buddhism, or sooffeeism, or Pythagorism, or Platonism, or gnosticism—this same doctrine, thinly spangled with Christian phrases, is clearly and boldly expressed.

These hymns then, as the productions of a man, albeit a bishop, and an associate of the great divines of the age, who at the time of his almost compulsory consecration, did not profess himself to be much better than half a Christian, could not fairly avail us, in argument, as legitimate evidence, if they did not find parallels in the best theological writings of the time. If indeed a correct notion of gnosticism is to be gathered from the reports of Clement, Irenæus, and Origen, this airy and seductive doctrine, utterly unlike Christian theology, is substantially imbodyed in the Hymn of Synesius, leaving out indeed so much of its jargon, as must have shocked every Christian ear, and expressing just so much as might find its apology in the writings of the orthodox. This gnostic doctrine then, as advanced by the bishop of Cyrene, implies the total oblivion as well of man's real condition, as guilty and morally corrupt, and of the divine purity, opposed to this corruption, and the putting in the place of these truths, the Buddhist idea of the Father of souls, or ocean of mind, into which pure spirits, struggling away from matter, are at length to return. If the first and second hymn be compared with Basil's treatise on virginity, from which I have already made an extract, not merely a loose resemblance, but a close analogy must be acknowledged to connect the two writers, in this instance; and if the bishop of Cyrene employs a phrase or two which the bishop of Cæsarea would perhaps have rejected, there is little or nothing to choose between the two, either as to principle, or tendency.

Many turns of expression, occurring in the hymns of Synesius, might pass unnoticed by a modern reader who was not already apprized of the specific sense attached to such phrases in the contemporary gnostic

schools. Some indeed of these modes of speaking would seem strange in the last degree, and utterly unwarrantable: as for instance, when, addressing the Deity the poet says—

Συ πατερ, συ δ' εσσι ματηρ  
 Συ δ' αφην, συ δε θηλυς :

but when we come to open the records of gnosticism, the real value, or, as it is called, the *historic sense* of these characteristic phrases presents itself clearly enough. Such are the terms—"root of the world," "root of roots," "fountain of fountains," and the prosopopeias of "Wisdom," "Mind," "Generative Power," "Celestial Silence," and the like. "The wave-troubled Hylé," the "bright Morpha," the "Primogenitive Beauty," and the "dæmon swarm which Nature hatches." And such too is the language in which Synesius lauds the abstractive life, which, as he says, "opens to the human spirit a way of return to the upper sphere" (language almost identical with that of Basil; see particularly the close of the second hymn; or of the third) and he prays that, until he shall be permitted to lose himself again in the "ocean of light," and while compelled to submit to the trammels of the corporeal state, he may at least be aided in leading a life as exempt as possible from human affections, and from all contact with the soul-depressing Hylé. With these aspirations of the lofty mystic, it is rather curious to compare the temper and conduct of the real Synesius—the palpable bishop of Cyrene, who does not dissemble the fact that he would fain have relieved the tedium of his corporeal existence, now and then, by the jocund pleasures of the chase.

If an elaborate disquisition on this important feature of ancient Christianity were in hand (instead of a hasty

allusion to it, which is all I can attempt) the hymns of Synesius might very properly be taken as the text of the argument; with these, adduced at length, should then be compared the entire extant specimens of the language of the professedly gnostic teachers—Syrian and Egyptian. Next should follow, what might easily be collected, a copious collection of passages from the Nicene writers, presenting, not merely innumerable coincidences of expression, but many real analogies, of doctrine, and near approximations in feeling; and all tending, in the same direction, to establish, beyond a doubt, the fact, that the oriental theosophy, while formally repelled by the orthodox church, had silently worked its way into all minds; uttering itself in the various modes of mystic exaggeration, and condensing its practical import within the usages of the ascetic system. The massive walls of the church, like a hastily constructed coffer-dam, had repelled, from age to age, the angry billows of the gnostic heresy, which could never open a free passage for themselves within the sacred enclosure. Nevertheless these waters, bitter and turbid, no sooner rose high around the shattered structure, than, through a thousand fissures, they penetrated, and in fact stood at one and the same mean level, within, where they were silently stagnant, as without, where they were in angry commotion. Dare we say that, at rest, they worked themselves either clear or sweet?

## II. CONNEXION OF THE CELIBATE WITH THE NOTIONS ENTERTAINED OF THE SCHEME OF SALVATION.

WE have in the next place to inquire in what way and to what extent, the principle and practice of re-

ligious celibacy affected, as well the doctrine as the sentiment of the ancient church, in regard to the scheme of salvation, and the means of the divine mercy toward man, as depraved, and as liable to condemnation.

There is surely some prominent truth which broadly distinguishes Christianity, as compared with every other religious system, and which may be taken as its leading characteristic; nor can we hesitate to name, as such, the mode it propounds for restoring mankind, guilty and polluted, to the divine favour—a scheme utterly unlike any which man has devised for himself. Every thing else, belonging to the gospel, may find, elsewhere, its faint resemblance, or its imperfect rudiment: but this doctrine is the prerogative of the inspired writings; obscurely, yet substantially unfolded in the Old, fully and brightly set forth in the New Testament. By emphasis, this doctrine of mercy, however variously expressed, or peculiarly expounded in different schools of divinity, is called—the GOSPEL; for it is the happy news which God only could announce; which man never had surmised, and which, although so worthy as it is of all acceptance, he has perversely shown himself, in every age, marvellously slow to apprehend, apt to lose sight of, and prompt to embarrass or deny.

In the present instance, as I am anxious to avoid, on the one hand, the style and method of a philosophical or generalized disquisition, so on the other, I would gladly refrain from the specific, or technical language of a theological or polemical treatise; keeping close to what is proper to a plain historical inquiry concerning facts which may be unquestionably established by an appeal to evidence. But, avoiding every phrase that has acquired a controversial sense, and every mode of expression that may recall the “confession” of this, that, or

the other religious party, one may surely speak of the characteristic principle of Christianity, in terms such as, without being vague, shall carry the concurrence of all devout and intelligent readers of the scriptures. Is not, then, the gospel a message of mercy—free, full in its provisions, and sovereign—a message implying that all men are, in this regard, on a level in the sight of God, and that that which is indispensable to the salvation of the most flagitious offenders, is not the less indispensable to that of the most amiable and harmless? Is not the gospel ONE METHOD OF SALVATION, sufficient and efficacious for the worst—necessary for the best? Does not the gospel (if indeed it be understood,) carry with it as thorough a lesson of humiliation to one proud heart, as to another? Does it not bring with it as much, and as sure a consolation to one guilty heart, as to another? Does it not convince all men alike, of sin, and of moral impotency? Does it not confirm all (if indeed it be accepted,) in the same good hope of acceptance, and of being regarded as now no longer aliens, but as sons, and as fellow-heirs with Christ?

In whatever way other religious schemes, that have prevailed in the world, may be classified, they all stand at an equal distance from Christianity, in regard to its peculiarity and its glory, its doctrine of justification, through faith: some of these schemes may, indeed, approach it more nearly than others, as to its morality: some seem to come within the penumbra of the light which it sheds upon the unseen world; some consist better than others with the temporal well-being of man;—but all occupy a ground immeasurably remote from that on which the gospel takes its stand. All differ from Christianity, in this respect, just as night differs from day; and whether the night be rendered magnificent by millions of stars, or be overcast with the thickest clouds.

If at any time a comparison be instituted between true religion and false religion, taken absolutely, it may barely be worth the labour it may cost, to distinguish among the several kinds of the latter; inasmuch as all come nearly to the same practical result; the best, as well as the worst, leaving man uncomforted in the prospect of futurity, and unamended, in his heart and life.

But when, as now, our intention is to make inquiry concerning the particular corruptions which true religion has undergone, in the lapse of ages, it then becomes necessary to distinguish, and to classify a little, those several forms of error which have successively overlaid the truth, one by one; or several in conjunction. Such a discrimination is absolutely requisite, (as all protestants admit) in relation to Romanism, which so strangely and so admirably combines the main principles of every anterior false religion. Nor shall we find it, really, less requisite in following up to their sources, those fatal errors of the ancient church, which gradually ripened into Romanism.

All religions have been of Asiatic origin; and (the true now not considered) they resolve themselves easily into two great principles, conveniently designated by the historical terms Buddhism, and Brahminism. The influence of the former, in its more recent garb, as gnosticism, we have already adverted to; and especially in so far as it gave birth to, and sustained, the *abstractive* ascetic practice, and the doctrine of the angelic virtue of virginity. We shall next have to trace the operation, latent indeed, but unquestionable, of the Brahminical principle, combining itself with the former; and the two, hostile as they were east of the Indus, blending together, most amicably, within the precincts of the Christian church. This blended Buddhism and Brahminism is, in a word,



the ancient monkery, at once abstractive and penitential. How shall wretched man return to virtue and happiness? The Buddhist, the Sooffee, the Pythagorean, the gnostic, replied—By extricating the imperishable spirit from its connexion with matter, the eternal source of evil; and by merging itself anew in the eternal, universal good. The characteristic of *this* scheme, under all its varieties, is its total disregard of the *moral* derangement of human nature; or rather, we should say, its view of moral evil as a mere accident, and a temporary consequence of natural evil. In its practical instructions, therefore, it insisted more upon mental abstraction, silence, simplicity of diet, and celibacy, than upon any positive austerities, or propitiatory rites: sin, man's misfortune, not fault, did not need to be expiated.

But the Brahminical doctrine took up the other element of theology; and along with its terrible array of divinities, most of them vindictive, and all invested with human qualities, it propounded a system of propitiation, and concerned itself immediately with the *moral sentiment*, and wrought upon the conscience: it addressed itself more to the fears, than to the hopes of which the human mind is alternately the sport: it admitted man to be guilty, and in danger of wrath; it was, therefore, sanguinary, gloomy, sumptuous, and elaborate in ceremonial, popular in its aspect, rather than philosophical, and of unbounded potency, involving as it did, and having at its command, all the terrors that wait upon guilt; so that it could enforce the most revolting, and the most excruciating practices of immolation, and of self-torture. In the name of the gods, the avengers of crime, it could command the trembling wretch—its victim, to inflict upon himself, or to sustain, whatever pains he might imagine his angry judge to be prepared to inflict upon

him. If we would see the two oriental systems, and each characteristically imbodyed, (one might say *disimbodyed*, for each leaves to man barely a shadow of his entire constitution) we should only have to look, on the one hand, to the dreaming sooffee, lost to sense and natural affection, an idiot sage, or, as one might say, a metaphysic vegetable, just alive, where he sits; and on the other side, to the Hindoo fakir, crucified without a cross, his nails piercing his palms; the martyr of conscience, and grasped by the despair of guilt.

The church of Rome has, without scruple, adopted, intimately blended, and refined, these two schemes of religion; and after having formally and tacitly, dogmatically and practically, excluded the GOSPEL, it has provided itself with a circuitous, and somewhat complex reply to the question which the alarmed conscience is ever and again propounding. Its answer to the question—"What must a man do to be saved?" involves something of Buddhism, and more of Brahminism; it takes up the gnostic physical abstraction, and the philosophic sanctity, and this it offers to its *élite*, the elevated, impassioned, and devotional *few*: and then it takes up the moral element of religion, and deals in penances, macerations, flagellations, masses, confessions, absolutions, purgatorial expiations, and the vicarious offices of the clergy, and of the saints, of the dead, and of the living; and this compound it offers to the rabble of mankind—the debauched and trembling multitude, who, as the long dreaded time comes, when nothing better can be thought of, thankfully accept from the priests' hands, any salvation that is offered to them, and on any terms.

In thinking of popery, we should never lose sight of its two blended elements—its Buddhism, and its Brah-

minism—its abstractive, and its expiatory principles—its provision for the few, and its provision for the many. Both ingredients are brought to bear, as in a focus, upon the monastic institute, of which, celibacy, the prime article, stood chiefly related to the first of them; while the practices of mortification and penance were related to the second. The perfect monk, ‘the angel upon earth,’ such as we find him elaborately depicted by the great church writers from Basil to Bernard, was at once, and in nearly equal proportions, the sooffee, and the fakir; the enthusiast, and the fanatic; the sublime theosophist, and the bleeding, weeping, whining or puling martyr of a darkened conscience.

But alas! it is not alone of the superstition of the middle ages that we have thus to speak; for ancient Christianity—the universally accredited system of the Nicene age, blends, in the like manner, though with less compactness, the two ingredients of the natural religion of mankind; and while it was most explicitly gnostic, in its temper and sentiments, was also Brahminical, as well in doctrine as in practice.

If, with the great divines of the fourth century around us, we plainly put the question to one, and all—“How shall guilty man approach the just and holy God, and how secure his favour?” the prompt and formal answer, no doubt will be—“By humbly accepting the redemption procured for mankind by the Saviour Christ, and conveyed through the hands of the church.” But then this reply is ordinarily couched in very indefinite terms; and when we come to repeat our demand, and to pursue it as a practical question, then the more exact answer given, by one and all, is to this effect—“*First*, that man may place himself near to God, and may anticipate, on earth, the absolute virtue and felicity of heaven, by

removing himself, as far as possible, from the inimical *ύλη* with which, in the present state, he is implicated; and with this view, that is to say, if he would be perfect, he must regard the preservation of an inviolate virginity as the great business of piety; and then, thus far exempted from the conditions of animal life, he must addict himself to lofty meditations of the divine attributes: or, to use the very words of Chrysostom, "That the soul disengaged from its trammels and all earthly thoughts, should wing its way to its home, and its native soil." But *secondly*, that, in order to regain and secure the favour of God, man must propitiate his offended judge, and take into his own hands, in the present life, that discipline of chastisement which he so well merits, and may so justly expect as his due. Now, in this latter point of view, celibacy has its use, as the necessary condition of that mode of life which leaves a man at full leisure to practise the whole round of expiatory and abstersive austerities. How should the married and the busy get through, from day to day, with the heavy work of penance? Such, in substance, was the ancient theology, and the piety of the Nicene church!

Within this system, therefore, religious celibacy was at once the expression of gnostic feelings (as we have seen) and the condition, or the preliminary of a course of penance and expiation.

Yet let it not for a moment be supposed that the Nicene church, or that the great writers of that age, either formally denied, or failed frequently to mention, the great doctrine of the remission of sins, granted through the means of the sacrifice once offered on the cross. The ancient church no more denied this doctrine, than it rejected orthodoxy; nevertheless the relative position into which it had been suffered to subside, was such as in

fact involved a loss of its vital influence: it no longer presented its radiating surface towards the consciences of men.

The experience of eighteen centuries might surely now suffice for convincing the church that, to secure the efficacy of the gospel, something more is requisite than a formal acknowledgment of a set of dogmas; and that the *relative position* of great principles, as foremost, or as hindermost, is the very circumstance on which depends their taking any effect upon the human mind. All systems, professedly Christian, agree in representing holiness, or an inwrought conformity to the moral character of God, as the end and substance of piety; and the difference between system and system turns upon the answer that is given to the question "How (as to the process) is this holiness to be effected?" The gospel, and this is its characteristic, makes the free and absolute remission of sins, and an immediate reconciliation to God, through the mediation of Christ, the spring-principle, or motive of morality. To him who would be *near* God, and to him who would be *like* God, it says—"Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." This is the gospel method of holiness. Reconciled to God, and enjoying the privileges of children, the Spirit of holiness dwells in the hearts of believers, as a purifying influence.

But, if, instead of putting the doctrine of justification, and reconciliation, and of the free and absolute remission of sins, foremost, as the source and cause of genuine religious feeling, and real virtue, we put an ill-digested, half-philosophic, half-hindoo, notion of sanctity, foremost, and if we bend our endeavours toward it, as the main object, then, whatever profession we may make of faith in Christ, our motives will have none of the vitali-

ty, or of the force of Christian holiness. The sun is not indeed driven from the heavens, in such a system; but it is eclipsed; and the Christian, for such we must still call him, droops, becomes pallid, gloomy, superstitious, timid, punctilious; a trembling attendant upon rites, a perfunctory practitioner of ceremonies—fretting, fasting, upbraiding himself, impatient of earth, afraid to hope for heaven, and feeling like the dyspeptic patient who, in his troubled dreams, thinks himself to be labouring to mount a ladder, or to ascend a flight of steps; and yet, with all his painful efforts, not rising an inch from the ground. Such is the sad condition of those in whose spiritual perspective the truths which should occupy the foreground, are seen in the distance;—they are indeed seen; but it is as “afar off,” and as a cold glimmer.

In the *perspective* of ancient Christianity, personal sanctity stood in front of the doctrine of justification by faith (or the doctrine, by whatever phrase it may be designated, which is the characteristic of the gospel) and so far obscured it: but this was not all; for, in front of this very doctrine of personal sanctity, stood the gnostic notion of angelic perfection, or virginity: thus was there effected a double eclipse of the light of the gospel. If the question had been put—“What is a Christian’s aim?” and it had been replied—“To be holy;” and again, “How may he become holy in the most absolute manner?” the answer was—“By avoiding the contaminations of matrimony, and by refraining, on earth, from that which the angels are denied in heaven—the marrying, and the being given in marriage.” Of what avail then would it be to prove, by multiplied citations, that the doctrine of the remission of sins, and of justification, in some ambiguous sense of the term, was firmly held by the ancient church? Let reasonable men ask them-

selves whether the gospel, such as we find it in the inspired writings, could possibly consist with, or could be efficacious, as a body of motives, in combination with notions such as these?

Is the doctrine of the atonement, and of a full remission of sins, thereby procured, a doctrine of universal application, or is it not? Have all men equal need of it; or is it only a desperate resource, left for those who have unhappily failed to secure heaven for themselves in a more direct, honourable, and legitimate manner? This question is a vital one in relation to Christianity, and on the answer that may be given to it, whether our reply be formal or tacit, turns the entire character of our piety. Let then this question be repeated in any such pointed manner as may seem the most likely to bring it conclusively to an issue. All allow that the thief on the cross must have been saved by a sovereign extension, toward him, of that mercy, the means of which were, at that moment, being secured by the suffering Saviour. But if the "beloved disciple" had been dragged to Calvary, along with his Master, and if, as might have happened, he had occupied the right-hand cross, would *he* too have been saved by the same means as the thief, and on the very same principle? Or, had *he* already reached, by merit of virginity, and by the purity of his manners, such a proximity to the divine holiness, as that *he* needed nothing but just to drop the encumbrance of the flesh, and to find himself at ease before the eternal throne? We surely should not gather any such supposition as this from his own language, when he says of the Saviour that "He is the propitiation for *our* sins."

But now there would be no end to our citations, were we to adduce all, or a third of those passages from the fathers in which the celibate, when held to in the strict-

est manner, is spoken of as a mode of life differing from that of the angels in heaven, neither in purity, nor in security; and only so far in felicity, as resulted from the conditions of mortality: "drop the flesh, and then the monk, or the virgin nun, is at once a seraph!" That no such passage might be produced, I will not affirm, but certainly I have met with not so much as one, in which the inviolate virgin is spoken of as being, *like others*, even like any repentant Magdalene, dependent altogether for salvation upon the vicarious merits of the Saviour. Allowing, however, that some such passage might be hunted up, yet assuredly it is not the usual style of the great church writers of the Nicene age. Certainly this way of putting the case, in relation to the monk and virgin, is not characteristic of "catholic teaching." Catholic teaching runs in a contrary direction, and the clear import of it is to this practical effect—That, to have exhorted a "spotless nun," in her last hour, to look to the atonement, as the only ground of hope for a dying sinner (or saint) would have been a very inappropriate, unseemly, and even offensive sort of interference with the honour and comfort she was entitled to: and would have been an insult, like thrusting an obolus into the palm of a Cræsus.

I boldly ask any one competent to give me a reply, whether herein I misrepresent the *general character* of ancient catholic teaching; and if not, then I ask, appealing, not merely to the few, who may be able to turn to the patristic folios, but to the right-minded Christian world at large, whether the first element of the gospel was not effectually and fatally compromised by an institute which, in practice, superseded the "only hope" that "maketh not ashamed?"

At this point we touch that article of discrimination—



that test which exhibits the difference between apostolic, and Nicene Christianity. Does Paul, when, either obliquely or directly, he expresses his personal hope of heaven, so speak as to imply that he looked to be acquitted, accepted, and saved, on any other principle than that which he would have urged upon a penitent prodigal, called, at an hour's warning, to appear before God? We confidently assume that the apostle who, if any ever have understood Christianity, understood it, was used to make no distinctions whatever between man and man, when persuading all to "lay hold of the hope set before them in the gospel."

But how different is the style of the doctors of the Nicene and following age! Then, a spiritual aristocracy had grown up within the church; and those of this class who could profess that their celestial escutcheons were shamed by no spot—these, if never plainly told that they stood above the range of the gospel scheme of salvation, were seldom, if ever told, that they could claim no exemption, and were entitled to no prerogative, and must be saved, if at all, even as others. What then! after all her conflicts with nature, all her tears and fastings, must the spotless virgin, the spouse of Christ, submit, at the last, to the humiliation of standing along with the married, on the same level, needing mercy, even as others? alas! if it comes to this, has she not driven a poor trade?

Those can know very little of the human heart who can believe that monks and nuns, talked to as they constantly were by their spiritual guides, and told that, because virgins in body and soul, they stood as near to God as flesh and blood can stand—that these victims of delusion could, nevertheless, be humbly and contritely relying, as sinners, upon the propitiatory work of

Christ. It was not so in fact; no such spirit breathes through the extant records of monkish piety, here and there we gladly catch a faint gleam of sunshine, as in a wintry and watery day; but monkish piety, on the whole, was nothing better than what we must expect to meet with, as the proper fruit of this "catholic teaching."

Catholic teaching! let us hear a little of it; and, for a sample, take the portrait of a spotless nun, as drawn by the master hand of Chrysostom himself: and be it remembered, we are not now about to gaze upon the blind pharisee, whose lips, life, and manners, said to all around him—"Stand by, I am holier than thou;" but upon an ideal of Christian perfection, conceived and expressed by one who, irrespective of his high station in the church, has always been granted to stand forward as the prince of the fathers.

The passage I am about to quote is taken from a tract to which I must again refer: it was composed by Chrysostom, with the hope of repressing the infamous practice against which, as we have seen, Cyprian, long before, and in another quarter of the church, had vehemently protested, namely, that of nuns cohabiting with men, and which tract, with its companion, addressed to monks, contains admissions and exposures which one must have thought exaggerations, if they were not borne out by concurrent testimony. But let the archbishop's immaculate nun step upon the stage. Our author had just told the nun that, like cherubim and seraphim, she and her order, constituted, not the attendants of the eternal King, but his very chariot.\*

\* In quoting Chrysostom I shall refer to the volume and page of the recent Paris reprint of the Benedictine edition, which is perhaps as likely as any other to be accessible to the studious reader. The above occurs, tom. i. p. 321.

“The virgin, when she goes abroad, should present herself as the bright specimen  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\lambda\mu\alpha$  of all philosophy; and strike all with amazement, as if now an angel had descended from heaven; or just as if one of the cherubim had appeared upon earth, and were turning the eyes of all men upon himself. So should all those who look upon the virgin be thrown into admiration, and stupor, at the sight of her sanctity. And when she advances, she moves as through a desert; or when she sits at church, it is with the profoundest silence, her eye catches nothing of the objects around her; she sees neither women nor men; but her Spouse only; and he, as if present and apparent; and then retiring to her home, there again she communes with him, in prayers, and his voice alone she listens to, in the scriptures; and of him there she thinks, whom she desires and loves; and whatever she does, it is as a pilgrim and a stranger, to whom things present are as nothing. Not only does she hide herself from the eyes of men, but avoids the society of secular women also. The body she takes care of only so far as necessity compels her, while she bestows all her regards upon the soul: and who shall not marvel at her? who shall not be in ecstasy, in thus beholding the angelic life, imbodyed in a female form? And who is it that shall dare approach her? Where is the man who shall venture to touch this flaming spirit? Nay rather, all stand aloof, willing or unwilling; all are fixed in amazement, as if there were before their eyes a mass of incandescent and sparkling gold! Gold hath indeed by nature its splendour; but when saturate with fire, how admirable, nay even fearful is it! And thus, when a soul such as this occupies the body, not only shall the spectacle be wondered at by men, but even by angels.”

Miserable teaching this, whether catholic or not. How

could the subject of any such rhapsody, if any might actually have thought herself the archetype of the picture, how could she imagine herself obliged to listen, like others, to the humbling doctrine of the cross? But such as was the teaching and the system, such were its practical effects; and it is remarkable that, for an ingenuous statement of these effects, we need go no farther than to the two tracts above named; for actually within the distance of a page or two from the place where this "lump of molten gold" dazzles the eye, we find descriptions barely fit to be translated, of the ordinary night-scenes in a Constantinopolitan convent, or, more properly, ecclesiastical *μαστρεπικον*. Could nothing lead so wise and good a man as Chrysostom to entertain the suspicion that the church had, in this instance at least, utterly misunderstood the purport and spirit of the gospel?

Under another head of this present argument, I shall feel it unavoidable to revert to the two connected tracts, from one of which the above-cited passage is taken: leaving, therefore, its context untouched at present—pertinent though it be, I will here only observe that the quotation is a sample, one among hundreds, nay thousands, which might be easily produced, of a fault generally characteristic of the great writers (and the small writers) of the ancient church—I mean the propensity to magnify and glorify what is merely human; in fact, to worship and to deify the creature, more than the Creator; that is to say, so to magnify human virtue, as that, upon the general field of the people's view, the encomium of man *subtends a larger angle*, than the praises of God, and of his Christ. Do not the fathers then worship God? do they not adore the Son of God? Assuredly: but when they muster all the forces of their eloquence, when

they catch fire, and swell, as if inspired, whenever (I must be permitted to make the allusion, for it is really appropriate,) whenever they take their seat upon the tripod and begin to foam, the subject of the rhapsody is sure to be—"a blessed martyr," it may be an apostle; or a recently departed "doctor," or, "a virgin confessor;" or it is the relics of such a one, and the miraculous virtues of his sacred dust. If, in turning over these folios, the eye is any where caught by the frequency of interjections, such a page is quite as likely to be found to sparkle and flash with the commendations of the mother of God, or of her companion saints, as with the praises of the Son; and more often does the flood-tide of eloquence swell with the mysterious virtues of the sacraments, than with the power and grace of the Saviour. The Saviour does indeed sit enthroned within the veil of the Christian temple; but what the Christian populace hear most about, is—the temple itself, and its embroideries, and its gildings, and its ministers, and its rites, and the saints that fill its niches. In a word, what was visible, and what was human, stood in front of what is invisible and divine; and when we find a system of blasphemous idolatry fully expanded in the middle ages, this system cannot, in any equity, be spoken of as any thing else than a following out of the adulatory rhapsodies of the great writers and preachers of the Nicene church.

Of this impious adulation the martyrs and confessors were the first objects; and then came those "terrestrial seraphs," the monks and virgins. The ancient church, well knowing its real and vast superiority, on all grounds of theological truth, and moral principle, as compared with the polytheistic world, or with the schools of philosophy, and yet trampled to the dust, and contemned,

and exposed to humiliations, such as human nature very seldom well sustains, sought to right itself, as far as it could, by indulging in exaggerations of every kind; and no sooner did it get the upper hand of its enemies, that is to say—its abstract Enemy, and its personal persecutors in every particular vicinity, than it gave vent to its stifled pride and resentment, in torrents of adulatory congratulation, in the hurry of which the glory of God stood in abeyance, while the vindictory praises of man were to be uttered.

In advancing this general allegation, I must decline to appeal, for support, to those who, by a long and fond converse with Christian antiquity, and by mere familiarity with its style, have ceased to feel what others would most painfully be conscious of; but I am willing to be judged by any well-informed persons, of sound and undamaged mind, who, fraught with genuine Christian sentiments, and hitherto unacquainted with the writers in question, shall look through the orations of the most noted of them, such, I mean, as Chrysostom, Basil, the two Gregories, Jerome, and Augustine. On what occasions then do these great orators and doctors kindle and glow? When is it that they exhaust the powers of language, and return upon their theme, as if they could never think that they had done it justice? Is it when they are holding forth, before the multitude, the glory of the Saviour of sinners? Is it when they are blowing the silver trumpet of mercy, in the hearing of the guilty? Alas! it is not so. The Saviour, not denied indeed, but not glorified, is left, by these orators, to sleep in the hinder part of the ship: or he is imprisoned in the creeds and liturgies of the church, while commendations, which Grecian and Roman sages would equally have loathed to have pronounced, and have blushed to have received,

are lavished upon the heroes of the church and its anchorites.

Are these representations fair or not? I appeal to those who will go with fresh and modern Christian feelings, into the company of the fathers. But if the facts be such as I allege, will any pretend that an unaffected and heart-stirring proclamation of the gospel—the glad tidings of mercy, free, and adapted to all men's acceptance, was likely to consist with so much bombast and frippery, about the merits, miracles, and virtues of the shoals of saints that burden the calendar? Two such abhorrent elements will never coalesce; and if the church must and will have her demi-gods, to adorn her state in the eyes of the prostrate multitude, she must even forego the presence of her Lord.

A dry, polemic orthodoxy, severed from the gospel, is the doctrinal description of ancient Christianity: and I here refuse to be put to silence by any who shall return the phrase "the gospel," upon me, as if I used it in the cant sense of this, or that, modern sect; and as if it conveyed some restricted and special scheme of doctrine. By the GOSPEL, I mean nothing more or less than the frank declaration of God's mercy to guilty man, assuring to him, through faith in Christ, the full and absolute remission of his sins, and an exemption from "all condemnation," and fear of wrath. I do not affect to speak as a theologian; nor care to cut and trim the phrases I may employ, so as shall make them square with this or that "confession." Does the Bible offer no broad and universally intelligible sense, even on the most momentous subjects? If it do, then it does so in conveying, to the troubled conscience, a message of joy—authentic, simple, efficacious, and such as subdues the grateful heart to obedience.

—Now, meaning this by—the gospel, I affirm that, from beginning to end of the patristic remains, the clearness and brightness of the message of mercy is obscured, its simplicity encumbered, and its efficacious power almost entirely nullified. In entering the awful and gorgeous edifice of the ancient church, one's feelings are very much such as might belong to a descent into some stalactite cavern, the grim magnificence of which is never cheered by the life-giving beams of heaven; for there is no noon there—no summer. The wonders of the place must be seen by the glare of artificial light; human hands carry hither and thither a blaze, which confounds objects, as much as reveals them, and which fills the place more with fumes than with any genial influence. In this dim theatre forms stand out of more than mortal mien, as if a senate of divinities had here assembled; but approach them—all is hard, cold, silent. Drops are thickly distilling from the vault; nay, every stony icicle that glistens in the light, seems as if endued with penitence, or as if contrition were the very temper of the place: but do these drops fertilize the ground on which they fall? No, they do but trickle a moment, and then add stone to stone—chill to chill. Does the involuntary exclamation break from the bosom in such a place—Surely this is the very gate of heaven! Rather one shudders with the apprehension that one is entering the shadows of the valley of death; and that the only safety is in a quick return to the upper world.

Negations and deficiencies are not easily to be set forth, in any of the usual modes of adducing evidence; nor is it to be supposed that the general allegation of a want of that element which makes the gospel, a gospel, as attaching to ancient Christianity, could be established by the citation of a few passages collected here and



there. The fact alleged, presents itself to a rightly principled mind, in passing up and down through the patristic theology. What we ought to meet with in Christian writers, we do not find; or find it seldom, and find it overlaid, and find it wrought up with neutralizing ingredients. I will, however, endeavour to put a clue into the hand of the diligent student, which may enable him, with less labour than otherwise, to verify or to correct the averment here made, namely, That the religious celibacy of the ancient church, springing as it did from a gnosticised theology, excluded, or did not in fact consist with, that clear, cordial, efficacious, announcement of God's free mercy to a guilty world, through the propitiating work of Christ, which is the characteristic of the inspired scriptures, and which it has pleased God to revive, more or less fully, in the modern church. It is this heart-stirring preaching of Christ (no imputation of employing the phrase in a sectarian sense, shall deter me from the just use of it) it is this which makes Christianity a living doctrine; and it is this, of which we find but faint and feeble indications, look where we may, among the early writers. Between a dialectic and partisan orthodoxy on the one hand, and on the other, a mystification of the sacraments, and a stern, or fanatical asceticism, the gospel nearly disappears. Those who have known what it is, with a hand, warm with health, to take within their own the hand of a corpse, know how the chill ascends to the heart, and enters the soul. Of this sort is the feeling with which, if the mind be quickened by scriptural piety, it makes its first acquaintance with the body of ancient Christianity.

A sample or two of each of those kinds of evidence of which the present subject is susceptible, I shall now adduce; such, for instance, as formal statements of be-

lief—expositions of scripture—panegyrics of distinguished individuals, and accidental expressions of religious feeling. Of the first, we may take the following “Short Summary of Christian Belief,” conveying the faith of the accomplished Boethius, an orthodox, whether or not a Christian writer. ‘This compendium, “*Brevis Fidei Christianæ Complexio*,” after defining the Athanasian doctrine, as opposed to the several chief heresies of the times, goes on with an historical enumeration of the leading facts of Christianity, up to the moment of our Lord’s ascension, and the commission given the apostles, to evangelize the world, and then adds, “and whereas the human race, by the demerit of its nature, derived to it from the fault of the first sinner, had become pierced with the darts of eternal punishment, nor was sufficient for its own cure, (or salvation) having lost it in its progenitor, He (Christ) granted to it certain REMEDIAL SACRAMENTS, to the end that it (the human race) might acknowledge the difference between what it merited by nature, and what it received by gift of grace; and that, as nature could bring punishment only, grace, not called grace if granted to merit, might furnish whatever appertains to salvation.”

Such is the sum of the gospel, according to Boethius, who adds not a word more concerning the scheme of mercy. It may be said that he affirms salvation to be by grace, not merit, but what are the channels or the expressions of this grace of heaven? Nothing else than the remedial sacraments, in duly accepting which, from the hand of the priest, guilty men receive all that they have any need to think of; just as if the sacraments were potent drugs, or chemical antidotes, infallibly dispersing the poison inherited from Adam! But was that which animated the labours of the apostles, in traversing

kingdoms, and in crossing seas to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, was it, in fact—to impart the sacraments, and to open, in every country, genuine dispensaries of these panaceas for guilt and wo? There may be those who will not hesitate to reply in the affirmative, and who, with the Pauline epistles before them, will nevertheless profess their belief that, to give men every where a ready access to the two sacraments, was the object and completion of Paul's unwearied labours. There are those who will say this. Thank God there are multitudes who have read their Bibles to better purpose, and who, while happily ignorant of ancient, understand something of apostolic, Christianity.

When a question is in progress concerning the alleged absence of some important element of truth, there is a convenience, at least, in referring to small, and yet comprehensive tracts, which may soon be sifted. Now, with this view, we might take up again the often-quoted commonitorium of Vincent of Lerins. The writer's intention, and a commendable one, plainly was, to afford to a Christian man the ready and certain means of answering, for himself, the momentous question—"Am I right in matters of faith?"—"am I on the road that leads to heaven?" And with this view he offers rules, well condensed, and carefully guarded, by application of which, in every particular instance of doubt, a Christian may discriminate between catholic truth, and heretical pravity, or, which is the same thing, novelty. But now the whole of this criterion of doctrine turns upon the perfection of trinitarianism; not a hint is dropped, any where, that there are other principles essential to Christianity, after the Nicene faith has been duly secured. A reader of this tract is left to suppose that, if he do but hold the doctrine of the trinity, "uncorrupt and entire,"

nothing farther is wanting to him:—he is then a Christian—he is within the pale of the church, and as safe as all are on board a ship which is destined to reach her port. An orthodoxy purely logical, and which turns upon nicely trimmed phrases, came in the place of the entire Christianity of the apostolic writings. Vincent's catholicity has no more warmth, no more vitality, in it than Aristotle's Ethics; nay, is really much less likely to generate sentiments of virtue. There is not in this treatise a paragraph, or a sentence animated by a reference to the rich mercy of God in the gospel. We find the honours of the Mother of God—the Theotocos, carefully affirmed; but very little is said of the glory of Christ as the Saviour of the world. Be it observed then, that, while a dry and verbal trinitarianism would well enough hold its place by the side of a gnosticised and ascetic ethical system, the life-giving gospel, speaking peace to the troubled conscience, and supplying the motives of true holiness, in the doctrine of justification by faith, this doctrine, which sets Christianity in utter contrariety to every other scheme of religion, has never consisted, can never consist with, any modification of the ascetic system: and in fact, the evangelical glory faded from the view of the ancient church at the moment when the oriental philosophy lodged itself within its bosom: from that time forward the condition of the church was such as might very aptly be described in the language which Vincent himself applies to certain half heretics—"half dead, half alive, who have swallowed just such a quantity of poison as neither kills them, nor may be digested, nor compels them to die, nor suffers them to live."

It must by no means be imagined that the early decay and the disappearance, at length, of the evangetic energy

from the church, is attributable solely, or primarily, to the ascetic doctrine, and to the celibacy which it enjoined. To preclude any such supposition, which, in being dispelled, might seem to weaken my argument, I must, in passing, advert to the easily established fact, that this decay had commenced *before* the time when the ascetic practice had very perceptibly wrought its own effect upon the opinions and sentiments of the Christian body. By itself indeed it was enough (when fully expanded) to exclude the vital element of Christianity; but this element had already been edged off, by little and little, from the theological system, under the operation of several other causes; one of the chief of which, plainly, was the circumstance that Christianity, as early, at the latest, as the middle of the second century, had fallen into the hands, and thenceforward remained under the guardianship, of astute dialecticians, and wordy sophists, thoroughly trained in the intellectual gymnastics of the Grecian schools of philosophy, and who, while they found in the trinitarian doctrine a field well enough adapted to the performance of the evolutions in which they excelled, turned, with an instinctive distaste, from *the Gospel*, the ideas and sentiments connected with which were altogether unmanageable, as the materials, either of logical, or of metaphysical exercise.

A pertinent exemplification of this order of things, in the course of which whatever, in the Christian scheme, was the most nearly allied to the favourite subjects of pneumatology, in its various branches, came uppermost, while the evangelical element was left to subside, is presented in Origen's four books, *περὶ ἀρχῶν*. This work, of which indeed we should speak more confidently if it had come down to us in the author's own language, and

which is known to have undergone some trimming under the hand of Rufinus, to whom we are indebted for the Latin version now extant—this work professes to present a digest of Christian principles, as its title imports; and, in fact, along with the questionable opinions of the benign-minded writer, it sets forth, as then understood, the orthodox faith, and moreover argues all those topics of religion to which the dialectic and metaphysic apparatus was really applicable.—And there it stops;—nothing—literally nothing, beyond a mere phrase, does Origen find to say about the scheme of reconciliation—the means, process, freeness, sufficiency, or divine richness, of “the redemption that is in Christ.” Again and again we are told in this treatise, that, at the last, all men will be dealt with, *pro meritis*. Let this be true; but there is another truth, which the contrite reader of the New Testament thinks he finds clearly affirmed there, but which no reader of the “*De principiis*” would ever surmise to have belonged to the system which Origen was expounding.

The suppression of *the gospel*, under the hand of the ancient masters of logic and pneumatology, is however a subject, highly important as it may be, which is foreign to my present purpose, and to which I have here adverted only in order to anticipate an objection, as if I were attributing to the ascetic doctrine an extent of influence which may be shown to have arisen from more sources than one. Let then this be understood.

Another probable objection I must also exclude. In adducing the *polemic* treatises of the ancient church, as affording instances of the alleged decay of evangelic principles and feeling, it may be said, that the appeal is neither fair nor conclusive, inasmuch as it does not allow for the peculiar position of the church, as called

upon by the heresies of the times, most of which bore upon the trinitarian doctrine, to insist almost exclusively upon subjects of that abstruse class: whereas (it may be said) only let us look to these same writers when they had laid aside their weapons, or to those of their colleagues who stood off from the contest, and we shall find that they understood, and personally rejoiced in, and warmly promulgated, evangelic principles even as the apostles themselves.

A counter-statement such as this, if it could be substantiated, or even made to appear probably correct, ought to be at once yielded to. Nothing can be more equitable than the general principle on which it proceeds. But can it be made good? In a word, is there any reason to believe that the great champions of orthodoxy, or that their less distinguished contemporaries, when not engaged in repelling the assaults of heretics, thought and spoke more, or with greater energy, and vivacity, of the doctrines of reconciliation, than may be gathered from the tenor of their polemical writings? With the hope of resolving this question, I shall now move into a position, so to speak, alongside of the ancient church—looking at it on those special occasions which, if any could, must be held to be proper for displaying the real and intimate feelings of individuals, and of the community they belonged to. I proceed then to examine ancient Christianity in the concrete; that is to say, as imbodyed in the characters and sentiments of eminent individuals; and these individuals, we take as their portraits have been drawn by the most distinguished of their contemporaries. When a Christian writer undertakes to compose the panegyric of a departed friend, or eminent teacher, whom he, and others, consider to have reached

as near to the point of perfection as is ever permitted to humanity, in the present state, it is natural, nay inevitable, that, in arranging the materials of his eulogy, he should so place foremost what, in his esteem, are indeed the principal excellencies of the Christian character, as shall make manifest his own notions of the general scheme of Christian doctrine and practice: in other words, such a panegyric, especially when elaborate, and when it has evidently been well considered, may fairly be regarded as embodying the writer's confession of faith, dogmatic and ethical, only put in the concrete form. I propose then to look into two or three of the principal writers of the Nicene age, either citing, or referring to, the most remarkable of those eulogistic or funereal compositions with which they abound; only reminding the reader that these great writers and preachers are never more at home, than while exhausting their rhetorical powers upon themes of this particular description; and I will ask, at the outset, whether there is not a good probability, on all grounds of philosophical, I mean *genuine*, reasoning, that, in *this* line of evidence, we shall catch what was indeed the temper, character, and tendency of ancient Christianity; our immediate object being to inquire whether the divine richness, and the distinguishing glory of Christianity, as the revelation of God's mercy to a lost world, occupied the place due to it, in the view of the writers in question? and then, if the contrary appears to be the fact, we shall have the opportunity of seeing whether the foremost place which the GOSPEL should have filled, is not in fact usurped by those gnostic and ascetic principles of which celibacy was the core.

In this case, the question being—Whether certain



compositions, many of them of considerable length, do, or do not, comprise certain elements of truth, there are only two methods of proceeding that can be accepted as conclusive, the one being that of producing the entire tract, oration, or epistle; and the other, that of giving the studious reader such references as may facilitate his obtaining satisfaction, on the point, for himself. It is manifest that the former method is, in the present instance, altogether inadmissible, inasmuch as it must swell this tract to the dimensions of a bulky volume. I must, therefore, content myself with the latter, and, in adopting it, will express my very earnest wish that those who, at this time, may be preparing themselves to accept ancient Christianity, in the stead of apostolic Christianity, would first, and before they come to so fatal a decision, give themselves the pains to follow the clue I am putting into their hands, and to read *through and through*, the pieces to which I shall refer. Can it be denied that this particular line of evidence is very likely to expose (or say, exhibit) the true character of ancient Christianity? We are taking the church by surprise, not unfairly indeed, but just when it is sitting for its portrait, blushing and toying before some enamoured and favoured Zeuxis or Apelles. Will an opponent choose to stake the credit of the Nicene age on this very ground? I suppose not; but I think that those who have studied human nature, and who are accustomed to generalize upon the materials of history, will grant that the use now to be made of the patristic literature, is legitimate, and pertinent to our argument.

I will begin with a very sober writer—a stanch ascetic indeed, and such a one as Evagrius, the historian,

(lib. i. cap. 15,) calls a “living column, holding forth the perfection of the monastic and contemplative life.” I have already quoted him—Isidore of Pelusium, a bishop, and the intimate friend of Chrysostom, as well as of the chief ecclesiastics of his time, and who, if any did so, understood well the religious system, dogmatic and practical, of his age. He has bequeathed to our times two thousand, one hundred, and eighty-three epistles, or short commentaries and notes, upon subjects of all kinds naturally coming within the range of a churchman of that age. Punctiliously orthodox, and moreover professing the doctrine of the atonement, or propitiatory work of Christ, here and there, in unexceptionable terms; as for instance, in the 73d and 100th epistles of the fourth book, and yet, much more often writing like a mere stoic, or a Platonist, whose style glitters with a few shreds of Christian truth.

This Isidore (lib. ii. epist. 151) undertakes with much diffidence, and almost in despair, the epitaphium of a defunct brother, whom he speaks of as having reached the very acmé of perfection, and with whose various praises he fills a folio page: “better was he than all praise, the temple of sobriety, the home of prudence, the tower of virtue, the metropolis of righteousness, the cell of philanthropy, the sacred enclosure of gentleness; and to say all in a word, the treasury of all the virtues.” Then follows the catalogue of these virtues, the foremost being a tyrannous mastery of the bodily appetites, γαστρος, και των μετα γαστερα παθων; and the last, a modest and retiring munificence toward the poor. The bare word *Christian*, does indeed once occur in this eulogy; but it contains not so much as a syllable besides, which would enable the reader to guess that the subject of it was any other, or any better than many a Mahometan

dervish has been;—not a word concerning an humble reliance upon the merits of the Saviour; not a word indicating it as the belief of this saint, that the best of men must, at the last, stand with the most imperfect, as owing every thing to sovereign mercy; not a word savouring of the temper of the apostles: but, on the contrary, the whole tends to convey and support the opinion that nothing could be wanting to those who pursued a spotless ascetic course, but just to drop the *θυνητον*, and then to take their place among seraphs. Is this Christianity? but it is the common style of the ancient epitaphic eloquence. Not without reluctance, I must again call the venerable Athanasius into court.

And yet, who shall show cause why we should not bring evidence in illustration of the character of Nicene Christianity from the writings of Athanasius?—if not, where at all is any such evidence to be found? But if this be unexceptionable and pertinent testimony, then, while we turn to this great man's polemic and dogmatic writings, in order to find there the *abstract* Christianity of the times, what better can we do than seek for the *concrete*—the living and imbodied Christian excellence, in an elaborate and encomiastic biography, by the same hand, of one whom Athanasius holds up to the church as a pattern of Christian perfection, and who also was in fact so esteemed by the church catholic. We turn then to the life of St. Antony, and in doing so, I must clear the way for the inference I have in view. St. Antony, with his picturesque infernal legions, has become the jest of modern times, and is thought of, much rather as an excellent subject for Flemish art, than in any more serious connexion. Or if his name has occurred on the page of modern church history, it has been hastily dismissed, with a word or two of philosophic scorn.

But this loose style of treating such subjects, will not serve us any longer; inasmuch as we are now called upon to look narrowly into many things which, awhile ago, might, without damage, have slept on, in the obscurity that so well befits their intrinsic merits.

This St. Antony then, the transcendental prince of the ancient monkery, drew toward himself the wondering eyes of all Christendom, from the east to the remotest west; and he was allowed to have touched the point of Christian perfection as nearly as may be thought possible to any in the present life. Multitudes, animated by his example, rushed into the desert, and trod his steps. His universal reputation obtained for him the title of the "Patriarch of Monks." If then we were to go no farther, but, resting upon the unquestionable rule, that whatever, in any age, is the object of universal esteem and admiration, may be taken as a sure indication of the taste and the opinions of that age, we might, without any hazard of error, consider this same pattern-saint of the ancient church, as a fair sample of the feelings and notions of that church. Who can except against the use of such a criterion? But this is not all. It might indeed so have been, that, although our ascetic hero had become the idol of the vulgar of the Christian community, he yet stood low in the esteem of the well-informed leaders of the church; and, if not openly condemned by them, yet was but coldly approved, and his extravagances pointed to in the way of caution. The fact is the very reverse; for, in the first place, the great, and strong-minded Athanasius—the chief of the "first three," in the esteem of the modern admirers of antiquity—charges himself with the task of giving this eminent example of more than human sanctity, to the Christian world, in the form of a very elaborate and carefully

composed memoir, occupying not less than fifty-four folio pages. Here then is the portrait of a picked ancient Christian (so called) at full length, and from the pencil of the greatest master of the age. May we not learn something of what ancient Christianity was, in looking at this picture? But we do not yet state the whole case; for we find each great writer of the Nicene age, bowing in his turn, and worshipping this same idol:—Nazianzen, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom. The language of the latter is so pertinent to my argument, that I cannot but cite it. “And truly, if you will visit the Egyptian deserts, you will find there what is better than any paradise: there you will find, in human form, innumerable choirs of angels—tribes of martyrs, assemblages of nuns; in a word, the tyrannous empire of Satan brought to nothing, and the kingdom of Christ shining forth:”\* and after much more in the same strain, the eloquent preacher goes on to introduce St. Antony, “whom,” after the apostles, Egypt “has produced, blessed and great;” and whose life, as related by Athanasius, is said to hold forth all that the Christian institute “*οὐ τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγος*” demands. What more than this can we require, as authorizing the course we are taking, in considering the life of St. Antony, by Athanasius, as a complete sample of ancient Christianity?

I heartily wish that, with this very view, the entire piece were perused by whoever is still admiring, and yet has a misgiving concerning, the gay bubble—antiquity. The question is—Did the ancient celibacy and its concomitants, consist with, and promote, evangelic doctrine and feeling, or did it thoroughly exclude and nullify both! And if this question be answered, as I am

\* Hom. VIII. in Matth., tom. vii. pp. 147, 149.

sure it must, we shall still by no means be compelled to deny sincerity, and a species of devotion, and a high measure of certain of the Christian virtues, to St. Antony, and to those like him. The memoir before us may, in fact, be read with pleasure, and even edification, taken for just so much as it is worth; but as an exemplar of the Christian character, one may find as good, nay, some much better, among the monkish records of the worst times of Romanism. In all these fifty-four pages, scarcely so much as one sentence meets the eye of a kind to recall any notions or sentiments which are distinctively Christian. There is indeed an unimpeachable orthodoxy and a thorough-going submissiveness in regard to church authority; and there is a plenty of Christianized sooffeeism, and there is more than enough of demonology, and quite enough of miracle; but barely a word concerning the propitiatory work of Christ: barely a word indicating any personal feeling of the ascetic's own need of that propitiation, as the ground of his hope. Not a word of justification by faith; not a word of the gracious influence of the Spirit, in renewing and cleansing the heart; not a word responding to any of those signal passages of scripture which make the gospel "glad tidings" to guilty man. Drop a very few phrases borrowed from the scriptures, and substitute a few, drawn from the Koran, and then this memoir of St. Antony, by Athanasius, might serve, as to its temper, spirit, and substance, nearly as well for a Mahometan dervish, as for a Christian saint. The sort of piety herein exhibited has grown up under almost all religious systems, and samples of it, more or less refined, may be discovered in every age and country where the religious instinct has been powerfully developed.

Although the task would be far from a pleasing one, it might, at this time, be a useful undertaking, to give to the Christian world this life of St. Antony, without retrenchment; appending to it, by way of foil, a memoir or two, of the worthies and martyrs of our English reformation. None could fail to discern, in a contrast so violent as this, the vast, the immeasurable difference between that apostolic Christianity which, by the divine mercy, was restored in the sixteenth century, and that ancient Christianity—the sooffeeism of the Nicene age, which we are now called upon, by the Oxford divines, to put in its room! In a parallel such as I am now supposing, there would be points of agreement, good and bad; as, for instance, the ancient ascetics, and the modern reformers, were alike pure in their orthodoxy; both, moreover, were encumbered and depressed by a demonological belief, grotesque enough: and let it be added, that the one, as well as the other, held their faith as Christians with a firmness which, when occasions arose, carried them manfully through tortures and death. But how vast is the difference still! The one, in surrendering themselves (as the church universal had done) to the old oriental illusion, or, as we must call it, the gnostic principle, had lost their hold of all but the slenderest remnants of that evangelic system which, recovered by a return to the scriptures, imparted to the others—the reformers, a vitality, a force, a feeling, truly apostolic. It is impossible not to feel, when the two sets of men are placed in close comparison, that the one are mere drivellers, doting insufferably about the merest trifles; while the others, whatever trifles they might at times strive to invest with importance, nevertheless acted and spoke and wrote like men and like Christians of the apostolic school. Is there a mind so infatuated

as that it could, while referring to the temper and character of Paul as a standard, set by the side of it the puppet Saint Antony, and our Latimer or Ridley; and then choose and prefer the former! and yet we are now taught to think and speak of the reformers either with a hesitating approval, or even as worthy of our contempt, if not hatred, while we are enjoined to go back a fourteen hundred years, and to gather our Christianity anew from the lips of the idiot ascetics of the Nicene age, or of the blind doctors who worshipped them!

It is not to be imagined that the most intelligent body of clergy in Europe should give ear, for more than a moment,—a moment of illusion,—to advice such as this,—advice so pernicious,—and yet not more pernicious, than it is perverse and unutterably absurd.

But the point we are here engaged with is of such importance, and it so nearly touches the marrow of the controversy now on foot, that I must pursue it a little farther, and, in doing so, it will be at once curious and instructive to turn from the life of St. Antony, by Athanasius, to the portrait of a far better and wiser man, drawn by a greater master than even Athanasius—I mean the portrait of this same Athanasius, as given to us very elaborately by the eloquent Nazianzen.

Why should we hesitate to look into a formal and authoritative panegyric of the best and greatest man of the ancient church, as embodying, more or less distinctly, every principal element of the religious system of the times? It is thus, in fact, that the orator, in this instance, regards the task he has undertaken. (See Nazianzen's twenty-first oration.) “In praising Athanasius, I shall be praising virtue itself; for, in speaking of him, in whom were summed up all the virtues, nay, rather, who now possesses all, I commend all in one.” I must here



pass over the exordium, presenting, as it does, a piously worded sample of the gnostic style of the age, and which describes the blessedness of the “genuine philosophy.” Now, let it be granted that, in the peculiar instance of this great champion of orthodoxy, the merits of Athanasius, *as such*, should be made the prominent subject of his encomium: yet, would it not seem as if some single sentence, or even solitary phrase, calling up the recollection of those truths which are the life of Christianity, and its distinction, might well have found a place in the orator’s elaborate panegyric? The personal virtues of the saint are particularly enumerated, and various excellences of his character, beside his orthodoxy, are fervidly extolled; yet there do not meet the eye, in the whole composition, filling four and twenty folio pages, hardly three words, which could suggest to an uninformed reader the idea that Christianity comprised any element distinguishing it from the Grecian philosophy—the doctrine of the Trinity excepted. Few traces do we here find of the gospel; and no allusion, ever so remote, to the doctrines which are the main subjects of the Pauline epistles. Or to come nearer home, never would it be surmised, from any thing occurring in this oration, that there are principles of Christian belief, such as those so clearly imbodyed in the 9th, 10th, 11th, 15th, 17th, and 31st articles of the English church. Grant it, that we should not demand, in a commemorative oration, a logical synopsis of doctrine; but may we not demand, from a Christian preacher, and a bishop, that, as often as he stands before the people, he should afford them the means of knowing that his own heart, as a harp in tune, responds, in all its wires, to the harmony of heaven? Can we imagine any one of the leaders of

the English reformation to have pronounced Nazianzen's 21st oration? or would any one of them have concluded any such harangue, had they pronounced it, with an invocation of the dead Athanasius, now to look down upon him with favour, and to aid him in the government of his church! No such incongruity, no such contradiction, can be even imagined to have had place; for every one feels that Nazianzen's Christianity, and the Christianity of Jewell, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, Hooper, were *two systems*, the one excluding, or forgetting, that which the other made the most account of; the one dry, abstruse, extravagant, turgid, formal, vapid; the other, cordial, rich, efficacious; and, if tinged with superstition, yet immeasurably more concerned with the momentous realities than with the mere rites of piety.

It would be an error of serious consequence to suppose that the zealous archbishop of Alexandria was no better a Christian than we might gather reasons for thinking him, from the language of his panegyrist. His various writings forbid any such comfortless supposition. Athanasius was not only better than Nazianzen's portrait of him; but better, and the same may be said in a thousand instances, than his own notions of Christianity (considered as a system) would have made him. While he and his contemporaries took up the foreign gnostic element, the presence of which deranged the entire scheme of the gospel economy, he and they, or many of them, so retained their hold, personally, of its genuine and vitalizing principles, as that they still drew sap enough from the vine to adorn their branches with clusters of fruit. We may properly denounce and reject a particular form of Christianity, without being compelled to unchristianize those who have known nothing better.

But I must return a moment to Nazianzen. It might be thought, and with some appearance of reason, that, on so special an occasion as the one above referred to, and when he had to hold up, to popular admiration, the great champion of orthodoxy, the one prominent subject, the doctrine of the Trinity, would naturally exclude other topics of theoretic or practical theology. Let it be granted then; and on this supposition, we can do no better than turn from the panegyric of Athanasius, to that of Cyprian. In *this* instance at least, the remoteness of the subject from any local, temporary, ecclesiastical, or theological interest, may fairly be held to have exempted the orator from any such preoccupation of mind, as might have precluded the full and spontaneous expression of his feelings, as a Christian. The eulogium of the martyr of Carthage, is surely open ground; and in this instance we shall not fail to discover those features of Christianity which were foremost in the view of the speaker.

Of what sort then is this florid oration? (the 18th.) Not a whit more evangelical than the one already referred to. Utterly devoid is it of those notions and modes of feeling which, in the strictest and most proper sense, are Christian. A dry, punctilious orthodoxy, with more than a spice of offensive superstition, are its characteristics: there is indeed, what we may find elsewhere, and among heathen philosophers, a high contempt of the world, and of its pomps, luxuries, and vanities; but there is not even a beam of that splendour—the radiance of heaven, which, in the scriptures themselves, gladdens the hearts of the contrite. If the ten lines concerning Christ, the “protomartyr,” may be urged in mitigation of this averment, let them be produced; but they amount only to a profession which no Christian could avoid

making; and such a turn is given to the allusion to the sufferings of Christ, as serves to ally the doctrine of the atonement with the dim theology of the times. “Many things there are indeed, which tend to lead us into the better way; and many which train us in virtue, such as reason, law, the prophets, the apostles, and even the sufferings of Christ, the protomartyr, who ascended the cross, leading me thither, that he might attach to it my sin, and triumph over the serpent, and sanctify the tree, and vanquish pleasure, and rescue Adam, and restore the fallen image (of God in man.)”

Let, however, this profession pass for as much as it can be worth, conjoined with what follows; and I do not see another line that is equally, or in any proper sense, evangelic. But what is it that follows? Such things as these—a love story (whence derived does not appear) but the purport of which is, that Cyprian, before his conversion, being desperately enamoured of a beautiful nun, had pursued her so importunately as to reduce her almost to despair. In this terrible extremity, to whom should she have recourse, but to the blessed Mary, the queen and patroness of virgins: not indeed as if forgetting God, and her Saviour—*ἐπὶ τὸν θεὸν καταφευγεί;* but, as the readiest and surest means of obtaining immediate assistance. “She supplicated the Virgin Mary, *ἰκετεύουσα*, beseeching her to afford aid to a virgin in peril; and, by the medicine of fasting and prostrations on the bare earth, she farthered her purpose, partly that, by these means, she might tarnish those charms which were the cause of her trouble, and so remove fuel from the flame; and partly, that, by her sufferings and humiliations she might propitiate God: for indeed by nothing is God so well pleased, *θεραπεύεται*, as by the sufferings

of the body, and it is to tears that he is wont to render his compassion."

'This is "antiquity;" this is "catholic teaching;" this is that "perfect form of our religion," which, as we are now told, was at length brought out, after a three hundred years' preparation, or concoction of its rude elements: this is the venerable system which we are to put in the place of the Christianity of the reformers? Many who, seduced by fair words, and a very partial, and therefore fallacious exhibition of what ancient Christianity really was, are giving in their submission to what is called Catholicism, would be horror-stricken did they fully know what this catholicism actually includes.

If it should be said that passages such as the above are but spots on the disk of the sun, and need be taken no account of, our part then will be, in the place of every single quotation, to produce a hundred; and all of the same dark colour. Is it possible that the gospel, such as the apostles gave it to the world, should consist with the practice of praying to the Virgin Mary? No; if there be any consistency in religious principles. Nor, in fact, did these irreconcilable elements cohere: the worse presently expelled the better, and brought with it every kindred superstition:—as for instance—

—After the executioner had done his office, says our orator, the body (of Cyprian) strange to say, was not to be found, *αφ' ους ου*: the "treasure had, however, been taken care of by a pious lady, who long concealed it, whether it were merely that it pleased God thus to honour and reward her piety; or whether to prove us, and to try if the deprivation of the sacred relics would really distress us. However this might be, at length private advantage was made to yield to the public welfare, and the God of the martyrs brought the sacred remains to

light! What honours have not been granted to women!" . . . Then follow the innumerable miracles of healing effected by this holy dust! all which those were ready to attest, who had made proof of their efficacy.

To translate at length the nauseous drivelling of Nazianzen in this, and similar instances, is a task I must decline:—let those who are hovering between Christianity, and "catholic antiquity," read it for themselves; or let the Oxford divines give to the English public, whole and entire, the festival orations of the two Gregories, and of Chrysostom. All would then know, fairly and at once, the extent to which they will have to go in accepting the latter, and in relinquishing the former.

Fitly, in this instance, as in others, Nazianzen includes, in his peroration, a devout prayer to the glorified martyr. "And thou, from thy seat, look down upon us propitiously . . . aiding us in the government of the flock." That this was not a rhetorical flourish appears, not only from the seriousness and frequency of similar invocations, but from a formal profession which the speaker, in the funeral oration for his father, makes of his opinion on this point of "catholic belief." (See the 19th oration.) "I am persuaded," says Nazianzen, "that our father's intercession now avails us more than his teaching did while present with us in the body; now that he has got near to God, has shaken off the fetters of the body, and, freed from the mud of earth, approaches naked the naked." . . .

It might be well to follow this same father through his panegyric orations. Let the diligent inquirer do so; and if he finds, here and there, expressions fitting a Christian preacher, consider always with what ingredients these shining fragments are mingled.

It may, however, seem probable that, although Nazian-

zen's florid eloquence might conceal the better and purer elements of Cyprian's Christian character, these would not fail to make their appearance if we could look into some memoir of the martyr, composed by a contemporary, and one, therefore, who was nearer, by a century, to the apostolic age. Such an opportunity is then actually afforded to us in the Life of St. Cyprian, as written by his own deacon, his constant attendant and friend, Pontius. Be it that Nazianzen plays the part of the mere orator, ambitious to shine, and looking at his object through the haze of time, and the mists of superstition: but Pontius was the disciple and intimate companion of the martyr, and the sharer of his perils. What materials then does this authentic record present, pertinent to our argument?—we find in it the same absolute destitution of evangelic sentiments, and the same ascetic feeling. The deacon commences his portrait of his master precisely in the style that characterizes the fathers, from Tertullian downwards. “The preservation of continence, and the treading under foot the concupiscence of the flesh by a robust and thorough sanctity,” was, we are told, the prime rudiment of Cyprian's Christianity, and the most direct means, in his esteem, of rendering his bosom the fit receptacle of truth! The modern reader should be on his guard against the error of attaching, either a *protestant* or a *classical* sense, to the terms which meet us in this instance, and on every page of ecclesiastical literature; and which, as there employed, carry always a *technical* sense; as, for instance, in this place, *sanctimonia*, is not holiness, either in an apostolic, or a modern sense of the term; but the *sanctimoniousness*, or factitious purity of the ascetic life: the *concupiscentia carnis*, is the abstract affection, proper to our nature, not its irregular or depraved excesses: the

*continentia*, is not purity of heart and manners, but celibacy: and the *pectus idoneum*, is such a preparation of the animal nature, as, according to the gnostic notion, was the prerequisite of all correspondence with the Supreme Being. The rest of this Life of Cyprian is occupied with the martyr's virtues, his charity, diligence, courage, contempt of the world, and so forth;—virtues, springing from motives far more powerful than any that were known to heathen philosophy, and reaching a practical extent in proportion, and such as heathenism had never dreamed of. What stoics have ever acted as Cyprian did, during the pestilence at Carthage? what stoics have ever died as he did? Nevertheless, Cyprian's virtue would be much better described as a stoicism purified and animated, than as Christianity imbodyed. None could fail to feel powerfully the vast difference between apostolic (and protestant) Christian sentiment on the one hand, and gnosticised ancient Christianity on the other, who would do themselves the justice to read Pontius's Life of Cyprian, by the side of any memoir of the martyr bishops of the English reformation. Was not Cyprian, then, a good man, and a Christian too? Who can doubt it? but yet not nearly so well taught a Christian, as have been scores of Romanist bishops and monks, of the middle ages. If, therefore, we choose to reject the reformers as our masters in theology, it were far better to stop short near at hand in the church of Rome, where we may find spirituality, as well as fervour, and a more full expansion of doctrines, than to go up to the Nicene, or the Cyprianic age, where all is dim and unformed. This, I am persuaded, will be felt and frankly acknowledged by all open to conviction, who, laying aside their terror of popery, will deliberately and calmly compare



the best Romish writers with the best Nicene or ante-Nicene fathers. It may be very true that a return to Romanism, on the part of the English church, would involve some very awkward practical consequences, which are not involved in a return to ancient Christianity, and which we might bring about, as it were, silently and unobserved. But if, political and ecclesiastical considerations apart, we were to entertain the question of such a proposed change, on purely religious grounds, I verily believe that we should see reason enough for accepting the former alternative, rather than the latter.

I do not suppose that any champion of the fathers, calling himself a protestant—any one who yet holds by the articles and homilies of the English church, will bring forward a writer like Gregory Nyssen, with the view of counteracting the impression made by the passages cited, or referred to above. All know that, between Nyssen's Christianity and popery, the distinction, if any, is of the nicest kind—hard to catch, and harder to keep one's hold of. I leave him therefore, much as my argument might be served by adducing the evidence he furnishes of the errors of his times.

The temper, as well as the style and method of the Latin theologians, differs much from that which distinguishes the eastern and Alexandrian churches' writers. And yet, notwithstanding the contrast presented by the richness, the exuberance, the refinement and subtlety, and the theoretic tendency of the latter, and the severity and practical directness of the former, the sovereign influence of the system to which the one as well as the other had bowed, is every where apparent. In the place of the gospel, as preached by the apostles, and "worthy of all acceptance," and equally necessary for all, the

church had adopted a transcendental mysticism, the honours and benefits of which were offered to a very few; while to the many, instead either of the free gospel, or of the prerogatives of the upper species of virtue, the church offered its sacraments, as tangible conveyances of so much grace as might secure salvation to those whose faith and virtue were of a vulgar stamp.

In whatever respects Ambrose of Milan may differ from the Gregorys, or from Chrysostom, he is thoroughly in accordance with them, so far as the above general description goes:—they indeed may incline toward the mild, abstracted, and imaginative sooffeeism,—or Platonism; while he, and the Latins, less given to meditation, and more conversant with the business of life, leaned toward the stern and stoical system: they, speaking of Christianity as a scheme of *philosophy* (the term constantly employed by the Greek fathers) these calling it a system of *discipline*. The general product, however, of the two institutes was the same, and both alike dimmed, or removed from its place, the glory of the gospel.

To the instances which I have adduced above, it may perhaps be objected that the occasions on which the formal orations I have quoted were uttered, were not the most favourable for bringing forth the intimate and personal sentiments of the speakers, as Christians; and that, just on these annual festivals, the temptation to make a show of sparkling rhetoric overcame the better feelings of the preacher.—Be it so. Let us then take up an instance in which, if in any that is conceivable, a preacher may be supposed to have had his best and most characteristic Christian sentiments so powerfully wrought upon, as to carry him far above the range of the inferior motives of intellectual ambition. When is it that our modern pulpit orators are seen, if not to the greatest ad-

vantage as orators, yet to the greatest as men, personally imbued with the quickening motives, and animated by the hopes of the gospel? Surely it is, when the fountains of grief having been broken up, by some sudden bereavement, whatever, in their ordinary style, may have been formal, or artificial, or perfunctory, is thoroughly dispelled by the agony of the heart; and when the energies of faith impart life and power to every word that is uttered. We may then, on the ground of this general rule, very properly make our way into the crowded episcopal church at Milan, at the solemn hour when the holy father—Ambrose, smitten with the keenest shaft of sorrow, and yet compressing and commanding his tumultuous grief, harangues the multitude, a few days only after the death of his beloved brother, Satyrus. Now, surely, if at any time, we shall hear the *Christian* freely uttering Christian sentiments; and now, if ever, in the eulogistic enumeration of the departed saint's virtues, we shall see what ancient Christianity was in the concrete, and when the most fully developed.

Of the two orations pronounced on this mournful occasion, the second, on the faith of the Resurrection, we may pass by, noticing only the proof it furnishes of that coldness of the affections, and mere intellectuality, which has ever been the fruit of the ascetic system: nothing can be more chilling than this discourse, considered in reference to the circumstances which attended its delivery. The first oration pronounced in the great church whither the corpse of Satyrus had been carried, presents those perpetual antitheses, and smart turns intended to catch the ear of the vulgar, which belong rather to the bad taste of the times, than to the mind of the individual speaker; they indicate, however, the same in-

tellectual frigidity, and that thoroughly sophisticated sentiment, which the religious system had brought in with it.

Ambrose professes the tenderest affection to have subsisted between himself and his deceased brother, who had been his solace, stay, and adviser, amid the cares and labours of his public life. Natural affection had, in this instance, only cemented the more intimately an attachment which the amiable and exalted qualities of Satyrus must alone have rendered fervent and devoted. This beloved brother, after having narrowly escaped from shipwreck, was attacked soon after his return to Italy, with an acute disorder, which snatched him from the fondness of his family and friends, and from the public service. Alas! it appeared from the event, that he had asked only of "St. Laurence the martyr,"—what had indeed been granted to his prayers—a safe passage! Would that he had prayed also for length of years! Let not the protestant reader, who may lately have heard Ambrose named as one of the great three, to whom we are to look for our idea of finished Christianity, let him not be startled at this praying to a saint. Ambrose in the west, as well as Nazianzen, Nyssen, Chrysostom, in the east, and others, too many to name, had convinced himself that no prayers were so well expedited on high, as those which were presented by a saint and martyr already in the skies! In fact, a good choice as to the "patrocinium," was the main point in the business of prayer. These matters were, however, regulated by a certain propriety and conventional usage,—may we say, etiquette: it was not on every sort of occasion that the Virgin was to be troubled with the wants and wishes of mortals: each saint had, indeed, come to

have his department; and each was applied to in his particular line. In connexion with subjects such as this how can one be serious? unless indeed considerations are admitted that agitate the mind with emotions of indignation and disgust.

It was, however, a consolation to Ambrose, in the loss of his brother, that he had lived to return to Milan, where the sacred dust would be at all times accessible, affording to him means of devotion of no ordinary value—"habeo sepulcrum," says he, "super quod jaceam, et *commendabiliorem* Deo futurum esse me credam, quod supra sancti corporis ossa requiescam." Ambrose was truly a gainer by the death of his brother; for in place of his mere bodily presence, as a living coadjutor, he had the justifying merits of his bones, and the benefit of his intercession in heaven! Ungracious task indeed is it to adduce these instances of blasphemous superstition, as attaching to a name like that of Ambrose; but what choice is left us when, as now, the Christian community, little suspecting what is implied in the advice, are enjoined to take their faith and practice from the divines of the Nicene age, and from Ambrose, Athanasius, and Basil, especially?

The weeping orator having spent a little his verbose grief, returns upon his path, in order to set before the people—the plebs sancta, this exemplar of virtue, or compendium of Christian graces. It is certain therefore that this highly finished portrait of one so well known to him, and so fondly admired, will contain whatever was, in the preacher's opinion, most important to the Christian character:—the instance is then every thing we could wish for, considered as a criterion of ancient Christianity, in the concrete. Without a play upon

words, it may properly be called an *experimentum crucis*. We proceed then to analyze this most conclusive record. What were the virtues and graces of Satyrus—a perfect Christian after the Nicene model?

First comes his reverential regard to the rites of religion; of which a striking instance is afforded. The vessel in which Satyrus was returning to Italy having got on the rocks, he, not as yet initiated in the higher mysteries, and not regenerated, yet not fearing death, but fearing lest he should die without them, had recourse to those on board who had in their custody the consecrated elements (ordinarily carried, in a journey, as a safeguard against all perils) and having obtained them, wrapped them in a stole, or sacrificial kerchief, which he tied about his neck; and, thus armed, in any event, fearlessly threw himself into the sea: *itaque his se tectum atque munitum satis credens, alia auxilia non desideravit*. A good beginning, is it not? The modern admirers of antiquity seem to be offended when they are accused of “putting the sacraments in the place of the Saviour;” but now they are turning us over to masters of divinity who recommend what, if it do not imply some such substitution, is altogether unintelligible. Thrust this same incident into the memoirs of any one of the insulted fathers of the English reformation: will it suit the connexion, and consist with the spirit and doctrine of the context? It would not, and those are miserably betraying the English church, who, under cover of a mystification of plain and untoward facts, are striving to put the debased Christianity of Ambrose, Jerome, and Basil, in the place of the gospel recovered by its founders.

But we proceed with the virtues of Satyrus, the list of which includes fortitude, and pious gratitude, evinced

in his thanksgiving on account of the deliverance above referred to;—gratitude, the expression of which gave evidence of, and augmented his faith, and a faith such as had enabled him to confide almost as calmly in the efficacy of the consecrated elements tied about his neck, as he could have done had they actually passed into his stomach! Next comes an instance of his cautious regard to legitimate church authority. Then, the childlike simplicity of his disposition and manner, and his singular modesty—pudor and purity, in speech as well as deportment and person. And such an admirer of chastity was he, and yet so abhorrent of ostentation, that, “when urged by his family to marry, having resolved to maintain his purity, he rather dissembled his purpose, than professed his determination. Who then shall not admire a man who, not wanting in magnanimity (sense of distinction) and standing as he did between a sister professing virginity, and a brother of high rank in the church, yet affected not the honours of either condition, while himself replete with the virtues of both?”

The frugality and temperance of Satyrus kept pace with his chastity; all which were cemented by the cardinal virtue justice, and a regard to the claims of all, whether those claims were of the definite or indefinite class, and not least, those of the poor. Such is this portrait; and the preacher, having satisfied his own conception of the congeries of Christian virtues, indulges again in the sorrow which yet he reproves, and concludes by commending the “innocent soul,” as an offering to God. Innocent, that is to say, one of those whom Ambrose, in another place, (*De Pœnitentia*, lib. ii. sect. 10,) says it was easier to find, than any who had duly practised penitence.

But not one line does this funereal panegyric contain breathing an evangelic feeling, or adverting to the great principles of the gospel! It would be wrong to speak of this elaborate composition as defective, or ambiguous, or erroneous, in relation to the leading truths of Christianity; for it touches them not even in the remotest manner. As well say that the *Phædo* of Plato is wanting in evangelic perspicuity, or that Cicero, *De natura deorum*, does not fully express the doctrine of the thirty-nine articles. Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, any one we may choose to name, is as evangelic as Ambrose, so far as the composition before us goes. Nor is the contrast more violent between the writings of heathen moralists, and the epistles of Paul, than that which offers itself when, by the side of the inspired writings, we place this Nicene oration.

The inference I draw from so signal an instance would be in no degree invalidated by adducing, from the same writer, passages of an evangelic aspect. Such passages would either come under the designation of dry dogmatic statements; or they would express those occasional outbursts of a better feeling which enable us yet to believe that these writers were personally better than their system. But then, the Romanist writers, even those of the darkest times, may readily be supplied with a similar apology. And how much more full and satisfactory is such an apology in the instance of more modern Romanists, as for example, those of the Port Royal school! Whatever may be the demerits of Romanism, as compared with Nicene Christianity, it is not to be denied, that, in fervour and evangelic feeling, too, its best writers are decisively superior to those of the earlier time. In fact, it would be extremely difficult to collect, any where, from those distinctively called—the fathers, a



mass of Christian sentiment, such as might be brought together, with the greatest ease, from the devotional and practical works of the middle and later ages. It would be perfectly safe to accept a challenge to adduce three passages from Romanist authors, for every one from the Nicene fathers, such as would satisfy a modern protestant ear.

Or the comparison might be instituted on a rather different ground, as for example, on that of the presence or absence of expressions, utterly offensive to every sound Christian feeling; and which it is very hard to reconcile with the supposition of genuine piety, in the writer. Now, it must be confessed, that many things meet the eye on the pages of the great writers of the Nicene age, of a kind that finds no parallels in the accredited and most esteemed Romanist writers. Altogether, those proprieties, both moral and religious, which modern refinement demands—and properly demands, are far better observed by the later, than they were by the earlier authors; and especially will this appear to be true, if we confine ourselves to those of the highest reputation, respectively. None, I think, will attempt to deny this advantage, as belonging to the Romish church, in regard to the observance of the moral decencies of style, or subject; nor do I see that it can be refused in relation to *theological* proprieties: as for instance—

Ephrem the Syrian, a highly esteemed writer of the Nicene school, and one who, ascetic as he is, may be read with pleasure and advantage by those who are better taught than himself, and who know how to supply his deplorable deficiencies in evangelic principle, gives us a story to the following effect. Abraham the hermit, his own intimate friend, had had consigned to his care,

in the wilderness (alas the luckless girl,) an orphan niece, the heiress of an ample fortune, then in her seventh year, whom her relatives (such were the notions of the times,) conveniently disposed of, by incarcerating her in a cell, destitute of every comfort, adjoining that of the hermit. In this den the poor girl's hours were occupied in the performance of menial offices for her uncle, and in the routine of penance and devotion. It was her misfortune, moreover, to be very handsome, so the legend runs. Seen and seduced by a monk, who, on pretence of spiritual perplexity, frequented the holy seclusion, she abandoned, at once, her profession, her prison, and her keeper; who, after awhile, discovers her shame, and the place of her sojourn; whither he follows her in disguise, acting a part the most foreign to his habits. At last, discovering himself to the fair runaway, he brings her to tears and shame, and among the inducements, by means of which he labours to restore her to virtue, and to the ascetic life, he says, with the view of obviating her despair of forgiveness, "Mary—I will be answerable for thee before God in the day of judgment. I will repent for thee on account of this course of sin.—Upon me be thy sin, my child; of my hands shall God require this thy sin; only listen to me, and return with me to thy place." Ephrem. p. 231. Oxford edition.

It is only the inferior class of Romanist writers who, in any such way, are found to outrage all propriety. How miserably must those have lost the consciousness of their own position, as sinners, needing mercy, who could have fallen into the habit of making themselves responsible for the sins of others!

Until of late, in perusing the fathers, we have been accustomed to take very little, or no account, of flagrant impieties such as this: and passing them, perhaps, with

a smile, have simply said—"Such was the style of the times." But we must no longer allow ourselves this sort of easy philosophic indifference. The Nicene fathers, with their superstitions and their sooffeeism, are now to be forced upon the English church, in the room of her wise, holy, manly, and *Christian-like* founders. The substitution is horrid: it must be resisted; and to resist it, and to dissipate the illusions which favour the traitorous attempt, the real quality of these writers, and of their theological system, must be laid bare, without scruple or mercy.

Now it will not do, slightly, to say in reply—"Oh, the fathers had their *blemishes*, no doubt, and so have the best writers, of the best ages; and we leave these minor imperfections where we find them; and we think the bringing them forward is an instance of ill-directed industry." This mode of disposing of the difficulty will not meet the occasion.—A blemish may be either a spot or stain, tarnishing the surface of a solid and precious substance; or it may be a corroded speck, or a worn point, or edge, in the mere gilding that hides a worthless material: a blemish, of the former sort, may be removed, with equal ease and advantage to the body to which it has attached; but to rub and scour an attenuated gilding, what is it but to reveal, at every stroke, the vile brass, or wood, or clay, to which we had fondly attributed a hundred times its intrinsic value?

The lives, labours, and writings of our English reformers, are disfigured by many blemishes; grant it. But it is also true, that, in making ourselves acquainted with them, our own minds being imbued with biblical sentiments, we become more and more impressed with the conviction of their solid excellence:—they were men of God, and, taught as they were from above, whatever

may have been their faults, they understood and professed what is the most momentous in the Christian system. The result of an equally thorough examination of the Nicene fathers, and under the guidance of genuine principles, will be, if not of an *opposite*, yet of a very different kind; and we shall be compelled to confess, that those vital elements of truth which the one set of men had recovered, under the divine guidance, from the scriptures, the other set did but dimly discern, and faintly hold, and were continually surrendering, for a mere phantom of piety.

The limits of this tract, and the range of subjects it must embrace, render it impracticable for me to acquit myself otherwise than very imperfectly, of the task I have undertaken; but I shall be content if I shall have induced any to pursue, for themselves, the line of inquiry which I have indicated. If a hundred instances were added to the few already given, the complexion of all would be the same. That is to say, whenever we look at ancient Christianity, in the concrete, or as imbodyed in the lives, sentiments, and practices of those who enjoyed the highest reputation for sanctity, we find, ever and again, the same ingredients, and these placed nearly in the same order; and with the same utter want of evangelic feeling.—There is foremost, the high-wrought ascetic virtue, and its indispensable condition—virginity; or, what we may fairly call, an illuminated stoicism: then follow the virtues which best harmonize with the ascetic life, and the motives of which are drawn, with much effect, from the Christian doctrine of another life. The accessories—sometimes the leading excellences of this order of piety, were, a prostrate submission to church authority, and such a regard to the sacraments, especially to the holy eucharist, as is not surpassed, a

whit, by the boldest professors of transubstantiation. This description applies, with hardly a shade of difference, to all instances intervening between the times of Tertullian, and the age of Gregory I.

To afford a digested summary of the style of expounding scripture by the Nicene writers, and such as should fairly represent it, seems altogether impracticable; and, especially, because nothing short of lengthened quotations would enable the reader to judge the whole question. A sample or two may be offered, merely in illustration of what is meant by the broad assertion—That the notions universally entertained of religious celibacy, and of its high merits and importance, had the effect of *dislodging* the most momentous truths of the Christian system: as thus—

I suppose that, in expounding the parable of the ten virgins, most modern and protestant writers have considered the solemn meaning it conveys as intended for the benefit of Christians at large, and by no means as restricted to the members of a spiritual aristocracy. Moreover, it has, I think, been generally understood, that our Lord, by “the oil in the lamp,” meant that principle of genuine piety which distinguishes his true followers from mere pretenders, or professors; so that the general purport of the parable is to incite us to make serious inquiry into the state of our hearts, as “alive to God,” or not. But it is in no such manner that the illustrious Chrysostom understands, or interprets, the allegory: let us hear him, (*περι μετανοιας*, Hom. III. tom. ii. p. 348.)

“What! hast thou not understood from the instance of the ten virgins, in the gospel, how that those who, although they were proficient in virginity, yet not possessing the (virtue of) almsgiving, were excluded from

the nuptial banquet? . . . . . Truly, I am ashamed, and blush and weep when I hear of the foolish virgin. When I hear the very name, I blush to think of one who, after she had reached such a point of virtue, after she had gone through the training of virginity, after she had thus winged the body aloft toward heaven, (sheer gnosticism this,) after she had contended for the prize with the powers on high, (the angels,) after she had undergone the toil, and had trodden under foot the fires of pleasure, to hear such a one named, and justly named, a fool, because that, after having achieved the greater labours, (of virtue,) she should be wanting in the less! . . . . Now, the fire (of the lamps) is—VIRGINITY, and the oil is—ALMSGIVING. And, in like manner as the flame, unless supplied with a stream of oil, disappears, so virginity, unless it have almsgiving, is extinguished . . . . . But now, who are the venders of this oil?—The poor who, for receiving alms, sit about the doors of the church. And for how much is it to be bought?—for what you will. I set no price upon it, lest, in doing so, I should exclude the indigent. For, so much as you have, make this purchase. Hast thou a penny?—purchase heaven, *αγορασον τον ουρανον*; not, indeed, as if heaven were cheap; but the Master is indulgent. Hast thou not even a penny? give a cup of cold water, for he hath said, &c. . . . Heaven is on sale, and in the market, and yet we mind it not! Give a crust, and take back paradise; give the least, and receive the greatest; give the perishable, receive the imperishable; give the corruptible, receive the incorruptible. If there were a fair, and a plenty of provisions to be had, at the vilest rate,—all to be bought for a song,—would ye not realize your means, and postpone other business, and secure to yourselves a share in such

dealing? Where, then, things corruptible are in view, do ye show such diligence, and where the incorruptible, such sluggishness, and such proneness to fall behind? Give to the needy, so that, even if thou sayest nothing for thyself, a thousand tongues may speak in thy behalf; thy charities standing up, and pleading for thee. Alms are the redemption of the soul, *λυτρεν ψυχης εστιν ελεημοσυνη*. And, in like manner, as there are set vases of water at the church gates, for washing the hands; so are beggars sitting there, that thou mayest (by their means) wash the hands of thy soul. Hast thou washed thy palpable hands in water? wash the hands of thy soul in almsgiving!"

The preacher then makes an allusion, such as no protestant would disallow, to the context, "inasmuch as ye did it," &c.: and then proceeds, "My brethren, almsgiving is a great matter. Let us embrace it, to which nothing is equal *ης ουδεν ισεν*, for it is sufficient for the wiping out of whatever sins" (Chrysostom's expression *και αλλας, αμαρτίας*, must carry this sense, or something like it) "and for warding off condemnation. Even if thou standest speechless, it shall plead for thee; rather I should say, there is no need of words, to him who has gained the mouths of the poor. Give what thou hast, for the reward is according to intention, not of constraint . . . But I return to the virgins." . . .

What follows, although the citation be long, is too pertinent to our present purpose to be omitted.

"But what is it which, after so many labours, these (foolish) virgins hear?—I know you not! which is nothing less than to say that virginity, vast treasure as it is, may be useless! Think of them (the foolish virgins) as shut out, after undergoing such labours, after reining

in incontinence, after running a course of rivalry with the celestial orders, after spurning the interests of the present life, after sustaining the scorching heat, *την καυσωνα την μεγάλην*, after having leapt the bound (in the gymnasium) after having winged their way from earth to heaven, after they had not broken the seal of the body (a phrase of much significance) and obtained possession of the form of virginity (the eternal idea of divine purity) after having wrestled with angels, after trampling upon the imperative impulses of the body, after forgetting nature, after reaching, in the body, the perfections of the disembodied state, after having won, and held, the vast and unconquerable possession of virginity, after all this, then they hear—Depart from me, I know you not!

“Now you will not imagine that I make small account of virginity, great as it is. So great is it indeed, that none of the ancients were able to hold to it. For by the great grace (that has come to *us*) what was the most formidable in the view of the prophets and the ancients, has become to us an easy matter, so that the things which to them were the heaviest, and most extreme, namely, virginity, and the contempt of death, are now thought nothing of (as difficult,) even by mere girls. So difficult *then* was virginity esteemed, that none attempted to practise it. Noah, a just man, and one to whom God himself bore witness, nevertheless cohabited with a wife! as did also Abraham, and Isaac, the heirs of the promise. Joseph, that pattern of chastity, yet cohabited with a wife! A heavy thing indeed was the profession of virginity; nor until that time did virginity become efficacious, when the flower of virginity had blossomed (an allusion to our Lord’s birth of a virgin) and so it was that none of the ancients (none living be-



fore the birth of Christ) were able to addict themselves to the ascetic practice of virginity.

“A great matter indeed it is to rein the body. Paint to me now the figure of this virtue, and learn of what magnitude it is; seeing that it is waging a warfare which knows no truce, even for a day, a warfare worse than that with barbarians; for the contest we carry on with these have some interval, some truces; if now the savage hordes assail us, now again they desist, and there is something of order, and an observance of seasons, adhered to. But the warfare of virginity hath no quiet, for the devil himself is the enemy, who regards no seasons of attack; nor ever waits while his adversary prepares for the assault; but stands every moment watching to find the virgin stripped, so that he may inflict upon her an opportune wound. Nay, so far from being permitted to rest, she carries her arch-enemy about with her. The condemned see their prince and judge, only at a season, and do not constantly endure the same torments; but the virgin, go whither she may, bears her avenger in her bosom, and supports her adversary in her arms, who allows her no repose, at eventide, or in the night, or in the dawn, or at noon; but still wages war, ἡδονὴν ὑποτιθόμενος, γὰρον μνησθῶν; so as that an advantage may be gained over her; ἐκκαίεται ἐφ’ ἑκάστης ὥρας τῆς ἡδονῆς ἢ καμίνος μάλ’ ὅλως ὑποκαίσμενη. Think then what the labour is which this course of life exacts! and yet, even those who have undergone all this, may hear the words—Depart from me, I never knew you! And see how great a virtue virginity is, seeing that she hath for her sister—Almsgiving! having nothing that can ever be more arduous, but will be above all. Wherefore it was that these (foolish virgins) entered not in, because they had not, along with their

virginity—almsgiving!—. . . . . Thou hast then that efficacious mode of penance almsgiving, which is able to break the chains of thy sins; but thou hast also a way of penitence, more ready, by which thou mayest rid thyself of thy sins.—Pray every hour!”

These citations I would not curtail, inasmuch as they tell upon our argument in more ways than one. Let them, fraught as they are with the darkest errors of the darkest times of the church, sink into the mind of every protestant who, while he is being cautioned against *popery*, is invited (inveigled might we not say) to accept the overcast Christianity of Chrysostom and his contemporaries. The practical amount of the above cited passages is this, and nothing better, that whoever could appear at the gate of heaven with virginity in the one hand, and a sixpence of alms in the other, might boldly claim admission. When Chrysostom, drawing to a conclusion, after dwelling upon the hard-earned merits of celibacy, comes to say—Nevertheless all this merit may, at the last, avail its possessor nothing; one fully expects to hear him add—“unless it be accompanied with, and unless it spring from, a genuine and gracious principle of piety;” but such is not the doctrine of this prince of the Nicene church;—virginity, celestial virtue as it is, will not purchase heaven, apart from almsgiving. Heaven! what is its price? virginity and an obolus! The burden of sin, how is it to be got rid of? by virginity and an eleemosynary obolus! Let us now be plainly told whether passages such as these, cited from this principal divine of the Nicene church, do really embody, and fairly express the doctrine, and the general tenor of the articles and homilies of the English church. Was it to establish pharisaic delusions so gross as those which Chrysostom

laboured to uphold, that the illustrious victims of Mary's fury died in the flames at Oxford and in Smithfield? The time must come when it will be felt, by all ingenuous minds, among the clergy, that, although the English church may have been allied to the Nicene, by the retention of a few untoward phrases, in some of its offices, the heart and mind of the English reformers, and of the Nicene fathers, were totally dissimilar: the gospel, recovered for us by the one, had little or nothing in common with the dreaming theosophy of the other; except just the nomenclature of Christianity. The real question now at issue is—whether we shall go over to Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Basil; or stand fast by the English church and its founders.

That the doctrine advanced by Chrysostom, in his homilies on repentance, was not a hasty rhetorical flourish, appears from its recurrence, in nearly the same terms, in his exposition of the gospel of Matthew (Hom. lxxviii. tom. vii. p. 848,) and where he very distinctly affirms that, vast as is the merit of virginity, it will not avail apart from almsgiving. We may, however, meet with doctrine a little less grossly erroneous elsewhere among the Nicene expositors: thus for instance Augustine, who, by the way, appears to be much less in favour with the Oxford divines than are his more popish predecessors and contemporaries, offers an explication of the same parable, which, making due allowance for the style of the times, may be admitted as rational and scriptural (see the Sermon on the Parable, and, *De diversis quest.* lix. and *Enarratio in Psal.* 147) notwithstanding the conceit about the five senses, as prefigured by the five virgins, and which had been adopted by several of the fathers. Jerome's exposition approaches, in some de-

gree, that of Augustine; and yet holds in part also to that of Chrysostom. *Venditur hoc oleum, et multo emittur pretio, ac difficili labore conquiritur, quod in elemosynis cunctisque virtutibus et consiliis intelligimus magistrorum.* (Jerom. in loco.) Hilary (Comment. in Matt.) says that the lamps (flames) prefigure the “light of those resplendent souls that shine in the brightness of the sacrament of baptism: the oil is the fruit of good works: the vessels are the bodies of men, within which is hidden the treasure of a good conscience: those who sell this oil, are they who, needing the aid of the faithful, make this return, and by the supply of their necessities, furnish the buyers with what they seek. These (works of charity) are the copious material of a flame that fails not. In ascending higher, we do not meet with notions much more evangelic. Origen (in loco) says—“those who rightly believe and live, are properly compared to the five prudent; but those who, while professing faith in Christ, have not prepared themselves by good works for salvation, are likened to the five foolish virgins.”

Among those who occupy the foremost rank in the ancient church, and who are now, by name, held up as our masters in theology, there are shades of difference, and yet very nearly the same mind—a mind dimly illuminated by the apostolic light, and from which the first principle of Christianity was almost wholly expelled by a substantially false notion of sanctity. There is, however, solid satisfaction, in finding that, while men high in station were, with one consent, hotly driving the Christian world onwards toward the precipice into which the Romish church plunged it headlong, there were those, in the shade, and of obscure name, who held to a

better doctrine, and who, as we may well believe, diffused, unnoticed and unknown, a life-giving illumination of truth, within their narrow circles. Whoever may have been the author of the Homilies and Apophthegms, attributed to Macarius, the Egyptian—a hermit of the Nicene age, he evidently knew far more of Christianity, and more clearly perceived its real intention than any of the great orators and doctors of the same age. The record of the true church is on high, and we may well believe that our Lord's promise to be with his church always, has received its accomplishment from age to age, in relation to thousands whose names make no figure in the patristic folios.

Without affirming more of the following passages than they seem to deserve, I think they may with advantage be contrasted with the quotation just above made from Chrysostom. “Behold the five virgins, prudent and vigilant, who, hastening to admit into the home of their nature—the vessel of their heart, the oil, that is to say, *that grace of the Spirit which descends from above*” (compare this with Chrysostom's virginity, lit up with a penny's worth of eleemosynary oil) “were able to enter with the bridegroom into the heavenly marriage-feast. Whereas the foolish, abiding in their own natural state, *εν τη ιδια φυση απομεινασαι* did not watch, nor took care to receive the oil of gladness into their vessels; but, just as they were in the flesh, slumbered through carelessness, laxity, and indolence; or through ignorance, and a false notion of their own righteousness” (just such a notion as the language of the fathers above cited tended to foster) “wherefore they were shut out from the royal banquet; not being such as could please the heavenly Bridegroom. For being held by the chain of mundane affections, and the love of things earthly, they had not

rendered their entire hearts, in cordial attachment, to the heavenly Spouse, nor had received the unction; whereas souls seeking to entertain the divine guest, to wit, the sanctification of the Spirit, are bound by an undivided love to the Lord, and walk with him, converse with him by prayer, fix their thoughts upon him; from all else diverted, and so are deemed worthy to receive the oil of the heavenly grace, and thence are enabled to lead a life without offence, and altogether to please the spiritual Bridegroom." (Macarius, Hom. iv.)

Much might be quoted from this same author, which, saving a phrase or two here and there, would pass as protestant and scriptural writing; and which offers almost the strongest possible contrast to the manner and spirit of the great contemporary divines. It is particularly to be noted that this writer, although himself an ascetic, a hermit, abstains from the favourite ascetic topics; and often speaks in disparaging terms of celibacy, fasting, and the like. His style also, in regard to the sacraments, differs essentially from that current in his times: in a word, he speaks of these means of grace in a manner befitting one who was spiritually taught. It is important to mark the latent alliances of doctrines, or that secret principle of affinity, which brings seemingly unconnected notions into actual conjunction. Thus, while the great Nicene writers, *one and all*, are seen to exclude the gospel, and to substitute a flimsy home-made justification, hammered out of celibacy, almsgiving, fasting, and all the frippery of the ascetic discipline, they are also heard to indulge in the wildest extravagances regarding the efficacy of the sacraments, the dignity of the sacerdotal office, the power of the church, and the like. They are also heard invoking the saints, adoring, or near to it, the relics of martyrs, and magnifying

whatever is formal and human, while they depress or forget whatever is spiritual and divine.

The very reverse, in all these respects, is true of our obscure Macarius, who, taught from above, rises superior, in great measure, to the delusions of the times he lived in, of which many striking instances might be adduced, and which would make conspicuous that miserable defection from evangelic principles which attaches to those of the Nicene fathers who are now being cited as authorities in theology. The contrast is made the more pointed, if we keep to the particular subject which we have found to be handled so poorly by Chrysostom, and others.

“Unless humility, and simplicity, and goodness, adorn our tempers, a form of prayer will avail us nothing; nor indeed any other labours we may undergo, in preserving virginity, or the like, . . . and, destitute of these graces, we shall take our part with the foolish virgins, in the day of judgment, who, because they had not in the vessels of their hearts the oil of spiritual grace, were named fools, and were excluded from the kingdom, by the spiritual Bridegroom.” And elsewhere:—“unless humility, simplicity, love, cleave to us, our prayers, or, I should rather say, the semblance or pretence of prayer, will avail us nothing; and what is true of prayer, is true of other exercises of piety, even the most painful and laborious, such as virginity, vigils, fastings, psalmody, ministrations, and such like offices of *a specious godliness*.” (De custodia cordis.)

We must not indeed expect to find in *any* writer of the Nicene age, not even in one who, like Macarius, gives evidence of rational and scriptural piety, a clear exhibition of what we emphatically call the gospel; for this had too long been lost sight of, to be recovered in

its fulness and power by any single mind. But there is, at the least—truth to a certain extent, as well as the absence of gross and fatal errors. Macarius may be read with pleasure and advantage, by those who are better taught than himself; while the principal Nicene fathers, whatever benefits we may receive from the perusal of them, are not to be looked into without distress, amazement, and the utmost caution.

#### SOME SPECIAL METHODS OF ESTIMATING THE QUALITY OF THE NICENE THEOLOGY.

There is a very simple method of ascertaining the tendency, and theological quality, of religious writings, which, although it may seem a little arbitrary, yet will, I think, very seldom prove to be fallacious: it turns upon the rule that a writer's selection of scripture, incidental, or formal, indicates his personal feeling, and his doctrinal bias. This rule would at once be admitted, by many, as a safe one, if applied to some of our modern ultra protestant writers, who, while expounding, and quoting, a thousand times over, certain noted passages in Paul's epistles, are found to advert, much less often, to our Lord's discourses, and very sparingly adduce any of the merely preceptive portions of the very epistles, the doctrinal parts of which engage so much of their attention. Why may we not then avail ourselves of this same rule, in other directions? It surely has a foundation in the reason of things, and it implies that, if at any time, or in any particular church, certain elements of truth have lost their due place in the system of doctrines, those passages of scripture where such elements are prominent, will be seldom adduced, or when adduced, will be confusedly and perversely expounded.



Now, nothing can be more striking than is the result of a general survey of the patristic literature, as brought to the criterion of this special rule. The question being—Did the Nicene divines themselves understand, and preach, the gospel? Look to their choice of scripture—the list of texts, most in favour with them. The general reader should be apprized that, in almost all the editions of the fathers, there is found, besides a general index, *rerum memorabilium*, an index also of the passages of scripture which the author expounds, or which he incidentally cites. By the aid then of these indices, a pretty exact idea may, without much labour, be obtained, of the feeling and doctrinal tendency of these theologians, on the ground of the rule above advanced. It will not be imagined that the absolute completeness or correctness of these indices should be vouched for; nevertheless, their general accuracy may very safely be affirmed; nor do I believe that the issue of such an examination would be at all affected by the few instances of omission, which a diligent research might perhaps discover.

Assuming, then, these tables of texts cited or expounded, to be, in the main, correct, we shall find, in the first place, that, with a remarkable uniformity, they offer to the eye those half dozen texts which afford a colour of authority to the principles and practices of the ascetic institute. Few indeed omit a reference to our Lord's words—Let him that is able to receive it, &c., or, They neither marry nor are given in marriage, &c., or, to Paul's—It is good for a man not to touch a woman, &c. These tables exhibit also, and of this we do not complain, an abundant gleanings, nay a rich harvest, gathered from the preceptive portions of the inspired volume:

generally, more from the Old Testament, than from the New, and more from the gospels, than from the epistles, and more from the didactic than from the doctrinal parts of the epistles.

But those noted passages which, to protestant ears are the most familiar, and to the well taught and spiritually minded, are the most dear, such bright passages are, in some of these lists, altogether wanting, and in most are the least frequently cited; or where cited, it is in a sense, or for a purpose, very unlike (as we must think) their true intention. There are certain passages which, setting forth in the clearest manner, the freeness, the largeness, and the sufficiency of the method of salvation, are the first to convey hope and joy to contrite spirits; and they are the very same which the most eminent (modern) Christians—the most laborious, and the most holy, have clung to in their last hours: they are the passages, moreover, which the most efficient and enlightened preachers and pastors have employed as the key-note of their ministrations, public and private; and the very same are what may be called the hinges of controversy, between the first reformers and their purblind antagonists of the Romish church.

Now I would earnestly recommend those who are conscientiously determined to satisfy themselves, by personal researches, concerning the great question now at issue, between the Nicene fathers, and the reformers, to pursue the suggestion I am here offering, and to ascertain (no very difficult task) whether the allegation be true or not—That the great divines of antiquity either avoid all reference to passages of the kind now spoken of; or cite them in some incidental manner, and apart from any expression of their own feelings; or, if they quote and expound such passages, do it in a perverted

manner, and so as to make it certain that they themselves discerned little or nothing of the glory of Christianity, as therein expressed. This strange forgetfulness of what, on every account, claims our constant regard, and which, in modern times, has, on all sides (among those who have seriously addicted themselves to the study of the scriptures) received the most attention, forces itself upon our notice, whenever we open the remains of ancient Christianity. Every thing is wrought up and expanded, and repeated, and expounded—every thing, but the gospel itself! From the apostolic fathers, and Justin, down to Gregory I. and Boethius, nearly the same dimness in this respect attaches to all.

I am anxious to suggest to those who will avail themselves of such aid, various and *independent* modes of bringing to the proof, the patristic theology, on this most serious allegation, of its sad deficiency in evangelic feeling, as well as doctrine. Among these methods, I have already mentioned, as peculiarly conclusive, an examination of those portraits of Christianity, in the concrete, with which the works of the fathers abound. To this criterion, let it be objected that the false rhetorical taste of the times may perhaps have hidden from us, in such instances, the simple evangelic element, of which we are in search, and which actually attached, as well to the orator as to the subject of his too flowery declamation. Be it so; but is it not a rule in historical science, that, though men may often, after their death, be painted in false colours, by their admiring friends, they will be found to have truly painted themselves, in their letters to their intimate associates?

Now if *this* rule be a good one, I fear its application to the Nicene divines will exhibit them in no very advantageous light, personally, as Christian men. That

they were, most of them, sincere, devout, assiduous in their duties, and anxiously intent upon the welfare of the churches under their care, is incontestably proved by these remains. But does it appear from the same documents, that their hearts were warmed by those truths which are the glory of the Christian system, and which, when so entertained, impart an unction, and an animation to Christian communion? I think the affirmative cannot be pretended in favour of these divines, by even their most devoted admirers. What can be more dead and trivial than a large proportion of the epistolary remains of the ancient church? I will not name the epistles of Synesius, or those of Gregory Nazianzen; but what are those even of Basil, or Ambrose, or Chrysostom? If these specimens of ancient Christian friendship are found, generally, to breathe a simple-hearted evangelic piety, or to glow with an apostolic zeal for the fartherance of a pure gospel, then let it be acknowledged that whatever unfavourable inferences may seem to have resulted from a perusal of other portions of the early Christian literature, we have been mistaken in the estimate we have formed of the men and of the system. Are the advocates of Nicene Christianity willing to abide by the result of a full examination of the extant patristic epistles? I suppose not; and yet it does not appear why the criterion should not be regarded as a fair and conclusive one. Putting out of view, for a moment, their inspiration, we think ourselves able, in reading the *apostolic* epistles, to say what subjects were uppermost in the minds of the writers; nor can *protestant readers* of the Bible find themselves at a loss in determining, from these documents, whether the religion of the writers was a system of fear, servility, bodily service, ascetic virtue, credulity, exaggeration, sacra-

mental mystification, and ecclesiastical arrogance; or a system of warmth, affection, hope, joy, love, substantial virtue, and real holiness. Now, judging of the Nicene writers precisely in the same way, that is to say, by the general tenor and apparent temper of their letters to the churches, or to their individual friends, is there any one bold enough to affirm that the former, not the latter, are the characteristics of these remains, and to invite ample citations, in support of so perilous a challenge? I can only mention these methods of proof, and express the hope that the conscientious inquirer will avail himself of them.

There is, however, another criterion, which might with advantage be appealed to. What I mean is an examination of the subjects selected by the Nicene writers, as their favourite themes; or as those which they thought themselves the most imperatively called upon to treat. Now, the religious literature of any age may be loosely classified, as consisting of—Expositions of scripture, whether consecutive or incidental—Polemic treatises on the points in controversy at that time—Free, or as we may say, spontaneous disquisitions, whether in the homiletic form, or otherwise, upon the chief subjects of practical piety, and of Christian morals—Treatises, mainly philosophical, or critical, yet bearing upon theology;—and lastly, though not of least account, Compositions bearing upon ecclesiastical order, ritual, and the actual government or welfare of particular churches. In taking a glance, then, at the contents of the seventy or eighty folios which comprise the *choice* of the Nicene theology, we might dismiss, as not so pertinent to our immediate object, two of the above-named classes, namely, the Polemical, and the Philosophical, and examine the remaining three. In the present instance, however,

I can only offer a remark upon the first, namely, the ancient expositions—a subject indeed so wide and various, that it would be absurd to make a cursory allusion to it, except in reference to particular and well-defined points. A limited reference then, of this sort, I will proceed to make.

In looking broadly at the ancient expositions of Scripture, the well-known, and prominent characteristic of many of them, namely, the mythic, or allegorizing interpretation of its plain histories, and simple statements of fact, has a meaning which, I think, has been too little adverted to. This propensity to mystify the plainest things, may be, and has been, attributed to the operation of several independent causes; but there is one which, although the less obvious, was, as I am persuaded, the principal and the most constant. If Origen be named (whether justly or not) as the author of this allegorizing method, he will aid us, as we shall see, in tracing it up to its secret source—that same gnostic feeling, which explains so many other characteristics of ancient Christianity. A reference to two or three places in this learned, amiable, and pious writer, will exclude any doubt as to the fact, that the Christian church, participating with the gnostics, in those sickly and oriental notions of the divine nature, which led the latter, as heretics, to attribute the visible creation to an inferior and imperfect being, and to regard the Jewish history, and economy, as unworthy of the supreme goodness and wisdom, this deep gnostic feeling impelled the Christian expositors to rid themselves, as far as might be, of difficulties so formidable, first, and where it could be done, by roundly affirming that certain narrations, in the Old Testament, are not histories of facts, but pure allegories, or mythic inventions, conveying spiritual truths;

secondly, where this bold hypothesis was altogether inadmissible, or where its adoption was not hazarded, by merely diverting the attention from the plain history, in the copious use of ingenious accommodations; that is to say, allegories *appended* to the history, where the history could not be absolutely melted down into fable. So much for the mode of interpreting scripture, in avoidance of gnostic objections. But there remained a rather more difficult task, imposed by the same gnostic sentimentality, which was that of reconciling the gnostic notion of the divine nature, as pure and wise, with the constitution of the animal creation. Now, this task was connected with the interpretation of scripture, by the means of allegorizing disquisitions upon the Mosaic account of the six days' work. It was not indeed that the lion, the tiger, the crocodile, the adder, the vulture, the shark, could be spoken of as other than they are; but yet, while a thousand gay conceits concerning the "spiritual meaning," couched under these untoward natures, could be held before the mind, something was done, and a respite was obtained from the tormenting pressure of the theosophic conception of the Deity.

Ample, and really amusing illustrations of what I am now affirming, may be met with by referring to the *Hexaëmeron* of Ambrose; where the forms, qualities, habits, of fishes, reptiles, birds, and beasts, are convincingly shown to adumbrate all points of theology and morals. And to what lengths did this irresistible infatuation carry so respectable a writer? To what use, for instance, does he dare to convert the (misunderstood) natural history of the vulture? Let the reader look to the twentieth chapter of the fifth book, and amidst his amazement and disgust, acknowledge the proof he there, and elsewhere, finds, of the presence of a motive, pow-

erful enough to overthrow all soundness of judgment, and to violate all religious decorum. Nonne advertimus quod Dominus ex ipsa natura plurima exempla ante præmisit, quibus susceptæ incarnationis decorem probaret, et adstrueret veritatem. Basil makes the same offensive use of the same ridiculous fable; and throughout his *Hexaëmeron* employs a rich invention in what he, and others, considered as the laudable endeavour, not so much to derive lessons of piety from the natural world, as to obviate, or supersede, the terrible gnostic objection to the mundane system, as impure and sanguinary. But we must return for a moment to the mythic interpretation of the Old Testament history, and see in what way Origen opens up to us the real motive of this practice.

The principle of allegorical interpretation which he adopted, is stated and defended, as well incidentally as formally, in many parts of his writings, and, among the reasons adduced in behalf of it is this, that it aids us in understanding passages which, if literally interpreted, would either involve contradictions, or be offensive, and tend to encourage sentiments and practices elsewhere explicitly condemned (see the Fragment on Galatians, tom. i. p. 43, Benedictine, and more at length, in the *De Principiis*, lib. iv.) He formally assumes a license for considering as allegory, whatever, even in the plainest narrations, does not seem to consist with certain received notions of what was fitting in the divine dispensations, or in the conduct of the patriarchs. That this principle of interpretation sprung, not merely from the wish to obviate gnostic objections, but from a latent admission of their force, appears clearly enough from the tenor of the following passage; especially when compared with the places in which the rule of allegorical exposition is actually applied to particular instances. Origen, having



established the inspiration of the scriptures, states the necessity of laying down such a rule of interpretation, as shall exclude the cavils and false assumptions of Jews and heretics.

“These latter, when they read such texts as these—a fire is kindled by my wrath,” &c. . . . and a thousand things of the like kind, have not indeed dared to deny that these scriptures are from a God; but then they suppose them to have proceeded from the demiurge, whom the Jews worship, an imperfect, and not benevolent being; and they affirm that the Saviour has come to announce to mankind a more perfect Deity, whom they deny to be the same as the demiurge, or creator of this world. Having once strayed from the truth, they have adopted various opinions, at the suggestion of their fancy, and have adopted notions concerning the visible and the invisible worlds, as attributable to different creators. There are moreover, even within the pale of the church, some of the simpler sort, and who mainly hold to the true theology, and who yet (in consequence of their adherence to the literal sense of scripture) think of the true God in the most unworthy manner. . . . Now the sole cause of all the errors above referred to, whether of the impious, or of the simple-minded, is the habit of understanding scripture not in the spiritual (or mystic) but in the naked and literal sense.” Our author then proceeds, at great length, to expound and to recommend his own remedial system of interpretation; which, as he thinks, will enable us to evade every difficulty, and to preserve, unimpaired, those just and elevated notions of the divine purity, justice, and benevolence, which the gospel conveys.

It is manifest then, and other passages might be cited to the same effect, that, with Origen, who was the au-

thor, or great promoter of the mythic mode of interpretation, the primary motive for its adoption was a tacit admission of the gnostic sentiment and doctrine. This system of exegesis, violent as it was, and shocking to common sense, and precarious too, for it could not be applied to all cases, even to those the most needing it, has often, by modern writers, been attributed merely to "a false taste," or to an "ambition of ingenuity," or to an oriental exuberance of the imagination. But we see that it had a deeper and a more serious meaning, and that it is the indication of what I have called a gnostic feeling, strong in the minds even of those who were the most decisive opponents of the gnostic heresies. The broad expression of this same feeling we have found under another form—the doctrine and practice of abstractive asceticism and celibacy, and have thus obtained incidental, and yet conclusive proof of the *oneness* and consistency of that system which, in the Nicene age, had come into the place of apostolic Christianity.

I wish especially, on this occasion, to point out the slightness and fallacy of the mode in which modern writers have allowed themselves to allude, with an incurious and affected scorn, to the characteristic features of ancient Christianity. "Monkery and asceticism"—they were the "follies of the age;"—"superstitious notions and practices;"—the human mind had then "become enfeebled;"—"the mystic interpretation of scripture"—"the fathers were men of more imagination than judgment;" and, in a word, "we, better taught as we are, may just glance at these errors, and pass on." This frivolous style, unsatisfactory and unphilosophical as it is, might have passed as sufficient in the times that are gone, or that are going by; but it is now becoming not simply obsolete and inappropriate, but seriously delusive

and dangerous; inasmuch as it favours the supposition that ancient Christianity, although disfigured by some blemishes, was yet, as compared with the Romanism of later times, pure and sound.

A more exact, and I must needs say, a more philosophical analysis of the ancient church system, will, as I am fully persuaded, serve to convince all unprejudiced minds that these trivial imperfections, or "follies," as we have been taught to call them, were, in truth, the several symptoms of one and the same deep-seated disease; and that, for instance, things so seemingly unconnected and independent as we may think the profession of virginity, and the mythic interpretation of scripture, both sprang, in no circuitous manner, from ONE PRINCIPLE, and that principle nothing else but the rudiment of the Asiatic theosophy. But then, this same sovereign cause gave law to every thing else, or to every thing which distinguishes the Nicene, from the apostolic church. Hence the danger of borrowing notions, rites, and practices, from a system which had come under the tyrannous control of a foreign and fatal influence.

But there are peculiarities attaching to the ancient mode of expounding scripture which demand to be noticed as illustrating our present position, that the great Nicene writers were, in a very low degree, conscious of those truths which protestants regard as constituting the glory and peculiarity of the gospel.

I have already mentioned that omission of the most vividly evangelic portions of scripture, which appears when we examine the indices of texts cited by the fathers. But when we open what professes to be a consecutive exposition of an epistle fraught with the most animating passages, we feel as if, now at least, we must discover what was the feeling of the writers; for how

can they avoid what stands directly in their path, and in a path chosen by themselves? How avoid such evangelic passages? Sometimes by neatly leaping over them! Of which several instances may be found in Chrysostom's expositions of the Pauline epistles. These serious lacunæ in certain noted ancient expositions, would, if the continuity of the discourse did not preclude the supposition, make one think that a leaf, here and there, had been torn from the manuscript. But, if passages of the kind now referred to are not actually passed over, they are too often expounded in a style that is dry and cold, or ambiguous, or positively erroneous.

In support of this representation I must confine myself to one or two instances, but they will be such as to carry the inference appended to them. Chrysostom's mode of exposition is characterised by its diffuseness, and prolixity; and we may say, in a sense, its comprehensiveness. He stands, moreover, by general suffrage, at the head of the Nicene divines, and is surely second to none of them as an expositor—all qualities taken together. We may safely, therefore, bring him forward as an authoritative instance.

The seventh homily on the Epistle to the Romans contains a diffuse exposition of the latter portion of the third chapter; and it is such as would, probably, satisfy many modern readers, clearly affirming as it does, that salvation is God's free gift; a gift received by faith, and not to be obtained by the observance of the Jewish law. So far all is well; and one is happy, too, to meet with so much of truth; but yet no such distinction is observed as warrants our supposing that Chrysostom had, in his mind, the important difference between the "*making just*," and the *justifying*, or declaring just, in a forensic sense; nor does he kindle upon the theme,

nor take the occasion to awaken the hearts of his hearers, as a modern preacher would not fail to do; but he slides off immediately into ethical disquisitions, which, proper as they may be in themselves, yet, in the connexion in which they come, must have tended to cherish, rather the legal, than the evangelic feeling of those whom he addressed. The phrase *ἐξαιτίας δικαίους πείν*, might suggest the belief, that, justification by faith, in the protestant sense, was intended; but when we turn to the places where the same writer declares his opinion of the justifying efficacy of baptism, it becomes but too evident, that such an expression, and much besides, which might by itself seem unexceptionable, really meant a far different doctrine; how different, let those say who have read and considered the two exhortations addressed to the candidates for baptism. (See especially the passage, tom. i. p. 269.) “Although a man should be foul with every vice, the blackest that can be named, yet, should he fall into the baptismal pool, he ascends from the divine waters, purer than the beams of noon.” This, then, was Chrysostom’s sense of the “making just in a moment.” In truth, this is placed beyond doubt by what soon follows—“They who approach the baptismal font, although fornicators, &c., are not only made clean, but holy also, and just, *αγίους καὶ δικαίους*.”

Nothing is more necessary, in looking into the fathers, than to be guarded against the illusion of attributing an evangelic sense to phrases and passages which can be so understood only so long as we attribute to them a modern sense; but which, when collated with other passages in the same writer, are found to have borne, in the mind of the ancient church, a meaning totally different; and, as we must think, a meaning miserably erroneous. Let us not then be referred to Chrysostom’s exposition

of the Epistle to the Romans, in proof of the substantial soundness of his opinions, until there be adduced also passages, such as the one now cited, where, whatever a protestant might wish to say of justification by faith, and of salvation by grace without works, is attached to the baptismal rite, as its constant and proper effect. Nothing would be easier than, by an artfully selected series of quotations, to make Chrysostom preach like Luther, or even Calvin; but let Chrysostom be allowed to expound Chrysostom, and then the illusion is dispelled. "As a spark thrown into the ocean, is instantly extinguished, so is sin, be it what it may, extinguished when the man is thrown into the laver of regeneration." Nay, he comes forth another man. That the highest possible importance was attached to the *mere rite*, appears from the way in which it is every where spoken of, and particularly when the preacher is reprehending those—too many, who deferred baptism to their last hour, and who, irrespectively of their state of mind, or moral condition, are solemnly declared to be liable, until so regenerated, to eternal torments. But this is a subject too weighty to be cursorily treated, and which will demand hereafter the fullest explication. The instance may be enough to illustrate my meaning, in saying that, what may seem the most evangelic and unexceptionable in the patristic expositions, must always be held as worth only what it will appear to mean, after the author's sense of the phrases he employs has been ascertained from himself; and has been entirely disengaged from our protestant modes of thinking.

What were Chrysostom's candidates for baptism likely to be thinking of, supposing them to have been sincere and devout? Was it the grace and power of the divine

Saviour, in whom, if they were at that time fit subjects for the rite, they had already believed, or was it the abstract doctrine of justification by faith, or indeed any doctrine, or any state of mind, truly called spiritual? It *might* have been so; but the direct tendency of the preacher's very solemn discourse, on this occasion, was (the human mind being such as it is) to make them think intently, and almost exclusively, of the rite of baptism—the “pool of regeneration and justification,” a descent into which was the turning point of salvation—the wicket, in passing through which the man made his way in a moment, from the confines of the pit of eternal misery, and set foot upon the terra firma of eternal life:—this pool, hiding beneath its sparkling surface the most tremendous mysteries, was almost certain to fix the eyes of the trembling candidate, in the previous moment a child of wrath, unregenerate, unjustified, and, should any accident intervene, unsaved. To such a one, nay, to far the larger proportion of all who approached the awful brink of those wonder-working waters, the *rite* took the place of the *spiritual reality*, and of the Saviour.

This point, although it lead us a little from our direct path, we must insist upon a moment. In considering, practically, the effect of different modes of presenting religious truths to the mass of minds, the question is not, whether such and such great principles, acknowledged to be momentous, are sometimes offered to the view of the people; but rather this, whether they are so offered as that the several elements of religion are seen in their true perspective—the foremost, foremost; the hindermost, hindermost? Every thing depends upon this perspective, even all the vast difference between a saving gospel, and a pernicious delusion. And in considering such a question,

in a practical manner, we must take into the account, not the nice and well-compacted notions of a few cultured minds, well trained in analysis, and synthesis, and order; but must have regard to the thousand, the many, who, purely passive as to whatever is intellectual, will accept things, just as they are offered to them. It is precisely on this ground of practical wisdom, that we (protestants) are used utterly to reject the fine papistical apologies that have been offered for image worship, and the supplication of the saints. Tell us not how the few may possibly steer clear of fatal errors, and avoid a gross idolatry, while admitting such practices. What will be their effect with the multitude? The actual condition of the mass of the people in all countries where popery has been unchecked, gives us a sufficient answer to this question; nor do we scruple to condemn these practices as abominable idolatries. Tell us not how Fenelon, or Pascal, might extricate themselves from this impiety: what are the frequenters of churches in Naples, and Madrid? nothing better than the grossest polytheists, and far less rationally *religious*, than were their ancestors of the times of Numa and Pythagoras.

When the eye opens upon a wide and splendid prospect, idly gazing upon it, all its parts are depicted on the retina, as well as present to the mind. Say, however, to the listless spectator—"If you keep your eye fixed upon yonder obscure cottage, you will presently see the greatest monarch on earth issue from it," and the effect would be instantly, that, although the same width of landscape was still before the organ—the same fields, groves, rivers, mountains, palaces, painted on the retina; yet nothing would be present to the mind, nothing but this cottage. The law of intellectual vision is pre-



cisely analogous to this. It means nothing to say, "such and such important objects have been placed within the view of those whom we instruct:"—upon which, among these objects, has the mind been concentrated? All else is nearly as if it were not. And it is, moreover, to be remembered, that, according to the invariable laws of the human mind, while the power to take a comprehensive and just view of various objects, lying together within the field of vision, belongs to the calmest minds only; and, in their several degrees, to every mind in its calmest moments, the *exclusiveness* of the mind's regard to single objects, is always directly as the amount of emotion at the time. Agitate the soul, in any way, excite its fears, hopes, or any of the passions, and then instantly, and *just in proportion to the excitement*, will the mind lose its consciousness of all but the single exciting object. Show a man the muzzle of a loaded cannon, peeping from a thicket, in the distance, and whence he may every moment expect his death; show him, on the broad bosom of a tumbling sea, an open boat, in which his wife and children are tossing, between hope and despair, and what else will he see!

Now this law of our nature, a law taking sovereign hold of the mass of mankind; indeed of all but a very few, has a most important bearing upon the style and topics of popular religious instruction. You may disregard, if you will, the due perspective of objects when you are coldly lecturing upon philosophy; but to fall into this error of position and proportion, when the stirring motives of eternity, when the alternatives of heaven and hell, are quickening the most intense emotions, and stimulating the most vivid anxieties, to do so, in such instances, is the same thing as to teach, in a positive form, the blackest heresies: no heresy can be really more fatal

than is the practical error of presenting the objects of religious regard in *an inverted order*, to a mind deeply moved by religious sentiments. It is cruel mockery, in such a case to say—"nay, we set forth all the truth." On what point was the anxious eye fixed?

Now I am persuaded that the merits of the general system of popular teaching as practised by the ancient church, as well as the soundness of what are now termed "church doctrines," if judged of according to *this* rule—a rule founded upon the first principles of human nature, may readily be determined; and the result of applying such a criterion will be to reject, as far worse than positive heresy, that practical *dislocation of objects* which was the characteristic of ancient Christianity, and which is the characteristic of the Oxford Tract "church doctrines." Let us apply this criterion for a moment, and in doing so, take the ground, and admit the premises, of the Oxford Tract writers.

In one of the most ingenious, specious, candid, and attractive of these publications, (No. 85,) perhaps the most so, after that on "Reserve in communicating religious knowledge," the difficulties under which "church principles" labour, as resting upon very slender and indirect proofs, are fully and fairly stated—stated, and (let it be granted) mitigated, if not removed; nay, I would allow, so far removed, or the pressure of them so far relieved, as to prevent their being *fatal* to those doctrines—other considerations which weigh against them, not now admitted. It is granted by the writer, that these doctrines, such as the divine right of episcopacy, the apostolic succession, the power of the church, the efficacy of the sacraments, the sacrificial virtue of the Lord's supper, and so forth, are wanting in direct or satisfactory proof, and are to be established, if at all, only by the

aid of very attenuated, and nicely managed inferential arguments. "Every one must allow," says the writer, speaking in the person of an objector, "that there is next to nothing, on the surface of scripture, about them (these church doctrines) and very little, even under the surface, of a satisfactory character."—"In short, is not, it may be asked, the state of the evidence for all these doctrines just this—a few striking texts, at most, scattered up and down the inspired volume; or one or two particular passages, of one particular epistle, or a number of texts, which *may* mean, but need not mean, what they are said by churchmen to mean, which say something *looking like* what is needed, but with very little strength and point, inadequately and unsatisfactorily?" And again, the same objection is otherwise stated.—"Now, when we turn to scripture, we see much indeed of those *gifts* (spiritual) we read much of what Christ has done *for* us, by atoning for our sins, and much of what he does *in* us, that is, much about holiness, faith, peace, love, joy, hope, and obedience; but of those intermediate portions of the revelation, coming between him and us, of which the church speaks, we read very little."—p. 50.

After having thus, and more at length, admitted the difficulty, the writer goes on, with much address, and let it be confessed, with some solid reason, *so far*, to show that, although so slenderly attested, and so slightly alluded to in scripture, these doctrines *may* nevertheless, like other principles, universally received among orthodox Christians, have actually constituted a part, and even an essential part, of apostolic Christianity, and that, whether we find them in scripture, or *elsewhere*, they *may* reasonably claim our reverential regard.

Let all this conditional reasoning, and the ingenious

illustrations attending it, be admitted as satisfactory, and let it (for a moment) be granted that the opinions of the Oxford Tract writers concerning "Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Church Union, Ministerial Power, Apostolical Succession, Absolution, and other rites and ceremonies," are sound; that is to say, that these doctrines and practices are either somewhere contained in, or are virtually conveyed by, the New Testament, although not thence to be gathered by any convincing method of proof; or, that they may be gathered from history. Be it so; that is to say, that, while the apostles insist upon faith, hope, love, joy, peace, obedience, and the like, they also taught and established, in the churches, the "church principles and practices," such as we find them every where in the records of ancient Christianity.

For reasons which may lie beyond our ken, it may have pleased God to convey the spiritual and moral elements of religion through the medium of explicit written statements; while the ritual and ecclesiastical elements of the same great and harmonious scheme were to reach us more circuitously, or more ambiguously. If this were granted to be the fact, (which is much more than we grant,) yet could we go on to believe that the *relative position*, or, as we may say, the perspective of objects,—the spiritual, the moral, the ritual, the ecclesiastical,—was, with the divine sanction, and in accordance with the divine will, to be distorted, or inverted, when the apostolic scheme came into the hands of the next generation? Grant it, that more belonged to apostolic Christianity than may certainly or clearly be gathered from the apostolic writings; but yet, was not this after-portion to fall into its place, in obedience to the GENERAL LAW of the system, as we may gather that law from the style,

temper, and very words, and special decisions, of the apostles? Was it intended that the individual Christian was, as soon as the apostles left the world, to shift his position, and to betake himself to a point of view whence every thing, spiritual, moral, ritual, and ecclesiastical, would appear under a totally different aspect, and present to the eye a side that had not been seen before; and that these objects, severally, should subtend, on the field of vision, exchanged magnitudes—the great seeming small, and the small great? Is this to be believed?

But it must be believed, if we are to take the several articles of what is called “church doctrine” in the order, and under the perspective, in which we find them, *where only we do find them at all*, namely, in the extant remains of the early church. If we give up these records, we give up those superadded practices and principles, or “church doctrines;” for we have no other sufficient warrant for paying them any regard. But, if we adhere to these records, then on what principle do we submit to the rites and notions thence derived, as of apostolic authority, and yet reject the *relative position* therein assigned to them? Whence do we draw our authority for making this distinction, and for acting upon the difference, between the doctrines or practices themselves, and the location of them? If the bishops of the early church are to teach us “the way of the Lord more perfectly” than we can learn it from the apostles themselves, then, on what ground do we call in question their right to hold the entire scheme of religion up to our view, in its just perspective? I do not understand how we can yield ourselves to this extra-apostolic authority, just in regard to the *articles* of Christian belief and worship; and then withdraw ourselves from it, in regard to the *order* in which they are to follow one the other.

I assume it, then, as certain, that, in taking what are called the "church doctrines" from the early and Nicene church writers, we are bound to receive them not insulated, or in fragments: but *as we there find them*. But, if so, then we, that is to say, those who yield themselves to this guidance, are placed in a predicament as serious as any that can be imagined, for we are not merely called upon to accept, as of divine authority, very much which the inspired writers barely glance at; but to regard those things as foremost which, in the inspired writings, even if they appear at all, and which is confessed to be doubtful, are placed hindermost. To make so many *additions* to our faith, worship, and practice, is something; but it yet is nothing compared with the ominous operation of inverting the entire order of things—spiritual, moral, ritual, and ecclesiastical. What religious mind will not hesitate and tremble when invited to go to such a length as this?

No fact in the history of religion, or philosophy, obtrudes itself more forcibly, or more frequently, upon our notice, than that of the utter contrast between the apostolic writings and the writings of the fathers, especially of the Nicene fathers, (who are now to be our masters,) in this particular, namely, the relative position of the diverse elements of religion. I can hardly believe that any will be so bold as roundly to deny, or as in any important sense to qualify, the statement of this fact. Assuredly none: not the Oxford Tract writers, for *they* have confessed the very contrary; none will dare to say that the apostles were mainly intent upon the enhancement and glorification of the rites, forms, dignities, and exterior apparatus of Christianity. If any will say this, I have no reply to make to them. Nor can I suppose that any, except a very few, who, by long and fond con-

verse with antiquity, have lost the vigour of their moral and intellectual perceptions, will deny that the fathers, and the Nicene fathers especially, look at the components of *their* Christianity from an opposite point. They do not, as I have stated twenty times, deny, or altogether forget, that which is spiritual in religion; but they place foremost, and they urgently direct, the minds of the people towards that which is visible, ritual, and ecclesiastical. It is on these matters that their seriousness and fervour are employed; it is, while upholding these, that they kindle and spend their force. When do they lavish rhetoric? in glorifying the Saviour of sinners, and in recommending the gospel?—seldom; some of them *never*. But they can, one and all, glow, and burn, and roll thunders, and dart their sparks, when the mysteries and powers of the church are in question!

An illustration in harmony with the subject offers itself among the stores of graphic ecclesiastical antiquity, where one may find the delineation of this or that sacred edifice, fairly depicted in bold lines, and strong colours; embossed, too, and palpable, in its glittering decorations. Then there are about it, and about it, flimsy, faint-coloured cherubs, and seraphs, hovering in the clouds, and chirping anthems; and, altogether, making a seemly border to the temple of St. Peter, or St. Mark. Now, much like this is the view of Christianity presented to us in the patristic records—there is the CHURCH, boldly drawn, and bodily laid upon the parchment, so as that one may feel its outlines, as well as look at it; and this church is made awful to the mind of the spectator by its hiding the “terrific mysteries,” while around it, and over it, flutter the airy figures of spiritual piety—faith, hope, charity, joy, peace, and the like; and, to render justice to the system, the moral virtues—temperance,

self-denial, charity, (almsgiving,) are seen, in substantial quality, moving in and out of the building, as living personages. Yet, such is the general arrangement of objects in the piece—such the grouping and the distribution of light and shade. As to the crowd around, if the few and the better taught kept their eye fixed upon spiritual objects, the many could do nothing else but look directly toward that which, in a practical sense, was alone of any consequence to them. They looked to the sacraments, which they were solemnly assured conveyed infallibly, and entire, the benefit they were in search of, namely, exemption from future peril. Nay, so direct is the tendency of perverted human nature toward whatever is visible and formal in religion, that, with the mass of men, it was not so much the sacrament,—the *whole* religious rite,—which fixed their attention, as the mere material, or instruments of the sacraments: the glassy surface of the baptismal pool, as yet unruffled, and reflecting the marbled magnificence of the church, seemed the very mirror of eternity, and, as if, while intently gazing upon it, the glories of heaven might be dimly descried beneath. An analogous instance, and hundreds of the like kind might be adduced, I have already referred to; I mean that of the brother of Ambrose, who had been taught to attach such importance to the mere eucharistic wafer, as to think that, tied about his neck, it would serve him better than the stoutest of the ship's timbers, in making his way to land, through the breakers!

Now, when we have instances of this sort before us, the question is not, (the immediate question,) whether the notions of the early church concerning the sacraments, and the wonder-working efficacy of the bread, the wine, the water, the oil, the salt, the spittle, were



true or false; but whether, in a broad and practical sense, the effect of these notions upon the mass of the people, nay, upon the best-trained minds, (such, for instance, as Satyrus,) was not to invert the order in which the spiritual, the moral, the ritual, the ecclesiastical elements of Christianity, were to be viewed, as compared with the order in which they seem to have stood in the view of the apostles? I am content that all should turn upon a fair reply to this question.

Say, that catholic teaching, I mean that of the Nicene fathers, regarding the sacraments, and other "church doctrines," is what we ought to adopt and follow. But now I would gladly put the plain question—an *historical*, not a theological question, to any one, competently informed, and to any one, who has too much of the feelings of a gentleman to resort to evasions, and too much of the feelings of a Christian to put a false colour or varnish upon facts touching religious principles, and too much of the feelings of a minister, or public person, to compromise, in any manner, his professional character—to such a one, I would be glad to put the question—Whether, so far as we can judge by their writings, the apostles, and the Nicene fathers, and their hearers, respectively, were accustomed to look at the spiritual, and the ritual, elements of Christianity from one and the same point of view, or not rather from *opposite points of view*? Who will give me such a reply to this question as shall not leave him open to a speedy refutation?

Shall the answer to such a question be staked upon a full exhibition of the style and doctrine of Ambrose, concerning the sacraments; or shall we introduce him, passionately pleading with God for the soul of Valentinian, who had died uninitiated, unregenerate, unjusti-

fied, that is—unbaptized:—Solve, igitur, Pater Sancte, munus servo tuo! Upon the popular mind, what effect could the ambiguous, anxious intercession of their trembling bishop, when thus supplicating mercy for the soul of the uninitiated “servant of God,” have had, but that of putting the ritual in forefront of the spiritual element of religion? In conformity with the same notion, the church, from an early time, held that the blood of martyrdom, although nothing else could, might be held, in the case of a catechumen, to supply to the soul the want of the water of baptism.

So the custom, general as it became, of deferring baptism to the last hour, a custom so utterly opposed to the practice of the apostolic age, whence did it arise, but from the doctrine of the church at the time; for the people, estimating, if we may so speak, their chances of heaven, all things considered, concluded, and not unreasonably, that, although, in doing so, they incurred the fearful risk of meeting death suddenly, or where the “regenerating water” could not be obtained, yet, inasmuch as a death-bed initiation, if it could but be had, would cover all defects, and moreover, as sin after baptism could be expiated, if at all, only in the precarious and painful methods of penance, which expiatory process itself might be cut short by death, leaving no remedy whatever; the safer course, although a perilous one, was to hold in reserve, to the last, and trusting to good fortune, *that one remedy*, concerning the efficacy of which no doubt could be entertained. This course, moreover, had a farther recommendation, incidentally attached to it, namely, that with the sovereign remedy still untouched, and at hand, a man might, mean time, live as he pleased—only let him be so fortunate, at the

last, as to have a kind priest within call, and all would be right! In vain the great preachers of the Nicene age spent their eloquence in denouncing this impiety. Men coolly made their own calculations, and chose to abide by what they felt to be their better chance.

It would be of no avail, in this case, to make a loose admission in regard to the Nicene divines, and to say—“Yes, we grant that they often express themselves *unguardedly*, or indulge in the language of exaggeration; or, while insisting upon some one point, forget too much its relative importance—we grant this.” Such an apology will not cover what it is stretched over. The question is not concerning *a little more* or *a little less*; or concerning the proprieties of language, but plainly concerning the relative position, as apprehended by the people at large, of the spiritual and the ritual parts of Christianity; and it is here affirmed that whereas, in the apostolic writings, the spiritual stands foremost, and the ritual hindermost (where it appears at all) in the Nicene writings, on the contrary, whatever may be said about the spiritual, the ritual is so placed as to fix upon itself the most intense, if not the exclusive regards of the people. And that this was the actual effect of this reversed order, is attested by the simple fact that the people did so interpret the church doctrine, as bearing upon their personal conduct; the more religious class taking the steep, but certain road to heaven, through virginity, and the ascetic discipline; while the many—the less devout, in all degrees, down to the gross and sensual, either secured their salvation within the church, availing themselves carefully of all its customary remedies, or took a lodging just under the eaves of it; and, as they hoped, within reach of the one great remedy, when the worst should come.

That is to say, after we have set off from the Nicene system, the super-human institute of celibacy, which could avail for only a few, then, and for the many, this system was precisely what popery has always been—A RELIGION OF SACRAMENTS.

To return then for a moment to the argument of the Oxford Tract writer, (No. 85,) if we were to grant that apostolic Christianity, as conveyed in, *and out of* the New Testament, is also a religion of sacraments, we should still have made no progress toward the desired point, that of reconciling ourselves to the religion of the Nicene age, unless we could bring ourselves to affirm and believe also, that apostolic Christianity is a religion of sacraments foremost, and of spiritual principles hindermost!

It may be asked by some—"Why may we not have a religion of sacraments—of church mysteries, and church power, and yet, at the same time, give due prominence to the spiritual and moral realities of the gospel? Why may we not keep the spiritual and the ritual fairly abreast one of the other?" Such a question admits of three distinct and categorical answers; as First—The original constitution of the human mind forbids the attempt so to hold elements in equipoise, the very nature of which is not to occupy one and the same level. Secondly, the actual condition of human nature, as perversely disposed always to substitute the ritual for the spiritual in religion, renders any such attempt to place the two evenly before the mind, or otherwise than as the scriptures place them, in the last degree, unwise, nay, mischievous. Thirdly, God forbids this endeavour, bringing as it does his truth upon the very stage which all false religions have occupied.

If we appeal to history, in attestation of these three answers to the question put, the whole course of it comes to our aid in one crowded mass—all confirming each, with undivided force.—It confirms the first and the second, together, by showing that, as well among highly civilized communities, as among the rudest, where the ritual element of religion has been thrown forwards, or put out of its place, in relation to the spiritual, the two have never, actually, rested for a moment, as if in equipoise; but, on the contrary, there has been an accelerated movement, until the spiritual had entirely subsided, or retired, leaving nothing but the merest formality, and the grossest superstition. The third is confirmed by all those instances in which it has become manifest, even to the irreligious, that an influence holier and mightier than that which man can originate, has been at work within the church; for in every such case, the two elements have instantly, and as if by a natural gravitation, resumed their due places—that is to say, they have gone into the relative position which manifestly they occupied in the apostolic church—the spiritual and the moral foremost, and uppermost; and the ritual, not excluded, but held in its subordination. Moreover, the first symptom of decay and decline, has ever been—a revival of the ritual part of religion, as a mass of solemn formalism, and of impious mummeries:—the Ichabod of the church has ever borne this very interpretation.

But there is another, and perhaps a more conclusive, or a more affecting confirmation of the same great principle, afforded by those signal, single instances, in which eminent and sincerely religious men have laboured, and laboured in vain, from the commencement to the end of their public course, to hold the two elements of Christianity, the spiritual and the ritual, in equipoise. None

have spent their strength, in this endeavour, under more advantageous circumstances than did the illustrious John Chrysostom. Nor is there any one of the Nicene fathers to whom an appeal, of this sort, might be made with the hope of its being more satisfactory, to all parties, or more exempt from exceptions of every kind; none surpassed him *altogether* in acquaintance with the scriptures, in breadth and richness of intellect, in fervour of piety, vigour of character, eloquence, and influence. To name any one of his distinguished contemporaries, of the Greek church, rather than himself, would seem to be an intentional disparagement of the sacramental cause. To name Augustine, would not be conclusive, inasmuch as his reputation, as a theological authority, is questioned in this case, and is ambiguous. What could an opponent gain by putting in the place of the archbishop of Constantinople, either the bishop of Milan, or the crabbed monk of Bethlehem, or the bishop of Cæsarea, or Nazianzen, or Nyssen? and how much would they put in peril, by any such substitution?

Now, if we take this great divine as our conclusive instance, it will appear (or it must be granted by those who are at all familiar with his writings,) that the whole of his ecclesiastical course was a struggle, an agony, incited by the vehement endeavour to keep, in even equipoise, the spiritual and the ritual elements of religion. How does he toil and pant in this bootless task! Personally, too much alive to the spiritual and vital reality of the Christian scheme to be quietly willing, like most of his contemporaries, to let it subside, and totally disappear, and yet far too deeply imbued with, at once, the gnostic and the Brahminical feeling, and too intimately compromised, as a public person, with the "church doctrines" of the times, he could never rest, as did others;

but was ever tossing from side to side, like one borne helplessly on by an impetuous tide, through a narrow and winding Hellespont:—now thrown upon the steep Asiatic shore, and now, as by a sudden eddy, carried right athwart the current, toward the European shallows. Few great writers offer so little repose as Chrysostom; few present contrasts so violent; and they are contrasts of apparent intention, as if his own guiding motive—his *cynosure*, had been a binary star, shedding contrary influences upon his course: and so it was in fact. Scarcely is there a homily all of a piece, hardly are there two consecutive passages that can be read without a surprise, amounting to a painful perplexity, until the secret of all this perpetual contrariety is understood; and then it becomes manifest enough that, within the writer's soul, a spiritual and substantial Christianity, which *should* have been uppermost, was ever wrestling with church doctrines, and gnostic sentiments, which *would* be uppermost. From no one of the Nicene fathers might extracts be made so nearly satisfactory to a protestant ear; from no one may there be gathered wilder extravagances, such as the papist makes his boast of; and from no divine of any age or communion, could such instances be adduced of the two kinds in intimate combination.

Nevertheless the convulsive effort spent itself in vain:—the laws of human nature, and its perversity, and, not less, the eternal constitutions of heaven prevailed, and severally took their proper effect. Chrysostom left Nicene Christianity what he found it—a religion of asceticism, and of sacraments, and of high “church principles.” And if we want proof of this, we may either look to the actual and well-known condition of the Greek church, in the next age; or, into his own writings, and especially into those parts of them in

which, from the nature of the subject, and the occasion, the real relative position of the superior, and the inferior elements of religion, is conspicuously placed before us. To such an instance I will now appeal, and I do so with the confidence that it ought to be accepted as satisfactory and conclusive, and that it will be so accepted by the candid inquirer.

What is Christian repentance? is it a refined species of natural remorse? is it, as compared with philosophical reform, a better omened endeavour of the moral nature, to purify itself, and set out anew on the path of virtue? or is it not rather a deep and lasting commotion of the affections, the moral sentiments, originated from above, and having for its impulse, and its centre, those facts and principles which are peculiar to the gospel? I assume that this is the true description, or, at least, the truer of the two: and then it will follow that, if a well-informed and devout writer, and a leader of opinion, is found treating a subject such as this, which may be called the preliminary of piety, and which touches intimately and directly the rudiments of Christianity—if such a writer shall be found so treating this subject, as that the practical result, upon the mass of minds, shall be to favour their own perverse propensity to addict themselves to the forms and the austerities of religion, and to forget its higher elements, then, and in such an instance, we are clearly justified in affirming that the Christianity of the age had slid from its original foundations, and had become effectively corrupt.

Let us then give more than a moment's attention to Chrysostom's treatise on Repentance (tom. ii. pp. 328—414)—a careful composition, comprised in nine homilies, and occupying a space equivalent to the tract now in the reader's hand. We may therefore well look into



it with the expectation of finding there a fair sample of the writer's principles, and mode of teaching. In advancing upon this ground I especially challenge the reader's attention to the fact, that those passages which I may cite, or refer to—and with pleasure, as of a redeeming quality, that is to say, evangelical and animating, and nearly allied to our protestant notions, are peculiarly pertinent to my immediate purpose, inasmuch as they show that the sacramental principles, and the “church doctrines,” which, at the same time, the preacher laboured so strenuously to maintain, possessed, in this instance, all the advantage they could derive from their being associated with the better and purer elements of Christianity. It is not as if I were here adducing some one of the blind and florid orators of the same age, whose enormities of superstition are barely, or not at all relieved, by any indications of genuine pious feeling. Who is there that shall come after Chrysostom, and hope to give the ritual principle a better chance than he gave it, of recommending itself to our approval? Moreover, I must ask the reader to keep in view the striking indications he will meet with, as we go on, of the connexion of the celibate with Chrysostom's theological system, of which, in fact, it was the master-principle.

To preclude any objection, I will premise a note of the learned editor, concerning the last three homilies. “The seventh, eighth, and ninth homilies, do not offer the same indications of genuineness (as the others.) The style is inferior to that of Chrysostom, in elegance; and therefore it is not without some scruple, that we leave them standing among his undoubted writings; and yet we have not thought it proper to set them aside, especially considering (as we have elsewhere stated) that our holy doctor is not always himself, as it regards language

and manner: other homilies indeed we have in hand, on the same subject, which, as being manifestly spurious, we have thrown into the appendix."

The homilies on Repentance were pronounced on successive Sundays to his flock, (at Antioch) after an absence in the country, for the recovery of his health, during which, as he declares, their welfare, and themselves, were ever present to his mind. They express, therefore, not the hurried emotions of an overburdened public course, but the calm and refreshed sentiments that return upon a well ordered mind, in a season of seclusion—seclusion amidst the scenes of nature; and when the perturbations of the soul, and its ambition, have been stilled by the languors of disease. Now certainly we shall find the Christian preacher himself.

The first of these homilies is occupied chiefly with illustrations of the opposite dangers of desperation, or despondency, and of inertness, or indifference, in religion. Among these illustrations, and for the purpose of checking despondency, (as promoted by the Novatian doctrine) he adduces the parable of the prodigal son, proving, as it does, that repentance is *possible*, and the remission of sins attainable, after baptism—a point elsewhere held to be very doubtful. "The prodigal son answers," says Chrysostom, "to those who fall after baptism: he does so, inasmuch as he is called a *son*; for none are sons apart from baptism, with which are connected all the benefits of heirship, and a community of interests with the family. He is called moreover the brother of him who was approved; but there is no fraternity (in the church) without the spiritual regeneration" (baptism.) The second homily opens in a manner very characteristic of the preacher's style. "Last Sunday did ye witness a fight and a victory? the fight indeed of

the devil, and the victory of Christ? Have ye seen the commendation of repentance, and the wound of the devil, and how ill he bore it, and how he trembled and shuddered? Wherefore didst thou fear, O devil, while repentance was commended? why groan? why shudder? Properly enough, says he, do I groan, and trouble myself, for this same repentance snatches from me my choicest treasures."

"—The first course or path of repentance is confession: Come to church, and acknowledge your sin: come, if you are a sinner, that you may profess repentance: come, if you are one of the just, that you fall not from your righteousness." Some indeed would lay the foundation of (Christian) repentance a little lower, and speak, *first of all*, of that conviction of guilt, impotency, and danger, which the Spirit infuses, and which takes its force from the doctrine of the atonement. Not so the divine before us, who introduces no topic of this sort. "Sinner! be beforehand with the devil—put him out of his office, which is that of accuser. Enter the church, and say to God—I have sinned. Nothing else do I ask of thee: . . . acknowledge sin, that thou mayest loosen sin!" Then follow various examples in point.

But there is a second means of repentance, "and what may that be? Weeping for sin. Hast thou sinned? Weep, and thou shalt absolve sin. Is this a great matter? Nothing more do I require of thee, than this—to weep for sin." In confirmation of which doctrine the instances are adduced, to wit Ahab, and the Ninevites.

There is, however, a third means of repentance; "for I have mentioned *many*, that the way of salvation may be made the more easy to thee: and what is that? Humility. Be lowly in mind, and thou hast broken the bonds of thy sins." The proof and instance we have

in the parable of the pharisee and the publican; and the way in which Chrysostom treats this instance, demands to be noticed. The pharisee, through his arrogance and uncharitableness, retired from the temple, having lost his *δικαιοσύνη*, whereas the publican, by his humiliation, had acquired what he had not before. But here we might ask, whether, in fact, the pharisee had any genuine righteousness to lose? let this however pass, while we endeavour to ascertain, from what follows, our preacher's notion of this same humility, which is one of the elements of true repentance. "The publican's humility, then, after all, barely deserved the name; since his confession—I am a sinner, was nothing more than *the mere truth*; but humility indeed is shown when one who is *really great*, humbles himself. Now who is a sinner if a publican be not one? . . . . Wherefore if even this publican, sinner as he was, obtained this great boon, justification, upon his showing a humiliation, which indeed was mere truth, how much rather shall he be so favoured, who, while he is *εναρπτος*, a proficient in virtue, nevertheless humbles himself? . . . . Wherefore, if thou confess thy sins, and humblest thyself, thou becomest just. But wouldst thou learn who it is that is truly humble? Look at Paul, who was humble indeed. Paul the teacher of the wide world—Paul the spiritual orator, the elect vessel, the unbillowed harbour, the unshaken tower—Paul, who, little as he was, traversed the world, moving from land to land as if winged; look at such a one, esteeming himself so little—unlearned, although a philosopher; poor, although rich; such a one, I say, humble indeed, who engaged in innumerable toils," &c. &c. Then follows a page nearly, of that sort of adulatory exaggeration, lifting Paul to the pinnacle of praise, and above it, which so often offends the ear in

the patristic pulpit oratory: the purport of the whole being to show, by the comparison between the publican and the apostle, how great and sure must be the "justifying efficacy" of humility, if, even when it consisted in the simple confession of a naked truth, it procured this boon, falling far short as it did of the transcendental humiliation of such a holy doctor and illustrious philosopher as Paul!

I do not know how this may sound in other ears; but in mine it sounds ill; and it seems to imply a sad misunderstanding of the true grounds and properties of Christian humility. Not very unlike is it to what one may find in the "Ethics" of a famous pagan, much read and esteemed in certain high places; but altogether unlike any thing found in the New Testament—unless it be the portrait of the pharisee of the parable and of his fellows. Chrysostom does in effect put the feeling of the—"God, I thank thee, I am not as other men," into the lips of the apostle, who surely, from the moment that the light shone upon him in the road to Damascus, had renounced every such notion of his own merits, as well as of the merit of his renunciation of merit.

"You have forgotten every word I said to you last Sunday—the beginning, the middle, and the end. Is it not so? But I will not upbraid you; you have your families to mind, your homes to take care of, your services to fulfil, your crafts to follow, while *we* think of nothing but these sacred themes. Well; be it so; I commend you, at least, that, leaving every thing, you come to church, without fail, on a Sunday." Thus, in substance, opens the third homily. I hope I shall not seem to be advancing a captious refinement in saying that, when the preacher returns to his theme, he makes a representation which is doctrinally erroneous, and big

with practical mistakes: let us hear him. "I have said that many and *various* are the roads of repentance, so that salvation may be rendered the more easy. For if HE had given us one only way, we might have rejected it, saying we cannot follow *that* path, and therefore cannot be saved. But now, cutting off from thee any such pretext, he hath afforded thee, not one way only, nor a second only, nor a third only; but *many* and *different*; so that the ascent to heaven may be rendered as easy to thee as possible!"

Surely this is at the best blind teaching, and so blind as to border upon sheer nonsense, and nonsense of the worst tendency; or if sense, then downright error. So far as there could be any *good* sense attached to Chrysostom's statement, in his former homilies, that there are "several paths of repentance," it must mean that repentance has various ingredients, or conditions, each indispensable, and *altogether* necessary to its perfection; but here we find him, as it were, standing on the plain, and pointing to the mount of God, and saying, yonder is the heavenly hill; and how indulgently has He dealt with you, who invites you thither; for he has opened many paths, each of which leads to the gate; and if you find one of them to be too steep, or rugged, or on any account not agreeable, you may turn and take another. That is to say—if you don't relish confession, shed a plenty of tears, and that will do; or if tears are not fleet enough with you, practise humiliation, and that will do: and then he goes on to open yet *other* paths, each independent of the other, and each infallible. If this be not merely foolish, it is intensely false doctrine; and whether it be most foolish, or most false, it could not be otherwise than in the last degree pernicious. What, however, we have to notice particularly is the

secret consistency of errors, such as these, with the master error of the ancient church—the independent efficacy of the mere sacraments, when duly solemnized. The same principle which led Chrysostom to tell the people—“only let us dip you, and you are regenerate, justified, and ready for heaven,” impelled him to say also—‘This mode of penitence, or that, or that, duly made use of, will save you; and one of them nearly as well as another.

But the fourth road of repentance! and what may that be? Almsgiving!—the queen of virtues, and the readiest of all ways of getting into heaven. Then follows the egregious passage, concerning the combined merits of almsgiving and virginity, of which I have already produced a sufficient sample. In *this* instance, however, it appears that the two courses must coincide; that is to say, how straightforward soever may be the road to heaven, through virginity, you may not think to walk in it unaccompanied by almsgiving! Nothing can be much more distinct than is language such as the following—

“But now that I come to speak of the way of almsgiving (as a path of repentance) our discourse becomes animated. Already we have said that almsgiving is a vast possession; thence advancing, the open sea of virginity receives us. ‘Thou hast, therefore, the capital (species of) repentance by almsgiving; which is able to absolve thee from the bonds of thy sins; and yet again thou hast another path of repentance, as ready as possible, by which thou mayest get a discharge from thy sins. Pray every hour.’ It may be said, all this is only an incautious mode of strongly stating the force and efficacy of humility, of charity, of prayer, and so forth; and that, with a little trimming, it may all be understood in

a good sense. But was it likely to be so understood by the mass of the people, and especially when they were constantly exposed to the same ill-judged and delusive mode of teaching? Or, to put another question, tending to the same point—Is any such indiscretion of style fallen into by men who themselves understand the gospel scheme of salvation, and who moreover well know how prone men are to find out, and to follow some by-path to heaven? It is not, in fact, until after the church has *long* lost its hold of the truth, that men of so much intelligence, fervour, and upright intention, as belonged to Chrysostom, are found using language so dark and fatal.

Our great preacher, as he goes along, takes care, from time to time, to make the people understand that it is “in church” that a truce with heaven, on whatever terms obtained, is to be ratified. “Hast thou sinned? Enter the church, and wipe out thy sin.”

The fourth homily treats of the consolations of repentance; among which are those derived from the instances afforded in scripture of its efficacy; and we are moreover told to follow the example of the saints, proficient in philosophy, who did not suffer themselves either to be depressed by calamities, or elated by prosperity. We are moreover to betake ourselves to God, who is ever accessible. “At all times, beloved, let us take refuge in God, who is at once willing and able to release us from our misfortunes: it is otherwise in our approaches to men . . . . But as to God, there intervenes nothing of the sort between us and him, who may be entreated, without a mediator (it is not to be imagined that Chrysostom here intends to exclude the mediatorial office of Christ) without wealth, without cost, he yields to prayer: sufficient is it to cry out from the heart, and to offer



tears, and immediately entering in, thou mayest draw him to thy part."

Let our preacher have the benefit of all that is rational and scriptural in this passage, without deduction on the score of its questionable phraseology.

The fifth of these homilies is esteemed as one of Chrysostom's happiest compositions: is then its subject the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit in softening the heart, and in consoling it? Is it the power and willingness of Christ to deliver the penitent from guilt and fear? is it the sufficiency of the atonement? or the efficacy of the Redeemer's mediation? no such themes occupy the eloquent preacher, on this occasion; but instead of them we have—The efficacy and merits of Fasting! Need we ask whether evangelic warmth, and purity of doctrine, or whether a dead and delusive formalism were the characteristic of the Nicene church? But let us push our way through the applauding crowd, toward the preacher: with what a trumpet blast does he usher in—is it the Saviour, the King of Glory? no, alas! but the awful personage whom he challenges as a tremendous prince—Fasting! terrible indeed; yet not to Christians, but to the race of demons! His approach is, to us, like that of some august monarch, when his entrance into his capital is announced! and yet if we may credit the intimate confessions of an illustrious modern professor of "church doctrines," this same awful personage wears sometimes a very grim visage, even when looked at by his meekest admirers; so much so, as that the favour of a few hours of his company has driven the votary, nolens volens, to seek the consolations of "tea with cream and buttered toast!" But we hasten from the cloisters of Oxford to the great church at Antioch, and step back from the Christianity of the nineteenth century, to that of the fourth.

“Wouldst thou learn what an ornament to men is—Fasting, and what a guard and preservative? Look well to the monastic tribe, blessed and admirable as it is! For these, fleeing from the tumults of common life, and running away to the summits of mountains, rear their huts in the tranquil wilderness; as it were moored in a sheltered creek, and thither lead with them fasting, as the companion of their lives. Wherefore it—(fasting) makes angels of them, men as they are. Nor these alone (the *eremites*) but those also who, in the midst of cities (the *cœnobites*) by the same means, reach the pitch of philosophy. . . . Wherefore God, at the moment when he made man, instantly committed him into the hands of Fasting as to a loving mother, and excellent mistress, intrusted with his welfare. . . . If then fasting were indispensable even in paradise, (Gen. ii. 16) how much more so out of paradise? If this drug were beneficial before the wound had been received, how much more after? . . . Hast thou observed how God’s anger was kindled by a contempt put upon fasting? (in Adam’s sin.) Learn how he rejoices when it is honoured!” Then follow the scripture instances; among them that of Peter (the immediate subject, fasting, having been dropt) who, notwithstanding his denying his Master, was, after a brief but fervent penitence, restored to his dignity as “the præfect of the universal church.” But to return to the virtues of fasting; see the instance of Daniel, and of the three children. How was it that the body of the one escaped the teeth of the lions, and the bodies of the others the power of the furnace?—“Ask Fasting, and it shall answer thee, and clear up this enigma.” But inasmuch as physicians recommend that powerful remedies should not be administered upon a full stomach, lest they be too much for the strength of

the patient, so should our use of that potent drug, Fasting, be preceded by a degree of moderation. But if it be resorted to when the body has already been somewhat reduced, and the mind sobered, it, *το φαρμακον*, will the more surely avail for the purging of the multitude of old sins. It is worthy of notice that, whereas in the exordium of this homily, Fasting is introduced as an august prince, in the peroration, he makes his appearance in a new character (so regarded by too many) as a wild beast. Moreover, in what sense practically our preacher's doctrine was understood, by the mass of the people, may be gathered from such indications as these. "If I shall ask you, Why have you been to the bath to-day? you reply, To cleanse the body, in preparation for the fast. But if I ask, And why did you get drunk (yesterday?) again thou wilt reply, Because I am to fast to-day." So much for this elaborate discourse upon the duty and benefits of fasting, as a way or means of repentance! Apart from the customary doxology at the end, neither the love of God nor the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor the communion of the Holy Spirit, has any place or part in this celebrated sermon.

The sixth homily resumes the subject of fasting, and offers some rational corrective advices, to those who had just practised it; dehorting the people from the customary rush toward the amusements of the theatre; or, as we may say, of the *carnival*. Nothing affecting our present purpose, or nothing new, offers itself in this sermon. The next, the genuineness of which need not be questioned on account of its doctrine, affords instances of that celerity, in passing from the spiritual or evangelic, to the formal side of any subject, which is the characteristic of the Nicene writings. When the eye is caught by a text which might suggest a strain of

a happier kind, a disappointment almost always ensues; and if there be two admissible modes of commenting upon a passage of scripture, the one which is the most ambiguous, and the most open to a dangerous misconception, is most often the one adopted. “In the gospel for to-day, ye have heard the Saviour saying to the paralytic—Son, thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee. Now the forgiveness of sins is the well-spring of salvation, and the premium, *επαθλον*, of repentance. Repentance is the efficacious remedy of sin; a heavenly gift, an admirable power, a gracious victory over the penalty of laws.” How much better a method of popular teaching is it to insist rather upon the first cause, than upon the proximate causes of our deliverance from guilt and condemnation!

Farther on in this seventh homily, there is a repetition which the preacher excuses, on account of the importance he attaches to the subject, of his doctrine concerning the all-availing merits of almsgiving, and with an addition which could not but thicken the darkness already shed upon the one and only path of salvation. It seems as if Chrysostom were doing his utmost to put out of view the true principle of Christian beneficence, and to substitute the most sordid and mercenary motives. Condensing the paragraph, the substance of it is to this effect—If a cup of cold water, which costs nothing, merits, and shall obtain its reward; with how vast a reward shall the equitable Judge remunerate munificent charities, and the costly bestowment of garments, money, and the like. Should we regard the following, as any thing more than a foolish extravagance, certainly of very ill tendency? “He that pitieth the poor, lendeth to the Lord. Now if we lend to God, we make him our debtor. Which of the two then wouldst thou have

him to be—thy debtor, or thy judge? The debtor reverences his creditor; the judge entreats not the debtor.”

Among the many repetitions which occur in these homilies, one hopes to find amended in one place, what has been wrongly put in another; but the preacher's own mind having too far lost its hold of the great principle of the gospel, he does but diversify a little his confused notions of the scheme of salvation. Thus, in the early part of the eighth homily, he seems to be approaching a better doctrine, while speaking of the divine mercy; and yet hardly reaches higher than to the level of a “gospel according to David.” Seldom, that is to say three or four times, in the course of this elaborate treatise, does he satisfy the Christian ear; as thus:—“Such is the goodness of God, that, to save a servant, he spared not his only Son; delivering up his only-begotten, that he might redeem his unthankful servants, and laying down the blood of his Son as the price of their deliverance. Oh the goodness of the Lord! Say not then to me again, I have sinned much, how can I be saved? Thou art not able to effect this, but thy Lord is able, and so able as to blot out thy transgressions.”

Few, and far between, are passages of this sort. When they occur, they serve to confirm our general conclusion, that a religious system, combining capital errors with something, or even much, of what is true, still takes its character, as a practical doctrine, from its errors, rather than from its truths. So it has always been with popery, and so was it, as history clearly shows, with the Greek church: which became altogether such as the Nicene delusions tended to make it, a religion of superstition, of formalism, and of the most puerile mummeries. What the actual and immediate effect of Chry-

sostom's own preaching was, may be gathered, but too plainly, from his constant tone and style, which do not seem to imply that he felt himself to be addressing spiritually minded and consistent Christians; but rather the loose church-going and play-going rabble, high and low, of a debauched and luxurious city. That his congregation was actually of this sort, is, I think, a fact that is borne on the face of all his homilies. Moreover, the significant, though usual consequence of exaggerating the ritual part of religion, at the cost of the spiritual, namely, that *the rites themselves* came to be contemned by a large portion of the people, is also apparent. It is nothing but a straightforward and energetic teaching of Truth—spiritual truth, that can bring, even the rites of religion into general esteem. In corroboration of this principle, it may be well to cite a passage or two from the ninth and last homily on Repentance, especially as we shall, at the same time, obtain a specimen of our preacher's style of speaking of the eucharistic rite—lauded more than the Saviour, and nevertheless held in contempt, spite of the preacher's vehement upbraidings, by the people.

Toward the close of this ninth homily (and of the treatise) Chrysostom turns toward those who, even during the hour when the rites of the “dreadful and mystic table” were celebrating, lounged their time away in idle company, and, who, in doing so, belied the profession they had just made in taking part in the liturgical language. “Art thou not afraid, dost thou not blush, to be found a liar at that very hour? What! the mystic table has been prepared; the Lamb of God for thee is slaughtered; the priest for thee contends—the spiritual fire from the sacred table ascends; the cherubim holding their stations round about, while the seraphim hovering

around, and the six-winged veiling their faces, while for thee all the incorporeal orders, along with the priest, intercede. The spiritual fire descends; and for thy purification, the blood from the spotless side is emptied into the cup, and thou, dost thou neither tremble nor blush, to be found false (to thy professions) at this dread hour! A hundred sixty and eight hours are there in the week, and one only of these has God set apart for himself; and this one dost thou devour in worldly business, in merriment, or in any thing that may chance to come in thy way! With what assurance then canst thou afterwards (at any other time) approach the mysteries? with a conscience how defiled! Wouldst thou dare, with dung in thy hands, to touch the skirts of an earthly monarch? Far from it. Not as bread shouldst thou look at that (bread) neither esteem that (cup) as wine; for not like other aliment do these (elements) descend into the draught. Far be it; think no such thing, for just as wax, held to the fire, suffers no detriment, as to its substance, although melted all away; in like manner hold it to be true, that the substance of the mysteries is absorbed by the body (of the participant:) wherefore, when ye approach (the table) think not that ye receive the divine body, as from the hand of man; but rather as was the fire from the tongs of the very seraphim given to Isaiah!"

Although not inseparably connected with my immediate argument, I feel it impossible to pass the above-cited passage without directing the clerical reader to a comparison, which indeed can hardly have failed to force itself upon his own mind, while reading it. Is the style, temper, and *obvious popular import*, of Chrysostom's language, as here quoted, one and the same with that of the church of England? I would put it to the

clerical reader, whether he could think it one and the same thing to read, before the communion, this specimen of Nicene Christianity, or the exhortation actually appointed, by the English church, to be read, "In case the minister shall see the people negligent," &c. What dignity, what simplicity, what fervour, in the one: what extravagance, what superstition, what revolting presumption in the other! I verily believe that, even the most thorough-going of the Oxford Tract divines would shudder at the thought of such a substitution; and I am sure the majority of the clergy would regard it as nothing less than a treason to the protestant church to admit it. There may perhaps be a distinction, which however I have never been able to retain my hold of, between the Nicene doctrine, of the eucharist, and that of the church of Rome; but whatever logical and acutely analytic minds may make of such a distinction, this is clear enough, that, in the view of the people at large, the two doctrines are not two, but one, practically the same, and alike tending to fix the gross apprehensions of the people upon the mere rite, to the exclusion of whatever is spiritual in religion.

Opportunity, I hope, will be afforded me, when the ground has been cleared for that purpose, for placing, in broad contrast, the Nicene and the English churches, which, allied as they may be by the retention of half a dozen ambiguous phrases, differ substantially, and immeasurably. Such a contrast, extreme as it is in its essential features, would warrant an appeal to the honour and conscience, to the good sense, and to the Christian feeling of every clergyman, and the appeal would be to this effect—Do you adhere to the Nicene fathers, or to the English reformers? The Oxford Tract controversy can have no other issue, when the whole question comes



to be fully understood, than that of compelling every clergyman to make his choice, in this momentous alternative.

But, to resume my immediate argument. We have reviewed Chrysostom's nine homilies on repentance. I can imagine no reason why this set of sermons should not be appealed to as a fair sample of the doctrine, and of the ordinary style, of the great Nicene divines. Whatever it presents which may startle our modern and protestant ears, may be matched with the greatest ease, from the pages of the same writer, and his contemporaries; nor would any purpose be answered by demurring at the sense attributed to this or that phrase, or passage. Chrysostom's meaning, to the very same effect, may be gathered from many other places.

The reader has seen upon what points of doctrine and practice the preacher chiefly, and the most earnestly, if not exclusively, insists:—we have heard him, most incautiously, recommending the several accompaniments, or ingredients, of repentance, as *severally* sufficient for securing salvation; a mode of speaking as grossly delusive, as any thing that is met with in the worst Romish writers of the worst times. It has, moreover, appeared, that, while extraordinary importance is attached by him to almsgiving, as a direct means of salvation, the preacher reserves his choicest rhetoric, as a free-will offering, to be laid upon the altar of celestial virginity: this he feels to be the real strength of the system he is upholding.

But, now, what is it that we *do not* find, in these noted homilies? Alas! (some few phrases allowed for) what we do not find is—Christianity itself. In particular, there is barely any thing, although the subject seems necessarily to involve it, concerning the work of the

Holy Spirit, in softening and renewing the dead, callous, and depraved affections of man. No, for in the place of the work of the Spirit, we have the wonders of the “justifying pool.” There are two or three passages, affirming the remission of sins, through the merits of Christ’s death; but, then, neither is this truth expanded, abstractedly, nor is it connected with Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith, nor, which is the worst omission, (because it implies a positive error,) is the vicarious work of Christ in any way represented as the spring or reason of genuine repentance. This is surely a fatal deficiency. Another omission, highly significant as it respects our present purpose, must be noticed—namely, the absence of any of those pointed cautions, which a well-informed Christian minister, knowing what human nature is, invariably introduces, when he is insisting upon the accessories of piety. Let us suppose that a preacher is urging upon his hearers the importance of prayer, humility, almsgiving, and the like, as indispensable accompaniments of a genuine repentance, will he fail to warn the formal, and the self-righteous, of the danger of a pharisaic substitution of these things, for the grace, and power, and merit of the Saviour? Very few, now-a-days, would approach Chrysostom’s incautious style in these instances; nor any, but the most blind, omit those correctives, apart from which this mode of teaching reaches the flagitious quality of the worst heresy.

Nicene Christianity, then, taken in its fairest samples, and weighed in the balances of common sense and scripture, or put in the scales of the church of England, and compared with the articles and homilies, and with the lives and writings of the English reformers, is it not found wanting? Does it not well deserve our indignant

reprobation, when it is proposed to us as our model and authority? By Nicene Christianity must be meant, if any thing is meant, not a shadowy form of things, which we may fondly imagine to have had place somewhere, we know not where, and to have been in its perfection at some time, we know not when; but precisely the system, doctrinal, ritual, and ecclesiastical, which meets us in passing up and down, through the extant works of the divines of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. This, then, is the system which, although it has long been revered under favour of a disingenuous concealment, must fall into contempt; nothing can save it, when once it comes to be fully understood. Let but a patient hearing be given to the naked evidence, and the result is inevitable; nor can it be long delayed.

There is yet a consideration suggested, not remotely, by the instance I have adduced.—Let it be said that neither Chrysostom, nor his contemporaries, whatever may *seem* to be the import of their language, held the doctrines we hear them sometimes affirming, uncorrected, in a sufficient degree, by the vital principles of Christianity.

Be it so, then, that the “church principles” so strenuously maintained by the Nicene divines, were, in fact, although we cannot perceive it, duly balanced by more spiritual elements; and, in a word, that the counterpoise was just such as we might wish to see realized among ourselves. But how is any such hypothesis sustained by history?—if there be any meaning in history.

The florid orators, bishops and great divines of the fourth century, we find, one and all, throughout the east, throughout the west, throughout the African church, lauding and lifting to the skies whatever is formal in religion, whatever is external, accessory, ritual, ecclesi-

astical: it was upon *these* things that they spent their strength; it was these that strung their energies, these that fired their souls. Virginitv they put first and foremost; then came maceration of the body, tears, psalm-singing, prostrations on the bare earth, humiliations, almsgiving, expiatory labours and sufferings, the kind offices of the saints in heaven, the wonder-working efficacy of the sacraments, the unutterable powers of the clergy: these were the ripe and favoured themes of animated sermons, and of prolix treatises; and such was the style, temper, spirit, and practice of the church, from the banks of the 'Tigris, to the shores of the Atlantic, and from the Scandinavian morasses, to the burning sands of the great desert; such, so far as our extant materials give us any information. And all this was what it should have been! and this is what now we should be tending toward!

But now, what was the condition of the (so called) Christian church, as thus taught, trained, and hopefully sent forward by the Nicene fathers, within the short period of two hundred years? Well would it be if this condition, as well of the east as of the west, at the opening of the seventh century, were far better understood among us than it appears to be: we should then entirely leave off blaming the church of Rome, as having debauched the Christian world; and should retreat with alarm, with pity, with disgust, from Nicene Christianity.

Within the short period of two hundred years from the death of Chrysostom, and within less than a century from the death of the men whom he and his contemporaries had trained, and while still the Nicene system retained its integrity, Mahomet broke upon the world, and the tempest of heresy which he raised, came as a blast of health upon the nations. What Mahomet and

his caliphs found in all directions, whither their cimeters cut a path for them, was a superstition so abject, an idolatry so gross and shameless, church doctrines so arrogant, church practices so dissolute and so puerile, that the strong-minded Arabians felt themselves inspired anew as God's messengers to reprove the errors of the world, and authorized as God's avengers to punish apostate Christendom. The son of the bond-woman was let loose from his deserts, to "mock" and to chastise the son of the free-woman. We read, in the story of the moslem conquests, a commentary, written by the finger of God, upon Nicene Christianity. Or, if we will not, in that terrible history, acknowledge God's displeasure against this system of fraud, folly, and impiety, we can hardly refuse to listen to the notices contained in the Koran, and the Mahometan writers, of the impression that had been made upon the Arabian mind by the spectacle of the debauched Christianity of the Greek and African churches. It is here that we may the most surely learn what was the actual result of the system imbodied in the writings of Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory, Cyril, and their contemporaries.

Does it seem, then, when we come to look into history, as if these same "church principles" were, indeed, the true and wisely-chosen vehicles and preservatives of genuine Christianity? Are the notions we may have indulged of their excellence and sanctity, altogether confirmed by our researches among the ecclesiastical remains of the times of Gregory I. and Mahomet? What has become of common sense, to say nothing of philosophy, if we are not, on the contrary, to allow that the evidence of history frowns altogether upon these false and pernicious doctrines, and declares that, to exalt the ritual and ecclesiastical elements of religion, into

a position of equality with the spiritual, is a course more certainly fatal to Christian principles than that of propagating even impious heresies.

It is, besides, a task of no difficulty to show that, although Nicene Christianity, and the popery of the middle ages, differ in various incidental points, the former passed into the latter in the course of an easy and inevitable transition; and moreover, that, in respect of apostolic Christianity, the one was to the full as fatally delusive as the other; while *as a practical system*, or consistent scheme of ecclesiastical despotism, the latter might well be accepted in the place of the former. A careful comparison, article by article, of the two systems (if two) imbodyed in the writings of Chrysostom and Bernard, respectively, would *on the whole*, such is my persuasion, leave an advantage on the side of that professed by the latter.

Yet so complicated are all human affairs, especially such as are mixed up with matters of opinion, that inferences the most convincing, to plain understandings, drawn from the actual operation and issue of either a religious or a political system, may easily be evaded. Putting such evasions however out of sight, I would ask unprejudiced persons, whether the religious history (if we ought to call it a religious history) of Europe, eastern and western, from the fifth century downward, to the fifteenth, ought to be admitted as recommendatory, or as condemnatory of the Nicene church principles? In other words, does the actual result of the experiment which was made on so extensive a scale, and under such a diversity of circumstances, for proving that Christianity is best promoted by enhancing its ritual and ecclesiastical elements—does this result justify or discourage our

attempting to repeat it? Is it, let us candidly be told, is it with a fair and well-omened promise of a happy issue, that now again, we are to set about the work so zealously urged forward by the Nicene doctors—I mean the work of magnifying the church, and its mysteries, and its ministers; while so much heart and labour only as could then be spared, is allowed to the endeavour to exalt the spiritual elements of religion?

Against such an enterprise there stands opposed, first, the entire mass of all experience, as presented on the pages of history; and next, the whole force of the best *a priori* calculation we can make of the tendencies of human nature, when two *such* elements are offered, on any thing like even terms, to its choice. But more than all, we are, or we should think ourselves, prohibited from so rash an attempt by the manifest intention of the apostolic writings, in this very behalf, and by the explicit predictions they contain of the very corruptions which thence have arisen.

If then it be proposed to us to set about reviving what are called “church doctrines,” our reply might be—either, that the whole tenor of church history discourages such an endeavour:—or, that the dictates of common sense and sound philosophy declare against it; or that the spirit and letter of scripture are opposed to it. But now it may be said, and as waiving any such conclusions, Is it not possible that, as in one age church principles, relatively, may have been lifted to too high a level, so in another, and in our own, for instance, they may have been depressed below, or far below, the line which marks their due place in the religious system?—what then should be done? are we not to endeavour to remedy this admitted evil; and must we not, in such a case, ought we not, to use all means for re-

storing what has so fallen out of its place? Yes; but by what means, or in what order of proceeding are we to make the attempt? Plainly, by endeavouring to invigorate anew the *spiritual* forces of piety, and then it will be easy enough, under a wise management, to restore the ritual elements: nothing is in fact more easy, when once men are thoroughly awakened to a sense of the infinite importance and excellence of the great realities of the gospel, and when such an awakening spreads through a community—nothing is more easy than, at such a time, to secure their reverent regard to, and diligent attendance upon, the exterior means and observances of religion. It is in *this direction only*, that what we profess to be aiming at, can actually be reached. Nothing is more insane—strictly nothing more *preposterous*, than the endeavour to *work upward*, in any case, from the ritual to the spiritual, in religion.

Look at these two methods as we may imagine them to have been exemplified in the instance which we have just now had before us, of the church at Antioch. Chrysostom bitterly lamented the general indifference of the people of his charge in matters of religion, and especially their contempt of the Lord's supper. Now, with the hope of effecting a reform in this single particular, two courses were fairly open before him; the one was that which he actually adopted, namely, the giving the reins to extravagance in speaking of the rite, and the pouring forth torrents of bombast on the subject, telling the people *generally* that the eucharist and baptism were the main instruments of salvation, and assuring them, as to the former, that cherubim and seraphim hovered trembling over the altar, veiling their faces, lest they should catch a glimpse of the consecrated elements; and moreover, adding the impious nonsense, that these ele-



ments had the miraculous property of melting away into the animal system; and that they never took the course of ordinary aliment!

This was one method of bringing the people back to a reverent attendance upon the rites of the church; and it was the method chosen and practised by Chrysostom and his contemporaries. But there is another method (oh that it had been once tried!) namely, that of zealously and affectionately opening up to the people the evil mysteries of their own hearts—convincing them of their sin, danger, and helplessness—speaking to them warmly and solemnly of the sacred influence which overcomes every obstacle in the way of man's salvation, and of the power and grace of Him by whom that salvation has been obtained. This is another method, tending not less certainly (far more so) toward the object at first proposed, namely, that of leading the people on to a reverent and profitable attendance upon the external means of grace. But such was not the method taken, or ever thought of, so far as we can learn, by the Nicene divines. Yet can we ourselves hesitate in making our choice between the two?

I must then take the liberty plainly to express the opinion, that the Oxford Tract writers, religiously desirous as no doubt they are, to correct what they feel to be the excesses of protestantism, and to renovate church authority, to enhance sacramental reverence, and to deepen ritual solemnity, show themselves to be by no means wise master builders, by commencing their labours, as they do, at what we must think, the wrong end; and by persisting to carry them on in the wrong direction. In *that direction* in which they are toiling so hard, even their immediate object is not to be attained. A people may indeed, by such perilous tampering, be led on, and

beguiled, into the swamps of an abject superstition; but a genuine and reverent regard to religious rites and ordinances, will be the result of nothing but an invigorated promulgation of a pure, apostolic gospel.

It is surely for the sake of that gospel—for the sake of the spiritual realities of Christianity, and not for the mere sake of the ritual and ecclesiastical elements themselves, that these zealous, devout, and learned men are stirring so deeply the clerical and public mind, at the present moment. So far, they, and those who may oppose their endeavours, might seem to be fully agreed; and then the controversy would appear to relate merely to the *means* fittest to be used, or to the course of proceeding which might be thought the best for securing the object aimed at by all parties. But such is far from being the real quality of the controversy; for, by the opponents of the Oxford writers, it is alleged, and on no narrow grounds of experience, that, to prosecute this ultimate object in the mode adopted by the early church, and carried on by the church of Rome, and now again so earnestly recommended by the Oxford divines, is not simply (which we might excuse) to take a longer, instead of a shorter course, but to take a course which, as to the mass of the people, leads to an abyss whence there is no return! From that treacherous border the few would make their escape, heavenward; as the few, in every age, have escaped from the false bosom of the Romish church; but the many—the thousands of the people, would become the pitiable victims of this religion of sacraments.

It would be a delusion as gross as this ancient delusion itself, to imagine that a refined and spiritualized Nicene Christianity, such a system as is now issuing from the cloisters of Oxford, would prove itself materi-

ally a better scheme than was its original, or than was the papal church; or that it would not lead on to the same spiritual debauchery and tyranny. The principle is one and the same, and it is a principle with which neither the gospel nor the well-being of society will ever consist. If, in fact, this newly refined gnosticism should retain the highly wrought polish imparted to it by its modern originators, it would be only so much the more dangerous; inasmuch as it would captivate more minds, and be itself less open to assault. But it would *not* retain its first refinement—no, not through the lifetime of the next series of its adherents: the tendencies of human nature are powerful as a deluge, headed up for awhile; and they will take their constant course. The very youths who, at this moment, are being lulled by the poisonous atmosphere of the Nicene levels, will, twenty years hence, or sooner, interpret the doctrine they are receiving in a new, and a more intelligible, and practical, and consistent sense; and, in fact, while they will teach the vulgar to revere their deceased masters, they will, themselves, and in private, scorn their memory as scrupulous devotees, and mock the recollection of their devout sincerity. That shall happen to *them*—the Oxford worthies of our times, which has happened to the saints of Rome—to be worshipped by the rabble, and spit upon by the priests. The plague, not otherwise stayed, a very few years would be enough for bringing back upon England, not merely the mummeries always attendant upon a religion of sacraments, nor merely the filth and folly, the lies and woes of the ancient monkery, but the palpable and terrible cruelties of the times of St. Dominic, of Ximenes, and of Bonner. If there are those who will scout any such anticipation, as a mere controversial flourish, or rhetorical extravagance, or as a dis-

ingenuous endeavour, on the part of a writer, to enlist popular fears and vulgar prejudices on his side, let them read again the history of Europe, and of the church, from the second century downwards, and gather thence what hitherto must have escaped them—the first principles of human nature, and of the social system as developed by religious motives. Of this history hitherto we have, on all sides, known far too little.

I cannot conclude this tract without repeating the profession I have already made, of an entire exemption from every acrimonious, or disrespectful feeling towards the eminent persons whose *public conduct*, as divines, I am compelled to speak of in terms of the strongest reprobation. No one who is accustomed to think of Athanasius, Chrysostom, Basil, and Ambrose, and others of that age, as devout and upright men, or to peruse the works of the *Romanist* writers, with pleasure and deference (reserving always an opinion of their Christianity) can feel it to be difficult to entertain sentiments of respect and esteem towards men who are not inferior, probably, to any of the best of the latter class, and who, without a doubt, are far more enlightened, as Christians, than were any of the former.

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It remains, then, and it is a task which may be accomplished within the limits of the next number, to exhibit the bearing of the principle and practice of religious celibacy upon the ethical system, and the actual morals of the ancient church—upon its ritual institutions, and upon its ecclesiastical, or hierarchical constitutions. We shall then be in a position, or, at least, so far as so imperfect a sketch of a very extensive field can put us in position, for giving a reply to two questions, First, Whether the celibate, and its attendant monkery, be really

separable from the other elements of Nicene Christianity; and if not, then, Secondly, whether, after the sample we shall have had of the former, we shall accept and imitate the two, as one system; or whether we shall reject both together?

In acquitting myself of that part of my task which yet lies before me, while it will be unavoidable to adduce, or to refer to, evidence such as one would have been glad to have left untouched, I shall also find a proper opportunity, which, indeed, I am most anxious to meet with, for giving its due commendation to the ancient church; and, in fact, for righting a little the balance between ancient and modern Christianity. Truth, virtue, and piety, as a whole, have not been the monopoly of any one age, or communion: nor has any body of Christians so far, or so completely, fallen from scriptural excellence, as not to have retained some specific merits, as compared with other bodies. The ancient church, while fatally deluded, nevertheless might boast several such merits; and some, of a high order; and it will be to perform at once, an edifying, a gratifying, and a consoling office, to bring these excellences forward, and to use them as a means of correcting our defective modern notions and practices.

I feel perfectly certain that, among those who would the most decisively and warmly resist the culpable endeavour now making to foist Nicene Christianity into the room of the reformation, there are many who would gladly and meekly listen to any reasonable reproofs, or corrections, drawn from the example, the lives, or the teaching of the early Christians, and tending to supply what may be wanting in, or what may have dropped out of, our protestant principles or practices. When there-

fore occasions of this sort may present themselves, I shall readily embrace them, not at all fearing to offend well trained protestant ears. On the contrary, I am sure it will afford a cordial satisfaction to religious minds to find that the church has been the church—a body vivified by virtue and piety, in every age: nor will this satisfaction be at all spoiled, rather it will be made the more lively, when it happens that, from such comparisons of age with age, a lesson of humiliation comes home to ourselves. There would, I am persuaded, be no hazard in engaging, on behalf of the sound protestant community in this country, that, while it would reject with indignation the unwise endeavour now made to drive the church back upon the foolish, flimsy, and pernicious church principles of the Nicene age, it would meekly submit itself to a correction, drawn from any bright examples of self-denial, constancy, or devotedness, which that age may offer.

WE, I mean sound protestants, know what human nature is, and always remember that, while it has never been such as should make it a fit object of worship, it does not at any time stand excused from the duty of humbly comparing its rate of wisdom and goodness with that of other times. WE, therefore, neither crouch before the doctors of the Nicene age, any more than we do before those of any other period; nor do we utterly condemn any set or community of our fallible predecessors and brethren. All such superstitions, and all such intolerance, we utterly disclaim, and leave both to Romanists, to whom, however, in their turn, we are perfectly willing and ready to look for any patterns of excellence, whether more or less complete, which they may have to produce.

This is our catholicity, and this is our reverence for

venerable antiquity! We venerate antiquity, and we are curious to penetrate its secrets, because we firmly believe that, in every age, God has had his people. We venerate antiquity, just as we venerate any, even the most despised community of modern Christians, who appear, in any degree, to enjoy the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit; and who, as it may seem, along with many and deplorable errors, yet “love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”

WE, too, heartily make profession of our belief in the “Holy Catholic Church;” and after having made this profession, and after having attached an intelligible and most comfortable meaning to the words—venerable words as they are, we should shudder as much at the cold impiety of excluding from its pale the deluded genuine Christians of the Nicene, or Romish churches, as the deluded (if they be deluded) genuine Christians of some avoided and abhorred sect of our own times. This is our catholicity; and it fills our hearts with comfort and our mouths with praise: it brightens the sadness, and composes the distractions of earth; and it brings into our bosoms something of the genial emotions which, we believe, will make up the felicity of the “communion of saints” in heaven.

Whether we shall find in heaven “all the saints” of the calendar, we do not well know; but we do know that we shall meet there “a great multitude,” of those whom the intolerant have wished in perdition, or have sent into the skies through flames, and from racks and gibbets;—and we would almost as soon lend a hand, in this work, to a Bonner, as admit to our creed or bosom, any notion or feeling, the effect of which would be to alienate us, even in thought, from any whom there we *shall* meet.

This is our catholicity; nor does it take up a grain of

that mingled indifference and infidelity which is called latitudinarianism. This word, as we understand it, means what is equivalent to professing, either that nineteen and twenty are absolutely equal; or that the difference between the two sums is not worth regarding. But such a profession, when it attaches to matters of religion, is not a mere absurdity, but an impiety also; and it is a certain indication of such a coldness of heart as would lead a man to throw up his interest in the nineteen parts of his faith, as easily as in the one. Now, far from sharing in either the absurdity, or the impiety, of a latitudinarian temper, we give a proof of how justly we estimate the value of the *nineteen* elements, or points of religion, by recognising their aggregate worth, even when the *one* may be wanting.

But now we find fault with the catholicity that attends “church principles,” on this very account, that it drives men into at once the absurdity, and the impiety, of making as much ado about the one, as about the nineteen parts of their Christianity; or even to attach more practical importance to the one, than they do to the nineteen. While the latitudinarian slights the circumstantials of religion, because he inwardly cares little or nothing about its substance, the zealot of “church principles,” by magnifying enormously the importance of its circumstantials, puts a real contempt upon the substance; and he does so, probably, under the influence of the very same feeling of secret disaffection to that substance.

On the contrary, the catholicity which we profess, gives the most convincing proof possible of its remoteness from latitudinarian indifference, or chilliness of heart, by opening its arms to all who can furnish any credible evidence of their possessing that substance.—Who is it then that steers the farthest from infidelity—he



who will never acknowledge Christianity at all, except when it meets him trimly attired in the court livery he is fond of? or he who heartily welcomes it, even when he may much dislike the garb which, in any instance, it happens to wear?

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### THE RULE OF RELIGIOUS CELIBACY, AS LAID DOWN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

No difficulty attaches to the subject of religious celibacy if we confine ourselves to what is said concerning it by our Lord, and the apostles; nor can even the most fervent-minded Christians be in danger of running into extravagance on this ground, so long as the great principles of the gospel are understood, and their genuine influence is admitted. But the moment when these principles are compromised, and when the humble and happy path of faith and true holiness is abandoned, and a factitious pietism is courted, then fervour becomes enthusiasm, and every folly and enormity of the ascetic life follows in rapid succession.

Thus it was with the ancient asceticism; nor with this error alone; and it is a singular circumstance that so close an analogy subsists between the two subjects of celibacy and martyrdom, as well in regard to the rule laid down for each by our Lord and the apostles, as to the fatal misunderstanding of that rule by the ancient church, that if any ambiguity may be thought to embarrass the one of these subjects, it may readily be cleared up by a direct analogical argument, derived from the other. The fact is really curious, as well as impor-

tant in a practical view, that, from the moment when the church was left to its own discretion, it went astray, or, as we might say, ran wild, on *both* these parallel lines; so that if we were balancing in regard to the one, and doubting whether, after all, the practice of antiquity was not substantially apostolic, we no sooner turn to the other, than we perceive the not-to-be-misunderstood indications, of sheer enthusiasm, and of an almost total want of sound evangelic feeling.

If at any time one were yielding oneself to the natural and agreeable illusion of supposing that the early church enjoyed a continuity of that miraculous influence which preserved the inspired men from the follies and errors that are incident to humanity, and which are so abundantly generated by religious excitements—if one were thinking this to have been the fact, the dream is instantly dispelled by merely looking into the ancient martyrologies. Affecting and admirable as are many of these memorials of Christian fortitude, we instantly feel that, when compared with the temper, principles, and style of the inspired persons, a something essential is wanting, and that a something fatal has come in its place. We are breathing another atmosphere, and another colour is spread over all objects. These good men, the early martyrs, spoke, acted, and suffered nobly; and we love and admire them; and we also find it easy to follow, in their case, those workings of human nature which, under trials so severe and unusual, hurried them far beyond the modest line of evangelical simplicity. We are not now intending to deal rigorously with these worthies; but are simply noticing the fact that they did so act as men are likely to do, who are not benefited, more than we ourselves may be, by supernatural aids.

This is not the place for entering into argument with

any (a hopeless task in truth) who might profess to think the early martyrologies, and the florid repetitions of them by the Nicene orators, to be altogether in the style and temper of the New Testament. I assume, on the contrary, that the marked difference is perceived, and fully admitted, by all candid persons. But then, if there be such a difference, it involves the fact that the ancient church had lost its hold of evangelic simplicity in regard to the rule, and the motives of martyrdom; and then there can be no ground on which to resist the evidence which attests its having also, and as early, fallen into an error in relation to celibacy, which error was only another consequence of the same departure from apostolic doctrine.

The rule of martyrdom may be stated to this effect.—The Lord demands of every one who would not be denied by him at the last, that he shall be willing rather to suffer the loss of all things, and of life itself, than deny him before men. This first stipulation of our Christian profession, is absolute, and clear, and of permanent obligation; and if any cases arise in which it may be doubtful what “denying Christ” means; as when Christians have been required, by a usurping church, to violate their consciences in relation to points not of supreme importance, then the ambiguous case falls under a broader rule, namely, that of suffering any extremity sooner than defile the lips by an insincere profession, especially if that profession have a bearing upon religion; for a prevarication of this sort, whatever may happen to be the immediate subject of it, is a “lying unto God,” and carries a peculiar turpitude.

But then, while this serious duty is peremptory, and of universal application, not less so is the precept that the Christian is, in all cases, to withdraw himself from

so terrible an alternative, if he may do it either by flight, or by availing himself of any civil privilege, or forensic plea, which, if equitably interpreted, would screen him from the rage of his persecutors. The apostles, in their own conduct, exemplified both parts of this injunction. Peter, indeed, once forgot the first: Paul, again and again, acted upon the second.

But then a passage or two occurs in which something beyond this strict rule is held before those who should actually be called, in compliance with it, to suffer loss, and to bleed for the sake of Christ.—There is, as it appears, a gracious reward, and an eminence of happiness, to be conferred, by sovereign goodness, upon sufferers for truth. By these promises *genuine* sufferers for Christ's sake have in every age been wont to sustain their fortitude; and just so long as the great evangelic principle of piety is adhered to, and its humbling influence felt, all is safe: the due counterpoise of motive is preserved, and while the heart-cheering hope of a “better resurrection” is admitted, enthusiasm, self-righteousness and presumption are avoided. It is thus, in fact, that we find the martyrs of the reformation, generally to have suffered and died. The GOSPEL, which had then just been recovered, and which was entertained in its energy and beauty, carried these worthies, unhurt, not merely through the ordeal of torture and a fiery death, but safe through the far more difficult trial of high religious excitement. In thousands of instances the victims of papal ferocity have died, not only joyfully, and resolutely; but what is more—meekly and humbly.

Why did not the age of protestant suffering (rare and discouraged instances excepted) why did it not produce its bands of insolent confessors, its knights spiritual, stalking in and out of the church, as a privileged class,

rich in *supererogatory merit*, and as such entitled to the honour of violating all church order? Why have not our protestant preachers been used to spend their choicest rhetoric upon the commemorations of the martyrs of protestantism? Why is it that a very little of this sort of declamation has been felt to be more than enough? Why have we seen no pilgrimages to the spots where our English worthies suffered? Why have we not been used to entreat, for ourselves and the church, the all-prevailing advocacy (patrocinium) of Latimer, and Ridley, and Hooper, in the heavens? Why have no miracles been wrought by their rescued finger-bones or teeth? Why do not our churches boast of bottles of the blood, and locks of the hair of *our* martyrs? No such things have been done, or tolerated, in the protestant church, simply because the protestant church has understood something of the first principles of Christianity, and has, in the main, been not merely *orthodox*, but *evangelic*; and has, therefore, abhorred the practices, and scorned the sentiments, which were in universal esteem in the Nicene church.

It cannot be necessary in this place to describe what has so often found a place in modern church histories, namely—first the enthusiasm, then the fanaticism, and then the unbounded superstitions which were connected with, and which utterly spoiled the otherwise, noble constancy of the ancient church. To say all in a word, the sufferings of the second and third centuries, became the curse and ruin of the fourth and fifth; and so it was that the Enemy, who had altogether been foiled in his rage, triumphed in his craft.

But what is to be especially observed is this, that all the enthusiasm, and all the fanaticism of the early martyrdoms, and much of the superstition which thence

took its occasion, sprung directly from certain abused passages of scripture, and that the illusion sustained itself by quoting text upon text; nevertheless not until after the genuine principles of Christianity had been compromised. Now this is precisely the case with the parallel enthusiasm, fanaticism, and superstition, of the ancient celibacy—all was justified by scripture—the gospel having first been discharged from its place in the minds of the people, and their teachers.

It is even now asked by some, did not the ascetic system support itself by an appeal to scripture? Yes, and so has every superstition of the papacy, and so did the enormities of the Donatists, and so the atrocities of the fanatics of Munster; so the lawless bloodshed and cruelty of the crusades, so the horrors of the inquisition, and so (to return to our point) the enthusiasm of martyrdom. But, in all such cases, how specious soever may be the plea of the deluded party, a simple course, clearing every difficulty, is open to us—Let but the great principles of the gospel be restored to their place in the heads and hearts of Christians, and then the practical misinterpretation of single texts is at once obviated; for, not merely are such misinterpretations then seen to be opposed to the spirit and tendency of the New Testament, but, as they severally spring from modes of feeling which will not consist with a genuine evangelic feeling, they, in fact, find no place, where better motives are in vigour. A man, whose mind is fraught with apostolic sentiments, will neither adore a relic, nor worship the image of a saint, nor pray to the Virgin, nor burn a heretic, nor offer himself to be burned, nor drive spikes into his sides, nor, if he be unmarried, will he call himself, or allow himself to be called a terrestrial seraph. All these follies

and enormities, whether sustained by many texts, or by few, belong to darkened souls, and to a dark age.

The rule of religious celibacy, as found in the New Testament, is, in fact, much more clearly defined than are some other things which have become the occasion of serious errors. Three or four passages comprise all that is said on the subject by our Lord, or the apostles: and, happily, if any ambiguity might seem to attach to the letter of the rule, we may derive from our Lord's personal behaviour, and from the practice of the apostles, such a comment upon it as must be amply sufficient for removing every doubt; at least, if our own minds be free from factitious excitements.

It is a remarkable circumstance that, of the four principal passages,\* relating to celibacy, in the New Testament, namely, Matt. xix. 12, Luke xx. 35, 1 Cor. vii. and Rev. xiv. 4, *that one* is the most frequently referred to by the ascetic writers, and is made to bear the greatest stress, which, in fact, is wholly irrelevant to the subject—I mean our Lord's assertion concerning the angels, as reported by Luke. But it is not difficult to divine the motive of this absurd preference. Our Lord's doctrine of celibacy, as given by Matthew, carries with it a definite restriction, which pointedly condemned the general practice of the church, and especially its cruel usage of inciting *children* to devote themselves to a single life. Then, again, Paul's lengthened disquisition on the subject involves so many principles of practical wisdom, and so much cool good sense, as made it dangerous to insist very long, or minutely, upon the pas-

\* To these texts Cyprian, who musters forces on this point, adds, Gen. iii. 16, Exod. xix. 15, and 1 Kings xxi. 4. (Testim. lib. iii. 32.)

sage; and then, as to the phrase occurring in the Apocalypse, besides that the book altogether was not universally admitted as canonical by the early church, and is much less quoted by the ancient writers than other parts of the canon, the figurative, and, as it seems, the true interpretation of the passage, as intending the faithful worshippers of God, uncontaminated by idolatry, was not unknown to the early expositors.—See Origen, tom. iv. p. 3.

But, if only the absurdity involved in any such application of our Lord's language—Luke xx. 35—could be got over, then it afforded precisely the kind of support that was wanted in favour of the notion of a spiritual aristocracy, or class, answering to the gnostic *πνευματικοί*, and to whom the epithet “terrestrial angels,” or seraphs, might be applied. To obtain the aid of this passage, reasoning such as this was to be resorted to—The “marrying, and the being given in marriage,” is the condition of our present mode of existence: but it is not the condition of the future life; therefore—how sound the inference! those who, although actually belonging to this world, and not to the next, choose to renounce marriage, become, in doing so, angels, and are at once “children of the resurrection.” As if we were to say—animal life is sustained by aliment; not so the angelic life; *therefore*, to abstain from food, so far as possible, is, in the same degree, to make oneself an angel! Illusions so gross as these could never have overcome the good sense of the early church, if the broad road of unbounded absurdity had not first been opened before it by the gnostic heresies.

Our Lord's intention, in this instance, can hardly be misunderstood; for, while his main purpose was to re-



fute the sadducee, whose doctrine strikes at the very root of religion, he took the occasion, also, to reprobate those gross conceptions of the future life, then current among the Jewish people, whence alone the hypothetical objection propounded to him could draw any force. "Your dilemma supposes that there will be marrying and giving in marriage, in heaven: absurd and grovelling thought! know that the heavenly society is constituted on another principle: what becomes then of your assumed difficulty? The children of the resurrection shall be as the angels."

So much for a passage of which more use was made than of any other, in recommending the practice of religious celibacy! Precisely in the same style of unscrupulous logic, were the sanguinary measures of the papacy excused and recommended—"Compel them to come in"—"I am not come to send peace on the earth, but a sword"—"it is better that one member perish," (that one heretic, or a thousand, be burned,) "than that the whole body" (the church) be lost or damaged. Perhaps the surest indication, in the case either of an individual or a community, of abandonment to delusion, is that of the habit of perversely interpreting single phrases, or insulated passages of scripture, in open contempt of its spirit and tendency. This practice, of which the pattern was set by Satan himself, has been the constant characteristic of those who have appeared to be "led captive by him at his will." In its entire ascetic doctrine, as well as in many other important points, one can hardly think any thing else than that the Nicene church had yielded itself to a strong delusion, and was given over to believe a lie.

Our Lord's direct affirmation, and his implied doc-

trine, as stated, Matt. xix. 12, does really bear upon the question of religious celibacy, and it therefore demands to be seriously considered. The Jewish *national* belief and feeling on the subject of marriage, which that people considered as a positive and universal duty, required, like some other national prejudices, to be loosened and corrected, in order to make room for a higher, and a more comprehensive religious system. Our Lord surely did not intend to condemn or disparage personal cleanliness when he affirmed that, "to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." What he meant was, to bring in a spiritual and genuine notion of purity, in the place of the national and rabbinical superstition of the Jews. He did not mean either to condemn, or to abrogate the worship of God in the Jewish temple, when he affirmed that the time was come for establishing the worship of God on a broader and more spiritual basis than that of the Mosaic institute. Nor does he, as we may confidently assume, in the present instance, intend, either to throw discredit upon matrimony, (which, here and elsewhere, he honours by a solemn sanction,) nor to speak of celibacy as if it were a holier and loftier condition; for, to have done this would have been to have recognised that very principle of exterior and ceremonial purity, against which he so strenuously, we might say vehemently, inveighed, on various occasions. Although, in this particular point, the national prejudice of the Jews stood opposed to the ascetic doctrine, yet the *general principle* of sanctity, as attaching to visible observances, and of a merit, as belonging to classes of men, on the ground of peculiar abstinences, was altogether agreeable to the natural mind, and would have been readily listened to by the pharisees.

Our Lord seems to have intended, after condemning

the lax and flagitious practice of divorce, as then prevalent among the Jews, and, after giving the most emphatic sanction to the institution of marriage, to take the occasion, suggested by the query of the disciples—"At that rate is it good to marry?" for introducing a higher motive of conduct, belonging to the "kingdom of heaven," and which, in opposition to the Jewish opinion and custom, might lead certain individuals (who are so described as to preclude a fanatical misinterpretation of the rule) to separate themselves even from the lawful engagements of ordinary life, and so the better to promote this kingdom, in an evil world, unencumbered by any earthly ties. The sovereign motives of the new dispensation were of such force, that they might lead a man even to lay down life itself for Christ, or to surrender property, and every social endearment; and, as a *circumstance* attending this sort of unsparing devotedness, an abstinence from marriage might be not only a lawful, but an acceptable sacrifice. "Ye are not your own, but are bought with a price,"—"glorify God therefore with your bodies, and with your spirits, which are his,"—"present your bodies, a living sacrifice unto God," &c. These several injunctions, being only various consequences, all flowing from the one supreme reason and motive which the gospel introduces, practically amount to this—be ready to die, be ready to suffer, be ready to labour, be content, whether full or empty, as to earthly enjoyments; and, in a word, hold every thing in subordination to the one principle of Christian conduct; or, to say all at once—"let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who pleased not himself." This sovereign rule of behaviour may make a man a martyr, or may induce him to lead a single life, or may impel him to traverse the globe, having no cer-

tain dwelling-place—when the doing so shall clearly, and, in the judgment of good sense, tend to promote truth in the world. But, on the contrary, the enthusiast, or the fanatic, who, for the mere purpose—a selfish purpose—of snatching the martyr's crown, insults a persecuting power; or the ascetic, who, to no imaginable good purpose, inflicts torture upon himself, or passes his years, like a wild beast, in a cavern, or who adheres to celibacy as if it were an angelic excellence, and, in doing so, puts contempt upon the divine appointment—all such persons, puffed up by the self-idolizing conceits of an inflamed imagination, and of spiritual arrogance, wholly misunderstood the rule (as they are plainly destitute of the principle) of Christian self-denial. The course pursued under any such false impulses has, in fact, always diverged so widely from the line of Christian simplicity, humility, and benevolence, as to make evident enough the originating error whence it resulted.

In our Lord's rule, above referred to, there are very distinctly to be observed, *first*, the well-defined and seriously propounded restriction—"All are not able to receive this word—if any man *is able* to receive it—if, to any this ability has been given, let *such* receive it;" plainly pointing to a peculiarity of original temperament, such as that, having been well ascertained by the individual, he might act upon it without peril or presumption. How frightfully and cruelly was this restriction contemned by the Nicene writers and preachers, who not only so lauded the merits and honours of virginity as in fact to seduce multitudes—tens of thousands, into a snare fatal to their present happiness and to their souls, but moreover, laboured with the utmost intensity to promote the flagitious practice of dedication to Christ (miserable

misnomer) *before the age of puberty*, nay, from infancy! 'This practice was the foul stain of the Nicene church. Even with our Lord's significant caution on their lips, we find the great writers of that infatuated age provoking the fanaticism of parents, and aiding to drive troops of helpless children and youths onward toward the precipice, and into that fiery abyss the horrors of which themselves have described!\*

But in the *second* place, our Lord's rule points distinctly to a motive, which, after the restriction had been duly regarded, might justify this unusual course of life:—it was for the sake "of the kingdom of heaven," a phrase the meaning of which is put beyond doubt by a comparison of the places where it occurs, and by a consideration of the actual instances wherein its meaning was confessedly carried out into practice. Now if we compare this condition of the rule of celibacy with the ascetic institute, how was it set at naught! Let us admit the most favourable supposition possible, namely, that the ascetics were, in the large majority of instances, the most devoted and spiritually minded members of the Christian commonwealth; then, instead of seeking to promote "the kingdom of heaven," by remaining in the midst of the mass, as a conservative element, and in-

\* I have already, p. 230, referred to Gregory Nyssen and Augustine, on this point; and of the style in which this practice was urged, a favourable specimen may be found in Chrysostom's third book, addressed to the opponents of the monastic life, tom. i. p. 92, *et seq.* It appears both from Chrysostom and Basil, that children were received into the religious houses, and there trained in the ascetic discipline until their deliberate choice could be ascertained. Basil, Reg. Fusios. Inter. xv. But this education, if it disgusted many, must have availed with too many in inducing them rashly to profess, long before they could know what they were doing.

stead of endeavouring to shed a holy influence upon the dark world around them, they either shut themselves up in religious houses, located, most often, in the wilderness, or they absolutely secluded themselves from all human society, passing long years in the crevices of the mountains. That is to say, they acted upon a principle of unmixed and avowed *selfishness*, and in direct contrariety to the spirit and precepts of the gospel; and whereas Christ had set an example to his followers, in not pleasing himself, and in “going about doing good,” and in “consorting with publicans and sinners,” for their good—“for the kingdom of heaven’s sake,” these ascetics, minding only “their own things,” left the church and the world to take their course. And all this flagrant contradiction of the spirit and letter of Christianity received the admiring approval of every one of the great Nicene writers.

In the *third* place, a material circumstance, in this instance, is the absolute want, in our Lord’s language, of any implication, ever so remote, of the great ascetic doctrine—the spirit of the whole system, namely, that of the intrinsic holiness and angelic merit of virginity. No alliance whatever has our Lord’s practical recommendation with the gnostic-Nicene principle, that marriage is a pollution, and celibacy a “holy state,” and a condition of proximity to God. If any such notion had been in our Lord’s view, was not this the place to have let it appear? With the ascetics, if indeed any regard was had to the possible utility of a single life, that is to say, its *public* utility, yet the all in all in *their* view was—the sanctity of the state, and its spiritual, or rather celestial eminence.

In each of these respects, then, the Nicene ascetic in-

stitute was a flagrant contempt of our Lord's rule of Christian celibacy: that is to say, *first*, as it wholly overlooked the *restriction* with which he had guarded it; *secondly*, as putting contempt upon the *motive* which might justify the celibacy of the few to whom it would be proper; and *thirdly*, as bringing in, and putting foremost, a motive or doctrine not merely foreign to Christianity, but subversive of its very purport.

The interpretation we should give of our Lord's rule, may, however, be brought to a very satisfactory test, that I mean of his personal and immaculate behaviour (as well as the conduct of the apostles) and this behaviour contrasted with the established usages of the ascetic life, looked at in parallel circumstances. Be it remembered then that, whereas among the Jews, the moral dignity of woman, and the religious equality of the sexes, had been far better understood than among any other people of antiquity, even the most refined, and whereas rational and purifying domestic habits, allowing to woman her due place in society, were still in existence in Palestine, our Lord, in his personal behaviour, and in a most remarkable manner, recognised this national feeling, and allowed himself to be attended, and "ministered to," by women,\* and thus practically recognised, as good and safe, that intercourse of the sexes, in domestic and common life, which then prevailed. The first disciples, and the apostles, instead of drawing back from this wonted liberty, held to, and sanctioned it;† and in fact, it has been the glory of Christianity, wherever it has not been overpowered by the gnostic poison, to have wrought the regeneration of the social

\* Luke viii. 1—3, and Matt. xxvii. 55.

† Acts i. 14. Phil. iv. 3.

economy, precisely in this way, that is to say, by raising woman to her moral level, and by refining and sanctioning the home intercourse of the sexes. How deep and fatal was the injury, in this particular, done to the world by the ancient asceticism, and to what extent it operated to debauch the social system, we shall have to state by and by. At present, let us contemplate the edifying contrast of our blessed Lord's behaviour, as compared with that of the heroes of gnostic sanctity—the Nicene saints.

Our Lord was in some instances attended in his journeys by women, his wants being provided for by their generous attachment, and his personal comfort secured by their assiduous affection. But now no injunctions of the ascetic institute are more frequent or serious than those which interdict all intercourse between the sexes. To frequent the society of women, to converse with them, to lift the eye from the earth where they were present, was an offence, or at least an extreme imprudence. The places are innumerable in which cautions of this sort occur:—the touch of a female hand, what contamination did it convey!\* It may be well, while our blessed

\* If the extravagances of inferior writers were here cited, an objection would be raised, as if an unfair advantage were taken of the folly of individuals. I will refer therefore to none but the highest authorities. Among these none is of higher reputation than Basil, and the reader may, at the cost of an hour's reading, form his own opinion of the Nicene monkery as to its *principles* and *rules*, in examining the ascetic tracts of this father; I mean especially his replies to the queries of the monks, and his Monastic Constitutions, to which I shall make some particular references in the following sections. Ephrem also, and Cassian, must be cited in proof of what is here only incidentally affirmed, namely, that the ascetic sanctity demanded restrictions, in personal behaviour, which were never thought of by the apostles, whom we must believe to have been not less holy than these monks.



Lord's conduct is vividly recollected, to take a single instance of a mode of behaviour, in one of the most prominent personages of the Nicene age, which imbodyes the admitted principles of Nicene feeling and morality, both as to clerical pretensions, and to ascetic purity. When we see a "successor of the apostles," in the fourth century, admitting an adulation and a personal worship which the apostles themselves would not have allowed—and at the same time pretending to a sanctity which the Son of God knew nothing of, we must either grant, what is now affirmed, by some, that the Christianity of the Nicene age was indeed a purer and a more finished form of our religion than that which Christ and the apostles were acquainted with; or else allow that the striking contrariety that distinguishes the two schemes of piety and manners, is that which properly characterises, on the one side, true holiness, simplicity, and truth; and on the other, factitious sanctimoniousness, unbounded spiritual arrogance, and a falseness, which was the product either of delusion, or of knavery, or of both. Let the reader bear in mind those various incidents of the gospel narrative which exhibit our Lord's behaviour toward his female followers; and then turn to the life of *Saint Martin of Tours*, as reported by his admirer and disciple, *Sulpitius Severus*. (*Sulpit. Sev. Dial. II. c. 5, 6.*)

This famous *St. Martin*, "justly compared with the apostles and prophets, whom in all things he resembled, in faith, virtue, and miraculous power," had occasion, soon after his consecration, to visit the imperial palace. *Valentinian*, knowing that he was come to ask for that which he did not wish to grant, ordered him to be driven from the gate—instigated to this irreverence by his wife. The insulted bishop forthwith had recourse to

the wonted aids of fasting, sackcloth, ashes, and prayers; and at the end of a week an angel appeared to him, commanding him to repeat his attempt to see the emperor, and assuring him that every obstacle should now give way before him. In fact, neither doors, nor guards, obstructed his approach to the royal apartments. The emperor, however, enraged at his unbidden intrusion, does not deign to rise at his entrance (a reverence due by an *emperor* to a *bishop*) until the throne itself had burst out in flames—*ipsunque regem eâ parte corporis, quâ sedebat, adflaret incendium!* The haughty prince, thus unwillingly driven from his seat, rose, to St. Martin; and moreover, being convinced and won by this same fervid logic, he granted all that was demanded; and from that time loaded St. Martin with honours. The mention of the palace, leads the narrator to introduce another incident, characteristic of his master's virtues and manners. The wife of the emperor Maximus was accustomed to listen with the utmost reverence to the conversation of the saint, and following the evangelic example, she washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. Martin, whom never before a woman had touched, knew not how to escape from the assiduous attentions, nay rather, the servile offices of the empress, who, in comparison with the honour of rendering such services to such a saint, held in contempt all princely pomps, power, and wealth. In the end she prepared his repast, waited upon him at table, and gathering the crumbs, esteemed them as more delicious than the dainties of a royal banquet.

The narrator is however here stopped by his friend, with the startling inquiry, How it could be, that so eminent a saint, whose sacred person a female hand had never before contaminated, could admit so great a free-

dom on the part of the empress: and he fears what may be the consequence, upon some minds, of such an instance of condescension. To this it is replied that the singularity of the occasion, and the saint's benevolent errand at that time, seemed sufficiently to justify his relaxing a little the severity of his rule; and well were it for those who might be likely to make an improper use of his example, in this instance, if they could so consider it as to be confirmed in their adherence to the ascetic discipline. Let such consider the case—once in his life only, and he already in his seventieth year, had any such thing happened!—Consider too, it was no widow to whom he granted this indulgence, nor virgo lasciviens; but a wife, in the presence of her husband, and at his request;—an empress too, performing these offices: nor did even she dare to partake with him of his repast! Take the instance as it is—such an occasion—such a person, such a reverence, such a table—and in the whole course of life—once only!

Now what is all this but insufferable spiritual prudery—arrogance—hypocrisy, or much worse? Yet it is the characteristic style of the Nicene age. The writer, Sulpitius, more than once impiously sets his saint by the side of Christ, as if the two characters might be compared on some ground of analogy; in fact, they stand in absolute contrast, and not to have seen and felt this contrariety, was itself an effect of that universal delusion and thick darkness, which had then surrounded the church. This however is manifest enough, that our Lord's rule of celibacy neither implied, nor resulted from, any such notion of sanctity as that which constituted the principle of the ascetic system.

Biblical exposition I do not profess: nevertheless an historical inquiry concerning a perverted use of scrip-

ture, in any important particular, almost unavoidably implies the making some reference to the plain import of such passages. The seventh chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians demands in fact some careful criticism, as well historical as biblical; but I attempt, in this place, only what seems indispensable in reference to my particular argument.

The essential difference between apostolic and Nicene Christianity presents itself very prominently in comparing the latter verses of the sixth chapter, with the ascetic doctrine, of which some samples have already been produced. "What, know ye not," asks the apostle, "that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" or, as in the third chapter, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God? . . . if any man defile the temple of God" . . . . This serious truth he employs in no other manner than as a most powerful dissuasive from *sinful* indulgences, such as those specified in the context; and it is clear that, in *his* view, Christians living unblamably under the conjugal relationship, fulfilled the intention of his injunctions: in abstaining from the works of the flesh, as enumerated Gal. v. 19, and in cherishing the fruits of the Spirit, the Christian law was satisfied. But not so with the ascetics—I mean the train of writers, now extant, from Tertullian to St. Bernard. The body of a Christian is the temple of the Holy Ghost, say these divines, *therefore*—no part of it, not ordinarily exposed, must ever be seen by another eye, and *therefore*, none but the simplest and purest substances, and those in the smallest possible quantities, are to be admitted into the stomach, and *therefore* the grossest of all terrestrial contaminations, that of the matrimonial connexion, is to be utterly avoided by whoever would be holy indeed!

Here then we have before us, most distinctly expressed, *two* doctrines of holiness, derived professedly from the same truth, namely, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but involving totally different principles, and leading to different practices. Nor is the mere *difference* all we have to notice, for, as the ascetic doctrine assumed to itself a higher credit than the apostolic, and was spoken of as “a more excellent way;” or was, to use the phrase current in the Nicene age, “a merit beyond law,” its effect was to dislodge, or we should say to dethrone, the apostolic principle of morals. The apostle tells you to be holy in abstaining from vice, but we speak to you of a loftier and a more genuine holiness;—and if ye aspire to perfection, listen to us, not to him!

The commendation of virginity, re-echoed from all sides within the Nicene church, that it was “a merit beyond law,” is alone enough to exhibit the opposition between the two systems. Neither in this passage of the epistle to the Corinthians, nor any where else in the New Testament, is there to be discovered the remotest trace of the doctrine that celibacy is “a merit,” or that it is a holier condition, or that matrimony is, in any sense whatever, a spiritual degradation, or a pollution. This is the very point of distinction between the poisonous illusion of the ascetic system, and the simple rule of religious celibacy, as found in scripture. Among those who devote themselves to the work of the Lord, and especially to itinerant labours, or perilous missions to the heathen, it is very plain that a man who has three children only, must feel himself less obstructed in his course than one who has twelve; and so he who, although married, has no children, may advantageously meet difficulties which the father even of two or three might do better not to encounter. Clearly then, the un-

married, supposing always that they have not misinterpreted their *personal calling*, have an advantage, which, if wisely employed, may far more than compensate to them what they have relinquished. All this is intelligible enough; and the reasons and motives which such a doctrine involves are manifestly enhanced in those seasons of trial to the church when severe privations are to be submitted to by Christians. It was, in our Lord's view, to be esteemed a favour when the storm of public calamity fell upon a community during the summer, rather than the winter, and, at such a time, those were to be accounted comparatively happy who were not "with child," or "giving suck." What can be more simple?

And now, let reasonable men say whether such is not the *general purport* of the seventh chapter of the epistle before us: or, in other words, let it be asked whether this chapter teaches the ascetic principle of the higher sanctity of virginity, as if it were, in the Lord's sight, an excellence, placing those who adhere to it on a level above that of the married, and so much the nearer to the divine nature. The apostle's disquisition on this subject is long enough, and it is sufficiently precise to have included the statement of some such principle, if, indeed, he had held it: but instead of advancing the ascetic doctrine, and at the very turn of his argument, ver. 25, when he declares that the Lord had enjoined nothing on the subject, and when it would have been so fit an occasion for insinuating the "higher philosophy," he reverts to the temporary and special reason which might recommend celibacy—"I suppose that this is good for the present distress," for a man, if unmarried, "not to seek a wife."

If then we come to ask, at ver. 38, what is meant by "doing better," we have only to look back to the rea-

sons which the apostle had already advanced, and which involve nothing beyond the practical advantages or immunities of a single life, in relation, either to seasons of persecution, or to extraordinary labours of evangelic zeal, or to any circumstances under which a Christian (personal temperament being considered) might think himself, or herself, free to use the privilege of "waiting upon the Lord without distraction." "I would that ye should be without carefulness"—exempt from distracting anxieties: this is the unambitious motto of the entire chapter; and it is here highly curious to observe, that, while the ascetics of the Nicene age substituted, for so homely and reasonable a principle, the lofty doctrine of seraphic virginity, they did, in their actual practice, involve themselves in all the cares of married life, and in worse. Let us take Chrysostom's description of "a holy monk's" manifold solicitudes. Paul says nothing about a single man's being, on that account, as holy as Gabriel; but he *does* say, that those who would please the Lord, might, in certain cases, do well not to marry. Be it remembered, that, in every instance of a comparison, such as the one now before us, we have the question at issue always in view, whether apostolic and ancient Christianity be one and the same, or, opposed, and contradictory.

The custom against which Cyprian had inveighed, as we have seen, in the third century, at Carthage, was no incidental or local abuse; for it had spread itself on all sides, and, in the time with which we have now to do, it had become, notwithstanding all remonstrances, the usage of the cœnobite ascetics, and even of some of the anchorets. Not only did the *aged* monks avail themselves of the offices, and enjoy the society of young women in their cloisters, but *young* monks also did the

same, in defiance of the scandals that could not but arise from so indiscreet a practice, (Chrysost. tom. i. p. 279:) while, on the other hand, young nuns entertained a cortège of “philosophic” paramours, under various pretexts. (pp. 310, 312, *et seq.*) What a sight is it, says Chrysostom, to enter the cell of a SOLITARY monk, and to see the apartment hung about with female gear, shoes, girdles, reticules, caps, bonnets, spindles, combs, and the like, too many to mention; but what a jest is it to visit the abode of a rich monk, and to look about you; for you find the *solitary μωνις*, surrounded with a bevy of lasses, one might say, just like the leader of a company of singing and dancing girls: what can be more disgraceful! and, in fact, the monk is all day long vexed and busied with petty affairs proper to a woman . . . not merely is he occupied with *worldly* matters, contrary to the apostolic precept, but even with *feminine* cares; and these ladies, being very luxurious in their habits, as well as imperious in their tempers, the good man was liable to be sent on fifty errands—to the silversmith’s, to inquire if my lady’s mirror was finished, if her vase was ready, if her scent-cruet had been returned: and from the silversmith’s to the perfumer’s, and thence to the linendraper’s, and thence to the upholsterer’s; and at each place he has twenty particulars to remember. Then add to all these cares, the jars and scoldings that are apt to resound in a house full of pampered women! Paul says, Be ye not the servants of *men*; shall we not then cease to be the slaves of *women*, and this to the common injury of all? Christ, who would have us behave ourselves as his valiant soldiers, assuredly has not for this purpose clad us in the spiritual armour, that we should take upon ourselves the office of waiting, like menials, upon worthless



girls, *καρῶν τριβλιμαίων*, or that we should busy ourselves with their spinnings and sewings, or spend the live-long day by their side, while at work, imbuing our minds with effeminate trifles!" (Abridged from pp. 295, 296, 297.)

So egregious and ridiculous are the inconsistencies into which those are sure to fall, who, not content with religion and morality, such as God has given them to us, must frame to themselves something loftier.—What that loftier profession actually comes to, we may learn (to go no farther) from Chrysostom's two tracts, above cited; and let the reader who peruses them throughout, say whether we do not deal leniently with the Nicene asceticism in speaking of it only as trivial and absurd. And after such a perusal, and after turning to those many passages, in the same writer, in which the powers of language are taxed to make up the encomium of celibacy, let him open again Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, and say—in conscience, whether an utter contrariety of feeling and of principle does not distinguish the two writers. Let it be particularly observed that the apostle not only does not assume any peculiar *sanctity* to attach to a single life, implying a correlative pollution as belonging to the marriage state; but he attributes such an honour, or recommendation, to this state (whatever his language may precisely mean) as that, even when impaired by the heathenism of one of the parties, it still conferred an ecclesiastical prerogative or benefit upon the other, so as to secure church privileges for the offspring (ver. 14.)

The expressions occurring in the fourteenth chapter of the Revelation (ver. 4,) although often alluded to by the ascetic writers, were not, for the reasons that have been already mentioned, so much insisted upon as might have been supposed; and at present there are few, I be-

lieve, who would admit that the passage has any bearing whatever upon the subject of celibacy. 'The well understood and ancient import of the phrases in question, when employed prophetically and symbolically, as intending *purity of faith*, opposed to idolatrous (adulterous) compliances and corruptions, accords entirely with the obvious meaning of the context. 'The subjugation of Christendom, generally, to an adulterous, that is, an idolatrous power, arrogating to itself divine honours, having been predicted, the scene is suddenly brightened by the vision of the Lamb, with his select company of the faithful, who, through all vicissitudes of their earthly warfare and pilgrimage, adhere to their holy profession, following him "whithersoever he goeth." To this vision succeeds the fall and punishment of the *idolatrous* adherents of the blasphemous and apostate usurpation.

True Christians, without any regard to the unimportant circumstance of their being single or married, are called, by the apostle James (i. 18) a "first-fruit," ἀπαρχή unto God, and in this place of the apocalypse, also, the *faithful*, as distinguished from the *false*—those in whose mouth no lie (ψευδὲς, not δόλος, is the reading) was found, are called ἀπαρχή, "a first-fruit" unto God and the Lamb; and they are said to be (not ἀφθγοί, which was the ecclesiastical term technically and ordinarily applied to the παγθγοί, but) ἀμωμοί, unblamable; not absolutely so indeed; but *in respect of their adherence to the true worship of God*. Phrases, all of them turning upon the same symbolic metonymy recur in every part of this prophecy. Does any one imagine that the flagitious woman who had debauched the earth with her fornications, and seduced kings, means nothing more than a personification of licentiousness, in the literal sense of the term? No such interpretation has ever been main-

tained by rational expositors:—the scarlet clad woman, shameless, and cruel, and arrogant, and the inveterate enemy of the saints, is an adulteress in the ecclesiastical and symbolic sense of the word, and whatever actual profligacy may always have attended idolatrous superstitions, it is not the *profligacy*, but the *idolatry*, that is mainly intended by the prophetic style. The *correlative*, or antithetic import then of the phrases by which the holy and antagonist company are designated—the “true and faithful,” the “followers of the Lamb,” cannot be misunderstood. These *παρθένοι*, who are they, but those that have refused to drink of the wine of her fornications, who had corrupted the nations? If these terms are to be understood in their literal sense, so must other terms with which they are connected, and then the endeavour to expound the book in any portion of it must be hopeless.

But if there were room to entertain, for a moment, the supposition of a literal meaning in this place, then one could not but look to its bearing upon the general tenor of church history, or the outline of facts connected with the extant records of the ascetic institute. Let us then assume with St. Bernard (vol. ii. p. 471) that, by this virgin company is actually meant “the virgins of the church,” who are to enjoy an honour which is not to be shared by those, however eminent, *qui non sunt virgines, quamvis tamen sint Christi*. In the first place then, such an interpretation excludes from the privileged choir several of the apostles—probably all but one or two of them, and with them, very many of the holiest men and women of every age. As to the worthies of our own times—the truly great and wise of the protestant churches, it is but a few that would not be excluded by this interpretation. On the other hand, what has been the gene-

ral moral condition of those whom it must include? Assuredly it is with the broad characteristics of the communities or classes which it designates, that prophecy has to do; now a man must be resolute indeed in his credulity, who can actually look into the extant evidence, and still persuade himself that genuine purity of mind and manners, or that any eminent Christian qualities have *generally* belonged to the monastic orders. Take this evidence whence we please, from Cyprian down to St. Bernard; or look no farther than to the partial testimony, and the reluctant admissions of Chrysostom,\* and Jerome, and it will be impossible to doubt that, while a few were virtuous and sincere, and at the same time fanatical and extravagant, there prevailed among the many the worst kinds of immorality:—that is to say, either shameless vices, or a pravity of the heart that was at once pitiable and loathsome. And yet it is from the bosom of a community such as this, that the Lord (if this interpretation is adopted) selects his peculiar favourites! and of these (ecclesiastical) virgins it is declared that they were “blameless,” and that nothing “*false*” was found in their mouth! How miserably are any such

\* “Alas, my soul! well may I so exclaim, and repeat the lamentable cry, with the prophet! Alas, my soul. Our virginity has fallen into contempt:—the vail is rent by impudent hands, that parted it off from matrimony: the holy of holies is trodden under foot, and its grave and tremendous sanctities have become profane, and thrown open to all; and that which once was had in reverence, as far more excellent than matrimony, is now sunk so low, as that one should rather call the married blessed, than those who profess it.—Nor is it the enemy that has effected all this; but the virgins themselves!”—Chrysostom, tom. i. p. 304. Such is the confession of the warmest admirer of the ascetic life—and such, if we may trust him, had it become in his times. Jerome’s testimony to the same effect, will be referred to presently.

designations contradicted by the ordinary characteristics of the ascetic records! Read the "Lives of the Saints"—read the Lausaic history, and what presents itself on every page but the details of self-deception and knavery? What, but a digested system of vain pretensions, and profitable frauds, or, in a word—LIES, either in the sense of delusions, or in the sense of wilful falsifications? Take the very choicest specimens of Nicene monkery (to some of which I have already alluded,) such, for instance, as the life of St. Antony, or that of St. Hilarion, by Jerome, or that of St. Martin of Tours, and then let any one who retains his hold of common sense, determine whether these narratives are distinguished most by the spirit of holy simplicity, modesty, and TRUTH; or of wonder-loving extravagance, delusion, and LYING? I ask pointedly for a conscientious reply to this definite question. In taking instances such as these, we give the ascetic system the greatest advantage possible; that is to say, we leave untouched the heap of abominations, and we adduce the very brightest instances, from what is spoken of as "the golden age" of the monastic system. Few protestants, surely, will be so courageous as first to adopt the literal interpretation of the passage in question, and then to appeal to church history, and the monkish legends in support of such an exposition! The real meaning of the phrases, surrounded as they are by symbolic language, drawn from the same analogy, and concerning which there can be no doubt, will not, I think, be questioned by any but those who can spare nothing that may give a seeming support to a groundless doctrine.

## THE PREDICTED ASCETIC APOSTACY.

THERE is however yet a passage, and it is a signal one, which demands to be adverted to in connexion with our present subject. I mean Paul's plain prediction of the approaching apostacy (1 Tim. iv.) But here again we are met by that protestant habit of thinking, which has, in so many instances, impelled the anxious opponents of the papacy to attribute specifically to the *Romish* church, what, in truth, belongs to it only in common with the eastern, and with the Nicene church. Now, for example, not a phrase occurs in this most remarkable prediction—a prediction announced as “explicit,” not symbolical, which can equitably be applied to the *papacy*, as distinguished from the church catholic, eastern and western, of the Nicene age: each characteristic of the “apostacy,” as here specified, must have been admitted to have had its accomplishment in the ecclesiastical system of the *fourth* century, even if no such despotism as that of Rome had afterwards come into existence. It is otherwise with the mystic and difficult prophecy recorded in the second epistle to the Thessalonians; this latter having a more determinate and *hierarchical* import, while the one now in question has a wider meaning, and has respect rather to the *moral* qualities of the predicted defection.

Let us only imagine that the church universal had been brought back to apostolic purity in the sixth or seventh century, and that thenceforward, and to the present time, it had retained its integrity: how should we, in that case, have applied this prediction? Clearly, and without a doubt, to the ascetic doctrine, and to the mo-

nastic institute *of the preceding four centuries*. Each prophetic mark is actually found upon that system; nor is there any other *Christian* system, or sect, or institute, in any age or country, that has borne them. The prophecy having been issued under this very condition of its being a plain and literal description, we find it to have been literally realized within the church, and to have presented itself, with singular uniformity as to its characteristics, in every section of the church: and this well-defined error is termed an APOSTACY, involving the church which harboured, sanctioned, and idolized it, in the most serious reprobation.

Those who choose to do so, may amuse their leisure with a dozen ingenious methods for evading the application of this remarkable prophecy; but no such subterfuges will satisfy unsophisticated minds, and it is to such that the prediction is immediately addressed. Is it not a Daniel that is appealed to on this occasion? for there are no dark symbols to be interpreted, there is no mythos to be unfolded. The Spirit speaketh, *ῥητῶς*, as the Lord himself had done when he foretold the manner of his own death and the time of his resurrection. Prophecy, when delivered in *this* style, differs from history only in the brevity of its descriptions, and in the mere circumstance of its preceding the event. And if, in such an instance, a real ambiguity, or a confessed difficulty is found to attend the application of the prediction, our alternative must be either the conclusion in which infidelity would triumph, or the strange supposition that the church was thus explicitly forewarned of a danger which it was not to encounter until the remotest period of its history.

But how stands the prediction when it comes to be placed by the side of the church history of the first five centuries?

The Spirit explicitly declares that, in the after seasons, that is, in the times succeeding the era of the apostolic personal ministry, some *τινες*, shall apostatize from the faith—from the principles of Christianity. *Some*—as if it were a portion of the church, or certain churches, or certain individuals, and not the whole body. Now, although the entire church, and especially as represented by its chiefs, did in fact share in the ascetic apostacy, by approving it, it was specifically the error of a class, or brotherhood, every where existing indeed, yet no where embracing the community. It was otherwise in relation to the worshipping of images, and the praying to the saints, which were the errors of the church at large, while the ascetic practice was the error of some, and the marks of apostacy here mentioned are peculiarly the characteristics of the anchorets and cœnobites, or the ascetics of the two classes, the solitary and the conventual.

The ellipsis of the third verse being supplied, as it must, by the word *καλεινοῦστων*, or one of similar import, then the meaning will be that the body, or community, or sect, to which the prediction relates, will be distinguished by it insisting, in an absolute and invariable manner, and in relation to all who come within the circle of its authority, upon abstinence from matrimony, and from the ordinary indulgences of the appetite. Whatever diversities might be admitted in relation to other points of discipline within this apostate community, no exceptions could be allowed in regard to these two. The first law (and an iron law) of this predicted body should be the preservation of virginity, and its second law, equally binding upon all, although susceptible of diversities in the interpretation, was—a general and severe abstemiousness, as to diet, and the most rigorous occasional fastings. So it should be, that, after setting off every va-



riable or incidental peculiarity attaching to this apostacy, in different times, and communities, these two marks should always belong to it, namely, the enforcement, or the *pretended* enforcement (for hypocrisy was also to be a characteristic of the system) of celibacy, and of fasting. And we are directed to look, not *around* the church, but *within* its pale, for the defection which is thus described.

Whatever force we may attach to the words—"Forbid,"\* and "Command," they can mean no more than a peremptory and invariable injunction, affecting whoever comes within the limits of the legislating body. The Romish church did not enforce celibacy either upon the clergy of the eastern church, or upon Persian mages; for its jurisdiction did not extend so far; but its prohibitions reached to the utmost border of its acknowledged authority, and even within that circle, while it laid down an irreversible law, admitting of no exemptions, the most flagrant violations, both in regard to continence, and abstinence, every where prevailed. The papacy took to itself these marks of an apostate church, by exerting all its authority for maintaining the ascetic principle and practice, as well in relation to the secular, as the regular

\* *Καλῶ*, hinder, restrain, deny permission, or forbid, whether authoritatively and effectively, or only in intention: *impe-dio quovis modo, et factis et verbis, quominus aliquid fiat*. To prohibit by edicts, and under penalties, is a *special* sense of the word. But, as well in a more general, as in a more strict sense, the ancient church, that is, of the fourth century, forbade to marry—absolutely, within the pale of the ascetic community; and generally, as to the clergy, by the force of opinion and usage. What the encratites did in the second century, the church catholic did in the fourth; and any endeavour to affix the prediction, now before us, to that early sect, must *à fortiori*, attach it also to the ascetic system of the next age.

clergy. But then, the Nicene church, long before, *had done the very same thing*, and had, in like manner, branded itself as apostate, and not in an incidental or partial manner, but by directing the steady force of its utmost influence toward the end of giving extensive effect to the ascetic rule of life. The only style of Christianity which it would consent to speak of as complete, and pre-eminently excellent, was that which observed this ascetic rule. The highest encomiums, as we have seen, were lavished upon these two foremost articles of the monastic institute—virginity and abstinence. Every one of its great divines gives his zealous support and solemn sanction to this institute; and, if celibacy were not sternly and invariably enforced upon its clergy, they were taught to think themselves degraded if they refused to observe it. Mean while, *as to the ascetic body*, the law of celibacy was, in the fullest sense, absolute.

The point now before us is of no small importance; for the inference it involves fixes the apostolic brand of apostacy upon the Nicene church, and therefore goes far in determining, by a summary method, the present controversy concerning “church principles.” I confidently appeal, then, in this instance, to plain, unprejudiced minds, and ask whether or not Paul’s prediction attaches to the asceticism of the ancient church?\*

Protestant commentators, in referring to this prediction, have been wont to call it—“a striking prediction of *poper*y.” But why of *poper*y? as well say, “of Spanish catholicism,” or “of Irish catholicism.” The special marks herein given us, attach, distinctively, nei-

\* Let the reader consider, in this connexion, Jerome’s statement of the errors of Jovinian, of which he courteously says—*hæc sunt sibia serpentis antiqui*. Adv. Jovin. lib. i. toward the beginning.

ther to the Irish, nor to the Spanish forms of the general superstition; nor to the papacy peculiarly. The Romish church, centuries after the monastic institute had been every where established, and long after the time when the celibacy of the secular clergy had been universally assented to as proper, if not indispensable, gave its sanction, formally, to the common opinion, by specific enactments. But in what terms had the Nicene church uttered itself on this subject long before?—hear its highest authority; *Certè confiteris non posse esse episcopum, qui in episcopatu filios faciat; alioqui, si deprehensus fuerit, non quasi vir (husband) tenebitur, sed quasi adulter damnabitur.\** That is to say, in effect, whereas, Paul had distinctly spoken of a bishop as a married man, and a father, the Nicene church, having first had its “conscience seared as with a hot iron,” read the apostolic text, and then deliberately decided that a bishop who did not separate himself from his wife, should be regarded as no better than an adulterer! Again; *Aut virgines clericos accipiunt, aut continentes; aut, si uxores habuerint, mariti esse desinunt.†* That is to say, whereas the Lord had solemnly decreed that “what God had joined together, man should not put asunder,” the Nicene church, having lost all religious sensibility of conscience, could coolly look at this divine law, and then reverse it by its own impious ordinance, that its ministers, in receiving orders, should *separate themselves from their wives*—a law to which submission was yielded in innumerable instances. Upon many, excommunication was actually inflicted on account of their having returned to the society of their wives, after ordination: in many instances, when mar-

\* *Adversus Jovin. lib. i.*

† *Adversus Vigilantium.*

ried men had been promoted to ecclesiastical dignities, in compliance with the tumultuous will of the populace, a long course of penance was imposed upon them, in order to expiate the offence. In several recorded instances men who sincerely desired to evade such promotions pleaded their disqualification, on the very ground of their being married men. The second council of Carthage, held within the limits of the Nicene era, thus speaks—*Omnibus (episcopis) placet, ut episcopi, presbyteri, et diaconi, et qui sacramenta contrectant, pudicitie custodes, etiam ab uxoribus se abstineant!*\* Epiphanius† offers an apology for those cases in which, by sheer necessity, married men had been admitted to priest's orders; and, from Cyprian downwards, the flagrant impiety of a man's "putting away his wife," when promoted to the episcopate, received authentication in the practice of the most eminent persons. During the same time, not only did thousands of persons yield obedience to the monastic law, and renounce marriage; but hundreds put away their wives, deserted their children, and hid themselves in monasteries; and their doing so, especially when they surrendered their patrimony to the church, was lauded as the highest act of piety.‡

Does then the prophetic mark of "forbidding to marry," attach, or not, to the Nicene church generally, and to the monastic institute specifically; or is it equitable to go on saying, as we have been used to do, that this is a sign of the apostate *papacy*? Is not this a question simply *historical*, and admitting of a peremptory answer—Yea or Nay?

\* Con. Carthag. can. 2.

† Hæres. 59.

‡ Basil will be hereafter cited in illustration of this article of the monastic economy—namely, the surrender of all property, and generally to the monastery.

As to the other definite sign, the “commanding to abstain from meat,”\* there can, I think, be no need to adduce formal evidence. The practices of abstinence from animal food, and the rigorous fasts enjoined by the ancient church, and especially enforced within the monastic houses, are too well understood, and have been too often described, to leave room for a question on the subject. But let us turn to the other, and less definite characteristics of the predicted apostacy, and in doing so we may recede, in our order, from the fixed points, already considered.

These apostate communities, or individuals, within the church, were so to speak and act, as to prove that they had lost, in a deplorable degree, their sensibility *as religious men*—“having their consciences seared as with a hot iron.” That is to say, as when, to an ulcerated or mortified limb (according to the rough methods of the ancient surgery) a heated iron was applied, with the intention of destroying, for ever, the sensibility of the diseased part. What then may be the meaning of this bold figure as applied to those who prohibited marriage, and enjoined fasting? One should say, that it described the state of mind of those who, having surrendered themselves to the influence of some false and pernicious religious principle, had, in so doing, become, as it were, unconscious of, or incapable of perceiving, the very plainest injunctions of the divine law. A similar condition of the conscience we have an instance of in the pharisees, to whom our Lord applies, with indignant scorn, the epithets—“fools, and blind—phari-

\* In what way these two main articles of asceticism bore one upon the other, producing the worst evils, appears from the confessions of the monkish writers; see, for instance, Cassian, p. 759, *et seq.* and Jerom, ad Eustach.

see, hypocrite—blind pharisee;” and who, with God’s law before them, to which they owed submission, yet, set it at defiance, and made it void by their wicked and foolish enactments.

What phrase then can better describe (in so few words) the religious condition of the ascetic mind? The false oriental philosophy having been admitted, which put abstraction and penance in the room of the gospel, and of true holiness, a thick infatuation thenceforward took possession of all minds, so that the most extreme contradictions of the inspired rules of morality were allowed and approved, even while this rule itself was daily before the eyes, and was echoing in the ears of all. A sufficient instance of this sort of contumacy is the one already adduced: no practical rule, any where found in the apostolic writings, is more clear, or more free from ambiguity, than that which permits and *recommends* the marriage state to bishops; nevertheless, with this rule full in its view, the Nicene church forbade matrimony to its bishops. Our Lord, in the tone of the supreme law-giver, said, “let *not* man put asunder what God has joined;” and the apostle determines, that, even the heathenism of one party should not be held a ground of exception to this rule. But the Nicene church, fully informed of God’s law, in this respect, decided otherwise, and, on pain of degradation, or even excommunication, decreed that a priest or bishop, if already married, should separate himself from his wife; and it pronounced those who did not do so, to be living in adultery! Christ had said, to do this is a sin: the Nicene church said, *not* to do it is a sin; and to do it is an angelic merit. The apostle says, “whoremongers and adulterers God will judge:” the church said, he is an adulterer who, on receiving priest’s orders, does not put away his wife!

This then is what we may well understand as “having the conscience seared as with a hot iron.”\*

On this point, again, let the substantial injustice that has so long been done to the church of Rome, by protestants, be adverted to and disclaimed. To the vast majority of all who have lived under the shadow of the papacy—clergy and laity, the scriptures have ever been sealed, or at best, very partially known; and not known at all, as to the passages that are flatly opposed to the Romish errors. With respect to such, therefore, there did not take place this cauterizing of the conscience; and many affecting instances are on record, of the painful sensibility of those who, happening to hear something more than they had heretofore learned of God’s word, mournfully exclaimed,—“If this be God’s word, all that we have hitherto been taught, is utterly false.” But the case was quite otherwise with the Nicene church; and this indeed is at once its wonder, its merit in one sense, and its sin in another, that, while the grossest superstitions were promoted, and the most outrageous violations of scriptural piety were practised, the scriptures themselves were copiously read and expounded in the churches, and were actually in the hands of the opulent, at least, and were thoroughly familiar to many of the ascetics.† In whatever way we may account for

\* Perhaps we could no where find a more striking instance of this cauterizing of the conscience, than in the case of Jerome, who, with more knowledge of the scriptures than any other divine of his times (and few of any age have surpassed him) coolly cuts a path for himself through the sacred text, whenever he has a point of superstition to carry. His tracts against Jovinian and Vigilantius abound with instances of this kind of audacity. To these we must hereafter refer.

† It is affirmed by Palladius, Jerome, and others, in their lives of

this inconsistency, the fact should surely be taken into the reckoning when we are balancing the merits of the Nicene and Romish churches; and if the particular mark of a cauterized conscience be in question, it must be granted to attach more directly to those who, knowing fully their Lord's will, yet boldly set it at naught, than to those who, although doing the same thing, knew not that will.

“Speaking lies in hypocrisy”—narrating falsehoods, for the purpose, as we colloquially say, of “making out a case;” or, “of putting a good face upon things.” Now really one can hardly imagine a phrase that could better describe the legend-telling style of the ascetic writers. There is absolutely no class of writers, in the whole range of literature, at all to be compared with these, in this respect. Wonder-mongers are they, from the earliest to the latest of the tribe; and these wonders—these tales of exploits, passing human strength and virtue, have all one meaning, and one and the same manifest intention, namely, that of glorifying the ascetic institute. Open these books where you please, and you will rarely find two pages together destitute of some tale of saintly prowess; and each has the ever-recurring moral—“What giants of piety are we monks!” Let the reader say whether it be not so, and for this purpose let him take in hand any one of the Nicene ascetic writers, and then decide whether *this* mark also of the predicted apostacy does not belong to the ascetic institute of the ancient church. Are not the ascetics the tellers and makers of falsehoods, for an interested purpose—“in hypocrisy?”\*

the hermits, that some of them could repeat, memoriter, a large portion of the scriptures, and some the New Testament entire.

\* Jerome's Life of St. Hilarion, his contemporary, I recom-



“Giving heed to seducing spirits, and teachings of, or concerning, demons.” Of *all* error, and of each in particular, it might be affirmed, that it was suggested by evil spirits: the phrases thus understood, would therefore have no specific import, nor could they avail us in endeavouring to attach the prediction to any one of the thousand heresies that have sprung up within the church.—But as it is the characteristic of the prophetic style to be *definite*, we must take these phrases in their characteristic sense, and assume that the “teachings,” to which “some should give heed,” were narrations, and pretended revelations, concerning supernal beings, or the invisible species that are believed to haunt the earth. Now what is that element which we find every where mixed up with the ascetic records? what is it by which the continence, the abstinences, the macerations, and the miracles of the ascetic worthies are made to assume a dramatic air? Is it not the ever-recurring tales of conflicts, personal and visible, with the infernal legions? Is not this taste for demonological adventures the very characteristic of monkery? and has it not been so from the earliest to the latest times? The farce of monkery has, in every age, shown the same personages on the stage—namely, the gaunt spectres of humanity, the monks and hermits, and the same aerial troops, besetting these heroes like swarms of wasps. In proof and illustration of all these predicted characteristics of the ancient asceticism, we could not do better than appeal to the most elaborate, and the most authentic of all the extant me-

mend entire to the calm consideration of those who would satisfy themselves as to the point now in hand. Let this piece be included among those *selected* to make up the Library of the Fathers: the Christian community would then fairly know what is before them.

morials of this order of piety—the piece I have already referred to—Athanasius's life of St. Antony. In this, we have a genuine portrait of Nicene monkery in its very fairest colours; and the features it presents are precisely those which constitute the prophetic marks of the predicted apostacy.—That is to say—a sternly enforced celibacy, as the chief of all virtues,—a rigorous system of abstinence, entire as to animal food, and extreme in all kinds,\*—an obstinate contrariety to scripture precepts and principles, even while scripture is on the lip—an unbounded credulity in regard to invisible agency, and a general style of *pretension*, as to miraculous powers, and superhuman virtues, such as involves more than a suspicion of deliberate knavery. I must here warmly recommend the conscientious inquirer, first, to fix in his mind the several particulars of Paul's characteristics of the coming apostacy, and then to peruse those memorials of the Nicene asceticism which he will find almost on every page of the church historians, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, and in Athanasius, Chrysostom, Palladius, and Jerome.

But there yet remains a mark to be considered. Those who should apostatize, were to do so in giving heed to “seducing spirits.”—False teachers, say the commentators, and no doubt truly; but yet too indefinitely. As *any* heresy or error may be attributed to the influence of infernal suggestions, so does *every* error take its rise from, and spread by the means of “false teachers;”—

\* Jerome, in his Life of Hilarion, describes, very minutely and solemnly, the saint's diet, in each period of his long ascetic course, who never broke his fast until sunset. No person of ingenuous mind can read this life and not acknowledge that the Nicene asceticism is distinctly marked as the apostacy which Paul predicted.

this vague interpretation, therefore, although true generically, does not aid us in attaching the prediction to its object: so understood, the terms will apply to whatever we please. Let it be inquired, then, whether there be not a meaning more precise, couched in the phraseology. The "giving heed" seems to indicate a listening to something *from without*, as if a doctrine, foreign to the church, and of extraneous origin, had caught the ear of the community, and had captivated certain minds. Now, with the facts before us, that the church borrowed, as well the principle, as the practices and rules of its asceticism from the oriental contemplatists, the phrase in question receives at once a specific meaning. 'Those who "turned away from the faith," did so in listening to a foreign doctrine.

Then, should we err, or assume more than history makes good, in understanding these "seducing spirits," as the gnostic teachers, arrogating to themselves the title *πνευματικοί*, and whose doctrine was not merely *seductive*, or erroneous in a general sense, but specifically characterised by its lawless and interminable *roamings*, through the dark and unknown regions of the spiritual universe? Such, eminently, were those impostors and dreamers, in giving heed to whom the more ardent and meditative members of the early church fell into the snare of the oriental asceticism, and became the authors of a system of factitious pietism, which quickly displaced apostolic Christianity.

Let it now be imagined that monkery had been confined to the *eastern* church, and that it had not arisen until the *sixth* century, so as that it had stood related in no way to any system with which our modern opinions or institutions are implicated. In that case, should we have felt any difficulty in appropriating to it the apostolic

prediction—an apostacy, arising within the church, and marked by the prohibition of marriage, and of meats, by contempt of the divine law, by impudent pretensions, and hypocrisies, and by a boundless credulity, in regard to demoniacal agency?—would not these characters have been enough to convince us that the prediction had received its fulfilment? But, in fact, this same asceticism has, in an equal degree, affected the western church; nor have protestant commentators hesitated—how should they hesitate in so plain a case?—to avail themselves of this prediction, as marking the apostacy of Rome. Unfortunately, however, in our eagerness—the eagerness natural to controvertists—to attach this brand to the *papacy*, we have too much forgotten that Rome only inherited and shared the more ancient apostacy. What justice then, or what historical accuracy, is there in the customary protestant comment on this passage—“a clear prediction of the monastic system of *the Romish church?*” With quite as much propriety might the belief of the resurrection be called “a dogma of the *papacy.*”

Nothing so much favours a bad cause as to load it with more disgrace than strictly belongs to it; for, in so doing, we enlist in its defence the best feelings. Popery will live and triumph so long as those corruptions continue to be called *popish* which, in fact, were much more ancient. In the present instance I appeal to serious and candid minds, competently informed in church history, and ask whether the BRAND OF APOSTACY be not herein fixed by the apostolic hand upon—the Nicene Church? Perhaps no method more conclusive or concise could be adopted by a conscientious inquirer, in relation to the present controversy, than that of so making himself acquainted with the Ascetic Institution of the *fourth* cen-

tury, as to be able to reply, for himself, to the question, —Whether that institution meets and satisfies the terms of the predicted apostacy?

I am inclined to press this definite argument, nor shall easily consent to its being evaded. What can be more summary or clear than the process of reasoning we have to pursue; for a multifarious controversy converges to a focus at this point. The Christianity of the fourth century is now proposed to us as our pattern, or as an imbodied exposition of the APOSTOLIC MIND, written and unwritten. Specifically, this body of principles and practices is said to be contained in the extant writings of Athanasius, Basil, and Ambrose. (Let any others be added; *protestants* will except against none.) Now these writers, along with their contemporaries, have handed down to us, with their warmest approval, beside the great dogmas of theology, and the general principles of Christian morality, and of worship, and of church government, a certain artificial scheme of life, not enjoined, indeed, upon all Christians, but recommended as “the more excellent way,” and as that which the most devoted souls would always embrace. By eminence this scheme is, in their view, the path of perfection.

Moreover it is a simple historical fact, that this same scheme of life, unaltered in any of its principles or requirements, has come down from age to age, and is now extant, entire, as a main element of Romanism. The monkery of the papacy, is in form and substance—the ascetic system of the third and fourth centuries. The difference between the two does not amount to so much as the diversities that distinguish one order of regulars from another. If an exception to the present argument

can be raised upon the ground of the *difference* between papistical monkery and Nicene asceticism, let that difference be clearly stated, and be shown also to be such as affects our intended conclusion.

But, in the monkery of Romanism, and *not less* in the Nicene ascetic institute, we find, beyond all doubt or question, Paul's marks of the coming apostacy; nor is there any other system, or body, or sect, within, or around the pale of the church, to which these designations can be made to attach.

It is also to be observed, and the highest importance belongs to the fact, that, while the reformers, German, Swiss, and English, paid a modest and religious regard to antiquity, and have left many proofs of their desire to adhere to it, as far as they could, they, one and all, utterly rejected the ancient asceticism, and broadly separated the churches they founded from the branded apostacy, ancient, and strongly recommended as it was.

Again, it is to be noticed, that those who, at the present moment, are explicitly or covertly giving it to be understood that they have very little sympathy with the reformers, and that they would gladly put the Nicene fathers in their room, are also favourably looking toward the ancient ascetic institute, in its several elements, and are not hesitating to recommend its characteristic articles.

These momentous considerations, and significant facts, I recommend to the dispassionate attention of those whose consciences are not "seared as with a hot iron." Let it not however be supposed that I would apply this, or any such phrase, in an opprobrious sense to the present promoters of asceticism, or as if it implied, in their case, a moral turpitude, or a conscious resistance to truth perceived. What it does imply, in my own use of it, in this instance, may be otherwise termed, a being given

up to an INFATUATION, which, like a thick fog, actually conceals from the view, objects the nearest at hand. Our own times have furnished two or three signal instances of this sort of “strong delusion,” of which some have become the victims, whose sincerity ought not to be questioned, and who have given notoriety to their pitiable fate by eminent powers of mind, and many shining accomplishments. In considering cases of this sort, a grim suspicion as to the *real origin*, or as one might say—*authorship*, of such delusions forces itself upon the mind, and returns, again and again, after it may have been dismissed at the remonstrance either of skepticism, or of charity. ‘The counterfeit piety of the monastic system, was the fatally successful “temptation” of the ancient church:—the revival of the very same principle and system, under the attractive colours of a high-wrought refinement, to what can we trace it but to the immortal craft of the same adversary?

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## THE EXTENT OF THE ASCETIC INSTITUTE, AND THE SANCTION IT RECEIVED FROM THE NICENE CHURCH.

NOTHING is more monotonous than the story of the monkish life, whether pagan, Christian, or Mahometan. ‘This phantasy, or ignis fatuus of the ecclesiastical levels, find it in what climate we may, or, whether we look for it in our own times, or in the middle ages, or in the Nicene age, or in the remotest periods of history, shows the same form and the same hue. Like the long trains

of figures that adorn the passages of an Egyptian temple, there is throughout, one costume, one physiognomy, one style of attitudes, one dull ground, and one or two crude colours.

It is really surprising to find in how small a degree the widest diversities of religious belief, as well as the most extensive differences of climate, and national character, have modified this immemorial species of insanity. During the lapse of at least three thousand years, the first principles, the aim, the practices, and even the visible and graphic characteristics of the ascetics, whether eremite or cœnobite, have remained nearly the same, or have varied only as a flower in the green-house, or the hot-house, may differ from its variety, a field. It is, in fact, just thus that the Nicene monkery is to be distinguished from that of the Nubian gymnosophists, and the Indian brahmans, of the remotest antiquity. The high and *close* temperature of the church, brought out richer colours and more leafage, and even, we may allow, a better fruit; but the plant has always been the same.

The chagrin of the Romish missionaries in finding, wherever Buddhism had prevailed, the very counterpart of their own hierarchical and monastic system, was occasioned by the near resemblance, or rather identity of all institutes founded upon the ascetic principle—"The devil," said they, "has been at work here, spitefully mimicking the church for our special mortification." These good and zealous men would have kept nearer, at once, to historical and to theological truth, in saying that, what the crafty adversary had really done was to set the church mimicking the pagan delusion.

Madmen are said to be insensible to changes of temperature; for the mind, having come under the tyranny



of some one idea, or single class of impressions, ceases to be conscious of whatever might divert it. Sultry heat and extreme frost are the same to the maniac, and thus, and it is a highly curious fact, the ascetics of the torrid zone were not surpassed, as to contempt of the extremes of heat and cold, by the anchorets of the then frozen forests of Germany and Gaul, who would give up no point of their discipline—a discipline borrowed from Syria and Egypt, during the utmost severities of a northern winter. Should this fortitude be regarded as the mild constancy of Christian courage, or as the iron insensibility of lunacy?

The burning solitudes of Upper Egypt,\* and the craggy seclusions of Nubia, had, from time immemorial, been occupied by a race of troglodyte sages, whose successors of the Nicene era adhered to the very same modes of life, and professed the very same abstract principles, differing only in the phrases they made use of, and in the circumstance of putting themselves in alliance with the church. The church, on her part, acknowledged them as her most illustrious and devoted sons, and made them the objects of her unmeasured admiration. India was, however, the cradle of the anchoretic life, and Buddhu the father of its doctrines; and in like manner as all Christendom, during many centuries, was accustomed to look to Egypt and Nubia for its brightest patterns of holy abstraction and mortification, so did these refer to the banks of the Indus, and the Ganges, as the sources of their doctrine and practice.

\* The excavated rocks which, in earlier times, had been tenanted by robbers, or by outlaws, and afterwards by the coiners of base money (Jerom. Vita S. Paul,) afforded sepulchral shelter to the Christian ascetics.

Strabo,\* Arrian,† Diodorus Siculus,‡ Porphyry,§ as well as several of the fathers, especially Clement of Alexandria,|| and Augustine,¶ have handed down incidental notices of the philosophy and manners of the Indian and Egyptian gymnosophists, such as are amply sufficient for the purpose of identifying the ancient, and the more recent—the Buddhist, and the Christian ascetic institute. These professors of a divine philosophy, like their Christian imitators, went nearly naked; they occupied caverns or chinks in the rocks; they abstained entirely from animal food; they professed inviolable virginity;\*\* they practised penance; they passed the greater part of their time in mute meditation; they imposed silence and absolute submission upon their disciples; they professed the doctrine, that the perfection of human nature consists in an annihilation of the passions, and of every affection which nature has implanted, whether in the animal or the mental constitution: abnegation was, with them, the one point of wisdom and virtue, and a reabsorption of the human soul into the abyss of the divine mind, was the happy end of the present system, to the pure and wise.

Now, one might reasonably have supposed, that a system of doctrine and practice such as this, if it were to come at all under the powerful influence of Christianity, must have admitted some extensive modifications: but it was not so in fact:—a few phrases and another di-

\* Strabo, lib. xv.

† Arrian, *Exped. Alex.* lib. vii. c. 1; and *Hist. Ind.* c. 11.

‡ Diod. lib. ii.

§ Porph. *de Abstin.* lib. iv.

|| Clemens. *Strom.* lib. i. and iii.

¶ August. *Civ. Dei*, lib. xiv. c. 17; and lib. xv. c. 20.

\*\* Non enim est hoc bonum, nisi cum fit secundum fidem summi boni, qui est Deus. *Civ. Dei.*

alect, or slang, adopted, make almost all the difference which serves to distinguish the ancient gymnosophist, from the Christian anchorite of the Nicene age. If we are to confide in those highly encomiastic descriptions of these latter, which adorn the pages of the Christian writers of that era, the one institute was a close imitation of the other. The extant information bearing on this subject is not scanty, and it is furnished, explicitly, or is incidentally confirmed, by Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen,\* Theodoret, Athanasius, Palladius, Sulpitius Severus, Cassian, Jerome, Chrysostom, Basil, Augustine, Isidore, Ephrem, some of whom furnish the minutest details of the “seraphic life,” and all speak of it in terms of wonder and admiration.

The more rigid and heroic of the Christian anchorites dispensed with all clothing except a rug, or a few palm-leaves round the loins.† Most of them abstained from the use of water for ablution;‡ nor did they usually wash or change the garments they had once put on; thus St. Antony bequeathed to Athanasius a skin in which his sacred person had been wrapped for half a century. They also allowed their beards and nails to grow, and sometimes became so hirsute, as to be actually mistaken for hyænas or bears.§ It need not be said that ce-

\* Perhaps there is no where to be found a less exceptionable statement of the nature and purport of the monastic life than the one given by Sozomen, lib. i. c. 12. He subjoins also a *reasonable* history of the origin of the institution; but let the reader go on to the history of the monk Ammon!

† Jerom. Vita S. Paul.

‡ “It is idle to think of *cleanliness* in a hair-cloth!” Jerom. Vita Hilarion. Ἡ νιψάμενος καὶ τοὺς ποδας ἰδατῇ. Athan. Vita S. Ant. p. 504.

§ Palladius reports several instances of this kind: it is superfluous to cite passages in reference to facts which have been so

libacy was the *first* law of this institute, and that an abstinence the most rigid was its *second* law. Many, having scooped narrow cells for themselves in the crevices of precipitous rocks, built themselves in, leaving only a small aperture, and depended entirely upon the piety of their disciples, or admirers, for supplying their daily wants. Of many it is affirmed, that they had passed fifty years without exchanging a word with a human creature. Some inflicted upon themselves the tortures of perpetual ulceration.

Egypt seems to have been the centre of asceticism in its most terrible form; and it was therefore toward Egypt that the Nicene writers directed the eyes of the church, as to the high school of sacred wisdom. In Syria, in Arabia, and in the mountainous regions of Asia Minor, especially in Pisidia and Cappadocia, a somewhat mitigated rule of the solitary and monastic life appears to have prevailed; the hermits building huts, comparatively commodious, in the middle and higher regions of the mountains; and often choosing, like Basil, the most delicious spots for their abode;\* and admitting just so much relaxation of discipline, as might render this mode of life not altogether uninviting to those who, in embracing it, left behind them the racking anxieties, the

often stated, and which no one calls in question. The only circumstance important to our argument is this, that the extravagances often spoken of as attaching to the more recent monkery took their pattern from the ascetics of the Nicene age; and of this no one can entertain a doubt who reads Jerome, Cassian, Athanasius, Sulpitius, Palladius, and Socrates.

\* Basil, a thorough enthusiast, as to the ascetic life, paints it in the brightest colours: his epistles to Nazianzen might seduce any imaginative reader into the wilderness; if indeed he could find a wilderness such as Basil describes in a letter to his friend. Naz. tom. i. p. 835.

wrongs, and the privations of common life. To many, celibacy and fasting were but a moderate price to pay for tranquillity, and an exemption from laborious courses, and dangerous services; especially if already the fervour of life was gone by, and if, as with many, appetite had been abated by disease, or early luxurious habits.

At what time precisely, the wilderness exchanged its pagan for a Christian tenantry, it is not easy to ascertain. In some instances, no doubt, the very individuals who had begun their course as heathen gymnosophists, ended it as Christian anchorets. But oftener, probably, the deserted cell or cavern of the savage philosopher was taken possession of by one who, having, in the neighbouring cities, received the knowledge of the gospel, betook himself to the angelic life in consequence of persecutions, or of disappointments in love or in business. This is certain, that many of these solitaries were well acquainted with the scriptures, and must therefore have passed some years in Christian society.\*

The cœnobite institution reached its organized state in an irregular manner, and continued, to a late period, open to many anomalies. In frequent instances, those who professed virginity or continence, continued to reside with their friends, and, in fact, lived at large, using their profession as a general license, or ticket of liberty, exempting them from the restraints which the manners of the age, and country, as well as the common sentiments of modesty, imposed upon women wishing still to be regarded by the other sex, as worthy to be chosen

\* The writings of Ephrem may be referred to as a sample of the mode of instruction usual in the monasteries, and which, whatever may have been its defects, yet imbodyed copious citations of scripture. Some of this writer's sermons are little more than strings of texts.

as wives. In truth, the reserves to which, in the ancient world, all women of the liberal class were subjected, were broken through, as on one hand by courtesans, so on the other by the virgins of the church, nor did the circumstance of enjoying, in common with the former, a liberty from which others were debarred, fail to convey an infectious sentiment of shamelessness to the habits and sentiments of the latter. Who is it that appears in public places, unattended, unveiled, and daintily attired? Who and what is she?——no, you are wrong in your conjecture; it is “a virgin of the church.”\*

The contubernium, or *κοινοβιον*, offered many advantages to those who had renounced the business and relationships of common life. It excluded some scandals, or at least hid them. Moreover in these religious lodging houses, a common fund, derived in part from the church chest, and in part from the dedicated or sequestered or bequeathed property of the rich members of the society, might the most easily be disturbed. The society (brotherhood or sisterhood) thus assembled under one roof, was conveniently subjected to the daily visitations of the clergy, and so came under the direct authority of the bishop. Nor should we, in justice, omit to say, within these seclusions, the routine of religious services would, with the most effect, be carried on, and the rules of the monastic life be the best enforced. At the same time, those manual labours which were an important ingredient of the system, could, in such houses, be rendered the most serviceable, and be made to press evenly upon all, and to contribute to the support of all.

\* Farther on I have made a reference to Chrysostom, in relation to the manners of the nuns, which those will turn to who are incredulous on the subject; and which those will gladly avoid, who would not infect their own minds.

Monasteries and convents, in the *modern* sense of the terms, do not belong to the Nicene age; and it was the praise of the Romish church, and especially of certain reformers, celebrated as the founders of orders, to have gradually brought the irregular and scandalous practices of an earlier time under some wholesome restraints. Unquestionably the monkery of the middle ages was better ordered than that of the Nicene.\*

The loose, and often exaggerated style of the church writers, when speaking of the extent of the system which they so much admired, discourages the endeavour to ascertain, even in a general way, the actual numbers of the anchorets and monks in different countries. This number no doubt varied, from year to year, with the changing fortunes of the Christian body; times of persecution, as well as of public calamity, driving multitudes into the wilderness who, during seasons of peace, would not have abandoned their places in society. Then again the extraordinary reputation of certain heroes of asceticism, or an unusual flush of the fanatical impulse, affecting the church, locally or generally, for awhile, would operate to swell these bands, which might afterwards see themselves reduced (if we may borrow a military term) to a skeleton.

\* The reader may perhaps here recollect the comparison so indignantly drawn by Erasmus (*Vita Hieron.*) between the monkery of his own times, and that of the times of Jerome; and it may appear as if this high authority contradicted what is affirmed above. But in fact what Erasmus insists upon is the incarceration and consequent inanity and misery and frivolity of the monks, his contemporaries, as compared with the *license* enjoined by those of Jerome's times. He does not say that this liberty did not give room for much licentiousness. Nor, in truth, are his statements, in the passage referred to, borne out by the actual evidence. Basil and Cassian contradict him in each point of his encomium of the ancient monastic system.

Some of the Egyptian abbots are spoken of as having had five, seven, or even ten thousand monks under their personal direction; and the Thebais, as well as certain spots in Arabia, are reported to have been literally crowded with solitaries. Nearly a hundred thousand of all classes, it is said, were at one time to be found in Egypt. The western church probably could boast of no such swarms. This however is certain, that, although the enthusiasm might be at a lower ebb in one country than in another, it actually affected the church universal, so far as the extant materials of ecclesiastical history enable us to trace its rise and progress. These materials, that is to say, the writings of the fathers, and the church historians, leave no doubt as to the prevalence of the ascetic system throughout the countries to which they themselves belonged, namely—Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Asia Minor, Thrace, Italy, Gaul, Spain, and North Africa. Moreover the narratives which they have furnished of the propagation of the gospel in countries remote from the shores of the Mediterranean, and beyond the limits of the Roman empire, make it evident that, in most instances, the individuals who carried the knowledge of Christianity into the secountries carried it under its ascetic guise.\*

\* The reader may find a pertinent instance, related by Socrates, lib. i. c. 20, concerning the conversion of the Hiberians (between the Euxine and the Caspian) who were brought over to the faith by the means of a Christian slave, who “led the philosophic life,” practising the ascetic discipline with the extremest severity. See also Sozomen, lib. ii. c. 7. Another instance of the same sort this writer reports, lib. iv. c. 36, concerning the conversion of the Saracens. The conversion of India, under the direction of Athanasius, Soz. lib. ii. c. 24, we cannot doubt to have been effected, in the ascetic spirit. The reconversion of Britain, under the auspices of Gregory I. has the same characteristics.



An absolute universality of assent can scarcely be pretended in support of any one article of the Christian faith:—there have been some to oppose, or to deny almost every doctrine, in its turn. What is practically meant by the *ab omnibus* is—the *greater number*. Orthodoxy, during some eras, could by no means claim the majority as its adherents. As to the ascetic principle, the assent of the church is more nearly complete than in most cases, and the dissidents (hereafter to be spoken of) were very few. It may however be well, and in order to exclude exceptions, or doubts, on the part of those who are not conversant with church literature, to run over the list, and summarily to report the suffrages of all whose testimony can be of any importance. But in doing so, as I have had, and shall yet have, to cite, or to refer to particular passages in these same authors, all bearing on the subject of the ascetic institute, a general statement, such as I am sure will not be contradicted by any who are themselves familiar with the patristic volumes, is all that can be needed.

What we have now in view is not the earlier history of the ascetic practice, but the credit it enjoyed, and its universality in the Nicene age;—or, more definitely, during the fourth century. We need not therefore here go back to Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Dionysius, concerning whose opinions, however, there can be no question.

The extant writers of this period (those not included of whom some fragments only remain) are not more in number than about twenty. We shall glance at them in their order.

The first to be named, and who finished his course in the last years of the third century, is Methodius, bishop

of Olympus in Lycia, and afterwards of Tyre, and a martyr. This writer (commended by Jerome\*) speaks the sentiments of the church in the time of Cyprian. A tone of moderation distinguishes this writer; and amid the vagaries of an uncurbed fancy, he pays more regard to good sense and great principles than do many of higher repute. The Banquet (Symposium) of the Ten Virgins, assumes as true the universal opinion, that virginity is the highest of all excellences, and that it is the only way of near approach to God, which is possible on earth.† In this writer then we find, and apart from the fanaticism and extravagance of the Nicene divines, that settled opinion of the *ancient* church from which sprung, inevitably and naturally, the ripe monkish system, and at length, the enforced celibacy of the clergy. Men of mild disposition, like Methodius, if they did not “*forbid* to marry,” effectively restrained from marrying; and in fact, writings such as his were likely to have more influence in spreading the error, than those of a sterner character. It may be noticed that Methodius (as quoted by Theodoret) holds that lofty style concerning martyrdom, which we have mentioned as running parallel with the ascetic enthusiasm.

Lactantius, the Christian Cicero, and who is better worth the reading than most of his contemporaries, had far too much vigour of mind to give himself blindly to the extravagances common in his times; nevertheless he too accepts, as unquestionable, the opinion concerning the transcendental excellence of absolute continence; and he says of one who adheres to it, adopting the universal style, *hic erit consimilis Deo, qui virtutem Dei cepit*:‡

\* Catalogue Script. Eccles.

† As quoted by Photius, Myriob. art. 237.

‡ Lactant de Vero Cultu, lib. vi. c. 23.

and he affirms that continence is the height and consummation of all the virtues: he alludes also to the "plurimi," and the "multi," who, in his times, preserved the "blessed and incorrupt integrity of the body," and who made proof of this "celestial mode of life." At the same time this writer's very slender or ambiguous reference to any doctrine properly evangelic, ought to be noticed. Christ, in his view, lived and died as a pattern of all virtue, and that he might relieve men from an excessive fear of death, and show them how to subdue the passions. Such, at this early time, was the cold Socinianism of too many, calling themselves Christians!

A place among the *authorities* of the Nicene age ought certainly to be allowed to the council of Nice itself, and in connexion with our present subject, a part of its proceedings, if we are to give credit to Socrates and Sozomen, demands to be noticed; premising only an explanatory statement concerning the opinion of the church, as indicated by the decrees of preceding councils. The council of Ancyra, held at the commencement of the fourth century, had decreed,\* and its decision expresses the feeling, as well as defines the practice of the church at the time, that, if a deacon, when he received ordination, made an explicit profession of his intention to marry, as being in his own case unavoidable, he should be permitted to do so, the bishop's license to that effect screening him from future censures. But that if, at the time, he made no such protestation, and on the contrary allowed it to be supposed that he professed continence, and yet afterwards married, he should be removed from his ministry. What was this restricted permission to marry, but a virtual "forbidding to marry?"

\* Canon 9. Routh, vol. iii. p. 410.

It was clearly an expression of the unfitness of the married for the sacred office, and thus an infatuated contravention of the apostolic law on this very point. I cannot but notice, in passing, the curious coincidence that, as appears from the 14th canon of this council, there were, at this time, some of the clergy, "priests and deacons, who not merely abstained from animal food, but who held it in such abhorrence that they would not even touch any vegetables that had been cooked with it. The simple abstinence the council *allows*; but condemns this extreme scrupulosity. Did not the prophetic marks attach to the ante-Nicene church?\*

The same council (canon 19) decreed that those who falsified their profession of virginity, should be numbered among such as had contracted a second marriage! The same canon prohibits the cohabiting of virgins with men—a custom of which we find the traces in all directions. The nuns, thus living *under the protection* of their spiritual guardians, were denominated their "sisters," or "darlings," ἀγαπῆται.

The synod of Neocæsarea, held about the same time,† or a little later, but before the council of Nice, decreed that a priest marrying, should be deposed. If this be not a "forbidding to marry," what are the enactments of Hildebrand? It is true that, at this time, and long afterwards, many priests, and even bishops, continued to live with their wives, and had children born to them,

\* There was a well understood *physical* connexion between the two main articles of the ascetic life. Rigorous fasting, says Jerome, and none knew better than he how necessary it was in this respect, is indispensable to those who would be perfect, quod aliter pudicitia tuta esse non possit. Ad Eustoch.

† Routh, vol. iii. p. 457. A various reading in this canon does not affect its meaning in relation to our immediate object.

although still approaching the altar; but none (except the deacons who had made this express stipulation,) were allowed to marry *after* ordination.\* For a second marriage, the church imposed a course of penance, more or less severe.

At the council of Nice, according to the accounts of Socrates,† and Sozomen,‡ who tell the same story, it was proposed, with a view, as it is said, to the reformation of manners, that a rule should be established, requiring all bishops, priests, deacons, and, says the latter historian, subdeacons, who had married before their ordination, to withdraw from their wives, or cease to cohabit with them; and the colour of the account leads us to suppose that this regulation, which, in respect to the church universal, was called “a new law,” although not new to several of the churches, was near to have been carried, and probably would have been, had not the good sense and right feeling of one of the bishops present defeated the fanaticism of the others. Paphnutius, a bishop of the Thebais, a confessor, having lost an eye in the late persecution, and himself an ascetic, rose, and with spirit asserted the honour and purity of matrimony, and insisted upon the inexpediency of any such law, likely as it was to bring many into a snare. For a moment reason triumphed; the proposal was dropped, nor any thing farther attempted by the insane party, beyond the giving a fresh sanction to the established rule or tradition, ἀρχαίαν παραδосιν, that none should marry *after* ordination.

In these facts, then, we have the evidence of a prevalent, if not a universal feeling, against matrimony, as a pollution, and therefore, a disqualification in those who

\* Routh, p. 464.

† Socr. lib. i. c. 11.

‡ Socr. lib. i. c. 23.

sustained office in the church. And so strong was this feeling with some, that it impelled them toward the monstrous impiety of enjoining the actual separation of man and wife, in direct contravention of the divine law. Moreover the fact (in other ways abundantly established) is here attested, that marriage after ordination was then, and had long been considered, as disgraceful and unlawful: in other words, the ancient church had deliberately taken to itself the predicted mark of apostacy, by opposing itself to marriage, and by actually forbidding it to *all* who desired to make proficiency in piety; and to its clergy—as such:—a married man might be ordained; but *no* ordained person might marry! Common sense resents the futility of the endeavour to draw an important distinction between the papacy, and the Nicene church, on this ground.

It is of no importance to our present argument to fix the precise date of the Apostolic Constitutions. This spurious compilation may at least be taken as good evidence in relation to the notions and usages of the Nicene age, and it is manifestly intended to represent those of a much earlier period. This appears among many other instances from the description given (lib. ii. c. 2,) of the bishop's qualifications, who “should have, or should have had,” a wife. The class of virgins is however recognised, once and again,\* as *a constituted order*, in the church. The main intention of the authors or compilers of this collection being to hitch the Christian hierarchy upon the foundation of the Aaronic priesthood, and in fact to claim for the bishop, as Pontifex, the utmost stretch of honour and of power, according to the

\* Lib. ii. cap. 25, 26, 57; lib. iii. c. 15; lib. iv. c. 14; and lib. viii, c. 24.

theory which Hildebrand laboured to realize, whatever does not directly subserve this purpose is very lightly touched. That the lofty rank, and irresponsible power assumed for the bishop, was in fact the creation of a later age than the apostolic, we need no other proof than the incidental one, afforded by the oversight or blunder of the forger of these Constitutions, who, in describing the church (the structure) and the mode of worship,\* betrays, little aware of what he is doing, the *costume*, so to speak, of the fourth century. Of the ill opinion entertained of second marriages, and of the infamy attached to a third, we find the indications.† Nevertheless, and it should be remarked, the fanatical extravagance which attaches to the language of the great Nicene writers, when they enter upon subjects of this class, is entirely avoided in the Apostolical Constitutions. In fact, there is far less of gnosticism, and of the ascetic mania, in this spurious work, than presents itself, every where, on the pages of Ambrose, Basil, Chrysostom, and their contemporaries. It might indeed pretty fairly be appealed to as exhibiting the difference between the *ancient*, and the *Nicene* church; the latter, rather than the former, being the model to which we are referred by the Oxford divines.

The tenth chapter of the sixth book, enumerates, and condemns, the wild notions of the times, including the prohibition of marriage, and of animal food, which was then actually insisted upon by the ascetic party in the church. Well had it been if the ambitious divines who are now commended to us as our masters, had known how to confine themselves to the profession of faith con-

\* Lib. ii. c. 57, and lib. viii. c. 12.

† Lib. iii. c. 2; and especially lib. vi. c. 17, where a second marriage is *forbidden* to the clergy.

tained in the eleventh chapter of this book; well, if even they could have respected common sense, in relation to subjects which they were not compelled to make matter of piety. Let the reader compare certain passages of Athanasius, and Basil, cited, or referred to, above, with the sober propriety of the twenty-ninth chapter. But inasmuch as “church principles” are not to be supported without the aid of the divines of the fourth century, those who, by the necessity of the case, are making their appeal to *them*, involve themselves in a farther necessity of either disguising, or of professing, every superstition of the papacy—and among these errors, all the inherent extravagances of the ascetic institute.

The accomplished Eusebius of Cæsarea, took up Christianity as he found it, and his evidence, in the present instance, merely amounts to that of a witness to the actual state of the church, in his times. The customary language of admiration in regard to religious celibacy he employs, without scruple;\* speaking of the choir of nuns, as his contemporaries were wont to do.

There can be no need to make new citations from Athanasius: I will do no more than request the reader, after referring to what this great and holy man has written on the two allied subjects of virginity and fasting, and after listening to his credulity concerning demoniacal agency, to consider, with all seriousness, whether the scheme of piety which he so devoutly recommends, is not most distinctly marked with the characteristics of the predicted apostacy. The admission that it is so marked, may startle and distress some religious minds; for long cherished illusions are never dispelled without

\* As for instance:—Vita Constant. lib. iv. c. 26, and 28. Hist. Eccles. lib. ii. c. 17.



pain, amazement, and peril. Yet what can be done, on the present urgent occasion, but resolutely to follow truth? I can imagine no plea by aid of which Paul's prophecy can be warded off from its manifest application to that ascetic institute, of which Athanasius was the principal patron.

The good and superstitious Cyril of Jerusalem we have already referred to, as more moderate than many of his contemporaries: he does not, however, scruple to take up the usual phrases,\* in connexion with this subject.

Adhering to the order of time, we pass from Palestine to the extreme west, and find still the same elements of the religious system. Hilary of Poitiers, in the places already referred to,† speaks the language of the times. He contends for that great dogma of the ascetic system, the perpetual virginity,‡ *ita venerabilis ejus ostenderetur in Jesu matre, virginitas*: and perplexes himself with an allegorical exposition of Psalm cxxvii. in order to reserve or assert the superior honours and blessedness of celibacy.

We return from the West to the East, and mention next, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, of whom, in connexion with our present subject, it is enough to say that he was himself a severe ascetic, and the founder and abbot of a monastery:—no dissident, therefore, from the doctrine and practices of the Nicene church.

Basil of Cæsarea, who may be taken as a fair specimen of the religious system which the fourth century bequeathed to the eighth and ninth, and which system we are told to accept as “ripe Christianity,” was, as

\* Catech. vi. toward the end, and xii. xvi.

† P. 308.

‡ In Matth. com. canon i.

every one knows, the great promoter of monkery in his times; and in fact his influence upon after ages has been deep and extensive. Basil "revised," would, perhaps, differ very little from the scheme of doctrine, worship, and discipline, which the Oxford divines, were they once set quite clear of the untoward labours of the reformers, would re-establish in England.\* In this enumeration of witnesses it would be altogether superfluous to make citations from the writings of those who are well known to have been the most ardent promoters of the ascetic practices. I therefore merely name, as coming next in order of time, Gregory Nazianzen, the intimate friend of Basil—a main pillar of that vast structure of superstition and idolatry which we have been used to brand as popery.

Ephrem the Syrian, who may be read with comfort and substantial profit, by any, bringing apostolical Christianity with them, as an antidote, exhibits, perhaps, as well as any writer of the class he belongs to, the utmost extent to which the blind gospel of the Nicene church may be carried, in producing the passive virtues—patience, self-denial, mortification of the appetites, humility, or rather *submissiveness*, obedience, and charity, (in the sense of almsgiving.) To this list may also be added a grace for which we have no exact modern designation—alas the poverty of a *protestant* church nomenclature! What I mean ought not to be called heavenly-mindedness, for it is the condition of a soul, destitute of light, and warmth, and hope, and faith; but, if a term must be coined, we must name it—*unearthly-minded-*

\* Those who will soon be reading the "select" treatises of this father, will be virtually misled and imposed upon, unless they look into his entire works.

ness; for it was the *contrary* of sensuality, covetousness, and turbulent passion; and yet not the genuine and efficacious opponent of the sordid principles of our nature. In naming Ephrem, I cannot but caution the reader against the delusion which may be practised upon him by "selections." At this urgent moment, when the church is fearfully vibrating between apostolic Christianity and the Nicene superstitions, nothing can be of any avail but an appeal to the historical apparatus *entire*, whence alone true notions of things may be derived. Selections are schooled witnesses, and therefore worse than none.

Gregory of Nyssa, the brother of Basil, and, although a married bishop, yet so ardent an admirer of celibacy, that one is apt to think his wife must have been a very Xantippe. In this writer may be found more than the germs of *every* abomination of the papacy. Let it be granted that, in extravagance of expression, he goes a little beyond some of his contemporaries; but yet is he, in no point of superstition or fanaticism, at variance with them. His scheme of doctrine and discipline is only Nicene Christianity, vividly expressed; or, as one might say, the same outline of things in bas-relief. Now I would gladly receive an ingenuous reply to these following plain questions:—

1st. Putting aside the mere ecclesiastical question of the pretensions of the bishop of Rome, can any broad and intelligible distinction be established between Gregory Nyssen and the Romanism or popery of the tenth century?

2d. Can any important distinction be made good between this father and his contemporaries, particularly Basil, Athanasius, and Ambrose?

3d. And this question I would humbly and seriously

address to men fearing God, (and competently informed,) Whether *each article* of Paul's explicit prediction of the coming apostacy does not find its pointed and complete fulfilment in the system which this writer's works embody?

I can imagine several modes in which, these questions might be evaded, or, "a case made out," very learnedly and ingeniously, and much to the satisfaction of all who love to be excused the toils of investigation, and which should appear to dispose of the difficulty, and of him who starts it; but I am thoroughly persuaded that, dealt with apart from prejudice and controversial influences, they can be replied to only in one manner, and in a way fatal to the illusion which is now spreading within the protestant church. I abstain from advancing any challenge in this instance; but will merely recommend the conscientious student to read and ponder—GREGORY NYSSEN, and then to ask himself, whither he will be tending in surrendering himself to the Nicene divines or—to those who have made the Nicene divines their masters.

Ambrose of Milan, the best authority in support of "church principles," and in recommendation of—the virtues of relics—the advocacy of the saints—the celestial excellence of virginity—the efficacy of fasting, and other works of penance, and of what you please of the trumpery of the Nicene and popish superstition. In writing to Pope Syricius, Ambrose submissively says—*quos sanctitas tua damnavit, scias apud nos secundum judicium tuum esse damnatos.\** Well is it for the Lord's people that they are to receive their award from other lips; but Ambrose might have added, "and whatever your holiness approves at Rome, we approve also at

\* Epist. 42. class i.

Milan." In fact, he gave all his soul, and devoted his eminent talents to the work of upholding the church system of his times—most zealous, when most in the wrong. I have already, and must again cite him in the course of this argument.

The erudite Jerome stands next on our list of witnesses. It may be permitted to Erasmus,\* while indignantly comparing the sottish and vapid monkery of his own times, with the ascetic system of the Nicene age, to say, *monachi institutum, quod ne quis in hoc erret, id temporis longe diversum erat ab hoc quod hodie videmus*. Let it be that there was a difference in *circumstance*, between the two systems; but assuredly not in substance; and whoever looks into this great writer's ascetic treatises and epistles, will grant, that on all points of the predicted apostacy, Jerome carried his notions to the highest pitch of extravagance: but of this more presently. Yet let us notice, in passing, a signal instance of that perversion of all genuine moral sentiments—a perversion fatal to the virtue of youth, which attended the universal notion of the celestial merit of virginity. A youth, religiously educated, and religiously disposed, overcome by temptation, falls into some licentiousness of conduct: what then are the feelings which should attend his recovery to virtue?—sorrow surely, and shame, in recollection of his *sin*. It was altogether another thing with the ascetic Jerome, who, in his own case, deploras, not the *sin* of his early fall, but his *loss of caste* among the terrestrial seraphs, and his having forfeited those ineffable honours of which others might make their boast! Jerome's language, in this instance, carries with it a volume of meaning in relation to the real quality of Nicene Christianity. I commend the passage to the reader's particular atten-

\* In the life of Jerome above referred to.

tion, and shall cite his own words.\* After protesting that he does not *condemn* matrimony, he says—*Virginitatem autem in cælum fero, non quia habeam, sed quod magis mirer quod non habeo. Ingenua et verecunda confessio est; quo ipse careas, id in aliis prædicare. Nunquid, quia gravi corpore terræ hæreo, avium non miror volatus, nec columbam prædico, quod radit iter liquidum, celeres neque commovet alas?* Notions of this sophisticated sort, are of similar tendency to those substitutions of the law of honour, for the rules of virtue, which in fact give a license to every immorality that does not happen to be touched by the penalties of this arbitrary code. Jerome must take his place among the foremost promoters of the false principles of the Nicene church system.

Mark, the hermit, might be cited along with Macarius the Egyptian, as affording evidence of the consolatory fact that good sense and spirituality still held a place, even among the ascetics: an ascetic, however, he is, and moreover a mystic, going far toward the oriental illusion and its pantheism.

Differ as much as they might on other points, these great writers are unanimous on the subject of the ascetic doctrine: thus Rufinus, while rending his friend Jerome's reputation, with merciless asperity, is as stanch a monk as he, or as any of his contemporaries.

And so again Augustine, although he claims to be set off from his contemporaries, on various accounts, nevertheless holds firmly to the catholic doctrine, on this ground; nor can a more striking, or a more edifying instance be adduced, of the sovereign influence of religious illusions, in perverting the strongest and the soundest

\* *Apologia ad Pammach.* toward the end.

minds. If any are staggered by Augustine's authority in this instance, and are inclined by it to think well of what otherwise they would not hesitate to condemn, let them remember that this same eminent father favours, and warmly defends, each principal article of the superstition of his times, and has been, and may fairly be cited, by Romanists, in support of almost every element of the papal system.

I will not, however, dismiss Augustine without referring the reader to a passage in which, by nice distinctions, he labours to set the church clear from the marks of the predicted apostacy.\* Ille enim prohibet, qui hoc malum esse dicit, non qui huic bono aliud melius anteponit. True, the church catholic did not forbid marriage, like certain heretics, universally, or as in itself abominable; but it did absolutely forbid it to *all* who aspired to walk on the path of what it represented as the only Christian perfection: it did absolutely (or so far as it could) forbid marriage to all men in orders: it discouraged the ordination of the married: it spoke of a second marriage as adultery; and, in a word, it universally and uniformly taught a doctrine, and sanctioned a practice, from which nothing else could result but that horrible prohibition of marriage, by the Romish church, which, during a long course of ages, has deluged Europe with licentiousness and misery. Let it be temperately asked whether the Romish church has assumed any *general principle*, in relation to the celibacy of the monastic orders, or of the clergy, which is not to be found distinctly advanced, and warmly defended, by Augustine himself. If not (and no one will affirm that it did) then it is equally unjust and frivolous to make a

\* Contra Faust. lib. xxx. c. 6.

distinction between the papacy and the Nicene church, in respect to this mark of apostacy.

All that has been said of Augustine, is true of his illustrious contemporary Chrysostom. We have heard him using language, in regard both to virginity and fasting, such as is not surpassed in extravagance, or in pernicious tendency, by any popish writer.

No important accession to our present argument would be secured by passing forward into the fifth century, or by adducing the train of secondary writers who mark the course of it. Every one knows what their tendency is, as to the points in question. But, if the reader pleases, let him look into Sulpitius Severus, (the biographer of St. Martin,) or into the church historians, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret; or into Palladius, Isidore, Cassian, or Cyril of Alexandria.

Whether the writers above enumerated belong to the eastern or to the western, to the north African, or to the Alexandrian churches, they hold the same language, and seem to emulate each other in their zeal to promote every one of those notions and practices which, when digested into canons, decrees, or ecclesiastical usages, make up what we mean by popery, or Romanism, as the system adopted and enforced by the papacy.

By protestants it has always been admitted, as it has always been felt by the Romish church herself, that the monastic orders are the strength of the system; and it was the monks who were the most determined opponents of the reformation. If, then, protestants still think as the reformers did, and as they themselves have been used to do, of the papacy, as an "apostacy," and as a system of cruelty, corruption, and illusion, the monkery which has always been the darling of this church, and its main support, must take an ample share of the repro-



bation with which we regard the papal system. What then is our dilemma? This same monkery, reprobated as a principal element of popery, traces itself up to the Nicene church, and glows in a false splendour upon the pages of every one of the great writers of the Nicene age. We ought, then, either to embrace asceticism, on the ground of this "catholic consent," and so to renounce the reformation; or, adhering to the reformation, to disown the Nicene fathers. There is no consistency in a middle course; nor can there be coherence in a system which would bind in the same bundle the two opposed authorities.

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## THE OPPOSITION MADE TO THE ANCIENT ASCETICISM.

WHETHER at all, or, to what extent, if at all, the prevalent ascetic doctrine and practice were opposed by any individuals, or parties, within the pale of the church, although a point of some importance in itself, is not essential to our present argument; I shall, however, devote a page or two to the subject, for the purpose of excluding any probable exceptions; but must request that the bearing of it upon our inquiry concerning the deference that is due to Christian antiquity, may not be lost sight of. The case then stands thus.—

It has been frankly acknowledged by the advocates of "church principles," that they are barely indicated, if so much, in the canonical scriptures: and that they can never be satisfactorily sustained without the aid of the Nicene writers. This being admitted, we may suppose

an opponent to say, as a demur to the conclusion toward which I am tending, "It may be true that the writers who have been cited did express themselves too warmly, and with too little caution, on the subject of celibacy, and the excellence of the ascetic life; but there is good reason to think that, in doing so, they outran the general feeling of the church: in fact, indications may be gathered of the existence of a contrary opinion and feeling."

Be it so; and would that it had been so to a far greater extent than we are at liberty to assume. But then, in what position do we place the extant church writers, one and all; and what will be the value of their evidence in establishing church principles? If indeed these writers—that is to say, *all* who have come down to modern times, or all who are usually appealed to as authorities, in support of these principles, were in fact maddened by the ascetic phrensy, and if, under its influence, they forgot moderation, and virtually belied, or greatly overstated the general sentiment of the church, in their times; then, how can we venture to rely upon them, as our guides, in relation to those other church doctrines, such as the intrinsic efficacy of the sacraments, and the high bearing of the sacerdotal office, in relation to which the inducements were manifest and strong to overstep the limits of sobriety?

If, after all, the holy catholic church of the Nicene age, that is to say, the mass of Christians, was much more moderate and sound than we should suppose, in looking into the fathers (a most comfortable supposition, truly!) then it follows, that, in yielding ourselves to the guidance of these writers, we make ourselves the dupes of their personal enthusiasm and folly; and are just so far, and to that extent, led astray from what we are professing to admire, namely, "catholic purity." Most clearly,

the fathers, without whose aid, as it is confessed, church principles are not to be established, can be safely resorted to only on the strength of the contrary supposition, that they themselves were in harmony with the church of their times, and did truly represent its opinions, feelings, and practices.

But on the other hand, if (and as in fact is evident) the extant church writers *did* speak the mind of the great mass of Christians in their times, though not absolutely of all, and if, in the main, a true notion of the feelings and usages of the church catholic, be gathered from these remains, and if genuine church principles are embodied in the writings of Ambrose, Athanasius, Basil, and their contemporaries, then, without a question, the ascetic doctrine and practice—that is to say MONKERY, with its illusions, its frivolity, its pretensions, and its corruptions, was a principal and a darling element of this catholic system; and then moreover, if, on the authority of the Nicene fathers, the modern church is to adopt principles and practices which can in no other manner be sustained, there can be no consistency in rejecting (merely because we may not happen to like it) its fully-sanctioned ascetic system. Let us repress, if we can, the abuses to which that system has always been open; but the institute itself, with the doctrines on which it rests, wants no sanction on the part of the authority to which, in other matters, we are religiously bowing.

Take it then either way, our inference is saved.—If the ascetic mania was in fact more generally opposed than we have imagined it to have been, then the fathers are delusive guides, in regard to church principles; and they are especially to be suspected when they are known to have been exposed to the influence of powerful motives for running into extravagance. But if such opposition was

in fact of small amount, and if the church catholic went all the length of its teachers, then this church catholic—people and leaders, together,—was the victim of a system, which we must think false in principle, and fatal in its operation, and such as vitiates whatever it is mingled with. An opponent may take which alternative he pleases.

It may be gathered from the language of Chrysostom, on several occasions,\* that objections were raised against the prevailing practices by, probably, the laxer sort of professed Christians; and, also, that more than a few, in and out of the church, were accustomed to make a jest of the enormous follies, and the hypocrisy, and the shameless abuses, which disgraced the monkish system.† It cannot be imagined that in any age, or whatever may be the influence of the promoters of fanaticism, the common sense of mankind should be entirely overpowered, or that absolute silence should be imposed upon either the remonstrance of the wise, or the ribaldry of the profane. All the terrors of Rome, in the height of her pride, did not avail to protect the monks and the monasteries from the rebuke and contempt which they deserved.

In fact, the existence of a somewhat formidable opposition, and the prevalence of a whispered contempt, might be inferred from that very style of extravagance

\* Tom. i. p. 323, and the Treatise against the Impugners of the Monastic Life, *passim*.

† We may easily imagine what would be said and thought by the people at large, when the monks were seen, in open church, and during the celebration of the “terrible mysteries,” to be proffering all sorts of gallant attentions to the ladies, their companions. See the passage from which I have already cited some sentences, tom. i. p. 297.

in which the church writers indulge. Men of sense, unless provoked, and alarmed, do not often run so far upon a road where they are sure to be outdone by fools. There were, in fact, some serious protests made, from time to time, against the wide-spread infatuation of the general church; and we find each of its culpable superstitions on the one side, branded with merited reprobation, and, on the other, passionately defended by perverse ingenuity. But in each case the church catholic proved itself too strong for the dissidents, who were cursed, borne down, banished, crushed; and so the goodly structure of artificial piety was preserved from injury, and safely handed down to succeeding ages. Unhappily the protesting party, in these several instances, and the same is true, more or less, of every protest against popery, down to the time of Luther, took the obvious, but the ineffective course, of inveighing against *the particular superstitions* of the church; the objectors themselves, probably, not being conscious of that fatal departure from the first principles of Christianity whence all these errors had resulted. Luther, on the contrary, steadily held on his way, and actually brought about a reformation, because (divinely taught) he *felt* the apostacy of the church from the *gospel*, long before he had learned to disapprove of the prevalent superstitions; and he announced to the world the life-giving truth which the church had long lost sight of, while yet he himself submissively bowed before the papal chair.

Jovinian, Vigilantius, and others, upon whom Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine trampled, do not appear to have understood the secret reason of the errors they denounced. We should think so, judging merely from the failure of their endeavours to promote reform. What

their actual opinions were, is not to be ascertained; for we possess no evidence better than the reports of their malignant and triumphant antagonists, to confide in whom, in such a case, would be something worse than credulity; for it would involve a cruel injustice toward men who, by their very persecutors, have been denied the opportunity of appealing to the candour of posterity. The personal character of Jovinian, were it known, might enable us to form a better opinion of his doctrine: it would not, perhaps, be altogether safe to interpret the calumnies of his enemies, as so many testimonies to his virtue and piety. Nothing, however, contradicts the supposition that he honestly and religiously opposed the madness of his times: at least he did so courageously, and he suffered the consequence; for, having been *ecclesiastically* condemned at Rome, and Milan, he was *civilly* banished to a desolate island, where he ended his days.

In nearly the same path followed Vigilantius, who had been sustained, as it appears, by certain bishops. Proh nefas! exclaims the sanctimonious Jerome,\* *si tamen episcopi nominandi sunt, qui non ordinant diaconos, nisi prius. . . .* There *were* therefore some, and it is a consoling thought, who, notwithstanding the rabid asceticism of the church at large, adhered at once to common sense, and to the apostolic injunction, and who, knowing the peculiar temptations to which the clergy were exposed (especially in consequence of the easy

\* Jerome's Epistles, and Treatise, against Jovinian and Vigilantius, as they are not very long, will no doubt be read, or at least cursorily examined by the reader who has access to his works. This comprehensive reference may therefore be enough, on the present occasion. The Epistle to Vigilantius, particularly, deserves a perusal.

access allowed them to convents) wisely *required* that those whom they ordained should be married men. It was on *this very account*, and precisely because these bishops paid respect to the commandments of God, disregarding the foolish and wicked traditions of men, that this crabbed monk grinds his teeth at them, and would fain have stripped them of their dignities.

It does not appear, as I have already said, that Vigilantius, any more than Jovinian (or than later reformers, before the sixteenth century) knew how to lay the axe to the root of the superstitions of his times, by insisting upon those great principles of Christianity, which, when understood, exclude these follies in a mass, as by the force of an inherent energy, repelling whatever springs from another source. His protest therefore, although calm, reasonable, and not unsupported, died away; his party was crushed, and the doctors who trampled the remonstrants under their feet, had the satisfaction, in leaving the world, to see the ship of the church,\* in full sail, gaily decked with all the fool's colours and tawdry tatters which human wit could devise, and making its way, in gallant bearing, by favour of wind and tide, toward the haven which it at length reached under the pilotage of the Gregorys, and the Innocents of Rome. Jerome may fairly claim the praise of having sealed the fate of Christianity, for a thousand years, by the influence of his pernicious pen; and especially in crushing, as he had done, the rising tendency toward reformation. How different might have been the history of Europe, how different the spiritual condition and *fate* (if the word may be used,) of millions of mankind, if this learned and able writer—commanding the ear of the church,

\* Constit. Apost. lib. ii. c. 57.

eastern and western, had only once given place to a modest and religious doubt, as to the soundness of the prevailing notions. If, instead of heaping execrable scurrilities upon the heads of Jovinian and Vigilantius, he had mildly considered their remonstrances, and consented to look into the scriptures, to see "if these things were so," a new era might have opened upon the church. Alas! Jerome, the great apostle and pillar of "church principles," was conscious of no feelings, as a disputant, and when irritated, but those of a Torquemada!

But although these remonstrants, and others, did not, so far as appears, touch the spring of all superstition, they fully understood the oneness and consistency of the manifold inventions that had been heaped upon the church; and they felt that it was a living mass, connected by fibres, not to be severed without affecting the whole. Along with many diversities of opinion, a very remarkable agreement is to be observed, as to this point, among the remonstrants who, in succession, have assailed the prevailing corruptions of the church, from Jovinian, down to Luther, and this intimate connexion has been well understood on the other side; and, from Jerome, down to cardinal Cajetan and Tetzels, all have thoroughly known that, to amputate a limb of this body of superstition, was nothing else than to leave the whole to bleed to death. Our modern revivers of church principles, too, give indications enough of their consciousness of this harmony of the ancient notions and practices; and they are therefore restoring, one by one, all the parts and members of the Nicene church system.

Occasions such as those now before us, I mean the remonstrances which Ambrose, Syricius, and Jerome, united their efforts to crush, offer the means of applying a very satisfactory criterion to our own religious dispo-



sitions, individually, and I beg leave to avail myself of this criterion, as follows—

There are a few signal scenes in history, while contemplating which, every one's sympathies kindle, and pass over, entire, or nearly so, to the one side, or to the other:—our instinctive emotions, the momentary products of our characteristic dispositions, involuntarily wake up, and choose their part:—we declare ourselves Greeks or Trojans, whether we will or not. And there is reason in such instinctive movements. It may indeed be very true that, when we come to look narrowly into the personal qualities or private worth of the actors, in such critical scenes, there may appear to be a balance of merits; or at least all merit may not be on the one side, nor all demerit on the other. And farther, if the interests in debate are coolly and minutely examined, a candid observer may be compelled to acknowledge that there is, between the antagonists, a sort of partition, or breaking up of truth and error; it is not always, nor often, as it was when Copernicus and the church were debating concerning the solar system, that the one side is absolutely right, and the other is absolutely wrong.

Nevertheless, after all such allowances have been made, we impatiently return to the scene of action, and, without hesitation, resume our seats, on the one side, or on the other, of the stage, and give our chosen champion our hearts and prayers. Thus, for an example, a good Romanist looks on while the heretics, John Huss, and his disciple, are being consigned to the compassion of the civil power, to be dealt with as they may deserve: and so again, such a one waits to hear the incorrigible monk of Wittenberg sentenced to the flames, by Charles and his reverend assessors, at Worms; and sighs to think that the church was then defrauded of her revenge.

Now let any one take in hand Jerome's famous (infamous) letter to Vigilantius, and he will soon find toward which side his involuntary sympathies are tending. And let him not be prejudiced against "church principles" by the revolting malignity which breathes through every line of this epistle:—let Jerome's venom on the one side, and, on the other, the apparent mildness and reasonableness which distinguish the few sentences quoted from Vigilantius be put out of view, and then, looking at the mere controversy between the two men (the wolf and the lamb) let him choose his part. On the one side

\* The few sentences quoted by Jerome from Vigilantius, contain nothing that is offensive; and we may be pretty sure that, had there been any thing of this kind, it would have been adduced by his irritated adversary. On the contrary, his own two epistles, 59 and 60, cannot be read without the liveliest disgust:—they are the vigorous expression of the worst sentiments to which human nature is liable. Either to utter or to hear what Vigilantius had advanced, Jerome assures us, is "a sacrilege." He, better called Dormitantius, than Vigilantius, had opened his fetid mouth, fraught with a putrid stench, against the relics and ashes of the martyrs. He is a Samaritan, and a Jew, and a madman, disgorging a filthy surfeit. He is a useless vessel, which should have been shattered by the *iron rod* of apostolic authority. A tongue, he had, fit only to be cut out. He is a maniac, a portent, and one who well deserves with Ananias, Sapphira, and Simon Magus, to be consigned to eternal darkness—*non est crudelitas pro Deo, sed pietas*. Vigilantius is—a dog, a monster, a servant of the devil, a blasphemer, and of course, a heretic, as well as an ass, a fool, a sot, a glutton, a dreamer.—What! shall we listen to such a one, and then be compelled to condemn all the fathers—all the bishops—all Christian people, and all Christian princes? for *all*, says Jerome, have authorized, and approved and practised what Vigilantius condemns! This was very nearly true, and it was also true that the *quod ab omnibus*, was a mass of foolish and pestilent superstitions. The reader who has Jerome at hand, will doubtless peruse these epistles.

there are church principles, such as—the merits of holy virginity—the godly usage of pilgrimages to the tombs of the martyrs—the reverence, if not worship, due to the relics, and the images of the saints—the intercessory power of the saints in heaven—the expediency of the flambeau church vigils, and, in a word, all the principal articles of later and modern Romanism. Then on the other side there is a calm remonstrance against these practices and notions, founded on an appeal to scripture, and to the experience which the church had had of the ill tendency of all such usages.

Looking, then, at this controversy broadly, and without attempting to mince the particulars, or to make out fifty nice exceptions, let every one ingenuously say—was Jerome right, or was Vigilantius right? What is the verdict of our consciences? Was it well for the church that Jerome triumphed, or might it have been well if Vigilantius had been listened to? But before we reply, let us look to the consequences of our decision as affecting ourselves. If Jerome was in the right, and Vigilantius in the wrong, then Wickliff was wrong, and Huss was wrong, and Jerome of Prague was wrong, and Luther was wrong, and the English reformers, the founders of the protestant church in this country, were wrong; for all, in their turn, held substantially the same language, and the last named have left on record a protest, couched in language far more animated and severe than Vigilantius ventured to employ, against *the very superstitions* which he called in question.\*

But now, if in thus looking at this controversy of

\* It cannot be necessary to remind the clerical reader of the terms employed by the authors of the Homilies, when speaking of these same superstitions.

fourteen hundred years, concerning certain principles and observances, on the one side pretended to be godly and edifying, and on the other affirmed to be fatal, and subversive of Christianity—if, in so considering it, we decide that the English reformers, and that Luther, and Wickliff, and Huss, and Vigilantius, were right, then after taking *this side* of the argument, in what position do we find ourselves to be placed in regard to the Nicene church? I will boldly say that any attempt to draw an arbitrary line of distinction somewhere between the later reformers, and the remonstrants of Jerome's time, merely with the view of saving the Nicene church, would be equally frivolous, disingenuous, and unavailing; nor can I imagine that any such attempt will be made by honest and well informed men. Common sense rejects the endeavour to distinguish between things so nearly the same.

Disregarding then any such futile plea of exception, the Nicene church, with Jerome as its worthy representative and advocate, is seen to range along with the papacy, as the zealous and devoted admirer and patroness of SUPERSTITION, and as the intolerant and infatuated opponent of the authority of scripture.

Let it be imagined, however, that some persons, diffident of the guidance of common sense, and foreseeing the far-stretching consequences that must follow from a decision against Jerome, in this instance, will hold to the belief—a belief that they will not choose narrowly to scrutinize, that, after all, and although he might indulge a bad temper, and might go too far, he was nevertheless, in the main, right, and should be thought of gratefully, as having upheld “godly usages, and discipline,” against the liberalism of his times. Be it so: but let us take care not to violate historical justice.

Now, when we open the monkish legends of the middle ages, and find them crammed with revolting absurdities, such as almost sicken us of human nature, and bring our best convictions into peril, we do not hesitate to say—"Whatever this ascetic system might have been in its *bright days*, it had evidently got so far wrong, in these later times, as at once to paralyze the understandings, and to vitiate the moral sentiments, and to cauterize the consciences, of those who came under its influence." Thus we make our escape from the humiliating scene. But what if it shall appear that the monkery of the darkest ages does not surpass, a whit, in folly, extravagance, and moral ulceration, that of the times to which we have been used, inconsiderately, to attribute wisdom and purity? And what if this always-vicious system shall be found to have shed its corrupting and stultifying influence over even the most powerful, and the most accomplished minds? Shall we not at length be convinced that the entire scheme was of evil quality, when we find a man like Jerome, to be affected, from head to foot, with the "putrefying sores" of this spiritual scrofula?

The task of reporting Jerome's ineffable absurdities, just as they stand, without compromising the sacred things with which he mixes them, is indeed a difficult one; but I must attempt it, taking refuge under St. Bernard's axiom—*melius est ut scandalum oriatur, quam veritas relinquatur*.

The "Patriarch of Monks," who has been so often referred to in these pages, and who was adored, almost, by the Nicene church, and held up (as we have seen) as a pattern of Christian perfection by Athanasius, had been, it seems, in danger, at one time, of thinking too highly of his own incomparable merits. *Hæc in men-*

tum ejus cogitatio incidit, nullum ultra se perfectum monachum in eremo consedisse. And, for his humiliation, it was revealed to him that the unexplored depths of the wilderness had long hidden, from the view of mortals, a solitary, surpassing himself in the ascetic virtues, as far as *he* surpassed the generality of his order. He was therefore commanded to leave his monastery, and to go in quest of this immaculate pattern of sanctity. It was in his ninetieth year that he thus set out, propping his tottering frame upon a staff, and not knowing toward what quarter to direct his steps. Fainting under the fervours of noon, yet nothing doubting of his course, what should meet his eyes but—a centaur—a creature half man, half horse, quo viso, salutaris impressione signi armat frontem (what good catholic would not have crossed himself at such a sight!) The beast, however, was found to be more obliging in temper than might have been expected, and in reply to the saint's inquiry—"Whereabouts does the servant of God live?" he courteously pointed to the desired path, and then galloped off with the swiftness of a bird! The learned Jerome does not attempt to solve the weighty question, whether this centaur was a mere guise of the devil, or a real and substantial son of the wilderness. Be that as it might, St. Antony held on his way; but he had gone only a few steps farther, when lo! he beheld, in a rocky glen, a negro-snouted urchin, whose forehead budded horns, while his inferior parts were those of a goat; in a word, it was a genuine satyr! St. Antony, scutum fidei, et loricum spei, ut bonus præliator arripuit. Another friend, however, (whether beast or devil) presents himself under this ambiguous form; and one who was gifted, not merely with urbanity, and with the faculty of speech, but with reason and truth:—mortalis ego sum, et unus

ex accolis eremi, quos vario delusa errore gentilitas, faunos, satyrosque et incubos vocans colit. To exclude the incredulity of his readers, Jerome assures them that an animal of this very species, which had been brought alive to Alexandria, had been sent in pickle to Antioch, where it had been examined by the emperor. We must however cut short our story, and bring the holy monk to the cave of the still holier Paul, an eremite indeed, who, utterly, and long forgotten by man, had passed nearly a century in this seclusion, clad only with a wisp of the leaves of the palm tree, which also, during forty years, had supplied him with his only diet; since the failing of which he had received a ration of bread, daily, like Elijah, from heaven. Long did St. Antony knock, and earnestly did he pray before he could gain admittance. "Qui bestias recipis," said he, "hominem cur repellis? . . . . Quod si non impetro, hic moriar ante postes tuos: certè sepelies vel meum cadaver!" The door opens at this appeal, and nothing could be more sweet than the greetings and the discourse of the two anchorites. While chatting, a crow perches on the branch of a neighbouring tree, and then lays a *whole loaf* on the table; integrum panum ante ora mirantium deposuit! Now it seems that, for sixty years or more, this same almoner had brought the hermit, daily, *half a loaf*; but this day, a *whole loaf*! Dominus nobis prandium misit . . . . militibus suis duplicavit annonam! But now who should have the honour of splitting it in two? Long and ingeniously was this difficulty discussed, when at length it was agreed that, each holding his part, they should break it by their conjoined efforts! The reader should be told that all these edifying incidents are garnished with texts of scripture, which I must take the liberty to omit.

Again, to cut short our instructive narrative, we must briefly say that the hermit Paul, knowing that his own departure was at hand, enjoined St. Antony to fulfil the functions of his undertaker, and sexton, and executor; but first desired that he would return whence he came, and fetch, from his monastery, the pallium, given him by Athanasius, and wherein he would fain be wrapped for interment. Antony complies, retraces his weary way, with all speed, seizes the cloak, and returns breathless, fearing lest he should be too late to discharge the last offices to his dying friend. On his way he beholds a heavenly choir of prophets and apostles, and among them, the departed Paul, in snow-white robes! Too true a portent! The hermit had already breathed his last when St. Antony reached the cavern. After indulging his grief awhile, he bethinks himself of the duties of his office; but here comes the staggering difficulty! how shall he dig the grave, having neither spade nor shovel? While much perplexed, and well nigh in despair—*Moriar ut dignum est*. What should he see but a pair of lions scouring the hills, who, approaching the spot, and coming up to the corpse, signified, by many blandishments, and by wagging their tails, their sympathy with the saint, on the sad occasion: nor was this all; for they forthwith most humanely set about digging a grave for the defunct; and, strange to say—as exact to the measure, as the most expert sexton could have done it! *unius hominis capacem locum foderunt*; and then, having finished their task, and looking for their hire, they threw back their ears, licking St. Antony's hands and his feet:—*at ille animadvertit benedictionem eos a se precari!*—nor did the saint refuse them a remuneration so well earned:—blessed lions! We may leave them then, and him, to conclude the obsequies as they can, and



shall here cut short the legend. Is it enough; or need we adduce more of like quality from the same great doctor's other ascetic memoirs?\*

I do not ask whether the above savours of truth and piety and reason, a question which would be insulting to the reader, but whether it be in any way more deserving of regard than is the vilest legendary trash of the most besotted times of monkery?—From this rhodomontade, mixed up as it is with the sacred language of scripture, every sound mind turns with utter disgust. It is hard to imagine what that condition of the conscience could be, which might allow a man such as Jerome, to sit down, and deliberately string together these miserable inanities. 'That a stupid monk, who never had had a nobler thought, should do so, is what one may understand; but in the case of a man of vigorous intellect, one is driven to the alternative, either of supposing something like a *possession*, or infatuation, or otherwise must believe that he, and some other of his contemporaries, the makers and venders of the like commodities, having forbidden the perusal of the gentile classic literature to the laity, laboured to supply the place of it with what should be highly entertaining, and at the same time of a sort to stimulate the fanaticism, and to debilitate the reason of the people. This, however, would not be very unlike the "speaking lies in hypocrisy."

The gentile classic literature! May Plato and Xenophon and Cicero be mentioned in such a connexion? It is not without an emotion profoundly painful, that one turns from the turbid, frothy, and infectious stream of Jerome's ascetic writings, to the pellucid waters of pagan Greece and Rome.—Reason darkened indeed; but

\* Vita Pauli Erem.

it is *reason* still, and, moreover, reason, struggling toward the light; and exempt from virulence, from hypocrisy, and from absurdity. Such a contrast impresses the mind powerfully with a sense of the infinite mischief that has been done to mankind by men, who, when Christianity, with its simple grandeur, and its divine purity, was fairly lodged in their hands, and committed to their care, could do nothing but madly heap upon it, and often for selfish purposes, every grossness and every folly which might turn aside its influence, and expose it to contempt.

It may be a Christian-like and kindly office to palliate the errors, and to cloak the follies, and to give a reason for the false notions of the Nicene divines; but when, on the other side, one thinks of the long centuries of wo, ignorance, persecution, and religious debauchery, which took their character directly from the perversity of these doctors, it is hard to repress emotions of the liveliest indignation. As to Jerome, who coined afresh, and issued anew, all the superstitions of his age, and who sent them forward for fourteen hundred years, one can hardly think of him otherwise than as an enemy of his kind. By a line of causation, not very indirect, he has been the author of a hundred times more human misery (not to look into the hidden world) than was inflicted upon the nations by a Tamerlane.\*

\* In what manner Ambrose and Augustine treated the opposers of the ascetic system may be seen by referring to the following places:—Ambrose, addressing pope Symiacus (Epist. 42, class. i.) “his Lord and well-beloved brother,” includes Jovinian in a list of condemned heretics—Manichees and others, to whom no indulgence could be shown. These, whom the most benign emperor had execrated, and who were indeed deserving, as he says, “of all execration,” had been condemned, first at Rome and then at Milan, whence they had been driven—quasi profugus. Jovi-

## MONKERY AND MIRACLE.

As every one now knows that, in order to acquire a genuine acquaintance with history, we must examine the extant original materials of the times in question; so every one knows, that these contemporary materials are to be examined in the full light of our *modern* good sense, and general intelligence. To lose ourselves in the original documents, and to be charmed out of our wits by their antique fascinations, is to read Homer like

nian's opinion that there was no difference of *merit* between the married and the unmarried, is termed "a savage howling of ferocious wolves, scaring the flock." It is curious to find the great church authorities contending, with the most acrid zeal, for the *two* doctrines of the merit of virginity, and the efficacy of fasting, as if inseparable principles. Thus, Ambrose, Epist. 53, certain babblers had come in, qui dicant nullum esse abstinentiæ meritum, nullum frugalitatis, nullam virginitatis gratiam . . . Jovinian, it appears, had belonged to a monastery at Milan, where he had neither seen any luxury, nor been allowed any liberty of discussion. Augustine, in his *Retractations*, mentions the motives and occasions of his various works; speaking of the book *de bono conjugali*, he says, that the heresy of Jovinian had prevailed at Rome to such an extent, that several nuns, of whose purity there had been no previous suspicion, had been induced by it to fall into matrimony. But—huic monstro sancta ecclesia quæ ibi est, fidelissime et fortissime resistit. Nevertheless the poison, not having been altogether expelled, Augustine had thought himself called upon to apply a remedy. This remedy (with the bishop's mode of treating his adversary) is to be found in his several treatises—*de continentia*—*de bono conjugali*—*de virginitate*—*de conjugii adulterinis*—*de nuptiis*—*de bono viduitatis*—*de opere monachorum*—and, *contra Julianum*. In the book, *de Hæresibus*, Jovinian finds his place, and his alleged errors are particularly mentioned, c. 82, Cito tamen ista hæresis oppressa et extincta est, nec usque ad deceptionem aliquorum sacerdotum potuit pervenire.

a school-boy, who, for the moment at least, believes, not merely in Homer's heroes, but in his gods and goddesses. The lecturer upon *history* finds himself compelled, in giving *his* account of the ten years' war, to strip off from the *Iliad* a prodigious quantity of finery, and to make sad work, with poetry and crests, before Achilles, and Ajax, and Agamemnon, are reduced to their true dimensions, as blustering leaders of so many bands of brigands and pirates.\*

Now shall we allow a similar operation to be performed upon the *Iliad* of Nicene asceticism, or do we choose rather to keep a fool's paradise entire on this sacred ground. There is no need to go to Gibbon's school in this instance; in truth, the best security against the danger of finding ourselves there, in the end, is to be had in the prompt exercise of a sound and vigorous good sense. Renounce this good sense, and then we must either settle down in the flowery fields of Butler's *Lives of the Saints*—the fairy land of unbounded credulity; or else yield ourselves to a universal skepticism: and in fact, we are very likely to follow a path through the former, into the latter; that is to say, if we take our first lessons from Butler, to take our last from Gibbon.

Grant it, that the task of paring romance down to history, is an ungracious one. Nay, more; If it be *religious* romance that is in question, it will be hard entirely to avoid an ill consequence, thence accruing, incidentally, to our own religious sentiments. The mere circumstance of sitting, for some time, so *near* to the "seat of the scorner," is dangerous; but whose is the fault? not ours surely, who must remove an offence that has been placed on the path by others. It is the legend-mongers who have done the mischief. If good and

\* Thucydides, lib. i. c. 5.

learned men, like Alban Butler, will employ themselves in cramming twelve closely printed volumes with pious fables, outraging reason, history, and religion, and will then moor this *mole* of mud to our common Christianity, to the great peril of the credulous, and to the still greater peril of the incredulous, what is to be done? Some will say—let it alone—leave it to sink by its own weight; and truly nothing better could have been done, if it had not happened that this very mass of feculence is just now being attached anew to our protestant church.

“The Lives of the Saints!” who, now-a-days, thinks or cares about the Lives of the Saints? or who would waste an hour in the serious endeavour to expose to contempt such a farrago? Unhappily we are not yet free to treat with contemptuous silence what so well deserves it: and why we are not free is easily shown, as follows:—Let any one open Alban Butler’s volumes, at hazard, and without looking to the dates of the several lives therein related, let him select a few which appear the most ridiculously absurd, or which are, on any account peculiarly offensive, and I will venture to predict that these articles, so distinguished by their extravagance and folly, will turn out to be *Nicene*, and not *popish*. In fact, they will be found to be translations, nearly literal, from Athanasius, Basil, Palladius, Jerome, or some of their contemporaries. On the contrary, any lives that may appear to be less objectionable, and, in a sense, edifying, will be those of *modern Romanist* saints. If then the Lives of the Saints, *as a whole*, be worthy of contempt, the principal stress of this contempt falls, not upon the church of Rome, but upon the church catholic of the third and fourth centuries. I make this averment without fear of contradiction; and I recommend the fact to the reader’s consideration.

But let us come to particular instances, for the more we do so, the more must our present argument gather strength. Among the enormous and revolting fables of this vast collection—Butler's Lives of the Saints, I will suppose the reader to fix upon two, namely the life of Paul the hermit (above referred to) and that of St. Hilarion. But whence has the learned editor drawn these precious morsels? Is it from the stupid pages of some dreaming contemporary of St. Dunstan? No, it is from the vigorous and erudite tomes of Jerome—the most gifted of the Nicene divines! The uninitiated reader, however, is very likely to imagine that the popish editor has garnished his materials, and has added to them what might recommend them the more to the bad taste of his credulous and superstitious catholic readers. The very reverse of this is the fact. Let him see if it be not so: if Butler's version of Jerome's lives be examined, it will appear that, instead of rendering them *more* superstitious, and *more* miraculous, and *more* popish, he has made them much less so: he omits what is the most offensive, he softens extravagant phrases, he inserts extenuations, or plausible explanations of manifest incongruities, and altogether offers, to the modern reader, in the place of what in the original is utterly shocking, or in the last degree puerile, what *may* be read. In a word, the popish editor chastises the Nicene legend-monger; and in collating the two—the original and the version, a convincing proof is obtained of the fact that, much more reason, and more piety too, has belonged to the Romish, than ever belonged to the Nicene church. It is not to be doubted that there are devout Romanists who, while they might bring themselves to approve of Butler, would loathe Jerome (if not told that this Jerome was *Saint Jerome*.) That any *protestant* should, after examination, profess

to prefer Jerome, or Socrates, or Palladius, to Butler, I can hardly think possible, and will not believe.

But there is a point of justice involved in this comparison between the Romanist and the Nicene biographers, which it would be wrong to omit to mention. The excellent Alban Butler, an undoubting son of the church, set himself, at the distance of twelve centuries from the times in question, to collect edifying memoirs of the ancient ascetics; and having *first* taken the wise precaution of closing the window shutters of his library, within an inch of pitchy darkness, and having laid it down as a law, that he is never to enter upon any inquiry which, by possibility, might lead him whither his church forbids him to go, he, by these means, saves himself (at least in particular instances) from the flagrant guilt of putting forth as true, what he personally knew to be false. But how was it with the original compiler of these same stories? Jerome writes the lives of his contemporaries! Jerome was no simple soul, believing every thing from sheer guilelessness: he had trod the stage of the great world, and knew mankind; he had formed his taste by the study of Xenophon and Thucydides; he was thoroughly skilled in historical criticism; he was gifted with sagacity and judgment; and, as a literary forester, he had that sharp scent which enabled him to track a dead lion, if any such thing were actually in the wind: his temper moreover was of that corrosive quality which tends to the testing and the solving of adulterated articles. Now this Jerome compiles, at some length, the history of a certain wonder-working monk, his contemporary, who, in search, as he declared, of *seclusion* and oblivion, had traversed the principal countries of the Roman world—Egypt, Sicily, Italy, Greece, Syria; and wherever he went, he had wrought the most astounding miracles, emulating

those of Elijah, and of our Lord. If then these miracles were real, thousands of persons of all conditions, Christians and pagans, were able to attest them, in quality of eye witnesses; and hundreds might readily have been appealed to, if it had been thought desirable to institute any serious inquiry on the subject.

Was then Jerome himself a believer in these miracles? or did he ever ask himself, while dressing them up for the entertainment of the church, whether they were true or false? If he did believe them, so as to preclude the necessity of any investigation, how gross must have been the delusion to which he had surrendered his powerful and acute mind! But did he not choose to ask himself whether he believed them or not; and seeing that they tended to glorify the church, and to recommend monkery, and orthodoxy, did he give them all the advantage of his great reputation, mean while half, or more than half, suspecting them to be impious fabrications? I will attempt no solution of these difficulties, but will only say that, should I be hardly dealt with on account of my dealing with this Nicene doctor, I must hold up his lives of Paul and of Hilarion as my defence. To those who will profess to attach their faith to these prodigious legends, I have nothing to say; with those who think of them as they deserve, I am safe.

Affirmations of miraculous interposition, may, if untrue, float any where between delusion and fraud; and therefore they may involve various degrees of culpability, on the part of those who promulgate them. But no such narrative can float between *truth* and *falsehood*; for it must always be either true, or false, that the divine power has, in any alleged instance, diverted the ordinary course of nature. Now the Nicene ascetic system was either attested by a copious display of miraculous



powers (as affirmed by the principal contemporary writers) or it was not so accredited. If it were, then what is protestantism, and what is the English church, which does not embrace, nay, which has put silent contempt upon a divinely sanctioned, and most ancient and catholic institution? But if the contrary be true, then what was that system itself, and what the moral condition of the church which embraced and admired it, while it made the boldest pretensions—false and blasphemous pretensions, to the power of working miracles—miracles in which no room was left for illusion, and easy credulity? The reader will choose his alternative.

The question being then—What was the moral value of the ancient ascetic system, our FIRST reply is—That it was what it might be consistently with its pretensions to miraculous powers: and it should be remembered that, in the *fourth* century, if we put out of view the customary dreams, visions, and various forms of mere illusion, it was *none but the monks and hermits*, who claimed to work miracles; this credit therefore, or this stain—this glory, or this infamy, is the prerogative of the ascetic institute.\*

A SECOND reply to the question in hand, I have in part anticipated, and shall not pursue the topic farther; merely stating the fact that the ascetic institute was, in a moral sense, such as it was likely to be, seeing that it had been adopted, with no material modification, from the ancient gymnosophists, and the Buddhist sages.

\* Of several of the ancient hermits, there is reason to think better than that they should themselves have pretended to the powers attributed to them. The lie was that of their biographers. Thus the nonsense and knavery attributed by Palladius to Macarius, the Egyptian, are utterly contradicted by the spirit of his writings. It was the besotted companions and disciples of some

## MONKERY, THE RELIGION OF SOUTHERN EUROPE.

A THIRD reply to the inquiry concerning the moral condition and influence of the ascetic institute, turns upon a consideration of what has always been (at least during the last eighteen hundred years) the physical and moral characteristics of the nations bordering upon the Mediterranean. Unless we are resolved to shut our eyes to plain matters of fact, facts of this class must be taken into account, whenever we look into the materials of the religious history of these nations. Not to do so is to take up sheer romance, for solid history; and moreover, as one error implies more, we shall really be doing the ancient church a great injustice, at the moment when we are wishing to enhance its credit; for the same reasonable considerations which forbid our being duped by its romantic professions, supply also an apology for its follies, and a palliation for its grievous faults.

During the last two thousand years, what has been the state of manners and morals in all the countries between the thirty-fifth and the forty-fifth parallels of latitude, and between the Caspian and the Atlantic? These zephyr-breathing and garden lands of the world have presented, throughout this course of time (or only with partial and transient exceptions) a social condition intimately disordered by the want of moral tone; and parallel with this ill habit of the social mass, there has run on a religion which, while it has very faintly affected the many, or to any good purpose, has spent its force upon a few, and

of these good men who patched up the legend of their "virtues," as soon as they were gone.

these few so removed by artificial distinctions from their fellows, as to do little or no good, by their example. Throughout these countries, and during this lapse of ages, there have been the *EXTREMES* in morals, but no *MEAN*.

The philosophy of the moral, political, and religious history of southern Europe, turns upon this very fact. *Northward* of the forty-fifth parallel (in Europe) may be found—a generally diffused animal health, and a physical robustness—and a wide middle class in society—and a breadth of opinion and feeling—and a soberness and mild liberality of judgment, and a dislike, and an avoidance of, *enormities* of conduct, and sentiment; none of which important elements of national well-being can be predicted of the south.

Before the absolute *moral merit* of the nations, respectively, who occupy these two geographical bands, can be ascertained, many intricate questions must be gone into; but mean time, the *characteristics*, above stated, remain undisturbed. And then, if, on this ground, the nineteenth century is to be compared with the third or fourth, it will appear that the *difference* which marks the lapse of time, attaches almost entirely to the north of Europe, where every thing, in that interval of time, has been regenerated, or absolutely created: while the south, amid many apparent revolutions, has remained substantially the same—physically, morally, and religiously. Indeed, whenever the ancient and the modern worlds are compared (and by *ancient*, I now intend the declining period of the Roman empire) the difference discoverable is such as results, chiefly from that creation of a *broad mean*, in the social, political, and religious spheres, which has come about in *northern* Europe, during the last five centuries.

The tendency of (pure) Christianity is always to *create*

*a mean* in society, or as we may say, to consolidate and extend the political, social, and moral terra firma, or wide continent of common interests, and ordinary or standard sentiments. Wherever the gospel is to get a footing in a country, the proclamation is of this sort,—“Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth.” Not indeed that Christianity is a *levelling* doctrine, in the cant, modern sense of the term; but yet its gradual operation is to call into existence a mean, wherein, and whereupon, the extremes of high and low may meet, and be reconciled. Let a pure Christianity now take its course in Turkey, and what would be the political and social consequence, after a few years, but to blend the discordant elements of the national system; and first to create, and then to empower, a middle class, and a middle doctrine, and a middle influence, which should at once elevate the degraded, and chastise and control the proud? In this happy sense Christ’s doctrine is indeed revolutionary.

Christianity was, in fact, just about to work this its proper effect upon the Roman world, and was making a happy commencement by putting woman into her long lost place, and by giving her personal virtue, and reverence and influence, without which, as there is no healthy condition of the domestic system, so there can be no national virtue, or liberty, or elevation of character. This happy change was commencing, when the ascetic fanaticism came in; *first*, to poison the domestic system, at the core, by its hypocritical prudery, and its consequent separation of the sexes; and *secondly*, to turn off the fertilizing current of the most powerful and elevated senti-

ments from the field of common life, and to throw them all into the waste-pipe which emptied itself upon the wilderness. We use no figure, or a figure only in the terms, when we say that the mighty waters of Christian moral influence, which would have renovated the Roman world, and have saved the barbarism of a thousand years, was, by the ascetic institute, shed over the horrid sands of Egypt and Arabia—there to be lost for ever!

It was as if, on a rich and virgin soil, favoured by the sun, one were to find the plough, and the spade, and the various implements of husbandry, employed, by a stupid race, not upon the teeming lands, but in vainly enscalping the surface of rocks, and in bootlessly furrowing the faithless sands of the shore! Such, in a word, was that perversion of the moral force of the gospel which was imbodyed in the ancient asceticism. Southern Europe was therefore left to be *southern* Europe still, for another cycle of centuries, and monkish fanaticism, with its celibacy and its fastings, has continued now these fifteen hundred years, to be the grim antithesis of a wide-spread dissoluteness of manners. In Portugal, Spain, the south of France, Italy, Sicily, and the islands about, during all this lapse of time, while very few temperate and virtuous husbands and wives have blessed the common walks of life, monks and nuns, of ambiguous character, have swarmed from religious houses. Little or no national morality has been seen there; but more than enough of the madman's imitation of virtue and piety. Throughout these countries, and during these ages, few families have been blessed with purity and peace; but miracles have been a going on all hands; the green leaf and sweet fruits of piety have not covered the fields; but the seculars and regulars, like a perpetual visitation of locusts, have brooded on the waste.

In passing, fresh and full-fraught with English feelings, from our northern latitudes to the south or Europe, every one feels strongly that the degrading superstition of the common people is not a doctrine and practice that have invaded these countries, oppressing and corrupting the social system, but rather, that it is the spontaneous and congenial religion of races distinguished by physical debility, by relaxation of principle, by abjectness of soul, by ferocity, and by actual debauchery. The gospel, even now, would indeed bring in upon these very people, the energy of moral health, and it would have done so in the times of Diocletian; but those who were then intrusted with it, mistook its spirit, and in holding forth a crazed asceticism as the only genuine virtue, they left the mass of the people just such as they found it—debauched, ferocious, superstitious; and such, with transient exceptions, have they continued, under the influence of the very same system, from that time to this.

Beside many differences, affecting the mere surface of society, and which belong to our general civilization, as distinguishing modern from ancient southern Europe, there is one moral and ecclesiastical point of contrast, which I would not overlook; and it is this—The church, in the fourth century, was moving down a declivity: whereas at present, and long since, it has reached its point of lowest depression, upon a dead level. Now, so long as this decline was in progress, all persons of fervent mind, conscious of the general movement, struggled mightily to arrest it. This eager and anxious struggle is then that which gives vehemence and animation to the hortatory compositions of the Nicene age. The great preachers and writers, whom we have occasion so frequently to name, stood midway, and breast-high in the torrent; and how passionately do they contend for their footing, and how manfully do they fight the billows!

There *was*, therefore, a resistance, an agony, an animation belonging to the church in the fourth century, which do not belong to it (in the same countries) at present. Yet it would be going much too far to affirm that the moral condition of the mass of society was better then than it is now, *on the same soils*. There is an abundance of evidence proving the extreme corruption of manners in the era now in question; nor can it be requisite, in this place, to enlarge upon so trite a subject. It is, therefore, a sheer illusion—although it be one easily followed, which would assume our *northern* and *English* notions of morality—the morality of our sober middle classes, and then, attributing any such state of things to the social system in the fourth century, and to the nations bordering the Mediterranean, imagine that the ascetic virtues of those times stood high above any *such* level of morals. In taking our idea of the Nicene monastic life from the romantic descriptions given of it by its credulous admirers, we think of it as an obelisk, pointing to the skies, the base of which rested on firm level ground, and on a ground of *general* virtue and piety. It was in fact no such thing:—the Nicene asceticism rose out of a bog, and it barely kept its apex above the wide-spread corruption: or it was like those monuments of Egyptian magnificence which just peep out of the deluge of sand that has long smothered the glory of so many temples and palaces.

The ancient ascetic virtue, far from being lofty *absolutely*, was barely so *relatively*; and indeed, if we are to trust some of its best informed advocates, it had actually worked itself down a good way below the general level of decency, temperance, and continence. It was therefore very far from being, what we are likely to imagine it to have been, when we read carefully selected specimens of ascetic piety.

## MORAL QUALITY OF THE ASCETIC INSTITUTE, AS IT AFFECTED THE MONKS THEMSELVES.

THE evidence of history forgotten, and our better Christian notions laid aside, it is then easy for an ardent and serious mind to follow the hermit into his wilderness, or the monk into his cloister, with a vivid sympathy. In fact, the real difficulty with persons of imaginative temperament, is to repress that yearning of the soul for seclusion and meditation, which impels them to enter upon the same flowery path. There are those, and it is more than a very few, to whom the course of *self-denial* is—the continuing to live in the midst of the turmoil, the duties, and the enjoyments of common life; and to whom the course of *self-indulgence* would be that of dreaming existence away in a cloister, or on the sunny side of a mountain, far remote from the haunts of man. He is the Epicurean, who surrenders himself to the leading of his personal tastes, without regard to duty, or to the welfare of others: now, these tastes may be of a sensual kind, or they may be imaginative, or they may be intellectual, or they may be a mixture of all, and we may call them religious; but surely a wonderful mistake rests with those who, while they are giving an unbridled swing to their particular inclinations as contemplatists or intellectualists, and are leaving the world to go its own way; yet speak disdainfully of the glutton, or of the voluptuous, as Epicureans, and speak boastfully of themselves as self-denying men! A poor proof of self-denial, surely, to wear a filthy hair shirt, and to wait until after sunset for one's breakfast, if, in doing so, a man thoroughly pleases *himself*, and no one else! No voluptu-



ary is so uniform or so thorough-going in self-pleasing, as the hermit, who, while he permits some charitable dupe to bring him his weekly rations of bread, makes it his glory never to see, to speak to, or to thank his benefactor.

The capital illusions of the anchoret being duly allowed for, then it is easy to believe that he may have had his virtues, of a certain sort, and his devotion, too, and his high-wrought unearthliness: but, then, no descriptions which we may meet with of the loftiness or of the deliciousness of the anchoretic or monastic life, ought for a moment to make us forget its inherent selfishness, and its direct contrariety to the spirit and precepts of the gospel. 'The institute can never be proved to be abstractedly good, by any amount of this sort of incidental recommendation; and it is clear that whatever recommendations, of this sort, we may allow to have attached to the *early* ascetic life, attach much more decisively, and with fewer drawbacks, to the institute as we find it regulated in later times, and when it came under the eye of the Romish church.

To any then who would indignantly ask—"What! do you make no account of the pure and holy lives of multitudes of the ancient solitaries?" We may reply—Yes, we make much of them, even after we have righted the balance by considering how much selfishness, and how much delusion, entered into the whole system. But then we ought to make still more account of what is really more pure and holy, and is far less open to suspicion, and is better relieved by instances of learning and utility, I mean the monkery of modern times. As to any practical inference, drawn from the assumed sanctity of the ancient solitaries, in favour of the *system*, à for-

tiori may such an inference be made good in favour of the Romish monastic orders. If, then, this hair-cloth Epicureanism is to be restored among us, it would be idle to think that we could do better than follow the model of the Benedictines, or the Franciscans.\*

It is, however, necessary to descend a little farther toward particulars. With this view I will now offer some considerations, and adduce some evidence, tending to exhibit the moral quality of the ascetic institute according to its THEORY, and assuming it to have been what its authors intended, and as good in fact as some of its admirers represent it to have been. We must afterwards inquire what its moral influence was under its actual condition; and under each of these heads we must advert, on the one hand to the case of those who came *within* the enchanted circle, and on the other, to that of those who stood *without* it.

I here substitute the phrase—the *ascetic institute*—it being remembered that celibacy was the prime article of that institute; the more comprehensive term being employed, because it is not practicable so to analyze the *moral result* of the entire system, as to be able to assign its precise amount of influence, in the general product, to the *celibacy* as distinguished from the abstinences, the mortifications, the seclusions, and the other observances of the monastic life.

The greatest possible advantage is given to the Nicene asceticism by deriving our notions of its THEORY† from

\* “By all which I have ever read of the old, and have seen of the modern monks, I take the preference to be clearly due to the last, as having a more regular discipline, more good learning, and less superstition among them than the first.”—*Middleton*.

† By *Theory* I mean the system entire—*contemplative*, and *practical*, as imbodyed in the Monastic Constitutions, and in Basil's ascetic treatises and epistles.

the writings of Basil, inasmuch as this eminent man leaves out of his system many of those offensive enormities which attached to it as practised in Egypt and Syria; and at the same time he includes many excellencies and embellishments which others did not allow.

Take this scheme of life, then, at the best, and supposing it exempt from all suspicion, it is, in its very idea, a moral suicide. The suicide violates the often quoted rule—*non est injussu imperatoris*, &c., by the sword or the rope; the ascetic does so as effectually by his vow. Under colour of piety, the monastic system is a course of contumacy towards the government of God; or a wilful and captious rejection of the part assigned to a man, and the taking up, without leave, another part, in compliance with a fastidious, infirm, self-indulgent, or morose temper. It was a behaviour like that of a humoured and fractious child, who will be very good just so long as you allow him to please himself, and to sit sullen in a corner, but who breaks out into passion the moment you attempt to control him. As the ascetic had set out with a total misapprehension of the spirit of Christianity and of the scheme of salvation, so did he fall into the most extreme error in regard to the very nature of virtue, which is not a celestial phantasy, that may be realized if a man is allowed to shape every thing about him to his mind, but a terrestrial excellence, consisting in the adherence to fixed principles, under external circumstances of whatever kind, and even the most disadvantageous. This is the very turning point in the discrimination between *real* virtue and every sort of counterfeit, that it is—the acting uniformly, or with an invariable purpose, under and amidst all diversities, and those the most perplexing, of external circumstances; or, as we technically say, “temptations.” “I will be

virtuous," says the ascetic, "if only you will let me chalk out my own path." While those who alone really deserve to be called virtuous are confronting every species of difficulty, opposition, and seduction, upon the rugged common of the open world, the nice ascetic turns off upon a level gravel-walk, between two walls, and there, forsooth, he too will be virtuous!

An inquiry, therefore, concerning the moral quality of the ascetic scheme, according to its theory, might fairly be cut short by the previous exception—There can be no *virtue* of a genuine sort in a system of conduct which allows a man to evade whatever duties he happens to dislike. Among the many illusions which meet us on all sides in the Nicene church none, therefore, was more gross than that involved in the customary language of the admirers of the ascetic life, who spoke of it always as the highest style of *virtue*. Just as well point to a marble statue, whether it be of a Socrates, or of a Silenus, of a Diana, or of a Bacchus, would make no difference, and say, "See what temperance is here imbodyed, what command of the passions, what unruffled fortitude, what angelic purity, what indifference to the pleasures and honours of the world!" Not so, for these excellencies are the qualities of a conscious voluntary agent, and can never be predicated of a block of marble. And so, it is not the ascetic, in his cell or cloister, who may justly be called temperate, pure, self-denying, heavenly-minded; but rather the man who, surrounded by the ordinary inducements to act and feel otherwise, nevertheless holds control over "the lusts and desires," as well of "the flesh as of the mind."

And what if, after thus incurring the guilt of moral suicide, and after running away, as he thinks, from all temptations, the monk is found, by his own confession,

to have become the abject and conscience-smitten slave of heart-burning impurities.\* A Christian man, living in the midst of every social relation, and calmly going in and out among the occasions of common life, yet practically remembers that, "his body is the temple of the Holy Ghost." The ascetic, following implicitly the holy Basil's instructions, vows chastity;—and in fact violates it every hour of his existence: he subscribes to Basil's rule never to speak to, to touch, or look upon a woman (unless by the most absolute necessity.†) But shall we listen—no we would not listen to the ascetic's own pitiable description of his conflicts with "*the adversary*." If there be any thing at all belonging to the moral nosology of human nature, which is at once horrible and loathsome, it is that idea of the ascetic agonies which we cannot but gather from incidental confessions abounding in the ascetic writings. Is then the monk's actual condition—physical and moral, a desirable one? and is his the choicest style of virtue—is *he* the chaste and virtuous man compared with the Christian husband and father?

It is easier to allow there to have been a certain order of *piety*, than any kind of *morality*, among the ascetics. Let it be granted that, to condemn the debilitated stomach to churn saliva from sun-rise to sun-set, might possibly promote devotion, but assuredly, there is *nothing* in

\* Ego....sæpe choris intereram puellarum: pallebant ora jejuniis, et mens desideriiis æstuabat...Jerom. ad Eustach. "Listen not," says Ephrem, "to the enemy who whispers thee, *οὐ δυνατὸν παυσασθαι τὴν πυρᾶσιν ἀπο σοῦ, εἰ μὴ πληρηφορήσῃς τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν σου*," p. 161. Oxford. Expressions of similar import abound in the ascetic writings. It is impossible to doubt what was the real mental condition of many of the ascetics, perhaps of most.

† Const. Monas. c. 3.

such a discipline which we can call morality. There is morality in "speaking evil of no man," but no morality in not speaking at all. There is morality in not eating more than is good; but none in not eating at all. There is morality in acting, speaking, and thinking, chastely, when the temptation to do otherwise is presented; but none in avoiding those temptations which, in fact, are the least to be feared, while those are foolishly incurred which are the most insidious, and the most likely to take effect. There may indeed have been pure and holy ascetics; but then their *asceticism* was no ingredient of their holiness or purity; nor even a means toward it; but on the contrary, and by their own confession, it was always a greater impediment than the actual trials of common life could have offered. With the same grace, and the same inclination towards virtue, they would have made much more proficiency if relieved from the intolerable load of their "rule," than they did, as burdened by it.

A man may, in the wantonness of his presumption, impose upon himself some task so difficult, and so idle, as that, while actually making the most prodigious efforts, the visible result is little or nothing; as if one were to resolve to walk always on the heel and the toe, without allowing the sole of the foot to touch the ground, and mean while, not to exhibit any awkwardness of gait, or to fall behind others: terrible would be the torment and toil of such an exploit; and a man, using his feet naturally, might walk twenty miles for one, with the same fatigue. Now the ascetics, or *athletæ*, as they were called, sweating and wasting themselves to skeletons, on the tread-wheel of their devout task-work, what did they do but just effect a useless rotation! So difficult as they confess, and so arduous, was the mere rou-

tine of the religious life, that a monk had no chance of acquitting himself tolerably well, unless he surrendered himself, body and soul, to the work. To get through with the daily and nightly task of prayers, psalm-singing, watchings, scourgings, fastings, and all this time to keep "the *enemy*" at bay, that is, to exclude the most abominable imaginations, was the utmost that mortal powers might be equal to. Not a particle of moral force, therefore, was left at large to be employed in the reasonable duties of a useful Christian course. The *ασκησις* was a task for a Hercules, and it would have been cruel to have demanded from a wretch thus worn down by excessive toils, any thing more than his rule prescribed.

Those who, on Christian and reasonable principles, exercise themselves daily in "godliness and virtue," personal and relative, find that they have enough to do, without undertaking any such supererogatory labour as that of removing a heap of sand, in a sieve, from one side of the monastery garden to-day, only that they may have to return it, by the like means, to its former position to-morrow.

From the general tenor of the ascetic memoirs it appears clearly that almost the whole moral and spiritual energies of the soul were spent and exhausted upon the *artificial* part of the system of discipline; and indeed it is but too evident, that, with more than a few, the defence of the *citadel* of monastic virtue, consumed the entire forces of the mind and body. Is such a system then a wise and eligible one, and likely to promote morals and real virtue on broad ground? Even if we could believe that it *did* secure, for the monk, a higher place in heaven, the ascetic practice cost him nearly all his virtue on earth. By virtue we ought to mean *αρετη*, in the Christian sense of the word, that is to say, a quality of

actions, and of dispositions, and habits, marked by vigour, animation, and productiveness. What is, or can be, the *virtue* of the inert, or of the imbecile, or of the frivolous, or of the abject? at the best, it is only a languid semblance of the shining reality, like the dimmed, flickering image of the sun, reflected from a puddle: and such, generally speaking, was the virtue of the monks.

Let the reader, after perusing Basil's Monastic Constitutions, and those expounded, or drawn into detail in Cassian's Institutes, imagine what would be the effect which such a system must produce upon his own conduct and sentiments. Consider the principal elements of this system:—beside the vow of celibacy, and the other rigorous rules and abstinences of the ascetic life, the monk was removed from the influence of every one of those motives which impart energy to the human mind; and he was at the same time brought under the influence of every motive which tends to break down its force, to dissipate its individual purposes, and to reduce it to a condition of hopeless degradation, and ineptitude.

Not content with forbidding to marry, the ascetic Lycurgus sternly demanded of the monk, that, as far as possible, he should break connexion with his nearest relatives, and literally cease, henceforward, to know his parents, brethren, and sisters, according to the flesh! a measure this which, how severe soever, was found to be an indispensable condition of the conventual life, and necessary to the enforcement of obedience. Such was the first iron-hearted lesson of this schooling in celestial virtue! It is curious to contrast these atrocities of the *system*, with the actual fact, not merely that the monks, though estranged from their *natural* connexions, were used to buzz from house to house, meddling with whatever they should have let alone, but that, whenever the



opportunity presented itself, these holy persons, who had devoted their lives to celestial contemplations, pushed themselves into courts, and palaces, and halls of justice, and into the tents of military commanders, taking it upon themselves to overrule secular affairs, of every kind, with a high hand.\* Thus it was that the men who had renounced marriage, actually lived in shameless concubinage; and that those who had disowned their parents and nearest relatives, were the common mischief makers in families; and that those who had proclaimed themselves the citizens of the heavenly country, undertook the administration of the world's affairs, and would be foremost in the control of fleets and armies!

It was the unalterable law of the monastic institute, that a monk should retain no personal property—scarcely his right in the filthy rug that covered his shoulders. The *pecuniary* consequences of this rule we have not now particularly to do with, but it is easy to see in what way it would operate to animate the zeal of the chiefs, the bishops and abbots, who were the fund-holders, in

\* “Voici une étrange contradiction de l'esprit humain. Les ministres de la religion, chez les premiers Romains, n'étant pas exclus des charges et de la société civile, s'embarrassèrent peu de ses affaires. Lorsque la religion chrétienne fut établie, les ecclésiastiques qui étaient plus séparés des affaires dumonde, s'en mêlèrent avec modération: mais lorsque, dans la décadence de l'empire, les moins furent le seul clergé, ces gens, destinés par une profession plus particulière à fuir et à craindre les affaires, embrassèrent toutes les occasions qui purent leur y donner part; ils ne cessèrent de faire du bruit partout, et d'agiter ce monde qu'ils avaient quitté.

“Aucune affaire d'état, aucune paix, aucune guerre, aucune trêve, aucune négociation, aucun mariage ne se traita que par le ministère des moines; les conseils du prince en furent remplis, et les assemblées de la nation presque toutes composées.”—*Montesquieu, Grand, des Rom. cap. 22.*

trumpeting the delights and rewards of the monastic life. Vast wealth, by this very means, came under the control of spiritual persons. But we now think only of the monk, individually. Manual labours were indeed a part of his daily discipline; but then this labour was the cheerless druggery of a slave;—a slave of the most abject class; for never could he improve his condition, by his exertions: toil was *toil* without a motive. Often it was a task imposed simply as a proof and trial of implicit obedience: he was enjoined to dig, and to fill in—to carry, and to re-carry, to build and to pull down. Could the energy of *virtue* survive these vilifying exercises? Is a man found, in fact, to retain his dignity, as the image of God, or does he reserve to himself that individuality of purpose which is the very ground of his accountableness, when thus, or in any such way, he is trodden in the dust? The intelligible and stimulating motives which ordinarily prompt men to spontaneous exertions, afford also the fulcrum of all active virtue. Even those virtues of which there was so much talk in the Nicene church, as for example almsgiving, were rendered impracticable by the monastic rules. A monk who could never be master of an obolus, how could he practise that capital virtue, apart from which, according to the authorized doctrine of the church itself, even virginity could not secure admission into heaven?

The demands of morality are not to be acquitted in single acts; nor are habitual duties to be transacted wholesale. The monk, who, just as the reluctant miser makes his will, did all the charity of his life, at one stroke, in resigning his estate to the church or monastery, did none at all, in the eye of reason or Christianity;—Christian almsgiving is the imparting, daily, or as occasions arise, to the needy, something which is a

man's own, and which he might retain to his proper use.

Inasmuch as genuine morality is the doing right, when the doing wrong is possible, so, just in proportion as the personal independence and liberty of an agent is restricted, his sphere of moral excellence is narrowed. And here let it be noticed that, although you may impose many restraints upon a man's visible, bodily, or civil liberty, while yet you leave him in possession of that liberty of the soul without which he ceases to be accountable, and apart from which he can practise no real virtue—in proportion as restraint touches the soul itself, and passes inward, from the visible behaviour, to the very centre of the moral nature, the man is deprived of that liberty whence virtue takes its commencement. Thus, an over-anxious and rigorous parent is sometimes seen to keep so stern an eye upon, not the conduct merely, but the inmost sentiments of a child—looking into his very soul, that the victim of this well-meant cruelty, while precluded perhaps from overt acts of disobedience, is also denied the very possibility of becoming in any genuine sense, good and virtuous. Now, in the monastic system, taking the theory of it from Basil, where it is to be found in its mildest and least offensive form, not only was every part of the monk's exterior conduct, even to the most trivial circumstances of personal behaviour, prescribed, and compliance exacted under severe penalties; but an unreserved confession, to the superior or to his deputy, was enjoined; and not merely the confession of delinquencies in *conduct*, whether more or less important, but every faithlessness or failure of the spirit, and every wandering of the desires, was to be ingenuously and punctiliously exposed: and this discipline was to be carried up into the recesses of

the soul, until the victim of it had surrendered the last wrecks of his moral nature, and had allowed the foot of his spiritual tyrant to trample upon the pitiful residue of those personal affections which make a man, a man. And this scheme of execrable despotism was glorified by all the heads and leaders of the Nicene church, as a school of "divine philosophy," and as a high training of heavenly virtue!

Virtue!—the last life blood of virtue, or of the energy whence virtue might have sprung, was bled out of the tortured monk, drop by drop, and then the needless severity of binding him, hand and foot, and of bandaging his eyes, and of gagging him, was exacted, and after all, the wretch, reduced to this syncope of the moral nature, was exhibited as a faultless pattern of holiness, the *αγλαμυα* of all excellence, earthly and heavenly!

Such was the Nicene monkery in its theory, and upon too many the theory took effect, in all its intensity of cruelty and horror, or in its sad efficacy to produce the apathy and vacuity of mind and heart of an idiot. But in fact, and, as appears, in the greater proportion of instances, every kind of irregularity, and the grossest licentiousness came in to mitigate this theory, in its operation, and so to relieve the cold horrors of the monastery by swamping it with corruptions. A wretched state of any system truly is that in which the only relief that can be looked for from the pressure of tyranny, is what may slip in through the sewers and sluices of profligacy! So it was, precisely, in the Nicene monasteries and convents. To look *at* them in the constitutions of the Cappadocian bishop, is to feel amazement, but to look *into* them, through the remonstrant pages of Chrysostom, and Jerome, is only to be filled with contempt.

As often as any stern and fanatical renovator came into

the management of these religious houses, a return was made to the *theory* of the system, which, taking effect upon the sincere and simple-hearted, and reducing others to outward decorum, seemed to work wonders. Such a reform, just lasting out the life-time of its mover, quickly gave place to the ordinary state of things; leaving the institute to what may well be called its natural condition of mingled fanatical and puerile absurdity, of idiot-like inertness, and of shameless profligacy.

He must be a bold Quixote who should undertake to show that such has not been the *ordinary* condition of the monkish institute from age to age. Or if there are times in its history which might claim an exemption, certainly the period with which we have now to do was not such a time:—it was not, if we are to receive the report of the best qualified contemporary witnesses; and especially if we may interpret, on principles of common sense, the incidental allusions to the state of things around them, which these witnesses have let fall.

And why should we not deal in this rational manner with the materials in our hands? On what grounds do they claim to be handled with a credulous reverence? The canonical writings do not ask for any such indulgence, why then should the Nicene? But to peruse them in the unrestrained exercise of a vigorous good sense, is to convince oneself that the Nicene monkery was altogether less deserving of respect than that of almost any other age. It would indeed be easy to “get up” a representation which should seem to contradict this averment. Single homilies and treatises may be picked out of the mass, which would charm the uninitiated. But let the same method be applied to a rather later period, and we must acknowledge it to be fallacious. Suppose,

for example, we take the *De Imitatione Christi*, and assume that the occupants of cloisters, generally, in the author's time were such as he himself was.—First let us look into the caustic writings of the author of the *Laudatio Stultitiae*, who assuredly will prove a safer guide to the historical inquirer.

There was indeed a Thomas à Kempis in the fifteenth century, and there were many kindred spirits, dispersed among the monastic orders at the same time. There was a Macarius in the fourth century; and a “seven thousand,” unknown to the world, but reserved by sovereign grace in an age of wild fanaticism and wide-spread profligacy—religious and irreligious. Religious profligacy!—I mean the hardened licentiousness of men and women who, while making the loftiest pretensions, were living in the practice of the foulest vices; or, to say the least and the best that can be said, were so living, just within the pale of ostensible virtue, as to show that their heart and mind were always wandering beyond it. There will be false members attached to the purest communities; but the plain import of Chrysostom's representations compels us to believe that, among the professors of asceticism, in his times, the pure were the excepted few, while the shameless practices against which he inveighs characterized the conduct of the many. “I do not speak of all,”\* says the indignant yet cautious preacher. What does this mean, but that he *did* speak of most, when he charged the monks and nuns with the most flagitious indecencies?

“To such a pass have things come now-a-days, that a Christian man or woman had better be married than profess virginity.” Ah, how much better, could but the

\* Chrysost. tom. i. p. 306.

Nicene church have understood so simple a truth! Not understanding it, thousands, and tens of thousands, of souls were driven on, till they had reached a condition more frightful than any other which an accountable being can occupy. The profligacy of the sensual and giddy herd of mankind has no such appalling aggravation attaching to it as that which attends the course of those whose intemperance has the blackness of hypocrisy, whose excesses are a sacrilege, who go into the temple of God with the language of devotion, every syllable of which, coming from such lips, is a blasphemy; and who retire from the church to chambers of wantonness, clad in a garb which should sear them. Multitudes, in an early season of religious fervour, were enticed into religious houses, where every better purpose was speedily overthrown by the most dangerous seductions, and where, deprived of the invigorating influence of common motives, and strenuous employments, and breathing the sweltering atmosphere of pseudo-spiritual excitements, they met with facilities they had not dreamed of, for gratifying the worst propensities.

Enthusiasts err on no point more grievously, than in the supposition that the many, among whom they may excite a momentary sympathetic extravagance, will continue to be as absurd as themselves, when left to the gravitation of their proper natures. Unhappily, the broad net which the ascetic enthusiasts cast over the waters of the church, entangled multitudes who were susceptible of just so much of the crazy influence as to prevent their speedy return to the common world; but by no means of so much as might have enabled them to leave behind them its vices.—Mad enough to hold to their profession of celestial virtue, and yet sober enough to avail themselves coolly of every opportunity to belie it.

It is but the *surface* of a subject, such as the one now before us, that can, with any propriety, be touched in a publication which may fall into the hands of the young. Those who have read certain of the ascetic writers will grant that a due regard to the feelings of the general reader forbids my making such a use of my materials as would be the most conclusive. I cannot suppose that an ingenuous opponent would take advantage of the peculiar difficulty which attaches to the subject; or that, presuming upon the impracticability of fully opening the wound of the monastic system, he would scout the meager evidence which I have actually adduced. A cheap triumph of this sort would be a perilous one. I will dismiss the subject then with one remark—

Although debauched manners will not consist with genuine holiness of heart, they will very well consist with a highly-wrought sentimental sanctimoniousness;—for there is no *real* contrariety between a gross voluptuousness, and a refined voluptuousness. Now this general fact being admitted, as it will by all who know what human nature is, I request the reader, in the first place, to turn to the statements already made, pp. 238—242, concerning the imaginative sensitiveness, and the prurient pudicity with which Basil laboured to affect the female mind. Let us distinctly conceive of the moral and intellectual condition of young women fully surrendering themselves to this kind of influence, which led them to people their dressing-rooms with invisible admirers. Then let us turn, either to Basil's own intimations concerning the shameless profligacy that was often going on in the monastic houses; or, still better, to Chrysostom's very explicit and astounding statements of the manners of the nuns in his time.\* How stands the case then?

\* See notes at the end.



Basil had fomented a dangerous sentimentality which could have no other effect than that which we find actually to have resulted from it, namely—the loss of the last remains of feminine delicacy, and a grossness of conduct which many of the unfortunates whom society has expelled, would blush to imitate—and in fact would not imitate, even in the last stages of their degradation.

Yet such is the reach of inconsistency, when once religion and morals are unhinged, that these same women—these virgins! could issue reeking from their quarters, and frequent church, and approach the “tremendous altar,” and, as we are assured, could, with unblushing face, and while all blushed for them, admit *there* and at the very moment when the “terrible mysteries” were celebrating, the coaxing attentions of their monkish paramours!

Whatever may be the licentiousness prevailing in modern catholic countries, I believe that the decorum of public worship is rarely violated; and on the contrary, that an imposing solemnity, and deep abstraction, characterize, generally, the behaviour of those who attend mass. The scenes which Chrysostom speaks of, as of ordinary occurrence, at Antioch, and at Constantinople, would not, I think, be tolerated now in any church in Europe.

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## THE NECESSARY OPERATION OF AN ASCETIC INSTITUTE UPON THE MASS OF CHRISTIANS.

WHEREVER a system exists which is favourable to such a course, persons of fervent and moody religious

temper will, notwithstanding the remonstrances of common sense, and Christian principles, and the reluctances of ordinary motives, betake themselves to the ascetic life, which, in truth, has many charms for the inert and feeble-minded. And such persons will say—"We have counted the cost; we know what we are doing; and we think ourselves free to obey what we feel to be a holy impulse." Let it be so; yet there is one part of this "cost" which such persons seldom or never take any account of, namely, the cost to the community, which, as an inevitable consequence, attaches to the establishment in a country of the ascetic institute; I mean the cost to public morals. This serious consequence, although seldom adverted to, invariably attends the prevalence of such a system. A few words will be enough for explaining this connexion of cause and effect.

The motives of Christianity are found to take effect in various degrees of intensity upon any number of individuals, some admitting them to the full, while others seem scarcely sensible of their power. Yet still all, and especially those who occupy an intermediate ground, feel themselves to be *liable*, abstractedly, to the entire force of these motives; and any one of these persons, even the lowest on the scale of religious feeling, may, at any time, admit their fullest energy, and may move onward to a higher position, without obstruction. So it will be, if the natural order of things has not been disturbed; and in such a state of things the fervour and the attainments of the few, intermingled with the many, operate beneficially upon all.

But now, if, in such a community, any *artificial* line of demarcation is drawn around the few who are presumed to have made great attainments, and farthermore, if whatever is the most affecting in the Christian system

be assigned to these few, as their prerogative, then the many are at once mulct of their shares in what had before been common property, and, so long as they entertain no hope or intention of forcing their way within the narrow circle of privilege, they actually sustain a privation of almost the whole of that influence which before had, in greater or less degrees, operated upon them, for their benefit. The more this artificial distinction between the few and the many is abrupt, arbitrary, and difficult to be passed over, the more complete will be the consequent subtraction of spiritual warmth and light from the outer space.

Let nothing more be done in any society of Christians than to make a rule that whoever professed eminent seriousness should wear a hood, or a tassel to his cap; and, at the same time, let such a doctrine as this be constantly inculcated—That the virtue and piety of the “unhooded,” or the “untasseled” commonalty is always of an inferior quality; and let the custom prevail of never quoting the choicest passages of scripture, except as applicable to the liveried aristocracy. The silent, but inevitable consequence of such a system upon the minds of the many must be the almost total withdrawal of all efficacious motives, and a general subsidence of moral feeling, such as (if the few really justify their high profession) leaves a vast interval between them and the many. In fact, there will soon be no middle and *hopeful* class, but only an alternative of rare sanctity (if it be sanctity indeed) and a wide waste of lifeless formality.

Such, in fact, from the first, has been the condition of every community in which the monastic system has prevailed; nor is it easy to follow the history of this institution, uniform as it is in its characteristics, without being impressed with the belief that the Satanic craft has

had to do with the contrivance of the ascetic institute. Christianity, wherever it actually took effect, produced a moral revolution, so absolute and so amazing as to show that, if left unobstructed to pursue its course, every thing evil must give way before it. Nothing less than a familiar converse with pagan antiquity (or, instead of it, a few years' residence in the heart of Brahminical India) can enable any one to estimate the vastness, we might say the strangeness, of the change which the gospel was hastening to bring about. The early apologists, all of them, appeal triumphantly, and with the calm confidence of truth, to the moral renovation that was then in progress. The kingdom of the wicked one was visibly shaken; and new counsels must be followed, and new measures must be tried. The first endeavour was to crush the rising moral energy by calumnies and tortures; but these methods of open violence only added force to it. What then remained to be attempted? The arch-Ahithophel was not to be so soon baffled, and he presently took a more wily, and a far more effectual course. "If we cannot fight with this new power upon the open field, we may do better: we may WALL IT IN." In other words, the monastic scheme was suggested and set a going: the enemy found his ready agents within the church, and a proclamation was loudly made, on all sides, to this effect—That all who aspired to perfection, after the model of the new and divine philosophy of Christ, should throw up their interests in this world's affairs, and shut themselves up in houses dedicated to sanctity and prayer! This device, notwithstanding the violence it did to human nature, took effect to an extent that could not have appeared probable. The wise and learned, as well as the simple, caught at the bait; and scarcely a voice of dissent was heard. In every part of

Christendom the regenerative force of Christianity was forthwith cloistered, and although the endeavour to exterminate the gospel had every where failed, the scheme which entombed it every where prospered. This view of the *authorship* of the ancient monastic system, as affecting the moral condition of the social mass, I must profess to entertain, deliberately and steadily; and do most seriously believe it to have been Satan's especial contrivance for restraining and hemming in the gospel, as to its diffusive moral influence. Not for a moment forgetting how much piety and beneficence has, at all times, been incarcerated within monastic walls, nor forgetting the many benefits which have incidentally resulted from these establishments, during ages of barbarism and violence, nevertheless, if the weighty question be put, concerning the monastic institute, Whence was it? I cannot for a moment hesitate to say—"from beneath." That specious scheme which the doctors and preachers of the Nicene age agreed to admire and extend, was nothing else, as I firmly believe, but the devil's desperate device for retaining his hold of the mass of mankind, notwithstanding the presence of the gospel, which he had found it impossible to expel from the world by open force.

If facts were adduced, illustrative of the actual condition of the (so called) Christian nations in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, twenty causes might easily be named rather than the influence of the monastic institute, to which the general dissoluteness of manners might be attributed. Let us, however, consider (not to look farther) what must have been the effect of the practice of setting the ascetic seal upon every text of the Bible which has any peculiar force or stress of meaning. It

would not easily be believed to what an extent this pernicious practice prevailed. One is, indeed, amazed at the perverse ingenuity which was employed in carrying on this work of exegetical monopoly. Not content with assigning to the use of holy hermits, monks, and nuns, all the cream of scripture—its promises especially—and with giving a twisted application to every general precept, the ascetic interpreters—I mean all the principal Nicene writers—took up even those preceptive portions of the New Testament which most clearly belong to Christians in common, and set them off for this bye use. It is thus that the rapacious never rest so long as any thing meets their eye which has not been appropriated.

Let any number of intelligent persons (not initiated in the patristic chicanery) read the second, third, and fourth verses of the seventh chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, and I will venture to say that not one in a hundred of them would ever surmise any thing else than that the apostle is there intending to convey certain advices to the *married*. No such thing, says a high authority; and this superficial interpretation we should regard as a specimen only of our protestant tampering with the mysteries of scripture. All that Paul here addresses *apparently* to the married is *really* said, as Chrysostom deliberately assures us, *in terrorem*, and for the express purpose of deterring Christians, male and female, from matrimony! Marry—who would bring himself, or herself, under so wretched a bondage? Why!—a married man hath, as the apostle says, no longer any power over his own body!—nor hath a married woman any power over her own body, but has become the slave of another!—alas the fools who marry! and how wise are they who rather dedicate their bodies to Him whose service is perfect freedom! The passage may, indeed, says our expositor, at first sight, seem to have a lower and a

lenient meaning; but whoever considers it more attentively will perceive that the apostle's real intention is of a kind more worthy of himself, and of his argument!\*

Against a method of interpretation such as this, no principles of truth can stand; and in the use of it, any enormity may readily be substantiated. I would engage to adduce, very quickly, a hundred similar instances of crooked exposition. The effect was to cut off the waters of the sanctuary, in their destined course, hither and thither, to bless the church and the world: the healing streams, turned by a deep cross-cut into the monastery, either stagnated in that turbid pool, or sunk away through bottomless quicksands. Thus it was that the gospel so faintly affected the European morals as that the Mahometan deluge came, where it came, as a cleansing inundation. If Mahomet, plagiarist as he was, had but included in his scheme the Jewish notions and usages relating to women, and had his religion embraced the purifying element of domestic virtue, it must, so far as we can calculate upon the operation of natural causes, have triumphed over the debased Christianity of the seventh century, which, as a system of religion, had become a frivolous idolatry, and which, as a moral system, or code of manners, had driven all natural sentiments from off their foundations. The degrading influence of the Mahometan polygamy, and of its doctrine of a voluptuous paradise, just served to balance the monkish enormities of Christendom, so as to leave with the latter enough of advantage to enable it to hold its ground when borne upon by its rival.

To exclude woman from the domestic and social circle, is the same thing as to expel all virtue thence. A

\* Chrysost. tom. i. pp. 351—354.

truism such as this, one would not have ventured to repeat, now-a-days, did it not appear that there are those who are wishing to make a new experiment, with the view of hitching Christian morals up to a higher level, by again separating the sexes. This separation, if not the end immediately aimed at, yet follows as an inevitable consequence from the institute of celibacy;—it is a measure of discretion, quickly found to be indispensable, when once the oriental doctrine of the *sanctity* of virginity has come to be preached among young people, and when once a choir of virgins, male and female, has been set off from the community. If these unfledged “seraphs” are not to be literally incarcerated, after the Romish fashion—which incarceration is, in truth, nothing but mercy and wisdom; then it will be found, notwithstanding the lofty style which the *senior* promoters of the scheme may think fit to use, an utterly impracticable thing to allow of their freely conversing, either with each other, or with their former associates in promiscuous society. The Nicene church tried this method, and the consequence was—just what any man in his senses would have predicted—the prevalence of abuses ineffably revolting.

A middle course must then be followed; that is to say, if the temper of the times forbids the immuring of the “professed,” it must be silently understood that they are to be seen in society only as spectres, or only as a spectacle in “procession;” or only as the mute personages of a church pomp; or be it, as angels of mercy, flitting hither and thither, commendably indeed, among the wretched. But what has become of the once happy circles whence these victims have been snatched? Not only will the domestic and general circle have lost their brightest ornaments—their “first born” of virtue, puri-



ty, and piety—that is to say, the very individuals who, by native elevation of sentiment, and by a high tone of feeling, were the salt of the mass; but those who are left behind, thus orphaned, as we may say, are henceforward condemned to look upon themselves, and upon one another, as a degraded class, or as the reprobates of purity; nor can they feel, speak, or act, otherwise than under the extreme moral disadvantage of being robbed of the finer feelings of self-respect, and of mutual respect. What remains for them is to seek indemnifications, and these are to be sought, and may always be found, near at hand, in licentious or perilous freedoms of behaviour.

The Christian father of a numerous and well-trained family, finds (many such may soon find to their amazement) that his “Angelica,” or his “Priscilla,” or his “Agnes,” having listened to the whispers and sighs of some apostle of church principles (whether stern and demure, or blithe and seraphic) has actually dedicated herself,\* in a word, has “professed;” and if she has not taken an irreversible vow, has so pledged her conscience and honour, as that to draw back would be infamy.—Let it be so; the victim has bled; but can we believe that the “Marthas,” and the “Annes,” and the “Elizabeths,” of this despoiled family continue to occupy precisely the same moral level that they did before?—Nay, they have been cruelly robbed, and without their fault, of the bloom of beauty, the grace and transparency, of their feminine honour.—Thenceforward they are to think themselves somewhat less than chaste and pure; for it is their seraphic sister only, who, as they are

\* To take this step against the will and advice of parents, or without their knowledge, was an additional merit, with the Nicene doctors.

taught, merits to be called so in any proper sense: but, for a woman to be brought to think of herself, and for her to know that she is thought of by others, as having, in any way, stepped down from the high place of womanly reverence which she once occupied, is, in fact, for her to be thrust down to a level where delicacy does not breathe at ease. The Marthas, and the Annes, and the Elizabeths of this family, whose common sense has stood in the way of their promotion, and who number themselves among such as may marry, find that the new code of morals which has got admittance among them has drawn a broad line through the once united band, and that, on the one side of it stands chastity, and virginity, and angelic purity, and on the other side, where themselves are ranged, there is marriage, not forbidden, but just tolerated, and a little lower down, according to the Nicene scale—concubinage, and lower still, the several grosser forms of licentiousness; and these fair victims are then offered the alternative either of professing, with their sister; or—of standing associated with the impure.—Horrid mischief this!

The practical meaning of religious celibacy, as an institute, is—the degradation of woman\*—her expulsion from general society—the lowering of manners and sentiments among young persons universally—the setting married life off from the circle of the highest and best motives, and a general licentiousness diffused through the community. These consequences follow—they ever have followed, and it is easy to see how and why they must follow, from the celibate, even supposing the best,

\* I say nothing of the consequences of the celibate, as affecting the male sex—directly and indirectly. Those who know something of monkish history will know why this branch of the subject must be passed in silence.

namely, that the “professed” generally justify their high pretensions. But what happens when, as has in fact always been the case, monasteries and convents are known, by every body, to be sinks of pollution—the sewers of the open world, into which every thing descends that should shun the light! Shall we dare to imagine the effect that would be produced upon our English manners, supposing the celibate to be restored—under any imaginable modifications—and supposing that, after the first few years of fresh enthusiasm, it became, in frequent and notorious instances, just what we find it in the Nicene age, as described by Chrysostom’s monasteries and convents, dispersed through the country, would breathe pestilence enough to reduce England, quickly, to the level of Spain and Italy; and mean time every thinking man in the land, would have become an infidel.

“Yes, but,” say the promoters of church principles, “we shall know how to obviate these extreme abuses: we shall go to work on a better-considered plan, and shall be provided against certain foreseen inconveniences. True—provision *may* be made against the shameless licentiousness of the Nicene monkery;—things *may* be better managed than they were then, and they *have* been; and it has been found possible to screw the system up much tighter than was at first attempted. But then this was done by the means which the church of Rome employs. The Romish monastic economy—none of its rigours excepted, is the only condition under which the celibate can be endured: and this is what we must come to. The learned and zealous persons who are now recommending celibacy and asceticism, well know that their present endeavours, public and private, can have no other end; and that they themselves do not recoil from such an issue, has become manifest.

## THE INDIRECT INFLUENCE OF THE MONASTIC INSTITUTE UPON THE POSITION OF THE CLERGY.

No reader of ecclesiastical literature can need much to be said in proof of the assertion that the ascetic doctrine, and the institutions thence resulting, powerfully affected the temper, conduct, and official position of the clergy, in the Nicene age, as well as in later periods. In truth, it might be broadly affirmed, that monkery *without* and monkery *within* the hierarchical enclosure, comprise the sum and substance of church history, through many centuries. What it may be requisite to advance, on this subject, presents itself under these two general heads, namely—the indirect influence of the extra-clerical monastic establishments upon the position and character of the clergy;—and the direct effect of the usage of celibacy, upon the clergy themselves, and upon their relations with the laity. We take then the first of these topics, which embraces the following affirmations—That the ascetic orders—the virgins, monks, anchorets, constituted what may be called an ecclesiastical *substratum*, serving to give breadth, support, and altitude, to the ecclesiastical structure—That these orders were a class to be maintained, and therefore swelled the amount of funds administered by the clergy—That they were also a class largely contributing to those funds; and, That they were a class to be governed, and to be made use of, as aids and instruments in governing the laity.

A calm inquirer concerning the origin of episcopacy, is liable to be at first, not a little discouraged (if his predilections are in favour of that institution) by the clear

indications which meet him, on every side, of the strenuous endeavours of the ancient church to create for itself, and to consolidate, a complex hierarchical scheme, which, from an ample base, should tower to a proud height. Very manifest it is, that the Pontifex—the sovereign bishop, was to be seated at the apex of a lofty pyramid: hence the long list of church functionaries, and dependents, all, to the last and the lowest, personally interested in the support of the ecclesiastical edifice; and all looking up to the throne, as the fountain of honour and emolument. The facts, looked at in this light, give rise to a prejudice against episcopacy; and the most impartial mind may easily conceive a disgust, which would lead to a too hasty conclusion, a conclusion not sustained (as I humbly believe) by the evidence, when it comes to be more strictly analyzed.

Nevertheless, while we exempt the primitive episcopacy from the prejudice incidentally resulting from the facts adverted to, it is most evident that, at a very early time, great anxiety was manifested, and great industry used, tending to bring about what we find existing, in a settled form, in the Nicene age, namely—a complicated and broadly-bottomed hierarchical structure, which, while it furnished dignities, occupation, maintenance, and emoluments, to a large proportion of the Christian body, gave a decisive preponderance, ordinarily, to the clergy, as balanced against the laity. Particular circumstances allowed for, it would naturally happen that all who had a common interest with the clergy, would be found to stand on their side, and would sustain them, in any instance of contention with the people:—the people were in fact out-voted, and having been robbed of their proper representatives, and their due influence, by the insidious absorption into the clerical body of those

who should have acted as their tribunes, and retaining no control whatever over the funds of the church, they were either dealt with, at pleasure, by the sacerdotal college, or, as is usual in despotic governments, they expressed their will, and inspired some necessary fear, on signal occasions, in the irregular and dangerous mode of tumultuary proceedings, and of open violence—the natural remedies against usurpations of whatever kind.

The stability of a hierarchy (or of any monarchy) in its relations towards the people, and the power of the single chief toward the various members of the hierarchy itself, (or the aristocracy) alike demand not merely a numerous and diversified body of functionaries, regularly subordinated, from the highest to the lowest; but also, one or more *collateral* bodies, which, while constituting a portion of the whole, shall yet have a real independence, in respect of all but the highest authorities. This appears to be the secret of the monarchical constitution, civil, or religious; nor has any monarchy actually stood long, which has not so rested a portion of its weight upon side buttresses. Now, while the several ranks of the clergy, and the inferior church officers, down to the porters, and the sweepers of the aisles, constituted the bishop's ordinary state, he, and the few who worked the machine of government under his immediate control, felt a want, which was at length, and gradually, supplied. From how slender and unsightly a collection of materials, was that prodigious mass prepared which has in fact proved the real prop of the church, through the tempests of many centuries! A pitiable company of desolate old women, were, if we may say so, the *rubble of the mole*, which has propped the papacy from age to age.

There is reason to believe that, in the ancient world,

perilous as were many ordinary employments, now comparatively safe, dangerous as were navigation and land travelling, murderous as was war, reckless as were all governments of human life and welfare, prodigal of blood as were the public amusements, horrid as were the usages of slavery, and withal, wanting as was antiquity in the medical and surgical care of the lower classes—the average mortality of the male sex as compared with the other, vastly exceeded its proportion in modern times. And whereas, even now, widows are always many more than widowers, in ancient times, the number of women whose husbands had been snatched from them by violent and accidental deaths, was so great as that these “*destitutes*” constituted a class, so considerable as to attract peculiar regard. Heathenism might indeed take little account of its widows and orphans; but the gospel instantly brought them forward, as the especial objects of the regard of the church. The first, or one of the first duties of a primitive Christian society, was to take care of its widows; and as the tendency of all things, connected with a social economy, is, for what was at first incidental and liable to the guidance of occasions, to settle down into the fixed form of a regulated constitution, it was not long before the widows of the church, numerous as they were, came to make a standing class, or permanent order, situated, as we may say, on one side of the hierarchical structure. In what way this class, with others similar, affected the bishop’s power, as patron and fundholder, we shall presently see. Apart from this *financial* bearing of the widow-band, the appendage of a company of helpless women, might seem to add little that was enviable to episcopal grandeur;—but with it, the consequences were important. Give to any one nothing better than an irresponsible

oversight of the poor, with power to levy for their maintenance, and you have made him a considerable personage in the state.

But the widow-band served, very early, as the ground for a more important and sightly structure;—as bundles of lithe rushes, and sear sticks are used to be laid upon a bog to sustain better materials. Next came, and at a very early date, as we have already seen, the illustrious company of dedicated virgins—a body collateral to the hierarchy, and independent, at once, of the people, and of the inferior clergy, and yet (generally) subject to the bishop, through the means of the most influential among the presbyters. The regards of the people toward the widows, we cannot suppose to have been of a kind to involve much reverence; but their regards—the regards they were constantly taught to entertain toward the virgins, carried sentiments of awe and deference; and this credit they could lend when it was needed, to him who, on particular occasions, might wish to borrow it. Thus was the hierarchical structure, even in times of suffering and depression, acquiring, not merely altitude, but a great breadth of base.

A little later, as it seems, the order of male virgins, or monks and eremites, encrusted itself about the church; nor was it long before this body swelled to such a magnitude, and acquired so portentous an influence, with the mass of the people, as to give it rather too much of independent consequence. Still, however, in the main, the monasteries, thickly sprinkled as they were, over the surface of Christian countries, constituted so many forts and citadels of ecclesiastical power, under the command of the highest authorities, and altogether independent of the lower clergy, and of the people. On several recorded occasions these sombre garrisons swarmed out,



in thousands, to the terror of their opponents, and to the effective aid of their patrons. Can we then be amazed at the zeal of the church authorities, in promoting, as they did, the ascetic doctrine? are we at a loss in accounting for the fact, at first so strange, that men of the highest intelligence, men of learning, and knowledge of the world, should so have vilified themselves as they did, by trumpeting monkish exploits, and by repeating, with all gravity, the most insufferable nonsense, tending to glorify the ascetic life in the eyes of a besotted populace? Nothing is more easily understood than this course of things. We should do the rulers of the Nicene church a great injustice if we were to think them so simple as not to have understood, in measure, what they were about, while so assiduously employed in heaping up the materials, and in pouring in the cement, which, at length, rendered the ascetic institute the immoveable BUTTRESS OF CHURCH POWER. And yet we must not impute to them too much foresight in this instance; for it is not often given to men to sit down and deliberately to devise those schemes of power which are to be ripened in a long course of years. But when once a course of ambition has been opened before a society, or body of men in power, then there are always found minds quick to discern, and prompt in availing themselves of, whatever presents itself as fit to promote their designs. The chiefs of the church did not, in the first instance, plan the ascetic institute, as the most proper means for establishing a vast system of spiritual despotism; but—asceticism offering itself to them, just when every extrinsic aid was needed, it was eagerly seized upon, and industriously turned to the best account. If there were any *planning* in this instance, we must look

beyond the circle of human agency for the designing party.

Still more caution is needed when we come to advance any general statements concerning the influence of mercenary motives, with men professing to be actuated by the loftier principles of religion. What we need, in such cases, is not merely candour, but a wise recollection of that confused condition of mind which so often belongs to men of ordinary quality, who, while they think they intend only what is holy and honest, are tacitly governed by very inferior considerations. It is but few men who, habitually and severely, question themselves as to their real motives: and public men do so, perhaps, less often than others. Men may be pursuing a course, such as might have been dictated by the lust of wealth, without in fact being mercenary knaves; for there were, in their view, other, and better motives, on which they kept their eye fixed, while their hands were busy in sweeping gold and silver, like usurers into their bags.

Now, with these considerations before us, we need call no ill names, while we look to the *financial* bearing of the ascetic institute, upon the ancient church system; and especially upon the position of the ruling clergy.

The church then, and it was its glory, had under its wing a very numerous body of pensioners;—that is to say, the poor generally, and many reduced to want in times of persecution—the widows, as a distinct class, and the virgins also as a class; and all were to be provided for, in one mode or another: and the people, recognising the duty of making this provision, and knowing to how serious an extent the bishop was constantly responsible, could not leave him slenderly furnished with the necessary means. The church chest, whence also

the clergy themselves drew their incomes, must be a deep one; and in fact it often enclosed enormous amounts in money, plate, jewels, and costly apparel. The bishop's *patronage* therefore, and his power and consequence as steward of ample revenues, and as the guardian, often, of fortunes, came to be, at an early time, very great; and it is easy to see that this power and patronage were directly enhanced by every addition made to the *permanent pensionary establishment*. Cyprian then, was quite right, in an *economic* sense (though, perhaps, he did not distinctly mean as much) when he said that the glory of mother church bore proportion to the numbers included in the choir of virgins. There is no mystery in all this: none but the most ordinary connexions of cause and effect are involved; and yet so obvious a bearing of the celibate institution upon the power and influence of the clergy has been very little regarded.

But then the church virgins were not merely a class to be maintained; for they were, or some of them, large contributors to the church chest. This fact, too, has been much less regarded than it deserves. Woman has a noble, as well as a warm heart, and when once she has admitted the influence of powerful and elevating motives, she gives, after a princely sort—yea, “all her living;” whether it be “two mites,” or lands and houses and thousands of gold and silver. Many noble ladies were among the earliest converts; and the gospel continued to draw such into the church; and these, as if they had been conscious of the blessings which the sex at large should at length owe to Christianity, “brought an offering,” like that of the eastern mages, to lay at their Saviour's feet. Are we then invidiously and coldly blaming this liberality? God forbid: whether always

controlled by discretion, or not, it afforded a signal instance of the quality and power of Christ's doctrine.

In the earliest times, and while large sums were required for redeeming and maintaining sufferers for conscience sake, these ample donations, or sequestrations, found a proper employment; and perhaps did not greatly exceed the real wants of the church; but when, and at the same moment, the season of tranquillity came, and the monastic system assumed a regular form—when the ascetic enthusiasm being at its height, wealthy converts were taught to think that the noblest of all modes of employing the mammon of unrighteousness, was to build and endow religious houses, what could happen but that the stewards and administrators of church funds, and generally all who drew their incomes from the common chest, should be exposed to a terrible temptation to make a trade of the holiest things? Much need not be said on so obvious a point. Whether the monasteries and convents which, chiefly in this very mode, sprung up so thickly over all the Christian surface, in the fourth and fifth centuries, were financially independent of the neighbouring churches, or were placed under the bishop's immediate control, the general result would be the same. Vast wealth was continually flowing over, from the world to the church. The religious body was, every day, gaining upon the secular body. The church had made excavations, deep and wide, here and there, and every where; and into these pits there was a constant drainage; and every commotion of the social system threw into them a new flood, charged with precious matters.

While therefore the church presented to the eye of the people a broad front of eleemosynary demand—its poor, its widows, its confessors, its virgins, its monks, and the clergy themselves, and all to be supported by the people, it

was in fact silently becoming the steward, under various conditions, of many entire private fortunes. But could such things happen without producing a reflective effect upon the religious sentiments and manners of the men most nearly concerned? Can we believe it? or can we believe that the singular animation which marks the style of the Nicene orators, when they are lauding the monastic life, received no heightening from the unconfessed influence of inferior motives?—Inferior and unworthy motives seem endowed with a sort of tact and sense of propriety, impelling them to skulk into the dark corners of men's minds, where, without attracting any notice, or making any noise, they may, with a soft finger, press the springs of action, or ease the moral machinery, just at the moment when such interpositions seem needed:—a prince's most needed, and least honoured attendants, know how to do their office, noiselessly, and to keep out of view.

There can be no need offensively to impugn the *integrity* of men whom, nevertheless, it were absurd not to think of as much influenced by motives which it would be an insult loudly to attribute to them. In connexion with our immediate subject, nothing more is requisite than to bear in mind the simple fact, that the ascetic institute did, as well in its earlier, as in its later form, that is to say, as well in the middle of the third century, as at the end of the fourth, and onwards, very materially, and very dangerously affect the pecuniary position of the clergy; and that, at length, it became the principal means of so enriching the church as to make her the mistress of the world's affairs. It is then a sheer infatuation to cite seraphic hymns, and glowing orations, concerning the "angelic life," and to forget the homely

import of the entire system, in pounds, shillings, and pence.

But again: the ascetic institute, or, to speak of it in the concrete, the companies of monks, nuns, and eremites, were bodies to be governed, and engines to be worked. The clergy, and especially the more eloquent members of the body, commended the ascetic life, in the hearing of the people, who were taught to look upon those who professed it, as superhuman beings: in return, these unearthly personages gave their weight, as required, to the clergy, and actually moved on, in phalanx, when peculiarly needed: the ascetics constituted a *corps de reserve*, which the church might summon to her aid in critical moments. Under ordinary circumstances, as is easy to understand, these recluses, drawn as they were from the bosoms of families, and trained to silence toward the world, and to unlimited disclosures toward their spiritual guides, were the fittest instruments of that sort of clandestine management, by means of which the clergy may exercise a terrible despotism over private life. No family that had a daughter or a sister in the choir of virgins, could be exempt from anxieties. All this is well understood in catholic countries; but then, in the Nicene age, the license that prevailed, among the ascetics, left a much wider scope for this sort of dumb tyranny: the nuns not being actually incarcerated, might worm themselves through all the crevices of society, and, at the same time, as they habitually “confessed” to the clergy, and received instructions from them, they might be employed to effect any nefarious purpose.

But what shall we say of that influence upon the morals and manners of the clergy—an unmarried clergy, which resulted from the access allowed them to convents? The less that is said on such a theme the better;

yet it is indispensable to place it, in its outline at least, before the reader. If the worst enemy of the church—if its infernal enemy, were supposed to have had the opportunity to devise a plan most certain to corrupt it, what better could he have done, than, first, to stir deeply the sensibilities of human nature; then to impose celibacy on both sexes; then to screen both from the eye of the world; and then to allow the one free access to the other, under pretext of spiritual superintendence! Need any thing more be said? Are we to think such a constitution of things to have been the contrivance of infinite wisdom and goodness? Grant that paganism has established what was as bad; but certainly, it has sanctioned nothing worse. Under a luxurious climate, in countries where inveterate licentiousness had brought all sentiments and habits down to the lowest level, young women at the earliest age were snatched from their homes—the only places then where modesty still took refuge; they were congregated in dim seclusions, where they received visits from unmarried men, to whom, moreover, and in hours of tremulous excitement, they were to expose the inmost secrets of their hearts! This is that scheme which we are to admire, and to emulate, and to set a going afresh among ourselves!

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## THE DIRECT INFLUENCE OF THE CELIBATE UPON THE CLERGY.

WE have only to follow the inevitable course of things, a very little way, and it will become evident that what has actually happened, could not but have happened, and must always, unless under the most extraordinary circumstances, happen wherever the princi-

ple of the ascetic life is embraced.—The doctrine that celibacy is a higher and a holier state than matrimony,\* and that it is “a more excellent way,” and that virginity, as the fathers constantly express it, places a man near to God, is, let us suppose, broached in a Christian community, and it is put forward, whether modestly, or fanatically, so as to enchain ardent minds. Such, instantly profess this angelic excellence:—the people (not taught better) admire and applaud the specious instance of fervour and self-devotion; they gaze with awe and affection upon the “holy” youth, or virgin; and this awe is just so much respect withdrawn from those, however excellent they may be, who fall short of so high a standard. But can there be any element of sanctity which is not eminently to be desired in those who administer holy things? The people will feel this congruity, and the ardent and ambitious among the clergy will keenly feel it too; and although other means of popularity should be wanting, this at least is at hand:—the weak and enthusiastic, as well as the haughty and aspiring, will snatch at the distinction, and there will soon be a band of “holy” priests and deacons, who by the aid of the very qualities which have impelled them to walk on so arduous a path, will soon draw towards themselves the warmest feelings of the devout portion of the community. When things have proceeded thus far, many, who had been insensible to powerful and primary motives, will yield to such as are secondary; and they also will “profess.”

Thus the band of the “chaste” will gradually have swollen to such a magnitude, as to disturb the equilibrium of feeling throughout the church: a new mode of speaking will have come in, adapted to this altered state of

\* Letter to the Bishop of Oxford, pp. 208, 213.



things;—"marriage is *lawful*, no doubt; to say otherwise were heretical;—but yet how angelic is chastity—and how fit is it, that those who wear spotless white, at the altar, should also be inwardly and personally white! Whenever it is possible, let us receive the holy sacrament from holy hands." When once this comes to be said, or felt, by the devout, the fate of the church is sealed. Married priests rest, thenceforward, under an obloquy;—they are not indeed driven from the altar; but they gladly give place there to those who can lift an unblushing front to heaven. More and more go over to the privileged company, and while indemnifying themselves as they may, and all but a few *will* indemnify themselves, will yet claim in public, the honours of continence, and join in decrying, as sensual, the married priest. When it comes to be understood that it is marriage, and not profligacy that is condemned, none but the few who retain some sense of virtue and piety will subject themselves to contempt for the mere sake of being able to call the woman they live with—wife. At length it is felt to be a measure, at once of discretion and of mercy, not to say necessity, to *forbid* universally, what has become the occasion of scandal and of invidious distinctions: the last step therefore is taken, and holy celibacy, joining hands with detestable vices, celebrates its triumph. Fanaticism proclaims a high day, and blows her seven trumpets of—lust, hypocrisy, cruelty, blasphemy, infidelity, madness, and misery; and the church thenceforward sits enthroned upon the overthrown decencies of domestic life, and is encircled by an unmarried priesthood, the ministers and patterns of all evil. The social system then putrefies to the core, and the poison of its corruption sheds death on every side. In various degrees of aggravation, such have always, and in all coun-

tries, been the consequences of clerical celibacy; and clerical celibacy is the inevitable consequence of the doctrine that the virgin state is more holy than the married.

Whether we speak of these things problematically, as what *must* happen, or historically, as what *has always* happened, is indifferent to our argument: the connexion of the effect with its cause is of the most intimate and inseparable sort; nor can any exceptions be produced that should affect our conclusion. So long as religious celibacy rests upon the plain ground of utility, it will keep within narrow bounds, and the practice may be exempt from peril; but the moment it is propounded as an object of spiritual ambition, or as a lofty distinction, many motives, and some of them of a very impure kind, will come into play, impelling multitudes to snatch this glory, who have sadly mistaken their personal call.—Only one course of events can then follow—namely, the prevalence of frightful abuses. If religious celibacy be a glory and a beauty, in itself, the clergy must not leave this advantage to the laity. This were as if the brightest military courage—the freshest laurels of war, neglected by the officers in an army, were left to be the distinction of the privates. Then if *some* of the clergy arrogate this *professional* virtue, all must at length pretend to it. The doctrine of Tertullian and of Cyprian, is the alpha in a series, to which Hildebrand subjoined the omega; and the modern favourers of antiquity are setting a going again, that which, should it proceed, can have no other end.

A small portion of men only will (moments of excitement excepted) adhere virtuously to a vow of continence: to expect any thing else is ridiculously absurd. But even if the proportion were large, as it possibly might

become for a time, and under unusual circumstances of religious animation, or of proselyting zeal, it remains to inquire what the effects of celibacy are upon the dispositions of the clergy—even supposing the best that can be imagined. This is a trite subject. Unavoidably, the ministers of religion are so far set off from the influence of ordinary motives, as to involve some peril to their humility, their candour, and their good sense; but to sever them from the social mass violently, by celibacy, is to aggravate, tenfold, all the ill tendencies of their position, and to render them morose, selfish, arrogant, prurient, trivial, fanatical, and perversely ambitious; in a word—to induce habits and dispositions the most pernicious in their bearing upon private life, and dangerous in the highest degree to the state. The history of Europe has abundantly established these general principles, which few now dispute.

The Lord best knows what human nature is; and he has otherwise determined for his ministers than that they should want the salutary and softening influences of domestic life; and here we come to a decisive instance in which the explicit law of God being violently and without shame contradicted and set aside by the decisions of the church, a choice must be made between the two authorities. On this particular ground, as I humbly venture to predict, the Oxford Tract church principles will either win a signal triumph—a triumph fatal to Christianity and to England—or they will meet their merited fate, and give their last sigh to the unpitied winds. Feeling well, as they must, how critical this question is, the promoters of Nicene Christianity will hardly do otherwise than evade a premature trial of their strength in respect to it. At the present moment, for them to say all they mean, and clearly to propound all

they wish to see effected, would instantly bring hundreds of their disciples to their senses. Not, indeed, that these divines *intend* the remoter consequences of the course they are pursuing; but they intend that which must infallibly induce those consequences.

It is peculiarly desirable that this momentous dissonance between church principles and New Testament authority should be calmly regarded. Virginity is, says the church, a holy condition, and a link of connexion between the human and the divine nature. Our Lord has consecrated it; and its high patroness is the Ever-Virgin-Mother, the Blessed Mary. Catholic antiquity gives it suffrage in favour of this doctrine, with uncommon animation and unanimity; and how pleasing, nay, glorious, is the notion, and how enviable the privilege and the honour of those who walk on earth as angels, and who, although in the body, have renounced its humiliations! But then, if things be so, it would be cruel and impious to exclude the clergy—the very ministers of heaven—from this arena of celestial merit. No canons could effect any such exclusion. All the most lofty-minded of the clergy must seize this distinction; and the very persons whom the church would wish to see in the seat of authority will, as a matter of course, be unmarried men. If sacerdotal dignity were always conferred by the rule of professional merit, bishops, (under such a state of things as we are now supposing) would be chosen almost always from the band of virgin presbyters.

Here, then, we directly confront a clear, positive, and reiterated divine enactment. 'This should be looked to. The present advocates of church principles assume it as one of their principles that things which are only once, or incidentally and very slightly alluded to by the in-

spired writers, may, nevertheless, be absolutely binding upon the church. Let us, then, take this ground, and we must admit that, notwithstanding any general inference to the contrary, if nothing more had been said in all the New Testament concerning the marriage of sacerdotal persons than what is dropped (and “near not to have been dropped”) by Paul, when he asks, “what, may we not lead about a sister, a wife?” &c., that even in that case the *liberty* of clerical matrimony would have been secured. This cannot be denied by those who profess the principle above mentioned.

But, now, so it is, that no circumstance or condition of the ecclesiastical constitution established by the apostles has been more explicitly, or more formally specified than this, of the *domestic qualifications* of church officers, supreme and subordinate. The apostolic rule would nearly justify the maxim—No husband, no bishop. If episcopacy itself had been as clearly enjoined as is the marriage of bishops and deacons, there would probably never have been a question on the subject. Timothy and Titus are authoritatively addressed on subjects specially *clerical*, and they are formally instructed how they are to behave themselves in “the house of God;” and, particularly, they are told what sort of men they ought to elevate to the most responsible stations. No doubt, then, we shall hear the apostle say—the apostle whom we have heard recommending celibacy—“although bishops and deacons are not to be prohibited from marrying, yet, whenever it can be done, it is well to give a preference to those who have professed virginity; for, besides that no man who warreth entangleth himself with the things of this life, celibacy is a holier and a higher condition.” Does not the inspired text run thus? Strange that it should not! Ought we not to

call the reading in question, when we find so flagrant a contradiction of primitive doctrine and practice—a bishop to be a husband!—a bishop to be one who has children about him!—the deacons too—and their wives—and again—a bishop *blameless*, and yet a husband; a bishop a pattern of piety, and yet surrounded with children!

Not one word is there in these clerical epistles, of “the merit of virginity,” not a hint that celibacy is at least a “seemly thing” in those who minister at the altar! The very contrary is what we find there. A bishop’s and a deacon’s qualifications for office are directly connected with their behaviour as married men, and as fathers. So pointed is this assumed connexion, that we might even consider the apostle’s rule as amounting to a tacit exclusion of the unmarried from the sacerdotal office. If a man who does not “rule well” his family, is thereby proved to be unfit to assume the government of the church; by implication then, those are to be judged unfit, or at least they are unproved as fit, who have no families to govern.—The meager, heartless, nerveless, frivolous, or abstracted and visionary cœlebs—make *him* a bishop! The very last thing he is fit for:—let him rather trim the lamps and open the church doors, or brush cobwebs from the ceiling!—how should such a one be a father to the church?

And in these same epistles, wherein the married state is formally specified and demanded as a qualification for church office, the very illusions under the influence of which the church ran counter to the apostolic decision, are plainly predicted, and solemnly condemned. Not one of the superstitions or abuses of popery has been so clearly foreseen, and proscribed, as is that clerical celibacy which the ancient church, almost instantly after the death of the apostles, favoured, and at length firmly established.

On this point, immensely important as it is, the authority of scripture, and that of the fathers, are directly at issue;—the one authority explicitly enjoining the very thing which the other discourages, condemns, and at length absolutely forbids. There is no middle ground to be taken here: there is no room to evade the practical question; for it touches the main pillar of the ecclesiastical edifice. Either it is good that a bishop should be a husband and a father, or it is not good. The Nicene church, as well in theory as in practice, decides that it is not good; nor could it, consistently with its principles, come to any other decision.—In a word, the first principle of Nicene Christianity is found to be subversive, as well in theory as in practice, of apostolical Christianity. The two systems diverge from their starting points, and get wider asunder, at every step of their course.

A principle so simple as that it may be propounded in seven words, and which, as so propounded, seems to contradict no other, may appear to be a very unfit object of serious reprehension. But let us only follow it out, in its practical interpretation, and we may soon come to think otherwise of its importance. We are told that —“The preference of celibacy, as the higher state, is scriptural, and as being such, is primitive.” We utterly deny any such assertion; but if it were granted, this at least would be certain, that this “preferable and higher state, was not, in the apostolic age, to be desired or sought after by those who were to be the “ensamples to the flock:” on the contrary, such were to set an example of virtue and wisdom, as husbands and as fathers. Bishops and deacons were to relinquish this “sanctity,” together with the celestial distinctions belonging to it; and they were to walk on a lower path—a path where

they were liable to be looked down upon by the celestial band. But can we think that any such element of insubordination was intended by Paul to be dropped into the ecclesiastical constitution? The ancient church could not suppose it, and in adopting as it did the seraphic doctrine, it felt that the reverence of the people toward the clergy could not be secured, if these were excluded from the honours attaching to the "higher and holier" state. But grant them leave to profess virginity, and then the doctrine itself comes out in the form of a direct violation of the apostolic injunction. If bishops and deacons are allowed to choose "the more excellent way"—and how cruel were it not to grant them this indulgence!—then bishops and deacons will not ordinarily be married men. In other words, whoever is the most devoted, the most fervent, the most self-denying, and therefore, so far, the most fit for office, will be one who is *not* what Paul declares a bishop and deacon ought to be—a married man, and a father.

Say what we please about the *enforcement* of celibacy, this open contrariety between scripture, and an ascetic church, must always present itself *long before* the enforcement could be thought of as practicable or desirable. Only let it *now* be attempted, without any preparation of public opinion, to *enforce* celibacy upon the English clergy. As easily lift the halls and colleges of Oxford from their basements, and found them on the clouds. But if first, the "primitive" doctrine could be brought into favour with the clergy and the laity, and if it were so far to prevail as that many of the clergy professed the "higher state," and that married men were seldom or never ordained, and that a shade of discredit, or more, rested upon the married clergy, *then* an ecclesiastical ordinance, enjoining upon all, what most ac-



tually practised, and what the people had come to consider as becoming, might be nothing more than a measure of prudence. What, in such a case, could be more absurdly unjust, than to throw all the blame upon the last act of the church, while the doctrine and the practices which had led to this last act, were applauded. At the worst, this enforcement could be considered only as a stretch of power, outrunning a little the demands of public feeling.

But now, let the explicit authority of the apostle, speaking as in the name of the Lord, be left untouched; and let it be held, not merely as allowable, but as proper and desirable—we *might* say, indispensable, that bishops and deacons should be husbands and fathers (or should have been such) let the people be taught to look to their pastors as examples of married purity, and of paternal authority and love;—let the happy home of a Christian minister be regarded as his best sermon;—let true holiness take the place of a prurient, hollow, sanctimoniousness; and then it will be found utterly impracticable to make any thing of the “primitive doctrine” of virginity—the bubble will burst as often as it is blown. In a community in which the ministers of religion are married men, and are *honoured as such*, and in which, as a consequence, domestic virtue reaches its highest mark—woman blessing man, as wife and mother—there, and in such a community, no efforts will avail to enrol companies of seraphs; on the contrary, contempt, and a well-merited disgust, will cover the busy promoters of any such pernicious folly. Morals and domestic felicity will be saved, and the bosom of the social system will be kept free from the worst of all plagues—a virgin priesthood;—in other words, bands of—*men*, we must not call them, wrought up to a silent frenzy, and

leagued against the purity and peace of every home near them.

If there be any one practical injunction of the New Testament infinitely momentous, as affecting the welfare of society, it is *this* one, which makes marriage a first qualification for office in the church. Let us look to it then that we adhere, herein, to the authority of scripture, and resolutely oppose the insidious advances of those "church principles," and of the Nicene Christianity, which, by the sure operation of the doctrine concerning celibacy, cut at the roots of the morals and domestic happiness of the community that admits them.

## THE CONNEXION OF THE ASCETIC INSTITUTE WITH RITUAL NOTIONS AND PRACTICES.

SEVEN years ago, if undertaking to treat, philosophically, of the progress of opinions in the church from the apostolic age, to the period of the council of Nice, one should have felt not a moment's hesitation in roundly affirming the fact of the connexion which we are now to speak of; for, what may be called the natural history of the sacramental superstition, one should have thought too obvious to require formal proof. It has, however, become necessary to advance with more caution upon ground which might well enough have been surveyed at a glance.

There is, I believe, no controversy concerning the historical fact, that practices had been established, and that notions were prevalent, relating to the ritual parts of

Christianity, in the fourth century, of which we can discover scarcely a trace in the apostolic age. No one pretends to affirm that Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine, speak of baptism, and the eucharist, precisely as Paul, and Peter, and John, had spoken of them. A difference then, in this respect, had arisen in the course of three hundred years; but this difference, say the modern advocates of church principles, was nothing more than the repining, or natural expansion of certain rudiments, which the apostles had mingled, silently, yet designedly, with the Christian institute. Discerning, or thinking that we discern these rudiments, even in the apostolic writings, we do well, it is said, to derive our own notions and practices, from the mature, rather than from the crude era of their history. If what was done and taught by the Nicene divines, in regard to the sacraments, was nothing more than what had been foreseen, and intended by the apostles, our part is to consult the Nicene, rather than the apostolic writings, on such points.

But let it be asked, under whose auspices had this gradual expansion of ritual notions and practices been effected? This question is surely a pertinent one, and the answer it must receive brings us at once to the alleged connexion between the ascetic institute (especially the clerical and monastic celibacy) and the sacramental doctrine and practice of the Nicene age.

This doctrine and this practice, were nothing else than what men, so placed, as were the clergy of the ancient church, would inevitably move toward, and adopt. That an unmarried clergy, professing and admiring the wildest extravagances of the oriental ascetism, should have adhered, century after century, to the modesty, simplicity, and unobtrusive seriousness of the apostolic sacramental

doctrine, would have been a miracle far more astounding than any of those to which the church, even in St. Dunstan's time, pretended. Every principle of human nature forbids such an incongruity, nor is an example of the sort presented by history:—it could not have been;—it is not to be believed;—it was not the fact. The Nicene sacramental doctrine was just such as might bescem, and accord with, the ascetic feeling and condition of the clerical body. A conclusion so manifestly true might be left unargued, with dispassionate and well informed minds. But we will follow the subject into some of its elements.

The Nicene sacramental doctrine and practice, had then a *general* connexion with the prevailing asceticism, and they had some *special points* of connexion also, which must be briefly stated.

Good sense, sobriety of judgment, and a tone of moderation and quietness, which belong to some men—a very few, by endowment of nature, can belong to a body of men, take them where you please, only as the consequence of circumstances, favouring the growth of such qualities of the mind and temper: and if the circumstances of a body of men are of a kind to generate the very opposite qualities, it is not the influence of the few who may be of sound temperament, that will avail to contravene the powerful and constant operation of inducements and excitements, tending to inflame the heart, and pervert the reason.

The apostolic injunction, that church officers should be married men, was more than a mere license, *permitting* what it might have been difficult to prevent; for it had a positive reason, and it was a provision, not simply against the grievous abuses that attend clerical celibacy; but it was a security for the moderation, and mental sa-

nity of those who were to be the leaders of opinion in the church. On the one side, let us imagine, that there is a body of men whose affections have been warmed and softened, and whose moral and religious notions have been corrected by a varied experience of, and an actual concernment with, the ordinary interests of life. On the other side, is a body that has been, by some violent excitement, thrown or seduced out of the common path, and whose sympathies have no natural objects, who have not been happy, as other men, who have not shed tears, as others; who, while chafing under a sense of privation and inferiority, have also arrogantly challenged for themselves peculiar honours;—men who, by being compelled, until it has become a habit, to look at their own condition under vehement excitements, as from a forced position, have learned to look at every thing else in the same unnatural manner. Now to which of these bodies shall we refer any moral, political, or theological controversy? Even if a loftier style be found among the latter, will not soundness and sobriety of judgment be the prerogatives of the former? will not excess—extravagance, severity, and practical absurdity, be the characteristics of the opinions of the latter? This we assume as unquestionable. Every man in his senses would make his appeal, in a cause of whatever kind, to the former, not to the latter.

On this very ground it has been determined, by express divine authority, that the *rulers* of the church, if not all who may exercise their gifts in its service, shall be married men. But, from a very early time, and more and more so, every year, onward to the Nicene age, the clergy were striving to reverse this rule; and, in the fourth century, the temper and habits of the cle-

rical body were entirely governed by the ascetic doctrine; and the majority were actually unmarried men.

At once then, and on every admitted principle of common sense, and of scriptural authority, we must appeal from the judgment of these unmarried ascetics—these unhumanized, these half crazed sophists, whose imaginations were habitually inflamed, whose animal system was deranged, whose notions were like themselves, harsh, acrid, malign, and who could neither think nor speak, but in hyperbole. From such men we will learn nothing—or nothing but a caution against folly and hypocrisy:—such lips, shrivelled and burning, are not wont to distil wisdom, nor will we seek it thence. There is then a *primâ facie* case against the Nicene divines, inasmuch as they were *not* husbands and fathers, as church rulers should have been; but either frenzied fanatics, or imbeciles, or hypocrites; or they were, individually, tending toward some one of these conditions.

Even in relation to the most remote or abstracted point of theology, the judgment of a body of ascetics is sure to be perverted: much more so, if the question be of a kind involving the very principle of the ascetic life. So is it with the sacramental question; and the doctrine prevalent in the fourth century was nothing else but *another form*, or expression, of the very principle which the ascetic life imbodyed. The ascetic error did not consist in a denial, or exclusion, of what is moral, spiritual, and real; but in thrusting forward, and in making too much of, what is visible, formal, and accidental. Holiness and purity were not denied; but virginity and bodily purity were chiefly talked of, and were regarded as if they implied, and conveyed, and were the equivalents of, genuine moral qualities.

This insensible substitution of the form, for the substance, is so prominently characteristic of the ascetic scheme of life, that I cannot suppose it to be called in question. But now, what was the sacramental doctrine of the very same men? It was—not a denial of grace, and of the spiritual realities of the Christian life, but a putting foremost, and a talking most of, the rite, *as a rite*. The very men who were accustomed to use the words sanctity, and virginity, continence, and celibacy, as synonymous terms, or as equivalents, did also constantly speak of baptism, and of the eucharist, as intrinsically holy, and as conveying holiness; or, at the best, they so held up these rites before the people, as led them to pay a superstitious and fatally exclusive regard to the ceremony, while moral and spiritual qualities, or states of the heart, were lost sight of.—The very man who thinks himself as holy as Gabriel, because a virgin, and who reckons so many hours' fasting to be worth a certain quantum of expiatory merit, is he who attributes a justifying and sanctifying efficacy to baptismal water, and believes that the swallowing, or the carrying about with him, a consecrated wafer, shall get him admitted into heaven. Is there then no *oneness of principle*, in these several notions? But if the analogy be admitted, then, to be consistent, we should either admit the ascetic, along with the sacramental doctrine, both springing, as they do, from the same principle; or else, rejecting that principle, disallow both of its consequences.

The sacramental and the ascetic doctrine were, however, connected by yet another link. We have adverted to the fact that it was the ascetics exclusively, or nearly so, who pretended to miraculous powers, and it was they too who were the dealers with the demon legions. That is to say, men who are cut off from the employments,

interests, cares, and enjoyments of common life, and who are kept also out of the school of common sense, must provide themselves with excitements of another order, and they will court such as, being condemned by reason, will be left to their uninvaded enjoyment.—In other words, monks and hermits, and men forced by wild notions of religion from off the path of humanity—such, will feed upon wonders. The transition from what is unnatural to what is supernatural, is an easy process, needing nothing but so much religious belief as may fall far short of what would render a man either pious or moral.

But the supernatural has its two species, and superstition has, therefore, its two kinds. Events out of the course of nature are either irregular or regular, the one being directly miraculous, the other indirectly so, and subjected to a fixed mode of operation. The first are miraculous in the usual sense of the word; the second, consisting in ritual performances, involve an immediate interposition of the divine power, but yet are infallibly connected with the due observance of certain ceremonies. The exorcisms of the ancient church occupied a place between these two species of miracles; for, while they were occasional and visible, like proper miracles, they, nevertheless, followed, infallibly a given formula, and were effected, like any other church service, by a distinct class of ecclesiastics. The exorcists were officers who could expel demons more certainly than physicians can heal the most curable diseases.

There were many other influences, not now to be spoken of, which concurred in bringing forward the sacramental superstition; but the one we have here in view would have been enough alone. When all the more fervent-minded of the clergy, along with the ambitious,



and the credulous, affected celibacy, and were in fact ascetics—debarred from every salutary and corrective motive, these would be tending, with the regulars, toward the miraculous, in both kinds. It cannot be imagined that men breathing the stifling atmosphere of religious houses, and ever gaping for miracles,—seeing visions, hearing voices, encountering legions of demons,—that such should be contented to rest in a ritual purely spiritual and rational, and which secured edification by the divine blessing upon the use of ordinary means of instruction and persuasion. No such rule of sobriety and simplicity could satisfy men who, instead of coming from their homes to church, and of returning from church to their homes, issued from cloisters, and returned to cloisters. 'The sacramental miracles, which blaze on the pages of Chrysostom—"the terrible mysteries," which archangels dared not look upon—are the awful rites of a religion whose ministers (the serious and sincere among them) have been wrought up into an habitual sombre frenzy, and to whom nothing is real but the unreal.

The sacraments, just as we find them alluded to in the New Testament, may well and fitly be administered by one who, in going forth to his duties, returns a chubby infant to its mother's arms, and who, in returning, is greeted by laughing eyes and clapping of hands. The religion of the apostles is part and parcel with the natural and domestic condition of the human heart; it is pure, kindly, gentle, and soothing to every affection of our nature. Its observances are *not* "terrible"—"astounding"—"ineffable:" they are *not* the wonder-fraught rites of the Nicene church;—no, because the apostolic ministers, bishops, presbyters, deacons, were *men* still;

but the Nicene bishops, priests, deacons—what must we call them, seeing that they had put off from themselves all the better qualities of the manly nature? The difference between the apostolic and the Nicene clergy, as to their personal and social condition, just measures out the confessed difference between the apostolic rites, and the Nicene mysteries.

But farther; the sacramental doctrine and practice of the Nicene, and of the ante-Nicene church, had a special ecclesiastical import, which offers itself to the eye of every impartial inquirer. The church, very early, had gathered around itself a various mass, which it had to govern, by means altogether of a factitious kind. While, on the one side, it had forfeited the vital energy of apostolic truth, having compromised, as well doctrines as precepts, it had driven a portion of its members into a position where, to govern them at all, was a task of the highest imaginable difficulty. Not now to speak of the clergy themselves, let it be considered that every local church had, under its care, companies of women, elder and younger, who being removed from their natural guardians, whether husbands, or parents, or brothers, had also been pushed forward to sustain a part they were few of them equal to. These women were, for the most part, dependent for their daily bread upon the church, and the condition of their receiving this eleemosynary maintenance, was their being in communion therewith. As *poor* merely, their moral and spiritual state might have been overlooked; but as *virgins*, they could advance no claim irrespective of their personal deserts.

Unless we bear these simple facts in mind, it will be impossible to understand the motive of that intense anxiety not to be excluded from communion, which induced the nuns to submit, as reported by Cyprian and by

Chrysostom, to the last humiliations, in attestation of their virtue. These things were not occasional, but ordinary; and not even the vicious operation of the ascetic institute can be believed so far to have robbed woman of her proper nature, and of her self-respect, as is implied in these revolting usages—unless it be under the pressure of some cruel necessity. Pitiably indeed was the condition of multitudes of young women who had been driven by fanatical or licentious priests, or cruel relatives, at the earliest age, into convents (or into the profession of virginity) and who, thus reduced to helplessness, were compelled, from time to time, to earn their ticket for the sacrament, and for their bread, by shameful compliances.

It is manifest, however, that an influence of a higher sort than that which might arise from the mere anxiety of a pensioner, would be kept in force, if possible. That is to say, communion with the church, and a participation in the rite which sealed and signified that communion, besides its vulgar import, to these pensioners, would be surrounded with loftier and more impressive sentiments. The clergy, feeling the peculiar difficulty of their task, in having to govern, before the eye of the church and the world, the virgin company, would do and say every thing tending to strengthen their influence over the imaginations of the governed, and to bring them within the range of more refined hopes and fears.

As to the genuine motives of piety, it were absurd to suppose that these could take effect upon the minds of women such as were those spoken of by Cyprian, Jerome, and Chrysostom. Yet such, even the most frivolous, and the most licentious, are often vividly alive to superstitious terrors. In modern catholic countries this combination is found to involve nothing that is incompa-

tible; and the nuns of Antioch, in the Nicene age, gave proof also of the harmony of these same elements.

The clergy had a cumbrous engine to work; and, to keep it in order, they availed themselves of every means which they found would take effect upon it. Hence the mysterious terrors wherewith the eucharistic rite was enveloped. Minds hardened against the genuine motives of the gospel, might yet be overawed by the terrors of the eucharistic ceremonial; and might be made to tremble by the threat of being driven from the altar. One cannot read those overwrought passages in which the great Nicene preachers are labouring to invest the celebration of the mysteries with terrors—even with horrors, and not feel that there was an unconfessed motive, a secret necessity, a latent reason of government, at the bottom of all this astounding rhetoric. The apostles were accustomed to speak in no such style of their “breaking of bread;” no, for the apostles had no convents and monasteries to manage.

The eucharistic rite may very well be regarded as the hinge of the ecclesiastical economy of the Nicene age. There was a tendency of every thing toward it; it was more thought of and regarded than any other element of the religious system; the highest benefits were connected with a due participation in it, and the most terrible evils were the consequences of even a temporary exclusion from the privilege. Before the time when the church wielded secular powers, excommunication was its last resource, in dealing with the refractory; and after the time when ecclesiastical censures were followed by civil pains, it continued to be the terrible precursive act of a process which might deprive the victim of fortune, liberty, life, and consign him to eternal misery.

Now, it can never be believed that this well-designated

“terrible mystery” should have continued, from age to age, unchanged, while the scheme of government of which it was the hinge was advancing from the simplest condition of an humble association of guileless men and women, to that of a vast, complicated, wealthy, and ambitious polity, embracing interests of all kinds, and binding together various bodies, and these wrought up to a state of unnatural excitement. Look at the apostolic church, such as we may suppose it to have been in reading the Acts of the Apostles: look at the churches of the Nicene age, at Antioch, Constantinople, Rome, Milan, three centuries afterwards, and then consider whether that “breaking of bread,” which was the symbol of communion in the one society, was likely to have undergone no changes when it came to be the symbol of communion in the other! In truth, the two rites differ just as the two societies differ; and the two differed in their first principles, in their ingredients, and in their spiritual and moral characteristics.

What is now proposed to the protestant church is in substance this—To leave, as crude, or as “undeveloped,” the ritual elements of Christianity, such as they may be gathered from the monuments of the apostolic age, and to take these elements from the hands of the ascetic, unmarried (often licentious and ambitious) superstitious, and fanatical clergy of the fourth century.

Were it not better to yield ourselves at once to the better-digested doctrine and practice of the later (Romish) church? If a power of gradual development belongs at all to the church, (and unless this is supposed, the ripened doctrine and worship of the Nicene age has no authority, and is nothing but innovation,) then, how can we be sure that this power had exhausted itself, or had been abro-

gated, precisely in the fourth century? On what grounds do we resist its operation as extant in the fifth, sixth, seventh? Or, why believe that it put forth its last energy, and expired, in the acts of the council of Trent? The church of Rome may, indeed, choose to take her stand at this point; but she is not, in principle, compelled to do so, and might even now, on urgent motives, so modify her past decisions (never will she change her *nature*) as to enable her to invite the return to her bosom of some whom she sees to be mourning their alienation from her maternal embraces.

The power which removed the cup from the lips of the laity, may restore the boon; or it may so expound any article of faith as to open a door of return to the penitent. Whether it will, or may, make any such concessions, or not, the church of Rome, at the present moment, does not leave her banished ones to doubt of the yearnings of her heart toward them. If *they* would fain return, *she*, on her part, would fain receive them. The feeling pervading the catholic world, and cherished especially at Rome, in regard to the Oxford divines, and their party, has not failed to express itself, and will probably become more and more decisive: witness the following:—

“The attention of all good catholics, and especially of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, cannot be enough excited by the present state of religion, in England, in consequence of the new doctrine, propagated with so much ability and success, by Messrs. Newman, Pusey, and Keble, with arguments drawn from the holy fathers, of which they have just undertaken a new edition (translation) in English. These gentlemen labour to restore the ancient catholic liturgy—the breviary (which many of them, to the knowledge of the writer,

recite daily,) fastings, the monastic life, and many other religious practices. Moreover they teach the insufficiency of the Bible, as a rule of faith—the necessity of tradition, and of ecclesiastical authority—the real presence—prayers for the dead—the use of images—the priests' power of absolution—the sacrifice of the mass—the devotion to the virgin, and many other catholic doctrines, in such sort as to leave but little difference between their opinions and the true faith, and which difference becomes less and less every day. Faithful! redouble your prayers, that these happy dispositions may be increased!"\*

Whilst the Romish church anticipates the happiest consequences to result from the movement now taking place in England, she need not entertain much anxiety concerning the course to be adopted when the question of an actual reconciliation may come on. She has an argument in reserve, which, even apart from any small concessions, may be found effective in overcoming the scruples of conscientious men. A Romanist might thus address the advocates of Oxford Tract principles—

“You tell us that certain dogmas and practices confirmed by the council of Trent, are neither catholic nor ancient. Grant it, and yet we might demand, on general principles, the submission of those (or their silent conformity) who, while they think much of the criminality of schism, also hold that the church, from the first, has possessed a permanent legislative and adminis-

\* *Avvenimenti Edificanti massime Recenti, &c.* p. 14. Roma, 1839. *Con facolta.* In other numbers of this religious periodical occur allusions to the progress of “sound opinions” in England, which might perhaps startle the persons implicated, as well as the public. The passage cited above is thus designated in the table of contents—*Mirabile avvicinamento fra protestanti alle Dottrine Cattoliche.*

trative authority.—If it did not, how shall we justify the many additions made to apostolic practice during the first three centuries?—*Your* church principles, what are they, if there be no such authority? But if there be, then how do you prove that it came to an end, and did not flow on to the church of Rome—at least in regard to western Christendom?

“But leaving this; we think it does not become you to except against our dogmas and practices on the ground of the alleged *authority* of a higher antiquity, until you have yourselves yielded, fully and openly, to that same authority; and especially in those matters which it affirms to be of prime importance. In claiming the right, as you seem to do, to reject certain parts of the ancient church system, on the plea of a higher *scriptural* authority, that is, on the strength of your private interpretation of the canonical writings, you go the whole length of heretics and ultra protestants, who do nothing worse; and all the difference between you and them, will be a difference *in particulars*. This is not to adhere to church principles.

“Now, as you well know, the ascetic doctrine, expressed in the monastic life, and the consequent celibacy of the clergy, claim all the weight and authority that can be derived from the sanction of high antiquity, and universal consent. You know that the monastic system was an intimate and inseparable element of the religious and ecclesiastical system, at the time to which you attribute such an authority, as that it should overrule the later enactments of the Romish church. You have yourselves admitted the abstract excellence of the ascetic life;—you adopt, as far as you can, its characteristic devotional exercises, and you give the world reason to



believe that the restoration of the monastic orders would be by no means disagreeable to you.

“ But, to advance so far, is to advance too far, or not far enough. You stand in an ambiguous position which it is hard to justify on any general principle whatever. Even if the reformers had some pretexts for change, in relation to certain abuses of the Romish church, it was their high sin to have rejected and blasphemed the monastic system—unquestionably ancient as it is:—*this* system was no popish corruption; and to cast it out as evil, is to subvert the first principle of church authority, and to set up another, even that of the ultra-protestant principle. But what say you to the church within which, at the peril of your souls, you remain, and at whose altar you minister? Your church has outraged catholic antiquity by its rejection of monasticism. Your church has no holy virgins: but was there any ancient church that had not, or that did not make its boast of them? Your church has not a monastery, or a convent, or a hermit, or any one of those things which the church universal of the Nicene age regarded as of the highest value. Call, now, St. Athanasius, and St. Basil, and St. Ambrose, and St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Augustine, call them from their high seats in glory, and let them judge between you and us! What name think you would these holy doctors bestow upon a church shorn of all the honours of virginity—naked, naked, as it is? With what emotions of horror would they look around upon your married bishops, your married priests;—bishops and priests married after ordination—married, some of them, a second time—it may be a third! Tell us then, are you bearing a faithful and courageous testimony to holy catholic principles, in conforming to a church which, as you cannot doubt,

would have been spurned and condemned by all the fathers and saints of the best age?

“Tell us, and tell the world plainly, do you think with the holy fathers, above named, on these momentous subjects; or do you think with the founders of your protestant church? You are wont to use strong language (though not too strong) in speaking of the sin and danger of dissent; but may not a man sometimes do worse in conforming, than he could in dissenting? Dissenters, if they sincerely think what they profess, are at least honest men. But now, do *you* think with your church in those prominent matters in relation to which it contradicts and impugns catholic antiquity? If you think with your church concerning the monastic life, the merit of virginity, the invocation of saints, the devotion paid to holy relics, and the like, where is your professed deference to antiquity? If you do not think with it in these points, essential as they are, what are you but dissenters—wanting courage?”

Obvious reasons of policy may induce the Romish church to forbid itself, at present, the use of arguments such as the above. In what way the cogency of them, when advanced, may be evaded, remains to be seen. The Oxford Tract divines are *not* Romanists in disguise; they do *not* intend the re-establishment of popery; but they devoutly admire, and would gladly restore, that which the English reformers did not intend, and which they rejected, feeling and seeing its contrariety to apostolic doctrine and morals.

These accomplished and devout divines have, as it seems, advanced at a too rapid rate; not duly considering that, though reformation may be quick-paced, and even sudden, the advances or the return of superstitions

(let the word be pardoned) must always, in the nature of things, be slow. Seven or ten years will not bring about the changes which were the work of two or three centuries. By this precipitation they have become seriously insnared;—insnared as churchmen, approving what their church does not allow, or has pointedly condemned:—insnared as the professed adherents of catholic antiquity, by not bearing their testimony openly and practically, to every catholic principle.

From these embarrassments they may indeed withdraw themselves, silently and insensibly, if time be allowed them for gradually shifting their position, and for retracting, little by little, what has been said—before its time. Mean while the cordially affected adherents of the reformation must wish to see the present controversy dealt with in the most summary method, and brought to the speediest possible conclusion.

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## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES AND CITATIONS.

IN the preceding pages I have purposely avoided throwing the stress of my argument, in any instance, upon facts or testimonies of a recondite or questionable kind, and have appealed only to evidence which abounds on all sides, and of which any one may readily collect more than enough, who has access to the works where it is to be found. Even a few days' industry, properly directed, would amply suffice for enabling the reader to satisfy himself concerning all the statements

or allegations to which, in these numbers, any importance is attached. It is not indeed to be supposed that *many* should give themselves even this degree of trouble, some, however, will do so;—more than a very few are actually engaged in researches of this sort, and it is much to be desired that they should be continued until the truth, and the *whole* truth, concerning the religious opinions and practices of the first six centuries has become generally diffused. It is only by the means of this knowledge of antiquity that we can be qualified to deal with Romanism, or can be secured against the insidious advances of that species of pietism of which popery is merely a digested scheme.

More with the view of saving the labour of any who may be entering upon these studies, than of substantiating in a formal manner statements which no well informed opponent would think of calling in question, I shall now point out the path in pursuing which the reader may, with very little expense of time, satisfy himself as to the condition of the Nicene church, in regard to one or two principal points which have been glanced at in the preceding pages: and in order to preclude an incidental disappointment, I will refer to those works only which are the most likely to be accessible to the reader. In fact, it is the evidence of these few that is the most conclusive: what is recondite and rare would be so much the less satisfactory.

One principal point referred to in these numbers, is the actual condition, from the first, of the ascetic institute. The evidence bearing upon this subject has a double importance, first, inasmuch as it dissipates the fond and dangerous illusion concerning an age of purity, and of generally diffused truth and holiness; and, secondly,

as it tends to discourage and to arrest the attempts, now so industriously making, to re-establish the celibate.

The ascetic institute and the celibate has existed under three distinguishable conditions—the *first*, that in which we find it in the middle of the third century, when it was the least artificial in its constitution, and, one would suppose, the least liable to abuses. What it was in *fact*, at that time, may be gathered from those passages in Cyprian to which I have already referred, p. 113. The epistle to Pomponius, and the *Treatise de habitu Virginum*, must be perused entire. The *second* condition is that of the Nicene age, when monasteries and convents were springing up on all sides, and when the ascetic feeling (*mania*) was at its height. The *third*, is that regulated and severe form, imposed upon the monastic orders under the auspices of the Romish church, and with which at present we have nothing to do. It is with the second that we are concerned. Does the inquirer choose then to take his idea of the Nicene asceticism from devotional pieces, and hortatory compositions, showing what it should have been; or from the direct and indirect admissions of its admirers? I presume the latter course to be preferred; nor can we do better than open Chrysostom; and it is curious to turn from any of his splendid descriptions of the celestial polity which the monastic orders professed to realize (as tom. i. p. 115) to passages such as the one already cited (p. 405) and to the two treatises, in one of which this passage occurs. I will say nothing more of them than that they should serve as a caution against the easy, but dangerous error of supposing that modern church historians, have fully and fairly depicted the ancient church. The very facts most necessary to be known, are barely glanced at by

any of these writers. The first of these admonitory treatises is addressed *προς τους εχοντας παρθενους συνεισακτους*, the title of the second is—*προς του μητας κανονικας συνεικειν ανδρασιν*. It is manifest that the practices inveighed against were common, and the abuses mentioned notorious. There is, indeed, nothing to be wondered at in these things—except it be the infatuation of those who, with such facts before them, could yet persist in the endeavour so to fight against human nature, common sense, and Christianity. Basil's Treatise on Virginitv, which I will *not* recommend the reader to make himself acquainted with, gives indications enough of the existence and frequency of abuses even worse than those referred to by Chrysostom. Jerome, cautious, and yet caustic, can neither withhold the truth, nor plainly declare it; in his Epistle to Eustochium he must be listened to as a reluctant witness, intimating more than he will say. Elsewhere, however, he freely admits that the excellence professed by the two classes of ascetics was but rarely realized. Comment. in Lament. cap. 3. *Sed rara est, et paucissimis dono Dei hæc perfectio concessa*. Again, in the epistle—*Ad Rusticum Monachum*, the truth comes out, and it appears plainly that the system exhibited, in Jerome's time, every one of those inherent bad qualities which have always drawn upon it the contempt and abhorrence of mankind. This epistle (of a few pages only) the studious reader will peruse throughout: no evidence can be more unexceptionable. Alone, Jerome's testimony might well be admitted as sufficient; but it accords minutely with that of Chrysostom, especially as to the custom against which the first of the above-named treatises is directed.—“Some you may see with their loins girt, clad in dingy cloaks, with long beards, who yet can never break away from the company of women; but live under

the same roof, sit at the same tables, are waited upon by young girls, and want nothing proper to the married state, except—wives! The luxury commonly indulged in by the rich ascetics, the ostentatious and rapacious practices of the poor, and the insanity of the fanatical sort, are spoken of without disguise. *Vidi ego quosdam, &c. . . publice extendentes manus, pannis aurum tegimus, et contra omnium opinionem, plenis sacculis morimur divites, qui quasi pauperes viximus.* Nothing else can be inferred from this epistle (and see, ad Nepot.) than that the graphic description it contains of knavery, licentiousness, and insanity, was applicable to the many; and that the exceptions were few: *nequaquam considerans quid alii mali faciunt, sed quid boni tu facere debeas; neque vero peccantium ducaris multitudine, et te pereuntium turba, &c.* This sort of evidence, furnished by a passionate admirer of the ascetic institute, ought to be considered as conclusive. Erasmus, determined to give the ancient monks a credit, at the expense of his contemporaries, contradicts the clearest testimonies in his “Antidote” to this epistle, which, by the way, is highly curious as indicative of the approaching reformation. I beg to commend the passage to the attention of the modern admirers of ascetic practices, quæ, says Erasmus, magis ad judæos pertinent, quàm ad christianos, et superstitiosum facere possunt, pium non possunt. Does not all experience confirm this testimony?

I really resent the humiliation of making grave references to book and chapter of a work like that of Cassian. If called upon to make good any of the assertions or intimations concerning the Nicene monkery which I may have left unsupported by direct citations, Cassian would help me out of every difficulty. The monastic rules of St. Pachomius are appended to this

writer's Institutes, and exhibit the spirit and quality of the monastic life: they are prefaced by Jerome, with a brief and curious account of it, as then established in the Thebais, under the immediate direction of "an angel sent from heaven," for this purpose.

But the reader who would give the ancient asceticism the highest possible advantage, will take his idea of it from Basil. This father's ascetic writings do not occupy much space, and they should be read by those who are now told that the monastic system of the ancient church was wise, holy, rational, and Christian-like. These compositions are—some of his epistles, as those to Nazianzen, and to Amphilochius: the treatises—on virginity, and on abdication of the world, and spiritual perfection. By the way, why should not *this* treatise find a place among "selections" from the fathers? Let us have it faithfully rendered, and without retrenchment. Basil says to his disciple—a young monk—"Hast thou left thy cell? Thou hast left there thy virtue." What sort of virtue is that which evaporates the moment it is exposed to daylight? or what is the whole meaning of the impassioned advice—"Shun the society of those of thine own age; Yea, flee from it as from a burning flame?" How few then are the steps that lead from the doctrine of angelic virginity, to the lowest depths! First comes celibacy, imposed upon youths of ardent temperament—then, by necessity, the stern separation of the sexes; and next—what? we may learn from Basil! It is not without vehement emotions of disgust and indignation that one sees this ancient and worst device of the devil set a going again, after such proofs of its true quality. Basil's "Monastic Institutions," and "Rules," longer and shorter, embody all points of the theory and practice of the ascetic life; and whoever wishes to know



what it was, will read these throughout. Compelled to forego the ample citations I had intended, I will point to a few expressions only, as they present themselves. Ad Amphiloc. 2. Basil decides that girls should not be allowed to profess *before* their sixteenth, or seventeenth years. Any irregularity fallen into by those who had voluntarily devoted themselves at this *mature* age, was to be punished with "inexorable severity!" He enjoins also that when parents or brothers, or, as sometimes happened, distant relatives, brought girls to the convent, from interested motives, the consent of the victim should be ascertained! The Monast. Constit. commence by recommending a total surrender of the soul and body to God, including (cap. xx.) the renunciation of every tie of kindred: "it is the devil's craft," says Basil, "to keep alive in the mind of the monk a recollection of his parents and natural relatives, so as that, under colour of rendering them some aid, he may be drawn aside from his heavenly course!" Let us now compare theory with facts. We hear Basil (cap. iii.) strictly forbidding, except in cases of the most extreme necessity, any sort of intercourse with women. At the same moment the monks, generally, according to Jerome and Chrysostom, were maintaining as many girls about them as their means would allow! Pachomius forbids a monk to secrete any thing in his cell, not even an apple; and Basil insists, again and again, that his monks are to renounce every atom of private property, as cap. xviii.; but Jerome tells us that the monks about him were gathering wealth within their ragged sleeves. To Basil's rule that a monk should cease to care for his relatives, some, he tells us, objected the apostle's declaration—"If a man provide not for

his own," &c. Yes, but Paul addressed this to the *living*, not to the *dead*; but a genuine monk is virtually dead to the world, although breathing the upper air; and as such, he is exempt from every secular obligation! cap. xx. "as dead thou art free from all contributions for the benefit of thy natural relatives; and, as utterly a pauper, thou hast nothing which thou canst bestow." Is not this nearly the same as the "corban" of the pharisees? In his second discourse, *Constit. Monast.*, Basil insists upon the greater severity needful in the government of *convents*, and imposes restrictions which one would imagine must have secured a degree of decorum. How far these rules were regarded, we may best learn from Chrysostom. I must cut short these references, only taking the liberty to recommend those who may now be carrying the "*Hymni Ecclesiæ*" in their pockets, or in their bosoms, to look into the history of monkery, from the Nicene age, onward, before they allow themselves to speak of it as a heaven-born institution.

THE END.











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