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Commentaries on the affairs
of the Christians before

COMMENTARIES
ON THE
AFFAIRS OF THE CHRISTIANS
BEFORE THE TIME OF
CONSTANTINE THE GREAT.

VOL. I.

Strahan and Preston,
Printers-Street, London.

COMMENTARIES
ON THE
AFFAIRS OF THE CHRISTIANS
BEFORE THE TIME OF
CONSTANTINE THE GREAT;
OR,
AN ENLARGED VIEW OF
THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE
FIRST THREE CENTURIES.

ACCOMPANIED WITH
COPIOUS ILLUSTRATIVE NOTES AND REFERENCES.

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN OF
JOHN LAURENCE MOSHEIM, D.D.
LATE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GOTTINGEN.
BY ROBERT STUDLEY VIDAL, Esq. F.S.A.

ΠΑ'ΝΤΑ ΔΟΚΙΜΑ'ΖΕΤΕ· ΤΟ ΚΑΛΟ'Ν ΚΑΤΕ'ΧΕΤΕ.

Il faut donc avouer que quelques que puissent être les suites de l'examen, on doit s'y exposer; et puis qu'il faut nécessairement que nous jugions, que l'on doit acquiescer les lumieres nécessaires pour juger solidement.

LE CLERG.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, IN THE STRAND.

1813.

THE
TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE name of Dr. Mosheim ranks so deservedly high in the republic of Letters, that no additional recommendation, it is presumed, can be wanting to ensure the attention of the learned to any work that may come forth under its sanction.—As a writer of Ecclesiastical History this profound and judicious scholar may be said to stand without a competitor. The subject was congenial to his mind, and whether we consider the talents he possessed, or the peculiar judgment and felicity with which he applied them to the elucidation of this department of Literature, his merit is alike conspicuous, and can never be too highly appreciated or extolled.

Amongst other works of acknowledged ingenuity and erudition which he published on this interesting and important subject, the one which we now venture to submit to the Public, for the first time in an English translation, appears to have engaged a very considerable portion of his attention and pains.

That vast fund of curious and important matter which, in the shape of Notes, will be found to constitute its chief bulk, could not possibly have been within the reach of any common degree of exertion: on the contrary, we offer it with no small confidence to the intelligent Reader as an illustrious memorial of those laborious and extensive researches, and that severe course of study, to which it is well known that Dr. Mosheim devoted himself for the purpose of illustrating the history of Christianity, and bringing it more within the grasp of ordinary diligence and apprehension.

The masterly and highly-valuable disquisitions which are to be met with in these Notes, respecting many abstruse and intricate points connected with the rise and first establishment of Christianity, appear to have been founded on a most comprehensive and deliberate re-examination of the Ecclesiastical History of the first ages, originally undertaken by the learned Author with a view to an enlarged edition of his Elements of Christian History, a work of high and established reputation, and of which the English reader long since received a translation from the pen of the late learned Dr. Archibald Maclaine.—But as the nature and design of that work could not well be brought to admit of any thing like a detailed examination or satisfactory discussion of several
topics

topics on which the curiosity of an intelligent and inquisitive Reader might very naturally be excited, the illustrious Author appears to have conceived that it would be yielding no unacceptable service to the literary world for him to write a set of Commentaries on a plan which, touching but lightly on subjects that had been previously well illustrated, should have an express reference to the investigation of such interesting particulars as had not been satisfactorily discussed either in his own Institutes or in the works of any other writer.

Of these projected Commentaries it is to be lamented that Dr. Mosheim lived only to publish a portion; but it will, we presume, be productive of no small degree of satisfaction to the Reader, to be apprised that the Work is complete as far as it goes, and embraces the entire history of somewhat more than the first three centuries; a period perhaps, beyond all others, replete with matter of the highest import to the right understanding of the genuine, unsophisticated principles of the Christian Religion.

Of the motives by which the Translator was induced to undertake the rendering of this Work into English, it can be necessary to say but little. It will probably be thought sufficient for him to remark, that the original Work having been

long held in the highest estimation by those the best qualified to judge of its merits *, it was imagined that an attempt to extend, in some measure, the sphere of its utility through the medium of an English translation, would at least be viewed with indulgence, and might possibly be rewarded with approbation by a liberal and enlightened Public.—It may however, farther be observed, that the Book had become exceedingly scarce, inasmuch that although it was not unfrequently sought after with the most eager assiduity, a copy was rarely to be procured even for any price.

In what manner the undertaking has been executed, it will be for others to determine, and he will therefore, as to this point, content himself with merely stating that he has, throughout the whole Work, endeavoured to exhibit the sense of his original with the most scrupulous fidelity, but at the same time without so closely

* Amongst the more recent testimonies in favour of this Work, the Public will, we are persuaded, attach no inconsiderable degree of weight to that of the Rev. Henry Kett, B. D. senior Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford; who includes these Commentaries in the List of Books recommended at the end of his “Elements of General Knowledge,” (vol. ii. p. 31.) and adds, “It is much to be regretted that this excellent Work has never been translated into English, as it would so well fill up the defective account of the three first centuries in the Ecclesiastical History.”

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purfuing that object as to fink the fpirit of his Author in a tame and fervile tranflation.

In fubmitting this tranflation to the judgment of the Public, it would be unbecoming for him not to feel a confiderable degree of diffidence, if not of apprehenfion.—He has endeavoured indeed to render it as perfect as he was able, but he is not fo much the dupe of vain conceit as to imagine that it will be found altogether free from inaccuracies, or unblemifhed by miftakes.—There is a proper confidence, however, which belongs to every one who, in making an attempt like the prefent, is not confcious of having undertaken that to which he ought to have known himfelf to be unequal; and the Tranflator trusts, that it will not be thought exceeding the juft limits of that confidence, for him to exprefs a hope that his labours will not be pronounced either difcreditable to himfelf or injurious to the reputation of that illuftrious Author, to whom it has been throughout his moft anxious wifh and intention to do juftice.

ROBERT STUDLEY VIDAL.

17th Nov. 1812.

. N. B. The Tranflator had it at one time in contemplation to have fubjoined, as he went on, a few remarks of his own on certain points that either appeared to follicit further investigation, or on which additional light has been thrown

fince

since the time when Dr. Mosheim wrote ; but on further consideration (and more particularly on account of the very great extent to which the page is already occupied with annotation,) he has been induced to abandon that design, and to reserve what observations he may have to offer of his own until the conclusion of the work ; when, should the Public appear disposed to regard his labours with an indulgent eye, and other circumstances not wear a discouraging aspect, it is his intention to bring them forward in a supplemental Volume, accompanied with a Life of Mosheim, a Catalogue of his numerous Publications, and a Translation of some of his most approved Dissertations and smaller pieces.—To pledge himself to any thing beyond this at present, might perhaps be thought to favour somewhat of presumption ; but he trusts that he shall not incur the imputation of arrogance, by adding that there is one other Undertaking, in the way of translation, to which he has occasionally ventured to direct his attention, and which, should it ever be in his power to accomplish, will put the English Reader in possession of a Work, that in the original Latin has long been considered as an inestimable Appendage to one of the noblest productions of the human mind : he alludes to Dr. Mosheim's Notes on Cudworth's Intellectual System of the Universe.

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ERRATA. VOL. I.

Page	31, last line, for <i>Itenere</i> , read <i>Itinere</i> .
—	38, line 6. for or “ <i>God</i> ,” read or “ <i>of God</i> .”
—	49, — 12. for <i>Sacca</i> , read <i>Saccas</i> .
—	72, — 27. for <i>Sudduces</i> , read <i>Sadducees</i> .
—	77, — 31. for <i>Indicalum</i> , read <i>Indiculum</i> .
—	164, — 29, for <i>Cruely</i> , read <i>Cruelty</i> .
	Passim, — for <i>Intrinjsically</i> , read <i>Intrinfecally</i> .

THE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE work which I here offer to the public, owes its origin rather to a fortuitous concurrence of circumstances, than to any regular premeditated design. My *Institutes of Christian History* having met with such a rapid sale, that every copy was disposed of within four years; the worthy person, at whose expence they were printed, urged me to publish an enlarged and improved edition of them. In compliance with his wishes, I sat down to a revision of the work; and having compared its contents with the original ancient authorities, together with what else was to be met with on the subject in the writings of the learned, and also with such notes and observations as a daily course of reading and reflection had enabled me to make, I perceived, or rather my attention was again caught by what for many years before I had perceived to be the case, that in the history of Christian affairs, some things had been almost entirely omitted, others not properly represented, and not a few, either

PREFACE.

from negligence, a partial view of the subject, or the placing of too great a reliance on the industry of others, altogether misconceived.

Whatever remarks of this kind presented themselves, were carefully minuted down, with a view to render the proposed fourth edition of my book both more complete and of greater utility than the preceding ones. Proceeding constantly in this way, my collection of notes at length acquired no inconsiderable degree of bulk; and the more frequently I considered them, the more disposed I felt, (for we naturally conceive a regard for what has cost us some pains,) to believe them not wholly unworthy of being preserved. In the course of time, a thought suggested itself to me of writing a set of Commentaries on Christian affairs, upon a different scale; reducing my observations within a narrower compass on such topics as had been sufficiently treated of by others, and, at the same time, giving a more copious and satisfactory discussion of those matters which a long course of study and attention had rendered more particularly familiar to me, and respecting which I had obtained a precise and accurate knowledge. I mentioned this idea to the person above spoken of, who had submitted to me the proposal of publishing an enlarged edition of my former small work, and it met with his approbation: but, as the undertaking was of some magnitude, we agreed that the work should be published

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published in separate parts; taking care, however, that each division might be so far complete in itself as not to have the appearance of being disjointed, or awkwardly torn off from the rest. The work was accordingly taken up by me without delay; and I have now to express my hope, that what is here offered to the public as the first part, (but which may be considered as forming a work of itself,) may be productive of the wished-for beneficial effects. If the Supreme Disposer of human affairs prolong my days, and grant me a continuance of my health and faculties, the others will follow in regular succession. Indeed the next, consisting of *Commentaries on the affairs of the Christians under the family of Constantine*, may be expected within a very short period: the materials have been long since collected and arranged, and only wait for the printer.

Since the subject of the following work has been treated of by many before me, it is impossible but that my book should contain several things in common with theirs; but notwithstanding this, it will be found, both in respect of the matter, as well as of the manner of handling it, to differ considerably from other works of a similar kind. With regard to the form or order of narration, I have endeavoured to steer a middle course, having neither arranged my materials after the plan of annals, nor yet according

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to that which I followed in my smaller history, and which many prefer, of distributing the transactions of each century under certain general titles. Each of these modes has its advantages: the latter, however, is attended with this inconvenience, that it frequently separates things the most closely connected; and by thus interrupting the chain of history, renders it difficult for the reader to trace the progress of events from their beginning to their close, or to connect some of the greater revolutions and changes with the causes which produced them. My object, therefore, has been to unite, as far as possible, the advantages of both these methods, by managing my subject so as that, whilst every proper attention was paid to the order of time, a due regard should likewise be had to the connecting of events with their causes, and the keeping distinct things which had no relation to each other. I trust that both the memory and the judgment of the reader may be assisted by this mode of arrangement, and that it will be found instrumental in developing the more remote causes of those changes which have occasionally taken place in the Christian commonwealth.

For the matter which forms the basis of this work, I have principally depended on such original monuments of antiquity as have escaped the ravages of time. I have not, indeed, neglected to avail myself of whatever assistance could be drawn

drawn from those writers of a more recent date, whose merits have given them an authority with the public, and stamped a celebrity of character on their works; but, at the same time, it has been my care to follow none of them without consulting, and, as far as I was able, examining with attention and assiduity, the original sources themselves from whence the authors derived, or appeared to have derived, their information. That the reader may the more readily judge of my caution and fidelity in this respect, I have, in every case where doubts might arise on a point of any moment, subjoined the testimony of these ancient writers in their own words. I have not occupied myself in discussing the merits of the different opinions, explanations, and conjectures that are to be met with in the writings of the learned, unless through necessity, or where the antiquity and weight of the opinions themselves, or the abilities and high reputation of the authors by whom they were maintained, appeared to demand it. In treating of Christian affairs, it has been my study rather to recount what, upon the faith of ancient writers, I consider as the simple fact, than to entangle myself with any particular opinions that may have been entertained on the subject.

I have intentionally avoided entering into any discussion respecting matters of a minute and trifling kind; such, for instance, as the birth-

place of Simon, Valentine, and others, the particular year in which any sect sprung up, the exact situation of places, obsolete and obscure words and phrases, and the like. For, not to say any thing of the uncertainty with which things of this sort must in a great measure remain enveloped, in spite of every endeavour that might be used to extricate them, it would neither be consistent with propriety, nor attended with the promise of any sort of benefit, to occupy the attention with them in a history like the present, of the practical species, or that which applies itself to the immediate and most important purposes of life; although, in another place, the consideration of them might probably be productive both of pleasure and utility. Besides, there are many works already extant, in which those who have a taste for disquisitions of this kind may meet with the most ample gratification.

In the following Commentaries, the history of the first century will be found less copious than that of the succeeding ones: indeed, in some instances, the reader will meet with scarcely any thing more than a mere summary notice of the fact. To account for this, it need only be known, that an enlarged edition of my *Institutes of the Ecclesiastical History of the first Age*, is already before the public, in which, whoever shall be desirous of obtaining further information on any topic which is but slightly noticed in the
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present work, may find it treated of expressly and more at large. I could not by any means, consistently with the plan of these Commentaries, entirely pass over the first century, since it was my design that they should comprehend an universal history of ecclesiastical affairs from the commencement of the Christian era to the time of Constantine the Great, written upon a different scale from that of my former work, and disposed after a new method: but, on the other hand, common justice appeared to demand that I should not wholly disregard the interests of those who had purchased my above-mentioned enlarged Elementary History of the first Age; nor could I in any shape reconcile it with the principles of fairness and honesty, to send out into the world a mere transcript or repetition of what was already before it under a different title. I therefore determined to follow a middle line of conduct, confining my account of the transactions of the first century within much narrower limits than I had prescribed to myself in my former work, but, at the same time, availing myself of the present opportunity to make several corrections in the history of that period, and also to enrich it with some additional matter. In fact, the two works will be found to assist and reflect mutual light on each other. The enlarged edition of my Institutes will supply the reader with a more ample and minute investigation of such

particulars relating to the history of the first century, as are but briefly touched on in the following work; whilst, on the other hand, by a reference to these Commentaries, light will be obtained on such matters as are not treated of with sufficient perspicuity in the Institutes, some partial omissions in that work will be supplied, and the means be furnished for correcting some inaccuracies which found their way into it through inadvertence, or want of better information. If, in the following work, any particulars, hitherto unknown, be brought to light; their due weight be given to any circumstances, hitherto passed over without proper attention; any points, hitherto but imperfectly supported by proofs, or not explained with sufficient perspicuity, be substantiated, and rendered easy of apprehension, (and unless I have been led to form too favourable an estimate of my reading, my memory, and my judgment, the book will be found to have some pretensions of this sort,) it will better accord with my feelings to leave these things to be noticed by the intelligent reader in the course of his progress, than for me to anticipate his discernment, by pointing them out in this place.

INTRODUCTION.

IT appears to me desirable, (and the opinion is not, I think, built upon slight grounds,) that before we enter on the history of the origin and progress of Christianity, a summary view should be taken of the age in which the Gospel Dispensation had its commencement. For in no other way than by a reference to the manners and opinions of those times, can we obtain any insight into the reasons and causes of many things which happened to the early Christians, or form a proper judgment of several of their primary regulations and institutions; nor can we know justly how to appreciate the great extent of those benefits which CHRIST hath procured for mankind, unless we previously acquaint ourselves with the forlorn and miserable condition of the human race before the Redeemer's advent. By way of introduction, therefore, to the following work, we shall, in the first place, present the reader with a sketch of the general state of the world, at the time of our SAVIOUR's birth; and then call his attention particularly to the civil and religious economy of the Jewish nation, at the same interesting period.

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C H A P. I.

Of the Civil, Religious, and Literary State of the World in general, at the Time of Christ's Birth.

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State of
the Roman
Empire.

I. **A**T the time when the SON of GOD, having taken upon himself our nature, was born in the land of Judea, the greatest part of the habitable earth was subject to the senate and people of Rome, who usually committed the care and administration of those provinces which were removed to any considerable distance from the imperial city, to temporary governors or presidents sent from Rome; or if in any of them the ancient form of government was permitted to be retained, gave it such a modification, and clothed it with so many restrictions, as effectually secured to the Roman state a supreme and controuling dominion. Although the appearance, or rather the shadow of freedom and dignity yet remained with the senate and people of Rome, the reality had long been lost to them; all power having centred in the one CÆSAR AUGUSTUS, who was graced with the titles of Emperor, High Priest, Censor, Tribune of the People, and Proconsul, and invested with every office of the state that carried with it any thing either of majesty or authority [a].

[a] Augustin Campianus, *de Officio et Potestate Magistratum Romanorum, et Jurisdictione*, lib. i. cap. i. § 2. p. 3. Edit. Genév. 1725, in 4to.

II. Were

II. Were we to form our judgment of the Roman government from the principles of its constitution, or the nature of its laws, we must consider it as mild and moderate [b]. But whatever promise of happiness the equitable spirit of the original system might hold out to the people, it was constantly checked and counteracted by a variety of causes, and particularly by the rapacity and dishonesty of the publicans, to whom the collection of the public revenue was entrusted [c]; the unbounded avarice of the governors of provinces to increase their private wealth; and the insatiable cupidity of the people at large, which displayed itself not merely in the tenacity with which they maintained every part of their conquests, but also in a constant readiness to seize all opportunities of extending the bounds of the empire. Whilst, on the one hand, this incessant thirst after dominion gave rise to continual wars, and rendered it necessary constantly to burthen the inhabitants of the provinces with the maintenance of a formidable military force, a thing in itself doubtless sufficiently grievous, the greedy publicans and governors were, on the other hand, fleecing the people of the residue of their property, by the most shameful and iniquitous pecuniary exactions.

III. It must not, however, be overlooked, that the bringing of so many nations into subjection under one people, or rather under one man,

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Defects of
the Roman
government.

Benefits
arising out of
the Roman
government.

[b] See a discourse by the very ingenious Mr. Walter Moyle, entitled, *An Essay upon the Constitution of the Roman Government*, published amongst his posthumous works, vol. i. p. 1-48. Lond. 1726. 8vo. Giannone, *Histoire Civile du Royaume de Naples*, vol. i. p. 3, 4, et seq. Scip. Maffei, *Verona Illustrata*, lib. ii. p. 65.

[c] See Pet. Burmannus, *de Vestigalibus Populi Romani*, cap. ix. p. 123, et seq.

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was productive of many and great advantages. For, 1st, By means of this, the people of various regions, alike strangers to each other's language, manners, and laws, were associated together in the bond of amity, and invited to reciprocal intercourse. 2dly, By Roman munificence, which shrank from no expence to render the public ways commodious, an easy and ready access was given to parts the most distant and remote [*d*]. 3dly, Men that had hitherto known no other rules of action, no other modes of life, than those of savage and uncultivated nature, had now the model of a polished nation set before their eyes, and were gradually instructed by their conquerors to form themselves after it. 4thly, Literature and the arts, with the study of humanity and philosophy, became generally diffused, and the cultivation of them extended even to countries that previously had formed no other scale by which to estimate the dignity of man, than that of corporeal vigour, or muscular strength.

Since all these things materially contributed to facilitate the propagation of the gospel by our Saviour's apostles, and enabled them the more easily to impress men's minds with the doctrines of the true religion, we cannot but readily accord in opinion with those who maintain, that the Son of God could not have revealed himself to man-

[*d*] See a learned work of Nicol. Bergier concerning the Roman public ways, entitled, *Histoire des grands Chemins de l'Empire Romain*, Brussels, 1728, in 4to. Also a treatise by the learned Everard Otto, *de Tutela Viarum publicarum*, p. ii. p. 314. Many other highly respectable authors have also either professedly, or incidentally, treated of this subject, and pointed out the great care and industry of the Romans, to render the channels of communication both by sea and land, throughout every part of the empire, safe, easy, and expeditious.

kind

kind at a more favourable or auspicious season [e].

IV. Those intestine discords, by which the Roman state had long been distracted and ravaged, were terminated in the acquisition of the sovereign power by Augustus; and the wars with foreign states continued no longer to be undertaken with the accustomed precipitancy, or prosecuted with that degree of ardour by which they had been formerly characterised. Although, therefore, we cannot subscribe to the opinion of those writers, who, being led into a mistake by Orosius, have asserted, that at the time of our Saviour's birth the temple of Janus was shut [f], and every part of the Roman empire wrapt in a profound peace, it must nevertheless unquestionably be admitted, that if the period of which we are speaking, be brought into comparison with antecedent times, it may justly be termed the age of peace and tranquillity. Indeed, had not such been the state of things, it would have been almost impossible, (as St. Paul pretty plainly intimates [g],) for our Saviour's apostles to have executed with effect, the important commission to mankind with which they were entrusted.

V. Our knowledge of the state of any of those nations which were situated beyond the confines

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Peace prevails nearly throughout the world.

State of other nations.

[e] Amongst the early fathers of Christianity, we may refer to Origen, who particularly notices this circumstance in the second book of his Reply to Celsus, p. 79. edit. Cantab. In after-times, we find it adverted to by several of those who have entered the lists against the adversaries of revealed religion.

[f] Maffon has given us a very masterly examination of the ancient opinion respecting the temple of Janus, in his *Templum Jani Christo nascente resecratum*, published at Rotterdam, 1706, in 8vo.

[g] 1 Tim. ii. 2.

of

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of the Roman empire, is of necessity very imperfect and obscure, owing to the paucity of their historical monuments and writers. We obtain, however, light sufficient to perceive that, the eastern nations were distinguished by a low and servile spirit, prone to slavery and every other species of abject humiliation, whilst those towards the north prided themselves in cherishing a warlike and savage disposition, that scorned even the restraint of a fixed habitation, and placed its chief gratification in the liberty of roaming at large through scenes of devastation, blood, and slaughter. A soft and feeble constitution both of body and mind, with powers barely adequate to the cultivation of the arts of peace, and chiefly exercised in ministering at the shrine of voluptuous gratification, may be considered as the characteristic trait of the former; a robust and vigorous corporeal frame, animated with a glowing spirit, that looked with contempt on life, and every thing by which its cares are soothed, and the calamities to which it is obnoxious alleviated, that of the latter [b].

All devoted
to super-
stition and
polytheism.

VI. The minds of the people inhabiting these various countries, were fettered and held in melancholy bondage, by superstitions of the most abominable and degrading nature. At the command of their priests, who were invested with an authority bordering on despotism, these deluded beings shrank from no species of mental debasement whatever, but were ready to plunge headlong into every extravagance of the most absurd

[b] *Fere itaque imperia penes eos fuere populos, qui mitiore calo utuntur: in frigora, septentrionemque vergentibus immanueta ingenia sunt, ut ait poeta, suaque simillima calo, Seneca, de Ira, lib. ii. cap. xvi. p. 36. tom. i. opp. edit. Gronov.*

and

and monstrous credulity. In saying this, we would not be understood to mean that the sense of a supreme deity, from whom all things had their origin, and whose decrees regulate the universe, had become entirely extinct; but, that the number of those who endeavoured by meditation and prayer to elevate their minds to a just conception of his nature and attributes, and to worship him in spirit and in truth, was comparatively insignificant, and of no account. Throughout every nation, a general belief prevailed, that all things were subordinate to an association of powerful spirits, who were called Gods, and whom it was incumbent on every one who wished for a happy and prosperous course of life to worship and conciliate. One of these gods was supposed to excel the rest in dignity, and to possess a supereminent authority, by which the tasks or offices of the inferior ones were allotted, and the whole of the assembly, in a certain degree, directed and governed. His rule, however, was not conceived to be by any means arbitrary; neither was it imagined that he could so far invade the provinces of the others, as to interfere with their particular functions; and hence it was deemed necessary for those who would secure the favour of Heaven, religiously to cultivate the patronage of every separate deity, and assiduously to pay that homage to each of them which was respectively their due.

VII. Every nation, however, worshipped not the same gods, but each had its peculiar deities, differing from those of other countries, not only in their names, but in their nature, their attributes, their actions, and many other respects; and it is an highly erroneous supposition which some have adopted, that the gods of Greece and

The same deities, however, not worshipped by all.

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Rome were the same with those which were worshipped by the Germans, the Syrians, the Arabians, the Persians, the Egyptians, and others [i]. Pride and ignorance, amongst other motives, and possibly something of a similarity which might be perceptible between their own statues and images and those which they found in other countries, induced the Greeks and Romans to pretend that, the gods which they acknowledged, were equally revered in every other part of the world. In support of this identity, they accustomed themselves to apply the names of their own divinities to those of foreign states; and the opinion of its existence having found abettors in every succeeding age, even down to our own times, the press has swarmed with an host of idle disquisitions on the subject, by which the history of ancient religions, instead of being elucidated, has been involved in a degree of uncertainty, confusion, and obscurity, that is scarcely to be described. It might probably be the case with most nations, that the gods of other countries were held in a sort of secondary reverence, and perhaps in some instances privately worshipped; but of this fact we are certain, that to neglect or disparage the established worship of the state, was always considered as an offence of the deepest and most heinous nature.

This diversity
of religions
did not ge-
nerate wars.

VIII. This diversity of gods, and of religious worship, was never known to generate animosity,

[i] Athanasius has particularly noticed this in his *Oratio contra Gentes*, tom. i. opp. p. 25. It has also been pointed out by several modern writers, particularly by Le Clerc in his *Ars Critica*, p. ii. sect. 1. cap. xiii. § 11. p. 280.; and in his *Bibliothèque Choisie*, tom. vii. p. 84. Also by Dr. Warburton, in his *Divine Legation of Moses*, vol. ii. p. 233, et seq.

or kindle the flames of war between nations, except in the one solitary instance of the Egyptians: and considerable doubts may be entertained, whether even in this case a difference of religion alone was the cause of strife [k]. Each nation readily conceded to others the right of forming their own opinions, and judging for themselves, in matters of religious concern; and left them, both in the choice of their deities, and their mode of worshipping them, to be guided, by whatever principles they might think proper to adopt. Although this may appear at first sight to many as a very extraordinary and unaccountable circumstance, yet, when it is examined, there will be found nothing in it that should excite either our wonder or surprize [l].

Those who were accustomed to regard this world in the light of a large commonwealth, divided into several districts, over each of which a certain

[k] That the Egyptians were at times engaged amongst themselves in religious wars, *i. e.* in wars undertaken on account of their gods and their religion, is clear from many passages in ancient authors, the principal of which are brought into one view by Pignorius, in his *Expositio Mensæ Iſiacæ*, p. 41, et seq. But if by a religious war be meant that which is undertaken by a nation or people in defence of their religion, or with a view to make another nation or people renounce the religion of their ancestors and adopt theirs, in such case I do not see that those wars of the Egyptians can with any propriety be termed religious ones. The Egyptians engaged in wars with their neighbours, not with a view to make them change their religion, but for the purpose of revenging the injuries that had been done to certain animals which they themselves held sacred. The fact was, that animals, which in some of the provinces of Egypt were revered as gods, were in others considered as noxious, and killed whenever they could be found: and hence arose the quarrels and warfare to which we allude.

[l] See Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*, passim, vol. ii. p. 166. iii. p. 60. 86, 87. 154, &c.

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order of deities presided, and who never extended their views or hopes beyond the enjoyments of this life, certainly could not, with any shadow of justice, assume the liberty of forcing other nations to discard their own proper divinities, and receive in their stead the same objects of adoration with themselves. The Romans, we know, were jealous in the extreme of introducing any novelties, or making the least change in the public religion; but the citizens were never denied the privilege of individually conforming to any foreign mode of worship, or manifesting, by the most solemn acts of devotion, their veneration for the gods of other countries [m].

Various
kinds of
deities.

IX. The principal deities of most nations, consisted of heroes renowned in antiquity, kings, emperors, founders of cities, and other illustrious persons, whose eminent exploits, and the benefits they had conferred on mankind, were treasured up and embalmed in the minds of posterity, by whose gratitude they were crowned with immortal honours, and raised to the rank of gods. An apotheosis had also been bestowed on several of the softer sex, whose virtues or superior talents had improved and thrown a lustre on the age in which they lived. This may easily be perceived by any one who will take the pains to explore the sources of the heathen mythology; and it at once accounts for what must otherwise appear a monstrous incongruity, namely, that of their attributing to those celestial beings the same evil pro-

[m] Vid. Corn. a Bynkershoek, *Dissert. de Cultu peregrinæ Religionis apud Romanos*, in *Opuscul. Ling. Bat.* 1719, 4to. N^o iv. Matth. Ægyptii, *Dissertatio ad Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*, tom. vii. Livii Drakenborchiani, p. 197, et seq. Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*, vol. i. p. 307, et seq.

penalties,

penalties, errors, and vices, that we have daily to deplore as the characteristic frailties of human nature. In no other respects were the gods of the Gentiles supposed to be distinguished beyond mankind, than by the enjoyment of power, and an immortal existence. To the worship of divinities of this description was joined, in many countries, that of some of the noblest and most excellent parts of the visible world; the luminaries of heaven in particular, the sun, the moon, and the stars, in whom, since the effects of their influence were constantly to be perceived, a mind or an intelligence was supposed to reside. The superstitious practices of some regions were carried to an almost endless extreme: mountains, rivers, trees, the earth, the sea, the winds; even the diseases of the body, the virtues and the vices, (or rather certain tutelary genii, to whom the guardianship and care of all these things were conceived to belong,) were made the objects of adoration, and had divine honours regularly paid to them. In Egypt, this excess of religious culture reached to the worshipping of the most noxious and venomous animals [n].

X. Buildings of the most superb and magnificent kind, under the names of temples, fanes, &c. were raised and dedicated by the people of almost every country to their gods, with the expectation that the divinities would condescend to make those sumptuous edifices the places of their immediate residence. They were not all open to the public, but some of them confined to the exercise of private and retired devotion. Internally, those of either description were ornamented with

Temples and
statues of
these deities.

[n] See the learned work of Gerard Jo. Vossius, *de Idololatria*, lib. i. ii. iii.

INTROD. images of the gods, and furnished with altars, and
 CHAP. I. the requisite apparatus for sacrifice.

The statues were supposed to be animated by the deities whom they represented: for though the worshippers of gods like those above described, must, in great measure, have turned their backs on every dictate of reason, they were yet by no means willing to appear so wholly destitute of common sense, as to pay their adoration to a mere idol of metal, wood, or stone; but always maintained, that their statues, when properly consecrated, were filled with the presence of those divinities whose forms they bore [o].

Sacrifices
 and other
 rites.

XI. The religious homage paid to these deities, consisted chiefly in the frequent performance of various rites, such as the offering up of victims and sacrifices, with prayers and other ceremonies. The sacrifices and offerings, were different, according to the nature and attributes of the gods to whom they were addressed [p]. Brute animals were commonly devoted to this purpose; but in some nations of a savage and ferocious character, the horrible practice of sacrificing human victims prevailed [q]. Of the prayers of pagan worshippers, whether we regard the matter or the mode of expression, it is impossible to speak favourably: they were not only destitute in general of every thing allied to the spirit of ge-

[o] Arnob. *adv. Gentes*, lib. 6. p. 254. edit. Heraldi. Augustin. *de Civitate Dei*, lib. 8. c. 23. p. 161. tom. 7. opp. edit. Benedict. Julian. *Misopogon*, p. 361. opp. edit. Spanheim.

[p] Vid. Jo. Saubertus, *de Sacrificiis veterum*, Lug. Bat. 1699, 8vo. and republished by Crenius.

[q] See what has been collected on this subject by Columna, in his Commentary on the Fragments of Ennius, p. 29, et seq. Also Saubertus, *de Sacrificiis veterum*, cap. xxi. p. 455.

ruine piety, but were sometimes framed expressly for the purpose of obtaining the countenance of heaven to the most abominable and flagitious undertakings [r]. In fact, the greater part of their religious observances, were of an absurd and ridiculous nature, and in many instances strongly tinged with the most disgraceful barbarism and obscenity. Their festivals and other solemn days, were polluted by a licentious indulgence in every species of libidinous excess; and on these occasions, they were not prohibited even from making the sacred mansions of their gods the scenes of vile and beastly gratification [s].

Their priests.

XII. The care of the temples, together with the superintendance and direction of all religious ordinances, was committed to a class of men bearing the titles of priests or flamins. Within the peculiar province of these ministers it came to see that the ancient and accustomed honours were paid to the deities publicly acknowledged, and that a due regard was manifested in every other respect for the religion of the state. These formed their ordinary duties; but superstition ascribed to them functions of a far more exalted nature. It considered them rather in the light of intimate and familiar friends of the gods, than in that of officiating servants at their altars; and consequently attributed to them the highest degree of sanctity, influence, and power. With the minds of the people thus prejudiced in their

[r] Vid. Matth. Brouerius a Niedeck, *de Adorationibus veterum Populorum*, Traj. 1711, 8vo. Saubertus, *de Sacrificiis*, cap. xii. xiii. p. 343, et seq.

[s] The impiety and licentiousness which characterised the festivals of heathen nations, are very fully and ably exposed by Philo Judæus, in his treatise *de Cherubim*, p. 155, 156. tom. i. opp. edit. Mangey.

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favour, it could be no very difficult thing for an artful and designing set of men, possessed of a competent share of knowledge, to establish and support a system of spiritual dominion of the most absolute and tyrannical kind.

Mysteries.

XIII. In addition to the public service of the gods, at which every one was permitted to be present, the Egyptians, Persians, Grecians, Indians, and some other nations, had recourse to a species of dark and recondite worship, under the name of mysteries. The practice of certain secret religious rites may indeed be said to have been common to the people of almost all countries except the Romans, who adopted no such usage until the time of Adrian [t]. None were admitted to behold or partake in the celebration of these mysteries, but those who had approved themselves worthy of such distinction, by their fidelity and perseverance in the practice of a long and severe course of initiatory forms. The votaries were enjoined, under the peril of immediate death, to observe the most profound secrecy as to every thing that passed [u]: and this suffi-

[t] That the Romans practised no sort of mysteries before the time of our Saviour, is clear from the testimony of Dionysius Halicarnassensis, and others. Aurelius Victor is my authority for considering these secret rites, and particularly the Eleusinian mysteries, to have been introduced at Rome by the emperor Hadrian, whose curiosity was unbounded. *Pace ad orientem composita Romam regreditur. Ibi Græcorum more, seu Pompilii Numæ, cæremonias, leges, Gymnasia, doctoresque curare occupit;—atque initia Cereris, Liberæque, quæ Eleusina dicitur Atheniensium modo, Roma percoleret.* Lib. de Cæsarib. cap. xiv. p. 349. edit. Arintzenii. I am aware that the credit of Aurelius Victor has been called in question by several very learned men, but I must confess I know not on what grounds.

[u] See what has been collected on this subject by Meursius, in his work *de Mysteriis Eleusiniis*; and by Clarkson, in his *Discours sur les Liturgies*, § 4. p. 36.

ciently

ciently accounts for the difficulty that we find in obtaining any information respecting the nature of these reclusive practices, and for the discordant and contradictory opinions concerning them that are to be met with in the writings of various authors, ancient as well as modern [v]. From what little can be collected on the subject, it should seem that these mysteries were not all of the same nature. In the celebration of some of them, it is pretty plain, that many things were done in the highest degree repugnant to virtue, modesty, and every finer feeling. In others, perhaps, the course of proceeding might be of a very different complexion; and it is very probable that in those of a more refined cast, some advances were made in bringing back religion to the test of reason, by inquiring into and exposing the origin and absurdity of the popular superstitions and worship [w]. There might, therefore, be some

[v] Dr. Warburton has discussed the subject of these mysteries with much ingenuity, though not always with equal felicity, in his celebrated work on *the Divine Legation of Moses*, tom. i. lib. 2. sect. 4. p. 131. f. That great scholar thinks that all the different sorts of mysteries were instituted for the purpose of teaching the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. But this appears to me to be carrying the matter too far. I grant that in some of them, the principles of a rational religion might be inculcated, and the absurdity of the public superstitions exposed; but that this was the case with all, no one can believe who has attended to the nature of the mysteries of Bacchus, the celebration of which, according to Livy, was positively forbidden at Rome. I have myself formerly written on the subject of the mysteries, by way of note to Cudworth's *Intellectual System of the Universe*, tom. 1. p. 329. tom. 2. p. 1049. ; and I still retain the same sentiments that I there expressed.

[w] Vid. Cicero *Disput. Tusculan.* lib. i. cap. 13. tom. 8. opp. ed. Minoris Verburgianæ. Lib. i. *de Legibus*, cap. 24. p. 3362. Varro *apud Augustinum de Civitate Dei*, lib. iv. cap. 31. p. 87. tom. 7. opp. Eusebius *Præparat. Evangelica*, lib. ii. cap. 3. p. 61. f.

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foundation for the promise usually held forth to those who were about to be initiated, that they would be put in possession of the means of rendering this life happy, and also have the expectation opened to them of entering on an improved state of existence hereafter. However this might be, it is certain that the highest veneration was entertained by the people of every country for what were termed the mysteries; and the Christians, perceiving this, were induced to make their religion conform in many respects to this part of the heathen model, hoping that it might thereby the more readily obtain a favourable reception with those whom it was their object and their hope to convert [x].

The religion
of the Greeks
and Romans.

XIV. At the time of Christ's birth, the religion of Rome had been received; together with its government and laws, by a great part of the world. The principal tenets of that religion were built on the superstitions of Greece [y]; but, at the same time, there was in some points a material difference between the two. For not to say any thing of the regulations established by Numa

[x] They adopted, for instance, in common with the pagan nations, the plan of dividing their sacred offices into two classes: the one public, to which every person was freely admitted; the other secret or mysterious, from which all the unprofessed were excluded. The initiated were those who had been baptised; the unprofessed, the catechumens. The mode of preparatory examination also bore a strong resemblance, in many respects, to the course of initiatory forms observed by the heathen nations, in regard to their mysteries. In a word, many forms and ceremonies, to pass over other things of the Christian worship, were evidently copied from these secret rites of paganism; and we have only to lament that, what was thus done with unquestionably the best intentions, should in some respects have been attended with an evil result.

[y] Vid. Dionysius Halicarn. *Antiquit. Romanor.* lib. 7. cap. 72. p. 460. tom. i. opp. ed. Hudsoni.

and

and others, relating to the government and support of the state, the people had in the course of time, adopted much of the old Etruscan mythology, and a place amongst their gods had also been given by them to some of the Egyptian deities [z].

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XV. But since the conquered nations did not so implicitly conform to the Roman religion, as utterly to discard that of their ancestors, a species of mixed religious culture by degrees sprung up in the provinces, partaking in its nature both of the religion of the country, and of that of Rome. It appears to have been the object of the Roman government at one time, completely to abolish the religious systems of those nations whose sacred rites were of a ferocious and cruel character, or in any shape repugnant to humanity [a]; and to introduce their own religion in their stead. The attachment however of those barbarians to the superstitions of their forefathers, entirely defeated the accomplishment of those views, and rendered it impossible to effect any thing beyond a sort of compromise, by which certain of the Roman deities and rites were associated and intermixed with those peculiarly belonging to the conquered countries. Hence it is that we frequently find a deity distinguished by two appellations; the one being its original title, the other that which it had acquired by this kind of denization: and to the same cause we must refer much of that affinity which

The religions of other nations adulterated by the Romans.

[z] Vid. Petitus *Comment. in Leges Atticas*, lib. 1. tit. 1. p. 71. f. ed. Batav. Lactantius *Divinar. Institution.* lib. 1. cap. 20.

[a] Vid. Strabo, *Geograph.* lib. iv. p. 189, 190, where, after descanting on the barbarous and inhuman religious rites of the Gauls, the Germans, and the Celts, he states that every endeavour was used by the Romans to abolish them.

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The religions
of the Indi-
ans, Eryp-
tians, Per-
sians, and
Celts.

is often to be perceived between the Roman forms of worship, and those of the nations which they subdued.

XVI. Amongst the most remarkable of the religions which prevailed at that time, may be reckoned those which were cultivated by the Indians, the Persians, the Egyptians, and the Celts. Of these the Indians and Celts are chiefly distinguished, by having selected for the objects of their adoration a set of antient heroes and leaders, whose memory, so far from being rendered illustrious by their virtues, had come down to posterity disgraced and loaded with vice and infamy. Both these nations (or rather classes of men,) believed that, the souls of men survived the dissolution of their bodies: the former conceiving that all of them without distinction migrated into new terrestrial habitations; whilst the latter on the contrary, considering immortal life as the meed bestowed by heaven on valour alone, supposed that the bodies of the brave, after being purified by fire, again became the receptacles of their souls, and that the heroes thus renewed, were received into the council and society of the gods. The most despotic authority was committed to their priests by the people of either country: their functions were not limited to the administration of divine matters, but extended to the enacting of laws, and the various other departments of civil government.

The religion
of the Eryp-
tians.

XVII. In treating of the religion of the Egyptians, it is necessary to make a distinction; since only a part of it can properly be considered as the general religion of the country, the practice of the rest being confined to particular provinces or districts. The liberty which every city and province enjoyed of adopting what gods it pleased, and
of

of worshipping them under any forms which the inhabitants might think proper to institute, of course gave rise to a great variety of private systems. In the choice of their public or national gods, no sort of delicacy was manifested, the chief class of them being indiscriminately composed of mortals renowned in history for their virtues, and those distinguished alone by the enormity of their crimes: such as Osiris, Serapis, Typhon, Isis and others. With the worship of these, was joined that of the constellations, the sun, the moon, the dog-star, animals of almost every kind, certain sorts of plants, and I know not of what else. Whether the religion of the state, or that peculiar to any province or city be considered, it will be found equally remote in its principles from every thing liberal, dignified, or rational; some parts were ridiculous in the extreme, and the whole in no small degree contaminated by a despicable baseness and obscurity. Indeed the religion of the Egyptians, was so remarkably distinguished by absurd and disgraceful traits, that it was made the subject of derision even by those whose own tenets and practice were by no means formed on the suggestions of a sound wisdom [b]. The priests had a sacred code peculiarly their own, founded on very different principles from those which characterized the popular religion, and which they studiously concealed from the curiosity of the public, by wrapping it up in characters the meaning and power of which were only known to themselves. Nothing absolutely certain, it should seem, can be ascertained respect-

[b] See what I have said concerning the religion of the Egyptians, in a note to *Cudworth's Intell. System. tom. i. p. 415.*

INTROD. ing it, but if we may give credit to what is said
 CHAP. I. by some ancient authors on the subject, it bore a
 pretty close analogy to that system, which attributes the production of every part of the universe to a certain energy or power contained and operating within itself; putting nature in fact in the place of the Deity [c].

The religion
 of the Per-
 sians.

XVIII. The Persians owed their religious institutes chiefly to Zoroaster. The leading principle of their religion was, that all things were derived from two common governing causes; the one the author of all good, the other of all evil: the former the source of light, mind, and spiritual intelligence; the latter that of darkness and matter, with all its grosser incidents. Between these two powerful agents they supposed a constant war to be carried on. Those however who taught upon this system did not explain it all in the same way, or draw from it the same conclusions: hence uniformity was destroyed, and many different sects generated. The opinion of the better instructed seems to have been, that there was one Supreme Deity, to whom they gave the name of MITHRA, and that under him there were two of inferior degree, the one called OROMASDES, the author of all good, the other ARIMAN, the cause of all evil. The common people who equally believed in the existence of a Supreme Being, under the title of MITHRA, appear to have considered him as all one with the sun; and it is probable, that with the two inferior deities above-

[c] The more occult and abstruse parts of the Egyptian religion have been investigated with much sagacity and erudition, by the learned Paul. Ern. Jablonski in his *Pantheon Ægyptiorum, seu de diis eorum Comment.* 8vo. Francf. 1750.

mentioned,

mentioned, they joined others, of whom scarcely any thing can be known at this day, [d].

XIX. Whoever will attentively examine the nature of the antient religions, must, I think, readily perceive that nearly all of them were framed by the priests upon principles suited to the climate, the extent, and the civil constitution of the states for which they were respectively designed. Hence by way of distinction, they may be divided into two classes, the civil, and the military. Under the former may be placed the systems of almost all the eastern nations, the Persians, Indians, Egyptians and others, whose religious institutes were manifestly subservient to the public weal, by promoting the safety and tranquillity of the people, encouraging those arts by which the necessaries of life were multiplied, and securing to the kings and magistrates a due degree of authority and dignity. Within the latter division we would comprehend the religious economy of all the people of the north; nations whose every sentiment imbibed from their priests, respecting the gods, and the proper mode of sacred worship, tended to inspire them with fortitude of mind, a contempt of death, a ferocity of disposition, and every other quality calculated to form a valorous and warlike people. Under governments of a mild and moderate character, the gods were represented as just, placable, and merciful: in those of the opposite description, the people were made to believe that the deities delighted in severity, were harsh, wrathful, quickly

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These religions suited to the climate, &c. of the countries where they prevailed.

[d] Dr. Hyde has written a commentary professedly *de veterum Persarum Religione*, 4to. Oxon. 1703; but his work must be read with some caution. Some remarks on the same subject are to be met with in my notes to Cudworth's *Intellectual System*, tom. i. p. 327 & 249. f.

INTROD. to be irritated, and with difficulty brought over
 CHAP. I. to the side of mercy.

Virtue and
 sanctity of
 morals not
 promoted by
 these reli-
 gions.

XX. None of these various systems of religion appear to have contributed in the least towards an amendment of the moral principle, a reformation of manners, or to the exciting a love, or even a respect, for virtue of any sort. The gods and goddesses who were held up as objects of adoration to the common people, instead of exhibiting in themselves examples of a refined and supereminent virtue, displayed in illustrious actions, stood forth to public view the avowed authors of the most flagrant and enormous crimes [e]. The priests likewise took no sort of interest whatever in the regulation of the public morals, neither directing the people by their precepts, nor inviting them by exhortation and example, to the pursuit of a wise and honourable course of life; but on the contrary indulged themselves in the most unwarrantable licentiousness, maintaining that the whole of religion was comprized in the rites and ceremonies instituted by their ancestors, and that

[e] The most learned of the Greeks and Romans admit this: vid. Plato *de Legibus*, lib. i. p. 776, & *de Republica*, lib. ii. p. 430, 431. opp. edit. Ficini. Isocrates *in Orat. in Encomio Busiridis*, p. 452. Seneca *de Vita beata*, cap. xxvi. p. 639. tom. i. opp. Terentius, *Eunuch.* act. iii. sc. 5. v. 35. Martialis, lib. xi. epig. 44. From this circumstance, Ovid takes occasion elegantly to caution those females who had a regard for their honour, to avoid the temples of the deities. *Trist.* lib. ii. v. 287, & seq.

- “ Quis locus est templis augustior? Hæc quoque vitet,
- “ In culpam si qua est ingeniosa suam.
- “ Cum steterit Jovis Æde, Jovis succurret in Æde
- “ Quam multas Matres fecerit ille Deus.
- “ Proxima adoranti Junonia templa subibit
- “ Pellicibus multis hanc doluisse Deam.
- “ Pallade conspecta, natum de crimine Virgo
- “ Sustulerit quare, quæret Erichthonium.

every

every sort of sensual gratification was liberally allowed by the gods to those who regularly ministered to them in this way [f]. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul and of a future state of rewards and punishments, had also been but very partially diffused, and even what had been advanced on the subject was, for the most part, of a very vague and unsatisfactory nature, and in some respects calculated, rather to corrupt the mind than to produce any good effects. Hence, at the coming of our Saviour, any notions of this kind found little or no acceptance with those who pretended to any thing beyond a common share of knowledge, and especially the Greeks and Romans, but were all regarded in the light of old wives fables, fit only for the amusement of women and children. No particular points of belief respecting the immortality of the soul being established by the public religion, every one was at liberty to avow what opinions he might please on the subject [g].

XXI. Under

[f] See what is said on this subject by Barbeyrac in the preface to his French translation of Puffendorf's work *de Jure Naturæ & Gentium*, last edit. § vi. p. xxii.

[g] *Polybius Historiar.* lib. vi. cap. liv. p. 693. tom. i. ed. Gronov. According to Sallust, in *Catalin.* cap. li. p. 309, 310. ed. Cortian, Julius Cæsar when delivering himself publicly in the Roman senate, made no scruple of denying that man had any thing to fear or hope for after death: *de pœna possumus equidem dicere id, quod res habet: in lætæ atque miseris mortem ærumnarum requiem, non cruciatum esse: eam cuncta mortalium mala dissolvere: ultra neque curæ neque gaudio locum esse.* Which speech of Cæsar's, so far from calling down the censure of that great defender and ornament of the stoic philosophy M. Portius Cato, seems rather to have met with his unqualified approbation: For in cap. lii. § 13. p. 332, we find him as it were studiously panegyricing it.—*Bene et compositè*, says he, *Cæsar paullo ante in hoc ordine de vita et morte differuit: falsa, credo, existimans quæ de inferis memorantur; diverso itinere malos a bonis loca tetra, inculta,*

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The lives of men professing these religions, most flagitious.

XXI. Under the influence of such circumstances, it is not to be wondered at that the state of society should have become in the highest degree depraved. The lives of men of every class, from the highest to the lowest, were consumed in the practice of the most abominable and flagitious vices: even crimes, the horrible turpitude of which was such, that it would be defiling the ear of decency but to name them, were openly perpetrated with the greatest impunity. If evidence be required of this, the reader may at once satisfy himself of the truth of what is here said, by referring to LUCIAN amongst the Greek authors, and to the Roman poets JUVENAL and PERSIUS. In the writings of the former in particular, he will find the most detestable unnatural affections, and other heinous practices, treated of at large and with the utmost familiarity, as things of ordinary and daily occurrence. Should any one conceive that these or other writers might give the rein too freely to their imagination, and suffer themselves to be carried into extremes by their genius for satire and sharp rebuke, let him turn his attention to those cruel and inhuman exhibitions which are well known to have yielded the highest gratification to the inhabitants of Greece and Italy, (people, who in point of refinement, possessed a superiority over all other nations of the world,) the savage conflicts of the gladiators in the circus: let him cast his eye on

sæda, atque formidolosa habere. Never would these great and leading characters have ventured to speak after this manner in the senate, had it been a part of the public religion to believe in the immortality of the soul: nay, had a belief of this kind even been generally prevalent amongst the people, such sentiments as the above could never have been uttered in public.

that

that dissoluteness of manners by which the walks of private life were polluted; the horrible prostitution of boys, to which the laws opposed no restraint; the liberty of divorce which belonged to the wife equally with the husband; the shameful practice of exposing infants, and procuring abortions; the little regard that was shewn to the lives of slaves; the multiplicity of stews and brothels, many of which were consecrated even to the gods themselves. Let him reflect on these, and various other criminal excesses, to the most ample indulgence in which the government offered not the least impediment, and then say, if such were the people distinguished beyond all others by the excellence of their laws and the superiority of their attainments in literature and the arts, what must have been the state of those nations who possessed none of these advantages, but were governed entirely by the impulses and dictates of rude and uncultivated nature [b]!

XXII. It was impossible that the vanity, the madness, the deformity of systems like these, should escape the observation of any who had not renounced both reason and common sense. But to all objections that might be raised, the artful priests were ever furnished with a reply from two sources: first, the miracles and prodigies which they asserted were daily wrought in the temples, and before the statues of the gods and heroes; and, secondly, the oracles or spirit of divination,

The arguments used by the priests in defence of these religions.

[b] A very copious and animated description of the extreme profligacy of manners that characterised the heathen worshippers, is given by Cyprian in the first of his *Epistles*, p. 2. ed. Baluz. Several things likewise on this subject are brought together from ancient monuments by Cornelius Adam, in his *Exercitatio de Malis Romanorum ante Prædicationem Evangelii Moribus*, which is the fifth of his *Exercitationes exegeticae*, Groning. 1712, 4to.

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by which they pretended that the gods, either by signs, or in words and verses, made known what was about to happen. The deception practised in either case was made the subject of ridicule by many, who saw through the fraud and knavery of the priests; but a regard for their own safety constrained them to observe no little degree of caution in the exercise of this sort of pleasantry. For in all these matters an appearance was constantly maintained, sufficiently specious and imposing to seize on vulgar minds; and the multitude was ever ready, at the call of the priests, to assert the majesty of their gods, and to punish with the utmost severity those who might be charged with having done any thing inimical to the interests of the public religion.

Philoso-
 phers.

XXIII. This state of things rendered it necessary for those who embraced opinions more consonant to reason, and whom it became customary to distinguish by the appellation of philosophers, to temporize in a certain degree; and although they might entertain a just contempt for those notions respecting religion by which the vulgar were influenced, they yet found it expedient to pay the accustomed honours to the gods of the country, and so far to qualify and soften down their doctrines, as to render them not obviously repugnant to the ancient established religion. Amongst this class of men there were not wanting some, indeed, who ventured with much point and ingenuity to contend against the popular superstitions and absurd notions respecting the gods; and who, in many respects, defined the rules of human conduct on principles equally consonant to nature and reason; apparently considering every part of this universe as subject to the governance of an omnipotent, all-bountiful, and pre-excellent deity:
 and

and there seems, therefore, to be no foundation for the opinion which some have entertained, that all these philosophers were the favourers of impiety, or in fact atheists, denying altogether the existence of a God [i]. It must, however, be acknowledged,

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[i] There is a remarkable passage in Cicero, which goes near to prove that, in his time, philosophers of every sect were accounted the adversaries of the gods and of religion. It occurs in that part of his treatise *de Inventione*, where he discusses the nature of probabilities; and lays it down, that all matters of common belief (quæ in opinione posita sunt) are to be regarded as such. By way of illustration, he adduces the following examples: "In eo autem quod in opinione positum est, hujusmodi sunt probabilia: impiis apud inferos pœnas esse preparatas: eos, qui philosophia dent operam, non arbitrari deos esse." *De Inventione*, lib. i. cap. 29. tom. i. opp. p. 171. ed. Verburgianæ. In the time of Cicero, therefore, it was the general opinion that those who were called philosophers denied the existence of the gods; and hence, according to his judgment, it was not less probable that they did so, than that there were punishments in reserve for the wicked hereafter. It is established indeed beyond doubt, by many passages in ancient authors, that the number of impious and wicked men was very great in that age, and especially amongst those of the philosophic sects. Juvenal notices this depravity, sat. 13. v. 86, 87.

"Sunt in fortunæ qui casibus omnia ponant,

Et nullo credant mundum rectore moveri,

Natura volente vices, et lucis, et anni,

Atque ideo intrepidi quæcumque altaria tangunt."

Philo Judæus also complains in the strongest terms of the great prevalence of atheism in his time. Lib. 3. *Allegor. Legis*, p. 93. tom. i. opp. I do not, however, think that we ought to give implicit credit to those who involve all the philosophers of those times in one undistinguishing censure, and insist that even those were at enmity with religion, in whose writings are to be found the most admirable discussions relative to God, and subjects of a divine nature: and it appears to me that many very learned men of modern times have strained matters too far, in attempting to prove that it was the object of all the ancient sects, either avowedly or in secret, to undermine the fundamental principles of all religion. Can it for a moment be believed that none of those

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 knowledgeable, that the principles laid down by
 many of them went wholly to extinguish every
 sense

great and excellent men, whose minds were, as far as we can perceive, uninfluenced by any vitious or illiberal principle, should have been so happy as to possess the faculty of reasoning justly and with perspicuity? Can we conceive that those who expressly acknowledged the existence of a God, and sublimely descanted on the nature of his attributes, were all deceivers and liars, believing one thing, and writing and professing another? Not to notice what has been urged on the subject by authors of more ancient date, that excellent and eminently sagacious writer, Dr. Warburton, has, with a vast deal of ingenuity and abundance of learning, laboured to establish this point, in his celebrated work on the *Divine Legation of Moses*, vol. i. p. 332. f. and p. 419. f. He would fain persuade us, that all the philosophers disbelieved and denied the immortality of the soul in private, whatever might be the sentiments they publicly avowed and taught respecting it; and that in reality they gave the place of the Deity to a principle, which they termed the Nature of Things; considering the minds of men to be particles separated from the soul of the universe, and that upon the dissolution of their bodies, these particles again fought and were re-united to the source from whence they proceeded. But without objecting that we have no authority for this but the Grecian philosophers, whereas other nations had their peculiar philosophic sects, differing widely in their tenets from those of Greece; laying aside, I say, this objection, we cannot help remarking that this illustrious author has by no means substantiated his accusation by those plain and irrefragable proofs which the importance of the case should seem to demand, but supports it merely by conjectures, coupled with a few examples, and finally by inferences drawn from certain institutes or dogmas of particular philosophers. Now, if accusations are required to be made good only according to these rules; if examples and inferences be deemed sufficient to convict those, whose words excite not the least suspicion of any latent criminality,—who, I would ask, shall be accounted innocent? With that mediocrity of talent, and those inferior powers to which alone I can pretend, in comparison with such a man as Warburton, let me only have permission to adopt the same mode of attack against the whole body of Christian divines, as he has availed himself of in regard to the ancient philosophers, and
 I will

sense of God and of religion, and completely to do away all distinction between good and evil; and that in the tenets even of those who espoused the cause of God and of morality, many things were contained to which no good or rational man could yield his approbation or assent [k]. If the very best of these philosophic systems, therefore, had been substituted in the place of the ancient popular religions, it may well be questioned whether it would eventually have been attended with any considerable advantage to mankind.

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XXIV. At the time of the Son of God's appearance upon earth, there were two species of philosophy that generally prevailed throughout the civilized world: the one, that of Greece; the other, what is usually termed the Oriental. There are many, indeed, who make no distinction between these two kinds of philosophy; but it appears to me that, in blending them together, they confound things of a very opposite nature, and betray no trifling want of information respecting matters of antiquity [l]. The term philosophy

Two modes
of philo-
sophising
prevail.

I will undertake to prove that none of them were sincere in what they publicly professed, but that all were devoted to the purpose of slyly instilling into men's minds the poison of impiety.

[k] By way of specimen, we refer the reader to what is said respecting the absurd tenets of the philosophers of their time, by Justin Martyr, *Dial. cum Tryphon.* p. 4, 5, 6, 7. edit. Jebb.; and by Hermias, in an elegant little work, entitled, *Irrisio Philosophia.* If any additional proof were wanting on the subject, enough might easily be collected to form a volume of itself.

[l] Every one who has examined this subject thoroughly must admit, that nothing can be better authenticated than the vast and essential difference that existed between the philosophy of the eastern nations and that of the sages of Greece. It is equally well established, that amongst the different doctrines professed by the various oriental sects,

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lofophy properly belonged to the former; thofe who were familiar with the Greek language having given to the other the appellation of γνῶσις, or knowledge: to understand the force of which term, it is neceffary that we confider the word Οεῖς, or God, as annexed to it [m]; fince the leading

that of the ancient Chaldeans and Perfians, which regarded matter as the fource of all evil, and fuppofed it to be under the influence and controul of a fpiritual agent peculiar to itfelf, held the chief place, being the moft widely diffeminated of any, and that on which ingenuity had particularly exercifed itfelf in giving it variety of modification. It muft alfo, unlefs I am very much miftaken, be apparent to every unprejudiced inquirer, that in this moft ancient philofophy originated all thofe modes of difcipline adopted by the profefors of the Gnoftic fystem, and which, though they were in many refpects different from each other, had yet, as it fhould feem, amongft other points of fimilarity, one common origin and end. It can alfo be fhewn, if it fhould be thought neceffary, that the name or title of “oriental philofophy or doctrine” was known to ancient writers. Amongft other proofs which might be adduced, fome extracts from Theodotus, one of the Gnoftic fchool, which were made for the ufe of Clemens Alexandrinus, are ftill extant under the following title, which appears to be of very ancient date: Ἐκ τῶν Θεοδοτῆ καὶ τῆς ΑΝΑΤΟΛΙΚΗΣ καλεσμένης ΔΙΔΑΣΚΑΛΙΑΣ ἐπιτόμιαι. *Excerpta ex Scriptis Theodoti et Doctrina que Orientalis appellatur.*

Whether the perfon who gave this title to the work were himfelf a Gnoftic, or an enemy of the Gnoftics, it leaves us in no doubt as to this fact, that the Gnoftics mingled none of the principles of the Grecian philofophy with their fystem of difcipline, but framed it entirely after the oriental model. In acting thus, they neither impofed upon others, nor were they deceived themfelves.

[m] The word γνῶσις was ufed by the Greeks to exprefs the knowledge of fuch things as are not the objects of fenfe, but are only to be comprehended by the mind or underftanding; and fince thofe things which are perceptible to the mind alone are not liable to alteration or change, but continue fixed, and are perennial, the appellation γνῶσις feems to have been not improperly ufed to fignify that fpecies of knowledge which relates to things of an eternal and immutable

leading tenet of those who professed this species of philosophy was, that by means of their institutes, that knowledge of the Supreme Deity and great First Cause of all things, which it had been the ill fate of mortals to lose, might again be discovered and restored to mankind. The principles of the former, or what was properly called Philosophy, were not confined to Greece, but were embraced by all such of the Romans as aspired to any eminence of wisdom. The followers of the latter were chiefly to be found in Persia, Chaldæa, Syria, Egypt, and the other oriental regions. Many of the Jews had likewise adopted it. Both these sorts of philosophy were split into various sects, but with this distinction, that those which sprang from the oriental system all proceeded on one and the same principle, and of course had many tenets in common, though they might differ

mutable nature. Vid. Jac. Thomasi *Origines Historiæ Eccles. et Philosophiæ*, § 25. f. p. 21. f. The term appears to have had a similar meaning, when applied to that kind of philosophy which I denominate the oriental; since it was not conversant with objects of opinion and sense, but occupied itself solely in the contemplation of things of an abstract and unchangeable nature. I conceive, however, that we ought to understand it in a more restricted sense, when we find it applied to that species of philosophy to which the earliest corrupters of Christianity were inclined, and that in this case it was used emphatically to signify the knowledge of the Deity in particular: for it was the boast of the teachers of that vain system, that through their means mankind might recover that knowledge of the true God, from which nearly the whole world had long been estranged. The knowledge of the Deity, indeed, since it is infinitely above all other knowledge that can be acquired by man, and is the fountain from whence alone true religion can spring, may certainly in the strongest and most emphatical sense be styled γνῶσις; or knowledge. It is in this way that the sacred writers, when speaking of that truth which is our guide to salvation, style it simply ἀληθεία, truth; and a faith in Christ, πίστις, faith, without any addition.

INTROD. as to some particular inferences and opinions ;
 CHAP. I. whilst those to which the philosophy of Greece
 gave rise were divided in opinion even as to the
 elements or first principles of wisdom, and were
 consequently widely separated from each other in
 the whole course of their discipline. St. Paul ad-
 verts to each of these systems, (to that of Greece,
 Col. ii. 8. ; to the oriental, Tim. i. 4. iv. 7.
 vi. 20.) and strenuously exhorts the Christians
 to beware of blending the doctrines of either with
 the religion of their divine master [n]. To this
 admonition

[n] The most learned expositors and commentators on the Holy Scriptures, as well ancient as modern, are unanimously of opinion that St. Paul, in the passages to which I have referred, meant to reprove those who, in the then infancy of Christianity, had the presumption to attempt encumbering the beautifully plain and simple doctrines of Jesus Christ, with expositions founded on that species of philosophy, to which they had given the pompous title of *γνώσις*, or knowledge of the Supreme Deity. The remarkable passage, indeed, which I have cited from that inspired writer, in which he warns Timothy to avoid “oppositions of science falsely so called,” (1 Tim. vi. 20) applies so directly to the vain and foolish system styled *γνώσις*, that even the arguments of those who would willingly give it a different interpretation, instead of invalidating, have rather added strength and confirmation to this construction of it. It is clear from the words of St. Paul, 1st, That there was a particular species of philosophic discipline prevalent amongst the Greeks of his time, to which his friend would understand him to allude by the appellation *γνώσις*. 2dly, That it was not a system cultivated in retirement and privacy, for he speaks of it as a thing openly known, and familiar to the public. 3dly, That it appeared to him undeserving of such an high and august title ; for he says, that it is “falsely” (by which we must understand him to mean improperly and without reason) “so called.” 4thly, That those who were addicted to this philosophy had been endeavouring to blend its doctrines with those of the Christian religion : for if no one had attempted this, with what propriety could he have admonished Timothy to beware of this sect, and to keep that deposit of divine truth, which had been committed to his trust, pure
 and

admonition had those to whom it was directed paid due attention, they would in an eminent degree have consulted the interests of the cause they had espoused. But to the great injury of divine truth, it unfortunately happened that vain and presumptuous men could not be satisfied with that wisdom which leads to eternal life, as it came pure from above; but must needs set about reconciling it, first of all to the principles of the oriental philosophy, and afterwards to many of the dogmas of the Grecian sects.

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XXV. The more illustrious sects of the Grecian school, whose doctrines were also much cultivated by the Romans, may be divided into two classes: the one comprising those whose tenets struck at the root of all religion; pretending, indeed, by specious eulogium, to support and recommend

The Greek
philosophic
sects.
The Epi-
curans.

and uncontaminated by any admixture with such vain and trifling theories 5thly, That the professors of this sort of discipline maintained the existence of certain ἀντιθέσεις, or oppositions, which, since they are the only circumstances relating to it that are noticed by the apostle, may without doubt be considered as having constituted the essential and fundamental principles of the system. What we are to understand by these oppositions may readily be perceived: for it was an established tenet with the followers of this doctrine that light and darkness, God and matter, the body and the soul, the Supreme Deity, and those powers by whom they supposed the universe to be governed, were constantly at variance and opposed to each other; even man himself, according to them, was a compound, made up of two adverse and conflicting principles; and the powers of darkness ever occupied in active hostility against eternal light. Upon the ground of these oppositions they pretended to account for all events and changes whatever, whether natural, moral, or political, and in fact for every occurrence good or evil. It is, therefore, with no less propriety than elegance that St. Paul intimates his disapprobation of the whole system, by a strongly marked reprehension of these its distinguishing features.

the

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the cause of virtue, but in reality nourishing the interests of vice, and giving colour to almost every species of criminality; the other being composed of such as acknowledged the existence of a deity, whom it was the duty of men to worship and obey, and who inculcated an essential and eternal distinction between good and evil, just and unjust; but who unfortunately sullied and disgraced what they thus taught conformably to right reason, by connecting with it various notions, either absurd and trifling in their nature, or taken up hastily, and with an unwarrantable presumption [o]. Under the first of these classes may be ranked the disciples of Epicurus and those of the academy. The Epicureans maintained that the universe arose out of a fortuitous concurrence of atoms; that the gods (whose existence they dared not absolutely to deny) were indifferent as to human affairs, or rather entirely unacquainted with them; that our souls are born and die; that all things depend on, and are determined by accident; that in every thing, voluptuous gratification was to be sought after as the chief good; and even virtue itself only to be pursued, inasmuch as it might promise to minister at the shrine of pleasure. The votaries of a system like this, (and there were but few amongst the favoured children of prosperity, the wealthy, the noble,

[o] The reader will find what we have here briefly stated, respecting the different sects of philosophers, treated of at large in a very masterly manner by the learned Brucker, in his *Historia Philosophiæ Criticæ*; a work that will immortalize the erudition of its author, and which no one ought to be without, who is willing to acquire an accurate knowledge of the success that attended the labours of those illustrious characters of all ages and nations, who devoted their talents to the discovery and elucidation of truth.

and

and the powerful, who were not captivated by its allurements [*p*],) naturally studied to pass their lives in one continued round of luxurious enjoyment: the only restraint they imposed on themselves arose out of a desire to avoid, at all times, such an excessive or immoderate devotion to pleasure as might generate disease, or tend in any other shape to narrow the capacity for future indulgence.

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XXVI. The Academics, although they affected to be influenced by better and wiser principles than those of the Sceptics, yet entertained maxims of an equally lax and pernicious tendency with them. In fact, they subscribed to the fundamental dogma on which the whole system of sceptic discipline was built, namely, that "nothing can be known or perceived with certainty, and therefore that every thing may be doubted of and questioned." The only distinction which they made was this, that whereas the sceptics insisted that "nothing should be assented to, but every thing made the subject of dispute;" the Academics, on the contrary, contended that "we ought to acquiesce in all things which bear the appearance of truth, or which may be considered in the light of probabilities." But since the Academics were ever undetermined as to what constituted that sort of probability to which they would have a wise man assent, their doctrine

The Academics.

[*p*] The number of those who embraced the Epicurean system was every where so immensely great, in the age to which we allude, that whole armies might have been formed of them. This is sufficiently plain from Cicero alone, who, in various parts of his works, complains of the vast increase of the Epicurean sect. Vid. *de Fin. Bonor. et Malorum*, lib. i. cap. vii. p. 2350. tom. viii. opp. lib. ii. cap. xiv. p. 2388. *Disput. Tusculan.* lib. v. cap. x. p. 2829. tom. viii. opp.; and many other places to the same purport.

INTROD. contributed, no less than that of the Sceptics, to
 CHAP. I. render every thing vague and unsettled [g]. To
 make it, as they did, a matter of doubt and un-
 certainty, whether the gods existed or not;
 whether the soul was perishable or immortal;
 whether virtue was preferable to vice, or vice to
 virtue;—was certainly nothing less than to un-
 dermine the chief and firmest supports of religion
 and morality. The philosophy of the Academy
 was at one time so much neglected, as to be nearly
 lost. Cicero revived it at Rome, not long before
 the coming of our Saviour [r]; and so much
 weight was attached to his example and autho-
 rity, that it was soon embraced by all who aspired
 to the chief honours of the state [s].

XXVII.

[g] The manner of the Academics cannot be better illus-
 trated than in the words of Cicero, who may be considered
 as the leader of the sect. “Ea, quæ vis, explicabo (he is
 treating of death and the immortality of the soul) ut ho-
 munculus unus e multis, *probabilia conjectura sequens*. Ultra
 enim quo progrediar, *quam ut veri videam similia*, non habeo.
 Certa dicent ii, qui et percipi ea posse dicunt, et se sapientes
 esse profitentur.” *Tusculan. Disput.* lib. i. cap. ix. p. 2570.

[r] Multis etiam sensu mirabile videri, eam nobis potis-
 simum probatam esse philosophiam, *quæ lucem eriperet et*
quasi noctem quamdam rebus offunderet, desertæque disciplinæ et
jam pridem relicte patrocinium nec opinatum a nobis esse
 susceptum. Cicero *de Natura Deor.* lib. i. cap. iii. p. 2884.
 This passage of the Roman orator unfolds without disguise
 the nature of the academical philosophy, of which we see he
 openly avows himself the patron and restorer. He repeats
 this in cap. v. p. 2886.

[s] The philosophy of the academy, inasmuch as it in-
 culcated the uncertainty of every thing, and encouraged a
 spirit for disputation on all topics, contributed in an eminent
 degree to sharpen the mental powers, and to strengthen and
 improve those faculties which give advantage in debate. It
 cannot, therefore, appear surprising to any one that at
 Rome, where every man's power may be said to have been
 commensurate with his eloquence, the example of Cicero
 should have stimulated all those who were ambitious of glory
 and

XXVII. Within the other class of philosophers, that is, of those who manifested a respect for religion, the most distinguished sects were the Peripatetics founded by Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Platonists. The Peripatetics acknowledged the existence of a God, and the obligations of morality; but, at the same time, their tenets were not of a character to inspire a reverence for the one, or a love of the other. The Aristotelian doctrine gave to the deity an influence not much beyond that of the moving principle in a piece of mechanism: considering him, indeed, to be of an highly refined and exalted nature, happy in the contemplation of himself, but entirely unconscious of what was passing here below; confined from all eternity to the celestial world, and instigating the operations of nature rather from necessity than volition or choice. In a god of this description, differing but little from the deity of the Epicureans, there was surely nothing that could reasonably excite either love, respect, or fear. We are unable to ascertain, with any precision, what were the sentiments of the Peripatetic philosophers respecting the immortality of the soul [t]. Could the interests of religion or morality, we would ask, be in any shape effectually promoted by teachers like these, who denied the

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CHAP. I.
The Peri-
patetics.

and honour, to the cultivation of that philosophy, from which he professed himself to have derived so much advantage.

[t] See what I have said on this subject, in some notes to Cudworth's *Intellect. System*, tom. i. p. 66. 500. and tom. ii. p. 1171. See also a learned work of the celebrated Jesuit Michael Morgues, which he entitled, *Plan Theologique du Pythagorisme*, tom. i. let. ii. p. 75. where it is proved that the system of Aristotle excluded the deity from all knowledge of, or interference with, human affairs.

INTROD. superintendance of a divine Providence, and in-
 CHAP. I. finuated, in no very obscure terms, a disbelief of
 the foul's future existence?

The Stoics.

XXVIII. The deity had somewhat more of majesty and influence assigned to him by the Stoics. They did not limit his functions merely to the regulating of the clouds, and the numbering of the stars; but conceived him to animate every part of the universe with his presence, in the nature of a subtle, active, penetrating fire. They regarded his connection with matter, however, as the effect of necessity, and supposed his will to be subordinate to the immutable decrees of fate: hence it was impossible for him to be considered as the author either of rewards to the virtuous, or of punishment to the wicked. It is well known to the learned world, that this sect denied the immortality of the soul, and thus deprived mankind of the strongest incitement to a wise and virtuous course of life. Upon the whole, the moral discipline of the Stoics, although it might in some respects be founded on unexceptionable principles, the result of sound reasoning, may yet be compared to a body of a fair and imposing external appearance, but which, on a closer examination, is found destitute of those essential parts which alone can give it either energy or excellence [u].

The Platonists.

XXIX. Of all the philosophers, Plato seems to have made the nearest approach to the principles of true wisdom; and there are certainly grounds for believing that his system was not wholly unproductive of benefit to the human race. He

[u] The reader will find this illustrated by what I have remarked in my notes to Cudworth's *Intellectual System*, tom. i. p. 517, et seq.

considered

considered the deity, to whom he gave the supreme governance of the universe, as a being of the highest wisdom and power, and totally unconnected with any material substance. The souls of men he conceived to proceed from this pre-eminent source; and, as partaking of its nature, to be incapable of death. He also gave the strongest encouragement to virtue, and equally discountenanced vice, by holding out to mortals the prospect of a future state of rewards and punishments. But even the system of Plato had its defects. For, not to mention his frequent assumption of things without any sort of proof, and the obscure and enigmatical way in which he often expresses himself, he ascribes to that power, whom he extols as the fashioner and maker of the universe, few or none of the grander attributes, such as infinity, immensity, ubiquity, omnipotence, omniscience; but supposes him to be confined within certain limits, and that the direction of human affairs was committed to a class of inferior spiritual agents, termed dæmons. This notion of ministering dæmons, and also those points of doctrine which relate to the origin and condition of the human soul, greatly disfigure the morality of Plato; since they manifestly tend to generate superstition, and to confirm men in the practice of worshipping a number of inferior deities. His teaching, moreover, that the soul, during its continuance in the body, might be considered as it were in a state of imprisonment, and that we ought to endeavour, by means of contemplation, to set it free, and restore it to an alliance with the divine nature, had an ill effect, inasmuch as it prompted men of weak minds to withdraw every attention from the body and the
concerns

INTROD. concerns of life, and to indulge in the dreams
 CHAP. I. and fancies of a disordered imagination [v].

The Eclectic.

XXX. Since the little of good that presented itself in the tenets of any of these various sects was sullied and deformed by an abundant alloy of what was pernicious and absurd; and as it was found that no sort of harmony prevailed amongst philosophers of any description, even though they might profess one and the same system, but that they were constantly at variance either with themselves or with others; it occurred to some, who perhaps were more than ordinarily anxious in their pursuit after truth, that the most ready way of attaining their object would be to adopt neither of these systems in the whole, but to select from each of them such of its parts as were the most consonant with sound and unbiassed reason. Hence a new sect of philosophers sprang up, who, from the manner in which their system was formed, acquired the name of Eclectics. We are certain that it first appeared in Egypt, and particularly at Alexandria, but the name of its founder is lost in obscurity; for though one Potamon of Alexandria is commonly represented as such by ancient writers, it is by no means clear that this opinion of theirs is correct. However, we have sufficient authority for stating, (indeed it might be proved even from Philo Judæus

[v] The reader will find the objectionable points of the Platonic philosophy discussed in an eloquent and copious manner by Fra. Baltus, an ingenious Jesuit, in a work undertaken by him with a view to exonerate the early fathers from the charge of Platonism, and entitled, *Defense des Peres accusez de Platonisme*, Paris, 1711, 4to. His reprehension, however, is occasionally carried to an excess; and he is not always sufficiently attentive to the force and spirit of the Platonic opinions.

alone,)

alone,) that this sect flourished at Alexandria at the time of our Saviour's birth [w]. Those who originated this species of philosophy, took their leading principles from the system of Plato; considering almost every thing which he had advanced respecting the Deity, the soul, the world, and the dæmons, as indisputable axioms: on which account they were regarded by many as altogether Platonists. Indeed this title, so far from being disclaimed, was rather affected by some of them, and particularly by those who joined themselves to Ammonius Sacca, another celebrated patron of the Eclectic philosophy. With the doctrines of Plato, however, they very freely intermixed the most approved maxims of the Pythagoreans, the Stoics, the Peripatetics, and the oriental philosophers; merely taking care to admit none that were in opposition to the tenets of their favourite guide and instructor [x].

XXXI. The

[w] The writings of Philo Judæus are, in every respect, marked by the same species of philosophy that characterizes those of Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, and other fathers of the Christian church, who were confessedly Eclectics. He chiefly follows Plato, and on this account he is regarded by many in the light of a mere Platonist; but it would be difficult to make this opinion accord with the encomiums which we find him at times bestowing on the Stoics, the Pythagoreans, and other philosophers, and whose maxims and mode of expression he adopts without reserve. We should rather, therefore, consider him as belonging to those who professed themselves to be of no particular sect, but who made it their study to select and appropriate to themselves the most rational parts of every system. Mangey, the learned English editor of Philo's works, did not overlook this, though he suffered so many things else to escape him, but remarks in the preface, p. viii. that his author ought to be classed with the Eclectics.

[x] Justin Martyr mentions, (*Dial. cum Tryphon. sect. 2. p. 103. opp. edit. Benedict.*) amongst other philosophic sects of his time, that of the Theoretics, which he considers

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The oriental
philosophy.

XXXI. The documents that have hitherto come to light relating to the oriental philosophy are so few, that our knowledge of it is of necessity very limited. Some insight, however, into its nature and principles may be obtained from what has been handed down to us respecting the tenets of several of the first Christian sects, and from a few other scattered relics of it, that may be collected here and there. Its author, who is unknown, perceiving that in almost every thing which comes under our observation there is a manifest admixture of evil, and that human nature has an obvious leaning to what is criminal and vitious, whilst, at the same time, reason forbids us to regard the Deity in any other light

as holding a middle place between the Peripatetics and the Pythagoreans. Langus, the translator of Justin, imagines that he applied this denomination either to the Academics or the Sceptics, who assigned no bounds to their doubts and inquiries. This suggestion appears to me to carry some weight with it: but Prudentius Maranus, a Benedictine monk, who some time back published an edition of Justin, maintains a very different opinion, and asserts that by the term Theoretic was meant that species of philosophy which disregards action, and devotes itself entirely to contemplation. I do not think, however, that we can altogether rely on the judgment of this industrious good old man, whose accuracy of conception is not every where alike conspicuous. Justin speaks of the Theoretics as one of the sects that flourished at the time he wrote; but none of those sects, except the Academics, can be said to have so far embraced the contemplative system as to neglect laying down any rules for the conduct of active life. But is it not possible that the sect which Justin terms the Theoretics might be one and the same with that of the Eclectics? There is certainly nothing in the name that militates against this supposition, since the term Theoretics might naturally enough be used to characterize a class of philosophers who were continually prying with the most vigilant curiosity into the maxims and opinions of other sects, and adopted none into their own system but such as had undergone a severe and penetrating scrutiny.

than

than as the pure and unfulfilled fountain of good alone, was induced to seek for the origin of this calamitous state of things in a different source [y]. But as he could discover nothing besides God, to which this evil influence could be attributed, unless it were the matter of which the world, and the bodies of men, and all other living creatures are formed, he was led to regard this principle as the root and cause of every evil propensity, and every untoward affection. The unavoidable consequence of this opinion was, that matter should be considered as self-existent, and as having exercised an influence entirely independent of the Deity from all eternity. But this proposition imposed on its abettors a task of no little difficulty, namely, that of explaining by what agency or means this originally rude undigested mass of matter came to be so skilfully and aptly arranged in all its parts; how it happens that so many things of a refined and exalted nature are connected with it; and particularly, to account for the wonderful union of ethereal spirits with supine and vitiated fleshly bodies. It was found impossible to solve these

[y] The ancient fathers of the Christian church, although they could form but a very imperfect judgment of the Gnostic system, since they were unacquainted with its true origin and growth, yet plainly perceived that this species of philosophy was founded on a wish to remove from the Deity every imputation of his being the cause or author of any thing evil. Tertullian says, (*de Præscript. advers. Hæreticos*, cap. vii. p. 119. opp. edit. Venet.) “Eædem materiæ apud hæreticos et philosophos volutantur, iidem retractatus implicantur: unde malum? et quare? et unde homo? et quomodo?” See also Epiphanius, hæref. xxiv. Basilidianor, sect. vi. p. 72. tom. i. opp.; and beyond all, that fragment of Valentine preserved by Origen, *Dialog. contra Marcionitas*, sect. iv. p. 85. ed. Wettsten. in which he points out with much perspicuity the various steps by which he arrived at that form of religion of which his conscience approved.

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points by any arguments drawn from nature or reason; recourse was, therefore, had to the suggestions of a lively invention, and a fabulous sort of theory was propounded, respecting the formation of the world, and that remarkable admixture of good and evil in every thing belonging to it, which so continually obtrudes itself on our notice. The Deity could not, consistently with their views of him, be considered as the author of either; since it must have appeared incredible to those who regarded the Supreme Being as purity and goodness itself, and utterly averse from every thing of an opposite character, that he should have employed himself in giving form and arrangement to a vitiated and distempered mass, or have been anywise instrumental in associating good with evil.

The oriental
philosophers
divided into
sects.

XXXII. As none more readily disagree among themselves, than those who pretend to resolve the most abstruse and intricate points by the strength of the human intellect alone, it will easily be conceived that those who endeavoured to extricate themselves from the difficulties above noticed, by the assistance of fiction, would of course run into a great diversity of sentiment. Those of the most numerous class seem to have believed in the existence of a being, whom they considered as the prince or power of darkness, upon whom the Prince of light (that is, the Deity himself) made war; and having obtained the victory, made matter the receptacle of the spoil and forces which he had taken from his opponent. Tales like this, of the wars carried on between a good and an evil power, were commonly adopted by all of this sect; but they were far from being unanimous as to the nature of that prince of darkness, or matter, who was thus set in opposition to the Deity.

By

By some, he was considered as of an equal nature with the Author of all good, and of necessity to have existed from all eternity; by others, he was thought to have been generated of matter, which they supposed to be endowed with both animation and fertility; whilst others regarded him as the son of Eternal Light, the offspring of the Deity, who, unable to endure the controul of a superior, had rebelled against the author of his existence, and erected for himself a separate and distinct estate. The opinion entertained by another sect was, that matter was not subject to the dominion of a prince or ruler peculiar to itself, but that it was fashioned and brought into order, and man created, by one of those eternal spirits whom God begat of himself, and who acted not from design, but was stimulated to the undertaking by a sudden accidental impulse. This opinion also, when it came to be discussed and enlarged upon, gave rise to much dissension. Some contended that this architect or fabricator of the world acted with the consent and approbation of the Deity; others denied this. Some supposed that, in the commencement of this undertaking, he was uninfluenced by any vicious principle; but that having accomplished his purpose, he gave himself over to iniquity, and, at the instigation of pride, withdrew men from the knowledge of the Supreme Deity. Others conceived him to have a natural and necessary inclination to what was evil; others imagined that he might be of a middle nature, somewhat between the two; and many esteemed him to be a compound essence, made up of a certain proportion of good and evil. The sentiments of a third sect appear to have been formed on an union of those of the two former. According to these, the world, and all things belonging to it,

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were under the regulation and guidance of three powers, namely, the Supreme Deity, the prince of darkness and of matter, and the creator or maker of the world. I believe I may venture to say, that every one who shall attentively examine the opinions and maxims entertained by some of the Christian sects of the first century, will readily give his assent to the accuracy of this statement. Of the first class we may account Simon Magus, Manes, and others; the principal leaders of the Gnostics may be ranked under the second; and Marcion, with perhaps some others, may be considered as belonging to the third.

Certain tenets, however, common to them all respecting the deity.

XXXIII. Notwithstanding that the various sects of oriental philosophers, who believed matter to be the cause of all evil, were so much divided in opinion as to the particular mode or form under which it ought to be considered as such; there were yet some maxims, or points of doctrine, to which they all subscribed without reserve, and which may be regarded as the principles on which the system in general was founded. In the first place, they were unanimous in maintaining that there had existed from all eternity a divine nature, replete with goodness, intelligence, wisdom, and virtue, a light of the most pure and subtle kind diffused throughout all space, of whom it was impossible for the mind of man to form an adequate conception. Those who were conversant with the Greek language gave to this pre-eminent Being the title of *βουδης*, in allusion to the vastness of his excellence, which they deemed it beyond the reach of human capacity to comprehend. The space which he inhabits they named *πληρωμα*, but occasionally the term *αιων* was applied to it. This divine nature, they imagined, having existed for ages in solitude and
 silence.

filence, at length, by the operation of his omnipotent will, begat of himself two minds or intelligences of a most excellent and exalted kind, one of either sex. By these, others of a similar nature were produced; and the faculty of propagating their kind being successively communicated to all, a class of divine beings was in time generated, respecting whom no difference of opinion seems to have existed, except in regard to their number; some conceiving it to be more, others less. The nearer any of this celestial family stood in affinity to the one grand parent of all, the closer were they supposed to resemble him in nature and perfection; the farther off they were removed, the less were they accounted to partake of his goodness, wisdom, or any other attribute. Although every one of them had a beginning, yet they were all conceived to be immortal, and not liable to any change; on which account they were termed *αἰῶνες*, that is, immortal beings placed beyond the reach of temporal vicissitudes or injuries [z]. It was not, however, imagined that

[z] *Αἰών* properly signifies indefinite or eternal duration, as opposed to that which is finite or temporal. It was, however, metonymically used for such natures as are in themselves unchangeable and immortal. That it was commonly applied in this sense even by the Greek philosophers, at the time of Christ's birth, is plain from Arrian, who uses it to describe a nature the reverse of ours, superior to frailty, and obnoxious to no vicissitude: 'Ου γὰρ ἐμὲ Ἀἰὼν ἀλλ' ἀνθρώπος, μέρος τῶν πάντων ὡς ἔσται ἡμέρας, ἐνδύεται με δεῖ ὡς τὸν ἄρα, καὶ παρελθεῖν ὡς ἔσται. Non ego natura sum perennis et immutabilis (it was an error of the translator to render it non ego sum eternitas) sed homo, pars hujus universitatis, quemadmodum hora pars est diei. Oportet me non fecus ac horam existere et occidere. *Dissert. Epictetearum*, lib. ii. § 5. p. 179. edit. Holstenii. There was, therefore, nothing strange or unusual in the application of the term *αἰῶνες*, by the Gnostics, to beings of a celestial nature, liable to neither accident

INTROD. that the vast extent of space called πλήρωμα was
 CHAP. I. occupied solely by these spirits of the first order :
 it was likewise supposed to contain a great number of inferior beings, the offspring of the αἰῶνες, and consequently of divine descent, but who, on account of the many degrees that intervened between them and the first parent, were considered comparatively to possess but a very limited portion of wisdom, knowledge, or power.

nor change. Indeed the term is used even by the ancient fathers of the purer class, to denote the angels in general, good as well as bad. The example of Manichæus the Persian, who, according to Augustin, applied the denomination of Ἀἰῶνες (which Augustin renders into Latin by the word sæcula) to celestial natures of the higher order, seems to prove that the term was adopted in much the same sense by the followers of the oriental philosophy in general, as well by those who were not conversant with the Greek language as those who were. Amongst the commentators on Holy Writ are some of acknowledged erudition and ingenuity, who conceive that αἰῶν has a similar signification in the writings of the New Testament. St. Paul describes the Ephesians, before they were acquainted with the gospel of Christ, to have walked κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τῷ κόσμῳ τῷ τῷ, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τῷ ἄερος. In this passage. ἄρχων τῆς ἐξουσίας τῷ ἄερος, “the prince of those powerful natures which belong to, or have their dwelling in the air,” appears to be one and the same with him who is first spoken of as the Ἀἰὼν τῷ κόσμῳ τῷ τῷ; and according to this exposition, Ἀἰὼν must here unquestionably mean an immutable nature, a spirit or an angel of the highest class. Vid. Beaufobre’s *Histoire du Manichee*, tom. i. p. 574, 575.; as also his *Remarques sur le Nouveau Testament*, tom. ii. p. 7, 8. Jerome and, as it should seem, some others approved of this interpretation. Jo. Alb. Fabricius thinks that the same sense may be given to the term in that passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where God is said by his Son to have made τῶν αἰῶνας δι’ ἑ καὶ τῶν αἰῶνας ἐποίησεν. (I. 2.) Quo in loco, says he, per Ἀἰῶνας non absurdum sit intelligere angelos. *Codic Apocryphi Nov. Test.* tom. i. p. 710. Of these interpretations, the first has certainly the appearance of being a just one; of the latter I cannot say quite so much.

XXXIV. Beyond that vast expanse refulgent with everlasting light, which was considered as the immediate habitation of the Deity, and those natures which had been generated from him, these philosophers placed the seat of matter, where, according to them, it had lain from all eternity, a rude, undigested, opaque mass, agitated by turbulent irregular motions of its own provoking, and nurturing, as in a feed-bed, the rudiments of vice, and every species of evil. In this state it was found by a genius or celestial spirit of the higher order, who had been either driven from the abode of the Deity for some offence, or commissioned by him for the purpose, and who reduced it into order, and gave it that arrangement and fashion which the universe now wears. Those who spoke the Greek tongue were accustomed to refer to this creator of the world by the name of Demiurgus. Matter received its inhabitants, both men and other animals, from the same hand that had given to it disposition and symmetry. Its native darkness was also illuminated by this creative spirit with a ray of celestial light, either secretly stolen, or imparted through the bounty of the Deity. He likewise communicated to the bodies he had formed, and which would otherwise have remained destitute of reason, and uninstructed except in what relates to mere animal life, particles of the divine essence, or souls of a kindred nature to the Deity. When all things were thus completed, Demiurgus revolting against the great First Cause of every thing, the all-wise and omnipotent God, assumed to himself the exclusive government of this new state, which he apportioned out into provinces or districts; bestowing the administration and command over them on a number of genii or spirits of

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Opinions of the oriental philosophers respecting matter, the world, the soul, &c.

INTROD. of inferior degree, who had been his associates
 CHAP. I. and assistants.

Their tenets
 respecting
 man.

XXXV. Man, therefore, whilst he continued here below, was supposed to be compounded of two principles, acting in direct opposition to each other: 1st, a terrestrial and corrupt or vitiated body; 2d, a soul partaking of the nature of the Deity, and derived from the region of purity and light. The soul or ethereal part being, through its connection with the body, confined as it were within a prison of matter, was constantly exposed to the danger of becoming involved in ignorance, and acquiring every sort of evil propensity, from the impulse and contagion of the vitiated mass by which it was enveloped. But the Deity, touched with compassion for the hapless state of those captive minds, was ever anxious that the means of escaping from this darkness and bondage into liberty and light should be extended to them, and had accordingly, at various times, sent amongst them teachers endowed with wisdom, and filled with celestial light, who might communicate to them the principles of a true religion, and thus instruct them in the way by which deliverance was to be obtained from their wretched and forlorn state. Demiurgus, however, with his associates, unwilling to resign any part of that dominion, of whose sweets they were now become sensible, or to relinquish the divine honours which they had usurped, set every engine at work to obstruct and counteract these designs of the Deity; and not only tormented and slew the messengers of heaven, but endeavoured, through the means of superstition and sensual attractions, to root out and extinguish every spark of celestial truth. The minds that listened to the calls of the Deity, and who, having renounced obedience

to the usurped authorities of this world, continued stedfast in the worship of the great first Parent, resisting the evil propensities of the corporeal frame, and every incitement to illicit gratification, were supposed, on the dissolution of their bodies, to be directly borne away pure, aerial, and disengaged from every thing gross or material, to the immediate residence of God himself; whilst those who, notwithstanding the admonitions they received, had persisted in paying divine honours to him who was merely the fabricator of the world, and his associates, worshipping them as gods, and suffering themselves to be enslaved by the lusts and vicious impulses to which they were exposed from their alliance with matter, were denied the hope of exaltation after death, and could only expect to migrate into new bodies suited to their base, sluggish, and degraded condition. When the grand work of setting free all these minds or souls, or, at least, the greatest part of them, and restoring them to that celestial country from whence they first proceeded, should be accomplished, God, it was imagined, would dissolve the fabric of this nether world; and having again confined matter, with all its contagious influence, within its original limits, would, throughout all ages to come, live and reign in consummate glory, surrounded by kindred spirits, as he did before the foundation of the world.

XXXVI. The moral discipline deduced from this system of philosophy, by those who embraced it, was by no means of an uniform cast, but differed widely in its complexion, according to their various tempers and inclinations. Such, for instance, as were naturally of a morose, ascetic disposition, maintained that the great object of human

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human concern should be to invigorate the energies of the mind, and to quicken and refine its perceptions, by abstracting it as much as possible from every thing gross or sensual. The body, on the contrary, as the source of every depraved appetite, was, according to them, to be reduced and brought into subjection by hunger, thirst, and every other species of mortification, and neither to be supported by flesh or wine, nor indulged in any of those gratifications to which it is naturally prone; in fact, a constant self-denial was to be rigorously observed in every thing which might contribute either to the convenience or amœnity of this life; so that the material frame being thus by every means weakened and brought low, the celestial spirit might the more readily escape from its contagious influence, and regain its native liberty. Hence it was that the Manichæans, the Marcionites, the Encratites, and others, passed their lives in one continued course of austerity and mortification. On the other hand, those who were constitutionally inclined to voluptuousness and vicious indulgence, found the means of accommodating the same principles to a mode of life that admitted of the free and uncontrouled gratification of all our desires. The essence of piety and religion, they said, consisted in a knowledge of the Supreme Deity, and the maintaining a mental intercourse and association with him. Whoever had become an adept in these attainments, and had, from the habitual exercise of contemplation, acquired the power of keeping the mind abstracted from every thing corporeal, was no longer to be considered as affected by, or answerable for, the impulses and actions of the body, and consequently could be under no necessity to controul its inclinations,

or

or resist its propensities. This accounts for the dissolute and infamous lives led by the Carpo-
cratians, and others, who assumed the liberty of
doing whatever they might list; and maintained
that the practice of virtue was not enjoined by
the Deity, but imposed on mankind by that
power whom they regarded as the prince of this
world, the maker of the universe [a].

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[a] Clemens Alexandrinus clearly perceived this discordance of sentiment amongst the oriental sects, and accordingly divides the heretics of his time into two classes; viz. such as deemed every thing lawful for those who maintained a communion with God, and such as believed that man could innocently indulge himself in scarcely any thing. *Stromat.* lib. iii. cap. v. p. 529. The former placed no restraint whatever on their inclinations; the latter made it a point to reduce and afflict their bodies by every species of mortification and self-denial. Slender indeed must be their acquaintance with the writings of antiquity, who would contend that all the followers of the Gnostic absurdities are indiscriminately represented by the Christian fathers of the first century as men of reprobate and dissolute lives. For so far from this being the case, the generality of them acknowledge, that not a few of that numerous class had, by their continence and austerity of demeanor, acquired a reputation for sanctity, and gained to themselves the love and veneration of the multitude. That the greater part, however, of those who affected the title of Gnostics boldly set all virtue at defiance, and polluted themselves by every species of criminal excess, is manifest not only from the testimony of Christian writers, but also from the accounts given of them by those adversaries of Christianity, Plotinus the Platonic philosopher and Porphyry. See the treatise of the former, *contra Gnosticos*, cap. xv. p. 213, 214.; and of the latter, *de Abstinencia*, lib. i. sect. 42. p. 35. edit. Cantab. But not to enlarge more than is necessary on the subject, there are some striking passages in the writings of the apostles, which evidently point to the two opposite systems of morals that were thus drawn from one and the same source. St. Paul (Col. ii. 18, et seq.) mentions, amongst the first corruptors of the Christian religion, those who neglected all care of the body, displaying in themselves a great shew of sanctity and wisdom;

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XXXVII. The inferences to be drawn from the statement which has thus been given, of the wretched aspect of the whole world at the time of the Son of God's appearance upon earth, must, it is presumed, be sufficiently obvious. To every one who shall peruse it with a mind disposed to be informed, I conceive it will be manifest, that such was the hopeless and forlorn condition into which the human race had fallen at that period, that its recovery could only be effected by a divine instructor and guide, who might overthrow the strong and widely extended dominion of superstition and impiety, and call back unhappy, lost, and wandering man to the paths of wisdom and virtue. But little or no assistance was to be expected from the efforts of man himself against these adversaries; since we see that even those mortals who were endowed with a superior degree of intellectual power, and who occasionally obtained a glimpse of the true path, were yet unable to proceed in it, but again lost themselves in the mazes of error and uncertainty, and disgraced what little they had acquired of sound wisdom, by an admixture of the most extravagant and absurd opinions. I should also hope, that from this view it will appear of what infinite advantages the Christian religion hath been productive to the world, and its inhabitants; I mean not only in a spiritual sense, by opening to us the road that leads to salvation and peace, but also in the many and vast improvements in government

wisdom; whilst St. Peter (2 Pet. ii. 1, et seq.) and St. Jude (in Epist.) notice, as belonging to the same class, men who were so impious and depraved as to maintain that the followers of Christ might freely give the rein to their passions, and with impunity obey the dictates of every corrupt inclination.

and

and civilization to which its influence gave rise. Take away the influence which the Christian religion has on the lives of men, and you at once extinguish the cause to which alone those unspeakable advantages which we enjoy over the nations of old can be fairly or justly attributed.

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Of the civil and religious State of the Jewish Nation in particular, at the Time of Christ's Birth.

I. **T**HE condition of the Jews, at the time of the Son of God's advent in the flesh, was not much superior to that of other nations. The reins of their government had been placed in the hands of a Stipendiary of Rome, called Herod, and surnamed the Great, (a title, by the bye, to which he could have no pretensions, except from the magnitude of his vices,) who, instead of cherishing and protecting the people committed to his charge, appears to have made them sensible of his authority merely by oppression and violence. Nature, indeed, had not denied him the talents requisite for a lofty and brilliant course of public life; but such was his suspicious temper, so incredibly ferocious his cruelty, his devotion to luxury, pomp, and magnificence so madly extravagant, and so much beyond his means: in short, so extensive and enormous was the catalogue of his vices, that he was become an object of utter detestation to the afflicted people over whom he reigned, and whose substance he had exhausted by the most vexatious and immoderate exactions. With a view to soften, in some degree, the asperity of the hatred which he had thus

The Jewish nation governed by Herod the Great.

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thus drawn on himself, he pretended to adopt the religion of the Jews, and at a vast expence restored their temple, which through age had gone much to decay : but the effect of all this was destroyed by his still conforming to the manners and habits of those who worshipped a plurality of gods ; and so many things were countenanced in direct opposition to the Jewish religion, that the hypocrisy and insincerity of the tyrant's professions were too conspicuous to admit of a doubt [a].

Sons and
successors
of Herod.

II. On the death of this nefarious despot, the government of Palestine was divided by the emperor Augustus amongst his three surviving sons. Archelaus, the eldest, was appointed governor of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria, under the title of ethnarch, though, by his conduct, he made it appear that the title of monarch would have better suited him. Antipas had Galilee and Peræa for his share ; whilst Batanea, Trachonitis, Auranitis, with some of the neighbouring territory, were assigned to Philip. The two latter, from their having a fourth part of the province allotted to each, were styled tetrarchs. Archelaus, who inherited all the vices of his parent, with but few or none of his better qualities, completely exhausted the patience of the Jews ; and by a series of the most injurious and oppressive

[a] For an ample illustration of these matters, we refer the reader to the Jewish historian Josephus ; and in addition to that author, he may consult Basnage, *Histoire des Juifs*, tom. i. part i. p. 27, et seq. Norrius *Coenotaphia Pisana*. Noldii *Historia Idumæa*, published by Havercamp, at the end of his edition of Josephus, tom. ii. p. 333. 396. Cellarii *Historia Herodum*, which is the eleventh of his *Academical Dissertations*, part i. p. 207. Prideaux's *History of the Jews*. In a word, there has scarcely perhaps been any thing written on the subject of Jewish affairs, from whence he may not derive information.

acts,

acts, drove them, in the tenth year of his reign, to lay their complaints before the emperor Augustus, who, having inquired into the matter, deposed the ethnarch, and banished him to Vienne in Gaul.

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III. After the removal of Archelaus, the greater part of Palestine which had been under his government, was reduced by the Romans into the form of a province, and put under the superintendance of a governor, who was subject to the controul of the president of Syria. This arrangement, it is probable, at first met with the ready concurrence of the Jews; who, on the death of Herod, had petitioned Augustus that the distinct regal form of government might no longer be continued to them, but their country be received under his own immediate protection, and treated as a part of the empire. The change, however, instead of producing an alleviation of misery to this unhappy people, brought with it an intolerable increase of their calamities. To say nothing of the avarice and injustice of the governors, to which there was neither end nor limit, it proved a most disgusting and insufferable grievance to most of them who considered their nation as God's peculiar people, that they should be obliged to pay tribute to a heathen, and an enemy of the true God, like Cæsar, and live in subjection to the worshippers of false deities. The extortion, likewise, of the publicans, who after the Roman manner were entrusted with the collection of the revenue, and for whose continual and flagrant abuses of authority it was seldom possible to obtain any sort of redress, became a subject of infinite dissatisfaction and complaint. In addition to all this, the constant presence of their governors, surrounded as they were by an

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the Roman
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host of foreign attendants of all descriptions, and protected by a Roman military guard, quartered with their eagles, and various other ensigns of superstition, in the heart of the holy city, kept the sensibility of the Jews continually on the rack, and excited in their minds a degree of indignation bordering on fury; since they considered their religion to be thereby disgraced and insulted, their holy places defiled, and in fact themselves, with every thing they held sacred, polluted and brought into contempt. To these causes are to be attributed the frequent tumults, factions, seditions, and murders, by which it is well known that these unfortunate people accelerated their own destruction.

The condition of the Jews who were under Philip and Antipas, the other sons of Herod, was somewhat better; the severe punishment of Archelaus having taught his brothers to beware of irritating the feelings of their subjects by any similarly excessive stretch or abuse of authority.

Their high
priests and
sanhedrim.

IV. If any remnant of liberty or happiness could have been possessed by a people thus circumstanced, it was effectually cut off by those who held the second place in the civil government under the Romans and the sons of Herod, and who also had the supreme direction in every thing pertaining to religion, namely, the chief priests and the seventy elders, of whom the sanhedrim or national council was composed. The chief priests, according to what is handed down to us of them by Josephus, were the most abandoned of mortals, who had obtained that elevated rank either through the influence of money, or iniquitous pliability; and who shrunk from no species of criminality that might serve to support them in the possession of an authority thus infamously

famously purchased. Since all of them perceived that no reliance could be placed on the permanency of their situation, it became an object of their first concern to accumulate, either by fraud or force, such a quantity of wealth as might either enable them to gain the rulers of the state over to their interest, and drive away all competitors, or else yield them, when deprived of their dignity, the means of living at their ease in private. The national council, or sanhedrim, being composed of men who differed in opinion respecting some of the most important points of religion, nothing like a general harmony was to be found amongst its members: on the contrary, having espoused the principles of various sects, they suffered themselves to be led away by all the prejudice and animosity of party; and were commonly more intent on the indulgence of private grudge, than studious of advancing the cause of religion, or promoting the public welfare. A similar depravity prevailed amongst the ordinary priests, and the inferior ministers of religion. The common people, instigated by the shocking examples thus held out to them by those whom they were taught to consider as their guides, rushed headlong into every species of vicious excess; and giving themselves up to sedition and rapine, appeared alike to defy the vengeance both of God and man [b].

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V. Two sorts of religion flourished at that time in Palestine, the Jewish and the Samaritan; and what added not a little to the calamities of the Hebrew nation, the followers of each of these regarded those of the other persuasion with the

The Jewish
worship cor-
rupt.

[b] See Josephus *de Bell. Judaic.* lib. v. cap. xiii. sect. 6. p. 362. edit. Havercamp.

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most virulent and implacable hatred, and mutually gave vent to their rancorous animosity in the direst curses and imprecations. The nature of the Jewish religion may be collected from the books of the Old Testament; but at the time of our Saviour's appearance, it had lost much of its original beauty and excellence, and was contaminated by errors of the most flagrant kind, that had crept in from various sources. The public worship of God was indeed still continued in the temple at Jerufalem, with all the ceremonies which Moses had prescribed; and a vast concourse of people never failed to assemble at the stated seasons for celebrating those solemn festivals which he had appointed; nor did the Romans ever interfere to prevent those observances: in domestic life, likewise, the ordinances of the law were for the most part attended to and respected: but it is manifest, from the evidence brought forward by various learned writers, that even in the service of the temple itself, numerous ceremonies and observances, drawn from the religious worship of heathen nations, had been introduced and blended with those of divine institution; and that, in addition to superstitions like these of a public nature, many erroneous principles, probably either brought from Babylon and Chaldea by the ancestors of the people at their return from captivity, or adopted by the thoughtless multitude, in conformity to the example of their neighbours the Greeks, the Syrians, and the Egyptians, were cherished and acted upon in private [c].

VI. The

[c] See Spencer's *Treatise de Ritibus et Institutis Hebræorum a Gentium Ufu desumptis, nullibi vero a Deo præceptis aut ordinatis*, which is the fourth in the last Cambridge

VI. The opinions and sentiments of the Jews respecting the Supreme Deity and the divine nature, the celestial genii or ministering spirits of God, the evil angels or dæmons, the souls of men, the nature of our duties, and other subjects of a like kind, appear to have been far less extravagant, and formed on more rational grounds than those of any other nation or people. Indeed it was scarcely possible that they should altogether lose sight of that truth, in the knowledge of which their fathers had been instructed through an immediately divine communication; since it was commonly rendered habitual to them, even at a tender age, to be diligent in hearing, reading, and studying the writings of Moses and the prophets. In every place where any considerable number of Jews resided, a sacred edifice to which, deriving its name from the Greek, they gave the appellation of synagogue, was erected, in which it was customary for the people regularly to assemble, for the purposes of worshipping God in prayer, and hearing the law publicly read and expounded. In most of the larger towns, there were also schools under the management of well-informed masters, in which youth were taught the principles of religion, and also instructed in the liberal arts [d].

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The religion
of the Jews.

VII. Rational

bridge edition of his grand work, *de Legibus Ritualibus veterum Ebræorum*, tom. ii. p. 1089. See also Joh. Gothofred. Lakemacheri *Observationes Philolog.* lib. i. observ. ii. p. 17. where it is proved that the Jews adopted several of the rites of Bacchus from the Greeks. An account of the various private superstitions which the Jews had derived from foreign nations, and of which the number was not small, may be found in most authors who have treated of the Jewish rites and manners.

[d] See Campeg. *Vitringa de Synagoga veteri*, lib. iii. cap. v. p. 667. and lib. i. cap. v. p. 133. cap. vii. p. 156.

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Wrong opinions entertained by the Jews respecting God and the angels.

VII. Rational and correct, however, as the Jews appear to have been in those principles and sentiments which they had derived from their sacred code, they had yet gradually incorporated with them so large an admixture of what was false and absurd, as nearly to deprive the truth of all its force and energy. The common opinion entertained by them respecting the nature of God was, unless I am much deceived, closely allied to the oriental doctrine of its not being absolutely simple, but somewhat resembling that of our light. To the prince of darkness, with his associates and agents, they attributed an influence over the world and mankind of the most extensive nature; so predominant, indeed, as scarcely to leave a superior degree of power even with the Deity himself. Of various terrific conceits founded upon this notion, one of the chief was, that all the evils and calamities which befall the human race, were to be considered as originating with this prince of darkness and his ministering spirits, who had their dwelling in the air, and were scattered throughout every part of the universe. With a view, in some degree, to lessen the fear that was very naturally produced by this idea, they were willing to persuade themselves that an art had been divinely communicated to mankind, of frightening and driving away these evil spirits, by the use of various sorts of herbs, by repeating certain verses, or by pronouncing the names of God, and of divers holy men; or, in other words, they were led to entertain a belief in the

Besides whom, the reader may consult those other authors who have written concerning the synagogues, the schools, and the academies of the Jews, pointed out by Fabricius in his *Bibliographia Antiquaria*, and by Wolfius in his *Bibliotheca Hebraica*.

existence

existence of what is termed magic. All these opinions, and others of a kindred nature, were, as it should seem, borrowed by the Jews from the doctrine of the Chaldæans and Persians, amongst whom their ancestors had for a long while sojourned in captivity. Their notions, also, and manner of reasoning respecting the good genii, or ministers of divine providence, were nearly of the same complexion with those of the Babylonians and Chaldæans, as may clearly be perceived by any one who will compare the highly absurd and irrational doctrines maintained by the modern descendants of the Magi, usually styled Guebres, as also by the Arabs, and other oriental nations, concerning the names, functions, state, and classes of angels, with the sentiments anciently entertained by the Jews on these subjects [*e*].

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VIII. The greatest part of the Jewish nation were looking with the most eager desire for the appearance of the deliverer, promised by God to their fathers; but their hopes were not directed to such an one as the Scriptures described: they expected not a favour of souls, but a strenuous warlike leader, whose talents and prowess might recover for them their civil liberty [*f*]. Concerning

As also respecting the Messiah, the sum of religion, and other matters.

[*e*] See *Observationes ad Jamblichum de Mysteriis Ægyptior. a Thom. Gale*, p. 206. ; also what is said on this subject by Sale, in the Preface to his English translation of the *Koran*. Even Josephus himself hints in no very obscure manner, though with some caution, that the intercourse with the Babylonians had proved highly detrimental to the ancient religion of the Jews. See his *Antiquitates Judaic.* lib. iii. cap. vii. sect. 2. p. 140.

[*f*] Basnage in his *Histoire de Juifs*, tom. v. cap. x. p. 193. treats particularly of the notions which, about the time of our Saviour's coming, were entertained by the Jews respecting the Messiah. Some very learned men of our own time have considered it as a matter of doubt, whether the

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 CHAP. II. which it was imagined would last for the term of
 a thousand

Jews in general looked for a Messiah, or whether the expectation was not cherished by merely a part of them: and there are those who maintain, that the Pharisees alone are represented in the writings of the New Testament as looking for a prince or deliverer; and would hence conclude, that the Sadducees entertained no such hope. But not to say any worse of this opinion, it appears to me to favour highly of temerity. I cannot indeed pretend to determine what might be the sentiments of the Essenes, who differed in so many respects from the regular Jews, that they can only be considered as half Jews; but I think it is manifest beyond all doubt, that all the rest of the Hebrews who dwelt in Palestine, and the neighbouring regions, fully expected the coming of a Messiah. Numberless passages might be cited, which place it out of all controversy that this consolatory hope was generally cherished in the minds of the people at large, (see particularly Joh. x. 24, et seq. xii. 34. Matth. xxi. 9.); and that not only the Pharisees, but also the Sadducees entertained a similar expectation must, I think, readily be admitted by every one, if it be considered that the sanhedrim, or general council of the nation, together with all the doctors and interpreters of the law, and also the whole of the priesthood, evidently looked for the coming of the Christ. The national council, as appears from the authority of Scripture itself, was composed of Sadducees as well as Pharisees; and the various orders of priests were made up indiscriminately of those of either sect. If, therefore, it can be ascertained that the whole of the sanhedrim, together with all the priests and doctors, both wished for and expected a Messiah, nothing further can be requisite to prove that the sentiments of the Sadducees were similar to those of the Pharisees on this point. And that such was actually the case, admits not of the least ground for dispute. Herod the Great, alarmed by the coming of the Magi or wise men from the East, commanded the priests and interpreters of the sacred volume to assemble, and inquired of them concerning the country in which the Messiah would be born. This general assembly of all the learned of the nation, amongst whom were undoubtedly many of the Sadducees, with one accord replied, that, according to the prediction of the holy prophets, the deliverer of the people would be born in Bethlehem. Matth. ii. 4, 5, 6. Not a single

a thousand years, as also of the profusion of pleasures and luxuries with which it would be attended, INTROD.
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single individual of them, therefore, appears to have entertained the least doubt of the coming of a Messiah. When John began to execute the divine commission with which he was charged, of baptizing with water, the council at Jerusalem sent messengers to inquire of him whether he were the Messiah or Christ. Joh. i. 20. 25. It is evident, therefore, that this council must have been unanimous in the expectation of a Messiah. Caiaphas the high priest, the president of the Jewish council, required of our Saviour, under the most solemn adjuration, to say whether or not he were the Messiah: and when Jesus answered in the affirmative, that pontiff at once accused him of direct blasphemy, and demanded of the members of the council what punishment ought to be inflicted on him? who all without exception replied, that a man who could be guilty of such impiety was deserving of death. Matth. xxvi. 63, et seq. The whole council, therefore, we see were of opinion, that for a man to call himself the Son of God, or the Messiah, was an insult to the Divine Majesty, and merited nothing short of capital punishment. But with what propriety, and on what grounds could such a judgment have been with one voice pronounced by this assembly, which comprehended many of the Sadducees, if it was their belief that the notions entertained by the people respecting a Messiah had no solid foundation, but ought to be regarded in the light of a fabulous delusion? Could a man be said to have offered a serious affront to God, by merely endeavouring to give to a popular whim or idle conceit of the vulgar a turn in his own favour? But how, it has been asked by some of the learned, could it be possible for the Sadducees to feel any sort of interest in the coming of a Messiah, when, as is well known, they never extended their views of happiness beyond the present life, and absolutely denied the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments? The answer is easy. It was indeed impossible for the Sadducees, consistently with the tenets of their sect, to entertain any expectation of the coming of such a Messiah as God had promised, a spiritual deliverer, a redeemer of souls; but nothing could be more natural than for men like them, who maintained that obedience to the law of God would be rewarded in no other way than

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attended, of his wars with a terrible adversary, to whom they gave the name of Antichrist, and finally of his victories and their consequences, many wonderful tales were related; some of which were afterwards adopted by the Christians. With the exception of merely a few of the better instructed, the whole nation may be said to have considered the sum and substance of religion as consisting entirely in an observance of the ceremonies prescribed by Moses, to which they attached so high a portion of merit, as to believe that every one who constantly and strictly conformed to them might, with a degree of certainty, look forward to the enjoyment of the blessings of divine favour, both in this life and that which is to come. To the calls of humanity and philanthropy the Jews paid not the least attention, except in regard to those who were allied to them by nature and blood, or were at least so far connected with them as to belong to the same religious community with themselves. They were even so wholly destitute of every generous feeling or sentiment towards strangers, as not only to shun, by every means in their power, whatever might lead to any thing like an intimacy, or reciprocal interchange of good offices with them, but also to imagine themselves at liberty to treat them on all occasions in the most injurious and oppressive manner. It was, therefore, not without reason that they were taxed by

than by an abundance of this world's goods, health of body, riches, and the like, to look with eagerness after such a Messiah as was the object of the ardent hope of the Jewish nation at that period, namely, an illustrious prince, a hero, or vanquisher of the Romans, and a restorer of their lost liberties.

the

the Greeks and Romans with cherishing an hatred of the human race [g].

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Jewish sects.

IX. Among the various untoward circumstances which conspired to undermine the welfare of the Jewish nation, one of the chief was that, those who possessed a superior degree of learning, and who arrogantly pretended to the most perfect knowledge of divine matters, so far from being united in sentiment, were divided into various sects, widely differing in opinion from each other, not only on subjects of smaller moment, but also on those points which constitute the very essence of religion itself. Of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, which were the two most distinguished of these sects both in number and respectability, mention is made in the writings of the New Testament. Josephus, Philo, and others speak of a third sect, under the title of the Essenes [b]; and it

[g] See the authorities collected by Elfner, (*Observation. Sacr. in Nov. Test.* tom. ii. p. 274.) to which, if it were necessary, many others might be added.

[b] It is certain that no express mention is made of the Essenes, in the writings of the New Testament: several learned persons, however, have imagined, that although the name is not to be found there, yet that the principles and doctrines of this sect are glanced at in various passages. Some, for instance, point to Col. ii. 18, et seq.; others to Matth. vi. 16.; whilst others again fancy that a similar allusion is to be perceived in several other places. It cannot be necessary to enter into a serious refutation of these opinions, since they have no other support than that of mere random conjecture. From this silence of the sacred writings respecting the Essenes, (or, as some perhaps would prefer to have them called, Essees,) the adversaries of religion have taken occasion to insinuate that Christ himself belonged to this sect, and was desirous of propagating its discipline and doctrines in the cities, in opposition to the wishes of the Pharisees and Sadducees. See Prideaux's *Histoire des Juifs*, tom. iv. p. 116. But the opinion is manifestly childish and absurd in itself; and nothing more is required than a comparison

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it appears from more than one authority, that several others of less note contributed still farther to distract the public mind. St. Matthew, in his History, notices the Herodians; a class of men who, it seems highly probable, had espoused the cause of the descendants of Herod the Great, and contended that they had been unjustly deprived of the greater part of Palestine by the Romans. In Josephus we also find mention made of another sect, bearing the title of the Philosophers; com-

parison of the discipline of the Essenes with that of the Christians, to prove it at once utterly false and void of foundation. Others, influenced by less hostile motives, have suggested as a reason why Christ and his apostles forbore to cast any reprehension on the Essenes, that notwithstanding all their proneness to superstition, they might probably appear to be actuated by a rectitude of intention, and a sincere desire to worship God aright. Finally, there are some who imagine that the Essenes without hesitation embraced the truth propounded to them by Christ, and became his disciples; and consequently exempted themselves from the censure to which they would otherwise have been exposed. But it appears to me, that no one who will be at the pains attentively to examine the principles and tenets of the Essenes, and to compare them with the history of Christian affairs, can well accede to either of these opinions. At the same time, I conceive, that without going any farther than to the manners and habits of this sect, we may be furnished with a most plain and satisfactory reason why no mention is made of it either by the evangelists, or any other of the apostles. Those four historians of the life and actions of Christ, whom we term evangelists, confined their narration to such things alone as were said and done by him in the Jewish cities and towns, and particularly at Jerusalem. In like manner, the epistles written by the apostles were addressed only to Christians who dwelt in cities. But the Essenes, it is well known, avoided all intercourse whatever with cities, and spent their lives in wilds and desert places. It would therefore have been altogether digressive, and out of place, had any notice been taken, in either of the books of the New Testament, of any disputes which either Christ or his disciples might have had with a sect of this description.

posed

posed of men of the most ferocious character, and founded by Judas a Galilean, a strenuous and undaunted asserter of the liberties of the Jewish nation, who maintained that the Hebrews ought to render obedience to none but God alone [i]. In fine, I do not think that the accounts given of the Jewish sects or factions by Epiphanius and Hegefippus, as preserved in Eusebius, should be considered as altogether groundless and underserving of credit [k].

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X. The

[i] Josephus *Antiquit. Judaic.* lib. xviii. cap. ii.

[k] In support of the opinion which I thus profess myself to entertain, that what Epiphanius has recorded concerning the Jewish sects, in the Preface to his book *de Hæresibus*, is probably not wholly fictitious, or unworthy of credit, I will here bring forward a conjecture, which I have never turned in my mind without feeling strongly persuaded of its probability, and that it might with propriety be submitted to the consideration of the learned. Possibly it may contribute towards dispelling a portion of that obscurity with which ancient history is enveloped. Amongst the various Jewish sects enumerated by Epiphanius, is that of the Hemerobaptists, a set of people who, according to him, were accustomed to wash their bodies daily, imagining that without this perpetual ablution, it would be impossible for any one to obtain salvation. Now mention is made of this same sect by Hegefippus, a very ancient writer, *apud Euseb. Histor. Eccles.* lib. iv. cap. xxii. p. 143.; and Justin Martyr also notices it, *Dialog. cum Tryphon.* p. 245. ed. Jebb. merely with this difference, that rescinding the first part of the word, he terms the sect Baptists. In the *Indicalum Hæreseon*, a work which is commonly attributed to Jerome, it is likewise reckoned as one of the Jewish sects. The author of those tracts, which bear the name of *Clementina*, says that one John was the founder of this sect, and that he had under him a company of twelve apostles, besides thirty other select associates. *Homil. secund.* cap. xxiii. p. 633. tom. i. *Patr. Apostol.* The same thing is also said in the *Epitome Gestorum Petri*, which is subjoined to the *Clementina*, § xxvi. p. 763. If any reliance whatever, therefore, is to be placed in ancient history, the fact seems to be incontrovertibly established by evidence that admits of no suspicion

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Of the larger
sects, their
points of
concord and
disagree-
ment.

X. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the
Essenes, the three most distinguished and power-
ful

picion either on the ground of deceit or ignorance, that such a sect as that of the Hemerobaptists did in reality exist amongst the Jews: and we should consequently do wrong in considering every thing recorded by Epiphanius as fabulous, and undeserving of credit. But what appears to me to be by no means an improbable conjecture is, that some of the descendants of these Hemerobaptists have survived even to this day. The learned well know that there exists in Persia and India a very numerous and widely extended class of men, who call themselves Mendai Ijahi, or the disciples of John; but who, from their appearing to have received a tincture of Christianity, although but in a very slight and imperfect degree, are most commonly styled by Europeans, "the Christians of St. John." The Orientals give them the name of Sabbi or Sabiin. Ignatius a Jesu, a Carmelite, who resided for a long while amongst these people, published an account of them in a particular little work, bearing the following title: *Narratio Originis Rituum et Errorum Christianorum S. Johannis; cui adjungitur Discursus per Modum Dialogi, in quo confutantur xxxiii Erroris ejusdem Nationis*, Romæ, 1652, in 8vo. The book is not to be despised, since it contains many things well worthy of attention; but it is deficient in method, and is evidently the production of an untutored genius. Besides what is to be met with in this author, copious accounts have been given of these people by Herbelot, in his *Bibliotheca Orientalis voce Sabi*, p. 726.; and Asseman, in the *Bibliotheca Oriental. Clement. Vatican*; as also by Thevenot and Tavernier, in the accounts of their travels; and Kæmpfer, in his *Amanitates exotic. fascic. ii. cap. xi. p. 435, et seq.*; and more recently by Fourmont, in the *History of the Academy of Inscriptions, &c. at Paris*; and others. Bayer also is known to have been engaged in a work expressly on this subject, and which it is probable that he had nearly, if not quite, completed at the time of his death. The origin and nature of this sect have not been as yet satisfactorily determined. We have sufficient proof before us at this day, that it cannot in any shape be referred to the Christians; for the opinions which those who belong to it entertain respecting Christ, are evidently such only as have been accidentally imbibed from their intercourse with the Chaldean Christians; and they do not pay him any sort
of

ful of the Jewish sects, were cordially united in sentiment as to all those fundamental points which

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of adoration or worship. By most people they are considered as the descendants of the ancient Sabii, of whom frequent mention is made in the Mohammedan law, and in Maimonides. But their manners and tenets by no means accord with those which are ascribed to the Sabii: and in regard to the appellation of Sabii, which is given to them by the Mohammedans, no argument whatever can be drawn from it, since it is well known that this is a generic term, applied by the Arabs to all who are of a different religion from themselves. For my own part, I should rather consider these Christians of St. John as the descendants of the ancient Hemerobaptists, who appear to have flourished in Judea about the time of our Saviour's birth; and I ground my opinion on the following reasons: 1st, These people profess themselves to be Jews, and assert that their forefathers dwelt in Palestine, on the banks of the river Jordan; from whence, according to them, they were driven by the Mohammedans. This is of itself, I think, sufficient to overturn the opinion of those who would confound them with the Sabii. 2dly, They rest their hopes of the remission of sins, and of salvation, on the frequent ablution of the body; an error by which the Hemerobaptists were principally distinguished from other Jews. At this day, indeed, the disciples of John, as they wish to be called, are washed in the river, according to solemn form by the priests, only once in the year; whereas the Hemerobaptists practised a daily ablution of the body: but it is strongly impressed on the minds of all of them, that the oftener this ceremony is performed by any one, the more refined and holy he becomes; and they would, therefore, rejoice if it were possible for them to undergo the like ablution every month, or even every day. It is the avarice of the priests which alone prevents the frequent repetition of this ceremony: money being the only motive by which they can be stimulated to the exercise of the duties of their function. 3dly, The name of the founder of this sect, as that of the Hemerobaptists, was John; from whom they pretend to have received a certain book, which is regarded as sacred, and preserved with the greatest care. It is a common opinion that this John was the same with him who was the forerunner of Christ, and who is styled in Scripture the Baptist; and hence many have been led to conclude, that the people who are styled

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which constituted the basis and chief support of the Jewish religion. All of them, for instance, rejected with detestation the idea of a plurality of gods, and would acknowledge the existence of but one almighty power, whom they regarded as the creator of the universe, and believed to be endowed with the most absolute perfection and goodness. They were equally agreed in the

Sabii are the descendants of John the Baptist's disciples. Ignatius a Jesu, in particular, is of this opinion. See his work above mentioned, cap. ii. p. 13, et seq. But it is plain from the account which, even according to Ignatius himself, these people give of the founder of their sect, that he must have been a person altogether different from the Baptist: for they will not admit that the John, whose memory they hold in such reverence, suffered capital punishment under Herod; but maintain that he died according to the course of nature at a city of Persia, named Sciufter, and was buried near that place. They also relate of him, that he was married, and had four sons. It cannot indeed be denied but that, in some few particulars, the account which they give of this their John corresponds with what is recorded in Holy Writ of John the Baptist; but it appears to me beyond all doubt, that these things, as well as the few facts of which they are in possession respecting Christ, were adopted from the Christians, with whom they sojourned for a while, after their flight from the oppression of the Mohammedans. Perceiving nothing in these things either contradictory or adverse to their tenets, and being, through their extreme ignorance, utterly unqualified for examining into or controverting any points of which they might chance to be informed, they probably without hesitation received and propagated them as a part of their own system. Of the degree of merit that may belong to this conjecture of mine, which I scruple not to say appears to me to have every probability on its side, the public will be better able to judge, when it shall be put in possession of those books which the Christians of St. John hold sacred, and particularly of that one which this sect consider to have been written by their venerated founder. Copies of these books were, a few years since, deposited in the King of France's library; and it may therefore reasonably be expected that, ere long, they will find their way into the hands of the learned.

opinion, that God had selected the Hebrews from amongst the other nations of the earth as his peculiar people, and had bound them to himself by an unchangeable and everlasting covenant. With the same unanimity they maintained that Moses was the ambassador of heaven, and consequently that the law promulgated by him was of divine original. It was also their general belief, that in the books of the Old Testament were to be found the means of obtaining salvation and happiness; and that whatever principles or duties were therein laid down or inculcated, were to be received with reverence and implicitly conformed to. But an almost irreconcilable difference of opinion, and the most vehement disputes, prevailed amongst them respecting the original source or fountain from whence all religion was to be deduced. In addition to the written law, the Pharisees had recourse to another, which had been received merely through oral tradition. This latter both the Sadducees and the Essenes rejected with contempt, as altogether spurious. The interpretation of the law yielded still further ground for acrimonious contention. The Pharisees maintained that the law, as committed to writing by Moses, and likewise every other part of the sacred volume, had a twofold sense or meaning; the one plain and obvious to every reader, the other abstruse and mystical. The Sadducees, on the contrary, would admit of nothing beyond a simple interpretation of the words, according to their strict literal sense. The Essenes, or at least the greater part of them, differing from both of these, considered the words of the law to possess no force or power whatever in themselves, but merely to exhibit the shadows or images of celestial objects, of virtues, and of

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duties. So much diffension and discord respecting the rule of religion, and the sense in which the divine law ought to be understood, could not fail to produce a great diversity in the forms of religious worship, and naturally tended to generate the most opposite and conflicting sentiments on subjects of a divine nature [l].

Of the Phari-
sees.

XI. In point of numbers, riches, and power, the Pharisees far surpassed every other Jewish sect; and since they constantly exhibited a great display of religion, in an apparent zeal for the cultivation of piety and brotherly love, and by an affectation of superior sanctity in their opinions, their manners, and even in their dress, the influence which they possessed over the minds of the people was unbounded; insomuch that they may almost be said to have given what direction they pleased to public affairs. It is unquestionable, however, that the religion of the Pharisees was, for the most part, founded in consummate hypocrisy; and that at the bottom they were generally the slaves of every vicious appetite, proud, arrogant, and avaricious, consulting only the gratification of their lusts, even at the moment of their professing themselves to be engaged in the service of their Maker [m]. These odious features in the

[l] A collection of what had been written concerning these Jewish sects, by Jos. Scaliger, Drusus, and Serarius, three distinguished authors, who, as it appears, differed in opinion as to many things connected with the subject, was published by Trigland in 2 vols. 4to. 1702, under the following title: *Trium Scriptorum illustrium de Judæorum Sectis Syntagma*. Since that time, Basnage, Prideaux, and numberless other writers, have used their endeavours still farther to elucidate the subject; but the attempt has not, in every case, been attended with equal success.

[m] Josephus, although himself a Pharisee, yet authorises this statement. See what he says in his *Antiquitates Judaicæ*. lib. xvii. cap. iii.; and also in some other places.

character

character of the Pharisees caused them to be rebuked by our Saviour with the utmost severity of reprehension; with more severity, indeed, than he bestowed even on the Sadducees, who, although they had departed widely from the genuine principles of religion, yet did not impose on mankind by a pretended sanctity, or devote themselves with insatiable greediness to the acquisition of honours and riches. The Pharisees considered the soul to be immortal. They also believed in the resurrection of the body, and in a future state of rewards and punishments. They admitted the free agency of man to a certain extent; but beyond this, they supposed his actions to be controuled by the decrees of fate. These points of doctrine, however, seem not to have been understood or explained by all of this sect in the same way; neither does it appear that any great pains were taken to define and ascertain them with precision and accuracy, or to support them by reasoning and argument [n].

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XII. The Sadducees fell greatly short of the Pharisees in number as well as influence. This is easily to be accounted for, from the manners and principles of the sect. Their leading tenet

Of the Sadducees.

[n] Even Josephus, who must have been intimately acquainted with the tenets of the Pharisees, is very inconsistent with himself in the account which he gives of them, as may easily be perceived by any one who will compare together the different passages relating to them in his works. It would also prove a task of some difficulty to reconcile every thing which he says concerning the opinions of the Pharisees, with what is recorded of them in the writings of the New Testament. Such inconsistency and contradictions can scarcely be accounted for, otherwise than by concluding that a difference of sentiment prevailed amongst the Pharisees on various points; and that their opinions, so far from being fixed and determinate, were in many respects altogether vague and unsettled.

INTROD. was, that all our hopes and fears terminate with
 CHAP. II. the present life; the soul being involved in one
 Of the Sad- common fate with the body, and liable, like it,
 ducees. to perish and be dissipated. Upon this principle,
 it was very natural for them to maintain, that
 obedience to the law would be rewarded by God
 with length of days, and an accession of the good
 things of this life, such as honours and wealth;
 whilst the violators of it would, in like manner,
 find their punishment in the temporary sufferings
 and afflictions of the present day. But persons
 impressed with this opinion could not possibly
 consider any as the favourites or friends of
 Heaven but the fortunate and the happy; for the
 poor and the miserable they could entertain no
 sentiments of compassion: their hopes and their
 desires must all have centred in a life of leisure,
 of ease, and voluptuous gratification: and such
 is exactly the character which Josephus gives us
 of the Sadducees [o]. With a view, in some de-
 gree,

[o] According to Josephus, the sect of the Sadducees was of small number, and composed entirely of men distinguished for their opulence and prosperity. *Antiquit. Judaic.* lib. xviii. cap. i. § 4. p. 871. lib. xiii. cap. x. § 6. p. 663. He also represents those belonging to it as entirely devoid of every sentiment of benevolence and charity towards others; whereas the Pharisees, on the contrary, were ever ready to relieve the wants of the poor and the wretched. *De Bell. Judaic.* lib. ii. cap. viii. § 14. p. 166. It likewise appears, from his account of them, that they were studious of passing their lives in one uninterrupted course of ease and pleasure; insomuch that it was with difficulty they could be prevailed on to undertake the duties of the magistracy, or any other public function. *Antiquit.* lib. xviii. cap. i. § 4. p. 871. They were also, it should seem, decidedly hostile to the doctrine of fate and necessity; considering all men to enjoy the most ample freedom of action, *i. e.* the absolute power of doing either good or evil, according to their choice. It would have yielded some gratification to the reader,

gree, to justify this system, and cast as it were a veil over its deformity, they denied that man had

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CHAP. II.
Of the Sadducees.

reader, possibly, had Josephus traced these distinguishing traits in the character of the Sadducees to their proper source; but on this part of the subject he is altogether silent. The deficiency, however, may, I think, be easily supplied; and I will therefore attempt it in a few words. Since the Sadducees believed that the law of Moses was of divine original, they were unavoidably constrained to admit that God had promised rewards to the obedient, and threatened evil-doers with punishment. But as it made a part of their creed, that death put a final period to the existence of the soul as well as the body, it became with them a necessary point of belief, that the remuneration bestowed by God on the righteous would consist of the good things and enjoyments of the present life; and that its temporal evils, such as poverty, disease, ignominy, and the like, would constitute the punishment of the wicked. Now it strikes me, that every thing which Josephus has handed down to us respecting the Sadducees may readily be accounted for from this one principle: for under the influence of such an opinion, they would necessarily consider the man who abounded in wealth, and other means of worldly enjoyment, as upright and acceptable to God; whilst the miserable, the poor, the destitute, and the diseased, must in like manner have been regarded by them in the light of sinners, hateful in the sight of their Maker. Persons of slender or but moderate means, to say nothing of the afflicted, the indigent, and the naked, could have had no inducement whatever to join themselves to men professing such sentiments; and as the number of these has ever far exceeded that of the rich and the happy, it was impossible for this sect to extend itself so as to become any way numerous. To the same source may likewise be referred that want of humanity, which they discovered towards the necessitous, and those who had to struggle with the ills of adverse fortune: for since it was their belief, that every thing in this life went well with the righteous, and that adversity was the lot only of the wicked, they were naturally led to conclude that the poor and the wretched must, by their crimes and offences, have displeased God, and drawn on themselves the effects of his just indignation; and that to relieve the wants of those who were at enmity with Heaven, or to attempt, by any means, to mitigate or soften down chastisements in-

INTROD. had any natural propensity to either good or evil ;
 CHAP. II. but insisted that he was left at perfect liberty to
 choose

Of the Sadducees.

sisted by the hand of the Almighty, would be acting in direct opposition to the dictates both of reason and religion. It is probable, therefore, that in the observance of a harsh and unfeeling carriage towards their unfortunate fellow mortals, they imagined themselves to be actuated by motives of piety and a love towards God. Again, nothing could be more natural for men who conceived that the soul would not survive the body, and that all those who should be found deserving of the favour of Heaven would receive their reward in this world, than to devote themselves to a life of ease and voluptuous gratification : for in vain, they might say, would God lavish on his favourites riches and health, or any of the various other means of enjoyment, if he did not intend them to be used for the purpose of rendering the path of life smooth and delightful. According to their view of things, the pleasures and gratifications placed by the bounty of Divine Providence within our reach, ought rather to be considered in the light of rewards which God bestows on the just, by way of remuneration for the difficulties which they may encounter in the study of his law. Unless I am altogether mistaken, our blessed Saviour, in that history of the rich man, (whether true or feigned, matters not,) which is recorded in St. Luke's Gospel, cap. xvi. v. 19. hath given us a just picture of the manners and way of living of the Sadducees. Dives was a Jew, for he calls Abraham his father ; but he was neither a Pharisee nor one of the Essenes, and we may therefore conclude him to have been a Sadducee. Indeed, our Saviour's narrative leaves us in no doubt as to this point ; for the request of Dives to Abraham is, that he would send Lazarus to his brethren, for the purpose of converting them to a belief in the soul's immortality, and in the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments. It is plain, therefore, that during his life-time he had imagined that the soul would perish with the body, and had treated with derision the doctrine maintained by the Pharisees respecting the happiness or misery of a future state ; and that the brethren whom he had left behind entertained similar sentiments,—sentiments which clearly mark them as the votaries of that impious system to which the Sadducees were devoted. This man is represented as having amassed great wealth. His riches were employed in obtaining for him authority and respect amongst the people :
 for

choose between the two. A man's happiness and prosperity, therefore, they asserted, depended entirely

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for the eyes of the multitude were studiously drawn towards him, by the splendour and costliness of his apparel; and he fared sumptuously and joyously with his companions every day. Lazarus, a poor wretch, the prey of misery and disease, was suffered to lie languishing at his gate, neglected and scorned as a being hateful in the sight of Heaven, and undeserving of any commiseration. The writings of Moses and the prophets were not indeed rejected by him; on the contrary, it should seem that he held them in respect. "They have Moses and the prophets," says Abraham. The Holy Scriptures, therefore, it appears, were in the hands of these men; but they would not allow that any thing contained in them would warrant a conclusion that the souls of men would survive the dissolution of their bodies, and be either punished or rewarded in a future state for the deeds done in the flesh. The authority, therefore, of Christ himself may be adduced in support of the greater part of what Josephus has handed down to us respecting the Sadducees. It was impossible for any thing to be more directly repugnant to the manners and opinions which we have just been considering, than the doctrine of the Pharisees, who maintained that there is in mankind a natural proneness or inclination to what is evil and vicious, and that consequently great allowances ought to be made for the weakness and corruption of our nature: that many are involved in misery, not so much through their own fault, as in compliance with the all-wise arrangements of Divine Providence, which freely dispenses both good and evil to its creatures, according to its will; whilst the afflictions and sufferings of others are evidently to be attributed to imprudence, to ignorance, to accident, or perhaps to the injustice and tyranny of wicked men. A man's fortune or circumstances in life, therefore, they contended, could in no wise furnish a just criterion whereby to estimate his uprightness or depravity. On every one of these points, the Sadducees differed from them *toto calo*; insisting that man is endowed with the most perfect freedom of will to do either good or evil, without being under the least controul whatever, from any impediment either external or internal; and that he is not driven by necessity, or inclined by natural propensity, to either the one side or the other. The happiness of mortals, therefore, being thus made wholly dependent on themselves, if they

INTROD. entirely on himself; and hence if he were poor
 CHAP. II. and miserable, he was not deserving of any com-
 miferation or pity, fince his adverfe lot was alto-
 gether the confequence of his own depravity and
 mifconduct.

Division of
 the Effenes.

XIII. The Effenes are generally divided by the
 learned into two claffes, the *practical*, and the
theoretical. This arrangement of the feft is
 founded on a fuppoftion that the Therapeutæ,
 concerning whom Philo Judæus has left us a
 diftinct little treatife, belonged to it. To this
 opinion I cannot implicitly fubfcribe, fince it has
 no other fupport on its fide than mere probability;
 but, at the fame time, I do not pretend to fay
 that it may not be a juft one. Thofe whom they
 call practical Effenes were fuch as engaged in
 agriculture, or practifed medicine, or any of the
 other arts, and did not efrange themfelves from
 the fociety of mankind. The term theoretical
 they apply to thofe who, renouncing every fort of
 bodily occupation, devoted themfelves entirely to
 the exercife of contemplation; and who, to
 avoid pollution, withdrew themfelves from all
 converfe with men of a different perfuafion.
 The practical Effenes were ftill further divided,
 according to Jofephus, into two branches: the
 one being characterifed by a life of celibacy, de-
 dicated to the inftruction and education of the
 children of others; whilft the other thought it
 proper to marry, not with a view to fenfual

fail to attain it, it muft be entirely through their own fault.
 At this diftance of time, it is impoffible to enter more at
 large into the fubject, or to relieve it altogether from the
 obfcurity with which it is enveloped; fince we are ignorant
 of the manner in which the Sadducees might explain and
 recommend their fyftem, and are equally unacquainted with
 their mode of reasoning, in answer to the arguments of
 their opponents.

gratification,

gratification, but for the purpose of propagating the human species [*p*]. It is possible that these might not be the only opinions and habits, by a difference in regard to which these two classes were distinguished from each other. The monks of Christianity, a description of men that first appeared in Egypt, seem to have taken for their model the manners and scheme of life of the practical Essenes: indeed the account given us by Josephus of the latter corresponds so exactly with the institutions and habits of the early votaries of monachism, that it is impossible for any two things more nearly to resemble each other. Those solitary characters, who came to be distinguished by the appellation of hermits, appear to have copied after the theoretical Essenes or Therapeutæ.

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XIV. The practical Essenes were distributed in the cities, and throughout the countries of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. Their bond of association embraced not merely a community of tenets, and a similarity of manners, and particular observances, like that of the Pharisees or the Sadducees; but extended also to a general participation of houses, victuals, and every sort of goods. Their demeanor was sober and chaste; and their mode of life was, in every other respect, made subject to the strictest regulations, and put under the superintendance of governors, whom they appointed over themselves. The whole of their time was devoted to labour, meditation, and prayer; and they were most diligently attentive to the calls of justice and humanity, and every moral duty. Like all other Jews, they believed

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[*p*] Josephus *de Bello Judaic.* lib. ii. cap. viii. sect. 13. p. 165, et seq.

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in the unity of God: but from some of their institutes, it appears that they entertained a reverence for the sun; considering, probably, that grand luminary as a deity of an inferior order, or perhaps regarding him as the visible image of the Supreme Being. The souls of men they imagined to have fallen, by a disastrous fate, from the regions of purity and light into the bodies which they occupy; during their stay in which, they considered them to be confined as it were within the walls of a loathsome dungeon. For this reason, therefore, they would not believe in the resurrection of the body; although it was their opinion that the soul would be rewarded or punished in a life to come, according to its deserts. They also allowed themselves but little bodily nourishment or gratification, fearing lest the immortal spirit might be thereby encumbered and weighed down. It was, moreover, their endeavour, by constant meditation, to withdraw the mind as much as possible from the contagious influence of the corrupt mass, by which it was unhappily enveloped. The ceremonies or external forms, enjoined by Moses to be observed in the worship of God, were utterly disregarded by many of the Essenes; it being their opinion that the words of the law were to be understood in a mysterious recondite sense, and not according to their literal meaning. Others of them, indeed, conformed so far as to offer sacrifices; but they did this at home, since they were totally averse from the rites which it was necessary for those to observe, who made their offerings in the temple [q]. Upon the whole, I should think it
no

[q] Philo, in his book *Quod omnis Probus Liber*, p. 457. tom. ii. opp. edit. Anglic. denies that the Essenes offered

no improbable conjecture, that the doctrine and discipline of the Essenes arose out of an endeavour

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up any sacrifices. Josephus, however, in his *Antiquitates Judaic.* lib. xviii. cap. i. § v. p. 871. says, that they did not indeed sacrifice in the temple at Jerusalem; and for this plain reason, that the Jews would not permit them to do so, on account of their refusing to observe the customary national ceremonies; but that, separately, among themselves, they offered up victims to the Supreme Being with more than ordinary solemnity. The learned are divided in opinion as to which of these accounts is most deserving of credit. The generality of them lean to the authority of Philo, and propose, either by an emendation of the words of Josephus, or by giving them a new interpretation, to make him say much the same thing with Philo: on which subject I have already taken occasion to make some remarks, in my notes to Cudworth's *Discourse concerning the true notion of the Lord's Supper.* I must confess that I see nothing which should prevent us from considering both these accounts as supported, to a certain extent, by the real fact. For since it appears that the Essenes were so much divided in opinion respecting the marriage state, as that some of them utterly disapproved of entering into it, whilst others freely took to themselves wives; I think it by no means impossible that one part of this sect might be wholly averse from sacrifices of any kind, and consider the law from beginning to end merely in the light of an allegory, whilst the remaining part, thinking that the words of the law ought in some sort to be understood according to their literal sense, might comply with them so far as to offer sacrifices to God, although, in their manner of doing so, they might probably have a regard to some of the principles which they had imbibed from a different source. There are, however, some highly respectable literary characters, to whom it appears altogether incredible that any Jews, who believed in the divine original of the Mosaic law, should have dared to sacrifice in any other place than the temple; and who consequently refuse to place any faith in what Josephus says of the Essenes having done so. But I rather think that I am furnished with the means of making these opponents of the Jewish historian alter their opinion, and of rendering them willing again to restore to him whatever they may have detracted from his credit and authority. The fact is, that I have met with a remarkable passage in Porphyry, the Platonic philosopher,

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to make the principles of the Jewish religion accord with some tenets which they had imbibed from

philosopher, which has never, as far as I can discover, been noticed by any one who has treated of the Effenes, or undertaken to illustrate Josephus; but which clearly vindicates the account of that historian from all suspicion of error, and tends in great measure to remove the obscurity which hangs over his narrative. Porphyry, in his treatise *de Abstinentia a Carnibus Animalium*, lib. ii. § 26. p. 70. assigns a distinguished place to the Effenes, amongst those whom he commends for abstaining from the flesh of victims. Καὶ τοὶ Σύρων μὲν Ἰουδαῖοι διὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς θυσίαν, ἔτι καὶ νῦν φησὶν ὁ θεόφραστος ζωοδυνῶντες, ἐν τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἡμᾶς κελεύειεν θυσίαν ἀποσαίημεν ἂν τῆς πράξεως· ἔ γὰρ ἐσιμῶμενοι τῶν τυθέντων, ὀλοκαυτῶντες δὲ ταῦτα νυκτός, καὶ κατ' αὐτῶν πολὺ μέλι καὶ οἶνον λείβοντες, ἀνήλισκον τὴν θυσίαν θάπτου, ἵνα τῆ δεινῆ μὴ ὁ πανόπτης γένοιτο θεατῆς. Καὶ τῶτο δρῶσι, νηστεύοντες τὰς ἀνὰ μέσον τῆτε ἡμέρας, καὶ κατὰ πάντα τῶτον τὸν χρόνον, ἅτε φιλόσοφοι τὸ γένος ὄντες, περὶ τῆ θείᾳ μὲν ἀλλήλοισι, καλέσει, τῆς δὲ νυκτός τῶν ἀστῶν ποιῶνται τὴν θεωρίαν, βλέποντες εἰς αὐτὰ καὶ διὰ τῶν εὐχῶν θεοκλυτῶντες. Proinde Judæi qui Syriam incolunt, propter primum sacrificiorum institutum eo modo etiamnum animalia, ut ait Theophrastus, sacrificant: quo si nos juberent facere, a ritu immolandi deficeremus. Non enim victimas epulantur, sed eas integras per noctem comburentes, multo melle et vino iis superfuso, sacrificium ocus consumunt, ne qui omnia videt, facinus hoc intueatur. Hoc autem faciunt, diebus interjectis jejunantes, et per totum tempus, tamquam e philosophorum erant genere, de numine colloquuntur: nocte etiam astra contemplantur, ea intuiti et precibus deum invocantes. It is true, that this passage does not refer to the Effenes by name; and it may, therefore, at first sight, appear as if Porphyry and Theophrastus, whom he quotes, were speaking of the Jews at large. But the nature of the account itself thus given of them places it beyond a question, that it was meant merely of some Jewish sect, and indeed of none other than the sect of the Effenes: for not a single particular of what is thus related can be reconciled with the customary practice and usages of the Jews in common; whereas the account corresponds, in every respect, with the institutions and discipline of the Effenes. The Jews of whom it speaks were philosophers; they sacrificed in the night; they did not feast on the things offered; they occupied themselves in contemplating the stars; they revered the sun; they poured out

from that system, which we have above spoken of under the title of the oriental philosophy.

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out honey and wine on their sacrifices; they consumed the whole of what was offered with fire; and prepared themselves for the performance of their sacred rites by an abstinence from food. Now nothing could be more foreign than all these things were from the religious observances of the Jews as a nation; whilst, at the same time, they precisely accord with the principles and practice of the Essenes. The fact, therefore, undoubtedly was as Josephus represents it, that the Essenes did not bring their sacrifices to the temple, but offered them up at home. It is also easy to perceive the reasons on account of which the Jewish pontiff and priesthood would not permit them to sacrifice in the temple. The gifts, indeed, which they were accustomed to send to the temple, according to Josephus, were not rejected, neither were its doors closed against them personally; but since they would not, in their sacrifices, follow the institutes and usages of their forefathers, but introduced rites of a novel and profane nature, permission to perform them in the temple was an indulgence which it was utterly impossible to grant. 1. It is well known that all Jews (*i. e.* who were such in reality, and according to the strict sense of the term) were accustomed to feast solemnly on such part of the victims as remained after sacrifice. But this was an abomination in the eyes of the Essenes, who, according to the principles of the oriental philosophy, considered the soul to be held in bondage by the body; and thinking it, therefore, improper to add more than was necessary to the strength of the latter, supported it merely by a small quantity of meagre food, and abstained altogether from the flesh of animals. 2. The Jews devoted only a part of the victim to the fire; but the Essenes burnt the whole of it with as much expedition as possible. 3. The Essenes poured out upon their burnt offerings an abundance of honey and wine; a practice entirely unknown to the Jews. The honey and wine were no doubt meant as visible signs of certain thoughts or reflections, by which they deemed it proper that the minds of those who were assisting at the sacrifice should be occupied. 4. The Jews offered up their sacrifices in the day-time; but the Essenes during the night. Porphyry gives us to understand, that they fixed on the night-time for performing these rites, "lest this ungracious act should meet the eyes of him who sees every thing." This usage was exactly conformable

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XV. Notwithstanding that the practical Effenes were very much addicted to superstition, society derived

formable to a superstitious notion of the Effenes, of which Josephus has taken notice. He who sees all things, and to whose eyes the Effenes were unwilling that their sacrifices should be exposed, was unquestionably the sun, whom they worshipped as the deity. But neither Porphyry nor Theophrastus has hit upon the true reason why this preference was given to the night-time for sacrificing. The author, who assigns the above reason for it, appears to have thought that the Effenes did not consider sacrifice as a thing altogether unlawful in itself, but yet regarded it as an usage by no means pleasing or acceptable to God; and that their offerings in this way were made rather in compliance with the custom of their country, than in obedience to what they deemed to be his will. It being their opinion, therefore, that the offering of sacrifice was an act not grateful in the sight of Heaven, they always performed their sacred rites before the rising of the sun, whom, in some way or other, they considered as holding the place of the Deity; being naturally desirous to avoid doing that, which they imagined was not pleasing to the God who sees every thing, so immediately in his presence as it must be during the day-time. But this reason was probably framed from the suggestions of the writer's own imagination, or else drawn from the principles of the more recent Platonic philosophy, since it could have no foundation whatever in a knowledge of the tenets of the Effenes. It appears from Josephus, that the Effenes believed the night to be a more sacred season than the day, and were, therefore, accustomed to perform all those rites and services, with which they imagined it behoved them to worship the Deity, before the appearance of the dawn. Throughout the day, they conceived themselves at liberty to discourse of the business and concerns of this life; but during the night, they permitted themselves to converse only on subjects of a sacred and divine nature. The chief part of the night was spent in contemplation; but before the approach of dawn, they recited their prayers and hymns. The day they devoted to labour. The circumstance, therefore, of their sacrificing in the night-time, instead of warranting the conclusion which Porphyry would draw from it, serves rather to prove that they considered the offering up of victims as an usage of the most sacred nature, and as constituting a necessary part of divine worship. The rule which
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derived no inconsiderable benefit from their labour, and the strictness of their morals. Those of the theoretical class, however, or the Thera-

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the Essenes thus prescribed to themselves, of reserving the night for the performance of their divine rites, and confining themselves wholly to secular affairs during the day, appears to have excited some astonishment amongst several of the learned, who consider it as in no wise supported by reason. But if a proper opportunity offered itself, I could, without any very great pains, demonstrate that this reverence for the night was founded on the principles of the ancient oriental doctrines, or that system which comes more particularly under the denomination of the Egyptian philosophy. Many of the oriental nations appear, from the earliest times, to have considered the night not only as having a claim to our preference beyond the day on the score of antiquity, but also as being more dignified and sacred. Indeed, they carried their veneration for the night so far, as almost to place it on a footing with the Deity himself. See the particulars which have, with much diligence and care, been collected by the eminently learned Paul Ernest Jablonsky, on the subject of the night, and of the veneration in which it was held by the Greeks, Phœnicians, and Ægyptians, in his *Pantheon Ægyptiorum*, lib. i. cap. i. § 7, et seq. p. 10, et seq. It seems indeed extremely probable, that the Essenes might consider the night as having some resemblance to that vast unbounded space in which, previously to the existence of the world, of the sun, and of time, the Deity, accompanied only by such natures as were generated of himself, had from all eternity reigned in consummate bliss and glory. 5. It was the custom of the Essenes to continue their sacrifices for several successive nights. The whole season during which these observances lasted, was deemed particularly sacred. They renounced, for the time, their usual occupations, and employed each intervening day in subduing the body by fasting, so that it might not impede the vigour and operations of the mind. The nights were passed in contemplating the stars, which, without doubt, they believed to be animated and filled with a divine spirit. Differing, therefore, so essentially as the Essenes did in all these particulars from the Jewish discipline and law, it can afford matter for surprize to no one that the priests should not have permitted them to offer their sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem.

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 peutaæ of Philo, ſeem to have ſet ſcarcely any bounds whatever to their ſilly extravagance. Although they professed themſelves to be Jews, and were deſirous to be conſidered as the diſciples of Moſes, they were yet, if we except the name, and ſome few trifling obſervances, entirely ſtrangers to the Moſaic diſcipline [r]. Renouncing every

[r] On this ſubject I agree in opinion with thoſe who conſider the Therapeutæ of Philo to have been Jews both by birth and by name, although they materially differed from the bulk of that people in their ſentiments, their inſtitutions, and their manners. For Philo, to whom we are indebted for every information that we have reſpecting the Therapeutæ, and who was himſelf a Jew, expreſſly calls them Jews, and the diſciples of Moſes; and in addition to this, there are to be perceived in their cuſtoms and manners ſeveral peculiarities which favour ſtrongly of the Jewish diſcipline: and this opinion, from the ſtrength of the arguments by which it may be ſupported, is, I am convinced, daily gaining ground. There are, however, even at this day, not a few amongſt the learned who will not yield their aſſent to it; but I rather ſuſpect that their ſcruples and backwardneſs to be convinced may rather be attributed to prejudice or party attachment, than to any arguments by which the opinion can be oppoſed. In the firſt place, ſeveral of the dependents on the papal hierarchy, and alſo ſome Engliſh writers, perſiſt in giving the preference to the ancient opinion of Eusebius, who thought that the Therapeutæ muſt have been Chriſtians; and would ſain avail themſelves of this, as a proof that the monaſtic mode of life was originated in Egypt amongſt the firſt inſtitutions of Chriſtianity. Bernard de Montfaucon, a moſt learned brother of the Benedictine order, having in the notes to his French tranſlation of Philo's treatiſe, *de Vita contemplativa*, published at Paris, 1709, in 8vo. undertaken to ſupport this opinion, it involved him in a controverſy with Jo. Bouhier, at that time preſident of the parliament of Dijon. The latter, a man equalled but by few in point of ingenuity and literary attainments, endeavoured, with great ſtrength of argument, to prove that the Therapeutæ were not Chriſtians; but the monk was not to be driven from his poſition: perceiving plainly that in yielding to his antagoniſt on this occaſion, he ſhould abandon a point of the utmoſt importance

to

every sort of employment, and all worldly goods, they withdrew themselves into solitary places, and

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to himself and his fraternity, in establishing the antiquity of monachism. The contest between these two eminent scholars was carried on amicably; and the correspondence which took place on the occasion was collected into an octavo volume, and published at Paris, in 1712, with this title, *Lettres pour et contre sur la fameuse Question, si les solitaires appellent Therapeutes dont a parle Philon le Juif, etoient Chre-tiens*. A book of some size, in answer to Montfaucon on this subject, was likewise written by Gisbert Cuper, and of which mention is made in his *Letters*, published by Bayer, p. 63, 64. 70. 239. 241. 250. See also Reimari *Vita Fa-bricii*, p. 243, et seq.; but it was never published. Whilst there shall be monks in the world, there will not be wanting men, who, in spite of the most forcible arguments to the contrary, will persist in assigning to the Therapeutæ a place amongst the earliest Christians; as is plain from the recent example which we have had in Mich. le Quien, a brother of the Dominican order, who, although a man of considerable ingenuity and learning, has not hesitated to maintain (*Orient. Christian.* tom. ii. p. 332.) that the Therapeutæ were of his fraternity. The attempt is awkwardly made, and ill supported; but it is evident that the good man was willing to subject himself to every sort of contempt, rather than renounce the satisfaction which he and his brethren derived from their relationship to these ancient Ascetics. So much the more praise, however, is due to Joseph. August. Orsi, a copious and elegant writer, belonging to the same order of monks, but who has had the courage, even in the city of Rome itself, to contend that the Therapeutæ have no claim whatever to be considered as Christians. See the *Ecclesi-astical History* written by him in Italian, vol. i. p. 77. Amongst the English, Mangey, the editor of Philo, has prevailed on himself, (though confessedly with reluctance, and under the apprehension of exciting ill will,) to espouse the opposite side of the question to that which is the favourite one of his church. With the assistance of chronological calculation, he clearly demonstrates that, at the time when Philo wrote his account of the Therapeutæ, Christianity had not found its way into Egypt. *Præfat. in Opera Philonis*, p. 111. See also *Opera*, tom. ii. p. 471. In the next place, there are some distinguished literary characters, though comparatively but few, who will not admit that the

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 CHAP. II. the remnant of their days without engaging in
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Therapeutæ were either Jews or Christians. The learned Jo. Joach. Langius published at Hall, in 1721, two dissertations *de Therapeutis in Ægypto et Essais*, in which he endeavours to make it appear that these Ascetics were a Gentile philosophic sect, who had interwoven with their system of discipline some few particulars drawn from the religion of the Jews. But the difference between this opinion and that of those who conceive the Therapeutæ to have been Jews, is not so great as the learned author seems to have imagined: for, according to his own account, the discipline of this sect appears to have been taken in part from the Jewish religion, and partly from some species of philosophy; and exactly in this light is the system of the Therapeutæ regarded by all those who contend that they were Jews. These dissertations, therefore, have nothing in them of novelty, unless it be the author's refusal to assent to the general opinion, that the Therapeutæ were Jews. On this point it is not necessary at present to enter into a discussion, although it might be very easily shewn that the opinion of this learned writer is destitute of every kind of support; whilst many circumstances offer themselves in favour of those who maintain that the Therapeutæ were Jews, and that, not merely so far as regarded certain institutions and tenets, but really and strictly such by birth and descent. Still further removed from the commonly received opinion is that of Paul. Ernest. Jablonsky, a man eminent for his curious and recondite learning, who, in a treatise written professedly on the subject, has attempted to prove that the Therapeutæ were priests of Egypt, who devoted themselves to the observation of the stars, and those other sciences accounted sacred in that country; in fact, that they were the same with those whom Democritus, as cited by Clement, calls *Arpedonaptæ*. The outlines of his undertaking may be seen in his *Letters to Matur. Veiffiere la Croze*, tom. i. p. 178, et seq.; and I trust it will not be long ere the work itself is given to the public. As far as I am capable of forming a judgment of the matter, the learned author will have to encounter many obstacles of no small consequence, and particularly, amongst other things, that part of Philo's account which represents the Therapeutæ as not confined merely to Egypt, but as having established themselves in various other countries. In truth, he will have a vast deal to teach us, of which we are

any kind of bodily labour, and neither offering sacrifices, nor observing any other external form of religious worship. In this state of seclusion from the world and its concerns, they made it a point to reduce and keep the body low, by allowing it nothing beyond the most slender subsistence, and, as far as possible, to draw away and disengage the soul from it by perpetual contemplation; so that the immortal spirit might, in defiance of its corporeal imprisonment, be kept constantly aspiring after its native liberty and light, and be prepared, immediately on the dissolution of the body, to re-ascend to those celestial regions from whence it originally sprang. Conformably to the practice of the Jews, the Therapeutæ were accustomed to hold a solemn assembly every seventh day. On these occasions, after hearing a sermon from their præfect, and offering up their prayers, it was usual for them to feast together,—if men can in any wise be said to have feasted, whose repast consisted merely of salt and bread and water. This sort of refection was followed by a sacred dance, which was continued throughout the whole night until the appearance of the dawn. At first, the men and the women danced in two separate parties; but at length, their minds, according to their own account, kindling with a sort of divine ecstacy, the two companies joined in one, mutually striving, by various shouts and songs of the most vehement kind, accompanied with the most extravagant motions and gesticulations of the body, to manifest the fervid glow of that divine love with which they were inflamed. To so great an extent of folly

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are as yet completely ignorant, before we can be brought to consider the Therapeutæ as having been the priests or ministers of the Egyptian deities.

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 CHAP. II. taining erroneous principles respecting the Deity,
 and the origin of the human soul!

The moral
 doctrine of
 these sects.

XVI. Neither of these sects, into which the Jewish people were divided, can be considered as having in the least contributed towards promoting the interests of virtue and genuine piety.—The Pharisees, as was frequently objected to them by our blessed Saviour, paid no regard whatever to inward purity or sanctity of mind, but studied merely to attract the eyes of the multitude towards them, by an ostentatious solemnity of carriage, and the most specious external parade of piety and brotherly love. They were also continually straining and perverting the most grand and important precepts of the divine law; whilst, at the same time, they enforced an unreserved obedience to ordinances which were merely the institutions of men [s].—The Sadducees considered all those as righteous who strictly conformed themselves to the observances prescribed by Moses, and did no injury to any of the Jewish nation, from whom they had received none. Since their tenets forbade men to look forward to a future state of rewards and punishments, and placed the whole happiness of man in riches and sensual gratification, they naturally tended to generate and encourage an inordinate cupidity of wealth, a brutal insensibility to the calls of compassion, and a variety of other vices equally pernicious and degrading to the human mind.—The Essenes laboured under the influence of a vain and depressing superstition; so that, whilst they were scrupulously attentive to the demands of justice and equity in regard to others, they ap-

[s] Matth. xv. 9. xxiii. 13, et seq.

pear to have altogether overlooked the duties which men owe to themselves.—The Therapeutæ were a race who resigned themselves wholly to the dictates of the most egregious fanaticism and folly. They would engage in no sort of business or employment on their own account, neither would they be instrumental in forwarding the interests of others. In a word, they seem to have considered themselves as released from every bond by which human society is held together, and at liberty to act in direct opposition to nearly every principle of moral discipline [t].

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XVII. Owing to the various causes which we have thus enumerated, the great mass of the Jewish people were, at the time of Christ's birth, sunk in the most profound ignorance as to divine matters; and the nation, for the most part, devoted to a flagitious and dissolute course of life. That such was the miserable state of degradation into which this highly favoured race had fallen, is incontestibly proved by the history of our Saviour's life, and the discourses which he condescended to address to them: and it was in allusion thereto that he compares the teachers of the people to blind guides, who professed to instruct others in a way with which they were totally unacquainted themselves [u]; and the multitude to a flock of lost sheep, wandering without a shepherd [v].

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XVIII. To all the sources of error and corruption above pointed out, we have still further to add, that, at the time of Christ's appearance,

The oriental philosophy adopted by many of the Jews.

[t] See what is said by Barbeyrac, in the Preface to his French translation of Puffendorf's *Jus Naturæ et Gentium*, § vii. p. xxv.

[u] Matth. xv. 14. Joh. ix. 39.

[v] Matth. x. 6. xv. 24.

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many of the Jews had imbibed the principles of the oriental philosophy respecting the origin of the world, and were much addicted to the study of a recondite sort of learning derived from thence, to which they gave the name of *cabbala*, and which they considered as of great authority; attributing to it, in many respects, a superiority over the plain and simple system of discipline prescribed by Moses. Abundant proof of this might be adduced from the writings of the New Testament, as well as from the early history of Christianity [zw]. But to pass over other facts which might be noticed, it is certain that the founders of several of the Gnostic sects, all of whom, we know, were studious to make the Christian religion accommodate itself to the principles of the ancient oriental philosophy, had been originally Jews, and exhibited in their tenets a strange mixture of the doctrines of Moses, Christ, and Zoroaster. This is of itself sufficient to prove that many of the Jews were, in no small degree, attached to the opinions of the ancient Persians and Chaldæans. Such of them as had adopted these irrational principles would not admit that the world was created by God, but substituted, in the place of the Deity, a celestial genius endowed with vast powers; from whom, also, they maintained that Moses had his commission, and the Jewish law its origin. To the coming of the Messiah, or deliverer promised by God to their fathers, they looked forward with hope; expecting that he would put an end to the dominion of the being whom they thus regarded as the maker and ruler of the world. Their no-

[zw] See what has been collected on this subject by Jo. Christ. Wolfius, in his *Biblioth. Ebraic.* vol. ii. lib. vii. cap. i. § ix. p. 206.

tions,

tions, therefore, so far as they related to the abolition of the ceremonial law by the coming of Christ, were certainly more correct than those of the Jews in common. But their hopes in this respect redounded but little to their credit, since they were founded on a most grievous error, and were accompanied with many strange and unwarrantable conceits, not less repugnant to right reason than to the Jewish religion.

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XIX. The Samaritans, who performed their sacred rites on mount Garizim, were involved in the same calamities which befel the Jewish people, and were no less forward than the Jews in adding, to their other afflictions, the numerous evils produced by factions and intestine tumults. They were not, however, divided into so many religious sects; although the instances of Dositheus, Menander, and Simon Magus, plainly prove that there were not wanting amongst them some who were carried away by the lust of novelty, and sullied the religion of their ancestors, by incorporating with it many of the principles of orientalism [x]. Many things have been handed down to us by the Jews respecting the public religion of these people, on which, however, we cannot place much reliance, since they were unquestionably dictated by a spirit of invidious malignity. But since Christ himself attributes to the Samaritans a great degree of ignorance respecting God, and things of a divine nature [y], it is not to be doubted that in their tenets the truth was much debased by superstition, and the light in no small danger of being overpowered by ob-

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[x] The principal authors who have treated of the Samaritans are pointed out by Jo. Gottlob. Carpzovius, in his *Critic. Sacr. Vet. Test.* part ii. cap. iv. p. 585.

[y] Joh. iv. 22.

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curity; and that their religion was much more contaminated by error than that of the Jews. In this one thing only can they be said to have shewn themselves superior to the Jews, that they did not attempt to gloss over or conceal the many imperfections of their religion, but frankly acknowledged its defects, and looked forward with hope to the time when the Messiah (whose advent they expected in common with the Jewish nation) would communicate to them that larger measure of spiritual instruction, of which they stood so much in need [z].

XX. So

[z] Joh. iv. 25. That the sentiments of the woman who conversed at the well with Christ were the same with those of the Samaritans in general, will not admit of a doubt: for from whence could a common person like her have obtained the information she discovers on several points relating to the Messiah, unless from popular traditions current amongst those of her own nation. These sentiments then furnish us with a strong argument in answer to the English writer Ant. Collins, and others, who contend that the more ancient Hebrews entertained no expectation of a Messiah; but that this hope first sprung up amongst the Jews some short time before the coming of our Saviour. So deep and inveterate was the enmity which subsisted between the Jews and the Samaritans, that it is utterly incredible that a hope of this kind should have been communicated from either of them to the other. It necessarily follows, therefore, that as both of them were, at the time of our Saviour's birth, looking for the appearance of a Messiah from above, they must have derived the expectation from one common source, doubtless the books of Moses and the discipline of their ancestors; and consequently that this hope was entertained long before the Babylonish captivity, and the rise of the Samaritans. I mention only the books of Moses, because it is well known that the Samaritans did not consider any of the other writings of the Old Testament as sacred, or of divine original; and it is, therefore, not at all likely that any information which they might possess, respecting the Messiah that was to come, should have been drawn from any other source. In the discourse of the Samaritan woman, we likewise discover what were the sentiments

XX. So exceedingly great was the fecundity of the Jewish people, that occasionally multitudes of them had been constrained to emigrate from their native country; and at the period of which we are now treating, the descendants of Abraham were to be met with in every part of the known world. In all the provinces of the Roman empire, in particular, they were to be found in great numbers, either serving in the army, or engaged

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ments of the ancient Hebrews respecting the Messiah. The expectation of the Jews, at the time of our Saviour's coming, was, as we have seen, directed towards a warlike leader, a hero, an emperor, who should recover for the oppressed posterity of Abraham their liberty and rights: but the Samaritans, as appears from the conversation of this woman, looked forward to the Messiah in the light of a spiritual teacher and guide, who should instruct them in a more perfect and acceptable way of serving God than that which they then followed. Now the Samaritans had always kept themselves entirely distinct from the Jews, and would never consent to adopt any point of doctrine or discipline from them; and the consequence was, that the ancient opinion respecting the Messiah had been retained in much greater purity by the former than by the Jews, whose arrogance and impatience, under the calamities to which they were exposed, had brought them by degrees to turn their backs on the opinion entertained by their forefathers on this subject, and to cherish the expectation that in the Messiah promised to them by God they should have to hail an earthly prince and deliverer. Lastly, I think it particularly deserving of attention, that it is clear from what is said by this woman, that the Samaritans did not consider the Mosaic law in the light of a permanent establishment, but expected that it would pass away, and its place be supplied by a more perfect system of discipline, on the coming of the Messiah. For when she hears our Saviour predict the downfall of the Samaritan, as well as the Jewish religion, instead of taking fire at his words, and taxing him, after the Jewish manner, with blasphemy against God and against Moses, (Acts, vi. 13, 14, 15.) she answers with mildness and composure, that she knew the Messiah would come, and was not unapprised that the religion of her ancestors would then undergo a change.

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in the pursuits of commerce, or practising some lucrative art. Those of the Jews who thus ventured to establish themselves without the confines of Palestine, were every where successful in obtaining that general sort of encouragement and protection from violence, which was to be derived from various regulations and edicts of the emperors and magistrates in their favour [a]: but the peculiarities of their religion and manners caused them to be held in very general contempt, and not unfrequently exposed them to much vexation and annoyance from the jealousy and indignation of a superstitious populace. Many of them, in consequence of their long residence and intercourse amongst foreign nations, fell into the error of endeavouring to make their religion accommodate itself to the principles and institutions of some of the different systems of heathen discipline, of which it would be easy to adduce numerous instances: but, on the other hand, it is clear that the Jews brought many of those with whom they sojourned to perceive the superiority of the Mosaic religion over the Gentile superstitions, and were highly instrumental in causing them to forsake the worship of a plurality of gods. Upon the whole, the circumstance of the Jews having found their way into almost every region of the habitable globe, may, I think, justly be classed amongst the means made use of by Divine Providence to open a path for the general diffusion of the truths of Christianity. For it is not to be doubted that the knowledge which the Gentiles thus acquired from the Jews, respecting the only true God, the Creator and Governor of

[a] Vid. Jac. Gronovii *Decreta Romana et Asiatica pro Judæis ad cultum divinum per Asia Minoris Urbes secure obtundum*, Lugd. Bat. 1712, in 8vo.

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the universe, although it might be but partial, and of limited extent, inclined many of them the more readily to lend their attention to the arguments and exhortations which were subsequently used by our Saviour's apostles, for the purpose of exploding the worship of false deities, and recalling men to those principles of religion which have their foundation in reason and in nature.

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THE
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY
OF THE
FIRST CENTURY.

I. **W**ITH a view to effect the recovery of the human race from such a deplorable state of wretchedness and disorder, and to instruct mankind in the path that leads to everlasting salvation and peace, the Son of God voluntarily condescended to take upon himself our nature, and to be born of a virgin, a descendant of the royal house of David, in Bethlehem, a city of Palestine. This event, we know, took place under the reign of the emperor Augustus; but as to the identical day, or month, or even year of its occurrence, it is impossible to speak with any degree of precision, since all the historians of the life of our blessed Saviour, with whose writings we are acquainted, are entirely silent as to these particulars: and indeed it should seem that the earliest Christians were not much better informed on the subject than ourselves, since they appear to have been much divided in opinion as to the exact time of this most important nativity [a]. Several ingenious

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[a] Vid. Clemens Alexandr. *Stromat.* lib. i. p. 339, 340. Beaufobre *Remarques sur le Nouveau Testament*, tom. i. p. 6. If the early Christians had known the precise day of our Saviour's nativity, they would without doubt have distinguished it by a religious commemoration, in the same way as

C E N T. I. } genious and profound scholars have, at different periods, bestowed an abundance of pains on the subject, in the hope of being able to supply this deficiency in the more ancient writers; but none of them have as yet made any discovery that can be said to put the matter out of all doubt [b]. But surely it is of little or no consequence that we are uninformed of the particular year and day that ushered in this glorious light to the world: it is sufficient for us to be assured that the Sun of Righteousness hath arisen on our benighted race, that its refulgence hath dispelled the darkness with which the human mind was enveloped, and that nothing intervenes to prevent us from availing ourselves of the splendour and invigorating warmth of its beams.

Accounts of
his infancy
and youth.

II. The inspired historians of the life and actions of our Saviour, have left but little on record respecting his childhood and early youth.

as they were accustomed to celebrate the day of his resurrection. But it is well known that the day which is now held sacred as the anniversary of our Saviour's birth, was fixed on in much more recent times than those in which we find the Christians celebrating the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles, and the resurrection of Christ from the dead. This circumstance may, I think, be considered as a proof that the friends and companions of our Lord themselves were unacquainted with the day of his birth, or, at least, that they left no memorial behind them concerning it, and that the first Christians, finding the point involved in much obscurity and doubt, would not take upon them to determine any thing about it.

[b] The reader who wishes to obtain a view of most of the opinions that have been entertained respecting the year of Christ's nativity, may consult *Jo. Alb. Fabricii Biblioth. Antiq. cap. vii. § ix. p. 187.* Some additional arguments and conjectures may be collected from the more recent publications of several learned men on this subject; but, from amongst all these different opinions, it is not possible to select one that can be altogether relied on as free from error.

Whilst

Whilst yet an infant, it appears that his parents fled with him into Egypt, in order to shield him from the persecuting violence of Herod the Great [c]. At twelve years of age, we find him in the temple at Jerusalem, disputing with the most learned of the Jewish doctors, who were filled with astonishment at his understanding and knowledge. The remaining part of his life, until he entered on his ministry, he appears to have spent with his parents; exhibiting in himself an exemplary pattern of affectionate filial obedience [d]. Farther than this, it should seem the divine

[c] Matth. ii. 13.

[d] Luke, ii. 51, 52. Several of our best informed scholars do not hesitate to assert with the greatest confidence, that Christ, during his youth, exercised the art of a carpenter, which he had learnt of his parent, and that he assisted Joseph in the different parts of his business. Indeed there are some who consider this circumstance as a very honourable feature in our Saviour's character, and who consequently have not been very sparing of their censure on those who do not believe the fact, or at least have ventured to express some doubts on the subject. See Montacute's *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, tom. i. p. 305, and 384. For my own part, without pretending to dictate to others, I must confess that the matter does not appear to me to have been so clearly ascertained, as to be placed beyond all doubt. Those who take the affirmative side of the question, rely principally on two arguments: the first drawn from the words of the Jews, Mark, vi. 3. εἰς τὸς ἐν τῷ ΟΥ ΤΕΚΤΩΝ ὁ υἱὸς Μαρίας. Is not this *the carpenter*, the son of Mary? The other from a passage in Justin Martyr, in which our Saviour is said to have worked as a carpenter, and made ploughs and yokes. *Dialog. cum Tryphon.* p. 270. I pass over the more recent authorities that are brought forward in support of the fact, as of little moment, since they are all either founded on the above mentioned passage in Justin, or drawn from vulgar report, or the apocryphal gospels. Confining myself, therefore, to the two principal authorities above noticed, I must say that I do not perceive how any argument of much weight is to be drawn from either of them. For as to the remark of the Jews, in which our

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divine wisdom did not think it necessary that we should be informed. But these few particulars

Saviour is termed the carpenter, I consider it to refer merely to the occupation of his parent; and that τέκτων ought to be understood, in this place, as meaning nothing more than ὁ τῷ τέκτωνος υἱός, the son of the carpenter. In support of this explanation of the term, I may refer to the authority of St. Matthew himself, cap. xiii. 55.; and almost every language supplies us with instances which prove that it was a common practice to distinguish a child from others of the same name, by giving him a surname derived from the trade or occupation of his parent. The English language furnishes us with examples of this in the surnames of Baker, Taylor, Carpenter, Smith, &c.; and what is still more to the point, it is at this day the custom in some of the oriental nations, and particularly amongst the Arabs, to distinguish any learned or illustrious man that may chance to be born of parents who follow any particular trade or art, by giving him the name of such trade or art as a surname, although he may never have followed it himself. Thus, if a man of learning happen to be descended from a dyer or a taylor, they call him the Dyer's son, or the Taylor's son, or frequently, omitting the word son, simply the Dyer, or the Taylor. This fact is so well known to those who are conversant in oriental affairs, that I deem it unnecessary to cite any particular authority for it. I shall not here enter into an inquiry whether the reading of the passage of St. Mark above alluded to, as it stands in our copies, be correct or not. The matter unquestionably admits of some doubt: for it is clear from Mill, that there are many ancient manuscripts which, instead of τέκτων, have ὁ τῷ τέκτωνος; a reading which I certainly shall not take upon me, like him, absolutely to reject, since, as I before observed, it may be supported on the authority of St. Matthew himself. Vid. Millii *Prolegomena in Nov. Test.* § 698. p. 66. It should seem also that Origen understood the words of St. Mark in this sense, since he expressly denies that Christ is called τέκτων, or a carpenter, in any part of the New Testament. *Contra Celsum*, lib. vi. p. 662. The learned well know that Justin Martyr is not to be considered in every respect as an oracle, but that much of what he relates is wholly undeserving of credit. Possibly what he says, in regard to the point before us, might be taken from one or other of the apocryphal Gospels of the Infancy of Christ, which were in circulation amongst the Christians in his time.

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not being found sufficient to satisfy human curiosity, some artful unprincipled characters amongst the early Christians had the presumption to avail themselves of the ignorance and inquisitiveness of a credulous multitude in this respect, and, under the pretence of illustrating this obscure part of our Saviour's life, to impose on the public a compilation of ridiculous and nonsensical stories, which they entitled Gospels of the Infancy of Christ [e].

III. Christ entered on his ministry in the thirtieth year of his age; and, in order that his doctrine might obtain a more ready acceptance with the Jews, a man named John, the son of a Jewish priest, a person whose gravity of deportment and whole tenor of life was such as to excite veneration and respect, was commanded by God to announce to the people the immediate coming of the promised Messiah, and to endeavour to awaken in their senseless groveling minds a proper disposition to receive him. This illustrious character proclaimed himself to be the forerunner or herald of the Messiah, commissioned to call with a loud voice on the inhabitants of the wilderness to amend and make ready their ways for the King that was approaching [f]; and

John the
præcurfor
of Christ.

[e] Such parts of these Gospels of the Infancy of Christ as had escaped the ravages of time, were collected together, and published by Jo. Albert. Fabricius, in his *Codex Apocryph. Nov. Test.*

[f] If we recur to the manners of the eastern nations, John's comparison of himself to a forerunner, or herald, will be found to possess a peculiar force and beauty. In those countries it has ever been customary, even down to our own times, for monarchs, when they are about to undertake a journey, to send before them, into those regions through which they mean to travel, certain of their servants, who, with a loud voice, admonish the inhabitants to amend the

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and having his mind inflamed with a holy zeal, he executed his mission with ardour and fidelity, rebuking the vices of the nation sharply and without reserve. The form of initiation which he adopted, in regard to all those who promised an amendment of heart and life, was to immerge them in the river, according to the ancient Jewish practice [g]. Jesus himself, before he entered on his ministry, condescended to comply with this rite, and was solemnly baptized by John in the river Jordan, lest (according to his own words) he should appear to have disregarded any part of the divine law. John finished his earthly course under the reign of Herod the tetrarch. Having had the courage openly to reprove that tyrant for an incestuous connection with his brother's wife, he was in consequence thereof cast into prison, and after some little while beheaded [b].

The life of
Christ.

IV. It cannot be necessary that we should, in this place, enter into a minute detail of the life and actions of Jesus Christ. The writings of the four evangelists are in the hands of every one; and no one who has read them can need to be informed, that for upwards of three years, in the

roads, and remove every obstacle that might obstruct or impede the royal progress. By the form of annunciation, therefore, which John made use of, an ardent wish was manifested to exalt the character of the Messiah, by likening his approach to that of the mightiest of monarchs; whilst, at the same time, so far from magnifying the importance of his own services, they are with the greatest humility placed on a level with those which were usually executed by inferior servants.

[g] Matth. iii. 2. John, i. 22.

[b] The reader who may wish for more copious information on this subject, is referred to two dissertations of Cellarius *de Johanne Baptista ejusque Carcere ac Supplicio*, which he will find published by Walchius, amongst his *Dissertationes Academicæ*, part i. p. 169. part ii. p. 373.

midst

midst of numberless perils and insidious machinations, and in defiance of the most insulting and injurious treatment, he continued with an inflexible constancy to point out to the Jewish people, by a mode of instruction peculiarly adapted to the manners and way of thinking of themselves, and the other nations of the east, the true and only sure means by which everlasting salvation was to be obtained. It must be equally unnecessary to remark, that he discovered no sort of desire whatever for either riches or worldly honours, but that his life was spent in poverty, and distinguished by such sanctity and innocence, that even his most virulent enemies could find nothing whereof they might accuse him. In regard, likewise, to the divinity of his mission, and the truth of the doctrines which he taught, every one must be apprized that he placed both the one and the other beyond all doubt, not only by referring to various prophecies and oracular passages contained in the writings of the Old Testament, but also by a series of the most stupendous miracles. Of his miracles it may be observed, that, from beginning to end, they were uniformly of a salutary and beneficent character, *i. e.* they were, in every respect, strictly consentaneous to the spirit and tendency of his ministry, and exhibited no unfaithful types or images of those spiritual blessings which he was about to communicate to mankind. Had our Saviour come to enforce with rigour the penalties of the law, he might with propriety have established the authenticity of his mission by terrific prodigies and signs; but he came as the messenger of divine clemency and pity, and in no way could the truth or the character of his doctrine have been more beautifully or emphatically

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marked than by the wonders of benevolence and love.

V. In the line of duty which Christ prescribed for the Jews, he omitted none of those points which were enjoined by the law of Moses; and it is observable, that he joined with the inhabitants of Palestine in their acts of public worship, and in all other rites of divine origin. This should seem to have been done, partly for the purpose of bearing testimony to the divine authority of the Jewish law and religion, and partly with a view to avoid incurring the hatred and ill offices of the priests and lawyers by any unnecessary provocation. He made no scruple, however, openly to predict the downfall, not only of the Jewish state, but also of the Mosaic worship and religion, and to declare, in the plainest and most express terms, that under his auspices a new religious community would be established, founded upon more perfect principles of worship, and which, extending itself to the farthest parts of the earth, would unite the whole human race in one common bond of fraternal love [i]. Neither did he confine himself merely to thus prophesying the rise of a new and most comprehensive religion, but proceeded at once with his own hands to lay the foundation of it, by causing his disciples to baptize with water all those who, either through the preaching of himself or his apostles, had been brought to confess that he was the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind commissioned from above; thereby initiating them under a new covenant, the terms and obligations of which were such as could not fail to separate

[i] Luke, xix. John, iv. 21. Matth. x. 32. xvi. 18. John, x. 16.

them

them from the rest of the Jewish community [k]. Although, therefore, it must be allowed that Christ and his disciples did not formally renounce their connection with the Jewish church, or absolutely withdraw themselves from it; yet it is clear that, in a certain degree, he established a new sect therein, and that in reality he separated both himself and his followers from the rest of the Jews [l].

VI. Since

[k] John, iii. 22. 26. iv. 2.

[l] Several learned men, chiefly amongst the civilians, have had their doubts as to this point, of Christ with his followers having seceded from the Jewish church, and established a new and distinct religious community. But to me the fact appears to admit of no question whatever. Whoever promulgates new principles or precepts,—prescribes a new rule of life and conduct,—makes use of a certain sacred rite, with a view to distinguish all those who are willing to conform to those precepts, and who approve of such rule of life, from the rest of the community, and to mark their reception into his sect,—holds separate solemn assemblies with these his associates,—and, lastly, exhorts them on every occasion to be constant in their adherence to that rule of faith and action which they had thus embraced;—such person must, in my opinion, unquestionably be considered as founding a new religious community, and causing his followers, in a certain degree, to forsake that to which they formerly belonged. Now our Saviour did all these things. For, in the first place, he announced himself to all whom he undertook to instruct, as the Messiah promised by God to the ancestors of the Jews; and taught them, that their hopes of eternal salvation ought to be built on his merits alone. Then, those who believed in him were enjoined to love each other as brethren, and informed that the worship required of them by God was not that of sacrifices and external observances, but that of the heart and mind. Next, all who professed themselves ready to espouse these principles, and conform to these precepts, were made to undergo a solemn form of lustration at the hands of his disciples, (John, iv. 2, 3.) and by this regenerating ceremony became invested as it were with the rights of citizenship. And lastly, those who had been thus initiated he associated with himself in the closest ties of intimacy, and caused them publicly to declare the faith and the hope which they had in him; convening

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VI. Since it was intended that the religious community thus established by Christ, although confined

them frequently together for the purpose of religious worship, and, amongst other things, particularly apprising them of the approaching downfall of the Jewish state and religion. The fact is likewise supported by other circumstances, but I do not deem it necessary to bring them forward at present. I will, however, take this opportunity of saying a few words respecting the rite of baptism, by which our Saviour ordained that his followers should be received into the kingdom of heaven, or the new covenant. My opinion on this subject entirely corresponds with theirs, who consider this ceremony as having been adopted by the Jews long before the time of our Saviour, and used by them in the initiating of strangers who had embraced their religion. To omit other arguments of no little weight in favour of this opinion, I think it may be supported on the authority of Scripture itself, and particularly from the account given us in John, i. of the embassy sent by the supreme council of the Jews to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. For the rite itself, of baptizing with water those who confessed their sins, and promised an amendment of life, does not seem to have been regarded by the elders of the Jews in the light of a novelty, or as a practice by any means of an unusual kind. The only point on which they require information of John is, from whence he derived his authority to perform this solemn and sacred ceremony. The thing itself occasioned them no surprise, since daily use had rendered it familiar to them: what attracted their attention was, that a private individual should take upon him to perform it in a way contrary to the established usage of the nation. But, unless I am much deceived, an inference of still greater moment may be drawn from this message sent by the Jewish council to John, and which will supply us with the reason why our Saviour adopted this ancient Jewish practice of baptizing profelytes with water: for, as it strikes me, the concluding question put by the messengers evidently implies an expectation in the Jews of that age, that the Messiah for whom they looked would baptize men with water. After John had told them that he was neither the Christ or Messiah, nor Elias, nor any other of the ancient prophets, they finally interrogate him thus: "If thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, nor that prophet, why baptizest thou then?" John, i. 25.

confined at first within very narrow limits, should by degrees extend itself to the farthest parts of the earth, it was requisite that he should select certain persons, who, from their being admitted to a constant and familiar intercourse with him, might acquire that lively degree of faith and zeal, which should enable them, in spite of every obstacle and difficulty, to make their way into the different regions of the world, for the purpose of propagating the religion of their divine Master, and bearing testimony to the exemplary purity of his life, and the stupendous deeds and miracles by which he established the truth of his doctrine. From amongst the great multitude of Jews, therefore, that had joined themselves to him, he chose twelve whom he deemed the most faithful and best fitted for the task; appointing them, in a

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i. 25. Now if these words be attentively considered, I think it must be allowed that they will unquestionably admit of the following construction: "We, as well as those who sent us, understand that when the Messiah shall come, he will baptize and purify the Jewish race with water; we also expect that Elias, who is to precede him, will use the same ceremony for our initiation: but by what authority is it that you, who acknowledge that you are neither the Messiah nor Elias, assume to yourself the right of doing that which can only properly belong to them to perform,—we do not mean the baptizing of strangers, but the descendants of Abraham?" If this be the fair construction of the messengers' words, (and I rather think that but few, if any, will deny it to be so,) we have no farther to look for the reason that in all probability induced our Saviour and his forerunner John to baptize their disciples. An opinion, it appears, prevailed amongst the Jews, that Elias, whose coming was to precede that of the Messiah, and also the Messiah himself, would initiate their disciples by a sacred ablution; and it was therefore necessary, in order to avoid giving the Jews any pretext for doubt respecting either Christ's authority or functions, that both John and himself should accommodate themselves to this popular persuasion. Of the origin of the opinion itself I know nothing.

C E N T. more especial manner, his ambassadors to the
 I. human race, and distinguishing them from the
 Election of the apostles. rest of his disciples by the title of apostles [m].
 The

[m] The word apostle, it is well known, signifies a legate, an ambassador, a person entrusted with a particular mission. The propriety, therefore, with which this appellation was bestowed by Christ on those friends whom he thought proper to select for the propagation of his religion throughout the world, is manifest from this its common acceptation. But the reader will perhaps discover a peculiar force in this term, and more readily perceive the motives which probably induced our Saviour to apply it to those whom he sent forth, when he is informed that, in the age of which we are now treating, this appellation was appropriated to certain public officers of great credit and authority amongst the Jews, who were the confidential ministers of the high priest, and consulted with by him on occasions of the highest moment. They were also occasionally invested with particular powers, and dispatched on missions of importance, principally to such of their countrymen as resided in foreign parts. The collection of the yearly tribute to the temple, which all Jews were bound to pay, was likewise entrusted to their management, as were also several other affairs of no small consequence. For since all Jews, however widely they might be dispersed throughout the various regions of the world, considered themselves as belonging to one and the same family or commonwealth, of which the high priest residing at Jerusalem was the præfect and head; and as the members of every inferior synagogue, however distant or remote, looked up to Jerusalem as the mother and chief seat of their religion, and referred all abstruse or difficult matters, and any controversies and questions of moment respecting divine subjects, to the decision of the high priest, it was absolutely necessary that this supreme pontiff should always have near him a number of persons of fidelity, learning, and authority, of whose services he might avail himself, in communicating his mandates and decrees to those Jews who were settled in distant parts, and in arranging and determining the various points referred to him for decision. My recollection indeed does not enable me to produce any express proofs from ancient authors, that, at the period of which we are speaking, the high priest had any such ministers attached to him under the name of apostles; but I think that I can adduce such presumptive evidence of the fact, as
 will

The persons thus selected were of mean extraction, poor, illiterate, and utterly unprovided with any

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will scarcely leave room for any question on the subject. In the first place, it appears to me that St. Paul himself evidently intimates such to have been the case, in the opening of his epistle to the Galatians, when he terms himself an apostle, not ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων, of men, nor δι' ἀνθρώπου, by man, but of God himself, and his Son Jesus Christ. Gal. i. 1. For what necessity could there be that this inspired writer should thus accurately define the nature of his commission, and so particularly mark the distinction between himself and an apostle invested with mere human authority, if the Jews, to whom that epistle is principally addressed, had been strangers to that other kind of apostles commissioned by men, namely, apostles sent by the Jewish high priest and magistrates to the different cities of the Roman empire? This interpretation was, long since, given to the words of the apostle by St. Jerome, *Comm. ad Galatas*, tom. ix. opp. p. 124. edit. Francof. *Usque hodie*, says he, *a patriarchis Judæorum apostolos mitti* (constat). *Ad distinctionem itaque eorum qui mittuntur ab hominibus, et sui, qui sit missus a Christo, tale jumpfit exordium: Paulus apostolus, non ab hominibus, neque per hominem.* These words of St. Jerome, who resided in Palestine, and was every way skilled in Jewish affairs, must, I think, necessarily be allowed to weigh strongly in favour of the above statement respecting the apostles of the high priest. The meaning they convey indisputably is, that in the time of St. Paul, it was the practice of the Jewish high priest to send forth apostles, after the same manner as the Jewish patriarchs were accustomed to do at the time he (St. Jerome) wrote: and there appears to be no reason whatever which should induce us to question the credibility of what is thus said. But let us return to the words of St. Paul, in which, as it appears to me, there is something worthy of remark, which, if my memory does not fail me, has never hitherto attracted the attention of any commentator. St. Paul says, that he is an apostle, not of men, neither by man. He therefore clearly divides human apostles into two classes; *viz.* those who were commissioned merely by one man, and those who were invested with their powers by several. Now what does this mean? Who are these men, and who that single man, who, in St. Paul's time, were accustomed to send amongst the Jews certain persons, whom it was usual to distinguish by the appellation

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any of those arts or gifts which are calculated to win the countenance and favour of the world, and

of apostles? I trust that I shall be able in great measure to clear this up. The single man to whom St. Paul alludes could, I conceive, have been none other than the great high priest of the Jews; and the several men who had also their apostles were, as it strikes me, unquestionably the *archontes*, or Jewish magistrates. The learned well know that justice was administered to the Jews who dwelt in the different provinces of the Roman empire, by certain magistrates or vicegerents of the high priest, who were termed after the Greek *archontes*, concerning whom a curious and elegant little work was published by Wesseling, *ad Inscript. Beren.* Traject. ad Rhen. 1738, in 8vo. I take the meaning, therefore, of St. Paul to be, that he neither derived his commission from those inferior magistrates, to whom the Jews who dwelt without the limits of Palestine were subject, nor was he delegated by the chief of their religion, the high priest himself. That these *archontes* had under them certain ministers who were termed apostles, much in the same way as the high priest had, is clear from Eusebius, who says, Ἀποστόλους δὲ εἰσὶν καὶ τῶν Ἰσραήλ ἐστὶν Ἰουδαίους ὀνομάζειν τῶς τὰ ἐγκύκλια γράμματα παρὰ τῶν ΑΡΧΟΝΤΩΝ αὐτῶν ἐπικομιζόμενης. Apostolos etiam nunc Judæi eos appellare solent qui *archontum* suorum litteras circumquaque deportare solent. *Comment. in Esaiam*, cap. xviii. in Montfauconii *Collezione nova Patr. Græcor.* tom. ii. p. 424. But I shall leave this conjecture to the consideration of those who may be qualified to judge of it. My present object extends no farther than to shew that, in the time of our blessed Saviour, those persons who were delegated by the high priest for any special purpose, or charged with the execution of his commands, were distinguished by the appellation of apostles. It affords an argument of no small consequence in support of the fact as thus stated, that it has been clearly proved by several learned men, and particularly by Gothofred, Petavius, and Wesseling, from various passages in the *Codex Theodosianus*, and other ancient authors, that, after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish patriarchs, who may be said to have in a certain degree supplied the place of the high priests, had attached to them certain ministers of great trust and authority under the denomination of apostles. Vid. Jac. Gothofredus *ad Codicem Theodosianum*, tom. vi. p. 251, 252. edit. Ritterian. Dion. Petavius *Animadvers. ad Epiphanium ad Hæres.* xxx.

and to impose on the unwary and credulous part of mankind: and it is intimated in Scripture, (1 Cor. i. 20, 21, et seq.) that such were intentionally chosen, lest the efficacy and fruits of their mission should be attributed to eloquence, to authority, or to any other human and natural cause, and not to the divine power of God. In order, likewise, that the testimony with which they were to be charged might be of the most ample kind, and superior to all exception, he made them his constant and intimate companions through life;

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the apostles.

et de Hierarchia Ecclesiast. lib. i. cap. vi. p. 16. and lib. ii. cap. ii. § x. p. 45. in *Dogmatibus Theologicis*, tom. iv. Petr. Wesselingius *de Archontibus Judeor.* p. 91. That these patriarchs should have borrowed the term from the Christians, admits not of a moment's belief; since they regarded every thing pertaining to Christianity with the most inveterate hatred, and revolted with the utmost abhorrence from any thing like a shadow of connection with those who professed it: a circumstance which must have escaped Gothofred, or he never would have concluded that the Jews were unacquainted with the term apostle until after the destruction of Jerusalem. The appellation, therefore, was unquestionably Jewish; and it appears to me equally indisputable, that the Jewish people were well acquainted with its use and import in the time of our Saviour. These considerations, I think, can leave but little doubt on the mind of any one as to the motives which induced our blessed Lord to denominate, as we are expressly told by St. Luke (vi. 13.) that he did, those of his ministers whom he selected for the purpose of making known his precepts to all the nations of the earth, apostles. By the application of this term to those whom he thus delegated, his intention doubtless was to intimate to the Jews that he was invested with all the rights of the supreme head of their religion, and that they ought to look up to him as the true high priest of the Hebrew nation. It does not appear how many persons of this description the high priest had under him, at the period of which we are speaking; but I conceive it to be extremely probable that their number corresponded with that of the Jewish tribes. Supposing this to have been the case, it accounts for our Saviour's fixing the number of his apostles at twelve.

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retaining them always about his person, except on one occasion when he sent them, for a short space, on a mission to the Jews [n]. Their number being fixed at twelve, has a manifest relation to the Jewish tribes [o]; and it should seem that Christ intended thereby to intimate to the Jews that he was the Sovereign Lord, the true King, and great High Priest of all the twelve tribes of Israel.

And of the
seventy disci-
ples.

VII. In addition to these twelve, whom Christ ordained to be the messengers and teachers of his word to the world at large, he selected from his disciples seventy others, whom he sent before him into the different parts of Judæa, whither he meant to come, for the purpose of preparing and disposing the minds of the Jewish people; so that his own preaching might be the more readily listened to, and attended with the greater effect [p]. Of these seventy mention is only once made by any of the evangelists, and no reliance can be placed on the account which some more recent writers have pretended to give of their names, their journies, and their labours [q]. We are not, however, by any means authorized from hence to conclude that they were only once employed by Christ, or that their powers were

[n] Matth. x. 5, 6, 7.

[o] To be convinced of this, I think we need only recur to our Saviour's own words, Matth. xix. 28. Luke, xxii. 30. which plainly intimate that the number of his apostles had an express reference to the number of the Jewish tribes.

[p] Luke, x. 1, et seq.

[q] Some notices or memoirs respecting the seventy disciples, compiled by some of the later Greek writers, were published by Fabricius, at p. 474. of his *Libri de Vita et Morte Moïsis, a Gilb. Gaulmino illustrati*; but which Blondell, (*de Episcopis et Presbyteris*, p. 93.) has shewn to be utterly undervalued of credit.

withdrawn

withdrawn from them after they had fulfilled the object of this their first mission. Their number corresponded with that of the senators who composed the sanhedrim, or chief council of the Jews; and I therefore consider it as highly probable that Christ, in the selection of this number, also might intend to impress on the minds of the Jewish people, by an ostensible sign, that the former authority of the high priest and chief council was now abolished, and all power as to divine matters become vested in himself alone.

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VIII. The personal ministry and instruction of our blessed Saviour was confined entirely to the Jews; nor did he suffer his disciples, during his continuance on earth, to go to any of the neighbouring nations [r]. The magnitude, however, of the wonderful things that he performed will not permit us to doubt but that his fame soon diffused itself throughout a great part of the world. Amongst other things which tend to prove this, it is related by writers of no small credit, that Abgarus, the king of Edeffa in Syria, being afflicted with a severe disease, besought by letter the assistance of Christ; and that our Saviour not only returned an answer to the king, but also sent him his picture [s]. What are considered by some as genuine copies of the letters that passed on this occasion, are still extant. In regard to the fact itself, I see no reason for rejecting it as altogether undeserving of belief; but as to what is said of the picture, I think we may con-

The fame of
Christ ex-
tends beyond
Judea.

[r] Matth. x. 5, 6. xv. 24.

[s] Eusebius *Histor. Eccles.* lib. i. cap. xiii. p. 31. And Jo. Alb. Fabricius *Codice Apocrypho N. Test.* tom. i. p. 317. Theoph. Sigifr. Bayer enters much at length into the history of Abgarus, in his *Historia Edeffena et Ofröena*, lib. iii. p. 104, et seq. and p. 358.

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sider it as unquestionably the invention of the Greek writers of a later age: and it appears to me, that the letters carry with them no very obscure marks of forgery and imposition [t].

IX. A considerable number of the Jews, penetrated with astonishment at the many wonderful proofs which Christ gave of his divine authority and power, became his disciples; being convinced that he could be none other than the holy one of God, the true Messiah, whose coming was predicted of old by the prophets: and it is clear

[t] The arguments by which the authenticity of this history, and of the letters, which form no inconsiderable part of it, is maintained or denied, are brought together into one view, and contrasted with much judgment by Basnage, in his *Histoire des Juifs*, tom. i. cap. xviii. p. 500. Asseman adopts somewhat of a middle course between the two extremes, considering Abgarus's letter as genuine but supposing that reputed to be Christ's to have been merely a note or minute of our Saviour's words made by Abgarus's ambassador. *Biblioth. Oriental. Clement. Vatican.* tom. i. p. 554. and tom. iii. part ii. p. 8. For this opinion he had the authority of Bellarmin. Bayer also is friendly to it, in his *Historia Edeffena*, p. 109. On the other hand, the learned and pious Bourguet would fain persuade us, that both the letters and the history itself were the invention of Eusebius. *Biblioth. Italique*, tom. xiii. p. 121, et seq. I cannot, however, by any means consent to charge a man so devoid of superstition, and so well affected to the cause of Christianity as Eusebius was, with an imposition of so gross a nature; and more particularly since I find it impossible to divine any motive or cause which could have incited him to the commission of such an infamous fraud. No man does evil unadvisedly, or without some inducement. Keysser, in the account of his travels, written in German, tom. ii. p. 29. says, that amongst other ridiculous monuments of superstition exhibited to the credulous multitude at Rome, is shewn the picture which Christ sent to Abgarus on the above-mentioned occasion. But Beaufobre has demonstrated this part of the story to be void of all semblance of truth, in his *Dissertation des Images de Main divine*, which is to be found in the *Biblioth. Germanique*, tom. xviii. p. 10, et seq.

that

that many more would have joined themselves to him, had not the priests and lawyers, whose crimes and deceit he exposed without reserve, and rebuked with the utmost severity, exerted all their influence, and made use of various arts and devices to prejudice the minds of a timid and fickle people against him. But it was not long that these enemies of Jesus rested content with giving vent to their animosity merely in this shape. For, finding that it would be impossible for them to retain their credit and authority with the world, and the numerous advantages attendant thereon, in any other way than by the destruction of Christ, they began to lay snares for his life. Our blessed Saviour, perceiving himself to be thus beset, had recourse to the dictates of prudence, and by avoiding, both in his words and actions, as far as was consistent with the nature of his function, every thing which might tend still further to inflame the malice of these perfidious men, he for some time succeeded in rendering all their schemes abortive. Moreover, when he was at Jerusalem, where there was every reason for him to be most apprehensive of danger, his enemies were withheld from laying hands on him during the day by a fear of the people, who were well inclined towards him; and the place where he passed his nights was not known to any, except his intimate friends and companions.

X. Of these his companions, however, one was at length found, named Judas, who, bartering his salvation for money, agreed, for a reward of no great value, to discover the nightly retreat of his divine Master; who was, in consequence thereof, seized on by a band of soldiers, and hurried away as a criminal to answer charges which involved his life. Betrayed thus infamously

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mously into the hands of his enemies, our blessed Saviour was first led before the high priest and chief council of the Jews, by whom, without the least shadow of justice, and merely on testimony of the most vague and contradictory nature, he was pronounced guilty of blasphemy, and worthy of death. From thence he was taken to the tribunal of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, and accused of a crime totally different in its nature from that wherewith he had been first charged, and of which it had been his particular care to avoid incurring even the least suspicion, namely, attempting to excite sedition and conspiracy against Cæsar. Pilate, although he does not appear to have been over scrupulous in the administration of justice, yet discountenanced this accusation, which he at once perceived to be founded in falsehood; and strenuously exerted himself to save a man, for whom, on account of his wisdom and sanctity, it should seem that he felt no little respect. Finding, however, after repeated efforts on the side of mercy, that the multitude, who were stirred up by the chief priests, would not be satisfied with any thing short of the blood of Christ, but persisted to call for it with a tumultuous violence, approaching nearly to a state of insurrection, he was at length induced, though evidently with considerable reluctance, to comply with their demands, and passed on the meek and blameless object of their fury a sentence of death. As our blessed Saviour had taken upon himself our nature with a view to expiate the sins of mankind, and was conscious that the divine councils and decrees had been satisfied by him, and that every purpose for which he took up his abode with man was fulfilled, he used no endeavours to screen himself from

from this injurious treatment, but voluntarily submitted to undergo the pain and ignominy of a capital punishment, and calmly breathed out his pure and spotless soul upon the cross; praying, even in his agony, for the forgiveness of those who were the merciless and unrelenting authors of his sufferings [u].

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I.

XI. The body of Christ, being taken down from the cross, was laid in a sepulchre which

His resur-
rection and
ascension
into heaven.

[u] It is manifest, from the history of the death of Christ, that he spake most truly when he said, No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself, John, x. 18. For how easy would it have been for him, even without a miracle, to have avoided falling into the hands of his enemies? The insidious designs of the Jewish pontiff and chief priests were well known to him; and it is plain that he was no stranger to the treacherous intentions of his perfidious disciple Judas, since he expressly alludes to them on more than one occasion. On the other hand, it appears that he had several great and powerful friends, on whom he could have depended for support. Would he but have quitted Jerusalem, and returned into Galilee, every scheme that had been formed against him must have fallen to the ground. Indeed, even this was not requisite: for his safety would have been completely secured, had he merely changed the place of his nightly resort, and, lest Judas should have discovered it, dismissed that wicked and deceitful man from his society. Besides these obvious means, there were others to which he might have had recourse, and which would have proved equally efficient in defeating and bringing to nought the evil councils and designs of the Jewish priests and elders. But it should seem that he disdained, or at least voluntarily neglected to avail himself of any of those precautions, which a very moderate share of human prudence would have suggested to any man under similar circumstances. He remained in Jerusalem; he permitted Judas to continue about his person, in the character of an intimate friend; he continued to pass his nights in the usual and accustomed place. All these circumstances being considered, who is there but must readily perceive that Christ voluntarily subjected himself to the punishment of death, and offered up his life to God as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind?

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Joseph, one of the Jewish senators, had prepared for himself, where it remained until the third day. Early on the morning of that day, our blessed Saviour, according to his own prediction, again resumed the life which he had voluntarily laid down; and by triumphantly rising from the tomb, demonstrated that the divine justice was satisfied, and the path which leads to immortality and life once more rendered easy of access to the human race. During the succeeding forty days, he held frequent converse with his disciples, confirming their faith, and instructing them in the nature of those important functions and duties which he designed them to fulfil. It is observable that, after his return to life, he shewed himself to none of his enemies. Amongst other reasons which he might have for this reserve, it is probable that he foresaw that even the appearance of one risen from the dead would produce no salutary impression on men, whose minds were not only blinded by malice, but corrupted by various popular superstitions respecting *manes* and spectres [v]. At the end of the above-mentioned period,

[v] The motives which withheld our Saviour from shewing himself to any except his disciples, after his resurrection from the dead, have been sought after with more than ordinary diligence by the learned; inasmuch as the enemies of Christianity have, for ages, urged this circumstance as a reason for calling in question the truth of his return to life. Now to me it appears that the reasons which influenced Christ on this occasion are readily to be collected from the answer which he puts into the mouth of Abraham, in reply to Dives, who had requested that Lazarus might be sent to his brethren from the dead: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Luke, xvi. 30. For, unless I am altogether deceived, we ought to consider this answer as conveying a prophetic intimation in regard to the point before us;—much as if our blessed Saviour had added:

" In

period, having assembled his disciples, and commanded them to go and preach the gospel unto all nations, he blessed them, and rising sublimely from the earth, was in their presence received up into heaven.

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“ In like manner, there can be no hope whatever that those, whom I may have in vain endeavoured to convert by all the force of divine eloquence, and by exhibiting to them so many stupendous proofs of infinite power, during my life, should be brought to believe in me even by my rising from the dead. I shall not, therefore, shew myself to my enemies after my resurrection; since I am certain that my doing so would be productive of no good effect.” At least, I think it must readily be granted me, that the reason which Abraham gives why no good was to be expected from the mission of Lazarus, applies most aptly and forcibly to the subject before us. Many arguments of considerable weight might be urged in support of the proposition, which I conceive is thus to be deduced from the answer of Abraham; but I will content myself with bringing forward one only. The Jews had accused our Saviour, during his life, of holding converse with the prince of the devils, and making use of magic. In addition to this, the minds both of the Jews and the Romans were, at that time, possessed with an idea that the *manes* or souls of the dead might be called up from the grave by magical incantation; and that, without this, the spirits of the departed did not unfrequently, either of their own accord, or by command of the prince of darkness, again revisit this earth, and shew themselves to the living under an ærial form. Amongst men who entertained notions like these, the appearance of our Saviour after his resurrection could have wrought no good effect. Had Christ, after his return to life, appeared openly in the temple, or in other places of public resort, such as the palace of the Roman governor, and the Jewish senate, it is more than probable that his enemies would not only themselves have regarded the circumstance in an unfavourable light, but also persuaded the multitude either that the unhappy spirit of Christ had been again raised up by some or other of his disciples who were versed in the arts of magic, or that, being itself filled with indignation, and unable to rest, on account of the violent means by which it had been separated from its earthly abode, it was come back for the purpose of, in some measure, avenging itself by haunting and terrifying mankind.

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Effusion of
the Holy
Spirit on the
apostles.

XII. Those whom Christ had selected as above mentioned to be the witnesses of his life and acts, and the messengers of his gospel to the world, were not, at the time of his ascension, endowed with powers adequate to the discharge of the important functions with which they were invested. Having, therefore, again resumed his station in glory, and sat down at the right hand of the everlasting Father, he, about the fiftieth day from the time of his death, sent down on them from above, according to his promise, the divine power and gifts of the Holy Spirit [*w*]. In consequence of this miraculous effusion, their minds became irradiated with celestial light, their faith acquired strength, their knowledge of the will of their divine Master was rendered more perfect, and they were inspired with a zeal and fortitude which armed them against every difficulty that it was necessary to encounter in his service, and enabled them, in the execution of his commands, to triumph even over death itself. One of the most astonishing of the endowments thus bestowed by our Saviour on his apostles, was an instantaneous acquaintance with languages of which they were previously ignorant, so as to qualify them to instruct the different nations of the earth in their own proper tongues [*x*].

XIII. Inspired

[*w*] Acts, ii. 1.

[*x*] Amongst the various gifts of the Holy Spirit communicated to the apostles, I do not include the faculty of altering the established laws of nature, or, in other words, the working of miracles: for I must confess, I cannot at all comprehend how a faculty like this, which requires infinite power, could be communicated to men. The miracles which the apostles appeared to work were, as I conceive, wrought by Christ himself, on their invocation; and, therefore, when he promised them the power of effecting what men and angels could not accomplish, I imagine nothing more

XIII. Inspired with the requisite confidence and powers by this communication of succour from above, the apostles entered on their ministry without delay; endeavouring, first of all, as they had been commanded, to convert the inhabitants of Jerufalem to a faith in Christ, and then directing their efforts to the propagation of his gospel amongst the remainder of the Jewish nation [y]. Nor were these their first exertions chilled by any thing like a want of success: for within a very short period, the flock of Christ, which, at the time of his departure, could not be considered otherwise than as small and weak, was augmented and strengthened by the accession of many thousands of Jews. It appears that by one sermon alone of Peter's, three thousand, and that by another, five thousand were added to the Christian community in this its infancy [z]. A preference having been thus given to the Jews, the apostles, in compliance with the express commands of our Saviour, next extended the blessings of their ministry to the Samaritans [a]. At

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The gospel preached first to the Jews and Samaritans, and then to the rest of the world.

more was implied than that he would be always present to their prayers, and ready to effect, through the infinite power which he possessed, whatever might in any case appear to be expedient or necessary. Peter commanded the lame man to rise up and walk, and immediately he arose and walked. Acts, iv. 6. But I cannot by any means believe that, on this occasion, an energy or power residing in Peter was transferred into the bodily frame of this poor wretch, so as to produce the restoration of his nerves or muscular action; or that the apostle could, by a mere act of volition, accomplish this wonderful cure. No; it is not to Peter, but to our blessed Saviour himself, on whose name Peter called, that this miraculous restoration of the cripple ought, in my opinion, to be ascribed. In confirmation of this, see the words of Jesus himself, John, xiv. 12, 13.

[y] Luke, xxiv. 47. Acts, i. 8. xiii. 46.

[z] Acts, ii. 41. iv. 4.

[a] Acts, i. 8. viii. 14.

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to the Jews
and Samari-
tans, and
then to the
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world.

length, having continued for many years at Jerusalem [b], and given a due degree of stability

[b] That the apostles continued at Jerusalem for many years after the ascension of our Saviour, is manifest from their Acts, which were written by St. Luke; nor can it be doubted that their stay there was in consequence of the divine command. The reasons on which this divine mandate was founded are, I think, readily to be perceived. In order to establish the Christian commonwealth on a firm and durable basis, and to furnish the churches which were about to be planted in the different nations of the earth with a model after which they might form themselves, it was requisite that the first Christian assemblies should be constituted and instructed with great care, under the immediate eye of the apostles themselves. An affair of such magnitude, it will be allowed, must necessarily have required a considerable time for its accomplishment. But to this reason was added another of still greater consequence and weight, which imperiously demanded the presence of the apostles at Jerusalem. For being invested, as they were by Christ himself, with the entire guardianship and administration of the concerns of his religion, the other disciples who were employed in establishing churches in Judæa, Samaria, and the neighbouring territories, were of course subject to their direction, and consequently felt it their duty, in all affairs of difficulty or doubt, to recur to them for advice and instruction. But how could these inferior messengers of divine truth have consulted the apostles, or availed themselves of their instruction or commands, if the latter had departed from Jerusalem at an early period, and distributed themselves about in various parts of the world? The general interests of Christianity, therefore, required that those whom our blessed Saviour had appointed the judges, or, as we ought perhaps rather to say, the arbiters of divine matters, and to whom he had given the power of regulating and determining every thing relative to the establishing of his religion, should for a certain time remain together in one place, that so an easy access to them might be had by those who were likely to stand in need of their advice or assistance; and their orders and decrees possess an additional weight and authority, from its being known that they comprised the sentiments, not merely of one or two, but of the whole collective body of those who had been admitted to a more particular intimacy with Christ, and were the best instructed in his will. How long

bility and strength to the several Christian fraternities or churches which had been formed in Palestine, they proceeded to communicate the glorious light of the gospel to the different Gentile nations of the earth; and in the various regions through which they travelled, were successful in establishing the church of Christ to an extent and with a rapidity that are, in every respect, truly astonishing.

XIV. The first concern of the apostles, after our Saviour's ascension into heaven, was to render their number complete according to its first establishment, by electing a man of superior worth and sanctity to supply the place of Judas, who had perished by a miserable death. Having, therefore, gathered together the small assembly of Christians which had been formed in Jerusalem, two men distinguished for their sanctity and faith in Christ were proposed as candidates on this occasion; the one named Barsabas, the other Matthias. The whole assembly then joined in devout prayer to God, that their choice might not, through human frailty, fall on that man of

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I.

The election
of a new
apostle.

long the apostles thus continued at Jerusalem, and in what particular year from the time of our Saviour's leaving them they departed on that mission to the Gentile nations with which they were charged, is by no means certain. According to an ancient report quoted by Eusebius from Apollonius, a writer of the second century, our Saviour ordered his apostles to remain at Jerusalem for twelve years after his parting from them. Euseb. *Histor. Eccles.* lib. v. cap. xviii. p. 186. and Clemens Alexandr. *ex Prædicatione Petri, Stromat.* lib. vi. cap. v. p. 762. Considering the great antiquity of this account, it may perhaps be not altogether undeserving of credit; but, at the same time, we cannot help regarding it with some suspicion, since it is certain that, even in the earliest ages of Christianity, it was no uncommon thing for men to fill up the chasms of genuine history with fictitious conceits, the mere suggestions of their own imagination.

C E N T. the two which was least acceptable in his sight ;
 I. after which, proceeding to the election, they
 either by lot, or rather, as I suspect, by the suffrages of such Christians as were present, chose Matthias to fill the office of a twelfth apostle [c].

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 of a new
 apostle.

XV. All

[c] Acts, i. 15, et seq. Many things highly worthy of observation present themselves to notice, in the account which St. Luke gives us of the appointment of Matthias in the room of Judas. Passing over, however, other things which might be pointed out, I will, in this place, merely make a few remarks on the mode and form of the election. All the commentators agree in representing Matthias as having been chosen an apostle by lot, agreeably to the ancient Jewish practice. On a more attentive consideration, however, of the words of the sacred historian, I rather think it would be found that this commonly received interpretation of them is what they by no means authorize. St. Luke commences his account by stating, that Peter, in a suitable speech, pointed out to the people who were assembled the necessity of electing a new apostle. After this, at verse 23, he adds, that two men equal to the station were set forth in the midst, in order that one of them might be chosen to undertake the office. As to the persons by whom these men were produced and recommended, he is quite silent. His words are simply *καὶ ἔστησαν δύο*: but I have not the least doubt that we ought, in this place, to consider the word *Ἀποστόλοι* as meant to be understood. For who can possibly believe that the Christians of the ordinary rank, who were in so many respects inferior to the apostles, should have assumed to themselves the right of selecting two of their own order, and recommending them as fit for the apostleship? I therefore consider it as certain, that the apostles made the selection of these two persons from amongst the general body of Christians at that time resident in Jerusalem, and directed the assembly at large to choose one of them for an apostle. The narrative concludes with an account of the manner in which this mandate was complied with; describing it as follows: *καὶ ἔδωκαν κλήρους αὐτῶν, καὶ ἔπαισεν ὁ κλήρος ἐπὶ Ματθίαν*, v. 26. Now in this passage, all the commentators attribute so much force to the word *κλήρος*, which properly signifies a lot, that they unanimously consider the true interpretation of the first branch of the sentence to be, *et jecerunt sortes eorum*, “and they cast their lots;”

XV. All these apostles were uninformed, illiterate men. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, indeed,

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I.

The conver-
sion of St.
Paul.

lots;" and hence conclude that Matthias was chosen by lot. But to me it appears that this interpretation is entirely repugnant to the Greek idiom: for whenever the casting of lots is spoken of by the Greek writers, we constantly find the verb βάλλιν joined with κλήρον; and therefore, if St. Luke had meant to indicate what these commentators suppose, he would have written καὶ ἔβαλον κλήρον, or κλήρον, and not ἔδωκαν, which latter word was never, at least as far as I know, applied in this way. It was equally unusual for the Greek writers to add the pronoun αὐτῶν after κλήρον, when the latter was used by them in the sense of a lot that was thrown. They say simply, with Homer, ἔβαλον κλήρον, "they cast lots." And certainly, what occasion there could be for St. Luke to add this pronoun in the passage under consideration, if he was speaking of casting lots, I am quite at a loss to conceive. All the commentators refer it, and, consistently with their interpretation of the passage, could only refer it to the candidates for the apostleship, Matthias and Barabas. But in what sense could those lots be said to be theirs, which, if the above opinion be just, were thrown in that assembly? Correctly speaking, can the lots, by which an election is to be determined, be termed the lots of the candidates or persons to be elected? Considering the weight of these and other objections, which oppose themselves to the commonly received interpretation of the above passage, I cannot help thinking that in these words of St. Luke we ought to understand the term κλήρον as having the same signification with ψῆφος, viz. a *suffrage*, or what in common language is termed a *vote*; and that what he meant to say was simply this, "and those who were present gave their votes." In this case, it will be perceived that for αὐτῶν I should substitute αὐτῶν. Considering this to have been the mode which was adopted for the appointment of a new apostle, it would, in a very striking degree, correspond with the form which was observed by the most ancient Christian churches, in electing their teachers and pastors; and which, in my opinion, there is every reason to think was founded on the manner of proceeding to which the apostles had recourse on this occasion. When a presbyter or a bishop was to be elected, those who presided over the church proposed certain candidates for the office, of approved worth and ability. Of these the as-
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indeed, their minds had become fully irradiated with celestial light; but to any other sort of wisdom than that which is from above, they had no pretensions; neither were they at all instructed in any of the different branches of human learning. In the then infancy of the Christian church, however, it was absolutely requisite that, in addition to these, there should be some one appointed who might be able to repress the domineering spirit of the Jewish doctors, by encountering them with their own weapons; and also be qualified, if occasion should require, to enter the field of disputation with the advocates and supporters of the various systems of pagan philosophy. Our blessed Saviour, therefore, revealing himself from heaven in a very wonderful manner to a young man of the name of Saul, but who afterwards changed it for that of Paul, appointed him a thirteenth

sembly at large pointed out by their suffrages, and not by lot, him whom they deemed the most deserving; and whoever had the majority of votes in his favour, was considered as elected through divine preference. Such was the form observed by the primitive churches, and I conceive such to have been the form to which the apostles had recourse on the above-mentioned occasion; and that the greater number of those who constituted the then infant church of Jerusalem gave their suffrages for Matthias, in preference to his companion Barfabas. The word κληρος, in the latter part of the passage under consideration, does not mean a lot, but the office or function with which Matthias was invested; τῆς διακονίας, which must be understood as annexed to it in order to render the sense complete, being omitted for the sake of brevity. To perceive at once the force of the term in this place, we need only imagine St. Luke to have studied conciseness less, and written καὶ ἔπεισεν ὁ κληρος (τῆς διακονίας ταύτης) ἐπὶ Ματθίαν; the sense of which in English is, “and the office of that ministry (*i. e.* the apostleship) fell on Matthias.” In what I have thus said, I do not pretend to any thing like infallibility, but merely propose a conjecture, which appears to me to have no small degree of probability on its side, for the consideration of the learned.

apostle.

apostle. Saul, who was a Jew, a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, and belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, had been endowed by nature with great and excellent mental powers, and was eminently skilled in every kind of Jewish learning. He was also conversant with the literature and philosophy of the Greeks. Led away by prejudice and warmth of temper, he was at first the bitter persecuting enemy of Christ and his flock; but as he journeyed on a certain time towards Damascus, with power from the high priest to seize on any Christians whom he might find there, and bring them bound to Jerusalem, he was on a sudden struck to the earth, and so affected by the voice and power of our Saviour, that he became at once a convert to his cause, devoting himself wholly to it, and, with the utmost cheerfulness and fortitude, exposing himself to innumerable hardships and dangers on account thereof, throughout the whole course of his future life [d]. In how great a degree every interest of Christianity was promoted by the exertions of this illustrious and admirable character, how many churches he founded throughout the greatest part of the Roman empire, how numerous and how formidable the contentions and perils which he encountered and overcame, his own epistles which are still extant, and the history of the Acts of the Apostles written by St. Luke, abundantly testify.

XVI. In the accounts which have been given by various writers, of the labours, the travels, the miracles, and the deaths of the apostles, there is little that can be altogether depended on, except what is recorded in the books of the New Testament, and a few other monuments of great

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Of the labours, martyrdom, &c. of the apostles.

[d] Acts, ix. 1, et seq.

antiquity.

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antiquity. In this case, as in most others of doubt and uncertainty, a difference of opinion prevails as to what ought to be received, and what rejected. For my own part, I think that we cannot well withhold our credit from such particulars as stand supported by the clear and positive testimony of Origen, Eusebius, Gregory Nanzianzene, Paulinus, Jerome, Socrates, and certain of the more ancient writers who are cited with approbation by Eusebius; but as to any thing that is to be met with merely in the writings of uncertain authors, or those of a later age, I should ever feel inclined to receive it with considerable hesitation and distrust, unless it should happen to be corroborated by documents that admit of no dispute. For when once certain of the Christian writers had been unfortunately tempted to have recourse to fiction, it was not long before the weakness of some and the arrogant presumption of others carried forgery and imposition to an extent, of which it would be difficult to convey to the reader any adequate idea. Amongst various other things that I consider as having been too readily received upon trust respecting the apostles, I cannot help including those accounts which have been handed down to us of their having, for the most part, undergone violent deaths; although I am well aware, that the fact of their having suffered in this way is commonly considered as established beyond dispute [*e*].

XVII. Amidst

[*e*] That every one of our Saviour's apostles, except St. John, (who ended his days in the natural way at Ephesus,) underwent capital punishment by command of the civil magistrate, is a report that appears to have been regularly transmitted down from very early ages, and is supported by the

XVII. Amidst all the uncertainty, however, in which the history of the apostles is involved, it appears

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the testimony of many different writers. The opinion that such was the fact has, moreover, taken such deep root even in the minds of many who would not willingly be thought either credulous or uninformed, that whoever may venture either to call it in question, or oppose it, must run no inconsiderable risk of being accounted hostile to the fame and reputation of those divine characters. In what I am about to say, it is far from my wish to cast any reflection on those who may have espoused this opinion; but I must, at the same time, claim for myself the liberty of remarking, that the evidence on which they rest their proof of the fact, that the major part of the apostles underwent violent deaths, is by no means so conclusive as they seem to imagine. That Peter, and Paul, and James suffered in this way, is what, on the faith of so many ancient authorities, I am very ready to admit; but there are several considerations which combine to prevent me from believing that their colleagues perished by the same untimely fate. My doubts are founded, in the first place, on the testimony of Heracleon, a very ancient author of the second century, a Valentinian indeed by profession, but most evidently neither an ill-informed nor incautious writer, who, as quoted by Clement of Alexandria, (*Stromat.* lib. iv. cap. ix. p. 595.) expressly denies that Matthew, Philip, Thomas, Levi, and some others, were put to death, in consequence of their having made open profession of their faith in Christ in the face of the civil power. Heracleon is arguing against an opinion which was entertained by certain of the Christians of that age, that the souls of martyrs alone were received up into heaven after death; and contends, that those who had never been called upon to lay down their lives for the cause of Christ, but had merely continued steadfast in faith and holiness of life, would equally, on the dissolution of the body, be admitted to the mansions of the blessed. This opinion he supports by the examples of the above-mentioned apostles, whom, with many others, he concludes to have been exalted to a seat in heaven, although they were never put to the test of making an open profession of their faith in Christ before an earthly tribunal, and sealing it with their blood. Ὅτι γὰρ πάντες οἱ σωζόμενοι ὡμολόγησαν τὴν διὰ τῆς Θωῆς ὡμολογίαν, καὶ ἐξῆλθον. Ἐξ ὧν Ματθαῖος, Φίλιππος, Θωμᾶς, Λεὺίς, καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί. *Non enim omnes qui salvi facti sunt, eam (Christi) confessionem,*
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 then

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qua per vocem (apud magistratus) ediderunt, et post eam ex vita excefferunt. Ex quibus est Matthæus, Philippus, Thomas, Levis, et multi alii. Clement of Alexandria, who makes a quotation from Heracleon, of which this passage forms a part, although he takes occasion in some respects to condemn and reject what he thus brings forward, yet never once intimates the least objection to the above cited words of that author respecting the apostles: a circumstance which plainly indicates that he did not consider them as open to any exception. To this twofold testimony may be added others of no less authority. The apostle Philip is clearly excepted out of the class of martyrs by Polycrates, who states him to have died and been buried at Hierapolis. *Epistola ad Victorem* apud Eusebium *Histor. Eccles.* lib. v. cap. xxiv. p. 191. Baronius, indeed, *Annal.* tom. i. ad ann. 35. § 141. and many others after him, would have us to understand Polycrates as speaking of that Philip who was one of the seven deacons of the church at Jerusalem, and not of Philip the apostle. But the advocates of this notion stand confuted by Polycrates himself, who says expressly that the Philip of whom he makes mention was one of the twelve apostles. But there is an argument of still greater force and weight to be brought forward on this subject,—an argument, indeed, nearly sufficient of itself to establish the point for which I contend; and that is, that all the writers of the first three centuries, including those most strenuous advocates for the honour and dignity of the martyrs against the Valentinians, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, reckon no more than three of the apostles as coming within the class of martyrs, namely, Peter, Paul, and James the great. Tertullian says, *Quæ tamen passos apostolos scimus, manifesta doctrina est: hanc intelligo solam acta decurrens. — Quod Petrus cæditur, quod Stephanus opprimitur, quod Jacobus immolatur, quod Paulus distrabitur, ipsorum sanguine scripta sunt. Et si fidem commentarii voluerit hæreticus, instrumenta imperii loquuntur, ut lapides Jerusalem. Vitas Cæsarum legimus: orientem fidem Romæ primus Nero cruentavit. Tunc Petrus ab altero cingitur, quem cruci adstringitur. Tunc Paulus civitatis Romana consequitur nativitatem, quem illic martyrum renascitur generositate Hac ubicunque legero, pati disco: nec mea interest, quos sequar martyrii magistros, sensusne an exitus apostolorum.*
 Scorpice,

then known and civilized world, and within a short time, either by themselves, or with the assistance

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Scorpiace, cap. xv. p. 633. edit. Rigaltii. If these words of Tertullian be attentively considered, they will be found to militate strongly against the opinion of those who have been led to believe that all the apostles, except St. John, suffered violent deaths. Tertullian is contending with the Valentinians, who, as we hinted above, denied that there was any necessity of laying down one's life for Christ, and maintained that those of his servants who continued steadfast in faith and holiness of life would obtain salvation equally with the martyrs. To this opinion Tertullian opposes the example of the apostles, who were known to have exposed themselves to sufferings of various kinds in the cause of Christ, and not to have refused encountering even death itself for his sake. Now if, at that time, even the slightest rumour had prevailed amongst the Christians, that all the apostles of our Lord had sealed their testimony with their blood, this author, who appears to have been never backward in availing himself of vulgar report, would most assuredly have brought it forward on this occasion. On the contrary, however, he with more than ordinary caution contents himself with naming merely three of the apostles as martyrs, *viz.* Peter, Paul, and James. It is, therefore, fairly to be presumed that he knew of no more; and if he knew of no more, we may rest assured that the Christians of that age were apprised of none besides: for if any one had been able to add to the above list, it must have been Tertullian, who was thoroughly conversant with every part of Christian history, true as well as feigned. Tertullian, indeed, does not attempt to conceal his ignorance of any other of the apostles that could be deemed martyrs. He was a man by no means wanting in penetration or judgment, and was fully aware that the Valentinians, his opponents, might reply, that only a few of the apostles suffered martyrdom,—so few indeed, that even he himself had not been able to swell the list beyond three. With a view, therefore, to preclude them from parrying the force of his argument in this way, he adds, *Nec mea interest quos sequar martyrii magistros, sensusne an exitus apostolorum*: words which, it must, I think, be allowed, make strongly in favour of the point for which I contend. For the meaning intended to be conveyed by them is obviously this: “It can be of no avail for you to object, that a few only of the apostles underwent

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of the
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sistance of certain of their disciples who accompanied them in their travels, and shared their labours,

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violent deaths. I do not take upon me to controvert this. It is sufficient for me to have proved that I have the general sense of the apostles on my side, inasmuch as they were both ready and willing to have died for the cause of Christ. But few of them, indeed, were called to so severe a trial of their constancy; but there can be no doubt that it was the meaning and desire of them all to glorify their divine Master by their death. The general sense, then, of these illustrious characters I take as my guide; and, after their example, I desire to die for the sake of Christ, although I am aware that the deaths of the major part of them were different from what they had thus expected and desired." Influenced by these and other considerations, I am induced to think that the accounts which have been handed down to us, respecting the martyrdom of our Saviour's apostles, were invented subsequently to the age of Constantine the Great. That such accounts should have been invented, may readily be accounted for on two grounds. First, the incredible veneration in which the martyrs were held;—a veneration which had been carried to a great height even in the earlier ages of Christianity, but which increased beyond all measure upon the restoration of tranquillity to the Christian commonwealth by Constantine. For when the martyrs came to be worshipped almost like gods, and to have all those honours paid to them which it was customary for the Greeks and Romans to offer to their demigods and heroes, it might of course be thought necessary to include the apostles within this class, lest they should appear to want that which was considered as the most distinguishing and infallible mark of sanctity and glory. Secondly, the ambiguity attached to the word *martyr* might occasion ignorant men to invent accounts of their tragical deaths. *Martyr*, in the Greek language, signifies any sort of witness: but the term was applied by the Christians in a more eminent sense to that kind of witness, who placed it beyond all doubt that Christ was the centre of all his hopes, by sealing his testimony with his blood. The apostles are denominated μαρτυρες, witnesses, in the former sense, by Christ himself. Acts, i. 8. And the term has evidently no higher import annexed to it, when applied, as it afterwards is, by the apostles to themselves, by way of elucidating the nature of their functions. Acts, ii. 32, &c. It might, however, very easily happen that

labours, established churches dedicated to Christ in almost all the provinces [f]. But even here we are precluded from giving scarcely any thing beyond this general statement of the fact: the great obscurity which hangs over nearly every part of the early history of Christianity not only preventing us from marking with precision the extent of the apostles' progress, but also rendering it impossible for us, with any degree of confidence, to name any particular churches as founded by them, except such as are mentioned in the writings of the New Testament [g]. Throughout the world there is scarcely, not to say a nation or people, but even a city of any magnitude or consequence, in which the religion of Christ may be said to flourish, that does not ascribe the first planting of its church to one or other of the apostles themselves, or to some of their im-

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that unlearned persons, not aware of this distinction, might conceive that the word martyr, which they found thus applied to the apostles in the writings of the New Testament, was to be understood in the latter sense; and in consequence thereof, hastily adopt the opinion that they ought to be placed in the same class with those whom it was usual for the Christians to style, in a more eminent sense, martyrs.

[f] That the apostles should have made their way to parts of the earth which at that time were not civilized, nor even known, is what I should think could scarcely be believed by any one. The weight is vast which those take on their shoulders, who would fain persuade us that the various accounts which carry the apostles to America, as well as to Sweden, Denmark, and Lapland, and even make them penetrate into the interior of Africa, are conformable to truth.

[g] A list of those churches founded by the apostles, of which mention is made in different parts of the New Testament, is given by Hartman in his work *de Rebus gestis Christianorum sub Apostolis*, cap. vii. p. 107.; as also by Fabricius, in his *Lux Evangelii toti Orbi exorians*, cap. v. p. 83, et seq.

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mediate and most intimate disciples. But no reliance whatever can be placed on traditions of this sort; since it has been pretty clearly ascertained, that the same spirit of vain glory which prompted ancient nations to pronounce themselves the offspring of the soil, or the descendants of the gods, found its way into the churches of Christ, and induced many of them to suppress the truth, and claim for themselves a more illustrious origin than in reality belonged to them [b].

XVIII. But

[b] Amongst the European nations, there is not one that does not pride itself on being able to attribute the first foundation of its church either to one of the apostles, or of the seventy disciples, or to some holy personage bearing an apostolic commission. The Spaniards boast of having had the light of the gospel communicated to them by two of the apostles in person, viz. St. Paul and St. James the Great, as well as by many of the seventy disciples, and of those who were the companions of the apostles: and it would be far from prudent for any one who wishes to cultivate the good will of these people, to attempt to undeceive them in this respect. The French, with equal ostentation and pertinacity, attribute the conversion of their forefathers to the preaching and labours of Crescent, the disciple and companion of St. Paul, of Dionysius of Athens the Areopagite, of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, and I know not of how many others. Throughout Italy, there is scarcely a city which does not pretend to have received the first rudiments of Christianity from either Paul or Peter; and that its first bishop was appointed by one or other of these. Vid. Giannone *Histoire civile du Royaume de Naples*, tom. i. p. 74, 75. And it would be hardly possible, indeed I may say it would be altogether impossible, for any one to escape the imputation of heresy, who should venture in any way to indicate his disbelief of this. Vid. Jo. Lami *Delicia Eruditorum*, tom. viii. Præf. p. xxxv, xxxvi. and tom. xi. Præfat. The Germans affirm that Maternus, Valerian, and many others were sent to them by the apostles; and that the persons thus commissioned by St. Peter and his colleagues established some considerable churches in their country. The

XVIII. But the labours of the apostles, in the cause of their divine Master, were not restricted merely

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1.

The writings of the apostles.

inhabitants of Britain consider St. Paul, Simeon Zelotes, Aristobulus, and particularly Joseph of Arimathea, as the founders of their church. That the former of these actually extended his travels to that island, and first preached the gospel there, is a fact which has been strongly contended for by many, who chiefly rely on the authority of a passage in the first epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians. The Russians, with the Poles and Prussians, venerate St. Andrew as the parent of their respective churches. All these things, and many others which I shall pass over, were considered as indisputable during those benighted ages, when every species of sound learning, divine as well as human, was overwhelmed and trodden under foot by ignorance and superstition. At present, however, they are regarded in a very different light; and the wisest and best informed scholars give them up for the most part as fictions, invented subsequently to the age of Charlemagne, by illiterate and designing men, who expected that by thus propagating a notion of the great antiquity of their several churches, they should open to themselves a source of profit as well as honour. Vid. Calmet, *Histoire de Lorraine*, tom. i. p. xxvi. Le Beuf, *Dissertations sur l'Histoire de France*, tom. i. p. 192, 193. 198; and others. In one particular, perhaps, as we shall presently take occasion to point out, this opinion may not be strictly correct; but in every other respect it meets with the unreserved assent of all of the present day, who prefer truth to the authority of antiquity; and is expressed with much neatness and force of illustration, by that eminently learned French writer Jo. Launois, in a dissertation, in which he undertakes the defence of a passage in Sulpitius Severus respecting the first martyrs of Gaul, and which is to be found in the second volume of his works, part i. p. 184. His words are, *Media atate orta est inter ecclesias super antiquitate originum suarum contentio et certa quædam emulatio, quæ fecit, ut cum simplicem veritatem ultro oblatam facile proferre poterant, ait Damianus, fategerint, ut mendacia cum labore confingerent. Etenim dum reconcinnarunt pleraque primorum episcoporum acta, nunc ad stipulante nominum similitudine, Trophimum puta Arelatensem, et Paulum Narbonensem, qui sub Decio venerant in Galliam, cum Trophimo et Paulo Sergio, Pauli apostoli sectatoribus confuderunt: nunc eadem vel alia de causa Rufum, e Macedonia Avenionem, et Lazarum.*

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merely to journeyings, to watchings, to the chearful endurance of deprivations and sufferings, to

Lazarum e Cypro Massiliam traduxerunt, nunc alios a secundo vel tertio ecclesiæ seculo revocarunt ad primum, eosque Petri vel Clementis discipulos et nobiles ortos parentibus, quos sæpe nominant, affirmarunt : nunc etiam alios constituerunt, de quibus per antiquæ traditionis testes, qui ante Caroli Magni tempus floruerunt, nihil licet quicquam pronuntiare. To the justness of this statement, so far as it goes, I most readily subscribe ; but as to what is further imagined by many of the learned, that it was not until after the age of Charlemagne that the European churches began to contend with each other respecting the antiquity of their foundation, and, in direct violation of the truth, to refer their origin to the apostolic age, I conceive that it admits of some doubt. To me it appears that those preposterous attempts to carry back the origins of churches even to the times of the apostles, and to give them a venerable air by trumping up the most idle tales of their extreme antiquity, are of much older date than the age of Charles the Great : indeed I have not a doubt but that this silly sort of emulation had taken possession of the minds of both the Greeks and the Latins, even so far back as the age of Constantine. That this opinion of mine may not have the appearance of being adopted hastily, or on insufficient grounds, I will support it by an example drawn from the history of Gregory of Tours, a writer of the sixth century ;—an example which must certainly be allowed to stand in no danger of suffering by a comparison with the most wonderful of any of these wondrous tales ; indeed, of so marvellous a complexion, as to call for a stretch of credulity to which I rather think but few, if any, of us are equal. The narrative occurs in Gregory's book *de Gloria Martyrum*, cap. xii. p. 735. and is as follows: *Tunc temporis a Galliis matrona quædam Hierosolymis abierat, pro devotione tantum, ut Domini et salvatoris nostri præsentiam mereretur. Audivit autem quod beatus Johannes decollaretur : cursu illic rapido tendit, datisque muneribus supplicat percussori ut eam sanguinem defluentem colligere permetteret non arceri : illo autem percutiente, Matrona concham argenteam præparat, truncatoque martyris capite, cruorem devota suscipit : quem diligenter in ampulla positum, patriam detulit et apud Vāsatensem urbem, ædificata in ejus honorem ecclesia, in sancto altari collocavit.* Now I will take upon me to assert, that such a foolish, such a mad conceit as this, in which the

to the communication of oral instruction, or to the use of such other means as promised to be instrumental in promoting the edification of those of their own age. The welfare of future generations was likewise the object of their solicitude; and they accordingly made it a part of their concern to commit to writing a code of testimony and instruction, of which the whole human race might avail itself in all ages to come: the Holy Spirit, to whose influence and guidance their minds were in every respect subject, doubtless prompting them to the undertaking. St. Matthew with his own hand wrote a history of the life and actions of Christ, as did also St. John; and St. Peter and St. Paul respectively dictated similar histories to St. Mark and St. Luke [i].

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the apostles.

Certain

the people of Bazadois gloried long before the age of Charlemagne, never entered into the brain of any monk subsequently to that period. For these people, we see, were willing to have it believed that their church existed prior to the death of our Saviour; having, according to the above statement, been founded not long after the death of John the Baptist, by a certain devout woman on her return from Palestine, whither she had been induced to go by the fame of Christ's miracles. But even this was not enough: they must carry the matter still farther, and pretend that this pious woman actually built the church at Bazas in Guienne before Christ's death, dedicated the altar therein with Christian rites, and placed on that altar the blood of St. John. To such an high and incredible antiquity none other of the Christian churches ever made pretension, except that of Jerusalem, which was instituted by Christ himself. The people of Bazadois, however, to my certain knowledge, even yet cherish this error, considering their honour as in no small degree involved in the maintenance of it. Such ridiculous extravagance naturally reminds one of the Arcades, who anciently boasted that their race was older than the moon.

[i] That St. Mark wrote his history of Christ from the dictation of St. Peter, is a fact that stands supported by those

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Certain epistles also, in which are comprised the leading principles of Christianity, and various precepts or rules of life, were addressed by St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude, to the churches which they had established in different parts of the world. At no very great distance of time from the age of the apostles, the Christians, with a view to secure to future ages a divine and perpetual standard of faith and action, collected these writings together into one volume, under the title of The New Testament, or The Canon of the New Testament. Neither the names of those who were chiefly concerned in the making of this collection, nor the exact time of its being undertaken, can be ascertained with any degree of certainty; nor is it at all necessary that we should be precisely informed as to either of these particulars: it is sufficient for us to know that it may be proved by many strong arguments, that the principal parts of the New Testament had been collected together before the death of St. John, or at least not long after that event [k].

XIX. To

those great and highly respectable authorities, Papias, apud Eusebium *Histor. Eccles.* lib. iii. cap. xxxix.; Irenæus, *adv. Hæreses*, lib. iii. cap. i.; Clemens Alexandrinus, Tertullian, and others. That St. Luke derived the materials of his history from St. Paul is also asserted by Irenæus, lib. iii. cap. i.; Tertullian, *contra Marcionem*, lib. iv. cap. v.; and others. It is, therefore, not without reason that St. Paul and St. Peter are termed by some the original authors of the gospels of St. Luke and St. Mark.

[k] The insidious attempt made by Toland, in his *Amyntor*, to undermine the divine origin and authority of the canon of the New Testament, gave rise to very warm disputes amongst the learned; and many different opinions were, in consequence thereof, brought forward respecting the authors of that collection, and the time when it was made. For which, see Jo. Ens in his *Bibliotheca sacra, seu Diatriba de Librorum Novi Test. Canone*, Amstelod. 1710, 8vo.

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creed.

XIX. To these writings of the apostles it might be proper to add that formulary of faith, which is commonly known by the name of the apostles' creed, if any reasonable grounds appeared to warrant that notion respecting its origin, which obtained pretty generally in the Christian world subsequently to the fourth century, and which is entertained by many even at this day, namely, that it was drawn up by the apostles themselves, before they departed from Jerusalem on their mission to the Gentiles [1]. But to say nothing of the silence of all the most ancient writers as to this point, and equally passing over the fact that this formulary was not uniformly adopted by the Christian churches, which would most undoubtedly have been the case, had they known it to have been dictated by such high authority; omitting, moreover, to lay any stress on the cir-

8vo. Jo. Mill in his *Prolegomena ad Nov. Testament*, sect. i. p. 23, et seq. and Jo. Frickius *de Cura veteris Ecclesie circa Canonem Nov. Testamenti*, a small work of considerable erudition published at Ulm. To me it appears that after all that has been brought forward on the subject, the matter remains in great measure undecided. The most general opinion seems to be, that the books of the New Testament were originally collected together by St. John: an opinion for which the testimony of Eusebius (*Histor. Eccles.* lib. iii. cap. xxiv.) is very confidently quoted as an indisputable authority. But it is to be observed, that allowing even the highest degree of weight to the authority of Eusebius, nothing farther can be collected from his words, than that St. John approved of the gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, and added his own to them by way of supplement. Concerning any of the other books of the New Testament, Eusebius is entirely silent.

[1] See what has been with much industry collected on this subject by those highly respectable writers: Jo. Franc. Buddeus, in his *Isagoge ad Theologiam*, lib. ii. cap. ii. § ii. p. 441.; and Jo. Georg. Walchius, in his *Introductio in Libros symbolicos*, lib. i. cap. ii. p. 87.

C E N T. cumtance of its having never been received or
 I. accounted as a part of the apostolic writings; it
 is alone a sufficient refutation of this opinion, that
 we know for certain that this creed was at first
 extremely short; and that it was afterwards, by
 little and little, extended and dilated, according
 as new errors from time to time sprang up in the
 Christian community [m]. No one surely will
 maintain, that we ought to regard that as a
 genuine formulary of faith prescribed by the
 apostles, which can be proved to have been amplified
 in several respects subsequently to their
 death.

Causes to
 which the
 quick prop-
 agation of
 Christianity
 must be
 ascribed.

XX. The system of discipline which the
 apostles, by the authority and command of their
 divine Master, employed themselves in propa-
 gating throughout the world, was not only re-
 pugnant to the natural disposition and inclinations
 of mankind, but also set itself in direct opposition
 to the manners, the laws, and the opinions of all
 the different nations of the earth: and as for the
 persons themselves who were selected to be the
 propounders of it, they were altogether rude and
 unskilled in any of those arts by which the human
 mind is to be rendered docile, and brought to
 yield assent and obedience. It is impossible,
 therefore, to account for the astonishingly rapid
 propagation of the Christian religion amongst
 so many different nations, part of them of a sa-
 vage and ferocious character, and part entirely

[m] That such was the fact has been clearly demon-
 strated by Sir Peter King, in his *History of the Apostles' Creed, with critical Observations on its Articles*, London,
 1702, 8vo. This work was translated into Latin by
 Gothofred Olearius, and first printed at Leipzig, 1704,
 in 8vo.; a second edition was some time afterwards published
 at Basle.

devoted

devoted to licentiousness and sloth, otherwise than by receiving with implicit credit the accounts which are given us, by profane as well as sacred writers, of the miraculous gifts by which the apostles were distinguished; namely, that they possessed a faculty of persuasion more than human, that they predicted future events, laid open the secrets of men's hearts, held the operations of nature in controul, enacted wonders beyond the reach of any human power, and lastly, were capable of transmitting these supernatural endowments to any on whom they thought proper to confer them, simply by the imposition of their hands on them, accompanied with prayer. Let these things be considered for a moment as false, and we shall at once find how utterly out of our power it is to assign any rational cause that could have prevailed on so large a portion of mankind, within so short a period, to turn their backs on the allurements of pleasure, to forsake the religion of their ancestors, and voluntarily to embrace Christianity, at the hazard of life, fortune, honour, and every thing else that could be dear to them [n].

XXI. Our

[n] It is certainly a very ill-advised attempt, and a disgraceful abuse of talents, for any one to pretend to account for that wonderful revolution in the sentiments and affairs of mankind, which was thus brought about by a mere handful of illiterate Jews, from mere natural causes. There are, however, several who, espousing the principles of Hobbes and others, persist in contending that the uncommon degree of benevolence and charity towards the poor and the miserable, by which the early Christians were distinguished, operated as a lure in bringing over great multitudes of the necessitous, and others of the lower class of people, to the profession of Christianity, under the expectation of having their wants relieved, and being enabled, through the munificence of others, to pass the remainder of their days in inactivity

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condition.

XXI. Our opinion in regard to this point is not at all shaken by the arguments of those, who, after

activity and ease. But surely this is a very unwarrantable sporting with reason. For if such were the motives by which the poor and the indigent were influenced, yet by what incentive—by what inducement could those be stimulated to become Christians, out of whose abundance the necessities of the poor and the indigent were supplied? But can it be necessary to inform those who maintain this opinion, that the idle and the slothful had no place amongst the first Christians; and that St. Paul commands, “that if any would not work, neither should he eat?” 2 Theff. iii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Can it be necessary to inform them, that the lazy, the vicious, and the sensual, were, by order of the apostles, to be expelled from the Christian community? Can it be necessary to inform them, that every Christian family was charged with the maintenance of such of its own members as were in need; and that those alone were relieved at the public expence, who had no relatives capable of yielding them assistance? 1 Tim. v. 3. 16, &c. Equally superficial and futile is the reasoning of those, who would persuade us that great numbers were induced to embrace Christianity, on account of the infamous lives led by the heathen priests, and the many extravagant absurdities by which the various systems of paganism were characterised. Motives of this sort might indeed so far influence men of sound sense and principle, as to cause them to renounce the religion of their ancestors: but in no shape whatever could they operate as inducements for them to embrace a new system, which called upon them to restrain and mortify their natural propensities; and the profession of which exposed their lives, their reputation, and every thing else that could be deemed valuable by them, to the most imminent danger. Others there are who imagine that the virtues by which the apostles and the earliest converts to Christianity were so eminently distinguished, such as their continence, their contempt of this world’s goods, their fortitude, their patience, and the like, had that effect on the generality of mankind, that they were readily prevailed on to adopt them as their instructors and guides in the road to salvation. Great indeed, I am ready to allow, is the effect which eminent probity and virtue have on the minds of men: nor would I be thought to insinuate that the exemplary lives of the apostles had no weight with those whom they converted

after the example of Celfus, Julian, Porphiry, and other ancient adverfaries of Chriftianity, call upon us to recollect that the firft Chriftian afsemblies or churches formed by the apoftles confifted of men of low degree, of fervants, labourers, artificers, and women ; in fhort, that they

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converted to a faith in Chrift. But all of us who are acquainted with what we are ourfelves, and what human nature is, muft be well aware that, although purity of morals and innocence of life may excite the refpect and veneration of mankind, they will not often produce imitation under any circumftances,—and hardly ever, if it be manifelt that fuch imitation would be attended with ignominy and danger. We need not be told that virtue itfelf, and that even of the moft exalted kind, is commonly regarded in an unfavourable light, if it require men to renounce the principles and opinions in which they were bred, to abandon their pleasures, and caft off habits to which they have been long attached. And certainly nothing lefs than this is taught us by the examples of the apoftles, who, from the purity of their morals, are faid to have overcome the world. Indeed, were further proof wanting, the matter is placed beyond all doubt by the example of the Lord and Mafter of the apoftles himfelf, whofe whole life exhibited one uninterrupted courfe of fanctity and innocence. That the pure and inoffenfive lives led by the apoftles might fo far operate in favour of their caufe, as to fecure them in fome degree from personal violence or injury, is what I can very readily bring myfelf to believe : but that the ftrictnefs of their morals and demeanor, and their contempt of this world's goods, fhould alone have been fufficient to caufe many thoufands of men to believe in that Jefus, who was crucified by the Romans at the infligation of the Jews, as the Saviour of the human race ;—induce them feduloufly to form themfelves after the apoftolic model ;—and finally, infpire them with the refolution to die rather than renounce the principles which they had thus embraced, is what I am certain no one poffeffed merely of ordinary powers will ever prevail on me to admit. And to pafs over many other things, let me only by way of conclufion ask, to what fource or to what caufes are we to afcribe that aftonifhing virtue and fanctity in the apoftles, by which it is pretended to account for the unanimity and eagernefs difplayed by fuch vaft multitudes, in laying hold on Chrift as the only anchor of falvation ?

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were wholly composed of uninformed illiterate persons, possessed of neither wealth nor dignity, and who were, of course, easily to be wrought upon and managed by any one even of very moderate abilities. For, in the first place, what they thus so confidently press on our attention is not a correct representation of the fact; since we are expressly taught in Scripture, that amongst those who were converted by the apostles to a faith in Christ were many persons of wealth, rank, and learning [o]. And, in the next place, it is well known to every one who has had the

[o] The apostles, in their writings, prescribe rules for the conduct of the rich as well as the poor, for masters as well as for servants: a convincing proof, surely, that amongst the members of the churches planted by them were to be found persons of opulence and masters of families. St. Paul and St. Peter admonish Christian women not to study the adorning of themselves with pearls, with gold and silver, or with costly array. 1 Tim. ii. 9. 1 Peter, iii. 3. It is therefore plain, that amongst the early Christians, there must have been women possessed of wealth adequate to the purchase of bodily ornaments of great price. St. Paul exhorts the Christians to beware of the philosophy of the Greeks, and also of that oriental system which was styled *γνωσις*. 1 Tim. vi. 20. Col. ii. 8. Hence it is manifest that amongst the first converts to Christianity there were men of learning and philosophers, who wished to temper and improve, as they thought, the doctrine of our blessed Saviour, by incorporating with it the precepts of their own wisdom. For if the wise and the learned had unanimously rejected the Christian religion, what occasion could there have been for this caution? St. Paul's remark, that amongst the members of the church of Corinth were not to be found many of the noble or the mighty, (1 Cor. i. 26.) unquestionably carries with it the plainest intimation that persons of rank and power were not wholly wanting in that assembly. Indeed, lists of the names of various illustrious persons who embraced Christianity, in this its weak and infantine state, are given by Blondell, at page 235. of his work *de Episcopis et Presbyteris*; also by Wetstein, in his Preface to Origen's *Dialogue contra Marcionitas*, p. 13.

least experience in human affairs, that men even of the lowest class not only inherit from nature, in common with their superiors, the warmest attachment to life, and whatever may contribute to their own well-being, but are also in a far greater degree bigotted to, and consequently much more jealous over, the customs, opinions, and religious principles handed down to them from their ancestors, than those of intelligent and cultivated minds, who are possessed of wealth and authority, and fill the higher stations in life [p].

XXII. That the apostles, in accomplishing the objects of their mission, derived no inconsiderable assistance from the great fame of their divine Master, which soon spread itself far and wide, and thus preceded them in their journies, admits of little or no doubt. Authors of no mean credit assure us that, before the departure of the apostles from Jerufalem, the fame of the wonders wrought by Christ in the land of Judea had

Christ held in great estimation by the Gentiles.

[p] Ignorance and fear generate and nourish superstition. By how much the more any one's mind is weak and unenlightened, by so much the stronger hold will superstitious influence be found to have on it. With a much better prospect of success, therefore, if superstition stand in your way, may you undertake to convince ten men than one woman, or a hundred sensible and well-informed people than ten of such as are ignorant and stupid. Vicious inclination never predominates more strongly than in servants and persons of the lower class; and with far greater ease may you extinguish evil propensities in six hundred well-born persons of ingenuous mind, than in twenty servants or people of the common order. In my opinion, therefore, if the fact would bear out the adversaries of Christianity in what they thus so confidently urge, that the churches founded by the apostles were made up of men of no account, of low and illiterate characters, servants, women, and the like, it would rather tend to augment than diminish the reputation and glory of those divine teachers.

extended

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extended itself throughout a great part of the world, or at least of the Roman empire, and impressed many with the highest estimation of his character. It is even said that some of the Roman emperors themselves entertained an honourable respect for his name, his doctrine, and his acts. Indeed, if Tertullian and some others may be credited, Tiberius, who was in other respects a most execrable tyrant, conceived such an esteem for the character of our Lord, that it was his intention to have assigned him a place amongst the deities publicly worshipped by the Roman people; but that the design fell to the ground, in consequence of its being opposed by the senate. There have not, indeed, been wanting amongst the learned some who consider this as altogether a fabrication; but, on the other hand, men, by no means inferior to these in point of erudition, have brought forward several arguments in its support, which, as it appears to us, are not easily to be answered [9].

XXIII. The

[9] Eusebius relates (*Histor. Eccles.* lib. vii cap xviii. p. 265.) that many amongst the heathens had procured images of our Saviour, and his apostles, and which were preserved by them in their houses with great care and reverential regard: a striking proof that the Gentiles had been early brought acquainted with the character of Christ, and held it in great respect. The Carpocratians, a celebrated Gnostic sect of the second century, exhibited, according to Irenæus, both statues and pictures of our Saviour, and said that Pilate had caused a likeness to be painted of him. Lib. i. *contra Hæreses*, cap. xxv. p. 105. edit. Massvet. Concerning the favourable disposition manifested by the Roman emperors towards the Christian religion, there is a notable passage cited by Eusebius, *Histor. Eccles.* lib. iv. cap. xxvi. p. 148. from the apology addressed by Melito of Sardis to Marcus Antoninus, on behalf of the Christians; in which he intimates, that the ancestors of the emperor had not only tolerated the Christian religion, in common with
other

XXIII. The very great and daily accelerating progress of Christianity was, however, contemplated with the utmost jealousy and apprehension by the Jewish priests and rulers, who plainly perceived that if the people should be prevailed on to embrace this new religion, the law of Moses would no longer retain its dignity, and there

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other systems, but had also treated it with considerable honour and respect. Ἦν καὶ ἐν πρόγονοι σὲ πρὸς ταῖς ἄλλαις θεησοκείαις ἐτίμησαν. Quam sectam majores tui una cum cæteris religionibus coluerunt. The same author adds, that Nero and Domitian were the only emperors who had ever suffered themselves to be so far influenced by the suggestions of wicked and malevolent advisers, as to conceive an ill opinion of the Christian religion, and favour the cause of its adversaries. If Melito be correct in what he thus says, that it was the counsel of evil disposed persons which caused Nero to persecute the Christians, it should seem that John of Antioch might have some reason for stating, as he does, (*in Excerpt. Valesian.* p. 808, et seq.) that Nero, at his first accession to the purple, was well inclined to the cause of Christ, and favoured the Christians. Tertullian (*in Apologetic.* cap. v. p. 57. ed. Havercamp.) speaks of the intention of Tiberius to have assigned our Saviour a place amongst the deities of Rome, as of a thing publicly and commonly known. The circumstance is repeated after him by Eusebius, Orosius, and others; all of them appearing to rely chiefly on the authority of Tertullian. Vid. Franc. Balduin. *Commentar. ad Edicta veterum principum Romanorum de Christianis*, p. 22, 23. Alb. Fabric. *Lux Evangelii toti Orbi exorians*, p. 221. Some of the most learned men, however, of the present day consider this as altogether incredible; deeming it impossible to reconcile such an intention, either with the disposition of Tiberius, or with the state of the Roman empire at that period. In what way, and to what extent the arguments brought forward by those who take this side of the question have been met and answered by men of no less learning and ingenuity on the opposite side, may be seen in a curious work of Theod. Hafæus, de *Decreto Tiberii quo Christum referre voluit in Numerum Deorum*, Erfurt, 1715, in 4to.; as also in a French Letter of J. Christ. Ifeleus, which is pregnant with deep erudition, and printed in the *Biblioth. Germanique*, tom. xxxii. p. 147. and tom. xxxiii. p. 12.

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menced by
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would consequently at once be an end of their authority, and of the many emoluments and advantages of which they contrived to make it the source. They, therefore, opposed the doctrine of Christ with all imaginable violence and rancour; and availing themselves of every favourable opportunity to lay hold on his apostles and their disciples, they threw them into prison, where they were threatened and scourged, and had every other species of evil heaped on them without reserve: some of them being even made to undergo capital punishment. Of the malevolence and injustice which the first teachers of Christianity thus experienced at the hands of the Jews, abundant testimony is left us on record by St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles. The most eminent amongst those who suffered death at Jerusalem for the cause of Christ were Stephen, a very devout man, whom the Jews stoned [r]; St. James the apostle, the son of Zebedee, whom Herod Agrippa put to the sword [s]; and St. James the Just, the bishop of the church at Jerusalem, who was slain in a cruel manner, as is shortly noticed by Josephus [t], but described more at large by Hegesippus [u]; in whose account,

[r] Acts, vii. 55.

[s] Acts, xii. 1, 2.

[t] *Antiquit. Judaic.* lib. xx. cap. viii. or, according to Havercamp's division, cap. ix. p. 976.

[u] *Apud Euseb. Hist. Eccles.* lib. ii. cap. xxiii. The exceptions which are, not without reason, taken by the learned to this account of Hegesippus are all brought into one view, and augmented with some additional observations of his own, by Joh. Le Clerc, in his *Historia Eccles. duorum primorum seculorum*, p. 414, et seq. Even Jos. Aug. Orsi himself, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, a work of much elegance, written by him in Italian, tom. i. p. 237, et seq. frankly confesses that it is not possible even for the most

count, however, there are many things to which no one, who is in the smallest degree conversant with

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most credulous person to believe every thing related by Hegesippus; and pronounces the account given by Josephus, who represents James as having been stoned to death, as much more deserving of credit. For my own part, I must decline entering into a discussion of the numerous difficulties which give an air of improbability to the narrative of Hegesippus; but since the occasion presents itself, I will just offer a few remarks, which may perhaps be found to throw some light on one passage in it, of which the learned have hitherto professed themselves utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning. The Jews, according to Hegesippus, proposed this question to James the Just: *τις ἢ θύρα τῆ Ἰησοῦ?* Quodnam est ostium Jesu? What is the gate or door of Jesus?—To which he is represented as answering, that this gate was the Saviour: *καὶ ἔλεγε, τῶτον ἵνακι τὸν Σωτῆρα.* Eusebius *ubi supra*. Now it is truly wonderful to behold how erudition has bewildered itself in attempts to discover the meaning of this question. Hen. Valesius, in his notes on Eusebius, p. 39, says, Ostium, hoc loco est introductio, seu institutio atque initiatio. Ostium igitur Christi nihil est aliud quam fides in Deum Patrem, et in Filium, et in Spiritum Sanctum. In this explanation it should seem as if the learned author fancied that he had given us something very great; whereas, in fact, he has given us nothing: for his interpretation neither accords with the question of the Jews, nor with the answer of James. Admitting this notion of Valesius to be correct, the Jews must have meant to ask of James, What is faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? But who, let me ask, can possibly attach any such sense to the words they are stated to have made use of—Quodnam est ostium Jesu? What is the Gate of Jesus? And what relation to such a question as the above is to be discovered in the answer of James?—Ostium hoc est Servator. The Saviour is the gate. Is the Saviour then a faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Indeed it is plain that Valesius himself was by no means satisfied with this explanation; for within a very few words after, we find him at variance with himself, and giving the passage a very different interpretation: *Christi ostium*, says he, *est remissio peccatorum, quæ fit per Baptismum.* This exposition, we see, is of quite a different nature from the one cited above, but yet not at all more rational or intel-
ligible.

C E N T. with either Christian or Jewish antiquities, can by
 I. any means give credit.

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 tians com-
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ligible. The Jews, according to this interpretation, must be understood to have asked of James—*Quanam est remissio peccatorum per baptismum?* What is remission of sins by baptism? To which he answers—*Remissio peccatorum est Servator.* Remission of sins is the Saviour. But I again repeat what I said above. This eminent scholar no doubt meant to throw light on this very obscure passage, and probably pleased himself with the notion that he had done so; but, in fact, he has done nothing of the kind: indeed it may be said, that he has thrown additional obscurity over a place already of itself sufficiently dark. In my opinion, Jo. Le Clerc pursued a much wiser course, by ingenuously confessing his inability to explain this passage as it stands, and intimating a suspicion that it must have been some how or other corrupted. *Quod quid sibi velit,* says he, *non intelligo, neque enim Græcum hoc est, nec Hebraicum ullum similem comminisci possum. Respondet enim Jacobus, hunc esse Servatorem, quasi δὲξα significaret munus aut quidpiam simile. Sed forte locus est corruptus. Histor. Eccles. duorum primor. Sæculor. p. 416.* Le Clerc perceived that this passage in Hegesippus required correction, but he would not undertake the amendment himself. This, however, has been not long since attempted by a learned French author, who, in 1747, published at Paris, in 4to., a prospectus *d'une nouvelle Traduction de l'Historien Joseph.* According to this writer, p. 9. the term δὲξα, which has been all along considered as Greek, and rendered into Latin by the word ostium or porta, ought in fact to be considered as an Hebraism; and the way in which he proposes to correct the passage in question is by substituting תורה, Torah, for δὲξα, or rather by changing the latter into δόξα. This conjecture is noticed by the learned editors of the *Nova Eruditorum Acta* at Leipzig, in their number for March 1750, p. 142.; and they appear to consider it as a peculiarly happy one. *Est tamen,* say they, *una inter cæteras conjectura, scita felicit ingenii filia; quam calculos peritorum hominum laturam esse, nulli dubitamus.* The emendation thus offered is, I must own, entitled to every sort of praise on the score of ingenuity; but, at the same time, I cannot go the length of saying that I deem it altogether unobjectionable, and free from doubt; since it appears to me in no shape to accord with the answer of James. Were we to adopt the ingenious

XXIV. Moreover, not content with thus accumulating every possible injury on such of the harmless

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genious correction proposed by this author, the question of the Jews would be this—*Quenam est lex Jesu?* What is the law of Jesus? But what sort of reply to this is conveyed by the answer of James, which, according to the same emendation, must be translated—*Lex Jesu est Servator.* The law of Jesus is the Saviour. What sense or meaning would there be in this? or, in what way can it be regarded as an answer to the question proposed? Is James trifling with the Jews, or does he give them the desired information? Let us leave this conjecture then, and see if it may not be possible to suggest an emendation more consentaneous to the object which the Jews evidently had in view. Now I entirely agree in opinion with the above-mentioned learned French author, that, in rendering the Hebrew words made use of by the Jews in the questioning of James, into Greek, a mistake was made by the translator, whoever he might be, whether Hegesippus or another, and that the object of their inquiry was entirely misconceived by him. But it strikes me, that the error is rather to be discovered in the name *Ἰησοῦ*, than in the term *θύρα*. The Jews manifestly had it in view to learn from James what he deemed the way or the gate of salvation, or, in other words, the true means of obtaining eternal life. I have, therefore, not the least doubt but that, speaking in their vernacular tongue, they made use of the term *תְּשׁוּבָה*, *Jeschuah*, salvation; and that their question to James consequently was—What is in your opinion the gate of salvation? By what means may we arrive at eternal life? But the Greek translator, either through inattention, or for want of sufficient skill in the Hebrew language, mistaking this term for the proper name of our Saviour Jesus, instead of rendering the question, as he ought to have done, *τίς ἡ θύρα τῆς σωτηρίας*; What is the gate or door of salvation?—translated it, *τίς ἡ θύρα Ἰησοῦ*; What is the gate of Jesus? To the question, when corrected in this way, nothing can be conceived more pertinent or apposite than the reply of James—The gate or door of salvation is our Saviour Jesus Christ: for, in fact, he answers in our Saviour's own words, who, in John, x. 7. says of himself, *Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ἡ θύρα τῶν προβάτων*; I am the door of the sheep. Indeed the event of this examination tends so strongly to corroborate this conjecture of mine, that I rather think it will be considered as having every probability

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harmless disciples of Christ as were to be found in Palestine, the high priest and rulers of the Jews dispatched legates or missionaries into all the different provinces, for the purpose of animating their distant brethren with similar sentiments of jealousy and hatred towards the Christians, and stirring them up to seek for every occasion of annoying and persecuting this inoffensive flock [v]. By what is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and other ancient authorities, it appears that the Jews, throughout every part of the world, discovered the utmost readiness in obeying this call of their spiritual instructors and governors, and with one consent made it their endeavour, by various calumnies and infamous machinations, to draw on the Christians the indignation and ill-will of the presidents, the magistrates, and the people at large. The chief of all the accusations where-with the followers of Christ were loaded by the malice of these their inveterate foes, was that of their being enemies to the state, and conspirators

on its side. “On hearing this,” (*i. e.* the answer of James,) continues Hegelippus, “some of them were prevailed on to believe in Jesus as the true Christ.” Now if the answer of James had that effect on the Jews, as to persuade them to believe that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah,—it follows of necessity that he must have declared Jesus to be the author, or, in figurative language, the gate or the door of salvation.

[v] Frequent mention is made of this by the early Christian writers. See Justin Martyr *Dial. cum Tryph.* p. 51, 52, 53. 318. edit. Jebb. It is also intimated at p. 109. that the Jews forbid their people even from speaking to the Christians; and at p. 138. 207. that in their schools and synagogues, the followers of Christ were loaded by these infuriate persecutors with the direst curses and imprecations: a circumstance of which we find mention also made by St. Jerome and others. See also Eusebius *Comment. in Esaiam*, cap. xviii. p. 474.; in Montfaucon’s *Nov. Collect. Patrum Græcor.* tom. ii.

against

against the imperial majesty: in proof whereof, it was alleged that they regarded one Jesus, a malefactor, who had been put to death by Pilate on very sufficient grounds, as a monarch sent down to mankind from above. To this conduct are to be attributed the many complaints that we meet with in the writings of the early Christians, respecting the hatred and cruelty of the Jews, whom they represent as more inimical and malicious in their carriage towards them than even the pagans themselves [*w*].

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XXV. An effectual check, however, was given to the insatiable rancour with which the Jews thus persecuted the Christians, about the seventieth year from our Lord's birth, when Divine Justice delivered up their land, their city, and their temple, to be laid waste and overthrown, and even their name as a nation to be utterly blotted out, by the Romans under Vespasian and his son Titus. This tremendous scene of carnage, ruin, and devastation, which had been foretold by our Saviour himself, is very particularly described by the historian Josephus, who was present at the destruction of Jerusalem, and for the most part an eye-witness of all its attendant horrors. The cause which, beyond all others, may be considered as having more immediately contributed to bring down these heavy calamities on the Jewish nation, was the mal-administration of the Roman presidents, to whom the government of Palestine had been from time to time committed, and particularly of Gessius Florus, whose oppressive and vexatious conduct was every way cal-

Overthrow
of Jerusalem
and the
Jewish na-
tion.

[*w*] See the passages collected by J. A. Fabricius, in his *Lux Evangelii toti Orbi exorients*, cap. vi. § 1. p. 121. See also *Epistola Smyrnenfis Ecclesie de Martyrio Polycarpi*, § xii, xiii. tom. ii. *Patr. Apostol.* p. 199, 200.

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culated to exhaust the patience of this wretched and unfortunate people. Irritated and goaded by insults and severities, to which they saw no prospect of an end, they endeavoured to regain their former liberty; but their efforts, instead of promoting the object they had in view, served only to accelerate their final ruin, by rendering them at one and the same time a prey to intestine faction and the Roman sword. In the course of a seven years' war there perished of this ill-fated people, according to Josephus, either by fire, the sword, famine, pestilence, or different kinds of punishments, no less a number than one million three hundred and thirty-seven thousand four hundred and ninety. In the fourth year of this memorable contest, the city of Jerusalem was taken, after a six months' siege, and the temple, contrary to the wish of the emperor Titus, consumed by fire. The buildings that escaped the ravages of the flames were afterwards pulled down, and levelled with the ground. Throughout the whole history of the human race, we meet with but few, if any, instances of slaughter and devastation at all to be compared with this. In contemplating it, amongst various other things which present themselves to our notice as well deserving of the most serious attention, it is particularly worthy of remark that the Jews themselves, rather than the Romans, must be considered as the authors of that great and tremendous accumulation of evils which signalized this final desolation of the house of Israel.

The ten per-
secutions of
the Chris-
tians.

XXVI. About two years before the breaking out of this war between the Romans and the Jews, the Christians who dwelt at Rome were made subject to very unjust laws, and otherwise experienced the most severe and iniquitous treatment

ment at the hands of the emperor Nero. His example was, in this respect, pretty uniformly copied after by his successors, during three centuries; although their severity was not always carried to the same extent: and hence the professors of Christianity had to endure a long series of dire afflictions, or, to use a more familiar term, persecutions, to which an end was not put until the time of Constantine the Great. We have been for ages in the habit of considering the number of these persecutions as decidedly fixed at ten; but the early history of Christianity does not appear by any means to warrant this. If it be meant to speak merely of such persecutions as were particularly severe, and of general extent throughout the empire, they certainly did not amount to ten; if, on the contrary, the lesser ones, or such as may be termed provincial, are designed to be included, it is equally clear that they exceeded that number. The persons who first fixed the number at ten, certainly found nothing on record to authorize their doing so; but were, as it should seem, led away by a wish to make history, in this respect, accommodate itself to certain passages of Scripture, in which they imagined it to be foretold that just so many persecutions would befall the Christians [x].

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XXVII. As

[x] The notion of the Christians suffering exactly ten persecutions under the different heathen emperors, is without doubt extremely ancient, and may be traced back as far as to the fifth century. But notwithstanding this, I will venture to incur the responsibility of assuring all lovers of truth, that it is wholly built on popular error, without the least shadow of foundation. The authors of it are indeed unknown; but thus far is certain, that they did not derive this opinion from what was to be met with on record, but first of all imbibed it from a mistaken interpretation of Scripture, and then obtruded it on the world as a point of history.

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XXVII. As the Romans allowed to every citizen the free exercise of his own reason and judgment

history. We have good authority for stating that, in the fourth century, the number of Christian persecutions had not been exactly ascertained. Lactantius, in his book *de Mortibus Persequutorum*, enumerates only six. Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, recounts the sufferings which the Christians had at various periods undergone; but he does not take upon him to fix the times of persecution at any determinate number. It may, however, in some measure be collected from what he says, that the church had experienced nine such seasons of adversity. Sulpitius Severus, in the fifth century, records the like number: but it appears that, at the time he wrote, the notion of ten persecutions had begun to be entertained; for, after enumerating nine that were passed, he gives the Christians to understand that the tenth, which would be the final one, was not to be expected until the end of the world. *Exinde*, says he, *tranquillis rebus pace perfruimur: neque ulterius persecutionem fore credimus, nisi eam, quam sub fine jam sæculi Antichristus exercebit. Etenim sacris vocibus decem plagis mundum afficiendum pronuntiatum est; ita quum jam novem fuerint, quæ superest ultima erit. Histor. Sacr. lib. ii. cap. xxxiii. p. 248, 249. ed. Clerici.* Now it appears to me scarcely possible to conceive any thing that could more strongly support the position advanced by me in the commencement of this note than this passage does. The Christians of the fifth century, we see by it, had, from their interpretation of some passages of Scripture, (what those passages were Sulpitius does not mention,) been led to entertain a belief that the Christian commonwealth was destined to endure ten principal calamities; but the persecutions recorded in history, they found, did not amount to that number. In order, therefore, to uphold the authority of the sacred volume, they determined that the completion of the predicted number of persecutions was to be looked for in the coming of Antichrist, at the end of the world. But even in that same age, there appear to have been others of the Christians who, although they were equally confident in the persuasion that ten persecutions were predicted in Scripture, yet did not think that the afflictions to be expected from Antichrist were to be included in that number; and therefore endeavoured, by twisting and perverting the history of the Christian church previous to the time of Constantine the Great.

judgment in regard to matters of a divine nature, and never molested the Jews on account of their religion,

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Great, to make it exhibit all ten of the calamitous periods which they conceived to be thus foretold in the sacred writings. For this we have the testimony of Augustine, in his work *de Civitate Dei*, lib. xviii. cap. lii. p. 404, 405, tom. vii. opp. edit. Benediēt. where, adverting to this subject, he declares that he can by no means assent to the opinion that only ten persecutions of the Christians are foretold in Scripture: *Proinde ne illud quidem temere puto esse dicendum, sive credendum, quod nonnullis visum est, vel videtur*, (this opinion, therefore, we see, was entertained merely by a few,) *non amplius ecclesiam passuram persecutiones usque ad tempus Antichristi, quam quot jam passa est, id est, decem, ut undecima, eademque novissima, sit ab Antichristo*. In these words Augustine points to the way in which the persecutions were computed, by those who maintained that the church had undergone ten previously to the time of Constantine, and which is similar to the modern mode of computation. With regard to its being correct or erroneous he delivers no opinion, but leaves the question entirely at rest. We are next put by him in possession of the particular part of Scripture on which this notion of the ten persecutions, antecedent to the time of Constantine, was grounded. *Plagas enim Ægyptiorum quoniam decem fuerunt, antequam inde exire inciperet populus Dei, putant ad hunc intellectum esse referendas, ut novissima Antichristi persecutio similis videatur undecimæ plagæ, qua Ægyptii, dum hostiliter sequerentur Hebræos, in mari rubro, populo Dei per siccum transiente, perierunt*. We see here, then, the source from whence sprung the notion of the ten persecutions antecedent to the reign of Constantine; and also the reason why the opinion of Sulpitius was rejected, and the last persecution under Antichrist excluded from that number. Some silly trifling Scriptural commentators of the day had taken it into their heads, that the ten plagues of Egypt were to be regarded as typical of the persecutions that the Christians were to undergo at the hands of the pagans; and that Pharaoh bore the representation of Antichrist: and hence they were led to consider it as indisputable that ten persecutions of the Christians must have taken place prior to the reign of Constantine; and that the afflictions to be expected from Antichrist ought not to be reckoned as one of those ten calamitous seasons which it was predicted in Scripture should

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religion, it has afforded grounds for surprize to many that they should have discovered a temper
so

should befall the church. It is, however, a circumstance which must, we should presume, in no small degree excite the reader's astonishment, that these sagacious commentators on Holy Writ should not have perceived that this exposition necessarily implies what it is utterly beyond the reach of belief to credit, namely, that the Egyptians, and all those on whom the Almighty sent down the ten dreadful scourges mentioned in Scripture, and particularly Pharaoh, with his servants and soldiers, who were swallowed up in the Red Sea, were the typical representatives of the innocent and holy Christians, who were persecuted by the Roman emperors. For if the ten plagues, with which God afflicted the Egyptians, are to be considered as typical of the first ten persecutions of the church of Christ, it necessarily follows that the persons who endured these plagues must have been the representatives of the early Christians; and if the miserable overthrow and destruction of Pharaoh and his host is to be understood as prefigurative of the direful visitation which good men are taught to expect from Antichrist and his followers, we are equally constrained to regard the Egyptian king and his army as representatives of the faithful adherents of our Lord, who are to endure the persecuting violence of this arch adversary to the cause of Christ. Indeed, Augustine himself, although he entertained no doubt but that the words of Scripture had a recondite meaning attached to them, yet considered this interpretation as futile, and built on no solid foundation. *Sed ego, says he, illa re gesta in Egypto, istas persecutiones propheticè significatas esse non arbitror: quamvis ab eis, qui hoc putant, exquisitè et ingeniosè illa singula his singulis comparata videantur, non prophetico spiritu sed conjectura mentis humanæ, quæ aliquando ad verum pervenit, aliquando fallitur.* But it should seem that Augustine was not acquainted with all the arguments by which the advocates for the opinion, that the Christians had undergone ten persecutions, endeavoured to establish this point, so repugnant to all history. A principal argument of theirs (and one which, to confess the truth, has something specious in it) was drawn from the Apocalypse. St. John sees a harlot sitting on a terrible beast, which had seven heads and ten horns. Rev. xvii. 1—10. There is no question but that this woman represents Rome; and St. John expressly tells us, that the ten horns of the beast signify ten kings.

so inhuman and implacable in their carriage towards the Christians, a set of men of the most harmless

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kings. Rev. xvii. 12. The same inspired writer adds, that these ten horns of the beast, or ten kings, should make war with the Lamb, that is, Christ; but that he should overcome them. v. 14. This is the prophecy which induced the ancient Christians to maintain that ten of the Roman emperors, prior to Constantine, were at open enmity with the church; and to attempt to force on us, in direct opposition to all historic evidence, the notion that the number of persecutions had been exactly ten. Their way of reasoning was this:—Since by the woman whom John saw is to be understood Rome, and by the ten horns ten kings, there can be no doubt but that these ten kings must be ten Roman emperors; and since the wars of these ten kings with the Lamb, that is, Christ, unquestionably signify their endeavours, by means of laws and punishments, to extirpate the Christians, and entirely abolish their religion, it is evident that ten Roman emperors would oppress and persecute Christ in the persons of his disciples. But, said they, the successors of Constantine, who at present govern the Roman empire, are Christians: and it is not at all likely that their descendants should renounce the faith: those ten enemies of the Lamb or Christ must, therefore, have lived and made war on him before the reign of Constantine. Not permitting themselves to doubt of the accuracy of this mode of reasoning, it became at once their object so to manage the history of the church, previous to the reign of that emperor, as to make it exhibit the ten regal enemies of our Lord making war upon him, by ten persecutions of his faithful adherents. No one would ever have taken up the notion of the ten persecutions, had it not been for the ten plagues of Egypt recorded by Moses, and the ten horns of the beast mentioned by St. John. There are none who have assumed greater freedom in perverting ancient history than those who, without the requisite talents and information, have taken upon them to expound the sacred Oracles. In confirmation of what I have thus advanced, I will quote merely one passage from Gerhohus *de corrupto Ecclesie Statu*, a work published by Steph. Baluzius, in the fifth volume of his *Miscellanea*, p. 77. It is not indeed older than the twelfth century, but it nevertheless puts us in possession of what was the opinion of prior ages. *Deinde reliqui leones a Nerone usque ad Diocletianum per decem universales persecutions*

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cutions.

harmless inoffensive character, who never harboured in their minds a wish or thought inimical to the welfare of the state [y]. But it is not very difficult to account for this. The Romans, it is true, extended their toleration to every kind of religion, from whence no danger to the public safety was to be apprehended; but, at the same

tiones ita comederunt ac dispererunt gregem Domini, ut illa bestia decem cornibus terribilis Danieli præostensa jam singulis cornibus in singulis persecutionibus debachata, et sanguine sanctorum satiata sit, ultra quam dici possit. There were some, however, as we learn from the following words of Gerhohus, who were of opinion that by the ten horns of the beast, we ought rather to understand the ten years of the Diocletian persecution: *Et quia ultima persecutione, Diocletiano et Maximiano tyrannizantibus, decem annis vexata est ecclesia, sive in decem universalibus persecutionibus, sive in decem annis ultimæ persecutionis intelligas decem cornua crudelis bestię, Romani videlicet imperii, gratanter accipe humiliationem ex tunc illius bestię, ita ut foenum quasi bos comedens et præsepe Domini sui agnosceus rore cęli tinđa sit, baptizato videlicet Constantino imperatore.*

[y] As every thing which can tend to excite suspicion or doubt in the minds of the ignorant, respecting the divine origin of the Christian religion, is eagerly caught at by those of the present day who undertake to disprove it, it is not to be wondered at that they should endeavour to avail themselves of the antipathy of the Romans to Christianity, in order to throw a shade over its excellence, and discredit its authority. The wisest people, say they, that ever existed upon the face of the earth,—a people in the highest degree distinguished for their humanity, and who were never known in any other instance to molest any mortal whatever on account of his religion, yet pronounced Christianity to be incompatible with the public welfare, and refused it toleration. It will therefore not admit of a doubt, but that there must have been something vicious and highly censurable in the conduct and character of the early Christians, which, if not repressed, threatened eminently to endanger the prosperity and safety of the commonwealth. But as nothing can be more ill founded than these surmises, they serve only to expose the ignorance of those by whom they are suggested, and to betray their utter want of acquaintance with the ancient Roman history.

time,

time, they would not endure that any one should deride or attempt to explode the religion of the state, or that which had the support of the laws: for there existed between the government and religion of the Romans such an intimate connection and dependence on each other, that whoever attacked or endeavoured to undermine the latter, could not of necessity appear to them otherwise than as hostile to the former, and inimical to the dignity of the state. On this account, all such of the Jews as lived intermixed amongst the Romans, were particularly cautious in whatever they said or did, to avoid every thing which could be construed into a reflection on the religion or gods of the commonwealth. But the conduct of the Christians was directly the reverse of this: for, laying aside every sort of fear, they strenuously endeavoured to make the Romans renounce their vain and silly superstitions, and were continually urging the citizens to give up and abolish those sacred rites, on the observance of which, as we above remarked, the welfare and dignity of the commonwealth were thought so much to depend. Under these circumstances, it could not well otherwise happen but that the Christians, although they intended no ill whatever to the state, yet should come to be looked upon and treated as enemies of the Roman government.

XXVIII. It yielded a still further ground for offence, that the Christians did not content themselves with entering the lists against the religion of the Romans only, but also boldly asserted the falsehood and insufficiency of every other religious system in the world; and contended that eternal salvation was to be obtained in no other way than by laying hold on Christ. For the inference which the Romans drew from this was,

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that the members of this sect were not only immeasurably arrogant and supercilious in their pretensions, but were also filled with hatred towards all those who differed from them in opinion, and were consequently to be regarded as persons likely to sow amongst the people the most inveterate discord, and to occasion disturbances of a very serious nature to the state. For it was of old recognized as a maxim of civil polity, that a sect which not only believes those of every other persuasion to be in the wrong, but also considers every other species of religious culture, except that which its own tenets prescribe, as impious and offensive in the sight of Heaven, is ever prone to excite public commotions, and give annoyance to those who do not belong to it. And I have no doubt but that we ought to understand Tacitus as intending to reproach the Christians with cherishing a disposition of this sort, when he represents them as *odii generis humani convictos*; and in like manner, Suetonius, when he attributes to them *maleficam superstitionem* [z].

XXIX. Whilst

[z] Tacitus, *Annal.* lib. xv. cap. xxxv. Suetonius in *Nerone*, cap. xvi. Some very eminent men have imagined that these historians did not properly distinguish between Jews and Christians, but hastily ascribed to the latter the same *hostile odium adversus omnes alios*, which was not without reason attributed to the former. But it should seem to have escaped those who entertain this opinion, that Tacitus and Suetonius are, in the passages above referred to, evidently speaking of a crime peculiar to the Christians,—a crime of so heinous a nature as to deserve capital punishment. Whatever there might be in the Jews of the *humani generis odium*, it is certain that it did not appear to the Romans in this highly criminal light, or of such a dangerous nature as to be termed *exitiabilis superstitio*, which is the expression made use of by Tacitus in regard to the Christians, since they were freely permitted to take up their abode, and openly to exercise their religion in any part of the

XXIX. Whilst these considerations had the effect of stirring up the emperors, the senate, the presidents, and the magistrates, to endeavour, as far as in them lay, to arrest the progress of Christianity, by means of the most rigorous laws and punishments; there were others which operated no less powerfully on the people, and particularly on the pagan priesthood, so as to cause them to require of their governors and magistrates, with an importunity approaching even to violence, that the Christians, wherever they could be found, should be put to death: and it not unfrequently happened that, by their clamours and threats, they extorted a compliance with their demands even from those who would never otherwise have been prevailed on to imbrue their hands in the blood of the just. The Jews were possessed of a splendid temple; the ceremonies attending their religious rites were grand and magnificent; they offered up sacrifices, and had a supreme pontiff, with a numerous priesthood; and their mode of worship was, in several other respects, of a showy and an attractive nature: hence the Jewish religion appeared to the heathens as differing in no very material degree from those of other nations; and the God of the Hebrews was looked upon by them as the provincial deity, who had the immediate and especial care and governance of that particular people. But the Christian mode of worship was accompanied with none of those appendages which constituted the apparent affinity between the Jewish

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the empire. It may also be noticed, that Suetonius expressly terms the religion of the Christians *nova superstitio*, a modern superstition; by which he clearly distinguishes them from the Jews, whose religion was well known to be of no recent origin.

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religion and those of other nations: ignorant men, therefore, like the pagan multitude, who imagined that the worship acceptable to the gods consisted in the observance of ceremonies and festivals, and the offering up of victims, at once concluded that the Christians paid no sort of homage to Heaven, and consequently believed neither in a Supreme Being, nor a Providence. When the minds of the people at large had received an impression of this sort, it could scarcely happen but that the most virulent rage for persecution should ensue: for it was inculcated no less strongly by the Roman laws than by those of other states, that men who disbelieved the existence of the gods ought to be regarded as pests of the human race, the toleration of whom might endanger the state, and be productive of the highest detriment to the best interests of society.

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XXX. But this was not all. Attached to the service of that host of deities which the Romans worshipped, both in public and private, there was an immense number of priests, augurs, soothsayers, and ministers of inferior order, who not only derived from it the means of living at their ease, with every luxury at command, but were also, from the sacred nature of the functions with which they were invested, sure to stand high in the estimation of the people, and to possess no inconsiderable degree of influence over them. When all these perceived that it was highly probable, or rather felt it to be morally certain, that if once the Christian religion should become predominant with the public, there would immediately be an end to all the emoluments, honours, and advantages, which they then enjoyed; a regard for their own interests naturally prompted them to endeavour, by every means in their power, to lessen

lessen the credit of the Christians, and to render them obnoxious to the people and the magistrates. Associated with these in their efforts to put down Christianity, there was an innumerable multitude of persons of various other descriptions, to whom the public superstitions were a source of no small profit; such as merchants who supplied the worshippers with frankincense and victims, and other requisites for sacrifice, architects, vintners, gold and silver-smiths, carpenters, statuaries, sculptors, players on the flute, harpers, and others; to all of whom the heathen polytheism, with its numerous temples, and long train of priests, and ministers, and ceremonies, and festivals, was a principal source of affluence and prosperity [a].

XXXI. From the enmity of the Jews, and of persons like these, proceeded those horrible calumnies, with which it is well known that the character of the first Christians was very generally aspersed, and which occasioned them to be considered by the magistrates and the people at large as entirely undeserving either of benevolence or pity. Nor is it at all to be wondered at that the slanders to which we allude should, until they were refuted, have been productive of this effect; for the crimes thus falsely imputed to the Christians were of the foulest and most disgusting complexion. Amongst other heinous offences whereof they were accused, it was asserted that even their solemn religious assemblies

Calumnies propagated respecting the Christians.

[a] Acts, xix. 24. An idea of the vast detriment which the interests of these priests and merchants experienced from the rapid spread of Christianity, may be collected from this one passage in Pliny's epistles, lib. x. epist. 97. p. 458. *Satis constat prope jam desolata templa capisse celebrari — passimque venire victimas, quarum adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur.*

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were polluted by the commission of the most detestable of crimes; that in the place of the Deity they worshipped an ass; that they paid divine honours to their priests, in a way which it would be an unpardonable violation of decency even to name; that they were active in promoting sedition, and desirous of bringing about revolutions in the state [b]. And with so much art and address were these malignant falsehoods framed and supported, that they obtained credit even with those who filled the highest stations in the government. But what contributed as much as any thing to inflame the passions of the lower orders, and stir them up to acts of revenge, was the malicious artifice of their priests, in attributing every thing which could be regarded in the light of a national or general affliction, to the toleration of the Christian religion: for whether it were war, or tempest, or pestilence, or any other species of calamity which befel the public, they equally availed themselves of it, and assiduously inculcated on the minds of the people that such was the method in which the gods avenged themselves of the insults offered them by the Christians. Instructed thus from what they deemed infallible authority, that such was the origin and cause of their sufferings, the credulous multitude thought of nothing but revenge, and demanded of their magistrates, with the most imperious clamour,

[b] The reader who wishes to pursue this topic further may consult a work, written by Christ. Kortholt, expressly on the subject of these calumnies, and entitled, *Paganus Obtrectator, seu de Calumniis Gentilium in Christianos*, Kilon. 1698, in 4to.; as also the treatise of Jo. Jac. Huldric, *de Calumniis Gentilium in Christianos*, Tigur. 1744, in 8vo.: the materials for both of which were drawn from the Apologies of the early Christians, and other ancient authorities.

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the extirpation of a sect so utterly hateful and pernicious [c].

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confessors.

XXXII. Those belonging to the Christian commonwealth who, during this critical situation of its affairs, fell victims to their piety, and whose constancy in the cause of their divine Master even death itself under a variety of terrific forms had not been able to shake [d], were thenceforward denominated *martyrs*: an appellation borrowed from the sacred writings [e], and emphatically applied to these illustrious *witnesses* of the divinity of the Christian religion, in consequence of their having sealed their testimony with their blood. Those who had never been called upon to give this last severe proof of their faith and sincerity, but had nevertheless, at the peril of their lives, and with the hazard of honour, fortune, and every other worldly consideration, made open profession of their belief in Christ in the face of the heathen tribunals, were distinguished by the title of *confessors*. The authority and respect which holy men of either

[c] See Arnobius *adversus Gentes*, and also the various other writers of the first ages, who came forward on behalf of the Christians, and defended them against all these malignant aspersions of their adversaries.

[d] Respecting the various kinds of punishment and suffering which the martyrs were made to undergo, the reader may consult a most elegantly printed little work of Ant. Gallonius, the last edition of which is that of Antwerp, 1668, 12mo. A work on the same subject was also published by Casp. Sagittarius at Jena, in 1673, in 4to. But in both of these works there is much that cannot be relied upon; for as to those accounts which have come down to us under the title of *Acta Martyrum*, or "the Acts of the Martyrs," their authority is certainly for the most part of a very questionable nature: indeed, speaking generally, it might be coming nearer to the truth perhaps, were we to say that they are entitled to no sort of credit whatever.

[e] Hebr. xi. 39. xii. 1.

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of these descriptions enjoyed amongst their brethren during life, and the veneration in which their memory was afterwards held by the Christians of their own age, were such as almost surpass belief [*f*]. As time advanced, this reverence for the

[*f*] Both martyrs and confessors were looked upon as being full of the Holy Spirit, and as acting under an immediate divine inspiration. Whatever they said, therefore, was considered as proceeding from the oracles of God; whatever, during their imprisonment, they required or wished to have done, was regarded in the light of a divine command—to disobey which would be the very height of impiety; and whatever they did was accounted as nothing less than the act of God himself, with whose Spirit they were conceived to be filled. Whatever might have been the sins and offences of the martyrs, it was imagined that they were all atoned for and washed away by their own blood, not by that of Christ. (Vid. Clemens Alexandr. *Stromat.* lib. iv. p. 596.) Being thus restored to a state of absolute purity and innocence, it was conceived that they were taken directly up into heaven, and admitted to a share in the divine councils and administration; that they sat as judges with God, enjoying the highest marks of his favour, and possessing influence sufficient to obtain from him whatever they might make the object of their prayers. Annual festivals were appointed in commemoration of their deaths, their characters were made the theme of public eulogies, monuments were charged with transmitting of their names and acts to posterity, and various other distinguished honours were paid to their memories. Those who had acquired the title of confessors were maintained at the public expence, and were on every occasion treated with the utmost reverence. The interests and concerns of the different religious assemblies to which they belonged were, for the most part, consigned to their care and management;—inasmuch, indeed, that they might almost be termed the very souls of their respective churches. Whenever the office of bishop or presbyter became vacant, they were called to it as a matter of right, in preference to every one else, although there might be others superior to them in point of talents and abilities. Out of the exceedingly high opinion that was entertained of the sanctity and exalted character of the martyrs, at length sprung up the notion that their reliques possessed



the characters of both martyrs and confessors increased; and being seconded by various opinions respecting these victims of persecution, of an inspiring nature indeed, but which appear to have been by far too hastily adopted, it had the effect of stimulating others to make equal sacrifices in the cause of Christ, and for his sake to encounter the hazard of a cruel and an ignominious death with the utmost readiness and fortitude, and to meet this most severe of human punishments in all its terrors, without the least reluctance or dismay. By degrees, however, it degenerated into a pernicious kind of superstition, and, becoming a source of corruptions in the true religion, was eventually productive of no small detriment to the interests of Christianity.

XXXIII. That the number of those who suffered death in the cause of Christ, during the different persecutions to which the church was exposed for upwards of three centuries, so far from being small, was, on the contrary, very considerable, is a fact that stands supported by the weightiest and most positive evidence. There can, however, at the same time, be no doubt but that many of those whose names are to be found in the immense army of martyrs, which both the Greek and Roman churches laud and

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possessed a divine virtue, efficacious in counteracting or remedying any ills to which either our souls or bodies may be exposed. From the same source arose the practice of imploring their assistance and intercession in cases of doubt or adversity, as also that of erecting statues to their memory, and paying to these images divine worship: in fine, to such an height of vicious excess was this veneration for the martyrs carried, that the Christians came at last to manifest their reverence for these champions of the faith by honours nearly similar to those which the heathens of old were accustomed to pay to their demi-gods and heroes.

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worship, might with very great propriety be struck out of the list. To be at once convinced of this, we need only be apprised that the governors and magistrates did not direct their severity promiscuously against the great body of the Christians at large, but selected as objects of capital punishment merely such of them as filled the office of bishop or presbyter, or held some other station of rank and consequence in the church, or who had displayed a more than ordinary zeal for the propagation of the Christian faith, or were distinguished for their wealth and dignity [g]. As for those of a lower order in the church, or of an inferior condition in life, although they might be occasionally imprisoned and called to an account, they were, for the most part, considered by the civil power as beneath notice, and might, without any danger to themselves, be present at the last sad scene of their brethren's sufferings. Whenever, therefore, a Christian of either of the descriptions above noticed was thrown into prison, the deacons and Christians of common rank found nothing to prevent them from visiting him, and otherwise ministering, as far as in them lay, to his assistance and comfort, or finally from accompanying him, after his condemnation, to the place of punishment [b].

XXXIV. Fore-

[g] Polycarp. *Martyrium*, § xii. *Acta Fruentiosii in Ruinarti Actis Martyrum sinceris*, p. 219. Cypriani *Epist.* v. xiv., p. 10. 23. edit. Benedict. et plur. al.

[b] Lucian. in *Peregrin.* tom. ii. opp. p. 566. edit. Grævii. Cypriani *Epist.* ii. iv. p. 8, 9. If this statement of the fact be allowed to have its due weight, it must, I think, operate considerably towards placing the celebrated controversy respecting the number of martyrs in a proper light, and thus be highly instrumental in bringing it to a conclusion.

XXXIV. Foremost in the rank of those emperors, on whom the church looks back with horror as her persecutors, stands Nero, a prince whose conduct towards the Christians admits of no palliation, but was to the last degree unprincipled and inhuman. The dreadful persecution which took place by order of this tyrant, commenced at Rome about the middle of November, in the year of our Lord 64 [i]. As a pretext

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conclusion. That but few, comparatively speaking, suffered death for the cause of Christ was, as is well known, a favourite position with the famous Hen. Dodwell, a man eminent for his learning and extensive reading, but, as it should seem, headstrong, and apt to run into extremes. The arguments by which he endeavoured to establish it are to be found in the eleventh of his *Dissertationes Cyprianicæ*. This opinion has also been embraced by many other celebrated literary characters, though not on the same grounds. On the other hand, there are several authors who have entered the lists on the opposite side, strenuously and at much length maintaining that the number of the martyrs was very great. Of these, Theod. Ruinart may be considered as taking the lead, in his Preface to the *Acta Martyrum sincera et selecta*. By abating somewhat on either side of the question, we might probably arrive pretty near the truth. Were Dodwell's position to be so far modified, as to assert merely that the number of martyrs was considerably less than is commonly supposed, it must command the ready assent of every one who, in making up his mind on the subject, has not suffered his judgment to be misled by popular traditions and idle stories, such as for the most part constitute what are termed the Acts of the Martyrs, but formed his opinion from the evidence contained in monuments of indisputable credit. On the other hand, it should seem that the adversaries of Dodwell might be very well able to substantiate their argument, could they be prevailed on to reduce it simply to this, that the number of the martyrs was certainly much greater than Dodwell could ever be brought to allow.

[i] This has been clearly proved by Al. de Vignoles, in two dissertations *de Causa et Initio Persecutionis Neronianæ*, which are to be found in Masson's *Histoire critique de la*

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pretext for his cruelty, Nero did not, according to Tacitus [k], bring forward any accusation against the Christians on account of their religion, but imputed to them the commission of a most heinous crime against the public. For having himself, by way of sport, caused some houses to be set on fire, and thus kindled a conflagration, by which great part of the city of Rome was destroyed, he, in order to divert the tide of popular indignation from its proper channel, denounced the Christians as the authors of this public calamity, and displayed the utmost eagerness in directing against them all the vengeance of the state; putting them to death without mercy, and even making a jest of their torments. Amongst other horrible cruelties exercised on them by his command, they were wrapped in pitched garments, and, being fastened to stakes, were lighted up as torches to dispel the darkness of the night; their punishment being thus made to bear somewhat of an analogy to the crime whereof they were accused. According to some ancient authorities, both St. Peter and St. Paul suffered martyrdom under this first persecution; the former being crucified invertedly, the latter beheaded: but this has been much questioned by subsequent writers, who find a difficulty in reconciling it with chronology [l]. Of any of the other victims of Nero's cruelty no memorial is left us whatever; none even of their names having

Republique des Lettres, tom. viii. p. 74. 117. and tom. ix. p. 172. 186. See also Nicol. Toinard. *ad Laëtant. de Mortibus Persequutorum*, p. 398. ed. Du Fresnoy.

[k] *Annal.* lib. xv. cap. xxxviii.

[l] Tillemont. *Histoire des Empereurs*, tom. i. p. 564. Phil. Baratier, *de Successione Romanor. Pontificum*, cap. v. p. 60.

escaped

escaped the obliterating hand of time: for as to what is told us by the people of Milan, as well as those of Lucca, Pisa, Aquileia, Ravenna, and other cities of Italy and Spain, about their patron saints having been put to death under the Neronian persecution, it can obtain but little credit with any one of the least intelligence, since it stands altogether unsupported by any evidence of weight or authority. Clement of Alexandria says, that St. Peter's wife was slain before her husband [*m*]; but even this is by no means certain. This dreadful persecution ceased but with the death of Nero. The empire, it is well known, was not delivered from the tyranny of this monster until the year 68, when he put an end to his own life: it appears, therefore, that the Christians must, in this first instance, have been exposed to every species of insult and outrage, under sanction of the imperial authority, for a period of no less than four years.

XXXV. Ancient authors leave us in much doubt as to the extent of this persecution; so that we cannot well say whether Nero made it his object to extirpate the Christians from every part of the empire, or whether his severity was limited so as for it to fall merely by way of punishment on those who, from their residence at Rome, might be considered as immediately implicated in the crime of setting fire to the city. Hence it has arisen that although the learned in general favour the former opinion, yet we meet with several very eminent men who propend towards the latter. Those who will be at the pains to compare the arguments that are urged on both sides must at once perceive that there is no pos-

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[*m*] *Stromat.* lib. vii. p. 869. ed. Potter.

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bility of setting the question so completely at rest, as to leave no room for hesitation or doubt on the subject; since if the famous Spanish inscription, which there is every reason to consider as a forgery, be rejected, there is nothing like positive testimony to be brought forward by either party. The weight of probability, however, as well as of argument, is certainly in favour of the more common opinion of the two [n].

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[n] According to Lactantius, (*Institut. Divinar.* lib. v. cap. xi. p. 578. ed. Walch.) a collection of all the edicts, published by the different emperors against the Christians, was formerly got together by one Domitius, a celebrated Roman lawyer, and given to the public in a work of his, *de Officio Proconsulis*. If this book were now extant, it would throw considerable light on the general history of the afflictions and calamities to which the early Christians were exposed, and enable us at once to determine this question respecting the extent of the Neronian persecution. But since this work has been for a long time lost beyond the hope of recovery, we have no where now to seek for illustration as to many points, except in conjecture. The first writer that I know of, who took upon him to controvert the commonly received opinion respecting the persecution of the Christians by Nero, was that most eminently learned and ingenious civilian Franc. Balduin, who, in his *Comment. ad Edicta Imperatorum in Christianos*, p. 27, 28. edit. Gundling. maintains that no laws were enacted against the Christians before the time of Trajan; which, if it could be by any means ascertained for a fact, must at once place it beyond all doubt that Nero's severity was directed merely against the Christians of Rome. Next to him may be reckoned Jo. Launois, who, in the dissertation which he published in defence of a passage in Sulpitius Severus, respecting the first martyrs of Gaul, § i. p. 139, 140. tom. ii. p. i. opp. by way of supporting the opinion there given concerning the first introduction and progress of Christianity in that country, denies that the Neronian persecution extended itself to the provinces. Nearer to our own times, this opinion has been still more ably and at large defended by Hen. Dodwell, in the eleventh of his *Dissertationes Cyprianicæ*, § xiii. p. 59.; and many others, who have since exerted

XXXVI. The persecution of the Christians, which had ceased on the death of Nero, was, towards

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exerted themselves in purging ecclesiastical history of its fables and absurdities, have followed pretty nearly in the same path. Of all the arguments which the writers on this side of the question bring forward, the principal and most cogent one is that which they deduce from the cause which, it is acknowledged on all hands, gave rise to this persecution. Nero, say they, did not deliver over the Christians to punishment on account of their religion, but in consequence of the crime which he falsely imputed to them of setting fire to the city. But it could never be objected to those of the Christians who lived in distant provinces, and had no connection with Rome, that they had any share in an offence like this; and therefore it is most reasonable to conclude that the vengeance of the public was in no shape directed against them. As to any other reasons that have been adduced in support of this opinion, I feel no hesitation in saying that they are such as have but little weight or certainty in them, and are very easily to be refuted. And even in regard to that argument which I have just noticed as being the principal one that is brought forward on this side of the question, so far is it from appearing to me at all conclusive, that I rather think those on the opposite side might with equal propriety give a turn to it in their own favour. For it is incredible, they might urge, that the tyrant should permit the brethren and associates of men, who were the reputed authors of so great a calamity at Rome, to continue unmolested, though living at a distance. The public might very naturally feel apprehensive that the Christians in the different provinces were actuated by similar views, and meditated the same attempts as were imputed to those at Rome; and it was, therefore, no more than what the common safety appeared to demand, that the emperor should direct his severity generally against the whole body of those who professed a religion so dangerous and pregnant with destruction. The arguments of those who maintain that the Neronian persecution extended throughout the whole of the empire, possess greater force than those which are adduced on the opposite side; yet they are not so determinate, but that there are some exceptions which may very properly be taken to them. Lactantius, it is urged, says, that it was superstition, or a regard for the religion of his ancestors, which prompted Nero *ad excidendum caeleste templum*

C E N T. wards the end of the first century, revived by the
 I. emperor Domitian, who, taking, as it should
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plum profilire. But to this the advocates for the opposite opinion may well object, that surely, as to this point, more reliance is to be placed on the testimony of Tacitus, who was a more ancient writer than Lactantius, and doubtless by far better acquainted with Roman affairs than he could possibly be. And indeed this superiority in the testimony of Tacitus over that of Lactantius was long since contended for by Alphonf. de Vignoles, in an admirable dissertation, which is to be found in *Maflon's Histoire critique de la Republique des Lettres*, tom. ix. p. 172. An inscription is next brought forward, which it is pretended was found somewhere in Portugal or Spain, and of which a copy (after Schott and Metellus) is given by Gruter, in his *Inscription. Romanar. Corpus*, tom. i. p. ccxxxviii. n. 9. Its purport is to extol Nero, in the first place, on account of his freeing the province from robbers; and, in the next place, *ob eandem provinciam his qui novam generi humano superstitionem inculcabant purgata.* Now if this inscription had come to light through a channel that admitted of no suspicion, it must at once be received as a proof that Nero's persecution of the Christians extended itself to the provinces: for it is clear from a passage in Suetonius, (in *Nerone*, cap. xvi.) that *nova superstitio*, "the new or modern superstition," was the title by which the Romans were accustomed to refer to the Christian religion. But Scaliger and other great men after him have entertained considerable doubts as to the authenticity and authority of this monument, and, in my opinion, not without ample reason: for I may, without danger of contradiction from any, even of the most learned and intelligent of the Spanish writers themselves, state it for a fact that no Spaniard or Portuguese ever had the least glimpse of it. But had any thing like a genuine inscription of this nature ever been discovered, there can be no doubt that it would have been preserved with the utmost care, as a thing of the highest value and importance. I pass over the various other arguments on this side, which any one who may be inclined to examine them will find in the Preface to *Ruinart's Acta Martyrum sincera*, § iii. and will only, by way of conclusion, remark that in my opinion there is nothing which makes more strongly in favour of the general notion respecting the Neronian persecution, than the disputation of Tertullian with those who endeavoured to disguise

seem, the cruelty of the former for his model, began about the year 94 or 95 to afflict the church

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disguise their own malice towards the Christians under the cloak of the imperial edicts. For at the time when Tertullian wrote his *Apology*, that is, towards the end of the second century, and before the emperor Severus had enacted any new laws against the Christians, the Roman magistrates were accustomed to reply to any who might come forward on behalf of the Christians, that in this respect nothing was left to their discretion; for that however desirous they might feel to spare these unfortunate people, it was impossible for them to do so, since the laws were peremptory to the contrary. *Postremo*, says Tertullian, (in *Apologet.* cap. iv. p. 46. edit. Havercamp.) *legum obstruitur auctoritas adversus veritatem, ut aut nihil dicatur retrahendum esse post leges, aut ingratis necessitas obsequii preferatur veritati.* This pretence Tertullian attacks with great eloquence, and exposes its weakness and fallacy by various arguments, of which the following is not one of the least forcible -- Those laws to which ye refer, as not permitting you to suffer the Christians to exist, were enacted by princes whose cruelty, impiety, and mad fury, ye cannot but regard with detestation, namely, by those monsters of the human race the emperors Nero and Domitian. Their successors in the government of the empire have all been too deeply impressed with the sentiments of justice and benevolence, to follow their example. Trajan revoked these laws in part, and others have suffered them to fall altogether into neglect. Doth it become you then, I would ask, you to whom we are taught to look up as to men distinguished for wisdom and juridical sagacity, to keep alive and enforce laws which had for their authors the most unprincipled of morals? *Quales ergo leges istæ, quas adversus nos soli exequuntur (exequi is used by Tertullian in the same sense as ferre or sancire) impii, injusti, turpes, vani, dementes: quas Trajanus ex parte frustratus est, vetando inquiri Christianis: (the laws of Nero and Domitian must of course, therefore, have directed that the Christians should be prosecuted:)* *quas nullus Hadrianus, quanquam curiositatum omnium explorator, nullus Vespasianus, quanquam Judæorum debellator, nullus Pius, nullus Verus impressit.*—Now if this statement of Tertullian be deserving of credit, and there is certainly no reason whatever to suspect its accuracy, there can be no doubt but that Nero as well as Domitian promulgated edicts

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church of Christ afresh. As to the immediate cause of this second persecution, we have no express testimony on record: but if what Eusebius reports be true, (and his statement is, he tells us, grounded not only on ancient tradition, but also on the testimony of Hegesippus, an author of great antiquity,) namely, that Domitian had ordered every descendant of the House of David to be put to death; and that in consequence of this, the relations of Christ, who dwelt in Palestine, were called forward, in order that he might know who they were;—I say, if this may be depended on, we are certainly warranted in concluding that it was the apprehension of their being implicated in seditious conspiracies against his government that prompted this tyrant to aim at the extirpation of the Christians [o]. It was during

edicts against the Christians; and if such edicts were promulgated, not a question can remain of their having been carried into effect throughout all the provinces. There are some other things which might be pointed out, in addition to what I have thus noticed; but, to confess the truth, it appears to me that nothing of any moment would thereby be added to the evidence already adduced.

[o] Vid. Euseb. *Histor. Eccles.* lib. iii. cap. xix, xx. p. 89. In the account there given, I see nothing whatever that can be deemed difficult of belief. From beginning to end, it has all the appearance of a simple unvarnished narrative. The fact, therefore, seems to have been, that some one, an enemy alike both to the Jews and the Christians, had suggested to the emperor that the Jews looked daily for a king to arise from amongst the posterity of David, who should give law to the whole earth; that the Christians, in like manner, expected that Christ would soon return, and establish for himself a grand and extensive dominion; and that, consequently, both Christians and Jews were to be regarded with a jealous eye, as persons harbouring views dangerous to the state, and only awaiting their opportunity to break out into open revolt. Insidious whispers of this kind would naturally prompt the tyrant to order, as we are told

during this season of calamity to the church that St. John the apostle was banished to the island of Patmos, after having, as Tertullian and others report, come forth safe and uninjured from the midst of a cauldron of boiling oil, into which his enemies had caused him to be thrown [p]. The

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told he did, that all the posterity of David should be sought after, and put to death; and that measures should be taken to give an equally effectual blow to any designs which might be entertained against him by the Christians. The subject of the particular year in which this persecution commenced is learnedly discussed by Toinard, in his notes to Lactantius *de Mortibus Persequentorum*, p. 351. edit. Bauldrian.

[p] On this subject the reader may consult what I formerly wrote, in answer to the venerable Heuman, in the first volume of my *Dissertationes ad Hist. Ecclesiastic. pertinentes*, p. 497—546. I must confess that the account given by Tertullian, and after him by Jerome and others, of St. John's being thrown into a vessel of boiling oil, by command of Domitian, and of his miraculous deliverance therefrom, appears to me to admit of some doubt. What if, by way of solving the difficulty, we were to hazard a conjecture that the whole account might be nothing more than a figure made use of by some one or other, in order to convey a strong idea of the imminent peril to which St. John had been exposed,—and that Tertullian, instead of taking what was said in a metaphorical sense, understood it literally? To use figures or metaphors of this kind, when speaking of any one's life or fortune as having been exposed to considerable danger or hazard, is a practice to which all the people of the east are peculiarly prone: and we ourselves very commonly say of a man who has been saved from imminent peril of his life, that he was plucked from the fire or the flames. In this way some one, in allusion to the very narrow and unexpected escape which St. John had experienced, in having the punishment of death to which he had been sentenced commuted for that of banishment, might perhaps say that he had, beyond all hope, got safe out of the burning oil. By a person strongly disposed, as Tertullian certainly was, to catch at and magnify every thing which had the appearance of a miracle, an expression of this sort might very readily be misconceived, and, instead of being taken in a figurative sense, be understood literally.

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principal persons who are said to have suffered at this period were Flavius Clemens a consul, and Flavia Domitilla, who was either his niece or his wife. The former is stated to have been put to death, and the latter to have been commanded to withdraw into the island Pandataria. They were both of them related to the emperor [q].—It is admitted on all sides that this persecution was not of any long continuance. Ancient writers, however, are not agreed as to the authority by which it was put an end to: some of them representing Domitian himself as having retracted the orders he gave for persecuting the Christians; whilst others consider the revocation of them as the act of the senate, upon Domitian's death [r].

XXXVII. Amidst

[q] Euseb. *Histor. Eccles.* lib. iii. cap. viii. *et in Chronic.*
[r] According to Hegesippus, (*apud Euseb. Histor. Eccles.* lib. iii. cap. xx.) Domitian, on hearing that there were living in Palestine certain nephews of that Judas who was called the brother of Christ, descendants of the royal house of David, commanded them to be brought to Rome, and closely examined them as to their descent, the extent of their property, and the nature of their expectations in regard to the future reign of Christ. These good and pious men, he says, without hesitation, acknowledged to the emperor that they had sprung from the stock of David; but, at the same time, made it appear to him that their condition in life was humble, and that they were destitute of every thing like wealth; and, finally, they told him that the future kingdom of Christ was not expected to be of this world, but of heaven, and that it would not commence until the end of all things here below. Domitian, it is stated, having satisfied himself as to these points, and considering the men as objects unworthy to excite apprehension, dismissed them to their homes, and published an edict, forbidding any further persecution of the Christians in Palestine. In like manner Tertullian reports, (*Apologet.* cap. v. p. 61.) that Domitian, not being altogether deaf to the calls of humanity, at length relented of the violence
into

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XXXVII. Amidst all this distress and calamity, however, the Christian community had to exult in the most rapid extension of its limits; the labours of the apostles and of their companions and disciples being crowned with such success, that churches dedicated to Christ had by this time been established in nearly all the provinces of the empire. Since all these churches were constituted and formed after the model of that which was first planted at Jerusalem, a review of the constitution and regulations of this one church alone will enable us to form a tolerably accurate conception of the form and discipline of all these primitive Christian assemblies.—The Christians at Jerusalem, then, although they did not secede from the public worship of the Jews, were yet accustomed to hold additional solemn assemblies of their own, for the purposes of devotion, in which, agreeably to apostolic institution, they joined in offering up general prayers, and in commemorating the death and passion of

into which he had suffered himself to be betrayed, and liberated all those whom he had either sent into banishment or imprisoned. Lactantius, on the contrary, in his work *de Mortibus Persequutorum*, cap. iii. states it to have been subsequently to the death of Domitian that peace was once more restored to the church. Xiphilin also, in the *Life of Nerva*, says that it was this prince and not Domitian who called back those that had been sent into banishment for their *heresy*. Orosius and some other writers of inferior authority might, but that I deem it unnecessary, be quoted to the same purport. This difference of testimony will at once be accounted for, if it be permitted us to suppose that Domitian might, some short time before his murder, have published an edict forbidding any further persecution of the Christians; but that his assassination followed too quick on this for the Christians in general to experience any material relaxation of their sufferings until after his death.

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[s] Unless I am altogether deceived, a distinct enumeration of all the different branches of divine worship used in the church of Jerusalem, is given us by St. Luke in Acts, ii. 42. His words are, *ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεβῆντες*, (1.) *τῇ διδασκῆ τῶν ἀποστόλων*, (2.) *καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ*, (3.) *καὶ τῇ κλάσει τῶν ἄρτων*, (4.) *καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς*. "And they continued stedfast in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Now, with the exception of that only which is termed *κοινωνία*, *i. e.* "communion or fellowship," it will, I think, readily be allowed by every one that the account here given refers directly to the manner in which the brethren at Jerusalem occupied themselves in their religious assemblies. In regard to what is termed communion or fellowship, it is not impossible indeed but that some may hesitate; but it appears to me, that since we find it thus inserted amongst the acts of the church collectively, propriety demands that we should understand it in a sense that may accord with the nature and object of such an assembly. For if the term is to be considered as referring merely to the exercise of a daily private duty, I can see no reason whatever for its being thus introduced to our notice, amongst the different branches of the public worship. We may regard St. Luke, therefore, I conceive, as presenting us, in the above-cited passage, with a sketch of the manner in which the Christians at Jerusalem employed themselves, when they met together for the purpose of joining in the worship of God. In the first place, one or other of the apostles delivered a sermon or doctrinal discourse, for the instruction and edification of the people present. Next followed the communion. The word *κοινωνία*, "communion," is used in Scripture, as is well known, in an especial sense for liberality towards the poor. See Rom. xv. 26. 2 Cor. viii. 4. ix. 13. Heb. xiii. 16. The apostolic exhortation, therefore, being finished, the brethren who were present, it seems, came forward with gifts or offerings, which they consecrated to God for the relief of the poor and such as were in need. This custom of bringing with them to their solemn assemblies gifts or offerings for the use of the community in general, but more especially the poor, and publicly presenting them previously to the celebration of the Lord's supper, is of the highest antiquity amongst the Christians, and one which uniformly prevailed in all the churches;

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churches; and that this usage was founded on the practice of the original church at Jerusalem, will not admit of a doubt. The history of Ananias derives no inconsiderable degree of illustration from hence; whilst, on the other hand, the account which we have of that unfortunate man serves to throw light on the nature of the rite itself. The whole relation, as it is given by St. Luke in Acts, v. 1, et seq. tends, in my opinion, plainly to shew that Ananias made a tender of his offering to the apostles publicly in the face of the whole assembled church. From what is said in verse 2, we may certainly infer that when this transaction took place, the whole of the apostles were gathered together. But that the apostles were accustomed thus to meet together in one place, except it were in general assemblies of the church, is what, from its utter improbability, I am persuaded that no one will take upon him to assert. It should seem that a considerable number of other persons were likewise present; for, in verse 5, St. Luke says that great fear came on all who had heard what Peter said. Indeed, from verse 11, it may be collected that the affair took place in the presence of the whole, or at least a great part of the church. It appears that when these things happened, the apostles had near them *οἱ νεώτεροι*, certain "young men." Now I take it that these were not merely young men of the ordinary class, but ministers of the apostles and the church, through whom the apostolic mandates were communicated, and to whom it belonged, when the church assembled, to make the necessary arrangements, and provide the members of it with every requisite accommodation. For unless we understand these young men to have been of this description, I do not see how it can be accounted for that they alone should at once rise up, and taking up the dead bodies of Ananias and his wife, carry them out and bury them: but if we regard them as inferior ministers in the church, every difficulty is at once removed, and we see plainly the reason why, without waiting for any directions, they came forward of themselves and performed this melancholy duty. And that there must have been public ministers of this sort in the primitive church, no one who is apprised of its nature, and the form of the religious assemblies of the Christians of that age, can possibly entertain a doubt. Certain persons must ever have been necessary to perform such duties, as the keeping of the places

C E N T. certain, that the day of the week on which our
I. Saviour

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places of meeting clean and decent, arranging the tables and seats, handing and taking away the sacred volumes, providing the members, when celebrating the feasts of love, with every thing requisite, and clearing the tables at the end of these solemn repasts, with a variety of other things that might be enumerated. These particulars, I think it must be allowed, tend manifestly to shew that the attempt of Ananias to impose on the apostles was made in one of the solemn religious assemblies of the Christians at Jerusalem. It should seem, therefore, that the multitude being gathered together for the purposes of divine worship, and a sermon or instructive discourse having been addressed to them by St. Peter, or some other of the apostles, this wretched man, whose soul appears to have been at once the prey of avarice and ambition, coming forward with the rest, in order to give proof of his *κοινωνία*, “communion or fellowship,” advanced to the apostles, and laid at their feet a part of the money for which he had sold a portion of land, accompanying this donative with a declaration that, being touched with compassion for the brethren who were in need, he had disposed of his patrimony to a purchaser, and now begged thus to tender the whole of what it sold for as an offering towards their relief. St. Luke, indeed, who was studious of brevity, records no such speech as having been made by Ananias; but that the man must have come forward with a declaration somewhat to the above purport, is manifest from the terms in which St. Peter’s reproof to him is couched. For with what propriety could the apostle have upbraided him with the telling of a lie, unless he had openly professed that what he offered was the full price for which the land had been sold? Greedy of reputation and honour, Ananias would fain have passed himself on the apostles and the church as a man overflowing with love and charity towards the brethren; whereas his regard for them had nothing at all extraordinary in it. But although he could have entertained no doubt of the sacred nature of the apostles’ character, he was not aware of their possessing the faculty of divination. It is unnecessary for me to state what befel him, in consequence of his audacious duplicity. The corpse being removed, it is probable that one or other of the apostles took occasion, from what had happened, to address the congregation present in the way of admonition. The feast of love and celebration of the Lord’s supper
doubtless

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doubtless followed. About three hours having elapsed, and the time being nearly arrived for the dismissing of the assembly, the wife of Ananias came in, for the purpose, as I conceive, of partaking in those general prayers with which it was customary for the public service to be concluded. This woman having had the effrontery to re-assert the flagrant untruth which her husband had told, was like him, by an instantaneous visitation, deprived of life. As for the reasons which caused her to absent herself from the early part of the public service, although I am persuaded that it might be possible for me to assign such as would appear by no means unlikely ones, I shall not enter into them in this place, as my doing so would occasion me to digress too widely from the subject which we have at present more immediately under consideration. In these solemn assemblies of the Christians, the *κοινωνία*, or charitable contribution towards the relief of the necessitous, was followed, according to St. Luke, by the "breaking of bread." The expression "to break bread," when it occurs in the Acts of the Apostles, is for the most part to be understood as signifying the celebration of the Lord's supper, in which bread was broken and distributed: we are not, however, to consider it as exclusively referring to this ordinance of our Saviour, but as also implying that feast of love, of which it was the customary practice of the Christians, even from the very first, always at the same time to partake. That these two things were thus associated together, even in the very earliest infancy of Christianity, is clear from what is said by St. Luke in Acts, ii. 46. For after having there told us that the brethren at Jerusalem continued daily in the breaking of bread at different houses, he immediately adds, that they "did eat their food together with joy and simplicity of heart:" *μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι τῆς καρδίας*. See also Acts, xx. 11. where the breaking of bread, or the celebration of the Lord's supper, is again clearly associated with a feast or repast of the Christians. It appears, therefore, that when, in compliance with our Saviour's injunction, the Christians would break bread together, they also partook of a repast in the nature of a supper. Their meals of this sort were distinguished by an holy mirth, arising out of the love of Christ and of the brethren; but this hilarity had no connection whatever with any thing like sensuality or intemperance. And this is what I understand St. Luke to mean by that simplicity of

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apart for the holding of these solemn assemblies [t]. As to the place of these meetings, it should seem that at the first they were held in such of the private houses of the Christians as had room adequate to the accommodation of any thing like a considerable number of persons. When the church, however, came to consist of many thousands of people, so that it was utterly impossible for them to assemble with any degree

heart, with which he states the Christians to have eaten their food. For what are we to understand by a heart in a state of simplicity, but a heart altogether devoid of every sensual and depraved appetite? The service terminated with some general prayers, which appear to have been distinctly recited by one or other of the apostles or presbyters, and repeated by the whole congregation after him.

[t] It may, I think, unquestionably be taken for a fact, that the first day of the week, *i. e.* the day on which our blessed Saviour triumphantly burst the bonds of death, and arose from the grave, was expressly appointed by the apostles themselves, during their continuance at Jerusalem, for the holding of these general solemn assemblies of the Christians for the purposes of public worship. In Acts, xx. 7. we see the Christians of Troas assembling together on the first day after the Jewish Sabbath, in order to celebrate the Lord's supper and the feast of love, and St. Paul addressing them, when thus met, in a discourse of no inconsiderable length. For that by *μίαν τῶν σαββάτων*, the day on which this meeting is stated to have been held, was meant the day next immediately following the Jewish Sabbath, has been demonstrated by several learned writers so clearly as to leave no room for dispute. Now who, I would ask, can entertain a doubt but that the Christians of Troas, in dedicating this day to divine worship, were guided by apostolic authority, and the practice of the church at Jerusalem, which it is well known that all the other Christian assemblies took for their model? or, who can believe that the apostle Paul, intimately acquainted as he must have been with the discipline of the church at Jerusalem, would have sanctioned the appointment of any other day for the public worship than the one on which he knew that the rest of the apostles were accustomed to hold their solemn religious assemblies in that city?

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of convenience in one place, it is probable that the members distributed themselves into classes, or, as we should say in modern language, parishes, to each of which was assigned a separate place of meeting, for the purposes of divine worship [u]. The presidency or chief superintendance

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[u] If I may give myself credit for any discernment at all, I am sure I plainly discern this, that the vast multitude of persons converted by the apostles to Christianity at Jerusalem must have been distributed into several companies or classes, and that each company or class had its own proper presbyters and ministers, as also its separate place of meeting for the purposes of religious worship. For let any one, who may find a difficulty in believing this, figure to himself a church composed of eight or ten thousand persons, and then reflect whether such a multitude of people could possibly have assembled together in one place, with any degree of convenience or advantage to themselves;—to say nothing of the very imminent danger to which they would necessarily on such occasions have been exposed, in a city teeming with hostility to the disciples of Christ, and in which any meeting together whatever of the Christians was severely denounced. Could it have been possible, let him ask himself, for them to have joined in the celebration of the Lord's supper, and the feast of love connected with it, with any sort of order or convenience? The more he shall reflect on this, the more apparent must, in my opinion, the impossibility of the thing become to him. Now if it be granted that the church at Jerusalem must of necessity have been classed or divided into several minor assemblies, it follows of course that over each of these assemblies there must have presided certain persons in the character of presbyters, in order to regulate the concerns of the meeting, and see that all things were conducted with propriety and prudence. For a flock without shepherds is sure to wander out of the way, and take the very road which leads to the ruin of its own interests and welfare. These things then being admitted, it appears to me that, divesting the subject of such particulars as may evidently be referred either to the wisdom or the cupidity of much more recent times, the origin of what we term *parishes* may, with every sort of probability, be deduced from the arrangement and distribution of the primitive and parent church at Jerusalem. I do not know

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ance of the whole church rested with the apostles themselves. Next, under these, were certain men

whether I may go so far as to say that I have the authority of St. Luke expressly on my side, when he says, in Acts, ii. 46. and v. 42. that the Christians at Jerusalem assembled together, *κατ' οἶκον*, to break bread. The commentators in general conceive these words to indicate, that the Christians did not hold their meetings always in the same place, but sometimes in this house, sometimes in that, with a view to avoid, as far as possible, disturbance by the Jews. But for my own part, I cannot see any thing whatever that should prevent us from giving to the expression *κατ' οἶκον*, the meaning of *in diversis domibus*, “in different houses;” and understanding the apostle in the same sense as if he had expressed himself here as he has done in Acts, viii. 3. xx. 20. and written *κατὰ τὰς οἰκίας*, which is the same as *ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις*. Indeed this latter sense is by far more suitable to the words than the former one, since it is certain that the singular number is most frequently put for the plural. In the ancient Vulgate, we find the expression taken in this sense; the translator not altogether unaptly rendering the Greek words *κατ' οἶκον* by *circa domos*. Nor did it escape our countryman B. Luther, that this was the way in which they ought to be understood; and he well translates them, “*Hin und her in den haeusern.*” And it appears to me, that St. Luke is to be considered as speaking in allusion to these houses in which the brethren at Jerusalem were accustomed to assemble, when he states St. Paul, before his conversion, to have entered *κατὰ τὰς οἰκίας*, “into the houses,” and dragged away the Christians captive from thence. Acts, viii. 3. For I can by no means persuade myself, that Paul and his attendants burst into the private houses of the citizens of Jerusalem, and dragged away from thence any men and women whom he might suspect of being Christians. Is it to be believed that in Jerusalem, a city at that time under the dominion of the Romans, any man would have been permitted to violate at pleasure the rights of peaceable citizens, who had never been convicted of apostasy from the religion of their ancestors? I conceive, therefore, that the houses into which Paul thus entered were those in which the Christians were wont to hold their meetings, during the night season, for the purposes of divine worship; and that taking the opportunity, with the assistance of the servants of the high priest, to break in upon the brethren at the
time

men of approved faith and authority, who were distinguished by the Jewish appellation of presbyters or elders. They were no doubt appointed to their office by the apostles, with the consent of the people, and gave their counsel, voice, and assistance in the government of the church at large, or certain parts of it. A considerable portion of the members of this primitive church

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time of their being thus assembled, he laid hold of as many of them as were not able to make their escape, and put them in bonds, as offenders taken in the very act itself. The sentiments which I have thus been led to entertain respecting the partition or distribution of the church at Jerusalem, occasion me to regard what St. Luke says, in Acts, xv. of the assembly, or, to use a more familiar term, the council of that church, convened in order to decide on the controversy that had arisen at Antioch, in a light somewhat different from that in which it is commonly viewed. If merely the words of the divine historian are to be taken into the account, we must indeed unavoidably conclude, as every commentator whom I have had the opportunity hitherto of consulting has done, namely, that the whole multitude of Christians who dwelt at Jerusalem, met together and discussed the question proposed by the deputies of the church at Antioch. But if we bring this conclusion to the test of reason, the thing appears at once to be utterly incredible. For what house could there possibly have been in Jerusalem capable of containing such an immense number of persons? or, how could such a multitude have assembled together in one place, in a city swarming with enemies and informers, but under the greatest degree of dread, and at the utmost peril of their lives and every thing they might possess? I can, therefore, scarcely permit myself to doubt that this assembly or council consisted merely of the apostles and presbyters, and a certain number of select persons, to whom the church had delegated its power and authority; and that by *ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*, “the whole church,” which St. Luke states, at verse 22, to have assented to the proposal of St. James, we ought to understand merely a certain part of it, which had been invested with the power and authority of determining the proposed question.

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having to struggle with poverty and distress, their necessities were liberally supplied by the bounty of such of their brethren as were in better circumstances: indeed to such an extent did this spirit of charity prevail amongst the first Christians, that St. Luke represents them as having had all things in common [v]. The management and disposal of these contributions of the brethren, towards the relief of the necessitous, were at first entrusted to certain men selected by the apostles from amongst the Hebrews or indigenous Jews; but, it being complained of that these persons were guilty of partiality in the distribution of the alms, the church, by the direction of the apostles, appointed seven others from amongst the Greeks or foreigners, for the purpose of taking care that

[v] There is an ancient opinion, (it is not, however, older than the fourth century,) that the same community of goods existed amongst the members of the church at Jerusalem, as did of old amongst the Essenes, and does at present amongst the monks. But the notion is utterly destitute of any thing like a solid foundation, and has no other support than merely the words of St. Luke, who, in Acts, ii. 44. iv. 32. says that the Christians had all things in common:—words which, however they may at first strike the ear, can certainly never of themselves justify any such conclusion; since an abundance of examples might be brought from ancient authors to prove that we may with the greatest propriety annex to them a very different sense, and consider them as implying a communion merely of the *use*, not of *possession*. Indeed that such is the acceptation in which they ought to be taken, is manifest from the address of St. Peter to Ananias, (Acts, v. 4.) without recurring to other authority. The reader who may wish to pursue this subject further will find it more amply discussed in a particular treatise of mine, *de vera Natura Communionis Bonorum in Ecclesia Hierosolymitana*, which stands the first in the second volume of my *Dissertationes ad Historiam Ecclesiasticam pertinentes*.

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this branch of the church might for the future experience no similar kind of injury [w]. The power

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[w] Respecting these seven men, to whom the care of the poor was committed by the church of Jerusalem, I cannot say that my sentiments altogether correspond with those which it should seem are entertained by the generality of people. From the very first rise of the church at Jerusalem, there were without question certain persons whose office it was to take care of the poor: it is not possible that the church could have been without them. Had the apostles taken upon themselves the management and distribution of the alms, there can be no doubt but that they would have dispensed them religiously, and without the least partiality; nor would there have been any grounds afforded for those complaints of the foreign Jews against the natives, which gave rise to the appointment of the seven men. For who can possibly suppose that the apostles could have been either so inattentive or so regardless of their duty, as to give to the widows of Jews a preference to those of Greeks? In Acts, vi. 1. the Greeks or foreign Jews are not represented as murmuring against the apostles, on account of the improper distribution of the alms, but against the Hebrews or native Jews generally. It appears, therefore, (and it is a circumstance particularly necessary to be attended to,) that before those seven men were elected, there were certain persons at Jerusalem, appointed either, as is most likely, by the apostles alone, or otherwise by the suffrages of the people in general, to make distribution of the alms offered by the affluent for the relief of the necessitous: in short, there were deacons in point of fact, before there were any such by name. These ministers, however, having been selected from amongst the indigenious Jews, who in number far exceeded the foreign ones, it was found that they were not strictly impartial, but were apt to lean a little more than was right in favour of their fellow citizens, and those of their own country, and discovered a greater readiness in relieving the widows of native Jews than the others. The foreign Jews, whom St. Luke terms Greeks, being much dissatisfied at this, and murmuring greatly against the Hebrews on account thereof, the apostles convoked the members of the church, and commanded them to nominate seven men of approved faith and integrity, to whom the management of the concerns of the poor might without apprehension be committed. The people complied with these directions,

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directions, and chose by their suffrages the appointed number of men; six of them being Jews by birth, and one a proselyte, of the name of Nicolaus. They then brought them to the apostles, who consecrated them by prayer and the laying on them their hands. These seven deacons, as we commonly call them, were all of them chosen from amongst the foreign Jews. This I think is sufficiently evident, from the circumstance of their names being all of them Greek ones: for the Jews of Palestine were not accustomed to adopt names for their children from the Greek, but from the Hebrew or Syriac languages. These circumstances considered, I cannot by any means bring myself to believe that these seven men were entrusted with the care of the whole of the poor at Jerusalem. For can any one suppose that the Hebrews would have consented that the relief of their own widows and poor should be thus committed to the discretion of the Jews of the foreign class? The native Jews would, in this case, have been liable to experience the same injustice from the foreign brethren, as the latter had to complain of, whilst the alms were at the disposal of the Hebrews; and instead, therefore, of at once striking at the root of the evil which they proposed to cure, the apostles would, by such an arrangement, have merely applied to it a very uncertain kind of remedy. Besides, the indigenous Jews made no complaints against those who had hitherto managed the concerns of the poor; and consequently there could be no necessity for their dismissal from office. It appears to me, therefore, clear beyond a doubt that those seven men were not invested with the care of the poor in general, but were appointed merely as curators of the widows and poor of the foreigners or Greeks; and that the others continued under the guardianship of those who, prior to the appointment of the seven, were entrusted with the superintendance and discretionary relief of the whole.—Camp. Vitranga saw the matter evidently in this light, as is plain from his work *de Synagoga vetere*, lib. iii. part ii. cap. v. p. 928. In regard to what is urged in opposition to him by B. Just. Hen. Bohmer, *Diff. vii. Juris Eccles. antiqui*, § xxii. p. 378. it is of very little weight indeed. In fine, I do not see how it is possible for any one to be of a different opinion from that which I thus state myself to have formed on this subject, unless he maintain either that there were no persons whose office it was to take care of the poor

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poor in the church at Jerusalem, prior to the appointment of these seven men,—or that, upon the election of the latter, the primitive curators or guardians of the poor were dismissed as persons unworthy of being any longer continued in the trust. But of these two positions, the one is utterly destitute of every sort of probability, and the other implies a disregard of the dictates of equity and fraternal love. As to the reason which caused the number of these men to be fixed at seven, I conceive that it is to be found in the state of the church at Jerusalem, at the time of their appointment. The Christians in that city, it strikes me, were most likely divided into seven classes; the members of each of these divisions having a separate place of assembly. It was therefore deemed expedient, I take it, that seven curators should be appointed, in order that every division might be furnished with an officer or superintendant of its own, whose immediate duty it should be to take care that the widows and the poor of the foreigners should come in for an equitable share of the alms and benefactions, and to see that due relief was administered according to the necessities of the different individuals. It appears to me impossible for any one to assign any more probable reason for the adoption of this number, unless perhaps he should pretend to find some sacred or mystical qualities in it; but the futility of any conjecture of this sort would be manifest on the slightest scrutiny. I cannot, therefore, help considering it as a mark of great superstitious weakness in some of the ancient churches, that they should have given their sanction to such a notion as that there should, in no case, be more or less than seven deacons appointed, lest the apostolic rule in this respect,—a rule which cannot be shewn to exist anywhere but in fancy, should be broken through or infringed: and I think that those had much more reason on their side who confined themselves to no particular number, but appointed as many deacons as the state and condition of the church appeared to require. But it is not impossible that the authority of St. Luke may be brought forward against me on this occasion, and I shall perhaps be told that he represents the whole church of Jerusalem as having been convened by the apostles, and the whole church as joining in the election of the seven men, (Acts, vi. 2. 5.); and that from hence it should seem reasonable to conclude that the tutelary powers with which these men were invested related

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not merely to a particular branch of the people, but to the multitude at large: for if the Greeks were alone to be benefited by their labours, the Greeks alone would have been the proper persons to make the appointment. But I cannot say that I perceive much force in this objection.—For not to notice that in many parts of Scripture the whole of a thing is mentioned, when only a part thereof is meant to be understood, it is evident that equity, no less than the critical situation of the church in those times, most urgently demanded that the Hebrews should not be excluded from being present at, and taking a part in, the whole of this transaction. For the Hebrews contributed in no less a degree than the Greeks towards the support of the fund, from whence the relief for the poor was drawn; and a separation pregnant with the greatest danger at that period might well have been apprehended, had the Greeks been ordered to treat of their concerns separately, and a set of public ministers been appointed, without the Hebrews being called to take a share in their election. That St. Luke does not absolutely give us this statement of the matter is a circumstance of no consequence whatever; since we know that the sacred penman contented himself with shortly touching on the leading points of the early history of the church, and left to his readers a very ample scope for filling up and perfecting, by means of meditation and conjecture, what they might thus receive from him under the form of a sketch or merely in outline. Entertaining then these sentiments on the subject, I cannot but feel myself compelled to withhold my assent from many things which, in later times, have been contended for by several persons of no small weight and erudition, respecting these deacons of the church at Jerusalem. For the most part they maintain, that it was not a function of the ordinary kind with which these seven men were invested, but one of an extraordinary nature; that their office was not one which was common to the church in general, but exclusively appropriate to the church at Jerusalem; and that the deacons, therefore, of whom St. Paul in his epistles makes mention, must have been of a different order from those of Jerusalem. In support of this opinion they adduce the following reasons: 1st, It is urged that the appointment of the seven men at Jerusalem was rendered necessary by the communion of goods which prevailed in the church of that city; but that

apostles, although invested with divine authority, either

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this kind of communion being unknown in the other Christian churches, there could be no occasion for their appointing any officers of a similar kind. But this reason, inasmuch as it is founded entirely on the ancient erroneous notion respecting the nature of the communion of goods in the church at Jerusalem, which may now, I think, be considered as wholly exploded, falls at once of itself to the ground. There was unquestionably the same community of goods in all the other early churches as in that of Jerusalem; and I have no hesitation in saying that whoever may have entertained the notion, that the individual possession or ownership of things was given up and renounced by the members of the church of that city, has suffered himself to be grossly imposed upon by monkish artifice. It is moreover most clearly manifest from St. Luke's account of the affair, that it was not a communion of goods which occasioned the appointment of these seven men, but the desire of preventing for the future any partiality in the administration of relief to the necessitous. Had no such tendency to partiality found its way into the church at Jerusalem, a community of goods, even supposing it to have been adopted there, might have been very well regulated and administered without the superintendance of any such officers as these seven men.

2dly, They say that the deacons of whom St. Paul makes mention in his epistles, and still more particularly those who in after-ages discharged the functions of deacons in the church, had not the care of the poor committed to them, but were occupied in duties of another nature; and that, therefore, they must have been of an order altogether different from the seven men in the church of Jerusalem. But the insufficiency of this reason also may, I think, be made appear without much difficulty. For if it were true, as these learned persons assert it to be, that neither the deacons alluded to by St. Paul, nor those of after-ages, were entrusted with the care of the poor, it still would not amount to a proof that these deacons did not derive their origin from the appointment of the seven men in the church of Jerusalem. An abundance of instances might easily be brought forward, to prove that the titles of offices are frequently retained without the least alteration, although the duties attached to those offices may, from various causes, have gradually undergone a change. But in my opinion the fact was not such in reality, as it is thus assumed to have been :

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for although it is true that the deacons of after-times had other duties assigned them to fulfil, yet in none of the churches were they altogether removed from the management and superintendance of the relief of the poor. As the riches of the church increased, the bishops contrived by degrees to draw into their own hands the more honourable and lucrative part of the charge; but as to such branches of it as had any thing of trouble or inconvenience connected with them, they willingly left them under the superintendance and management of the deacons. Amongst the Latins, the churches from whence the poor, the strangers, the widows, the old people, and the orphans, had the alms dealt out to them, and adjoining to which were houses or apartments in which the poor were maintained, were always of old denominated *diaconia*, (indeed the term is not even yet become obsolete,) and the persons who had the care of such churches and houses were always taken from the order of deacons. Vid. Lud. Anton. Muratori *Antiquitates Italicae medii Ævi*, tom. iii. p. 571, et seq. Du Cange in *Glossar. Latin. med. Ævi voc. Diaconia, Diaconites, Diaconus*. At Rome, even down to our own times, we see the cardinal deacons, as they are called, have the care of churches of this kind, from the revenues of which the poor are furnished with subsistence, and to which there are attached certain houses for refectory, and what are termed hospitals. Add to this, that all the ancient churches were unanimous in referring back the origin of their deacons to the church of Jerusalem; and on this account the greater part of them, as is well known, would never consent that the number of them should be more than seven. But why should I multiply words? There must have been, as I have already shewn, certain persons who acted as curators or guardians of the poor at Jerusalem, prior to the appointment of those seven men to that office; nor could any church in that early age, when it was most religiously provided that no brother or sister should want, in fact be without such. The thing speaks for itself; and with such an obstacle in his way, I conceive that scarcely any one will find it an easy matter to persuade himself that the function with which those seven men were invested was of an extraordinary nature, or that it ought to be regarded as having been by any means exclusively appropriate to the situation and circumstances of the church of Jerusalem. In saying this,

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this, however, I would be understood as disposed most readily to admit, that this office was not of divine origin, or instituted by our Saviour himself: for St. Paul, in enumerating the offices that were of divine institution in the Christian church, 1 Cor. xii. 28. Ephes. iv. 11. makes no mention whatever of deacons, although in other places he points out what manner of persons it was fitting that they should be: a circumstance that I could wish to press on the attention of those who contend that Christ himself instituted the three orders of bishops, priests, and deacons; and that, therefore, such churches as have no deacons are to be regarded as defective in their constitution. Just. Hen. Boehmer, an eminent and deservedly illustrious lawyer of our own times, has started a conjecture that the seven men above alluded to were presbyters of the church of Jerusalem. This notion he appears to have espoused, with a view to its yielding him assistance in proving that our modern spiritual teachers possess nothing in common with the presbyters of the primitive church, and that no distinctions were ever introduced by Christ and his apostles amongst either the teachers or the people. *Dissert. Juris Eccles. antiqui*, diss. vii. § xx. p. 373, et seq. Long before this, Bilson bishop of Winchester, had endeavoured to establish a point, which, could it be ascertained for a fact, would strongly support the opinion of Boehmer, namely, that under the denomination of presbyters, in the books of the New Testament, deacons are also included. See his work *on the perpetual Government of Christ's Church*, cap. x. p. 179, 180. Lond. 1611, in 4to. But amongst all the different passages which he cites in order to prove this, there is not a single one that can be said to yield him even a moderate degree of support. Dr. Gilbert Burnet, another English bishop, and one who has obtained for himself a most distinguished rank amongst the writers of our own age, appears disposed to place the seven men in question on a level nearly with the apostles themselves. The deacons of whom St. Paul makes mention, and for whom his instructions were designed, this prelate will not allow to have been either inferior ministers of the church, or curators of the poor, but contends that they were presbyters. See his *History of the Rights of Princes in the disposing of Ecclesiastical Benefices*, Pref. p. xiv, et seq. The reader will perceive that in this opinion also there is something nearly allied to that of Boehmer. But it is evident that all these learned writers, as well as others, who reject the ancient

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general body of Christians, of which the church was composed [x].

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[x] There can be no doubt but that the apostles might have filled up a vacancy in their own number, without any reference to the multitude: yet we find them convoking the general body of Christians to take a share in this matter. When the seven men were to be appointed, the whole affair was, we see, submitted by the apostles to the judgment of the church at large. When a question arose at Antioch respecting the authority of the law of Moses, (Acts, xv.) the apostles, inasmuch as they were constituted by Christ himself expounders of the divine will, might with the greatest reason have taken the cognizance and determination thereof to themselves; yet we find them here again convoking and taking council with the whole church. I conceive it to be unnecessary, or otherwise it would be easy to point out several passages in St. Paul's epistles, which lead to the same inference with the above.

notion respecting the seven men appointed by the church of Jerusalem, and endeavour to impose on us a new one of their own in its stead, do so merely with a view to the support of other opinions, which it is their object to establish. Thus Boehmer, by converting the deacons of old into presbyters, would prove that our modern spiritual teachers bear no resemblance whatever to the presbyters of the primitive church. Bilson, a defender of episcopacy, found himself opposed by what St. Paul says in 1 Tim. v. 17.; and from which passage it has been usual to infer that it did not belong to all the presbyters of the primitive church to teach, but that some were appointed to see to its well ordering and government; and in conformity to this, we see the presbyterians, as they are called, in addition to their teaching presbyters, appoint others whom they term ruling or governing presbyters. But the episcopalians will not admit of any such presbyters as those of the latter kind; and therefore, by way of obviating the force of the passage above referred to, Bilson maintains, though without the least foundation, that by the term presbyters we ought in this place to understand St. Paul as meaning not only presbyters but deacons, and that those presbyters amongst the ancient Christians who did not preach were none other but deacons. With a view to give some degree of colour and authority to this hasty and ill-founded opinion, he contends that the term presbyter was commonly

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commonly applied of old both to presbyters or teachers and to deacons. The object of Burnet was to drive the presbyterians from another ground, on which they were wont to assail episcopacy. The presbyterians, it is well known, assert that in the books of the New Testament mention is made of no more than two classes of the sacred order, viz. those of presbyters and deacons; and hence they maintain, that in the apostolic church the degree of bishops, according to the modern sense of the term, was altogether unknown. Burnet, by way of rendering their plan of attack on this ground ineffectual, would willingly persuade us that by the term presbyters, in the writings of the New Testament, are meant bishops in the modern sense of the word; and that the persons whom we therein find styled deacons, were of the same degree as those to whom in after-times the title of presbyters was given. From these examples it is plain that to such an extent may the spirit of party, and a desire to vindicate a favourite hypothesis prevail, that even the wisest men shall not be proof against their deception, but become the advocates of opinions that have no authority or probability whatever to support them. What Billou has advanced, I regard as utterly unworthy of any thing like a serious refutation; for I will take upon me to affirm that, unless it be by the assistance of perversion and wrong interpretation, there is not a single passage in the New Testament to be produced in his favour. Burnet, which is much to be wondered at in a man of his penetration and sagacity, did not perceive that the opinion which he wished to inculcate, with a view to support episcopacy, was in fact calculated to make directly against it. For let us suppose for a moment, that in those passages where the term presbyter occurs we ought to understand it in the sense of bishop according to modern acceptance, and that where deacons are spoken of we should consider presbyters as meant, and the conclusion unavoidably must be, that the first churches had each of them several such bishops: a conclusion which, if supported by just premises, would of necessity derogate most materially from the dignity and authority of the episcopal character. In Acts, xx. 17. we find St. Paul calling to him the presbyters or elders of the church of Ephesus. According to bishop Burnet, then, the church of Ephesus had not merely one, but several bishops. St. James ad-

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by
 monishes the sick to call for τὰς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας, “ the presbyters or elders of the church.” Trusting to the same authority, therefore, we must conclude that each individual church had a number of bishops belonging to it. St. Paul directs Titus, whom he had left in Crete, to ordain presbyters or elders in every city. Tit. i. 5. Conformably then to the exposition of the above mentioned learned prelate, we must understand this as meaning that a variety of bishops were to be appointed in every city. But will any bishop, let me ask, endure to hear of this? I intentionally pass over some other arguments which would prove this notion to be altogether groundless, since I should consider it a waste of time to combat, at greater length, a proposition, in which I cannot perceive even a shadow of probability. If the opinion of Boehmer be adopted, *viz.* that the seven men appointed by the church of Jerusalem were presbyters, it must necessarily be admitted that the presbyters ordained by the apostles themselves, or by their direction, in the various other churches, were altogether of a different order from those of Jerusalem: for it is clear beyond a question, from what is said in St. Paul’s epistles concerning presbyters, that those there spoken of had nothing to do with the relief of the poor, or the distribution of the alms, but were solely occupied in instructing the brethren and governing the church. To refer but to one passage out of many, for they are all in substance the same, consult the picture of a presbyter or bishop, as it is given in 1 Tim. iii. 1. But that the functions of the presbyters of the church of Jerusalem should have differed in so material a point as this from those of the presbyters of any other church, (the church of Ephesus for example, whose presbyters are directed by St. Paul, Acts, xx. 28. to occupy themselves in feeding the church of God, and warding off from it all noxious errors,) is so incredible and contradictory to every kind of probability, that I cannot believe it possible for any one possessed of even a common degree of erudition to be so far imposed on as to receive it for the fact. Indeed, when I consider the arguments by which this illustrious jurist has endeavoured to establish his opinion, I cannot help suspecting that they could never have wrought in a mind of such intelligence as his, that conviction which he would willingly have had them produce in the minds of other

by the apostles themselves, or their companions, with the assent of the multitude, to preside over it,

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other people. The arguments to which I allude are two. The first of them is drawn from the silence of St. Luke. This inspired writer, it is urged, makes no mention whatever of any election of presbyters in the church of Jerusalem; and therefore we must regard these seven men as having been the presbyters of that church. But surely it cannot be possible that any one should be so ignorant as not to know, that there are several things of no small moment passed over by St. Luke without the least notice: and with regard to his silence respecting the election of presbyters in the church of Jerusalem, I account for it by supposing that their first appointment was coëval with the establishment of the church itself. And in this place, I must beg once more to direct the reader's attention towards those νεώτεροι or νεανίσκοι, "young men," who carried forth the dead body of Ananias, Acts, vi. 6. 10. and whom I have above shewn to have been public ministers of the church. For unless I am much deceived, the title thus given to them is of itself a proof that there were others at that time belonging to the church who were termed πρεσβύτεροι, "elders;" and if I am right in this, it is manifest that, besides the apostles, there were presbyters in the church of Jerusalem some time before the appointment of the seven men took place. And that such must have been the fact will appear still more certain, if we consider how utterly incredible it is that a church so vastly numerous as that of Jerusalem was, and divided as it must have been of necessity into various minor assemblies, to each of which a separate place of meeting was assigned, could by any means have dispensed with the want of a set of men of this description. As for those that are termed "the young men," I have little or no doubt but that they were the deacons, to whom the care of the poor was committed by the apostles before the election of the seven men; other duties, however, being then, in like manner as in after-times, annexed to their office. Let us now examine what force there may be in the second argument adduced by this eminent civilian, and to which he attributes a considerable degree of weight. It is clearly manifest, says he, from Acts, xi. 29, 30. that the presbyters or elders of the church of Jerusalem had the management of the concerns of the poor; and therefore these presbyters could have been none others than those seven men, to whom the care of the poor

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was committed. On this argument he expatiates at great length, for the purpose principally of shewing that, in addition to their other duties, it also belonged to the presbyters of the church, in the second, third, and fourth centuries, to take care that the necessities of the poor were relieved. But as no one ever entertained a doubt of this, I shall merely inquire whether what is said in Acts, xi. 29, 30. will justify the inference which this very learned writer would draw from it. The Christians of Antioch, we are there told, being given to understand that many of the brethren belonging to the church of Jerusalem were in want, determined to send relief unto them by the hands of Paul and Barnabas. These contributions are stated to have been sent to the presbyters or elders; and hence this learned author concludes that the presbyters were those seven men who had been elected curators or guardians of the poor. But in this conclusion of his there are confounded together two things altogether distinct, *viz.* the custody or care of the charitable fund in the aggregate, and the daily distribution of what might be necessary for the relief of the different individuals in distress. That the seven men were never entrusted with the first of these, must be evident to any one who will attentively read the history of their appointment. It was the latter, or the daily distribution of relief to the necessitous, which was committed to their management. The Christians of Antioch, therefore, judged rightly in sending their contributions, not to the deacons, but to the presbyters or elders. The only inference, then, that can properly be drawn from this passage is, that in consequence of the disturbance which had arisen in the church of Jerusalem, respecting the improper distinction that was made in administering relief to the poor, the apostles, by way of preventing, for the future, even a shadow of suspicion from lighting on themselves, came to the resolution of having nothing more to do with the custody of the poor's fund, but transferred the keeping thereof to the presbyters or elders. Before these dissensions took place, it was the practice to lay whatever might be designed for the relief of the poor, at the apostles' feet, during one or other of the solemn assemblies of the brethren. At that time, therefore, the poor's fund was at the disposal of the apostles; and certain persons of the Hebrew nation were entrusted by
 them

dence of old age, rather than age itself, in those who bore it; the latter had an allusion to the nature of the function wherewith they were charged [y]. Of these presbyters it is a commonly received opinion, (founded on the words of St. Paul, 1 Tim. v. 17.) that a part only took upon them to instruct the people, and deliver exhortations to them in their solemn assemblies, after the manner of the apostles; and that such of them as had not either received from nature, or acquired by means of art, the qualifications requisite for this, applied themselves to promote the prosperity and general interests of the church in some other way [z]. But since St. Paul requires

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them with the distribution of relief to those who were in want, according to their necessities. The integrity of these inferior ministers, however, having been called in question, the apostles recommended that the foreigners should elect certain curators or guardians for the poor of their own class; and declining to have any thing further to do with the pecuniary concerns of the church, directed that the custody of the contributions for the relief of the necessitous should thenceforward be committed to the presbyters.

[y] That the terms *bishops* and *presbyters* are applied promiscuously, as synonymous in the books of the New Testament, is most clearly manifest from Acts, xx. 17. 28. Philipp. i. 1. Tit. i. 5. 7. With regard to the term *presbyter*, the reader will find its force and use well illustrated by Camp. Vitringa, in his work *de Synagog. veter.* lib. iii. part i. cap. i. p. 609. ; and also by that eminently learned theologian and ornament of his country, Jo. Bened. Carpovius, in his *Exercitationes in Epist. ad Hebr. ex Philon.* p. 499.

[z] Acceding, as I readily do, to the commonly received interpretation of St. Paul's words, 1 Tim. v. 17. and feeling not at all inclined to controvert the opinion of those who, chiefly on the strength of this passage, maintain that in the infancy of Christianity it was not the province of every presbyter to teach; I yet must own, that without some further support than what is afforded to it by these words of the apostle, the distinction between teaching and

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quires in exprefs terms that a presbyter or bishop should possess the faculty of teaching, it is scarcely

ruling presbyters does not appear to me to be in every respect so well established as to be placed beyond the reach of doubt. In no part whatever, I believe, of the New Testament is the verb *κοπιῶ* made use of, either absolutely or conjoined with the words *ἐν χειρῶ* or *ἐν λόγῳ*, to express the ordinary labour of teaching and instructing the people. But I observe that St. Paul, in various places, applies this verb, and also the noun *κόπος*, sometimes separately, and at other times connected with certain other words, in an especial sense to that kind of labour which he and other holy persons encountered in propagating the light of the gospel, and bringing over the Jews and heathens to a faith in Christ. In Rom. xvi. 12. (to pass over what is said in verse 6. of one Mary) the apostle describes Tryphæna and Tryphosa as labouring in the Lord; and Persis, another woman, as having laboured much in the Lord, or, which is the same thing, for the sake of, or in the cause of the Lord. Now what interpretation can be given to this, unless it be that these women had assiduously employed themselves in adding to the Lord's flock, and in initiating persons of their own sex in the principles of Christianity? The word appears to me to have the same sense in 1 Cor. iv. 12. where St. Paul says of himself, *καὶ κοπιῶμεν, ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσὶ*, "and we labour, working with our own hands." By labouring, I here understand him to have meant labouring in the Lord, or for Christ; and the sense of the passage appears to me to be,—“although we labour for Christ, and devote our life to the spreading the light of his gospel amongst mankind, we yet derive therefrom no worldly gain, but procure whatever may be necessary to our subsistence by the diligence of our hands.” And when in the same epistle, 1 Cor. xv. 10. he declares himself to have laboured more abundantly than all the rest of the apostles, *περισσότερον αὐτῶν πάντων ἐκοπίασα*; his meaning unquestionably is, that he had made more converts to Christianity than they. It would be easy to adduce other passages, in which by labouring, whether it occur absolutely or in connection with some explanatory addition, is evidently meant not the ordinary instruction of the Christians, but the propagating of the gospel amongst those who were as yet ignorant of the true religion; but I conceive that the citations which I have already made will be deemed sufficient. We see, therefore,

scarcely possible, or rather it is impossible, to entertain a doubt, but that this distinction between teaching

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fore, that it might not without some shew of reason and authority be contended that by *πρεσβυτέρως κοπιῶντας ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλία*, “the elders who labour in the word and doctrine,” are to be understood such of the presbyters as were intent on enlarging the church, and occupied themselves in converting the Jews and heathens from their errors, and bringing them into the fold of their divine Master,—and not those whose exertions were limited to the instructing and admonishing of the members of the church, when assembled for the purpose of divine worship. No one can doubt but that amongst the elders to whom the care of the churches was committed, there must have been many whose holy zeal carried them beyond the limits of that particular assembly over which they presided, and urged them to use every endeavour for the propagation of the gospel amongst their benighted neighbours; and nothing could be more natural than for such to be pointed out as more especially deserving of an higher reward, and worthy to be held in greater esteem than the rest. This interpretation appears to me to receive no inconsiderable confirmation, when I compare the passage in question with another of a similar nature in St. Paul’s epistle to the Theſſalonians: *Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀδελφοὶ ἐπιγῆναι τῆς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ προϊσαμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ, καὶ ναδιετηντας ὑμᾶς*, “and we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.” 1 Theſſ. v. 12. Now nothing, I think, can be more manifest than that the apostle, in this place, alludes to the maintaining and honouring of the presbyters or elders. I have not the least idea of any one’s denying it. Apparently he distinguishes them into three classes, *viz.* 1. *κοπιῶντας*, those who laboured; 2. *προϊσαμένους*, those who ruled or presided; and, 3. *ναδιετηντας*, those who taught or admonished. But it is not so much to this point that I would wish to direct the reader’s attention, as to the circumstance that *τον κοπον*, “the labour” of the ministers of the church is here clearly spoken of by the apostle as a thing distinct from *ναδιεσία*, “admonition or exhortation:” from whence it may naturally be inferred that the presbyters who are said by him to labour were different from those who instructed the members of the church, when assembled, in the nature of their faith and duties, or, in other words, “admonished them.” The verb *κοπιῶ* is here put absolutely;

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teaching and ruling presbyters was after a short time laid aside, and none subsequently elected to that office but such as were qualified to admonish and instruct the brethren. The number of these elders was not the same in every place, but accommodated to the circumstances and extent of the church. The endowments which it was requisite that a presbyter should possess, and the virtues which ought to adorn his character, are particularly pointed out by St. Paul in 1 Tim. iii. 1. and Tit. i. 5.; and it cannot be questioned that his injunctions on this subject were strictly adhered to, in those early golden days of the church, when every thing belonging to it was characterized by an ingenuous and beautiful simplicity. It must, however, I conceive, be so obvious to every one as scarcely to need pointing out, that in the requisite qualifications thus specified by the apostle, there are several things which apply exclusively to those times, when Christianity had scarcely established a footing for

absolutely; but there can be no doubt but that we ought to understand the words *ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ*, as in 1 Tim. v. 17. or *ἐν κυρίῳ*, as in Rom. xvi. 12. as annexed to it. Indeed it does not appear to be altogether necessary that we should call in any further aid than is afforded by the passage itself, for determining the force of the word in this place: for probably the generality of people will be disposed to consider the words *ἐν κυρίῳ* as common to all the three members of the sentence, and as having, notwithstanding their immediate connection with *προϊσαμένους*, a reference likewise to the terms *κοπιῶντας* and *νεδιτῶντας*. In my opinion, therefore, the apostle, in the passage before us, is to be understood as addressing the Thessalonians thus: "I earnestly intreat you to take care that your presbyters be liberally supplied with every necessary; first of all, those who labour among you with all their might to propagate the faith of Christ, and augment his flock;—and, in the next place, those who govern the church, and admonish and instruct you by their voice and example."

itself

itself in the world, and the state of manners was far different from what it is at the present day.

XXXIX. That the presbyters of the primitive church of Jerusalem were elected by the suffrages of the people cannot, I think, well be doubted of by any one who shall have duly considered the prudence and moderation discovered by the apostles, in filling up the vacancy in their own number, and in appointing curators or guardians for the poor. This power of appointing their elders, continued to be exercised by the members of the church at large, as long as primitive manners were retained entire, and those who ruled over the churches did not conceive themselves at liberty to introduce any deviation from the apostolic model [a]. The form of proceeding in this matter was unquestionably the same in the first age as we find it to have been in the second and third centuries. When at any time the state of the church required that a new presbyter should be appointed, the collective body of elders recommended to the assembly of the people one or more persons, (in general selected from amongst the deacons,) as fit to fill that office. To this recommendation the people were constrained to pay no further respect than it might appear to them to deserve [b]. Indeed it is placed beyond a doubt,

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[a] What St. Paul says, Tit. i. 5. of his having left Titus in Crete, for the purpose of ordaining presbyters in the churches there, militates in no respect against the above statement. In executing the commission with which he was entrusted, Titus might, and doubtless did, consult the wishes of the people, and not appoint any to the office of presbyter but such as he found were approved of by them.

[b] It is plain from hence, that what we term the right of presentation, (except in as far as it is at present compulsory,) has nothing in it repugnant to the practice of the church

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a doubt, that the multitude, so far from always adopting the candidates proposed by the presbyters, were accustomed not unfrequently to assert the right of judging wholly for themselves, and to require that this or that particular person, whom they held in higher esteem than the rest,

church in the earliest times. Our Saviour's apostles, we see, exercised a right of this kind, when it became necessary to fill up the vacancy in their own number, occasioned by the fall of Judas; and in after-ages, until the right of patronage, as it is called, found its way into the church, a similar right of presentation was uniformly recognised as belonging to the bishops and collective bodies of presbyters. Nor will any one, it is presumed, take exception to this, who shall reflect that, the generality of the individuals constituting the church of Christ are of necessity incapable of estimating the extent of a man's endowments, or of judging how far one may excel another in the qualifications requisite for teaching, and are apt rather to follow the bent of their own wayward humours and prejudices than to listen to the voice of reason and prudence; and how expedient and requisite, therefore, it is, that when a bishop or presbyter is about to be elected, certain persons of discretion and experience should be commissioned to point out to the multitude one or more fit objects for their choice. I pass over the extreme difficulty which is for the most part experienced, even in small assemblies, in conducting an election with any degree of harmony or order, where there are a number of rival candidates for a vacant place, unless there be some one appointed to officiate as superintendant or moderator. For the multitude, if left entirely to itself on such an occasion, is sure to have its proceedings distracted by a conflict of discordant interests and opinions. It must be observed, however, that prior to the age of Constantine the Great, notwithstanding this right of presentation, the most perfect freedom of choice still resided with the people; the multitude being at liberty to reject the persons thus recommended to them, without assigning any reason for their so doing, and either to fix on others for themselves, or else demand that fresh candidates should be proposed to them by the bishop or presbyters. In this respect the right of presentation, as it is now exercised, differs very materially from that which was recognised in the primitive church.

should

should be advanced to the office of an elder. When the voice of the multitude, in the election of any one to the sacred ministry, was unanimous, it was considered in the light of a divine call. In compliance with the express commands of our Lord himself and his apostles, these teachers and ministers of the church were, from the first, maintained and supplied with every necessary by the people for whose edification they laboured [c]; a certain portion of the voluntary offerings, or oblations as they were termed, being allotted to their use. It will easily be conceived that whilst the churches were but small, and composed chiefly of persons of the lower or middling classes, the provision thus made for the support of the presbyters and deacons could not be very considerable.

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XL. By far the greater part of those who embraced the Christian religion in this its infancy being of mean extraction, and wholly illiterate, it could not otherwise happen but that a great scarcity should be experienced in the churches of persons possessing the qualifications requisite for initiating the ignorant, and communicating instruction to them with a due degree of readiness and skill. It pleased God, therefore, to raise up in every direction certain individuals, and, by irradiating their minds with a more than ordinary measure of his holy Spirit, to render them fit instruments for making known his words to the people, and imparting instruction to them, in their public assemblies, on matters relating to religion. These are they who, in the writings of

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[c] 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14. 1 Tim. v. 17. Gal. vi. 6.
2 Thess. v. 12, 13.

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the New Testament, are styled prophets [d]. Whoever professed himself to be under the influence of a divine inspiration, and claimed attention as an extraordinary interpreter of the will of God, had permission granted him to speak in public: for, without hearing him, it was impossible for any one to say whether his pretensions to inspiration were or were not well founded. When once he had spoken, however, all uncertainty with regard to his commission was at an end; for there were in the churches persons instructed of God, who could discern by infallible signs between a true prophet and one who falsely

[d] It appears to me that the function of these prophets, as they are styled, is too much narrowed by those who would have us believe that they were merely interpreters of the sacred writings, and more especially of the prophecies delivered under the old covenant. It was a common thing, I grant, for these prophets to adduce proofs of the truth and divine original of the Christian religion from the inspired writers of the Old Testament. I am ready also to grant that not unfrequently particular passages in the Old Testament, the genuine sense of which had either escaped the Jewish doctors, or been obscured by them, were, through the sagacity of these prophets, illustrated and placed in a proper point of view. But notwithstanding this, I am persuaded that whoever shall with calmness and deliberation examine and compare with each other the different passages in the New Testament, in which mention is made of these prophets, cannot fail to perceive that they did not confine themselves merely to the interpretation of the Scriptures. On this subject I have already given my sentiments to the public at some length, in a particular tract *de illis, qui Prophetæ vocantur in novo Fœdere*, which is to be found in the second volume of my *Dissertationes ad Historiam Ecclesiasticam pertinentes*. We have no positive testimony that there were prophets in all the early churches; but it appears extremely probable that such was the case, since St. Paul, in enumerating the ministers of the church appointed by God himself, assigns the second place to the prophets. 1 Cor. xii. 28. Ephes. iv. 11.

pretended

pretended to that character. The apostles also had left on record certain marks, by which one specially commissioned from above might clearly be distinguished from an impostor [e]. This order of prophets ceased in the church, when the reasons which gave birth to it no longer existed. For when the affairs of the church took a prosperous turn, and regular schools or seminaries were instituted, in which those who were designed for the sacred ministry received an education suitable to the office, it consequently became unnecessary that God should any longer continue to instruct the people by the mouths of these extraordinary ministers or prophets [f].

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[e] 1 Cor. xii. 2, 3. xiv. 29. 1 John, iv. 1.

[f] There can be no doubt but that, from almost the very first rise of Christianity, it was the practice for certain of the youth, in whom such a strength of genius and capacity manifested itself as to afford a hope of their becoming profitable servants in the cause of religion, to be set apart for the sacred ministry, and for the presbyters and bishops to supply them with the requisite preparatory instruction, and form them by their precepts and advice for that solemn office. On this subject St. Paul, in the latter of his epistles to Timothy, ii. 2. expresses himself in the following terms: καὶ ἃ ἤκουσας παρ' ἐμοῦ διὰ πολλῶν μαρτύρων, ταῦτα παράδειξις τοῖς ἀνδρωποῖς, οἵτινες ἱκανοὶ ἔσονται καὶ ἑτέροις διδάξαι; "and the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." The apostle here, we see, directs Timothy, in the first place, to select from amongst the members of the church a certain number of men, who might appear to him to possess the talents requisite for conveying instruction to others, and who were persons of tried and approved faith. For it will not admit of a doubt that by the πεισοὶ ἀνδρωποῖς, "faithful men," here alluded to, we ought to understand not merely believers, or those holding the faith, but persons of approved and established faith, to whom things of the highest moment might be entrusted without danger or apprehension. Secondly, to the persons thus selected he was to communicate and expound that discipline,

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XLI. Whilst the Christian assemblies or churches were but small, two, three, or four presbyters

discipline, in which he himself had been instructed by St. Paul before many witnesses. Now it is evident that St. Paul could not by this mean that they were to be taught the mere elements or rudiments of the Christian religion; for with these every one professing Christianity was of course brought acquainted; and doubtless, therefore, those whom the apostle in this place directs Timothy to instruct, must have known and been thoroughly versed in them long before. The discipline, then, which Timothy had received from St. Paul, and which he was thus to become the instrument of communicating to others, was without question that more full and perfect knowledge of divine truth as revealed in the gospel of Christ, which it was fitting that every one who was advanced to the office of a master or teacher amongst the brethren should possess, together with a due degree of instruction as to the most skilful and ready method of imparting to the multitude a proper rule of faith, and correct principles of moral action. But what is this, I would ask, but to direct Timothy to institute a school or seminary for the education of future presbyters and teachers for the church, and to cause a certain number of persons of talents and virtue to be trained up therein, under a course of discipline similar to that which he himself had received at the hands of St. Paul? It may moreover be inferred from these words, that the apostle had personally discharged the same office which he thus imposes on Timothy, and applied himself to the properly educating of future teachers and ministers for the church: for it appears by them that he had not been the tutor of Timothy only, but that his instructions to this his favourite disciple had been imparted *διὰ πολλῶν μαρτύρων*, “before many witnesses;” *διὰ* having, in this place, unquestionably the force of the preposition *ἐνώπιον*. To determine, indeed, whom we ought to understand by the persons thus termed “witnesses,” has occasioned no little stir amongst the commentators. According to some, we should connect them with the following word *παράδει*, and consider St. Paul as saying, *διὰ πολλῶν μαρτύρων παράδει*, “transmit by many witnesses.” Others would have us understand by these witnesses, the presbyters who ordained Timothy to the sacred ministry by the laying on of hands, 1 Tim. iv. 4.; and conceive that, immediately previous to such ordination, St. Paul had, in the presence

presbyters were found amply sufficient to labour for the welfare, and regulate the concerns of each: and over a few men like these, inflamed as they were with the sincerest piety towards

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and hearing of these presbyters, recapitulated and again inculcated on the mind of his adopted son in the faith the chief or leading articles of the Christian religion: whilst others, again, imagine that the persons here alluded to, were witnesses of the life, actions, and miracles of our Lord. But of these and some other conjectures on the subject, which it is needless to enumerate, there is not one but what is encumbered with considerable difficulties. A much more natural way of resolving the point, as it appears to me, is by supposing that St. Paul had under him, in a sort of seminary or school which he had instituted for the purpose of properly educating presbyters and teachers, several other disciples or pupils besides Timothy; and that the witnesses here spoken of, before whom Timothy had been instructed, were his fellow-students, persons destined like him for the ministry, and partakers together with him of the benefits that were to be derived from the apostle's tuition. It is highly credible, I may say indeed it is more than credible, that not St. Paul alone, but also all the other apostles of our Lord applied themselves to the properly instructing of certain select persons, so as to render them fit to be entrusted with the care and government of the churches; and, consequently, that the first Christian teachers were brought up and formed in schools or seminaries immediately under their eye. Besides other references which might be given, it appears from Irenæus *advers. Hæreses*, lib. ii. cap. xxii. p. 148. ed. Massuet. that St. John employed himself at Ephesus, where he spent the latter part of his life, in qualifying youth for the sacred ministry. And the same author, as quoted by Eusebius, *Histor. Eccles.* lib. v. cap. xx. p. 188. represents Polycarp, the celebrated bishop of Smyrna, as having laboured in the same way. That the example of these illustrious characters was in this respect followed by the bishops in general, will scarcely admit of a doubt. To this origin, in my opinion, are to be referred those seminaries termed "episcopal schools," which we find attached to the principal churches, and in which youth designed for the ministry went through a proper course of preparatory instruction and discipline under the bishop himself, or some presbyter of his appointment.

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God, and receiving but very moderate stipends, it was not required that any one should be appointed to preside in the capacity of a ruler or superintendant. But as the congregations of Christians became every day larger and larger, a proportionate gradual increase in the number of the presbyters and ministers of necessity took place; and as the rights and power of all were the same, it was soon found impossible, under the circumstances of that age, when every church was left to the care of itself, for any thing like a general harmony to be maintained amongst them, or for the various necessities of the multitude to be regularly and satisfactorily provided for, without some one to preside and exert a controuling influence. Such being the case, the churches adopted the practice of selecting, and placing at the head of the council of presbyters, some one man of eminent wisdom and prudence, whose peculiar duty it should be to allot to his colleagues their several tasks, and by his advice, and every other mode of assistance, to prevent as far as in him lay the interests of the assembly, over which he was thus appointed to preside, from experiencing any kind of detriment or injury [g].

The

[g] This statement respecting the origin of the order of bishops must, I am persuaded, obtain the assent of every one who knows what human nature is, and shall reflect on the situation of things in that early age, and also on the jealousies, dissensions, and various other embarrassing evils, that are incident to collective bodies of individuals who are all on a footing of equality. That the first churches had no bishops may, I think, very clearly be proved from the writings of the New Testament.—I do not mean from the circumstance to which so much weight is by many attributed, *viz.* that it is not unusual to find therein the term bishop applied to presbyters in general: for those who take the opposite side of the question will say in reply, that persons

The person thus advanced to the presidency, was at first distinguished by the title of "the angel" C E N T.
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persons invested with the prelacy were at first distinguished by another name; but that, after some time, the term bishop ceased to be applied to presbyters of the common order, and was appropriated exclusively to the chief or presiding presbyters. But the evidence which, as I have stated above, I deem conclusive as to this point is this,—that neither in the Acts of the Apostles, nor in St. Paul's epistles, although in both express mention is frequently made of presbyters and deacons, do we find the least notice taken of any church having been subject to the authority or rule of a single man. It appears to me, however, equally certain that the churches did not long continue under the care and management of councils of presbyters, amongst whom there was no distinction of rank; but that in the more considerable ones at least, if not in the others, it came, even during the life-time of the apostles, and with their approbation, to be the practice for some one man more eminent than the rest to be invested with the presidency or chief direction. And in support of this opinion, we are supplied with an argument of such strength in those "angels," to whom St. John addressed the epistles, which, by the command of our Saviour himself, he sent to the seven churches of Asia, Rev. ii. iii. as the presbyterians, as they are termed, let them labour and strive what they may, will never be able to overcome. It must be evident to every one, even on a cursory perusal of the epistles to which we refer, that those who are therein termed "angels" were persons possessing such a degree of authority in their respective churches, as enabled them to mark with merited disgrace whatever might appear to be deserving of reprehension, and also to give due countenance and encouragement to every thing that was virtuous and commendable. But even supposing that we were to wave the advantage that is to be derived from this argument in establishing the antiquity of the episcopal character, it appears to me that the bare consideration alone of the state of the church in its infancy, must be sufficient to convince any rational unprejudiced person, that the order of bishops could not have originated at a period considerably more recent than that which gave birth to Christianity itself. For it is impossible for any one who is acquainted with what human nature is, and knows how things were circumstanced in the first ages, to believe that a proper harmony

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of his church; but in after-times it became customary to style him, in allusion to those duties which constituted the chief branch of his function, “the bishop [*b*].” In what particular church,

could be maintained amongst the presbyters, or that the assemblies of the church could be convened and regulated, or any factions or disturbances that might arise amongst the people be repressed and composed, or that many other things which might be enumerated could be accomplished with any degree of promptitude, regularity, and ease, without some one being appointed to act in the capacity of moderator or president. If I figure to myself an assembly composed of merely a moderate number of people,—say, for instance, a hundred,—and suppose such assembly to be placed under the care of one or two excellent persons, possessing hearts filled with love towards God and man, and entirely devoid of ambition and cupidity of wealth, I can very well conceive that, owing to the paucity and sincere piety of the assembly itself, as well as of those entrusted with the care and management of its concerns, it might be possible for its affairs to be conducted with the greatest regularity, and for its proceedings not to be disgraced by any thing like confusion or party spirit. But when I enlarge upon this idea, and present to my mind’s eye a multitude consisting of perhaps four or five hundred persons,—a multitude, too, not receiving laws from a superior, but legislating entirely for itself, and classed or distributed under perhaps ten different presbyters or teachers, all on a footing of the most perfect equality, the case becomes entirely altered, and I should deem it no less essential for such a multitude to have some individual leader or guide assigned to it, than for a legion of soldiers to have its proper commander or tribune.

[*b*] The title of “angel” is applied by our Lord himself to the presidents of the seven churches of Asia, Rev. ii. iii.; and hence it may fairly be inferred that persons of that description were usually styled so in the first century: for it is not to be imagined that our Saviour addressed those chiefs of their churches by a new and unaccustomed title. As to what has been urged by several learned persons, respecting the peculiar significance and force of this appellation, it appears to me for the most part as rather speculative and curious than well founded and important. For since the term ἀγγελος signifies in general a legate, or person accredited

church, or at what precise period, this arrangement was first introduced, remains nowhere on record. It appears to me, however, that there are the strongest reasons for believing that the church of Jerusalem, which in point of numbers exceeded every other, took the lead in this respect; and that her example was gradually copied after by the rest in succession, according as their increase in size, or their situation in other respects, might suggest the propriety of their doing so [i].

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credited either of God or man, and those presidents of the churches were regarded as being in an especial degree commissioned of God, it, in my opinion, requires no very great depth of research to account for their being styled angels, at a time when, in conformity to the practice of the apostles themselves, it was customary for the title of bishop to be applied to presbyters in general, and consequently some other appellation was found necessary, in order to distinguish the chief presbyters from those of the ordinary rank. A more just or appropriate title than this could scarcely have been fixed on. As the term, however, could not be deemed altogether free from ambiguity, and might perhaps be found to give occasion for some aspiring individuals to over-rate their own consequence, and fancy themselves nearly on a level with those who are in the strict sense of the word styled angels, (for even the merest trifles are sufficient to supply men with arguments for vanity and pride,) it was probably thought better to exchange this title for one more definitive and humble, and to substitute for it that very one which had previously been common to the presbyters at large; so that these presidents might thereby be constantly reminded that they were merely placed at the head of a family of brethren, and that their function differed not in its nature from that wherewith all the elders were at the first invested. It appears to me, therefore, that in the appellation ἄγγελος τῆς ἐκκλησίας, the word θεῶς is to be supplied; and that the title ought to be understood as running thus, Ἄγγελος τῶ θεῶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, *i. e.* a person especially commissioned of God, or one who occupies the station of a divine legate in the church.

[i] As the early churches are well known to have taken all their institutions and regulations from the model ex-

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hibited to them by the church of Jerusalem, it appears to me that scarcely a doubt can be entertained of their having been also indebted to this last-mentioned venerable assembly for the example of appointing some one man to preside over the presbyters and general interests of each individual church, and that the first instance of any one's being invested with the episcopal office occurred in that city. This much at least is certain, that no church whatever can be proved to have had a bishop prior to that of Jerusalem; and that none of the ancient accounts and notices of bishops, which are to be met with in Eusebius and other authors, do ascend so high as those of Jerusalem. All ancient authorities, from the second century downwards, concur in representing James the Younger, the brother of our Lord after the flesh, as the first bishop of the church of Jerusalem, having been so created by the apostles themselves. Vid. *Acta sanctor. Mens. Maii*, tom. i. p. 23. Tillemont, *Memoires pour servir a l'Histoire de l'Eglise*, tom. i. p. 1008, et seq. Now if this were as truly as it is uniformly reported, it would at once determine the point which we have under consideration, since it must close the door against all doubt as to the quarter in which episcopacy originated. But I rather suspect that these ancient writers might incautiously be led to form their judgment of the state of things in the first century from the maxims and practice of their own times, and finding that, after the departure of the other apostles on their respective missions, the chief regulation and superintendance of the church at Jerusalem rested with James, they without further reason concluded that he must have been appointed the bishop of that church. It appears indeed, from the writings of the New Testament, that, after the departure of the other apostles on their travels, the chief authority in the church of Jerusalem was possessed by James. For St. Paul, when he came to that city for the last time, immediately repaired to this apostle; and James appears to have thereupon convened an assembly of the presbyters at his house, where Paul laid before them an account of the extent and success of his labours in the cause of his divine Master. Acts, xxi. 19, 20. No one reading this can, I should think, entertain a doubt of James's having been, at that time, invested with the chief superintendance and government of the church of Jerusalem; and that not only the assemblies of the presbyters, but also those general ones

degree of power which placed them much above the presbyters, will not be disputed by any un-
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ones of the whole church, in which, as is clear from verse 22, was lodged the supreme power as to all matters of a sacred nature, were convened by his appointment. But it is to be observed that this authority was no more than must have devolved on James of course, in his apostolic character, in consequence of all the other apostles having quitted Jerusalem; and that therefore this testimony of St. Luke is by no means to be considered as conclusive evidence of his having been appointed to the office of bishop. Were we to admit of such kind of reasoning as this,—the government of the church of Jerusalem was vested in James, therefore he was its bishop, — I do not see on what grounds we could refuse our assent, should it be asserted that all the twelve apostles were bishops of that church, for it was at one time equally under their government. But not to enlarge unnecessarily. — The function of an apostle differed widely from that of a bishop; and I therefore do not think that James, who was an apostle, was ever appointed to or discharged the episcopal office at Jerusalem. The government of the church in that city, it rather appears to me, was placed in the hands of its presbyters, but so as that nothing of moment could be done without the advice and authority of James; the same sort of respectful deference being paid to his will as had formerly been manifested for that of the apostles at large. But although we deem those ancient writers to have committed an error, in pronouncing James to have been the first bishop of Jerusalem, it may without much difficulty be demonstrated that the church of that city had a bishop sooner than any of the rest, and consequently that the episcopal dignity must have taken its rise there. The church of Jerusalem, at the time of that city's being taken and finally laid waste by the emperor Hadrian, towards the middle of the second century, (about the year of our Lord 137 or 138,) had had fourteen bishops, without our reckoning James as one of them. A list of their names is given us by Eusebius, (*Hist. Eccles.* lib. iv. cap. v. p. 117.) who derived his information in this respect, not from any vague report or tradition, but from certain ancient written documents which had come under his own immediate inspection: *ἱεὶς ἑννεκάδων*. At that period, according to the same historian, the church of Rome had had no more than seven bishops, and that of Alexandria only five. He

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prejudiced or impartial person: but we are not possessed of sufficient information on the subject, to enable us to state with exact precision the extent to which those rights and that power reached during the first century. It is certain, however, that it would be forming a very erroneous judg-

likewise represents (*Hist. Eccles.* lib. iv. cap. xx. p. 141.) the church of Antioch as having, even so late as in the reign of the emperor Marcus Antoninus, been under the government of merely its sixth bishop. The number, then, of bishops who had filled the see of Jerusalem having, in the time of Hadrian, reached to more than double that of the prelates of any other of the more considerable churches, it appears to me that we are amply justified in concluding that the church of that city placed itself under a bishop long before either of the rest, and that the other churches were successively induced to follow her example. Eusebius indeed says, that he had not been able to ascertain exactly how many years each of these bishops had held the see; but that, according to common report, they all presided but for a short time. But this in no respect militates against the above conclusion. If we assign, as surely we may at the least, to each of these bishops three years, we shall find it give us somewhat above forty years as the term of their government altogether. Should we, however, be of opinion that the church of Jerusalem (which, from its amplitude, and the great number of its presbyters, must have felt in a very eminent and pressing degree the necessity of having a chief ruler or president) was, as is most probable, induced, immediately on the martyrdom of James the Just, to place itself under the superintendance and care of a bishop, we may, in such case, allow a much longer period to the government of the fourteen prelates mentioned by Eusebius: for it has been resolved by the learned, apparently on very sufficient grounds, that James was put to death in the year of our Lord 62, which was more than seventy years prior to the final overthrow of Jerusalem by Hadrian. But in whatever way our calculations as to this point may be made, it will be equally placed beyond dispute that the church of Jerusalem had over it a bishop long enough before the close of the first century after Christ; and this being established, it will scarcely, I had almost said it cannot, be denied that the episcopal dignity must have originated in and passed to the other churches from that of Jerusalem.

ment,

ment, were we to estimate the power, the revenue, the privileges, and rights of the first bishops, from the rank, affluence, and authority attached to the episcopal character in the present day. A primitive bishop was, as it should seem, none other than the chief or principal minister of an individual church, which, at the period of which we are speaking, was seldom so numerous but that it could be assembled under one roof. He taught the people, administered what are termed the sacraments, and supplied the ailing and the indigent with comfort and relief. With regard to the performance of such duties as it was impossible for him to fulfil or attend to in person, he availed himself of the assistance of the presbyters. Associating, likewise, these presbyters with him in council, he inquired into and determined any disputes or differences that might subsist amongst the members of his flock, and also looked round and consulted with them as to any measures which the welfare and prosperity of the church appeared to require. Whatever arrangements might be deemed eligible, were proposed by him to the people for their adoption, in a general assembly. In fine, a primitive bishop could neither determine nor enact any thing of himself, but was bound to conform to and carry into effect whatever might be resolved on by the presbyters and the people [k]. The episcopal dignity would not be much coveted, I rather think, on such terms, by many of those who, under the present state of things, interest

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[k] All that we have thus stated is clearly to be proved from documents of the first ages. Of this the reader may satisfy himself, by consulting, amongst other works, Bingham's *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, and Beveridge's *Codex Canonum primitivæ Ecclesiæ*.

themselves

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themselves very warmly on behalf of bishops and their authority. Of the emoluments attached to this office, which, it may be observed, was one of no small labour and peril, I deem it unnecessary for me to say any thing: for that they must have been extremely small, cannot but be obvious to every one who shall consider that no church had, in those days, any other revenue than what arose from the voluntary offerings, or oblations as they were termed, of the people, by far the greater part of whom were persons of very moderate or slender means; and that out of these offerings, in addition to the bishop, provision was to be made for the presbyters, the deacons, and the indigent brethren.

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bishops and
dioceses.

XLIII. It was not long, however, before circumstances became so changed, as to produce a considerable extension and enlargement of the limits, within which the episcopal government and authority had been at first confined. For the bishops who presided in the cities, were accustomed to send out into the neighbouring towns and country adjacent certain of their presbyters, for the purpose of making converts, and establishing churches therein; and it being of course deemed but fair and proper that the rural or village congregations, which were drawn together in this way, should continue under the guardianship and authority of the prelate by whose counsel and exertion they had been first brought to a knowledge of Christ and his word, the episcopal sees gradually expanded into ecclesiastical provinces of varied extent, some greater, some less, to which the Greeks in after-times gave the denomination of dioceses. Those to whom the instruction and management of these surrounding country churches were committed

by the diocesan were termed chorepiscopi, *i. e.* τῆς χώρας ἐπισκοποὶ, “rural bishops.” Persons of this description are doubtless to be considered as having held a middle rank between the bishops and the presbyters: for to place them on a level with the former is impossible, since they were subject to their diocesan; but, at the same time, it is manifest that they were superior in rank to presbyters, inasmuch as they were not accustomed to look up to the bishop for orders or direction, but were invested with constant authority to teach, and in other respects to exercise the episcopal functions [1].

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XLIV. In addition to these its governors and teachers, the church had ever belonging to it, even from its very first rise, a class of ministers, composed of persons of either sex, and who were termed deacons and deaconesses. Their office was to distribute the alms to the necessitous; to

Deacons and
deaconesses.

[1] The reader will find this subject very copiously treated of in the following (amongst other) works: Morin. *de sacris Eccles. Ordinationibus*, part i. exerc. iv. p. 10, et seq.; Blondell. *de Episcopis et Presbyteris*, sect. iii. p. 93. 120, et seq.; Bevereg. *in Pandect. Canonum ad Canon.* xiii. *Concilii Arcyrani*, tom. ii. p. 176.; Zeigler. *de Episcopis*, lib. i. cap. xiii. p. 105, et seq.; Pet. de Marc. *de Concordia Sacerdotii et Imperii*, lib. ii. cap. xiii. part xiv. p. 159, et seq.; Boehmer. *Adnotat. ad illum*, p. 62, 63.; Thomassin. *Disciplina Eccles. vet. et nov.* part i. lib. ii. cap. i. p. 215.: the learned authors of which are divided in opinion as to whether the “chorepiscopi” belonged to the episcopal order, or to that of presbyters. But it appears to me, that whoever shall attentively consider what has been handed down to us respecting these “rural bishops,” must readily perceive that they cannot with propriety be ranked under either of those orders. In fact, I conceive that the question would never have been agitated amongst men of erudition, had it not been for a preconceived notion, too hastily taken up by them, that all the ministers of the primitive church were to be classed under one or other of the three orders of bishops, presbyters, or deacons.

carry

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carry the orders or messages of the elders, where-
ever necessary; and to perform various other
duties, some of which related merely to the
solemn assemblies that were held at stated in-
tervals, whilst others were of a general nature.
That the greatest caution and prudence were, in
in the first ages, deemed proper to be observed
in the choice of these ministers, appears plainly
from St. Paul's directions on the subject. 1 Tim.
iii. 8. et seq. From what is afterwards said by
the apostle, at verse 13. of the same chapter,
learned men have been led to conclude, and ap-
parently with much reason, that those who had
given unequivocal proof of their faith and pro-
bity in the capacity of deacons were, after a while,
elected into the order of presbyters. The dea-
conesses were widows of irreproachable character
and mature age. In the oriental countries,
where, as is well known, men are not permitted
to have access to the women, the assistance of
females like these must have been found of es-
sential importance: for, through their ministry,
the principles of the Christian religion could be
diffused amongst the softer sex, and various things
be accomplished in relation to the Christian sister-
hood, which, in a region teeming with suspicion
and jealousy, could in no wise have been con-
signed to or undertaken by men [*m*].

XLV. From

[*m*] The origin of the order of deacons is, in my opinion,
unquestionably to be referred back to the primitive church
of Jerusalem; but the reader will have perceived, from what
I have above remarked on the subject, that I do not agree
with the majority of writers in considering it as having
taken its rise in the appointment of the seven Greeks spoken
of in the Acts of the Apostles*. For that there must have
been ministers who discharged the functions of deacons in

* Vid. *supr.* § xxxvii. note [*r*] p. 203.

XLV. From these particulars we may collect a general idea of what was the form and constitution

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the assembly of the Christians of that city, prior to such appointment, will not with me admit of a doubt: since, not again to bring forward other reasons, it is evident that the business of the church could by no means have been properly conducted, without the assistance of persons acting in that capacity. The more attention, likewise, that I bestow on those "young men," who appear to have been in waiting on the apostles, and committed the bodies of Ananias and his wife to the earth, the more am I convinced that they were in fact none other than deacons. The seven men subsequently appointed I conceive to have been public ministers, differing in no respect from those whom, for the sake of distinction, we will term original deacons, except only that their sphere of duty was limited to that part of the church which was composed of foreigners. Now if this opinion be correct, as it really appears to me to be, there is at once an end of the notion entertained by some, that the deacons of after-ages differed from those of the primitive times; for that it was the office of the original or primitive ones to take care of the poor, but that those of after-times had duties of a very different nature assigned to them by the bishops. To me it seems clear that no such alteration took place in the functions of the deacons, but that, from the first, it was their duty to render themselves serviceable in all things which might be required of them by the situation and circumstances of the church at that time. Whether or not there were any such characters as those of deaconesses known in the church of Jerusalem, is what I have not the means of ascertaining with any degree of certainty. I think, however, it may very well admit of a conjecture, that those widows who were neglected by the Hebrew deacons, (Acts, vi. 1.) might be women acting in the capacity of deaconesses amongst the Greeks. That the handmaids of the churches were in that age termed "widows," in an absolute sense, is manifest beyond a doubt, and may in particular be proved from the words of St. Paul himself, 1 Tim. v. 9, 10. As far as my penetration is able to reach, I can perceive nothing that can be considered as at all opposing itself to this conjecture; but, on the contrary, several things present themselves to notice tending rather to support it. Of the arguments which may be adduced in its favour, I think it is not one of trifling force that the Hebrews,

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tution of those primitive Christian associations, which in the language of Scripture are termed *churches*.

Hebrews, against whom the complaint is made, are not accused of having neglected any of the foreign poor besides the widows. Most assuredly the Greek Jews who dwelt at Jerusalem must have had other persons amongst them who required relief as well as their widows! Then how came it to pass that their widows alone should have had cause given them by the Hebrew deacons to murmur and complain of neglect? Now if by the term widows we here understand deaconesses, it will be possible to assign no very unsatisfactory reason for this. The number of the Greek converts was undoubtedly not so great as that of the Hebrew ones: the duties, therefore, which the "widows" of those Greeks or foreigners had to discharge must have been executed with less labour and inconvenience than fell to the lot of the indigenous matrons, in the performance of their functions. Perceiving, then, that the trouble encountered by the foreign class of widows was disproportionate to that which necessarily attached itself to the services of the others, and being also perhaps somewhat influenced by a partiality towards those of their own nation, the Hebrew ministers, who were entrusted with the distribution of the alms, might probably conceive that there could be no impropriety in their granting relief on a more liberal scale to the widows of the indigenous Jews than to those of the foreign class. But leaving it to others to determine on the validity of this conjecture, I pass on to the notice of a few things which have suggested themselves to me, on a reconsideration of the history of the controversy above alluded to between the Jews and the Greeks, as given us by St. Luke. In the opening of his narrative, the sacred historian tells us that "there had arisen a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews." Being particularly studious of brevity, however, he omits adding some things which yet are necessary to be understood by his readers, in order to their forming a proper judgment of the affair. In the first place, then, although no such thing is expressed, yet it is evident from the context that we must consider the Greeks as having come to the apostles, and complained to them of the ill conduct of the Hebrews. It could not, however, surely have been against all the Christian converts of the Hebrew race, at that time dwelling in Jerusalem, that complaint was thus preferred. For no one that is in his senses can believe that the whole body of Hebrews

churches. Every church was composed of three constituent parts: 1st, Teachers, who were also invested

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Hebrews should have deliberately concurred in a wish to wrong the widows of the foreigners, or have agreed together that less relief should be afforded to them than to the others. The complaint there can be no doubt related merely to those indigenou Jews, to whom the relief and care of the poor had been committed by the apostles. We must also conclude that the Greeks, who were the bearers of this accusation, preferred at the same time, on behalf of their church, a request that the apostles would take upon themselves the future distribution of the alms, and the administration of whatever else might relate to the poor. For unless we conceive this to have been the case, it is impossible to account for the speech which is stated to have been made by the apostles to the multitude when assembled. Had no such direct application been made to them to take upon themselves the office, what room could there have been for their so formally declining it? Taking it, however, for the fact, that such request was made, as we are certainly well warranted in doing by the words of the apostles themselves, what follows will be found to correspond in a very striking degree with every thing precedent, and the whole affair is at once rendered clear and intelligible. The address delivered by the apostles, on this occasion, to the general assembly of the church, we may suppose to have ran somewhat in this way:—"Brethren, we are given to understand by the Greeks, that their widows have not experienced, in point of charitable assistance, that degree of justice which they had a right to expect at the hands of the ministers of the church; and they have, in consequence thereof, expressed a wish that we ourselves would undertake to see that things of this kind should be properly managed for the future. To this, however, we cannot by any means consent: for were we to comply with the request thus made to us, and take upon ourselves the business of administering relief to the poor, we should inevitably be obliged to neglect the most important part of our function, which consists in unfolding the truths of divine revelation, and extending the bounds of the Christian community, or at least should not be able to devote ourselves to it with that degree of attention and assiduity which the will of God requires. The remedy, therefore, which we will, with your consent, apply to

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 sex; and, 3dly, The multitude or people [n].
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to the evil complained of, shall be this.—Chooſe ye from amongſt yourſelves ſeven men, on whoſe faith and integrity ye can rely, to ſuperintend this buſineſs, and recommend them to us. From thoſe whom ye may thus point out, as perſons worthy to be entrusted with the guardianship and care of the poor, you will not find us in any wiſe diſpoſed to withhold our confidence.” For further information with regard to the deacons and deaconeſſes of the primitive church, the reader is referred to what has been written by Caſpar. Zeigler on the ſubject; as alſo to Baſnage’s *Annal. Politico-Eccleſ. ad Ann. xxxv. tom. i. p. 450.*; and Bingham’s *Origines Eccleſiaſt. lib. ii. cap. xx. p. 296, et ſeq.*

[n] Of all that I here ſtate, the greater part is, with a very moderate degree of trouble, to be proved from Scripture itſelf. Indeed the authenticity of it has been already ſo proved. I ſhall, therefore, content myſelf with merely adding a few obſervations, illuſtrative of ſuch things as may appear to require ſome elucidation. In the firſt place, then, it may be proper for me to remark, that in enumerating the conſtituent parts of a church, I have intentionally avoided making uſe of the terms *clergy* and *laity*:—not that I can perceive any thing objectionable in theſe terms, when properly explained; but leſt, by my having recourſe to them, I ſhould afford occaſion to ſome to doubt of my impartiality. I cannot, however, avoid taking this opportunity of profeſſing myſelf to be utterly unapprized of any good that has reſulted from the violent and long continued diſputes which have been carried on, reſpecting the antiquity and origin of theſe appellations. For my own part, I agree in opinion with thoſe who conceive them to have come very early into uſe,—in fact, to have been nearly coëval with the firſt riſe of Chriſtianity; but, at the ſame time, of any thing that is to be gained by eſtabliſhing this opinion, I am altogether ignorant. In like manner am I an entire ſtranger to any advantage that is to be expected from the carrying of their point, by thoſe who undertake to prove that theſe terms were not known in the church prior to the third century. Facts and ordinances conſtitute the proper objects of our attention when inquiring into the ſtate of the primitive church, not particular appellations or terms, which, whether they

Of these parts, the chief in point of authority was the people: for to them belonged the appointment of the bishop and presbyters, as well as of the inferior ministers;—with them resided the power of enacting laws, as also of adopting or rejecting whatever might be proposed in the general assemblies, and of expelling and again receiving into communion any depraved or unworthy members. In short, nothing whatever of any moment could be determined on, or carried into effect, without their knowledge and concurrence. All these rights came to be recognised as appertaining to, and residing in the people, in consequence of its being entirely by them that the necessary means were supplied for maintaining the teachers and ministers, relieving the wants of the indigent, promoting the general interests and welfare of the community, and averting from it occasionally impending ill. The contributions thus furnished consisted of all kinds of offerings, or *oblations* as they were commonly termed, which every one according to his ability, and of his own free will, without any sort of demand or admonition, brought with him to the assembly, and threw into the common stock. After some little while, it was judged expedient to divide the multitude into two orders or classes, *viz.* that of the *faithful*, and that of the *catechumens* [o]. Of these, the former were such as had

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they be of ancient or of modern origin, can in no shape alter the nature of things. In order to acquire a proper knowledge of the latter, we must pursue a course of study far different from that of words.

[o] At the first, there was no distinction recognised in the church between the *faithful* and the *candidates for baptism*, or *catechumens*; nor do I think that any vestige of such a division of the people is to be found throughout the

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had been solemnly admitted members of the church by the sacrament of baptism, and publicly pledged themselves to God and the brethren that they would strictly conform themselves to the laws of the community, and who, in consequence thereof, possessed the right of voting in the public assemblies, and of being present at, and taking a share in, every part of divine worship.—The

whole of the New Testament,—any, at least, that can be deemed clear and indisputable. Whoever, through the powerful operation of divine truth, had been brought to profess a belief in Christ as the Saviour of the human race, although they might in other respects be uninformed, and various errors might still remain to be rooted out of their minds, were yet baptized, and admitted into the fellowship of Christ's kingdom. The growth and increase of the church would have been beyond measure retarded, had no one in those early times been received into the Christian community but such as had gone through a long course of probation, and had acquired an accurate knowledge of the religion they were about to embrace. When Christianity, however, had obtained for itself somewhat of a more stable footing, so that in many places very large congregations of its professors were established, it was deemed expedient that none should be received into the church but such as had made themselves thoroughly acquainted with the Christian discipline, and had given convincing proofs of their possessing a sincere and upright mind. This regulation being once introduced, it unavoidably gave rise to the distinction between the *faithful* and the *catechumens*, or between those who were *fully* and such as were merely *partially* admitted into the Christian fellowship. Many have written on the subject of the catechumens, and particularly Tob. Pfanner, in whose book, however, I have to regret the same deficiency that occurs in almost every other work on Christian antiquities, namely, that although the things themselves be perspicuously discussed, and satisfactorily established by a reference to ancient authorities, yet the causes to which the laws and institutions of the primitive church owed their rise are either wholly passed over, or but slightly hinted at. This defect, however, is not of so serious a nature but that it may, without much difficulty, be supplied by any one of common learning and capacity.

latter

latter were those converts who, not having gone through the course of preparatory discipline and probation prescribed by the rules of the church, remained as yet unbaptized, and whose title to the rights of Christian fellowship was consequently deemed incomplete. These were not permitted to be present at the solemn assemblies of the church, or to join in the public worship; neither were they suffered to participate of the Lord's supper. All the members of the Christian community considered themselves as being on a footing of the most perfect equality.— Amongst a variety of other proofs which they gave of this, it was particularly manifested by their reciprocally making use of the terms “brethren,” and “sisters,” in accosting each other [p]. On the ground of this sort of spiritual relationship, the utmost care was taken that none should be suffered to languish in poverty or distress; since, whilst the means of assistance were not wanting, it would have been contrary to the laws of fraternal love to have permitted any brother or sister to remain without the necessaries of life [q]. That even in this early

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[p] Respecting the terms “brethren” and “sisters,” thus made use of to denote the perfect equality that was understood to exist amongst all the members of the Christian community, there was a book published at Goslar, 1703, in 8vo. by Gothofred Arnold, under the title of *Historia Cognationis spiritualis veterum Christianorum*. Like all the other works, however, of that author, who, although a well-intentioned man, and one by no means destitute of learning, was yet possessed of but a very moderate share of sagacity or judgment, it exhibits an undigested farrago of facts and opinions, by which the mind of the reader is embarrassed and distracted, instead of being gratified and enlightened.

[q] What St. Luke has left us on record in Acts, iv. 34. respecting the primitive church at Jerusalem, namely, that

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early age, there was in the church a mixture of the bad with the good, is what no one can doubt :

none of its members lacked or were in want, may, in the strictest sense, be applied to all the other early churches. Since the Christians considered themselves to be all on an equal footing, and all united in one common bond of fraternal love, they of course deemed it incumbent on them to take care that none of their number should be destitute of the necessaries of life ; but that, if any were in want of these, their necessities should be supplied out of the abundance of the others. Amongst those of the present day, however, who pique themselves on the faculty of seeing farther into things than other people, there are not a few who take exception to this liberality of the primitive Christians towards their poor, on the score of imprudence,—alleging that it tended to the encouragement of idleness and sloth. They are also fond of adding, that the compassion and regard thus shewn for the indigent and necessitous, must be considered as the cause which, beyond all others, contributed to the rapid propagation of the Christian religion : for that, under the expectation of being supported in ease and comfort by the liberality of others, without any care or pains of their own, vast crowds of idle, worthless, lazy people were led to embrace with eagerness the Christian fellowship. But that any thing like this should be urged by men, who would fain be thought no strangers to the apostles' writings, is truly amazing. Had those writings ever been perused by them with attention, nothing but the most wilful and inveterate blindness could have prevented them from perceiving that the liberality of the Christians towards their poor was regulated by the most discreet provisions, so as to render it nearly impossible that the munificence of the church could be either abused or misapplied. In the first place, it is expressly enjoined by St. Paul, that none should be included in the number of the poor who would not endeavour, as far as they were able, to support themselves by honest labour. Indeed, they were not only to be refused relief, but were to be absolutely expelled from the church. All, likewise, that did not conduct themselves as became the disciples of Christ, were to be withdrawn from, and to be denied the benefits of Christian charity. 2 Thess. iii. 6—12. In the next place, we find it laid down in clear and express terms, as the duty of every Christian family to provide, as far as they were able, for those of their own kindred, and not suffer them to become a burthen to the church. 1 Tim.

doubt :—it is impossible, however, that any one belonging to the Christian community could have openly persisted in a wicked, flagitious course of conduct; since it was particularly enjoined both by Christ and his apostles, that if repeated admonition and reproof should fail to produce repentance and amendment of life in any who might pollute themselves by a depraved demeanor, or by flagrantly violating the laws of morality and religion, they should be excommunicated, or in other words, be expelled from every kind of intercourse and association with the faithful [r].

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v. 3. 16. By another apostolic admonition, particular care is enjoined to be taken that evil-disposed persons might not be furnished, through the bounty of the church, with the means for vicious gratification. And lastly, in addition to all this, it is still further directed that the number of those to whom public relief was granted should not be suffered to increase beyond measure, or so as to press too hard on the means of those by whom such relief was supplied. It was not, therefore, every one who might happen to be destitute, or in need, that was regarded by the primitive church in the light of a pauper, meriting charitable assistance. To entitle a man to public relief amongst the first Christians, it was necessary that he should appear to be duly impressed with a proper sense of his duty towards God and mankind; and that he should not either be capable of procuring a subsistence for himself by any exertions of his own, or have any relatives or connections to whom he might with any degree of justice or propriety be referred for assistance adequate to his wants.

[r] It appears to me that if the voice of reason and common sense be attended to, not a question can for a moment exist as to the justice and propriety of expelling from any community all such of its members as may forfeit the pledge publicly given by them on their being admitted into such community, and contemptuously persist in an open violation of its laws. The dictates of reason, indeed, as to this point, are, in my opinion, so unequivocally clear and imperative, that I am altogether filled with astonishment

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XLVI. Both the teachers and the ministers of the church, when their appointment had received the approbation of the people, were consecrated by the presbyters to their office by prayer and the imposition of hands;—a practice which the Christians adopted from the Jews, probably on account of its very high antiquity, and the great appearance of piety which it carried with it. The duties of the presbyters consisted in instructing and exhorting the multitude, both publicly and in private. It belonged to them also to endeavour, by argument and persuasion, to convince and bring over the adversaries and enemies of the faith [s]. The converts were baptized by them. They also presided at the feasts of love, and celebration of the Lord's supper. In short, they were invested with the superintendance and management of every thing which might be essentially connected with the welfare and prosperity, either of the church in its collective capacity, or of its several members individually. When it came to be the practice for a chief or

when I reflect on the number of eminently learned men,—men, too, particularly versed in the principle and nature of laws, divine as well as human, who have not scrupled peremptorily to maintain that the practice of excommunicating evil-doers, or expelling them from the church, has no other support or foundation than the ancient Jewish law, or the mere arbitrary will of the first Christians. But the influence which opinions, that we have been once led to entertain and approve of, have on our future judgment is incredible. Whatever may appear to oppose itself to them is not for a moment to be listened to, however well it may be supported by either argument or evidence. To enter into any serious discussion of the matter, however, in this place would be useless, since there is not the least ground to hope for a revival of this pious and salutary custom in times like the present.

[s] Tit. i. 9. 2 Tim. ii. 24.

presiding

prefiding presbyter to be appointed, under the title of “bishop,” the province of teaching, and also the direction and management of every thing of a sacred nature, was transferred to him. As it was not, however, to be expected that one man could be equal to the personal discharge of duties so various and extensive, he had the power of committing to either of the elders the fulfilment of such of them as that elder might appear to him to be particularly well qualified to execute. When any thing of more than ordinary moment occurred, the bishop called together the presbyters, and consulted with them as to what was necessary or proper to be done. Having thus taken council with the elders, he next convened a general meeting of the people, to whose determination every thing of importance was always finally referred, and submitted to them, for their approval or rejection, the measures which appeared to him and the presbyters as either requisite or eligible to be pursued [†]. The bishop was commonly chosen from amongst the presbyters; and the presbyters, for the most part, taken from the class of deacons. The people, however, were not bound to abide by this rule; and it was occasionally departed from, when the probity, the faith, and the general merits of any individual amongst the multitude pointed him out as a person deserving of preference. That the income or stipend of the several teachers and ministers of the church could have been but small, whilst, at the same time, the trouble and perils which they necessarily had to encounter in the discharge of their functions were manifold and great, is so apparent as not to admit of a

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[†] Acts, xxi. 18. 22.

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doubt. But in those primitive times of which we are now treating, a Christian pastor's station in the scale of dignity and honour was, for the most part, estimated by the magnitude of the benefits derived from his labours, and not by the extent of his revenue, or of any other kind of pecuniary remuneration that might be attached to his office.

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XLVII. The particular form or manner of proceeding in those solemn assemblies, which were held at stated intervals for the purposes of divine worship, does not appear at the first to have been every where precisely similar [*u*]. It was

[*u*] Next to the writings of the New Testament, the most ancient authority that we have respecting the forms and method observed by the Christians of the first century, in their assemblies for the purpose of divine worship, is Pliny the Younger, a Roman of considerable eminence, who held the office of proprætor of Bithynia under the emperor Trajan. The particulars relating to this subject, which are contained in that well-known letter of his to his imperial master, (the *xcvii*th of the *x*th book,) on which so much attention has been bestowed in the way of illustration by the learned, were collected, as he himself expressly intimates, from the mouths of a number of persons who, intimidated by the fear of death, had renounced Christianity, and returned back to the worship of the Roman deities. The generality of people would, in all probability, have given implicit credit to so many persons, when thus found to agree in one and the same account: but to the mind of Pliny, a man, as it should seem, beyond measure cautious and circumspect, this united testimony did not appear altogether conclusive. Informed, as he was, of the various reports that were in constant circulation amongst the priests and populace, respecting the infamous clandestine practices and vile repasts of the Christians, and finding no correspondence whatever between those reports and the testimony of the above-mentioned repudiators of Christianity, (for they were all of them unanimous in asserting that, in the assemblies of the Christians, nothing was ever done in which it might be deemed at all disgraceful for a virtuous man

was frequently required that much should be conceded to place, to time, and to various other circumstances.

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man and good citizen to join,) he seems to have been apprehensive of being made the dupe of dissemblers, and to have entertained some doubt as to whether he ought to give the preference in point of credit to general report, or to the evidence of these particular witnesses. With a view, therefore, to arrive at greater certainty as to this point, he subjected two deaconesses of the Christians who fell into his hands, and who appear to have been of the rank of servants, to the torture, expecting thereby to obtain a full disclosure of the truth. Of the information that was extorted from them he speaks merely in general terms. *Quo magis*, says he, *necessarium credidi*, (it is apparent, therefore, that he entertained some suspicion as to the accuracy of the testimony of those renunciators of Christianity whom he had before examined,) *ex duabus ancillis, quæ ministræ dicebantur. quid esset veri et per tormenta quærere. Sed nihil aliud inveni quam superstitionem pravam et immodicam*. From these words of the proconsul, we may collect that he succeeded in obtaining from these women some additional testimony; but it is, at the same time, clear that he had been able to extort from them nothing whatever that tended, in any respect, to contradict or invalidate the account given by those whom he had before examined. The expression *superstitio prava et immodica*, although it conveys somewhat of a degrading and injurious imputation, and was evidently intended by Pliny so to do, has yet nothing in it which can be said in any wise to fully or derogate from the pure and sacred character of Christianity. The term "superstition" is applied by him to it, in consequence of its being a religion which differed in its principles and nature from that of the Romans, and which discountenancing the worship of their ancient deities, would substitute for it that of Jesus Christ. The epithet *pravus* was, we know, used to denote in any thing the opposite quality to *rectus*:—the latter, therefore, implying a consonancy with that which is fit, proper, and agreeable to rule; the former must, of course, be understood as indicating a want of such consonancy. By terming Christianity then *prava superstitio*, nothing more appears to have been meant than that it was a religion of an opposite character to the approved and established Roman mode of worship. The Romans, for instance, were accustomed to offer up victims to their gods, and to dedicate to them temples,

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circumstances. From what is left us on record, however, in the books of the New Testament, and

temples, altars, statues, and images. Their invocations and prayers to them were also accompanied with a long and varied train of ceremonies. But the Christian mode of worship was, on the contrary, in every respect characterised by the utmost plainness and simplicity. To Pliny, therefore, the latter, inasmuch as it opposed itself to what had received the sanction of long established and general usage, had the appearance of being (*prava*) founded in perversion and error. He likewise applies to it the epithet *immodica*, meaning thereby, as it should seem, that it was a religion of extravagance,—a religion not limited either by the bounds which the wisdom of antiquity had prescribed, or by those which were to be deduced from the dictates of philosophy. *Immodicus* was, we are certain, a term used by the Romans to characterise any thing by which a person was led into extravagance, or carried away beyond the bounds or rule assigned by reason, or the laws of the state. Now Pliny could have known no other bounds or rule for religion than the two above mentioned, namely, the rule prescribed by reason or philosophy, and that laid down by the Roman laws: and it appears to me, therefore, that by denominating the Christian discipline *immodica*, it was unquestionably the intention of this illustrious writer to intimate that it imposed greater and more difficult duties on mankind than were prescribed either by philosophy or by the ancient religion of the Roman people. With regard to the love of mankind, for instance, the principles recognized by the Roman people at large, and even by the most excellent of their philosophers, were that we ought to love and cherish our friends, and that no wrong or injury should be done to any one except our enemies: the latter, however, might, according to them, be without impropriety hated, and in every possible way vexed and persecuted. But the divine author of Christianity enjoins that our love of each other should be limited by no such bounds, but extend itself even to our enemies and greatest foes. By a Roman, then, the principles of Christianity might, in this respect, very naturally be considered as (*immodica*) exceeding the bounds of propriety. I have been induced thus to bestow some little pains in the illustration of these words, from my observing that the various learned commentators on Pliny have passed them over with but a slight notice. On the whole, it

and some other very ancient documents, it appears that the course observed in most of the churches

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it appears to me, that at the moment when this illustrious writer intended nothing less than to pay any sort of compliment to Christianity, he in fact pronounced its eulogium; and that, by the very terms which he applied to it in the way of reproof, he in reality establishes its claim to the character of superior wisdom and excellence.—Let us now turn our attention towards, and briefly examine those particulars, respecting the forms of divine worship observed by the first Christians, which Pliny states himself to have obtained from the many witnesses which he had examined, of whom some had renounced Christianity, others not. Great as is the number of commentators who have gone before us in this path, we may yet, I rather think, be able to pick up somewhat in the way of gleanings. In the first place, I will lay before the reader the words of Pliny himself, from the Gesnerian edition of his works, the most correct of any that have as yet been given to the public. *Adfirmabant autem, hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ vel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die autem lucem convenire: carmenque Christo, quasi deo, dicere secum invicem: seque sacramento non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent: quibus peractis, morem sibi discendendi fuisse, rursusque coeundi ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen et innocuum.* “They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a certain stated day before it was light, and addressed themselves in a form of prayer to Christ, as to some god, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up: after which, it was their custom to separate, and then re-assemble to eat in common a harmless meal.” (Melmoth.) Now it must immediately, I think, be remarked by every one who shall peruse this passage with attention, that the sketch which it exhibits of the forms observed by the Christians in their solemn assemblies is throughout but an imperfect one, and that in many respects it is wholly deficient. Not a word, for instance, is said of the exhortation or sermon usually delivered by one of the presbyters or the bishop, or of the reading a portion of the Scriptures; nor is there any notice taken of the celebration of

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churches was as follows.—After certain introductory prayers, (with the offering up of which there

of the Lord's supper, or of the oblations which it was customary for the communicants to offer. In making his report to Trajan, Pliny probably saw no necessity for setting down all that he had learnt from the witnesses, but deemed it sufficient to lay before the emperor merely such particulars as would give him an insight into the nature of the Christian discipline, and satisfy him that those who had embraced it were far from being of a character either so detestable or dangerous as that which was attributed to them by vulgar report. For Pliny's epistle, from beginning to end, is unquestionably to be regarded in the light of an apology for the Christians; the object of it evidently being to refute those calumnies under which they laboured, and to incline the emperor to treat with lenity and compassion a set of men, who, although they had espoused a different religion from that of the Romans, yet appeared to him to cherish no principles either of a vicious or dangerous tendency. In addition to this, it must necessarily be observed, (and it will presently be rendered more strikingly manifest,) that the information thus communicated by Pliny to the emperor is conveyed rather in terms and phrases of his own, than in those which it is at all likely that the Christians whom he had examined made use of; and that, in a certain degree, his description of the Christian sacred rites obviously, and as it were by way of illustration, accommodates itself to the Roman way of thinking on the subject. This, I have no doubt, was the result of design; his object in it being, as I conceive, to render the matter more intelligible and easy of apprehension than it would otherwise have been to Trajan, who was an utter stranger to the maxims and institutions of the Christians, and wholly unacquainted with their affairs. Had Pliny, in his account of the Christian principles and customs, made use of Christian terms and phrases, the emperor would in all probability have found no small difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of many of them, and might possibly have understood some parts of the letter in a sense very different from that which it was the object and intention of the writer to convey. But to come to particulars.—The account commences by stating in general terms, that the solemn assemblies of the Christians were held on a certain fixed day. This fixed day, as may be proved from the epistle itself, (and in another place I have so proved it,) was

there can be no doubt but that the service commenced,) a select portion of Scripture was read

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was the same with that which we at present consider as sacred, namely, the first day of the week, the day on which our blessed Saviour arose from the dead. B. Just. Hen. Boehmer would indeed have us to understand this day to have been the same with the Jewish Sabbath; but notwithstanding all that he has urged in his dissertation *de Stato Christianorum Die*, (which stands first in that series of tracts, in which he undertakes to illustrate the sacred rites, &c. of the Christians from Pliny,) I rather think that he has not succeeded in making any converts to his opinion amongst those who have read what Pliny says with attention, and taken the pains to make themselves acquainted with ancient manners. On this stated day, the Christians of Bithynia, it appears, were accustomed to hold two distinct meetings: the one before sun-rise, for the worship of God, and furtherance of piety; the other in the course of the day, most probably about the time of noon, for the purpose of partaking together of a common meal or repast. With the Christians of other countries it was not the custom thus to divide their sacred offices; but they went through the whole of whatever might be enjoined with regard to public worship at one and the same meeting. It is by no means difficult, however, to assign a very sufficient reason for this deviation of the Bithynian Christians from the general practice. Exposed, as they were on all sides, to the treachery of malignant foes, it would have been impossible for them to have met and gone through their forms of public worship during the day. Their assembly for this purpose, therefore, was held before sun-rise. To have joined in a meal, however, at this early hour would not have been seasonable or convenient; and the feast of love was, therefore, deferred until that time of the day, which in those regions was customarily allotted to bodily refection. The public worship, for the performance of which the first of these meetings was held, commenced with the offering up of prayers, in which they gave praise to Christ, and extolled the blessings to mankind of which he was the author. These prayers Pliny states them to have recited *secum invicem*. Now by the former of these words, I conceive him to have meant, that the prayers thus offered up were general ones, in which every person present joined. With regard to the term *invicem*, learned men have imagined that we ought to understand it as indicating the manner in which

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which these prayers were recited; and that it has, in this place, a similar import with *alternatim*; implying, as they would have it, that in the assemblies of which we are speaking, the Christians divided themselves into two choirs, and that the praises of Christ were alternately celebrated by each. For my own part, I should not by any means wish to be understood as pronouncing this opinion to be erroneous; but, at the same time, I cannot help observing that it appears to me not at all improbable that Pliny might have recourse to the term *invicem*, by way of briefly expressing what the Christians had told him, of its being usual for one of their presbyters, or their bishop, first to recite the form of prayer, and then for the people to repeat it after him, and add the word “amen” at the conclusion. Were the term to be considered as having this reference, we should unquestionably find less difficulty in making it accord with what we know of the forms and usages of the early ages. As to the force or precise meaning of the words *quasi deo*, I must confess that I really do not feel myself at all competent to speak with decision. For it appears to me to be altogether uncertain whether Pliny, in this place, makes use of words of his own, or adopts those of the Christians whom he had examined. If the expression is to be considered as Pliny’s own, it certainly cannot be adduced as a proof that those Christians entertained a similar opinion with ourselves as to the divinity of Christ: for *deus*, as is well observed by that excellent scholar and sagacious commentator, Jo. Matth. Gesner, in his remarks on this passage, was a term in the use of which the Romans allowed themselves considerable latitude; and so far from considering it as exclusively appropriate to the divine nature, were in the habit of not unfrequently applying it to spiritual beings of a very inferior order. On the other hand, could it be ascertained that *quasi deo* were the words of the Christians whom Pliny examined, there must at once be an end to all doubt as to the fact of those Christians having worshipped our blessed Saviour as the Supreme Deity.—With regard to the word *carmen*, it admits of some question whether we ought to understand by it that these prayers of the Christians were composed according to the rules of metre, and consequently sung; or whether the term is to be considered as implying in this place, what we frequently find it applied

pointment of bishops, the bishop, addressed himself to the people in a grave and pious discourse ;

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to elsewhere, merely a set form of words in prose. Some of the highest authorities, including the celebrated Gesner, lean in favour of the latter construction ; and influenced chiefly by the weight of such judgment, I was led to give the preference to this opinion in my *Histor. Christian. Institutiones majores*, sæc. i. The former construction of the word has, however, found an able advocate in a learned writer, whose masterly discussion of the subject, under the assumed title of *Hymnophilus*, is to be found in the fifth volume of the *Miscellanea Lipsiens. nov.* of the learned Mœnckeniuss. After having compared together the different arguments brought forward on either side, I must confess it now appears to me scarcely possible to say which way the scale preponderates. Those eminent scholars, to whose opinion I formerly subscribed, bring forward, in support of their construction of the word, the authority of a great number of ancient Latin writers, and beyond all, that of Pliny himself, in whose writings, they observe, the word *carmen* is several times put for prayers in prose. The verb *dicere*, too, they bid us remark, which Pliny in this place joins with *carmen*, will not admit of the supposition that compositions in verse were here alluded to ; for that had real verses been meant, they would have been stated (*canti*) to be sung, not (*dici*) said. But of these arguments, neither the one nor the other can be deemed conclusive. For as to the first, it can by no means be allowed to follow, that because the word *carmen* is frequently put by Pliny and others for a composition in prose, it may not have a different signification in the passage in question ; and particularly if it be considered that in the one case it is used in an extraordinary sense, but in the other merely in an ordinary one. And with regard to the arguments deduced from the word *dicere*, a variety of passages might be quoted, which would shew that this verb was occasionally put for *cantare*, and associated with *carmen* in its strict sense. In the *Carmen sæculare* of Horace, for instance, ver. 6, 7, 8, we find,

“ Quo Sybillini monuere versus
Virgines lætas, puerosque castos,
Diis, quibus septem placuere colles,
Dicere carmen.”

Indisputably alluding to the singing of a hymn, or composition in verse. Virgil too, when speaking of the hymn which

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not, as it should seem, composed according to the rules of art, but recommending itself to attention and

which the husbandmen were accustomed to sing to Ceres, before putting the sickle to the corn, *Georg.* lib. i. ver. 348, et seq. says,

“—————*Neque ante
Falcem maturis quisquam supponat aristis,
Quam Cereri, tortia redimitur tempora quercu,
Det motus incompositos, et carmina dicat.*”

And again, when describing a part of the inhabitants of the Elyfian Fields as occupied in song and dance, *Æneid.* lib. vi. ver. 644.

“*Pars pedibus plaudunt choreas, et carmina dicunt.*”

The very learned writer, to whom I have above alluded as taking with others the opposite side of the question, rests his argument principally upon the word *carmen*,—reminding us that it strictly and properly signifies a song, and contending that the strict and proper signification of a word is not to be departed from, unless through evident necessity. Now all this is certainly very well observed. But the advocates for the former opinion may reply, that this learned writer himself is one of the first to break through the rule which he thus prescribes to others, of adhering to the strict and proper signification of words, by insisting that we ought to understand Pliny as using *dicere* in the sense of *cantare*: for that this is literally rejecting the plain and commonly accepted meaning of the former verb, and annexing to it a remote and unusual signification, without any apparent necessity for so doing. In support of this construction, indeed, he adduces the authority of Eusebius and Tertullian: the latter (in *Apologetic.* cap. ii.) making use of the term *canere*, as expressive of Pliny’s meaning; and the former (in his *Ecclesiastical Hist.* lib. iii. cap. 33.) rendering the words *carmen dicere* into Greek by the verb *ὑμνεῖν*. Now this is certainly a circumstance not unworthy of remark; but, at the same time, it cannot be considered as altogether so conclusive as to place the matter beyond doubt: for were the question to be agitated, it is very possible that much difference of opinion might be found to prevail with regard to the merits of Tertullian and Eusebius as translators of Pliny. As to any thing else connected with this point, I purposely pass it over. These prayers, then, whether in verse or in prose, having been offered up, the Christians, according to Pliny, *sacramento se obstringebant, &c.* “bound themselves

and respect through the unaffected piety and fervent zeal of the preacher. In this discourse, the

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by an oath not to commit theft, robbery, or any other crime forbidden by law." But in this instance, it is plainly to be perceived that we have not the words of the Christians themselves given to us. The terms here used must be considered as belonging entirely to Pliny, who endeavoured, by clothing the information he had taken down from the mouths of the Christians in a Roman dress, to render it easier of comprehension to the emperor, and thus the more readily to satisfy him of the innocent and harmless character of the religion which these people professed. With regard to what he here first says, of its having been the practice of the Christians in their assemblies, *sacramento se obstringere*, "to bind themselves by an oath," that is, *to swear*, that they would lead a chaste life, &c. it is altogether a misrepresentation of the fact: and I know not how to account for it, that learned men, who do not appear to have been ignorant of the utter dislike which the early Christians had to oaths of any sort, should for a moment have brought themselves to believe that such was the case. For is it at all credible that men so exceedingly reserved and scrupulous in swearing, be the occasion what it might, should have regularly bound themselves by an oath, whenever they assembled together for the purposes of divine worship? This difficulty has not indeed escaped the observation of some men of erudition, and they have endeavoured to obviate it by suggesting that when the Christians, in the course of their examination, made mention of their *sacraments*, Pliny might not be aware of their meaning, but conceive that the term was used by them in its literal Roman sense; whereas what they alluded to were certain rites of their own, to which they had given the denomination of sacraments, namely, baptism and the supper of the Lord. The conjecture is certainly ingenious, but beyond this we can allow it to possess no merit whatever. For not to mention other things by which it might be shewn to be utterly destitute of foundation, its fallacy is rendered sufficiently apparent by Pliny himself, who expressly states that sacrament of which he speaks, to have been comprehended in the first part of the Christian worship; whereas the celebration of what were termed sacraments by the Christians, did not belong to that portion of their divine service. The Lord's supper, in particular, is known to have always formed a branch of

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the multitude were exhorted to frame their lives agreeably to the word which they had heard read, and

that latter or concluding part of their public worship, to which we shall presently advert. To me it appears most likely, that the Christians simply represented themselves as making a solemn promise to the Almighty, whenever they assembled together, that they would strive to lead a life of purity and innocence; and that Pliny, perceiving little or no difference between a promise of this sort and an oath, by way of making a stronger impression on Trajan's mind, preferred expressing himself after the Roman manner, and flated them *sacramento se obstringere*. It yields a further argument against our believing that the Christians were accustomed in their assemblies to take an oath to the above effect, that not the least vestige whatever of any such periodical repetition of the articles of their profession is to be met with in any of the monuments of antiquity; nor was it at all necessary. The practice was, for those who embraced Christianity, once, namely, at the time of their initiation, to pledge themselves solemnly to God that they would lead a life conformable to the religion they had espoused. After having done this, they do not appear to have been continually called upon for a repetition of their engagement, but were merely admonished publicly by the presbyters to beware of departing from, or forfeiting the solemn promise thus made. Finally, what Pliny thus reports to the emperor concerning the Christians, *viz.* that they solemnly pledged themselves to abstain from the commission of any acts that were forbidden as criminal by the Roman laws, such as theft, robbery, adultery, violation of compacts, refusal to restore any thing given merely in pledge, and the like, can never be considered as having constituted any very striking feature in that most pure and holy system of moral discipline, which the professors of Christianity made it their object to cherish and inculcate. Restrictions of this sort might doubtless occupy a subordinate place in the Christian code; but its injunctions mainly respected duties of a higher and more important nature:—that we were, for instance, to cherish the most unbounded reverence for God and his will; that our love should be extended universally to all mankind; that we should ever be ready to do good even to our enemies; and should earnestly strive to subdue, and as it were extinguish, within ourselves every sort of unlawful appetite. There can be little or no doubt

and to embrace every occasion of proving themselves worthy disciples of that divine Master, whose

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doubt that the Christians whom Pliny examined pointed out these things to him, but that he deemed it unnecessary to notice them; conceiving that every purpose he had in view would be sufficiently answered, by his representing to Trajan that no incongruity subsisted between the Christian discipline and the Roman laws, but that whatever was interdicted as criminal by the one was as strictly prohibited by the other. To me it appears most likely, that the account given by the Christians on this occasion was to the following purport:—That after offering up their prayers to Christ, it was customary for one or other of their ministers to read a portion of those Scriptures which they held sacred. That a solemn oration or sermon was then delivered by a presbyter, or the bishop, in which those present were exhorted to make what they had heard, the rule of their faith and conduct; abstaining, as far as in them lay, from the commission of evil of any kind; and that it was usual for all of them to promise, silently within themselves, that they would do so. If any refused to conform themselves to the word, agreeably to this admonition, and preferred continuing in the practice of iniquity, they were excluded from all communication with the assembly. And this is the sense which Tertullian, who perceived how widely Pliny's account, if taken literally, would differ in this respect from the practice of the first Christians, annexes to the passage in question. *Allegat*, says he, alluding to this letter of Pliny's, *nihil aliud se de sacris eorum comperisse, quam cætus ante lucanos ad canendum Christo ut deo, et ad confederandam disciplinam, homicidium, adulterium, fraudem, perfidiam, et cætera scelera prohibentes.* (*Apologetic.* cap. ii.) The reader will perceive that this exactly corresponds with what I have above remarked. Nothing is here said of the taking of any oath; nothing of any reiteration of the baptismal vow: on the contrary, the crimes which Pliny states the Christians to have abjured, are here represented as being merely prohibited, meaning doubtless forbidden by the mouth of the preacher. At their second meeting, it was the practice of the Christians to celebrate the feast of love, and the Lord's supper; of which two rites Pliny speaks in the following terms: *Rursusque coeundi ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen et innoxium.* *Promiscuus cibus*, it appears to me, is here put to denote food of the opposite quality to that

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that which is exquisite and delicate. By this expression, therefore, it should seem that Pliny meant to do away that suspicion of indulging in luxury and voluptuous excess, which the enemies of the Christians had excited against them; and to satisfy the emperor that in their repasts they made use of nothing costly or delicate, but merely the plain and ordinary articles of food. The epithet *innocius* was unquestionably intended by him to operate in direct refutation of a calumny respecting the Christians, which had been very generally propagated throughout the confines of the Roman empire, and had served to kindle amongst the lower orders of the people a wonderful degree of animosity towards them, namely, that of their occasionally joining in a sort of Thyeſtean banquet,—a charge of which we find frequent notice taken in the different apologies of the early Christians.

[v] There are several, not to speak merely of men of ordinary learning, but also of the better informed, who maintain that any individual amongst the Christians was, in this first age, at liberty to assume the office of a teacher in their solemn assemblies, and might there openly deliver his sentiments on divine subjects, for the benefit of the fraternity at large. A very unwarrantable use, however, has been made of this opinion by some of the present day, who aim at bringing about a new order of things in the Christian commonwealth, and would fain abrogate all rule; and jumbling every thing together, do away all sort of distinction between teachers and learners. For my own part, could I perceive that such an opinion was in any respect well founded, I would at once, without the least hesitation, acknowledge it. In fact I could, in the present instance, have no temptation whatever to disguise the truth; since, having never filled the office of a public teacher in the church, my interest is not at all involved in the question: and besides, I well know that should such or such appear to have been the customary or established practice of the first ages, it by no means follows that it ought not to have been deviated from in succeeding generations. But I most solemnly declare, that amongst the various arguments and proofs which are adduced in support of the above opinion, even by those of the learned who have espoused it, I have not been able to find any thing whatever that can, in my opinion, be considered as satisfactory,—I will not say by a
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aneous effusions, as it should seem, of a mind glowing with divine love) were then offered up aloud by the officiating minister, and repeated after him by the people. If there were any present who declared themselves to be commissioned of God to make known his will to the people, I mean persons professing themselves to be pro-

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man of acuteness and penetration, but by any one of common sense and understanding. So far as this, indeed, undoubtedly appears clear, that any one, whether he were a presbyter, or a bishop, or merely a person of the ordinary class, might use his endeavours to propagate the Christian religion, and exert himself to the best of his abilities in making known the blessings of celestial truth to those who lay chained in darkness and superstition. But does this, let me ask, at all support the idea that the office of teaching in the public assemblies of the Christians might be assumed by any of the brethren *ad libitum*? It is also unquestionable that the primitive Christians, in conformity to the direction of the apostles, were accustomed to admonish, exhort, and reprove each other. But there can be no doubt that this was done privately, and not openly in the face of the whole congregation, when assembled for the purposes of public worship. Finally, no one denies that the prophets, or those who asserted themselves to be under the influence of divine inspiration, had liberty to speak in the solemn assemblies of the church. But it appears to me truly astonishing that any one should bring forward this as an argument in favour of the opinion, that the office of teaching in public might of right be assumed by any of the brethren indiscriminately. If I am capable of forming any judgment at all on the subject, I am sure that what we know of these prophets, so far from yielding any argument in favour of such an opinion, makes directly the contrary way. It appears to me in fact altogether incontrovertible, that the prophets only had liberty to preach, and consequently that the liberty of preaching could not have belonged of common right to all the brethren; and that so far from its having been the practice for every one to address the brethren, in their public assemblies, who might feel inclined so to do, this privilege was confined merely to those who had given satisfactory proof of their being divinely commissioned to instruct the church.

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phets, they were now at liberty to address the congregation. After having heard what they had to say, it was referred to the acknowledged prophets, to determine whether they spake under the influence of a mere natural impulse, or were prompted in what they delivered by a divine inspiration. To this first solemn act of public worship succeeded a second, which commenced with the offering of certain voluntary gifts, or oblations, which all those who were possessed of sufficient ability were accustomed to bring with them, and present to the elders. From what was thus offered, the presiding minister selected so much as might appear to him to be necessary for the celebration of the Lord's supper, and consecrated it to that purpose in a set form of words; the people expressing their approval of his prayers, by pronouncing aloud the word "amen" at the conclusion of them. After partaking of the Lord's supper, the assembly sat down to a sober and sacred repast, denominated the feast of love. In this, however, the same order was not observed in all the churches. At the breaking up of the assembly, the brethren and sisters exchanged with each other what, from its being meant as a token of mutual good will, was termed the kiss of peace. How truly admirable the simplicity by which the rites of our holy religion were characterized in these its infant days [w]!

XLVIII. Al-

[w] The reader will find these particulars more fully discussed and illustrated in Bingham's *Origines Ecclesiasticæ*, Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, Goth. Arnold's work *de Vita et Moribus primorum Christianorum*, and the writings of various other authors. It may not, however, be improper to apprise him that considerable caution ought to be observed in reading books of this sort; since, to pass over other things,

XLVIII. Although all the churches were, in this first age of Christianity, united together in one common bond of faith and love, and were in every respect ready to promote the interests and welfare of each other by a reciprocal interchange of good offices; yet with regard to government and internal economy, every individual church considered itself as an independent community, none of them ever looking in these respects beyond the circle of its own members for assistance, or recognizing any sort of external influence or authority. Neither in the New Testament, nor in any ancient document whatever, do we find any thing recorded, from whence it might be inferred that any of the minor churches were at all dependent on, or looked up for direction to, those of greater magnitude or consequence: on the contrary, several things occur therein, which put it out of all doubt that every one of them enjoyed the same rights, and was considered as being on a footing of the most perfect equality with the rest [x]. Indeed it cannot,—I will not say

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things, the authors of them have not been on all occasions sufficiently particular in the choice of their authorities, neither have they made a proper distinction with regard to times, or between such things as are certain and indisputable and such as are merely probable.

[x] It appears indeed from the Acts of the Apostles, that the dignity and authority of the church of Jerusalem was for a while very great. In cap. xv. we find the Christians of Antioch referring their disputes concerning the necessity of observing the law of Moses, to the judgment of this church; and it seems extremely probable that other churches might act in a similar way. St. Paul too, although acting under an immediately divine commission, yet made it a point to commend himself and his doctrine to the favour and approval of the apostles, and the church of Jerusalem. Gal. i. 18. ii. 7, 8, 9. But the authority thus recognised in this particular church, did not arise so much out of any thing

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may be proved, but even be made appear probable, from any testimony divine or human, that in

thing like a superiority over the other churches, (for it never laid claim to any such pre-eminency,) as from the circumstance of its being under the immediate care and government of our Lord's apostles, who were expressly constituted by him himself supreme directors and judges of all matters connected with religion. Properly speaking, it was not to the church of Jerusalem, but to the apostles who presided over it, that the other churches had recourse for direction. To confess the truth, however, it is not improbable that in dubious matters, even in the absence of the apostles, application might oftener be made to this church than to any other for advice. For in the church of Jerusalem there must have been a far greater number of inspired persons than was to be met with in any of the other churches; since the Holy Spirit, at the time of its miraculous effusion, recorded in Acts, ii. did not descend merely on the apostles, but was poured out generally on all the disciples of Christ in that city. The churches of Asia, I have not the least doubt, recognized a similar authority in that of Ephesus, during the time that St. John presided over it. Indeed it appears to me not at all unlikely, that the honour of being occasionally looked up to by neighbouring churches for an example, both as to faith and practice, might be a distinction enjoyed by all such of the churches as had had the good fortune to be under the immediate tuition and care of any of the apostles. Should any one require it, I will concede even more than this; for I am sure it is my wish most readily to grant whatever can reasonably be expected of me. I will admit then, that it was for some time customary for all the apostolical churches, that is, those which had been founded and instructed by the apostles themselves, to be consulted respecting any new opinions that might be suggested, or any controversies that might arise respecting religion. Of this custom abundant testimony is to be collected from the writers of the second century. The spiritual instructors of that age appear to have thought, and in my opinion not without reason, as things were then situated, that with regard to matters of faith and doctrine, it was not likely that any should be better informed than those who had been under the immediate tuition of the apostles themselves. In the case, too, of any one's taking upon him to disseminate new opinions, and endeavouring to shelter himself

in this age it was the practice for several churches to enter into, and maintain amongst themselves that sort of association, which afterwards came to subsist amongst the churches of almost every province:—I allude to their assembling by their bishops, at stated periods, for the purpose of enacting general laws, and determining any questions or controversies that might arise respecting divine matters [y]. It is not until the second century

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himself under apostolic authority, no more effectual way of repressing his presumption could present itself than that of referring to the testimony of the churches which the apostles themselves had founded. See, for instance, Tertullian *de Præscript. adversus Hæreticos*. It is a most egregious mistake, however, for any one to imagine that we have in this any thing like a proof of an inequality having subsisted amongst the early churches, or of a judicial power having been possessed by such of them as were apostolical. For to pass over other things which might be urged, it was not to the churches, but to the apostles, the founders of those churches, whose counsel and discipline were supposed still to prevail in those assemblies, that this judicial power was attributed; and by degrees, as the decisions and authority of councils came to have more weight and influence, this ancient practice of recurring to the testimony of the apostolical churches fell into disuse. In fact, the thing was as much a matter of choice then, as at present it is with any one whether or not he will refer any doubts, with which he may be perplexed, to be resolved by a college of divines in an university. Certain I am that no proof whatever can be brought to shew that this sort of reference to the apostolical churches was at all compulsory, or that their determinations were considered of such authority as for it to be deemed impious in any one to decline complying with them. A great reverence was undoubtedly, during the first ages, entertained for such of the churches as had been long under the immediate instruction of any of the apostles; but if any one thing be certain, I am persuaded this is,—that these churches never possessed the power of governing or controuling the rest according to their will.

[y] In St. Paul's epistles there are several passages, which plainly prove that the first churches were held together

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century that any traces of that sort of association, from whence councils took their origin, are to be

gether by no bond, save only that of faith and mutual love ; and that each was governed and regulated by its own laws and institutions. Those seven epistles addressed to the Asiatic churches, with which the Revelations open, exhibit likewise indisputable testimony to the same effect. In the first place, nothing whatever is to be found in these epistles to warrant even a conjecture that these seven churches were united together by any sort of consociation, or that they were accustomed to assemble one with the other in the way of council : on the contrary, the circumstance of our Saviour's not directing what he had to say to them collectively, but, whether it be in the way of commendation, of reprehension, or of admonition, addressing himself to each one separately, tends unquestionably to prove that they had nothing in common, save that of their being of one and the same religious profession. Had it been usual for the bishops of these churches to assemble and consult together at stated periods, or when any thing new or extraordinary might occur, as was the practice in the second century, it is not at all probable that the circumstance would have been passed over by our Saviour without the smallest notice ; but that, on the contrary, he would have recommended to the pastors thus associated the cultivation of prudence and harmony, and would have attributed to them chiefly whatever presented itself either as exceptionable or praise-worthy in the state of these churches. Again, another argument of still greater cogency is to be drawn from these epistles :—for it appears by them that there was a considerable diversity in the tenets and regulations of these seven churches. The Nicolaitans, for instance, whoever they might then be, were wholly excluded from the church of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 6. ; whereas in that of Pergamos they had free toleration, Rev. ii. 15. The members of the church of Thyatira suffered those to continue of their number who ate with the worshippers of false deities in their temples, and were addicted to fornication ; things which were for the most part held in utter abomination by the rest. Now if the heads of churches, thus situated in one and the same province, had been accustomed occasionally to meet for the purpose of consulting together, and deliberating on the best means of promoting the common welfare of the assemblies over which they presided, in what way are we to account for the existence

be perceived; when we find them occurring here and there, some of them tolerably clear and distinct, others again but slight and faint: which seems plainly to prove that the practice arose subsequently to the times of the apostles, and that all that is urged concerning the councils of the first century, and the divine authority of councils, is sustained merely by the most uncertain kind of support, namely, the practice and opinion of more recent times [z].

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istence of this diversity of sentiments and moral discipline amongst them? Had it at that time been the practice to hold councils, the case of the Nicolaitans would without doubt have been discussed therein; and either their tenets would have been sanctioned by the general voice, or the sect would have been excluded from the churches altogether.

[z] It is very common for that assembly of the church of Jerusalem, of which we read in Acts, xv. to be termed the *first council*; and if people choose still to persist in giving it this denomination, I shall certainly not trouble myself so far as to fall out with them about it. I would wish them, however, to understand that this is applying the word *council*, in a way altogether inconsistent with its true import. The congregation that is stated to have met on this occasion was nothing more than an assembly of the members of one individual church, consisting of the apostles, the elders, and the people. Now if the term council could properly be applied to such an assembly as this, it would follow as a necessary consequence that more councils were held in the first century than in any subsequent one; whereas even the warmest advocates for their early origin are ready to admit, that in this age they were not by any means frequent. In fact, it was a most common practice in all the churches, at this period, for the members to hold meetings after the manner of that above alluded to as having been convened at Jerusalem, for the purpose of consulting together, and deliberating on matters relating to religion and divine worship: and therefore, if such a meeting is to be termed a council, it may even be said that there were more councils held in the first century than in all the subsequent ones down to our own time put together. A council, properly speaking,
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XLIX. In the age of which we are now treating, it was not deemed so essentially requisite in a teacher that he should be distinguished for profound or extensive knowledge, either human or divine, as that he should be a man of virtue and probity, and, in addition to a due measure of gravity, be possessed of a certain degree of facility in imparting instruction to the ignorant. Had the apostles indeed thought otherwise, and directed that none but men of letters and erudition should have been elected to the office of presbyters, it would not have been possible for the churches to have complied with such a mandate; since, at that time, the number of the wise and learned who had embraced the faith of Christ was but small, and as it were of no account. The Christian writers of the first century consequently were not many; and from the labours of the few whose works have reached us, whether we consult such as have been handed down whole and entire, or such as carry with

means an assembly of several associated churches, or a congregation of delegates representing a number of churches so united, in which the common welfare of the whole is made the subject-matter of consultation; and such things are resolved on and enacted as may appear to the members constituting such assembly, or to the major part of them, eligible, and fraught with a promise of conducing to the general good. Now, that such an assembly as this was even once held in the first century, is what I am sure no one, let him take what pains he may, will ever be able to find in the history of that age. As the cause of Christianity, however, advanced, and its concerns became more extensive, so that the churches composing an ecclesiastical province assumed, as it were, the form of a republic made up of various minor districts, it became necessary, in order to preserve tranquillity and a mutual good understanding amongst them, that several particulars should be occasionally discussed in a general meeting, composed of legates or deputies from each.

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them the marks of interpolation and corruption, it is uniformly evident that, in unfolding the sacred truths of Christianity to the world, the assistance of genius, of art, or of human means of any other kind, was but little, if at all, courted. For if the mind of a reader is not to be charmed or wrought upon by sanctity of sentiment, simplicity of diction, or the effusions of a genuine unaffected piety, it will be in vain for him to seek for either gratification or improvement in the perusal of the writings to which we allude. All these authors, although by no means on a level in point of dignity and judgment, are yet usually classed together under the general title of "the apostolic fathers;" alluding, as it should seem, to their having conversed with the apostles themselves, or with some of their immediate associates, and their works have, in consequence, been most commonly edited together. On this account, it may be the better way perhaps for us to collect here into one view whatever we may judge necessary to be known respecting them, than to postpone any part of it to a subsequent period; although Ignatius, Polycarp, and Hermas, rather belong to the second century, as that was the age in which they wrote and died [a].

C E N T.
I.
But few persons of erudition amongst the primitive Christians. The apostolic fathers.

[a] Whatever writings could in any way be ascribed to the apostolic fathers, whether good, bad, or indifferent, were all of them collected together by Jo. Bapt. Cotelerius, a French divine, and published by him in two volumes, illustrated with long and learned notes. This work was afterwards twice re-printed at Amsterdam, with various additions by Jo. Le Clerc. The better part of these fathers has also been given to the public, but without comment, by Tho. Ittigius, in his *Bibliotheca Patrum Apostolicorum*. They have been translated into English by Wake, archbishop of Canterbury; into German, by Gothofred Arnold; and the better part of them into French, by Abr. Ruchat.

L. At

C E N T.

I.

The genuine
writings of
Clement of
Rome.

L. At the head of these writers stands that Clement who, from his having been bishop of Rome, is usually by way of distinction styled the Roman; a man of unquestionably the highest authority, since we find other authors, with a view to obtain for their opinions and writings a favourable reception with the public, prefixing to them his name. The common accounts that we have of his life, the incidents by which it was chequered, and the manner of his death, are for the most part undeserving of credit, at least they are by no means well authenticated [b]. There are extant two epistles of his in Greek, addressed to the church of Corinth, at a time when it was distracted by intestine faction. Of these the first is generally, and I think not without reason, considered as indisputably genuine in the main; although a very ill applied industry appears to have been subsequently exercised upon it by some one or other, probably, however, without any evil design, in the way of interpola-

[b] Vid. Jo. Ernest Grabe *Spicileg. Patrum Sæc. i.* p. 264; Tillemont *Memoires pour servir a l'Histoire de l'Eglise*, tom. ii. part i. p. 269; Phil. Rondinin. lib. ii. *de S. Clement. Papa et Martyra, ejusque Basilica in Urbe Roma*, 1706, 4to. Some time back, when a sepulchre, bearing the name of Clement, was unexpectedly laid open at Rome, a good deal of discussion took place amongst the learned of Italy respecting Clemens Romanus. With regard to these investigations, however, the wisest and best-informed writers do not scruple to avow that the history of this venerable man is involved in great obscurity; and that several things, which have been hastily considered as relating to him, belong properly to Flavius Clemens the consul, who was put to death by Domitian. See the Dissertations of the Jesuit Zacharias, and Vitry, which were published by Angelus Calogera, in his *Opusc. Scientific.* tom. xxxiii. p. 300. 350, et seq.

tion [c]. The authenticity of the latter one has been regarded, even from a very remote period, as somewhat questionable, though it is not easy to say on what grounds, since there seems to be nothing whatever in it that is manifestly irreconcilable with what we know of the genius and character of Clement [d].

Supposititious writings
of Clement.

LI. In addition to these Epistles, there have been attributed to Clement the following works :

1. Eight books of *Apostolical Constitutions*, a

[c] This interpolation was first detected by Hieron. Bignonius, who communicated what he had thus remarked in a letter to Grotius. See Cotelarii *Patres Apostolici*, tom. i. p. 133, 134. The discovery was further prosecuted, not however without caution, by Ed. Bernhard, in some annotations of his on Clement, which were published by Le Clerc in the last edition of his *Patres Apostolici*. The learned Hen. Wotton, it is true, in his notes on this epistle, leaves no means untried to do away this imputation, and to persuade us that the letter in question has been handed down pure and unvitiated by any sort of corruption whatever. But the labours of this eminent scholar, so far from establishing his point, may be said to have been completely thrown away; since it is as clear as the light itself, that there are several passages in this epistle altogether irrelevant to the writer's purpose, and which hold no sort of connection or correspondence with what precedes or follows them; indeed some of them are manifestly taken from Clement of Alexandria. For my own part, I should think that it might be very possible for an attentive and skilful person to remove from this venerable author's robe, (if I may be allowed to apply the term robe to an epistle that has no pretensions to either learning or eloquence,) these patches with which it is at present disfigured; and it appears to me to be a kind of task which it might prove well worth the while for any judicious scholar to undertake.

[d] A list of the different editions of these epistles that have been published, is given by Jo. Albert. Fabricius, in his *Biblioth. Græc.* lib. iv. cap. v. p. 175, et seq. It does not, however, include the most accurate one of all, viz. that printed at Cambridge in 1718, in 8vo. by Hen. Wotton, and enriched with various notes and dissertations of his own, and of several other learned men.

work

C E N T.
I.Supposititious
writings
of Clement.

work of undoubted antiquity, but, at the same time, of uncertain date; the production of an author beyond all measure austere, and who, as it should seem, entertained a thorough contempt for intellectual culture of any kind. The most probable origin that we can assign to this work is, that some ascetic writer having drawn up a form of church government and discipline, upon what he conceived to be apostolic maxims, he, in order to gain for it more attention and respect, attributed it at once to the apostles themselves, pretending it to have been received direct from them by their disciple Clement [*e*]. 2. A set of *Apostolical Canons*, or Ecclesiastical Laws, eighty-five in number, which the person who framed them wished to be considered as having been enacted by the apostles, and transmitted by them to Clement. It should seem to be not at all unlikely that these Canons and the above-mentioned Constitutions might originate with one and the same author. Be that as it may, the matter of this work is unquestionably ancient;

[*e*] The various opinions entertained by the learned, respecting the Apostolical Constitutions and Canons, have been collected into one view by Tho. Ittigius, in a dissertation *de Patribus Apostolicis*, prefixed to his *Bibliotheca Patrum Apostolicorum*; as also by Jo. Franc. Buddeus, in his *Isagog. in Theologiam*, part ii. cap. v. p. 742, et seq. There are likewise two learned dissertations on the same subject, annexed by Jo. Phil. Baratiere to his work *de Successione Romanor. Episcoporum primorum*, p. 229, and 260: the object of one of which is to prove that these Constitutions are not, as many pretend, interpolated; whilst that of the other is to make it appear that they were compiled about the beginning of the second century. As to the first of these points, the generality of people will, I rather think, feel disposed to agree with him; but with regard to the latter. I conceive that his arguments will not be deemed conclusive by many.

since

since the manners and discipline of which it exhibits a view are those which prevailed amongst the Christians of the second and third centuries, especially those resident in Greece and the oriental regions [f]. With respect to its form, however the work is commonly looked upon as belonging to a more recent age. III. *The Recognitions of Clement*, in ten books. This is a narrative entirely fictitious, but at the same time of an agreeable interesting nature, and of considerable use in bringing us acquainted with the tenets of the Gnostics, and enabling us rightly to comprehend the state of Christian affairs in the age to which it refers. The work professes to be an account of the travels of St. Peter, and his disputes with Simon Magus, the leader of the Gnostics, written by Clement; in reality however it appears to have come from the pen of an Alexandrian Jew, who had but partially embraced Christianity, and still cherished errors of the grossest kind. Considerable hostility is nevertheless manifested by him towards the tenets of the Gnostics, and in some respects he proves himself to be neither a weak nor an unskilful adversary. For some time these Recognitions were known to the public merely through the medium of a Latin translation by Rufinus: we may consider the Greek text as having been first published by Cotelerius in his *Patres Apostolici*. For although the Clementina, as printed by Cotelerius, differ in many respects from the Recognitions, yet in both the

C E N T.
I.
Supposi-
tious writ-
ings of Cle-
ment.

[f] This has been proved, I think, beyond all controversy by that most able investigator of Christian antiquities, Bishop Beveridge, as well in his annotations on these canons, as in a separate work on this subject, published by him (Lond. 1678, in 4to.) under the title of *Codex Canonum Ecclesie primitivæ vindicatus & illustratus*.

C E N T. argument of each respective book is the same, in both the same order of narration is observed, and a similar correspondence between them prevails in the winding up and conclusion of the narrative: in fact it should seem that one and the same book was anciently edited twice, or perhaps oftener, under a somewhat different form [g].

Ignatius and his Epistles.

LII. Next after Clement in point of time comes Ignatius, to whom St. Peter himself is said to have committed the care and superintendance of the church of Antioch, and who, by command of the emperor Trajan, was delivered over as a prey to wild beasts in the theatre at Rome [b]. There are extant several Epistles with the name of Ignatius prefixed to them; but a question having been made as to their authenticity, a deal of learned and elaborate discussion has taken place on the subject amongst men of erudition, and the point has been contested by them with considerable vehemence; some asserting them to be spurious, others

[g] Concerning this work (which those who may be induced to consult it, will find to throw considerable light on several ancient matters and opinions, and to yield more assistance towards comprehending the mysteries in the discipline of Simon Magus and others of the Gnostics, than all the other early writers put together) I have spoken more at large in my Dissertation *de turbata per recentiores Platonicos Ecclesia*, § XXXIV. See my *Synagma Dissert. ad Hist. Eccl. pertin.* vol. i. I do not however consider myself as having, either here or even there, pointed out every ground on which it has a claim to our attention.

[b] For a copious account of Ignatius we refer the reader to Tillemont's *Memoires pour servir a l'Histoire de l'Eglise*, tom. ii. p. ii. p. 42. 80. Several others also have employed their pens on this subject, as may be seen in the *Biblioth. Græc.* of Fabricius, lib. v. cap. i. p. 38, where likewise the different editions of the Epistles of Ignatius are enumerated, and a view is taken of the disputes amongst the learned to which they have given rise.

insisting on it that they are genuine [i]. The most prevailing opinion appears to be that the seven which are reputed to have been written by him in the course of his journey to Rome, namely those respectively addressed to the Smyrneans, to Polycarp, to the Ephesians, to the Magnesians, to the Philadelphians, and to the Trallians, as they stand in the edition of them published in the seventeenth century, from a manuscript in the Medicean library at Florence are unquestionably genuine: though there are not wanting those who, on account of its dissimilitude of style, consider the authenticity of the Epistle to Polycarp as less to be depended on than that of the other six. As for the rest

C E N T.
I.
Ignatius and
his Epistles.

[i] But few probably would ever have interested themselves much in this question concerning the genuineness of the Epistles of Ignatius, had they not been found to favour the cause of those who contend for the divine origin and great antiquity of episcopal government. But the Presbyterians as they are termed, and those amongst us who are for doing away every thing of which the teachers of the church might avail themselves, in order to maintain a distinction between themselves and the people, perceiving this, have attacked these Letters with all the warmth of party spirit, and occasionally suffered themselves to be betrayed into so much violence on the subject, as rather to lessen their own credit than that of the Epistles in the eyes of a judicious reader. The Episcopalians have also, not unfrequently, run into the same fault; and in their eagerness to prove a want of penetration and judgment in their adversaries, have shewn a deficiency of candour and liberality in themselves. For my own part, I cannot perceive that it would be of any great consequence to either party to obtain the victory in this case; since it by no means appears to me that the cause of episcopacy is so far dependent on these Epistles for support, as that it must stand or fall accordingly as they may be adjudged to be either genuine or spurious. But the conduct of even our greatest scholars may, in some instances, be said to resemble that of advocates in courts of law, who frequently contend with more asperity and earnestness for minor or collateral points, than for the principal matter in dispute.

C E N T.
 I.
 Ignatius and
 his Epistles.

of these Epistles, of which no mention whatever is made by any of the early Christian writers, they are commonly rejected as altogether spurious. The distinction thus generally recognized in favour of the abovementioned particular letters, is grounded on reasons of no little force and weight, but at the same time they are not of such a conclusive nature as to silence all objection: on the contrary, a regard for truth requires it to be acknowledged, that so considerable a degree of obscurity hangs over the question respecting the authenticity of not only a part, but the whole of the Epistles ascribed to Ignatius, as to render it altogether a case of much intricacy and doubt [k].

LIII. The

[k] That the six or seven letters above pointed out have in them somewhat of a genuine cast is, I think, unquestionable, and rendered particularly manifest by (amongst others) Bishop Pearson in his *Vindiciæ Ignatianæ*, a work of great excellence, and replete with profound learning. As to the quantity however of what may thus be considered as authentic, I must confess myself unable to determine. There are extant, as is well known, two editions of the Epistles ascribed to Ignatius; the one an ancient one, and the more comprehensive of the two; the other, that which was published in the 17th century, first of all by Isaac Vossius, and afterwards by Sir Thomas Smith, from the Medicæan manuscript, and in which are not to be found several things that are contained in the former. Of these editions the latter has, in general, the preference given to it by those of the present day who wish to uphold the authority of Ignatius, inasmuch as it accords better with the tenets and opinions now generally prevalent in the Christian church than the other, in which some passages and expressions occur which cannot well be defended or reconciled with what are commonly deemed orthodox sentiments respecting God and the Saviour of mankind. This is not however considered as by any means a satisfactory reason for rejecting the other edition by some, who with truth remark, that prior to the existence of controversies in the church, its members appear to have allowed themselves considerable latitude both in thinking and speaking, and that consequently the rules of expression to which

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LIII. The Epistle to the Philippians, which is attributed to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who had

C E N T.
I.
Polycarp and
Barnabas.

we of the present day find it necessary to confine ourselves, must not be too strictly applied as a standard whereby to judge of any thing that may occur in the writings of the early Christians. There are therefore not wanting those who consider the more ancient and fuller edition as the best; amongst whom we may mention Jo. Morin (*de sacr. Ordinat.* p. iii. exerc. iii. cap. iii.) and W. Whiston: the latter of whom, in a work printed at London, 1610, in 8vo. endeavours to prove that Athanasius contrived to get every thing which seemed to militate against the Nicene dogma concerning the existence of three persons in one God, to be expunged from the Epistles of Ignatius, lest the tenets of himself and his associates might appear not to be in unison with the sentiments of so respectable a writer. As for what Whiston would thus insinuate respecting Athanasius, it is unquestionably to be regarded as nothing more than one of those dreams of fancy by which men are sometimes led astray, when they pay more attention to the suggestions of their own imagination than to the dictates of right reason; but it must at the same time be acknowledged that the opinion entertained by him, in common with other learned men, that a preference ought to be given to the more ancient and fuller edition of the Ignatian Epistles, although it may be questioned and opposed, can yet by no means be wholly set aside, or proved to have no foundation in truth. Le Clerc has attacked this opinion with no little force, in an express dissertation annexed to the last edition of the *Patres Apostolici*, tom. ii. p. 501, & seq.; as has also Wotton in the preface to his edition of the Epistles of Clement, p. clxxxv. & seq.; but should any one be inclined to enter the lists in defence of the opposite side of the question, he will not have far to seek for a reply. To me it appears not at all impossible that the longer epistles should have been curtailed or epitomized by some one or other; and it might, in my opinion, therefore be urged with some shew of reason, that the shorter epistles published by Vossius are merely an abridgment of the longer ones, made by some unknown person, who was probably apprehensive lest any loose and incautious expressions of Ignatius might prove of detriment to the orthodox belief respecting the divine Trinity. But to whichever edition we may give the preference, we shall never, under the present circumstances, let us endeavour what we

C E N T.

I.

Polycarp and
Parnabas

had been one of St. John's disciples, and who, about the middle of the second century, suffered martyrdom at a very advanced age, has merely a questionable claim to credit; in consequence of which it is regarded by some as spurious, though others consider it to be genuine [1]. The Epistle

may, be able to exonerate these letters from all suspicion of corruption and interpolation. Upon the whole, it appears to me, that this great controversy respecting the Epistles of Ignatius, although it has occupied the attention and talents of so many eminent men, remains as yet undecided, nor do I think that it can ever be satisfactorily determined, unless further light should be acquired by a discovery of some more ancient copies, or of some more explicit early authorities than those we are already in possession of on the subject. The letters themselves, come from what pen they may, are indisputably of very ancient date; and that they are not altogether a forgery is in the highest degree credible: but to ascertain with precision the exact extent to which they may be considered as genuine, appears to me to be beyond the reach of all human penetration.

[1] A list of authors who have written particularly respecting Polycarp, is given by Jo. Alb. Fabricius in his *Bibliotheca Græca*, lib. v. cap. i. p. 47, & seq. The most distinguished of these is Tillemont, whose diligence has never been surpassed by either of the others. See his *Memoires pour servir a l'Histoire de l'Eglise*, tom. ii. p. ii. p. 287, & seq. The year and month of this father's death have been made the subject of particular discussion by (amongst others) Baratier, in his work *de Successione Romanorum Pontificum*, and the Abbé Longuerue, in a dissertation *de Anno Macedonum*, which is to be found in J. D. Winckler's *Sylloge Anecdotorum*, p. 18. 25. But since the grounds and arguments relied on in this discussion, are chiefly drawn from the Greek Epistle of the church of Smyrna respecting the death of Polycarp, first published by Bishop Usher, it appears to me that very great doubt and uncertainty must continue still to hang over the point. For whoever will attentively consider that Epistle, and compare it with what is given us from it by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, lib. iv. cap. xv. cannot fail to perceive that it has been corrupted and interpolated by some weak and superstitious person, who, in his endeavours to multiply miracles, descends even to trifling, and occasionally falls into the absurdity of disagreeing with himself.

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that has come down to us with the name of Barnabas affixed to it, and which consists of two parts, the one comprising proofs of the divinity of the Christian religion derived from the books of the Old Testament, the other, a collection of moral precepts, is unquestionably a composition of great antiquity, but we are left in uncertainty as to its author. For as to what is suggested by some, of its having been written by that Barnabas who was the friend and companion of St. Paul, the futility of such a notion is easily to be made apparent from the letter itself; several of the opinions and interpretations of Scripture which it contains, having in them so little of either truth, dignity, or force, as to render it impossible that they could ever have proceeded from the pen of a man divinely instructed [m].

C E N T.
1.
Polycarp and
Barnabas.

LIV. The

[m] With regard to Barnabas and his Epistle, the reader may consult, amongst other works, Fabricii *Biblioth. Græc.* lib. iv. cap. v. § xiv. p. 173, and lib. v. cap. i. § iv. p. 3. Thom. Ittigii *Select. Histor. Eccles. Capit. sæc. i. c. i. §. xiv.* p. 20.—Bafnage, in his *Histoire des Juifs*, tom. iii. cap. xxvi. p. 558, has pointed out and corrected some of the more flagrant errors of this writer, but not all. For he has adopted many, and that too in things with regard to which it would have been easy for him to have obtained more accurate information. With respect to the real origin of this letter, I do not, for my own part, see any just grounds for believing it to have been written by some artful man, who, the more readily to gain readers and profelytes, introduced it to the world as an Epistle of Barnabas the companion of St. Paul. In fact I can perceive nothing whatever that should lead one even to suspect a thing of the kind: and the opinion therefore to which I incline is, that some Jew of the name of Barnabas, a man, as it should seem, not wanting in piety, but of a weak and superstitious character, being actuated by a wish to forward to the utmost of his ability amongst his brethren the cause of that most holy religion to which he had himself become a convert, drew up and sent out into the world this Epistle, but that the early

C E N T. LIV. The list of apostolical fathers closes with
 I. Hermas, a writer of the second century, who,
 according to early authorities, was brother to Pius
 bishop of Rome [n]. His book, which is now
 known

Christians, led away by a name for which they entertained the highest reverence, attributed it at once to that Barnabas who was the friend and companion of St. Paul.

[n] Amongst the learned there have not been wanting some, who, from a wish to exalt the character and authority of Hermas, the author of "The Shepherd," the writer to whom we here allude, have strained every nerve to persuade us that he was a different person from that Hermas whom ancient authors speak of as having been brother to Pius, bishop of Rome. What they maintain is, that the author of "The Shepherd," was either that Hermas spoken of by St. Paul in Rom. xvi. 14.; or if this should not appear to be probable, still that he was a very ancient writer, who lived in the time of Clement of Rome, and before the destruction of Jerusalem; a position which must at once fall to the ground, were it to be admitted that "The Shepherd" was written by the brother of Pius, bishop of Rome, since the Romish see was filled by no one of that name until the second century. No one has displayed greater learning in defence of this point, or entered into it more fully, than Just. Fontaninus: vid. *Histor. Literar. Aquilens.* lib. ii. cap. i. p. 63, & seq. But notwithstanding all that has been urged by him and others, it is most clearly manifest that the early writers who make mention of Hermas, the brother of Pius, understood him to be one and the same with that Hermas who was the author of "The Shepherd." To me it appears impossible for any one to doubt this who will attentively consider the following passage in the verses against Marcion, to be found amongst Tertullian's works, lib. iii. cap. ix. p. 366, edit. Venet.; and which, if wrongly attributed to Tertullian, were yet certainly written by some very ancient author—

*"Jamque loco nono cathedram suscepit Hyginus,
 Post hunc deinde Pius, Hermas cui germine frater
 Angelicus Pastor, quia tradita verba loquutus."*

Now the opinion of learned men with regard to this passage has been, that Hermas is here styled an *angelic pastor*, that is a teacher rivalling the angels, and possessed of angelic excellence.

known to the world merely through the medium of a Latin translation, was originally written in Greek,

C E N T.
I.
Hermas.

excellence. But that this is a mistake is evident from the context,—*quia tradita verba loquutus*. For supposing the above opinion to be just, we have here the reason assigned for the writer's applying to Hermas the title of *Angelic Pastor*: but who, let me ask, can possibly see in these words even the shadow of a reason to justify the appellation? Could the circumstance of his having spoken *tradita verba*, or "words transmitted from above," give Hermas a claim to the title of *Angelic Pastor*? If it did, the title is certainly not due to him alone, but belongs also to every sound Christian preacher; for all such men teach and speak words which came from God himself, and were commanded by him to be put in writing. The more natural conclusion then is, that it is not to Hermas that the magnificent title of *Angelic Pastor* has relation in this passage, but to some other person; nor does there appear to me to be the least difficulty whatever in immediately pointing that other person out. Not a question, as it strikes me, can exist but that the appellation refers to the work called "the Shepherd," which was written by Hermas, and in the second and third book of which an angelic pastor or shepherd is introduced as communicating to the author what is there recorded: and what Tertullian meant to intimate, in my opinion, undoubtedly was, that the Hermas of whom he spake was the same with him to whom an angel, under the form and garb of a shepherd, had communicated and explained certain mandates from above. If the common reading indeed of this passage be retained, I am ready to allow that the sense which I would thus annex to it may appear to be not altogether obvious or plain: but it will not admit of a doubt that this reading is corrupt. Even those who may be against me as to the above interpretation of the passage must yet allow this to be the fact: for as the words stand at present, it is impossible to annex to them any sense whatever. The correction I should propose would be, to transfer the comma which follows the word *pastor*, back to the word *frater* at the close of the preceding line, and to exchange the particle *quia* in the third line for the pronoun *cui*:

"—————*Hermas cui germine frater,
Angelicus Pastor cui tradita verba loquutus.*"

Corrected in this way the passage at once loses its obscurity,
and

C E N T. Greek, and is entitled “*The Shepherd*,” the principal character introduced in it being that of an
 I.
 Hermas.

and becomes in every respect clear and intelligible. “Pius,” says Tertullian, ‘has a natural brother called Hermas: I mean the person of that name who enjoyed the rare felicity of receiving from the mouth of an angelic pastor, or angel who assumed the form and guise of a shepherd, words transmitted from the Deity himself.’ That I should point to a variety of passages in the writings of other ancient authors, which explicitly corroborate the testimony of Tertullian in this respect, by attributing “the Shepherd” to that Hermas who was the brother of Pius, is, I conceive, not by any means necessary. For there was fortunately brought to light, some few years since, a work of unquestionable authority, the production of an author cotemporary with Hermas, and containing a passage which places it beyond all dispute that the book which we have extant under the title of “the Shepherd” was written in the second century, by the brother of Pius bishop of Rome. It is a fragment (the exordium being wanting) of a small work concerning the canon of the holy Scriptures, and was published by L. Ant. Muratori, in his *Antiquitates Ital. Med. Ævi*, tom. iii. diff. xliii. p. 853, & seq. The author of it is unknown. Muratori attributes it to Caius, a presbyter of the church of Rome, who lived in the latter part of the second century; but the point is by no means placed beyond doubt. Of this however we are certain, from the evidence of the book itself, that the author, whoever he might be, compiled it in the second century, and during the time when Hermas was alive. In this very valuable fragment we meet with the following testimony respecting Hermas, the author of “the Shepherd”: “*Pastorem vero nuperrime temporibus nostris in urbe Roma Herma conscripsit, sedente cathedra urbis Romæ Ecclesiæ Pio episcopo fratre ejus.*—Nothing surely can be more explicit than this; and there is consequently no room left for further dispute amongst the learned respecting either the age, the kindred, or the condition of Hermas. To this passage succeeds another no less worthy of remark, since it brings us acquainted with the degree of estimation in which Hermas was held as a writer by the Latin church. The construction of the paragraph is indeed not the most elegant imaginable, but it nevertheless leaves us in no doubt as to the fact, that the writings of Hermas were not included within the canon of sacred Scriptures: *Et ideo legi eum quidem oportet,*

an angel who had assumed the form and garb of a shepherd, and who under this disguise becomes the

C E N T.
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Hermas.

oportet, se publicare vero in ecclesia populo, neque inter prophetas completum numero, neque inter apostolos in finem temporum potest. “The Shepherd,” says this writer, “may properly enough be perused by pious persons in private, but it is not a work fit to be read publicly in assemblies of the church, or deserving of being classed with the writings of either the prophets or the apostles.”—The just discrimination exhibited in this passage reflects no little honour on the Latin churches, inasmuch as it proves them to have been more discreet and cautious in their judgment than the Greeks were, who for the most part regarded Hermas as an author not inferior to the prophets and apostles. Hermas himself, as I shall presently take occasion to shew, was unquestionably desirous of having a place assigned him amongst the sacred writers: but the teachers of the Latin, and especially the Roman churches, notwithstanding they were told that his book contained the discourses of an angel and the church, and that the precepts therein delivered were the very words of God himself, notwithstanding also that they knew the author was brother to Pius the Roman pontiff, as we should now call him, yet would they not suffer themselves to be imposed upon, but candidly and boldly affirmed, that neither the visions of Hermas, nor the discourses of his angelic instructor, were entitled to any credit. Out of respect, as I conceive, to the brother of a man of considerable authority, and a Roman bishop, they did not go the length of prohibiting the use of the book altogether, but permitted it to be perused with a view to pious edification in private; they however would not consent to its being read in public to the people. It must indeed be acknowledged that the Latin, and especially the Roman Christians, manifested from the first a greater degree of circumspection and prudence in drawing the line between such writings as were really and truly the fruit of divine inspiration and such as falsely pretended to that character, than those of Greece and the oriental regions, whose precipitancy was such, that, had their judgment been made the criterion, the canon of the New Testament would have come down to us by far more bulky in size than it is at present, and disgraced by writings which are now by common consent regarded as apocryphal. Whilst we are on the subject, I will add a word or two respecting the reason which some of the learned assign

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the instrument of conveying to Hermas instruction and admonition from above. The object of this author evidently was, to impress the world with a belief that his book was not the offspring of any human understanding or talents, but that whatever it contained had been derived either from God himself or from the abovementioned angelic shepherd. But there is such an admixture of folly and superstition with piety, such a ridiculous association of the most egregious nonsense with things momentous and useful, not only in the celestial visions which constitute the substance of his first book, but also in the precepts and parables which are put into the mouth of the angel in the two others, as to render it a matter of astonishment that men of learning should ever have thought of giving Hermas a

as chiefly inducing them to consider the author of the work now extant under the title of "the Shepherd" and Hermas, who was brother to Pius, as having been two different persons. In the *Liber pontificalis* and some other ancient writings, there is a passage cited respecting the celebration of Easter, from a book called "the Shepherd," written by Hermas, the brother of Pius, but which is no where to be found in the work that has reached us under that title. See Jo. Alb. Fabricii *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testam.* tom. iii. p. 761. Hence they infer that the Shepherd written by Hermas, the brother of Pius, was a different book from the Shepherd that we are in possession of. But this way of reasoning, although it might be fair enough if the work were extant in the original Greek, and we were certain that it had come down to us entire, will yet by no means hold good under the existing circumstances, since the work is known to us merely through a Latin translation, and it is far from being impossible that this translation should be incomplete. To me it appears not at all unlikely that those of the Greek and oriental Christians, who were styled *Quartadecimans*, might expunge from "the Shepherd" the passage above alluded to respecting the time of keeping Easter, inasmuch as it militated against the opinion which they themselves entertained on the subject.

place

place amongst the inspired writers. To me it appears clear that he must have been either a wild disordered fanatic, or else, as is more likely, a man who, by way of more readily drawing the attention of his brethren to certain maxims and precepts which he deemed just and salutary, conceived himself to be warranted in pretending to have derived them from conversations with God and the angels [o]

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[o] Several things, which I cannot well enter into in this place, conspire to impress me with the opinion that Hermas could never have been so far the dupe of an overheated imagination, as to fancy that he saw and heard things which in reality had no existence, but that he knowingly and wilfully was guilty of a cheat, and invented those divine conversations and visions which he asserts himself to have enjoyed, with a view to obtain a more ready reception for certain precepts and admonitions which he conceived would prove salutary to the Roman church. At the time when he wrote, it was an established maxim with many of the Christians, that it was pardonable in an advocate for religion to avail himself of fraud and deception, if it were likely that they might conduce towards the attainment of any considerable good. Of the host of silly books and stories to which this erroneous notion gave rise from the second to the fifteenth century, no one who is acquainted with Christian history can be ignorant. The teachers of the Roman church themselves appear to me to have considered Hermas as having written his work upon this principle, and not to have altogether disapproved of it. For as we have seen above, they permitted his book to be circulated and perused, with a view to pious edification in private, but would not allow it to be read publicly in the assemblies of the church. From their refusal of the latter it may fairly be inferred, that they did not regard the visions of Hermas, or the precepts and advice of the angel with whom he pretended to have conversed, in the light of divine communications: but their acquiescing in the former, very plainly shews, that the kind of fiction to which this author had recourse, appeared to them to be such as was warrantable, and that they did not think it unjustifiable to practise imposition on the multitude in the way of instruction, or to invent pious

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LV. That disputes and dissensions should not have been altogether unknown in the first Christian

pious stories for the sake of more readily commanding their attention. Had they believed Hermas to have written under the influence of divine inspiration, they would not have dared to deny his work a place amongst the sacred writings, and pronounce it unfit to be read in public: but on the other hand, had they felt indignant at the cheat practised by him, or disapproved of the guile to which he had recourse, they unquestionably would never have recommended the perusal of his work to Christians in private, as useful and likely to confirm their piety. That Hermas himself, however, was desirous of having a place assigned him amongst the inspired writers, and to have his work read in the public assemblies of the Christians as the writings of the prophets and apostles were, is plain from what occurs at the end of the second vision in his first book, (edit. Fabrician. p. 791.) The church, which he represents as having appeared to him under the form of an aged matron, is there made to enquire, *Si jam libellum dedisset senioribus?*—"If he had yet given his book to the elders?" meaning the presbyters of the Roman church. His reply is in the negative, *ad hoc non.* Hearing this, the church thus continues: *Bene fecisti: habeo enim quædam verba edicere tibi. Cum autem consummavero omnia verba, aperte scientur ab electis.* Admirably well observed indeed! The meaning of these words as is unquestionably proved by what subsequently occurs is nothing less than this: "After I shall have finished what I have in charge to communicate to thee from above, the book must be sent to all the Christian churches, and be read publicly therein, that no one may be ignorant of the divine will." We shall add what follows, as it most clearly evinces not only the deceit of the man, but also that he had the arrogance to aspire at being associated with the sacred writers. *Scribes ergo duos libellos, & mitte unum Clementi, & unum Grapte. Mittet autem Clemens in exterarum civitates: illi enim permissum est. Grapte autem commonebit viduas & orphanos. Tu autem leges in hac civitate cum senioribus qui præsentur ecclesiæ.* The Clement here spoken of must without doubt have been a man of the highest authority, since the power is attributed to him of sending round, and recommending to the foreign churches, such writings as might appear to be the fruit of inspiration; and he could consequently be none other than that Clement whom, by way of distinction, we usually style "the Roman:" for such

tian churches, or that errors of no small moment should have been engendered by some of them,

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ſuch pre-eminence and authority was never poſſeſſed by any one elſe of that name amongſt the early Chriſtians. The commentators on Hermas therefore are, in my opinion, right in conſidering him as the perſon here meant. Clement it is pretended was, at the time when Hermas wrote, abſent from the Roman church over which he preſided. For it was well known, that although that church was the principal and more immediate object of his care, yet that he frequently made excuſions to the neighbouring cities, with a view to extend and ſtrengthen the intereſts of the Chriſtian community, the duties appertaining to his office in the church of Rome being, during his abſence, committed to the elders. The book then was to be ſent to him at ſome no very diſtant city where he was ſtaying, and he was to circulate it amongſt all the other churches of Italy, by whom he was looked up to as a father, and give directions for its being read in their public aſſemblies. The object of this author therefore, who in fact wrote long after the death of Clement, namely under the pontificate of Pius, about the middle of the ſecond century, evidently was to render the inſpiration of his work leſs questionable, by making it appear as if it had been written at an earlier period, and during the life-time of Clement. This circumſtance muſt of itſelf ſurely be enough to convince every one that the man acted on the principle of deception, and had it in view to take advantage of the ſimplicity of his Chriſtian countrymen. In the Roman church, to which he himſelf belonged, a copy of the book was to be handed to the elders, to whom the regulation of all ſacred matters was committed during the abſence of Clement, in order that they might direct it to be read publicly to the people in their ſolemn aſſemblies. But even this was not deemed ſufficient. Recolleſting that the widows oppreſſed with age and infirmities, and the children as yet unbaptized, would not be preſent at thoſe aſſemblies, he took care to provide for another copy being ſent to Grapta, a woman who officiated as a deaconeſs, for the purpoſe of being read to the widows and orphans. As we have touched on the ſubject, it may not be amiſs juſt to remark by the way, that ſome little light appears to be thrown by this paſſage on the duties appertaining to the office of the deaconeſſes, in aſmuch as it ſeems plainly to ſhew that they were entrusted with the inſtruction and ordering of the feeble women

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can occasion no very great surprize to any one who shall reflect on the nature of their constitution, and the situation of things in the age of which we are treating. For the Christian fraternity was at this period composed in part of Jews and partly of Gentile worshippers, *i. e.* of people altogether differing from each other both in their opinions and manners; and of whom the former could by no means be induced to renounce their attachment to the law of Moses whilst Jerusalem was in existence, nor could the latter, without the greatest difficulty, prevail on themselves to endure with any becoming degree of moderation the superstition and imbecility of the Jews. Associated with these were also others of a middle class, who had either unconditionally embraced the maxims of the oriental philosophy respecting the nature of matter, the origin of this world, the conjunction of ethereal spirits with terrestrial bodies, and their expected future deliverance, or had else espoused them under certain modifications deduced from the principles of the Jewish religion. And from any of these no other conditions had been exacted previously to their being received into the Christian community by baptism, than that they should solemnly profess

women and the children. Upon the whole, it is manifest that Hermas wished to make the Christians of Rome believe that his book had been considered as of the number of inspired writings, and been read in public during the time of their highly venerated and holy pastor Clement, and that consequently they themselves might, without hesitation, bestow upon him a similar honour. But to be brief. The Pastor of Hermas is a fictitious work, of much the same kind with what are termed the Clementina and the Recognitions of Clement. In its plan however it is somewhat inferior to these, as instead of mortal characters conversing, we have the Deity himself, and his ministers or angels introduced on the scene.

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a belief in Christ as the Lord and Saviour of the human race, and declare themselves to be desirous of leading an innocent and holy life for the future, agreeably to his commands. Nothing like a regular course of preparatory institution had been gone through, no formal examination as to principles or opinions had taken place, no pains had been used even to root out from the minds of the converts any erroneous notions which they might have conceived or imbibed. In fact, a naked faith was all that in this infancy of the Christian church was required of any who were desirous of being admitted within its pale. A fuller and more perfect insight into its doctrines was left to be acquired in the course of time. That amongst men of this description then, allied closely indeed in point of moral worth and sanctity of demeanor, but at the same time differing widely from each other as to various matters of opinion, there should have occasionally arisen some disputes and controversies, was a circumstance so much within the ordinary course of things, as surely to yield no ground whatever for surprize.

LVI. The first controversy by which the peace of the church appears to have been disturbed, was that which was kindled in the church of Antioch by certain Jews, who conceiving that the ceremonial law promulgated by Moses was designed to be of perpetual duration, and that the observance of it was consequently necessary to salvation, contended that its ordinances ought to be complied with even by those of the Gentiles who had been converted to Christianity [p]. Being unable to come to any agreement as to this point

The first controversy respecting the necessity of observing the law of Moses.

[p] Acts xv. 1. & seq.

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amongst themselves, the Christians of Antioch deputed Paul and Barnabas to consult with the apostles on the subject. The latter, having submitted the matter to the consideration of the church of Jerusalem, the controversy was at length, with the general consent, put an end to by them in the following way, namely, that such of the Christian converts as were of the Jewish nation should be at liberty to conform themselves to the Mosaic ritual, but that those of every other description should not be considered as under any obligation whatever to comply with the ceremonies of the Jewish law. Lest the minds of the Jewish converts, however, should be too far alienated from the Gentile brethren, it was required of the latter to abstain from those things which were regarded as polluting and abominable by the Jews, namely, from partaking of those feasts which it was usual for pagan worshippers to prepare from the victims offered to their false gods, and from joining in the obscene libidinous indulgences with which the celebration of these feasts was in general accompanied, as likewise from blood and the flesh of animals strangled [q].

LVII. Con-

[q] It is common for us to term the assembly in which this controversy was settled, the first Christian council, and to consider it as the original or prototype of all the councils of after ages. Nay there are many who will go even farther, and maintain that the divine right of councils is to be proved from this assembly. "The apostles," say they, "by calling together the church of Jerusalem on this occasion, had it in view to point out to posterity, that controversies respecting religion were to be submitted to the cognizance and decision of councils." But the truth of the matter is, that we have learnt to think and speak thus from the friends to the papacy, who, after searching the Scriptures in vain for something that might establish the divine authority of councils,

LVII. Constantly bearing in mind the decree which he had thus received from the mouths of the

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councils, were at length constrained to lay hold on this convocation of the church of Jerusalem by the apostles, as on a sheet anchor or last hope. For my own part, I see no particular objection to any one's giving the denomination of a council to this assembly if he think fit; since it was anciently usual for any lawful assembly to be termed a council; and it can be shewn by many examples, that a meeting of merely the teachers of a single individual church was frequently so styled. Vid. J. Gothofred *ad Codicem Theodosianum*, tom. vi. p. 28. ed. Ritterian. But as to those meetings of the heads of the church which have been, from time to time, held subsequently to the second century, and which are properly termed councils, the assembly at Jerusalem, to which we allude, bears no resemblance whatever to them, and it is consequently idle for any one to think of deducing the origin of such conventions from that source. This want of resemblance is admitted by the acute and ingenious father Paul Sarpi, himself a Romanist, in his *History of the Council of Trent*, see lib. ii. p. 240. of the French translation of it by Courayer: but it at the same time appeared to him that he had hit upon a circumstance which would bear him out in maintaining, that the assembly at Jerusalem might still, in the strict sense of the term, be styled a council; and this was, that not only the apostles, the elders, and the brethren of Jerusalem, but also Paul and Barnabas, the deputies from the church of Antioch, are stated to have spoken therein. The title of "the first Council," he therefore thought might very justly be continued to this meeting. But surely it is scarcely possible for any reasoning to be weaker than this. Did it indeed appear that the deputies from Antioch had voted, or sat as judges in this assembly, in the same way as the elders of Jerusalem did, the argument might not be altogether destitute of force: but instead of this being the case, it is evident that they pretended to nothing beyond the character of deputies, and left the determination of the point wholly to the apostles and the other members of the church of Jerusalem. Speak they undoubtedly did, and it was necessary that they should speak; but it was not in the way of offering any opinion of their own as to the matter in question that they did so. In addition to this it is to be remarked, that the point in dispute was not resolved in this assembly by the number of votes, as was the custom in

C E N T. the apostles themselves at Jerusalem, we find St.
 I. Paul not only making it his endeavour, both in
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councils, but was determined solely by the judgment of the apostles. Had the suffrages been taken, it was possible that of the two opinions the wrong one might have prevailed: for a greater part of the Christians of Jerusalem were strongly attached to the Mosaic law, and contended warmly for its authority in this very assembly. But, by the speeches of Peter and James, an end was put to all dissensions, and a mode of determination suggested to which the multitude deemed it incumbent on them to make no opposition. We have not, therefore, here any thing in the least resembling a council: for the decision, it is plain, was not that of the church of Jerusalem, but of the apostles, by the interposition of whose opinion an end was at once put to the doubts and disputes of the church. Viewing the matter in this light, I find myself unable altogether to fall in with the opinion expressed on the subject by Just. Hen. Boehmer, in his *Dissert. Juris Eccles. Antiqui*, diss. iii. § lxxi. p. 218, and elsewhere, who would consider the decision of this assembly in the light of an award, as the lawyers term it, conceiving the church of Antioch *per modum compromissi causam controversam decisioni apostolorum & matricis ecclesie submisisse*. It should seem not improbable that the original author of this opinion might be father Paul Sarpi himself, as we meet with it in his *History of the Council of Trent*, lib. ii. p. 240, though expressed there but shortly, and with some reserve. But to me it appears that, in the first place, there is no foundation for what he sets out with assuming, namely, that the Christians of Antioch referred the determination of their controversy, not to the apostles only, but also to the whole church of Jerusalem. For it is most clearly manifest, from the statement of St. Luke, Acts xv. 2, that the persons referred to as judges on this occasion were solely the apostles and the elders, the latter of whom were well known to be of the number of those who enjoyed divine illumination in common with the apostles, and not the whole congregation of Christians resident at Jerusalem. The apostles and presbyters, it is true, when they were about to investigate and determine the question by which the church of Antioch was divided, convoked an assembly of the people; but their doing so was a matter of discretion, not of necessity: for had they chosen it, they might, from the power that was given them of God, have proceeded of themselves

the churches of which he was the immediate founder, and likewise in those to which he addressed

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selves to decide the point in dispute, in the absence of the people, and without in the least consulting them: of the exercise of which power by them we have a striking instance afforded us, in their checking the disposition which the people discovered to run into parties, and pointing out in what way the affair should be determined. In the next place, and which is to me an objection of still greater force, the apostles must, if this opinion be adopted, be considered merely in the light of referees or arbitrators, elected at the will of the contending parties, for the purpose of settling their dispute: whereas they had been constituted judges of all controversies like this, respecting religion, by divine appointment; and it was, therefore, not left to the option of the Christians of Antioch, whether they would refer the determination of their dispute to them or not. In a case like theirs, they were enjoined by nothing less than divine authority to have recourse to the tribunal of the apostles. Lastly, the very words themselves in which the decree, in this case, is conceived, forbid us to view it in the light of an award or judgment of arbitrators indifferently appointed by the parties. For it is not in terms of their own that the apostles make this decree, but what they ordain is expressly stated to be so done by the command and authority of the Holy Spirit. Ἐδοξε τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι καὶ ἡμῖν. "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." In which passage the words τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι, "to the Holy Ghost," must be referred to the apostles, through whom the Holy Spirit, by whom they were influenced, spake, commanded, and adjudged. The meaning is—"It seemed good to the apostles, in whom the power of the Holy Spirit is resident, and whom the same spirit animates." A similar mode of expression is made use of by St. Peter, in that terrible denunciation where-with he overwhelms Ananias, for having attempted to practise deceit on the Apostles: Acts v. 3, 4. *Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?* (that is, to us in whom the Holy Spirit is resident.) *Thou hast not lied unto (mere) men, but unto God* (who dwelleth in us). The words καὶ ἡμῖν, "and to us," which follow, do not refer to the apostles, but to the elders and brethren of the church of Jerusalem, who are joined with the apostles in the beginning of the letter. For the denomination of "the Holy Ghost" was not of course considered as embracing these, since they

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dressed epistles, to repress with every possible energy the attempts of the Jewish converts to impose on the necks of their Gentile brethren the yoke of the Mosaic covenant, but also labouring by degrees to extinguish in the minds of the Jews themselves that blind and immoderate partiality which they entertained for this law of their forefathers. From his epistles however it appears, that, in his attempts to accomplish these objects, he was ever most violently, and not unfrequently successfully, opposed by the Jews; the mistaken zeal and intemperate warmth of some of whom led them into such extremes, that they hesitated not at making use of every means to excite a general feeling of ill-will towards St. Paul, and to detract from the high character of this great apostle of the Gentiles, who could justly boast of having, in the most marked and emphatical manner, been called to the ministration of the word by the voice of our Lord himself. On the other hand, it was not without considerable difficulty that the Gentile converts could be brought to endure with patience that the Jews should thus obstinately persist in refusing to recede from the customs and institutions of their forefathers, and that they themselves should yield obedience to the decree of Jerusalem, which forbade them to partake of meats offered to idols, or to be present at the feasts of heathen worshippers. As for any disputes of inferior moment, of which description there are some particularly adverted to, and others incidentally noticed, by

enjoyed merely an ordinary illumination of the blessed Spirit. The above remarks are submitted to the consideration of the reader, in consequence of my observing that the force of these words has hitherto escaped the attention of commentators.

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St. Paul in his Epistles, I purposely pass them over in silence, as possessing no claim to our attention. C E N T.
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LVIII. Invincible nearly as the attachment of the Jewish converts to the law of ceremonies appeared for a long while to be, the destruction of their national city and temple by the Romans caused it sensibly to fall into the wane, amongst such of them as had taken up their abode without the confines of Palestine [r]. By the immediate inhabitants of that region however, who appear to have been buoyed up with the hope that it would not be long before they should obtain permission of the Romans to rebuild both their temple and the city, a belief continued still to be retained that the authority of the law of Moses was ever to be regarded by the descendants of Abraham as altogether sacred and inviolable. To the delusive expectations of these latter, an end was not put until Jerusalem had experienced its second and final overthrow, under the reign of the emperor Hadrian; when, every hope respecting the restoration of their city having vanished, a part of the Jewish brethren were prevailed on to renounce the institutions of Moses, and to embrace the freedom that was held out to them in the Gospel of Christ: others of them, however, gave the preference to continuing under the bondage of their ancient system of discipline, and in consequence thereof withdrew themselves from the

Schism generated by this controversy respecting the Mosaic law.

[r] Eusebius has left it on record, (*Histor. Eccles.* lib. iii. cap. xxxv. p. 106.) that, on the overthrow of Jerusalem and burning of the temple, a vast number of the Jews (*μυρίων εκ περιτομῆς*) were induced to embrace Christianity. Hence it is manifest how greatly the calamities to which they were exposed, contributed towards lessening the attachment of the Jewish people to the law of their forefathers.

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assemblies and society of the rest. Those who thus inflexibly persisted in encumbering the profession of Christianity with the observances of the Mosaic ritual had the denomination of *Nazarenes* and *Ebionites* given to them by the other Christians, or otherwise assumed these titles of their own choice by way of distinction [s].

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LIX. Nearly allied to these disagreements and contentions, respecting the necessity for observing the Mosaic law of ceremonies, although of infinitely greater moment, was a dispute stirred up by the Jewish doctors at Rome, and in others of the Christian churches, concerning the means whereby we are to arrive at justification and salvation. For whereas the doctrine taught by the apostles was, that our every hope of obtaining

[s] Of this schism or secession we shall treat more particularly when we come to the reign of Hadrian, in our history of the second century. The Ebionites and Nazarenes have, I well know, always hitherto been classed with the sects of the first age, but to me this appears irreconcilable with reason. For it can be indisputably proved, that those of the Christians who persisted in adhering to the observance of the law of Moses, did not separate themselves from the rest of the brethren, until Jerusalem, which had just begun to rise again from its ashes, was secondly, and finally, laid waste by the Romans, in the time of the emperor Hadrian; and that it was upon their so separating themselves, and not before, that they came to be distinguished by the titles of Ebionites, and Nazarenes, and were numbered amongst the corrupters of Christianity. Previously to their acting thus, they were regarded by no one in any other light than as true Christians. During the first century, they certainly had not by any means forfeited their claim to the title of brethren, although they had given proofs of weakness and a want of further light. Heretics, it is true, they became, but this was at a subsequent period, when they refused any longer to hold fellowship with those who had discernment enough to perceive, that Christ had relieved the necks of even the Jews themselves from the yoke and burthen of the law.

pardon

pardon and salvation ought to centre in Christ and his merits, these Jewish teachers, on the contrary, made it their business to extol the efficacy and saving power of works agreeable to the law, and to inculcate on men's minds, that such as had led a life of righteousness and holiness, might justly expect to receive eternal happiness from God as their due. To this doctrine, inasmuch as it went materially to lessen the dignity and importance of our blessed Saviour's character, and was founded on a false estimate of the strength of human nature, as well as repugnant to the voice and authority of the moral law itself, St. Paul opposed the most unremitting and particular resistance [†].

LX. With these supporters of the law of Moses, these mistaken advocates for the strength

Heretics commemorated by the apostles.

[†] It is clear, from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, that there were, besides this, other controversies in agitation at that period: but as the apostle, aware that he was addressing himself to persons to whom the subjects in dispute were familiar, omits the mention of several important particulars, doubtless well known to the Romans, but in regard to which we of the present day are, as it were, wholly in the dark, it is scarcely possible for any one, at this distance of time, to form any thing like a clear and precise notion of what these questions involved. The reader will find every thing that can, with any degree of certainty or apparent probability, be said on the subject, collected together and arranged by the following authors: Herm. Witfius, *Miscell. Sacr.* tom. ii. exerc. xx, xxi, xxii. p. 665, & seq.; Camp. Vitringa, *Observation. Sacr.* lib. iv. cap. ix, x, xi. p. 952; Jo. Franc. Buddeus, *Lib. de Ecclesia Apostolic.* cap. iii. p. 111, & seq. In these works there are indeed not a few things advanced which are founded merely in conjecture, and might, without taking any very great pains, be proved futile, and wholly destitute of substantial support; but, since we have it not in our power to substitute any thing more certain in their stead, it may be as well, perhaps, to leave them untouched, as to displace them for the purpose of bringing forward merely a fresh set of conjectures.

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of human nature, by whose contentious spirit the church of Christ was prevented from enjoying a perfect tranquillity even in this its golden age, we find ancient as well as modern writers very commonly joining the following persons, of whose apostacy or errors St. Paul and St. John make mention in their Epistles, namely, Hymenæus, Alexander, Philetus, Hermogenes, Phygellus, Demas, and Diotrophes. For they conceive all these to have been the founders of sects, or at least to have been the authors of various pernicious errors, through the introduction of which into some of the churches, Christianity experienced a partial adulteration [*u*]. But it appears to me, that if what the sacred writers have left us on record respecting these men be maturely weighed, the inclination of opinion must be that, with the exception of Alexander, Hymenæus, and Philetus, it is rather of a dereliction of Christian duty and charity that they are accused, than of perverting divine truth, or entertaining any heretical opinions [*v*].

LX. But

[*u*] See Vitringa and Buddeus *loc. supr. indicat.* also Tho. Ittigius *de Hæresarchis Ævi Apostolici & Apostolico proximi*, sect. i. cap. viii. p. 84, & seq.

[*v*] In 2 Tim. i. 15. we find St. Paul complaining that he had been deserted by all who had accompanied him from proconsular Asia, of which Ephesus was the chief city, to Rome. Of those he, for some particular reasons no doubt, though we are unacquainted with them, points out Hermogenes and Phygellus by name. The probability is, that these men, upon finding St. Paul cast into prison, considered his fate as pretty well decided, and despairing ever to see him regain his liberty, and continue the travels he had meditated, they left Rome, and returned into their own country. That their conduct in this respect was highly blameable, is what every one must admit: for to desert a brother, and, much more, one of God's apostles, whose life is in jeopardy, and to whose protection and comfort one might contribute
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LX. But by none of its adversaries or corrupters was Christianity, from almost its first rise, C E N T.
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more } Gnostic he-
retics.

by continuing with him, is certainly to evince both a levity of mind and also a forgetfulness of Christian obligation: but the inconstancy of these men has surely nothing in it that can authorize us to conclude, that, in returning home, they had it at all in view to become opponents of the principles which had been taught them by St. Paul, or meditated the introduction of any innovations into the Christian church. Of the number of these inconstant brethren there was also one Demas, whom St. Paul, in cap. iv. v. 10. of the same epistle, represents as having left him, and gone to Thessalonica, being captivated with the love of this world. In reproaching the conduct of this man, both ancient writers and modern ones seem to have set no bounds whatever to their indignation: those who except him out of the class of heretics, do it merely for the purpose of attaching to him a worse denomination, namely, that of an absolute apostate from Christianity. But for my own part, I see nothing in the words of St. Paul which can warrant us in drawing a conclusion so severe against him. The apostle does not accuse Demas of having forsaken Christ, but of having deserted him, Paul: which latter it was certainly very possible for him to do, and yet to remain steadfast in the faith of Christ. Nor does the reason which the apostle assigns for this man's having forsaken him, by any means imply a defection from Christ. For in Scripture those are said to love the world who prefer the enjoyment of the luxuries, the comforts, and the security of this life to the duties which Christianity enjoins us to fulfil. It appears to me, therefore, that the misconduct wherewith St. Paul is to be understood as reproaching Demas, amounted to no more than this, that he had consulted his ease and convenience rather than his duty, and preferred retiring to a life of safety and quietness at Thessalonica, to continuing any longer a partaker of the ignominy, dangers, and toils, which the companions and friends of St. Paul had continually to encounter at Rome: that the man had very much misconducted himself is unquestionable, but there are certainly no just grounds for believing him to have incurred that high degree of criminality which we so generally find attributed to him. Crescens and Titus, who are mentioned by St. Paul in the same verse with Demas, are stated to have gone into Galatia and Dalmatia, so that they had in like manner quit-
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C E N T. more seriously injured; by none was the church
 1. more grievously lacerated, and rendered less at-
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ted their captive master: but their departure from him was for the best of purposes, namely, to propagate the religion of Christ in those provinces; and they went with his consent and approbation: whereas the object of Demas in quitting Rome was altogether dishonourable, and unworthy of a disciple of Christ, for he withdrew from thence that he might shelter himself from danger, and spend his days in tranquillity and ease. Diotrephes is censured by St. John, in his third epistle, on a twofold account. First, that he had arrogated to himself a pre-eminence in the church to which he belonged, and which had probably been committed to his superintendance: and secondly, that he had conducted himself in a harsh and unfeeling manner towards certain of the brethren, who had deserved well of Christianity, and consequently had a claim to far different treatment at his hands. The circumstances of the case appear to have been these. Certain members of the church to which Diotrephes belonged had gone forth for the purpose of propagating the Christian religion amongst the neighbouring nations. Upon their return, they brought with them some strangers or foreigners whom they had initiated in the principles of Christianity, and also a letter from St. John, commending the faith and zeal which they displayed in the cause of Christ, and desiring that they and their companions might be hospitably lodged and entertained during their stay, as was the custom amongst the early Christians, and that on their again going forth they might be supplied, through the public liberality, with every thing which might tend to encourage and forward them in undertaking a fresh mission amongst the Gentiles. But Diotrephes, it seems, spurned at the recommendation of St. John, and not only forbid these good and useful men from being maintained out of the public fund, or at the expence of the church, but also went to the length of excommunicating those who had been induced to yield them some occasional private assistance. It will scarcely then, I had almost said it cannot, be denied me to infer from the above, that Diotrephes must have been the bishop of this church. For how could it have been possible for a private individual to have excommunicated any of the brethren with whom he might be at enmity? or by what means could such an one have brought it about, that a letter from one of Christ's apostles should be treated with neglect and contempt?

tractive to the people, than by those who were for making the religion of Christ accommodate C E N T.
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itself } Gnostic he-
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tempt? Some particular reason or other there unquestionably was, that induced this haughty character to conduct himself in the manner above stated; and it must, no doubt, have been such a reason as had all the appearance of being a just and an honourable one. Learned men have imagined that this reason is to be discovered in the quality or condition of the persons whom he excommunicated. Diotrophes they suppose to have been originally a Gentile, and those whom he refused to receive Jews: and hence they conclude that the contempt entertained by the former for the latter had gained so complete an ascendancy over his mind, that he could not forego the opportunity of manifesting it, even at the expence of violating the most sacred law of charity. This conjecture may, perhaps, at first sight, be thought to carry with it somewhat of a specious air; but if put to the test, there will be found in it nothing that can possibly have any weight with a considerate person at all conversant in Christian history. For, not to rest on the circumstance of its being unsupported by any sort of authority, except what is supplied by the name Diotrophes, which is certainly a Greek one, but of itself can surely never be considered as yielding an argument of the least cogency or force; and equally passing over the fact of there being no sort of memorial extant which can warrant us in believing that the Gentile Christians ever permitted themselves to be so far carried away by their hatred and contempt of the Jews, as to refuse to consider them as brethren, and withhold from them even the common fruits of charity; it is plain, from the fifth verse of St. John's Epistle, that those whom Diotrophes treated with such harshness were members of that church over which, it should seem, that he presided. The apostle, indeed, speaks of the Christians to whom he alludes as consisting of two classes,—*ἀδελφοί*, or brethren, and *ξένοι*, foreigners or strangers. But, since he is treating of Christians sojourning in one and the same church, and makes use of the term "brethren" in opposition to that of "strangers," there can be no doubt but that by the former he meant those who had been regularly admitted into fellowship with the church, and by the latter such as had not been so admitted. There are some, I am well aware, who think St. John is to be understood as meaning by "brethren," Jews—and by "strangers,"

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itself to the principles of the oriental philosophy respecting the Deity, the origin of the world, the nature

gers," Greeks: but it cannot be shewn either that the term "brethren" was ever used by the apostle in this restricted sense, or that it was customary for the Greek converts to be styled *ξένοι*, or strangers. What we set out, therefore, with observing, seems scarcely to admit of any question, namely, that certain members of the church which was under the care of Diotrephes had gone forth with a view of propagating Christianity amongst the people of the neighbouring district, and on their return brought with them some of their disciples, and also an epistle addressed by St. John to the church to which they belonged. And now, to give my own opinion as to the reason of their being so ungraciously received by Diotrephes, I think the cause of all his ill-will towards them is plainly pointed at by St. John himself. To every one perusing his Epistle it must be obvious, that the apostle introduces at ver. 7. somewhat of an apology to Gaius, to whom he writes for the journey which these good men undertook in the cause of Christ. First, he says, that their motive was good, that they went forth with the best mind and intention, being desirous only of contributing to the honour of God. Then he adduces it as further commendable in them, that, although they might reasonably have expected to be furnished with the necessaries of life by the people among whom they sojourned, they yet preferred maintaining themselves by the labour of their hands, and refused every sort of recompence, gratuity, or reward. Now it is clear, that what these men had done, could require no such defence or justification in the eyes of Gaius, for it appears that he had already befriended their cause, and we may therefore, I think, fairly infer, that what is thus said by the apostle was meant as an answer to the pretext by which Diotrephes pretended to justify his very harsh and unchristian-like conduct. St. John, it is observable, seems tacitly to admit that there was something irregular in the journey undertaken by these men, for the purpose of converting their heathen neighbours, and occupies himself in shewing, that if the end of their going forth, and the manner in which they conducted themselves, were attended to, this irregularity of theirs must appear to be but of small moment. To be brief then, it strikes me that the truth of the matter was this, that these good men had grievously offended Diotrephes, by having taken upon them

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nature of matter, and the human soul. We include to those who, from their pretending that they

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this mission to the Heathen without his consent or knowledge, and gone forth rather in compliance with the dictates of their own consciences than under any direction or authority from him. On their return, therefore, it was in vain that they looked up to this haughty character for countenance or support: not even the recommendatory letter which they had procured from St. John could have the effect of appeasing his wrath, or dissuade him from giving full vent to his indignation. Now, in early times, it undoubtedly was the custom for such of the members of any church as might be desirous of imitating the example of the apostles, and propagating the Gospel amongst the Heathen, to apply to the bishop for his licence, and to enter on their travels under his sanction. Ignatius, in almost all his epistles, inculcates this maxim—*Μηδείς χωρίς τῆ ἐπισκόπου τι πρᾶσσέτω τῶν ἀνηκόντων εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. Sine episcopo nemo faciat eorum aliquid quæ ad ecclesiam spectant*: vid. *Epist. ad Smyrneos*, § viii. *ad Trallianos*, *ad Philadelph.* *ad Polycarpum*; and it would be easy to produce innumerable passages from writers before the reign of Constantine, all tending to shew, that in the first ages of Christianity it was unlawful for any thing appertaining to religion to be either done or undertaken without the knowledge and consent of the bishop. The crime of Diotrephes, therefore, was not that of having assailed any of the received principles of the Christian religion, but of having discovered an unwarrantable degree of asperity and rigour in the maintenance of his own importance and dignity. For he, in the first place, manifested a latent pride of heart, in withholding from a set of pious and innocent men, who, in point of fact, were entitled to every sort of encouragement, the good offices and hospitality of the church, merely because they had not paid the proper attention to his authority and rights: and in the next place, he betrayed a still more inexcusable spirit of arrogance, in spurning at the authority and recommendation of one of Christ's apostles, to whose judgment and authority it became all bishops and churches to pay the utmost deference. This evidently is the offence which St. John censures in these words:—*ὁ φιλοπρωτεῶν αὐτῶν ἐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς.* "He who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them receiveth us not." The apostle does not, as is commonly imagined, reprehend him

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they were able to communicate to mankind, at present held in bondage by the Architect of the World,

for aspiring to the presidency of the church to which he belonged: for, as I before observed, he must, at the time of his offending, have been at the head of that church: but what he means to censure (as the words themselves indicate beyond all controversy) is that which he considers as a mark of an inordinately ambitious mind—a mind carried away by the lust of power, namely, that he had dared to assume to himself an authority superior even to that of an apostle. The plain sense of the words is this—“But their Diotrophes, who affects to be greater than any of the apostles, sets at nought my intreaties and authority.”

If the men, then, of whom I have been speaking, be taken from the class of the heretics of the first century, there will remain merely Hymenæus, Philetus, and Alexander. Hymenæus, the first of these, is in 1 Tim. i. 20. associated by St. Paul with Alexander: in 2 Tim. ii. 17. however, we find the apostle speaking of him in conjunction with Philetus. That one and the same man is referred to in both these places has never, as far as I know, been yet called in question by any one. But, upon attentively considering and comparing together the two above cited passages, I must confess that there appears to me very great reason to doubt whether the Hymenæus mentioned in the first Epistle to Timothy be the same with, or a different man from, him who is spoken of in the last Epistle. Indeed, I think that I might almost, with some confidence, take upon me to assert that they were two distinct characters, having nothing in common but the name. In the first place, it is worthy of remark, although it certainly does not go the length of wholly deciding the point, that the companion in error whom we find associated with Hymenæus in the former passage, is not the same person with whom his name is joined in the latter one. Secondly, it makes still more strongly in favour of my opinion, that the Hymenæus mentioned in the first Epistle, was, together with his associate, delivered over by St. Paul to the evil one, to be tormented until he should desist from blaspheming Christianity, 1 Tim. i. 20. a circumstance, surely, by no means easy to be reconciled with what is recorded of the Hymenæus spoken of in the second Epistle, who is not represented as being under any kind of restraint, but as going about perverting as many of the Christians as he could, and disseminating his errors with no small degree of success.

World, a correct knowledge (*γνωσις*) of the true and ever-living God, were commonly styled **Gnostics.**

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success. How, let me ask, could it have been possible for a man to do this, whom the apostle had subjected to the power of the Prince of Darkness, for the purpose of bridling his blasphemous tongue? Finally, there appears to have been as much difference between the one and the other Hymenæus, as there is between an open enemy of Christianity and an artful insidious corrupter of it. The words of St. Paul place it beyond all doubt that the Hymenæus first spoken of by him was, in every respect, a detestable character. His exhortation to Timothy is, that he should unite *πιστιν*, *faith*, i. e. a belief of the religion of Christ, with *ἀγαθῆ συνείδησει*, *a good conscience*. Holiness of life, or piety, is what is meant; the fruit of which is *a good conscience*, or a mind conscious to itself of no evil, and therefore peaceful and happy. The importance and necessity of attending to this admonition he exemplifies by the case of Hymenæus and Alexander, both of whom had discarded *την ἀγαθὴν συνείδησιν*, *a good conscience*, i. e. had plunged into an evil course of life, and turned their backs on the divine law: this corruption of their morals being once wrought, their progress in iniquity became accelerated, and these wretched men, at length, made perfect shipwreck, as it were, of faith, arriving by degrees at such a pitch of callous depravity, as not only to think ill of Christianity, but also publicly to blaspheme its doctrines. To “make shipwreck concerning faith,” is, I think, manifestly to be understood as the same with apostatizing from the Christian faith or religion. These two men, therefore, having given themselves up to a life of wickedness and impiety, were at length led on to renounce Christianity altogether. But the Hymenæus spoken of in the latter epistle, although he was involved in very great culpability, was yet not such a monster as this. He had not apostatized from Christianity, but merely given a corrupt interpretation to a part of its doctrines, namely, that which respects the future resurrection of the body. The probability is, that inclining, in this respect, rather to the principles of those philosophers who maintained that the body is, as it were, the prison of the rational soul, and matter the source of all evil, than to the doctrine taught by the apostles, he asserted that what Christ had delivered respecting the resurrection of the body, was not to be understood in a literal sense, but that what he meant to promise was a new life to

C E N T. Gnostics. This calamity was foreseen by St. Paul, and is predicted by him in 1 Tim. iv. 1. [w].
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the souls of men, not to their bodies. The apostle does not attribute to this man and his associate many errors. His course of life does not appear to have been flagitious, nor, like the other Hymenæus, had he, from a habit of sinning, taken occasion to deprave religion. Moreover, we do not find it imputed to him that he had been instrumental in causing others to lead a life of wickedness and impiety; although, as the apostle pretty plainly intimates, there was a tendency in his error to injure the cause of piety, and countenance an indulgence of our appetites. On these accounts St. Paul is led to speak of him with some degree of moderation, whereas his reproof of the other Hymenæus is couched in terms of the greatest severity and vehemence. In fact, he appears rather to lament his fall than to chide it. With regard to the Alexander of whom St. Paul makes mention in his first Epistle to Timothy, my opinion is precisely the same with that which I have above expressed respecting the Hymenæus there spoken of in conjunction with him, namely, that he was a different man from the one referred to under the same name by the apostle, in his second Epistle, and from whom he states himself to have received great injury at Rome. 2 Tim. iv. 14. And it appears to me that St. Paul had it in view to mark the distinction between them, when he added to the name of the latter the denomination of the craft which he exercised, calling him Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ χαλκεύς, “Alexander the coppersmith.” The meaning of this addition, it strikes me, was to distinguish the man of whom he spake from others of the same name who were known to Timothy, and particularly from him whom the apostle had, in his former Epistle, accused of perfidy to the cause of Christ. The Alexander first spoken of, it is also to be remarked, had, in order to prevent Christianity from suffering further from his blasphemy, been delivered over by St. Paul into the power of the evil one; and how then, it may be asked, could he have insulted St. Paul at Rome, and thrown impediments in the way of his doctrine?

[w] Although some difference of opinion may subsist with regard to this prediction of St. Paul, I am yet persuaded that every one who has made himself acquainted with what the Gnostic discipline was, will readily admit that that system is more particularly pointed at in the passage referred to in the text, notwithstanding that no necessity

We find him also, in various parts of his Epistles, exhorting the followers of Christ to maintain the discipline of their blessed Master whole and uncontaminated by any of the fables or inventions of the philosophers of this sect. 1 Tim. vi. 20.; 1 Tim. i. 3, 4.; Tit. iii. 9; Col. ii. 8. But an insane curiosity, and that itch for penetrating into abstruse or hidden things, by which the human mind is so liable to be tormented, caused many to turn their backs on the advice and admonition of the apostle and his associates; and no sooner did some of the Gnostics gain a footing in the recently established Christian churches, than the principles that they maintained respecting the first origin of all things, and the causes for which Christ came into this world, and to which their great austerity of demeanour, and rigid abstinence from even the lawful gratifications of sense, communicated an imposing gloss, were by numbers received with open ears, and suffered to take entire possession of their minds. To no purpose was it that the apostles and their disciples pointed out the emptiness of all these things, and how very incongruous they were with the genuine Christian discipline, al-

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cessity may appear to exist for considering it as exclusively applicable thereto. Numerous are the passages in the other Epistles of the New Testament, as well as in those written by St. Paul. which strike at this system, and call loudly on the Christian churches to beware of it; in fact more numerous, perhaps, than the generality of commentators appear to have imagined. I cannot say that I agree in every thing with Hammond, who, in his *Annotations on the New Testament*, translated into Latin by Le Clerc, and also in his book *de Episcopatus Juribus Dissert. prim. de Antichristo*, cap. iii. p. 11, & seq. takes upon him to apply several passages in the New Testament to the Gnostics, on no other ground, as it should seem, than that of a very slight accordance in terms. There are, however, many observations of his from which it would be inconsistent with candour to withhold our assent.

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though they might carry with them a specious shew of somewhat like recondite wisdom [x]. Intoxicated with a fondness for these opinions, not a few of the Christians were induced to secede from all association with the advocates for the sound doctrine, and to form themselves into various sects, which, as time advanced, became daily more extensive and numerous, and were for several ages, productive of very serious inconveniences and evils to the Christian commonwealth [y].

LXI. It

[x] The emptiness and folly of this system of discipline, is most aptly pourtrayed and exposed by St. Paul in 1 Tim. i. 4.; Tit. iii. 9.; 2 Tim. ii. 16.

[y] Learned men are not agreed as to the time when the first sects of the Gnostics were founded. Many of them place implicit faith in the authority of Clement of Alexandria, who says it was after the death of the apostles, in the reign of the emperor Hadrian, that these sects were established, and the integrity of the church was destroyed. *Stromat.* lib. vii. cap. xvii. p. 898, 899. With this testimony they conceive also that of Hegefippus to coincide, who, in a passage preserved by Eusebius, (*Histor. Eccles.* lib. iii. cap. xxxii. p. 104, and lib. iv. cap. xxii. p. 142.) reports the church to have remained a pure virgin until the time of Trajan, but that after the death of the apostles the leaders of divers sects began openly to make their appearance. Others, however, are of opinion that some congregations were formed by certain of the Gnostic tribe, in opposition to the churches of apostolic foundation, even so early as the first century, and during the lifetime of the apostles themselves. And this opinion seems to be favoured by what St. John says, 1 John, ii. 18, & seq. of many Antichrists having gone forth from the church, as well as by what has reached us respecting Cerinthus, and the Nicolaitans, who were heretics of the first century, and tainted with the Gnostic opinions. Conflicting as these sentiments are, it appears to me not at all impossible to reconcile them, without requiring a sacrifice of the point of honour to be made by either party. That dissensions, arising out of the attempt to blend the principles of Gnosticism with Christianity, had been generated in the churches previously to the second century and the reign of the emperor Hadrian, and that some

LXI. It is, however, by no means difficult to point out the way in which these people contrived to make the religion of Christ appear to be altogether in unison with their favourite system of discipline. All the philosophers of the East, whose tenets, as we have seen, were, that the Deity had nothing at all to do with matter, the nature and qualities of which they considered to be malignant and poisonous—that the body was held in subjection by a being entirely distinct from him to whom the dominion over the rational soul

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of those who were devoted to those principles, having drawn to them a number of partisans, had proceeded to the length of holding separate assemblies with their disciples is most manifest, not only from the apostolic epistles, but also from other ancient monuments. Nor is this at all opposed by the words of Clement or Hegesippus. For it should seem that what these writers say may, in fact, be considered as amounting merely to this, that in the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, the patrons of heresy came forward with greater boldness than before, and laying aside the caution and reserve with which they had hitherto maintained their doctrines, made open profession of their dissent from the rest of the Christians, endeavouring likewise, by every means in their power, both to augment the number of their partisans and also to place their different sects or fraternities on a firm and stable basis: though, with regard to what is said by Hegesippus, it may perhaps admit of a question, whether it is to be considered as relating merely to the church of Jerusalem, as some of the learned imagine, or, as others conceive, to the church at large. In short, the fact appears to have been, that during the first century the sects formed by those who were for interpreting the doctrines of Christianity according to the principles of the ancient philosophy of the Magi, were neither large, nor held in much account, their internal organization being at that time but very imperfect; but, that about the commencement of the second century, they burst through the obscurity by which they had been enveloped, and assumed for themselves a regular determinate form, under certain acknowledged leaders, and subject to a system of laws and regulations peculiarly their own.

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belonged—that the world and all terrestrial bodies were not the work of the Supreme Being, the author of all good, but were formed out of matter by a nature either evil in its origin, or that had fallen into a state of depravity—and, lastly, that the knowledge of the true Deity had become extinct, and that the whole race of mankind, instead of worshipping the Father of Light and Life, and source of every thing good, universally paid their homage to the Founder and Prince of this nether world, or to his substitutes and agents: I say all these looked forward with earnest expectation for the arrival of an extraordinary and eminently powerful Messenger of the Most High, who, they imagined, would deliver the captive souls of men from the bondage of the flesh, and rescue them from the dominion of those Genii by whom they supposed the world and all matter to be governed, at the same time communicating to them a correct knowledge of their everlasting Parent, so as to enable them, upon the dissolution of the body, once more to regain their long lost liberty and happiness. An expectation of this kind even continues to be cherished by their descendants of the present day. Some of these philosophers then, being struck with astonishment at the magnitude and splendour of the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles, and perceiving that it was the object of our Lord's ministry both to abrogate the Jewish law, a law which they conceived to have been promulgated by the Architect or Founder of the World himself, or by the chief of his agents, and also to overthrow those gods of the nations whom they regarded as Genii placed over mankind by the same evil spirit; hearing him, moreover, invite the whole world to join in the worship of the one omnipotent and only

only true God, and profess that he came down from Heaven for the purpose of redeeming the souls of men, and restoring them to liberty, were induced to believe that he was that very messenger for whom they looked, the person ordained by the everlasting Father to destroy the dominion of the founder of this world as well as of the Genii who presided over it, to separate light from darkness, and to deliver the souls of men from that bondage to which they were subjected in consequence of their connection with material bodies.

LXII. The principles and nature of this system of discipline, however, were such as to render it impossible for its votaries to yield their assent to many things which were delivered by Christ and his apostles, or to interpret them according to their obvious and commonly accepted sense. To have done so would have been acting in direct opposition to certain leading maxims, which were considered by persons of their persuasion as indisputable truths [z]. To various articles, therefore,

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[z] The early Christian fathers, who were acquainted with none other besides the Grecian system of philosophy, perceiving that some of the dogmas of the Gnostics coincided with the principles of the Platonists, were induced to conclude that the discipline of the former had been altogether generated by a conjunction of the platonic philosophy with Christianity: to this opinion great numbers of the learned of modern days have likewise subscribed, so many indeed, that they are scarcely to be enumerated. After having, however, examined the subject with every possible degree of impartiality and attention, I am most thoroughly convinced that the founders of the Gnostic schools cannot, with the least propriety, be reckoned amongst the followers of Plato. With regard to certain particulars taken separately, I am very ready to admit that there is no great want of resemblance between the platonic philosophy and the doctrine of the Gnostics; but only let the two systems be compared together, as they ought to be, *in toto*, and the great

C E N T. therefore, propounded in the Christian code as
 I. essential points of belief, they utterly refused their
 assent: such, for instance, as that which attributes

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dissimilarity that exists between them becomes at once conspicuous. That long series of *aons*, for instance, of either sex, through which the Gnostics uniformly deduce the connexion of the Deity with matter, is a thing altogether unknown to the system of Plato: whilst, on the other hand, the platonic doctrine respecting the nature of the Deity and the origin of this world, as exhibited by the Athenian sage in his *Timæus*, is in no respect whatever to be reconciled with the tenets of the Gnostics. The Deity is represented by Plato as eternally active and energetic, by the Gnostics as altogether passive and quiescent. According to the former, this world is eternal, and a work of beauty not at all unworthy of the almighty hand that framed it: by the latter, it is regarded as an ill-formed mass, the destruction of which is an object of desire and meditation with the Deity. In the opinion of the Platonists, this world and its inhabitants are governed either immediately by the Deity himself, or through the ministrations of *dæmons* commissioned by him: but according to the Gnostic scheme, an absolute and entire dominion over the human race, and the globe we inhabit, is exercised by the founder of the material world, a being of unbounded pride and ambition, who makes use of every means in his power to prevent mankind from attaining to any knowledge of the true God. In addition to what are here enumerated, many other points of difference between the two systems will readily be perceived by any one who will divest his mind of all bias or prejudice, and be at the pains of perusing the little book written by Plotinus the Platonist, in opposition to the Gnostics. Porphyry moreover, the disciple of Plotinus, says, in the *Life of his Master*, cap. xvi. p. 118. expressly, that the Gnostics considered Plato as a minute philosopher, who had never ascended in mind and thought to the first principles of all things. But not to multiply words: it is allowed by all that the discipline of Manes was the genuine offspring of the ancient philosophy of the East, or that of the Persians and Chaldæans: but this discipline, if we except the conclusions of some of its dogmas, corresponds so exactly in all respects with that of the Gnostics, that it is scarcely possible for any two systems to appear more similar to each other: that they were both, therefore, drawn from one and the same source, surely, cannot admit of a doubt.

the creation of the world to the Supreme Being, and those respecting the divine origin of the Mosaic law, the authority of the Old Testament, the character of human nature, and the like: for it would have amounted to nothing short of an absolute surrender of the leading maxims of the system to which they were devoted, had they not persisted in maintaining that the creator of this world was a being of a nature vastly inferior to the Supreme Deity, the Father of our Lord, and that the law of Moses was not dictated by the Almighty, but by this same inferior being, by whom also the bodies of men were formed and united to souls of ethereal mould, and under whose influence the various penmen of the Old Testament composed whatever they have left us on record. In addition to the articles of Christian belief, which they felt themselves constrained thus peremptorily to reject, there were others which they found it necessary to explain after their own manner, in order to render them compatible with the principles of the oriental discipline. Respecting Christ and his functions in particular, it was requisite for them, in support of their tenets, to maintain that he was to be considered as inferior to the Supreme Being, and as never having in reality assumed a material body. Their adoption of the former of these positions was an inevitable consequence of their believing, as they universally did, that the Deity had existed from all eternity in a state of absolute quiescence, but that at length, after ages spent in silence and repose, he begat of himself certain natures or beings after his own likeness, of whom Christ was one: to the maintenance of the latter they were constrained by that leading maxim of the oriental system, that all matter

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was intrinsically evil and corrupt. Consistently with these sentiments, they moreover found themselves called upon to deny that Christ, in reality, either underwent what he is reported to have suffered, or died, and returned again to life, as is recorded of him. In their exposition of this doctrine, however, they did not all of them follow precisely the same plan. Again, in regard to the purposes for which Christ came into the world, the principles of their system rendered it necessary for them to assert, that it was not with a view to expiate the sins of mankind, or to appease the wrath of an offended Deity, that he relinquished for a while his abode in the Heavens, but merely in order to communicate to the human race the long lost knowledge of the Supreme Being; and that, having put an end to the usurped dominion of the arrogant founder of this world, he might point out to the souls of men (those spirits of ethereal origin unhappily confined in earthly prisons) the means of recovering for themselves their native liberty and happiness. Finally, to pass over some other points which might be noticed, these votaries of orientalism were compelled, in support of their favourite maxim respecting the malignant nature of matter, to discountenance every idea of a future resurrection of men's bodies from the dead, and to maintain that what is said in Scripture on the subject is altogether figurative and metonymical. In their manners and habits the Gnostics were for the most part melancholy and austere. Indeed, allowing the principles and notions which they cherished respecting matter and the origin of our earthly forms to be just and correct, it cannot but follow, that to obey the instincts of nature, or to indulge in any sort of
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bodily gratification, must be contrary to reason, and even criminal. Strange, however, as it may appear to those who are not aware of the discordant conclusions which different men will sometimes deduce from the same premises, it is most certain that some of this sect conceived themselves to be warranted by these self-same principles in plunging, with the most barefaced effrontery, into every species of libidinous and vicious excess [a].

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[a] Amongst the learned, and more particularly amongst those of our own times, there have not been wanting several who have stood forward, with considerable ingenuity and eloquence, as the advocates and defenders of the Gnostics. The professed object of some of these has been merely to extenuate, as far as possible, the errors of this sect, and in the way of explanation to offer every kind of apology for them of which the nature of the case will admit. Others of them, however, have endeavoured to clear those corrupters of Christianity from every sort of reproach, insisting on it that the ancient authors, from whom we derive our knowledge of their principles and tenets, are to be regarded either as malignant and invidious accusers, or else as ill-informed and incompetent judges. But, notwithstanding all the respect that may be due to authority so commanding, we cannot help saying, that to us these eminent writers appear to have, in this instance, laboured to as little purpose as they would have done in attempting to wash a blackamoor white, and thrown away their time and talents on behalf of a cause which is altogether desperate, and admits of no defence. If there be any truth at all in history, not a doubt can exist but that the religion professed by this sect was of a nature diametrically opposite to that which is propounded to mankind in the writings of the New Testament. If taken up separately indeed, and exhibited apart by themselves, it may be very possible for ingenuity to give to certain particulars of the Gnostic system an air of soundness and truth: but only let the parts thus selected be referred to their proper stations in the general scheme, and the fallacy will at once become apparent. That the ancient Christian writers were actuated by malice in framing their reports of the Gnostics, and incurred the guilt of slandering a worthy
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set of men, for the purpose of securing to themselves an absolute sway, is what no good person, who is acquainted with the situation of things in those early times, will easily be induced to believe, and what, I am sure, this one consideration alone is enough to prevent any one in his senses from crediting, namely, that a variety of writers, separated widely from each other in point of time, place, manners, studies, and attachments, have handed down to us precisely one and the same account of the Gnostic principles and opinions. By every unprejudiced and impartial person, this concurrence of testimony will, I am persuaded, be allowed so completely to do away all suspicion of slander and misrepresentation, as to render any further evidence to this effect altogether superfluous. Were it at all necessary, other circumstances, not less cogent and conclusive, might easily be brought forward. With regard to those who would have us believe that the principles and maxims of the Gnostics were in reality found and correct, but that these philosophers, having made use of new and unaccustomed terms and phrases in propounding their opinions to the world, their meaning was hastily misconceived by their adversaries, I must confess that I do not see how this suggestion of theirs much helps the matter. Were we to admit this representation of the case to be just, the only effect it could have on our minds would be to make us no longer regard the Gnostics in the light of persons led away by error, and too great a fondness for certain opinions of their own, but as men acting under the influence of folly and impiety. For, unquestionably, men who could prevail on themselves to cloak up and disguise sentiments, which they knew to be sound and just, in pompous obscurities, and a high sounding theatrical kind of phraseology, must either have had it in view to impose on the world, and in this silly way to acquire for themselves the reputation of superior wisdom, or otherwise have been complete drivellers, and entirely deprived of their wits. And as for those whom this sort of senseless and bombastic language, which the perspicuity and simplicity of Holy Writ most strongly, although tacitly, condemns, could so far charm as to make them anxious to convert their brethren to a sense of its excellence and beauty, and who, rather than renounce this silly and obscure kind of jargon, would stir up dissensions in the church, and split it

into

their tenets and maxims were repugnant not only to the doctrine openly delivered by Christ himself, but also to the tenor of those writings which are considered by the whole body of Christians as the rule and standard of their religion, is what the generality of the Gnostics did not attempt to deny. In truth, the fact was too glaring to admit of a question. They, however, took care not to be unprepared with arguments, whereby to defend and support the system of discipline to which they were devoted. By the leaders of some of their sects it was contended, that the religion propounded by Christ was of two sorts; the one of easy comprehension, and suited to the capacity of the vulgar; the other sublime, and to be understood only by persons of refined intellect. The former they represented as being contained in the books of the New Testament, the latter as having been unfolded by Christ to his apostles alone in private. For their own knowledge of the latter they professed themselves to be indebted to certain disciples of the apostles Peter, Paul, and Matthias [b]. Others pretended that their leading tenets and maxims

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into sects, they cannot be regarded in any other light than that of wicked and presumptuous men, the enemies of love, peace, and harmony, or, in a word, than as the pests and canker-worms of the Christian community. But, even granting that the meaning of these men might in some respects be misunderstood, it is yet very easily to be proved that the ancient Christian writers are, for the most part, strictly correct in their representation of the Gnostic principles and opinions, and that the members of this sect gave themselves so entirely up to the suggestions of a disordered imagination, as altogether to set common sense and reason at defiance.

[b] Vid. Irenæus *adv. Hæreses*, lib. i. cap. xxv. § v. p. 104. & lib. iii. cap. v. p. 179. ex division. Renat. Mafuet. Clemens Alex. *Stromat.* lib. vii. cap. xvii. p. 898. 900.

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were drawn from the oracles and visions of Zoroaster and other divinely instructed sages of the East, as likewise from certain secret writings of Abraham, Seth, Noah, and other holy men of the Jewish nation, who flourished long before the time of Christ; a pretence which, in the age of which we are speaking, was certainly not wholly destitute of colour, since there were various fictitious writings in the hands of many at that time, which a set of villainous and artful men had palmed on the world as the productions of those great and sacred characters [c]. Some took upon them to exclude from the sacred code all such writings of the New Testament as appeared to militate with any degree of force against their principles, and to substitute in their places other gospels and epistles of their own forging, but which they pretended to have been written by certain of our Lord's apostles, such as Peter, Thomas, and Matthias [d]. Others, again, maintained, that the ordinary copies of the New Testament were corrupted, and in proof of this produced what they pretended to be correct ones, and in which, either through their own artifice, or want of care in the transcribers, a difference of reading presented itself in those passages which were adverse to the Gnostic tenets. Lastly, there

[c] Vid. Porphyr. *in Vit. Plotini*, cap. xvi. p. 118. edit. Fabric. Clemens Alex. *Stromat.* lib. i. cap. xv. p. 357. lib. vi. cap. vi. p. 767. Eusebius *Histor. Eccles.* lib. iv. cap. vii. p. 120. Epiphanius *Heret.* xxvi. § viii. p. 59. 84. *Heret.* xxxix. § v. p. 286, &c. *Constitutiones Apostolicæ*, lib. vi. cap. xvi. p. 348. et seq. tom. i. *Patr. Apostolicæ*. and various other authorities.

[d] Jo. Alb. Fabricius will be found to illustrate this the best of any one, in his *Cod. Pseudepigraph. Nov. Test.* The reader may also consult Beaufobre, *Histoire du Manichéisme*, tom. i. p. 344, & seq.

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were many of them who insisted on it, that, in the words of Scripture, there was enveloped a recondite meaning; (an opinion, indeed, at that time commonly entertained even by persons of strictly orthodox sentiments) and, upon this principle, were continually labouring in the most silly and puerile way, by the squeezing and torturing of words, to wring from them that assistance and support, which, without resorting to such means, they could in no wise be made to yield.

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LXIV. Great was, indeed, the detriment which the interests of Christianity experienced from this presumptuous sect, which arrogated to itself a correct and perfect knowledge of the Deity: but in a much heavier degree would the malign influence of its doctrines have been felt, had they been urged with a due measure of uniformity and consistence. Fortunately, however, it happened, that from its very first rise, this faction was split into various parties, the leaders and directors of which were as much at variance among themselves as with the Christians, whose tenets they stigmatized as highly derogatory to the character of the Deity, inasmuch as they attributed to him the creation of the world. For, although all of them took for their groundwork the same principles, yet when they came to enter into particulars, and proceeded to bring the different points of their doctrine to the test of a closer examination, for the purpose of ascertaining their due force, and reconciling them with each other, as well as of adapting them to the principles of the Christian religion, the difference of opinion that sprung up amongst these pretenders to superior knowledge was truly astonishing. All of them, for instance, were unanimous

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mous in regarding the Supreme Deity as a being altogether different from the creator and governor of this world: but as to the precise nature of this last mentioned being, and also the degree of his inferiority to the Father of our Lord, considerable controversy prevailed. Again, all of them were agreed in considering matter as intrinsically evil and corrupt, and as the womb and nurse of all those vicious desires and propensities wherewith mankind are continually tormented, but whether such had been its pernicious nature or quality from all eternity, or whether it had accidentally become thus depraved, whether it it was animate or inanimate, and whether it were possessed of a generative faculty, and could of itself produce living beings or not, was made the subject of very violent contention. That Christ was the Son of the Supreme Deity, and was sent into the world for the purpose of liberating the souls of men from the wretched bondage in which they were held by the body, was what all of them professed to believe: by some, however, his character was estimated higher than by others, and with regard to the body which he assumed, it was asserted by some to have been merely a visionary form; whilst others maintained it to have been a frame of an ethereal and celestial nature. A similar disagreement of opinion prevailed amongst them respecting a variety of other things. Nor have we far to seek for the cause which gave rise to these manifold dissensions. For, in the first place, the oriental philosophy, to which the Gnostics were addicted, having no foundation whatever in the principles of sound reason, but being grounded merely on various refined conceits, the offspring of human ingenuity, had for a long while been split into a great number of parties and

and sects [e]. In the next place, a considerable portion of the Gnostics had, previously to their embracing Christianity, assigned no limits whatever to their philosophical speculations; whereas others of them, who were of Jewish extraction, had, in a certain degree, restricted and modified the system of discipline to which they were attached, by incorporating with it various particulars of the law and institutions of Moses. By some again, the principles of Gnosticism had been united with certain maxims derived from a rude and superstitious kind of astronomical knowledge, by the cultivation of which different nations of the East, and particularly the Egyptians, had much corrupted their minds; whilst by others this study of the heavenly bodies was either altogether neglected, or attended to only to be treated with contempt. Finally, in addition to the abovementioned sources of disagreement it may be re-

[e] The learned Thomas Hyde, a man eminently skilled in oriental matters and opinions, expresses himself as follows in his *Historia Religionis veterum Persarum*, cap. i. p. 26. "*Cum itaque in hac religione (i. e. the religion of the magi, which assigned to matter a peculiar governor or ruler, and denied that this world had been created by the Supreme Deity, the author of all good) fuerint seclæ pluresquam 70, (uti etiam sunt in Christianitate) non est expectandum, ut omnia, quæ de eorum religione forte dicta fuerint, pertineant ad magos orthodoxos, sed aliqua etiam ad hæreticos. — Magorum seclæ orthodoxa ea est, quæ de duobus principiis credit unum fuisse æternum, alterum vero creatum. — Hæretici autem fuere tam alii qui in processu hujus operis enumerantur, quam magi dualistæ, statuentes, hæc duo principia fuisse æterna, & alii in aliis rebus minus orthodoxe sentientes.*" With regard to the position here laid down, that that particular sect of the magi which believed that the Prince or Governor of Darkness and Matter derived his existence from the Supreme Deity, was the predominant and principal one, it should seem to be not altogether established beyond the reach of doubt, but in every other part of his statement respecting the dissensions of these philosophers, this illustrious scholar is indisputably most correct.

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marked, that the attempt to blend philosophy, under any certain or particular form, with religion, no matter whether true or false, has never failed very quickly to produce much difference of opinion amongst those who have made it, and to supply them with a variety of grounds for disunion, contention, and dispute.

Simon Magus.

LXV. At the head of the heretics of this age, and particularly of the Gnostics, we find the ancient fathers of the church unanimous in placing a Simon Magus, whom they assert to have been one and the same with him whose depravity and perfidy was so severely reprobated by St. Peter at Samaria. [*f*]. Being in possession of no testimony

[*f*] Acts, viii. 9, 10. It ought not perhaps to be passed over unnoticed, that not a few writers, ancient as well as modern, have assigned the chief place amongst the heretics of the first century to Dositheus, or, as he is termed by the Chaldeans, Dosthai. That a man of this name existed about the time of our Saviour, and that he endeavoured to bring about a change in the religion of his countrymen the Samaritans, and became the founder of a sect which continued to exist in Egypt even down to the sixth century, is unquestionably certain. Vid. Origen, lib. vi. *contra Cels.* p. 282. Eulogius apud Photium *Biblioth. Cod.* ccxxx. p. 883. & seq. But the fact is, that instead of being included in the class of heretics, he ought rather to have a place assigned him amongst lunatics and madmen, or amongst those who, from a deranged state of intellect have been induced to obtrude themselves on the attention of the world as persons especially commissioned of God. For from the memorials that are extant respecting him, although they are neither very numerous nor explicit, it is clearly to be perceived that the man had been induced, not, as it should seem, so much through arrogance as from downright folly and inanity, to attempt passing himself on the Samaritans as the Messiah. Vid. Origen, *adv. Celsum*, lib. i. p. 44. lib. vi. p. 282. *Comm. in Johannem*, tom. ii. opp. p. 219. Eulogius apud Photium *Biblioth.* p. 883. The impious scheme which he had formed having been communicated to the Samaritan high priest, orders were issued for his apprehension with a view

mony or other means whereby to controvert their authority with regard to the identity of Simon Magus, and that Simon who was accounted the parent or chief leader of the Gnostics, it appears to me that we have no alternative but to acquiesce in it; although there are not wanting several very eminently learned men who cannot prevail on themselves to concede even thus much [g]. But as to the remainder of what they thus state respecting this Simon, I must confess that it seems to me to be entitled to no sort of credit whatever. For from every thing which even they themselves have handed down to us concerning the man, it is manifest beyond dispute that he can-

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view to punishment. By a precipitate flight, however, he escaped being taken; and seeking refuge in a remote cave, either voluntarily starved himself to death, or perished for want of being supplied with the necessaries of life. Vid. Epiphanius *Hæres.* xiii. p. 30. tom. i. opp. *Chronicon Samaritanum* apud Abr. Echeliensem *Annotat. ad Hebed-Jesu Catalog. Libror. Chaldaicor.* p. 162.

[g] Camp. Vitringa in the first place, and after him the venerable Christ. Aug. Heuman, and Isaac Beaufobre, contend that there were two Simons Magi, and that the ancient fathers, through mistake, attributed the errors and faults of a certain Gnostic philosopher of the name of Simon, to that Simon of whom mention is made in the Acts of the Apostles as having imposed on the credulity of the Samaritans. Considerable difficulty however presents itself in the way of our assenting to this conjecture, since there is no testimony or argument of any force to be brought in support of it, nor is there any thing that opposes itself to probability in the commonly received opinion. Isaac Beaufobre has indeed in his *Dissertation de Adamitis*, p. 2. subjoined to L'Enfant's History of the Hussite War, § 1. p. 350. & seq. come forward with no less than eight different arguments in proof of there having been more than one Simon Magus; but of the force of either or all of these arguments I will leave those to judge who will be at the pains of perusing with attention a dissertation published by me some time since on behalf of the opposite side of the question, or *de uno Simone Mago*.

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not with the least propriety be included in the class of heretics or corrupters of the Christian religion, but is to be reckoned amongst the most hostile of its adversaries, inasmuch as he hesitated not to revile and calumniate the character of our blessed Saviour, and made use of every means within his power to impede the progress of Christianity: pretending at the same time that he himself, and a female associate of his, of the name of Helen, were persons really commissioned from above for the purpose of enabling the souls of men once more to regain their native liberty and light [b].

From

[b] Unanimous as the Christian writers of the first three centuries, who make mention of Simon Magus, are in placing him at the head of the heretics of the first age, it is yet manifest, from every thing which they relate of him, that he could not have belonged to that class, but was an open and determined enemy of the Christian religion in all its branches. Origen (lib. v. *advers. Celsum*, p. 272.) expressly excludes the Simonians from the number of the Christian sects, and states that Jesus was not the object of their veneration, but Simon. And with this accords the testimony of all the rest; some of them indeed not making use of terms equally clear and explicit, but at the same time attributing to Simon principles and opinions which can leave no doubt on our minds as to the fact, inasmuch as they could never have been entertained by any man who had not set Christ far beneath him, and arrogated to himself all the dignity and consequence attached to the character of a divine legate; and hence it came to pass that the Simonians, as is recorded by Origen and Justin Martyr (*Apolo- log. pro Christianis secunda*, p. 70.) as well as others, experienced no sort of disturbance or molestation at a time when the Christians were constantly exposed to perils of the most formidable kind: for it was publickly known to every one, that so far from being the followers of Christ, they were the enemies of his doctrine. About twenty years since when, if I mistake not, I first suggested this opinion, there were some to whom it appeared almost as sacrilege to call in question the many high and sacred authorities

From this one circumstance alone, supposing that we were to lay out of the case various other corroborative proofs, it is plainly to be perceived that there must have been some mistake with regard to the Gnostic Christians being considered as the disciples of Simon, and his being accounted the parent or inventor of the Gnostic philosophy. The principles and maxims of this species of philosophy had become familiar to the people of the East long before the time of Simon's applying himself to the study and culture of it in Egypt; and as to his having been the chief leader of the Gnostics, it is certain that not one of their sects held him in the least reverence [i]. The probability is, that the early fathers, perceiving the similarity that subsisted between Simon's tenets and those of the Gnostics, and being, notwithstanding their proficiency in Greek literature, but mere novices in Oriental

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authorities by whom Simon was pronounced to be the parent of heresy, and to bring into dispute a matter which had received the sanction of so many ages. The opinion however has, on the strength of its own evidence, in the course of time obtained for itself many patrons, and was not long since, adopted by the learned Jo. Augustin. Orsi, in the *Ecclesiastical History* written by him in Italian under the particular patronage of the pope, tom. i. p. 348.

[i] The most positive testimony as to this is supplied by Irenæus himself, whom we cannot suspect of having misrepresented the fact, since he is otherwise loud in his condemnation of the Gnostics, on the very ground of their being the followers of Simon. None of the Gnostic sects, he observes, (lib. i. *adv. Hæreses*, cap. xxvii. § 4. p. 106.) were willing *nomen magistri sui* (Simonis) *confiteri*, but on the contrary, all of them were accustomed *Christi Jesu nomen tanquam irritamentum proferre*. Their repudiation of Simon, he adds, was altogether an artifice, by which they hoped to impose the more readily on the simple and the ignorant, and to free their character from every sort of stain. But in this he certainly does them wrong.

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learning, and consequently not aware of any one's having philosphized after this manner previously to him, were induced to believe that the whole tribe of Gnostics had proceeded from his school.

LXVI. The history of Simon is briefly this. He was by birth a Samaritan, but having gone down into Egypt, he was induced to continue there for some time, and apply himself to the study of the various arts which were cultivated by those who termed themselves *magi*, and the scourges of evil dæmons. Upon returning into his own country, he contented himself for a while with practising on the credulity of the multitude by means of the powers of deception which he had thus acquired. But having been a witness of the real miracles wrought by Philip the deacon, at Samaria, in confirmation of the truth of the doctrine which he preached, he professed himself a convert to Christianity, cherishing, as it should seem, a hope that by so doing he should ultimately, either through obsequiousness or bribery, find a way to obtain for himself the faculty of working similar wonders, and hence have divine honours paid him by the people. An impious attempt which he made to realize these expectations having met with its merited chastisement from St. Peter in that severe and memorable reproof which stands recorded in Acts, viii. 9, 10. he betook himself again to his former evil courses, and associating with him a woman of the name of Helen, spent the remainder of his days in wandering about through various provinces, endeavouring, wherever he came, by means of the different tricks and artifices of which he had made himself master, to impose on weak and ignorant minds, and make them believe that the two chief faculties of the
Supreme

Supreme Deity, the one being in its nature masculine, the other feminine, were actually resident in the bodies of himself and his female companion, having been sent down from above for the purpose of controuling the power of those enemies and tormentors of the human race, the creator of this nether world and his subordinate agents; and of stirring up the minds of men, in spite of their unhappy alliance with vile matter, to the acknowledgment and worship of the only true God. This certainly is all that can with truth, or with any great semblance of truth, be said of this extraordinary character; at least a considerable degree of suspicion attaches itself to whatever else is reported of him [k]. In what place, and under what circumstances, his mortal career terminated is altogether uncertain: for as to what several ancient authors report of his having, in consequence of the prayers of St. Peter, fallen headlong from a vast height in an attempt to fly which he made at Rome in the reign of the emperor Nero, and received thereby such wounds as shortly afterwards occasioned his death, it is a tale to which no credit is at present given, except by such as are the dupes of superstition, or ready to swallow down every thing that has the support of antiquity on its

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[k] Those who may be desirous of possessing themselves of every thing that has been handed down to us respecting Simon, may consult the 2d vol. of Tillemont, and those other authors who are recommended by Sagittarius in his *Introductio ad Historiam Ecclesiasticam*. We should wish the reader to understand this reference as equally applicable to the various other sects of which notice may be taken in the course of this work, as we shall studiously make it our endeavour to avoid, as far as possible, adding to its bulk by any unnecessary repetition of references to books or authorities.

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side. Nor is any belief now placed by the generality of people, in what Justin Martyr says of the Romans having honoured Simon with an apotheosis, and erected a statue to his memory : although it appears to be pretty certain, that the sect which he founded continued to exist in the third and even down to the fourth century, and persisted to the last in paying a sort of honorary worship both to him and his concubine [1].

LXVII. The

[1] The much agitated questions respecting the manner of Simon's death, and the statue said to have been erected to his memory at Rome, are in some measure grown obsolete, but cannot by any means as yet be said to have been set completely at rest ; inasmuch as there are still to be found many who, on such occasions, are always vastly alarmed lest the authority and credit of antiquity should experience any diminution : others again, who imagine that the greater credit is due to a thing in proportion as it is more wonderful and out of the common course : and finally, others whom superstition so blinds as to render them altogether incapable of discerning the truth. (I.) With regard to what is related by Arnobius, a writer of the third century, and after him by various ancient authors, of Simon's flying in the air by the assistance of the evil spirit, and of his being precipitated to the ground, in consequence of the prayers of St. Peter, it is in the highest degree incredible and absurd. Simon was a slight-of-hand man, a mere juggler, not such a character as the Prince of Darkness would have selected to affright and mislead mankind. Besides, who is there so ignorant as not to know how little faith is to be placed in what ancient authors relate of magicians, and prodigies wrought by the assistance of the devil ? Moreover, the most respectable of the early Christian writers, and beyond all Eusebius, the parent, as we may call him, of ecclesiastical history, say not a syllable respecting this event, which, if it had in reality occurred, must surely have been deemed worthy of being perpetuated throughout all ages : it is plain therefore, that they either were entirely unacquainted with it, or else accounted it nothing better than a mere idle story of the vulgar. In which-ever way their silence be interpreted, it is equally conclusive against the thing's

LXVII. The principles on which the discipline of Simon was founded appear to have been much the

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thing's ever having happened. It appears to me however extremely probable, that the tale might not be altogether of fabulous invention, but originate in a mistake, and be founded on an event which actually did occur at Rome during the reign of the emperor Nero. From the testimony of Suetonius, Juvenal, and Dio Chrysostom, it seems to be placed beyond a doubt, that some poor wretch who had pretended to possess the art of flying, and been presumptuous enough to solicit an opportunity of exhibiting a specimen of his ability in the theatre at Rome, did actually commit himself to the air, and being immediately precipitated to the ground, was literally dashed to pieces; the emperor himself, in whose presence the feat was essayed, being sprinkled with some of his blood. Sueton. *in Nerone*, cap. xii. p. 23. Now it is certainly not at all unlikely that the name of this unfortunate rival of Icarus might be Simon, and that the Christians, upon hearing that a magician (for so the common people at that time, termed every one who practised any unusual or extraordinary arts) of this name had come to such a disastrous end, might at once conclude that it was that very Simon the magician whose depravity and wickedness had long been in every one's mouth; and since they were accustomed to attribute every thing by which either the community or the church was materially benefited, to the effect of prayer, might be led to think that God had wrought destruction on this determined enemy of the true religion at the instance of St. Peter, who was perhaps at that time sojourning at Rome. Piety having once given rise to the idea, it is easily to be conceived that ingenuity would not be long in supplying all the little minutiae of circumstances. (II.) With regard to the statue which Justin Martyr, and after him Tertullian and others, report to have been erected by the Romans to the memory of Simon Magus, a discovery which was made in the Tiberine island at Rome, about the year 1574, of a marble base or pedestal inscribed to Semo Sancus, the ancient Deus Fidius, has induced many of the learned to think that the above-mentioned fathers, in consequence of their possessing merely a superficial knowledge of the Roman superstitions and ancient popular deities, were led into a mistake, and that what they conceived to be a monument raised in honour of Simon,

was

C E N T. the same with those which were recognised by
 I. all the different sects of the Gnostics. The Su-
 preme

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was in fact a statue dedicated to this ancient deity of a somewhat similar name: an error into which they might the more easily fall, if, as was by no means unusual, the sculptor had in the inscription, put *Simoni* for *Semoni*. Several instances of such commutations of the letters E and I are given from different authors by the learned Jo. Casp. Hagenbuchius in his *Epistola Epigraphica*, p. 70. vid. Anton. van Dale's *Dissertation de statua Simonis*, annexed to his work *de Oraculis*, p. 579. Salom. Deylingius *Observat. Sacr. Lib. 1. Observ.* xxxvi. p. 140. Beaufobre *Histoire de Manichée*, tom. i. p. 203. 395. Longeue in *Sylloge Anecdotorum* Ven. Jo. Dict. Winckleri, p. 211. as well as innumerable other authorities. So strongly supported indeed is this conjecture by different circumstances, that apparently it would be doing it no more than justice were we to give it a higher denomination. Yet such an amazing weight and influence have the names of Justin and Tertullian with some men, men too, by no means deficient either in point of sagacity or liberal information, that they will rather, on the faith and authority of these fathers, give credit to that which carries with it every stamp and indication of error, than adopt the judgment of some of our greatest literary characters, who not only shew it to be in the highest degree probable that these fathers laboured under a misconception or mistake, but also point out a way in which every unprejudiced person must allow it to be very possible that such a misconception or mistake might have originated. See in addition to Tillemont *Memor.* tom. ii. p. i. p. 340. Styan Thirlby *ad Justin Martyr*, p. 40. Prudent. Maranus the late editor of Justin, *Prefat. ad Justinum*, p. iii. c. vi. p. lxxxv. Jos. August. Orsi in his *Ecclesiastical History*, written in Italian, tom. ii. p. 119. as also what is contended for respecting this statue by a learned writer in the *Museum Helveticum*, tom. ii. p. 617. The chief of all the arguments that have been brought forward in favour of this statue is, that it is not to be believed that men like Justin Martyr and Tertullian, to whom the Roman language and religion were familiar, could have been so far deceived as to mistake the deity *Semo Sancus* for *Simon Magus*. But for my own part, when I recollect how many other errors these fathers have inadvertently admitted into their works, I must confess that I see

preme Deity, for instance, to whom he attributed every possible degree of excellence, had, according to his tenets, existed from all eternity, and at a certain period begotten of himself a number of æons, or natures after his own likeness. Again, matter, which he regarded as being radically corrupt, was represented by him as having in like manner existed eternally, and being possessed of a generative faculty, to have become the parent of the author of all evil, as well as of various other viciously disposed natures. The creation of this world he considered as having been brought about by a female æon, with the assistance of certain powerful genii, without the concurrence or sanction of the Supreme Deity. By this creator of the world, he maintained, who was herself of a divine nature and origin, were generated an incredible number of living souls, whom she united with bodies composed of matter, and consequently

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no difficulty at all in giving them full credit for such a blunder as this: whilst on the other hand, every thing whatever seems to oppose itself to my believing that the Romans could for a moment have so far discarded every sense of propriety, as to assign to a Jew or Samaritan of infamous reputation, to a man in fact no better than a juggler or a mountebank, a place amongst their gods, and to honour his memory with a statue. Concerning Helen, the associate of this despicable mortal, I shall enter into no discussion or enquiry. The labours of the learned with regard to her history, have hitherto only tended to involve nearly the whole of it in difficulties and obscurity. Of the fact of her having existed, however, there can be no doubt, unless all that has come down to us respecting Simon be untrue; for Irenæus, Eusebius, and Augustin, all agree in stating that her image was preserved, and had a sort of worship paid to it by the Simonians, and according to Origen, *contr. Cels.* lib. v. p. 272. the respect which they thus manifested for the memory of this woman caused them to be occasionally styled Helenians.

corrupt.

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Simon.

corrupt. Man therefore, according to him, was compounded of two parts, the one celestial, the other terrene; the one divine, the other depraved. The human race he represented as held in bondage by the founders or creators of this world, and as living in utter ignorance of the Supreme Deity, who contemplating with sorrow the disastrous situation and miserable servitude into which such a number of æthereal spirits were thus unhappily plunged, was in the highest degree solicitous that they should be stimulated to pursue that path which, upon their release from the body, would conduct them to his immediate residence, the seat of everlasting joy and happiness, to which this pretended philosopher, in common with the rest of the Gnostics, gave the appellation of *pleroma*. The course pointed out by him to be observed by the souls who were desirous of attaining to this blissful state, was to cast off all obedience to the founders of this world, by whom he professed himself to mean those beings who were commonly worshipped as deities by the multitude, and to endeavour, by means of meditation and mental exertion, to elevate themselves and approach as nearly as possible to the supreme source of all good. Souls not inflamed with such a wish, were, upon the dissolution of their present earthly prisons, to pass into new bodies until they should arrive at a knowledge of their great and everlasting parent. The laws to which the nations of the earth paid obedience, not excepting even the peculiar code of the Jews, were, he maintained, all fabricated by the founders of this world for the purpose of perpetuating the bondage of captive souls, and that they might therefore be disregarded with impunity by all such minds as had acquired illumination

mination from the fountain of all wisdom. When the projected deliverance of the souls of all mankind from the captivity of matter had been finally accomplished, and they had again joined their first great parent in the regions above, the whole fabric of this nether world and all its dependencies, which he pronounced to be a rude and imperfect work, would, according to his tenets, experience an overwhelming and utter destruction at the hands of the Deity. The discipline of Simon, however, differed most essentially from that of the Gnostic Christians in its principal feature, since instead of joining with them in paying homage to the Saviour of mankind, his aim evidently was to wrest from Christ the glory of man's recovery, and make it the inheritance of himself and his concubine. For he pretended that the greatest and most powerful æon, of the masculine sex, was actually resident within himself, and that the mother of all souls had in like manner taken up her abode in the corporeal frame of his companion Helen; and asserted that he was in an especial manner commissioned of the Most High for the three-fold purpose of communicating to captive souls the knowledge requisite for their deliverance, of overthrowing the dominion of the founder of this world, and of delivering Helen from the subjection in which she had long been held by the subordinate agents or associates of this author of all evil [m].

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LXVIII. The

[m] In the accounts given us by ancient writers of the religion and discipline of Simon, the student finds himself occasionally embarrassed by a want of coherence and perspicuity. By no one has the subject been handled with greater clearness and precision than by the uncertain author of *The Recognitions of Clement* and *The Clementina*, who under the

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 Menander.

LXVIII. The second station in the class of heretics derived from the Gnostics, is in general assigned by ancient writers to Menander, another Samaritan, whom they represent as having been initiated in the school of Simon. But little credit however can be given to this after comparing together the accounts which Irenæus, Justin, Tertullian, and a few others have handed down to us respecting this man. For from what they say it is plain, that his object was to supplant both Christ and Simon, and to pass himself on the world as the real Saviour of mankind, or an æon sent down from above for the purpose of effecting the salvation and deliverance of the souls of the human race, by communicating to them a knowledge of the true God; a circumstance which places it beyond all doubt, that he came neither within the description of a heretic, nor that of a Simonian. The opinion of the early writers above alluded to respecting him was, in all probability, grounded on their perceiving that his tenets and doctrine respecting the Deity, the nature of matter, the origin of this world, and the souls and bodies of its inhabitants, were nearly similar to those which were entertained and taught by Simon and the Gnostic Christians. From what has

the form of a disputation between St. Peter and Simon, throws considerable light on several things but very imperfectly and confusedly treated of by other writers. Nor do I see any just reason that should prevent us from yielding him every sort of credit as an expounder of the tenets of Simon, since he lived in an age when the sect of the Simonians was still in existence, and has certainly recorded nothing that is in any material degree repugnant to the accounts given by other authors. As for intentional misrepresentation or falsehood, it is difficult to conceive any inducement that he could have had to be guilty of it.

reached

reached us respecting Menander, I should conceive his character to have been rather that of a weak enthusiast than of an artful impostor. The sect which he founded existed but for a short period, and appears to have been always confined within very narrow limits [n].

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LXIX. Since Simon and Menander cannot properly be said to come within the description of heretics, it follows of course that at the head of those Christians who were tainted with the Gnostic heresies we must place the Nicolaitans, provided that the Nicolaitans who are rebuked by our blessed Lord in Rev. ii. 6. 14, 15. be the same with those who under that denomination are reckoned by the writers of the second century amongst the sects of the Gnostics [o]. The generality of ancient writers consider Nicolaus, one of the seven men elected by the church of Jerusalem, as having been either directly or indirectly the author of this sect. It should seem however, as if their opinion as to this was founded rather on uncertain report and conjecture than on any testimony that could be relied

The Nico-
laitans.

[n] On this subject the reader may consult Irenæus, lib. i. cap. xxiii. p. 100. Epiphanius *Hæres.* xxii. p. 61. Justin Mart. *Apolog.* ii. p. 69. Theodoret, *Hæret. Fabular.* lib. i. cap. ii. p. 193. tom. iv. opp. Tertullian *de Anima*, cap. l. p. 187. *de Resurrect.* cap. v. p. 205. Recourse may also be had to Ittigius, Tillemont, Nat. Alexander, S. Basnage, in *Annal.* and other recent authors who have directed their attention to the elucidation of the early Christian History.

[o] The opinions of such of the learned as either deny that such a sect as that of the Nicolaitans ever existed, or maintain that it took its name, not from any particular person who might be the founder of it, but from the accordance of its principles with the impiety of Balaam, have been made the subject of particular investigation by me in a dissertation which is to be found at p. 395. of vol. i. of my *Syntagma Dissertationum ad Historiam Eccles. pertinent.*

on

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laitans.

on [p]. Our blessed Saviour states the Nicolaitans to have incurred his displeasure in consequence of the laxity of their morals, and their continuing to partake of meats offered to idols, and to indulge in fornication contrary to the Apostle's injunction [q], but he does not charge them with entertaining any heretical principles or opinions. By the writers of the subsequent ages however, they are represented as having adopted the Gnostic maxims respecting the existence of two principles, the one of light, the other of darkness, the origin of the visible world, the ministry of æons, and the like. Over every thing relating to this sect there hangs a degree of obscurity which we believe it will ever be found beyond the power of human ingenuity to dispel [r].

LXX. In

[p] Cassianus, *Collation.* xviii. cap. xvi. p. 529. edit. Francf. 1722. fol. says, *Nam licet hunc Nicolaum quidam asserant non illum fuisse qui ad opus ministerii ab Apostolis est electus, nibilo tamen minus eum de illo discipulorum fuisse numero negare non possunt.*

[q] Acts, xv. 29.

[r] Irenæus *adv. Hæres.* lib. iii. cap. xi. p. 188. Tertullian *de Præscript. Hæret.* cap. xlvii. p. 128. Clemens Alex. *Stromat.* lib. iii. cap. iv. p. 524. Augustin *de Hæres.* cap. v. p. 60. To these I omit adding Epiphanius, because he confesses that what he says of the Nicolaitans belongs equally to all the different sects of the Gnostics. Upon a comparison of the grounds on which our blessed Saviour's rebuke of the Nicolaitans is founded, with the errors which are attributed to them by the writers of after-times, I must confess that I cannot help entertaining very considerable doubts whether the Nicolaitans mentioned in the Revelations were the same with the Nicolaitans of Clement and others, or a different sect. Had the Nicolaitans with whom our Saviour was so much displeas'd been devoted to the Gnostic discipline and opinions, they would not, in my humble judgment, have been reproved by him merely on account of their reprehensible course of life,

but

LXX. In the same age with St. John and the Nicolaitans flourished, as is commonly thought, the Jew Cerinthus, though there are not wanting some who consider him as having lived in the second century, and long posterior to the time of John [s]. Having devoted himself for some time

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to their erroneous principles would likewise have been made the subject of animadversion, and his followers would have been cautioned against imbibing any of their extravagant and pernicious tenets. For surely these principles were pregnant with no less, or rather a greater degree of danger, to the minds of the simple and artless Christians than was to be apprehended from the offensive improprieties and vices in which the Nicolaitans indulged, in direct opposition to the apostolic precepts. And is it to be believed, that our blessed Saviour, when enjoining his followers to avoid associating with the Nicolaitans, on account of their incontinence, would not have touched on, or in the slightest degree alluded to the origin or fount from whence this laxity of morals had proceeded? The probability, as it appears to me is, that in the second century amongst the numerous leaders of the different Gnostic sects which were at that time springing up in almost every direction, there might be one of the name of Nicolaus, who might give to his followers the denomination of Nicolaitans, and that the title, thus acquired by this sect, having reached the ears of the early Christian fathers, who, as we well know, were very apt occasionally to fall into mistakes as to matters of this kind, they were hastily led to consider these sectaries as being one and the same with the Nicolaitans mentioned by St. John in the Epistles to the seven Asiatic churches: and since they knew of no man of the name of Nicolaus who had attained to any degree of reputation or consequence in the Christian community except him who is mentioned in Scripture as having been elected one of the seven ministers of the church of Jerusalem, they at once concluded that this sect must have owed its origin to him. My desire is to be understood as throwing out these suggestions rather in the way of conjecture, than as pretending to speak with any degree of peremptoriness as to this point. I will not however scruple to say, that I think I have at least a strong probability in my favour.

[s] See Sam. Basnage *Annal. Politico-Ecclesiast.* tom. ii. p. 6. Petr. Faydit *Ecclaircissement sur l'Histoire Ecclesiastique*

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to the study of letters and philosophy at Alexandria in Egypt, he at length engaged in one of the most difficult undertakings imaginable, namely, that of harmonizing the principles of the Gnostic discipline and those of Christianity, with the peculiar maxims and opinions of the Jews. From the principles of the Gnostic philosophy he adopted those which respect the pleroma, the æons, the origin of this world, and the great length of time through which the human race had remained in utter ignorance of the supreme Deity, together with all such maxims and tenets as were intimately connected with these. As he could not however, with consistency, admit

tique des deux premieres Siecles, cap. v. p. 64. Fred. Adolph. Lampius, *Comm. in Evangel. Johannis Prolegom.* lib. ii. cap. iii. § xvii. p. 182. all of whom are of opinion that Cerinthus lived about the time of Hadrian or Antoninus Pius. The arguments on which their opinion is grounded have been replied to by Jo. Franc. Buddeus in his work *de Eccles. Apostolic.* cap. v. p. 412. The principal argument relied on by those of the learned who dissent from the common opinion is, that the early fathers, for the most part, place Cerinthus after Carpocrates in the catalogue of heretics, which latter, without dispute, lived and taught in the second century; a circumstance which doubtless would carry with it considerable weight, did it appear that the early Christian writers had paid due attention to the regular order of time in their enumeration of heretics: but instead of this we know the fact to be that the names of heretics are set down by Irenæus, Tertullian, Clement, and others at random, without any regard being had to the times in which they lived.

It is asserted by Irenæus, Jerome, and others, that St. John wrote his gospel, and particularly the commencement of it, with an express view to the confutation of the erroneous tenets of Cerinthus respecting Christ. See Tillemont's *Memoires*, tom. i. p. iii. p. 936. This is denied by some more recent writers, but on grounds not altogether satisfactory. See a small work of Geo. L. Oeder, *de Scopo Evangelii Johannis*, published at Leipzig in 1732, in 8vo.

into

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into his system any thing absolutely repugnant to the Jewish religion, it became necessary for him in part to qualify what he thus adopted, and he accordingly relinquished the position that matter was intrinsically evil and corrupt, inasmuch as it set itself in opposition to the belief entertained by the generality of the Jews respecting the future resurrection of men's bodies. The character likewise of the founder of this world, whom he considered as the legislator and governor of the Jewish people, was much softened down by him. The depravity, pride, and cruelty attributed to this being by the Gnostics, were all thrown into the shade, and he was represented as one of the most powerful genii, although unfortunately estranged from the true God. In the creation of this world he was not supposed to have acted without the knowledge and permission of the Deity, or to have been influenced by any improper motive. By way of reconciling this strange jumble of opinions with Christianity, Cerintus maintained, that the supreme Deity, being displeased with the uncontrolled dominion usurped by the founder of this world and his subordinate agents over the human race, which had by degrees degenerated into the most irrational tyranny, resolved at length to put an end to it, and with this view to send down amongst mankind a celestial legate, or messenger, who should remove from their minds that cloud of superstition and ignorance with which they were oppressed, and by communicating to them a knowledge of their first great Parent, instruct them in the way of regaining their native liberty and happiness. Amongst the sons of men no corporeal receptacle was deemed by the Almighty wisdom to offer so fit an abode for an heavenly

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guest of this kind as the body of Jesus, the legitimate child of Joseph and Mary, a person eminently gifted with talents and understanding. Upon him therefore it was ordered, that one of the ever-blessed æons, whose name was Christ, should descend in the shape of a dove at the time of his baptism by John. Jesus then having the æon Christ thus united with him, commenced, according to Cerinthus, a vigorous attack on the power and dominion of the founder of this world and his associates, endeavouring to convince the Jews that the one only supreme God was alone deserving of their worship, and confirming the truth of his doctrine and precepts by various miracles and signs. The result, however, of these his labours in the cause of the Deity was unfavourable: for the Jewish elders, at the instigation of that Being whose empire was thus seriously invaded, and whose energies were of course exerted to the utmost for the preservation of his usurped authority, laid violent hands on Jesus and put him to death on the cross. In the ignominy and horrors of this punishment nothing was supposed to have been involved beyond the bare corporeal frame of the man Jesus, the Nazarene: for immediately on the seizure of his person by the Jews, the divine principle, or Christ, by which it had been animated, took its departure from the earth and returned to the blissful regions of the pleroma from whence it had originally proceeded. The way chalked out by Cerinthus for obtaining salvation, partook in like manner of the Gnostic, Jewish, and Christian schemes. According to him it was incumbent on all who were desirous of arriving at future happiness to relinquish every sort of homage which they might have been accustomed to pay

to the founder of this world (who previously to the time of Christ had been the leader of the Jewish people) and his associates, or to any of the various Gentile deities, and to make the Supreme Deity, and father of Christ, together with Christ himself, the only objects of their reverential worship. Such parts of the law of Moses as Jesus by his example had sanctioned, he pronounced fit to be still observed, the rest to be disregarded. Finally, he declared it to be necessary that in all their actions they should strictly conform themselves to the law of Christ. To those who should continue steadfast in their obedience to these precepts he held out the promise of a future resurrection from the dead—enjoyments of the most exquisite nature during Christ's reign here upon earth—and subsequently, a life of immortality and endless joy in the blissful regions above. For, adhering to the Jewish way of thinking in this respect, Cerintus held, that upon the resurrection of our bodies Christ would be again united with the man Jesus, and having founded a new city on the site of the ancient Jerusalem, would reign there in triumphant splendour for the space of a thousand years [t].

[t] In the view which I have here given of the Cerinthian discipline, I am borne out by the express testimony of ancient writers. My account, however, amounts to nothing more than an imperfect sketch. For from no ancient author could I obtain that full degree of information respecting the Cerinthian system of religion which alone could enable me to exhibit a complete and satisfactory view of it; a thing which it would gratify me highly to have done, since in point of reason and ingenuity the author of it appears to have possessed a superiority over the rest of the Gnostics. It cannot indeed be denied, that by the generality of those writers who speak of him he is represented as devoid of understanding, libidinous, depraved, a man

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who held out, as an allurements to his followers, the promise of a free indulgence in obscene gratifications during the future reign of Christ upon earth. But really, as far as I am capable of forming a judgment on the matter, the blemishes and defects of his character appear to have been very unreasonably magnified by his accusers. In his opinions I perceive, it is true, the marks of a mind not sufficiently purified, and disposed not unfrequently, to deviate from the path of sound reason: but nothing whatever bespeaking a propensity to vicious or libidinous indulgences; nothing indicating a love for or pursuit of illicit pleasures: there are even some things in them which make in his favour, and prove him to have been destitute neither of sense nor of spirit. How, let me ask, could it be possible that the kingdom which it was asserted Christ would hereafter establish at Jerusalem, should have been held forth in promise as a sink of immorality, vice, and concupiscence, by one who entertained the highest reverence for the wisdom, justice, and virtue of Jesus of Nazareth, and maintained that it was his superior sanctity and knowledge which induced the Deity to select his corporeal frame as a fit terrestrial residence for his offspring Christ, the chief of the celestial æons? How could this have been done by one who was constantly propounding Jesus as a model of virtue and wisdom to mankind? By one again who inculcated the necessity of strictly observing that part of the law of Moses to which Jesus himself had conformed? Is it to be believed, that Cerinthus could have excited or countenanced in his followers an expectation that in the looked-for kingdom of 1000 years, during which, according to him, Christ, the immediate offspring of the Supreme Deity, united to the person of Jesus, the most intelligent and sacred of human beings, was to reign here on earth, every moral tie would be dissolved, and mankind be left at liberty to gratify their inordinate desires without restraint? Or in other words, that the greatest and best of potentates, the immediate offspring of the Deity, would become the instrument of promoting amongst a set of subjects newly recalled to life, the perpetration of all those crimes and flagitious enormities of which he had in times past expressed his utter detestation? To my mind this appears so remote from all probability, that I know not how to account for so many learned men's having insisted on it that Cerinthus held forth to his followers the prospect of their being permitted to riot without restraint in one continued scene of the grossest sensuality during the expected future reign of Christ here upon earth. I am at no loss however, in assigning this accusation to its proper

proper source. Not a doubt can exist but that it originated with Caius the presbyter and Dionysius Alexandrinus, two writers of the third century, as appears from Eusebius *Histor. Eccles.* lib. iii. cap. xxviii. p. 100. To prior ages it was utterly unknown. But at the time when the above-mentioned authors wrote the dispute with the Chiliasm, or those who maintained that Christ would hereafter reign upon earth for the space of a thousand years, was carrying on with considerable warmth, and the object of these writers evidently was to repress this doctrine. With a view therefore the more readily to accomplish their end, they made it appear that the original author or parent of Chiliasm amongst the Christians was Cerinthus, a pernicious character, and one who had long since been condemned. And this, perhaps, might be allowable enough: but not content with this, they, by way of still more effectually preventing the Christians from every imitation of Cerinthus, deemed it expedient to augment the popular antipathy against him, and to persuade the multitude that he was a distinguished patron of vice and iniquity; and that it was impossible for any one who was not inimical to the cause of piety and virtue, to approve of or countenance his doctrine respecting the future reign of Christ upon earth. Should it be objected to me, as it probably may, that this case of mine rests merely on supposition, and is grounded on no positive evidence, I confess it. But when it is considered that prior to these adversaries of Chiliasm, no one had ever attributed to Cerinthus so gross an error; when it is remembered that this very error with which he is charged is by no means to be reconciled with the other parts of his doctrine; in fine, when we reflect how utterly incredible it is that any man, not altogether bereft of his senses, should make an unrestricted licence to riot in obscenity and filth the characteristic feature of a kingdom over which Jesus Christ was triumphantly to reign; I rather think that but few things will appear to have a greater weight of probability on their side than the conjecture which I have thus hazarded.

Having relieved Cerinthus from the weight of this reproach, I will now advert to some particulars connected with the history of his system of discipline, in regard to which it were to be desired that further light could be obtained. (I.) It may be recollected that I have said Cerinthus differed in opinion from the rest of the Gnostics respecting the nature of matter. Now for this I cannot vouch any ancient authorities, but it struck me as very fairly deducible from certain of his tenets. For since he believed Jesus to have been a real man, born according to that

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that law by which all other mortals are produced, and yet considered Christ, who was of a divine nature, as having been united in the most intimate connection with him; and since it was likewise a part of his creed that men's bodies would hereafter be restored to life from the dead, it surely must be impossible that he could have regarded matter as the fountain and seat of all evil. In this respect I should suppose him to have been of the same opinion with those philosophers of the East who considered matter as having been originally produced by the Deity, and who consequently could not regard it as absolutely and intrinsically corrupt. What it was that Cerinthus looked upon as the cause of evil is not mentioned by any ancient author, nor is it to be collected from any maxims or tenets of his that have been handed down to us on record. (II.) A considerable degree of obscurity likewise hangs over the opinion entertained by him respecting the founder of this world. His notions of this Being appear to have been that he was of an order vastly inferior to the Supreme Deity, but altogether devoid of malice and arrogance; and that although he had lost all knowledge of God, the governor of all things, yet that his work was undertaken and completed with the knowledge, consent, and assistance of the Most High. Since it was not his wish to abrogate the whole of the Jewish law, although he considered it as having been framed by the founder of this world, but meant that a part of it should remain in force, it is plain that he must have attributed to this Being a portion of divine wisdom and illumination. It strikes me, therefore, that Cerinthus must have conceived that the Supreme Deity, by means of one of those celestial natures whom the Gnostics term *æons*, excited the Being who afterwards became the founder of the world, and who at that time perhaps presided over one or other of the heavenly orbs, to undertake the reducing into order and form the rude and undigested mass of matter which had through infinite ages been emanating from the bosom of Omnipotence, as also to replenish it with inhabitants, and give to those inhabitants a set of laws. That the Deity moreover was not at first displeased with the dominion which this Being and his associates in labour assumed over the human race; but that in process of time, upon observing that the founder of the world, who had reserved to himself the government of the Jewish people, and in a much greater degree those of his associates to whom the other nations of the earth had been rendered subject, had departed widely from the principles of sound wisdom, he determined by the
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mission of Jesus Christ to put an end to their tyranny. As no means present themselves for our obtaining a further insight into the opinions of Cerinthus as to these points, we are constrained to leave the subject as we found it, enveloped in obscurity. (III.) One of the accusations brought against Cerinthus by ancient writers, is that of his having entertained too great a partiality for the law of Moses: an accusation which I must confess I think to be by no means an ill-founded one. For it would be easy to point out several parts of his discipline which prove, to demonstration, that an attachment to the Jewish rites and opinions had gained a strong and predominating influence over his mind. And they are therefore in an error, who with Basnage and Faydit deny him to have been of the Jewish religion, as well as those who, with Massuet (*Diff. in Irenæum*, i. art. vi. p. lxxv.) assert that what is said by ancient authors of his having had it in view to reconcile the Jewish religion with Christianity is not deserving of credit. What is commonly reported however, of his having wished to impose on the necks of the Christians an observance of the whole law, is equally remote from the truth. The nature of his system of discipline did not admit of this; for in many respects it went to shew that the author of the law of Moses, *i. e.* the founder of this world, had erred: and since it was inculcated by Cerinthus that no sort of homâge should for the future be paid to this Being, but that the Supreme Author of every thing and the Father of Christ should alone be worshipped by the Jews as well as all other nations, it must of necessity have been a part of his scheme, that all those rites which were so peculiarly appropriate to the God of the Jews as not to admit of their being transferred into the service of another, and a superior Deity, should be abolished. Moreover, both Epiphanius and Philaster, the latter in his book *de Hæresibus*, cap. xxxvi. p. 78. The former, *Hæres.* xxviii. § 2. p. iii. expressly say that it was a *part* only of the law of Moses which appeared to Cerinthus worthy of being retained, and to which he thought the Christians might with propriety conform. It is observable, however, that Dionysius Petavius, the Latin translator of Epiphanius, has skipped over the words ἀπὸ μέρους in the original, and it seems not at all unlikely that this negligence of his may have given occasion to many to think that Cerinthus wished to encumber Christianity with an observance of the whole of the law of Moses. And here, should any one be desirous of knowing what part of the old law it was that Cerinthus thought to be of perpetual obligation, and what part he considered as having been abrogated by Christ, our reply must be, that
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it is a question involved in great obscurity, and consequently, one not easily to be resolved. The most probable conjecture appears to be, that he took the example of Christ for a standard or rule, deeming it proper that all those things to which Christ, during his union with the man Jesus, had conformed, should be observed and complied with by those who profess themselves to be his followers. An opinion which indeed Epiphanius seems greatly to countenance, when in *l. c.* § v. p. 113. he says, that the Cerinthians after the example of Christ supported the authority of the law of Moses. (IV.) At the first sight it seems somewhat wonderful that a man who conceived it proper to reject a part of the Mosaic law, should yet deem it fit to retain the Jewish persuasion respecting the future millenary reign of the Messiah here upon earth, an idle notion which had its rise long after the promulgation of the law. But upon a more attentive review of the discipline of Cerinthus, I think I can perceive the reasons which induced him to promote rather than repress the expectation of an empire of this kind. The holy, wise, and innocent man Jesus, in whose corporeal frame Christ had taken up his residence during his abode here on earth, had, according to the Cerinthian scheme, experienced great injury at the hands of this his celestial guest. For when the Jews, in consequence of his having attacked their lawgiver and Deity, proceeded to lay violent hands on Jesus, Christ, by whose instigation and command he had done so, instead of supporting him against them, at once took his departure and left this unhappy mortal, unbefriended and defenceless, to sink under the torments and fury of his enraged enemies. Now a desertion of this kind could not fail to carry with it an air of much injustice and ingratitude. For what can be conceived more unprincipled than in a time of the greatest peril to desert a good and eminent character, through whom one may have taught and acted, and leave him to be tormented and put to death by his enemies? By way therefore of relieving the character of the Deity and his son Christ from this blemish, Cerinthus deemed it expedient to promote amongst his followers a belief that Christ would one day or other, even here upon earth, make ample recompense to his former mortal associate, both in honours and rewards, for all the injuries and sufferings to which he had been subjected on his account. For that at a fixed time he would again descend from above, and renewing the union which had formerly subsisted between him and Jesus, make him his partner in a triumphant reign of one thousand years duration. Contrasted with this magnificent and lasting recompense, the calamities endured

by Jesus on account of Christ become light, and insignificant. (V.) It is sufficiently clear that the Cerinthian sect flourished chiefly in that part of Asia which was anciently termed Proconsular Asia, or Lydia, and of which the principal city was Ephesus, where St. John spent the latter part of his days. But as to the extent of this sect, or the time when it became extinct, we have no certain information. Its existence should seem not to have been protracted beyond the second century. Isaac Beaufobre indeed, in his *Dissert. sur les Nazareens*, which is to be found in the supplement to his *Histoire Hérétique*, p. 144. has attempted from some words of the emperor Julian, apud Cyrilum, lib. vi. *contra Julian*, p. 333. to prove that the Cerinthians were not extinct even in the fourth century. But the fact is, that he did not sufficiently attend to what is said by Julian. What the emperor remarks is this, that there were certain of the Christians who taught that "the Word" of which St. John speaks, was distinct from Jesus Christ. These Christians Beaufobre conceives to have been Cerinthians, but he is mistaken. For Cerinthus did not differ from the rest of the Christians in making a distinction between "the Word," or the divine nature, and the man Jesus Christ. All Christians do this; at least all who assent to the decrees of the Council of Nice. St. John himself clearly does so when he says that the Word was made flesh. John, i. 14. What distinguished Cerinthus from other Christians was his denying that the Word coalesced in one person with Jesus, and contending that the latter was thirty years of age when Christ descended on him, as also that upon the seizure of Jesus by the Jews, Christ withdrew from his person, and returned to the place from whence he had come. His opinion of Christ in this respect bears somewhat of a resemblance to that which is commonly attributed to Nestorius, dividing Christ Jesus into two distinct persons. His tenets, however, were by far worse than what the Nestorian maxims countenance, and we therefore cannot agree with Faydit, Lampius, and other learned men, who consider Cerinthus as having, in point of fact, been a Nestorian before the time of Nestorius.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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