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THE HULSEAN LECTURES

FOR

M. DCCC. L.



Cambridge :
Printed at the University Press.

THE EARLY PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL :

IN

EIGHT SERMONS,

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

IN THE YEAR M.DCCC.L.

AT THE LECTURE FOUNDED BY THE REV. JOHN HULSE, M.A.

BY

WILLIAM GILSON HUMPHRY, B.D.,

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE,

AND EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

LONDON: JOHN W. PARKER, WEST STRAND.

CAMBRIDGE: JOHN DEIGHTON;

MACMILLAN AND CO.

M.DCCC.LI.



TO THE
REV. JAMES CARTMELL, D.D.,
MASTER OF CHRIST'S COLLEGE,
AND LATE VICE-CHANCELLOR;

THE
REV. WILLIAM WHEWELL, D.D.,
MASTER OF TRINITY COLLEGE;

AND THE
REV. RALPH TATHAM, D.D.,
MASTER OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE;

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSES,
PREACHED BY THEIR APPOINTMENT,
ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

THE REV. JOHN HULSE, M.A., by his will bearing date July 21, 1777, founded a Lectureship in the University of Cambridge, to be held by a Clergyman in the University of the degree of Master of Arts, and under the age of forty years: the Lecturer to be elected annually on Christmas-day, or within seven days after, by the Vice-Chancellor, the Master of Trinity College, and the Master of St John's College, or any two of them: the subject of the Lectures to be as follows: "The Evidence of Revealed Religion; the Truth and Excellence of Christianity; the Prophecies and Miracles; direct or collateral proofs of the Christian Religion, especially the collateral arguments; the more difficult texts, or obscure parts of Holy Scripture;" or any one or more of these topics, at the discretion of the Lecturer.



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THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL AN EVIDENCE
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LUKE V. 4—6.

He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes.

THE holy Apostles, while engaged in their humble calling as fishermen on the lake of Gennesaret, were twice visited by their divine Lord and Master; and on each occasion they received a proof of his almighty power. First, at the commencement of his ministry, and again after his resurrection, he appeared to them at break of day, at the moment when they were desisting from the fruitless labours of the night. At his command they once more cast forth their net; and now they were scarcely able to draw it, for the multitude of fishes which it had inclosed. We learn indeed, that when he first performed the miracle, they were terribly afraid; but he invited them to follow him,

bidding them be of good courage, inasmuch as from that time they should be "fishers of men." This invitation, strange as it must have appeared, and requiring as it did the sudden abandonment of all that had ever been dear to them, they joyfully and at once accepted. On the second occasion, when he came to them after his resurrection, he not only led them away again from their worldly calling, but to one of their number he solemnly and emphatically renewed that pastoral commission, that Apostolic office which he had previously given to them all. "Feed my lambs," he said to Simon Peter; and again he said, "Feed my sheep:" and a third time, "Feed my sheep." Thus did he raise up the holy Apostle, and reinstate him in that high office, from which, in consequence of his recent backsliding, he might otherwise have felt himself degraded.

When therefore we recollect that in both cases the working of the miracle was presently followed by a declaration of the Apostolic office, we can scarcely doubt that the miracle itself had some reference to that office; and that the two were intended to be associated together in the minds of those who received them. Indeed, our Lord himself suggested such a conviction when he said to

them, as he took them away from their ships and their fishing implements, "Fear not; from henceforth ye shall catch men." They might marvel for a moment at the saying, that they should catch men; but though they did not understand it, they readily believed it, not doubting that he who had such power over the fish of the sea was Lord also of the human race. Surely the miracle was intended to be a pledge to those disciples of the success which awaited them in their new and heavenly calling. It was a token, that by them and their colleagues and successors the world should be converted, and that though the labour might be long, and for a while without reward, yet at last mankind should come, as it were in shoals, to the receptacle of Christ's Church. In this light the miracle was regarded by the great divines of ancient times; and their interpretation has been adopted by many expositors, who cannot be accused of looking for mystical or fanciful senses in holy Scripture.

There is good reason, therefore, for saying that in the miraculous draught of fishes, twice repeated, our Lord prefigured to his Apostles the success which they were to have in preaching his Gospel. But whether we accept or reject this figurative interpretation, one thing is certain, that the conversion of the world to

Christianity was no less preternatural than the wonder which was wrought on the waters of Gennesaret. The one event, no less than the other, denoted a divine interference in the natural order of the universe.

Undoubtedly, the capture of a great multitude of fishes at a single cast of the net was a thing, which, however unusual, could only be determined to be miraculous, by the circumstances under which it occurred. But that it should happen immediately upon the bidding of the Lord, at the very spot where they had toiled all night in vain, in the morning when they had given up hope, these circumstances at once directed the disciples to see in it the handiwork of their divine Master. In like manner it is conceivable, that a doctrine of merely human origin might, under a favourable combination of events, have spread through the world, and obtained the assent of mankind, more rapidly and more generally than the Gospel did on its first promulgation. But the Gospel had no outward circumstances in its favour. Humanly speaking, it commenced its career under every disadvantage. Its propagation depended in the first instance on the zeal and fidelity of a few fishermen, ignorant and unlearned men, whose occupation did not allow them to hold much inter-

course even with the inhabitants of their own remote and barbarous district. They knew so much of the world, and so much only, as they could survey from the peaceful bosom of their lake. Rude in their speech, and little versed in the arts of persuasion, they were commissioned to proclaim facts most hard to be believed, and doctrines most repugnant to human prejudice and pride. If there was a place where the facts were sure to be denied, that place was Jerusalem; for the people who had delivered up the holy One and the Just to be put to death, were not likely to lend a willing ear to the tidings of his resurrection. If there was a time, when the doctrines were likely to be unpalatable, that time was the day of Pentecost, the festival which gathered together the Jews out of every nation under heaven¹, to commemorate the giving of the Mosaic law. Then, if ever, those ancient ceremonies, the only ties which held together the scattered fragments of the nation, were regarded with affection and enthusiasm. But the Apostles had a doctrine to announce, which threw a new light upon the law of Moses, shewing it to be but the shadow of a substance, the 'type of a reality, a subordinate and temporary institution, the days of

¹ Acts ii. 5.

which were numbered. Jerusalem therefore was the most unfavourable place, and Pentecost the most unpropitious time. Yet at Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, they commenced their ministry; and there, and then, Galileans as they were, and the humblest of Galileans, they stood up before an assembly collected from distant lands, they spoke to every man in his own tongue, they put to silence the scoffers, they rebuked the murderers of their Lord, they asserted his resurrection, they exhorted their hearers to be baptized in his name. "And the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls¹." They soon acquired the favour of the people. Many also of the rich cast in their lot with them; and even of the priests a great company "became obedient to the faith²."

It was not long, however, before the prediction of their Master was fulfilled, that they should be hated for his Name's sake. But when the Rulers took counsel, and thought to pluck up the new religion by the roots, they were only instrumental in causing it to shoot forth more abundantly. The little community of believers at Jerusalem was indeed broken up, and for a time dispersed. But

¹ Acts ii. 41.

² Acts vi. 7.

wherever they went, they preached boldly, and made converts to the faith. One of their bitterest persecutors became their most zealous leader and champion. The glad tidings of salvation were received with joy in Antioch, the abode of pagan learning, in Ephesus, the stronghold of superstition, in Corinth, the sink of depravity, and in the haughty and imperious city, which styled herself the mistress of the world. The faith was everywhere spoken against; for its Jewish persecutors relaxed not in their efforts to destroy it; yet many were found in every place who for the glory that was set before them, despised the shame and courted the reproach of the cross of Christ. When St Paul had finished his course, and was offered up at Rome, he left in the city of his martyrdom, as we learn from¹ heathen testimony, a "vast multitude" of believers. Forty years later, when the last of the apostolic band had scarcely closed his labours, the state of Bithynia, a remote province of Asia Minor, was described by its² heathen governor. That country, so far as we can tell, had enjoyed no especial advantages; it was not one of the countries in which we should have looked for an early and rapid propagation of the Gospel; yet we learn from the un-

¹ Tac. *Ann.* xv. 44. ² Pliny, *Epist.* x. 97, written A. D. 110.

exceptionable testimony to which I refer, that it was completely penetrated, in all its towns and villages, by the Christian faith. There is no reason to think, that this description is too highly coloured; and if it was applicable to Bithynia and Pontus, it must have been true of many other districts both in Asia and Europe.

Descending through a period of one hundred years, and taking our station at the beginning of the third century, we find the prospect far brighter and much more extensive. That the Christians at that time formed an important element in the body politic of the Roman empire, is shewn not by the favour, but by the hostility with which they were regarded by the rulers of the state. The picture which is drawn of their condition at this time by their own writers, may be too flattering to be entirely relied on. But after every allowance is made for the bias and partiality of its authors; it justifies us in concluding, that the Christians abounded in every rank of society, in the court, in the camp, in the senate, in the forum, in the highways and byways of the world. It is clear, that at the period of which we speak, the Gospel had been more or less widely diffused through every province of the Roman world—not only in Egypt and Africa, where it was firmly established, but certainly

in Spain and Gaul, and Britain, if not in Germany, Dacia, and Scythia.

If we pass over the interval of another century, and again contemplate the altered scene, we find that the Christians by their patient continuance in well-doing, had overcome the jealousy of the rulers and the prejudices of the vulgar. They were admitted to the highest offices of state, and had ready access to the sovereign. Some of the imperial family were of their number. If not an absolute majority of the whole population, they appear to have been more numerous, and more conspicuous, than the worshippers of any other religion. Another struggle awaited them, a long and sharp one, and then their creed was to be accepted as the religion of the empire. They had yet to endure a Diocletian, before they should receive a Constantine. Whether the fury of the one, or the favour of the other, was most conducive to the real interests of Christianity, we may not now stop to inquire. In concluding our brief and imperfect sketch of the progress of Christianity, we will only observe, and it is an important observation, that before the Gospel received any support from the ruling powers, it had already established itself firmly in every province, in every city, almost in every village of

the Roman world ; and the sound of it had gone forth into countries which had never received the yoke of Rome. The faith of Christ at the beginning of the fourth century had taken deep root in Æthiopia and Persia ; in Armenia it was the religion of the state ; and there were Christian congregations and Christian bishops among the barbarous hordes which began to gather on the Northern frontier of the Empire¹.

“So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.” But this result might have passed for nothing more than a remarkable fact in history, if the powers of the world had co-operated in producing it. If the Christian faith had from the first been favoured by kings, or recommended by philosophers, or embraced by the multitude, its success might have been attributed, with some show of reason, to the policy of rulers, or the sophistry of the wise, or the madness of the people. But the very reverse of this was the case. The Gospel was assailed by every engine which the ruler, the philosopher, or the multitude could devise for its destruction. Its professors were accused by atheists of superstition, and by idolaters of atheism. The common people

¹ See *Lectures on the Ecclesiastical History of the First Three Centuries*, by the late Dr. Burton.

imputed to them the most abominable practices, and the most impious doctrines. Sorcerers and wizards endeavoured, with their lying wonders, to emulate the miracles of Christ. His doctrines were the theme of philosophic scorn and ridicule. The Rulers from the first had viewed with suspicion a sect whose principles they were unable to understand; they soon regarded it with hatred, and strove to extinguish it by intolerance and persecution. The Christians were oppressed, pillaged, tortured, put to death; or, worse than all, they were tempted by the fear of these things, and sometimes induced to deny their faith, and to sprinkle incense on the altar of a pagan deity. Lastly, we must not forget, that within the fold of Christ there were controversies and dissensions, which must have operated as sore lets and hindrances to the propagation of the truth. Yet, with all these impediments, such was the progress of the Gospel, that when the last and most deadly persecution had been carried on, for a period of ten years, throughout the greater part of the empire, the tyrant¹ who directed it was at length compelled to desist, admitting that he found it impossible to eradicate a religion which had become almost universal.

¹ Galerius, *Euseb.* VIII. 17.

When the power and vitality of the Gospel had been thus fully evinced, it pleased God that his faithful servants should be no more tried in that way ; and the conversion of Constantine at length gave rest to the Church, and completed the discomfiture of the ancient superstition.

Such a progress, effected under so many and great difficulties, may well be regarded, not merely as a secondary evidence, but as a substantial and convincing proof that our holy religion is derived from God himself. If it had been of man's device, assuredly it would have come to nought, in those fiery days of trial. The establishment of the Gospel, we must acknowledge, was the Lord's doing, and as such it is marvellous in our eyes. The ancient apologists of Christianity did not fail to see the force of this argument, and they urged it against their opponents with more and more effect, as each succeeding age increased its weight. And if we have to reason with the sceptic, we shall see the necessity of recurring to this evidence, drawn from the early history of the Church. We must not allow him to confine our attention to the aspect which Christianity now presents. He will say, and say truly, that the prevalence of our religion at the present day is not

a conclusive proof of its divine origin, any more than the religions of Mahomet and Brahma are proved to be true by their predominance in Asia and India : for the human mind is so constituted, as to acquiesce willingly, and without inquiry, in any system to which it has been from infancy inured. He will remind us also, that a great portion of the world still remains unreclaimed, unvisited by the light of the Gospel ; that those regions which were the first homes and nursing-places of the Christian Church, have fallen back into a state little better than their original heathenism ; and that even in Christian countries, even for instance in this highly favoured land, a large proportion of the inhabitants are either ignorant of the precepts of the Gospel, or living as if they had never known them. These facts we cannot gainsay ; sorrowfully and with reluctance, we must admit them. We can explain them indeed, in a manner satisfactory to ourselves, without any impeachment of the Christian Dispensation ; for we justly attribute them to the depravity of man, and not to any failure in the promises of God. But the sceptic, we may be sure, will take full advantage of our concessions, and will turn a deaf ear to our explanations. And therefore we must lead

him back to the first ages of the Gospel ; and when we shew him a religion, promulgated in the first instance by a few fishermen, when we bid him observe that religion, in its subsequent progress, not leaning on the arm of human power, not allying itself with the vices or prejudices or follies of the age in which it appeared, but always taking the highest ground, and combating vice and corruption in every shape, incurring the ridicule of the foolish, and the disdain of philosophers, exposed to the rivalry of impostors, subsisting unimpaired, when tyrants wreaked their fury on its professors, and when those professors were at strife among themselves, and all the while not losing ground, but winning its way incessantly, till it had converted by far the greater part of the Roman world ; and when we avouch as evidence of these facts, not the partial testimony of friends, but the involuntary admissions of heathen historians, satirists, philosophers and persecutors ; I do not say that we shall convince our opponent, for it is his will, not his reason, which resists us, but we shall reduce him, at least on this head of the argument, to an ignominious silence. Our position is, that all these facts, taken together, shew the Gospel to have been not a human invention, but a divine truth. This position

he can never overthrow ; let him turn aside, let him retreat, and discover a more vulnerable point in the evidences, if he can.

The success of Christianity therefore, under the circumstances which surrounded it, is a proof of its divine origin. There were brooding over its cradle all kinds of malignant influences, intent upon its destruction ; but it arose in its might, and wrestled with its enemies, and overcame them. It succeeded, we say, because it was divine. Yes, but did it succeed simply because it was divine ? Would a divine Revelation, promulgated by a few fishermen, approve itself to the consciences and hearts of men, if it were not supported by any external evidence whereby it was proved to be divine ? Whatever answer we might have given to this question on *à priori* grounds, it is certain with regard to the Gospel, that it was not left thus unsupported. We are able to assign certain causes which contributed to its success ; certain tokens which accompanied it, by which men recognised its heavenly origin. It was attested by miracles, it was heralded by prophecies, it was recommended by its intrinsic excellence, and by the fruit which it bore in the lives of those who adopted it.

Assuming, therefore, the divine origin of

Christianity, which no one here will deny, and assuming its rapid progress in the first three centuries, which even its enemies must admit, I propose in the Course of Lectures which I am now commencing, to consider the causes which were concerned in its success, the evidences that is to say, by which men knew it to be divine, and the barriers which were raised up against its progress, but which were overruled so as to become instrumental in its propagation and development. I shall ask you to observe the hand of God, building up the edifice of his Church, and the hand of man endeavouring, vainly endeavouring, to impede the work. As I set out with assuming the truth of Christianity, my observations will not tend, except indirectly, to confute the infidel; but I trust they will have the effect of confirming our own faith, by reminding us, how God wrought for his Name's sake in former times, and that they will also quicken our zeal, by shewing us, that a work still remains to be done, and that we are concerned in the doing of it.

The success of the Gospel is the fact to be accounted for; a fact which even the infidel cannot deny. But he approaches the consideration of it in what he deems a philosophic spirit, and thinks to explain it by the opera-

tion of ordinary and natural causes ; causes, that is to say, which have their origin in the constitution of our nature, in the state of society, in the moral and political condition of mankind. But we, as Christian men, in the spirit of a sounder philosophy, assert the cooperation of other causes, such as never before were permitted to sway the destinies of the human race, causes which we, therefore, denominate extraordinary and supernatural. The action of some of these we may be able to trace ; as for instance, we may observe the effect produced by miracles, by prophecies, by the intrinsic truth and beauty of the Gospel, in converting the minds of men. Moreover, there has been a power, working through all ages, in a manner which we cannot discern, and with a force which we cannot estimate, I mean the influence of God's Holy Spirit, disposing the hearts of men to listen to his Holy Word. That influence, however it may be withdrawn from our notice, must never be absent from our recollection ; and the thought of it will restrain us from attempting to define with any thing like precision, the effects of those other causes of which we propose to speak. Our subject, therefore, is one which we cannot exhaust ; for after our closest analysis, there will remain an element which

baffles our observation, and eludes our grasp : an element which is not “given to any man by measure,” and concerning which we cannot tell “whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.” Yet we may hope that the consideration of this subject, imperfect as it must needs be, will be profitable to us, and attended with some practical lessons. Profitable it cannot fail to be, by way of meditation, if it lead us, I will not say to forget for a moment our own trials and troubles, the afflictions of our Church, the unhappy divisions of our times ; but if it lead us, bearing all these things in mind, to dwell awhile on the ages that are past, and to remember the noble things that God did in the days of our fathers and in the old time before them—how he caused the vineyard which his servants had planted to increase and flourish, in spite of difficulties at least as great as any by which we are encompassed. And for practical lessons, we cannot turn in vain to any period in the history of the Church ; but most surely we shall find them, if we revert to that epoch, when Christianity was destitute of any outward pomp or circumstance, owing nothing to prescription, or the fashion of the day, or human power or authority ; advancing, as it has been said, like a ship against wind and tide. We behold it

walking then in its own strength, beautiful in its own simplicity, not disfigured or encumbered by any trappings of man's invention. It concerns us much to ascertain, as well as we are able, by what means in those ages it achieved its triumphs. For are there no resemblances between those ages and our own? Indeed there are many, too many to be now enumerated. Of one only will I now remind you, not because it is the most obvious, but because it is closely connected with my present subject.

The ancient Christians were sometimes met by their opponents with an objection of this kind¹:—If our pagan religion be false and hateful to God, as you would persuade us, why has he granted such signs of his favour, such dominion and power to the Roman people, a nation of polytheists and idolaters? Does not the prosperity of this great empire afford a proof that the divine blessing is with us, and is it not a refutation of your new religion? To this question the following reply was made on the part of the Christians: It is true, they said, that God has greatly prospered you; we admit that he

¹ See Prudent. *Contr. Sym.* II. 578; Origen, *Contr. Cels.* II. 30; Ambros. *Comm.* in Ps. 45; Augustin. *De Civ. Dei.* XVIII. 46.

has given success to your armies, and to your senators wisdom, bringing the nations under your sway, and establishing tranquillity and peace in all your borders. He has done this however, not to reward your merits, nor to sanction your mythology, but to carry out his own purposes; one of those purposes being the overthrow of polytheism and idolatry, and the propagation of our holy religion. If the kingdoms of the world are given into your hands, it is that they may the more easily become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. If you are permitted to civilise mankind, it is that we may come after, and evangelize them. If there is peace in all your vast dominions, it is that the Gospel may everywhere have free course. If roads are carried by your legions to the uttermost parts of the earth, it is that they may be trodden by the feet of them who publish glad tidings. You are but making straight in the desert a highway for our God. Such was the view taken by those ancient Christians, of God's purpose in raising up the Roman empire: and surely we cannot say that this was a fanciful or vain conceit. We cannot deny that the progress of the Gospel was in some degree facilitated by the consolidation of many countries in one empire, and by the

commerce and intercourse which subsisted amongst them. And they who have carefully traced the vicissitudes of history observe, that the Church in after times well repaid this adventitious aid, by imparting to the empire in its period of decrepitude and dissolution, some fresh principles of union and strength.

Surely the establishment of his own kingdom upon earth was among the purposes which the Almighty had in view, in permitting the domination of Imperial Rome.

But do not we ourselves belong to a nation which surpasses Imperial Rome, both in the extent and population of her dependencies; a nation which holds the furthest corners of the earth in her dominion, and has a great portion of the heathen for her inheritance? By her military prowess, and by her commercial enterprise, she is continually increasing her influence, for good or for evil, on the destinies of mankind. The paths of the great waters are in her keeping; her ships are in all the havens of the world. Peace is within her walls, and plenteousness within her palaces; and, greatest blessing of all, in her Churches, if anywhere on earth, God is worshipped in sincerity and in truth. Shall we say that he who ordained us to this pre-eminence, has done so with no regard to the increase of his

own Spiritual kingdom in the world? Is it not clear that God has shewn us all this favour, and invested us with all these privileges, in order that we may be his instruments and ministers, in making his way known upon earth, his saving health among all nations? This undoubtedly is our high calling: may we, in our generation, even we who are assembled here, be not backward to accomplish it.

It is true, there are many difficulties and discouragements in the work. The Christian world is lukewarm, hesitating, or divided. The heathen are suspicious, incredulous, or superstitious. We may think that if we had such advantages as were enjoyed by the early preachers of the Gospel, we should quickly overcome all obstruction. But let us not magnify our difficulties, nor disparage our resources, nor imagine it will be any excuse for our indolence, that other ages had greater facilities for propagating the Gospel than ourselves. Are we sure after all that they were more highly favoured in this respect than we are? Have we only the single talent, and had they the ten? I would invite you to recur to those early ages, to consider the evidence by which the Gospel was then supported, the favourable and adverse circum-

stances by which it was surrounded. The result, I trust, will be such as to give us encouragement, rather than to make us despond. For we shall see that God did not interfere to compel the submission of mankind. The evidences of Christianity may have been in some respects stronger, in others less clear than they are at present ; but their aggregate force has not varied materially from age to age, and has never been so irresistible as to fetter the free-will, and leave men no alternative but to obey. God has chosen that his Gospel should advance with a gradual, and not always with an uniform, progress. It sometimes appears to be stationary, sometimes to recede ; like the infant Spring, which often falls back into the arms of Winter, or like the planets, which to a terrestrial observer seem at times to stand still, and even to go back in their courses. Neither was it the will of God that his ministers should be exempt from human infirmities ; he entrusted the treasure, then, as he does now, to earthen vessels, to men of like passions with ourselves. His most faithful servants he suffered not always to see the fruit of their labours, but permitted them to be sore perplexed and discomfited, and cut off in the midst of their efforts to promote his glory. But when the

stability of the Gospel had been tried in every way, and the patience of his servants had had "its perfect work," then he delivered his Church from all its enemies, and brought it forth into a place of liberty. In like manner we doubt not, but firmly believe, that though the difficulties of the present time are neither imaginary nor few, though a large portion of our people here at home is in a state apparently little better than that of the beasts which perish, and though abroad we have to contend, as it were single handed, against all the idolatries of the world, and though among ourselves there be much dissension and controversy, much coldness and faintness of heart, and though we are not sufficient for these things; yet God is true, and his Gospel waxes not old, but is as strong now as it was in former ages: and when he has tried his Church and proved it, he will assuredly visit it, and bless it, and stablish it, and multiply it; and, as aforetime, he made it to be universal throughout the Roman empire, so he will do to it again and more also, among all the nations and languages, which in these latter days he has committed to our keeping. And this may he do, for his Name's sake!

LECTURE II.

THE EFFECT PRODUCED UPON JEWS AND GENTILES
BY THE EVIDENCE OF THE MIRACLES.

JOHN XIV. 12.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

THE rapid progress made by our holy religion in the first ages of its promulgation is a historical fact, as I observed in my last lecture, which stands above all dispute: and it was deservedly placed, by the ancient apologists, in the foremost rank of the evidences. Not that the *success* of a doctrine is always, and under all circumstances, to be taken as an infallible proof of its truth. With the thoughtless multitude, success is everything: it will often carry persuasion, where more solid reasons are disregarded. But when impartially examined by the light of history and experience, the argument from success, taken by itself, is found to conclude nothing for certain. Many forms of religious belief, as we know, have prevailed extensively, and do still prevail, concerning which we are sure that they are not of God. They have been

successful, yet they are not true : and when we inquire into the matter, we find that their good fortune has been owing to certain external circumstances. But in the case of Christianity, external circumstances were adverse to its growth. Upon its humble birth the smiles of human authority and patronage, of science and learning, were not bestowed ; and as it increased in strength, and proceeded on its march through the world, it had to quench the fiery darts with which it was assailed by the jealousy, the prejudice, and the depravity of mankind. In such a case, success may well be adduced as a proof of internal life and power. The continued progress of a doctrine, in spite of all that man could do to oppose it, is without a parallel, and admits of no explanation, except we confess that the doctrine was instinct with divine energy and truth.

This explanation, I am sure, will not be questioned by those who hear me ; and it is not my purpose further to insist upon it. I do not propose now to argue from the success of the Christian dispensation up to its divine origin ; but, supposing this to be done, I proceed to descend as it were from the source, and to consider the means, so far as they are open to our observation, by which God

was pleased to effect the establishment of his Gospel; we shall analyze the favourable or adverse circumstances, the propelling or retarding forces, which were concerned in that great result. That our review must of necessity be incomplete, is at once apparent, when we call to mind that all-pervading powerful influence, of which we can neither discern the operation nor measure the effect, I mean the grace of God's Holy Spirit, by which the hearts of men are in the first instance disposed to receive the Gospel, and afterwards enabled to obey it. Never let us forget the presence of that divine Advocate, pleading with men, and beseeching them to be reconciled to God through Christ. His godly motions are as hidden from our view, as the thought of our soul is from our bodily eye. What we *are* able to observe, is the machinery by which he acts; the agencies and appliances, the proofs and evidences, which he employs according to his good pleasure. These are, indeed, all intimately blended and combined; and in their union lies a great portion of their strength. For practical purposes, we should not rely on any one of them singly, to the exclusion of the rest. This would be to tempt God, and to lose sight of the "proportion of the

faith." Yet it is possible, and it may be instructive, to separate for a moment the several means which God employed for the propagation of his Gospel; to view each one apart, and trace its distinct operation and effect.

The first subject which engages our attention is the great apparatus of miracles, which accompanied the promulgation of the Christian faith. What influence, we ask, had those signs and wonders, either at the time they were exhibited, or subsequently, in the conversion of mankind?—How much of this result may be referred to their agency? We shall do no more than approximate to a solution of this question. Still, let us not be deterred from entertaining it; for even if we should fail of obtaining any definite answer, we shall surely meet with much instruction in the course of our inquiry.

We begin therefore with the ministry of our blessed Lord; we endeavour to follow him as he went about doing good, healing all manner of diseases, feeding the hungry, casting out devils, walking on the waves, rebuking the winds, reading the secret thoughts of men, restoring the dead to life. Doubtless these mighty works are to be regarded as the tokens of his boundless love and compas-

sion for the children of men. But they also answered another purpose; for we find him continually appealing to them as the *evidence* of his divine mission and authority. When the two disciples of John came and asked him, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" he answered by shewing them the miracles which he wrought; "Go," he said, "and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see¹." And to the same evidence he made his ultimate appeal, whenever he was questioned by the people. The people indeed, as he said, had "sent unto John," to inquire concerning the Christ: "and *he* bare witness unto the truth²." John answered and said, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me: for he was before me³." But the testimony of John was soon disregarded and forgotten; for though he appeared as a "burning and a shining light," it was only for a short season that the Jews were willing to "rejoice in his light⁴." And therefore our Lord did not rest solely upon his testimony, but proceeded to give other evidence: "I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the

¹ Matt. xi. 3, 4.

² John v. 33.

³ John i. 26, 15.

⁴ John v. 35.

Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me¹." And again he said, "Though ye believe not me, believe the works²." And he used the same argument to his own disciples: "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else," i. e. if ye will not receive my bare assertion, "believe me for the very works' sake³." If his own declarations concerning himself were discredited, and the testimony of John had lost its weight, he referred men to his miracles, as to an evidence which was notorious, incontrovertible, and level to every man's understanding. He alluded indeed, in a passing way, to other kinds of evidence; to the testimony of the Father⁴, who had declared that he was his beloved Son⁵; and to the testimony of the Holy Ghost, who spake by the prophets; for he told the Jews, that if they searched the Scriptures, it would appear that they were they which testified of him⁶. But he refrained from pressing the Jews strongly with either of these testimonies. It was useless to refer them to the Father; for they had no living faith in him, and as our Lord declared, they had not his word abiding

¹ John v. 36.² John x. 38.³ John xiv. 11.⁴ John v. 37.⁵ Matt. iii. 17.⁶ John v. 39.

in them¹. And with regard to the predictions of the prophets, though even at that time they were sufficiently plain to convince any one who searched them closely and honestly ; as we know that Philip in this way identified the Messiah, and declared that he had found him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write² ; yet it was not likely that the people in general would be able to recognise their Messiah, by the light of prophecies which for the most part were yet to be fulfilled. We must remember that, at that time, he had not been led as a lamb to the slaughter, his soul had not been reclaimed from hell, nor his body rescued from corruption. The argument from prophecy was still unfinished. So also was that which results from the consideration of his doctrine. Men heard him gladly, and even his first public discourse produced this effect, that the people were astonished at his teaching³ ; and he declared, that whosoever was really desirous of doing God's will, should "know of the doctrine, whether it be of God⁴." But before his death, the doctrines of the atonement and justification of mankind were not revealed in their full proportions ; those doctrines

¹ John v. 38.

² John i. 45.

³ Matt. vii. 28.

⁴ John vii. 17.

which are best calculated to strike the conscience, and which now awaken in every heart an echo to the saying of the centurion: "Truly this was the Son of God¹."

While, therefore, the other branches of evidence were incomplete, our Lord condescended to make his chief appeal to miracles. And we might have thought that the ocular demonstration which he thus afforded, would have superseded the necessity of any other proof, and would have been in itself irresistible. How then were his miracles received, and what conviction did they work in the minds of those who witnessed them? They induced Nathanael to exclaim, as though he were anticipating both the confession made at the foot of the cross, and the superscription written above: "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel²." They constrained Peter to fall down at Jesus' feet, and in a transport of awe and self-abasement to say, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord³." They brought Nicodemus to Jesus by night, and prompted him to confess: "No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him⁴." The man who was born blind, when he received his

¹ Matt. xxvii. 54.

² John i. 49.

³ Luke v. 8.

⁴ John iii. 2.

sight, protested, "If this man were not of God he could do nothing¹." And he was not to be driven by the frowns and threats of the Pharisees from reiterating his simple and conclusive argument. But these deep impressions appear to have been produced only on a few individuals. The Pharisees, in general, hardened their hearts against the miracles of Jesus: "We know," said they, "that this man is a sinner²." And again, "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils³." And no sooner was that fallacy exposed, than they changed their ground, and demanded of him a sign *from heaven*; as if the wonders which he wrought on earth were not sufficient, unless the heavens should give their testimony. Such were the pretexts for unbelief to which the Pharisees had recourse. As to the multitude, when Jesus fed them with bread in the wilderness, they were ready enough to cry, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." And no wonder; for had they beheld that miracle with indifference, had they held their peace, surely the very stones would have cried out⁴. But when he offered to that same multitude the bread of life, when he gave

¹ John ix. 33.

² John ix. 24.

³ Luke xi. 15.

⁴ Luke xix. 40.

them a morsel of doctrine, a hard saying or two, they melted away from his presence, and followed him no more¹. When he raised Lazarus from the grave, they again gathered about him, and shouted hosannas. But when he proceeded to take advantage of this feeling in his favour, and to engraft upon it a knowledge of the truth, how were his words received? We learn from his apostle St John, that at this period, at the very close of his ministry, "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him²." The hosannas were heard no more; and before many days were passed, "Away with him, away with him," was the popular cry. But why should we dwell on the inconsistency of the people? when even his most favoured disciples, who had seen all his miracles, and to whom, on more than one occasion, a sign from heaven was actually given, even they demanded something more, and on the last evening of his life exclaimed, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us³." And that night, before the cock crew, when the time of temptation came, they were offended because of him, and "fell away⁴."

We conclude, therefore, that so long as

¹ John vi. 14, 26, 66.

² John xii. 37.

³ John xiv. 8.

⁴ Luke viii. 13.

the Christian Dispensation rested principally on the evidence of miracles, as it did during the ministry of our Lord, it produced no permanent or deep impression on the minds of men. The strongest possible evidence, addressed to the sense, was not sufficient to convert the heart. It is easy now to descant on the incredulity of those men; to blame their fickleness, their wilful blindness, their base ingratitude; but is it certain that we, in their case, should not have been equally ungrateful, perverse, inconstant, and incredulous? are we sure that even a sign from heaven would have converted us?

We turn, however, to the events which took place when the ministry of our Lord upon earth was at an end, and he had returned to that place "where he was before." By the miraculous descent of fiery tongues the Apostles were endued with power from on high; their own faith was confirmed, and they were enabled to gain a hearing for the doctrine which they were commissioned to publish. Thus being strengthened both inwardly and outwardly, they preached boldly and with success. The Church of Christ traces its origin from the miracles of Pentecost; and the large accessions which it received in the first stage of its history, may

be attributed in a great measure to the mighty works which the Apostles wrought with their own hands, combined with the testimony which they gave of their Master's chief and crowning miracle, his Resurrection from the dead. Of this they all were witnesses; and they gave their testimony, as we are told, with great power¹, that is, with persuasive effect.

We have no very minute or circumstantial account of the manner in which the Apostles conducted their ministry. We learn, however, that not at Jerusalem only, but at many other places, they proved their divine mission by the exhibition of miracles: and the miraculous powers which they exercised, they communicated to some of their disciples, as for example to St Stephen and his colleagues², to Cornelius³, to the twelve disciples at Ephesus⁴, and to the daughters of Philip at Cæsarea⁵. They spoke of their Lord and Master as of one "approved of God," demonstrated to be from God, "by miracles and wonders and signs⁶." But it does not appear that they arrayed all his miracles in order, or that they dwelt on any one of them particularly, except on the last and greatest of all, which was in itself a sufficient proof of his divinity, while

¹ Acts iv. 33.

² Acts vi. 8; viii. 6.

³ Acts x. 46.

⁴ Acts xix. 6.

⁵ Acts xxi. 9.

⁶ Acts ii. 22.

it attested the doctrine which they taught, the general Resurrection of the dead¹. They did not fail also, as we shall see on another occasion, to adduce the evidence of prophecy, as well as that which was furnished by the divine beauty and excellence of their doctrine. They shewed by the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ². They laboured to prove that the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation³.” These points we may consider hereafter. But the fact to which we now confine our attention is this, that the miracles which the *Apostles* wrought had great effect in preparing the minds of men to receive the Gospel. Thus the promise of our Lord was literally fulfilled: “He that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do.” Yes, greater works did they than their Master; for he indeed gave sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf; he restored the dead to life: but his doctrine was not fully received by any class of his hearers, not by the Pharisees, not by the people, nor even—before his death—by his most favoured disciples, who had been with him from the beginning. After his departure from the world, when he had sent to those disciples the aid of the promised

¹ Acts iv. 2.² Acts xviii. 28.³ Rom. i. 16.

Comforter, they were endued with power: they wrought miracles, by means of which they were enabled to shed light into the hearts of men, and to raise up those who were dead in trespasses and sins to a new and spiritual life. So that the humblest of their disciples, he who was least in the kingdom of God, was in one sense greater, had a livelier and more enlightened faith, not merely than "many prophets and kings" of the Old Testament, not merely than John the Baptist, though he was "more than a prophet;" but even than Peter and James and John, such as those disciples were before the Crucifixion of their Lord. The Apostolic miracles were "greater" than those of Christ, not indeed in themselves, but in their consequences. For they gave birth to no momentary feeling of amazement, to no transient burst of enthusiasm, but to a faith which was destined to go round the world, and to endure throughout all generations.

But the time arrived, when either in the course of nature, or by the hand of persecution, all these inspired teachers were removed, and the community which they had planted was left alone in the world. And yet it was not alone; for Christ and his Holy Spirit were

with it always: and before his witnesses departed to their rest, they committed to writing an imperishable memorial, an inspired record of his life and doctrine. We could well believe that these assistances would be sufficient for the Church in every time of need, and that without any additional aid she might have passed safely through the fiery trial which awaited her. Not the necessities of her position, but the abundance of God's mercy, must account for whatever miraculous interpositions were subsequently vouchsafed to her.

It is well known that the continuance of supernatural powers in the Church is asserted by nearly all the ancient fathers; not indeed by those who lived nearest to the Apostolic age; for their scanty remains throw little light on this subject; but by a great number of independent writers, widely separated from each other both in time and place; by Justin Martyr and Tatian at Rome, by Theophilus of Antioch, by Irenæus in Gaul, by Tertullian and Cyprian and Arnobius in Africa, by Origen in Egypt. They repeatedly speak of demons exorcised in the name of Christ; of visions seen, of diseases healed, and even of the dead restored to life. Though they do not pretend to the possession of such powers them-

selves, they sometimes declare that they had witnessed the marvels of which they speak. "These statements are made by them," as it has been well observed, "not among themselves only, but to their professed, avowed enemies; not in their private writings only, but in their public apologies. These things are asserted by them before the Roman magistrates, not only the inferior judges and governors of provinces, but before the emperors themselves, and the Roman senate. They not only speak of these things as what they had seen done themselves, but they tell their enemies that they had been very frequently performed also in their presence. They proceed yet further, and desire that an experiment may be made, they call aloud for an open trial, and offer willingly to die, if this miraculous power be not manifestly shewn. These are men, not only of eminence in the Church, but they had been so, many of them, among the heathen; they had been philosophers, lawyers, orators, or pleaders, and distinguished as such; were wonderfully skilled in all the heathen learning; understood in the greatest perfection the heathen theology and mythology, as well as philosophy. Few of them were brought up as Christians. Far the most of them became such in their riper

years¹." All these circumstances serve to give weight to their testimony, and entitle it to our respectful consideration. In one instance where a miracle was alleged, there may have been a mistake, in another an exaggeration, in a third an imposture. And unquestionably no single case is attested by the same amount of evidence by which the Scripture miracles are substantiated. The age was a credulous one, at least in some respects: and a marvellous story would by willing hearers be readily received upon insufficient grounds. But still, if we are to discredit the whole mass of testimony to which I have alluded, if we are to treat those allegations of miraculous powers as entirely fabulous, we have only one alternative; we must suppose that there existed in the Christian community an extensive system of imposition, which we would not without strong reason attribute to any age of the Church, and which there is no reason for imputing to the age about which we are now concerned.

Granting, however, that the miracles in question have a claim to be considered genuine, they have evidently not been handed down to us in such a form that we can dwell on them profitably in meditation, or insist on

¹ Biscoe, *On the Acts*, p. 304; ed. 1840.

them strongly in argument, as a branch of the evidences. They are presented to us in a dim and undefined shape, so as not to intercept or divert our view from the cardinal miracles, if we may so term them, displayed by our blessed Lord and his Apostles. And even in the times of which we speak, there is no good proof that any large additions were made to the Church by the agency of miracles. The vision, the cure, the exorcism, were seldom if ever exhibited in public, and at the utmost led only to the conversion of a few individuals. And there was a reason why this should be so. For in that age of the world it was popularly believed, that a controul might be obtained over the powers of nature, and miracles might be wrought, by what in Scripture are called "curious arts¹," that is to say, by sorcery and magic; and in every part of the empire there were strollers, of various nations, such as the "vagabond Jews at Ephesus," who deceived the people by their lying wonders.

Thus it has ever been, in all ages of the world. The truth of God has no sooner been announced by his messengers, than it has been opposed by counterfeits, the invention of the Father of lies. Moses had to contend

¹ Acts xix. 19.

with the magicians of Egypt. There were false prophets and diviners in the days of Elijah, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Mical¹. So also it was, in a remarkable degree, during the first ages of the Gospel. Our holy religion was accompanied in its progress by a troop of mockeries and delusions. St Peter was preceded in Samaria by Simon Magus. St Paul at Cyprus encountered Bar-Jesus the sorcerer. Ephesus was renowned for enchantments, which were, however, destined only to be a foil to the divine virtue residing in the Apostle. Alexander strove with his sorceries, but strove in vain, to supplant the faith in Pontus. Even Athens and Rome beheld with admiration the refined and subtle tricks of Apollonius². The Christian miracles were readily confounded, by the careless and wilful observer, with these impostures; and while all were considered to be in some sense supernatural, none were allowed to be pre-eminently divine. When therefore the apologist appealed to the wonders which were daily wrought in the name of Jesus, his heathen opponent did not take exception to those wonders, as being ill-attested, improbable, or spurious; but he proceeded

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 12. Isai. xxx. 10. Jer. v. 31. Mic. v. 5.

² See the lives of Alexander of Abonoteichus and Apollonius of Tyana, by Lucian and Philostratus.

to make them void and of none effect, by ascribing them to the arts of magic. "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub;" this was the cry of the Pharisees: "The Christians seem to prevail by the enchantments of demons," was still the explanation of Celsus and Porphyry. Among such a people it was not likely that many mighty works would be shewn forth; partly because of their credulity, and partly because of their unbelief. Accepting whatever professed to be supernatural, they were incapable of discerning that which alone was divine. Even if miracles were of frequent occurrence, it is not likely that in such an age they would tend greatly to the spread of Christianity: and we have no reason to think that they did. The conversion of some few individuals may perhaps have been due to this cause. But there is no well-authenticated instance, subsequent to the Apostolic age, of any large addition made to the fold of Christ by the intervention of miracles. We may well therefore doubt whether the ancient Church possessed in this respect any great advantage over ourselves.

Again, with regard to the miracles of Christ and his Apostles, we find the ancient apologists occasionally insisting on them, as an evidence of the truth of the Gospel, but fre-

quently also waiving this argument, as if they did not expect it to have the same effect upon others which it had upon themselves. They declare that to their own minds it was entirely conclusive¹. The mighty works of Jesus were to them a proof that he was no other than the Christ, the Son of God. But they anticipated that those works, like the miracles of their own time, would be referred by the heathen to the agency of sorcery and magic. And therefore they do not put forward the miracles, as has been done in later times, to bear the main brunt of the conflict; but having briefly noticed them, they leave them as it were in the background, and proceed to bring forward other arguments, not more forcible, but more likely, in their opinion, to convince the persons whom they addressed².

Upon this branch of the evidences, therefore, it would appear that the preacher of the Gospel at the present time has no disadvantage, when compared with his predecessors of the early Church. In arguing from miracles, he is met by objections of a different kind from those which were formerly advanced. The attack has been shifted to an-

¹ Origen *contr. Cels.* II. 48. The argument from miracles is strongly urged by Eusebius, *Demonstr. Evang.* III. p. 109, &c.

² See Lecture III.

other ground, but is scarcely more formidable than it was before. He may now insist on the wonderful works of Christ and his Apostles, without any fear of their being attributed to magic. It is admitted that if the miracles really occurred, he who wrought them must have had his power from God. It is not sought now to depreciate the miracles, supposing them to be true, but to disparage the testimony by which they are authenticated. This attempt has been made in various ways; for error is manifold, its name is Legion: and when men have made up their minds to disbelieve, any hypothesis will serve their purpose. But no hypothesis has yet been framed, which does not involve such monstrous absurdities, and such insuperable difficulties, as to make the acceptance of the Gospel appear, in comparison, an easy, and indeed a necessary alternative. Every new hypothesis, when it has been tried and found untenable, becomes a further confirmation of the truth; and as the devils were forced to cry out and bear witness unto Christ, so we may claim the attacks of Celsus, of Hegel, and of Strauss, as unwilling testimonies to the truth of that Religion which they have unsuccessfully assailed.

But we must not forget, that besides en-

countering the avowed sceptic, we have to preach to the heathen. And here it is to be confessed, that when we carry the light of the Gospel into those lands which still sit in darkness and superstition, we cannot produce such miraculous credentials of our mission as the early teachers were enabled to exhibit. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit have been withdrawn; but have we nothing to shew instead,—no other proofs, less instantaneous indeed, but not less permanent in their effects? I speak not now of the wonders of art and civilization, which the Christian bears with him to distant climes, and by means of which he may gain at once the attention and respect of the heathen, and dispose them to receive favourably the doctrines which he teaches. But is it not in his power still to display an irresistible evidence of his Religion, not the extraordinary gifts, but the ordinary and accustomed fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance¹?” Will not the exhibition of these virtues avail, in the long run, to overthrow the strongholds of Satan, and to establish the Kingdom of Christ? Has it not done so in time past? will it not do so in the time to come? We

¹ Gal. v. 22.

cannot now enter on this important subject. I will only appeal to the testimony of an ancient Father, who was in his day a great promoter of missions. I quote the words of St Chrysostom, not because they are *his* words, but because they are full of sense and wisdom, conveying an encouragement and a warning to our age, as well as to his own. In concluding one of his Homilies¹, he says:

¹ Chrysostom. *Homil. in Joannem*. LXXII. (*al.* LXXI.) *ad fin.* I subjoin the original, of which the passage in the text is rather a paraphrase than a translation: Καὶ Ἕλληνας δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἐπάγεται σημεῖα, ὡς βίος· βίον δὲ οὐδὲν οὕτως εἶναι ποιεῖ, ὡς ἀγάπη. Ἐκεῖνα μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ποιοῦντας πολλακίς καὶ πλάνους ἐκάλεσαν· βίον δὲ ἐπιλαβέσθαι οὐκ ἂν ἔχοιεν καθαρῶν. Ὅτε μὲν οὖν οὐπω τὸ κήρυγμα διαδοθὲν ἦν, εἰκότως τὰ σημεῖα ἐθαυμάζετο· νῦν δὲ ἀπὸ βίου χρῆθ' ἐθαυμάζεσθαι. Οὐδὲν γὰρ οὕτως ἐντρέπει Ἕλληνας, ὡς ἀρετῆ· οὐδὲν σκανδαλίζει, ὡς κακία· καὶ εἰκότως. Ὅταν γὰρ ἴδῃ πλεονεκτοῦντα, ἀρπάζοντα, τὰ ἐνάντια κελεύοντα, καὶ τοῖς ὁμοφύλοις ὡς θηρίοις κεχρημένον τὸν κελευσθέντα καὶ ἐχθροὺς ἀγαπᾶν, λῆρον ἐρεῖ τὰ εἰρημένα. Ὅταν ἴδῃ τρέμοντα θάνατον, πῶς δέξεται τοὺς περὶ ἀθανασίας λόγους; Ὅταν ἴδῃ φιλαρχοῦντας καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις δουλεύοντας πάθεισιν, ἀκριβέστερον ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μενεῖ δόγμασιν, οὐδὲν μέγα περὶ ἡμῶν φανταζόμενος. Ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἐσμεν αἴτιοι, ἡμεῖς, τοῦ μένειν αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τῆς πλάνης. Τῶν μὲν γὰρ δογμάτων τῶν παρ' ἑαυτοῖς πάλαι κατέγνωσαν, καὶ τὰ ἡμέτερα δὲ ὁμοίως θαυμάζουσιν· ἐκ τοῦ βίου δὲ ἡμῶν κωλύονται. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ διὰ λόγων φιλοσοφῆσαι, εὐκολον (πολλοὶ γὰρ καὶ παρ' αὐτῶν τοῦτο ἐποίησαν)· ἐπιζητοῦσι δὲ τὴν διὰ τῶν ἔργων ἐπίδειξιν. Ἀλλὰ τοὺς παλαιοὺς παρ' ἡμῶν ἐννοοῖτωσαν. Ἀλλ' οὐδαμῶς πιστεύουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς νῦν ζῶντας ἐπιζητοῦσιν. Δεῖξον γὰρ μοι, φησὶ, τὴν πίστιν διὰ τῶν ἔργων σου. Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔστιν· ἀλλὰ μαλλον ὀρώντες καὶ θηρίου σπαράτ-

“The heathen are to be converted not so much by the Christian miracles, as by the Christian life; for they often treat as impostors those who merely work miracles. Nothing puts them to shame so much as a virtuous example; nothing excites in them so strong a prejudice against the Gospel, as the evil life of him who professes it. When they see a man covetous and rapacious, while he preaches moderation and self-denial; when they see him treating his own people like wild beasts, instead of obeying the commandment which bids him love even his enemies, they will regard all he says as an idle tale. How can they believe a man who promises them immortality, when they find that he is himself afraid to die? When they see a Christian believer the slave of ambition and other passions, they will become more inveterate in their own ways, and will form no very high opinion of ours. If

τοντας ἡμᾶς τοὺς πλησίον, λύμην ἡμᾶς καλοῦσι τῆς οἰκουμένης. Ταῦτα Ἑλληνας κατέχει, καὶ οὐκ ἀφήισι πρὸς ἡμᾶς μεταστῆναι. Ὡστε ἡμεῖς καὶ τούτων δίκην δώσομεν, οὐχ ὑπὲρ ὧν κακῶς πράττομεν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ ὧν βλασφημεῖται τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ . . . Διὸ καὶ δέδοικα μὴ τι γένηται χαλεπὸν, καὶ πολλὴν ἐπισπασώμεθα τὴν παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τιμωρίαν. Ὅπερ ἵνα μὴ γένηται, τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐπιμελώμεθα πάσης, ἵνα καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ἐπιτύχωμεν ἀγαθῶν, χάριτι καὶ φιλανθρωπίᾳ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι’ οὗ καὶ μεθ’ οὗ τῷ Πατρὶ ἡ δόξα, ἅμα τῷ ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι, νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.

they continue to wander from the truth, we are to blame. For they have already condemned their own superstitions; they admire the principles which we profess, but by our lives they are deterred from embracing them. It is an easy thing to speak the language of wisdom; many among themselves have done this; but they demand of us a further sign, an experimental proof of our doctrine. 'Shew us,' say they, 'your faith by your works.' And this we cannot do. When, therefore, they see us tearing each other in pieces, after the manner of wild beasts, they denounce us as the plague of the universe. These things hold back the heathen, and suffer them not to come over to us. So that we are responsible not only for our evil deeds, but for giving occasion that the name of God should be blasphemed. ... Wherefore, I am afraid, that some dreadful thing will happen to us, and that we shall draw down upon ourselves the heavy wrath of God. That this may not come to pass, let us apply ourselves to all virtue: so shall we obtain those good things, which are prepared for us by the grace and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom and with whom be glory to the Father and the Holy Ghost, now and for evermore. Amen."

LECTURE III.

THE EFFECT PRODUCED UPON JEWS AND GENTILES BY THE EVIDENCE OF PROPHECY.

ROMANS XVI. 25, 26.

The revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.

THESE words direct our attention forcibly to the Hebrew prophecies, and teach us to regard them as among the principal instruments placed in our hands by God, for the conversion of the heathen world to the Christian faith. We might not, perhaps, have expected that the Apostle would place them in quite so strong a light. Addressed in the first instance exclusively to the Jewish people, written in their language, interwoven with their history, coloured in some degree by their national customs and habits of thought, the prophecies might seem peculiarly calculated to persuade the Jews, but not so likely to affect the minds of mankind in general. The Apostle, however, declares that the mystery was made known not to the Jews merely, but to *all nations*, by the Scriptures of the prophets ; not of course meaning that this was

the *only* channel by which such knowledge was conveyed, but certainly implying that this was second in importance to none other. We are now about to observe, as closely as the nature of the case will permit, the use which was made of the evidence of prophecy, and the effect which it produced, in the first ages of the Gospel. It will, I think, appear as we proceed, that the words of my text were not written unadvisedly ; that they are true in the largest sense, and require no qualification ; and that while the prophecies were generally slighted by the nation to which they were first published, they were urged with great effect by the early promulgators of the Gospel in heathen lands. The prophets were not without honour, save in their own country.

I observed in my last Lecture, that our blessed Lord, in proof of his divine mission, appealed chiefly to the evidence afforded by his miracles. “The works which I do, these bear witness of me ;” such was the declaration which he repeated again and again, not only to the multitude and the Pharisees, but also to his own disciples. He relied but little on the argument from prophecy. Not indeed that he omitted it altogether ; he affirmed that if the Scriptures, which the Pharisees regarded with so much complacency, were duly

searched, they would be found to testify of him. And he not only spoke in this general way, but he sometimes intimated that certain events were about to happen to him, in fulfilment of prophecy. "Behold," he said, "we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished¹." And again, "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed²." But we are told by the Evangelist, that "they understood none of these things³." It does not appear that he quoted the prophecies at large; he did no more than allude to them: and his allusions were among those dark sayings of his, which as yet he did not explain, and they could not interpret; serving more for the trial than for the confirmation of their faith. It would be presumptuous to assign positively the reason, which induced our Lord to rely on one kind of evidence, rather than on another; but we can very well understand, that had he developed the argument from prophecy, it would not have been conclusive, while an important class of predictions, those namely which related to his sufferings and death, were not yet fulfilled.

¹ Luke xviii. 31.² Matt. xxvi. 24.³ Luke xviii. 34.

As an example of the manner in which men sometimes pervert the Gospel history to suit their own futile imaginations, it is worthy of notice, that the reserve maintained by our Lord with respect to this branch of evidence, was by certain heretics in the fifth century made a ground for discarding it altogether. “*He* did not appeal to the prophets,” they said, “and why should we? Sufficient for us is the testimony which he gave concerning himself; why need we any further witness?” As if men could afford to dispense with any portion of that knowledge which God has revealed to them. But they were fully answered by the observation, that if they gave any credence at all, as they professed to do, to the Apostles of our Lord, they must accept the prophetic Scriptures to which those Apostles so largely refer¹.

But if before his death our Lord was comparatively silent on the subject of prophecy, his conduct in this respect appears to have undergone a change after his Resurrection. The great mystery of prophecy had now been accomplished. The volume of the book was unrolled, and he who ran might read it. Accordingly, on the very day that he rose from the dead, he explained² it to two of his disci-

¹ S. Augustin. ad Faust. XIII. 2.

² Luke xxiv. 25, &c.

ples, while they were on the way to Emmaus. He upbraided them as “fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” And then, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” And the same evening he appeared to the eleven, and “opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.” Thus he not only referred them to prophecy, but he took away “the veil” which was on their hearts, he opened their understanding, that they might see the wondrous things contained in the word of God.

The Apostles, in their teaching, were not backward to use the argument which had been suggested to them by their divine Master. St Peter, in his very first speech, boldly declared that the effusion of the holy Spirit was in fulfilment of “that which was spoken by the prophet Joel¹.” And he directed them to see in one of the psalms of David, an intimation of the Resurrection of Christ. In his second address, he said that “those things

¹ Acts ii. 16.

which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer," had now come to pass. He reminded his hearers of the prediction of Moses, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me." He declared that "all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days¹."

This argument, when followed out, as we may be sure it was, through all the Scriptures of the Old Testament, must have contributed greatly to swell the numbers and confirm the faith of the infant Church. The only wonder is, when we consider the matter, that any men, being Jews, were able to resist such evidence. For we must remember, that it was no new thing to them to hear the predictions of the prophets referred to the Messiah and his times. We are assured, that almost every passage of the Old Testament which the Apostles applied to Jesus, was already regarded by the Jews as prophetic of the Messiah. Thus we learn from the Gospel history, that in answer to the question where Christ should be born, the scribes said, "In Bethlehem of Judæa," quoting as their au-

¹ Acts iii. 18—25.

thority the words of the prophet Micah¹. They also expected that Elias would first appear², and that there would be something mysterious in the birth of the Messiah; “when Christ cometh, we know not whence he is³.” They neither inquired nor wished to learn, whether or not these expectations had been fulfilled in Jesus.

But leaving the page of inspiration, we turn to another authority, which for our present purpose is equally conclusive, namely, to the rabbinical books, composed either before the coming of Christ, or within two centuries after that event. From this source of information, which certainly cannot be suspected of any misrepresentations *favourable* to Christianity, we find that almost every passage of the Old Testament which the Apostles apply to Jesus, was by the Jews themselves referred to the Messiah⁴.

The 2nd psalm, which begins, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?”

The 8th, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” &c.

¹ Matth. ii. 5. ² Matth. xvii. 10. ³ John vii. 27.

⁴ For an elaborate proof of this statement, see the interesting and learned work of the present Dean of Canterbury (Dr Lyall) entitled *Propædia Prophetica*, p. 101.

The 16th, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," &c.

The 22nd, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" &c.

The 40th, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not," &c.

The 45th, "My heart is inditing of a good matter," &c.

The 68th, "Thou art gone up on high," &c.

The 110th, "The Lord said unto my Lord," &c.

The 118th, "The stone which the builders refused," &c.

The 9th chapter of Isaiah, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," &c. (though this does not appear to be quoted in the New Testament¹);

The 28th chapter, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone," &c.

The 40th, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," &c.

The whole of the 53rd chapter, "He is despised and rejected of men," &c.

¹ This passage is not in the LXX. Mr Grinfield supposes, with some probability, that this is the reason why it was not quoted by the Apostles. (*Apology for the LXX.*, p. 71.)

The 60th, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come," &c.

The 61st, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me," &c.

The prophecy of Daniel respecting the 70 weeks, and the threescore and two weeks, when the Messiah was to be "cut off, but not for himself¹," &c.

The declaration of Haggai, that the glory of the latter temple should exceed that of the former²;

All these passages, and many besides, all these notes of time and place and circumstance, these traits of character, these predictions of suffering and triumph, of humiliation and glory, were to have their fulfilment, as the ancient Jews themselves expected, in the promised Messiah. Yet, strange to say, when the Apostles cited all these passages, and shewed how one was fulfilled in the place, and another in the time of their Master's birth, a third in his miracles, a fourth in his sufferings, a fifth in his resurrection, a sixth in his ascension; when they went on in this way through the whole chain of prophecy, and shewed that each portion had its counterpart in the history of Jesus, and when they confirmed their testimony by

¹ Dan. ix. 24.

² Haggai ii. 7, 9.

the signs and wonders which they wrought, they produced little or no impression on that class which was most learned in the law and the prophets, namely, the scribes and Pharisees, and scarcely more upon the nation at large, anxiously as they were at that time expecting the advent of the Messiah.

The Jews were unable to receive the spiritual interpretation of prophecy. They were fully persuaded, that in the Messiah they were to have a Deliverer, who should restore their temporal prosperity, and the glory of their theocracy; that he was to be a prophet like unto Moses, and a king to sit on the throne of his Father David, in a literal sense. These expectations not all the arguments and mighty works of the Apostles could induce them to forego. In vain they were directed to compare the predictions of the prophets with the history of Christ. In vain they were assured, that the Mosaic economy was not made void, but fulfilled by the new dispensation; that it was not merely attended with prophecies, but was itself a prophecy, a great prophetic system, consisting of types and symbols, the shadows of good things to come. For a moment they shewed signs of relenting: and when the Apostles commenced their ministry, a considerable

number became obedient to the faith. But the mass was unmoved ; or if they were moved, it was with a transient agitation, like that which, after an angel's visit, troubled the stagnant waters of Bethesda¹. When they saw that the doctrine of Christ tended to supersede the ceremonial law, and to place the Gentiles on the same level with themselves; when St Stephen uttered what they considered "blasphemous words against Moses and against God²;" when St Peter began to plant the Church among the heathen; the stiff-necked people fell back into their ancient obstinacy. They "stoned Stephen," and would gladly have slain St Peter and St Paul. The Jews at Antioch, upon hearing St Paul's exposition of the prophecies, "were filled with envy, and spake against those things" which he had spoken, "contradicting and blaspheming³." At Corinth in like manner they opposed and blasphemed⁴. At Rome, when the same Apostle had "persuaded them both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening," they agreed not among themselves, and departed; St Paul repeating to them, as they left his presence, yet another prophecy, an awful warning out of the book of Isaiah, which their wilful blindness and stubborn

¹ John v. 4. ² Acts vi. 11. ³ Acts xiii. 45. ⁴ Acts xviii. 6.

unbelief had now fulfilled. And he added these words, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it¹."

The longsuffering of God was at last exhausted; the day of vengeance arrived; and it was their own infatuation which hastened the catastrophe. For it is recorded by the historian, that the expectation of an universal king, who was to go forth from Palestine, encouraged the Jewish people to enter upon that desperate struggle, which ended in the total desolation of their city and temple². The hope which they had cherished so long, and the fulfilment of which, plainly set before their eyes, they had refused to see, was now finally extinguished. They were destroyed, and they could not say that their destruction had come upon them unawares. It had been foretold by one who sought to deliver them, and they would not hear him. Now, at least, he was proved to be a true prophet; what he foretold was actually accomplished. Their

¹ Acts xxviii. 28.

² Josephus (*de Bell. Jud.* III. 28) says that the chief thing which excited the Jews to their last and fatal war with the Romans was the ambiguous prophecy (*χρησιμὸς ἀμφίβολουσ*) which promised that one of their countrymen should become ruler of the world. He himself told Vespasian that this prophecy applied to him.

city was in ruins; their house was left unto them desolate. What then? Did they at length turn and look on him whom they had pierced? Were the eyes opened which had been so obstinately closed, and the ears which had been so dull of hearing? No; they were not even now convinced. And therefore their descendants wander upon the face of the earth to this day, a bye-word among the nations, and a testimony, in spite of themselves, that the Gospel is the word of God. Unhappy people, once singled out as the objects of God's especial favour, now joyless and unvisited, when a blessing is on all the rest of the world! As it was with the fleece of Gideon, upon which at first the dew fell, when it was dry upon all the earth beside; but afterwards "it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground¹:" so it has been with the people of Israel. May God permit the dew of his blessing to descend upon them yet again, as it fell at the beginning, and still more abundantly! 'Turn them again, thou Lord of Hosts, shew the light of thy countenance, and they shall be whole².'

But we must proceed with our inquiry as to the effect produced upon mankind by the

¹ Judges vi. 37.

² Psalm lxxx. 3.

evidence of prophecy at the first promulgation of the Gospel. We have seen how little influence it had upon the Jews ; as a nation they hardened their hearts against it, and resisted it to their final ruin. St Paul, finding that his efforts to persuade his own countrymen were ineffectual, said, “Your blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean : from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles¹.” Let *us* also now turn to the Gentiles, and see whether they were more amenable to the particular argument of which we are treating. We might perhaps suppose that if the Christian interpretation of prophecy was rejected by the Jews, it was little likely to find favour with any other people. By the Jews, the chain of prophecy might have been regarded as a connecting tie between the old and new dispensation, making the transition from one to the other appear only a further stage in the same system, and not a change to one entirely different. But among the Gentiles, Christianity was altogether aggressive. It sought to displace every existing system of religion, denouncing them all as idolatries and superstitions ; and the prophecies, so far from recommending it to general attention by connecting it with any old Pagan memories and

¹ Acts xviii. 6.

traditions, rather served to raise a prejudice against it, by binding it up with the history of an obscure, a turbulent and a despised people.

Knowing that the Jews were greatly disliked by the Gentiles, we might have thought that Christianity would have fared better in that age of the world, if it had disclaimed, as much as possible, all connexion with Judaism. But the progress of the Gospel was not according to human expectation; and though the prophets were not accepted in their own country, their voices were listened to with respect and attention in strange and distant lands. We cannot collect any thing with certainty on this point from the writings of the Apostles, because their Epistles are addressed to communities or individuals already instructed in the faith, and do not set out in order the arguments proper to be used with the heathen. The same remark applies to the Epistles of the venerable Christian fathers, who followed immediately after the Apostles. But in every one of those treatises, which were compiled in the second and third centuries, for the express purpose of converting the heathen, we find the argument from prophecy occupying a most conspicuous place. Thus the writer of one of those ancient apologies

forbears to dwell on the miracles of Christ¹, lest the objection should be made that they were the effect, not of divine power, but of magic; an objection which, as we saw in my last Lecture, was actually raised. On this account he waves the evidence of miracles, and, proceeding to that of prophecy, dwells at great length on the various passages of the Old Testament, in which the history of Christ, the doctrines which he taught, and the success of his preaching, are foreshewn. In another very powerful and elaborate defence of Christianity², the prophecies are declared to be “the most important head of the evidences,” “the most convincing demonstration” of the truth of the Gospel. Another writer³ says, “We do not believe Christ to be God, merely because he performed miracles; but because we have seen all things fulfilled in him which the prophets foretold. He did miracles, it is

¹ Justin Martyr. *Apol.* I. § 30.

² Origen, *Contr. Cels.* I. II.: τὸ μέγιστον τῶν περὶ τῆς συστάσεως τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κεφαλαίων. And again: ἰσχυροτάτην ἀπόδειξιν. See Dean Lyall's *Propæd. Prophet.* p. 84.

³ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* v. 3. Disce igitur, non solum idcirco a nobis Deum creditum Christum, quia mirabilia fecit, sed quia vidimus in eo facta esse omnia, quæ nobis annuntiata sunt vaticinio prophetarum. Fecit mirabilia: magum putassemus, ut et vos nunc putatis, et Judæi tunc putaverunt, si non illa ipsa facturum Christum prophetæ omnes uno spiritu prædicassent.

true; and we should have supposed him to have been a magician, as you now think, and as the Jews formerly thought, if all the prophets had not with one consent predicted that he would do these very things." Moreover, several¹ of these writers profess that they had themselves been converted from Paganism mainly by the study of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. And when the heretics, to whom I have alluded above, proposed to carry on their teaching without the aid of the prophecies, they were met by St Augustine² with the argument from experience. "It is madness," said he, "to treat the Hebrew prophecies as an evidence not fit to be addressed to the heathen, when we see that all the heathen nations have by those prophecies been brought to believe in Christ." It was therefore no unmeaning or idle phrase of St Paul, which I have taken for my text, that the Revelation of the mystery is "by the Scriptures of the prophets made known to all nations, for the obedience of faith."

¹ *e. g.* Tatian, Theophilus.

² *Contr. Faust.* XIII. 2: Dicere non esse aptam gentibus Hebræam prophetiam, ut credant in Christum, cum videat omnes gentes per Hebræam prophetiam credere in Christum, ridicula insania est.

In later times the importance of prophecy, as a branch of the evidences, has been maintained, against Grotius, by Huet. *Demonstr. Evang. Propos.* VII. 5.

Having regard then to the ancient authorities, we shall hesitate to agree with those divines¹ of modern times, who have classed the prophecies among the “auxiliary” or “secondary” proofs of our holy religion, as if they were inferior in importance to the proof from miracles. We shall rather esteem these two kinds of evidence co-ordinate in rank and importance, believing that they greatly strengthen each other, and that when viewed apart, neither of them can be seen in its just proportions. It has been shewn that in those early times the prophecies were allowed to take the lead in the argument. What there was in the character of that age which might render the miracles a less conclusive kind of evidence than they are at present, I endeavoured on a former¹ occasion to point out. I shall now proceed to inquire whether there were any circumstances peculiar to the same period, which might lend especial weight to the argument from prophecy.

I. In the first place, then, I would remind you, that prophetic knowledge was supposed by the heathen to be a higher gift than the power of working what we call miracles: it was thought to be derived from a superior

¹ *e.g.* Paley, *Evidences*, Part II. ch. 1.
See Lecture II.

Deity. Possibly the *knowledge* of the future was considered to imply a *control* over the future; and a control over a future event, implied a control over the whole intermediate chain of causes and effects: whereas a miracle involved only a momentary disturbance of the usual course of nature. But whether the ancient mythology was founded on this or any other sort of reasoning, certain it is, that many of the inferior gods were believed to interfere with the order of nature, according to their own unfettered caprice, by a power originating in themselves; but the Deity who presided over the oracles, exalted as he was in their estimation, was only an instrument in the hands of the supreme God, and was styled by one of their ancient and most religious poets, “the prophet of his Father¹.” Hence it would follow, that a single clear instance of a prophecy, which had been fulfilled, would weigh more with the men of that age than a series of miracles; since the latter might be referred to inferior demons, but the former was ascribed only to the chief deity of Olympus. And when a religion was placed before them, professing to be founded both on prophecies and miracles, the prophetic part of the evidence would produce the stronger im-

¹ Æsch. Eumen. 19. Διὸς προφήτης δ' ἐστὶ Λοξίας πατρός.

pression on their minds. Accordingly we find that the opponents of Christianity ventured to attribute the miracles to magic ; and in so doing, they carried with them the opinion of the vulgar ; but they had no explanation to give of the prophecies, and are accused by Origen of slurring them over in silence—like other controversialists, who contend for victory rather than for truth, and take notice only of those arguments which they consider themselves able to refute.

II. Again, we must remember, that the heathen had the very best means of ascertaining for themselves, whether the prophecies to which the Christians made appeal, were genuine, or not. For those prophecies were carried about through every province and city of the empire, and were regarded with the highest veneration, by large numbers of persons, who were independent of the Christians, and even totally opposed to them, I mean the Jews. The dispersion of the Jews throughout the world did not commence, as you well know, from the final destruction of their city by the Roman emperor. It had been going on for centuries ; ever since the time of the Babylonish captivity ; and it must be enumerated among the dispositions made by the divine Providence, with the view

of preparing the Gentiles for the reception of the Gospel. The number of Jews in Egypt was computed, soon after the Christian era, to be not less than a million; in Rome they occupied at the same period a very extensive quarter of the city. In the Eastern provinces they were asserted by a Roman proconsul to be almost as numerous as the indigenous inhabitants. And however much they were disliked, oppressed, and treated with contempt, they were by no means an obscure or uninfluential element in the population of the heathen cities. They not only compassed sea and land to make proselytes to their religion, but in many cases, as we know, they were successful, and that too among the highest and most intelligent classes of the community. The proofs of this are to be found, as I need not remind you, both in Scripture and in profane authors. Those heathen proselytes had opportunities, long before the Gospel was preached to them, of hearing Moses and the prophets read in the synagogue every sabbath-day. Passages were pointed out to them in those sacred books, which were considered to have reference to the future Messiah. In the course of time the synagogue was visited by teachers, who declared that the prophetic passages had been fulfilled in the life of

Jesus; and going through the Gospel history, about the facts of which there was no dispute, they shewed how each event tallied exactly with a prophecy. The intelligence might be scouted by the Jewish part of the congregation; for they had set their expectations on a temporal Messiah, a national deliverer, an earthly king. But the Gentile proselytes had no such prejudice to overcome. It was no objection in their minds, that Christ had come and gone, and left the kingdoms of the world unaltered. A revolution in secular affairs was not what the Gentiles desired. They had embraced the Jewish religion, because it was more pure and spiritual than their own: now something was offered them still more spiritual, still more pure. Why should they stop short where they were? They had newly accepted the Mosaic dispensation; could they reject that which was its sequel and its consummation? They could not, and they did not.

I am here stating no imaginary case; I am describing what appears to have actually taken place in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia; where, after St Paul had treated at length of the argument from prophecy, the result of his preaching was this, that the Jews “spake against those things which were spoken

by him," but the Gentiles "were glad, and glorified the word of God¹." And we cannot doubt, that the same process of reasoning and feeling operated upon the Gentiles in many other places.

III. Moreover, there is some reason to think that when the Gospel was first propagated, the knowledge of the Hebrew prophecies was not confined to those Gentiles who were proselytes. A rumour of them, more or less distinct, would seem to have gone abroad among the people. Such at least was the opinion of a person not ill qualified to judge of the matter, namely, of the emperor Constantine. In the remarkable discourse² which he addressed to his Christian subjects, on the anniversary of our Lord's crucifixion, he dwelt particularly on a celebrated composition of the greatest of Latin poets, which certainly bears a striking resemblance, and as he considered, no accidental one, to the inspired raptures of Isaiah. He quoted that work as a proof that the coming of the Messiah was anticipated among the heathen at the time when he actually appeared. He has been followed in that opinion by many of the learned and pious in later ages. The poem

¹ Acts xiii. 45, 47.

² See Euseb. Constantin. *Orat. ad Sanct.* 18.

has been adopted into our language by the scarcely inferior genius of one of our own poets; and who would wish to reject the evangelical interpretation which he has given it?—

Hark, a glad voice the lonely desert cheers;
Prepare the way, a God, a God, appears.

At least we can hardly resist the conclusion, that the ancient poet was acquainted with the letter, though he might be unable to enter into the spirit of the Hebrew prophecy. But whatever may be our judgment in this particular instance, we may say with confidence, that the heathen world were looking for a king who was to establish an universal empire, and that their expectations were, in process of time, directed towards Judæa, as the place from which he was to come forth. I need not remind you of the passages in pagan authors¹, which bear witness to the existence of such a presentiment. And if it existed, it might well dispose the heathen to give greater heed both to the Hebrew prophecies, which so minutely prefigure the Messiah, and to the assertion of the Christians, that he had already been manifested. They were told, indeed, that the kingdom, the universal empire, which he came to esta-

¹ Sueton. *Vespas.* 4; Tac. *Hist.* v. 13.

blish, was not of this world; but when the spiritual sense of the prophecies was placed before them, they received it without prejudice. They were not yearning, like the Jews, for a temporal deliverer. They were led to see that it was an unearthly, a heavenly kingdom, which had been foretold by the prophet and founded by the Saviour. To them it was not difficult to believe that in that kingdom they should reign with Christ, and be invested with a citizenship far more enduring, and far more glorious than any which they could attain on earth.

These considerations will, perhaps, enable us to understand, why the argument from prophecy was made so prominent by the early Christian apologists. For in the first place, it was more likely to have influence with the heathen than the appeal to miracles, inasmuch as it gave them to understand, that not any inferior demon, but the Supreme Deity himself had interposed in the affairs of men. Secondly, this argument was confirmed by the conduct of the Jews, the keepers of the Old Testament, who while they disputed the fulfilment of the prophecies, yet admitted their genuineness and inspiration. Lastly, the same argument fell in with certain anticipations, which, from whatever causes, had

already begun to prevail among the heathen, before the Gospel was preached to them.

An eminent living divine¹ has insisted strongly on the probability, that the heathen nations of antiquity were well acquainted with the Hebrew prophecies, and were by them prepared for the reception of the Gospel. According to his view, prophecy was the schoolmaster which brought the Gentiles unto Christ. Their previous knowledge of the prediction led them to recognise and welcome the fulfilment. And if we admit that they possessed such antecedent knowledge, we have less difficulty in accounting for what otherwise appears so extraordinary, their rapid conversion to Christianity. It follows, on the same hypothesis, that we ought not to wonder if the heathen at the present day are slow to receive the Gospel, seeing that they have no previous knowledge of the prophecies, and of course, no "earnest expectation" that those prophecies will be accomplished. We must now be at much pains to prove the genuineness, the antiquity, the signification of the Old Testament. All this trouble, it is said, was saved to the early propagators of the Gospel, by the previous instruction which their hearers had received at the hands of the Jewish people,

¹ Dean Lyall, *Propædia Prophetica*, p. 325, &c.

who dwelt numerously in all the heathen cities. There may be some truth in these observations. The prophecies of the Old Testament may have been made known to the heathen either through the Septuagint translation, or in some other way, before Christ was preached to them: and if so, they were in that respect better prepared to accept the Christian Covenant, than are the heathen at the present day. We have seen reason to believe that the great Latin poet was acquainted, through whatever channel, with the phrases and imagery of the prophet Isaiah, if not with the subject and scope of his predictions: and we have noticed rumours, however vague and undefined, of an universal King expected from the East. There is evidence to shew, that at least some faint echo of the voices of the prophets had reached to the heathen; and doubtless, even this was favourable to the Christian teacher. There may have been more than this; but we are unable to say certainly that there was. If there was, the proof of it has not descended to our times. Neither the writings of the Apostles, nor the remains of Christian antiquity, present us with any clear instance, where the messenger of Christ, addressing an exclusively heathen audience, appeals to the

Hebrew prophecies, or assumes on the part of his hearers a knowledge of the Old Testament.

Upon the whole, then, it appears not improbable that the heathen, from their prevailing habits of thought and superstition, were more accessible to the evidence of prophecy than to that of miracles. We may also conjecture, but cannot affirm positively, that they were predisposed in favour of the Gospel, by a knowledge, more or less accurate, of the Hebrew prophecies. And these considerations are sufficient to explain the great prominence which is given by the ancient Apologists to this branch of the evidences.

There may be some truth in the remark, that mankind are not at the present day so disposed to receive the evidence of prophecy, as they were in the first age of the Gospel. But we must remember that the argument itself has not been impaired by the lapse of time. It is as strong now as it ever was. It has even gained in strength; for the predictions of our Lord, which he spake concerning the fall of Jerusalem, and the universal diffusion of his Gospel, have been fulfilled. And it may be that there yet remains a great body

of prophecy, the accomplishment of which will give additional assurance to future generations.

The proof, however, which we have now been considering, is of itself amply sufficient, if only men are disposed to examine it fairly and with an earnest and simple desire to arrive at the truth. But how often is such a temper “the one thing needful,” in minds which are otherwise richly gifted!

Let us not close our present meditations without a feeling of thankfulness, that we ourselves were early instructed and trained in the faith of Christ, not left to form our religious convictions in riper years, from a comparison and combination of proofs and arguments however clear and however irresistible. We may take to ourselves the language which St Peter addressed to the Jews, when he described them as “the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers¹.” Our attachment to the Gospel of Christ rests not primarily on those proofs which are addressed to the reason, but on those, which, while the reason was yet slumbering, appealed to our conscience and touched our heart. Of that evidence we have yet

¹ Acts iii. 25.

to treat; without which the Christian teacher, whether in ancient or modern times, would have been but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. We have yet to speak of “a more excellent way¹.” And this we will do, if God be willing, on a future occasion.

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 31.

LECTURE IV.

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

TITUS II. 11—14.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

I HAVE spoken on former occasions of the miracles and the prophecies, which we may call the external evidences vouchsafed by God for the establishment of his Gospel: it now remains to inquire in what degree the inherent beauty, the moral excellence of Christianity, contributed to its success. There is no question among ourselves, that the doctrine of Christ is admirable, and his example altogether lovely. We readily accept the summary of Evangelical morality, which is given by the Apostle in my text. We all admit that such perfect rules, and such high motives, were never propounded by any human teacher. And some of us, I would hope, have tested the

doctrine by their own experience; and so have acquired that assurance of its divine origin which was promised by its Author; “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself¹.”

But what, if any, were the intrinsic recommendations of the Gospel in the sight of the heathen? Was it repugnant to their customs, habits, prejudices, vices, and passions? We may well believe that it was. What then; did it appeal to a higher tribunal; did it approve itself to the consciences of men, to their inmost feelings, their deepest convictions and yearnings? In proposing this question, we enter upon an extensive field of inquiry, which it is impossible to traverse in all directions. We shall prescribe to ourselves such a course as may enable us to see the general bearings of the subject, without dwelling upon the particular details. Of one thing we are certain at the outset, that there must have been in Christianity a living power, and that power congenial to the nature of man. Not all the miracles and prophecies would have availed to make it strike its root into the hearts of the heathen, and bring forth fruit, had it

¹ John vii. 17.

possessed no life in itself, and had it not also fallen upon a soil in some degree fitted for its reception. The lifeless and withered trunk may be planted with all solemnity, and honoured with a sounding name, but it remains lifeless and withered still. And the seed which has life in itself will fare little better, if it alight upon stony ground. But the word of the Lord “grew mightily, and prevailed.” What then were the affinities which existed between the doctrine of Christ and the heart of man ?

The Gospel, be it remembered, was first proclaimed in an age of high civilisation. The restless mind of the philosopher had endeavoured to explore, not merely the practical rules of morality, which were to guide men in their mutual intercourse, but the relation of man to a higher being, and the nature of that being. In default of anything which could be believed, or accounted certain, the world was teeming with theories and speculations. But to none of these did the Gospel ally itself, no, not for a moment. Had it done so, it would only have rendered the confusion worse confounded, and Christ would have been the restorer, not of Paradise, but of chaos. No ; he cancelled, on the one hand, the guesses of human reason, while, on the other, he swept

away the hypocrisies, the excuses, the cloaks for sin, which the vices and passions of mankind had invented. Yet he did not leave himself without a witness; he was able to appeal to certain deep instincts of our nature, which had long been stifled and neglected, but which could never be entirely extinguished. He struck the stony hearts of men, and forthwith there issued from them a fountain, which had been congealed, but never dried up. Men talked and acted as if this life were all in all. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" this was become the maxim of those times, a maxim not censured, but rather sanctioned, by the authority of the wise. Yet there was ever a voice in the soul, protesting against this doctrine, and whispering a hope—for which it could scarcely give a reason—that when the last to-morrow came, it would be the beginning, not of eternal night, but of eternal day. With this "testimony of the soul," as it was termed by a Christian¹ writer, the Gospel made common cause; and the revelation, which it gave to man, was the more acceptable, inasmuch as the human reason had lately done its utmost to throw a light across "the valley of the shadow of death," and had entirely failed².

¹ See Tertull. *De Testimonio Animæ*.

² See *Hulsean Lectures* for 1849, Lecture III.

But this was not the only point in which the Gospel coincided with the deeply-seated feelings of our nature. The discernment of moral good and evil, a predilection for the former, and an abhorrence of the latter, these great principles were disowned, disregarded, disobeyed: they consequently became torpid and irregular in their action; but they did not on that account cease to exist. It was a doctrine not altogether exploded from the schools, that virtue is the highest good, and that to live agreeably to our nature, we must live virtuously; and a sentiment resembling this still retained a hold, even upon the hearts of those who had done every thing to discard it. To this sentiment the Gospel gave fresh strength and boldness; confirming it, not by an elaborate theory, not by a systematic code of precepts, but by that which is far more touching than any code or theory, the force of example. It exhibited the perfection of human nature, the very pattern of all virtue; and thus rekindled the desire for whatever is just, and holy, and lovely, and pure, and true.

But these moral perceptions are connected in the human breast with another class of feelings, with the conviction of sin, the sense of alienation from God, the desire to be reconciled to him. And these feelings are not of

partial or accidental growth, but are as intimately bound up in our nature as are the moral notions themselves. For they came in, as we learn from holy Scripture, with the original transgression; which transgression consisted in eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. No sooner had our first parents tasted the fruit, than they hid themselves from the presence of God¹. Their posterity have inherited not only the sense of moral distinctions, but the sense of guilt, the shame, which they then acquired. Men have felt that they could not live without God, yet they have feared to meet him face to face. How were they to obtain boldness to approach him? By sacrifices and offerings they could not compass an atonement, though they might acknowledge their need of one. Not being able to lift up their own hearts to God, they sought in their folly to bring down the Godhead to the level of human nature, by investing it with our weaknesses, our passions, and our vices. But even so they did not satisfy themselves; for such a system was revolting to their deepest convictions, and though it was the basis of their mythology, their ordinary language and feelings rebelled against it. Yonder, they said, beyond the starry

¹ Gen. iii. 8.

heavens, there is a being pure and happy ; and here are we, his creatures, in some respects godlike, wallowing in the mire of vice and misery. Wide is the gulph which separates between him and us ; but is it impassable ? The schools of philosophy endeavoured to return an answer to this question, but they could not. It is admitted by an ancient¹ adversary of the Gospel, that no method of delivering the soul, capable of universal application, had been discovered by any sect of philosophy. If this pagan writer could have purged his ears from the jargon of the schools, and listened to a doctrine not recommended by “enticing words of man’s wisdom,” he might have found what he sought ; he might have known one who had made the required expiation, one who had satisfied the blind yearnings of the human race : one who was “the desire of all nations².”

From these observations it appears, that the doctrine of Christ, however opposed to the fashions and conventions of the world, was in harmony with the profound convictions and cravings of human nature ; and when viewed as a whole, it was seen to be consistent with itself, and satisfactory to the consciences

¹ Porphyry ; see Augustin. *De Civ. Dei.* x. 32.

² Hag. ii. 7.

and spiritual wants of those, for whose benefit it was intended. It held up for their imitation a standard of moral excellence; it revived in them the consciousness of moral guilt and degradation, and at the same time shewed them a sacrifice already made for their sins. It told them that the gate of death, at which they had been gazing so wistfully and so hopelessly, was the portal of everlasting life.

Taken as a whole therefore, and viewed in connexion with the supernatural evidence of miracles and prophecies by which it was supported, the Christian doctrine was too vast, and too compact, to be assailed with any prospect of success. Accordingly, its adversaries pursued the policy of breaking it up into fragments, and attacking it in detail; diverting the attention of men as much as possible from any general and comprehensive views. The miracles, as I have already mentioned¹, they ascribed to magic; their way of dealing with the prophecies, as I have also observed², was to say nothing about them, to pass them by without notice. But what objections did they make to the doctrine itself? Its general morality they did not call in question; the atonement they did not declare unnecessary; the hope of a future life they

¹ Lecture II.

² Lecture III.

dared not reject. Yet upon each of these heads they discovered some ground for cavil.

1. Thus we are told, that Christ crucified was “foolishness” to the Greeks¹; for they pretended that it was the height of absurdity to worship as God one, who had died the death of a malefactor. And so indeed it was, if the history had ended there. But they chose to put out of sight the evidence which proved that he, who so died, had also risen from the dead. “It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again².” 2. At another time the Resurrection of the body was made the subject of mockery³. And while they endeavoured to bewilder the disciples with subtle questions upon this subject⁴, they excluded from view the other doctrines with which it is connected. 3. Again, the objection was made, that Christianity addresses itself only to sinners, unlike all other religious systems, in which none were invited or allowed to approach the mysteries, but such as were of a pure conscience and innocent life⁵. True it is that Christ came “not to call the righteous, but sinners⁶.” It is however equally true, that the Gospel concludes *all* under sin,

¹ 1 Cor. i. 23. ² Rom. viii. 34. ³ Acts xviii. 32.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 17. See *Hulsean Lectures* for 1849, Lect. VII.

⁵ Origen, *Contr. Cels.* III. 59.

⁶ Matt. ix. 13.

saying that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God¹.” And the conscience of every human being bears witness to the truth of this declaration. All have been concluded under sin, “that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe².” And herein lies the grand difference between the heathen mysteries and our own ordinances; that whereas the former were open only to persons who ventured to consider themselves pure and perfect, and the impure and wicked were not even invited to assist at them, we exhort all persons, however far gone from righteousness, to repent them truly for their sins past, to have a lively and stedfast faith in Christ our Saviour, to amend their lives, to be in perfect charity with all men, that so they may be meet partakers of those holy mysteries. If it is a fault in a religion, to hold out hope to the sinner, Christianity undoubtedly has this fault, and makes no secret of it, but rather glories in it. If any man be without sin, let him be the first to blame our religion on this account.

In like manner the moral principles of the Gospel, instead of being considered in relation to one another, were made, each in its turn, the subjects of separate animadversion. Thus

¹ Rom. iii. 23.

² Gal. iii. 22.

the virtue of humility, one of the very chief ornaments of the Christian character, most strongly enforced both by the precept and example of our divine Master, excited the scorn of the heathen philosopher¹. To him it seemed a slavish self-abasement, a morbid sentiment, or else a form of hypocrisy and affectation. And yet in another point of view he could not but see that the Gospel imparts to its disciples a certain magnanimity, a nobility of thought and feeling: this he denominated immoderate pride and foolish exaltation. He did not perceive the true nature either of the Christian humility or of the Christian dignity; much less did he discern the indissoluble link by which these evangelical graces are united. He did not understand the force of the maxim, “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted².” He did not know that forasmuch as we are all sinners in the sight of God, it is our duty to carry ourselves very humbly towards him, to be meek and lowly in our conversation even with the most abject of our fellow-creatures, to take nothing upon ourselves, “in honour preferring one another, and each accounting other better than themselves³;” but that as

¹ See Origen, *Contr. Cels.* vi. 15.

² Luke xiv. 11.

³ Rom. xii. 10.

fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God, chosen of him and precious in his sight, we are emboldened to lift up our hearts above this transitory world, to entertain very great and glorious anticipations. Humility and dignity, self-abasement and self-respect under the Christian scheme are not incompatible. They have been joined together in us by one who in his own person united so many qualities apparently irreconcilable. In him divine strength and human weakness have been combined; in him mercy and justice, righteousness and peace have met together.

The principle of faith, being so prominent in the Christian system, was, of course, the especial object of the adversary's attack¹. He surnamed it credulity; he vilified it as a barren, barbarous, unscientific principle, fit only for the dotard and the slave. He did not care to observe the mutual relations and dependencies of faith and reason on the one hand, of faith and practice on the other; how the Christian is enjoined to have a reason for the faith which is in him; to "prove all things" first, and then to "hold them fast;" and how again it is declared that all things are possible to them that believe; that if our

¹ Clem. Alex. *Strom.* II. § 7; Origen, *Contr. Cels.* III. 44.

faith has any life in it, even though it be only as a grain of mustard-seed, we may triumph over all things that are without that vital principle, we may bid the mountains to be removed, as our Lord declares, or in the words of his Apostle, we have a victory which “overcometh the world¹.”

The objections taken to the Christian doctrine were in all cases deduced from such narrow and partial views as I have now described. They had no respect to the general “proportion of the faith,” but touched certain isolated portions, which might well appear incongruous and anomalous, when they were separated from the body to which they appertained, and placed in juxta-position with other systems of man’s invention. And if the coherence of the different parts was disregarded, still less was the great principle understood, the principle of heavenly love, which pervades and animates the whole scheme of the Gospel. The cold obdurate sceptic was ill qualified to discern that divine principle, descending upon earth, diffusing itself in this vale of tears, and causing itself to be reflected back to heaven, from the hearts of sinful men. It was only to the Christian that the words of the Apostle conveyed any meaning, “We love

¹ Matt. xvii. 20 ; 1 John v. 4.

him, because he first loved us.” “We have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren¹.” To a knowledge of these truths the unrenewed heart of man can never attain. It is no wonder, therefore, that objections of the kind which I have mentioned, should have occurred to men brought up in the darkness of error, and blinded by their own vain conceits. The objections for a time, perhaps, fulfilled their purpose, by raising a prejudice against the Gospel, and delaying its progress. But we cannot doubt that in a much larger measure they accomplished the purposes of God, by leading the disciples themselves to take broader and more comprehensive views of the Christian Dispensation, to observe its harmonies, to explore its depths and heights, and to know, better than they would otherwise have known, the vast dimensions of the love of God. The objections in due time fell to the ground; and having been preserved from oblivion by Christian writers, they now serve as trophies to remind us of the ancient conflicts and triumphs of the Church.

Hitherto we have spoken of the doctrine of the Gospel, as a system, which was propounded in teaching, and in that way sub-

¹ 1 John iv. 19; iii. 14.

mitted to the judgment and conscience of mankind. And we have seen that when viewed in this light, though opposed to the prevailing spirit of the times in which it appeared, it was congenial to the unchangeable instincts of our nature. But we must remember that there is another method by which religious and moral truths may be recommended and inculcated, a method often as effectual as that of direct dogmatic teaching, I mean the persuasive force of example. Some minds indeed, are so constituted by nature, or so warped by habit, as to be accessible to no other influence. And the ablest reasoners, addressing the most intelligent hearers, are glad to illustrate and fortify their arguments by an appeal to example and experience. And certainly this principle is not to be overlooked, when we are giving an account of the propagation of our holy religion. It is impossible to estimate the extent to which the cause of Christianity has been advanced, either in ancient or modern times, by those who have adorned its doctrine in their lives. Beginning with its divine founder, we not only find that he illustrated by his most holy life the precepts which he taught, bidding men "learn of" him, and follow him, but he also directed his Apostles to look to

the example furnished by their lives, as a means of promoting their doctrine. "Let your light so shine before men," he said, "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven¹." This maxim, uttered by our Lord at the outset of his ministry, was not forgotten by those who received it. Especially it was treasured up by St Peter, whose writings so often remind us of the sayings of our Lord; and he evidently had it in mind, when he exhorted his Hebrew converts to have their "conversation honest among the Gentiles;" "that whereas they speak against you," he continues, "as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation²."

For the same reason St Paul exhorts the brethren, whether in the control of their temper, or in the exercise of benevolence, to "provide things honest in the sight of all men³," that is, to provide, or furnish, a fair and good example. And he enjoins one who was his own "son after the common faith," and whom he appointed to be the chief pastor of the Cretan Church⁴, that he should in all things shew himself a "pattern of good works,"

¹ Matt. v. 16.

² 1 Pet. ii. 12.

³ Rom. xii. 17; 2 Cor. viii. 21.

⁴ Titus ii. 7.

and for this reason, "that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." And with regard to himself, meek as he was, and without boasting (save in the cross of Christ), reckoning himself the least of all saints, he was not ashamed to hold up his own activity and energy in the cause of his Master, as a pattern to others. "Brethren," he says to the Philip-pians, "be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample¹." "I beseech you," he says to the Corinthians, "be ye followers of me."

Nor did the successors of the Apostles underrate the importance of providing "things honest" in the sight of men. They were persuaded that if their conduct were in conformity with their professions, the world would not long stand against them; and that all their professions would go for nothing, if they were unable to point to some real and unquestionable fruits of their faith. Their doctrine, beautiful as it was in itself, needed to be adorned by the lives of those who adopted it: without such an illustration, it would scarcely have been distinguished from the philosophic fancies which it was endeavouring to supplant; it would have been regarded as the

¹ Phil. iii. 17. (See also 1 Cor. iv. 16; Acts xxvi. 29, &c.)

pleasing but Utopian theory of a set of noon-day dreamers. But those ancient apologists were able to appeal, and did appeal with force to the moral change produced by Christianity in those who embraced its doctrines. "Behold," said one of them¹, "we who were once slaves of lust, now are devoted to chastity; we have forsaken the arts of magic, in which we were sometime employed, and have dedicated ourselves to the only good and eternal God; lovers of riches as we were, and only anxious to increase our store, we now give what we have to the common use, and share it with every one that has need; we who once hated and murdered one another, and, on account of the difference of national customs, would have no common hearth with strangers, now, since the manifestation of Christ, live peaceably with each other, and pray for our enemies, and seek to persuade those who hate us without a cause, that they also may live according to the commands of Christ, and have a good hope of receiving the like blessings with us, from God, the Lord of all." And another says: "The Christian communities, compared with the people among whom they dwell, are as lights in the world²." "The name of Jesus

¹ Justin Martyr, *Apol.* i. 15. See also *Epist. ad Diogn.* § 5.

² Origen, *Contr. Cels.* iii. 29.

produces a wonderful gentleness, humanity, and goodness, in those who embrace his doctrines without hypocrisy, from no consideration of worldly advantage, but in sincerity and truth¹." Thus they challenged their heathen adversaries to test the Christian doctrine by the Christian life. And such an appeal, we may be sure, would not have been made so confidently, had it been without foundation. But we are not left to rely on these general statements. The facts speak for themselves. We are able to mention several particulars, in which the doctrines of Christ visibly and unquestionably affected the lives of the believers. We at once call to mind their mutual love, to which even their persecutors bore testimony, unable as they were to discern the source from which it sprang. To make provision for the widows, the fatherless, and the destitute, was one of the first cares of the infant Church²; and it was not long before the occurrence of a famine served to exercise the charity of the believers in a different way. In order to relieve "the brethren which dwelt in Judæa³," a subscription was set on foot by St Paul, the first perhaps ever made for a charitable purpose; to which it pleased them

¹ *Contr. Cels.* I. 67. See also Tertull. *Apol.* c. 46.

² Acts ii. 45; vi. 1.

³ Acts xi. 29.

of Achaia and Macedonia to make contribution¹. These apostolic examples were largely followed in succeeding times. To provide for the sick and needy was acknowledged to be a paramount duty: and those institutions were originated, which now fill every land with visible memorials of Christian benevolence. The hospital, the almshouse, and the charity school, are so familiar to our eyes, that we scarcely stop to ask ourselves what spirit it was, that first called them into existence. Yet it must not be forgotten, that they are essentially Christian Institutions, and that if there is in them any virtue or any praise, it is due entirely to our holy religion².

Such then was the internal goodwill and harmony which subsisted among the first disciples. But this, striking as it was, might have been misinterpreted by the pagans, had it proceeded no further. For those who on any account have incurred the hatred of the world, are by that very circumstance drawn more closely to each other. The scourge of leprosy reconciled together the Jew and the Samaritan³, who else had no dealings together: and even criminals and outcasts from

¹ Rom. xv. 26.

² See Ryan's *Effects of Religion*, chap. III. (Dublin, 1802.)

³ Luke xvii. 16.

society are found to exhibit a mutual amity, until some accident discloses the hollowness of their friendship. But the love of the Christian believer extended itself beyond the pale of his own community. When a pestilence visited the chief city of Africa, and the pagan part of the inhabitants abandoned their dying friends, and shrank from the duty of burying their dead, the Christian flock bravely undertook the work, and in a short time the bodies which filled the streets were interred, and the city delivered from the danger of an universal infection¹. The last of the persecutors (the emperor Maximin) was wont to boast, that by his severities against the Christians, he had secured the favour of the gods, and warded off from his dominions the calamities of famine and pestilence. But ere yet his persecution was at an end, his boastings were cut short, and famine and pestilence fell upon the cities under his sway. Then the persecuted Christians arose, and gathered together the famishing multitudes, and ministered to their necessities. Thus did they heap coals of fire upon the heads of their oppressors, thus did they make the name of Christ to be glorified among the Gentiles². And upon this point we have the

¹ See Neander, *Church Hist.* i. p. 352.

² Euseb. *Hist.* ix. 8.

testimony of one of the bitterest enemies of the Gospel. The emperor Julian, in his endeavour to infuse new life into Paganism, was willing to kindle its ashes if he could, by borrowing a spark from that holy religion which he had deserted. He pointed to the example of charity which the Christians set. "The Galileans," he said, for so he called them, "the impious Galileans support not only their own poor, but ours. Why do we not follow their example¹?"

Again, I need not remind you of the degraded and miserable condition of the slaves, who constituted so large a portion of the community in ancient times. It is a common remark, that the slave was regarded not as a man but a thing; that he was thought to be of an inferior order of beings, born to servitude. Here and there perhaps a philosopher was bold enough to assert, that nature had made no difference between the master and his slave. In like manner there were philosophers who arrived at the great Christian maxim, that men should do unto others, as they would that others should do unto them.

¹ Julian, *Epist.* 49: Τί οὐκ ἀποβλέπομεν ὃ μάλιστα τὴν ἀθεότητα συνηύξησεν, ἢ περὶ ξένου φιλανθρωπία, καὶ ἢ περὶ τὰς ταφὰς τῶν νεκρῶν προμήθεια, καὶ ἢ πεπλασμένη σεμνότης κατὰ τὸν βίον...τρέφουσιν οἱ δυσσεβεῖς Γαλιλαῖοι πρὸς τοῖς ἑαυτῶν καὶ τοὺς ἡμετέρους.

But these doctrines scarcely transpired beyond the schools in which they originated; and no one, even in the schools, ventured to combine them together, and to say, that a master ought to recognise in his slave a fellow-man, and to treat him as he would wish to be treated himself. It was left for the Christian philosopher to lay down this principle¹; it was left for Christianity to give effect to it. That all nations are of one blood, that all men are equal in the sight of God, that “whether we be Jews or Gentiles, bond or free²,” we are one in Christ, these truths, so familiar to ourselves, were paradoxes to the ancient world, and neither Jew nor Gentile was very willing to receive them. But they gradually approved themselves to the hearts of men, and wrought a change in the feelings and habits of society. The institution of slavery was not indeed directly abrogated. It was at first modified by the kindness of individual Christians; and, at length, when a Christian emperor ascended the throne, a series of laws were passed, relaxing its severity, and paving the way for its final abolition³.

¹ Clem. Alex. *Pæd.* III. § 92.

² 1 Cor. xii. 13.

³ See a learned Essay on Slavery by Mr Babington of St John's College.

Nor was it merely to the social charities of life that a new impulse and direction was imparted by the Gospel. The domestic affections, whose sway is so gentle and yet so powerful, had been degraded below their natural dignity: Christianity raised them above it; sanctifying them, and giving to them a deep significance, which, if viewed merely with reference to this present life, they could not have.

It would be interesting to trace the influence gradually gained by our religion over the private and public intercourse of men; to see old and barbarous practices losing their hold, and disappearing; to observe the fluctuations and irregularities of the process; for the ground was not won without a struggle, and temporary reactions have occurred, sufficient to alarm the friend of humanity, and even for a moment to discourage him. But the pursuit of this subject is beyond our limits, and, indeed, foreign to our purpose. Enough has been said to prove, that both the doctrine and practice of the Christians, though at variance with the received doctrines and prevailing practices of the heathen world, were in accordance with the religious and moral notions originally implanted in our nature. Those primeval notions, however overlaid by

the inventions and corruptions of men, could never be entirely extinguished; and when they were awakened by a voice from on high, they recognised that voice to be divine, and were not disobedient to the heavenly calling. I do not say that the doctrine was exhibited perfectly in the lives of those who professed it. In that age, as in this, there were men who brought scandal on the Christian name. Moreover, the enemies of the Gospel assailed its disciples with calumnies, which, though they were entirely false, could not be immediately refuted. Upon these points we may have occasion to say more hereafter. But still, the general fact was such as I have described it. The Christians were, on the whole, greatly superior to the pagans, both in their principles and in their practice: and it is the confession of the imperial apostate, whose testimony I have already quoted¹, that they owed their rapid increase to their charity, and to the holiness of their conversation.

In observing on the persuasive influence of the Christian life, our attention has hitherto been directed to those nations of antiquity which were most highly civilised. Was that influence equally powerful, it may be asked, where the people to be converted was in

¹ p. 102.

a simple and barbarous condition? In answer to this question, let it be sufficient now to adduce a single instance, furnished by our own rude forefathers, and recorded by the venerable historian of our ancient Church¹. After describing the mission of Augustine and his companions (A.D. 596), their arrival in Britain, and their journey to Canterbury, he proceeds to say, that “as soon as they entered the dwelling-place assigned to them, they began to imitate the course of life practised in the primitive Church; applying themselves to frequent prayer, watching and fasting; preaching the Word of God to as many as they could; despising all worldly things, as not belonging to them; receiving only their necessary food from those they taught; living themselves in all respects conformable to what they prescribed to others, and being always disposed to suffer any adversity; and even to die for the truth which they preached. In short, several believed, and were baptized; admiring the simplicity of their innocent life, and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine.”

It is easy to see how this subject bears upon ourselves, and what lessons we may derive from the experience of former ages.

¹ Bede, *Eccl. Hist.* cap. xxxvi. (Giles's translation.)

Human nature on the one hand, and the Gospel on the other, are the same now as they have ever been. The thought of a future life, the sense of moral good and evil, the consciousness of alienation from God, the desire to be at one with him, these principles are as deeply seated in the human mind at the present day, as they were two thousand years ago. We may proclaim the great truths of the Christian doctrine in the full assurance, that if they are set forth in their own simplicity and purity, they will find an echo in the hearts of those who hear them. But we shall have no confidence that they will work a full and permanent conviction on the mind of any one, if our doctrine is not supported by our practice, if the precept is not accompanied by the example. Certainly, if our practice be contradictory to our doctrine, if we shew an example which refutes the rule, our efforts in the cause of Christ will be worse than useless. Men will perhaps think the precept true, but they will follow the example. It is not, however, enough to avoid the evil of contradicting our doctrine. We must illustrate it. We must exhibit it not on our lips only. Looking to the experience of the first ages, there is no reason to think that the Gospel would have made any great way in the world, had it been

merely *preached*, had its messengers accompanied it with no practical commentary, had they not gone up and down in the world, so that their faith, their hope, and their charity, might be made known unto all men. If we really desire to advance the kingdom of Christ upon earth, we shall not be without our opportunities, whatever may be our station, and whatever our calling. But, in order to make good use of our opportunities, it is necessary not only to teach the truth, but to have our conversation among those whom we teach; mingling with them freely, casting off reserve, and allowing them to see our conduct, and scan the motives by which it is governed. He who does this, supposing his life will bear the scrutiny, needs not the tongue of angels to give effect to his exhortations.

It is my duty, before I conclude¹, to recommend to you especially one of those Christian principles, the development of which in the first age of the Gospel, I have already had occasion to notice. We have seen that, in the sight of God, all men are equal; equal, that is, as regards their spiritual, not their temporal interests; for he has himself ap-

¹ After the Sermon a collection was made in compliance with the Queen's Letter, on behalf of the National Society.

pointed inequalities of worldly condition, and has decreed that "the poor shall never cease out of the land¹." But he has declared that he is no respecter of persons, and that "whoever feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him²." We, as a nation, are in danger, or I would rather say, we have been in danger of disregarding this plain Christian principle. We cannot deny, that many among us have looked upon our poorer brethren with a feeling, which only a heathen man would venture openly to acknowledge; treating them as inferior beings, whom it was sufficient to feed and clothe, but who did not need to be instructed in the way in which they should go, nor to be provided with the bread of life. Can we contemplate the rapidly increasing and ill-educated population of our native land, without confessing, that for these many years we have been sowing the wind; and is it due to our own wisdom or deserts, that we have not long ago reaped the whirlwind? The evil is even now on the increase; but we trust that steps have been taken to cope with it in time to prevent it from overwhelming us. A better state of things, however, cannot be brought about suddenly, nor without a combined, a sustained, a vigorous effort. No light pretexts,

¹ Deut. xv. 11.

² Acts x. 35.

no lesser differences of opinion, must tempt us to impede the work, nor even to stand aloof from it. It must be done; the people must be taught. In his early prime, while he is yet pliant for good or for evil, the young child must be taken, and trained up in the way he is to go. We have already seen enough to convince us, that this duty cannot be neglected with impunity. A general feeling exists throughout the country, as we are assured by the Royal Letter in behalf of which I address you, "a general belief exists, strengthened by late events in other nations, that it is only by providing a sound religious education for the growing masses of the population, that the social and religious institutions of these kingdoms can be preserved." We are this day called upon to give a sign that we participate in this general feeling. And how can we do otherwise? We who are at this fountainhead of learning, whether we stand here by the well, or whether we have come up hither to draw the waters, we cannot but desire to dispense among our poorer brethren those blessings which we value so highly for ourselves. Let us then not go hence, without doing something to shew the strength of God to this generation, and his power to all them that are yet for to come¹.

¹ Psalm lxxi. 18.

LECTURE V.

REVIEW OF THE CAUSES CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL. THE HINDRANCES OCCASIONED BY THE CALUMNIES OF THE HEATHEN, AND BY THE ILL LIVES OF NOMINAL CHRISTIANS.

1 PETER II. 12.

Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles : that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

THE rapid propagation of the Christian Church in the first centuries of its existence, is a subject which affords us edification in different ways, according to the several aspects in which it is viewed. At one time we contemplate it as a general fact or result ; and considering how the Gospel went forth from its small beginnings in Jewry, and overcame the world, we acknowledge that herein we trace the handiwork of God, and behold one of the wonders, nay, the greatest of all the wonders which he hath done for the children of men. A new impulse was then given to the spirits of men, a new light was let in upon their hearts ; a change was wrought as marvellous, as if the Almighty Creator had taken this planet in his hands, and caused it to revolve about another axis, or round another

sun. Again, we endeavour to analyze this event, for the purpose of discerning the causes, which, humanly speaking, conspired to produce it. And then we find a union of such elements, as could neither have been fabricated nor put together by human ingenuity or forethought. And we say that in this combination we find a proof of divine contrivance and arrangement, at least as strong as any which is furnished by the phenomena of the natural creation.

Keeping in view this double mode of treating the subject, I commenced my present course of lectures by dwelling on the success of the Gospel as a substantive proof of its divine origin; and I then proceeded to consider the means, the machinery, if we may use such a phrase, by which that result was accomplished. Very much of this machinery must ever escape our notice, being either hidden altogether from our eyes, or so complicated as to be understood only by him who planned it. For all things in heaven and earth are working together to promote his ends. We have been content to observe those instruments which were most directly and obviously concerned in making his Revelation known to mankind; first the miracles, by which the Revelation was attended and ac-

credited; then the prophecies which it fulfilled; thirdly, the doctrine which it inculcated, a doctrine adapted to the wants and capabilities of human nature, and producing in the lives of those who received it a visible and living proof of its divine excellence. Thus the Church of Christ, though not arrayed in earthly pomp and circumstance, was a King's daughter, and was not only all glorious *within*, but also wore a clothing which was of wrought gold. The Gospel was recommended to the world at once by its intrinsic worth, and by the external tokens which it bore of its heavenly parentage.

I have endeavoured however to account for the progress of the Gospel, not merely by shewing that there were certain causes capable of producing that effect, but by tracing, as far as possible, the actual operation of those causes, and by ascertaining their real influence. For this purpose I have not relied on Christian testimony alone, but have appealed to the still more valuable admissions of pagan writers. And enough I trust has been said to shew that the Gospel was advanced by the causes which I have mentioned. It owed its triumph to none of those delusions which have sometimes arisen and rapidly overspread the earth, like the pestilence or the locust-flight.

Neither was it indebted, at that early period, to the policy of kings, or the prejudice of the people, or the reasonings of philosophers ; for all these things, as we well know, were against it. Nor do we find that recourse was had to those questionable expedients, the occasional use of which in later times may be palliated, but cannot be justified, by their success.

In one age of the world, for example, the victorious warrior imagined that he might atone for his many acts of violence, by committing yet one more, in the name of the Gospel ; and before he sheathed his sword he turned it against some heathen tribe, and compelled them to come in to the fold of Christ. Such was the rude argument which Charlemagne employed, to extend the Christian faith among the Huns and Saxons.

Again, there have been cases where the overzealous missionary, intent on the conversion of a savage people, but unable to succeed by more legitimate evidence, has thought it not inconsistent with the sincerity of the Gospel, to practise guile, and to cheat the simple barbarians to their own advantage, by frauds, pious frauds as they were called, pretended miracles, lying wonders. As if by falsehood a way could be paved for that doctrine, which is truth itself, and which requires truth in the

inner man, whether in him who preaches or in him who receives it. To such a system we cannot award our approbation, though it has been adopted with some appearance of success, by men of undoubted piety and zeal, as for instance, to mention only one great name out of many, by that devoted missionary and martyr Boniface, who went from this land to evangelize the heathen tribes of Germany.

There was a time also, when it was thought by some a possible, and also a laudable undertaking, to christianize the Pagan world, by paganizing the Gospel. And the worship of him who has declared himself to be a jealous God, of that name which is above every name, was associated with the abominations of idolatry and superstition. But this system of compromise was denounced with indignation by all true believers; and the experiment which was made with it in China by the Jesuits of the 17th century, will never, we trust, be repeated.

By such methods as these, by fraud, by violence, by compromise, we must admit that the pale of the Church has at different epochs been largely extended. It may be that God, in these instances, permitted the vices of men, as he often permits their infirmities, to redound to his glory. The work which had

a wrongful beginning, may by him perhaps have been sometimes brought to a goodly termination. But it is satisfactory to find, that by no such means as these was the Gospel propagated in those early times, which must ever be referred to as the most critical and the most triumphant epoch in its career. Published at the first among nations pre-eminent for their mental culture and civilization, watched by acute and jealous adversaries, it could not possibly have succeeded by fraudulent means. And violence was equally out of the question, where a handful of men had to contend against the world. And had it offered to make the slightest compromise with idolatry, it would quickly and reasonably have been confounded with the numerous superstitions which at that time infested society. No; its strength lay in its meekness, its sincerity, its independence of all existing systems. It won its way gradually, now by knocking at the hearts of men, and now by appealing to their reason. To the reason it addressed itself, by presenting an array of miracles and prophecies mutually confirming each other. To the heart it gained access, by offering such an atonement for sin, such a rule for our guidance here, and such a hope of immortality hereafter, as had long been the

objects of the blind and ineffectual yearnings of mankind.

Such then were the sources of that power which overcame the world. But if we would duly estimate the greatness of the power, we must not overlook the resistance by which it was opposed. We must not shrink from the contemplation of those untoward circumstances, whether within or without the Church, which threatened it with injury or dissolution. It is necessary to look on this side of the picture, not only that we may see how the divine providence was continually bringing good out of evil, but that we may derive lessons of wisdom and encouragement for ourselves, in this time of movement and progress, when the Gospel has gone forth, as with a new impulse, conquering and to conquer, to the uttermost parts of the earth. Conquering, I say, and to conquer; yet not without sustaining many a fierce assault from its open adversaries, and many a grievous wound and secret hindrance from those who have professed their allegiance to it. If it is our high calling, as a nation, to evangelize the heathen, (and who can doubt that it is so¹?) surely it must profit

¹ Dr Wingard, Archbishop of Upsal in Sweden, says (in his *Review of the Church of Christ*, translated from the

us to scan well the history of the primitive Church; and we may acquire strength for our own labours, by contemplating the difficulties, the conflicts and the triumphs of the former time.

I stated in my last Lecture that the excellency of the Gospel, as it appeared in the lives of those who professed it, was felt by the heathen to be a powerful argument in its behalf, and did in fact contribute greatly to its success. But when we say this, it must not be imagined that the example set by the Christians invariably conciliated the respect of the heathen, or invariably deserved it. Calumny ever waits upon goodness; and the best characters are commonly the most liable to detraction. In this respect the former days and the latter are alike. The first believers sustained a full share of those misrepresentations, which have been the heritage of holy men in every age. Again, in every society of men, professing to aim at a high standard of perfection, there have been individual cases of failure, which bring discredit on the whole body, and give occasion for its enemies to

Swedish, 1845, p. 14), "The English begin now to feel, though they forgot it for a long while in India, that Providence has placed in their hands the commerce of the universe, in order that they may be the instruments of spreading the Gospel all over the globe."

exult. In no age of its existence has the Christian community formed an exception to this remark. I propose, therefore, now to consider how far the Church of Christ was let and hindered in its early struggle with the world; first, by the voice of calumny, and, secondly, by its own inherent blemishes and imperfections.

I. Our blessed Lord had no sooner entered on his ministry, than his conduct was subjected to the most unjust aspersions. Because he sought out the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and associated with them, not forbidding any, not saying to any one,—as *he* might have said,—“I am holier than thou,” therefore he was pronounced to be “gluttonous, and a wine-bibber; a friend of publicans and sinners¹,” when he triumphed over the powers of darkness, he was accused of being in league with Satan²; when he spake as never man spake, and no one could gainsay his arguments, this was the answer which he received, “Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil³.” And if the Master of the house was called Beelzebub, so also were his servants. If they spoke with divers tongues, they were represented to be “full of new

¹ Matt. xi. 19.

² Matt. xii. 24.

³ John viii. 48.

wine¹.” If they demonstrated that the law of Moses had received its consummation, and that it was no longer binding as a religious system, they were accused of speaking “blasphemous words against Moses and against God².” When one of them shewed how the various prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Christ, it was objected to him that much learning had made him mad³. They were put out of the synagogues, as their Master had foretold. Under the opprobrious name of Nazarenes they were publicly anathematized⁴ by the Rabbis. And more than this, the Scribes and Pharisees sent into all the world emissaries, *Apostles* as they were called, to traduce the Gospel⁵. These Apostles, like Saul when he was on the way to Damascus, carried Epistles containing, in set form

¹ Acts ii. 13. ² Acts vi. 11. ³ Acts xxvi. 24.

⁴ See Bishop Kaye's *Just. Mart.* p. 40.

⁵ The statement in the text is derived from an interesting passage of Eusebius (in Isaiah xviii. 1): Εὐρόμεν ἐν τοῖς τῶν παλαιῶν συγγράμμασιν, ὡς οἱ τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ οἰκοῦντες τοῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἔθνους ἱερεῖς καὶ πρεσβύτεροι γράμματα διαχαράξαντες εἰς πάντα διεπέμψαντο τὰ ἔθνη τοῖς ἀπανταχοῦ Ἰουδαίοις διαβάλλοντες τὴν Χριστοῦ διδασκαλίαν ὡς αἴρεσιν καινὴν καὶ ἀλλοτριὰν τοῦ Θεοῦ, παρήγγελόν τε δι' ἀποστόλων μὴ παραδέξασθαι αὐτήν.....Οἱ τε ἀπόστολοι αὐτῶν ἐπιστολὰς βιβλίνας κομιζόμενοι.....ἀπανταχοῦ γῆς διέτρεχον, τὸν περὶ τοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν ἐνδιαβάλλοντες λόγον. Ἀποστόλους δὲ εἰσέτι καὶ νῦν ἔθος ἐστὶν Ἰουδαίοις ὀνομάζειν τοὺς ἐγκύκλια γράμματα παρὰ τῶν ἀρχόντων αὐτῶν ἐπικομιζομένους.

and phrase, a condemnation of our holy religion, and blasphemy against the Son of God. Surely the Lord in heaven had them in derision; he knew that it would be hard for them to kick against the pricks. Yet he suffered them to do their worst. We learn from the book of the Acts how St Paul himself was anticipated by the reports of such emissaries, at Thessalonica and at Rome. His appearance in the former city was the signal for the Jewish residents to make an uproar, crying, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also¹." And, on his arrival at Rome, he was informed that the way of God was "every where spoken against²." There were persons in those days, as in these, whose vocation it was to call good evil, to put darkness for light; and they were not slothful in their business. The Apostle of falsehood was everywhere endeavouring to outstrip the Apostle of truth. And though his calumnies, like the fire in the thorns³, ere long became extinct; yet, like the fire in the thorns, they prevailed for a time.

The Gentiles lent a willing ear to these accusations, and multiplied them a hundred-fold. And though, partly by force of reason,

¹ Acts xvii. 6.

² Acts xxviii. 22.

³ Psalm cxviii. 12.

and partly by the answers of their own oracles¹, they were sometimes compelled to acknowledge the excellence of Christ's doctrine, and the beauty of his example; still they professed to believe that his disciples were misguided and profligate men. We learn from the words of my text that, even in the time of St Peter, the Gentiles were accustomed to speak against the disciples as evil doers. At that period the defamation against which the Christians had to contend may have been vague and general; but we know how in the next generation it shaped itself into definite and tangible charges. Because the world hated the disciples, therefore they were accused of hating the world, of cherishing an universal misanthropy. Because they refused to bow the knee to idols, they were charged with atheism². Because they met together at stated seasons for the celebration of divine worship, they were accounted superstitious; and, inasmuch as the infidel and the scoffer were excluded from their assemblies, it was easy to propagate the report, that their superstition was abominable, that they committed in their hiding-places the grossest excesses

¹ See Euseb. *Dem. Ev.* III. 7; Augustin. *De Civ. D.* XIX. 23, 2.

² Αἵρε τοὺς ἀθέους. Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* IV. 15.

and the most odious crimes. They were compelled, by fear of their enemies, to say their prayers and sing their hymns by night in crypts and catacombs: therefore they were held to be a people that shunned the light; as if it were their own evil deeds, and not those of their persecutors, which made them afraid of the day. They solemnly foreswore the festive pomp, and all things thereto belonging, the garland, the frankincense, the sacrifice in the temple, the murderous show in the amphitheatre; hence they were esteemed morose, unsociable, disaffected. When we hear the “poms of the world” renounced on behalf of the young child at the baptismal font, how little do we call to mind the original significance of that phrase¹, and the scorn and contempt to which they were exposed, who first acted in conformity with that renunciation!

If we had been searching for testimony to shew that the early Christians were in general true to their principles, we could not have found a better proof than that which is afforded by the charges to which I have now referred. We know the worst that could be

¹ For the ancient custom of renouncing the devil and his poms, &c. at Baptism, see Bingham, *Ant.* Book XI. VII. 2. Under the word *poms* appear to have been included all processions, games, and shows, connected with the pagan religion.

said of them by their enemies. And considering the general tenor of these accusations, what they do not allege, as well as what they do, we may fairly infer that the community which was the object of them, though exposed to the severest temptations and provocations, did not forsake the assembling themselves together in the name of Christ; that they absented themselves resolutely from pagan ceremonies, and abstained from all occupations connected with idolatry; that they lived together indeed as a separate society, but without giving any substantial ground of offence to the jealous and captious people among whom they dwelt. Under these trials what comfort and support, yea, what joy they must have derived, from the recollection that Christ has promised an especial blessing to those against whom men shall say all manner of evil falsely for his sake¹! How they must have dwelt on the words of the Apostle, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God hath rested upon you²!”

And yet, when we think of it, how hard a thing it is to endure detraction; how it galls the spirit, how it wears the patience, how it tries the faith! To some natures even the

¹ Matt. v. 11.

1 Pet. iv. 14.

flame of persecution is more tolerable than the breath of calumny. Where such imputations as I have alluded to were widely circulated, there was no need of fire and sword, we may be sure, to make some of the weaker brethren turn back from the kingdom of heaven, and to deter from it many of the heathen who might be feeling after God, if haply they could find him. Even if a single drop of Christian blood had never been shed, we cannot doubt that the obloquy, which everywhere beset the disciples, must have prevented a great many timorous persons from assuming the name of Christ. To forego the praise of the world, to retire from its admiration, even when some prudential earthly considerations induce us to do so, is found to be no slight sacrifice ; but deliberately to forfeit its good opinion, to court its frowns, to invite its censure and its ridicule, is a trial which human nature, without some external support, cannot long endure. That such large numbers were found to undergo this trial in the first age of the Church, must be attributed solely to the good Spirit of God, sustaining the hearts of his people, lifting up the feeble knees, and the hands that hung down. The trial lasted long enough thoroughly to prove the Church, and to shew that it relied on an

arm which was not of flesh. At length the storm abated; the ignorance of foolish men was put to silence. At the beginning of the third century, the Church of Christ, to use the language of her earliest and greatest historian, by her dignity, her sincerity, her liberty, her sobriety, and her purity of manners, exhibited to the world the bright spectacle of a heavenly commonwealth and a divine philosophy; and the doctrine of the Gospel, by the general consent of mankind, was regarded as beyond the reach of calumny¹.

II. Without making mention therefore at present of the persecutions, which occasionally threatened to desolate the Church, we see that the false imputations to which the Christians were exposed, made their life a state of continual trial and temptation. But we must not forget, nor shrink from acknowledging, that the progress of the Gospel was retarded by another and a still more serious hindrance, which had its origin within the bosom of the Church. To us it is well known, that our religion, holy as it is in itself, makes no man perfect in this life. A pattern of all goodness has been set before us, which we are to take for our example here, that we may

¹ Euseb. *Hist.* iv. 7.

be transformed into its perfect likeness hereafter, in a world, where neither sin nor temptation will have any place. The old man of sin cleaves to us, so long as we are here. "Christ himself," as our Article¹ has expressed it, "was without sin ; but all we the rest, although baptized and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things, and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The Church of Christ, while in its infancy, probably approached more nearly to the innocency of its divine founder, than it does now, in its more mature estate. Yet we know, that it had scarcely been established, before disorders began to creep in, the signs of human frailty, which have been recorded, as a warning to ourselves. Even the distinguishing virtues, and the most sacred ordinances of the Church, afforded to some individuals an occasion of falling. While the richer brethren were selling their goods and giving to the poor, there was a guilty pair², who desired to have the credit of this self-denial, without incurring the cost of it. And if in the collection of alms, such instances occurred of hypocrisy and fraud, the distribution, on the other hand, gave rise to complaints³ of partiality and injustice, which

¹ Art. XV.² Acts v. 1.³ Acts vi. 1.

appear to have been not wholly unfounded. At Corinth the holy Sacrament of the Lord's supper was disgracefully misused¹. The correction of these disorders was a task which demanded the utmost vigilance and firmness on the part of the Apostles, and sometimes even called forth a display of their miraculous powers. Nay more; we discern, and doubtless it was intended that we should discern, some traces of weakness even in those very Apostles, the pillars of the Church. The treasure was committed to vessels made indeed for honour, but still "earthen vessels:" the chosen servants of the Saviour, the companions of his ministry, the witnesses of his resurrection, the first recipients of his holy Spirit, the bearers of his message to all the world, were men of like passions with ourselves.

When therefore we are told that the ancient Church contained some unworthy members, and that its most saintly members fell far short of the beauty of holiness which they endeavoured to attain, we seem to hear a trite and familiar saying, which neither excites our surprise nor for a moment shakes our belief. But it was not so in the beginning. Then every crime was a scandal, shocking the bro-

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 21.

therhood, and giving occasion to the enemies of the Gospel to blaspheme. We have the testimony of an ancient father¹, that when external difficulties had been surmounted, the corrupt lives of the Christians chiefly prevented the conversion of the heathen. And the great historian to whom I have already referred, as describing the beauty and holiness of the Church, has himself left a melancholy picture of its defects². At the very time when it was most rapidly advancing, overbearing all opposition, and possessing the earth, it was incurring, as he says, the anger, and drawing down the righteous judgment of the Most High. He tells us of mutual envyings and deadly strifes; of prelate arrayed against prelate, and people against people; of hypocrisy and deceit; of spiritual pride in high places; of every kind of wickedness rife in the Christian commonwealth. How are we to reconcile the statements of a writer who seems to be so at variance with himself? The task is not difficult; for while we admit that the Church was never free from the vices incident to humanity, and sometimes was deeply tainted by those vices, we at the same

¹ See the passage from St Chrysostom, at the end of Lecture II.

² Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* VIII. 1.

time maintain, that it was on the whole immensely superior to the world around it. The Christian doctrine continued to be the light of the world, though that light did not always shine steadily and brightly; the Christian life was still the salt of the earth, although the salt may have partially lost its savour. The corruptions of the Church, whether those which we see for ourselves, or those which we know by hearsay, though they affect us with sorrow, can occasion no diminution of our faith and hope; for we are assured, that the day is coming soon, when God will present unto himself "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing¹."

When therefore we speak of the ancient Church as holy, pure, and irreproachable, we are to remember that those titles can be applied to her only in a relative, and not in an absolute sense. Had it been otherwise; had it appeared that those primitive believers were adorned with every virtue, and exempt from every failing, the contemplation of their excellence would lead us to despond, when we cast our eyes upon the present condition of society, and see how many of those who profess and call themselves Christians are leading ill lives, and by their conduct desecrating that name

¹ Ephes. v. 27.

which they honour with their lips. If the Church were in the beginning pure, and even then with difficulty prevailed against the world, we should have little hope of her making progress among the heathen in our time, when she is so far gone from that original purity. It is some encouragement to us to know that the Church accomplished her earliest and greatest triumphs in spite of corruptions and disorders similar to those which we now have to lament. We say nothing of the schisms and heresies which rent away large numbers from her fellowship, and sometimes left the seeds of future dissension among those who remained; thus impairing and to a great degree neutralizing the efforts which were made to bring in the heathen. But looking merely to the lives of individual Christians, we say that the effect of their exemplary virtues was in a measure obscured by the vices of those who did despite to the mercy of Christ, and to the grace of his holy Spirit which was within them. The effect produced was great, but not such as it would have been, without that obstruction.

At the present day, it may be that the Church has fewer faithful children, a larger proportion of nominal professors, than she numbered in former times. Still we have good reason to hope, and to feel assured, that

her divine Head has not suffered her altogether to lose those visible graces, which formerly contributed so much to her success. Christianity has now been brought in contact with almost every heathen nation on the face of the globe; and we cannot turn a deaf ear to the statements, too often exaggerated, but sometimes, it is to be feared, too true, of the prejudice which is excited against our religion by the misconduct of those who represent it. Among the dominions of this vast empire, there may possibly be a country, the inhabitants of which have been grievously oppressed by our sway; their industry discouraged, their substance consumed, their numbers reduced by our avarice and misgovernment; while in the private lives of their conquerors they have beheld a contradiction of the first principles of religion and morality. If such a land there be, we cannot wonder that it should reject a doctrine, which is not seen to produce any fruits either in the public or private demeanour of those who profess it. Zealous indeed must be the missionary who is not discouraged in such a field, and he highly blessed of God, whose exertions are crowned with a measure of success. But if, as we believe, our sway in distant lands is generally mild and equitable, and consonant

with the principles of our holy religion ; and if, as we also believe, the conduct of those who go forth from us, though far below the standard at which they ought to aim, is yet on the whole such as to gain the esteem and confidence of the heathen ; if such is really the case, we have good reason to hope, looking to the progress of the Gospel in former times, that it will now also flourish and prevail wheresoever we plant it. We may trust that the candlestick which has been placed and by God's mercy hitherto preserved in this nation, will not be removed hence, till it has communicated its light to the furthest and darkest corners of the earth.

We do not presume to say absolutely, that God cannot and will not so counteract the wickedness of men, as to make their preaching effectual in spite of their bad life. But this is certain, that in proportion as we carry into practice the precepts of the Gospel, the more strongly we shall recommend them to the hearts of men. It was said by one of the ancients, who was himself a saintly preacher, that " the raising of the dead effecteth not so much towards the conversion of the heathen, as doth the example of a holy life. The one will fill them with astonishment ; the other will be to them a real advantage. The one

happeneth and is past; the other endureth and worketh continually in their souls¹." Our Redeemer knows that we are most strongly affected by the things which we see; and therefore he has chosen to exhibit himself visibly, not however in images made by human hands, such as the heathen worshipped, nor yet in sacramental symbols, the vehicles of his grace, but in the lives of his saints. These are the lively images, in which he reveals himself to mankind. It is in this way that he is still "evidently set forth²," crucified among us. For this cause we are exhorted to attain unto the measure of the stature of Christ, not only that we may be perfect ourselves, but that Christ may, through us, be made known unto others.

And these remarks apply to us not merely as a nation, called to convert the heathen, but individually to every one of us, whether we be among the shepherds or the sheep of the flock, and whatever be our worldly estate and condition. We all pray that God's kingdom may come, that his will may be done in earth as it is in heaven. And each of us has opportunities afforded him, in one way or an-

¹ Chrys. *Homil. in Rom.* xviii.; and see Neander's *Life of Chrys.* p. 294. (Engl. transl.)

² Gal. iii. 1.

other, of promoting that consummation. But our prayers will be comparatively lifeless, and our opportunities will assuredly be wasted, and so far from our saving the souls of others, our own souls will be put in jeopardy, unless we labour to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things¹ ;” in all things “approving ourselves as the ministers of God² ;” for such indeed we all are, or ought to be, having been called by him to be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people³ .”

¹ Tit. ii. 10.

² 2 Cor. vi. 4.

³ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

LECTURE VI.

THE EFFECTS OF PERSECUTION.

MATTHEW X. 16.

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.

THESE remarkable words were addressed by our Lord, on one occasion to the twelve apostles, and afterwards¹ to the seventy disciples, when he sent them into the world to declare that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He made no concealment of the dangers which awaited them in the discharge of their ministry; he enumerated those dangers with a precision which mere human foresight could never have attained, and with a calmness, which betokened an almighty power, superior to the attacks of the enemy. He told them that they should be delivered up to the councils, and scourged in the synagogues, and brought before governors and kings for his sake; but that in such circumstances they should be under no concern on account of their ignorance and rudeness of speech, they would have no need to premeditate their defence, for it should be given them in that

¹ Luke x. 3.

same hour what they should say. He spoke also of the domestic and social dissensions which should at first arise from the publication of the gospel of peace; how the brother should deliver the brother to death, and the father the child, and the child his parent. He declared that his own name should become a bye-word, ensuring for those who bore it the hatred of mankind. They were to be the servants of one who was himself opprobriously called Beelzebub; and the servants could not expect a better reception than that which had been given to their Lord. But that they might not be dismayed by these anticipations, he assured them, that they were followers of a Master who had overcome the world; that the death of the body was a thing by no means to be feared, since their souls could not be harmed, being held fast in his hand; and even as regards the body, he said that they who lost their life for his sake should find it, and live for ever.

“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves:” what good reason the Saviour had for giving this caution to his “little flock,” the event but too clearly proved. There was, however, a prediction, delivered many ages previously by the prophet Isaiah, that under the Gospel dispensation the wolf should “dwell

with the lamb ;” “the wolf and the lamb should feed together¹.” This also has had its fulfilment, in so far as the meek and gentle spirit of the Gospel has subdued the savage and brutal passions of mankind. But this did not come to pass without a deadly struggle. The wolf did not all at once forego his wolfish nature, but tore those sheep of Christ, who of their own accord exposed themselves to his fury. Full of zeal in their Master’s service, they fearlessly carried the message with which they were charged into the abodes of sin and superstition ; they boldly invoked the enmity which they had been prepared to expect. All honour and reverence be to the memory of those mighty spirits, mighty with a strength that was not their own, who, whether in the former or the latter times, after asserting the truth with the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove, have sealed their testimony with their blood. The recollection of their great examples may make us painfully conscious of our own cowardice and faintness of heart ; may it also elevate our spirits, and provoke us to a heavenly daring, and encourage us to remain, under our various trials, stedfast to the end.

In my last lecture, I took notice of the

¹ Isai. xi. 6 ; lxxv. 25.

calumnies by which the early disciples were assailed, and which having originated, as it appears, among the Jews, were readily caught up and believed by the Gentiles. I observed that if the opposition to the Gospel had been confined to those slanderous attacks, and had never taken a more violent form, it would have presented a formidable obstacle to the conversion of the world. To be convinced of this, we need only look at our own times, and read candidly if we can, the thoughts of our own hearts. For even now, when the world has nominally adopted the standard of the cross, and has outwardly submitted to the doctrine of Christ, it must be confessed that very many of us are deterred from giving ourselves wholly to his service, and from unreservedly following his commandments, by the obloquy and misrepresentation which frequently attends upon such conduct. And if this is the case now, what must it have been in those times when the Christian stood as it were by himself, abhorring what other men held sacred, and actuated by principles, which were not understood, or if understood were disavowed and despised by the rest of the world? Heavy indeed would be our trial, if nothing short of universal infamy were the penalty for bearing the name and the cross

of Christ: the faith of many I fear would grow cold; and some who now are loudest in their professions would be seen to waver and prevaricate, and perhaps, like Peter, plainly to deny their Lord.

But as we well know, the early disciples had to endure something more than calumny. The endeavour was made to "separate them from the love of Christ¹," by the pains of bodily torture, and by the terrors and agonies of death. In order to describe their sufferings, the apostle has adopted the thrilling words of the psalmist, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." We have now to speak of the persecutions, and to inquire what influence for good or evil they exercised upon the progress of the Gospel. With regard to the individual martyrs, we are sure, as St Paul expressed it in the passage to which I have just referred, that they were "more than conquerors, through him that loved them." They joined "the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven²," and their triumph was complete. May we say that the "Church militant here on earth" also came forth from her troubles "more than conqueror?"

¹ Rom. viii. 35.

² Heb. xii. 23.

I need not remind you, that several if not all the Apostles were permitted, either by their sufferings or by their death, to “glorify God.” Their cases must be distinguished from those of any other martyrs. For others died in assertion of their *belief*; but the Apostles by their deaths attested the truth of certain facts, whereof they themselves were eye-witnesses; those facts being the circumstances of their Master’s life and ministry, which they also caused to be written for our learning in the four Gospels. Their testimony, therefore, is the highest possible evidence, and must always have been, as it now is, an invincible weapon in the hands of the Christian apologist. For though some may be found willing to suffer for a false opinion, it has been well observed, that “no man, not even an enthusiast, will lay down his life in confirmation of facts which he knows to be false¹.” But we proceed to consider in what way they also glorified God, who came after, and who having been stedfast to the teaching of the Apostles, followed also stedfastly the example of their sufferings.

It is not my purpose to enumerate the motives, nor to trace the course of the persecutions, nor to distinguish their several out-

¹ Jortin, Discourse II. *On the Truth of Christianity.*

breaks, extending over a space of three centuries. In some instances they were confined to particular localities, where the populace, having been wrought up to a state of fanatical phrensy, demanded the death of those whom they denounced as Atheists; and the magistrates, seeing, like Pilate, that they “could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made¹,” consented to shed the innocent blood. But there was at least one occasion on which the persecution was general, as catholic as the Church itself. The ancient superstition had so entwined itself around the pillars of the state, that the rulers imagined it was an essential support to that fabric which it only tended to impair. They therefore took alarm at the establishment within their dominions of a religion in which *they* were not acknowledged to be divine, and of a kingdom which they could not sway with their sceptre. Had they made due inquiry into the doctrines of that religion, and the nature of that kingdom, they would have discovered a closer bond of union for their subjects, and a stronger support to their own power, than any that had hitherto existed. But, had they done this, they would have been wiser in their generation than many of the “children of light,” many

¹ Matt. xxvii, 24.

Christian governors in Christian times. They did what it was natural for them to do, and we may trust that the same palliation has been extended to them which was allowed to the Jews and their rulers, that "through ignorance they did it¹." They endeavoured by all the means in their power to suppress an institution which they regarded with jealousy and fear. They resorted to every kind of punishment, they spared neither age nor sex. In every province of their vast empire they made a voice to be heard of "lamentation and weeping and great mourning²." And after sternly pursuing this policy for a course of several years, till even their pagan subjects sickened at the carnage, they caused inscriptions to be cut in stone³, announcing to posterity that the Christian name had by their efforts been extinguished. But they were discomfited in the midst of their boastings; they were broken in pieces like a potter's vessel. The instigator of the last and most dreadful persecution⁴, he who had taken to himself the credit of extirpating Christianity, being at length worn out by the pangs of

¹ Acts iii. 17.

² Matt. ii. 18.

³ See Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, Part II. c. 7. Gruter. *Inscrip.* p. 210. 3, 4.

⁴ Galerius Maximianus. See Euseb. VIII. 17. Lactant. *de Mort. Persec.* 49.

disease, and the stings of remorse, granted rest and indulgence to the Christians, and besought them to pray for him to their God, and even, according to one account, concluded his miserable life by imploring the forgiveness and mercy of Christ.

It is to be remembered that while the most odious calumnies were publicly circulated against the Christians, no attempt was made to substantiate those calumnies before the tribunals of the country. No evidence, no imputation of any flagitious act was alleged. It was enough that a man called himself a Christian¹; no further witness was required. That name, first given at Antioch as a by-word², very soon became a crime. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ," says St Peter, "happy are ye³;" "If any man suffer as a Christian," that is, if he be punished for the offence of being a Christian, "let him not be ashamed." So spake one who in his day had known, what it is to be reproached, and what it is to be ashamed. He prepared his disciples for those taunts, by which he had formerly been overcome himself. He

¹ Tertull. Apol. ii. Just. Mart. Apol. i. 4.

² The name appears not to have been assumed by the disciples, but fixed upon them as a term of reproach by the heathen. See my *Commentary* on Acts xi. 26.

³ 1 Pet. iv. 14, 16.

spoke not in vain; for they who came after him, the more they were reviled for the name of Christ, the more they gloried in it; they remembered how their Master had foretold that they should be hated of all men for his *name's* sake. And even the boy of tender age with that name defied his tormentors, saying, "Do what you will; I am a Christian¹."

The disciples were hated without a cause, and condemned without a crime; and humanity shudders at the thought of the cruelties to which they were exposed. But into the detail of those horrors we need not enter. For it is rather our object to follow their consequences, and to ascertain what effect they produced upon the condition and progress of the Church. Did the noble army of martyrs and confessors suffer in vain? or did the holy Church throughout the world only increase the more rapidly, for the loss of her best and most devoted children?

Persecution has not been altogether an ineffectual weapon in the hands of our enemies. It has inflicted many grievous and lasting wounds upon the cause of Christianity; in one age driving out the Gospel from the kingdoms of the East, at a later

¹ See Neander, *Ch. Hist.* i. 208. (Engl. transl.)

period compelling the doctrines of the Reformation to relinquish the ground which they had occupied in Italy and in Spain¹. We cannot doubt that while it lasted, it did in some degree retard the progress of the Gospel in the Roman Empire. It is no wonder that Christians were found, who, in the presence of horrors worse than death, sprinkled incense on the heathen altars, and bowed the knee to Cæsar's image, and renounced the name of Christ, and gave rather their bibles than their bodies², to be burned, thereby earning for themselves the ignominious name of *traditores*, betrayers of the Word of God. The death of so many who were strong in the faith, and still more the apostacy of the weaker brethren, must have afflicted and disheartened many of those who remained; and had not those days been shortened, and the arm of the destroyer stayed, perhaps the Church would hardly have been saved upon the earth.

But for the sake of the elect those days were shortened. And when the direct and immediate consequences had passed away, it was found that the persecution had produced

¹ See the interesting treatises of M'Cric, on the *Reformation in Italy and Spain*.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

results the very opposite of those which its authors had anticipated.

I. The martyrs and confessors generally witnessed their good confession in a public manner, before many witnesses; and the constancy which they exhibited was not only a subject of joy and thankfulness to the brethren, but sometimes also put the accuser to shame, and excited the compassion of the magistrates; while he who had come as a careless spectator, went away thoughtful and disquieted. It had been said by a great philosopher of old¹, that the righteous man will endure, in defence of the truth, to be scourged, imprisoned, mutilated, crucified². An almost prophetic saying, as a Christian father³ has observed in quoting it; a saying destined to have its full accomplishment in the unflinching stedfastness of the army of martyrs. And if even the unlearned centurion, standing at the foot of the cross, was moved to exclaim, "Certainly this was a righteous man!" well might the student of the academy and the porch be impressed by what he saw, when he followed the infuriated multitude to the am-

¹ Plato, *Repub.* II. p. 361. Compare Cic. *Acad. Quæst.* II. 8.

² ἀνασκιδνυλευθήσεται.

³ Euseb. *Præp. Ev.* XII. 10.

phitheatre or the forum, and there beheld the most meek and quiet of his fellow-citizens emboldened in the name of Christ to confront “the mouths of lions,” to endure “the violence of fire” and “the edge of the sword.” Let it be sufficient now to make mention of one¹ such philosophic pagan, who by observing the fortitude of the martyrs was “not only almost but altogether” persuaded to be a Christian, and who having three times employed his learned pen in defence of the gospel, was finally required to seal his testimony with his blood. Nor did he disgrace that example of holy courage, which he had once beheld with so much admiration.

Indeed, the endurance manifested by the Christians took the whole world by surprise. It was a new phenomenon, not to be compared to anything which had taken place before: and even the persecutors could not fail to be amazed at it. With some² it passed into a proverb to express unconquerable pertinacity; but others were induced by it to relent, to inquire, and finally to believe. Subsequent experience perhaps has taught us, that such fortitude is not always to be taken as a conclusive test of truth and orthodoxy. We

¹ Justin Martyr. See his Second Apology, c. 12.

² Galen, *περὶ διαφ. σφυγ.* Lib. III. fol. 18. p. 2. Tom. III.

know that the courage of the early Christians, like every other great example, has given rise to many spurious imitations. Some men¹ in their fanaticism have even courted martyrdom; others have submitted to it out of obstinacy, rather than from conviction, as champions of an opinion, and not as servants of the truth. The fire of persecution has been sustained not only by Christians but also by Mahometans², not only by Catholics but by heretics, not only by protestants but by papists. The evidence of martyrdom was most unimpeachable when it first appeared, before it had acquired respect and dignity in the eyes of mankind; but if it were now repeated, it would probably be received with some reasonable doubts and suspicions. Not that we are even now altogether without this testimony; the same at least in kind, though not in the same degree. For there is a persecution which is not unto death, nor even unto blood, and yet is hard to bear; its weapons being disparagement, misrepresentation, and ridicule. And there is a certain unobtrusive courage in the cause of Christ, joined with patient submission to personal

¹ See Bp Kaye's *Eccles. Hist.* pp. 137—142.

² Foster's *Mahometanism Unveiled*, II. 467. Sale's *Koran*, Vol. II. p. 91, note o.

insult, which is nowhere to be found in the list of pagan virtues, and is the offspring of our holy religion. It is the almost involuntary habit of the truly religious mind, and being altogether without ostentation, and not capable of being attributed to hypocrisy or any false motive, it touches the hearts of men, and constrains even the scorner for a moment to believe and tremble.

II. Again, there was another way in which the persecutions tended manifestly to the diffusion of that religion which it was their object to suppress. Our Lord had warned the disciples¹, that when they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to another; he himself having given an example of such conduct, when to avoid the sword of Herod, he removed with his earthly parents into Egypt. They who obeyed this command, while they consulted for their self-preservation, did not fail to spread a knowledge of the Gospel whithersoever they went. Thus it came to pass, that in the persecution which ensued upon the death of the protomartyr St Stephen², the disciples were scattered abroad throughout all Judæa, and Samaria, and Phœnicia and Syria; and they preached the Gospel in those countries. In like man-

¹ Matt. x. 23.

² Acts viii. 1; xi. 19.

ner it is related, that when our own land was visited by that deadly persecution, to which the British protomartyr St Alban fell a victim, some of the clergy, withdrawing from the rage of the oppressors, fled to the remote and heathenish corners of these islands, and planted there the standard of the cross¹. Thus it commonly happens, that the machinations of human policy are made to defeat and stultify themselves, when they contravene the eternal purposes of God.

III. But there was a circumstance connected with the persecutions, which though almost unheeded by modern historians, was not without its weight upon the men of former times. It was observed² that all the persecutors, with scarcely an exception, received even in this life a token of the divine displeasure, and came to a miserable end. Nero was driven from his throne and hunted to death like a wild beast. Domitian was assassinated; Decius with his army sank in a morass; Valerian was taken prisoner by the enemy, Aurelian slain by his friends; Diocletian became insane; Galerius was the prey of a loathsome disease. To the Christian

¹ See Usher, *Ant. Brit.* cap. xvi.

² See the Treatise of Lactantius *de Mortibus Persecutorum*; Jerome, *Comm. in Zach.* xiv. 12.

apologist this series of disasters did not appear a blind coincidence, the result of chance. He traced in it the hand of an avenging God. He strongly urged it as an evidence of the truth and divine origin of the Gospel. This consideration may be set at nought by him who denies that the judgments of God can be discerned in the transactions of the world; but it was regarded in a very different light by the men of former times; and it appears to have made a strong impression on the mind of the imperial convert, who finally gave rest to the afflicted Church¹.

Well would it have been for the Christian name, had its professors learnt in their distress, that all persecution, whether on the side of truth or against it, is hateful in the sight of God, and in a worldly point of view inexpedient. But when they had been delivered from external enemies, they began to be at strife among themselves; and they thought to terminate their disputes by turning against each other those weapons, which had been wrested out of the hands of their common enemies. Catholics and heretics alike disgraced their cause, by resorting to measures of violence and extermination. Doubtless they

¹ See Constantine's Epistle to Sapor, ap. Euseb. *Vit Constant.* iv. 11, and *Orat. ad Sanctos.* xxiv.

thought they were doing God service; but they knew not what they did. Those domestic persecutions presented a miserable and repulsive spectacle to the heathen world, and greatly retarded the progress of the Gospel. And many centuries were lost, and much injury was done, to the cause of religion before men arrived at the conviction, that the peaceful weapons of persuasion are the only instruments, by which error can be extirpated, and truth established. Men have learnt this at last, if indeed they have now learnt it, by long and painful experience; yet they might have known it from the beginning, had they duly studied the example and the precepts of the Master whom they professed to serve. For he unceasingly addresses to his impatient followers, the rebuke which in the beginning he gave to Peter; "Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of Angels¹?"

IV. But it is not our present concern to lament over the evils of the latter days; we return to the inquiry, what were the conse-

¹ Matt. xxvi. 52.

quences arising out of those persecutions to which the *early* Christians were exposed? We have still another result to mention, which was favourable to the internal health, and by consequence, to the growth of the Church. It was supposed by some who lived in that fiery time of trial, that the prophecy¹ of John the Baptist was in process of fulfilment, which pointed to the coming of Christ with the fan in his hand to purge his floor, and gather up the wheat, and burn the chaff. And though we cannot accede to that application of the prophecy, we must allow that the Christian community was at that time sifted like wheat, and by the fire of persecution cleansed from many of its impurities. It is a subject of frequent lamentation with the ancient Fathers of the Church, that during the intervals of repose many disorders sprang up, and scandals prevailed, which caused the old and baseless calumnies of their enemies to be superseded by well-founded reproaches and accusations. Indolence², indifference to holy things, the excessive indulgence of private reason, ambition, uncharitableness, these and other faults incidental to a state of security, are mentioned as having been the Church's bane

¹ Matt. iii. 12.

² Euseb. viii. 1.

in a peaceful and prosperous age. But when the time of persecution ensued¹, the diminished band of believers became again a brotherhood that was at unity in itself; having a common sense of danger, and a common hope of reward; setting no thought on this world or the things thereof; carrying their lives as it were in their hands, ready to be laid down cheerfully whenever they should be required. Their loins were girded and their lights burning; they were sober and vigilant, tender-hearted and compassionate; they humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God.

Majestic indeed may have been the aspect of the Church, when after all her trials she sat down in peace, and kings became her nursing fathers, and the heathen who had raged against her were given her for an inheritance; when the kingdoms of the earth became the kingdoms of the Lord and his Christ. Yet we cannot forget the corruptions which befell her in that state of her prosperity—how by the smiles of imperial favour she was beguiled into a love of temporal pomp and power, and how the discomfiture of external foes was but a signal for the commencement of internal dissensions, heresies and persecutions. But to us who now look back

¹ Tertull. *De Fug. in Pers.* I.

upon those times, seeking in them for something which may quicken our faith and our zeal, that spectacle appears more edifying, more truly noble and triumphant, that spectacle which was given “to the world, and to angels, and to men¹,” when the Church was beleaguered by enemies intent on her downfall, and her children, if we may apply the words which the great Apostle² spake concerning himself, were troubled on every side, but not distressed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in their body.

We see therefore what were “the uses of adversity” to the Church in former times. The constancy of the Christians in their sufferings led the heathen to suspect that there must be some vital energy and truth in a religion for which men were even content to die; and every persecution had the effect of sending fugitives abroad, to preach in districts previously unvisited by the doctrine of Christ. The miserable fate of so many persecutors, whatever might be thought of it in such times as our own, was then regarded as no obscure

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 9.

² 2 Cor. iv. 8.

intimation of the divine displeasure—while under the chastening hand of affliction the Church became more pure, more amiable, more worthy of her heavenly Lord; his strength being made perfect in her weakness¹. And upon the whole we are justified in saying, that the very measures which were taken to destroy our holy Religion, became instrumental in educing fresh evidence of its truth, and in giving a new impulse to its progress.

But let us not coldly assent to this conclusion, and then dismiss it from our minds, as if for ourselves it could have no practical interest. It may be true that only a dis-tempered imagination would seek to trace a parallel between the former and the latter times. Yet there is hardly any period in the Church's history, which if we approach it in a teachable spirit, and ask of it a lesson for our guidance, will refuse to give us a response. And this is the warning which we receive from the ages of persecution. They assure us that any discouragement or opposition which the Church may encounter from the nations and rulers of the world is of little importance, in comparison of those domestic evils which are brought upon her by her own unworthy children. The efforts of the open enemy only

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

develope and consolidate her strength; but the elements of human imperfection, which she carries in her own bosom, are ever tending to mar her beauty, to impair her strength, and make her "ashamed to speak with the enemy in the gate." And, on the other hand, we learn, that as the arm of flesh cannot much retard, so neither can it greatly promote her advance. And though it may be in the power of a Constantine or a Theodosius to confer upon her the outward signs of stability and honour, the only real sources of her prosperity are to be sought first in the blessing of him who is her head, and next in the faith, the zeal, the mutual charity of those who are truly called her children. Far be it from her to deprecate the good-will of the nations and their rulers; for in doing her honour they are but rendering that homage which is due from the earthly powers to the will of God. And far be it from any of us to desire for her the hostility of the world, for though from such a struggle the Church as a body might come forth not only unscathed, but purified and strengthened, what individual among us can be sure that his own faith would not fail? It is the duty of the Church to conciliate the powers that be, and do all she can to bring them into subjection to the will of him by

whom they were ordained. She cannot look upon them with an indifferent or unfriendly spirit; but she has no need to court either their enmity or their goodwill. She may receive either the one or the other with equanimity, not doubting that either way the kingdom of Christ will be eventually promoted and established.

But I cannot turn from this subject without reminding you, that the truth which we have found to hold with regard to the Christian community at large, must be continually enforced upon its individual members. Each one of us is well aware, that he has to fear not so much the time of his tribulation as the time of his wealth, not so much the enemies which are without, as those which are within, even the lusts and deceits of his own heart. And many of us, I doubt not, may attribute their deliverance from a besetting sin, and the purity and inward peace which they now possess, to the hardships, the injuries, and the insults which they have experienced in their passage through the world. They are able to say with the psalmist¹, "Before I was troubled, I went wrong; but now have I kept thy word." And of this we are one and all convinced, that if we walk stedfastly in the

¹ Ps. cxix. 67.

faith and fear of Christ, as by the assistance of his holy Spirit we hope to do, then let the chances and changes of the world be what they may, they will contribute to make us more fit for the kingdom of heaven.

LECTURE VII.

THE EFFORTS MADE BY THE HEATHEN PHILOSOPHY
TO RESIST AND CORRUPT THE GOSPEL.

LUKE X. 21.

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes : even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

THE emotions of joy and sorrow are not so repugnant to each other as we are apt to imagine. They often dwell together in the same bosom. If the sweet water and the bitter, as the Apostle¹ says, are not sent forth from “the same fountain, at the same place,” yet they sometimes have their sources not far apart ; and in the tide of our feelings they blend in such a manner, that while the one prevails on the surface, there is a silent under-current of the other. Such has been the case, we may well believe, with the children of affliction in every age, and above all with him who was pre-eminently “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” He possessed at all times, as we cannot doubt, a joy which the world knew not of, and which the world could

¹ James iii. 11.

neither give nor take away. Yet there was one occasion on which he appears to have been moved with a peculiar impulse of joy; for on that single occasion it is said that he “rejoiced in spirit.” And why was he glad; was it for his own sake, or for ours? He rejoiced that his Gospel was revealed “unto babes;” that while it was beyond the comprehension of those who were filled with the conceit of human wisdom, it was plain and easy to every one, however lowly he might be, who received it with a simple and teachable spirit.

The words of our Lord will find an echo in every Christian school of learning. For we willingly acknowledge, that all our studies are useless, and worse than useless, if, instead of humbling our pride, they minister to it,—if, instead of leading to the knowledge and love of God, they make us forgetful of his Providence, and impatient of his service. They who come up to this seat of learning with the desire to enter fully into its spirit, and to make a right use of its privileges, must be assured that the knowledge of Christ, and of him crucified, is here confessed to be the first and best of all wisdom; and that to this all other objects, even all the studies and concerns of the world, are secondary and subservient;—secondary, because they belong to the things

of time, which will soon pass away;—subservient, inasmuch as each of them, in its different way, will discipline our minds, or school our hearts, making us more able to comprehend the doctrine, and to follow the example, of our Lord.

The wisdom of this world has long since done homage to the wisdom which is from above, and which was first revealed in the Gospel. The banner of human pride has been lowered before the standard of the cross, that standard which was once accounted to be the ensign of foolishness. But this submission was not made without a struggle. Long did the wise and prudent reject a revelation, which can be duly received by none but the meek and humble-minded. Men had been accustomed to think that a true acquaintance with the Most High was to be sought in learned contemplation and retirement, and that he was accessible only to those who trod the paths of human science. It was not to be expected, therefore, that philosophers would look with favour on a doctrine which spoke in equal language both to the wise and simple, first humbling them with the same sentence of condemnation, and again raising them up with the same promise of pardon and immortality. To assert that the common herd of men could

be purified and admitted to communion with God, was, in the opinion of the learned, an insult to their own dignity, a theory as absurd as if one should invest an inferior order of creation with the attributes of humanity. The philosophers, therefore, made common cause with the enemies of the Gospel; but being unable to assail their adversary with sound and valid argument, they betook themselves to the weapons of sophistry and ridicule; they scrupled not to conjure up ancient prejudices, and even sought to breathe new life into the dry bones of an obsolete mythology. But their mischief returned upon their own head. Christianity overthrew all its enemies. Philosophy shared in the general discomfiture; and being regarded as an implacable antagonist of true religion, it was for ages discredited and depressed below its proper level. The human reason being once subdued, was kept in bondage, and permitted only to labour like a culprit in chains. In this condition she raised up, as a great memorial of her slavery, the edifice of the scholastic philosophy. At length the time of her deliverance drew nigh, the era of the Reformation; then her chains were struck off, and she became what God intended her to be, the handmaid of Divine Revelation. To a higher place than that may

she never aspire, lest she be again smitten to the earth. For if she commit the sin of the angels, how shall she escape their punishment?

I have considered in my two preceding Discourses, some of the obstacles which the Gospel encountered in the commencement of its career. And we saw that, by its manner of overcoming those obstacles, an additional proof was given, that it was not a device of man, but a message from on high. We shall probably be led to the same conclusion, by observing its long-continued struggle against "the oppositions of science, falsely so called¹." Human nature, in those ages, had its dwelling, as it were, "among the tombs²;" for it had buried out of sight the great primeval truths of morality and religion; and it was possessed by philosophic fancies so multitudinous, that their name might have been called Legion, had they been marshalled in any order, or governed by any leading principle. In driving out those delusions, the Gospel obtained a triumph, which may justly be enumerated among the evidences of its divine power and truth.

The first great impediment to the Christian doctrine arose, not from direct opposi-

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 20.

² Mark v. 3.

tion, but from an insidious attempt, on the part of certain heathen philosophers, to accommodate it to their own tenets. We may trace the origin of this evil in the book of the Acts, where Simon, surnamed Magus, is mentioned as a temporary¹ convert to the preaching of the Apostles. We learn from other sources, that he employed to an ill purpose the knowledge which he thus acquired, distorting it to suit the oriental philosophy of which he was a professor. In this way a system was constructed, which, under the name of gnosticism, flattered the pride of the human intellect; and as it also gave the rein to the vicious propensities of our nature, it met with a ready acceptance, and rapidly overspread the world, threatening to supersede the pure and simple doctrines of the Gospel. How great and how imminent was the danger, we may infer from a single example, from the case of the Church of Ephesus. The great Apostle, who founded that community, never ceased to watch over it, to the very close of his life. On one occasion², he was hastening from Macedonia, wishing to reach Jerusalem before the feast of Pentecost; and as he knew not what might befall him in the holy city, he turned aside on his voyage, in order to

¹ Acts viii. 13.

² See Acts xx.

give a parting admonition to the Ephesian elders. And against what enemies did he warn them? Not against the priests or votaries of the ancient superstition, the men who had once been ready to tear him in pieces, crying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." He warned them not against the wolves which remained without the fold, but against those more grievous wolves which should enter within it, the false teachers, who should speak perverse things, and endeavour to mislead the flock of Christ to its destruction. And though he left them sorrowing at his departure, they were not long without comfort. For he appointed his beloved disciple Timothy to be their Bishop and Pastor. And when the danger which he had foreseen actually came upon them, he addressed Timothy once and again in Epistles which shew the anxiety of the Apostle, and the prophetic wisdom of his former exhortations. Hymenæus and Philetus and Alexander he mentions by name, as men who had erred concerning the truth, and made shipwreck of the faith; and others, it appears, had followed their bad example. Again and again he bids Timothy beware of the profane and vain babblings, "the questions and strifes of words," the "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds." While he

wrote thus, the time was at hand for him to be “offered¹.” But ere long another of the Apostolic band became the guardian of the Ephesian Church. Though the brethren were mistaken in supposing that St John² should not see death, but tarry till the return of their Lord, yet it was not without a purpose that his life was protracted beyond the usual span. He employed his concluding years in denouncing and confuting the heresy of Cerinthus. And if we ask what was the result of that long and perilous conflict, we have our answer in the inspired language of the same venerable Apostle. For thus was he commissioned to write to the angel of Ephesus: “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are Apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted³.” The primitive father Ignatius also gives his testimony, that in Ephesus no heresy took up its permanent abode⁴.

This one example may serve to shew us, by how great a danger the Church was menaced in the earliest times, when false

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 6.

² John xxi. 23.

³ Rev. ii. 2.

⁴ Ad Ephes. vi.: ἐν ὑμῶν οὐδεμία αἵρεσις κατοικεῖ.

philosophy endeavoured to act as a step-mother to the Gospel of Christ. But in order to see the danger at the height, and to observe the human reason in full conflict with Christianity, our attention must be transferred to another scene, and a somewhat later age. The city of Alexandria in Egypt was in those times the great emporium of the nations, a principal center both of learning and commerce. There the east and west met together, and interchanged not only the productions of nature, and the works of art, but the labours of the mind and the creations of the fancy. Thither the philosophers¹ repaired, and added to that land of monsters yet another chimæra, by combining the theories of Greece with the fables of Persia and India. They became strong in numbers and renown, and even threw into the shade the famous schools of Athens. But St Paul had not been afraid to confront the Epicureans and Stoics in the ancient seat of wisdom; nor were the successors of the Apostles backward to encounter the sages of Alexandria; and in the second century of our era, a Christian school was

¹ See Simon, *Ecole d'Alexandrie*, Vol. I. After its submission to the Romans, Alexandria began to lose the literary reputation which it had previously enjoyed, and became famous as the resort of philosophers.

established in that city, within sight of those who styled themselves the disciples of Plato. On one side were the shafts of wit and railery, the dreams of the mystic, the cavils of the sceptic, and all the memories and prejudices which could hold men to the ancient paths. But on the other side there was a message of glad tidings announced to be from God himself, certified by a cloud of witnesses, recorded in books of unquestionable authenticity, proclaimed by an order of ministers set apart for the purpose, illustrated by the devotion and active benevolence of those who accepted it. Against such a power what could be done by a philosophy, human in its origin, and without even human authority to recommend it, built on no uniform plan, but made up of different and contending systems, encumbered with theories which it did not believe, entangled in doubts which it could not solve; able to prove nothing, scarcely venturing to assert any thing for certain. We indeed can see that such a conflict could have only one result. But those who were engaged in it were unable or rather unwilling to perceive how great a strength was arrayed against them. Their efforts betokened infatuation and despair. They felt that the point at issue was not the predominance of one school or sect

over another, but the supremacy of the human reason itself. They were not content therefore now, as in former times, to remain coldly declaiming in their schools, but they condescended to go forth into the streets, and endeavoured to persuade the people. In the extremity of a common danger, philosophy entered into alliance with the pagan superstition, which it had always secretly despised, and sometimes openly ridiculed. Attempts were made to shew, that the various mythologies of the world were so many allegories, masking indeed, but still containing, the truth. It was observed, that the sacred books in the hands of the Christians, were a powerful instrument both for attack and defence. The ancient oracles, therefore, were collected into a book¹; that so paganism also might be able to appeal to its Scriptures. Elaborate treatises were composed attacking the Christian doctrine with all the objections which the most ingenious adversary could devise. The quiver of scepticism was exhausted; and if the modern infidel would assail the Gospel,

¹ By Porphyry. Euseb. *Præp. Ev.* iv. 6: Οὗτος (ὁ Πορφύριος) συναγωγὴν ἐποιήσατο χρησμῶν τοῦ τε Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν θεῶν τε καὶ ἀγαθῶν δαιμόνων· οὓς καὶ μάλιστα ἐκλεξάμενος αὐτῷ ἠγήσατο ἰκανοὺς εἶναι εἰς τε ἀπόδειξιν τῆς τῶν θεολογουμένων ἀρετῆς, εἰς τε προτροπὴν τῆς, ὡς αὐτῷ φίλον ὀνομάζειν, θεοσοφίας.

he must needs take up again the arrows, which long since fell pointless from its shield. At one time the Christian miracles were denied: at another they were referred to magic; and again an attempt was made to depreciate them, by adducing the lying wonders of certain heathen impostors. The calumnies which circulated among the people, the actual faults of individual believers, the disputes existing in the bosom of the Church, formed the subject of many a railing accusation against the Gospel of Christ.

But these attacks, instead of arresting the progress of the Church, served only to call out her latent energies, and to discover resources which might not otherwise have been perceived. And great indeed was the activity of the Christian school at Alexandria. The learning did not long remain altogether on the side of the philosophers; for among even "the wise and prudent," some were found meet to become "as newborn babes," and to receive "the sincere milk of the word." The heathen philosopher was sometimes transformed into the Christian apologist; every objection to the Gospel was patiently met and answered; not a few were retorted on those who advanced them. If any one ridiculed the foolishness of the Gospel, he was

taunted with the manifold absurdities of his own mythology. The holy Scriptures were diligently collected and translated into many languages; their text was ascertained, their authenticity vindicated, their meaning expounded. The true nature of the Christian doctrine was explained; the principles of the Christian life were set forth, and contrasted with that want of principle, which prevailed among the pagans. And as our holy religion relies not merely on reasoning and argument, like a system of philosophy or a demonstration of science, but addresses itself to the profound convictions and yearnings of the heart, the Christian preacher spoke with an eloquence by which the tongue of the rhetorician was silenced and abashed. For he spoke of human nature originally pure and noble, but fallen in Adam and far gone from righteousness, yet in its ruin retaining a trace of divine beauty, and ever longing to be restored to the image of God. He shewed how that restoration had become possible, through the sacrifice made by Christ; how the ravages of sorrow, sin, and death were to be effaced, and the body and soul were to be presented without spot or blemish before the presence of God. When he proclaimed his joyful message, and pointed to the evidence by which it was attested, the book in which it was

written, the orders of the ministry appointed to make it known, the sacraments ordained as the means of giving effect to it, he set forth a system at once congenial to the heart and acceptable to the reason, very different from those unsubstantial theories, which might hover in the imagination, but could take no hold either on the reason or the heart.

The fall of human wisdom was inevitable, from the moment when it allied itself with the ancient superstition, and endeavoured to stay the progress of the Gospel. The faith of Christ took possession of the world and the kingdoms thereof. One short reverse it experienced, when an apostate emperor ascended the throne and laboured to inculcate at once the fables of paganism, the theories of philosophers, and the virtues of the Christians. For this homage he still paid to the creed of his childhood, that even when he sought to suppress it, he held up its fruits, the good works which it produced, as a pattern to his subjects. But the reign of Julian was soon terminated by a disastrous death; and with him the pagan philosophy received its final overthrow. It lingered for a while, protected by its obscurity; till in the sixth century its last hiding-places, the schools of Greece and Egypt, were closed against it for ever¹.

¹ The school of Alexandria was closed by Justinian, A.D. 519.

Thus was subdued one of the most formidable enemies which had been raised up by the prince of the power of darkness, to obstruct the increase of the kingdom of light. But when philosophy ceased to exist as an independent system, foreign and hostile to the Gospel, did its influence altogether expire? Had it no effect upon the subsequent condition and fortunes of the Church? We have said that there were many who having been the disciples of Plato, became the servants of Christ. Did they in all cases submit to know nothing but Christ and him crucified? Did they retain none of the old leaven, no hankering after the things which they had left? It would have been well for them had this been the case. But as they continued to wear¹ the external garb of philosophy, so they not unfrequently declined to lay aside their accustomed habits of thought. They considered themselves qualified to supply that information on divine things, which the Gospel had forborne to give; as if where revelation ended, human wisdom might commence its work. Hence there came into the Church speculations concerning the nature of the Godhead, inquiries as to the origin of evil, attempts to reconcile the foreknowledge of God and the

¹ This was done by (*inter alios*) Athenagoras and Justin.

free-will of man, surmises concerning the interval which separates the present from the future life. On such subjects men "reasoned high,"

"And found no end, in wandering mazes lost¹."

There are questions in religion, as in natural science, which admit of no solution, and only bewilder the mind which seeks to investigate them. It may perhaps be well that such questions have been mooted. It may be profitable occasionally to recur to them. The knowledge that there are depths which we cannot fathom, may serve as a salutary lesson to our pride. But how greatly do we err, if we fancy that it is in our power to fathom those depths; and what mischief we inflict on the Church of Christ, if we seek to enforce, as divine certainties, our own feeble guesses and rash conclusions! In this way much tribulation has been occasioned to the Church; from an early period she has been harassed by a succession of controversies, heresies, and schisms, to which I need not now particularly allude. These obstructions were permitted by the good providence of God, in order, as we cannot doubt, that the faith might be more fully proved, and more clearly defined. The errors for the most part

¹ *Paradise Lost*, Book II.

have run their course and disappeared. The truth has remained stedfast. Some vain conceits, however, there are, distinctly traceable to the pagan philosophy, which still maintain their ground in a portion of the Lord's vineyard. Such is the Romish doctrine of purgatory, to which I have alluded on a former occasion¹, and which undoubtedly has its warrant, not in holy Scripture, but in the speculations of Plato. Let me now remind you of a practice, which may find its justification in the same unhallowed authority, but is altogether alien from the sincerity of the Gospel.

We have all heard of those transactions which pass under the name of pious frauds. We know that in order to confound the adversary, and convert the infidel, it was the habit of some Christians, even at an early age, to exhibit false miracles and spurious relics, to circulate interpolations and forgeries, such as the Verses of the Sibyl, and the Apocryphal Gospels. The example was followed in later times, by many who sincerely believed that this was a legitimate and an effectual method of promoting the salvation of mankind. False miracles and visions, fabulous legends and relics, spurious books, texts misinterpreted,

¹ See *Hulscan Lectures* for 1849, Lecture VIII.

doctrines perverted, such were the artifices with which the “sleight of men” was labouring to promote the truth of God. And, doubtless, in this way an advantage may sometimes have been gained over an unwary antagonist, or some simple barbarian may have been allured to a knowledge of the truth. But at how great a sacrifice were the ends attained; what discredit was brought on the Christian cause, when the fraud was discovered; and, even when it escaped detection, how it demoralized and debased the character of him who had recourse to it! Some there are, even among the great Christian fathers, whose memory we should more highly revere, and whose testimony we should quote more confidently, did we feel certain that they never resorted to any dishonest means of compassing the great end which they had in view. But whence was the practice derived; and how was it justified? Since it was used in propagating the Gospel, was the Gospel responsible for it? In what dark corner of the Apostolic writings was it to be found? Its advocates, indeed, rested on the command of St Paul, who says, “Speak every man truth with his neighbour¹;” and they pretended to infer from

¹ Ephes. iv. 25.

this, that they need keep no measures with those who were not their *neighbours*, not of the same household of the faith with themselves. For thus they chose to define the word. But in order to drive them from this subterfuge it was enough to remind them of the question, "Who is my neighbour?" and of the answer which was returned by the Saviour to that question. If I am to speak truth with my neighbour, where is the man to whom I may lawfully address a falsehood? No, not in the Gospel is there any shelter for such artifice. But we turn to the philosophic poets and sages of antiquity¹. With them we find that deception, righteous deception as they called it, was not without honour; and following in their footsteps, Origen, that great but erring father of the Church, ventured to give it the sanction of his authority. It was condemned by other authorities, more weighty and unimpeachable; St Augustine rose up and smote the serpent which had thus insinuated itself within the pale of the Church. But he did not destroy it.—It was destined to attain a colossal magnitude, before it was finally trodden under foot. And in later times mankind have beheld a society bound together by that

¹ On the origin of "pious frauds," see Note at the end of this Lecture.

Name which is above every name, attaining by degrees to great influence over both the temporal and spiritual affairs of the nations, but at length disclaimed by their own allies, and scouted by the world, because they maintained and acted upon the principle, that the cause of truth may be advanced by the use of falsehood, that the end will justify the means.

But we have not so learned Christ; and I trust that we shall never seek by any such methods to do him service. We cannot forget what is written; that "God is truth;" that "the devil is the father of lies;" that "no lie is of the truth." Greatly we desire that all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, should be rendered up unto Christ: but to promote this consummation, we dare not fall down and worship Satan. Slow, in our estimation, may be the process, by which the world is won to Christianity; but we cannot hasten it by disingenuous arts, by conniving at the vices of men, by misrepresenting the doctrine committed to our hands. By such unworthy means we might gain a temporary success; and we might perhaps escape the eye of the world; but there would be no real blessing on our labours, and in the sight of God and our own conscience we should incur a heavy condemnation.

And you, my younger brethren, who are come here to draw at the fountains of wisdom and learning, may you never cease to regard this place as the palace of truth ; and may all your studies and occupations work together, to confirm you in your allegiance to that sacred principle. While your minds are trained to receive the verities of exact science, and to distinguish in other departments of knowledge, the certain, the doubtful, and the false, may you be disciplined and made perfect in that higher kind of truth, which consists in sincerity and integrity of heart. May you follow it, not because it is recommended by the opinion of your equals, or the authority of your superiors, though these are high testimonies to its excellence, but because you love it, and are bound to it by a habitual and involuntary attachment. There are some who follow truth when it is convenient, but are ready, at the least provocation, to turn into the crooked paths of deception and guile.—They are self-deceivers ; for they think that in this way they shall maintain a good name, whereas they are generally detected, even by men.—They are slaves and cowards, afraid of the opinion of the world, without any respect for themselves ; and will not Christ be

ashamed to call them his brethren? Be ye not like unto them. But whether you are in the presence of good men, take no thought how you shall dissemble your failings and your faults—or whether you are thrown into the company of the wicked, make no concealment of your virtues, shrink not from acknowledging and acting upon your real principles. In both cases, and indeed in all your intercourse with men, you have need to be of a good courage, and ever watchful over yourselves. There is a Spirit, who, if you seek his holy influence, will lead you into all truth, and keep you in the same. And the truth shall make you free: free from the fear of men, free from doubts and perplexities, free from the chains of sin. You little know from how many difficulties and embarrassments, from how many actual sins, you will be preserved, if the love of truth be a leading principle of your conduct. Ingenuousness and simplicity are not inconsistent with advancing years, though they are so commonly laid aside in the race of life, that we are apt to associate them with the early prime. Watch over those precious jewels with a godly jealousy, and bind them closely to your forehead. They will become more precious as you grow older. If

you lose them, there is nothing which can supply their place, nothing which like them can illumine and cheer your soul. If you retain them, you may grow “wise and prudent” in earthly wisdom, and at the same time continue as the babes in whom Christ rejoices, and to whom the mysteries of godliness shall be revealed.

NOTE ON LECTURE VII.

ON THE ORIGIN OF PIOUS FRAUDS.

Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.

THE view taken in the Lecture as to the origin of "pious frauds," is derived from a learned tract by Mosheim, entitled *Dissertatio de turbatâ per recentiores platonicos ecclesiâ*: several of the illustrations which follow are from the same source.

I. *Pseudepigrapha. Supposititious writings.* The ancient Egyptian authors used to attribute their books to the god Thoth or Hermes, the supposed inventor of writing. Hence the Neo-platonist philosophers of Alexandria pretended that the treatises which they wrote against Christianity were the works of the same Hermes, surnamed Trismegistus. (See Smith's *Dictionary of Mythology, &c.*, under Hermes Trism.). In like manner certain books of the Apocrypha, apparently written in Egypt, were attributed to Solomon and Ezra. The disciples of Pythagoras published their own books in the name of their master.

As early as the second century this practice was adopted by some over zealous Christians, who circulated books under the great names of St Barnabas, St Clement of Rome, Dionysius the Areopagite, &c.

II. *Mental reservation.* Euripides propounded a sentiment which was not in accordance with the general feeling of his age, and which he probably imbibed in the school of Anaxagoras, when he wrote the celebrated line

ἡ γλῶσσ' ὀμώμοχ', ἡ δὲ φρήν ἀνώμοτος.

My tongue, but not my conscience, took the oath.

The doctrine that an oath is not obligatory, if pronounced with the intention of not swearing, or with a mental restriction or reservation, has been held by some Roman Catholic doctors, *e. g.* Suarez ; see Dens' *Theologia*, Vol. iv. p. 190, de Juramento. (It is only fair to say, that in that text-book of Romish faith and duty, all falsehood is condemned, without exception, on the authority of Rom. iii. 8, and in conformity with the opinion of St Thomas Aquinas, (Dens, Vol. iv. p. 308) : Plato and Origen are mentioned as the authorities for the contrary opinion).

The principle, that no faith was to be kept with heretics, appears to have grown out of the notion, that heretics were to be regarded as the enemies of God, and that therefore every means might be lawfully used for their extermination.

III. "*The end justifies the means.*" We may cite as an advocate of this doctrine the Pythagorean poet Æschylus, who says in a fragment (*ap. Stob. ix. 23*)

ἀπάτης δικαίας οὐκ ἀποστατεῖ Θεός.

To well-meant falsehood God is not averse.

Timæus of Locri, said to have been a teacher of Plato, says, where true reasons fail we may sometimes succeed by false ones, just as poisons will cure a disease, which cannot be combated by wholesome drugs. (*de Animâ Mundi*, p. 566), ὡς γὰρ τὰ σώματα νοσώδεσί ποκα ὑγιάζομεν, εἴκα μὴ εἴκε τοῖς ὑγιεινοτάτοις, οὕτω τὰς ψυχὰς ἀπείργομεν ψεύδεσι λόγοις, εἴκα μὴ εἴκε ἀλάθεσι.

Plato, in his *Republic*, (Lib. iii. p. 389), justifies falsehood on somewhat different grounds from his master, but has adopted and improved his medical illustration. He says that the gods have no need of falsehood ; and men only require it as a medicine. And as medicines ought to be administered by none but physicians, so deception should only be practised by the rulers of a state,

for the advantage of the subjects, and not by the subjects themselves. θεοῖσι μὲν ἄχρηστον ψεῦδος, ἀνθρώποις δὲ χρήσιμον, ὡς ἐν φαρμάκου εἶδει. δῆλον, ὅτι τό γε τοιοῦτον ἰατροῖς δοτέον, ἰδιώταις δὲ οὐχ ἀπτέον. Τοῖς ἄρχουσι δὲ τῆς πόλεως, εἶπερ τισὶν ἄλλοις, προσήκει ψεῦδεσθαι, ἢ πολεμίων ἢ πολιτῶν ἕνεκα, ἐπ' ὠφελείᾳ τῆς πόλεως· τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοις πᾶσιν οὐχ ἀπτέον τοῦ τοιούτου, &c.

Clement of Alexandria (A. D. 200), probably had in his mind the passage which I have just quoted from Plato, though he found in the healing art a different analogy, when he said (*Strom.* VII. p. 863, Potter), that the good Christian is sincere in all his thoughts and words, except it be for the good of others, in which case he speaks falsely, as a physician sometimes does, to cure his patients; ἀληθῆ τε γὰρ φρονεῖ ἅμα καὶ ἀληθεύει, πλὴν εἰ μὴ ποτε ἐν θεραπείᾳ μέρει (compare Plato's ἐν φαρμάκου εἶδει) καθάπερ ἰατρὸς πρὸς νοσοῦντας ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ τῶν καμνόντων ψεύσεται.

Origen quoted with approbation the sentiment of Plato, and for so doing is severely censured by St Jerome. The original words of Origen are not extant, having been contained in the 6th book of his *Stromata*. Jerome translates them as follows :

“ Vos igitur loquimini veritatem unusquisque cum proximo suo : non debemus dicere, quis est proximus meus ? sed considerare, quomodo philosophus (Plato) caute dixerit : Deo indecens et inutile esse mendacium, hominibus interdum utile, et quod ne pro dispensatione quidem putandus sit Deus aliquando mentiri. Sin autem commodum audientis exegerit, verbis loquitur ambiguis et per ænigmata quæ vult profert, ut et civitatis apud eum dignitas conservetur, et quod noxium esse poterat, si necdum proferretur in vulgus, quodam tectum velamine proferatur. Homo autem, cui incumbit necessitas mentiendi, diligenter attendat, ut sic utatur interdum mendacio, quomodo condimento atque medicamine, ut mensura ejus ne excedat terminos. . .

Ex quo perspicuum est, quod nisi ita mentiti fuerimus, ut magnum nobis ex hoc aliquid quæeratur bonum, judicandisimus, quasi inimici ejus qui ait, ego sum veritas."

On this passage St Jerome makes the following comment;

"Hæc scripsit Origenes : negare non possumus : scripsit in his libris quos ad perfectos et ad discipulos loquebatur, docetque magistris mentiendum, discipulos autem non debere mentiri. Qui ergo bene mentitur, et absque ulla verecundia quicquid in buccam venerit, confingit in fratres, magistrum se optimum probat." (*Apol. 1. Contr. Ruffin. Tom. 11. p. 138*).

Yet, strange to say, he who here censures Origen so severely, and even unfairly, is himself, in other parts of his works, the professed advocate of deception; citing as his examples Origen, Methodius, Eusebius, &c., and even St Paul, of whom he says; "Quam artifex, quam prudens, quam dissimulator sit, ejus quod agit. (*Op. 1v. pars 11. p. 236*). He thought St Paul only *pretended* to rebuke St Peter. (See *Op. 1v. pars 11. p. 630—642. Contr. Jovin. 1. cap. 1v. p. 235. Epist. Augustin. ad Hieron. 76, al. 96*).

St Chrysostom speaks to the same purpose, saying that deception may be used with honour not only in war, and towards our enemies, but in peace, and towards our friends, *de Sacerdot. 1. οὐκ ἐν πολέμῳ μόνον, οὐδ' ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν εἰρήνῃ καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς φιλιτάτους χρῆσθαι ταύτῃ (τῇ ἀπάτῃ) καλόν*. And again, *πολλὴ ἡ τῆς ἀπάτης ἰσχὺς, μόνον μὴ μετὰ δουλεῖας προαγέσθω τῆς προαιρέσεως· μᾶλλον δὲ οὐδὲ ἀπάτην τὸ τοιοῦτο δεῖ καλεῖν, ἀλλ' οἰκονομίαν τινα καὶ σοφίαν*.

Such was the teaching of the principal fathers of the Church, at the beginning of the 5th century. An occasion soon arose, which put their principles to the test. A sect of heretics, called the Priscillianists, in their intercourse with the Catholics, affected the Catholic faith, and pre-

tended to condemn Priscillianus and his tenets; justifying this dissimulation by examples from Scripture, such as that of Jehu, (2 Kings x. 18), and by the words of St Paul, (Ephes. iv. 25), "Speak every man truth with his neighbour;" *i. e.* with his *neighbour only*. In order to expose and refute these heretics, it was proposed that the orthodox should turn against them their own weapons, and should mingle among them, professing for a time to approve of their doctrines.

St Augustine in his treatise *contra Mendacium*, combats this scheme, shewing that it is contrary to the principles of the Gospel, and to the example and command of Him who is "the Truth;" that it is a worse sort of wickedness than that of the heretics who are sought to be reclaimed by it; and that its most probable effect will be to confirm them in their heresy. "Videsne quo tendat hoc malum? ut scilicet non solum nos illis, ipsique nobis, sed omnis frater omni fratri non immerito videatur suspectus. Atque ita dum per mendacium tenditur ut doceatur fides, id agitur potius ut nulli habenda sit fides." (§ 7) What if they ravage the flock of Christ like wolves in sheep's clothing? Our Lord has not commanded us to oppose them by putting on wolves' clothing; "non addidit ex mendaciis vestris, sed ex fructibus eorum cognoscitis eos... Interest quidem plurimum, qua causa, quo fine, qua intentione quid fiat; sed ea quæ constat esse peccata, nullo bonæ causæ obtentu, nullo quasi bono fine, nulla velut bona intentione facienda sunt."

He defends the suppression of the truth, as in the case of Abraham about his wife; and excuses Jacob's deception of his father as "non mendacium sed mysterium." In neither of these examples, I think, should we agree with him.

He allows (§ 33) that it is a point of some difficulty, whether we may not have recourse to a falsehood, for the

preservation and welfare of others ; but he meets the question fairly and boldly. “The man,” he says, “who never speaks falsely except it be for the good of others, may well be regarded with hope, though he is not yet entitled to our praise. But when we inquire, whether *a good man* may ever utter a falsehood, we ask a question which relates not to one who belongs merely to Egypt, or Jericho, or Babylon, or even to the earthly Jerusalem, which is in bondage with her sons ; but we ask concerning a citizen of that commonwealth which is above, which is free, the mother of us all, eternal in the heavens. And to this question the answer is, *No lie is of the truth*. “Ille certe est, quamvis re ipsa nondum, jam tamen spe et indole laudandus, qui nunquam nisi hac intentione mentitur, qua vult prodesse alicui, nocere autem nemini. Sed nos cum quærimus, sitne boni hominis aliquando mentiri, non de homine quærimus, adhuc ad Ægyptum, vel ad Jerichum, vel ad Babyloniam pertinente, vel adhuc ad ipsam Hierosolimam terrenam, quæ servit cum filiis suis ; sed de cive illius civitatis quæ sursum est, libera, mater nostra, æterna in coelis. Et respondetur quærentibus nobis ; omne mendacium non est ex veritate.”

The same language is held by St Bernard, *de Modo Bene Vivendi*, xxxi. “Non studeas mentiri, nec ut præstes alicui.”

It is worthy of observation that the indulgent view of falsehood which the fathers entertained is not made a ground of attack upon them by Barbeyrac, in his treatise *sur la Morale des Pères* ; on the contrary, he adopted it himself, and defended it in his notes on Puffendorf’s *Droit de la Nature et des Gens*, Lib. iv. c. 1 ; and Grotius, *de Jure Belli et Pacis*, Lib. iii. c. 1.

LECTURE VIII.

THE RESISTANCE MADE TO THE GOSPEL BY THE
PAGAN SUPERSTITION. THE RELICS OF PAGANISM.

GALATIANS IV. 8.

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

IF it is the propensity of some minds to be always contemplating the future with hope, it appears no less characteristic of others, to look back with regret upon the past. Many persons, indeed, have too good reason to take a sorrowful and wistful retrospect of their former lives. But there are not a few, whose course has been always a progressive one, and who yet, from time to time, remember fondly the low degrees¹ from which they have ascended. The mature man, in the exercise of all the faculties and affections of

¹ The ambitious man, according to Shakspeare, "Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees By which he did ascend;" (*Jul. Cæsar*, II. 1). Perhaps he does this *generally*; but there are moments when he is under the influence of the opposite feeling.

humanity, indulges a passing wish, that he could resume the thoughts and feelings of a less perfect age. He who has gained a high eminence in the path of ambition, is arrested for a moment, by the desire to return to his former obscurity. Even the liberated prisoner has been known to sigh for the land of his captivity, or the walls of his dungeon. This inconsistency of our nature is too familiar to require illustration. And if we have duly observed it, we cannot be surprised to hear, that some of the early Christian converts were occasionally disquieted and dejected, when they called to mind the old associations, the cherished friends, the time-hallowed customs, all which, in accepting the Gospel, they had for ever renounced and forsaken. Such feelings, though culpable, we should deem to be not wholly without excuse.

It appears, however, from the language of the Apostle in my text, and from other authorities, that there were some members of the infant Church, who clung to the memory of their former superstitions with more than transitory regret. Despising the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, they contemplated a return to their ancient bondage. Certain of the Galatian converts had been, to use the expression of St Paul, "bewitched"

with this feeling. Having formerly served those that were no gods, the deities of pagan mythology, and having been brought to a knowledge of the true God, they were lapsing again to those weak and beggarly elements, that doting and terror-stricken religion, to which they had been originally devoted. And if they did not actually return to the altars of idols, if they were ashamed of so directly contradicting their baptismal professions, yet they betook themselves to those obsolete Jewish observances, which bore an outward resemblance to the solemnities of paganism. They observed "days and months, and times and years." That is to say, they kept in a superstitious manner the sabbaths and new moons, the changes of the seasons, the revolutions of the years. Their former misbelief had left in them a morbid taste for ceremonies, a craving which the Gospel refused to gratify. They had recourse to the Mosaic ritual; and the Apostle does not scruple to say, that in comparison of the Christian worship, that ritual with all its external pomp, was poor and barren, and that the Gentiles, who went over to it, were but exchanging one yoke of bondage for another.

In the first age of the Church therefore, there were persons, outwardly Christians, who remained pagans at heart. When we trace

the history of later times, we find that this evil, instead of subsiding, increased, and attained its greatest height when paganism was nominally extinct. Several laws are still extant, which were enacted against Apostates from our holy Religion by Christian emperors¹: from these we learn that at a time when all the powers of this world were on the side of the Gospel, there were Christians who either relapsed altogether into their former superstition, or at least resorted frequently to the idolatrous rites of the pagan altars. And when such scandals were rendered impossible by the suppression of the sacrifices, and the destruction of the temples, the spirit of paganism found a sanctuary even within the precincts of the Church. But before we follow the progress of that secret and subtle mischief, let us endeavour to estimate the open opposition which the heathen religion presented to the march of Christianity.

Undoubtedly the system of paganism had been shaken to its foundations, even before the coming of Christ. It had been weighed in the balance by philosophers, and by them it had been found wanting. But we must not underrate the power which it still retained. It

¹ Gratian and Theodosius. See *Codex Theodosianus*, Lib. XVI. tit. 7. 1—5.

is true that the educated classes almost universally regarded it with a scepticism which they scarcely deigned to conceal. It could not well be otherwise with men, who had been taught to think for themselves. Yet even they could not entirely divest themselves of the suspicion, that there were some particles of heavenly truth, buried in the mass of absurdities which they despised. Nor were they willing to overthrow a religion which had at least been found useful, as a political engine, for the government and civilization of the lower classes. And in the eyes of the unthinking multitude what was paganism? It was a system, whose foundations indeed could not be ascertained, for they were lost in the depth of antiquity: but in its superstructure it was interwoven with the whole framework of society. It was connected with the public institutions of the state; it penetrated to the inmost recesses of domestic life. There was no part of the natural world which it did not pervade. To its service the sister arts of painting and sculpture had from their infancy been devoted. Its grossest fables had been made, through the medium of poetry, to assume an air of elegance, and a semblance of reality. It was so elastic a system, that while it readily sympathized with the virtues of

men, and encouraged their highest aspirations, it was indulgent and even obsequious to their vices. In a word, it was intimately bound up with the language and literature, with the habits and customs of the most civilized and the most powerful nation in the world. Was this a system likely to be overthrown and scattered to the winds by the assault of a few obscure strangers? St Paul has described the Athenian people as exceedingly afraid of their gods¹; and without asserting that the ribald populace had a distinct and serious belief in every fable of their mythology, or that the untutored rustic really suspected the presence of a particular deity in every brook which he crossed, in every thicket through which he threaded his path, we are justified in saying that the national religion, with its unlimited polytheism, with its gorgeous temples and images and altars, with its sacrifices and processions and festivals, had a strong hold upon the imagination and affections of the people at large.

In the face of such a system, what could the men of Galilee have done, had they been mere impostors or enthusiasts? They might possibly have erected at Athens an altar to

¹ δεισιδαιμονεστέρους. Acts xvii. 22.

their Lord, by the side of that which had been dedicated to "the unknown God." They might have added one statue more to the assemblage congregated in the Pantheon at Rome. For so much was conceded to the devotees of Egyptian Isis and Serapis, and many a barbarous divinity. But could they have prevailed upon the various nations of that great empire to renounce the ancient faith, and to receive a new one at their hands? Could they have overthrown every pagan altar, and dismounted every pagan god, not only from his pedestal of stone, but from his shrine in the hearts of men? Could they have made Christ Jesus to be all in all? The question is not whether this revolution could have been effected by a conqueror like Mahomet, who carried in his sword the irresistible credentials of his religion: but could it have been brought to pass by such persons as the men of Galilee and their successors, had not God been with them? Assuredly it was no effort of mere human strength, by which Samson brought down the temple of Dagon on the heads of the idolatrous Philistines¹; in like manner it was at the bidding of God, and not of man, that the stately edifice

¹ Judges xvi. 30.

of paganism disappeared, and gave place to the Christian Church.

Paganism did not yield without a long and desperate resistance ; and the efforts which it made to maintain its ground, are such as usually mark the decline of an ancient and popular, but false and hollow system. The most contemptuous language was held toward the Christians ; prejudices were excited, calumnies propagated, persecutions fomented ; but no attempt was made to shew, that the old religion had truth on its side, or that it satisfied the wants and yearnings of human nature. The tumult at Ephesus which is described in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, is a good illustration of the manner in which the popular feeling was excited against the teaching of the apostles. We find that for no less a time than two years St Paul had preached in that city openly and without molestation ; and the nature of his doctrine had become known throughout the whole province of Asia. With the prudence which characterised every part of his conduct, he had avoided irritating the prejudices of his Ephesian hearers ; and while he proclaimed the glad tidings of the Gospel, and denounced idolatry in general, he had abstained from any pointed and particular attack upon the local superstition.

It was acknowledged, that he was not a blasphemer of the goddess¹. This being the case, the people viewed with indifference the propagation of a new religion, till their jealousy was aroused by the apprehension that it was likely to supplant the old. At length he was obstructed in his preaching; not, however, by those whom we should have thought to be the natural defenders and patrons of superstition, the magistrates and priests. It even appears that he had conciliated the friendship of the officers, to whom the conduct of the pagan festivals was entrusted. For I need not remind you, that they who in our English Version are called the chief of Asia², were in reality the persons appointed to preside over the great religious ceremonies of the city. These magistrates were friendly, as they well might be, to one who came preaching a religion of peace and charity and obedience. As for the priests, they had their resources and their fixed sources of support, and so long as these were untouched, their zealotry was not greatly excited. But the alarm was taken by parties whose gains were immediately curtailed by the preaching the Gospel. The silversmith and his craftsmen, who made the models of the temple and its statue, and sold

¹ Acts xix. 37.

² Ἀσιαρχαί.

them to the pilgrims, these persons were naturally the first to raise an outcry against a religion, which declared "that they be no gods which be made with hands." They speedily produced a commotion, which it required all the address and authority of the chief magistrate to allay. And that which occurred at Ephesus, was repeated with more serious results in almost every city of the empire. They who gained their livelihood by the pagan ceremonies, were the unscrupulous promoters of all kinds of calumnies. And by means of those calumnies the populace were wrought up to a pitch of religious fury which frequently could only be appeased by the shedding of Christian blood. But notwithstanding these outbreaks, the old religion was gradually relaxing its hold on the minds of men. The calumnies were found to be false. Many persons in all ranks of life became believers. The attendance at the pagan sacrifices was sensibly diminished. Men were found bold enough to assert, that Cæsar was not a God. The alarm which had commenced with the makers of the idols, extended up to him who was the great earthly object of idolatry. The emperor conceived that the stability of his throne and the safety of the whole social fabric was connected with the national

religion. A general persecution was commanded ; with what results to Christianity, we have on a former occasion seen.

At length paganism was compelled to stand on the defensive, and to contend against its adversary in the equal field of argument. And then it was, in the last stage of its existence, that an attempt was first made to recommend it to the reason and consciences of men. For at that period, as I observed in my last lecture, philosophy also was reduced to its final extremity ; and waving, in the common danger, the contempt which it had entertained for the ancient superstitions, recanting all the slights and insults which it had cast on them, it held out to them a helping hand. Besides the elaborate treatises in which every possible objection was arrayed against Christianity, attempts were now made to supply paganism with that which it so greatly needed, an apology for itself. Until recently, it had been the fashion to discredit and explain away the myths and traditions of antiquity. But now a different language was adopted. To attend the feasts, the dances, the sacrifices, the mysteries, was now represented as the most delightful exercise and enjoyment of the soul. As for the images, they, after all, were not deities, but instruments, the conductors as it

were of human adoration, by which it passed from earth to heaven. And the innumerable deities themselves were not to be regarded as so many independent powers, and dominions, and principalities, but as the agents by whose intervention the Supreme Being regulated the order of the universe. The mythologies were recognised, not as literally true, but as symbolical of truth. The divine beauty of the oracles, their plenary, verbal and literal inspiration, was defended with a pertinacity, which reminds us of the purists, and other over-zealous advocates, who have upheld the canon of holy Scripture: while our more moderate and sensible divines are on this subject only adopting a theory, which a heathen philosopher had invented for the oracles. "From the Deity," said Plutarch¹, "proceeds the higher influence, the inspiration; he communicates the ideas to the soul, he kindles in it that light by which the future is surveyed; but neither the voice, nor the language, nor the expression, nor the metre, is from him." Yet even supposing that the divine authority

¹ De Pyth. Orac. v.: οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ θεοῦ ἡ γῆρυς, οὐδὲ ὁ φθόγγος, οὐδὲ ἡ λέξις, οὐδὲ τὸ μέτρον, ἀλλὰ τῆς γυναικός. ἐκεῖνος μόνος τὰς φαντασίας παρίστησι, καὶ φῶς ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ πρὸς τὸ μέλλον. See Neander's sketch of *the Emperor Julian and his Generation*. Eng. transl. § 1.

of those oracles had been established beyond question, they contained nothing which could militate against the new revelation, the lively oracles, which were set forth in the Gospel. Indeed there are extant certain responses, quoted by *pagan* writers, which, though veiled in the usual ambiguity, betray an evident leaning towards the doctrine of Christ.

There was another part of the pagan system, which had long been an object of ridicule, and which it required no little effrontery to advocate; namely, that which consisted in exploring the future by the observation of auspices, and by auguries. But even this was not left without defence; and it was boldly asserted¹ that the phenomena which happen in the ordinary course of nature, are signs and tokens conveying to those who can read them, an insight into the future destinies of men. Like the Pharisees of old, the soothsayers could discern the face of the sky; but how was it that they could not discern the “signs of the times?”²

This attempt to revive and refine the old religion, contained in it undoubtedly many views which, if considered by themselves, were ingenious, and even sublime and true. But when regarded as a whole, and measured

¹ See Plut. Pericl. 6.

² Matt. xvi. 3.

against the Gospel scheme, it could not but fail; for it was wanting in two essential points. In the first place, no attempt was made to prove that the belief in that particular form of polytheism was warranted by any divine revelation; still less was it pretended that a knowledge of that system was one of the innate principles originally implanted in human nature. There was therefore nothing to shew by whom the religion was constructed, or on what authority it relied. And in the second place, there were several feelings inherent in the soul, such as the sense of sin, the need of an atonement, the yearning after immortality, to which no religion of man's device, however transcendental, could give a moment's satisfaction.

After all the ingenuity, therefore, which had been expended upon it, the ancient faith was unable to cope with the advancing power of the Gospel. It might here and there gain an advantage; captivating perhaps some philosophic mind, which from early training had been rendered prone to receive it. But its doctrines were too cold and recondite to enlist the sympathies of the multitude. It had indeed its day, its brief season of victory. For the apostate Emperor Julian threw the whole weight of his example and authority into

the scale of this renovated paganism. But the slight reaction which he produced was followed by the still more rapid advance of Christianity. More than once in the course of history has a monarch made an ineffectual endeavour to rally and restore a superstition, which his subjects had already condemned. The downfall of paganism appears to have been precipitated by the reign of Julian, just as the Reformation of our Church received an impulse from the efforts of Queen Mary to arrest it. The will of the people was sternly expressed, and as sternly reflected in the enactments of the emperors. First, the revenues of the pagan priests were confiscated—then the sacrifices were forbidden—presently the statue of Victory was expelled from the Roman senate-house—lastly, the temples themselves were abandoned to the zeal, not always tempered with moderation, of the Christian multitude¹. At every stage of their

¹ (I) The confiscation of the revenues of the temples was commenced by Constantine, and renewed by Valentinian, Gratian, and Honorius.

(II) Constantius was, according to Libanius, the first to forbid the sacrifices. This prohibition was made more stringent by Theodosius.

(III) Gratian declined the office of Pontifex supremus, and caused the statue of Victory to be removed from the Senate-house. The old religion thus ceased to be formally recognised by the state. The pagans considered (not without reason) that

humiliation, the pagans sent forth an eloquent but unavailing appeal, addressed to the patriotism, the piety, and the compassion of the Emperor; and the writings of Libanius and Symmachus attest, that the old Religion did not fall for want of graceful and powerful advocates to plead its cause. Such then was the process—not unworthy even now to be borne in mind: shorn of its endowments,

unless these measures were repealed, their cause was hopeless—Hence the restoration of the statue of Victory (which had been first placed in the Senate-house by Augustus) became the great object to which their efforts were directed. To gain this point seven deputations, with the eloquent Symmachus at their head, went up to four successive emperors; and it was chiefly owing to the energy and influence of St Ambrose, that these attempts (favoured as they were by some of the Christian counsellors of Theodosius) were defeated. At length however the statue was restored by the usurper Eugenius, and so continued for two years and three months, till he was defeated by Theodosius.

(IV) In the year 386, Theodosius ordered his lieutenant Cynegius to close the temples in Egypt and Syria; upon this the Christian mob attacked and demolished many of the lesser, and some of the principal temples, such as that of Serapis at Alexandria. On this occasion Libanius addressed to the Emperor his oration *pro templis*. In the year 408 another edict was published, enjoining the demolition of images, and the occupation of the temples for secular purposes.

It is to be observed that paganism lingered in the Western empire longer than it did in the Eastern, where the influence of Theodosius was greater, and his laws were more strictly enforced.

See Liban. *pro templis*; Symmachi *Epist.* x. 54; S. Ambros. *contr. Symm.*; *Codex Theodos.* xvi. 10.; Beugnot, *Histoire de la Destruction du Paganisme*, Lib. I. c. 8; Milman's *History of Christianity*, Book III. chap. 8.

maimed of its services, disowned by the state, given up a prey to the mob, paganism breathed its last. May that process never be repeated in the case of any Christian Church!

But are we at liberty here to close our account of the struggle which was maintained between the pantheon and the Church? What if the most dangerous, and for Christians the most humiliating part of the conflict still remains to be told? What, if there was a spirit in paganism which did not die, but enabled it to revive, after all the wounds it had received, and almost displace the Gospel from its throne? The priests were scattered, the sacrifices discontinued, the images broken, the temples desecrated and destroyed, the gods¹ almost forgotten out of mind. Yet the work was not altogether well done; for it was done too hastily. The severe measures which were taken for the suppression of paganism, had a mischievous effect, by causing it to hide its head, and lurk out of sight, preying on the vitals of the Church. There was a super-

¹ Theodoret. Græc. affect. (περὶ τῆς μαρτύρων τιμῆς) p. 122. Sylb. Αὐτῶν τῶν καλουμένων θεῶν τὴν μνήμην ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐξήλειψαν διανοίας (οἱ μάρτυρες). τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐκείνων οὕτω παντελῶς διελύθη τεμένη, ὡς μηδὲ τῶν βωμῶν τὸν τύπον τοὺς νῦν ἀνθρώπους ἐπίστασθαι, αἱ δὲ τούτων ὕλαι καθωσιώθησαν τοῖς τῶν μαρτύρων σηκοῖς.

ficial uniformity of religion¹: with or without compulsion, men accepted the saving truths of Christianity. But they were loth to part entirely with the pleasing fictions of the olden times. They could with difficulty reconcile themselves to attend a worship which was without parade, in temples without images. They grew weary of lifting up their hearts continually to one and the same God, and of extolling “Him first, him last, him midst, and without end².” How far the Church set itself against those remnants of pagan prejudice, and with what energy she strove to overcome them, we cannot precisely ascertain; for the times to which we refer were barbarous, and are now wrapt in obscurity. But we know that during that dark period concessions were made, which we can never cease to deplore.

Not that all the concessions of that age are to be visited with equal censure. We may lawfully go out of our way to conciliate the prejudices of men, so long as we are sure that

¹ Libanius says (*Orat. pro templis*) that many of those who went to the Christian Churches did not really worship there; but stood in the attitude of prayer, and invoked, perhaps some pagan god, perhaps none at all. He justly adds, that in such matters persuasion should be used, not compulsion—καταστάντες εἰς σχῆμα τὸ τῶν εὐχομένων, ἢ οὐδένα καλοῦσιν, ἢ τοὺς θεούς. . . . δεῖ δὴ τὰ γε τοιαῦτα πείθειν, οὐ προσαναγκάζειν.

² *Paradise Lost*, Book v.

no sacred principle is endangered by our compliance. Certain things were permitted to the Israelites on account of the hardness of their hearts¹. For the same reason St Paul suffered Timothy to be circumcised²; possibly some things might on similar grounds have been yielded to the Pagans. If the Christian Church³ borrowed from the pagan ceremonial many of its external adjuncts, as for instance the incense, the lustral water, the lights burning at the altar, the votive gifts, this might be in itself a harmless condescension, and would only become mischievous, in case a superstitious attention were bestowed on the accessories of religion, to the neglect of religion itself. By the introduction of images and pictures into the Churches, a still greater peril was incurred. It was to be feared that the devotions due to the invisible God, would be sometimes intercepted by the visible objects made with hands. But even this innovation, if carefully watched and restricted, might perhaps have been justifiable, as the most effectual means of instructing an illiterate and barbarous people. We know from our own experience, that with such helps the imagination is better able to conceive a fact, and the memory to retain it. Among the Jews, the

¹ Matt. xix. 8.

² Acts xvi. 3.

³ See Middleton's *Letter from Rome*.

brazen serpent was for many centuries preserved, as a relic of former times, a memorial of the things which had befallen their forefathers in the wilderness: but when it had been perverted from that its original use, and made an object of idolatrous worship, Hezekiah brake it in pieces¹, and called it NEHUSHTAN, a thing of brass. And it was high time that the images should be expelled from the Christian Churches, when they were regarded as instinct with the Divine presence, and endued with miraculous power.

Other compliances, however, there were, for which no defence can be made, inasmuch as they were infractions of one of the first principles of the Gospel, the unity of the Godhead. We find an ancient Christian writer, no less a person than Eusebius², treating it as a matter of congratulation, that in the army of martyrs the Church had a class of personages analogous to the demi-gods of heathenism. When so eminent a person could allow himself to use such unguarded language, it is no wonder that the ancient hero-worship was before long resuscitated, with little more than a nominal change, in the saint-worship of the Christians. Without entering now into particulars on this subject, I would only direct

¹ 2 Kings xviii. 4.

² *Præp. Ev.* XIII. 11. Theodoret. *supra*, p. 206.

your attention to one instance, which is the most flagrant of all.

The Virgin mother of our Lord we willingly acknowledge to have been highly blessed among women. We would not be wanting in a reverent regard to her; for he that is mighty hath magnified her, and holy is his Name¹. Her character and her history are not indeed very prominently set forth in holy Scripture: still we may derive much benefit from meditating her spotless purity, and meekness of spirit, and from recollecting the sorrow to which even she, with all her high privileges, was exposed. But when we see her invested with the attributes of Deity², and worshipped as such, when we hear of her images, like those of the Ephesian Artemis, sent down from heaven, when we are told that her influence over her Divine Son is irresistible, and that she is able to address him in the language, not of entreaty, but of command³, we are amazed at these things, and we ask, by what authority this throne has been set for her in the heavenly places? We search the Bible, and examine diligently the

¹ See Bishop Pearson, *On the Creed*, Art. II. Bishop Bull, Sermon IV.

² See Middleton's *Letter from Rome: Tyler's Romish Worship of the Virgin*.

³ "Non rogans, sed imperans." Damianus, quoted by Bishop Bull, Sermon IV.

records of Christian antiquity. The result is, that the worship of the Virgin receives no sanction, either directly or indirectly, from any passage of holy Scripture; that it had no existence in the primitive Church; that it is not countenanced by any sentence or remark of any ecclesiastical writer, either in the East or the West, for more than 500 years. We then ask again, where we are to seek for its origin, and how we are to account for its finding favour with the Church of God? The mystery appears to be solved by a reference to the heathen mythology. Throughout the pagan world, a great female divinity was held in especial honour. It matters not what was the name of this imaginary being; whether it were Cybele or Rhea or Ceres, or Artemis or Isis or Aphrodite, the attributes of the goddess and the enthusiasm of her votaries were, for the most part, of the same character. No superstition was more obstinate than this. If the imperial city was a great centre of the Christian faith, it was also the last rallying-place of the ancient polytheism: and among all the fifty temples which occupied the Roman capitol, not one was more reluctantly abandoned than the shrine of Cybele, the mother of the gods. What could be more natural than that some of the heathen, joining

the Church as they did in multitudes, and not always from the purest motives, should wish to retain some semblance of a worship to which they were so strongly addicted¹? Accordingly we find, that the first instance of divine honour paid to the Virgin is afforded, at the end of the 4th century, by certain Christian women of Thrace², who carried her image in procession on a festive car, and worshipped her with such libations and sacrifices as were

¹ The following appears to me a striking illustration of the view suggested in the text. Sicily was very backward in receiving Christianity; and until the middle of the fifth century, the Gospel made little progress in that island. But in the year A.D. 431, the council of Ephesus pronounced the Blessed Virgin to be θεοτόκος, "the mother of God;" thereby, as Bishop Bull observes (Sermon IV. p. 101, ed. 1827), inadvertently exalting the mother, while the primary intention was to assert the inseparable union of the two natures in her Son. Soon afterwards, eight of the principal temples in Sicily were thrown open to the worship of the Virgin; viz. I. The temple of Minerva at Syracuse. II. The temple of Venus and Saturn at Messina. III. The temple of Venus Erycina on mount Eryx. IV. The temple of Phalaris at Agrigentum. V. The temple of Vulcan on mount Etna. VI. The Pantheon at Catana. VII. The temple of Ceres at Catana. VIII. The tomb of Stesichorus at Catana. See the Jesuit Aprile's *Chronologia universale della Sicilia*, p. 601, quoted by Beugnot, II. 271. Aprile adds that in his time (1725) there were many ancient images of the Virgin in Sicily, bearing the inscription, Μητήρ Θεοῦ.

² Called, from the cakes which they offered to the Virgin, Collyridianæ. See Mosheim, *Hist.* I. p. 414. ed. 1841, and note, *ibid.*

usually offered to the heathen goddess of whom I have spoken.

Here then was an open attempt to engraft upon the Gospel one of the abominations of heathenism. But this open attempt was at once denounced as a heresy, and suppressed. The ancient father¹ who treats of it does not temporize with it, nor seek to extenuate it. He exposes it as an attempt to transfer to the creature that honour which is due only to the Creator. He draws no nice distinction, like that which has been since relied on, between *latria* and *dulia*, between the worship rendered to the Creator, and the veneration accorded to the creature. But that which could not be accomplished openly, was done surreptitiously. By what slow degrees the worship of the blessed Virgin was established we need not now inquire. We are sure that it was hailed by many who, like Lot's wife, were fondly and regretfully looking back upon the devastation which was behind them. Moreover it was congenial to certain tender and affectionate feelings of our nature, which are easily tampered with and misled. And to remove any scruples which might remain, visions and miracles were alleged, the genuineness of which no man cared to question. Lastly, the arts of painting and sculpture and

¹ Epiphanius, *Hæres.* LXXVIII.

poetry, once the handmaids of the pagan mythology, were called in, to give substance and beauty and dignity to the Christian polytheism. Of the practical influence of those arts, for good or for evil, in religious affairs, we perhaps, situated as we are, can form no conception. But in some countries they still contribute in no small degree to uphold the corruptions of which I speak.

And what are we to think of the men who in those times were shepherds of the flock of Christ? can we say that they were faithful to their charge? To permit the entrance of such abuses, to acquiesce in their growth, to sanction their establishment,—these indeed were grievous faults. But a greater and more irretrievable error was subsequently committed. For the time arrived when mankind became sufficiently enlightened to see this heathenish system in its true colours. They felt its folly and its wickedness; they urgently called for its abolition. Yet, instead of giving heed to this reasonable demand, the ruling powers set their seal to the abuse, and on its continuance staked, so far as they could, the very existence of the Church and the salvation of the world. We need not say what vast consequences flowed from their infatuation; how some portions of the Church struggled for liberty, and gained it, while

others were reduced to a more abject slavery; and how the unity of Christendom was dissolved, to all human appearance, for ever.

But let us refrain from following out these reflections, and return home to ourselves. If we cannot contemplate the history of the Church with unmingled satisfaction, if we must confess that human perversity has been ever toiling to mar the work of the Divine Spirit, may we not rejoice in our own condition? We at least are worshippers of no false gods. But are we worshippers of the true one? Do we really serve him? Is our religion "pure and undefiled before God and the Father?" Are there not among us idolatries, earthly, grovelling idolatries, quite as offensive to God, and quite as dangerous to the soul, as the superstitions from which we boast our immunity? There are sceptics who deify their reason; there are worldlings who worship mammon; there are sensualists whose god is their belly. Having their affections set on things below, they are but nominal Christians; keeping up perhaps the form of godliness, but neither knowing God, nor known of him. Of such children the Church must needs be ashamed, when she speaks with her enemies in the gate. Whatever zeal they may at times profess in her behalf, they unnerve her arm, they paralyse her strength. Unless

sanctity of life be one of her characteristics, the purity of her creed and the simplicity of her ritual will be of little avail in her conflict with the powers of darkness. She will be as a house divided against itself. Let every one of us therefore labour with all humility and zeal to set the house in order; each beginning the work there where he will find most to do, namely, in his own heart; casting out from thence all the idols which he has hitherto served, all malice and hypocrisy, and whatsoever may offend the living God. If our heart become a temple meet for the Holy Spirit, it will shed a heavenly influence upon all around us; and while busily working out our own salvation, we shall not be living merely to ourselves; but we shall do more to save the souls of others than if we spent our time in chiding their follies, and inveighing against their vices. For we shall be, like the Thessalonians¹ of old, ensamples from whom the Word of the Lord will sound forth; and in every place the knowledge of our faith will be spread abroad. And the glory of the Lord, which was revealed in Christ, will be reflected even in us, his unworthy servants.

¹ 1 Thess. i. 8.

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