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The Early Days of Christianity

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PREFACE.

I complete in this volume the work which has absorbed such leisure as could be spared from many and onerous duties during the last twelve years. My object has been to furnish English readers with a companion, partly historic and partly expository, to the whole of the New Testament. By attention to the minutest details of the original, by availing myself to the best of my power of the results of modern criticism, by trying to concentrate upon the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists such light as may be derived from Jewish, Pagan, or Christian sources, I have endeavoured to fulfil my ordination vow and to show diligence in such studies as help to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. The "Life of Christ" was intended mainly as a commentary upon the Gospels. It was written in such a form as should reproduce whatever I had been able to learn from the close examination of every word which they contain, and should at the same time set forth the living reality of the scenes recorded. In the "Life of Saint Paul" I wished to incorporate the details of the Acts of the Apostles with such biographical incidents as can be derived from the Epistles of Saint Paul; and to take the reader through the

Epistles themselves in a way which might enable him, with keener interest, to judge of their separate purpose and peculiarities by grasping the circumstances under which each of them was written. The present volumes are an attempt to set forth, in their distinctive characteristics, the work and the writings of Saint Peter, Saint James, Saint Jude, Saint John, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. If my effort has been in any degree successful, the reader should carry away from these pages some conception of the varieties of religious thought which prevailed in the schools of Jerusalem and of Alexandria, and also of those phases of theology which are represented by the writings of the two greatest of the twelve Apostles.

In carrying out this design I have gone, almost verse by verse, through the seven Catholic Epistles, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Revelation of Saint John— explaining their special difficulties, and developing their general characteristics. Among many Christians there is a singular ignorance of the Books of Scripture as a whole. With a wide knowledge of particular texts, there is a strange lack of familiarity with the bearings of each separate Gospel and Epistle. I have hoped that by considering each book in connexion with all that we can learn of its author, and of the circumstances under which it was written, I might perhaps contribute to the intelligent study of Holy Writ. There may be some truth in the old motto, *Bonus textuarius bonus theologus*; but he whose knowledge is confined to “texts,” and who has never studied them, first with their context, then as forming fragments of entire books, and lastly in their relation to the whole of Scripture, incurs the risk of turning theology into an erroneous and artificial system. It is thus that the Bible has been misinterpreted by substituting words for things; by making the dead letter an instrument wherewith to murder the living spirit; and by reading into Scripture a multitude of meanings which it was never intended to express. Words, like the chameleon, change their colour with their surroundings. The very same word may in different ages involve almost opposite connotations. The vague and differing notions attached to the same term have been the most fruitful sources of theological bitterness, and of the internecine opposition of contending sects. The abuse of sacred phrases has been the cause, in age after age, of incredible misery and mischief. Texts have been perverted to sharpen the sword of the tyrant and to strengthen the rod of the oppressor — to kindle the fagot of the Inquisitor and to rivet the fetters of the slave. The terrible wrongs which have been inflicted upon mankind in their name have been due exclusively to their isolation and perversion. The remedy for these deadly evils would have been found in the due study and comprehension of Scripture as a whole. The Bible does not all lie at a dead level of homogeneity and uniformity. It is a progressive revelation. Its many coloured wisdom was made known “fragmentarily and multifariously” — in many parts and in many manners.

In the endeavour to give a clearer conception of the books here considered I have followed such different methods as each particular passage seemed to require. I have sometimes furnished a very close and literal translation; sometimes a free paraphrase; sometimes a rapid abstract; sometimes a running commentary. Avoiding all parade of learned references, I have thought that the reader would generally prefer the brief expression of a definite opinion to the reiteration of many bewildering theories. Neither in this, nor in the previous volumes, have I wilfully or consciously avoided a single difficulty. A passing sentence often expresses a conclusion which has only been formed after the study of long and tedious monographs. In the foot notes especially I have compressed into the smallest possible space what seemed to be most immediately valuable for the illustration of particular words or allusions. In the choice of readings I have exercised an independent judgment. If my choice coincides in most instances

with that of the Revisers of the New Testament, this has only arisen from the fact that I have been guided by the same principles as they were. This volume, like the "Life of Christ" and the "Life of Saint Paul," was written before the readings adopted by the Revisers were known, and without the assistance which I should otherwise have derived from their invaluable labours.

The purpose which I have had in view has been, I trust, in itself a worthy one, however much I may have failed in its execution. A living writer of eminence has spoken of his works in terms which, in very humble measure, I would fain apply to my own. "I have made," said Cardinal Newman — in a speech delivered in 1879 — "many mistakes. I have nothing of that high perfection which belongs to the writings of the saints, namely, that error cannot be found in them. But what I trust I may claim throughout all I have written is this — an honest intention; an absence of personal ends; a temper of obedience; a willingness to be corrected; a dread of error; a desire to serve the Holy Church; and" (though this is perhaps more than I have any right to say) "through the Divine mercy a fair measure of success."

F. W. FARRAR. Saint Margarets Rectory, Westminster, June th, 1882.

CHAPTER I.

MORAL CONDITION OF THE WORLD.

The epoch which witnessed the early growth of Christianity was an epoch of which the horror and the degradation have rarely been equalled, and perhaps never exceeded, in the annals of mankind. Were we to form our sole estimate of it from the lurid picture of its wickedness, which Saint Paul in more than one passage has painted with a few powerful strokes, we might suppose that we were judging it from too lofty a standpoint. We might be accused of throwing too dark a shadow upon the crimes of Paganism, when we set it as a foil to the lustre of an ideal holiness.

But even if Saint Paul had never paused amid his sacred reasonings to affix his terrible brand upon the pride of Heathenism, there would still have been abundant proofs of the abnormal wickedness which accompanied the decadence of ancient civilization. They are stamped upon its coinage, cut on its gems, painted upon its chamber walls, sown broadcast over the pages of its poets, satirists, and historians. "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant!" Is there any age which stands so instantly condemned by the bare mention of its rulers as that which recalls the successive names of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and which after a brief gleam of better examples under Vespasian and Titus, sank at last under the hideous tyranny of a Domitian? Is there any age of which the evil

characteristics force themselves so instantaneously upon the mind as that of which we mainly learn the history and moral condition from the relics of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the satires of Persius and Juvenal, the epigrams of Martial, and the terrible records of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dion Cassius. And yet even beneath this lowest deep, there is a lower deep; for not even on their dark pages are the depths of Satan so shamelessly laid bare to human gaze as they are in the sordid fictions of Petronius and of Apuleius. But to dwell upon the crimes and the retributive misery of that period is happily not my duty. I need but make a passing allusion to its enormous wealth; its unbounded self-indulgence; its coarse and tasteless luxury; its greedy avarice; its sense of insecurity and terror; its apathy, debauchery, and cruelty; its hopeless fatalism; its unspeakable sadness and weariness; its strange extravagances alike of infidelity and of superstition.

At the lowest extreme of the social scale were millions of slaves, without family, without religion, without possessions, who had no recognized rights, and towards whom none had any recognized duties, passing normally from a childhood of degradation to a manhood of hardship, and an old age of unpitied neglect. Only a little above the slaves stood the lower classes, who formed the vast majority of the freeborn inhabitants of the Roman Empire. They were, for the most part, beggars and idlers, familiar with the grossest indignities of an unscrupulous dependence. Despising a life of honest industry, they asked only for bread and the games of the circus, and were ready to support any Government, even the most despotic, if it would supply these needs. They spent their mornings in lounging about the Forum, or in dancing attendance at the levies of patrons, for a share in whose largesses they daily struggled. They spent their afternoons and evenings in gossiping at the Public Baths, in listlessly enjoying the polluted plays of the theatre, or looking with fierce thrills of delighted horror at the bloody sports of the arena. At night they crept up to their miserable garrets in the sixth and seventh stories of the huge *insulae* — the lodging houses of Borne — into which, as into the low lodginghouses of the poorer quarters of London, there drifted all that was most wretched and most vile. Their life, as it is described for us by their contemporaries, was largely made up of squalor, misery, and vice.

Immeasurably removed from these needy and greedy freemen, and living chiefly amid crowds of corrupted and obsequious slaves, stood the constantly diminishing throng of the wealthy and the noble. Every age in its decline has exhibited the spectacle of selfish luxury side by side with abject poverty; of —

“Wealth, a monster gorged amidst starving populations :” —

but nowhere, and at no period, were these contrasts so startling as they were in Imperial Rome. There a whole population might be trembling lest they should be starved by the delay of an Alexandrian corn ship, while the upper classes were squandering a fortune at a single banquet, drinking out of myrrine and jewelled vases worth hundreds of pounds, and feasting on the brains of peacocks and the tongues of nightingales. As a consequence, disease was rife, men were short-lived, and even women became liable to gout. Over a large part of Italy most of the freeborn population had to content themselves, even in winter, with a tunic, and the luxury of the toga was reserved only, by way of honour, to the corpse. Yet at this very time the dress of Roman ladies displayed an unheard-of splendour. The elder Pliny tells us that he himself saw Lollia Paulina dressed for a betrothal feast in a robe entirely covered with pearls and emeralds, which had cost forty million sesterces, and which was known to be less costly than some of her other dresses. Gluttony, caprice, extravagance,

ostentation, impurity, rioted in the heart of a society which knew of no other means by which to break the monotony of its weariness, or alleviate the anguish of its despair.

“On that hard Pagan world disgust And secret loathing fell; Deep weariness and sated lust Made human life a hell. In his cool hall, with haggard eyes, The Roman noble lay; He drove abroad in furious guise Along the Appian Way; He made a feast, drank fierce and fast, And crowned his hair with flowers — No easier nor no quicker pass the impracticable hours.”

At the summit of the whole decaying system — necessary, yet detested — elevated indefinitely above the very highest, yet living in dread of the very lowest, oppressing a population which he terrified, and terrified by the population which he oppressed — was an Emperor, raised to the divinest pinnacle of autocracy, yet conscious that his life hung upon a thread; — an Emperor who, in the terrible phrase of Gibbon, was at once a priest, an atheist, and a god.

The general condition of society was such as might have been expected from the existence of these elements. The Romans had entered on a stage of fatal degeneracy from the first day of their close intercourse with Greece. Greece learned from Rome her cold blooded cruelty; Rome learned from Greece her voluptuous corruption. Family life among the Romans had once been a sacred thing, and for 520 years divorce had been unknown among them. Under the Empire marriage had come to be regarded with disfavour and disdain. Women, as Seneca says, married in order to be divorced, and were divorced in order to marry; and noble Roman matrons counted the years not by the Consuls, but by their discarded or discarding husbands.

To have a family was regarded as a misfortune, because the childless were courted with extraordinary assiduity by crowds of fortune hunters. When there were children in a family, their education was left to be begun under the tutelage of those slaves who were otherwise the most decrepit and useless, and was carried on, with results too fatally obvious, by supple, accomplished, and abandoned Greeklings. But, indeed, no system of education could have eradicated the influence of the domestic circle. No care could have prevented the sons and daughters of a wealthy family from catching the contagion of the vices of which they saw in their parents a constant and unblushing example.

Literature and art were infected with the prevalent degradation. Poetry sank in great measure into exaggerated satire, hollow declamation, or frivolous epigrams. Art was partly corrupted by the fondness for glare, expensiveness, and size, and partly sank into miserable triviality, or immoral prettinesses, such as those which decorated the walk of Pompeii in the first century, and the Parc aux Cerfs in the eighteenth. Greek statues of the days of Phidias were ruthlessly decapitated, that their heads might be replaced by the scowling or imbecile features of a Gaius or a Claudius. Nero, professing to be a connoisseur, thought that he improved the Alexander of Lysimachus by gilding it from head to foot. Eloquence, deprived of every legitimate aim, and used almost solely for purposes of insincere display, was tempted to supply the lack of genuine fire by sonorous euphony and theatrical affectation. A training in rhetoric was now understood to be a training in the art of emphasis and verbiage, which was rarely used for any loftier purpose than to make sycophancy plausible, or to embellish sophistry with speciousness. The Drama, even in Horace's days, had degenerated into a vehicle for the exhibition of scenic splendour or ingenious machinery. Dignity, wit, pathos, were no longer expected on the stage, for the dramatist was eclipsed by the swordsman or the ropedancer. The actors who absorbed the greatest part of popular favour were pantomimists, whose insolent prosperity was generally in direct proportion to the infamy of their character. And

while the shamelessness of the theatre corrupted the purity of all classes from the earliest age, the hearts of the multitude were made hard as the nether millstone with brutal insensibility, by the fury of the circus, the atrocities of the amphitheatre, and the cruel orgies of the games. Augustus, in the document annexed to his will, mentioned that he had exhibited 8,000 gladiators and 3,510 wild beasts. The old warlike spirit of the Romans was dead among the gilded youth of families in which distinction of any kind was certain to bring down upon its most prominent members the murderous suspicion of irresponsible despots. The spirit which had once led the Domitii and the Fabii “to drink delight of battle with their peers” on the plains of Gaul and in the forests of Germany, was now satiated by gazing on criminals fighting for dear life with bears and tigers, or upon bands of gladiators who hacked each other to pieces on the encrimsoned sand. The languid enervation of the delicate and dissolute aristocrat could only be amused by magnificence and stimulated by grossness or by blood. Thus the gracious illusions by which true Art has ever aimed at purging the passions of terror and pity, were extinguished by the realism of tragedies ignobly horrible, and comedies intolerably base. Two phrases sum up the characteristics of Roman civilization in the days of the Empire — heartless cruelty, and unfathomable corruption.

If there had been a refuge anywhere for the sentiments of outraged virtue and outraged humanity, we might have hoped to find it in the Senate, the members of which were heirs of so many noble and austere traditions. But — even in the days of Tiberius — the Senate, as Tacitus tells us, had rushed headlong into the most servile flattery, and this would not have been possible if its members had not been tainted by the prevalent deterioration. It was before the once grave and pureminded Senators of Rome — the greatness of whose state was founded on the sanctity of family relationships — that the Censor Metellus had declared in a.u.c. 602, without one dissentient murmur, that marriage could only be regarded as an intolerable necessity. Before that same Senate, at an earlier period, a leading Consular had not scrupled to assert that there was scarcely one among them all who had not ordered one or more of his own infant children to be exposed to death. In the hearing of that same Senate in a.d. 59, not long before Saint Paul wrote his letter to Philemon, C. Cassius Longinus had gravely argued that the only security for the life of masters was to put into execution the sanguinary Silanian law, which enacted that, if a master was murdered, every one of his slaves, however numerous, however notoriously innocent, should be indiscriminately massacred. It was the Senators of Rome who thronged forth to meet with adoring congratulations the miserable youth who came to them with his hands reeking with the blood of matricide. They offered thanksgivings to the gods for his worst cruelties, and obediently voted Divine honours to the dead infant, four months old, of the wife whom he afterwards killed with a brutal kick.

And what was the religion of a period which needed the sanctions and consolations of religion more deeply than any age since the world began? It is certain that the old Paganism was — except in country places — practically dead. The very fact that it was necessary to prop it up by the buttress of political interference shows how hollow and ruinous the structure of classic Polytheism had become. The decrees and reforms of Claudius were not likely to reassure the faith of an age which had witnessed in contemptuous silence, or with frantic adulation, the assumption by Gaius of the attributes of deity after deity, had tolerated his insults against their sublimest objects of worship, and encouraged his claim to a living apotheosis. The upper classes were “destitute of faith, yet terrified at scepticism.” They had long learned to treat the current mythology as a mass of worthless fables, scarcely amusing enough for even a schoolboy’s laughter, but they were the ready dupes of every wandering quack who chose to assume the character of a mathematicus or a mage. Their official religion was a decrepit

Theogony; their real religion was a vague and credulous fatalism, which disbelieved in the existence of the gods, or held with Epicurus that they were careless of mankind. The mass of the populace either accorded to the old beliefs a nominal adherence which saved them the trouble of giving any thought to the matter, and reduced their creed and their morals to a survival of national habits; or else they plunged with eager curiosity into the crowd of foreign cults — among which a distorted Judaism took its place — such as made the Romans familiar with strange names like Sabazius and Anchialus, Agdistis, Isis, and the Syrian goddess. All men joined in the confession that “the oracles were dumb.” It hardly needed the wail of mingled lamentations as of departing deities which swept over the astonished crew of the vessel off Palodes to assure the world that the reign of the gods of Hellas was over — that “Great Pan was dead.”

STOICISM AND CHRISTIANITY.

Such are the scenes which we must witness, such are the sentiments with which we must become familiar, the moment that we turn away our eyes from the spectacle of the little Christian churches, composed chiefly as yet of slaves and artisans, who had been taught to imitate a Divine example of humility and sincerity, of purity and love. There were, indeed, a few among the Heathen who lived nobler lives, and professed a purer ideal than the Pagans around them. Here and there in the ranks of the philosophers a Demetrius, a Musonius Rufus, an Epictetus; here and there among Senators an Helvidius Priscus, a Paetus Thrasea, a Barea Soranus; here and there among literary men a Seneca or a Persius — showed that virtue was not yet extinct. But the Stoicism on which they leaned for support amid the terrors and temptations of that awful epoch utterly failed to provide a remedy against the universal degradation. It aimed at cherishing an insensibility which gave no real comfort, and for which it offered no adequate motive. It aimed at repressing the passions by a violence so unnatural that with them it also crushed some of the gentlest and most elevating emotions. Its self-satisfaction and exclusiveness repelled the gentlest and sweetest natures from its communion. It made a vice of compassion, which Christianity inculcated as a virtue; it cherished a haughtiness which Christianity discouraged as a sin. It was unfit for the task of ameliorating mankind, because it looked on human nature in its normal aspects with contemptuous disgust. Its marked characteristic was a despairing sadness, which became specially prominent in its most sincere adherents. Its favourite theme was the glorification of suicide, which wiser moralists had severely reprobated, but which many Stoics belauded as the one sure refuge against oppression and outrage. It was a philosophy which was indeed able to lacerate the heart with a righteous indignation against the crimes and follies of mankind, but which vainly strove to resist, and which scarcely even hoped to stem, the ever swelling tide of vice and misery. For wretchedness it had no pity; on vice it looked with impotent disdain. Thrasea was regarded as an antique hero for walking out of the Senate house during the discussion of some decree which involved a servility more than usually revolting. He gradually drove his few admirers to the conviction that, even for those who had every advantage of rank and wealth, nothing was possible but a life of crushing sorrow ended by a death of complete despair. Saint Paul and Saint Peter, on the other hand, were at the very same epoch teaching in the same city, to a few Jewish hucksters and a few Gentile slaves, a doctrine so full of hope and brightness that letters, written in a prison with torture and death in view, read like idylls of serene happiness and paeans of triumphant joy. The graves of these poor sufferers, hid from the public eye in the catacombs, were decorated with an art, rude

indeed, yet so triumphant as to make their subterranean squalor radiant with emblems of all that is brightest and most poetic in the happiness of man. While the glimmering taper of the Stoics was burning pale, as though amid the vapours of a charnel house, the torch of Life upheld by the hands of the Tarsian tent maker and the Galilsean fisherman had flashed from Damascus to Antioch, from Antioch to Athens, from Athens to Corinth, from Corinth to Ephesus, from Ephesus to Rome.

CHAPTER II.

THE RISE OF THE ANTICHRIST.

All the vice, all the splendour, all the degradation of Pagan Rome seemed to be gathered up in the person of that Emperor who first placed himself in a relation of direct antagonism against Christianity. Long before death ended the astute comedy in which Augustus had so gravely borne his part, he had experienced the Nemesis of Absolutism, and foreseen the awful possibilities which it involved.

CHRISTIANITY AND ROME.

But neither he, nor any one else, could have divined that four such rulers as Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero — the first a sanguinary tyrant, the second a furious madman, the third an uxorious imbecile, the fourth a heartless buffoon — would in succession afflict and horrify the world. Yet these rulers sat upon the breast of Rome with the paralysing spell of a nightmare. The concentration of the old prerogatives of many offices in the person of one, who was at once Consul, Censor, Tribune, Pontifex Maximus, and perpetual Imperator, fortified their power with the semblance of legality, and that power was rendered terrible by the sword of the Praetorians, and the deadly whisper of the informers. No wonder that Christians saw the true type of the Antichrist in that omnipotence of evil, that apotheosis of self, that disdain for humanity, that hatred against all mankind besides, that gigantic aspiration after the impossible, that frantic blasphemy and unlimited indulgence, which marked the despotism of a Gaius or a Nero. The very fact that their power was precarious as well as gigantic — that the lord of the world might at any moment be cut off by the indignation of the canaille of Rome, nay, more, by the revenge of a single tribune, or the dagger thrust of a single slave — did but make more striking the resemblance which they displayed to the gilded monster of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Their autocracy, like that visionary idol, was an image of gold on feet of clay. Of that colossus many a Christian would doubtless be reminded when he saw the huge statue of Nero, with the radiated head and the attributes of the sun god, which once towered 120 feet high on the shattered pediment still visible beside the ruins of the Flavian Amphitheatre.

The sketch which I am now presenting to the reader is the necessary introduction to the annals of that closing epoch of the first century, which witnessed the early struggle of Christianity with the Pagan power. In the thirteen years of Nero's reign all the worst elements of life which had long mingled with the sap of ancient civilization seem to have rushed at once

into their scarlet flower. To the Christians of that epoch the dominance of such an Emperor presented itself in the aspect of wickedness raised to superhuman exaltation, and engaged in an impious struggle against the Lord and against His saints.

THE the days of Nero the Christians had never been brought into collision with the Imperial Government. We may set aside as a worthless fiction the story that Tiberius had been so much interested in the account of the Crucifixion forwarded to him by Pontius Pilate, as to consult the Senate on the advisability of admitting Jesus among the gods of the Pantheon. It is very unlikely that Tiberius ever heard of the existence of the Christians. In its early days the Faith was too humble to excite any notice out of the limits of Palestine. Gaius, absorbed in his mad attempt to set up in the Holy of Holies “a desolating abomination,” in the form of a huge image of himself, entertained a savage hatred of the Jews, but had not learned to discriminate between them and Christians. Claudius, disturbed by tumults in the Ghetto of Jewish freedmen across the Tiber, had been taught to look with alarm and suspicion on the name of Christus distorted into “Chrestus;” but his decree for the expulsion of the Jews from Pome, which had been a dead letter from the first, only affected Christianity by causing the providential migration of Priscilla and Aquila, to become at Corinth and Ephesus the hosts, the partners, and the protectors of Saint Paul. Nero was destined to enter into far deadlier and closer relations with the nascent Faith, and to fill so vast a space in the horrified imaginations of the early Christians as to become by his cruelties, his blasphemies, his enormous crimes, the nearest approach which the world has yet seen to the “Man of Sin.” He was the ideal of depravity and wickedness, standing over against the ideal of all that is sinless and Divine. Against the Christ was now to be ranged the Antichrist, — the man god of Pagan adulation, in whom was manifested the consummated outcome of Heathen crime and Heathen power.

Up to the tenth year of Nero’s reign the Christians had many reasons to be grateful to the power of the Poman Empire. Saint Paul, when he wrote from Corinth to the Thessalonians, had indeed seen in the fabric of Roman polity, and in Claudius, its reigning representative, the “check” and the “checker” which must be removed before the coming of the Lord. Yet during his stormy life the Apostle had been shielded by the laws of Pome in more than one provincial tumult. The Roman politarchs of Tliessalonica had treated him with humanity. He had been protected from the infuriated Jews in Corinth by the disdainful justice of Gallio. In Jerusalem the prompt interference of Lysias and of Festus had sheltered him from the plots of the Sanhedrin. At Casarea he had appealed to Caesar as his best security from the persistent hatred of Ananias and the Sadducees. If we have taken a correct view of the latter part of his career, his appeal had not been in vain, and he owed the last two years of his missionary activity to the impartiality of Poman Law.

THE EMPERORS.

Hence, apart from the general principle of submission to recognized authority, he had special reason to urge the Roman Christians “to be subject to the higher powers,” and to recognize in them the ordinance of God. With the private wickednesses of rulers the Christians were not directly concerned. Rumours, indeed, they must have heard of the poisoning of Claudius and of Britannicus; of Nero’s intrigues with Acte; of his friendship with the bad Otho; of the divorce and legal assassination of Octavia; of the murders of Agrippina and Poppaea, of Burrus and Seneca. Other rumours must have reached them of nameless orgies, of which it

was a shame even to speak. But knowing how the whole air of the bad society around them reeked with lies, they may have shown the charity that hopeth all things, and imputeth no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity, by tacitly setting aside these stories as incredible or falsa. It was not till a.d. 64, when Nero had been nearly ten years on the throne, that the slow light of History fully revealed to the Church of Christ what this more than monster was.

A dark spirit was walking in the house of the Caesars — a spirit of lust and blood which destroyed every family in succession with which they were allied. The Octavii, the Claudii, the Domitii, the Silani, were all hurled into ruin or disgrace in their attempt to scale, by intermarriage with the deified race of Julius, “the dread summits of Caesarian power.” It has been well said that no page even of Tacitus has so sombre and tragic an eloquence as the mere *Stemma Caesarum*. The great Julius, robbed by death of his two daughters, was succeeded by his nephew Augustus, who, in ordering the assassination of Caesarion, the natural son of Julius by Cleopatra, extinguished the direct line of the greatest of the Caesars. Augustus by his three marriages was the father of but one daughter, and that daughter disgraced his family and embittered his life. He saw his two elder grandsons die under circumstances of the deepest suspicion; and being induced to disinherit the third for the asserted stupidity and ferocity of his disposition, was succeeded by Tiberius, who was only his stepson, and had not one drop of the Julian blood in his veins. Tiberius had but one son, who was poisoned by his favourite, Sejanus, before his own death. This son, Drusus, left but one son, who was compelled to commit suicide by his cousin, Gaius; and one daughter, whose son, Rubellius Plautus, was put to death by order of Nero. The marriage of Germanicus, the nephew of Tiberius, with the elder Agrippina, grand daughter of Augustus, seemed to open new hopes to the Roman people and the imperial house. Germanicus was a prince of courage, virtue, and ability, and the elder Agrippina was one of the purest and noblest women of her day. Of the nine children of this virtuous union six alone survived. On the parents, and the three sons in succession, the hopes of Rome were fixed. But Germanicus was poisoned by order of Tiberius, and Agrippina was murdered in banishment, after the endurance of the most terrible anguish. Their two elder sons, Nero and Drusus, lived only long enough to disgrace themselves, and to be forced to die of starvation. The third was the monster Gaius. Of the three daughters, the youngest, Julia Livia, was put to death by the orders of Messalina, the wife of her uncle Claudius. Drusilla died in prosperous infamy, and Agrippina the younger, after a life of crime so abnormal and so detestable that it throws into the shade even the monstrous crimes of many of her contemporaries, murdered her husband, and was murdered by the orders of the son for whose sake she had waded through seas of blood.

That son was Nero! Truly the Palace of the Caesars must have been haunted by many a restless ghost, and amid its vast and solitary chambers the guilty lords of its splendour must have feared lest they should come upon some spectre weeping tears of blood. In yonder corridor the floor was still stained with the life blood of the murdered Gaius; in that subterranean prison, the miserable Drusus, cursing the name of his great uncle Tiberius, tried to assuage the pangs of hunger by chewing the stuffing of his mattress; in that gilded saloon Nero had his private interviews with the poison mixer, Locusta, whom he salaried among “the instruments of his government;” in that splendid hall Britannicus fell into convulsions after tasting his brother’s poisoned draught; that chamber, bright with the immoral frescoes of Arellius, witnessed the brutal kick which caused the death of the beautiful Poppaea. Fit palace for the Antichrist — fit temple for the wicked human god! — a temple which reeked with the memory of infamies — a palace which echoed with the ghostly footfall of murdered men!

Agrippina the Second, mother of Nero, was the Lady Macbeth of that scene of murder, but a Lady Macbeth with a life of worse stains and a heart of harder steel. Born at Cologne in the fourteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, she lost her father, Germanicus, by poison when she was three years old, and her mother, Agrippina, first by exile when she was twelve years old, and finally by murder when she was seventeen. She grew up with her wicked sisters and her wicked brother Gaius in the house of her grandmother Antonia, the widow of the elder Drusus.

THE FATHER OF NERO.

She was little more than fourteen years old when Tiberius married her to Cnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus. The Domitii were one of the noblest and most ancient families of Rome, but from the time that they first emerged into the light of history they had been badly preeminent for the ferocity of their dispositions. They derived the surname of Ahenobarbus, or brazen beard, from a legend of their race intended to account for their physical peculiarity. Six generations earlier the orator Crassus had said of the Domitius Ahenobarbus of that day, "that it was no wonder his beard was of brass, since his mouth was of iron and his heart of lead." But though the traditions of cruelty and treachery had been carried on from generation to generation, they seem to have culminated in the father of Nero, who added a tinge of meanness and vulgarity to the brutal manners of his race. His loose morals had been shocking even to a loose age, and men told each other in disgust how he had cheated in his praetorship; how he had killed one of his freedmen only because he had refused to drink as much as he was bidden; how he had purposely driven over a poor boy on the Appian Road; how in a squabble in the Forum he had struck out the eye of a Roman knight; how he had been finally banished for crimes still more shameful. It was a current anecdote of this man, who was "detestable through every period of his life," that when, nine years after his marriage, the birth of his son Nero was announced to him, he answered the congratulations of his friends with the remark, that from himself and Agrippina nothing could have been born but what was hateful, and for the public ruin.

Agrippina was twenty one when her brother Gaius succeeded to the throne. Towards the close of his reign she was involved in the conspiracy of Lepidus, and was banished to the dreary island of Pontia. Gaius seized the entire property both of Domitius and of Agrippina. Nero, their little child, then three years old, was handed over as a penniless orphan to the charge of his aunt Domitia, the mother of Messalina. This lady entrusted the education of the child to two slaves, whose influence is perhaps traceable for many subsequent years. One of them was a barber, the other a dancer.

On the accession of Claudius, Agrippina was restored to her rank and fortune, and once more undertook the management of her child. He was, as we see from his early busts, a child of exquisite beauty. His beauty made him an object of special pride to his mother. From this time forward it seems to have been her one desire to elevate the boy to the rank of Emperor. In vain did the astrologers warn her that his elevation involved her murder. To such dark hints of the future she had but one reply — *Occidat dum imperet*, "Let him slay me, so

so do but reign!"

By her second marriage, with Crispus Passienus, she further increased her already enormous wealth. She bided her time. Claudius was under the control of his freedmen, Narcissus and Pallas, and of the Empress Messalina, who had borne him two children, Britannicus and Octavia. The fierce and watchful jealousy of Messalina was soon successful in securing the banishment and subsequent murder of Julia, the younger sister of Agrippina, and in spite of the retirement in which the latter strove to withdraw herself from the furious suspicion of the Empress, she felt that her own life and that of her son were in perpetual danger. A story prevailed that when Britannicus, then about seven years old, and Nero, who was little more than three years older, had ridden side by side in the Trojan equestrian game, the favour of the populace towards the latter had been so openly manifested that Messalina had despatched emissaries to strangle him in bed, and that they had been frightened from doing so by seeing a snake glide from under the pillow. Meanwhile, Messalina was diverted from her purpose by the criminal pursuits which were notorious to every Roman with the single exception of her husband. She was falling deeper and deeper into that dementation preceding doom which at last enabled her enemy Narcissus to head a palace conspiracy and to strike her to the dust. Agrippina owed her escape from a fate similar to that of her younger sister solely to the infatuated passion of the rival whose name through all succeeding ages has been a byword of guilt and shame.

But now that Claudius was a widower, the fact that he was her uncle, and that unions between an uncle and a niece were regarded as incestuous, did not prevent Agrippina from plunging into the intrigues by which she hoped to secure the Emperor for her third husband. Aided by the freed man Pallas, brother of Felix, the Procurator of Judaea, and by the blandishments which her near relationship to Claudius enabled her to exercise, she succeeded in achieving the second great object of her ambition. The twice widowed matron became the sixth wife of the imbecile Emperor within three months of the execution of her predecessor. She had now but one further design to accomplish, and that was to gain the purple for the son whom she loved with all the tigress affection of her evil nature. She had been the sister and the wife, she wished also to be the mother of an Emperor.

The story of her daring schemes, her reckless cruelty, her incessant intrigues, is recorded in the stem pages of Tacitus. During the five years of her married life, it is probable that no day passed without her thoughts brooding upon the guilty end which she had kept steadily in view during so many vicissitudes.

AGRIPPINA

Her first plan was to secure for Nero the hand of Octavia, the only daughter of Claudius. Octavia had long been betrothed to the young and noble Lucius Junius Silanus, a great grandson of Augustus, who might well be dreaded as a strong protector of the rights of his young brother in law, Britannicus. As a favourite of the Emperor, and the betrothed of the Emperor's daughter, Silanus had already received splendid honours at the hands of the Senate, but at one blow Agrippina hurled him into the depths of shame and misery. The infamous Vitellius — Vitellius who had once begged as a favour a slipper of Messalina, and carried it in his bosom and kissed it with profound reverence — Vitellius who had placed a gilded image of the freedman Pallas among his household gods — trumped up a false charge against Silanus, and, as Censor, struck his name off the list of the Senate His betrothal

annulled, his praetorship abrogated, the highspirited young man, recognising whose hand it was that had aimed this poisoned arrow at his happiness, waited till Agrippina's wedding day, and on that day committed suicide on the altar of his own Penates. The next step of the Empress was to have her rival Lollia Paulina charged with magic, to secure her banishment, to send a tribune to kill her, and to identify, by personal inspection, her decapitated head. Then Calpurnia was driven from Home because Claudius, with perfect innocence, had praised her beauty. On the other hand, Seneca was recalled from his Corsican exile, in order to increase Agrippina's popularity by an act of ostensible mercy, which restored to Rome its favourite writer, while it secured a powerful adherent for her cause and an eminent tutor for her son. The next step was to effect the betrothal of Octavia to Nero, who was twelve years old. A still more difficult and important measure was to secure his adoption. Claudius was attached to his son Britannicus, and, in spite of his extraordinary fatuity, he could hardly fail to see that his son's rights would be injured by the adoption of an elder boy of most noble birth, who reckoned amongst his supporters all those who might have natural cause to dread the vengeance of a son of Messalina. Claudius was an antiquary, and he knew that for 800 years, from the days of Attus Clausus downwards, there had never been an adoption among the patrician Claudii. In vain did Agrippina and her adherents endeavour to poison his mind by whispered insinuations about the parentage of Britannicus. But he was at last overborne, rather than convinced, by the persistence with which Agrippina had taken care that the adoption should be pressed upon him in the Senate, by the multitude, and even in the privacy of his own garden. Pallas, too, helped to decide his wavering determination by quoting the precedents of the adoption of Tiberius by Augustus, and of Gaius by Tiberius. Had he but well weighed the fatal significance of those precedents, he would have hesitated still longer ere he sacrificed to an intriguing alien the birthright, the happiness, and ultimately the lives of the young son and daughter whom he so dearly loved.

And now Agrippina's prosperous wickedness was bearing her along full sail to the fatal haven of her ambition. She obtained the title of Augusta, which even the stately wife of Augustus had never borne (during her husband's lifetime. Seated on a lofty throne by her husband's side, she received foreign embassies and senatorial deputations. She gained permission to antedate the majority of her son, and secured for him a promise of the Consulship, admission to various priesthoods, a proconsular imperium, and the title of "Prince of the Youth." She made these honours the pretext for obtaining a largess to the soldiery, and Circensian games for the populace, and at these games Nero appeared in the manly toga and triumphal insignia, while Britannicus, utterly eclipsed, stood humbly by his side in the boyish praetexta — the embroidered robe which marked his youth. And while step after step was taken to bring Nero into splendid prominence, Britannicus was kept in such deep seclusion, and watched with such jealous eyes, that the people hardly knew whether he was alive or dead. In vain did Agrippina lavish upon the unhappy lad her false caresses. Being a boy of exceptional intelligence, he saw through her hypocrisy, and did not try to conceal the contemptuous disgust which her arts inspired. Meanwhile he was a prisoner in all but name: every expedient was invented to keep him at the greatest distance from his father; every friend who loved him, every freedman who was faithful to him, every soldier who seemed likely to embrace his cause, was either secretly undermined, or removed under pretext of honourable promotion. Tutored as he was by adversity to conceal his feelings, he one day through accident or boyish passion returned the salutation of his adoptive brother by the name of Ahenobarbus, instead of calling him by the name Nero, which was the mark of his new rank as the adopted son of Claudius. Thereupon the rage of Agrippina and Nero knew no bounds; and such insolence — for in this

light the momentary act of carelessness or venial outburst of temper was represented to Claudius — made the boy a still more defenceless victim to the machinations of his stepmother. Month after month she wove around him the web of her intrigues. The Praetorians were won over by flattery, gifts, and promises. The double praefecture of Lucius Geta and Rufius Crispinus was superseded by the appointment of Afranius Burrus, an honest soldier, but a partisan of the Empress, to whom he thus owed his promotion to the most coveted position in the Roman army. From the all powerful freedmen of Claudius, Agrippina had little to fear. Callistus was dead, and she played off against each other the rival influences of Pallas and Narcissus. Pallas was her devoted adherent and paramour; Narcissus was afraid to move in opposition to her, because the accession of Britannicus would have been his own certain death warrant, since he had been the chief agent in the overthrow of Messalina.

INTRIGUES OF AGRIPPINA.

As for the phenomena on which the populace looked with terror — the fact that the skies had seemed to blaze with fire on the day of Nero's adoption, and violent shocks of earthquake had shaken Rome on the day that he assumed the manly toga — Agrippina cared nothing for them. She would recognize no omen which did not promise success to her determination. Nothing could now divert her from her purpose. When Domitia, the aunt under whose roof the young Nero had been trained, began to win his smiles by the contrast between her flatteries and presents and the domineering threats of his mother, Agrippina at once brought against her a charge of magic, and in spite of the opposition of Narcissus, Domitia was condemned to death. The Empress hesitated at no crime which helped to pave the way of her son to power, but at the same time her ambition was so far selfish that she intended to keep that son under her own exclusive influence.

Many warnings now showed her that the time was ripe for her supreme endeavour. Her quarrel with Narcissus had broken out into threats and recriminations in the very presence of the Emperor. The Senate showed signs of indignant recalcitrance against her attacks on those whose power she feared, or whose wealth she envied. Her designs were now so transparent, that Narcissus began openly to show his compassion for the hapless and almost deserted Britannicus. But, worst of all, it was clear that Claudius himself was becoming conscious of his perilous mistake, and was growing weary both of her and of her son. He had changed his former wife for a worse. If Messalina had been unfaithful to him, so, he began to suspect, was Agrippina, and he could not but feel that she had changed her old fawning caresses for a threatening insolence. He was sick of her ambition, of her intrigues, of the hatred she always displayed to his oldest and most faithful servants, of her pushing eagerness for her Nero, of her treacherous cruelty towards his own children. He was heard to drop ominous expressions. He began to display towards Britannicus a yearning affection, full of the passionate hope that when he was a little older his wrongs would be avenged. All this Agrippina learned from her spies. Not a day was to be lost. Narcissus, whose presence was the chief security for his master's life, had gone to the baths of Sinuessa to find relief from a fit of the gout. There lay at this time in prison, on a charge of poisoning, a woman named Locusta, whose career recalls the Mrs. Turner of the reign of James I., and the Marchioness de Brinvilliers of the court of Louis XI Y. To this woman Agrippina repaired with the promise of freedom and reward, if she would provide a poison which would disturb the brain without too rapidly destroying life. Halotus, the Emperor's praegustator, or taster, and Xenophon, his physician, had been

already won over to share in the deed. The poison was infused into a fine and delicious mushroom of a kind of which Claudius was known to be particularly fond, and Agrippina gave this mushroom to her husband with her own hand. After tasting it he became very quiet, and then called for wine. He was carried off to bed senseless, but the quantity of wine which he had drunk weakened the effects of the poison, and at a sign from Agrippina the faithless physician finished the murder by tickling the throat of the sufferer with a poisoned feather. Before the morning of Oct. 13, A.D. 54, Claudius was dead.

His death was concealed from the public and from his children, whom Agrippina with hypocritical caresses and false tears kept by her side in her own chamber, until everything was ready for the proclamation of Nero. At noon, which the Chaldaeans had declared would be the only lucky hour of an unlucky day, the gates of the palace were thrown open, and Nero walked forth with Afranius Burrus by his side. The Praetorian Praefect informed the guard that Claudius had appointed Nero his successor. A few faithful voices asked, "Where is Britannicus?" But as no one answered, and the young prince was not forthcoming, they accepted what seemed to be an accomplished fact. Nero went to the Praetorian camp, promised a donation of 15,000 sesterces (more than a £130) to each soldier, and was proclaimed Emperor. The Senate accepted the initiative of the Praetorians, and by sunset Nero was securely seated on the throne of the Roman world. The dream of Agrippina's life was accomplished. She was now the mother, as she had been the sister and the wife of an Emperor and that young Emperor, when the tribune came to ask him the watchword for the night, answered in the words — *Optima Matri*, "To the Best of Mothers"

CHAPTER III.

THE FEATURES OF THE ANTICHRIST.

From the very moment of her success, the awful Nemesis began to fall upon Agrippina, as it falls on all sinners — that worst Nemesis, which breaks crowned with fire out of the achievement of guilty purposes. Of Agrippina on the night of Claudius's murder it might doubtless have been said, as has been said of another queen on the tragic night on which her husband perished in the explosion at Kirk o' Fields, that she "retired to rest — to sleep, doubtless — sleep with the soft tranquillity of an innocent child. Remorse may disturb the slumbers of the man who is dabbling with his first experiences of wrong. When the pleasure has been tasted and is gone, and nothing is left of the crime but the min it has wrought, then, too, the Furies take their seats upon the midnight pillow. But the meridian of evil is for the most part left unvetted; and when human creatures have chosen their road, they are left alone to follow it to the end."

From the day that she had won her own heart's desires, Agrippina found that her hopes had vanished, and that her life was to be plunged in retributive calamities. She found that crime ever needs the support of further crime; that the evil spirits who serve the government of an abandoned heart demand incessant sacrifices at their altar. She had brought about the ruin of the young Lucius Junius Silanus. His elder brother, Marcus, was a man of such a gentle and unassuming character that Gaius had nicknamed him "the Golden Sheep;" and though the blood of the imperial family flowed in his veins, he excited so little jealousy that he had been

raised to the consulship, and even sent to Asia with proconsular command. Tet Agrippina dreaded that he might avenge the death of his brother, and, without the knowledge of Nero, sent the freedman Helius, with P. Celer, a Roman knight, who poisoned Silanus at a banquet, so openly that the whole world was aware of what had been done

The aged Narcissus was her next victim; and more murders would have followed had not Burrus and Seneca taken measures to prevent them. Their influence was happily sufficient, since they were still regarded as tutors of the young Caesar, who was only seventeen years old. They also endeavoured to veil, and as far as possible to cloak, the audacious intrusions into state affairs, which showed that Agrippina was not content with the exceptional honours showered upon her. Of those honours, strange to say, one of the chief was her appointment to be a priestess of the now deified Emperor whom she had so recently poisoned! It is clear that, though she had again and again proved herself to be the most ungrateful of women, she expected from her son a boundless gratitude. Indeed, she so galled the vanity and terrified the cowardice of his small and mean nature by her constant threats and upbraidings, that he feared her far more than he had ever loved. The consequence was that she had at once to struggle for her ascendancy. It was threatened on the one hand by the influence of Burrus and Seneca, and on the other by the blandishments of bad companions and fawning slaves. Bent on pleasure, fond of petty accomplishments, flattered into the notion that he was a man of consummate artistic taste, Nero occupied himself with dilettante efforts in sculpture, painting, singing, verse making, and chariot driving, and was quite content to leave to his tutors the graver affairs of state. His tiger nature had not yet tasted blood. Seneca in his treatise on clemency, written at the close of Nero's first year, had informed the delighted world that the gentle youth, on being required to sign the order for a criminal's execution, had expressed the fervent wish that he had never learned to write. Seneca also composed for him the admired speeches which he was now and then called upon to deliver. The government of the world was practically in the hands of an upright soldier and an able philosopher; and however glaring were the inconsistencies of the latter, he had yet attained to a moral standard incomparably superior to that professed by the majority of his contemporaries. If the political machine worked with perfect smoothness, if Rome for five years was shocked by no public atrocities, if informers to some extent found their occupation gone, if no noble blood was wantonly shed, if the Senate was respected and the soldiers were orderly, the glory of that "golden quinquennium" — which, in the opinion of Trajan, eclipsed the merits of even the worthiest princes — was due, not to the small minded and would be aesthetic youth who figured as Emperor, but to the tutors who kept in check the wild passions of his mother, and directed the acts which ostensibly proceeded from himself.

But in order to keep him amused they thought it either inexpedient or impossible to maintain too strict a discipline over his moral character. Nero was nominally married to the daughter of Claudius, but from the first they were separated from each other by a mutual and instinctive repulsion. When he entered into an intrigue with Acte, a beautiful Greek freedwoman, his tutors held it desirable to connive at vices which the spirit of the age scarcely pretended to condemn. Agrippina, however, treated him as though he were still a child, and, when she observed his resentment, forfeited all his confidence by passing from the extreme of furious reproach to the extreme of fulsome complaisance. Hence, alike in affairs of state and in his domestic pleasures he was alienated from his mother, and in his daily life he fell unreservedly under the influence of corrupt associates like Marcus Otho and Claudius Senecio, two bad specimens of the *jeunesse doree* of their day, the dandies of an age when dandyism was a far viler thing than it is in modern times. At last the quarrel between Nero and Agrippina became

so fierce that she did not hesitate to reveal to him all the crimes which she had committed for his sake, and if she could not retain her sway over his mind by gratitude, she terrified him with threats that she who had raised him to the throne could hurl him from it. Britannicus was the true heir; Nero, but for her, would have remained a mere Ahenobarbus. She was the daughter of Germanicus; she would go in person to the Praetorian camp, with Britannicus by her side, and then let the maimed Burros and the pedagogic Seneca see whether they could prevent her from restoring to the throne of his fathers the injured boy who had been ousted by her intrigues on behalf of an adopted alien. "I made you Emperor, I can unmake you. Britannicus is the true Emperor, not you." She dinned such taunts and threats into the ears of a son who was already vitiated in character, who already began to feel his power, until he too was driven to protect, by the murder of a brother, the despotism which his mother had won for him by the murder of a husband. Thus in every way she became the evil angel of his destiny. She drove him into the crimes of which she had already set the fatal example. It was her fault if he rapidly lost sight of the lesson which Seneca had so assiduously inculcated, that the one impregnable bulwark of a monarch is the affection of his people.

Nero began to look on the young Britannicus as King John looked on the young Arthur. Even civilised, even Christian ages have shown how perilous is the position of a hated heir to a usurped throne. The threats of Agrippina had deepened dislike into detestation, and uneasiness into terror. Britannicus was a fine, strong, well grown boy, who showed signs of a vigorous character and a keen intellect. A little incident which occurred in December, a.d. 54, had alarmed Nero still further. The Saturnalia were being celebrated with their usual effusive joy, and at one of the feasts Nero — who had become by lot the *Bex bibendi*, or Master of the Revel — had issued his mimic commands to the other guests in a spirit of harmless fun; but in order to put the shyness of Britannicus to the blush, he had ordered the lad to go out into the middle of the room and sing a song. Without the least trepidation or awkwardness Britannicus had stepped out and sung a magnificent fragment of a tragic chorus, in which he had indicated how he was expelled from his rights by violence and crime. The scene would have been an awkward one under any circumstances; it was rendered still more so by the fact that in the darkening hall a deep murmur had expressed the admiration and sympathy of the guests. Yet no steps could be taken against a young prince whom it was impossible to put to death openly, and against whom there was no pretence for a criminal accusation.

But the first century, like the fifteenth, was an age of poisoners. Locusta was still in prison, and Nero employed the Praetorian tribune Julius Pollio to procure from her a poison which might effect a slow death. There was no need to win over the praegustator, or the personal attendants of the young prince. Care had long been taken that the poor boy should only be surrounded by the creatures of his enemies. The poison was administered, but it failed. Nero grew wild with alarm. Stories, which probably gained their darkest touches from the horror of his subsequent career, told how he had threatened the tribune and struck Locusta for her cowardice in not doing her work well, "as though he forsooth, need have any fear about the Julian law." Deadlier poison was then concocted outside his own bed chamber, and tried upon animals, until its effects were found to be sufficiently rapid. Setting aside these stories as crude exaggerations, all authorities are agreed as to the circumstances of the death of Britannicus. It was a custom established by Augustus that the young princes of the imperial house should sit at dinner with nobles of their own age at a lower and less luxuriously served table than that at which the Emperor dined. While Britannicus was thus dining, a draught was handed to him which had been tasted by his praegustator, but was too hot to drink. He asked for water to cool it, and in that cold water the poison was administered. He drank, and

instantly sank down from his seat silent and breathless. The guests, among whom was the young Titus, the future Emperor of Rome, started from the table in consternation. The countenance of Agrippina, working with astonishment, anguish, and terror, showed that she at least had not been admitted into the terrible secret. Octavia looked on with the self-possession which in such a palace had taught her on all occasions to hide her emotions under a simulated apathy. The banqueters were disturbed until Nero, with perfect coolness, bade them resume their mirth and conversation. "Britannicus," he said, "will soon be well. He has only been seized with one of the epileptic fits to which he is liable." It was no epileptic fit — the last of the Claudii was dead. That night, amid storms which seemed to mark the wrath of heaven, the corpse was carried with hurried privacy to a mean funeral pyre on the Field of Mars. We may disbelieve the ghastly story that the rain washed off the chalk which had been used to disguise the livid indications of poison; but it seems certain that the last rites were paid with haste and meanness little suited to the last male descendant of a family which had been famous for so many centuries — to the sole inheritor of the glorious traditions of so many of the noblest lines.

The Romans acquiesced too easily in this terrible crime, because it fell in with the Machiavellian policy which would gladly rid itself of a source of future disturbances. But they were punished for their facile tolerance by the change which every year developed in the character of their Emperor. Agrippina felt that even handed justice was indeed beginning to commend the ingredients of the poisoned chalice to her own lips. Her enemies began to see that their opportunity was come. Her prosperity was instantly swallowed up in the "chaos of hatreds" which she had aroused by her unscrupulous ambition. The coward conscience of the Emperor was worked upon by a plot, contrived by Silana and Domitia I^{epida}, which charged Agrippina with the intention of raising Rubellius Plautus to the throne. This plot she overbore by the force of her own passionate indignation. Scornfully ignoring the false evidence trumped up against her, she claimed an interview with her son, and instead of entering on her own defence, demanded and secured the death or exile of her enemies. But she had by this time been deprived of her body guard, of her sentinels, of all public honours, even of her home in the palace. Her son rarely visited her, and then only among a number of centurions, and he always left her after a brief and chilling salutation. She was living deserted by her friends, and exposed to deliberate insults, in alarmed isolation amid the hatred of the populace. Worse dangers thickened around her. Nero became deeply enamoured of Poppaea Sabina, the wife of his friend Otho, and one of the most cruel and cold blooded intriguers amid the abandoned society of Roman matrons. Nero was deeply smitten with her infantile features, the soft complexion, which she preserved by daily bathing in warm asses' milk, her assumed modesty, her genial conversation and sprightly wit. He was specially enchanted with the soft, abundant hair, the envy of Roman beauties, for which he invented the fantastic, and, to Roman writers, the supremely ludicrous epithet of "amber tresses." If Otho was one of the worst corrupters of Nero's character, he was punished by the loss of his wife, and Nero was punished by forming a connexion with a woman who instigated him to yet more frightful enormities. Up to this time his crimes had been mainly confined to the interior of the palace, and his follies had taken no worse form than safe and cowardly outrages on defenceless passengers in the streets at night, after the fashion of the Mohawks of the days of Queen Anne. But from the day that he first saw Poppaea a headlong deterioration is traceable in his character. She established a complete influence over him, and drove him by her taunts and allurements to that crime which, even among his many enormities, is the most damning blot upon his character — the murder of his mother.

That wretched princess was spending the last year of a life which had scarcely passed its full prime in detested infamy, such as in our own history attended the last stage in the career of the Countess of Somerset, the wife of James's unworthy favourite, Robert Carr. Worse than this, she lived in daily dread of assassination. Her watchfulness evaded all attempts at poisoning, and she was partly protected against them by the current fiction that she had fortified herself by the use of antidotes. Plots to murder her by the apparently accidental fall of the fretted roof in one of the chambers of her villa were frustrated by the warning which she received from her spies. At last, Anicetus, a freedman, admiral of the fleet at Misenum, promised Nero to secure her end in an unsuspecting manner by means of a ship which should suddenly fall to pieces in mid sea. Nero invited her to a banquet at Bairn, which was to be the sign of their public reconciliation. Declining, however, to sail in the pinnace which had been surreptitiously fitted up for her use, she was carried to her son's villa in her own Utter. There she was received with such hilarity and blandishment, such long embraces and affectionate salutations, that her suspicions were dispelled. She consented to return by water, and went on board the treacherous vessel. It had not proceeded far when the heavily weighted canopy under which she reclined was made to fall with a great crash. One of her ladies was killed on the spot. Immediately afterwards the bolts which held the vessel together were pulled out, and Agrippina, whose life had been saved by the projecting sides of her couch, found herself struggling in the waves. A lady who was with her, named Acerronia, thinking to save her own life, exclaimed that she was the empress, and was instantly beaten down with poles and oars. Agrippina kept silence, and, escaping with a single bruise on her shoulder, she swam or floated safely till she was picked up by a boat sent from the shore, which was glittering with lights and thronged with visitors who were enjoying the cool evening air. The wretched victim saw through the whole plot, but thought it best to treat the matter as an accident, and sent one of her freedmen, named Agerinus, to announce to Nero her fortunate escape. Nero had already received the news with unfeigned alarm. Would the haughty, vindictive woman fire the soldiery with the tale of her wrongs would she throw herself on the compassion of the Senate and the people? would she arm her slaves to take vengeance on her murderer? Burrus and Seneca were hastily summoned. To them the Emperor appealed in the extreme agitation of unsuccessful guilt. In silence and anguish the soldier and the Stoic felt, as they listened to the tale, how fatal to their reputation was their prosperous complicity with the secrets of such a court. Seneca was the first to break the silence. He asked his colleague "whether the Praetorians should be ordered to put her to death." In that hour he must have tasted the very dregs of the bitter cup of moral degradation. Perhaps the two ministers excused themselves with the sophism that things had now gone too far to prevent the commission of a crime, and that either Agrippina or Nero must perish. But Burrus replied that "the Praetorians would never lift a hand against the daughter of their beloved Germanicus. Let Anicetus fulfil his promises." Miserable soldier! miserable philosopher! Stoicism has been often exalted at the expense of Christianity. Let the world remember the two scenes, in one of which the polished Stoic, in the other the Christian Apostle stood — the one a magnificent minister, the other a fettered prisoner — in the presence of the lord of the world!

Anicetus rose to the occasion, and, amid the ecstatic expressions of Nero's gratitude, claimed as his own the consummation of the deed. On the arrival of Agerinus with the message of Agrippina, Anicetus suddenly flung a dagger at the wretched man's feet, and then, declaring that Agrippina had sent him to murder her son, loaded him with chains. By this transparent device he hoped to persuade the world that Agrippina had been detected in a conspiracy, and had committed suicide from very shame. The news of her recent peril had caused the wildest excitement among the idlers on the shore. Anicetus, with his armed emissaries, had to assume

a threatening attitude, as he made his way through the agitated throng. Surrounding the villa and bursting open the door, he seized the few slaves who yet lingered near the chamber of their mistress. Within that chamber, by the light of a single lamp, Agrippina, attended by only one handmaid, was awaiting in intense anxiety and with misgivings which became deeper and deeper at every moment, the suspicious delay in the return of her faithful messenger. The slave girl rose and left the room. "Do you too desert me" she exclaimed; and at that moment the door was darkened by the entrance of Anicetus, with the trierarch Herculeius and the naval centurion Obaritus. "If you have come to inquire about my health," said the undaunted woman, "say that I have recovered. If to commit a crime, I will not believe that you have my son's orders; he would not command a matricide." Returning no answer, the murderers surrounded her bed, and the trierarch struck her on the head with his stick. "Strike my womb," she exclaimed, as the centurion drew his sword, "I bore a Nero." These were her last words before she sank down slain with many wounds. There is no need to darken with further and unaccredited touches of horror the dreadful story of her end. The old presage which she had accepted was fulfilled. She had made her son an Emperor, and he had rewarded her by assassination. Such was the awful unpitied end of one on whose birthday and in whose honour in that very year altars had smoked with sacrifices offered at the feet of the god Honour and the goddess Concordia.

When the crime was over, Nero first perceived its magnitude, and was seized with the agony of a too brief terror and remorse. There is in great crimes an awful power of illumination. They light up the conscience with a glare which shows all things in their true hideousness. He spent the night in oppressive silence. For the first time in his life his sleep was disturbed by dreams. He often started up in terror, and dreaded the return of dawn. The gross flattery and hypocritical congratulations of his friends soon dissipated all personal alarm. But scenes cannot change their aspect so easily as the countenances of men, and there was to him a deadly look in the sea and shore. From the lofty summit of Misenum ghostly wailings and the blast of a solitary trumpet seemed to reach him from his mother's grave. He despatched a letter to the Senate, full of the ingenious and artificial turns of expression which betrayed, alas! the style of Seneca; and in it he charged his mother's memory with the very crimes of which he had himself been guilty. But though he recalled her enemies from exile, and threw down her statues, and raked up every evil action of her life, and insinuated that she had been the cause of the enormities which had disgraced the reign of Claudius, men hardly affected to believe his exculpation, and the very mob charged him with matricide in their epigrams and scribblings on the statues and walls of Rome. But yet when he returned to Rome, the whole populace, from the Senate downwards, poured forth to give him a reception so enthusiastic and triumphant that every remnant of shame was dispelled from his mind. Feeling for the first time that no wickedness was too abnormal to shake his absolute power over a nation of slaves, he plunged without stint or remorse into that career of infamy which has made his name the synonym of everything which is degraded, cruel, and impure.

Through the separate details of that career we need not follow him. The depths into which he sank are too abysmal for utterance. Even Pagan historians could not without a blush hold up a torch in those crypts of shame. How he established games in which he publicly appeared upon the stage, and compelled members of the noblest Roman families to imitate his degradation; on how vast a scale, and with how vile a stain, he deliberately corrupted the whole tone of Roman society; how he openly declared that the consummation of art was a false aestheticism, corrupt and naked, and not ashamed; how he strove to revive the flagging pulse of exhausted pleasure by unheard of enormities, and strove to make shame shameless

by undisguised publicity; how he put to death the last descendant of Augustus, the last descendant of Tiberius, and the last descendant of the Claudii; how he ended the brief but heartrending tragedy of the life of Octavia by defaming her innocence, driving her to the island of Pandataria, and there enforcing her assassination under circumstances so sad as might have moved the hardiest villain to tears; how he hastened by poison the death of Burrus, and entrusted the vast power of the Praetorian command to Tigellinus, one of the vilest of the human race; how, when he had exhausted the treasures amassed by the dignified economy of Claudius, he filled his coffers by confiscating the estates of innocent victims; how he caused the death of his second wife, Poppaea, by a kick inflicted on her when she was in a delicate condition; how, after the detection of the conspiracy of Piso, he seemed to revel in blood; how he ordered the death of Seneca; how, by the execution of Paetus Thrasea and Barea Soranus, he strove to extinguish the last embers of Roman magnanimity, and to slay "virtue itself;" how wretches like Yatinius became the cherished favourites of his court; how his reign degenerated into one perpetual orgy, at once monstrous and vulgar; — into these details, fortunately, we need not follow his awful career. His infamous follies and cruelties in Greece; his dismal and disgraceful fall — a tragedy without pathos, and a ruin without dignity — all this must be read in the pages of contemporary historians. Probably no man who ever lived has crowded into fourteen years of life so black a catalogue of iniquities as this Collot d'Herbois upon an imperial throne. The seeds of innumerable vices were latent in the soil of his disposition, and the hot bed of absolutism forced them into rank growth. To speak thus much of him and of his reign has been necessary, because he was the epitome of the age in which he lived — the consummate flower of Pagan degradation at the time when the pure bud of Christian life was being nurtured into beauty amid cold and storm. But here we must for the present leave the general story of his reign, to give our attention to the one event which brought him into collision with the Christian Church.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BURNING OF ROME, AND THE FIRST PERSECUTION.

Had it not been for one crime with which all ancient writers have mixed up his name, Christianity might have left Nero on one side, not speaking of him, but simply looking and passing by, while he, on his part, might scarcely so much as have heard of the existence of Christians amid the crowded thousands of his capital. That crime was the burning of Rome; and by precipitating the Era of Martyrdom, it brought him into immediate and terrible connexion with the Church of Christ.

Whether he was really guilty or not of having ordered that immense conflagration, it is certain that he was suspected of it by his contemporaries, and has been charged with it by many historians of his country. It is certain, also, that his head had been full for years of the image of flaming cities; that he used to say that Priam was to be congratulated on having seen the ruin of Troy; that he was never able to resist the fixed idea of a crime; that the year following he gave a public recitation of a poem called Troica, from the orchestra of the theatre, and that this was only the burning of Rome under a thin disguise; and that just before his flight he meditated setting fire to Rome once more. It was rumoured that when some one had told him

how Gaius used to quote the phrase of Euripides —

“When I am dead, sink the whole earth in flames!”

He replied, “Nay, but while I live!” He was accused of the ambition of destroying Rome, that he might replace its tortuous and narrow lanes with broad, regular streets and uniform Hellenic edifices, and so have an excuse for changing its name from Rome to Neropolis. It was believed that in his morbid appetite for new sensations he was quite capable of devising a truly artistic spectacle which would thrill his jaded aestheticism, and supply him with vivid imagery for the vapid antitheses of his poems. It was both believed and recorded that during the terrors of the actual spectacle he had climbed the Tower of Maecenas, had expressed his delight at what he called “the flower and loveliness of the flames,” and in his scenic dress had sung on his own private stage the “Capture of Ilium.” It was said that all attempts to quench the fire had been forcibly resisted; that men had been seen hurling lighted brands upon various buildings, and shouting that they had orders for what they did; that men of even Consular rank had detected Nero’s slaves on their own property with tow and torches, and had not ventured to touch them; that when the wind had changed, and there was a lull in the conflagration, it had burst out again from houses that abutted on the gardens of his creature Tigellinus. At any rate, the Romans could hardly have been mistaken in thinking that Nero might have done much more than he did to encourage the efforts made to extinguish the flames. It was remembered that, a few years earlier, Claudius, during a conflagration, had been seen, two nights running, seated in a little counting office with two baskets full of silver at his side, to encourage the firemen, and secure the assistance of the people and the soldiers. Nero certainly, in this far more frightful crisis, did nothing of the kind. Even if some of the rumours which tended to implicate him in having caused the calamity had no better foundation than idle rumour, or the interested plots of robbers, who seized the opportunity for promiscuous plunder, they acquired plausibility from the whole colour of Nero’s character and conversation, and they seemed to be justified by the way in which he used for his own advantage the disaster of his people. For immediately after the fire he seized a much larger extent of ground than he had previously possessed, and began to rear with incredible celerity his “Golden House” — a structure unexampled in the ancient world for gorgeous magnificence. It was in this amazing structure, on which the splendour of the whole Empire was recklessly squandered, that Nero declared, with a smirk of self satisfaction, that now at last he was lodged like a human being!

But whether Nero was guilty of this unparalleled outrage on the lives and fortunes of his subjects or not, certain it is that on July 19, a.d. 64, in the tenth year of his reign, a fire broke out in shops full of inflammable materials which lined the valley between the Palatine and Caelian Hills. For six days and seven nights it rolled in streams of resistless flame over the greater part of the city, licking up the palaces and temples of the gods which covered the low Hills, and raging through whole streets of the wretched wooden tenements in which dwelt myriads of the poorer inhabitants who crowded the lower regions of Rome. When its course had been checked by the voluntary destruction of a vast mass of buildings which lay in its path, it broke out a second time, and raged for three days longer in the less crowded quarters of the city, where its spread was even more fatal to public buildings and the ancient shrines of the gods. Never since the Gauls burnt Rome had so deadly a calamity fallen on the afflicted city. Of its fourteen districts, four alone escaped untouched; three were completely laid in ashes; in the seven others were to be seen the wrecks of many buildings, scathed and gutted by the flames. The disaster to the city was historically irreparable. If Nero was indeed guilty, then

the act of a wretched buffoon, mad with the diseased sensibility of a depraved nature, has robbed the world of works of art, and memorials, and records, priceless and irrecoverable. We can rather imagine than describe the anguish with which the Romans, bitterly conscious of their own degeneracy, contemplated the destruction of the relics of their national glory in the days when Rome was free. What could ever replace for them or their children such monuments as the Temple of Luna, built by Sen ins Tullius; and the Ara Maxima, which the Arcadian Evander had reared to Hercules; and the Temple of Jupiter Stator, built in accordance with the vow of Romulus; and the little humble palace of Numa; and the shrine of Vesta with the Penates of the Roman people and the spoils of conquered kings? What structural magnificence could atone for the loss of memorials which the song of Virgil and of Horace had rendered still more dear? The city might rise more regular from its ashes, and with broader streets, but its artificial uniformity was a questionable boon. Old men declared that the new streets were far less healthy, in consequence of their more scorching glare, and they muttered among themselves that many an object of national interest had been wantonly sacrificed to gratify the womanish freak of a miserable actor.

But the sense of permanent loss was overwhelmed at first by the immediate confusion and agony of the scene. Amid the sheets of flame that roared on every side under their dense canopy of smoke, the shrieks of terrified women and the wail of infants and children were heard above the crash of falling houses. The incendiary fires seemed to be bursting forth in so many directions that men stood staring in dumb stupefaction at the destruction of their property, or rushed hither and thither in helpless amazement. The lanes and alleys were blocked up with the concourse of struggling fugitives. Many were suffocated by the smoke, or trampled down in the press. Many others were burnt to death in their own burning houses, some of whom purposely flung themselves into the flames in the depth of their despair. The density of the population that found shelter in the huge many storeyed lodging houses increased the difficulty of escape; and when they had escaped with bare life, a vast multitude of homeless, shivering, hungry human beings — many of them bereaved of their nearest and dearest relatives, many of them personally injured, and most of them deprived of all their possessions, and destitute of the means of subsistence — found themselves huddled together in vacant places in one vast brotherhood of hopeless wretchedness. Incidents like these are not often described by ancient authors. As a rule, the classic writers show themselves singularly callous to all details of individual misery; but this disaster was on a scale so magnificent that it had impressed the imaginations of men who often treat the anguish of multitudes as a matter of course.

Even if he had been destitute of every human feeling, yet jiolicy and necessity would have induced Nero to take what steps he could to alleviate the immediate pressure. To create discontent and misery could never have formed any part of his designs. He threw open the Campus Martius, the Monumenta Agrippae, even his own gardens, to the]>eople. Temporary buildings were constructed; all the furniture which was most indispensable was brought from Ostia and neighbouring towns; wheat was sold at about a fourth of the average price. It was all in vain. The misery which it was believed that his criminal folly had inflicted kindled a sense of wrong too deeply seated to be removed by remedies for the past or precautions for the future. The resentment was kept alive by the benevolences and imposts which Nero now demanded, and by the greedy ostentation with which he seized eveiy beautiful or valuable object to adorn the insulting splendour of a palace built on the yet warm ashes of so wide an area of the ruined city.

Nero was so secure in his absolutism, he had hitherto found it so impossible to shock the feelings of the people or to exhaust the terrified adulation of the Senate, that he was usually indifferent to the pasquinades which were constantly holding up his name to execration and contempt. But now he felt that he had gone too far, and that his power would be seriously imperilled if he did not succeed in diverting the suspicions of the populace.

NERO AS A PERSECUTOR.

He was perfectly aware that when the people in the streets cursed those who set fire to the city, they meant to curse Atm. If he did not take some immediate step he felt that he might perish, as Gains had perished before him, by the dagger of the assassin.

It is at this point of his career that Nero becomes a prominent figure in the history of the Church. It was this phase of cruelty which seemed to throw a blood red light over his whole character, and led men to look on him as the very incarnation of the world power in its most demoniac aspect — as worse than the Antiochus Epiphanes of Daniel's Apocalypse — as the Man of Sin whom (in language figurative indeed, yet awfully true) the Lord should slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. For Nero endeavoured to fix the odious crime of having destroyed the capital of the world upon the most innocent and faithful of his subjects — upon the only subjects who offered heart felt prayers on his behalf — the Roman Christians. They were the defenceless victims of this horrible charge; for though they were the most harmless, they were also the most hated and the most slandered of living men.

Why he should have thought of singling out the Christians has always been a curious problem, for at this point Saint Luke ends the Acts of the Apostles, perhaps purposely dropping the curtain, because it would have been perilous and useless to narrate the horrors in which the hitherto neutral or friendly Roman Government began to play so disgraceful a part. Neither Tacitus, nor Suetonius, nor the Apocalypse, help us to solve this particular problem. The Christians had filled no large space in the eye of the world. Until the days of Domitian we do not hear of a single noble or distinguished person who had joined their ranks. That the Pudens and Claudia of Rom. xvi. were the Pudens and Claudia of Martial's Epigrams seems to me to be a baseless dream. If the "foreign superstition" with which Pomponia Grsecina, wife of Aulus Plautius, the conqueror of Britain, was charged, and of which she was acquitted, was indeed, as has been suspected, the Christian religion, at any rate the name of Christianity was not alluded to by the ancient writers who had mentioned the circumstance. Even if Rom. xvi was addressed to Rome, and not, as I believe, to Ephesus, "they of the household of Narcissus which were in the Lord" were unknown slaves, as also were "they of Caesar's household." The slaves and artisans, Jewish and Gentile, who formed the Christian community at Rome, had never in any way come into collision with the Roman Government. They must have been the victims rather than the excitors of the Messianic tumults — for such they are conjectured to have been — which led to the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the futile edict of Claudius. Nay, so obedient and docile were they required to be by the very principles on which their morality was based — so far were they removed from the fierce independence of the Jewish zealots — that, in writing to them a few years earlier, the greatest of their leaders had urged upon them a payment of tribute and a submission to the higher powers, not only for wrath but also for conscience sake, because the earthly ruler, in his office of repressing evil works, is a

minister of God. That the Christians were entirely innocent of the crime charged against them was well known, both at the time and afterwards. But how was it that Nero sought popularity, and partly averted the deep rage which was rankling in many hearts against himself, by torturing men and women on whose agonies he thought that the populace would gaze not only with a stolid indifference, but even with fierce satisfaction

Gibbon has conjectured that the Christians were confounded with the Jews, and that the detestation universally felt for the latter fell with double force upon the former. Christians suffered even more than the Jews because of the calumnies so assiduously circulated against them, and from what appeared to the ancients to be the revolting absurdity of their peculiar tenets. "Nero," says Tacitus, "exposed to accusation, and tortured with the most exquisite penalties, a set of men detested for their enormities, whom the common people called 'Christiana' Christus, the founder of this sect, was executed during the reign of Tiberius by the Procurator Pontius Pilate, and the deadly superstition, suppressed for a time, began to burst out once more, not only throughout Judaea, where the evil had its root, but even in the city, whither from every quarter all things horrible or shameful are drifted, and find their votaries." The lordly disdain which prevented Tacitus from making any inquiry into the real views and character of the Christians is shown by the fact that he catches up the most baseless allegations against them. He talks of their doctrines as savage and shameful, when they breathed the very spirit of peace and purity. He charges them with being animated by a hatred of their kind, when their central tenet was an universal charity.

EXPIATIONS.

The masses, he says, called them "Christians;" and while he almost apologises for staining his page with so vulgar an appellation, he merely mentions, in passing, that, though innocent of the charge of being turbulent incendiaries, on which they were tortured to death, they were yet a set of guilty and infamous sectaries, to be classed with the lowest dregs of Roman criminals.

But the haughty historian throws no light on one difficulty — namely, the circumstances which led to the Christians being thus singled out. The Jews were in no way involved in Nero's persecution. To persecute the Jews at Rome would not have been an easy matter. They were sufficiently numerous to be formidable, and had overawed Cicero in the zenith of his fame. Besides this, the Jewish religion was recognized, tolerated, licensed. Throughout the length and breadth of the Empire, no man, however much he and his race might be detested and despised, could have been burnt or tortured for the mere fact of being a Jew. We hear of no Jewish martyrdoms or Jewish persecutions till we come to the times of the Jewish war, and then chiefly in Palestine itself. It is clear that a shedding of blood — in fact, some form or other of human sacrifice — was imperatively demanded by popular feeling as an expiation of the ruinous crime which had plunged so many thousands into the depths of misery. In vain had the Sibylline Books been once more consulted, and in vain had public prayer been offered, in accordance with their directions, to Vulcan and the goddesses of Earth and Hades. In vain had the Roman matrons walked in procession in dark robes, and with their long hair unbound, to propitiate the insulted majesty of Juno, and to sprinkle with sea water her ancient statue. In vain had largesses been lavished upon the people, and propitiatory sacrifices offered to the gods. In vain had public banquets been celebrated in honour of

various deities. A crime had been committed, and Romans had perished unavenged. Blood cried for blood, before the sullen suspicion against Nero could be averted, or the indignation of heaven appeased. Nero had always hated, persecuted, and exiled the philosophers, and no doubt, so far as he knew anything of the Christians — so far as he saw among his own countless slaves any who had embraced this superstition, which the elite of Rome described as not only new, but “execrable” and “malefic” — he would hate their gravity and purity, and feel for them that raging envy which is the tribute that virtue receives from vice. Moreover, Saint Paul, in all probability, had recently stood before his tribunal; and though he had been acquitted on the special charges of turbulence and profanation, respecting which he had appealed to Caesar, yet during the judicial inquiry Nero could hardly have failed to hear from the emissaries of the Sanhedrin many fierce slanders of a sect which was everywhere spoken against. The Jews were by far the deadliest enemies of the Christians; and two persons of Jewish proclivities were at this time in close proximity to the person of the Emperor. One was the pantomimist Aliturus, the other was Poppaea, the harlot Empress. The Jews were in communication with these powerful favourites, and had even promised Nero that if his enemies ever prevailed at Rome he should have the kingdom of Jerusalem. It is not even impossible that there may have been a third dark and evil influence at work to undermine the Christians, for about this very time the unscrupulous Pharisee Flavius Josephus had availed himself of the intrigues of the palace to secure the liberation of some Jewish priests. If, as seems certain, the Jews had it in their power during the reign of Nero more or less to shape the whisper of the throne, does not historical induction drive us to conclude with some confidence that the suggestion of the Christians as scapegoats and victims came from them? Saint Clement says in his Epistle that the Christians suffered through jealousy. Whose jealousy? Who can tell what dark secrets lie veiled under that suggestive word? Was Acte a Christian, and was Poppaea jealous of her? That suggestion seems at once inadequate and improbable, especially as Acte was not hurt. But there was a deadly jealousy at work against the New Religion. To the Pagans, Christianity was but a religious extravagance — contemptible, indeed, but otherwise insignificant. To the Jews, on the other hand, it was an object of hatred, which never stopped short of bloodshed when it possessed or could usurp the power, and which, though long suppressed by circumstances, displayed itself in all the intensity of its virulence during the brief spasm of the dictatorship of Barcochba. Christianity was hateful to the Jews on every ground. It nullified their Law. It liberated all Gentiles from the heavy yoke of that Law, without thereby putting them on a lower level.

HATRED AGAINST CHRISTIANS.

It even tended to render those who were born Jews indifferent to the institutions of Mosaism. It was, as it were, a fatal revolt and schism from within, more dangerous than any assault from without. And, worse than all, it was by the Gentiles confounded with the Judaism which was its bitterest antagonist. While it sheltered its existence under the mantle of Judaism, as a *rdigio licita*, it drew down upon the religion from whose bosom it sprang all the scorn and hatred which were attached by the world to its own especial tenets; for however much the Greeks and Romans despised the Jews, they despised still more the belief that the Lord and Saviour of the world was a crucified malefactor who had risen from the dead. I see in the proselytism of Poppaea, guided by Jewish malice, the only adequate explanation of the first Christian persecution. Hers was the jealousy which had goaded Nero to matricide; hers not improbably was the instigated fanaticism of a proselyte which urged him to imbrue his hands

in martyr blood. And she had her reward. A woman of whom Tacitus has not a word of good to say, and who seems to have been repulsive even to a Suetonius, is handed down by the renegade Pharisee as “a devout woman” — as a worshipper of God!

And, indeed, when once the Christians were pointed out to the popular vengeance, many reasons would be adduced to prove their connexion with the conflagration. Temples had perished — and were they not notorious enemies of the temples? Did not popular rumour charge them with nocturnal orgies and Thyestean feasts? Suspicions of incendiarism were sometimes brought against Jews; but the Jews were not in the habit of talking, as these sectaries were, about a fire which should consume the world, and rejoicing in the prospect of that fiery consummation. Nay, more, when Pagans had bewailed the destruction of the city and the loss of the ancient monuments of Rome, had not these pernicious people used ambiguous language, as though they joyously recognized in these events the signs of a coming end? Even when they tried to suppress all outward tokens of exultation, had they not listened to the fears and lamentations of their fellow citizens with some sparkle in the eyes, and had they not answered with something of triumph in their tones? There was a Satanic plausibility which dictated the selection of these particular victims. Because they hated the wickedness of the world, with its ruthless games and hideous idolatries, they were accused of hatred of the whole human race. The charge of incivility, so fatal in this Reign of Terror, was sufficient to ruin a body of men who scorned the sacrifices of heathendom, and turned away with abhorrence from its banquets and gaieties. The cultivated classes looked down upon the Christians with a disdain which would hardly even mention them without an apology. The canaille of Pagan cities insulted them with obscene inscriptions and blasphemous pictures on the very walls of the places where they met. Nay, they were popularly known by nicknames, like *Sarmenticii* and *Semaxii* — untranslatable terms of opprobrium derived from the fagots with which they were burned and the stakes to which they were chained. Even the heroic courage which they displayed was described as being sheer obstinacy and stupid fanaticism.

But in the method chosen for the punishment of these saintly innocents Nero gave one more proof of the close connexion between effeminate aestheticism and sanguinary callousness. As in old days, “on that opprobrious hill,” the temple of Chemosh had stood close by that of Moloch, so now we find the *spoliarum* beside the *fomices* — Lust hard by Hate. The *camificina* of Tiberius, at *Capreae*, adjoined the *Sellariae*. History has given many proofs that no man is more systematically heartless than a corrupted debauchee. Like people, like prince. In the then condition of Rome, Nero well knew that a nation “cruel, by their sports to blood inured” would be most likely to forget their miseries, and condone their suspicions, by mixing games and gaiety with spectacles of refined and atrocious cruelty, of which, for eighteen centuries, the most passing record has sufficed to make men’s blood run cold.

Tacitus tells us that “those who confessed were first seized, and then on their evidence a huge multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of incendiarism as for their hatred to mankind.” Compressed and obscure as the sentence is, Tacitus clearly means to imply by the “confession” to which he alludes the confession of Christianity; and though he is not sufficiently generous to acquit the Christians absolutely of all complicity in the great crime, he distinctly says that they were made the scapegoats of a general indignation.

THE CHRISTIAN MARTYRS.

The phrase — “a huge multitude” — is one of the few existing indications of the number of martyrs in the first persecution, and of the number of Christians in the Roman Church. When the historian says that they were convicted on the charge of “hatred against mankind” he shows how completely he confounds them with the Jews, against whom he elsewhere brings the accusation of “hostile feelings towards all except themselves.”

Then the historian adds one casual but frightful sentence — a sentence which flings a dreadful light on the cruelty of Nero and the Roman mob. He adds, “And various forms of mockery were added to enhance their dying agonies. Covered with the skins of wild beasts, they were doomed to die by the mangling of dogs, or by being nailed to crosses; or to be set on fire and burnt after twilight by way of nightly illumination. Nero offered his own gardens for this show, and gave a chariot race, mingling with the mob in the dress of a charioteer, or actually driving about among them. Hence, guilty as the victims were, and deserving of the worst punishments, a feeling of compassion towards them began to rise, as men felt that they were being immolated not for any advantage to the commonwealth, but to glut the savagery of a single man.”

Imagine that awful scene, once witnessed by the silent obelisk in the square before Saint Peter's at Rome! Imagine it, that we may realize how vast is the change which Christianity has wrought in the feelings of mankind! There, where the vast dome now rises, were once the gardens of Nero. They were thronged with gay crowds, among whom the Emperor moved in his frivolous degradation — and on every side were men dying slowly on their cross of shame. Along the paths of those gardens on the autumn nights were ghastly torches, blackening the ground beneath them with streams of sulphurous pitch, and each of those living torches was a martyr in his shirt of fire. And in the amphitheatre hard by, in sight of twenty thousand spectators, famished dogs were tearing to pieces some of the best and purest of men and women, hideously disguised in the skins of bears or wolves. Thus did Nero baptise in the blood of martyrs the city which was to be for ages the capital of the world!

The specific atrocity of such spectacles — unknown to the earlier ages which they called barbarous — was due to the cold blooded selfishness, the hideous realism of a refined, delicate, aesthetic age. To please these “lisp[ing] hawthorn buds/” these debauched and sanguinary dandies, Art, forsooth, must know nothing of morality; must accept and rejoice in a “healthy animalism 99; must estimate life by the number of its few wildest pulsations; must reckon that life is worthless without the most thrilling experiences of horror or delight! Comedy must be actual shame, and tragedy genuine bloodshed. When the play of Afranius called “The Conflagration 99 was put on the stage, a house must be really burnt, and its furniture really plundered. In the mime called “Laureolus,” an actor must really be crucified and mangled by a bear, and really fling himself down and deluge the stage with blood. When the heroism of Mucius Scaevola was represented, a real criminal must thrust his hand without a groan into the flame, and stand motionless while it is being burnt. Prometheus must be really chained to his rock, and Dirce in very fact be tossed and gored by the wild bull; and Orpheus be tom to pieces by a real bear; and Icarus must really fly, even though he fall and be dashed to death; and Hercules must ascend the funeral pyre, and there be “veritably burnt alive; and slaves and criminals must play their parts heroically in gold and purple till the flames envelope them. It was the ultimate romance of a degraded and brutalised society. The

Roman people, “victors once, now vile and base,” could now only be amused by sanguinary melodrama. Fables must be made realities, and the criminal must gracefully transform his supreme agonies into amusements for the multitude by becoming a gladiator or a tragedian. Such were the spectacles at which Nero loved to gaze through his emerald eye glass. And worse things than these — things indescribable, unutterable infamous mythologies were enacted, in which women must play their part in torments of shameful more intolerable than death. A Saint Peter must hang upon the cross in the Pincian gardens, as a real Laureolus upon the stage. A Christian boy must be the Icarus, and a Christian man the Scevola, or the Hercules, or the Orpheus of the amphitheatre; and Christian women, modest maidens, holy matrons, must be the Danaids, or the Proserpine, or worse, and play their parts as priestesses of Saturn and Ceres, and in blood stained dramas of the dead.

DEEDS OF THE ANTICHRIST.

No wonder that Nero became to Christian imagination the very incarnation of evil; the Antichrist; the Wild Beast from the abyss; the delegate of the great red Dragon, with a diadem and a name of blasphemy upon his brow. No wonder that he left a furrow of horror in the hearts of men, and that, ten centuries after his death, the Church of Sta. Maria del Popolo had to be built by Pope Pascal II. to exorcise from Christian Rome his restless and miserable ghost!

And it struck them with deeper horror to see that the Antichrist, so far from being abhorred, was generally popular. He was popular because he presented to the degraded populace their own image and similitude. The froglike unclean spirits which proceeded, as it were, out of his mouth were potent with these dwellers in an atmosphere of pestilence. They had lost all love for freedom and nobleness; they cared only for doles and excitement. Even when the infamies of a Petronius had been superseded by the murderous orgies of Tigellinus, Nero was still everywhere welcomed with shouts as a god on earth, and saluted on coins as Apollo, as Hercules, as “The Saviour of the World.” The poets still assured him that there was no deity in heaven who would not think it an honour to concede to him his prerogatives; that if he did not place himself well in the centre of Olympus, the equilibrium of the universe would be destroyed. Victims were slain along his path, and altars raised for him — for this wretch, whom an honest slave could not but despise and loathe— as though he was too great for mere human honours. Nay, more, he found adorers and imitators of his execrable example — an Otho, a Vitellius, a Domitian, a Commodus, a Caracalla, an Heliogabalus — to poison the air of the world. The lusts and hungers and furies of the world lamented him, and cherished his memory, and longed for his return.

And yet, though all bad men — who were the majority — admired and even loved him, he died the death of a dog. Tremendous as was the power of Imperialism, the Romans often treated their individual emperors as Nero himself treated the Syrian goddess, whose image he first worshipped with awful veneration and then subjected to the most grotesque indignities. For retribution did not linger, and the vengeance fell at once on the guilty emperor and the guilty city.

“Careless teems the Great Avenger : History’s pages but record One death grapple in the darkness ’twixt false systems and the Word Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the

throne.

Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.”

The air was full of prodigies. There were terrible storms; the plague wrought fearful ravages. Rumours spread from lip to lip. Men spoke of monstrous births; of deaths by lightning under strange circumstances; of a brazen statue of Nero melted by the flash; of places struck by the brand of heaven in fourteen regions of the city; a of sudden darkenings of the sun. A hurricane devastated Campania; comets blazed in the heavens; earthquakes shook the ground. On all sides were the traces of deep uneasiness and superstitious terror. To all these portents, which were accepted as true by Christians as well as by Pagans, the Christians would give a specially terrible significance. They strengthened their conviction that the coming of the Lord drew nigh. They convinced the better sort of Pagans that the hour of their deliverance from a tyranny so monstrous and so disgraceful was near at hand.

In spite of the shocking servility with which alike the Senate and the people had welcomed him back to the city with shouts of triumph, Nero felt that the air of Rome was heavy with curses against his name. He withdrew to Naples, and was at supper there on March 19, A.D. 68, the anniversary of his mother's murder, when he heard that the first note of revolt had been sounded by the brave C. Julius Vindex, Praefect of Farther Gaul. He was so far from being disturbed by the news, that he showed a secret joy at the thought that he could now order Gaul to be plundered. For eight days he took no notice of the matter. He was only roused to send an address to the Senate because Vindex wounded his vanity by calling him “Ahenobarbus,” and “a bad singer.” But when messenger after messenger came from the provinces with tidings of menace, he hurried back to Rome. At last, when he heard that Virginius Rufus had also rebelled in Germany, and Galba in Spain, he became aware of the desperate nature of his position. On receiving this intelligence he fainted away, and remained for some time unconscious. He continued, indeed, his grossness and frivolity, but the wildest and fiercest schemes chased each other through his melodramatic brain. He would slay all the exiles; he would give up all the provinces to plunder.

PLIGHT OF NERO.

And now Agrippina's prosperous wickedness was bearing her along full sail to the fatal haven of her ambition. She obtained the title of Augusta, which even the stately wife of Augustus had never borne (during her husband's lifetime. Seated on a lofty throne by her husband's side, she received foreign embassies and senatorial deputations. She gained permission to antedate the majority of her son, and secured for him a promise of the Consulship, admission to various priesthoods, a proconsular imperium, and the title of “Prince of the Youth.” She made these honours the pretext for obtaining a largess to the soldiery, and Circensian games for the populace, and at these games Nero appeared in the manly toga and triumphal insignia, while Britannicus, utterly eclipsed, stood humbly by his side in the boyish praetexta — the embroidered robe which marked his youth. And while step after step was taken to bring Nero into splendid prominence, Britannicus was kept in such deep seclusion, and watched with such jealous eyes, that the people hardly knew whether he was alive or dead. In vain did Agrippina lavish upon the unhappy lad her false caresses. Being a boy of exceptional

intelligence, he saw through her hypocrisy, and did not try to conceal the contemptuous disgust which her arts inspired. Meanwhile he was a prisoner in all but name : every expedient was invented to keep him at the greatest distance from his father; every friend who loved him, every freedman who was faithful to him, every soldier who seemed likely to embrace his cause, was either secretly undermined, or removed under pretext of honourable promotion. Tutored as he was by adversity to conceal his feelings, he one day through accident or boyish passion returned the salutation of his adoptive brother by the name of Ahenobarbus, instead of calling him by the name Nero, which was the mark of his new rank as the adopted son of Claudius. Thereupon the rage of Agrippina and Nero knew no bounds; and such insolence — for in this light the momentary act of carelessness or venial outburst of temper was represented to Claudius — made the boy a still more defenceless victim to the machinations of his stepmother. Month after month she wove around him the web of her intrigues. The Praetorians were won over by flattery, gifts, and promises. The double praefecture of Lucius Geta and Rufius Crispinus was superseded by the appointment of Afranius Burrus, an honest soldier, but a partisan of the Empress, to whom he thus owed his promotion to the most coveted position in the Roman army. From the all powerful freedmen of Claudius, Agrippina had little to fear. Callistus was dead, and she played off against each other the rival influences of Pallas and Narcissus. Pallas was her devoted adherent and paramour; Narcissus was afraid to move in opposition to her, because the accession of Britannicus would have been his own certain death warrant, since he had been the chief agent in the overthrow of Messalina.

CHAPTER V.

WRITINGS OF THE APOSTLES AND EARLY CHRISTIANS.

When we turn from the annals of the world at this epoch to the annals of the Church, we pass at once from an atmosphere heavy with misery and corruption into pure and pellucid air. We have been reading the account given us by secular literature of the world in its relations to the Church. In the First Epistle of Saint Peter we shall read directions which were written to guide the Church in its relations to the world. We have been reading what Pagans said and thought of Christians; in the writings of Christians addressed to each other, and meant for no other eye, we shall see what these hated, slandered, persecuted Christians really were. In place of the turbulence laid to their charge, we shall have proofs of the humility and cheerfulness of their submission. We shall see that, so far from being resentful, they were taught unlimited forgiveness; and that, instead of cherishing a fierce hatred against all mankind, they made it their chief virtue to cultivate an universal love.

But although we are so fully acquainted with the thoughts and feelings of the early Christians, yet the facts of their corporate history during the last decades of the first century, and even the closing details in the biographies of their very greatest teachers, are plunged in entire uncertainty. When, with the last word in the Acts of the Apostles, we lose the graphic and faithful guidance of Saint Luke, the torch of Christian history is for a time abruptly quenched. We are left, as it were, to grope amid the windings of the catacombs. Even the final labours of the life of Saint Paul are only so far known as we may dimly infer them from the casual allusions of the pastoral epistles. For the details of many years in the life of Saint Peter we have nothing on which to rely except slight and vogue allusions, floating rumours, and false impression? created by the deliberate fictions of heretical romance.

It is probable that this silence is in itself the result of the terrible scenes in which the Apostles perished. It was indispensable to the safety of the whole community that the books of the Christians, when given up by the unhappy weakness of “traitors” or discovered by the keen malignity of informers, should contain no compromising matter. But how would it have been possible for Saint Luke to write in a manner otherwise than compromising if he had detailed the horrors of the Neronian persecution? It is a reasonable conjecture that the sudden close of the Acts of the Apostles may have been due to the impossibility of speaking without indignation and abhorrence of the Emperor and the Government which, between A.D. 64 and 68, sanctioned the infliction upon innocent men and women of atrocities which excited the pity of the very Pagans. The Jew and the Christian who entered on such themes could only do so under the disguise of a cryptograph, hiding his meaning from all but the initiated few in such prophetic symbols as those of the Apocalypse. In that book alone we are enabled to hear the cry of horror which Nero’s brutal cruelties wrung from Christian hearts.

But if we know so little of Saint Peter that is in the least trustworthy, it is hardly strange that of the other Apostles, with the single exception of Saint John, and — in the wider sense of the word “apostle” — of Saint James the Lord’s brother, we know scarcely anything. To Saint Peter, Saint John, and Saint James the Lord’s brother, it was believed that Christ, after His resurrection, had “revealed the true gnosis” or deeper understanding of Christian doctrine. It is singular how very little is narrated of the rest, and how entirely that little depends upon loose and unaccredited tradition. Did they all travel as missionaries? Did they all die as martyrs? Heracleon, in the second century, said that Saint Matthias, Saint Thomas, Saint Philip, and Saint Matthew, died natural deaths, and Saint Clemens of Alexandria quotes him without contradiction. The only death of an Apostle narrated in the New Testament is narrated in two words, “slew with the sword.” It is the martyrdom of Saint James the Elder, the son of Zebedee. Of Saint Philip we know with reasonable certainty that he lived for many years as bishop, and died in great honour at Hierapolis in Phrygia. Eusebius makes express mention of his daughters, of whom two were virgins, and one was married and buried at Ephesus. It cannot be regarded as certain that there has not been some confusion between Philip the Apostle and Philip the Deacon; but there is no reason why they should not both have had virgin daughters, and Polycrates expressly says that the Philip who was regarded as one of the great “lights of Asia” was one of the Twelve. If we ask about the rest of our Lord’s chosen Twelve, all that we are told is of a most meagre and most uncertain character. The first fact stated about them is that they did not separate for twelve years, because they had been bidden by Christ in His parting words to stay for that period in Jerusalem. Accordingly we find that up to that time Saint Paul is the only Apostle of whose missionary journeys beyond the limits of Palestine we have any evidence, whereas after that time we find James the Lord’s brother alone at Jerusalem as the permanent overseer of the Mother Church.

We are told that, after the Ascension, the Apostles divided the world among themselves by lot for the purpose of evangelisation, and in the fourth century there was a prevalent belief that they had all been martyred before the destruction of Jerusalem, excepting John. This, however, can have only been an *a priori* conjecture, and there is no evidence which can be adduced in its support.

The sum total, then, of what tradition asserts about these Apostles, omitting the worst absurdities and the legendary miracles, is as follows : —

St. Andrew, determining to convert the Scythians, visited on the way Amynsus, Trapezus, Heraclea, and Sinope. After being nearly killed by the Jews at Sinope, he was miraculously healed, visited NeoOesarea and Samosata, returned to Jerusalem, and thence went to Byzantium, where he appointed Stachys to be a bishop. After various other travels and adventures he was martyred at Patr» by uEgeas, Proconsul of Achaia, by being crucified on the decussate cross now known as the cross of Saint Andrew.

St. Bartholomew (Nathaniel) is said to have travelled to India, and to have carried thither Saint Matthew's Gospel. After preaching in Lycaonia and Armenia, it is asserted that he was either flayed or crucified head downwards at Albanopolis in Armenia. The pseudoDionysius attributes to him the remarkable saying that "Theology is both large and very small, and the Gospel broad and great, and also compressed."

St. Matthew is said to have preached in Parthia and ^Ethiopia, and to have been martyred at Naddaber in the latter country. According to Saint Clemens, he lived only on herbs, practising a mode of life which was Essene in its simplicity and self denial.

St. Thomas is called the Apostle of India, and is said to have founded the Christian communities in India who still call themselves by his name. But this seems to be a mistake. Theodoret says that the Thomas who established these churches was a Manichee, and the "Acts of Thomas" are Manichean in tendency. Origen says that the Apostle preached in Parthia. His grave was shown at Edessa in the fourth century.

St. James the Less, the son of Alphseus, who is distinguished by the Greek Church from James the Lord's brother, is said to have been crucified while preaching at Ostrakine in Lower Egypt.

St. Simon Zelotes is variously conjectured to have preached and to have been crucified at Babylonia or in the British Isles.

Judas, LebbjEUS, or Thaddeus, is said to have been despatched by Saint Thomas to Abgar, King of Edessa, and to have been martyred at Berytus.

Scanty, contradictory, late, and unauthenticated notices, founded for the most part on invention or a sense of ecclesiastical fitness, and recorded chiefly by writers like Gregory of Tours late in the sixth century, and Nicephorus late in the fourteenth, are obviously valueless. All that we can deduce from them is the belief, of which we see glimpses even in Clemens Alexandrinus and Origen, that the Apostles preached far and wide, and that more than one of them were martyred. It would be strange if none of the Twelve met with such an end in preaching among Pagan and barbarous nations; and that they did so preach is rendered likely by the extreme antiquity and the marked Judeo Christian character of Churches which still exist in Persia, India, Egypt, and Abyssinia.

But in the silence and obscurity which thus falls over the personal history and final fate of the Twelve whom Christ chose to be nearest to Him on earth, how invaluable is the boon of knowledge respecting the thoughts, and to some extent even the lives, of such Apostles as Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and Saint John, as well as of Saint Jude, and Saint James the Lord's brother, and the eloquent writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. And the boon is all the richer from the Divine diversity of thought thus preserved for us. For each of these Apostolic writers, though they are one in their faith, yet approaches the hopes and promises of Christianity from

a different point of view; each one gives us a fresh aspect of manysided truths.

THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Let us imagine what would have been our position if, in the providence of God, we had not been suffered to possess these works, of which the greater number belong to the closing epoch of the New Testament Canon.

The New Testament would then have consisted exclusively of the works of five writers — the four Evangelists and Saint Paul. The Synoptists, in spite of well marked minor differences in their point of view, present for the most part a single — mainly the external and historical — aspect of the life of Christ. We find in them a compressed and fragmentary outline of the work of Christ's public ministry, and even this is almost confined to details about one year of His work and one region of His ministry, followed by a fuller account of His Betrayal, Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. In the fourth Gospel alone we have a sketch of the Judsean phase of the ministry, as well as the doctrine of the Logos, and a yet deeper insight into the Nature and Mind of Christ. But, with this exception, we should be left to Saint Paul alone for the theological development and manifold applications of Christian truth. And yet in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles of Saint Paul himself, we should have found abundant traces that Aw view of Christianity was in many respects independent and original. Alike from his own pages, and those of his friend and historian Saint Luke, we should have learned the existence of phases of Christianity, built indeed upon the same essential truths as those which he deemed it the glory of his life to preach, but placing those truths in a different perspective, and regarding them from another point of view. We should have heard the echoes of disputes so vehement and so agitating that they even arrayed the Apostles in a position of controversy against one another, and we should have found traces that though those disputes were conducted with such Christian forbearance on both sides as to prevent their degenerating into schisms, they yet continued to smoulder as elements of difference between various schools of thought. Taking the Corinthian Church as a type of other Churches, we should have found that there was a Kephaz party, and an Apollos party, and a Christ party, as well as a party which attached itself to the name of Paul; and even if we admitted that the Corinthian Church was exceptionally factious, we should have learned from the Epistle to the Galatians, and other sources, that there were Jews who called themselves Christians, and claimed identity with the views of James, by whom the name and work of the Apostle of the Gentiles were regarded not only with unsympathising coldness, but with positive disapproval and dislike. We should have felt that we were not in possession of the materials for forming any complete opinion as to the characteristics of early Christianity. We should have longed for even a few words to inform us what were the special tenets which differentiated the adherents of Saint James, and Saint Peter, and Saint John, and Apollos, from those of the Great Missionary who in human erudition and purely intellectual endowments, no less than in the vast effects of his lifelong martyrdom, so greatly surpassed them all. We should have been ready to sacrifice no small part of classical literature for the sake of any treatise, however brief, which would have furnished us with adequate data for ascertaining the teaching of Apostles who had lived familiarly with the Lord by the Lake of Galilee; or of some other early converts who, like Saint Paul himself, formed their judgment of Christianity with the full powers of a cultivated manhood. We should, indeed, have known how Christianity was taught by one who had been living for years in Heathen communities, whose Jewish training at the feet of Gamaliel had been modified by his early days in learned Tarsus, and still more by his cosmopolitan familiarity with the cities and ways of men; but we should have asked whether the Faith was

taught in exactly the same way — or, if not, with what modifications — by a Peter and a John, who had known, as Saint Paul had never known, the living Jesus, and by a James the Lord's brother, who spent so many years in the rigid practice of every Jewish observance. We should have been lost in vain surmises as to the growth of heresies. If Marcionism and Antinomianism sprang from direct perversion of the teachings of Saint Paul, what was the teaching on which Nazarenes, and Ebionites, and Elchasaites, and Chiliasts professed to found their views? In fact, without the nine books of the New Testament, which will be examined in these volumes, the early history of the Church would have been reduced to a chaos of hopeless uncertainties. We should have felt that our records were grievously imperfect; that only in a unity wherein minor differences were reconciled, without being obliterated — only in the synthesis of opinions which were various, without contrariety — could we form a full notion of the breadth and length, and depth and height of sacred Truth.

Now this is the very boon which the Spirit of God has granted to us. Besides the four Gospels, besides the thirteen Epistles of Saint Paul, we have nine books of the New Testament which are the works of five different authors, and every one of these brief but precious documents is marked by its own special characteristics.

1. Earliest, probably, of them all is the book which is unhappily placed last, and therefore completely out of its proper order in our New Testaments, The Revelation of Saint John the Divine. It marks the beginning of the era of martyrdoms. It is in many respects exceptionally precious. It is precious as a counterpart to the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament, and therefore as furnishing us with a splendid specimen of a Christian, as distinguished from a Jewish, Apocalypse. It is precious as showing the effect produced on the thoughts and hopes of Christendom by the first outburst of Imperial persecution. It is especially precious as a Christian Philosophy of History, and as giving a voice to the inextinguishable hopes of Christians even in the midst of fire and blood. And besides all this it is precious as furnishing the earliest insight into the mind of the Beloved Disciple, in a stage of his career before the mighty lessons involved in the Fall of Jerusalem and the close of the old. /Eon had emancipated him from the last fetters of Judaic bondage.

2. In The Epistle to the Hebrews, which is being more and more widely accepted as the work of Apollos, we have a specimen of Alexandrian Christianity. Valuable for its singular dignity and eloquence, for the powerful argument which it elaborates, and for the original truths with which it is enriched, it also possesses a very special interest because it gives us a clear insight into the school of thought which sprang from the contact of Judaism and Christianity with Greek Philosophy. Of this Alexandrianism there are but scattered indications in Saint John and Saint Paul, but it was destined in God's providence to exercise a very powerful influence over the growth and development of Christian doctrine, because it furnished the intellectual training of some of the greatest of the Christian Fathers. Our loss would have been irreparable if time had deprived us of the earliest and profoundest Christian treatise which emanated from the splendid school of Alexandrian Theology.

THE EPISTLE OF Saint JUDE.

The remaining seven treatises of the New Testament are known by the general name of the Seven Catholic Epistles. Various untenable explanations of the name "Catholic" have been suggested; but in the third century it was used in the sense of "encyclical, and there can be little doubt that these seven letters were so called because they were addressed not to one city,

or even to one nation, but generally, to every Christian. In the West they were sometimes allied Epistolae Canonical, but this could not have been the original meaning of Catholic, since Eusebius gives the name to the letters of Dionysius of Corinth. ' Two of these letters — the Epistles of Saint James and Saint Jude — belong to the Judaic school of Christianity; two others — those of Saint Peter — represent the moderate and mediating position of Christians who wished to stand aloof, alike from Paulinists and Judaists, on the more general grounds of a common Christianity; three — those of Saint John — represent a phase of thought in which the chief controversies which agitated the first decades of the Church's history have melted into the distance, or have been solved for ever by the Fall of Jerusalem. At that epoch Truth was beginning to be assailed from without by new forms of opposition, or corroded from within by fresh types of error.

As we are about to study these Epistles in detail, we may here confine ourselves to a few general remarks respecting them.

3. The Epistle of Saint Jude is the work of a non Apostolic writer, but of one who was known as brother of Saint James the Bishop of Jerusalem, and who evidently resembled his more eminent brother in intensity of character and vehemence of conviction. His brief letter is interesting from its very peculiarities. It abounds in original and picturesque expressions, and fearlessly utilises both the Jewish Hagadoth and the apocryphal literature, with which the writer's training had rendered him familiar. In the passionate vehemence of its denunciations against Gnostic libertinism it reads like a page of Amos or of Isaiah, and is evidently the work of one who, like so many of the early Jewish Christians, had thought it both a national and a religious duty in entering the Church to remain true to the Synagogue. It is a sort of partial and anticipated Apocalypse, but it rests content with isolated metaphors, instead of continuous symbols.

4. The same stem Judaic character, rendered still more unbending by the asceticism of the writer, marks every page of The Epistle of Saint James. Living exclusively at Jerusalem, accurate as the Pharisees themselves in the observance of the Mosaic Law — a scrupulosity which had gained him his title of "the Just" — he was only called upon "to be a Jew to the Jews," and this he was by nature, by temperament, and by training. In the Synod at Jerusalem, where Saint Peter proposed emancipation, Saint James — even in assenting — proposes restrictions; and while Saint Peter, almost in Pauline language, declares that neither Jew nor Gentile can be saved except "through the grace of the Lord Jesus," Saint James, while holding the same faith, urges the claims of Moses, and follows the indications of the Prophets. Saint Peter never mentions "the Law;" Saint James never mentions "the Gospel." He accepts it indeed with all his heart, but it still presents itself to him as "the Law," though glorified from "a yoke that gendereth to bondage" into a perfect "law of liberty." In reading Saint James we can realize the sentiments of the Mother Church of Jerusalem, and feel that there is no discontinuity in the great stream of Divine Revelation. For him, and for the Jewish Christians of whom he was the recognized leader, Christianity is not so much the inauguration of the New as the fulfilment of the Old.

5. It is necessary, and even desirable, that there should in all ages be some whose mission it is to develop one special aspect of truth, and to stamp the whole of their religious system with the impress of their own powerful individuality. Such, respectively, were Saint Paul and Saint James. Even in their lifetime there were some who exaggerated and perverted the special truths which it was their work to teach. After their death there were Marcionite and

Antinomians who perverted the doctrines of Saint Paul, and there were Ebionites and Nazarenes who falsely claimed the authority of Saint James. But happily there are Christians in all ages who, while they only acknowledge a heavenly master, are anxious to accept truth by whomsoever it is presented to them, yet at the same time to strip it of all mere party peculiarities.

THE EPISTLE OF ST. JAMES.

Such was Saint Peter. He can see the side of truth which either of his great contemporaries represents. He is preeminently the Apostle of Catholicity. He had shown in his conduct at Caesarea that his convictions leaned to the side of the Apostle of the Gentiles; and at Antioch that he could not wholly emancipate himself from the habits induced by lifelong training in the principles of Saint James. He was neither able nor willing wholly to shake off the spell of personal ascendancy exercised over him alike by the great world missionary and by the unbending Bishop of Jerusalem. In The Epistles of Saint Peter we are able to trace the thoughts and expressions of both these great leaders. He dwells with all the energy of Saint James on the glory of practical virtue, and with much of the fervour of Saint Paul on the distinctively Christian motives and sanctions. But it is no part of his object to follow Saint Paul in the logical development and formulation of Christian theology, nor yet to dwell with the exclusiveness of Saint James on Christian practice. Even when using language which had been seized upon as the shibboleth of partisans, he strips it of all partisan significance. He was out of sympathy with the spirit which leads to disunion and factiousness by the exclusive maintenance of antagonistic formulae.

It is interesting to see that the same distinctive peculiarities are continued in later writers of the first and second centuries. In the Epistle of the pseudo Barnabas we have an exaggerated Paulinism; in the pseudo Clementines an exaggerated Judaism, which makes a special hero of Saint James. Saint Peter, standing between both extremes, was claimed by both parties. Basilides, the anti Judaic Egyptian Gnostic, claimed to have been taught by Glaucias, the interpreter of Saint Peter; and another apocryphal work, which uttered strong warnings against Jewish worship, was called "The Preaching of Peter." On the other hand, St Peter shares, though in a degree subordinate to Saint James, the admiration of the Ebionite partisans who wrote the Clementine Homilies and Recognitions. In a less objectionable way, but still with something of exaggeration, Hennis, the author of the famous Shepherd," reflects the teaching of Saint James; while Saint Clement of Rome, Catholic, like Saint Peter, in all his sympathies, combines the distinctive features of all the Apostolic Epistles," and "belonging to no party, he seemed to belong to all"

6. There remain The Three Epistles of Saint John, which may be regarded collectively as the last utterance of Christian Revelation in the New Testament They are the more interesting not only on this account, but because they are the work of one who had been exceptionally near to the heart of Christ, and had lived for many years face to face with the great heathen world. They are also the work of one who lived to see mighty changes in the growth and fortunes of the Christian Church. He had perhaps been the only Apostle who had seen Jesus die; he had been last beside the Cross, and first in the empty tomb. As one who had watched the death bed of the Mother of the Lord, he had been one of the very few depositories of the awful mysteries which it had been given to Saint Luke partly to reveal, after they had been pondered for many years in the holy reticence of the Virgin's heart. He had been one of the scattered despairing band who had spent in anguish the awful day in which they knew that Jesus was

lying dead, and did not yet understand that He should rise again. For a quarter of a century he was the sole survivor, not only of those who had heard the last discourses of the Lord on the evening of His Passion, but even of any who could say, "That which we have seen and our hands have handled of the Word of Life declare we unto you." But his Epistles have yet a further interest as the writings of one who, in his long and diversified experience, had undergone a remarkable change alike of character and of views; of one who had passed from the Elijah spirit to the Christ spirit — from the narrower scrupulosity of a Judaist, living in the heart of the Jewish capital and attending thrice a day the Temple worship, to the breadth and width and spirituality of Christian freedom. We have in the Apocalypse a work of his in the earlier stage of his Christian opinions, when he stood for the first time face to face with the Heathen world in its fiercest attitude of anti Christian opposition. We have in his Gospel and Epistles the sweetest and loftiest utterances of Christian idealism; the strains, as it were, of Divinest music in which the voice of inspiration died away.

It may perhaps be said that our possession of these treasures — especially of some of them — is disturbed by the growing suspicion as to their genuineness. On this score Christianity has little to fear. Every true and honourable man will regard it as a base and cowardly unfaithfulness to defend as certain the genuineness of any book of the Bible of which the spuriousness can be shown to be even reasonably probable. In spite of the conflict which has raged around the Gospel of Saint John, we are deeply convinced that the arguments preponderate in favour of those who accept it as the work of the Beloved Disciple. I should find no difficulty in regarding the Apocalypse as being the work of another John if, in spite of some acknowledged difficulties, the Johannine authorship did not seem to be all but incontrovertible. The Epistle to the Hebrews is not a work of Saint Paul, but it is pre eminently worthy of its honoured place in the Canon. The first Epistles of Saint Peter and Saint John may be said to stand above all suspicion. The Epistles of Saint James and Saint Jude have less distinctive value as parts of the Christian Revelation, but yet have their own inestimable worth, and derive a deeper interest from being the works of "brethren of the Lord."

THE EPISTLES OF SAINT JOHN.

The second and third Epistles of Saint John are almost certainly genuine, but whether they be by the Apostle or not is matter of minor importance, because of their extreme brevity, and because they consist for the most part of recapitulated truths. They are but corollaries to the first Epistle, and contain no doctrine which is not found more fully in the Apostle's other writings. The only one of the seven Catholic Epistles against the genuineness of which strong arguments may be adduced is the Second Epistle of Saint Peter, which is in any case the book least supported by external testimony. Its genuineness must be regarded as a question for still further discussion, and the recent discovery of its affinity in some passages to the works of Josephus requires careful attention. In the introduction to each of these Epistles the evidence as to their genuineness is discussed. Many, both in ancient and in modern days, have doubted about some of them. Dionysius of Alexandria and Eusebius, Gaius and Jerome, Erasmus and Cardinal Cajetan, Sixtus Senensis and Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Ecolampadius, Grotius, and many more, have regarded several of them as being at best deuterocanonical — authentic (if at all) in a lower sense, and endowed with inferior authority; but though the Church of England has shown herself wiser than the Council of Trent in not binding with an anathema the necessary acceptance of the genuineness of every one of them, we have every reason to rejoice that they were admitted by general consent into the Christian Canon.

Enough, I trust, has been urged to show the varied and exceeding preciousness of the writings which we are now about to examine. Saint Paul, as has been said, dwells, not of course exclusively, but predominantly, on Christian doctrine, Saint James on Christian practice, Saint Peter on Christian trials, and Saint John on Christian experience; — Saint Paul insists mainly on faith, Saint James on works, Saint Peter on hope, and Saint John on love; — Saint Paul represents Christian scholasticism, and Saint John Christian mysticism;— Saint Paul represents the spirit of Protestantism, Saint Peter that of Catholicism, while Saint James speaks in the voice of the Church of the Past, and Saint John in that of the Church of the Future; — Saint Peter is the founder, Saint Paul the propagator, Saint John the finisher; — Saint Peter represents to us the glory of power and action, Saint Paul that of thought and wisdom, Saint James of virtue and faithfulness, Saint John of emotion and holiness. Again, to Saint James Christianity appears as the fulfilment of the Old Law, to Saint Peter as the completion of the old Theocracy, to Saint Paul as the completion of the old Covenant, to Apollos as the completion of the old Worship and Priesthood, to Saint John as the completion of all the truths which the world possessed. Such generalisations may be too seductive, and may tend to mislead us by bringing into prominence only one special peculiarity of each writer, while others are for the time ignored. Yet they contain a germ of truth, and they may help us to seize the more salient characteristics. Two things, however, are certain : — One is, that in every essential each of the sacred writers held the Catholic faith, one and indivisible, which is no more altered by their varying individuality than Light is altered in character because we sometimes see it glowing in the heavens, and sometimes flashing from the sea. The other is, that in all these writers alike we see the beauty of holiness, the regenerating power of Christian truth.

But among the writers of the New Testament two stand out preeminently as what would be called, in modern phraseology, original theologians. They are Saint Paul and Saint John. On some of the special differences between them we shall touch farther on. Meanwhile we shall see at a glance the contrast between the dialectical method of the one and the intuitive method of the other, if we compare the Epistle to the Romans with the First Epistle of Saint John. The richness, the many sidedness, the impetuosity, the human individuality of the one, are as unlike as possible to the few but reiterated keynotes, the unity, the sovereign calm, the spiritual idealism of the other. The difference will be emphasised if we place side by side the fundamental conceptions of their theology. That of Saint Paul is : —

“But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God hath been manifested, witness being borne thereto by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no distinction : for all sinned, and are falling short of the glory of God, being accounted righteous freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. iii. 21 — 24).

That of Saint John is : —

1 Herein is manifested the love of God in us, because he hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” (1 John iv. 9).

It requires but to read the two formulae side by side to perceive the characteristic differences which separate the theological conceptions of the two Apostles. It is a rich boon to possess the views of both.

We shall be still more inclined to value this precious heritage of Christian thought when we notice that the least important of these Catholic Epistles stands on an incomparably higher level than any of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. This will be shown by a glance at the Epistle of Saint Clement and the Epistle of Barnabas — writings so highly valued in the Church that the first is found in the Alexandrian Manuscript, and the second in the Sinaitic Manuscript, after the Apocalypse, and both were publicly read in churches as profitable “scriptures.”

THE EPISTLE OF SAINT CLEMENT.

(1) The Epistle of Saint Clement is thoroughly eclectic, but the eclecticism is as devoid of genius and originality as an ordinary modern sermon. It consists in a free usage of phrases borrowed promiscuously from each of the great Apostles, rather than in a real assimilation of their views. The piety and receptivity of the writer is very beautiful, but it cannot be said that it is vivified by a single luminous or informing idea.

(a) Saint Clement has read Saint Paul and Saint John, and Saint James and Saint Peter, and as a pupil of the last he is animated by a genuine spirit of catholicity; but he does not seem to have realized the essential distinctions which separate their writings. The substance of his views is identical with that which we find in Saint Peter and Saint James, but he clothes them in expressions borrowed from Saint Paul. He says with Saint Paul, “We are not justified by ourselves, nor by works, but by faith” (c. xxxii.), and he says with Saint James, “being justified by works and not by words” (c. xxx.); but he says nothing to bring into harmony the apparent contradictions. His readiness to accept all moral exhortations and all Apostolic phrases acts as a solvent in which the special meaning of these phrases as parts of entire systems is apt to disappear. Three of the sacred writers refer in different ways and for different purposes to Abraham (Rom. iv.; James ii. 21; Heb. xi. 8). In the syncretism of Saint Clement the allusions made by all three are mingled in one sentence. Rahab, in Saint Clement, is saved by her faith and by her hospitality, which is a curious union of James ii. 25 and Heb. xi. 31; and the only original observation which Saint Clement adds is the allegorising fancy that the red cord with which she let the spies down from the window indicated the efficacy of the blood of Christ for all who believe and hope in God (Ep. ad Cor \ xii). Thus the mechanical fusion of two quotations is ornamented by a loose, poor, and untenable analogy, which enables him to add “prophecy” to the faith and hospitality which distinguished the harlot of Jericho.

(b) So, too, when Saint Clement speaks of the Resurrection, we see how immeasurably his theology has retrograded behind that of Saint Paul. He does not connect it immediately and necessarily with the Resurrection of Christ, but proves it by Old Testament quotations, and illustrates its possibility by natural analogies, especially by the existence and history of the Phoenix! How much would our estimate of inspiration have been lowered — how loud would have been the scornful laugh of modern materialists — had faith in the Resurrection been founded in the New Testament on such arguments as these! Tacitus, too, believed in the Phoenix; but Tacitus does not refer to the fable of its reappearance by way of founding on it an inestimable truth. We are not comparing Saint Clement with Tacitus; we love his gentleness and respect his piety; we are only endeavouring to show how far he stands below the level of Saint John and of Saint Paul

(c) But still more striking instances might be furnished of the theological and intellectual weakness of this ancient and saintly writer. He never deviates into originality except to furnish an illustration, and his illustrations, even when they are not erroneous, have but little intrinsic value. The worth of his Epistle consists in its earnest spirit, and in its historic testimony to the canonical Scriptures and to the constitution of the early Church. But how different is its diluted and transitional Paulinism from the force and wealth of the first Epistle of Saint Peter!

(2) Nor is it otherwise when we turn to the exaggerated and extravagant Paulinism of The Epistle of Barnabas. Here the inferiority is still more marked : it even leads to decadent doctrine and incipient heresy.

(a) The writer has learned from Saint Paul the nullity of the Law as a means of Salvation, but he has not learned the true and noble function of the Law in the Divine economy. He cannot see that there may be even in that which is imperfect a relative perfection. He does not understand the Divine value of Mosaism as God's education of the human race. Not content with spiritualising the meaning of the Law, he speaks of its literal meaning in terms of such contempt as almost to compromise the authority of the Old Testament altogether. He ventures to say that the circumcision of the flesh was an inspiration of "an evil angel" (c. ix.). When a writer has gone so far as this, he is perilously near to actual Gnosticism. In his attempt to allegorise the distinction between clean and unclean animals (c. x.) he is seen at his very worst. A single chapter so full of errors and follies, if found in any canonical book, would have sufficed to drag down the authority of Scripture into the dust.

(b) Again, like the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Barnabas — for that may have been his name, though he was not the Apostle — is acquainted with Alexandrian methods of exegesis. But his use of these is indiscriminate and unsatisfactory. The Israelites had been promised a land flowing with milk and honey; Barnabas proceeds to allegorise the promise as follows : — Adam was made of earth; the earth therefore signifies the Incarnation of Christ; milk and honey, which are suitable to infants, signify the new birth. Thus the Old Testament is a prophecy of the New! On this demonstration the author looks with such special complacency that he quotes it as a memorable example of true knowledge (gnosis).

(c) Again, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews had proved from Scripture that there still remains a Sabbath rest (, Sabbatismos) for the people of God. Barnabas connects this with what he calls an Etrurian tradition, and originates the notion that the world is to be burned up in the year 6000 after the Creation. Again, he has learned the general conception of numerical exegesis (gematria) from Jewish and Alexandrian sources, and he is specially proud of pressing Abraham's 318 servants into a mystic prophecy of the Crucifixion, because 318 is represented by II T, of which he stands for Jesus, and T for the cross.

THE EPISTLE OP Saint BARNABAS.

This is a style of exegesis Rabbinic, but not Christian. No one can read the Epistle of Barnabas after the Epistle to the Hebrews without seeing that the former is not only immeasurably inferior, but that it is so inferior as to tremble on the verge of dangerous heresy. Let the reader compare the reference to the Day of Atonement in the Epistle of Barnabas (c. vii.) with that in the Epistle to the Hebrews — let him contrast the numerous errors and monstrously crude typology of the former with the splendid spiritualism of the latter — let him notice how

tasteless are the fancies of this unknown Barnabas, and how absurd are many of his statements — and he will see the difference between canonical and uncanonical books, and learn to feel a deeper gratitude for the superintending Providence which, even in ages of ignorance and simplicity, obviated the danger of any permanent confusion between the former and the latter.

We have already seen what the condition of the world was like, let us sum up its points of contrast with the general picture presented by the early Christian Church.

To represent the Christian Church as ideally pure, as stainlessly excellent and perfect, would be altogether a mistake. The Christians of the first days were men and women of like passions with ourselves. They sinned as we sin, and suffered as we suffer; they were inconsistent as we are inconsistent, fell as we fall, and repented as we repent. Hatred and party spirit, rancour and misrepresentation, treachery and superstition, innovating audacity and unspiritual retrogressions were known among them as among us. And yet, with all their faults and failings, they were as salt amid the earth's corruption; the true light had shined in their hearts, and they were the light of the world. The lords of earth were such men as Tiberius and Caligula, and Nero and Domitian; the rulers of the Church were a James, a Peter, a Paul, a John. The literary men of the world were a Martial and a Petronius; the Church was producing the Apocalypse, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Gospel of Saint John. The art of the world was degraded by such infamous pictures as those on the walls of Pompeii; that of the Church consisted in the rude but pure and joyous emblems scrawled on the soft tufa of the catacombs. The amusements of the world were pitilessly sanguinary or shamefully corrupt; those of the Christians were found in gatherings at once social and religious, as bright as they could be made by the gaiety of innocent and untroubled hearts. In the world infanticide was infamously universal; in the Church the baptised little ones were treated as those whose angels beheld the face of our Father in Heaven. In the world slavery was rendered yet more intolerable by the cruelty and impurity of masters; in the Church the Christian slave, welcomed as a friend and a brother, often holding a position of ministerial dignity, was emancipated in all but name. In the world marriage was detested as a disagreeable necessity, and its very meaning was destroyed by the frequency and facility of divorce; in the Church it was consecrated and honourable — the institution which had alone survived the loss of Paradise — and was all but sacramental in its Heaven appointed blessedness. The world was settling into the sadness of unalleviated despair; the Church was irradiated by an eternal hope, and rejoicing with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. In the world men were "hateful and hating one another"; in the Church the beautiful ideal of human brotherhood was carried into practice. The Church had learned her Saviour's lessons. A redeemed humanity was felt to be the loftiest of dignities; man was honoured for being simply man; every soul was regarded as precious, because for every soul Christ died; the sick were tended, the poor relieved; labour was represented as noble, not as a thing to be despised; purity and resignation, peacefulness and pity, humility and self denial, courtesy and self respect, were looked upon as essential qualifications for all who were called by the name of Christ. The Church felt that the innocence of her baptised members was her most irresistible form of apology; and all her best members devoted themselves to that which they regarded as a sacred task — the breaking down of all the middle walls of partition in God's universal temple, the obliteration of all minor and artificial distinctions, and the free development of man's spiritual nature;

CHAPTER VI.

ST. PETER.

The early life of Saint Peter cannot here be rewritten, because in two previous works I have followed the steps of his career so far as it is sketched in the sacred volume. After his youth as a poor and hard worked fisherman of the Lake of Galilee, we first find him as one of the hearers of Saint John the Baptist in the wilderness of Jordan. Brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, he at once accepted the Saviour's call, and received by anticipation that name of Kephias which he was afterwards to earn, partly by the stronger elements of his character, and partly by the grandeur of his Messianic confession.

SAINT PETER.

We have already tried to understand the significance of the scenes in which he takes part. We have seen how he was called to active work and the abandonment of earthly ties after the miraculous draw of fishes. We have watched, step by step, the "consistently inconsistent" impetuosity of his character, at once brave and wavering — first brave, then wavering, but always finally recovering its courage and integrity. The narrative of the Gospel has brought before us his attempt to walk to his Lord upon the water; his first public acknowledgment of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God; the magnificent promises which, in his person, the Church received; the subsequent presumption, which his Lord so sternly rebuked; the many eager questions, often based upon mistaken notions, which he addressed to Christ, and which formed the occasion of some of our Lord's most striking utterances; the incident of the Temple contribution; the refusal and then the eagerness to be washed by Christ; the warnings addressed to him; the inability to "watch one hour"; the impetuous blow struck at the High Priest's servant; his forsaking of Christ in the hour of peril; his threefold denial; his bitter repentance and forgiveness; his visit to the Sepulchre; the message which he received from the Risen Saviour; the exquisite scene at morning, on the shores of the misty lake, when Jesus appeared once more to seven of His disciples, and when, having once more tested the love of His generous but unstable Apostle, He gave him His last special injunctions to tend His sheep and feed His lambs, and foretold to him his earthly end.

Similarly we have studied, in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, the leading part which he took in the early days after the death of Christ; his speech on the day of Pentecost; his miracles; his journey to Samaria and the discomfiture of Simon Magus; his kindness to Saint Paul; his memorable vision at Joppa; his baptism of Cornelius; his bold initiative of living and eating with Gentiles who had received the gift of the Holy Ghost; the dauntlessness with which he faced the anger of the Jerusalem Pharisees; his imprisonment and deliverance, the manly outspokenness of his opinions in the Synod at Jerusalem, when he declared himself unhesitatingly in favour of the views of Saint Paul as to the freedom of Gentile converts from the burden of Mosaic observances. At this point — about a.d. 51 — he disappears from the narrative of the Acts. From this time forward he was overshadowed — at Jerusalem by the authority of James the Lord's brother, throughout the Gentile communities by the genius and energy of Saint Paul. This was naturally due to his intermediate position between the extreme parties of Paulinists and Judaists. Among the scattered Christian communities of the Circumcision he maintained a high authority, although it is probable that Christian tradition has not erred in indicating that even among the Jewish Christians of the Dispensation Saint

James still occupied the leading position. All that we can further learn respecting him in Scripture is derived from his own Epistles, and from one or two casual but important allusions in the Epistles of Saint Paul. In the Epistle to the Galatians we read the description of the memorable scene at Antioch, which produced upon the Church so deep an impression. Led away by the timidity which so strangely alternated with boldness in his character, Saint Peter, on the arrival of emissaries from James, had suddenly dropped the familiar intercourse with Gentiles which up to that time he had maintained. Shocked by an inconsistency of which he would himself have been incapable, Saint Paul, the younger convert, the former persecutor, was compelled by the call of duty publicly to withstand the great Apostle, who by his own conduct stood condemned for inconsistency, and had shown himself untrue to his own highest convictions.

Further than this, we learn that the name of Peter was elevated at Corinth (a.d. 57) into a party watchword; and that he was engaged in missionary journeys, in which he was accompanied by a Christian sister, who (since we know that he was married) was in all probability his wife. From his own Epistles we learn almost nothing about his biography. Nearly every inference which we derive from them is precarious, even when it is intrinsically probable. He writes “to the elect sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” but we cannot be certain that he had personally visited those countries. The question whether his letter is addressed to the Jewish or the Gentile converts is one which still meets with the most contradictory, although at the same time the most confident, replies. He sends his letter by Silvanus; but we are not expressly told that this Silvanus is the previous companion of Saint Paul. He sends a salutation from “Marcus my son”; but there is nothing to prove that Marcus was not his real son, nor have we any certain information that he is referring to Saint Mark the Evangelist. In these instances we may, however, accept the general consensus of Christian antiquity in favour of the affirmative suppositions. If so, we see the deeply interesting fact that the chosen friends and companions of Saint Peter were also the chosen friends and companions of Saint Paul — a fact which eloquently refutes the modern supposition of the irreconcilable antagonism between the two Apostles and their Schools. But when we come to the closing salutation — “The elect in Babylon saluteth you,” the conclusions of each successive commentator are widely divergent. It is still disputed whether “the co elect” is a Christian Church or a Christian woman; and if the latter, whether she is or is not Peter’s wife; and whether Babylon is the great Assyrian capital or a metaphorical allusion to the great western Babylon — Imperial Home.

Eminent as was the position of Saint Peter, the real details of the closing years of his life will never be known. But Christian tradition, acquiring definitiveness in proportion as it is removed from the period of which it speaks, has provided us with many details, which form the biography of the Apostle as it is ordinarily accepted by Romanists. We are told that he left Jerusalem in a.d. 33, and was for seven years Bishop of Antioch, leaving Euodius as his successor; that during this period he founded the Churches to which his letter is addressed; that he went to Rome in A.D. 40, and was bishop there for twenty five years, though he constantly left the city for missionary journeys. The chief events of his residence at Rome were, according to legend, his conversion of Philo and of the Senator Pudens, with his two daughters, Praxedes and Pudenciana; and his public conflict with Simon Magus.

The impostor, after failing to raise a dead youth — a miracle which Saint Peter accomplished — finally attempted to delude the people by asserting that he would fly to heaven; but, at the prayer of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, he was deserted by the demons who supported him, and

dashed bleeding to the earth. During the Neronian persecution the Apostle is said to have yielded to the urgent requests of the Christians that he should escape from Rome; but when he had got a little beyond the Porta Capena he met the Lord carrying his cross, and asked him, "Lord, whither goest thou" (Domine , quo vadis?) "I go to Rome," said Jesus, "to be crucified again for thee." The Apostle, feeling the force of the gentle rebuke, turned back, and was imprisoned in the Tullianum. He there converted his gaoler, miraculously causing a spring to burst out from the rocky floor for his baptism. On seeing his wife led to execution, he rejoiced at her "journey homewards," and, addressing her by name, called to her in a voice of cheerful encouragement, "Oh, remember the Lord!" He was executed on the same day as Saint Paul. They parted on the Ostian Road, and Saint Peter was then led to the top of the Janiculum, where he was crucified, not in the ordinary position, but, by his own request, head downwards, because he held himself unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

In the whole of this legend, embellished as it is in current Martyrologies with many elaborate details, there is scarcely one single fact on which we can rely. For instance, the notion that Peter was ever Bishop at Antioch between the years a.d. 33 — 40 is inconsistent with clear statements in the narrative of the Acts, in which Paul and Barnabas appear as the leaders and virtual founders of that Gentile Church. Again, if he had founded the Church of Rome, or had ever resided there before a.d. 64, it is inconceivable that neither Saint Luke in the Acts, nor Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, nor again in the five letters which he wrote from Rome during his first and second imprisonments, should have made so much as the slightest allusion to him or to his work. The story of his collision with Simon Magus is a romance. It is founded on Saint Peter's actual meeting with the sorcerer in Samaria, which is developed in the Clementines into a series of journeys from place to place, undertaken with the express view of thwarting this "founder of all the heresies." The legend is partly due to a mistake of Justin Martyr, who supposed that a statue dedicated to the Sabine god Semo Sane us (of whom Justin had never heard) was reared in honour of "Simon Sanctus." With these elements of confusion there is mixed up a malignant Ebionite attempt to calumniate Saint Paul in a covert way under the pseudonym of Simon Magus, and to imply that Saint Peter was at the head of a counter mission to overthrow the supposed heretical teaching of his brother Apostle. The notion of this counter mission is derived from the actual counter mission of Judaists who falsely claimed the sanction of Saint James. The circumstance which suggested the legendary death of Simon in an attempt to fly was the actual death of an actor, who was dashed to the ground at Nero's feet while trying, by means of a flying machine, to sustain the part of Icarus. If the youthful actor who was condemned to make this perilous attempt was a Christian, who would otherwise have been executed in some other way, we may well imagine that Christians would not soon forget an incident which sprinkled the very Antichrist with the blood of martyrs. But it is possible that the legend may rest on small basis of fact. Rome abounded in Oriental thaumaturgists and impostors. Simon may have been attracted to a city which naturally drew to itself all the villainy of the world, and there he may once more have encountered Saint Peter. But if they met at Rome, all the details of their meeting have been disguised under a mixture of vague reminiscences and imaginary details.

The assertion that Peter was Bishop of Rome, but that he constantly left it to exercise apostolic oversight throughout the world, is nothing but an ingenious theory. The statement that he came to Rome in the reign of Claudius, ad. 42, is first found in the Chronicon of Eusebius, nearly three centuries afterwards, and cannot be reconciled with fair inferences from what Saint Paul tells us about the Church. As late as ad. 52, Saint Peter was at Jerusalem, and took an active part in the Synod of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 7); and he was then labouring mainly

among the Jews (Gal. ii. 7, 9). In a.d. 57 he was travelling as a missionary with his wife (1 Cor. ix. 5). He was not at Rome when Saint Paul wrote to that Church in a.d. 58, nor when Saint Paul came there as a prisoner in a.d. 61, nor during the years of Saint Paul's imprisonment, ad. 61 — 63, nor when he wrote his last Epistles, a.d. 66 and 67. If he was ever at Rome at all, which we hold to be almost certain, from the unanimity of the tradition, it could only have been very briefly before his martyrdom. And this is, in fact, the assertion of Lactantius (t 330), who says that he first came to Rome in Nero's reign; and of Origen (f 254), who says that he arrived there at the close of his life and of the Praedicatio Petri, printed with the works of Saint Cyprian. His "episcopate" at Rome probably consisted only in his efforts about the time of his martyrdom to strengthen the faith of the Church, and especially of the Jewish Christians. Indeed, there is much to be said in favour of the view that the Jewish and Gentile sections of the Church in Rome were separated by unusually deep divisions, and possessed their separate "presbyters" or "bishops" for some years. Such a fact would account for some confusion in the names of the first two or three Bishops of Rome. Eusebius — following Irenaeus and Epiphanius — says that the first Bishops of Rome were Peter, Linus, Cletus or Anencletus, and Clement. But Hippolytus (ad. 225) seems to regard Cletus and Anencletus as two different persons, and places Clement before Cletus; and Tertullian (t 218) says that Clement was ordained by Saint Peter.

The notion of the Apostle's crucifixion head downwards is derived from a passing allusion in Origen, and seems to contradict an expression of Tertullian. It was possibly suggested by an erroneous translation of some Latin expression for capital punishment. At any rate, it stands condemned as a sentimental anachronism, bearing on its front the traces of later and more morbid forms of piety rather than the simple humility of the Apostles, who rejoiced in all things to imitate their Lord. Those who accept these legends must do so on the authority of an heretical novel, written with an evil tendency, not earlier than the beginning of the third century; or else on that of the apocryphal *Acta Petri et Pauli*, which appeared at a still later date. All that we can really learn about the closing years of Saint Peter from the earliest Fathers may be summed up in the few words, that in all probability he was martyred at Rome.

That he died by martyrdom may be regarded as certain, because, apart from tradition, it seems to be implied in the words of the Risen Christ to His penitent Apostle. That this martyrdom took place at Rome, though first asserted by Tertullian and Gaius at the beginning of the third century, may (in the absence of any rival tradition) be accepted as a fact, in spite of the ecclesiastical tendencies which might have led to its invention; but the only Scriptural authority which can be quoted for any visit of Saint Peter to Rome is the one word, "The Church in Babylon saluteth you."

If, as I endeavour to show in the Excursus, there is reasonable certainty that Babylon is here used as a sort of cryptograph for Rome, the fair inferences from Scripture accord with the statements of tradition in the two simple particulars that Saint Peter was martyred, and that this martyrdom took place at Rome. These inferences agree well with the probability that Silvanus, of whom we last hear in company with Saint Paul at Corinth, and Saint Mark, for whose assistance Saint Paul had wished during his Roman imprisonment, were also at Rome, and were now acting in conjunction with the great Apostle of the Circumcision. The belief that Saint Mark acted as the interpreter of Saint Peter may have arisen from the Apostle's ignorance of the Latin languages, and his need for one to be his spokesman during residence and legal trial in the imperial city.

CHAPTER VII.

GENUINENESS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE & SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF SAINT PETER,

The previous chapter has led us to conclude that the First Epistle of Saint Peter was written at Rome. The date at which it was written cannot be fixed with certainty. The outburst of the Neronian persecution took place in A.D. 64, but it is difficult to suppose that Saint Peter arrived accidentally in Rome on the very eve of the conflagration. It seems more probable that he was either brought there as a prisoner, or went to support the Jewish Christians during the subsequent pressure of their terrible afflictions. In that case he wrote the First Epistle shortly before his death, and he must have been martyred in the year 67 or 68, about the same time as his great brother Apostle, Saint Paul, with whom he is always united in the earliest traditions.

That the First Epistle of Saint Peter is genuine — a precious relic of the thoughts of one of Christ's most honoured Apostles — we may feel assured. Its authenticity is supported by overwhelming external evidence. The Second Epistle, whether genuine or not, is at any rate a very ancient document, and it unhesitatingly testifies to the genuineness of the first. "The First Epistle is," says M. Renan, "one of the writings of the New Testament which are the most anciently and the most unanimously cited as authentic." Papias, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen, all furnish indisputable evidence in its favour. The proof that the writer was influenced by the Epistle to the Ephesians is in accordance with the character of the age, for the early Christians, as was perfectly natural, were in the habit of echoing one another's thoughts. Modern writers do exactly the same. The words and thoughts of every writer who makes any wide or serious impression are, consciously or unconsciously, adopted by others exactly as if they were original and independent; and this is true to such an extent that an author's real success is often obliterated by its very universality. The views which he originated come to be regarded as commonplace, simply because all his contemporaries have adopted them. But this was still more the case in days when books were very few in number. The writings of the Apostles are marked by mutual resemblances, and the works of men like Ignatius, and Polycarp, and Clement of Rome, consist in large measure of a mosaic of phrases which they have caught up from their predecessors.

The style of Saint Peter in this Epistle resembles in many particulars the style of his recorded speeches. It is characterised by the fire and energy which we should expect to find in his forms of expression; but that energy is tempered by the tone of Apostolic dignity, and by the fatherly mildness of one who was now aged, and was near the close of a life of labour. He speaks with authority, and yet with none of the threatening sternness of Saint James. We find in the letter the plain and forthright spirit of the man insisting again and again on a few great leading conceptions. The subtle dialectics, the polished irony, the involved thoughts, the lightning like rapidity of inference and suggestion, which we find in the letters of the Apostle of the Circumcision, are wholly wanting in him. His casual connexions, marking the natural and even flow of his thoughts, are of the simplest character; and yet a vigorously practical turn of mind, a quick susceptibility of influence, and a large catholicity of spirit, such as we know that

he possessed, are stamped upon every page. He aims throughout at practical exhortation, not at systematic exposition; and his words, in their force and animation, reflect the simple, sensuous, and passionate nature of the impulsive Simon of whom we read in the Gospels. Even if the external evidence in favour of the Epistle had been less convincing, the arguments on which its authenticity has been questioned by a few modern theologians have been so amply refuted as to establish its authorship with complete certainty.

1. It is not so much a letter as a treatise, addressed to Christians in general. It is mainly hortative, and its exhortations are founded on Christian hope, and on the effects of the death of Christ. It is not, however, a scholastic treatise, but rather a practical address, at once conciliatory in tone and independent in character. It may with equal truth be called Pauline and Judeo-Christian. It is Judeo-Christian in its sympathies, yet without any Judaic bitterness. It is Pauline in its expressions, yet with no polemic purpose. In both respects it accords with the character and circumstances of the great Apostle. It is completely silent about the Law, and enters into none of the once vehement controversies about the relation of the Law to the Gospel or of Faith to Works. There is no predetermined attempt to reconcile opposing parties, but all party watchwords are either impartially omitted, or are stripped of their sterner antitheses.

2. One proof that it was written by Saint Peter results from the natural way in which we can trace the influence of the most prominent events which occurred during his association with his Lord. He does not mention them; he does not even in any marked way refer to them; and yet we find in verse after verse the indication of subtle reminiscences such as must have lingered in the mind of Saint Peter. Christ had said to him, "Thou art Peter, and on this rock will I build my Church," and he speaks of Christ as "a rock," the corner stone of a spiritual house, and of Christians as living stones built into it. Christ had sternly reproved him when he made himself a stumbling block, and he sees how perilous it is to turn the Lord's will into a rock of offence, using the two very words which lie at the heart of those two consecutive moments which had been the crisis of his life. When he had rashly pledged his Master to pay the Temple didrachm, our Lord had indeed accepted the obligation, but at the same time had taught him that the children were free; and Saint Peter here teaches the Churches that, though free, they were still to submit for the Lord's sake to every human ordinance. Bound by the quantitative conceptions of Jewish formalism, he had once asked whether he was to forgive his brother up to seven times, and had been told he was to forgive him up to seventy times seven; and he has so well learned the lesson as to tell his converts that "Love shall cover the multitude of Sins." In answer to his too unspiritual question, "what reward the Apostles should have for having forsaken all to follow Christ," he had heard the promise that they should sit on thrones; and throughout this Epistle his thoughts are full of the future glory and of its "amaranthine crown." He had heard Jesus compare the "days of Noah" to the days of the Son of Man, and his thoughts dwell so earnestly upon the comparison that he uses the expression in a way which unintentionally limits the fulness of his revelation. He had seen his Lord strip off His upper garment and tie a towel round his waist, when, with marvellous self-abasement, he stooped to wash His Disciples' feet; hence, when he wishes to impress the lesson of humility, he is led insensibly to the intensely picturesque expression that they should "tie on humility like a dress fastened with knots." Perhaps, too, from that washing, and the solemn lessons to which it led, he gained his insight into the true meaning of Baptism, as being not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the intercourse of a good conscience with its God. At a very solemn moment of his life Christ had told him that Satan had desired to have him and the other Apostles, that he might sift them as wheat, and he warns the Church

of the prowling activity and power of the Devil, using respecting him the word “adversary” (ivritiiKos), which occurs nowhere else in the Epistles, but more than once in the sayings of the Lord. Again and again on the last evening of the life of Christ he had been bidden to watch and pray, and had fallen because he had not done so; and watchfulness is a lesson on which he most earnestly insists. He had been one of the few faithful eye witnesses of the buffets and weals inflicted on Christ in His sufferings, and of His silence in the midst of reviling, and to these striking circumstances he makes a very special reference. He had seen the Cross uplifted from the ground with its awful burden, and respecting that cross he uses a very peculiar expression. He had heard Jesus warn Thomas of the blessedness of those who having not seen yet believed, and he quotes almost the very words. He had been thrice exhorted to tend and feed Christ’s sheep, and the pastoral image is prominent in his mind and exhortations. Lastly, he had been specially bidden when converted to strengthen his brethren, and this from first to last is the avowed object of his present letter.

3. Again we recognize the true Saint Peter by the extreme vividness of his expressions. It has been a unanimous tradition in the Church that the minute details recorded by Saint Mark are due to the fact that he wrote from information given him by Saint Peter. Picturesqueness is as evidently a characteristic of the mind of Saint Peter as it is of the mind of Saint Mark. In Saint Mark it is shown by touches of graphic description, in Saint Peter by words which are condensed metaphors.

THE LAW.

4. Such is the close analogy between the thoughts and expressions of the Epistle and those which the Gospel story of the writer would have led us to expect. Nor is the resemblance between the speeches of the Saint Peter of the Acts and the style of the Saint Peter of the Epistle less striking. As in the Acts so in the Epistle, he refers to Isaiah’s metaphor of the rejected comer stone; in both the witness of the Holy Ghost is prominent; in both he speaks of the Cross as “the tree”; in both he dwells on the position of the Apostles as “witnesses;” in both he puts forward the death of Christ as the fulfilment of prophecy; in both the Resurrection is made the main ground of faith and hope; in both we find special mention of God as the Judge of quick and dead; in both the exhortation to repentance is based on the fact of man’s redemption; lastly, in both, as a matter of style, there is a prevalence of simple relational connexions, and as a matter of doctrine there is the representation of God as one who has no respect for persons.

5. Is it not, further, a very remarkable circumstance that in the Acts Saint Peter, in one of his outbursts of impetuous boldness, ventures to call the Law “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were strong enough to bear;” and in the Epistle — though he was a Jew, though he was closely allied to Saint James in many of his sympathies, though he strongly felt the influence of the Pharisaic Christians at Jerusalem, though he borrows the symbols of the theocracy to a marked extent — does not so much as once mention or allude to the Mosaic Law at all? Even if any of these peculiarities standing alone could be regarded as accidental, their aggregate force is very considerable; nor do we think it possible that a forger — even if a forger could otherwise have produced such an epistle as this — could have combined in one short composition so many instances of subtle verisimilitude.

6. A very remarkable feature of the Epistle, and one which must have great prominence in

leading us to a conclusion about its date, characteristics, and object, is the extent to which the writer has felt the influence both of Saint James and of Saint Paul. No one can compare the number and peculiarity of the identical expressions adduced in the note, without the conviction that they can only be accounted for by the influence of the earlier writers on the later. At this epoch, both among Jews and Christians, there was a free adaptation of phraseology which had come to be regarded as a common possession. That Saint Peter has here been the conscious or unconscious borrower may be regarded as certain, alike on chronological and on psychological considerations. If the Epistle was written from Rome, we see the strongest reasons to conclude that it was written later than the Epistle to the Ephesians, and therefore after the death of Saint James. The manner in which Saint Peter writes shows that he is often accepting the phraseology of others, but infusing into their language a somewhat different shade of meaning. When we consider the extreme plasticity of Saint Peter's nature, the emotional impressiveness and impetuous receptivity which characterise his recorded acts; when we remember, too, that it was his habit to approach all subjects on the practical and not on the speculative side, and to think the less of distinctions in the form of holding the common faith, because his mind was absorbed in the contemplation of that glorious Hope of which he is preeminently the Apostle, — we find an additional reason for accepting the Epistle as genuine. We see in it the simple, unsystematic, practical synthesis of the complementary — but not contradictory — truths insisted on alike by Saint Paul and Saint James. Saint Peter dwells more exclusively than Saint Paul on moral duties; he leans more immediately than Saint James on Gospel truths.

ORIGINALITY OF SAINT PETER.

7. There is no material difficulty in his acquaintance with these writings of his illustrious contemporaries. Among the small Christian communities the letters of the Apostles were eagerly distributed. The Judaists would have been sure to supply Saint Peter with the letter of the saintly Bishop of Jerusalem; and such companions as Mark and Silvanus, both of whom had lived in intimate relationship with Saint Paul, and of whom the former had been expressly mentioned in the Epistle to the Colossians, could not have failed to bring to Saint Peter's knowledge the sublimest and most heavenly of the Epistles of Saint Paul. The antagonism in which Saint James and Saint Paul had been arrayed by their hasty followers would have acted with Saint Peter as an additional reason for using indiscriminately the language of them both. It was time that the bitterness of controversies should cease, now that the Church was passing through the fiery storm of its first systematic persecution. It was time that the petty differences within the fold should be forgotten when the howling wolves were leaping into its enclosure from without. The suffering Christians needed no impassioned arguments or eager dialectics; they mainly needed to be taught the blessed lessons of resignation and of hope. These are the key notes of Saint Peter's Epistle. As they stood defenceless before their enemies, he points them to the patient and speechless anguish of the Lamb of God. Patient endurance in the present would enable them to set an example even to their enemies; the hope of the future would change their very sorrows into exultant triumph. In the great battle which had been set in array against them, Hope should be their helmet and Innocence their shield.

8. And yet in teaching to his readers these blessed lessons Saint Peter by no means loses his own originality. The distinctions between the three Apostles — distinctions between their methods rather than their views — may be seen at a glance. They become salient when we observe that whereas Saint James barely alludes to a single event in the life of Christ, Saint Peter makes every truth and exhortation hinge on His example, His sufferings, His Cross, His Resurrection, and His exaltation; and that whereas Saint Peter is greatly indebted to the Epistle to the Romans, he yet makes no use of Saint Paul's central doctrine of justification by Faith. Thus even when he is influenced by his predecessor's phraseology, he is occupied with somewhat different conceptions. The two Apostles hold, indeed, the same truths, but, to the eternal advantage of the Church, they express them differently. Antagonism between them there was none; but they were mutually independent. The originality of Saint Peter is not only demonstrated by the sixty isolated expressions (hapax legomena) of his short Epistle, but also by his modification of many of Saint Paul's thoughts in accordance with his own immediate spiritual gift. That gift was the that power of administrative wisdom which made his example so valuable to the Infant Church. It was worthy of his high position and authority to express the common practical consciousness of the Christian Church in a form which avoided party disagreements. The views of Saint Paul are presented by Saint Peter in their every day bearing rather than in their spiritual depths; and in their moral, rather than their mystical significance Saint Peter adopts the views of his great brother Apostles, but he clothes them in simpler and in conciliatory terms. And if these phenomena, from their very delicacy, constitute an almost irresistible proof of the genuineness of the Epistle, how decisive is the evidence which they furnish that there was none of that deadly opposition between the adherents of Kephas and of Paul which has been assumed as the true key to the Apostolic history! How certain is it that "the wretched caricature of an Apostle, a thing of shreds and patches, which struts and fumes through those Ebionite romances, would not have been likely to write with thoughts and phrases essentially Pauline flowing from his pen at every turn."

9. It is important and interesting to illustrate still more fully this indebted yet independent attitude of the Apostle; this tone at once receptive and original, at once firm and conciliatory, by which he was so admirably qualified to be the Apostle of Catholicity.

i. We see it at once in the language which he uses about Redemption. Saint Peter, of course, held, as definitely as Saint Paul, that "Christ suffered for sin, once for all, the just on behalf of the unjust;" that "He Himself, in His own body, took up our sins on to the cross that we were "ransomed with the precious blood as of a lamb blameless and spotless, even of Christ." But divine truth is many sided and infinite; and whereas Saint Paul mainly dwells on the death of Christ as delivering us from the Law, and from the curse of the Law, and from a state of guilt, Saint Peter speaks of it mainly as a liberation from actual immorality; a ransom from an empty, traditional, earthly mode of life; a means of abandoning sins and living to righteousness : — and these are to him the consequences which are specially involved in that more general conception that Christ died "to lead us to God."

REDEMPTION.

And besides this different aspect of the object of the death of Christ, the means by which that object is effected are also contemplated from a different point of view. In Saint Paul's theology the Christian so closely partakes in the death of Christ that, by that death, the flesh — the carnal principle of all sin — is slain within him the old man is crucified with Christ, and the

new man, the hidden man of the heart, the spiritual nature, lives the life of Christ by mystical union with Him. Now, Saint Peter uses expressions which at once remind us of those used by Saint Paul, but he uses them with a different scope. He too speaks of “a communion with the sufferings of Christ,” but it is only in the literal sense of suffering; and he never distinctly touches on (though he may doubtless assume and presuppose) the mystery of the Christian's identity with, incorporation with, the life and death of the Saviour. Christ's sufferings are set forth as producing their effect by the moral power of example, so that His life of suffering and obedience is as the copy over which we are to write, the track in which we are to walk; and so we are to be released from sin by the imitation of Christ. “He that hath died,” says Saint Paul, “hath been justified from sin,” meaning by this that he who by baptism (vi. 4) has been buried with Christ into His death, has also by baptism risen with Him into a new life of communion, in which God's righteousness has become man's justification. Saint Paul means, in fact, all the deep truth which he sets forth mystically in Rom. vi — 15, and which he explains through the remainder of that chapter by more popular metaphors. Now, Saint Peter, in words which are doubtless an echo of Saint Paul's language, says that “he who hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; but the practical intellect of Saint Peter had no resemblance to the deeper genius of Saint Paul, and the meaning of his words, as developed in the following verses, is simply the truth that the suffering life of the Christian has in it all the blessedness of trial; and that, just as the luxury and surfeit of heathen life (verse 3) is essentially a state of sin, so the trials borne by the Christian warrior who is armed with the mind of Christ, naturally put an end to the seductiveness of sin. Saint Paul dwells most on deliverance from guilt, Saint Peter on deliverance from sin. With Saint Paul the death of Christ is the means of expiation; with Saint Peter it is more prominently a motive of amendment. Saint Paul, in Rom. vi — 15, writes like a profound theologian. Saint Peter, in iv. — 4, is using the simpler language of a practical Christian. The union between the Christian and the death of Christ, in Saint Paul is an inner union. In Saint Peter the connexion is more outward — a connexion which rather invites our obedience than modifies our inmost nature.

ii. We shall see similar differences in the use of other words. Faith, for instance, is a prominent word with Saint Peter, but neither he nor any other writer of the New Testament uses it in that unique and transcendent sense which is peculiar to Saint Paul. With Saint Paul, as we have already seen, it comes to mean an absolute oneness with Christ. Saint Peter, like the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and like Saint Clement, uses it as the substance of things which are hoped for — the conviction of unseen realities.” It is, in fact, “a confidence in the promises of God.” It is hence nearly allied to Hope. In the Epistle to the Romans the main object of faith is God's redeeming favour evidenced by Christ's death; in Saint Peter faith is mainly directed to the future salvation, of which Christ's resurrection is a pledge, and to which His sufferings are a means. And although Saint Peter dwells so much on good works, that to do good” (koyoBovouiv) occurs no less than nine times in his Epistle, yet he is not in the least endeavouring to prove any theory of Justification by works, but simply regards good works as Saint Paul does — namely, as the natural issue of the Christian calling. Nor, when he speaks of fear, in i. 17, is there intended to be any opposition to Rom. viii. 15, any more than there is in John iv. 18. The fear” spoken of by Saint Peter is only a fear of falling away from grace. There is no contradiction between the Apostles, but there is a different gleam in their presentation of the “many coloured wisdom” of God.

iiL Again, we see a difference respecting Regeneration and Baptism, and here once more Saint Peter's view is predominantly moral and general, Saint Paul's is mystic and dogmatic. Regeneration with Saint Paul means a new creation, the beginning of a life which is not the human and individual life, but which is Christ in us.” But Saint Peter, like Saint James,

regards this new birth as produced by the living and abiding word of God, producing the purification which springs from obedience to the truth, and having as its objects a living hope and a sincere brotherly love. And whereas Baptism is, with Saint Paul, the beginning of the new birth, and the communication of the Spirit, with Saint Peter, on the other hand — whatever may be the exact meaning of the difficult expression which he uses — it is clear that his thoughts are mainly fixed on the moral obligations which enter into baptism as being a type of our deliverance by means of the resurrection of Christ.

THE GOSPEL TO THE DEAD.

10. But while Saint Peter brings down, as it were, the transcendental divinity of Saint Paul from heaven to earth — from the regions of a sublime theology to those of practical Christian life — while the diversities of gifts imparted by the same Spirit thus meet the individual needs of every Christian — while the contemplation of truth from many different points of view enables us to understand its solidity and perfectness — Saint Peter has one doctrine which is almost peculiar to himself, and which is inestimably precious. In this he not only ratifies some of the widest hopes which it had been given to his brother Apostle, if not to reveal, at least to intimate, but he also supplements these hopes by the new aspect of a much disregarded, and, indeed, till recent times half forgotten, article of the Christian creed; — I mean the object of Christ's descent into Hades. In this truth is involved nothing less than the extension of Christ's redeeming work to the dead who died before His coming. Had the Epistle contained nothing else but this, it would at once have been raised above the irreverent charge of being "secondhand and commonplace." I allude of course to the famous passage in which Saint Peter tells us (iii. 19, 20) that "Christ died for sins once for all that He may lead us to God, slain indeed in the flesh but quickened in the Spirit, in which also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, once disobedient, when the long suffering of God was waiting in the days of Noah, during the preparing of the ark, by entering into which few — that is, eight souls, were brought safe through water" So far is this from being a casual allusion, that Saint Peter returns to it as though with the object of making its meaning indisputably plain. When he speaks of the perishing heathen who shall, after lives of sin and self indulgence, give account to the Judge of quick and dead, he says — "For, for this cause also, even to the dead was the Gospel preached adding, as though to preclude any escape from his plain meaning, "that they may be judged according to men in the flesh, but may live according to God in the Spirit." Few words of Scripture have been so tortured and emptied of their significance as these. In other passages whole theological systems, whole ecclesiastical despotisms, have been built on the abuse of a metaphor, on the translation of rhetoric into logic, on the ignorance and incapacity which will not interpret words by the universal rules of literary criticism; and yet every effort has been made to explain away the plain meaning of this passage. It is one of the most precious passages of Scripture, and it involves no ambiguity, except such as is created by the scholasticism of a prejudiced theology. It stands almost alone in Scripture, not indeed in the gleam of light which it throws across the awful darkness of the destiny of sin, but in the manner in which it reveals to us the source from which that gleam of light has been derived. For if language have any meaning, this language means that Christ, when His Spirit descended into the lower world, proclaimed the message of salvation to the once impenitent dead. In the first indeed of the two allusions to this truth, the preaching is formally limited to those who had died in the Deluge. This is due to two causes. Saint Peter's mind is full of the Deluge as a type of the world's lustration, first by death and then by deliverance, just as baptism is a type of death unto sin and the new life unto righteousness. Also he is thinking of

Christ's comparison of the days of Noah to the days of the Son of Man. But it is impossible to suppose that the antediluvian sinners, conspicuous as they were for their wickedness, were the only ones of all the dead who were singled out to receive the message of deliverance. That restricted application is excluded by the second passage. There the Apostle shows that he had only referred to those who perished in the Deluge as striking representatives of a world of sinners, judged as regards men in the flesh, but living as regards God in the Spirit. For, in referring to the judgment which awaits the heathen, he tempers the awful thought of their iniquities and of the future retribution which awaited them by saying that, with a view to this very state of things the Gospel was preached to the dead; — in order that, however terrible might be the judgments which would befall their human nature, the hope of some spiritual share in the divine life might not be for ever excluded at the moment of death. Of the effects of the preaching nothing is said. There is no dogma either of universalism or of conditional immortality. All details, as in the entire eschatology of Scripture, are left dim and indefinite; but no honest man who goes to Holy Scripture to seek for truth, instead of going to try and find whatever errors he may bring to it as a part of his theological belief, can possibly deny that there is ground here to 'mitigate that element of the popular teaching of Christendom against which many of the greatest saints and theologians have raised their voices. That teaching rests with the deadliest weight on all who have sufficient imagination to realize the meaning of the phrases in which they indulge, and sufficient heart to feel their awfulness. If Christ preached to dead men who were once disobedient, then Scripture shows us that the moment of death does not necessarily involve a final and hopeless torment for every sinful soul. Of all the blunt weapons of ignorant controversy employed against those to whom has been revealed the possibility of a larger hope than is left to mankind by Augustine or by Calvin, the bluntest is the charge that such a hope renders null the necessity for the work of Christ! As if it were not this very hope which gives to the love of Christ its mightiest effectiveness! We thus rescue the work of redemption from the appearance of having failed to achieve its end for the vast majority of those for whom Christ died. By accepting the light thus thrown upon "the descent into Hell," we extend to those of the dead who have not finally hardened themselves against it the blessedness of Christ's atoning work. We thus complete the divine, all comprehending circuit of God's universal grace! In these passages, as has been truly said, "we may see an expansive paraphrase and exuberant variation of the original Pauline theme of the universalism of the evangelic embassy of Christ and of His sovereignty over the world; and especially of the passage in the Philippians,' where all they that are in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, are enumerated as classes of the subjects of the exalted Redeemer."

But alas! human perversity has darkened the very heavens by looking at them through the medium of its own preconceptions; and the clear light of revelation has streamed in vain upon the awfulness of the future. The attempts to make the descent of Jesus into Hades a visit merely to liberate the holy patriarchs, or to strike terror into the evil spirits, are the unworthy inventions of dogmatic embarrassment. The interpretation of Christ's "preaching" as only a preaching of damnation is one of the most melancholy specimens of theological hardness trying to blot out the hope of God's mercy from the world beyond the grave. "It was," as Reuss says, "far better than all that : it was for the living a new manifestation of the inexhaustible grace of God; for the dead a supreme opportunity for casting themselves into the arms of His mercy; and finally, for Christian theologians, so skilful in torturing the letter, and so blind at seizing the spirit, it might have been the germ of a sublime and fruitful conception, if, instead of compressing more and more the circle of life and light by their formulae and their anathemas, they would have learned from the teaching of the Apostle that this circle is

illimitable, and that the life giving rays which stream from its centre can penetrate even the most distant sphere of the world of spirits.”

Having thus seen the authenticity, and the characteristics of the first Epistle of Saint Peter, we may proceed to ask, What was its object? Clearly it was not meant as a system of theology. Some have supposed that its scope was directly conciliatory — that by borrowing alike from Saint Paul and Saint James, and endeavouring, as it were, to make them both speak with the same mouth, Saint Peter wished to calm the controversies which had arisen, and to show that the Christian faith, whether preached by Judaists or Paulinists, was essentially the same. Now there may have been in the mind of Saint Peter some such undercurrent of intention. For he was addressing, among others, the Churches of Galatia, which had been the scene of burning controversies; and he may have wished by his silence about the Law, and his omission of such phrases as “Justification by Faith,” to show that the essential truths of Christianity might be disengaged from polemical bitterness. There must have been something intentional in this silence, for no one can read the words of Saint Paul in Gal v.—

(1) “For ye were called for freedom, brethren,

(2) Only not freedom as a handle for the flesh,

(3) But by love serve one another.” side by side with those of Saint Peter, in ii.—

(1) “As free,

(2) And yet not using your freedom as a veil of baseness,

(3) But as slaves of God,” —

without seeing that the resemblance is more than accidental. The identity of structure, the similarity of rhythm, the echo of the thought, prove decisively that Saint Peter had read the Epistle to the Galatians. It could not, therefore, have been without deliberate purpose that, in addressing Galatians among others, he assumes, without the least controversial vehemence, the one startling proposition that faithful Gentiles are the true Jews, an elect race, a holy nation, the true heritage of God, and even the true priesthood, while yet he says no word about Mosaism, or about the terms of communion between Jews and Gentiles. Here, again, we may recognize the exact attitude of Peter as seen in the Acts of the Apostles.

He is a sincere and even a scrupulous Jew; yet he had been divinely taught that the practices which he might himself continue to adopt as matters of national obligation were in no sense binding on the Gentiles, and that their freedom did not place them in a lower position in the eyes of God, who is no respecter of persons. But though such thoughts may have been in his mind, they did not furnish the motive of his address, which was, as he himself says, essentially hortatory. He wrote to testify and to exhort, to confirm the converts in the truths which they had already learned from the missions of Saint Paul and his companions, and to comfort them under persecution by encouragements, founded on the hopes of which they were partakers, and on the example and effect of the sufferings of Christ.

As in other instances, the question has been raised whether Saint Peter intended to address Jews or Gentiles; — and, as in other instances, the true answer seems to be — neither class

exclusively. The Dispersion of which he is mainly thinking is a spiritual one. He is writing to all Christians in the countries which he mentions. Why he selected the Churches of Asia Minor, and did not include the Churches of Syria, Macedonia, and Achaia, is a question which we cannot solve, seeing that both in Greece and in Syria he was personally known. That he is addressing Gentiles as well as Jews cannot be doubted by any unconventional reader; but he regards them as alike pilgrims and sojourners on earth, common members of the ideal Israel, common heirs of the heavenly inheritance. Yet we need go no farther than the first line of his letter, with its two distinctively Jewish expressions of “sojourners” (Tashabim) and “the dispersion” (Galootha), to show that even to Gentiles he is writing with the feelings and habits of a Jew.

It seems likely that the Epistle was written after the final imprisonment of Saint Paul, during whose activity Saint Peter would hardly have written to any of the Churches which had been exclusively founded by the Apostle of the Gentiles. The condition of the Churches addressed accords well with such a supposition. He is writing to those who, although their faith was undergoing a severe test, like gold tried in the fire, were yet mainly liable to danger rather than to death. They were terrorism and suffering. Now this is exactly the state of things which must have existed in the provinces after the Neronian persecution. That crisis marked out the Christians for a special hatred above and beyond what they experienced as being, in the eyes of the world, a debased Jewish sect. It even brought into prominence the name of “Christians,” which, though invented by the jeering populace of Antioch as early as ad. 44, had not until this time come into general vogue. It is true that Orosius is the first writer who asserts that the persecution extended “through all the provinces,” and there is no authority for the assertion of Tertullian that Nero had made the repression of Christians a standing law of the Empire. Some have attempted to prove that the state of things referred to could only have existed during the persecution of Trajan (ad. 101), which is of course equivalent to saying that the Epistle is spurious. But, considering that we find the traces of trials at least as severe as those to which Saint Peter alludes some time before the Neronian persecution had broken out, and in the Apocalyptic letters to the seven Churches of Asia after it had broken out, the whole argument is groundless. The members of a sect which was “everywhere spoken against,” and for which even the worthiest Gentile writers can find no better epithet than “execrable” — a sect which from the first was supposed to involve a necessary connection with the deadliest crimes — a sect which from the earliest days seems to have been exposed to the insults of the vilest mural caricatures — were certainly as liable in the later years of Nero as they were in the days of Trajan to suffer such troubles as those to which Saint Peter alludes. It ought to have been regarded as decisive against the later date thus suggested for the Epistle, that, like all the Epistles in the New Testament, it is anterior to that rapid development of the power of the Episcopate which is so prominent in the earliest of the extra canonical writings. The Churches of the Spiritual Dispersion are still under the government of Presbyters, and Saint Peter addresses them as their “fellow presbyter.” The word “episkopos” occurs but once in his letter, and that in its purely general and untechnical signification. Hence the letter is addressed to the converts in general, with only a special message to Presbyters at the end. Hope is the keynote of this Epistle. Its main message is, Endure, submit, for you are the heirs of salvation

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF SAINT PETER.

“Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ” — such is the simple and authoritative designation which he adopts. He does not need to add any of the amplifications of his title, or assertions of his claim to it, which were often necessary to Saint Paul, whose apostolic authority had been so fiercely questioned. Nor does he need to adopt Saint Paul’s practice of associating the names of his companions with his own, although both Mark and Silvanus, so well known to the Asian Churches, were at this time with him in Rome. His dignity as an Apostle was unquestioned.

His words needed no further weight than they derived from his acknowledged position. It is not insignificant that he uses the name which Christ had given him, and uses it in its Greek, not its Aramaic, form. Had he been writing with any exclusive reference to the Jewish Christians, it is more probable that he would have used his own name, Symeon, by which James speaks of him to the Church of Jerusalem, or the Aramaic “Kephas,” by which Saint Paul designates him, because he was so called by the Judaists of Galatia and Corinth.

“To the elect sojourners of the Dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” The Dispersion — in Greek, Diaspora; in Aramaic, Galootka — was no doubt an essentially literal and geographical expression; but as Saint Peter uses the unusual word “sojourners” (pare pidemoi) in a metaphorical sense for “pilgrims” in iL 11, he probably uses it in the same sense here, and not in its narrower sense of scattered Jews. The Churches which he was addressing were composed of Jewish and Gentile converts. Many of the latter had doubtless been proselytes. Even those who had been converted direct from heathenism would have been made familiar from the first with the existence of the Old Testament, and with the truth which Saint Paul had so powerfully established in his letter to the Galatians, that the converted Gentiles constituted the ideal Israel. Nothing, therefore, is more natural to a Jewish writer than the half literal, half metaphorical expression, “the expatriated elect of the Dispersion.” The word “elect” marks them out as Christians, being one of the terms by which Christians used to define themselves. Many of them, being Jews by birth, were literal members of “the Dispersion;” all of them were strangers upon earth, exiles from heaven their home, dwelling in Mesech and amid the tents of Kedar. It is natural that the phrases of a Jewish writer should be predominantly Jewish. Even the language of Saint Paul, cosmopolitan as were his views, is largely coloured by theocratic images and metaphors belonging to the older dispensation.

There seems to be no traceable significance in the order in which the provinces of Asia Minor — to use a convenient later term — are mentioned. Writing from Rome, he begins with the most distant, Pontus, flinging as it were to its farthest east the net of the fisher of men. The order of the rest, from north east to south and west, must be due to some subjective accident. The Churches of two of the provinces, Galatia and Asia, — including some so important as Ancyra, Tavium, Pessinus, and the famous Seven Churches — had been founded by Saint Paul or his companions. Jews of Pontus and Cappadocia had been present at the great discourse of Saint Peter on the day of Pentecost, and these districts contained, among others, such wealthy towns as Tyana, Nyssa, Crcsarea, and Nazianzus. The Churches of Bithynia, which Saint Paul had been hindered from visiting by a Divine intimation, were forerunners of the communities to whose simplicity and faithfulness, forty years later, Pliny bore his impartial and memorable testimony in his letter to the Emperor Trajan.

Having thus named the converts whom he meant specially to address, he describes their election as due in its origin “to the foreknowledge of God the Father,” in its progress “to the sanctifying work of the Spirit,” and as having for its end “obedience, and sprinkling by the blood of Jesus Christ.” Thus, no less than Saint Paul, he describes each of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity as co-operant in the work of man’s salvation. In his salutation, “Grace unto you and peace,” he follows Saint Paul in the comprehensive formula by which he unites the Hellenic greeting of “joy,” with the Hebrew greeting of “peace” — both of them used in their deeper Christian sense, of a “peace” which passeth understanding, and a “joy” which the world could neither give nor take away. From the Book of Daniel, with which he was evidently familiar, he adopts the expression “be multiplied,” which is found in the letters of Darius and Nebuchadnezzar there recorded.

Then follows the rich and full thanksgiving, with its comprehensive glance at the future (3 — 5), the present (6 — 9), and the past (10—12) : — “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy, begat us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and stainless and unwithering, which has been reserved in heaven for you, — who by the power of God are being guarded by faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed at the last season. In which thought ye exult, though for a little while at present, if need be, ye have been grieved in various trials, that the tested genuineness of your faith — a far costlier thing than gold which perisheth, and yet is tested by means of fire— might prove to be for (your) praise and honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ; Whom though ye never saw ye love; 18 on Whom — though ye still see Him not — yet believing, ye exult with joy inexpressible and glorified; carrying off as a prize the end of your faith — the salvation of souls. Respecting which salvation the prophets diligently sought and searched, who prophesied concerning the grace which was coming to you; — searching as to what or what kind of season the spirit of Christ in them was indicating, when it testified beforehand the sufferings which were to fall upon Christ, and the glories that should follow them; to whom it was revealed that not mainly for themselves, but for you they were ministering these things, which have now been proclaimed to you by means of those who preached to you the Gospel by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; into which things angels desire to stop and look.”

EXHORTATION TO HOPE.

“Therefore, girding up at once the loins of your understanding, being sober, lean with perfect hope upon the grace that is being borne to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ; as children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves in conformity with the former desires in your day of ignorance.”

This pregnant exhortation is supported by the motives (i.) of God’s holiness (15, 16); (ii.) of the fear due to Him as a Father and impartial Judge (17); and (iii.) of the fact that they were ransomed from their empty traditional mode of life, not by mere corruptible silver and gold, but by costly blood, as of a lamb blameless and spotless, even of Christ; Who was pre-ordained before the world was, but has been manifested at the end of the time for the sake of them who through Him believe on God, who raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory, so that our faith is also hope towards God.

The exhortation to Hope founded on these motives is followed by an exhortation to sincere

and intense Love, as the natural result of the purification of the soul by the Holy Spirit in the path of obedience; and of that new birth — not by human engendering, but by means of the living word (a *6yos*) of God, which is not transient, as is the flower of human life, but is an utterance which abideth for ever — “And this is the utterance preached to you as the Gospel.

This is the starting point to fresh exhortations. There were evidently divisions between the members of the Churches, which led Saint Peter to impress on them the duty of fervent love. He proceeds to urge them to lay aside, like some stained robe, all that is ruinous to brotherly union — malice, guile, insincerities, envies, backbitings, which may easily have arisen from such conditions as we have seen existing in the Churches of Galatia. Born again, let them, as new born babes, desire to be nurtured into perfect growth by the unadulterated spiritual milk, since they knew by tasting that the Lord is sweet. And then, changing the metaphor, he bids them “come to Christ, a living stone, and be built upon Him — as living stones upon a corner stone — into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer upspiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” The rejection of that precious stone by men, and its choice by God, had long been prophesied. The preciousness of it should belong to those who believed on Him; to the others — “for which they were also appointed” — He should be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. “But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession, in order that ye may proclaim the excellence of Him Who called you from darkness into His marvellous light : once not a people, but now a people of God; once uncompassionated, but compassionated now.”

MORAL DUTIES.

Having thus laid the sure foundations of Hope and Comfort in the great doctrinal truths of Christianity, he devotes the rest of the Epistle to the enforcement of the moral duties which result from our Christian profession.

(1) First comes the appeal to live purely and blamelessly.

“Beloved! I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims to abstain from the carnal desires which make war against the soul, keeping fair your mode of life among the Gentiles, that, in the matter in which they speak against you as malefactors, they may, in consequence of your fair deeds, as they witness them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

(2) A second special duty of Christians in those days was due respect, in all things lawful, to the civil government. By Messianic exultation, by eschatological enthusiasms, by the sense of the glory and the dignity of redeemed manhood, by the revealed equality of all men in the sight of Him Who is no respecter of persons, by the conviction of the dwindling littleness of human distinctions in the light of eternal life, they might, if they were not warned, be naturally tempted to a demeanour which would seem contemptuous towards earthly authority. Nay, more; the fearful spectacle of the power of the world wielded by those who were but too manifest servants of the power of darkness — the sight of Antichrist seated in his infamy upon the world’s throne — the daily jiroof of odious wickedness in high places — the constant expectation of that arch angelic trumpet which would shatter the solid globe, and of that flaming epiphany which should destroy the enemies of Christ — might lead them into

defiant words and contumacious actions. Occasions there are — and none knew this better than an Apostle who had himself set an example of splendid disobedience to unwarranted commands — when “we must obey God rather than men.” But those occasions are exceptional to the common rule of life. Normally, and as a whole, human law is on the side of divine order, and, by whomsoever administered, has a just claim to obedience and respect. It was a lesson so deeply needed by the Christians of the day that it is taught as emphatically by Saint John and by Saint Peter as by Saint Paul himself. It was more than ever needed at a time when dangerous revolts were gathering to a head in Judaea; when the hearts of Jews throughout the world were burning with a fierce flame of hatred against the abominations of a tyrannous idolatry; when Christians were being charged with “turning the world upside down;” when some poor Christian slave led to martyrdom or put to the torture might easily relieve the tension of his soul by bursting into Apocalyptic denunciations of sudden doom against the crimes of the mystic Babylon; when the heathen, in their impatient contempt, might wilfully interpret a prophecy of the Final Conflagration as though it were a revolutionary and incendiary threat; and when Christians at Rome were, on this very account, already suffering the agonies of the Neronian persecution.

Submission, therefore, was at this time a primary duty of all who wished to win over the Heathen, and to save the Church from being overwhelmed in some outburst of indignation which would be justified even to reasonable and tolerant Pagans as a political necessity. Nor does Saint Peter think it needful to lay down exceptions to his general rule. In his days the letter of Scripture had not yet been turned into a weapon wherewith on every possible occasion to murder its spirit. He could not have anticipated in even the humblest Christian convert that dull literalism which in later ages was to derive from such passages the slavish doctrine of “passive obedience.” He felt no apprehension that an unreasoning fetish worship would fail to see that “texts” of Scripture are to be interpreted, not as rigid and exclusive legal documents, but in accordance with the general tenor of revelation. He was writing to Christians who had not yet invented a dogma about “verbal dictation,” which necessitated ingenious casuistry on the one hand, or unreasonable folly on the other, and which turned both into a deadly engine of irresponsible tyranny.

“Submit therefore,” the Apostle says, “to every human ordinance, for the Lord’s sake, whether to the Emperor as supreme, or to governors, as missioned by him for punishment of malefactors and praise to well doers; for this is the will of God, that by your well doing ye should gag the stolid ignorance of foolish persons; as free, yet not using your freedom for a cloak of baseness, but as slaves of God. Honour all men,” as a principle; and as your habitual practice, “love the brotherhood. Fear God Honour the king.”

(3) These being the general rules, he applies them first to domestics, whether slaves or freemen, bidding them with all fear to be submissive, not only to kindly but even to perverse masters, and that as a matter of conscience even in cases of unjust suffering. “For what kind of glory is it if doing wrong and being buffeted ye shall bear it but if doing well and suffering ye shall bear it, this is thank worthy with God. For to this ye were called, because Christ too” — Who was also “a servant” — “suffered on your behalf, leaving you a copy, that ye may follow in His track; Who did no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth; Who being reviled reviled not again, suffering threatened not, but gave up to Him Who judgeth righteously; Who Himself carried up our sins in His own body on to the tree, that becoming separated from our sins we should live to righteousness; by Whose bruise we were healed. For ye were as wandering sheep, but ye are now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.”

(4) But a word was also necessary on the subject of social as well as political submission. Christian wives married to heathen husbands might be led to treat them as inferior to themselves. The elevation of their whole sex by the principles of the new revelation might tempt them to extravagances of ornament or demeanour. To them therefore Saint Peter extends his exhortations, that, even if (to suppose the worst) any of them be married to heathens who obey not the Word (i.e., the Gospel), they may without word (t.6., by the eloquent silence of deeds) be won by the chaste humility, the “delicate, timorous grace,” of wives whose adornment should not consist in elaborately braided hair, golden jewels, or splendid robes, but in the inner soul, in “the incorruptibleness of the meek and quiet spirit, which is in God’s sight very precious.” It was thus that the holy women of old, hoping Godwards, adorned themselves, submissive to their husbands as Sarah was, whose spiritual children they would prove themselves to be by calm and equable well doing, and by not living in a state of nervous scare. Christian husbands too are to be gentle and considerate to their fellow heirs of salvation, that no jarring discords might cut short their prayers. What we have said in the first chapter will throw into relief the beauty and wisdom of these exhortations. By the flagrancy of immorality, the frequency of divorce, and the disgust for marriage which prevailed in Borne, we may measure the blessedness of Christian matrimony. The meanest Christian slave who was imprisoned in an ergastulum, and would be buried in a catacomb, had no need to envy the splendid misery of a Nero or the pathetic tragedy of an Octavia’s life. The life of many a Christian couple in the squalor of a humble slave cell was unspeakably more desirable than that of the Roman profligates in their terror haunted palaces.

“Oh if they knew how pressed those splendid chains, How little would they mourn their humbler pains!”

DUTY OF SYMPATHY

(5) Finally, it was the duty of all to be united, sympathising, fraternal, compassionate, humble minded, requiting good for evil and blessing for abuse, as being heirs of blessing. This lesson is enforced by a free citation of David’s eulogy of government of the tongue, and of a peaceful disposition as the secret of a blessed life, as well as by the truth that, whether just or evildoers, we live under the eye of God. Who then could harm them if they proved themselves zealots of the good Let them fear nothing, for there is a beatitude in persecution for the sake of righteousness if the will of God should so decree. Inward holiness, outward readiness to vindicate to every one their grounds of hope with meekness and fear, together with a good conscience, would in the long run make the heathen blush at their insulting and threatening calumnies against the holiness which they accused of criminality. For, contrary to the common opinion of men, it is better to suffer (if such be God’s will) unjustly than to suffer when we deserve to do so. If we suffer for sins which we have not committed, so did our great Example. “Because Christ also, once for all, suffered for sin,

just for unjust, that He may lead you to God; slain in the flesh, but quickened to life in the spirit, wherein also He went and preached to the spirits in prison who once were disobedient when the long suffering of God awaited in the days of Noah while the Ark was a preparing; by entering wherein, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water:which (water, leg. 5) also as an antitype now saveth you — namely, baptism — (not the putting away of the filth of the

flesh, but the entreaty for a good conscience towards God)— by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is on the right hand of God, having gone into Heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.”

The general meaning of this passage — Christ’s descent into Hades to proclaim the Gospel to the once disobedient dead — is to every unobscured and unsophisticated mind as clear as words can make it. Theologians have attempted to get rid of this obvious reference by explaining it of Christ preaching in the person of Noah; or by making “He preached” mean “He announced condemnation;” or by limiting “the spirits in prison” to Adam and the Old Testament saints; or by rendering four Peter “on the watchtower of expectation” (!); or by supposing that Christ only preached to those spirits who repented while they were being drowned! These attempts arise from that spirit of system which would fain be more orthodox than Scripture itself, and would exclude every ground of future hope from the revelation of a love too loving for hearts trained in bitter theologies. What was the effect of Christ’s preaching we are not told. Some, perhaps, may like to assume that the preaching of Christ in the Unseen World was unanimously rejected by the once disobedient dead, though the mention of their former disobedience seems to imply the inference that they did hearken now. Others can, if they choose, assert that this proclamation of the Gospel to disembodied spirits was confined to antediluvian sinners. With such inferences we are unconcerned. “It is ours,” says Alford, “to deal with the plain words of Scripture, and to accept its revelations as far as vouchsafed to us. And they are vouchsafed to us to the utmost limit of legitimate inference from revealed facts. The inference every intelligent reader will draw from the fact here announced : it is not purgatory; it is not universal restitution; but it is one which throws blessed light on one of the darkest enigmas of divine justice; the cases where the final doom seems infinitely out of proportion to the lapse which has incurred it.” On the other hand, we do not press the inference of Hermas and Saint Clement of Alexandria by teaching that this passage implies also other missions of Apostles and Saints to the ’world of spirits. We accept the words of Scripture, and leave the matter there in thankful hope.

Thus — continues the Apostle — as a preliminary to His exaltation, did Christ suffer for us, and we should therefore gird on the armour of the same resolve. Suffering (of course Christian suffering is implied) is a deathblow to concupiscence. In past times they had perpetrated the will of the Gentiles in “wine swillings and roysterings,” in lives of wanton excess, and idolatries that violated the eternal law of heaven; and now the Gentiles reviled them in astonishment that they would no longer run with them into “the same slough of dissoluteness.” But these Gentile opponents “shall give an account to Him that is ready to judge the living and the dead. For to this end, even to the dead was the Gospel preached, that, as regards men, they may be judged in the flesh, but may live as regards God in the spirit.”

EXHORTATIONS.

In the last verse we again encounter the ruthlessness of commentators. “The dead” to whom the Gospel was preached are taken to mean something quite different from “the dead” who are to give an account. The dead to whom the Gospel is preached are explained away into “sinners” or “the Gentiles,” or “some who are now dead.” Augustine, as might have been expected, leads the way in one wrong direction, and Calvin in another. Another view — which makes this verse mean that “Christ will judge even the dead as well as the living, because the dead too will not have been without an opportunity to receive His Gospel” — is indeed tenable. To me, however, judging of the feelings of the Apostle, from his boundless gratitude for the

opportunities of obtaining forgiveness, and from the love which he inculcates towards all mankind, the connexion seems to be, “The heathen, in all their countless myriads, who seem to be hopelessly perishing around you, will be judged; — but the very reason why the Gospel was preached by Christ to the dead was in order that this judgment may be founded on principles of justice, that they may be judged in their human capacity as sinners, and yet may live to God as regards the diviner part of their natures;” — if, that is, they accept this offer of the Gospel to them even beyond the grave.

(6) “But the end of all things” — and therefore of calumny and suffering and heathen persecution in this transitory life — “is at hand. Be sound minded, therefore, and be sober unto prayers, before all things having intense love towards one another, because love covereth a multitude of sins.” Then come fresh exhortations to uncomplaining hospitality (so necessary for poor and wandering Christian teachers), and to a right stewardship of God’s various gifts for the common benefit to the glory of God through Jesus Christ. They were not to regard the conflagration which was burning among them to serve as their test, as though it were something strange. They ought rather to rejoice because a fellowship in Christ’s sufferings would in the same proportion involve a fellowship in His glory. Reproach in the name of Christ is a beatitude. Let none of them suffer as a murderer, thief, malefactor, or intrusive meddler; but punishment for refusing to disown the name of Christian is not a thing for which to blush, but rather to glorify God. It showed them to be, as it were, under the very shadow of the wings of the Shechinah. The time for judgment had come. If it began from the house of God, what would be the end of those who disobeyed the Gospel of God? And if the righteous be saved with difficulty, the impious and sinner — where shall he appear? So then let even those that suffer commit their lives unto God, as to a faithful Creator, in well doing.

THE EARLY HAYS OF CHRISTIANITY.

The remainder of the Epistle is more specific. It is addressed to the elders by Saint Peter — as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of the Christ, and therefore also a partaker of the glory about to be revealed. He exhorts them to tend the flock of God among them with willing and self denying oversight, “not as lording it over their allotted charge, but proving themselves examples of the flock; then, at the manifestation of the chief Shepherd, they should carry off as their prize “the amaranthine chaplet of the conqueror’s glory. The younger, too, were to be submissive to the elders, “yea, all of you, being submissive to one another, tie on humility like a knotted dress, because God arrays Himself against the overweening, but to the humble He giveth grace. Be humbled, then, under the strong hand of God, that He may exalt you in season, casting, once for all, all your anxiety upon Him, because he careth for you. Be sober! watch! because your adversary, the Devil, like a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may swallow up. Against whom take your stand, firm in the faith, knowing that the very same sufferings are running their full course for your band of brethren in the world. But the God of all grace, Who called you unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, Himself shall perfect, establish, strengthen, place you on a sure foundation. To Him be dominion for the ages of ages. Amen.