

not, in using this language, refer to the present Creed,—for some of them, in using it, and even in applying to the summary the word *symbolum*, refer explicitly to the general confession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost in the administration of baptism, as prescribed by our Saviour, and recorded in Scripture; and the rest, when they speak of the creed, the canon, the rule of faith, give us a creed of their own, agreeing, indeed, in substance with the present Creed, but not by any means identical with it. This latter statement applies more particularly to Irenæus and Tertullian in the second century, who have given us each two different summaries of the faith generally received in the Christian church; and to Origen and Gregory Thaumaturgus, in the third, who have given us each one such creed or summary;—all these agreeing in substance with each other, and with the present Creed, but all so far differing from it, as to prove that it was not during the first three centuries known in the church as an apostolic document, and that no one brief summary of the Christian faith, supposed to possess apostolic authority, was then generally known and adopted. The entire absence of all reference to the Apostles' Creed in the proceedings and discussions connected with the Nicene Council, and the formation of the Nicene Creed, affords conclusive proof that the church in general, even in the early part of the fourth century, knew *nothing of any creed* that was generally regarded as having an apostolic origin and authority. And this is confirmed by the fact that, whereas the Nicene Creed, like the creeds or summaries of faith which we find in Irenæus, Tertullian, and Origen, was but an amplification of the confession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with a much more precise and specific condemnation of Arianism than we find in any previous creed or summary; it was not till the Council of Constantinople in 381, when our present Creed was becoming better known through the growing ascendancy of the Church of Rome, that there were added to the Nicene Creed, along with a much fuller profession concerning the divinity of the Holy Ghost, in opposition to the heresy of Macedonius, the other articles not so immediately connected with the confession of the Trinity, which still form the conclusion of the Creed.\*

\* The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon make no mention of the Apostles' Creed, and virtually repudiate any other than the Nicene. What we commonly call the Nicene Creed is really the Constantinopolitan.

The diversities which we find subsisting among the ancient creeds or summaries,—and which are very considerable as to their fulness, or the number of the different articles they contain, and as to the words in which they are expressed, though they all agree as to their substance so far as they go,—furnish satisfactory evidence that there was not during the first four centuries any creed, written or oral, which was generally regarded as the production of the apostles. And what is specially important and altogether conclusive, in showing that the present Creed has no claim to an apostolic origin in any other sense than this, that it contains, as all admit, a summary of the doctrine which the apostles taught, is the express testimony of Ruffinus, that the two articles, of the descent of Christ into hell, and the communion of saints, were not to be found in the creed of the Roman Church, or of any of the Eastern churches even at the end of the fourth century; while the creed of some other churches which contained these articles, wanted others which were found in the creeds of the Roman and Oriental churches.

In opposition to all this body of evidence, Romanists have really nothing to say that is possessed even of plausibility. They can say nothing but this,—that there was no material variation among the early creeds in point of substance. But this is not to the point. No one doubts that all those creeds which have been referred to, including the different versions of the present Creed, exhibit correctly, so far as they go, the substance of the doctrine which the apostles taught, and which is accordant with the Scripture. The only question is,—Was the present Creed,—as a document of course, as to the words of which it is composed,—or any other creed or summary of Christian doctrine, the production of the inspired apostles? and the evidence which has been referred to, *requires* us to answer this question in the negative. Yet the Church of Rome has defined in the Trent Catechism, that the apostles not only composed the Creed, but gave it the name of *symbolum*; and she exacts the belief of this of her subjects.

Laurentius Valla, a learned and candid writer who flourished before the Reformation in the end of the fifteenth century, maintained that the Creed was not the production of the apostles, and was not composed till the time of the Council of Nice; but the Inquisition compelled him to retract this heresy, and to profess that he believed what holy mother church believed upon

this point.\* Erasmus, in his preface to his Annotations upon Matthew's Gospel, made the following very cautious statement: "Symbolum an ab Apostolis proditum sit, nescio." The Faculty of Theology at Paris censured this *nescientia*, as they called it, as fitted to promote impiety; and Erasmus, in a declaration which he published in consequence of the censure, has fully explained the grounds of his hesitation, though professing his willingness to believe in its apostolic origin, if the church required it.†

Dupin, one of the most fair and candid of the Romanist writers, held that there was no proof of the apostolic origin of the Creed, and that, on the contrary, the historical evidence was against it. But he was obliged by the Archbishop of Paris to make a sort of retraction of this opinion; although, after all, it was only in the following form: "I acknowledge that we ought to regard the Creed of the apostles as a formula of faith prepared by them in substance, though some terms in it were not the same in all churches."‡

Attempts have been made to show that the canonical Scriptures countenance the idea that the apostles prepared and communicated to the churches a brief summary of Christian doctrine; nay, it has even been asserted that there are references in Scripture to that very document which we now call the Apostles' Creed. This notion is indeed repudiated by the more judicious and candid of the Roman Catholic writers,§ but it has found favour among the Anglican Tractarians, and Dr Newman went so far as to say that the apostle Paul quotes from the Creed,|| and refers in proof of this to 1 Cor. xv. 3: "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." The quotation of course is, "Christ died for our sins." Dr Newman is of opinion that the source from which Paul derived this doctrine was the Creed. It is scarcely necessary to remark, that Paul has repeatedly and explicitly declared that he received his doctrine from a different and a higher source, even from the Lord, and by the revelation of Jesus Christ. We have plain enough intimations in Scripture,

\* Ittigius, Hist. Eccl. Sæc. i., pp. 79, 80.

† Fabricius, Codex. Apoc. N. T., P. iii., p. 353.

‡ Pfaff. Histor. Theol. Liter., Pars iii., p. 280.

§ Nicole sur le Symbole, pp. 6, 7.  
|| Goode's Rule of Faith. New edition, vol. i., p. 109.

that, before men were admitted by baptism into the communion of the visible church, they were not only instructed in the leading principles of Christianity, but were called upon to make a profession of their faith in Christ, and to answer some questions which were proposed to them. It was quite natural that the profession of faith which converts were expected and required to make before and at baptism, should be connected with, and based upon, a confession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in whose name baptism was administered; and accordingly, as we formerly remarked, many of the fathers speak of the creed or rule of faith as comprised in the apostolic commission to baptize in the name of the three persons of the Godhead; and, moreover, we find that *all* the earlier creeds were just amplifications or explanations of these heads,—fuller statements of what the Scriptures teach concerning these three persons. This profession, though everywhere the same in substance, varied considerably at different periods and in different churches, just because there was no one form which was recognised as possessed of apostolical authority; and there was no church which, during the first three centuries, attempted to exercise, or was recognised as entitled to exercise, authority to impose a form upon the other churches of Christ.

We have no adequate materials for tracing the growth or enlargement of any of these early creeds, and the different changes they underwent; but we have good ground to believe generally, that explanations and additional declarations were from time to time introduced into them, guarding against the different errors and heresies that might have been broached, and importing upon the part of those who received them a renunciation of these errors and heresies; and this is just the principle which is to be applied in unfolding and explaining the history of *all* creeds and confessions down till the present day. This general statement applies no doubt to the Apostles' Creed, which was just the creed commonly used in the Roman Church. We do not know precisely the history of all the changes which have been made upon it; but we do know the important fact, that the articles on Christ's descent to hell and the communion of saints, formed no part of it till the end of the fourth, or the beginning of the fifth century; and we have no positive evidence that the article on Christ's descent to hell had previously existed in the creed of any church except that of Aquileia. Attempts have been made to trace the additions which, since

the apostles' age, have been made to the Creed, by reference to the errors against which they were intended to guard. But this is not a subject of much practical importance, as the errors and heresies referred to have long ceased to meet with any support; and as it can scarcely be said that the Creed, even supposing it were possessed of authority, does give anything like an explicit decision upon any topics of importance which now divide the professing churches of Christ.

Protestants usually profess their adherence to all the articles of the Apostles' Creed, as well as Papists; and neither party can deduce any argument against the other from anything actually contained in it. It is indeed true, that when Protestants used to defend themselves against the charge adduced by the Romanists, that they had departed from the apostolic faith, by alleging that they held all the doctrines of the apostolic Creed, some Papists met this allegation with a denial, and asserted that Protestants did not believe in the holy catholic church. But this, of course, they could make out only by attaching their own arbitrary and unwarranted sense,—first, to the holy catholic church as a subsisting thing; and secondly, to what is implied in a profession of belief in it. The Papists would fain have it assumed that the holy catholic church in the Creed, means a widely extended visible society, united in outward communion under the same government, and with one visible head. Protestants maintain that this is not the correct idea of the catholic church, as presented to us either in Scripture or in primitive antiquity; and of course object to the warrantableness of putting such an interpretation upon it in the Creed. Papists further contend that a profession of believing in the holy catholic church implies a conviction, not only that Christ has a church on earth, but also that all men are bound to believe the church in all things pertaining to faith. This is explicitly laid down in the ordinary Popish catechisms in common use in this country; and it was taught also by Dr Newman even before he made an avowal of Popery.\* Protestants, however, repudiate this interpretation, and can easily prove that the words do not properly mean, and were not in the early church understood to mean, anything more than a belief in the existence of the catholic church as a society in some respects *one*.

\* Goode's Rule of Faith, vol. i., p. 55.

If men appeal to the Creed as a proof of their orthodoxy, they are of course bound to explain its meaning, and to show that they hold its statements in a reasonable and honest sense. But except upon the ground of such an appeal made by ourselves, and thereby committing us, we are under no obligation to give *any* interpretation to the statements of the Creed,—to prove that they have any meaning, or to establish what that meaning is,—just because the Creed, not being possessed of any proper intrinsic authority, the truth and accuracy of all its statements must, like those of every other uninspired, and consequently unauthoritative document, be judged of by another standard. It may be an interesting inquiry to ascertain in what sense the articles of the Creed were generally understood at the time when, so far as we can learn, they were first introduced, and at subsequent periods. But the inquiry is a purely historical one, and the result, whatever it may be, can lay us under no obligation as to our own faith. An essay was once written by a Lutheran divine,\* in which he exhibited in parallel columns the Lutheran, the Calvinistic, and the Popish interpretations of all the different articles in the Creed. And it certainly could not be proved that any one of them was inconsistent with the sense which the words bear, or in which they might be reasonably understood. Another writer afterwards added a fourth column, containing the Arminian or Pelagian interpretation of all the articles, and neither could this be successfully redargued, without having recourse to a standard at once more authoritative and more explicit.

Nay, it is well known that Arians, who deny the divinity of the Son and the Holy Ghost, have no hesitation in expressing their concurrence in the Creed, and even appeal to the common use of it in early times, as showing that a profession of belief in the divinity of the Son and the Holy Ghost, was not required in the primitive church. The conclusion which they draw is unfounded. It can be satisfactorily proved that the doctrine of the Trinity was generally held in the primitive church from the age of the apostles, although it is also certain that, before the Arians and other heretics openly opposed it, some Christian writers did not speak with so much precision and accuracy on these points as were used by subsequent authors; and that on the same ground

\* Ittigius, Hist. Eccles. Sæc. i., p. 78.

it was not so prominently and explicitly set forth in the public profession of the church. It is also true that the Apostles' Creed, and indeed all the ancient creeds, are plainly constructed upon a plan which insinuates, or rather countenances, the doctrine of the Trinity, as they are all based upon the apostolic commission embodying a requirement to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Still it cannot be said that the Apostles' Creed excludes the Arian view with anything like explicitness; and it is certain that we have creeds composed by Arians in the fourth century, which do speak of the dignity of our Lord and Saviour, so far as the mere words employed are concerned, in a far higher strain than the Apostles' Creed does.

These considerations are quite sufficient of themselves to prove that the Apostles' Creed, as it is called, is not entitled to much respect, and is not fitted to be of much use, as a summary of the leading doctrines of Christianity. A document which may be honestly assented to by Papists and Arians, by the adherents of the great apostasy and by the opposers of the divinity of our Saviour, can be of no real utility as a directory, or as an element or bond of union among the churches of Christ. And while it is so brief and general as to be no adequate protest or protection against error, it does not contain any statement of some important truths essential to a right comprehension of the scheme of Christian doctrine and the way of salvation. It is quite true that, under the different articles of the Creed, or even under any of the earlier creeds which contained merely a brief profession of faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we might bring in, as many authors have done, an explanation of all the leading doctrines taught us in Scripture; but it is not the less true that they are not stated in the document itself, and that there is nothing in its words which is fitted to bring them to our notice.

Neither can it be said that all that is contained in the Creed is of primary importance; and it is rather gratifying to know that the articles of Christ's descent into hell, and of the communion of saints—certainly the least important which it contains—were not inserted at least till the end of the fourth century. The first of these articles—viz., the statement that Christ descended into hell—has given rise to a good deal of discussion. In adverting to it, it must be remembered that, in so far as the statement that Christ descended into hell is merely to be found in the Creed, we are

under no obligation to explain or to believe it. But the important question is, Does Scripture sanction the statement; and if so, in what sense? Now there is no reasonable doubt that the statement *in terminis* is sanctioned by Scripture. The declaration of Peter\* seems to imply, that immediately antecedent to His resurrection, the  $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$  of Christ was in Hades, the word often translated by hell in our version; and the statement of Paul,† referring apparently to the same period of Christ's history, seems to warrant us in applying to His condition at that time the idea of a descent, so that the statement applied to Christ in the Creed—*κατελθόντα εἰς ᾅδην*—"descendit ad inferos"—is *in terminis* supported by Scripture, and may therefore be warrantably adopted. It does not by any means follow, however, that it is either so clear in its sense as thus put, or so important in its application, as to be entitled to occupy a place in a public profession of faith, whether more compendious or more enlarged; and yet the Church of England has injudiciously made it the sole subject of one of her thirty-nine articles. But the only important question is,—What is the real meaning of those portions of Scripture which seem to warrant the statement that Christ descended into Hades?

Calvin's view has been already stated, but it is entirely unsupported by any scriptural evidence, and it seems to be plainly enough contradicted by our Saviour's declaration to the penitent thief upon the cross, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." Many are of opinion that the scriptural statements mean merely that He was really and truly dead in the same sense in which other men die, by the actual separation of the soul from the body, and that He really continued under the power of death for a time. And the Westminster divines give this explanation of the article in the Creed about His descent into Hades, that "He continued in the state of the dead, and under the power of death, till the third day." There is good scriptural ground for maintaining that Hades sometimes means merely the grave or the state of death, without including any more precise or specific idea: it is manifest that the scope of the passage in the second of Acts—and the same may be said of the passage in Ephesians—does not require us to attach any other meaning to it; and, therefore, so far as these two passages are concerned—and they constitute, as we have seen, the

\* Acts ii. 27.

† Eph. iv. 8, 9.

scriptural foundation of the position—nothing more than this can be proved. But the question still remains,—naturally suggested by this subject, though not necessary to the exposition of it,—Do we know nothing more of the condition of Christ's soul during the period of its separation from His body? The only thing in Scripture that can be fairly regarded as conveying to us any certain information upon this point, is His own declaration to the thief upon the cross, that he would that day be with Him in paradise, which may be considered to imply that His soul did go to Hades, or the state of the departed, taken as descriptive of, or including the place and condition of the souls of the righteous in happiness, waiting for the redemption of their bodies. The Church of Rome teaches—and in this she has the sanction of some of the fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, and even of Augustine, by far the greatest of them all—that Christ's descent into hell means that He went to the *limbus patrum*, a place somewhere in the neighbourhood of hell, in the more common sense of that word, where all the righteous men that died before His incarnation, from Adam downwards, had hitherto been kept,—took them thence with Him, and carried them to heaven. But all this is a presumptuous fable, having no warrant in the word of God. We have, indeed, no definite information as to anything Christ did, or as to the way in which He was engaged between His death and His resurrection, except His own declaration upon the cross, that He would that day be in paradise; for, with respect to the very obscure and difficult passage in 1 Pet. iii. 19, about His going and preaching to the spirits in prison, I must say that I have never met with an interpretation of it that seemed to me altogether satisfactory. Among the many interpretations that have been given of it, there are just two in support of which anything really plausible, as it appears to me, can be advanced—viz., first, that which regards the preaching there spoken of as having taken place in the time of Noah, and through the instrumentality of Noah; and secondly, that which regards it as having taken place after His resurrection, and through the instrumentality of the apostles. The latter view is ably advocated in Dr John Brown's Expository Discourses on First Peter. If *either* of these interpretations be the true one, the passage has no reference to the period of His history between His death and His resurrection.

I think it is much to be regretted that so very inadequate and

defective a summary of the leading principles of Christianity as the Apostles' Creed,—possessed of no authority, and having no extrinsic claims to respect,—should have been exalted to such a place of prominence and influence in the worship and services of the church of Christ; and I have no doubt that this has operated injuriously in leading to the disregard of some important articles of Christian doctrine, which are not embodied in it, but which are of fundamental importance. Even in the third century, we find the doctrines of grace,—the true principles of the Gospel which unfold the scriptural method of salvation,—were thrown into the background, were little attended to, and not very distinctly understood; while the attention of the church in the fourth century was almost entirely engrossed by controversial speculations about the Trinity and the person of Christ; and it is, I believe, in some measure from the same cause—*i.e.*, having the Apostles' Creed pressed upon men's attention in the ordinary public services of the church, as a summary of Christian doctrine, entitled to great deference and respect—that we are to account for the ignorance and indifference respecting the great principles of evangelical truth by which so large a proportion of the ordinary attenders upon the services of the Church of England have been usually characterized,—a result aided, no doubt, by the peculiar character and complexion of the other two creeds which are also sanctioned by her articles, and which are sometimes, though not so frequently, used in her public service—the Nicene and the Athanasian.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE APOSTOLICAL FATHERS.

ALTHOUGH I do not intend to dwell at any length upon individuals, however eminent, or upon mere literary history, I think it right to advert to the apostolical fathers, as they are called, and their works, genuine or spurious. Under this designation are comprehended those men to whom any writings now in existence are ascribed, who lived before the apostles were removed from the world, *i.e.*, before the end of the first century,—the date when there is good reason to believe that John, the last of the apostles, died. The period of which we have an inspired history in the book of the Acts, extends to about thirty years, from the death of our Saviour till about the year A.D. 64. There is no reason to doubt, though Mosheim speaks doubtfully of it, that Paul suffered martyrdom in the persecution of Nero, in the year A.D. 67 or 68; and there is some ground to believe, though the historical evidence of this is not so full and strong, that Peter too then entered into his rest. There are none of the canonical books of the New Testament which were written after this period, except the Epistles and the Apocalypse of John, composed about the end of the century. And these writings of John convey to us little information of a historical kind, with respect to the condition of the church, beyond this, that errors in doctrine and corruptions in practice had crept in, and infested the churches to a considerable extent. It has been often remarked, that there is no period in the history of the Christian church, in regard to which we have so little information, as that of above thirty years, reaching from the death of Peter and Paul to that of John. There is no good reason to believe that any of the writings of the apostolic fathers now extant, were published during that interval. Those of them that are genuine, do not convey to us much information concerning the condition of the church, and add but little to our knowledge upon any subject;

and what may be gleaned from later writers concerning this period, is very defective, and not much to be depended upon. It is enough that God has given us in His word everything necessary for the formation of our opinions, and the regulation of our conduct; and we cannot doubt that He has in mercy and wisdom withheld from us what there is too much reason to think would have been greatly abused. As matters stand, we have these two important points established: First, that we have no certain information,—nothing on which, as a mere question of evidence, we can place any firm reliance,—as to what the inspired apostles taught and ordained, but what is contained in, or deduced from, the canonical Scriptures; and secondly, that there are no men, except the authors of the books of Scripture, to whom there is anything like a plausible pretence for calling upon us to look up as guides or oracles. The truth of these positions will appear abundantly manifest from a brief survey of the apostolical fathers and their writings; and in conducting this survey, I shall aim chiefly at collecting such materials as may be best fitted to establish and illustrate them, as they are indeed the only really important lessons bearing upon theological inquiries, which an examination of the writings of the apostolical fathers is fitted to suggest.

There are five persons usually comprehended under this name, *i.e.*, there are five men who undoubtedly lived during the age of the apostles, and did converse, or might have conversed, with them, to whom writings still in existence have been ascribed, *viz.*, Barnabas, Hermas, Clemens, Polycarp, and Ignatius.

*Sec. I.—Barnabas.*

Barnabas was the companion of Paul during a considerable portion of his labours; is frequently mentioned in the book of the Acts; and has even the title of an apostle applied to him. An epistle exists,\* partly in Greek and partly in a Latin translation, which, though it does not contain *in gremio* any formal indication of its author, has been long known under the title of the Catholic Epistle of Barnabas; and it is expressly ascribed by Clemens Alexandrinus, and Origen, early in the third century, to the Barnabas of the Acts. The epistle gives no information, doctrinal,

\* Rennell's Proofs of Inspiration, c. iv., pp. 92-104.

practical, or historical, of the slightest value; and contains so much that is manifestly senseless and childish, especially in allegorizing the facts of Old Testament history, and the rites of the Jewish church, that it is strange that it should ever have been regarded as the production of Barnabas. Its genuineness was at one time strenuously defended by the most eminent writers of the Church of England, such as Hammond, Bull, and Pearson. Its spuriousness was elaborately and conclusively established by Jones, in the second volume of his work on the Canon. Its genuineness is now almost universally given up, even by Episcopalians,\* and is scarcely maintained, so far as I am aware, by any except some German rationalists, who have a very low standard of what was to be expected in point of sense and accuracy even from apostles; and who would fain persuade men that there are just as unwarrantable and extravagant misapplications of the Old Testament in the epistles ascribed to Paul, and especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as in that ascribed to Barnabas. The testimonies, however, of Clemens Alexandrinus, and Origen, prove that this epistle must have existed about the middle of the second century, and perhaps earlier; and it thus, especially when viewed in connection with the commendation which these eminent men bestowed upon it, affords a proof of the little reliance that is to be placed upon the authority of the fathers in the interpretation of Scripture. It is proper to mention, that the epistle ascribed to Barnabas does not contain indications of any material deviations from the system of doctrine taught in the sacred Scriptures, and that pretty explicit testimonies have been produced from it in support of the pre-existence and divinity of Christ.†

#### Sec. II.—*Hermas*.

Most of what has now been said about the Epistle of Barnabas applies also in substance to the work which has been called the Shepherd of Hermas. It is utterly unworthy of being ascribed, as it has often been, to the Hermas who is mentioned in Paul's epistles, or to any man who was a companion of the apostles, although, from the references made to it, not only by Clemens

\* Burton and Conybeare. *Vide* Conybeare's Bampton Lectures, 1839, pp. 72, 73.

† Bull and Horsley.

Alexandrinus, and Origen, but also by Irenæus, who lived before them, it must have been written before the middle of the second century, and, what is rather strange, was sometimes read in the churches. It contains nothing of any value, either historically or theologically, except that one or two extracts have been produced from it in support of the divinity of our Saviour. There is one passage in it which has been adduced by Blondell as a testimony in favour of Presbyterianism, and by Hammond in favour of Prelacy; while it is very plain, I think, that Hermas' words really give no support to either side,\* and that both these eminent men, in attempting to derive from it some support to their opposite views, on the subject of church government, were unduly influenced by a spirit of partisanship.

#### Sec. III.—*Clemens Romanus*.

We proceed to Clemens Romanus, described in after ages as Bishop of Rome, and now commonly known under that designation. Eusebius says that he was the same Clemens who is spoken of by Paul† as one of his fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life; and there is no historical ground to doubt the truth of this. Of course we do not believe that he, or any man, was at that early period Bishop of Rome, in the modern sense of the word bishop; but there is no reason to doubt that he occupied a prominent and influential place as a pastor in the Roman Church during the apostolic age, and held it till after the beginning of the second century. Many works have been ascribed to him, such as the Apostolic Canons and Constitutions, besides others of less value and importance, which can be proved to have been fabricated or compiled not earlier than the third, fourth, or perhaps even the fifth century, not to mention the five letters ascribed to him in the decretal epistles of the Popes, forged by the Church of Rome for Popish purposes most probably about the beginning of the ninth century. The only works ascribed to Clement, which have pretty generally been regarded as genuine ever since they were first published, about two centuries ago, from the Alexandrian

\* Blondelli, *Apol.*, p. 17; Hammond, *Dissert.*, p. 284.

† *Phil.* iv. 3.

MS. in the British Museum—the only copy of them known to exist—are an epistle to the Corinthians, and a portion of what has been called a second epistle to the same church, but which seems rather to be a fragment of a sermon. The genuineness of the first epistle has been very generally admitted, while many have doubted of that of the second. There is no distinct internal evidence to lead us to entertain any doubt that the second might have been written by the author of the first, and in the apostolic age. The difference lies almost wholly in the external evidence, and more particularly in this, that whereas we have abundant evidence in declarations, quotations, and references found in the works of subsequent fathers, that Clement did write an epistle to the Corinthians, which was highly esteemed in the early ages, and even for a time read in the churches, and which was in substance the same as we now have under the designation of his first epistle, we have no satisfactory evidence of a similar kind that he wrote a second epistle, such as we have under that name. The question is one of very little practical importance, for the second epistle, as it is called, by itself possesses no historical or theological value,—*i.e.*, it gives us no information, directly or indirectly, either as to matters of fact or doctrine, which may not be more fully and obviously deduced from the first.

Clement's first epistle, then, to the Corinthians, is to be regarded as the earliest of the genuine remains of Christian antiquity, written by one who was a companion and fellow-worker of the apostles, and who occupied, while some of them were still alive, and probably by their appointment, an eminent station in the church. This, of course, invests it with a large measure of interest. We have no certain means of knowing when this epistle was written, or what circumstances gave occasion to the writing of it, except what are derived from the contents of the epistle itself. It does not contain any very certain notes or marks of time. The most explicit is, that it gives some indication of having been written soon after the church had endured a severe persecution, and this must have been either the persecution under Nero or that under Domitian. If the former, it must have been written soon after the last of Paul's epistles, and before the destruction of Jerusalem; if the latter, which is much the more probable, it must have been written about the end of the first century, or beginning of the second; and this is the opinion

most generally entertained, that it was written soon after the death of John, and the close of the canon of the New Testament.

The genuineness of this epistle as the production of Clement being well established and generally admitted, the next question concerns its integrity, or its freedom from material corruptions and interpolations. As there is but one MS. of it, and that not in a very good state of preservation, the text is by no means in a very satisfactory condition, though, of course, there are no various readings except what owe their origin to conjecture. But the main question is, whether there have been any intentional deprivations or interpolations of the original text. Mosheim suspected that it had been interpolated by some person who wished to make the venerable father appear more learned and ingenious than he was; and who, accordingly, Mosheim thinks, has put in some things alien from the general simplicity of the substance and the style of it. There is no very obvious ground for this suspicion; the allegation is rather vague, and I do not think it can be supported by satisfactory instances. The only plausible instance of this kind is his referring to the well-known fable of the Phoenix, evidently believing the common story concerning it, as an argument or illustration in favour of the resurrection of the body. This may be regarded as a good proof that he was not raised by divine inspiration above ignorance and credulity in ordinary matters; and that, notwithstanding the relation in which he stood to the apostles, he was but a common man. But the credulity thus manifested is accordant enough with the views which Mosheim evidently entertained of Clement's general character. Mosheim gives in his larger work \* a statement of the grounds of his opinion as to the interpolations of this epistle, and they are not such as, even if true, warrant his suspicion about the special character and object of the supposed interpolations. He refers, indeed, to Clement's credulity in adducing the story of the Phoenix; but he rests principally upon this, that the train of thought in the epistle is not very closely or very steadily directed to its leading object; that it is broken by digressions which have no very clear relation to the main subject. There is some truth in this representation, though I think Mosheim somewhat exaggerates the defects; but as the digressions partake much of the general

\* Instit. Maj., p. 213.



character of the rest of the epistle, they can scarcely be regarded as interpolated by some one who wished, as Mosheim supposes, to make Clement appear more learned and ingenious than he found him.

Neander entertains the same opinion as Mosheim did as to Clement's epistle being somewhat interpolated by a later hand; but he rests his opinion upon a more definite and plausible, though, I am inclined to think, equally insufficient ground. He says,\* "This letter, although, on the whole, genuine, is nevertheless not free from important interpolations; *e.g.*, a contradiction is apparent, since throughout the whole Epistle we perceive the simple relations of the earliest forms of a Christian church, as the Bishops and Presbyters are always put upon an equality, and yet in one passage (§ 40 and following) the whole system of the Jewish priesthood is transferred to the Christian church." Now, there can be no reasonable doubt that the whole scope and spirit and several particular statements of Clement's epistle, in so far as it throws any light upon the government which the apostles established, and upon the existing condition of the church when he wrote, are unequivocally and decidedly Presbyterian, or at least anti-Prelatic. But I am not satisfied that the passage to which Neander refers is, as he alleges, inconsistent with this. The adduction of such an argument by Neander, and the confidence with which he rests upon it as of itself a conclusive proof of interpolation, affords a strong indication of the deep sense which he entertained of the utter inconsistency between the spirit and government of the apostolic church, and those of a Prelatic or hierarchic one; and it is gratifying to find that this conviction was so deeply impressed upon the mind of one who may be justly regarded as the highest recent authority in church history, as to lead him at once to conclude that the only passage which Prelatists have ever produced from Clement as countenancing their claims, must necessarily, and for that very reason, be an interpolation. If the passage really required the interpretation, admitting of no other, put upon it by the Prelatists and Neander,—for in this special point of the import and bearing of this particular passage, he, of course, substantially agrees with them,—I think we would

\* Neander, *Hist. of Christ. Religion* | translation, vol. ii., pp. 331-2; *vide*  
during First Three Centuries; Rose's | also vol. i., p. 199, note.

be entitled to reject it, as Neander does, upon the ground of its inconsistency with the rest of the epistle, and with the spirit of the apostolic and primitive church. But I am not satisfied that it requires the construction which Neander puts upon it. The matter stands thus:—

The church of Corinth was, it seems, involved at this time in divisions and contentions: a spirit of faction and insubordination had been manifested among them, and had assumed the form of casting off the authority of their pastors or presbyters. Clement, or rather the church of Rome, in whose name the letter runs, wrote this epistle to the church at Corinth, expostulating with them on their divisions, exhorting them to peace and harmony, and urging a return to the respect and submission due to their pastors or presbyters. This naturally led to a setting forth of the authority and claims of the ministerial office, and of those who held it. This, however, is done very briefly and very delicately, and in a spirit the very reverse of hierarchic assumption or insolence; Clement being evidently anxious principally about the state of their hearts and affections, both because this was most important in itself, and because here lay the true root of the evil, the contention and insubordination. He does, however, set forth the necessity of order and arrangement, and of each one keeping his own place, and executing rightly and peaceably his own functions. And in support of *these general positions* he does refer to the fact that the high priest, the priests, the Levites, and the people, had each their prescribed place and functions under the law, and that regulations were laid down in the Old Testament as to the administration of religious services. This is all he says about the Jewish priesthood, and the *only* application he makes of it is to inculcate the general obligation of order and subordination; and this affords no adequate ground for asserting, as Neander does, that he "transferred the whole system of the Jewish priesthood to the Christian church." The fathers of the third and fourth centuries often referred to the Jewish priesthood as establishing the claim of the Christian ministry in general to a kind and degree of sacredness and of power which the New Testament does not sanction, and came at length to regard the high priest, the priests, and Levites, as types and warrants of the threefold order of bishops, priests, and deacons. Neander evidently viewed all this with the strongest disapprobation; and there can be no doubt that

the unwarranted transference of the system of the Jewish priesthood to the Christian church produced unspeakable mischief,—mischief which continually increased until it issued in the establishment of the only feasible antitype of the high priest upon the hierarchic system,—viz., the Pope as the monarch of the universal church. It is not altogether improbable that Clement's allusion to the Jewish priesthood may have contributed somewhat to introduce and encourage in subsequent times the baneful mode of thinking and arguing to which we have referred; but Clement is not chargeable with it, and should not be held responsible for it, as he merely referred to the arrangements connected with the Jewish priesthood and services, to illustrate the importance and obligation of *order in general*; just as he also referred with the same view to the discipline of an army. In short, he does not lay down any position, or deduce from the Jewish priesthood any inference, respecting either the dignity and authority of the Christian ministry in general, or the different orders of which it is composed, in the least inconsistent with the word of God, or in the least resembling or sanctioning the use or application made of this topic by the fathers of the third and fourth centuries. Nay, he expressly lays down, as one ground of the claim which their pastors or presbyters had to respect and obedience, that, in accordance with apostolic arrangements, they had been settled among them with the cordial consent of the whole church, *σύνευδόκησας πάσης τῆς ἐκκλησίας*; and this, certainly, was not a Jewish and hierarchic, but a scriptural and Presbyterian, principle. The passage in Clement, then, does not, as Neander alleges, sanction the "transference of the whole system of the Jewish priesthood to the Christian church," and should in fairness really be regarded in no other light than our own Gillespie's entitling his masterly and valuable book, designed to "vindicate the divine ordinance of church government," "Aaron's Rod Blossoming," by an allusion to the way in which God decided the controversy as to the right of the priesthood. There is no inconsistency, then, between this portion of Clement's epistle and its general scope and spirit, which are undoubtedly and unequivocally anti-Prelatic; and most certainly no such *clear and palpable* inconsistency as to warrant us in regarding it as an interpolation of later times.

Upon the whole, I am not convinced by the arguments of Mosheim or Neander that Clement's epistle is interpolated,

and think we have sufficient grounds for regarding it as a genuine and uncorrupted work of a companion of the apostles, and as thus a most valuable and interesting relic of Christian antiquity.

The striking contrast between the writings of the apostles and their immediate successors has been often remarked, and should never be overlooked or forgotten. Neander's observation upon this subject is this: "A phenomenon singular in its kind, is the striking difference between the writings of the apostles and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, who were so nearly their contemporaries. In other cases, transitions are wont to be gradual; but in this instance we observe a sudden change. There are here no gentle gradations, but all at once an abrupt transition from one style of language to another; a phenomenon which should lead us to acknowledge the fact of a special agency of the divine Spirit in the souls of the apostles."\*

Clement's epistle shows him to have been a man of a thoroughly apostolical spirit, *i.e.*, a man who, understanding and feeling the power of the great doctrines of Christianity, was pervaded by zeal for the glory of God and love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and an earnest desire to promote the spiritual welfare of men; and who subordinated all other desires and ends to the manifestation of these principles, and the accomplishment of these objects. To this praise he is most fully entitled; but there is nothing else about him to call forth any great enthusiasm or admiration. We respect and esteem him as a devoted Christian, a faithful and zealous minister of the Lord; and this is the highest style of man: no higher commendation could be given. But there is nothing about Clement, so far as his epistle makes him known to us, that raises him above many in every age who have been born again of the word of God,—who have walked with Him, and have served Him faithfully in the gospel of His Son. There is nothing about him that should tempt us to look up to him as an oracle, or to receive implicitly whatever he might inculcate. He was indeed the friend and companion of the inspired apostles, and he *might* possibly have learned from them much which they knew by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. But whether this were so or not, THE FACT IS UNQUESTIONABLE, that the Lord has not been pleased to employ

\* Neander's General Church History, Torrey's translation, vol. ii., p. 438.

him in making known to us anything which is not at least as fully and clearly, and of course much more authoritatively, taught us in the canonical Scripture. Neither has God been pleased to give us through Clement almost any materials fitted to aid us in understanding any of the individual statements of the Bible. It appears from Clement's epistle that he held the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, and the other fundamental principles of Christian truth; but he has not left us any statements upon any doctrinal points which may not be as easily misinterpreted or perverted as the sacred Scripture, and to which men of different and opposite opinions have not just as confidently appealed in support of their own views as they have to the word of God. He has, neither by his own exposition of Scripture, nor by communicating to us any information which an expositor of Scripture might improve and apply, cast any light upon any portion of the word of God, or afforded to others any materials for doing so. Indeed, his epistle contains plain enough proofs that no great reliance is to be placed upon his accurate interpretation, or correct and judicious application, of scriptural statements. Besides the testimony which, in common with all the rest of the fathers, he bears to the leading facts on which the Christian system is founded, as then known and believed, and to the existence and reception of the books of Scripture (and all this, of course, is invaluable), the only things for the knowledge of which we may be said to be indebted to Clement are these two: First, that the scriptural and apostolic identity of bishops and presbyters continued in the church after the apostles left the world; and, secondly, that pastors continued, as under the apostolic administration, to be settled only with the cordial consent of the church or congregation. These things have been made known to us through the instrumentality of Clement. We receive and value the information, but it is information which most of those who profess the greatest respect for the authority of the fathers, and who are in the habit of charging Presbyterians with disregarding and despising them, seem but little disposed to welcome. I will have occasion to advert to this more fully when I come to consider more formally the government of the early church; but enough has now been said for my present purpose, in so far as Clement is concerned, which is merely to give a very general view of the character and value of the writings of the apostolical fathers.

*Sec. IV.—Polycarp.*

Polycarp, another of the apostolical fathers, is usually, in accordance with the style of later writers, described as Bishop of Smyrna, though his pupil and admirer, Irenæus, in a letter to Florinus, preserved by Eusebius,\* speaks of him long after his death, as "that blessed and apostolic *presbyter*." His name is not mentioned in Scripture, though some have supposed him to be the angel of the church at Smyrna, to whom the apocalyptic epistle was addressed by our Saviour. This is not probable; but there is no reason to doubt that he had conversed with the apostle John, and that he presided over the church at Smyrna for many years before his martyrdom, which took place about the year 160. He lived many years after all the rest of the fathers of the apostolic age; and if he had written much, and if his writings had been preserved to us, he might have given us much interesting and important information concerning the condition of the church during the first half of the second century. But the Head of the church has not been pleased to afford us this privilege, or to communicate to us instruction or information through this channel. The only thing of Polycarp's that has come down to us, is a very short epistle to the church at Philippi, consisting chiefly of plain, practical exhortations, wholly in the spirit, and very much in the words, of Scripture. It was written about the year 116, and thus belongs to exactly the same period as the epistles ascribed to Ignatius; and though Mosheim declines to give any decision upon the point, there is no sufficient reason, as Neander admits, for doubting its genuineness or suspecting it of interpolations.

Almost all the general observations we have made upon the character of Clement, and the value of his epistle, apply equally to Polycarp. Polycarp occupies an important place in bearing testimony, directly and indirectly, to the leading facts of Christianity, and to the general reception of the books of Scripture; but beyond this, there is not much of real value or importance that can be directly, or by implication, derived from his epistle. We learn from it nothing concerning Christ or the apostles, their actions or their doctrines, but what is at least as fully and plainly taught us in the canonical Scripture; and it contains nothing

\* Lib. v., c. 20.

fitted to throw any light upon any of the more obscure and difficult portions of the word of God. It does give us some indications of what was the government of the church in the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles; and these are in perfect accordance with the statements of Scripture and the informations of Clement. We learn from the inscription of this epistle, that other presbyters were associated with Polycarp in the government of the church at Smyrna; while we have no indication that he held a different office from theirs, or exercised any jurisdiction over them. We learn from it, also, that at this time the church of Philippi was governed by presbyters and deacons, just as we learn from Paul's epistle to the same church, written about sixty years before, that it was then governed by bishops and deacons. This might be regarded as a confirmation, if a thing so clear required to be confirmed, that in Scripture bishop and presbyter are the same; while it also shows that this identity, which the apostles established and the Scripture sanctions, continued for some time after the inspired rulers of the church had been taken away. The only other thing of any value or interest which we learn from Polycarp's epistle is, that instances occasionally occurred, even in that early period, in which presbyters fell into gross and open immorality, and were in consequence deposed from their office.

*Sec. V.—Epistle to Diognetus.*

There is a very interesting and valuable production now generally classed among those of the apostolical fathers, though formerly—I mean among the older writers on these subjects—it was little attended to or regarded, being hid, as it were, among the works of Justin Martyr, along with which, or rather as a part of which, it has commonly been published. It is in the form of a letter addressed to a person of the name of Diognetus; and the only reason apparently for ascribing it to Justin Martyr, and inserting it among his works, is, that we know that there was a philosopher of that name at the court of the emperor to whom one of Justin's apologies was addressed. We have no external evidence as to its author, or the time at which it was written. It bears *in gremio* to have been written by one who was a disciple of the apostles, and a teacher of the nations; and there is no evidence whatever, external or internal, fitted to throw any doubt upon the truth of this statement.

Some critics, judging from the style of thought and writing by which it is characterized, have pronounced a very confident opinion that it is the production of Justin; while others, judging by the same standard, have been equally confident that it could not have been written by the author of the works which are universally ascribed to him. The following short extract from Bishop Bull's Defence of the Nicene Creed, embodies the opinion upon this point of two very eminent authorities in patristic literature, viz., Bull himself, and Sylburgius, whom he quotes, who has published an edition of the works of Justin, "*Epistolam autem illam ad Diognetum plane Justinum redolere, si cum caeteris ejus scriptis conferatur, et multa cum illis habere communia, recte observavit Fredericus Sylburgius.*"\* On the other hand, one of the latest writers in this country on the subject—Dr Bennet—in a very valuable work, entitled "*The Theology of the Early Christian Church exhibited in quotations from the writers of the first three centuries,*" expresses his opinion in the following terms: "*The styles of Cicero and Tacitus, or those of Addison and Gibbon, are not more dissimilar than the composition of Justin and that of the writer to Diognetus. The sentences of the Martyr are loose, prolix, and inaccurate, with somewhat of a morose tone and a foreign air; while those of the letter writer have all the benevolent grace of the Christian, with all the elegant simplicity, luminous terseness, and logical finish, of a practised author in his native Greek.*"† And, in accordance with this view, Neander says of it, "*Its language and thoughts, as well as the silence of the ancients, prove that the letter does not proceed from Justin.*"‡

I have no great confidence in the judgments even of eminent critics upon questions of this sort, unless there be materials for bringing them to be tested by some pretty definite and palpable standard; and, indeed, I have made these quotations chiefly for the purpose of pointing out how little reliance is to be placed upon decisions of points of this sort, which abound so much in the writings of continental critics, and are by many of them applied very boldly even to the different books of Scripture. In this particular case, however, I think that the internal evidence is in favour of ascribing the letter to Diognetus to a different author from Justin;

\* Bull's Works, vol. v., p. 191. Oxford, 1827.

† Neander, vol. ii., p. 348, Rose's translation.

‡ Bennet, pp. 6, 7.