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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

## VIGILANTIUS: AN EARLY GALLIC PROTESTANT

THE two centuries which followed the Edict of Milan (A.D. 313) by which the Christian Church, after nearly three hundred years of obloquy and persecution, was raised to a position of honour and privilege, have sometimes been regarded as the Golden Age of the Church—the age which produced some of the Church's greatest thinkers, administrators, and saints—the age of expansion, development of organisation, and definition of dogma. But this is only one side of the picture. There is a darker side. These centuries were also marked by moral and spiritual deterioration. Says Dr. Edwyn Bevan: "The new position which Christianity had acquired in the world made a greater difference to the character of Christianity than it did to the character of the world. . . . The truth is that the world was very far from being converted to Christianity. Vast masses of people everywhere now called themselves Christian and were formally incorporated in the Christian Church, who were as pagan as ever in heart" (*Christianity*, pp. 107, 116). The Church was induced to make some "accommodation" with paganism, and this resulted in a lowering of spirituality and the introduction of many superstitious practices. Here and there voices were raised against the tendency of the times, and one of the earliest of these was that of Vigilantius, a presbyter of Gaul, whom Gibbon fittingly describes as "the Protestant of his age".

Our knowledge of Vigilantius is mostly derived from his bitter enemy, the famous Church Father, Jerome. Jerome is one of the most distinguished figures of the Church during this period. Few, if any, have displayed a wider range of knowledge, or more remarkable powers of expression. Yet his greatest admirers deplore certain defects of character which cast a shadow over his otherwise deservedly high reputation. Whatever merits he may have to veneration as a saint, it is all too clear that Christian charity was not one of his outstanding virtues. Dr. Foakes-Jackson truly remarks: "Jerome is a character difficult to understand unless studied with a certain sympathy. If we regard him as a great saint and read his life from the standpoint of the hagiologist, we shall be pained and

shocked at the spirit displayed by him in many of his works" (*History of the Christian Church to A.D. 461*, p. 480). Montalembert calls him "that lion of Christian polemics". Leonine he certainly was in the savage ferocity with which he attacked his opponents. The story of ecclesiastical controversy often makes sad reading, but it would be hard to find anywhere in literature words more vitriolic than those which poured from the pen of Jerome, and of these none surpass the invectives with which he assailed Vigilantius. But despite the harsh and defamatory terms which he applies to his critic, Vigilantius stands forth as a man of sincere faith, firm conviction, and daring courage, who, in an age when the Christian religion was imperilled by corrupting influences, ventured to make an earnest protest. Most Church historians, even if they mention him at all, give him the slightest notice, but his name deserves to be remembered by all lovers of evangelical religion.<sup>1</sup>

## I

Vigilantius was born circa 365. According to Jerome, his father was an innkeeper at Calagurris. As there were two places of that name, one situated a few miles south of the Pyrenees, and the other north of that range, opinion is divided whether Vigilantius is to be regarded as a Spaniard or a Gaul. The sixteenth-century Roman Catholic historian, Caesar Baronius, represents him as a Spaniard, and in recent times the German scholar, Dr. G. Grützmacher, describes him as "the Spanish presbyter" (*E.R.E.* vii, p. 499). The probability is that he belonged to Aquitania in south-west Gaul, and that the Calagurris where his early life was spent, is to be identified either with the town later known as Cazères, or with Saint Bernard-de-Comminges in Haute-Garrone. In any case the place was within sight of the Pyrenees. Jerome remarks: "You dwell at the roots of the Pyrenees and are close upon Iberia." Emphasising Vigilantius's lowly origin, he contemptuously calls him "this fellow, an innkeeper". The sneer may be discounted as the malicious utterance of an unscrupulous controversialist adept in the use of opprobrious epithets. We can well believe

<sup>1</sup> In 1844 Dr. W. S. Gilly, Vicar of Norham, and Canon of Durham, published a work of considerable length entitled *Vigilantius and His Age*. Though written with a strong anti-Tractarian bias, and containing some extraneous matter, this volume represents painstaking research. Its value is increased by the inclusion of the Latin text of Jerome's relevant writings, with translations by the Rev. Joseph Stevenson. These translations have been largely used in the present essay.

that as a youth Vigilantius assisted his father in the management of the *statio* or hostelry on the highway between Gaul and Spain, but, as Dean Farrar pertinently says, this is "no more discredit to Vigilantius than his youthful service in the Bell Inn at Gloucester was to Whitefield" (*Lives of the Fathers* ii, p. 364).

As travel in the Roman Empire was almost restricted to the main highways, we may assume that the roadside inn at Calagurris afforded Vigilantius many opportunities of meeting and conversing with distinguished persons, including not only Imperial officials but also eminent ecclesiastics who halted here on their way to Church Councils and Synods. Such gatherings took place at Saragossa in 380 and at Bordeaux in 384. At this period the Gallic Church possessed several saintly bishops such as Delphinus of Bordeaux, Phoebadius of Agen, and Exuperius of Toulouse. Jerome afterwards complained of certain Gallic bishops who supported Vigilantius in his views, and it is possible that some of these may have met him while he was living with his father at Calagurris. Other important persons who showed an interest in him were Sulpicius Severus, the biographer of St. Martin of Tours, and Paulinus of Nola.

At this time Sulpicius Severus owned estates on both sides of the Pyrenees, and he appears to have taken Vigilantius into his service. The correspondence between Sulpicius and Paulinus reveals that his master held the young man in high esteem. Sulpicius was a scholar, and Vigilantius may have acted as his amanuensis and collaborated with him in his Biblical, theological, and historical studies. Jerome speaks slightly of Vigilantius's educational qualifications and sneers at his uncouth literary style, but this is only another evidence of prejudice, for, as Erasmus remarks, the excerpts which Jerome gives from Vigilantius's writings do not support such a judgment. Vigilantius was at least scholar enough to prove himself a well-informed and doughty controversialist.

About the year 395 Vigilantius, accompanied by another servant of Sulpicius, was sent on a mission to Paulinus of Nola. The latter had been seriously ill, and Sulpicius wrote him a letter of sympathy. In his acknowledgment Paulinus apologises for having detained the young men so long:

"But this is not the only cause which has detained our young men here, for our Vigilantius has been labouring under a fever in Campania, both before he arrived at my house, and since; and he has thus sympathized in my illness by fellow-suffering, like one who is a member of my body. . . . When our Vigilantius began to be well enough to travel, then I thought of replying to your letter. I confess, however, that both would willingly have been on their journey long ago; but since the one would have been rash to hasten his departure, before he was convalescent, and the other, who was well, would have been unkind to set out before his companion, I quietly detained them both, against their wishes, by delaying to write to you, when I found that remonstrances were unavailing" (*Opera Paulini*, Ed. Ant., 1622).

The endearing expression "our Vigilantius", *noster Vigilantius*, suggests a previous acquaintance, while the whole passage indicates the warm regard of Paulinus for Vigilantius.

## II

The time and place of Vigilantius's ordination are uncertain, but the date cannot have been much later than his visit to Nola. From a statement by Gennadius of Marseilles, written at the end of the following century, that Vigilantius was a presbyter of Barcelona, some historians have assumed that he was ordained in that diocese, while others hold that his ordination took place in Gaul. The latter supposition is more likely, for Gennadius's reference may apply to a later period. In any case Vigilantius does not seem to have undertaken a pastoral charge, for shortly afterwards he set out for the East. His father's death provided him with means for travel. Among the letters of introduction which he carried was one from Paulinus to Jerome at Bethlehem. Credentials from such a source ensured a courteous welcome. In acknowledgment, Jerome writes: "With regard to the holy presbyter Vigilantius, and how warmly I received him, it is better that you should receive the information from his own mouth than from my letter."

Vigilantius's stay at Bethlehem, Jerome informs us, was brief. We cannot help wondering if already differences had arisen which afterwards were to develop into open hostility. The Jansenist scholar, Tillemont, thinks that there was no serious breach, otherwise Jerome would have expressed himself differently in his letter to Paulinus: "If they did not part on good terms, I do not see how Jerome could speak of him as if he were a 'holy priest'" (*Mémoires Ecclés.* xii, p. 195). But too much stress must not be placed upon the designation

"*sanctum presbyterum*". Jerome frequently uses the expression in relation to others, and it may have been little more than an honorific title.

From Jerome himself we learn that discussions did take place between him and Vigilantius, and subsequent developments suggest that on various matters they did not see eye to eye. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, whatever outward forms of courtesy were maintained, there soon grew up between host and guest a mutual distrust and even dislike. In his letter to Paulinus, Jerome says:

"I cannot explain why he should be in such a hurry to leave me, and should take his departure so soon, lest I should appear to injure somebody. However, I have detained him for a short time, though he was only a passing visitor, and in haste to be gone, and I have given him a taste of my friendship, that you may learn from him whatever you may desire to know about me."

Jerome's real feelings are better reflected in his letter to Vigilantius written two years later, and to which further reference will be made:

"I gave credence to the letters of the holy presbyter Paulinus, and did not imagine that his judgment of you was erroneous. And although immediately that I received the letter, I noticed that your conversation was unpolished, yet I thought there was more of clownishness and simplicity in you than of folly. Nor do I blame the holy man; for he thought it better to conceal from me what he knew, than to accuse his poor retainer by letters of which that person himself was to be the bearer. But I do reprove myself for yielding to the judgment of another than to my own, and that I trusted the account given by the letter, rather than that other which my own eyes perceived" (*Ad Vigilantium*).

After leaving Palestine Vigilantius spent some time at Alexandria where he may have met the bishop, Theophilus, who figures largely in the history of this period. From Egypt he sailed for Italy on his homeward journey. After calling at Nola to deliver Jerome's letter to Paulinus, he proceeded overland to Aquitania where he settled down at Calagurris, his native place. We may date his return about the year 397. Vigilantius now devoted himself to theological study and shortly afterwards produced a small treatise which evoked the ire of Jerome who had meantime heard rumours that the Gallic presbyter had spoken disparagingly of himself during the course of his journey back to Gaul. Jerome addressed to him a virulent letter in which he both defends himself and pours contempt upon his critic.

## III

From Jerome's *Ad Vigilantium* we gather that some of their differences arose out of the Origenist controversy which troubled the Church at the end of the fourth century. Origen was a daring thinker who from the first was viewed askance by many who disapproved of his philosophical and theological interpretations. Dr. W. R. W. Stephens writes:

"As a general statement it may be true to say that he [Origen] was less acceptable to the colder, more practical, more realistic mind of the Western Church, than to the lively imagination and speculative spirit of Oriental churchmen. The most controversial points, indeed, in his system were of a kind with which the Western mind did not naturally occupy itself. The pre-existence of souls; their entrance into human bodies after the fall as punishment of sin; their emancipation from the flesh in the resurrection; the ultimate salvation of all spirits, including Satan himself,—these are questions singularly congenial to Oriental, singularly alien from Western thought" (*Sr. Chrysostom, 299*).

For a time the controversy died down, but it broke out again with increased bitterness a century and a half after Origen's death. By this time there had been a marked hardening of ecclesiastical dogmatism, and the rigid theologians of the period had little or no sympathy with the mystical and speculative teaching of the great Alexandrian. The controversy had serious and lamentable results—acrimonious disputes, mutual recriminations, ruptured friendships. Dean Stephens remarks: "As usual, the real questions at issue were too often forgotten amidst the personal jealousies, intrigues, angry recriminations to which the discussion of them gave birth."

A year or so before Vigilantius's visit to Palestine, a Western monk, Artebius, while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, accused Rufinus of Aquileia, then the head of a community on the Mount of Olives, and Jerome of Bethlehem, of Origenism. The following year, Epiphanius of Salamis, a Cypriot bishop, charged John, Bishop of Jerusalem, with similar sympathies, and when Vigilantius arrived the controversy raged furiously. Undoubtedly Jerome had at one time been favourably disposed towards Origen, but sensitive respecting his reputation for orthodoxy, he resiled from his former position, thereby estranging his old friend Rufinus. It is highly probable that while Vigilantius was at Bethlehem, Origenism was one of the subjects he discussed with his host. His personal views may have been undecided, but it is reasonable to suppose that he would

take the opportunity of learning first-hand the opinions of the persons implicated in the dispute. He visited Rufinus at Jerusalem, and at a later date Jerome charged Rufinus with having influenced Vigilantius against him:

“ I have answered you in answering Vigilantius, for he blamed the same things which afterwards you both praise as a friend and blame as an enemy. I know by whom this person's madness against me is excited. I am aware of your underhand devices; I am not unacquainted with the simplicity which all commend. By this man's folly your malevolence against me has run riot ” (*Apologia in Rufinum*).

In his letter to Vigilantius Jerome repudiates the charge of Origenism:

“ In your absence I intimate to you the same things which I also told you when present; that I have read or am reading Origen, as I read Apollinaris or other authors, whose books the Church does not receive in some points. Not that I mean to affirm that all the contents of their books are to be condemned; but I admit that some things are to be reprehended . . . I am sufficiently astonished therefore that you have wished to object the dogmas of Origen against me, of whose error you are in many points entirely ignorant up to the present hour . . . So Origen is a heretic. What is that to me? for I do not deny that in many points he is a heretic. He has erred concerning the resurrection of the body; he has erred about the condition of souls, about the repentance of the devil; and what is more than these, he has declared in his Commentaries on Isaiah, that the Son of God and the Holy Ghost are the Seraphim. Did I not say that he has erred, and did I not daily anathematize these things, I should be a partaker of that error. For we ought not to receive what he has well said, in such manner as to be compelled to accept also what he has said amiss.”

To this *apologia* no exception can be taken. Jerome makes it clear that he could not subscribe to everything that Origen had written, and that he regarded some of his teaching as definitely unsound. Jerome may have had just cause for resentment, not only at what he felt to be a misrepresentation of his position, but also at the manner in which Vigilantius had spoken of him after he left Bethlehem, even if not while he was still his guest. Dr. Gilly, who inclines to idealise Vigilantius, admits: “ It is probable that Vigilantius had not yet made himself sufficiently master of the argument, that he had not even read enough of Origen's works, to entitle him to act as censor on the occasion, and that he betrayed some ignorance of the matters in dispute, which would make Jerome the more angry at his interference ”, and that “ Vigilantius, in the heat of the controversy, may have uttered many things which were unbecoming ” (*Vigilantius*, pp. 310, 353).



But when, after making his *apologia*, Jerome descends to personalities, he is grossly unfair and scurrilous. He proceeds:

“ It is a great point to be aware of one’s ignorance ; it becomes a wise man to know his own capacity, so as not, being excited by the malice of the devil, to make the world a witness of his stupidity. You are inclined, forsooth, to be boastful, and you brag, in your country, that I could not reply to your eloquence, and that I feared in you the acumen of Chrysippus. I am restrained by Christian modesty, and I would not unlock the privacy of my cell with a sharp discourse. But for this, I could expose all your weakness, which is well known even to children. But these things I leave either to be spoken of, or laughed at by others. I as a Christian, speaking to you as a Christian, beseech you, brother, that you would not aim at being wise above your knowledge, and that you would not make an exhibition of your innocence or your simplicity; or, at all events, that you would not by your pen proclaim those things about which I am silent, and which others understand, although you are ignorant of them ; and by your follies make yourself a general laughingstock. From your childhood you have learned another trade ; you have been accustomed to another kind of training. The same individual cannot examine both gold coins and the Scriptures—both sip wines and understand the Apostles and the Prophets.”

Jerome expresses regret that he gave credence to the letter of introduction from Paulinus instead of trusting his own judgment. He accuses Vigilantius of doublefacedness, reminding him how once after hearing him (Jerome) preach on the resurrection of the body, he had effusively expressed his admiration of his orthodoxy, but he adds, “ After you began to be at sea, the stench of the bilge-water struck to your inmost brain, and then you remembered that I was a heretic ”. Scornfully he suggests that Vigilantius should set about his education by studying Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, and Philosophy, for then he might hesitate to speak on matters he so little understood. Perhaps it is a waste of time to offer such advice to one “ who knows not how to speak, but cannot hold his tongue ”. He is called Vigilantius (Watchful)—obviously a case of *antiphrasis*, for “ your whole mind slumbers, and you are snoring, not so much in a deep sleep, as in a lethargy ”. He accuses Vigilantius of a blasphemous interpretation of a passage in the Book of Daniel, and declares that “ Such a tongue ought to be cut out, and torn into morsels and shreds ”. Let the blasphemer repent and seek forgiveness—if, indeed, forgiveness is possible. If, as Origen erroneously teaches, the devil may obtain pardon, so perhaps may he!—though the devil never uttered “ more blasphemy than by your mouth ”.

Such is a synopsis of Jerome’s *Ad Vigilantium*—a letter which reflects more adversely upon the character of the writer

than the man it attempts to vilify. But, as we shall shortly see, Jerome's ill-will to Vigilantius was to find still more malicious expression.

#### IV

It was during the period under review that there developed the cult of saints and martyrs, the veneration of relics, pictures, and images. "It is not a mere coincidence", states Canon Hobhouse, "that the widespread abuses in connection with the worship of martyrs and the relics of the saints first became prominent in the latter half of the fourth century. In the letters and poems of the saintly but superstitious Paulinus of Nola, we see that the abuse had grown to large dimensions, and that to the Campanian peasant the local saint was often merely the local genius or demi-god with a thin Christian veneer" (*The Church and the World*, pp. 116-117; cf. Gibbon, ch. xxviii).

It is in protest against such abuses that Vigilantius next appears before us. His nature had a strong puritan strain, and even during his early associations with Paulinus, whose saintliness he respected, he must often have been disturbed by what he heard and saw at Nola. It is clear, from Jerome's evidence, that after his return to Gaul, Vigilantius was foremost in opposition to the popular manifestations of a semi-paganised Christianity, and that in this respect he had the sympathy of influential churchmen.

In 404, Riparius, a presbyter of the diocese of Toulouse, wrote Jerome informing him that Vigilantius was speaking and writing against vigils and the veneration of relics. Without waiting to obtain a copy of Vigilantius's treatise, he immediately replied to Riparius in a letter marked by his characteristic invective:

"You say that Vigilantius is again opening his foul mouth, and is casting out the vilest nastiness against the relics of the holy martyrs, styling us who receive them, cinder-gatherers and idolaters, because we venerate the bones of dead men."

Jerome repudiates both the worship of relics and the worship of martyrs, but he justifies the honouring of the relics of the martyrs "that we may adore Him whose martyrs they are". Relics are not to be treated as things unclean, yet this is how Vigilantius regards them. He is no better than a Samaritan or a Jew who considers the bodies of the dead as unclean. Jerome expresses surprise that the bishop (probably Exuperius)

should seem to encourage his sacrilegious presbyter instead of striking him down with his apostolic rod of iron. His sacrilegious tongue ought to be cut out. "I once", he says, "saw this monster, and wished to bind the madman with Scripture testimonies, as with the chains of Hippocrates; but he went off, he departed, he escaped, he burst forth; and between the billows of the Adriatic and the Cottian Alps he has railingly complained against us. For whatever the [madman talks is to be styled bawling and clamour." Jerome regrets that his correspondent had not forwarded a copy of Vigilantius's treatise, but assures him that if he will do so he will deal more fully with his opponent.

## V

Two years later, in 406, Jerome published his *Adversus Vigilantium* in answer to the book written by the Gallic presbyter. Unfortunately, Vigilantius's work has not survived, and we are dependent for our knowledge of its contents on Jerome's bitter reply. John Milner has said, "I would gladly give up the whole invectives of Jerome and Rufinus for a single page of Vigilantius or Jovinian" (*Church History* ii, p. 480). Riparius and a fellow-presbyter named Desiderius had written again to Jerome complaining of the increasing influence of Vigilantius in Gaul, and had enclosed a copy of his work. Jerome set about his reply which he himself states was dictated in a single night—certainly a remarkable feat of composition, when we consider that it contains over 3,600 (Latin) words. Whatever it may lose in other respects, this hastily composed dissertation loses nothing in fiery invective, but reveals a vocabulary which for coarseness and abuse could scarcely be surpassed by that of the proverbial Billingsgate fishwife. Jerome repeats much that he had previously written to Riparius, but now, with his opponent's writings before him, he is able to fulfil his promise to deal more fully with the matters in dispute.

Jerome begins by saying that many monsters had been born into the world, but not until Vigilantius appeared had Gaul produced such a creature:

"Suddenly arose Vigilantius, or as he may more truly be called, Dormitantius, who in his unclean spirit fights against the Spirit of Christ, and denies that the sepulchres of the martyrs are to be venerated; who asserts that vigils are to be condemned; that Hallelujah is never to be sung except at Easter; that continence is heresy; that chastity is the forcing bed of lust."

Some years earlier, Jerome had been in controversy with Jovinian who had attacked asceticism, excessive reverence of martyrs, shrines, relics, burning of tapers, celibacy, and the superior merit of the monastic life. Jovinian had been condemned by Siricius, Bishop of Rome, but now, says Jerome, his depraved soul has come to life again in Vigilantius, the innkeeper of Calagurris, "who adulterates the pure wine with water", and "attempts to unite the poison of his heresy with the Catholic faith". From his correspondents, Riparius and Desiderius, he learns that not only has his pernicious teaching contaminated many in their parishes, but has even found favour with and support from certain Gallic bishops, especially in the matter of clerical marriages. "Verily it is quite in keeping with his pedigree, that he, who is the offspring of a rabble rout of robbers . . . should invade the churches of Gaul, and instead of the standard of the Cross, should carry the banner of the devil."

Jerome proceeds to deal with various points raised by Vigilantius, and gives excerpts from his writings.

On the question of relics, Vigilantius says:

"What need is there for you, with so much respect, not only to honour but even to adore that—I know not what you call it—which you worship as you carry it in a little vessel? Why do you, in your adoration, kiss dust folded up in a linen cloth?"

Jerome replies: Who ever worshipped (*adoravit*) the martyrs? Who ever regarded (*putavit*) man as God? But would Vigilantius have the relics of the saints and martyrs wrapped up in rags or thrown upon the refuse heap? Was it sacrilegious on the part of Constantine to have the relics of Andrew, Luke, and Timothy translated to Constantinople; or for Arcadius, the reigning emperor, to have brought from Judaea the bones of Samuel? Are all to be counted foolish who receive such relics with joy? Vigilantius says that the souls of the saints are with God and cannot be present in their sepulchres. Does he impose laws upon God? Would he put the saints in bonds until the day of judgment? Is it not written, "They follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"? Vigilantius denies the intercession of the saints, and says "so long as we are alive we can mutually pray for each other; but after we are dead the prayer of none for another can be heard", but how does he know? If the apostles and martyrs, while in the body, could pray for others,

why suppose that they cannot do so after they have obtained their crowns? Vigilantius cites Esdras in support of his contention, but the book of Esdras is not received by the Church and has no authority. (Cf. 2 Esdras vii. 102 ff.)

Respecting the use of candles, Vigilantius declares:

“Under the pretext of religion we see a custom introduced into the churches, which approximates to the rites of the pagans, namely, the lighting of multitudes of tapers while the sun is yet shining . . . Men . . . give great honour, forsooth, to the most blessed martyrs, thinking with a few insignificant wax-tapers to glorify those whom the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, enlightens with all the brightness of his majesty.”

Jerome answers: “We do not light candles in daylight, as you falsely accuse us, but we do so that we may alleviate the darkness of the night by this comfort, and that we may watch by the light, lest we, being blind, should sleep with you in darkness.” But if some simple people do use candles in honour of the martyrs, what harm is done? Christ Himself allowed the box of ointment to be broken over His feet, and the devotion of the faithful, however expressed, will be acceptable to Him. “As many as light tapers have their reward according to their faith.” In the Eastern churches it is customary to kindle the lamps, even in daytime, when the Gospel is read—“a proof that this is done not to drive away the darkness, but in token of joyfulness”. Vigilantius would restrict night-vigils to Easter-eve. But why so, any more than limit the commemoration of the Resurrection to Easter Day, instead of observing it weekly on the Lord’s Day? If sometimes vigils are abused, that is no reason why they should not be held.

After some observations on Vigilantius’s criticism of popular credulity respecting miracles at the shrines of the martyrs, Jerome turns to the objection raised against Fasting. He coarsely suggests that it rests upon his opponent’s fear that should the practice become common in Gaul, his business as a tavern-keeper would suffer and he himself have fewer opportunities of indulging in drunken orgies. Further, Vigilantius disapproves the sending of alms to the poor at Jerusalem—yet this custom has abundant apostolic authority. He quotes Vigilantius as saying: “Every one may do this in his own country, but there will be no scarcity of poor people to be supported by the riches of the Church.” Jerome answers that it is not denied that alms should be extended to all needy folk,

if the sum contributed be adequate, but the first claim is that of the "household of faith". Jerome misrepresents Vigilantius's objection. All that the latter desires is that there should be more discrimination in the disbursement of charity.

Finally Jerome deals with a matter which must have touched him most nearly—that of the monastic and celibate life of which Vigilantius had spoken disparagingly as compared with a normal life which included all worthy social and domestic relationships. "If all should shut themselves up and live in solitude", he had written, "who will serve the churches? Who will win the men of the world? Who will exhort sinners to virtue?" The questions were apposite, for Jerome had declined from his ordination to undertake pastoral duties. Resenting the rebuke, Jerome tells him that monks will not be deterred from their manner of life by his "serpent's tongue and savage worrying". He has no wish that all should live the celibate life—nor is there any fear on this score, for "This virtue is a rare one; nor is it coveted by many". Vigilantius asks, perhaps, why he himself adopts the hermit life! Well, it is because he may escape from such as he is, and may not be subjected to the temptations of the flesh. Vigilantius may say that he ought to stay in the world and fight, but safety is to be found in flight. "You, who fight, may either be conquered or conquer. I, who run away, shall not be conquered, since I fly; but I fly for this reason, that I be not conquered."

In summing up Jerome's *Adversus Vigilantium*, Dr. Wm. Bright says:

"Such was this coarse and violent, yet in some respects powerful tract against Vigilantius: it is marred by Jerome's incurable vulgarity and bitterness, not to say by his occasional irrelevance or even sophistry; but it exhibits clearly enough the position taken up by Vigilantius. Undoubtedly the latter hit some blots, and had serious grounds for deprecating or criticizing some excesses of popular religious enthusiasm, which had been largely fostered by the influence of superficial conversions."

With this judgment we may agree, but when Dr. Bright proceeds to suggest that Vigilantius carried his protests too far, we may well hesitate to follow him. Dr. Bright continues:

"Yet he seems, like Jovinian, to have carried on to lengths which could not but be repugnant even to calmer and fairer minds than that of their common enemy. Vigils might sometimes be perverted; the veneration for a martyr's body might too easily become superstitious; monasticism might often deprive the Church of forces that should have helped her to leaven society; the

prevalent Western ideas as to clerical life might often be an occasion of moral danger, as those bishops felt who, sympathizing with Vigilantius, went so far as to think that celibacy was unsafe and to ordain those only who had married beforehand; yet Vigilantius allowed himself to speak in a way that shocked some deep instincts of Christian awe and tenderness, and marred his chances of influence by hurrying, or being goaded, into the falsehood of one extreme, while Jerome took up his ground in the other" (*The Age of the Fathers* ii, pp. 128-129).

But there is abundant contemporary evidence that Vigilantius did not speak too strongly, and that his vigorous protest was needed. This is confirmed by the subsequent history of the Church, which shows that the abuses which Vigilantius attacked continued to increase and, as Gibbon says, "corrupt the pure and perfect simplicity of the Christian model".

This at least may be urged in defence of Vigilantius: his convictions were sufficiently deep and his courage sufficiently strong, to resist the stream of popular sentiment and to denounce practices which he felt to be inimical to the Church's welfare. Though branded as a heretic, there is no evidence that he erred in any point of the Catholic Faith. Did we know more of his teaching than is furnished by Jerome's extracts and statements, we might have further reason to admire his insight and fearlessness. The little we have is enough to justify Dean Farrar's words:

"There is scarcely a single point in which his views have not been confirmed by the ripe judgment of the Reformed Churches. . . . He was an enemy not to any single Christian truth, but solely to the ever-increasing abjectness, superstition, and reliance on outward works and conditions. . . . The voice of history, as of commonsense, has recorded its decision that the 'heretic' was in the right and the 'Father' in the wrong" (op. cit. ii, pp. 366-367, 371).

## VI

The later life of Vigilantius is shrouded in mystery, but it is generally supposed that about the time Jerome wrote his treatise his opponent had removed from Aquitania to Spain where, according to Gennadius, he held a pastoral charge in or near to Barcelona (*in Hispania Barcinonensis parochiae ecclesiam tenuit*). What led to his change of abode is a matter of conjecture. Early in the previous year (405) Exuperius, Bishop of Toulouse, had been in correspondence with Pope Innocent I, and among the matters mentioned were the views of Vigilantius relating to clerical celibacy. Some historians think that, as a result of pressure from Rome, Exuperius was induced to banish him from his diocese, but, as Dr. Gilly points out, had this been

the case, it is strange that Jerome does not mention the fact. It may be that Vigilantius's departure from Gaul was occasioned by expediency rather than by compulsion. Already the Barbarians were threatening the Roman provinces in the West, and by the end of the first decade of the fifth century Southern Gaul and north-east Spain had been over-run. Baronius makes the extraordinary statement that the invasion of Gaul was a Divine judgment upon the heresy of Vigilantius, but Salvian, a contemporary writer, attributes it to a judgment upon the general profligacy of the times. Barcelona was one of the places occupied by the Vandals, and in the upheaval Vigilantius may have perished. Had he lived longer, we might have heard of his later activities.

The question remains whether or not Vigilantius's influence passed away with him. Many historians, including Fleury, Mosheim, and Gibbon, believe that his witness was ineffectual, while Dean Milman calls him "a premature Protestant". It is significant, however, that during the centuries which intervened between this period and the Reformation, much of the opposition to the practices denounced by Vigilantius arose in those parts of Gaul and northern Italy which were most likely to have been affected by his teaching. In the ninth century Claudius of Turin was accused by Jonas, Bishop of Orleans, and Dungalus, of propagating the heresy of Vigilantius. Says Dr. N. D. Emerson: "When Claudius entered upon his episcopal labours at Turin he found a widespread cultus of saints and relics, and churches full of images—'Inveni omnes basilicas contra ordinem veritatis sordibus anathematum et imaginibus plenas'. He at once began a reforming campaign, and ordered all pictures and images to be removed, and forbade the observance of saints' days, and all mention of them in the liturgy, which led to intense excitement among the people" (*The Evangelical Quarterly*, x [1938], p. 141). In the darkest days of the Church there were not wanting men who stood out for a purer and more Scriptural type of Christianity. Claudius of Turin, Henry of Lausanne, and Peter Waldo, are connecting links between Vigilantius and the Reformers of the sixteenth century—representatives of an unailing evangelical succession.

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