

ART. V.—THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES.

THE legend of St. Ignatius—his long journey as a prisoner from Antioch to Rome, on the lines of St. Paul's progresses, and laid out apparently in imitation of them—could not but awaken the most intense interest in the primitive Christian community. The words of the martyr, dropped during his progress and in his last hours, were gathered up with even greater care and devotion than his relics, and hence we find that the earliest mention of them represents them rather as sayings preserved in the hearts of his followers, than as having any authentic epistolary record.

Origen, the earliest of the ancient Fathers who make mention of the martyr, records his famous words, *Meus amor crucifixus est*, as a saying,¹ but mentions in another place a saying of Ignatius as expressed in a letter.² He describes him in this passage as "a certain martyr," a designation which strangely contrasts with the parenthesis which follows it, "I mean Ignatius the second bishop of Antioch after Peter." We cannot but conclude from the discrepancy here noted, that the parenthetical identification is the interpolation of some later hand. Irenæus quotes a passage from the Epistle to the Romans, but simply as a saying,³ describing the author as *quidam de nostris*, a very inadequate representation of one who, if his history be authentic in all its features, would be a second St. Paul in his life and labours, as well as in his death, for the cause of the Gospel. He further describes the words themselves as *spoken* at the time of his martyrdom. We find, therefore, only three citations from the letters during a period of more than two hundred years, and these taken from only two of the seven, and mentioned either with faint praise or careless indifference. But there were others, of a less cold temperament than Origen or Irenæus, who devoted themselves to the task of interviewing all the bishops and clergy they met, and gathering from them all the traditions they possessed in regard to the life and writings of the early martyrs of Christianity. Eminent among these was Hege-sippus, who wrote five books of ecclesiastical history, of which Eusebius has given us some remarkable specimens.⁴ The date of his writings can only be fixed as between 179 and 194, a period covering the Roman Episcopate of Eleutherus, during which he came to Rome. Nearly ninety years must therefore have elapsed since the death of Ignatius, which is fixed by the most accurate writers at 107, and ample time given for the

¹ Prologus in Cant.
³ L. V., c. xxiii.

² Homil. vi. in Luc.
⁴ Euseb., H. E., l. iii. c. xxx.

reduction of the sayings attributed to Ignatius to a written form. The earliest date for this first record of them may, therefore, reasonably be supposed to be as nearly as possible 185. But is it certain that the history of Hege-sippus came to Eusebius' hand without alteration or interpolation? His quotations from it are so full of apocryphal and legendary matter, which he is said to have gathered from those he met, that we are led to question the source of the Ignatian narrative no less than the narrative itself. The story of the martyrdom of Simeon is so absolutely unsupported by any authentic testimony, and is in itself so incredible, that we may well decline to accept the Ignatian legend as resting on the same very doubtful testimony. Eusebius is himself evidently perplexed with many of Hege-sippus' relations. His legend of "St. James, the brother of the Lord," in itself incredible, is made still more so from its exact agreement with that of the apocryphal writings attributed to Clement—a very doubtful kind of affinity, which has its parallel in the references and extracts from the Ignatian letters which are found in the works of the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.¹ Nay, in the very passages cited by Hege-sippus from Ignatius, Eusebius is startled to find some testimonies regarding Christ, "from whence taken he is absolutely ignorant." The passage he refers to is alleged by St. Jerome to be taken from the Gospel of the Hebrews. It is significant to notice that Eusebius prefaces the Ignatian story with the words *λόγος ἔχει*. Our examination of the witnesses carries us on now to Athanasius, who gives an extract from one of the letters which could not possibly be written before the rise of the Arian or Eunomian heresies, as it contains the very term which was denounced by Athanasius, Basil, and Nazianzene as the recognised symbol and distinctive token of those heresies.² But Athanasius never cited them to the learned bishops of the Nicene Council, though their testimony to the truth of the orthodox doctrine is so overpowering. Nay, he explains away the suspicious epithet they contain by adding an orthodox version of it from "certain teachers after Ignatius"—a vague reference which leaves much room for conjecture.

The evidence of Eusebius, which is merely a repetition of that of Hege-sippus, rests wholly upon it, as does also the testimony of St. Jerome, which reproduces it almost exactly.

We arrive next at St. Chrysostom, who, in his sermon on the anniversary of Ignatius, gives all that was known, at least

¹ V. Photii Bibl., p. 1. "On the work of the Presbyter Theodore in defence of the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite."

² Athan. de Synod. Arimini et Seleuciæ Ep. Con. Arian., l. iii. ; Basil, Con. Eunomium, l. ii, iv.

in the East and at Antioch, where the knowledge might most naturally have been looked for, of the subject of his eloquent panegyric. He tells us much of his Roman journey, of his martyrdom and of his relics, but makes no mention whatever of his letters. This ignorance is most astonishing, when we reflect that these letters, if authentic, would stand in the very next rank to the Epistles of St. Paul in their value and authority. But St. Chrysostom gives an evidence that the sayings of Ignatius, even in Antioch, had not acquired a written and authentic form, by quoting a passage of his letter to the Romans as merely a saying at his martyrdom.¹ Still stranger is his appropriation to himself of the beautiful passage, "It is good to go down (or set) to the world that I may rise in Him"—an allusion to his journey from the East to the West, which is certainly more suited to the pictorial work of a panegyrist than to the writer of a letter describing a mere fact, and which he largely develops.

We pass on to Theodoret, who gives two or three extracts from the letter to the Smyrnæans in support of the argument of the "Orthodox" disputant in his famous dialogues. But here we are led to ask, If any real value was attached to them, and if they were regarded as the genuine work of Ignatius, why were they not produced at the Council of Chalcedon, whose decisions they anticipate so clearly? The learned Salig, in his treatise "*De Eutychnismo ante Eutychen*,"² proves the comparatively recent character of the so-called Athanasian Creed, from its never having been produced against the Monophysites, whose doctrines it condemns in words so precise and even technical. "Athanasius," he affirms, "as being so much earlier than Eutyches, could not refute Eutychnism. With what applause would (the creed) have been received and argued upon against Nestorius and Eutyches!"³ Exactly the same might be said of the letters of Ignatius. If they had been known, or at least recognised as genuine, the great assemblies of the Church, containing bishops both from the East and West, could not but have produced them as overwhelming testimonies, not only of the Divinity of our Lord, but of the mystery of the Incarnation and the perfection of His human nature as well as of the Divinity of the Holy Ghost. We now arrive at the period when catalogues of the authentic works of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church were drawn up both in the East and West. In the latter we have the remarkable decrees of Gelasius and Hormisdas, enumerating every work which was approved and received as

¹ "*Sermo de Uno Legislatore.*"

² Wolfenbüttel, 1723.

³ Salig, p. 132.

canonical, or orthodox and useful. In neither of these have the Ignatian letters any place.¹

We pass to the East, and after the lapse of about two centuries we find them mentioned in the important catalogue of Nicephorus, the Patriarch of Constantinople (A.D. 790), but he places them among the *Apocrypha*, ranking them with the Clementine and other forgeries. As Anastasius Bibliothecarius translated this catalogue for the use of the Latin Church, it must be held to represent the judgment of the Western as well as of the Eastern Church:

Nearly at the same time we find a review by Photius of the work of the Presbyter Theodore, asserting the genuineness of the now universally discredited works of Dionysius the Areopagite, in which the forger quotes a letter of Ignatius—a fatal anachronism, as Photius clearly indicates—showing at the same time that the advocate, though he persuaded himself, had not convinced the reviewer. To this we shall have to recur in our later remarks, as indicating the tests which ought to be applied to all pretensions of this kind.

As we enter the tenth century, that age of almost impenetrable darkness, we lose every mention or allusion to the letters of Ignatius, and the interest in his life seems to have died away altogether. In the great controversies which led to the disruption of the East and West, no appeal was made to their authority on either side. In the efforts to reunite the Church first in the Council of Lyons, and then in the Council of Florence—assemblies which brought together the bishops of all the world, there is the same profound silence in regard to a writer whose name would have commanded almost the authority of that of an apostle, and whose epistles cover almost the whole range of Christian doctrine. Yet in both these councils, and especially at Florence, MSS. were consulted, the Fathers both of the East and West were appealed to, while Jacobites, Armenians, and other seceders, were “reconciled” to Rome. Surely this, though only a negative evidence, is one of supreme importance in determining the value of a witness who, had his identity been admitted, would have been accepted as an arbitrator or a judge by both parties alike. Between A.D. 800 and A.D. 1396 the letters were under a total eclipse. In the middle of the latter century Nicephorus (Callistus) mentions them, but merely repeats the entire history of Ignatius as given by Eusebius; proving by this mention that they were still known to the Eastern Church—known but never recognised. Yet we cannot but see how

¹ They are both inserted in Credner's work, “Zur Geschichte des Kanons” (Halle, 1847, pp. 117-122).

profitable they would have been to Lanfranc in his controversy with Berengarius, and how greatly they would have contributed to the illustration of many of the minute controversial questions of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It was not, however, until Wicklif had published his *Triologus*, and was condemned in a council at London by Archbishop Arundel, that the Ignatian letters appear before the Western world. A Franciscan monk, William de Wideford, in 1396, published the treatise against Wicklif, and in defence of the doctrine of transubstantiation which Wicklif had impugned, and produced the well-known passage from the letters of Ignatius condemning the heretics for denying that the Eucharist was the "flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ which suffered for us, and which the Father in His goodness raised from the dead." This and other extracts formed the clue which led Archbishop Usher, nearly three centuries later, to discover an entire Latin version of the letters, differing in many respects from all before it; but the Greek original of this translation remained yet to be found. The learned Vossius, meantime, discovered a MS. which seemed to be the most authentic form of the letters which had yet been seen, which agreed as nearly as possible with the Latin version already obtained, and which, from its belonging to the Duke of Tuscany, acquired the name of the Medicean MS. This MS., however, contained, together with the seven letters alleged to be genuine, several of those which the learned of every age have rejected as forgeries. Unfortunately, the discovery was made at the period, and even in the scene, of the furious warfare which was raging between the advocates and the opponents of episcopacy, the former party attaching a priceless value to a document representing the perfect development of a diocesan episcopate in the very dawn of the Christian Church. The great divines both in England and on the Continent were ranged against one another in this conflict, both sides claiming the victory, yet neither able to close the controversy which has remained an open one until our own time.¹

Baur, by his searching criticism, had so exposed the weaker points of the letters, which Dr. Rothe had defended and endeavoured to explain, that the subject seemed almost exhausted until the recent labours of Bishop Lightfoot, who raised upon a foundation which no one can fail to see is very slender and precarious, a vast superstructure of learning

Cureton has appended to his able treatise, "*Vindiciæ Ignatiana*," the opinions of learned men of every denomination respecting the Epistles, from 1650 to 1843.

and ingenuity, which too many among us, without testing its strength and security, or proving its capability of bearing so great a weight, have rested in as an impregnable position. Yet the fact that from the earliest period the Ignatian letters have been treated with absolute neglect and indifference—that in the West they have been utterly ignored, and in the East placed in the class of apocryphal writings, must lead us to see that the theory of the Bishop is in direct opposition to the judgment of the whole Church, and that if we suppose it to be true, we imply that she has fatally neglected the most precious and authoritative documents she possesses in failing to produce them in her councils, and to be guided by them in her conclusions. In rejecting her testimony in regard to the documents she pronounced to be apocryphal we are obviously weakening her authority in the discrimination of those which she has declared to be canonical. Why should we put implicit confidence in her judgment in selecting from the numerous apocryphal gospels the four which represent our faith, and discredit it when she refuses to acknowledge the genuineness of the Ignatian letters? We have seen that they were not unknown to her—they were possessed by her in all their integrity from the first, and not suddenly discovered by a fortunate chance as they were by Usher, Pearson, and Voss. The Church, which is “the keeper and witness of Holy Writ,” might well be supposed to be the faithful keeper of those documents which came nearest to it in value and importance. But so it happens, that she not only neglected the letters in their doctrinal value, but took so little care to preserve the purity and integrity of their text, that we have no less than three distinct versions—an extended one (now known as the interpolated version), another, less than half the former in bulk (the Medicean text), and the third, a Syriac form discovered by Cureton, but since generally believed to be a reduced form of the letters, and to have no claim to represent them in their integrity.

Here it cannot but occur to all acquainted with the methods of forgery in every age, that the epistolary form is more liable than any other to such fraudulent dealing, and has in every age proved itself to be the easiest to the *falsarius*. From the letters of Phalaris, which perished under the destructive criticism of the great Bentley, until the forgery of the decretal epistles, and of bulls and briefs innumerable of a later day, to say nothing of the forged charters and donations which abounded in the mediæval times, and which had their grandest type in the donation of Constantine, this form of forgery has been singularly successful. The looser and more colloquial

form of a letter has never provoked so severe a criticism as a work which can be tested by the strictest rules of documentary investigation, and though in the case of ordinary epistles we are able to call in contemporary witnesses, and to compare them with writings of the same age, we have in the Ignatian letters a body of writings asserting for themselves an antiquity which has left us no contemporary evidence to appeal to, and therefore is too likely to mislead the world into the belief that they are the genuine product of the age they claim to represent. Unfortunately the letters themselves, in the discrepancies both of their numbers and of their texts, bear such fatal evidence against one another that even could we admit their genuineness we should be unable to determine their meaning or to discover an authentic version of them. But is it credible that the wonderful Providence which has guarded the text of the New Testament Scriptures from every serious injury should have failed to give even the most ordinary safeguards in the case of documents so nearly approaching the period when the Apostles were living witnesses of the truth? Well did Milton exclaim, "Had God ever intended that we should have sought any part of useful instruction from Ignatius, doubtless He would not have so ill-provided for our knowledge as to send him to our hands in this broken and disjointed plight."¹ Nor only in this fragmentary state. For we have the more serious difficulty of confronting three (it may yet be many) distinct versions of these letters, and have to select between them which is the real production of Ignatius—whether the longer version is interpolated, or the shorter one reduced—and have moreover the confession of the most learned advocates of the shorter or Medicean version that it sometimes represents a more corrupt text than the longer one, which they repudiate.² A witness who comes to us with three distinct stories, is hardly less to be trusted than a document with three distinct versions and countless conflicting readings. It would need the inspiration of a prophet to determine the relative merits of such documents, but fortunately we are not without the skill or the means of appraising their value. The authorized rules of criticism are as applicable to this case as they were to the letters of Phalaris or the works of the pseudo-Dionysius. They are well-suggested by the Presbyter Theodore in his attempt to establish the authority of the latter forgery, and are more fully laid down in the masterly criticism of it by the Abbé Dubois in his "History of the Church of Paris." With some modifications these rules are no less applicable to the Ignatian Epistles than they are to the pseudo-Dionysian ones,

¹ Milton on Episcopacy.

² See Cureton, vol. i., p. 18.

which by a significant affinity have so often been connected with them.

I. If the writings of Dionysius are genuine, it is asked why they were unknown to the ancient Fathers of the first centuries, and have never been cited by them? Here the Ignatian letters are in some degree distinguished from the former writings. They are mentioned in two passages of Origen and one of Irenæus during the first two centuries, but the faint praise which they receive indicates the doubts and suspicions which still hung over them. Nor can we have any assurance that the letters we possess are identical with those which these earlier writers quote, as only one or two sentences remain to enable us to compare them. From this period to the mention of them by Eusebius there is a century of suggestive silence.

II. In another point there is a difference between the two documents, for while Eusebius makes no mention whatever of the works of the Areopagite, he devotes a long chapter to the Ignatian legend as it was related by Hegesippus. But he prefaces it by words which show that he could not vouch for its truth—"It is said," or "reported"—and he mentions a passage in it whose derivation he cannot conjecture. He prefaces it moreover with the account of Trajan's edict of toleration, which casts so great a shadow of doubt on the story of his exceptional cruelty in regard to Ignatius.

III. It is next asked by Theodore, "Why were not the Dionysian writings produced against the Sabellian heresy, against which their testimony is so powerful?" We may put this question with equal if not increased force in regard to the Ignatian Epistles. Their evidence against Sabellianism is so emphatic that had their authority been recognised it would have gone far to refute that earliest of the errors which threatened the great doctrine of the Trinity.

IV. The fourth century brings us into the troubled waters of the Arian controversy, during which every authority of antiquity as well as every argument from the Scriptures was brought forward on either side. Yet here, except in the single reference by St. Athanasius to a passage which, according to his own reiterated testimony, contains a word of more than doubtful orthodoxy, we find no break in the profound silence which the Church has observed from the first on this important subject. At a later period the heresies that were gathered around the doctrine of the two natures in Christ—Nestorianism, Eutychianism, and their various modifications—rendered it more than ever necessary to produce the testimonies of the earliest Fathers in order to meet the threatened danger. Now the letters of Ignatius are full of the

most singular and emphatic testimonies against these heresies. Why, then, were they not produced at Ephesus, at Chalcedon, or in the conference held in the Heptaconch Triclinium at Constantinople under Justinian? We know that in some form at least they existed, and that they were known in the East as late as the time of the Patriarch Nicephorus (800). It was well said by the Canon Palmieri in the assembly of the Tuscan bishops at Florence in 1787: "Chi lascia in dubbio una verità evangelica è traditore egualmente di quello che la nega."¹ We may in like manner affirm that the doubt which the Church has from the first cast upon the Ignatian letters, had she supposed them to be genuine, would have been a denial of the truth of God and a betrayal of the interests of His kingdom. For what a triumph would it have secured for the orthodox doctrine could the precise and almost technical statements of Ignatius have been produced before the successive councils in which the definitions of the creed were perfected! It is surely incredible that such a testimony could have been withheld at such a terrible crisis in the Church's history. Nor would the "Letters" have failed to be recognised in the Council of Trent. Yet we find no mention of them there whatever, though Cardinal Cajetan alludes to them in his commentary on Phil. iv., where he accepts the probability that St. Paul was married, and cites the epistles of Ignatius with the doubtful qualification, "if credence is to be given to them."

V. The anachronisms in the writings of Dionysius are marked as an overwhelming testimony against them. The Abbé Dubois observes that rites and observances and institutions, absolutely unknown in the Apostolic times, are described by the writer as even then in general observation. Now, here the conviction cannot but force itself upon every reader of the Ignatian Epistles, that his description of the Episcopal, or rather Pontifical, organization of the Church, is so diametrically opposed to the pictures of its primitive state which we find in Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and the apologists generally, that if the writings of the latter are genuine, which has never been disputed, the Ignatian picture must be an imaginary one, agreeing rather with that of the "celestial hierarchy" of Dionysius, than with the simple outline of early Christian Church government. The appeals to the different Churches he addresses have almost in them the Papal ring. They belong incontestably to the period when the power of the Metropolitans was fast approaching, and the division of the two great orders of the priesthood, which but a few years

¹ Atti dell' Assemblea, tom. iii., p. 460.

before Ignatius wrote had not even begun, was completed and fully established. But it is not a little significant that no advantage was taken by the writers of that transition period of the authority of Ignatius as supporting the higher diocesan theory. No anachronism in the writings of Dionysius could be greater, or more fatal to the authenticity of his work, than this. It anticipates the Papal power, and Ignatius, even in his addresses to churches over which he had no jurisdiction, would seem to claim the *jurisdictio preveniens et concurrens* of the Papacy, unless he claimed the Apostolic mission of St. Paul, and the title of a universal bishop. Whether the promise of Dr. Virschl to prove the Petrine claim from Ignatius' letters was ever fulfilled, the writer of these lines is unable to say. That he might have made a good *primâ facie* case we may well admit, especially if he could remove Ignatius from Antioch to Rome, as St. Peter's bishopric was transferred in a still earlier day. The singular anachronisms of the letters in which the heresies of Arius and Aerius, and above all the still later Eutyches, are anticipated, enable us to apply to them the question raised by Theodorus the Presbyter, in regard to the works of the pseudo-Dionysius, and answered by Photius. "How is it that the book gives a minute account of the traditions which increased with the progress of the Church, and that for a long period? For the great Dionysius" (we might substitute Ignatius) "was a contemporary with the Apostles. But the matters comprised in the work in question are for the most part a development of the later traditions which have grown up in the Church. It is incredible that Dionysius (Ignatius) could have written upon matters which happened in the Church long after his death."¹ The same argument is used by Bentley in his criticism on the Epistles of Phalaris.

Unless Aerius existed before the writer, there could have been no occasion for his constant and almost passionate appeals for obedience to the bishops, and his assumptions of their Apostolic authority, and of their inherent superiority to the presbyters of the Church.² It would indicate rather a miraculous change than an ordinary process of development if, in the very few years which elapsed between Clement and Ignatius, the government of the Church should have passed from its simplest form into the culminating stage of a Pontificate. The same argument applies to the passages in the

¹ Photii Bibl., p. 1.

² This, as I observed in my published letter, is in direct contravention of the doctrine of the Western Church in every age, viz., that the bishops and priests are of the same *order* and differ only in *jurisdiction* (see Morinus, "De Ordinationibus Sacris," Exercit. iii., cc. i., ii.).

letters which anticipated the technical vocabulary of the Arian period. From the letters, we turn naturally to the history of the martyrdom, and are led to apply the same tests to it which have been already suggested in the case of the epistles themselves.

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(To be continued.)

Notes on Bible Words.

NO. VIII.—“EDIFICATION.”

IN that admirable work, “The Metaphors of St. Paul” (military, agricultural, architectural, and metaphors derived from the Greek games), Dean Howson writes: “Architectural phraseology is inwoven into the texture of his Epistles.”

A Concordance to the A.V. shows that “edify” or “edification” occurs, in some form or other, about twenty times in the N.T., and in every instance, except one,¹ it is used by St. Paul. But the Greek word² is found in other passages, and all in the same Apostle’s writings.³ See e.g., Rom. xv. 20: “that I might not build upon another man’s foundation.” Gal. ii. 18 . . . “build up the things which I pulled down” (κατέλυσα. This verb—pull to pieces—is the opposite of “build”; see Rom. xiv. 20: “destroy,” A.V.; “overthrow,” R.V. “Destroy” in verse 15 is ἀπόλλυε).

Dean Howson shows the bearing of all this (1) On *Christian Evidence*. The same prevalent metaphor is used, and in the same kind of way, in several of the Epistles which bear the name of St. Paul. Unity of style tends to favour unity of authorship. (2) On *Christian Doctrine*. To the word “edify” is now given an individual application: this or that, we say, is edifying to the individual Christian. But “edify” with St. Paul is always a social word, having regard to the mutual improvement of members of the Church and the growth of the whole body in faith and love. “The Churches . . . were edified,” *builded up*; Acts ix. 31. “Edify one another”; 1 Thess. v. 11. So 2 Cor. xii. 9, Eph. iv. 12 and 16. (3) On *Christian Practice*. We see the “duty of respecting scruples and prejudices . . . when we think of those around us as parts with ourselves of a building which ought to be advancing in beauty and solidity.”

¹ That exception is in the Acts (ix. 31), a book written almost certainly under St. Paul’s superintendence. See Acts xx. 32.

² οἰκοδομῶ, to build (Luke xi. 48; Matt. xxi. 42), edify; introduced from the Vulgate by Wycliffe. (St. Paul uses “build up” in a bad sense in 1 Cor. viii. 10: A.V. *embolden*).

³ In Hebrews iii. 3, 4, ix. 11, and xi. 10, the Greek is not that usual with St. Paul when he speaks of building.