

two of the three Epistles attributed to John the Apostle are written in the name of "John the Elder," while "John the Apostle" is hardly ever so called by any writer in the second century, being almost always named "John the Disciple of the Lord."

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THE OLD TESTAMENT QUESTION IN THE EARLY CHURCH.

WE are accustomed to speak of the Old Testament question as peculiarly a question of our own day; but it is not always realised that the earliest age of the Church had likewise *its* Old Testament question—one as serious and difficult for it as ours can possibly be to us. So far from being novel, the Old Testament question is, indeed, one of the very oldest in the history of the Christian Church,—was, in an important sense, *the* burning question of the second century. We have scarcely left the bounds of the apostolic age before we find the Church plunged into its prolonged conflicts with Ebionitism and Gnosticism, and both of these forms of error—Gnosticism especially—raised the Old Testament problems in their most acute shape. The question, as was natural, was then a theological rather than a literary or critical one; bore upon the substance of the Old Testament revelation rather than on the books which contained it; and the solutions proposed of difficulties were palpably of a kind which the modern mind could not accept. But even here the distinction is not absolute but relative. The newer criticism also has its historical and theological side, and is dependent to a larger extent than is sometimes acknowledged on theories and speculations as to the nature and laws of the religious development in Israel; while the older theorists did not wholly forego criticism, but

struck out hypotheses, often crude enough, yet occasionally singularly anticipative of modern ideas. It is in any case an exceedingly interesting phase of religious thought which is exhibited to us in this conflict of the post-apostolic Church with the early impugners of Old Testament revelation, and one which well deserves attention on its own account. I shall endeavour to present it in certain of its aspects, as it appears, first, in that remarkable literary product of Essenian Ebionitism in the second century — the pseudo-Clementine writings; and, secondly, in the multiform and influential developments of Gnosticism.

The Clementine writings, usually dated, in one or other of their forms, about the middle or latter half of the second century, are, as just stated, the principal literary monument of that form of Essenian Ebionitism, regarding which our chief informant is Epiphanius.¹ Epiphanius does not name the Clementines, but mentions Ebionite works (the *Ascents of James*, and *Circuits of Peter*) on the basis of which the Clementine books are evidently wrought up, and the general indications agree. It is a probable hypothesis that, after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Essenes, who from this time disappear from history, and who, even at an earlier period, as the forms of heresy at Colosse show, had made considerable attempts at amalgamation with Jewish Christianity, went over in a body to the Pharisaic section of the Jewish Christian Church, carrying with them many of their peculiar ideas and customs.² Thereafter the leaven of their influence seems to have spread somewhat widely, and given rise to a number of vigorous developments. Whether or not, as Ritschl supposes, the Clementine literature emanated from Rome,³ there is force in his suggestion that it

¹ *Adv. Hær.*, xxx.

² Cf. Ritschl, *Die Entstehung der altkath. Kirche* (1857), pp. 222-3, 234.

³ This is the usual view, but Uhlhorn, Lightfoot, Salmon, and others dissent.

represents a serious attempt to gain for Ebionitism a footing within the Gentile-Catholic Church, whose developed Episcopacy it takes over, and for whose sake it softens down some of its Ebionite peculiarities (*e.g.*, substitutes baptism for circumcision).¹ In the same spirit, the legitimacy of the Gentile mission is no longer contested, but the credit of it is claimed for its own Apostle Peter. On the other hand, the unchanged Pharisaic standpoint of the writings is testified by their attitude of hostility to St. Paul, who, even if we refuse to regard Simon Magus as throughout a mask for the Gentile Apostle, is the object of scarcely veiled attack.² In character the work is a religious romance—the earliest example of the theological novel. It exists in two recensions—the *Recognitions* and the *Homilies*, the latter much the more pronounced in its Ebionitism—and opinion is about equally divided as to which shape is the prior. I need not dwell on the story, which is substantially the same in both recensions, and forms the ingenious and not inartistic framework within which the doctrinal disquisitions and discussions of the book are set. We have as leading features the youth of Clement, his thirst for knowledge, his encounter with Barnabas at Rome (in the *Homilies*, at Alexandria), his meeting at Cæsarea with Peter, whose disciple and amanuensis he becomes, and whose discourses he transmits to James at Jerusalem, the successive recognitions of mother, brothers, and father (hence the title), the set debates with Simon, the pursuit of the heresiarch from city to city, etc. It is not surprising that a work of this description, the importance of which has only come to be fully recognised within the last half-century, should have exercised a powerful fascination on the mind of the early Church, that orthodox recensions of it should have been published, and that

¹ Cf. Ritschl, *ut supra*, p. 264.

² *Recog.*, i. 70; *Hom.*, xvii. 19.

numerous features in its representation should have found their way into the general Catholic tradition.¹

The theological ideas developed within this imaginative framework are, as might be anticipated, highly interesting and curious. The centre here is the Christology, which is quite peculiar. It is given most fully in the *Homilies*, and lays the basis for the treatment of the Old Testament, with which we are specially concerned. There is one true Prophet—this is the conception²—who, changing form and name, goes down through the ages, appearing now as Adam, now as Moses, now as Christ, restoring the truth when lost or corrupted by mankind and giving the eternal law by living according to which man shall please God. The True Prophet is omniscient, sinless, immortal, fore-knows all things, and is connected in the *Recognitions* with the idea that God has in the creation given to each class a head of its own kind: for man this head is the Adam-Christ.³ Christianity, in this view of its nature, loses its originality, for it is but the republication by the True Prophet of the one eternal law. With the Clementines, as with the Deist Tindal, Christianity is “as old as the creation.” This brings us to the conception and treatment of the Old Testament. Here, in the first place, the quasi-Gnostic views put into the mouth of Simon are energetically combated, and the identity of the God of the Law with the God of the Gospel—of the Creator of the universe and God of the Jews with the beneficent God of Christ, is maintained in lengthened argument. But in other respects the *Homilies* take up a position singularly approximative to Gnosticism—one which, indeed, might be held itself to

¹ *E.g.*, that Peter was Bishop of Rome, and named Clement as his successor.

² *Hom.*, iii. 20, and *passim*. Neander, Baur, Schliemann, etc., on the basis of *Hom.* xvii. 4, xviii. 13, find the seven pre-Christian appearances in Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses (“the seven pillars of the world,” xviii. 14); but see on this Uhlhorn, *Die Homilien*, etc., pp. 164-66.

³ *Recognitions*, i. 45-47.

show a strain of Marcionite influence, if it were not that the fundamental thesis of the book is so directly opposed to Marcionism. How this apparent contradiction should come about, it is not difficult to see. Apart from the obvious historical and moral difficulties of the Old Testament, to which Gnosticism had already given prominence, there was the question to be faced: If Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc., are to be regarded as incarnations of the Prophet, or even as perfectly righteous men, what is to be made of the narratives which ascribe to them various sins: as that Adam transgressed in Eden, that Noah was drunken, that Abraham was a polygamist, that Moses murdered?¹ If, again, as Essenes, the writers took up a position hostile to animal sacrifice, how account for the presence of ordinances in the Old Testament commanding and approving sacrifices? These were stumblingblocks in the path of the theory—how were they to be removed? It is here that we come on the characteristic features of this peculiar fusion of Essenism with Ebionitism. To take first the question of sacrifice, we find in the *Recognitions* the comparatively mild hypothesis that sacrifice was no original part of the law of Moses, but a supplementary institute, intended provisionally to curb the idolatrous tendencies of the people, and destined ultimately to be abolished.² To point this moral of its transient character was the object of the limitation of sacrifice to the one central sanctuary, and of the repeated devastations of the Temple.³ In the *Homilies*, however, a much stronger position is taken up, and connected with a general theory which better expresses the genius of the system. It is now boldly affirmed that the pure teaching of the Scriptures has been throughout corrupted by the infusion of false and blasphemous doctrines, which are attributed to the spirit of evil prophecy—this falsification being permitted in righteousness as a trial of

¹ *Hom.*, ii. 52.

² *Recog.*, i. 36.

³ i. 37.

the people's faith and discernment.¹ Epiphanius relates of his Ebionites that they rejected David and all the prophets, and opposed them to the True Prophet as prophets of the understanding; and states that in this way they explained as false everything which contradicted their positions.² Quite similar is the doctrine of the *Homilies*. Over against Adam, the True or *male* Prophet, stands Eve, the bringer in of *female* or false prophecy, of error, and sin, and death.³ She is the mistress of this present world. To her domain belongs everything that is temporary and perishable—all lust, war, unchastity, idolatry, sacrifice, etc. To the circle of error introduced by her, we must attribute everything in the Old Testament which gives unworthy or blasphemous representations of God, the narratives of the sins of the patriarchs, the approval of sacrifice, and all else of like nature. Here, to use a New Testament expression, "is the patience and the faith of the saints";⁴ here is the meaning of that traditional saying of Christ, which is repeatedly quoted—"Be ye approved money-changers,"⁵ *i.e.*, skilful discerners between true and false. The canon is a simple one—whatever conflicts with worthy views of God is to be set down unhesitatingly as belonging to the false prophecy.⁶ But the *Homilies* do not confine themselves to this subjective criticism; they stay themselves upon a species of higher criticism as well, explanatory of how such a wholesale corruption of the Old Testament Scriptures was possible. The Pentateuch, they hold, was not the composition of Moses.⁷ This is proved by the fact that it records the death and burial of Moses—for "how could Moses write that Moses died." The lawgiver did not write down his law, but delivered it orally to seventy wise

¹ *Hom.*, ii. 38, 39, 47-52, etc.

² *Adv. Hæer.*, xxx. 15, 18.

³ *Hom.*, iii. 22-28, etc.

⁴ *Rev.* xiii. 12.

⁵ *Hom.*, ii. 51, etc.

⁶ ii. 50; iii. 9, 55, etc.

⁷ *Hom.*, iii. 47.

men; the persons who afterwards reduced it to writing were not prophets, and so were liable to error. The book is first found in the Temple centuries after Moses; is again burnt and lost in the destruction under Nebuchadnezzar; consequently in its existing form is a post-exilian product.¹ In these vicissitudes there is ample room for corruption of the tradition, and for the entrance of false prophecy. Stripping the theory of its mythological vesture, we may perhaps express its meaning by saying that what is proposed is to test the parts of the Old Testament which show marks of imperfection, error, or defective morality, by reference to the underlying unity of revelation, which is assumed to be true, pure, and consentaneous throughout, and the ultimate touchstone of which is the perfect teaching of Jesus Christ. With all its ingenuity, there is no evidence to show that the attempt of the Clementine writers to propagate their peculiar type of doctrine in the Church met with much success.² Other forces were in the ascendant, and the energies of the Church were strained in the conflict with a far more formidable opponent in the intensely active and rapidly multiplying sects of Gnosticism. To this, the really influential heresy of the second century, we now turn.

Gnosticism is one of the most singular phenomena of the second century or of any age. The first thing we have to do in thinking of it is to try to realise how widely spread, many-coloured, and powerful, this Gnostic movement really

¹ Neander observes: "We see in him (the author), the first impugner of the genuineness of the Pentateuch; being in this, as in many other respects, a forerunner of the later phenomena, as also he availed himself of many of the arguments which, independently of him, were again brought forward by later disputers of the genuineness of the work."—*Hist.*, ii. p. 491 (Bohn).

² We find apostles of the kindred sect of the Elkesaites, with their revelation book, at Rome and Cæsarea in the beginning and middle of the third century, but any success they had was transient. They were combated by Hippolytus and Origen (*Hipp.*, *Refut.*, ix. 13-17; Origen in Euseb., *Hist.*, vi. 38). Epiphanius mentions a purely Jewish sect of *Nazaræi*, who rejected the Pentateuch as a forgery.

was. The Clementines were at best the manifesto of a comparatively small section of the Christianity of the time. But the Gnostic sects—some of them rising to the dignity of influential schools—embraced a multitude of adherents who must have formed no inconsiderable proportion of the total number of the Christians of their day. They honeycombed the Church in every direction, and with their alluring theosophic speculations drew off the *élite* of those who sought to combine philosophy and culture with their Christianity. Irenæus speaks of the Gnostic sects as multiplying like mushrooms out of the ground;¹ but how largely Gnosticism in general bulked in the Church consciousness of the time is best seen by observing the space which it occupies in the extant works of the Fathers of the period. Heresy, to the Catholic Fathers of the close of the second century, is almost simply Gnosticism. Practically the whole of Irenæus, more than the half of Tertullian, nearly all Hippolytus, and a good share of Clement of Alexandria (in his *Stromata*, which delineates the true Gnostic in opposition to the false or heretical Gnosis), are absorbed by this controversy. The peril to the Church was indeed great; and it was aggravated by the fact that the Church had as yet no developed creed, no formed canon of New Testament Scripture, and no ecclesiastical court of appeal, such as the Council afterwards became.² Dr. Hatch does not exaggerate the seriousness of the situation when he says: "The crisis was one the gravity of which it would be difficult to overestimate. There have been crises since in the history of Christianity, but there is none which equals in its importance this, on the issue of which it depended for all time to come, whether Christianity should be regarded as a body of revealed doctrine, or as the *caput mortuum* of a hundred philosophies—

¹ I, 29.

² It was the controversy with Gnosticism which led the Church first to set about in earnest defining its canon and rule of faith. Cf. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, i. pp. 287–353, and Dorner, *Person of Christ*, i. p. 259 (trans.).

whether the basis of Christianity should be a definite and definitely interpreted creed, or a chaos of speculations.”¹

But this Gnosticism, which kept the Church in turmoil during the whole of the second century, was, if not exclusively, yet assuredly in a very large degree, an Old Testament question, and through it the Old Testament question was introduced in a most living form into the heart of the Church speculation of the period. In the bewildering variety of the Gnostic systems, no feature is more constant than the distinction perpetually made between the Demiurge—author of this visible creation, and God of the Old Testament—and the Supreme God revealed in the fulness of time by Christ. So essential does this feature appear to Neander, that he uses it (Baur also to some extent) as the principle of his classification of the Gnostic systems, dividing them according to the attitude they severally take up to the Old Testament, viz., whether their attitude is one of pure negation, or whether they recognise a certain subordinate worth in the Old Testament revelation.² In the one class as in the other, however, the two Testaments are held to have different authors. The God of the Old Testament is an inferior Being—limited, passionate, vengeful; while the God of Christ is the Supreme God, the primal source of goodness, and truth, and beauty. Christ Himself is either a celestial visitant from the abode of Light, who appears in a phantasmal body among men for their salvation; or is the earthly Jesus, with whom this higher power temporarily unites Himself. The essence of the Gospel is here, no doubt, imperilled; but we shall utterly miss the significance of this phenomenon of Gnosticism if we regard it as mere perversity—inexplicable craze and hallucination. Gnosticism is also, in its own way, an attempt

¹ *Organisation of Early Christian Churches*, p. 96. Cf. Baur, *Church Hist. of First Three Cents.*, ii. p. 3 (trans.).

² *Hist of Church*, ii. p. 39 (Bohn).

at the explanation of things, and the problems it deals with under a mythological garb are precisely those which have haunted the brains of men in all ages, and will haunt them to the end; the relation, *e.g.*, of finite and infinite, how there comes to be a world at all outside of God, the origin of evil, how the world has come to be what it is—so full of contrasts and contradictions, of pain and struggle, of strange minglings of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, the origin of the spiritual principle in man, the purpose of history, the means of redemption. What the Gnostic systems aim at, in fact, in their higher forms, is nothing less than a philosophy of the universe which shall embrace within it also a philosophy of Jewish and Christian revelation. They are the prototypes of those great systems of absolute philosophy which have sprung up in Germany in our own century, and profess to explain everything. Basilides, with his powerful speculative grasp, might fitly be called the Hegel of the movement; Valentinus, with his poetry and rich mythology, its Schelling. The fact that Christianity had entered these speculative circles, and produced the ferment that it did, is a remarkable testimony to the degree in which it had penetrated, even at that early date, into the inmost thought and life of the time.¹

The point of peculiar interest for us in Gnosticism, however, in the present connection, lies, I think, in the bold and suggestive way in which it conjoins into one, two problems usually kept apart—the problem of Nature, and the problem of the Old Testament. Both of these problems lay directly across its path, as they lie across the path of every thinking man still, but the peculiarity of its treatment is in its assertion that these problems are not two, but one. There is the unsolved problem of external Nature,—the alleged flaws and imperfections in Creation, which, in the

¹ Cf. Baur, *History*, ii. p. 1. (trans.); Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, i. p. 199 (2nd Ed.)

opinion of many, stamp it as the product of imperfect wisdom and limited power—of such a Being of limited intelligence and power, *e.g.*, as Mr. Mill figures in his *Essays*,¹—the dark mysteries of natural and moral evil, and of the providential government of the world, which drive some to Atheism, some to Dualism, some to Pessimism. There is the cognate problem of the Old Testament, which, professing to come from the same God as the God and Father of Jesus Christ, yet presents, it is alleged, so striking a contrast to the New Testament Gospel,—moves on a lower plane, and abounds with marks of imperfection, and with historical and moral difficulties, which stagger and perplex faith. We are accustomed to separate these two problems; the Gnostic more logically united them. The Church had taken over the Old Testament from the Jews, and by spiritualising had treated it—as many treat it still—as simply an earlier edition of the New. The supreme service of Gnosticism was that it compelled men to face the facts. It stated the problem in its own way, and was not to be put off with too easy an answer. Whereas Butler meets the difficulties of revelation by saying—You find just as great difficulties in Nature; the Gnostic would reply, True, but this only proves what I say, that the God of creation and of the Old Testament cannot be the God of the Gospel. And whereas Deism, on the ground of the same difficulties, would infer that there has been no revelation at all, and yet inconsequentially postulates a perfect Framers of the Universe; the Gnostic would again answer, Yes, there has been a revelation, but the revelation, and Nature too, are the works of an inferior Being—such an one as we picture in our Demiurge. This was the character of the general solution, but the manner in which the fundamental antithesis was presented in the different

¹ *Three Essays on Religion*, pp. 186, 243, 253.

sects and schools of the Gnostic fraternity was, as already hinted, sufficiently various. Sometimes it was angels who created the world, and gave the law; sometimes it was an ignorant and limited, but not absolutely evil Being, as in the Ophite Jaldabaoth;¹ sometimes a Being purely evil, as among the Cainites, who went to the extreme length of glorifying all the wicked characters of the Old Testament as meritorious rebels against the tyranny of the Creator. But the higher schools get beyond this, as in the case of Basilides, who, in keeping with the general comprehensive-ness of his scheme, does not set the Old Testament in direct opposition to the New, but seeks to explain it as a lower stage of development. The imperfection adhering to it is, indeed, still accounted for by the hypothesis that it proceeds from a subordinate, inferior God; but this God—the Archon, in Basilides' phrase—is, though ignorant and imperfect, yet unconsciously an instrument of the Supreme Power, who works out his ends through him, and by him prepares the way for a higher revelation.² The ability and grasp of these conceptions is not to be denied, and they undoubtedly exercised an extraordinary influence on many minds in that age.³ We can no longer wonder that it required the most vigorous efforts of the Church teachers to check their advance.

This conflict of the Church with Gnosticism, we may now observe, came to its sharpest point in connection with the great Pontic heretic, Marcion. Marcion proved a formidable opponent to the Church in more ways than one. While other Gnostic leaders founded schools, Marcion took the bolder step of founding a rival Church, or organized society, of his own, which came to have a wide extension and a prolonged existence. Traces of it are said to be

¹ יְלְדָבְאוּת בְּהוֹת, Son of Chaos (Herzog, Art. "Ophiten").

² Hippol. vii., 11-13: Clem., *Stromata*, iv. 13. Cf. Neander and Baur.

³ On the ability of the Gnostic teachers, cf. Harnack, *Dogmengesch.*, i. p. 191.

discoverable as late as the tenth century.¹ Marcion differs *toto coelo* from the other Gnostics in his practical bent—in laying stress on faith, not knowledge, in his rejection of cosmological speculations, and of the doctrines of the æons. This, however, rather weakened his position than strengthened it, for it left him without any speculative basis for the tenets which he still held in common with other Gnostic teachers, particularly for his strong contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. The root of Marcion's thinking is no doubt to be sought for, as has been generally observed, in his ultra-Paulinism, his glowing sense of the grace and *newness* of the Gospel, and the keenness of his appreciation of the superiority of the new covenant to the old. But these contrasts his somewhat narrow and hard intellect now erected into a harsh antagonism. Identifying, like other Gnostics, the God of the Old Testament with the Creator of the world, he regards Him as an inferior and imperfect Being, and opposes Him to the God of the New Testament as the just God to the good.² But "just" with him here means simply strict and severe in enforcing a law; it does not mean that the law enforced is holy and good. His view, rather, is that the God of the Old Testament is a Being of limited knowledge, wisdom, and power: jealous, capricious, and revengeful,—anything but a Being to be loved. His law is a reflex of Himself, and shares His imperfections, but such as it is, He is strict, severe, rigorous, in enforcing it. The God of the Gospel, on the other hand, is pure love—benevolence without any taint

¹ *Dict. of Christ. Biog.*, iii. pp. 819, 820. On the importance of the Marcionite Church, cf. this Art., and Harnack, i. p. 240. The extensive developments of what would now be called "dissent" in the early centuries is a subject which has received too little attention. I may refer to the Montanist, Marcionite, Novatian, and Donatist Churches in illustration. Some of these were really powerful rival organizations to the main Catholic body, with a wide range of influence, a numerous membership, and a long duration.

² Cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Mar.*, *passim*.

of severity. He is not a being who punishes at all. We have spoken of Basilides as the Hegel, and of Valentinus as the Schelling, of the Gnostic movement; we might almost call Marcion, with his practical bent, his doctrine of faith, and his God of pure love, the Ritschl of the party. Marcion, too, was a critic in his own way, but it was chiefly the books of the *New Testament* to which his pruning knife was applied. His contribution to the discussion of the *Old Testament* was the composition of a book called *Antitheses*,¹ in which he laboured to set forth the self-contradictory character of the *Old Testament* revelation, and to detail its contrasts with the *Gospel*. If his objections sometimes touch real difficulties, they are often, on the other hand, incredibly trivial, as where he argues the ignorance of the Creator from the question of God to Adam—"Where art thou?"² None the less his procedure may be taken as a necessary protest against the allegorising treatment of the *Old Testament* by the church writers. It was again a neglected truth coming in unpleasant fashion to its rights. The Church had too much equalised the *Old Testament* with the *New*; Marcion, rejecting the allegorical method altogether, and insisting on taking each text literally as it stood, brought out into wholesome relief the contrasts between them. In this he undoubtedly did service.

The gain to the Church from this acute forcing upon it of *Old Testament* problems, and from its conflict with Gnosticism generally, was not slight. Apart from the direct stimulus given to theological reflection on the most fundamental questions of religion, of which we have the fruits garnered in the writings of the *Old Catholic Fathers*; apart, further, from the impulse given in such directions as

¹ *Adv. Marc.*, ii. 28, 29; iv. i. 36. Marcion's book was widely used by other sects: Harnack, i. p. 197.

² *Gen.* iii. 9, 11. *Adv. Mar.*, ii. 25.

the fixing of the canon, an important step was taken towards a juster conception of the Old Testament itself. We see this in Tertullian. The extremely acute and able polemic of this fiery Father against Marcion—disfigured as it often unfortunately is by injustice and controversial bitterness—has both a negative and a positive aspect. It was easy for Tertullian to press Marcion with the contradictions in which he involved himself with his doctrine of two Gods, and to show how untenable his theory was in the light of Christ's own teaching, as well as how shallow and unfair were many of his criticisms on the earlier Scriptures. The Old and New Testaments, he ably shows, are bound in indissoluble union, and stand or fall together as revelations of the one great Being. But Tertullian has a far more fruitful conception to bring to the solution of the difficulties raised by Marcion. This is the idea of an organic growth and of stages of development in revelation. We find this conception already employed by him elsewhere in the interests of Montanism. It is one which a writer like Basilides could hardly have refused, for it underlay his own philosophy. As in nature, so argues Tertullian, we have first the seed, then the shoot and shrub; then branches and leaves, till the formation of the tree is completed; then the swelling of the bud, the opening of the flower, and the growth and mellowing of the fruit; so is it also in the development of revelation. It began with rudiments; in the law and prophets, it advanced to infancy; in the Gospel, it grew up to youth; now by the Paraclete it has arrived at maturity.¹ It is this conception which Tertullian now applies with convincing effect in his reply to Marcion. Revelation has its stages; in comparison with the higher, the lower must always present the aspect of imperfection and contrast.² We need not pursue his argument in detail.

¹ *De. Vir. Vel.*, c. i.

² *Adv. Mar.*, iv. 1.

The key which he here puts into the hand of the Church is the only one by which it can hope even yet to unlock the riddles of this perplexing subject.

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THE CONTINUITY OF LIFE.

WHEN William Blake, the painter-poet, lay dying, "he said he was going to that country he had all his life wished to see," and just before he died "he burst into singing of the things he saw." It was the passion of a saint, whose heart had long been lifted above the present world; it was the vision of a mystic, whose imagination had long been exercised on the world to come. Few outside the Bible succession have been inspired of the Holy Ghost like him who wrote the Songs of Innocence and illustrated the Epic of Job. But common men share in their measure this instinct of the eternal, this curiosity of the unseen. One must be afflicted with spiritual stupidity or cursed by incurable frivolity who has never thought of that new state on which he may any day enter, nor speculated concerning its conditions. Amid the pauses of this life, when the doors are closed and the traffic on the streets has ceased, our thoughts travel by an irresistible attraction to the other life. What like will it be, and what will be its circumstances? What will be its occupations and history? "God forgive me," said Charles Kingsley, facing death, "but I look forward to it with an intense and reverent curiosity." He need not have asked pardon, for he was fulfilling his nature.

One is not astonished that this legitimate curiosity has created a literature, or that its books can be divided into sheep and goats. Whenever any province transcends experience and is veiled in mystery, it is certain to be the play of a childish and irresponsible fancy or the subject of