

them, and represented it as leaving to themselves a larger share of the capacity of producing the desired result than was at all consistent with the reality of the case, as represented to us in Scripture.

Besides this tendency to leave out of view the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and to exalt the natural powers and capacities of man in *virtual* opposition at least to the grace of the gospel, another evil result that flowed from Clement's addiction to philosophical pursuits, and his desire to conciliate men of a similar character, was, that he applied to Christianity the principle or device, common among the old philosophers, of an exoteric and an esoteric doctrine,—the one adapted to beginners, and the other to the more advanced or initiated; and that, in correspondence with this, he advocated the existence of a higher and lower standard of duty as well as knowledge,—the lower binding upon all, and the higher to be applied only to some, and, of course, implying no ordinary share of merit on the part of those who attained it. Both these ideas are substantially implied in the distinction which Clement elaborates between *πίστις* and *γνώσις*. He seems to have been the first among the Christian teachers who gave any countenance to these distinctions, and must therefore be regarded as, to a large extent, responsible for the mischief wrought by them upon the mode in which both doctrine and duty were afterwards inculcated in the church. An allegorizing perversion of Scripture had been practised before this time by Christian writers; but to Clement attaches the responsibility of not only practising it, but of laying it down formally and explicitly, as a right and proper rule for the interpretation of Scripture.

Clement may be regarded as the earliest writer who has discussed in detail the subject of Christian morality; for the epistle to Zenas and Serenus, ascribed to Justin Martyr, is of somewhat dubious origin, though its general character corresponds well enough with the interval between Clement and the apostolical fathers, *i.e.*, with the period at which Justin lived. We have not, in any of the writings of the apostolic fathers, anything like a scheme or system of moral duty. We find in their writings nothing in this department but an earnest and affectionate pressing of the plain precepts of Scripture. Matters, however, were changed, and changed for the worse, before the end of the second century, when Clement wrote. His object and plan naturally

led him to describe pretty fully the system of Christian morality, and to enter into the details of ordinary duty; and it is melancholy to notice what a grievous declension there is from the scriptural mode of treating of this subject. He exhibits plain traces of the operation at once of what have been called the ascetic and the mystic systems of morality. On the one hand, he prohibits indulgences which the Scriptures do not condemn (as second marriages); and, on the other hand, he releases men from obligations which the Scriptures impose,—as, for example, when he denies the necessity for regular times and seasons for prayer and religious exercises, upon the ground that men ought *always* to cultivate a devotional spirit. He maintains, in flat contradiction to Scripture, that Christ was a mere Stoic, who was wholly exempted from, or raised above, all the ordinary feelings and affections of the human heart, and under this fictitious aspect holds Him up as a model for Christians to imitate. One of the worst features of his system of morality is, that his instructions manifest a great neglect of the state of the heart and the affections, and are to a large extent composed of minute rules and directions about external and very trivial things. As he enters with much minuteness of detail into the subjects of eating, drinking, furniture, feasts, perfumes, chaplets, baths, female ornaments, etc., he furnishes some curious enough information about the domestic manners and customs of the period when he lived, while he does not convey a very high idea of the state of morality among the professing Christians of that age and country; and sets before us little or nothing that is at all fitted to promote the cause of genuine Christian holiness of heart and life.

Such was the most eminent and influential Christian teacher of the end of the second, and beginning of the third, century, whose works have come down to us; and when we see what they contain, and what are their general character and tendency, we cannot but be impressed with the conviction that the church had already greatly degenerated, both in doctrine and in character. It is not surprising, and indeed rather creditable to the Church of Rome, that it has been made a matter of discussion among some of her writers whether Clement ever was canonized, *i.e.*, whether he be legally entitled to the designation of a saint, and should in consequence be invoked and supplicated to intercede with God on our behalf. It is rather creditable that doubts

should have been entertained upon this point; though, after all, there are many much worse men, and more heretical writers, in the Romish calendar of saints, than Clement of Alexandria.*

Sec. IV.—Origen.

Tertullian, the first of the Latin fathers, would come next in point of time; but it may be better, in the first place, to say a few words about Origen, the pupil of Clement, and his successor, as the head of the catechetical school of Alexandria. Origen occupied the first half of the third century; and though he was inferior to none of the fathers in talent and erudition, and rendered some very important services to the cause of Christian literature, yet we fear it must be said of him, that he extended and propagated the corruption both of doctrine and morality which Clement had done a good deal to promote, and thus exerted a most injurious influence upon the church. Origen was a most voluminous writer, and many of his works have come down to us; but there have been great controversies among learned men both as to their genuineness and their integrity. In regard to some of the works which have been ascribed to him, it is not easy to decide whether the evidence for or against their genuineness preponderates. Many of them have come down to us only in a Latin translation; and the translator Ruffinus has candidly informed us, that he altered many of Origen's statements, in order to render them more intelligible and less objectionable. Hence it has happened that, both in ancient and modern times, there have been great controversies in the church as to the true opinions of Origen, and the extent of his deviations from the orthodox faith.

A lengthened controversy took place upon this subject between Jerome and Ruffinus in the end of the fourth century,—Jerome attacking, and Ruffinus defending him; and in the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, the question whether Origen was a heretic was discussed in several councils, and the decisions were generally adverse to him. At last he was conclusively pronounced to be a heretic by the fifth general council held at Constantinople in the year 553.† The decision was unquestionably a right one,

* Natalis Alexander, *saec. ii.*, cap. iv., art. vii.; Ittigius, *saec. ii.*, pp. 61, 62. | † Natalis Alexander, *saec. iii.*, cap. iii., art. xii., § iii.

for there can be no reasonable doubt that Origen grievously perverted some of the most important doctrines of the gospel. He was more deeply imbued with the principles of the eclectic or neo-Platonic philosophy than Clement, and applied it more boldly and unscrupulously than his instructor had ventured to do, in many daring speculations about God and the creation of the world, about angels and demons, and about the souls and destinies of men,—very much as if he had thrown off all regard to the authority of Scripture, and thought himself at full liberty to indulge without restraint in his own baseless speculations, even in regard to subjects which are plainly revealed to us. He believed in the eternity of matter, upon the ground that God could not have existed for *any* period of duration without putting forth the creative energy; thus setting a paltry piece of metaphysical speculation, upon a point of which man *can* know nothing except what God has been pleased to reveal, in opposition to the plain declarations of what he still professed to regard as the word of God. He believed in the pre-existence of human souls, and taught that they were confined in human bodies as a punishment for sins committed in some previous condition; and he believed in the ultimate salvation of all God's intelligent creatures, devils as well as men. He has spoken sometimes about the Trinity, and the person of Christ, in a way that has occasioned considerable difficulty to the defenders of the orthodoxy of the ante-Nicene fathers upon this point. Bishop Bull seems rather disposed to get rid of the necessity of investigating minutely the statements upon this subject contained in many of his other works, and thinks that his real opinion should be taken chiefly from his book against Celsus, because it was written when he was far advanced in life,—because it contains scarcely any of the extravagant and presumptuous speculations in which in his other works he so largely indulged,—and because it seems to have come down to us with a purer and more uncorrupted text than many of his other writings.* And in that very valuable work,—for such it undoubtedly is,—he very plainly asserts the divinity of Christ. It is certain, however, that Origen thought that the divine nature was united only with the soul, and not with the

* Bull's "Defensio Fidei Nicænae," and for general arguments in favour of his orthodoxy on this subject, pp. saec. ii., c. ix. For his general character of Origen, *vide* vol. v., p. 355; | 355, *et seq.* Oxford, 1846.

body of Christ; so that there was no proper hypostatical union, as it is commonly called,—no proper assumption by Christ of human nature. This groundless fancy led to his maintenance of what may be regarded as a still more serious and dangerous error, viz., a virtual denial that Christ offered any proper vicarious satisfaction to God, and thus made a real atonement for the sins of men. This, of course, overturns the Gospel of our salvation; and it is a melancholy instance of the extent to which an unwarrantable indulgence in mere philosophical speculations may lead men astray from the path of scriptural truth.

There is, however, another department in Origen's theology to which it may be more necessary to advert, not because it exhibits a more dangerous or deadly error,—for no error can be more dangerous or deadly than a denial of Christ's vicarious atonement,—but because Origen, while he received it in some measure from preceding writers, probably exerted more influence in diffusing it in the church than in propagating any of the other errors which he taught; and because it has enjoyed perhaps a wider diffusion in the church than any of them. We refer to what was afterwards called the Pelagian heresy. Jerome, who exerted himself so zealously and elaborately in the end of the fourth century to establish the heterodoxy of Origen in opposition to Ruffinus, has charged him with teaching the doctrines afterwards promulgated by Pelagius and his followers; and the charge, unlike some of Jerome's furious invectives, seems to rest upon a solid foundation. Origen, indeed, cannot be said to have taught the Pelagian *system* in expansion or in detail,—to have brought it out fully, and illustrated the relations or connections of its different parts; and it is not by any means certain that he would have subscribed to the doctrines of Pelagius, as it is not difficult to produce from his writings passages which have a more evangelical aspect, and are more accordant with the doctrines of grace. But it is certain that he has laid down principles which naturally, and by fair consequence, lead to the establishment of the Pelagian heresy, and consequently to the overthrow of the scheme of gospel grace; and that he has done so more explicitly than any preceding Christian writer. His doctrine of the pre-existence of souls, condemned to dwell in human bodies as a punishment for sins committed in a previous state, is inconsistent with any right scriptural apprehension of the doctrine of original sin; and erroneous and

defective views of the doctrine of original sin form the basis and foundation of Pelagianism.* Besides, he has asserted the freedom of the human will, in the sense in which it has been commonly maintained by Pelagians, much more explicitly than Justin, Irenæus, or even Clement; and his case is different from theirs with regard to this point, in this important particular, that he has made statements which enable us to see that what he has said about divine agency and divine grace, is not to be understood in such a sense as to favour what we believe to be the scriptural view upon this point, or as really implying more than Pelagians have commonly admitted. Pelagians can speak much and strongly about the universality and efficacy of God's agency, and about our dependence upon Him; and thus, when anything takes place or is effected which is regarded as a subject of joy or thanksgiving, they may ascribe it to the grace, or favour, or kindness of God. But it turns out, upon a careful investigation, that Pelagians, at least the more gross and open heretics among them, mean by this agency and grace of God, even when applied to spiritual results, effected upon men and by men,—to the renovation of their natures and the growing holiness of their hearts and lives,—nothing different in substance from what they understand by it when applied to the production of the ordinary events of Providence, by which the happiness of men is affected, or to the common actions of men produced by the ordinary operation of their faculties. They admit, of course, since they do not make a profession of atheism, that God's agency is in some way interposed in regard to all the actions of men as His creatures; that men are dependent upon this agency in all their bodily actions, and in all their mental operations; and are to look to Him as their sustainer, governor, and benefactor. But then they usually admit, or at least they may be driven to admit, that they do not hold that there is any difference *in kind* between the agency and grace of God as manifested in the production of their ordinary actions, and as manifested in the production of those which are spiritually good. In short,—for this is not an occasion for entering into detail upon the subject,—they virtually refuse to make any distinction between the ordinary agency of God, viewed simply as the Creator and

* *Vide* Walchii *Miscellanea Sacra*, Lib. i., Exercit. vii., *Historia doctrinæ de peccato originis*, p. 178. Bud-
dæus, *Instit. Theol. Dog.*, Lib. iii., c. ii., § 35, p. 844.

Governor of the world, in the production of all men's actions, and that special and peculiar agency in the production of actions *spiritually good*, which is ascribed in Scripture more immediately to the agency of the third person of the Godhead, in bringing men to Christ, and in preparing them for heaven.

We do not say that, where this distinction is not openly denied, there is no Pelagianism,—for many Pelagians, or at least semi-Pelagians, as they have been called, have involved their representations upon this subject in considerable obscurity by subtle discussions,—but we do say that there is undoubted and palpable Pelagianism wherever men give plain indications that this important distinction with respect to the divine agency in the production of men's actions is denied or disregarded. And this is what we fear applies to the case of Origen, and warrants us in regarding him as one of the precursors and promoters of the Pelagian heresy; for in commenting upon the declaration of the apostle, that God worketh in us, both to will and to do, of His good pleasure, he very explicitly lays down the principle, that as we have from God the power of moving, and are sustained or upheld by Him in the exercise of it, but determine *of ourselves* to move in one direction or another, so we have from God the power of willing, and are upheld by Him in the exercise of it, but have from ourselves the power of willing good or of willing evil.*

It is not at all surprising, considering the daring and presumptuous character of many of Origen's speculations, and the Pelagian cast of his sentiments, that he should have expressed great doubts, at least concerning God's omnipotence. Pelagian views, indeed, result from, or may be run up to, a virtual denial of the omnipotence and omniscience of God; and thus terminate in practically withdrawing from Him that glory and honour which He claims to Himself, and will not give to another.

Sec. V.—Tertullian.

There are only two other writers among those who flourished in the first three centuries to whom we mean to direct attention; and we do so, both because they exerted a considerable influence upon the state of opinion in the church, and because they were

intimately connected with the principal schisms which broke the outward unity of the church during this early period, and which occasioned the principal controversies that then took place among those who could with any propriety be called Christians, even as to outward profession. I refer to Tertullian and Cyprian,—the one a presbyter, and the other the Bishop of Carthage; and thus connected with what has been called the North African Church.

Tertullian was the earliest of the fathers whose works are written in Latin. He was a man of very fervid and vigorous mind, though his works are commonly written in a very rough, abrupt, and obscure style. He flourished during the first twenty or thirty years of the third century, and was therefore intermediate, in point of time, between Clement of Alexandria on the one side, and Origen and Cyprian on the other. He has been regarded as marking a pretty distinct era in the declension of the purity of evangelical doctrine and evangelical feeling in the early church. Neander* says of him, that he "stands on the boundary between two different epochs in the development of the Church." The leading characteristics of the system or state of things which Tertullian's works develop, and which he may be said to represent, as he no doubt did much to promote it, are,—first, that it does not, like that of the Alexandrian fathers, indicate the corrupting influence of philosophical speculations; and secondly, that *notwithstanding* this, it just as fully exhibits defective and erroneous apprehensions of the peculiar principles of the gospel; vehemently inculcates a morose, ascetic, and overstrained morality; and, both in regard to morality and religious worship, it manifests a most exaggerated sense of the importance of mere external things. With respect to Tertullian, as with respect to most of the fathers, there are some difficult and perplexing questions to be settled about the genuineness of some of the numerous and multifarious works which have been ascribed to him; and there is this additional peculiarity in his case, that when any attempt is made to estimate the value of his authority, attention must be given to the question, in some instances not easily decided, whether the particular treatise under consideration was written before or after he left the orthodox church, and joined the sect of the Montanists.

With regard to the views of Tertullian upon theological sub-

* Natalis Alexander, *sæc. iii., cap. iii., art. xii., § ii.*

* Rose's translation, vol. i., p. 199.

jects, as collected from the works generally understood to have been written before he became a Montanist, the great general truth is, that he gives less prominence than any preceding writer to the peculiar principles of evangelical truth, and that he teaches some things rather more explicitly opposed to them. He entertained orthodox opinions, in the main, on the subject of the person of Christ, though he has made one very awkward statement about the eternity of the Son, which has afforded a handle to Arians, and has perplexed their opponents. But in regard to the offices and work of Christ, even about the atonement of Christ as the ground of a sinner's forgiveness, there are scarcely any clear, full, and satisfactory statements to be found in Tertullian's voluminous writings. He has asserted the power of man to do the will of God at least as explicitly, and to all appearance in as unsound a sense, as Clement of Alexandria. And, what is deserving of special attention, he has brought his views in regard to the natural powers of man, and the value and importance of the good works which he is able to perform, and does perform, to bear more explicitly than any preceding writer upon the great subject of the justification of a sinner. Although he has made statements on the subject of the justification of a sinner, which are pretty much in accordance with the general train of scriptural language, he has also made others which are clearly opposed to it. He has asserted the doctrine of justification by works; he has ascribed a meritorious bearing upon the forgiveness of sins to celibacy and almsgiving; and he has attaching to him the discredit of being the first to apply the word *satisfaction* to men's good deeds in their bearing upon the favour of God and the remission of sins; and though he certainly did not employ it in the modern Popish sense, he may thus be said to have laid the foundations of a mode of teaching—of a system of perverting Scripture—which, in the hands of the Church of Rome, has contributed so fearfully to the destruction of men's souls. He taught what may be called the common absurdities and extravagances of the fathers, in regard to angels, demons, and the souls of men departed. And in regard to this last point, it may be worth while to notice that he mentions and recommends—and he is the first Christian writer who does so—prayers for the dead, and offerings to them on the anniversaries of their deaths. He does not, indeed, connect these prayers and offerings, as the Papists do, with the

doctrine of purgatory; and it must be admitted that there have been many who advocated the lawfulness of praying for the dead, who did not either defend or practise it in the way, or upon the grounds, set forth by the Church of Rome. Still the practice in any form involves a clear deviation from the simplicity of Scripture, and is an indication of a state of mind unchastened and superstitious, and likely,—nay certain, as experience proves,—to lead to many other corruptions in the worship of God.

These are the chief things worth noticing in the theological views of Tertullian, so far as he may be fairly regarded as representing the opinions that then generally prevailed in what was called the catholic or orthodox church, as distinguished from the heretics or sectaries. Tertullian, however, ultimately joined the sect or schism of the Montanists, and we have now to advert briefly to their principles. Montanus flourished in Phrygia, soon after the middle of the second century; and though he did not deviate materially from the general system of doctrine usually taught by the church, he yet put forth such notions, and adopted such a course of procedure, as to have been justly separated from its communion. His position seems to have been in some measure the result of the reaction occasioned by the incipient attempt to give a more literary and philosophical character to the exposition of Christian subjects. Montanus and his followers professed to take the more spiritual views upon all topics, and even pretended to enjoy the supernatural and miraculous influences of the Holy Ghost. The opinions entertained, and the practices adopted, by Montanus and his followers, are fully stated in Mosheim.* I direct attention to them as constituting an interesting feature in the history of the early church, more especially as being the first distinct manifestation of a fanatical spirit among persons who did not deviate materially from the standard of orthodoxy in doctrine, and many of whom, there is reason to think, were possessed of genuine piety. In this point of view, the history of Montanism is interesting, and is fitted to afford us some useful lessons. There is one circumstance which is fitted to make it peculiarly interesting to us, and it is this—that while there have been many

* In his Church History; and more fully in his Commentarii, Sæc. ii., secs. lxvi. lxxvii., pp. 410-424. Neander's Hist. of the Christ. Rel., sec. v., vol. ii., pp. 176-195, Rose's translation.

subsequent instances, in the history of the church, of much folly and fanaticism manifested by persons who had fair claims to be regarded as possessed of piety, we have seen, in our own day, and in our own country, perhaps a fuller and more complete reproduction of all the leading features of Montanism, than the church has ever before witnessed.

I do not recollect anything in the history of the church so like Montanism in all its leading features as one remarkable system which we have seen rise, decline, and in a great measure fall, in our own day, though it has not had any distinct or specific name attached to it. In both cases there was, along with a professed subjection to Scripture, and an attempt to defend themselves by its statements, a claim to supernatural and miraculous communications of the Spirit, and a large measure of practical reliance upon these pretended communications for the warrant and sanction of their notions and practices. In both there was the same great and offensive prominence of women as the chief possessors and exhibitors of supernatural endowments, and the same perversions of the same passages of Scripture to countenance these pretensions. In both there was the same assumption of superior knowledge and piety, the same compassionate contempt for those who did not embrace their views and join their party, and the same ferocious denunciations of men who actively and openly opposed their pretensions, as the enemies of God, and the despisers of the Holy Ghost; and the same tone of predicting judgments upon the community, because it rejected their claims. And, as if to complete the parallel, we find that as ancient Montanism, with all its follies and extravagances, received the countenance and support of Tertullian, who, though a man of powerful and vigorous mind, frequently appeals with all seriousness and reverence to the visions and revelations of gifted sisters, so the Montanism of our own day received the countenance and support of one noble-minded and highly-gifted man, who might otherwise have rendered important and permanent services to the church of Christ, but whose history now stands out as a beacon to warn men from the rocks on which he struck. These modern exhibitions of fanatical folly, and unwarranted pretensions to supernatural communications, would scarcely have excited so much surprise, or produced so great a sensation, as they did in this country in recent times, if men had been better acquainted with the history of the church, and

with previous exhibitions of a similar kind; especially if they had been familiar with the history of ancient Montanism.

Montanism lasted as a distinct, but very obscure and insignificant, sect in Phrygia for two or three hundred years, though it exerted no influence upon the general condition of the church. The pretensions to the miraculous communications of the Spirit, indeed, soon ceased,—the experience of ancient, concurring with that of modern, times, in proving that such pretensions are very short-lived, that they are not easily supported, and uniformly disappear with the decay of the first blaze of fanaticism in which they have originated. The chief purpose to which the ancient Montanists applied their pretended communications of the Holy Spirit was, not the inculcation of new doctrines, but the improvement and elevation of the standard of morality, which they alleged that Christ and His apostles had left in an imperfect state. The chief improvements introduced by the Montanists into the moral system of Christianity were these: they made absolute the prohibition of second marriages, which were disapproved of, indeed, as we have seen, by other writers unconnected with that sect; they imposed a variety of fasts as imperatively binding at stated seasons; repealed the permission, or rather command, which Christ had given, to flee from persecution; and maintained the unlawfulness of absolving, or readmitting to the communion of the church, men who had once fallen into gross sins.

The last of these notions was brought out more fully by Novatian, about the middle of the third century, and made the ground of a schism. The way in which the errors of the Montanists about the imperative obligation of fasting were received in the church fully proves that up till that time it had been left free, as the Scripture leaves it, to be practised by individuals according to their own judgment and discretion. And this consideration affords a conclusive objection against the apostolicity of the laws about fasting, which are now, in the Church of Rome, embodied among what are called the commandments of the church, and which are made binding upon all her subjects, under pain of mortal sin.

Sec. VI.—Cyprian.

Cyprian became Bishop of Carthage about the middle of the third century, and suffered martyrdom in the persecution of the

Emperor Valerian, 260. He was a great reader and admirer of Tertullian, but he was a man of a much more amiable and beautiful character, as well as a much more pleasing and interesting writer, than his *master*, as he used to call him. Cyprian is altogether one of the finest characters we meet with in the history of the early church; and his letters may still be read with profit, both by private Christians prosecuting the work of sanctification in their own souls, and by ministers of the gospel desiring to cherish the spirit in which their arduous and often very difficult and trying work ought to be carried on. Milner gives a very full and interesting account of Cyprian, and some edifying and impressive extracts from his letters, all well worthy of perusal; and he subjoins to all this a very full, elaborate, and, in the main, just and judicious comparison between him and his great cotemporary, Origen. Cyprian seems to have taken his views of divine truth somewhat more purely and simply from the Scriptures than many of the early writers; to have had less tendency than many of them to mix up scriptural truth with philosophical speculations, or to invent mere fancies of his own without any scriptural warrant; and to have had somewhat more of at least the spirit of the gospel. He was, indeed, far from being free from error; for while he ascribes the conversion of sinners, and the remission of all sins previous to conversion, to the grace of God through Christ, he does talk as if he thought that their subsequent sins might be washed away by penitence, almsgiving, and other good works. Neither can it be denied that, with all his personal and ministerial excellences, he did contribute to the propagation of unsound and dangerous errors upon some points. He gave some countenance to certain honours being paid to martyrs and confessors, which led at length, though not in his time, to their being invocated and worshipped. He was a zealous inculcator of obedience to ecclesiastical authorities, and is usually regarded as having done something to elevate the standard of episcopal domination, though even the Cyprianic bishop was very different from the modern one; and he advocated some notions about the absolute necessity and ordinary effects of baptism, which tended to corrupt the doctrine of the sacraments, and to accelerate the progress of superstition.

The works of Cyprian are the great battle-field of the Prelatic controversy, so far as the testimony of the first three centuries is concerned; and there are several important works upon both sides

of this controversy, whose very titles are taken from Cyprian's name; as, for example, on the Prelatic side, Bishop Sage's "Principles of the Cyprianic Age," and, a much larger and more important work, his Vindications of them; and, on the Presbyterian side, Principal Rule's "Cyprianic Bishop Examined," and a more valuable work, Jameson's "Cyprianus Isotimus," both of them written in answer to Sage. The principal controversies in which Cyprian himself was engaged,—the principal, indeed, which agitated the church in his time,—were, first, the schism which Novatian made in the church of Rome, in which Cyprian strenuously supported the Roman bishop Cornelius; and the other about re-baptizing those who had been baptized by heretics, in which he came into open collision with Stephen, one of Cornelius' successors. It is very certain, from a variety of statements in Cyprian's works, that even before the middle of the third century, very many had joined the church who were not really believers in Jesus Christ, and that it contained not a few whose outward conduct even was far from adorning the profession they made. Accordingly, in the persecution under the Emperor Decius, a great many professing Christians apostatized from the faith, and offered sacrifice to heathen idols. After the persecution ceased, and these persons—the lapsed, as they were called—asked readmission into the church, great difficulties arose as to the way in which their case should be disposed of. Cyprian, and the church in general, were inclined to receive them, provided they made a credible profession of penitence, and submitted to the ordinary penitential discipline. The number of the lapsed, however, was so great, that it was not easy to enforce these regulations. A device was fallen upon, which is curious, as indicating the gross ignorance and inconsideration which then prevailed, and the formal and superstitious spirit that was brought to bear upon ecclesiastical arrangements. Men who had suffered something in the persecution without lapsing, and were in consequence called confessors, were applied to by the lapsed to ask for them readmission into the church, without submitting to public penance. Many of these confessors—under the influence, there is reason to fear, of vanity and self-conceit—complied with these requests; and, as a compliment to these confessors, very many of the impenitent lapsed were readmitted into communion. The absurdity of this is too gross to need any exposure, and its prevalence affords a very unfavourable indication of the internal state

of the church. Cyprian opposed this device, and though in some respects he gave undue and unwarranted honour to martyrs, he severely censured these confessors for this gross and senseless abuse of the respect that was entertained for them.

This practice, however, was extensively acted upon in the church; and it seems to have driven Novatian, who was one of the presbyters of the church of Rome, into the opposite extreme, and led him to maintain, as the Montanists had done, that the lapsed, and other persons who had been guilty of heinous crimes, should be for ever excluded from church communion. They did not deny that they might be forgiven by God, but they thought they ought never to be forgiven by the church,—a notion manifesting great ignorance of the church's duty and functions, but yet based apparently upon a perversion of sounder views than then generally obtained of the elements of which the church *ought* to be composed. Novatian and his supporters, however, went further than this; and, by a process of exaggeration and extravagance which has been often similarly exemplified since his time, he contended, not only that the church ought for ever to exclude the lapsed from her communion, but also, moreover, that the church which admitted the lapsed, even upon a credible profession of penitence, became thereby so polluted, that her communion ought to be renounced. Accordingly, upon this ground, he himself and his followers renounced the communion of the church of Rome, and set up a rival communion of their own in the same city, of which Novatian became the bishop, or, as the Romanists call him in the style of a later age, the antipope. These views of Novatian had not in themselves any foundation in Scripture, but being opinions which are rather apt to spring up in the minds, and to commend themselves to the feelings, of pious men, when the communion of the visible church has fallen into a condition of laxity and impurity, they received a considerable measure of support; and it is in some respects creditable to the church that they did so. They have at various times been in substance brought forward, though most commonly by men who were more distinguished for pious feeling than for soundness of judgment. Cyprian strenuously opposed Novatian, and by his high character and great influence in the church afforded important assistance to Cornelius in his contest with his rival. This controversy is interesting chiefly as casting some light upon the state of doctrine, sentiment, and practice in

the church at the period at which it took place. Mosheim, in his *Commentaries*, gives a full view of the grounds taken by the different parties, and of the manner in which they defended them; and Neander, in treating of this subject,* has some very beautiful and striking observations on the measures of truth and error exhibited *by both parties* on the two general subjects that might be said to be involved in the controversy,—viz., first, the principles of penitence; and secondly, what it is that constitutes the idea and essence of a true church.

The other controversy, in which Cyprian took an active part, and in which he came into open collision with Stephen, Bishop of Rome, was upon this point,—whether persons who had been baptized by heretics should, or should not, on applying for admission into any branch of the orthodox or catholic church, be baptized again. The doctrine and practice of the churches upon this point varied. The Asiatic churches in general held that the baptism of heretics was null and void, and that persons coming from heretical communions should be baptized, just as if they had never received baptism at all. The church of Rome, and most of the Western churches, took the opposite side, and maintained that the baptism of heretics was valid, and that those who had received it should not be re-baptized. Cyprian took the side of the Eastern churches, and strenuously supported the necessity of re-baptizing those who had been baptized in the communion of the heretical sects. Both parties were of one mind, in holding the general position that baptism should not in any case be repeated; but the question was, whether baptism, administered by heretics, was really baptism, and served the purposes for which baptism was instituted. Stephen appealed to the tradition of the church in opposition to re-baptizing; but Cyprian, in reply to this appeal, gives us a noble testimony to the perfection and supremacy of the Scripture, as the only standard by which the controversy ought to be decided. Even Scripture, however, cannot be said to furnish any very direct or decisive evidence upon the subject. We find on both sides of the question, as then discussed, many very injudicious and unsatisfactory attempts to extract from scriptural statements a direct and precise decision upon the point. Scripture plainly enough sanctions

* *Commentarii, Saec. iii., secs. xv.* | of *Christ. Rel.*, vol. i., pp. 237–268, and *xvi.*, pp. 512–527. Neander, *Hist.* | Rose's translation.

the opinion, that baptism, in order to be valid, *i.e.*, in order to be what ought to be held and reckoned baptism—whatever may be the effects resulting from it—ought to be administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Beyond this it does not appear that there are any very clear or satisfactory materials in Scripture for laying down any other definite proposition on the subject except this,—that baptism, in order to be valid, and to be held and received as such, so that it should not be repeated, must be administered in a solemn and orderly way, *in a communion which is entitled to be regarded as in some sense a branch of the church of Christ.* Those who believe that infant baptism is unlawful will, of course, in consistency, regard it as null and void. But, irrespective of this peculiarity, there does not seem to be clear scriptural ground for laying down any other doctrines upon this subject than the two which have been stated; and the second and most important of them, *viz.*, that it must be administered in the communion of a society which, however erroneous in doctrine and corrupt in practice, is yet regarded as a church of Christ, leaves the whole subject on a footing very loose and undetermined. This general principle does not seem to have been formally denied by either party in the controversy; but there were peculiarities in the way in which it was necessary then to apply it which have not commonly existed, and no very clear or definite views then obtained as to what the unity of the church consisted in.

The generality of what were then called the heretical sects might with truth, and without any breach of charity, be denied the character of churches of Christ; so that whatever we may think of the abstract original principle, Cyprian was right in denying that these baptisms, with which they had then actually to do in practice, should be held as valid.* If there were any heretical sects at this period subsisting in distinct communions in addition to the Gnostic sects—and upon this point we have no very certain information—they must have consisted of persons who denied the divinity of our Saviour, under the name of Ebionites and Artemonites; and *they* might be justly denied to be churches of Christ. It is not very wonderful that Cyprian, in maintaining, in these circumstances, the necessity of re-baptizing, was led into some

* Dionysius of Alexandria, though | was disposed, much to his honour, to agreeing in the main with Cyprian, | except the Montanists.

notions upon the unity and catholicity of the church, which are of an unscriptural and dangerous character, and which, though on this occasion employed by him in opposing the Bishop of Rome, have been since very largely employed by that church in the construction and defence of her hierarchic and exclusive system. It was the fact at this time, that the great body of the churches throughout the world were living, so far as they had the means and opportunities of knowing and holding intercourse with each other, in terms of friendly communion; and that they were, upon the whole, warranted in regarding these heretics who were not united with them as not entitled to the character of churches of Christ. *This*, which was merely true *de facto* at the time, was converted by Cyprian into a sort of general principle or doctrine, in unfolding which he brought out, for the first time, with anything like clearness or distinctness, the idea of a catholic church, comprehending all the true branches of the church of Christ, and *bound together by a visible and external unity.* This was Cyprian's grand contribution to the progress of error and corruption in the church, and the ultimate growth of the Papacy; and we must not allow our esteem for the personal piety and excellence of the man to blind us to the magnitude of the error,—a temptation to which, in this case, Milner has very manifestly yielded.

Cyprian's views about the re-baptizing of heretics did not generally prevail in the church; but, on the contrary, soon lost ground,—chiefly, we believe, from the rise and growth in subsequent generations of other sects which deviated less widely from the general doctrines of the church, and which, therefore, men shrunk from denying to be in any sense churches of Christ. The general feeling and practice of the great body of the church has been decidedly opposed to re-baptizing, both in ancient and in modern times. And no Protestant church has ever denied the validity even of Popish baptism, until this was done recently by the most influential and respectable section of the Presbyterian church in the United States of North America. But though, upon the particular topic of re-baptizing, Cyprian's views have been generally rejected both by Papists and Protestants, the principles he laid down in defending his cause have had a wide and general currency, and have been carried out to applications which he never dreamed of. He may not unfairly be regarded as the author of the idea of the necessity of the whole church, and all its branches, being

connected together in an external visible unity,—an idea which forms the very basis of the Papal system. Cyprian, indeed, did not hold the necessity of one visible head of the church, possessed of authority or jurisdiction over all its branches; and nothing can be more clear and certain, from the way in which the controversy between him and Stephen was conducted, than that neither Cyprian nor anybody else at that time regarded the Bishop of Rome as the sovereign ruler of the church. Cyprian regarded the visible unity of the church as embodied in the unity of the episcopate, or the combination of bishops, each independent in his own sphere, all equal to each other in point of power and authority, and all to be regarded as equal colleagues in the government of the church. These views are stated by Cyprian so fully and so clearly, that they cannot be misunderstood or explained away; and of course they are manifestly inconsistent with the idea that he would ever have sanctioned the modern pretensions of the Papal See.

But it cannot be denied that, in unfolding his idea of visible unity, he has put forth some obscure and unintelligible statements* about a certain primacy of rank or order, though not of power or jurisdiction, given to Peter over the other apostles, as the symbol, type, or embodiment of the unity which Christ imposed upon His church; and of these statements the Church of Rome has not been slow to take advantage. It is quite certain, however, that Cyprian held that all bishops had equal power and authority, each being in his own sphere independent of any other bishop; that he denied to the then Bishop of Rome any jurisdiction over the churches of Africa; and that he did not ascribe to Peter any jurisdiction over the other apostles, but merely a certain primacy of rank or order. Nay, it can, we think, be proved that he ascribed to bishops only a similar primacy of rank or order above presbyters, without regarding them as possessed by divine authority of any real, superior, inherent power or jurisdiction. On these grounds, Presbyterians, Prelatists, and Papists have all confidently appealed to Cyprian in support of their respective opinions. All these three parties have something plausible to allege in their behalf from the writings of Cyprian; though the Papists, as usual, have had recourse to forgery and interpolation in order to

* So Barrow thought them.—The Pope's Supremacy.

increase the strength of their evidence.* The real and the whole truth upon this point—and it is of considerable importance in the history of church government—I am persuaded may be embodied in the three following propositions:—First, there is enough in the writings of Cyprian to prove that, down even till the middle of the third century, the substantial identity of bishops and presbyters was maintained; and that the idea of the episcopate being, by divine appointment, a distinct, independent, higher office than the presbyterate, was yet not generally received; Secondly, There is enough to prove that in Cyprian's time, and in a great measure through his exertions, an important distinction between bishops and presbyters, implying some superiority not well defined, of the one over the other, became prevalent; and Thirdly, That he has laid down, though very vaguely and obscurely, some principles which, when fully carried out and applied, lay a good foundation for maintaining that there should be one visible head of the whole church, and for vesting some kind or degree of primacy or supremacy in the Bishop of Rome.

* Gieseler, i., p. 154. Note, Cunningham's translation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES.

AFTER having given a brief account of the most eminent writers of the first three centuries, and of the theological views which they entertained and inculcated, we proceed now to take a brief *general* survey of this period, viewed as a whole; especially in its bearing upon those subjects connected with the doctrine, government, and worship of the church, which still give rise to differences of opinion, and to controversial discussions. To some subjects of this description I have already adverted, in considering the leading writers individually, and I need not now enlarge upon them. Enough has been said to show the grounds on which all true Protestants have ever refused to admit that the authority of the fathers should be held to be binding and conclusive, either in the interpretation of particular passages of Scripture, or in the exposition of the scheme of divine truth.

The obligation which all Roman Catholic priests have undertaken,—viz., that they will never interpret Scripture *except according to the unanimous consent* of the fathers,—is one which cannot be discharged, except by abstaining wholly from interpreting Scripture; for the unanimous consent of the fathers about the interpretation of scriptural statements, except those in the explanation of which all sane men are agreed, has no existence; and every Papist of any learning must be fully aware of this. Many of the patristic interpretations of Scripture are now universally rejected, and this applies to some cases in which their consent was at least as general as in regard to any passages that could be specified. What has been called a *catholic* consent,—and this must imply at least a general concurrence of the great body of the early writers in the exposition of doctrines,—is just about as difficult to be found as their *unanimous* consent, in the interpretation of Scripture. Indeed, the unreasonableness of the principle of resting upon the

authority of the fathers in the interpretation of Scripture, or in the formation of our theological opinions, is so clear, and has been so fully demonstrated, that there is a very strong temptation, in adverting to it, to give expression to feelings both of contempt and indignation towards those who profess to maintain it. It is not very easy to look upon them, as a body, in any other light than as being either weak and silly men, with whom it would be a sort of degradation to argue, or as daring and deliberate corrupters of the truth as it is in Jesus; although in this, as in almost every case of error, there are special instances of exception in men, whom it would be unfair to rank in either class, and in regard to whom we must be contented with expressing our unqualified surprise that they should have been deceived by such an illusion.

Bishop Bull, for instance, undoubtedly a great man, solemnly declared, when writing in defence of the Arminian and anti-scriptural view of the doctrine of justification, that “if there could but be found any one proposition that he had maintained, in all his Harmony, repugnant to the doctrine of the Catholic and primitive Church, he would immediately give up the cause, sit down contentedly under the reproach of a novelist, openly retract his error or heresy, make a solemn recantation in the face of the Christian world, and bind himself to perpetual silence ever after.”* Now, if the learned bishop had meant by this extraordinary statement merely to declare his thorough conviction that he was quite able to establish the opinions he had actually taught by an appeal to the catholic and primitive church, it would not have been so objectionable in point of principle, though it is not an easy matter to find out any definite standard in what might, with anything like propriety, be called the teaching of the catholic primitive church upon the subject he was discussing. But he evidently meant something more than this,—viz., first, that *de facto* there is a definite standard of the teaching of the primitive catholic church, with respect to the points controverted among modern theologians, which may be ascertained; and secondly, that *de jure* this primitive catholic teaching, when once ascertained, is an authoritative standard by which men are bound to regulate their opinions. Now, few things have been more conclusively established than the utter falsehood

* Waterland's First Defence, Preface, vol. i., p. 272, 2d Edit.

of *both* these positions; and sufficient materials have, I think, already been afforded to prove this.

These sentiments of Bishop Bull are in substance the same as those commonly propounded by the Tractarians, who talk much of catholic consent, as they call it, as an infallible standard of faith; while they arbitrarily and unwarrantably limit the sources from which this catholic consent is to be ascertained to the writings of the fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries. There is a mode of speaking upon this subject that is very common among Prelatic writers, even those who do not go so far as the Tractarians upon the subject of catholic consent, or on the existence and authority of the pretended rule,—“quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus,”—that ought to be adverted to and guarded against. They admit the supreme authority of Scripture as the only standard of faith, and deny any proper authority in religious matters to the fathers, or to the teaching of the early church; but still they are fond of talking about the fathers in such a way as seems to imply that they do ascribe to them authority, or something like it, after all. They talk much of the importance and necessity of studying the fathers, and investigating the doctrines of the early church; and of the *great* assistance thus furnished in ascertaining the meaning of Scripture, and the truth of doctrine. Much, of course, may be said truly and justly to this effect; but it is often said in such a way as seems to imply that, in some vague sense, the fathers, or the early but post-apostolic church, have some authority in matters of faith and practice; and hence the importance of forming clear and precise ideas of the distinction between what is authoritative, properly so called, and what is merely auxiliary,—of seeing and remembering that the difference is not in degree, but in kind,—and also of forming a pretty definite conception of the nature and amount of the assistance which the fathers do afford. Men sometimes talk as if they had a vague notion of the early fathers having had some inferior species of inspiration,—some peculiar divine guidance differing from that of the apostles and evangelists in degree rather than in kind,—and somehow entitling their views and statements to more deference and respect than those of ordinary men. All notions of this sort are utterly baseless, and should be carefully rejected. Authority, properly so called, can be rightly based only upon inspiration; and inspiration is the guidance of the Spirit of God, infallibly securing

against all error. When men can be proved to possess this, it is of course our duty to regard all their statements as invested with authority, and to receive them at once with implicit submission, without any further investigation, and without appealing to any other standard. Where there is not inspiration, there is no proper authority,—there *should* be no implicit submission, and there *must* be a constant appeal to some higher standard, if such a standard exist. The fathers, individually or collectively, were not inspired; they therefore possess no authority whatever; and their statements must be estimated and treated just as those of any other ordinary men. And when we hear strong statements about the absolute necessity of studying the fathers,—of the great assistance to be derived from them in interpreting Scripture, and in fixing our opinions,—and of the great responsibility incurred by running counter to their views, we always suspect that the men who make them are either, unconsciously perhaps, ascribing to the fathers some degree of inspiration, and some measure of authority; or else are deceiving themselves by words or vague impressions, without looking intelligently and steadily at the actual realities of the case. We have seen, in surveying the writings of the fathers of the first three centuries, that they were not in general judicious or accurate interpreters of Scripture; that most of them have given interpretations of important scriptural statements which no man now receives; that many of them have erred, and have contradicted themselves and each other in stating the doctrines of the Bible; and that, in so far as their views are accordant with Scripture upon subjects that have been, and still are, controverted, they are not brought out more fully or explicitly than in Scripture itself, or in a way in any respect better adapted to convince gainsayers, even if they were admitted to be authoritative.

A vague notion seems to lurk in men's minds that the fathers must have transmitted to us much which they had learned from the apostles, and which may thus be fairly regarded as invested with some authority. Now this notion can be applied with any measure of plausibility only to those who themselves associated with the apostles, and who are commonly called the apostolic fathers; although many, from inconsideration or confusion of thought, are in the habit of applying it indiscriminately to the fathers of the second, the third, and even the fourth centuries; and yet it is remarkable, as we have shown,—first, that the

apostolic fathers do not give, and do not profess to give, us any information as derived from the apostles about the meaning of scriptural statements, or the true import of Christian doctrines; and secondly, that in the writings and transactions of the second century we have the most conclusive proof that there was then no apostolical tradition not contained in Scripture (for the fathers of that age usually meant by *tradition* what was actually contained in the Bible) on which *any reliance* could be placed,—positions which, if true, utterly subvert the notion that any very *material* assistance of a peculiar kind is to be derived from the fathers either of the earlier or of subsequent centuries. But enough has been said upon this subject; more, perhaps, than its importance deserves.

Whatever weight may be ascribed to the opinions of the fathers, and on whatever grounds the weight that is ascribed to them may be made to rest, no one disputes the propriety and the importance of ascertaining, as far as we can, what their views really were; and most theologians in modern times, whatever opinions they may entertain upon the general question of the deference to be paid to the fathers, have shown some desire to exhibit in their own behalf the testimony of the early church, whenever it could with any plausibility be adduced; and this has given rise to a great deal of learned, voluminous, and often intricate and wearisome discussion. We have seen that in the third century, and even before the end of the second, there were controversies in the church as to what were the doctrines and practices of the apostles upon some points; and that both parties appealed to the tradition of the church, as well as to Scripture, without being able to convince each other by the arguments derived from the one source any more than by those derived from the other. This was still more extensively the case in the fourth and fifth centuries, when, in the Arian and Pelagian controversies, both parties appealed to the testimony of the primitive church. Both in these more ancient and in more modern times, men have acted upon a notion, more or less distinctly conceived, and more or less earnestly maintained, that the fact of a doctrine or system of doctrines having been held by the early church, afforded *some* presumption that it had been taught by the apostles. As a general position, this may, perhaps, be admitted to be true; but it needs to be very cautiously applied, and to be restricted within very narrow limits. Could we fully

and exactly ascertain, *as we certainly cannot*, the doctrine that generally prevailed in the church at large in the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles, we would confidently expect that it would be to a great extent the same as that which they taught; and could the prevailing views of that age be distinctly and unequivocally ascertained upon some particular point in regard to which Scripture had spoken so obscurely that we had great difficulty in making up our minds as to what is really taught, we might be disposed to allow the testimony of the immediately post-apostolic age, if we had it, to turn the doubtful scale. This may be admitted to be true abstractly; but it does not, in point of fact, apply to any of the actual realities of the case. And when we look more at things as they are, we see the necessity of much caution and circumspection in this matter.

The history of the church abundantly confirms what the Scripture gives us reason to expect, viz., that errors and heresies may creep in *privily*,—the enemy sowing the tares while men are sleeping. The history of the church fully proves, moreover, that very considerable changes may be effected in the prevalent opinions of a church or nation, and of course of many churches or nations, in a comparatively short period of time; and without, perhaps, our being able to trace them to any very definite or palpable cause. Many instances might be adduced of the prevalent theological views of a church or nation undergoing a very considerable change, even in the course of a single generation, and this too without calling forth much public opposition; and considering how very scanty are the remains we now have of the writings and documents of the first three centuries,—what a contrast there is in this respect between the first three centuries of the Christian era and the last three,—it is by no means certain that important changes of doctrine may not have taken place in what is called the early church, without our having any very specific evidence regarding them.

Indeed, it is certain, in point of fact, that there was a gradual change going on more or less rapidly in the church, even from the time of the apostles, in regard to matters of doctrine, as well as of government and worship. It is not possible, with the evidence before us, to believe that the views of the apostolical fathers were in all respects precisely the same as those of the second century, or those of the second precisely the same as those of the third.