

# QUEEN'S QUARTERLY

VOL. VII.

APRIL, 1900.

No. 4

All articles intended for publication, books for review, exchanges,—and all correspondence relating thereto—should be addressed to the editors, Queen's University, Kingston, Ont.

## GNOSTIC THEOLOGY.

“THERE is a body of men,” says Irenaeus, “who deny the truth, putting in its place fables and vain genealogies, which, as the Apostle says, ‘minister questionings, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith.’\* By specious and crafty suggestions they mislead and enslave the simple-minded. They wickedly pervert the good words of Scripture, which they handle deceitfully. They destroy the faith of many, leading them astray by the pretence of ‘knowledge’ (*γνώσις*) from Him who has established and adorned the universe, claiming to reveal something higher and greater than God, the creator of heaven and earth, and all that is therein. By their sophistry and rhetorical arts they indoctrinate the unwary in their method of questioning, and destroy their souls by absurd, blasphemous and impious doctrines, so that their victims are unable even to detect the falsehood of so gross a fiction as that of the Demiurge.”†

These words, with which Irenaeus opens his *Refutation of Heresy*, indicate the main features of the Gnostic sects as they existed in the second century. Their theology was not set forth in a reasoned and connected system, but was embedded in a fantastic cosmogony; their exegesis was of that artificial character with which our study of Philo has made us familiar; they claimed to be in possession of an esoteric doctrine or Gnosis, revealed only to the initiated; and between the Supreme Being and the world they interposed a number of spiritual Powers or Aeons, attributing the creation of the visible universe to a subordinate agent, the Demiurge. That a doctrine of this kind was inconsistent with the fundamental ideas of Christian theology,

\*1 Tim. i. 4.

†Irenaeus, *Refutation of Heresy*, Pref., §. 1.