

In less stormy periods, and when the Church had a respite under milder and more humane Emperors, the bishops assembled together, as far as circumstances permitted, and pronounced authoritatively upon whatever belonged to faith. We learn thus from the following very remarkable passage of Tertullian; "According to the prescribed ordinance, from all the Churches, there are in certain places of Greece councils assembled, in which the most important affairs are discussed publicly in common; and this representation of the whole Christian name obtains amongst us the greatest veneration."† Eusebius, speaking of the first ages, observes, "that, at the birth of heresy all the bishops of the world rose up to extinguish the fire." The ambitious Montanus aspires to pass for the paraclete promised by Jesus Christ. He seduces, by the austerity of his manners and of his precepts, and by the imposing style of his prophecies. The bishops of Asia assemble frequently at Hierapolis, and, after much precaution and a long examination, pronounce the prophecies of Montanus to be false and profane, as also those of Priscilla and Maximilla who had left their husbands to join the extravagancies of the impostor: they condemn their doctrine and their errors, and cut them off from the communion of the Church.

In 255, when peace was restored to the Christian under the Emperor Gallus, many of those who had fallen in the late persecutions demanded the peace and the communion of the Church and were received into it, after having undergone the rigours of the public penance. Novatian, a priest of a stern and harsh character, is indignant at the condescension that is shewn to these weak and cowardly creatures maintains that absolution cannot be granted to those who have fallen into idolatry, and separates from Pope Cornelius, whose see he even desires to usurp: a synod of sixty bishops condemn him at Rome and expels him from the Church.

Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch in 262, to draw to the Christian religion Queen Zenobia, at-

martyrdom, and begging of them to send trusty priests to his Church at Antioch to console it on his absence, and soon on his death. The following is the address of a letter written on occasion of the martyrdom of Polycarp, as found in Eusebius. "The Church of God which is at Smyrna salutes all persons of the holy Catholic Church spread throughout the world." In the year 168 Eusebius has moreover preserved us the letter of the Churches of Vienna and Lyons to the Churches of Asia and Phrygia on the martyrdom of Pothinus, Attalus, of Sabina and their companions, in 177. Even from the time of the apostles, a correspondence was opened among all the Churches and was frequent. St. Paul praises the Romans, "because their faith was spoken of in the whole world, and because their obedience was published in every place." He begs them to salute his fellow-labourers, Prisca and Aquila, who had for his life laid down their own necks, to whom not only he gave thanks, but also all the Churches of the Gentiles. From Asia Minor, St. John, according to ancient tradition addressed his first epistle to the Parthians, who were so remote from him and out of the Roman Empire. St. Peter wrote to the Christians of Pontus, Gallatia, Cappadocia, of Asia, Bithynia, and in fine, to all the faithful of the dispersion, St. James and St. Jude addressed their epistles to all the dispersed tribes, to all those who preserved themselves in God and in Jesus Christ.

tempts to reduce the mysteries to intelligible ideas, and attacks the mystery of the Trinity by denying the divinity of our Saviour. The bishops of the province take alarm flock a second time to Antioch: condemn the errors of Paul, depose him from his see, and with one voice excommunicate him. Paul under the protection of Zenobia, obstinately persists in not quitting his see, until such time as Aurelianus, becoming master of Antioch, ordains that the episcopal residence shall belong to him, to whom the bishop of Rome address their letters; judging, adds Theodoret, that he, who submits not to the sentence of those of his religion, ought to have nothing more to do in common with them.

These examples, to which others might easily be added, prove that from the first ages the bishops pronounced decidedly upon what pertained to faith, declared what was revealed and what was not, cut off from the Church those who refused to obey them and exiled them among heretics and infidels, by pronouncing anathema upon them. And it was not because these men had taught erroneous doctrines, but because they did not submit to the authority of their ecclesiastical superiors, because they persisted in their opinions after they had been condemned and raised themselves as contumacious rebels against the decision of the bishops. "The proud and the contumacious are struck unto death, by the spiritual sword (said St. Cyprian,) when they are cut off from the Church." Now to inflict spiritual death on proud spirits, and to devote the contumacious to eternal damnation, it was necessary that the bishops should know all their rights, that they should be convinced they could not be mistaken in their decisions: it was necessary that they should be assured that Jesus Christ was with them: that the spirit of truth never would abandon them, and that, according to the order of their master, whoever did not hear them, deserved to be treated as a heathen and a publican. Far from suspecting these venerable bishops of not knowing their authority, one would be much rather tempted to accuse them of having exaggerated it, and extended it beyond its bounds, by attributing to their scanty synods an infallibility which had only been given to the entire body of bishops. But it must be observed that the opinions it condemned in these first synods, had already been condemned by the apostles; that, perhaps also, this small number of assembled bishops knew to a certainty the doctrine of their absent brethren, and that at all events, the acceptance of these would take place in due time, and conclude by adding to the weight of the synodical sentences the last seal of infallibility. †

"Spirituali gladio superbi et contumaces necantur, dum de ecclesia ejiciuntur." Ep. LXII.—† Eusebius teaches us that the council of Antioch, after having condemned Paul of Samosata, addressed a synodical letter to Dionysius, bishop of Rome, to Maximus, bishop of Alexandria; to all the bishops, all the priests and all the deacons of the world, and to the whole Catholic Church under heaven.

"The faithful who were in Asia (says Eusebius again) assembled many times and in many parts of Asia, and, having examined the doctrine of Montanus they condemned it, on which account these heretics were driven from the Church and deprived of Catholic communion." "One might be surprised" observes the learned Thomassin, "that

The facts I have just adduced speak for themselves. The bishops have displayed their authority in all its possible extent; the faithful have recognized it by complying with the sentences passed upon the heretics, with whom they ceased from that time to hold any communication, Thus the usage and the practice of the primitive church sufficiently prove that the dogma of infallibility was recognized in it. We see, moreover, in the few writings that are come down to us from these times that the fathers considered this dogma as a truth generally established.

Let us return to the beautiful epistle of St. Ignatius, of whom I spoke in my preceding letter "While among you, I loudly called upon you and said: Be united to the bishop."† Avoid divisions as the source of evils: all of you follow the bishops, as Jesus Christ follows his father."‡ You see the episcopal authority marked out as the means of preserving unity—"I bid you farewell in Jesus Christ. Be submissive to the bishops and the priests according to the command of God."§ I exhort you to do every thing in divine concord, the bishop presiding in the place of God.¶ It is still to the episcopal chair that he attaches the bond of unity' You must concur with the aid of the bishops, as you do; for your worthy priests are in harmony with them, like the chords of a lyre, and your union forms a wonderful harmony. — Take care,

Eusebius, after saying that the Montanists were condemned by all the Catholic Churches, is satisfied with proving this by the councils that were held in Asia.—But the churches of Asia were living in Communion and in perfect understanding with the other Catholic Churches of the world; they had been informed that these revolted were equally displeasing to the other Churches as to themselves. The silence of the other churches confirmed the examination and decision of the Churches of Asia.

"Pope Cornelius wrote a letter to Fabius, bishop of Antioch, in which he informed him what resolutions had been agreed to by the council and by all the bishops of Italy and Africa, besides those of many other provinces. They had also published the letters of St. Cyprian and of the other bishops of Africa who were assembled."

Saint Alexander, after having assembled a Council at Alexandria, in which Arius and his adherents were condemned with unanimous voice, wrote to all the bishops a synodical letter, of which Theodoret has preserved us a copy. He lays open the proceedings and the doctrine of his council. Among other things he says "We all profess one only catholic and apostolic church, always invincible, although all the world conspire to make war upon it, and victorious over all the impious attempts of the heretics, placing her confidence on the word of the Father of the family, Take courage, I have conquered the world." And now see how he concludes. "Condemn them with us after the example of your brethren, who have written to me and subscribed to the note which I sent you together with their letters. There are some from all Egypt, from Thebias, from Lybia, Pentapoli, Syria, Pamphylia, Asia, Cappadocia, and the neighboring provinces. I am expecting to receive similar letters from you; for after many other medicines I am led to think that the agreement of the bishops could complete the cure of those whom they have led astray."

He sent these decrees to all the churches and from their unity they acquired their final strength. This is the remark of Bossuet upon the decision just adduced of the Synod of Alexandria against Arius.

† To the Philadelphians — † To the Christians of Smyrna. † To the Christians of Tralles. — † To the Christians of Magnessia.