

carded, as far as might be, such folly, so they were ill provided with the means of unfolding those things they had received, and in which they found peace. And accordingly this may help to explain what otherwise would be somewhat perplexing—the discrepancy between what they *did* and what *they wrote*. Their words are often feeble and obscure, while their doings are noble and excellent.

We, on the other hand, who live in modern times, have advantages which the early Gentile converts had not. The limits between what can and what cannot be known, have been accurately defined; while at the same time, in consequence of the care with which the scriptures have been studied by systematic writers, the doctrines they contain have been fully unfolded. The clouds that darkened the minds of men are now removed, and not a speck remains above the intellectual horizon that has not been dissipated. Seeing it is certain however that intellectual discernment and moral excellence are not necessarily united, so when we compare the modern writers with the ancient, we shall find, notwithstanding our superior knowledge in many things, we are inferior to them in faith and charity. And as the moral is of more value than the intellectual, it will be of some importance that we be not lifted up by our superiority; and in perusing the Epistles of Ignatius that we set about the task, not as masters but as scholars. The ancients felt more than they have written, whereas it is to be feared, we have written more than we have felt. And inasmuch as truth excels empty sound, so it will be by the grace of God, to the profit of Christians in modern times to mark the excellent graces of their ancient brethren, their deadness to the world and its pleasures, their hatred of life for the sake of the gospel, their charity towards the brethren and joy in their prosperity, and their victory over death and all the terrors of the enemy, yea their joy in departing to be with Christ, which indeed is far better. These things surely are worthy of our imitation; and in these the ancients may be set as our exemplars. We indeed surpass them in having a form of sound words; and while we hold this fact as being under God a fence against the assaults of the enemy, nevertheless let us keep in mind that the excellency of the church consists in her being glorious within; and if a separation is to be made between things that ought to remain united, it would be better that the fence were removed, than that the glory should depart and Ichabod be written on our Sanctuary.

It is needful, moreover, to keep in mind the precise character of the epistles of Ignatius. The

writings of the apostles are intended for the edification of the church in all ages. But Ignatius not being of the number of the apostles, his epistles partake of the nature of ordinary letters which good men may write to their friends, and the doctrine they contain is to be tried by the scriptures. It is needful to note this, that we may guard against error; for there are several passages in these epistles in which the writer requires obedience to office-bearers in the church in such a way as, if not explained, would be injurious to the doctrine which is according to godliness. Thus we find him writing to this effect:—"I cried whilst I was among you: I spake with a loud voice, "attend to the bishop, and to the presbytery, and to the deacons;" and again, "See that ye follow your Bishop, as Jesus Christ the Father;" "Hearken unto the bishop that God also may hearken unto you." Now, viewing these as private epistles, the counsel given might be good and profitable, because Ignatius would know the office-bearers of the churches in those parts, and knowing them to be approved and faithful men, he could hardly enjoin upon the people too strongly to yield them obedience, for this was in other words urging them to continue in the faith which the bishops preached, and to submit for edification to their discipline. But as the epistles of Ignatius are no longer confined to the persons who received them, but being published, seem as if addressed to the general church; so it is needful to enter a caution against the wrong inferences that might be drawn from a defectiveness of doctrine in this matter.

It is very obvious in the passages above noted, that Ignatius does not contemplate any separation between the office of Bishop and the doctrine they were to teach, these being united in the brethren to whom he made reference. And had all succeeding bishops been men of the same mind, there might have been need to add nothing more than what he had written. But all history proves that it has been far otherwise, and that men may hold the office without doing the work. And therefore to say, "Follow this guide," because he bears the name of bishop, would be to take the blind as our guide, and fall with him into the ditch. The counsel of Ignatius, however good it might be in reference to individuals that he knew, is defective in reference to other times and other men, in two respects:—*First*, because he does not with sufficient plainness distinguish between the true bishop we are to obey, and the false from whom we are to withdraw. The mere name is not enough, for that may be assumed. We must have his character described, that we may know who he is. And