

Poetry.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD.

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier (and they that bare him stood still) and said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. *—Luce, vii. 14, 15.*

Who says, the wan autumnal sun
Beams with too faint a smile
To light up nature's face again,
And, though the year be on the wane,
With thoughts of spring the heart beguile?
Wait him, thou soft September breeze,
And gently lay him down
Within some circling woodland wall,
Where bright leaves, reddening ere they fall,
Wave gaily o'er the waters brown.
And let some graceful arch be there
With wreathed garlands round,
With merriment to cheer his eyes,
And hush'd 'till they are closed,
And hush'd 'till they are closed,
As though beneath an April cloud—
Who says the widow's heart must break,
The childless mother sink?
A kinder voice I hear,
Whispering beside the mourner's bier
Whence parents' eyes would hopeless shrink,
Bids weep no more—O heart bereft,
How strongly, to thee, that sound!
A widow'er her only son,
Feeling more bitterly alone
For friends that press officious round.
Yet is the voice of comfort heard,
For Christ hath touch'd the bier—
The bereaved wait with wondering eyes,
The swelling bosom dares not sigh,
But all is still, 'twixt hope and fear.
Even such an awful soothing calm
We sometimes see alight
On Christian mourners, while they wait
In silence, by some church-yard gate,
Their summons to the holy rite.
And such the tones of love, which break
The stillness of that hour,
Quelling the mourner's agonizing strife—
"The Resurrection and the Life."
"Am I believe, and die no more."
Unchang'd that voice—and though not yet
The dead sit up and speak,
Answering its call; we gladlier rest
Our darlings on earth's quiet breast,
And our hearts feel their must not break.
Far better they should sleep awhile
Within the church's shade,
Nor wake, until new heaven, new earth,
Meet for their new immortal birth,
For their abiding place be made,
Than wander back to life, and lean
On our frail love once more.
"Tis sweet, as year by year we lose
Friends out of sight, in faith to muse
How grows in Paradise our store.
Then pass, ye mourners, cheerily on,
Through prayer into the tomb,
Still, as ye watch life's falling leaf,
Gathering from every loss and grief
Hope of new spring and endless home.
Then cheerily to your work again
With hearts new-bred and set
To run, an undivided, blessed race,
As meet for those who see to face
Over the grave their Lord have met.
Kelle's Christian Year.

THE DISCIPLINE AND UNITY OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

(From the Rev. J. J. Blunt's "Sketch of the Church in the first two Centuries"—Concluded.)

We have next to consider the manner in which these rulers of the Church exercised their authority, and the proof it affords that the system was restrictive. III. First, then, they *ordained* to the ministry. This, indeed, would follow from their very constitution; for unless they had this power they had none. It may seem, therefore, superfluous to adduce testimony to a fact so obvious. However, we read in the Epistle of Clement Romanus, in the course of his remonstrance with the factious Church of Corinth, the following remark: "Our Apostles knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be contentions touching the oversight. For which reason, they, having certain foreknowledge, ordained the persons *aforsaid*; and further made such arrangement, that when themselves should be no more, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. We hold it, therefore, an unjust act, that these parties, *ordained* by them, or afterwards by other men of repute, the whole Church approving, when they have ministered blamelessly to the flock of Christ, in all humility, in peace, and not grudgingly, and when all have borne witness to their worth, for a long time, should still be ejected from their ministry."¹

Clement, it seems, rests the iniquity of dispossessing these men of their ministry, not merely upon their personal character, but upon the validity of their orders, which they received through the line of their Apostles.

IV. Next they watched with all vigilance against *heresy and dissent*; the latter, indeed, in those days, being scarcely separable from the other. Nothing can be more striking than the pains they took in this department of their duty. Thus Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, writes to Caricus and Pontius, (a document of the second century, preserved by Eusebius), warning them against the heresy of Montanus, or the new philosophy as it is called; and he transmits them not only his own opinion, but that of other Bishops, in other parts, which he had been at the trouble to ascertain, to confirm his own. And from the same evidence it may be gathered, that one Sotas, a Bishop of Anchiolium, in Thracia, had actually travelled into Phrygia, to observe with his own eyes those novel prophets, as they were named, and that he came to the conclusion they were persons possessed.² A leading object of Ignatius, in his Epistles which he addresses to the several Churches, is to caution them against the two great heresies which had then appeared in the world; the one, that of the *Docetes*, which went to deny the humanity of Christ, an error which he combats in his Letters to the people of Smyrna and Tralles. The other, that of the *Ebionites*, which went to deny his divinity, an error which he contends against in his Epistles to Polycarp, the Ephesians, the Magnesians, and the Philadelphians. These were the tares that first sprung up, and here were the chief labourers ready at hand to root them out. In process of time heresies multiplied, but still were the chief governors of the Church alive to expose and extirpate them; and no stronger proof surely can be afforded of this than the great work of Irenæus, he a Bishop, and his book apparently addressed to one of the inferior clergy;³ the express object of it being to make his readers acquainted with "the monstrous and deep mysteries," as he calls them, of the religious speculations of the day, in order that he might again communicate the same to others, and warn them against such "abysses of folly and blasphemy against Christ."⁴ And truly nothing less than the strongest sense of the duty which his high office laid him under, could have prevailed with him, "one may well believe, to unravel the weary web of fanciful visions which these philosophers had weaved for themselves; and the scrutiny to which he submits them, and the diligence with which he replies to them, render that work of Irenæus a conspicuous monument of his patience, and, I must add, a severe trial of our own.

I have said that the spiritual rulers of the Church were on the alert to guard against *dissent*, as well as *heresy*. And I make mention of this fact distinctly, but not invidiously, as serving still to show that the spirit of the primitive Church was not so latitudinarian as some imagine. "It becomes you," writes Ignatius to the Magnesians, "not only to be called Christians, but to be such; as some persons talk of a Bishop, but do every thing without him. Such men do not appear to me men of good conscience, seeing that they do not steadily assemble themselves together according to the commandment."⁵ And, again, to the Ephesians: "Be not deceived; if a man be not within the altar, he falls short of the bread of God.—For if the prayer of one or two has such force, how much rather that of the Bishop and the whole Church? He, therefore, who refuses to join in the assembly is proud and self-endeavored; for it is written, God resisteth the proud."⁶ And Irenæus delivers himself in language very similar: "It is fitting," says he, "that they of the Church obey the Presbyters, men who derive their succession, as we have shown, from the Apostles; who, together with the succession of the overseers, received the certain grace of truth, according to the pleasure of the Father. But the rest, who secede from the chief succession, and assemble themselves in any place where they will, should be held suspected, as heretics and evil-disposed persons; or schismatics, proud and self-pleasers; or hypocrites and greedy of gain and vain-glory."⁷

I have already remarked, what it is only fair to repeat, that schism was in those days probably all but synonymous with heresy;—the schismatic usually denying some fundamental principle of the Gospel; and, on this account, the warning uttered against it is the more express and peremptory.

V. Upon the supposition, therefore, that heresy was discovered, how was the party offending proceeded against in the primitive Church? The reply to this involves the exercise of another power, emanating too, it should seem, from the ecclesiastical superior, that of *excommunication*, or exclusion from the Church of Christ. Now we are told by Justin Martyr, that amongst the Christians there were various heretics, distinguished by the names of their various leaders. Marcionites, Valentinians, Basilidians, Saturnilians, and others, (meaning by this last term, according to Bishop Bull, Ebionites). "For different sects," it is added, "teach different ways of blaspheming the Maker of the Universe, and Him whom He foretold by the Prophets should come, even Christ, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, with none of whom do we hold communion. Aware that they are godless, impious, unrighteous, lawless men, and that, instead of worshipping Jesus, they merely confess him by name."⁸ But Irenæus, as might be expected, is more express and full than Justin upon this particular question.—"The Gnostics, men who delighted in the oppositions of science, falsely so called, had discovered arguments for their errors, and the combinations into which they had disposed them, in certain numbers, of which mention occurs, from time to time, in the parables and other parts of Scripture; as, for instance, in the several hours at which the labourers in the vineyard were sent to work. "I will know," says Irenæus to his friend, "that on being informed of these things, you will laugh at the self-conceited folly of such men.—But it is rather matter for grief that they should distort, thus frigidly and by force, piety and the majestic might of ineffable truth, by these their numbers. As many, however, as withdraw from the Church, and follow after these old wives' tales, are truly self-condemned. Such, Paul instructs us, after one or two admonitions, to reject. (Tit. iii. 10). And John, the disciple of the Lord, aggravated their condemnation, desiring us not even to bid them God speed; for he who bids them 'God speed,' says he, 'is partaker in their evil deeds.'" (2 Ep. John, ver. 11). In another place Irenæus draws distinctions according to the nature of the case, directing that such heretics as are gentle and humane, be admonished and confuted; such as are fierce and unreasonable, expelled;⁹ so systematic was the exercise of this authority. On the other hand, directions are given, and still by the Bishops, to receive the parties again into the bosom of the Church, on their repentance. Dionysius writes to Amastrius and the other Churches of Pontus, to that effect. "And such communications from the authorities of the Church seem to have been read in the congregation, for we find the same Dionysius telling the Romans that the Epistle of Clement to the Church of Corinth, written in the name of the Church of Rome, had been thus read on the Sunday in the congregation."¹⁰ And the like appears from a precept of a Synod of Bishops held at Caesarea, enjoining the Asiatic practice of keeping Easter, copies of which were to be dispatched to all the Churches.¹¹ Moreover, Irenæus, in his letter to Florinus the Apostle, speaks of similar communications made by Polycarp to the Churches under his charge.¹²

VI. But here it may be asked, How was it determined what was heresy or schism? The reply to this inquiry will further tend to show that the primitive Church lay under restrictions; that if it had its liberty, it was not liberty without limits. Schism spoke for itself; being at once detected by the parties withdrawing from the assemblies of the Church, and meeting elsewhere; for so we have seen it already represented in more places than one of the Fathers. Neither did heresy escape; since the primitive Church had its symbol, or *confession of faith*, which, in common cases, would serve as its test. For Clement Alexandrinus, when replying to the Gentiles and Jews, who objected to the Christian faith, that it was difficult to know what mode of it they ought to adopt in the midst of the numerous heresies by which it was divided, observes, amongst other arguments, "What then, if a man breaks the covenant, and does not abide by the *confession which obtains amongst us*,"¹³ are we to hold back from the truth because he gives the lie to his *confession*? Surely not; but as a good man will not deceive, nor flinch from the thing which he hath promised, nor flinch others may be false to their word; so must not we, by any means whatsoever, transgress the *canon of the Church*."¹⁴ Nor is this all; Irenæus takes notice of a contrivance adopted by certain heretics of making Scripture utter just what sentiments they pleased, by packing fragments of texts together by a similar theological mosaic; he then shows that by a similar process Homer might be made to tell any story we chose, by the juxta-position, for instance, of one fragment appertaining to Ulysses, another to Hercules, and so forth; so that if each had his own, the argument would fall to pieces; and then he adds, "In like manner, he who holds fast the *canon of the truth which he received at his baptism*, will acknowledge the words, the sentiments, the parables of Scripture, but he will not acknowledge their blasphemous mysteries,"¹⁵ i. e. the mysteries Scripture was made to speak by this dishonest artifice.¹⁶ Now the *canon of the truth* which is here spoken of as a confession required of

those who sought admission into the Church by baptism—a confession so uniformly exacted at baptism, that the latter is once, in Clement Alexandrinus, expressly called by the name of *Confession*;¹⁷ this *canon of the truth* we shall not, I think, be at a loss to understand when we come to the next chapter of Irenæus, and which treats of the unity of the Church. The substance of this canon will be found, I conceive, in the following passage, which you will perceive differs but very little from the Apostles' Creed; and is a very valuable and early testimony, if not to the existence of that Creed at that time in its present form, at least to the matter of it. "The Church," says he, "though dispersed over the whole world, received from the Apostles, and from their disciples, a belief in One God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and the seas, and all things in them: And in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who took flesh for our salvation: And in the Holy Ghost, who proclaimed by the prophets the incarnation, advent, birth of a virgin, passion, resurrection from the dead, and bodily ascension into heaven, of the beloved Jesus Christ our Lord, and his coming again from heaven in the glory of the Father to restore all things, and to raise up all flesh of all mankind; that to Jesus Christ, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the pleasure of the invisible Father, every knee should bow of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess Him, and that he should do just judgment upon all, and consign to everlasting fire the spirits of evil, the angels who transgressed and became apes; and amongst men, the impious and unjust and lawless and blasphemous; and that to the just and holy, and to such as kept his commandments and abided in his love, whether from the first or after repentance, he should give freely life and immortality and everlasting glory." "The Church," it is then added, "having received this doctrine and faith, dispersed as she is over the whole world, keeps it diligently, as though she occupied but one house; and believes in these things as though she had but one soul and one heart; and preaches and teaches and delivers down the same with one consent, as though she had but one mouth; for though the languages of the world are divers, the force of tradition is one and the same; and that the Churches have held no other faith, and delivered down no other, whether they be established in Germany, in Spain, in Gaul, in the East, in Egypt, in Lybia, or in the middle of the world."¹⁸

Such was the harmonious result of this careful superintendence of the Church—the fact itself being attested by other authorities besides that of Irenæus,—for we are told in a valuable fragment of the ecclesiastical history of Hegeppus, (a document still within the period I propose), that he made a voyage to Rome that he took Corinth, where he tarried some time, in his way; that he was comforted by the soundness of the faith in those parts; that at Rome he formed a catalogue of the Bishops successively down to Anicetus; and that, on the whole, in every such succession, and in every city, things were done as the Law and the Prophets and the Lord enjoined.¹⁹ Theophilus of Antioch speaks to the same effect. "As there are fertile and well watered and inhabited islands, so both God appointed, for a world beaten about by sin, places of refuge, that is, holy Churches, wherein are taught the doctrines of truth."²⁰ So that the heretics and separatists of those days, though motley in the extreme as to their creeds, were it should seem, comparatively few as to their numbers.

It may be further remarked, that when the Churches had need of fuller information upon any particular point than the charges of their superiors supplied, they, on their own part, made application to the Bishops for instruction. Thus the Christians of Gaul submitted the novelties of Montanus to Eleutherus, Bishop of Rome, for his opinion,²¹ he being probably a person of great repute; or, perhaps, from his position, having local advantages for getting at the truth. And when the question was of such moment as to demand a still greater decision than that of one or two individuals, however high their station, a council of the heads of the Churches was called; one such, we know, was held at Caesarea, and another at Ephesus, both on the subject of Easter, and both within the second century.²²

VII. There are only two more departments of ecclesiastical rule to which I will advert, and that very briefly; both, however, indicating the substantial nature of it; the one, relating to the safe keeping of Scripture, as to its text and canon; the other, to the due distribution of the *alms and offerings* of the faithful. With respect to the former, I find Dionysius, a Bishop of Corinth, in the exercise of this wholesome watchfulness, declaring that certain of the devil's apostles, as he calls them, had not only corrupted his own letters, but had even attempted to do the same by "the Scriptures of the Lord."²³ And when Serapion, writing to Rhossion, (an Epistle to which I have before had occasion to allude), and saying, "We receive Peter and the other Apostles, as we receive Christ, but the spurious writings under their name we reject, as having experience in such things;"²⁴ and he then proceeds to speak of a Gospel in the name of Peter which he had not read when he last visited them, and which he had incautiously allowed them to adopt; but he had since had misgivings, and suspecting that it had been put forth by the Docete, he had procured and examined it; and the result of his investigation was, that the greater part was the sound word of Saviour, but that there were certain exceptions to this, and "these," says he, "I have submitted to you."²⁵ For though this is certainly no canon of Scripture expressly drawn out as such, in these early Fathers, yet there are many passages in them which lead us to believe that there was already an express understanding upon the subject nevertheless; and that a collection of sacred documents there was, of which the authority was acknowledged and indisputable. Irenæus, for instance, recognizes *four Gospels*, giving his reasons, such as they are, why there were only four.²⁶ And Clement Alexandrinus rejects a passage from the Gospel according to the *Ethiopi*ans, as not being in the *four Gospels* delivered unto us;²⁷ and, on another occasion, makes use of expressions which seem to imply that a much more comprehensive canon than this was at that time arranged.²⁸

VIII. With respect to the fiscal or eleemosynary province, a very serious and responsible charge in the early ages of the Church, we find an indication of the hands in which it was placed, in a communication of Dionysius, (of which I have before made mention),²⁹ in which he speaks of the fiscal or eleemosynary province, a very serious and responsible charge in the early ages of the Church, we find an indication of the hands in which it was placed, in a communication of Dionysius, (of which I have before made mention),³⁰ in which he speaks of the fiscal or eleemosynary province, a very serious and responsible charge in the early ages of the Church, we find an indication of the hands in which it was placed, in a communication of Dionysius, (of which I have before made mention),³¹ in which he speaks of the fiscal or eleemosynary province, a very serious and responsible charge in the early ages of the Church, we find an indication of the hands in which it was placed, in a communication of 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