

as the precursor of a still more glorious economy; the mighty change which Christianity, in primitive times, effected in the moral and social condition of man; and the history of modern efforts for the Christianization of the world;—these are themes of mighty interest, and they lie directly in the path of the Church Historian. They form at once the literature and the morale of theology; and the controversies of theology lose much of their repulsive aspect when viewed in connection with the blissful traces of Emmanuel's footsteps in the progressive regeneration of the human family.

The study of Ecclesiastical History embraces an enquiry into the causes of error, and such an enquiry is of great advantage as supplying in many cases the means of exposing and refuting the error itself. Many very plausible opinions and practices have gained currency amongst men, from the simple circumstance of their having come down to us with the stamp of a venerable antiquity; and the want of any historical record of their origin, has been held as a receipt in full for their title to acceptance. Now, when we can not only expose the absurdity of an error from its own abstract character, but point out the time and the circumstances of its rise, and of its first introduction into the Church; when we can trace it to certain principles and facts in human nature and the history of man; when we can even analyze the struggle which its first broaching occasioned, and the arguments for and against its reception; we furnish ourselves with the best of all weapons for detecting imposture and vindicating truth. Many heresies we can trace up to the early admixture of philosophical speculation with the truths of God. The heresy of the Gnostics, for instance, owes its existence wholly to this cause, and Gnosticism may be fitly termed the fruitful parent of many other heresies; yea, perhaps,

of every error which in the course of ages has corrupted and disfigured the simplicity of the faith. Its abettors set out with the assumption of two original principles equally potent—the one the source of good; the other the source of evil. The Eternal Being, or first cause, was identified with the one, and gross corporeal matter was identified with the other. Each was supposed to possess independent activity, and a perpetual and fierce struggle was the issue. The soul of man, clogged with the incumbrance of a material body, the Gnostics held to be originally and essentially pure, but sadly impeded in its career by the fatal incumbrance. To free the soul and the world itself from the foul dominion of matter, was, in their view, the grand design of the mission of the Redeemer. HIM they called the Son of the great God, but they held him to be a creature, though one of the greatest of the celestial *eons*, clothed with the *appearance* of a human body, but perfectly ethereal, and thus incapable of suffering. A great firmament, or *pleroma*, they filled with spiritual beings, intermediate between God and man; and allied with these were the *genii*, whose residence was on earth, or so near it, that they could with perfect ease interfere in every action of men. To this strange medley we may easily trace up all the pretensions and schemes of magic, astrology, and necromancy, as means designed to avert the evil influences, or to secure the good offices of these imaginary agencies. To the same source we trace all the varieties of penance to which superstition has had recourse in order to mortify the flesh. Hence, also, we find an easy explanation of the early introduction of celibacy among the clergy, the source, according to the minute and laborious researches of Isaac Taylor, of the Puseyism which has so injuriously affected the Church of God. Who