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LECTURE XI.

Further illustration of the defect in Barbeyrac's reasoning. Examination of his charge against Tertullian of interdicting trades connected with idolatry, the profession of arms, national customs, offices of state. Unfairness of regarding in the abstract what was meant only to apply to particular circumstances. Sentiments of Tertullian and Cyprian on self-defence accounted for. Justification of idolatry among the Pagans in Clemens, owing to a misinterpretation of Deut. iv. 19. His real opinion on that subject. Defence of writers subsequent to the third century declined. Late ecclesiastical antiquity less deserving of confidence. Subjects of the second Series.

YOU will remember that my object in the remarks I am making on Barbeyrac's treatise on the morality of the Fathers is not to follow him through every particular case which he adduces in detail, but to show that one defect pervades his reasoning throughout almost all of them, that of not taking into account the *peculiar character* of the times in which the Fathers lived—a defect arising, as I suggested, from Barbeyrac not having carefully read their writings for himself, and so not having possessed his mind thoroughly with a full and correct impression of those times, but having contented himself with using passages with which others supplied him—passages detached from the authors to which they belonged, and which simply served as texts for his Philippics. I gave proof of this fact from his animadversions on the manner in which they speak of *martyrdom*, and of *marriage*, and especially of *second marriage*. I pursue my observations, and I find further proof, in his strictures on Tertullian more particularly for the blame that Father casts on those who minister to what is wrong, however indirectly and however incidentally. Thus, says Barbeyrac, Tertullian, in his treatise on Idolatry, absolutely condemns every trade, profession, and calling which can in any way be of use to the heathens in carrying on their idolatrous worship, however difficult it may be for the parties to earn a maintenance by any other means; and Barbeyrac adds that he might as well interdict the sale of wine or of arms, because the one may

serve for debauchery and the other for violence. Possibly Tertullian may show himself over sensitive and impracticable in the restrictions he thus lays on the occupations of the Christian, nor may have sufficiently distinguished the circumstances which render the dealer accountable for the buyer's use of the articles which he sold him; but, at all events, the side he took was the safe one; nor, if we consider how idolatry had then wormed itself into the whole structure of society, shall we, perhaps, think that his interdicts were extravagant. He found, for instance, the carver by trade, though professing himself to be a Christian, tempted to make images for heathen temples¹, arguing as his excuse the difficulty of getting a living, and the Apostle's precept, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called"²; nay, in some cases these excuses of his connived at, and men who had so exercised their craft permitted to discharge inferior offices in the Church.³ He found the schoolmaster—he, too, being a Christian—teaching the adventures of the heathen gods, not after those gods had become despised and obsolete, but whilst they were yet the actual gods of the multitude; and continuing, from custom, perhaps, the old-established usages of the school, dedicating the first payments of the scholars to Minerva; receiving presents from the friends of his boys on heathen festivals⁴; keeping the holidays of Flora at the appointment of the Flamen or Ædile. He found the cattle-jobber, still a professing Christian, not scrupling to purchase victims for the use of the heathen temples⁵; and the dealer in incense—he too, a Christian—having for his principal customers (a thing of which he must have himself been perfectly aware) the heathen priests.⁶ It must be confessed that it was very difficult to correct callings of this kind, which had so close, though not a necessary connection with idolatry, by any other means than denouncing them altogether. Tertullian does denounce them, certainly, contending that the exercise of an idolatrous trade cannot be justified by the plea of getting a maintenance by it. The cost should have been counted before it was engaged in⁷; the cross, which the renunciation of that trade imposes, must be borne. James and John forsook their calling: a

¹ Tertullian, *De Idololatriâ*, c. iv.² c. v.³ c. vii.⁴ c. x.⁵ c. xi.⁷ c. xii.⁶ *Ibid.*

sound faith has no fear of lacking food.¹ At the same time he suggests that mechanics might often turn their hands to other branches of their business. The mason, for instance, can repair houses, plaster walls, line cisterns, coat columns, and work in stucco upon walls other ornaments besides images. He who can draw a figure, can paint a slab: he, who can carve a Mercury, can put together a chest of drawers. There are few temples to be built, but many houses; few Mercuries to be gilded, but many sandals and slippers: "luxury and vainglory," he adds in one of the many sentences in him which strongly remind us of Tacitus (an author, however, who does not appear to have enjoyed his sympathy, for he denounces him as a most mendacious writer,²) "luxury and vainglory are worth far more to the artist than all kinds of superstition."³

Barbeyrac further exemplifies this confounding of morality by Tertullian, in the condemnation he passes on the profession of arms⁴: and he quotes some strong passages to this effect from the same tract on Idolatry. "How can a Christian," argues Tertullian, "go to war; nay, how can he serve even in peace without a sword; which the Lord has taken away from him? For though soldiers came to John and were instructed by him in their duty; and though a centurion was a believer; yet Jesus declared against the profession of arms, when he bade Peter put his sword into its sheath."⁵ Nor can it be said that his Montanism narrows his view upon this subject; for even before his Montanism he seems to have demurred to the lawfulness of this calling; as appears from a few words in his "De Patientiâ."⁶ No doubt some of the reasons, the subordinate reasons, or rhetorical reasons one would rather call them, with which he underprops his main one, are puerile enough. I have before acknowledged in a similar case this propensity in the Fathers to accumulate poor arguments, as if they strengthened good ones. Thus here, in the "De Coronâ,"⁷ Tertullian asks in his declamatory manner, "Shall the soldier rest upon his spear, when it was a spear which pierced his Saviour's side? Shall he have the trumpet

¹ Tertullian, De Idololatriâ, c. xii.

² Ille mendaciorum loquacissimus.—
Apol. c. xvi.

³ Frequentior est omni superstitione
luxuria et ambitio.—De Idololatriâ,

c. viii.

⁴ Barbeyrac, p. 74.

⁵ Tertullian, De Idololatriâ, c. xix.

⁶ De Patientiâ, c. vii.

⁷ De Coronâ, c. xi.

to sound over his corpse, when he expects the archangel's?" and so on. But still it is easy to see that the cardinal objection, which weighed with him was the close contact, which the calling of the soldier brought him into with idolatry, and the species of sanction, which, under certain circumstances, he seemed compelled to afford it. For example, it was his duty to carry the standard, which was a rival of Christ, for with the soldiers the standard was an object of worship.¹ He had to swear by false gods when he took the military oath.² It was a part of his business to mount guard before the temples over idols which he had renounced at his Baptism. Barbeyrac, however, contends that it was a needless scruple in Tertullian to make the mounting guard over a temple a matter of objection. The temples of the false gods, says he, were only public buildings which belonged to the sovereign; and as sovereign he had a right to entrust the custody of them to any of his subjects, whether soldiers or not. It was a service purely civil.³ There may be many who will prefer the scrupulosity of Tertullian to the liberality of Barbeyrac, particularly when the character of these temples, over which the Christian soldier was to stand sentry, is taken into account. These temples, as Barbeyrac might have learned from the Fathers, were made to produce a considerable revenue to the emperor, and were farmed by speculating contractors,⁴ who usually took them on five years' leases,⁵ and by auction.⁶ They were regular brothels; the priests themselves the panders⁷; nothing being so natural, as that the heathen lessees who stood at rack rent, like our toll-bar keepers, bent on making the most of their bargain, should furnish them with such attractions as would draw to them the populace, and rival one another in all the profitable arts of seduction. And these were the places, over which the Christian soldier had to mount guard; and this the society to which he was to be exposed, whilst performing his duty. Do not the circumstances of the case and the times, I again say, go very far to excuse or even to justify Tertullian in diverting by any means

¹ Tertullian, De Coronâ, c. xi.

² So I interpret, *credimusne humanum sacramentum divino superinducere, et in alium Dominum respondere post Christum?*—Ibid.

³ Barbeyrac, p. 76.

⁴ Tertullian, Apol. c. xiii.; Theophilus, I. § 10.

⁵ Tertull. Ad Nationes, I. § 10.

⁶ Apol. c. xiii.

⁷ Minucius Felix, Octav. c. xxv.

Christians from a profession which put them necessarily in the way of such contamination? And is his morality to be so very much condemned because he does so? It is a very different question from the lawfulness of the military service in the abstract, and as that service is at present constituted and practised.

So, again, with respect to the Christian adorning his door with lamps and laurels; a custom, which Tertullian denounces in Christians, and for which sentiment Barbeyrac reproves him, saying that the festival which occasioned the display of such emblems, was ordered by the prince, and that they had no necessary connection with idolatry¹; with respect to this custom, I say, allowance must be made as before for the state of the times. In the lamp and the laurel there was nothing, but if on such occasions the door was universally regarded by the people as a shrine, and the decorations as offerings to the Divinity, which presided over it, whether Cardea, or Forculus, or Limentinus, or Janus himself² (for all these were Deities which appertained to that quarter of the house), then the lawfulness of the custom wears quite another aspect. If it was understood that what was done in honour of the door was done in honour of the idol, to whom the door was consecrated, as Tertullian affirms was the case, his argument seems sound, that having renounced the idol temple, you must not make an idol temple of your door; and at all events the matter is far from being the simple civil affair which Barbeyrac would represent it. Nor, in fact, does Tertullian in this instance write in any extreme or extravagant spirit; for almost in the same breath, he makes a concession to social convenience, such as shows that in the other instance he was advising in no morose temper of mind; and allows the Christian to attend the private and ordinary days of festivity in heathen families, such as the assumption of the toga, a marriage, or the naming of a child: and though sacrifices usually attended these solemnities, yet merely to the spectator of them, he thinks they could hardly be considered to involve the party in the guilt of them. But even here Tertullian naturally subjoins a wish; "Would to God we were not called upon to witness what it is not lawful for ourselves to do! But since through the devices of the evil one, idolatry compasses the world on

¹ Barbeyrac, p. 77.

² Tertullian, *De Idololatriâ*, c. xv.

every side, we may be permitted to be present on some occasions, which are calculated to show our kindly and dutiful feelings, not for idols, but for our fellow-creatures.”¹

Barbeyrac finds similar fault² with Tertullian for what he says on the subject of a Christian holding office or magisterial function in the state. And here, I think, his animadversions may be qualified by the same means as before, *i. e.* by a due regard to the circumstances of the times. It is obvious that Tertullian, in all the remarks which he makes upon this and upon other kindred subjects, exhibits a mind thoroughly possessed with the enormous difficulties which the idolatry that surrounded them, threw in the way of the Christians, and embarrassed them in all their movements, however otherwise blameless or indifferent. It is not the lawfulness or unlawfulness of acting as a judge or magistrate in the abstract, which Tertullian debates (as Barbeyrac would seem to represent the question³); but whether a Christian should undertake such a province, as things then were, and with the obstacles before him which such a position would evidently expose him to. This is the proposition in his thoughts, however he may fail to express it in so many words. It is true that Tertullian may appear to lay undue stress on the particulars of pomp and parade with which such an office was accompanied, the *prætexta*, the *trabea*, the *laticlave*, the *fascæ*, the wands, the purple, as if the *gravamen* lay in these; and it is true, also, that Tertullian, the better to reconcile his readers to the recommendation that they should have nothing to do with such offices, suggests the modest and humble aspect of our Lord, and his indisposition to be treated with kingly honours⁴; but even here the main objection to these trappings is the relation they bore to idolatry—the question of the habits at the period of the Reformation, deeply aggravated, as it might well be, being even then the matter of offence—they were to be shunned because, in the eye of the people, they were associated intimately with the worship of false gods; the figures of those gods were dressed in these robes; the processions, in honour of them, were attended by these insignia.⁵ It is impossible to say what weight should be ascribed to this argument, unless we knew more intimately

Tertullian, *De Idololatriâ*, c. xvi.

² Barbeyrac, p. 83.

³ pp. 85, 86.

⁴ Tertullian, *De Idololatriâ*, c. xviii.

⁵ *Ibid.*

than we possibly can know, the state of public feeling upon this point, and how far it really did identify these pageants with idolatry, and especially in the estimation of the weaker brethren, for whom St. Paul himself tells us consideration is to be had. But independently of this argument, Tertullian puts forward a number of inconveniences which would distress the Christian in the discharge of such duties, though he puts them *ex abundantia* and with a proviso, that even if they could be escaped, there was still cause enough left in such matters as I have just been adverting to, to deter him from embarking in such an occupation. "Let us admit," says Tertullian, for argument's sake, (that is his way of stating it,) "let us admit that by possibility it may happen to a man to enjoy an honour of this kind, and to make his way unencumbered by anything but the honour; neither called upon to do sacrifice, nor to sanction sacrifice by his authority, nor to deal in the victims for sacrifice, nor to appoint to the charge of the temples, nor gather the revenues derived from them, nor exhibit shows and games on his own account or on that of the public, nor preside over them, by whomsoever exhibited; let him have no judgment to pronounce, no edict to put forth, no oath to take; nay, let him be exempt from matters which strictly fall under magisterial duty; let him adjudicate on no man's life or character (I say nothing about fines); let him neither condemn nor make damnatory laws; let him consign no man to fetters, to prison, or to torture: *if it is credible that such a state of things could subsist*,¹—still, even allowing all this," contends Tertullian, "the very pomp and decoration of his office is so associated with idolatry, that that alone should induce him to refrain from it."² He may seem to waive the stronger argument, and rely upon the weaker, but a sense of the enormous hindrance in the way of a Christian magistrate, which a state of heathen society would present, is at the bottom of the whole reasoning. Nor can he be said to waive the other; for he expressly, you see, affirms, that exemption from such embarrassments, as he is supposing, is a thing incredible; that in point of fact, the party would have to do sacrifice, to preside over sacrifices, to exhibit spectacles; and so on, or in other words to be himself an idolater; and again, in point of fact, would have to adjudicate on men's lives

¹ Si hæc credibile est fieri posse.

² Tertullian, De Idololatriâ, c. xvii.

and characters, to fine, imprison, and torture. And who, may we presume, would be the parties between whom he would be perpetually called to judge? Would it not be between heathens and Christians? We have already discovered incidentally what a disturbing force in the world the introduction of Christianity proved; and I could add to the proof of this to almost any extent by going into details: how truly our Lord's prophecy came to pass, that he was not about "to send peace on earth, but a sword." There were endless calls for the interposition of the law to settle disputes and troubles which arose from the husband being a pagan, and the wife a believer; from the master and servant standing to one another in the like relation, and so on. There were contentions continually brewing from the consciousness of the heathen party on such occasions that he had the laws in his favour, and had his victim at his mercy; that he could treasure up a grievance to a future day, and produce it when the time served. There must have been numberless civil suits between the pagan and Christian most painful for the latter to decide. The mere debtor and creditor business between them must have been full of perplexity. The bond required an oath, a heathen oath; necessity on the one hand urging to it, conscience on the other resenting it¹; Tertullian himself almost at a loss how to advise, and ending what he has to say on the subject with a prayer that Christians may not be driven to the extremity of borrowing from heathens, but may find those who could lend amongst the brethren.

How could a Christian reconcile it to himself to volunteer placing himself in a position of such enormous difficulty by acting as a magistrate in these courts? And how can we find fault with Tertullian for dissuading him from so doing by every argument he can devise, however little to the purpose some of them may be? We are not, I must again remind you, to consider the question as Barbeyrac does, in cool blood, whether it is convenient for a Christian under any circumstances, and at any time, to bear the sword, to pass sentence of death, and so on; but whether under those circumstances, and at that time, it was convenient to do so. I repeat, it was the idolatry of the day that was influencing the mind of Tertullian in all the decisions we are now considering, as is obvious

¹ Tertullian, *De Idololatriâ*, c. xxiii.

from the passage with which he closes his treatise on idolatry, where they are all found. "These," says he, "are the rocks and bays; these the shores and straits of idolatry, amidst which faith, with sails filled by the Spirit of God, makes her voyage, safe, if cautious, secure, if wide awake.¹ But for those who are unshipped, there is in idolatry a deep which cannot be swum out of; for those who are dashed against it, a wreck which cannot be cleared; for those who are swallowed up, a submersion² which cannot be breathed in; whoever are choked by its waves, every vortex which it hath sucks them under to hell. Let no man then say, who can take all the precautions necessary for safety, unless he retired altogether from the world? as if it were not better to retire from it, than to live in it and be an idolater. Nothing can be more easy than precaution against idolatry, if there is a real fear of it.³ Any necessity is a trifle compared with peril so vast. Therefore did the Holy Spirit, when the Apostles held their council, relax for us the bond and the yoke, in order that we might be at leisure for avoiding idolatry. This will be our law; the more fully to be observed and required, in proportion as it is itself more simple and unembarrassed; the law proper to Christians; the law by which we are recognised and tested by heathens; the law which is to be propounded to those who are approaching towards the faith, to be inculcated to those who are entering on the faith, in order that those who are approaching the faith may ponder, and those who are keeping the faith may continue to do so, and those who are not keeping it may renounce themselves (and their profession). For we may consider whether according to the figure of the ark, the crow, and the kite, and the wolf, and the dog, and the serpent, may not be in the Church. But there can be no doubt that in the figure of the ark the idolater is not found. No animal can be made to represent the idolater. And what was not in the ark, let not the same be in the Church."⁴ I have given this winding up of the Treatise on Idolatry at full, in order to show how entirely the practical speculations of Tertullian, in the course of it, had been governed by his horror of a sin which, as he had said at the opening of his essay, comprised every other.⁵

¹ Attonita.

² Hypobrychium.

³ Or, a fear to begin with, in capite.

⁴ Tertullian, De Idololatriâ, c. xxiv.

⁵ Summus sæculi reatus.—c. i.

On the subject of *self-defence* Barbeyrac regards the morality of the Fathers, of Tertullian and Cyprian more especially, to be utterly faulty¹; carrying as they do the duty of patience to such an extreme, as to be scarcely compatible with self-preservation. A passage or two to this effect he produces, written, however, in that loose and rhetorical manner, for which allowance is always to be made. For instance, "The soldiers of Christ cannot be conquered, but can die; and by this very thing they prove themselves to be invincible, viz. by having no fear of death. Neither do they resist those who assail them, seeing that, *it is not lawful even for the innocent to slay the guilty*; but they deliver up their lives and their blood with alacrity, in order that they may the sooner retire from the ills and cruelties of a world wherein so much malice and barbarity prevails."² But a paragraph of this kind is a very insufficient foundation of any serious charge. The fact is, that at the time when these Fathers wrote, the Christians were in a minority, surrounded by fierce and watchful enemies; as our Lord expresses it, "sheep in the midst of wolves." In such a condition, the only chance for them was *patience*; patience proceeding almost to the degree of non-resistance; it was by far the most effectual defence that could be set up. *Vincit qui patitur*, was the best motto for them. And accordingly we find both Cyprian and Tertullian furnishing express essays on this virtue: but they are not philosophical essays: they were not dreaming of writing like Puffendorf and Barbeyrac on "natural rights:" the times in which they lived and the scenes in which they were concerned invited to no such tranquil speculations. Both these compositions are of the nature of Sermons or Homilies; "*Fratres dilectissimi*" is indeed the pulpit phraseology with which Cyprian interlards his address: they have for their object to brace up the hearers or readers of them to meet the distresses and dangers of the times; and to teach them not to faint in the day of trial. "And as we are all involved in the sentence" (on Adam) such is their language, "we can escape from it only by death. Therefore it is that we naturally weep when we are first brought into the world, testifying instinctively that it is a world of trouble: and patience supplies the only remedy to all; but most of all to *us*, whom

¹ Barbeyrac, pp. 91. 128.

² Cyprian, Ep. lvii. § 2.

persecutions, the gaol, the sword, the wild-beast, the fire, the cross, and whatever other engine of torment there may be, assailable. Even as our Lord said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'¹ And if Abel is adduced as a praiseworthy example of patient sufferance, who, when attacked by Cain, made no resistance²—for it is presumed of him from the silence of Scripture—surely this is scarcely to be drawn into a grave argument (as it is by Barbeyrac), that by such reasoning Cyprian was subverting the natural right of self-defence.³ In the eloquent eulogy on patience with which Tertullian closes his treatise on it, it is significantly said, in a long catalogue of its merits, "It strengthens faith"—"it rules the flesh"—"it bridles the tongue"—"it subdues temptations"—"it consummates martyrdom"—"it charms the believer"—"it attracts the unbeliever"⁴—the virtue evidently presenting itself to the mind of Tertullian in those aspects which a state of risk and danger in the times in which he lived suggested to him.

There is one particular more in the essay of M. Barbeyrac to which I think it needful to draw your attention; and though differing in character from some of them already noticed, it still serves to confirm me in my affirmation that Barbeyrac, in passing judgment on the morality of the Fathers, did not take sufficiently into account the condition of the times and of public opinion when they wrote. It is this; the justification of idolatry amongst the *Pagans*, which Barbeyrac imputes to Clemens Alexandrinus,⁵ when that Father says, that "God had given them the sun, the moon, and the stars, to worship (*εἰς θρησκείαν*)." I have, indeed, touched on this question before, and shown that Clemens, whose principle it was to make the heathen philosophy a stepping-stone to Christian truth, and so to tempt the learned Gentiles to a purer faith, did consider the heavenly bodies as objects set up for the religious contemplation of the Gentiles, in order that they might be saved, as he expressly says, from becoming vicious atheists, and that, carrying their thoughts up from these glorious creatures to God their Creator, they might be delivered from falling down and worshipping images, wood,

¹ Cyprian, de Bono Patientiæ, § xii.

² De Zelo et Livore, § v.

³ Barbeyrac, p. 128.

⁴ Tertullian, De Patientiâ, c. xv.

⁵ Stromat. VI. c. xiv. p. 795.

and stone—even the worship of the stars being thought better than the worship of stocks, as being more likely to advance the worshipper to the contemplation of God himself. But what led Clemens into this particular error was no obliquity in his morality, but simply a misinterpretation of a verse in Scripture,¹ “And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the Lord hath taken *you*” (*i. e.* the Israelites, as opposed to the Gentiles), “and brought *you* forth”—as though Moses had said, that the Israelites were not to worship the host of heaven, they having been furnished with better knowledge and a holier creed; but that to all the *nations* (*i. e.* the Gentiles as distinguished from the Jews) God had permitted these heavenly bodies to be objects of worship. Moreover, the Septuagint, which was the Scripture Clemens knew, was capable of being drawn into this meaning much more easily—*ὁ ἀπένειμε Κύριος ὁ Θεός σου ἀντὰ πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσι τοῖς ὑποκάτω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. ὑμᾶς δὲ ἔλαβεν ὁ Θεός, καὶ ἐξήγαγεν ὑμᾶς, κ. τ. λ.* Now we know that Clemens entertained the same opinion as the Fathers before him, an opinion which had come down to the modern Jews, that the Septuagint translation was made by miracle, and was the work of inspiration, even as the original itself was.² What, therefore, appeared to him to be the sense of the text in Deuteronomy he could not but bow to, however he might have felt difficulties about it. And that difficulties he did feel, and put the interpretation upon it he did, not because he wished to warp a text to support a theory, but because he was not aware of any other exposition,³ seems to be proved by the manner in which he expresses himself on two other occasions on the same subject, where the text of Deuteronomy does not happen to present itself to his mind, and where he speaks therefore under no constraint. For in the Exhortation to the Gentiles⁴ he declares his surprise that men should have been found who worshipped the Divine workmanship, instead of God himself, absurdly supposing the sun, the moon, and the

¹ Deut. iv. 19.

² Stromat. I. c. xxii. pp. 409, 410.

³ The same indeed was that of Justin,

Dial. §§ 55. 121.

⁴ Cohort. ad Gentes, § iv. pp. 54, 55.

chorus of the stars to be gods, whereas they were only instruments whereby to measure time. And in another passage in the same work, where he is describing the several sources from which idolatry took its beginning, he makes one of them to be this very admiration of the heavenly bodies, "Some, deceived by the spectacle of the heavens, or trusting to the eye alone, contemplated the motions of the stars, and admired and deified them, calling the stars gods (*θεοὺς*) from their motion (*ἐκ τοῦ θεΐν*); and worshipped the sun, like the Indians, and the moon, like the Phrygians."¹ The conclusion, therefore, we come to on the whole is, that the faulty views he puts forward on one single occasion, he does so put forward in deference to what he supposed to be Scripture; and only in deference to it: some constraint seeming to be laid upon his own judgment, as we gather from other parts of his writings, where the text of Scripture does not seem to occur to him.

I feel that I have now furnished you with the key by which, as it appears to me, the greater part of the objections of Barbeyrac may be solved; viz. his want of consideration for the popular character of the writings of the Fathers, and for the peculiar circumstances of the age in which they lived. I must, however, again remind you, that my remarks throughout these Lectures have been confined altogether to the Fathers of the first three centuries. I do not pretend to clear those of a later date, and particularly those of a *much* later, from all the charges which Daillé and Barbeyrac have brought against them; for their field is much wider than mine. My object has been in these Lectures, and in all that I have delivered on similar subjects, since I occupied my present post here, to interest my hearers on behalf of the Ante-Nicene Fathers; feeling as I do, that they are by far the most valuable of all, as being nearest the times of the Apostles; and feeling too, that their testimony, instead of unsettling your minds with respect to the doctrine and ritual of your own Church, will on the whole lead you to think, that you could betake yourself to no other, which so nearly resembles that of the primitive ages. I have said it before from this place, and I repeat it now, that it is not the reference to ecclesiastical antiquity, which has of late prevailed to such an extent, that has

¹ Cohort. ad Gentes, § ii. p. 22.

disturbed us, and given cause for jealousy and apprehension to so many, but it has been the reference to ecclesiastical antiquity of too low a date; a date, when the Church had lost much of the simplicity both of its faith and constitution. Such popular objections as are urged against the study even of these primitive Fathers, I trust I have in this Course of Lectures in a great measure removed. It will be my business in my Lectures next Term to follow up my present argument by an exposition of the *positive* advantages of many kinds which result from the study of the writers of the Ante-Nicene Church; and thus redeem the title which Dailé adopted "On the Use of the Fathers," whilst the only or chief object of his book proved to be, to persuade us that the Fathers are of no use at all.

Accordingly I shall show in these Lectures the light the study of the early Fathers casts upon the *Evidences*—the weapons with which they (in a peculiar manner) arm us against the infidel, and against Mr. Gibbon's infidelity more especially; by proving the rapid spread of Christianity over the world; by exhibiting the classes of society out of which its converts were made, and the mistake it is to suppose that they were exclusively of the lowest; by developing the care and caution with which their characters were sifted before their allegiance was received; by furnishing us with a true estimate of the extent and intensity of persecution they encountered and sustained, and the trying nature of some modes of it less obvious, and therefore less adverted to, but not less searching. I shall treat of the *miraculous powers* ascribed to the Primitive Church; and of its *ecclesiastical construction*. I shall explain the good offices the Fathers render us in our investigation of the *Canon* of Scripture—the *substance* of Scripture—the *text* of Scripture—and above all, the *meaning* of Scripture on great cardinal points, by reflecting to us the sense of the Primitive Church on them all, on the last of which subjects I shall have to dwell at some length.

I cannot but persuade myself that young men about to undertake the occupation of Ministers in Christ's Church, of teachers of the people in theological and ecclesiastical truth, particularly in times like our own, when so much error is abroad on such topics, and so many foundations subverted or shaken, which they may find themselves soon in a position to

restore or repair—I say, I cannot but persuade myself, that ingenuous men, with such prospects before them, may feel it a duty—an interesting duty—to make themselves acquainted with such questions as I have enumerated; and though no longer compelled to hear what I have to say on them by constraint, may be disposed to do so of good-will: and that I shall have the satisfaction of feeling, that in composing these Lectures, the results of many years' patient reading and thought, I have not been labouring in vain; but have a chance of diffusing the conclusions of my own experience through the country by the best of all channels, that of an enlightened and intelligent Clergy.