

LECTURES
ON THE
RIGHT USE OF THE EARLY FATHERS.

SECOND SERIES.

ON THE ADVANTAGES TO BE DERIVED FROM THE STUDY
OF THE EARLY FATHERS.

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LECTURE I.

Use of the Fathers in relation to the Evidences. Their testimony to the *wide dispersion* of the Gospel opposed to the statements of Gibbon. His unfairness in citing them. Argument from their incidental allusions. More direct testimony to the early establishment of Christianity on the shores of the Mediterranean and Euxine, and in the countries beyond the Euphrates. Its secret progress illustrated from the Acts, from St. Paul's Epistles, from the Fathers. Its disturbance of the social relations instrumental to its propagation. Exposition of Phil. i. 12-18. Further illustrations. Effect of the public games.

THE Course of Lectures which I delivered last Term on the Use of the Fathers, was entirely occupied in removing or abating those charges against them, which are advanced by Daillé and Barbeyrac: for I thought it would be well to clear away objections to the study of them, before I proceeded to enforce their value; and I thought too, that it would not be easy to find any which had escaped the notice of those two unsparing critics. I now propose to redeem the promise I made at the close of that course, and to show some of the positive benefits which accrue from an examination of the Fathers; still limiting my subject to the Fathers of the first three centuries. A portion of the present argument indeed was forestalled in that course, and the use of the Fathers was incidentally proved in various particulars, whilst I was more immediately engaged in relieving them from abuse. Such was especially the case with respect to questions involved in the Romish controversy; most of which have already passed in review whilst I was in fact engaged in answering Daillé and Barbeyrac. I shall endeavour, therefore, not to repeat myself in this continuation of my remarks, and omit such proofs of

the value of the Fathers as have already been offered under the other head of my subject.

Now, if we contemplate them in relation to the *Evidences* for the truth of our religion, it would be difficult to overrate their worth. It is obvious, that the very period at which they lived, would be enough in itself to make their testimony most precious. Whatever gives us a better command of the circumstances under which Christianity established itself in the world improves the field of evidence. For a vast number of infidel arguments are founded on ignorance or imperfect information of primitive times. I feel that the matter which belongs to this single branch of the subject is so overwhelming that I cannot attempt to produce a tithe of it. My object, indeed, is not to exhaust any of the topics I handle; the limits, within which these Lectures must be compressed, would not admit of it. All I can do is, to adduce so much proof as shall satisfy my hearers that I have a reason for what I say; and encourage them to pursue the further investigation of the subject for themselves.

Thus it has always been considered a very strong argument for the truth of the Christian religion, that though backed by no secular power whatever, and propagated by a few unlettered fishermen, it should have so soon made a lodgement in the world, overrun the nations so wonderfully fast as it did, till it made kings proud to be its nursing-fathers, and queens its nursing-mothers. But suppose to this it was replied that the assertion was not true—that it did not in fact begin to take possession of the earth till it became the religion of the empire, and was accordingly upheld by secular authority, and owed, indeed, its success to secular support—how is the objection to be met, but by an appeal to early Christian history? The objection itself is no imaginary one, you are well aware, but in the hands of a subtle historian has been no doubt made instrumental to shaking the faith of thousands: the rather because Gibbon lived at a time when few, if even any, scholars knew much about primitive ecclesiastical antiquity. Indeed, I can scarcely imagine he would have ventured on the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of his book in their present form, had not the theology of his age invited him to run risks, and take liberties with truth. For how ample is the testimony borne by the Fathers of the first three centuries to the wide dis-

persion of the Gospel even then. It transpires perpetually ; not directly only, but often in a manner the most circuitous and incidental—in such a manner as could only result from the fact itself being a settled conviction in the writer's mind.

Thus Clemens (even so early a witness as he) having occasion to produce some examples of the virtue of patience in support of his exhortation to the Corinthian Church to encourage it in themselves, mentions St. Paul. "Seven times," says he, "he was in bonds, he was scourged, he was stoned, he preached both in the east and in the west, leaving behind him a glorious report of his faith : and so, having taught the whole world righteousness, and having travelled even to the utmost bounds of the west, he at last suffered martyrdom."¹

Again, Justin Martyr tells us that the bells attached to the high priest's garment were a figure of the twelve Apostles who were dependent on Christ the Priest for ever ; the *whole earth* through their preaching having been filled with the glory and grace of God and of his Christ. Wherefore it was that David said, "Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words into the ends of the world."² Here we have another instance of the fact we are investigating, being communicated in the same unobtrusive way as before. Again, in the same author's exposition of Moses' blessing on Joseph, "his horns are like the horns of an unicorn, with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth,"³ the horn of the unicorn is the Cross, and its pushing the nations to the ends of the earth is but significant, says he, "of what has already come to pass *among all nations*. For they of all nations, pushed by the horn, that is, pricked to the heart by this mystery, have turned from their vain idols to the worship of God."⁴

Once more, Irenæus in commenting on the parable of the grain of mustard seed, remarks that in that parable, "the Judge of the whole world was announced—that he, in the heart of the earth and buried in the tomb, in three days became the greatest of trees, and stretched forth His branches to the ends of the world—that the twelve Apostles, shooting from the stem, like goodly and flourishing boughs, became a shelter for the nations, as those boughs are to the birds of

¹ Clem. Rom. Ad Cor. I. § v.

² Justin Martyr, Dial. § 42.

³ Deut. xxxiii. 17.

⁴ Justin Martyr, Dial. § 91.

heaven ; under which boughs, all finding shelter, like birds gathered into the nest, have partaken of that food nutritious and heavenly which proceeded from them.”¹ It is most improbable that Irenæus would have used expressions of this sort, if the Gospel had not actually made great progress when he penned them. Again, he is speaking of the uniformity of tradition in the orthodox Church, to whatever branch of it you turn, as presenting an insuperable objection to the novelties of the heretics. That is his argument ; but in treating it, he incidentally touches on the actual superficial extent of that Church in the following terms ; “so that the faith and tradition of the Churches is one and the same, whether they be established in Germany, in Spain, in Gaul, in the East, in Egypt, in Libya, or in the middle of the world.”² And here may be the proper place for remarking by the way the animus with which Gibbon handles such early evidence as this for the wide dispersion of the Gospel. We see Spain is one of the countries here enumerated as having received the Gospel, and in such a measure as to have her Churches appealed to on the subject of Tradition ; a circumstance indicating both that the spread of the Gospel in that country was considerable, and also that its date was even then of some standing. And yet Gibbon casts a doubt upon the Gospel having penetrated Spain even in Tertullian’s time, whose testimony to that effect he produces in order to disparage it, as if it was the earliest which existed on the question, altogether sinking this of Irenæus which preceded Tertullian’s and concurred with it. “From Gaul,” says Gibbon, “which claimed a just pre-eminence of learning and authority over all the countries on this side of the Alps, the light of the Gospel was more faintly reflected on the remote provinces of Spain and Britain ; and if we may credit the vehement assertions of Tertullian,³ they had already received the first rays of the faith, when he addressed his Apology to the magistrates of the Emperor Severus.”⁴ Now, why advert to a rhetorical passage of Tertullian, a later witness, and suppress this sober one of Irenæus, an earlier ? I say suppress, because though not taking the slightest notice of it in his *text*, where if Tertullian was

¹ Irenæus, *Fragm.* xxxi. or p. 347, *Bened. Ed.*

² Irenæus, *I. c.* x. § 2.

³ Tertullian, *Adv. Judæos*, c. vii.

⁴ Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. ii. p. 368.

worth producing, surely Irenæus was, he has a reference to it afterwards in a note¹; in a note, however, annexed to a sentence which has no particular relation to Spain, and the reference in that note confined to a bare citation of the book and chapter of Irenæus, without a word about the substance of the passage referred to, nothing in short done to invite us to examine it; as though on the one hand, Gibbon was reluctant to put his readers in full possession of an authority which was against him; and on the other, was willing to prepare for himself a retreat against the charge of ignorance of that authority, by barely jotting down the chapter and verse. The very next page furnishes an instance of the same disingenuousness in the case of *Armenia*. "It will still remain an undoubted fact, that the barbarians of Scythia and Germany, who afterwards subverted the Roman monarchy, were involved in the darkness of Paganism; and that even the conversion of Iberia, of Armenia, and of Æthiopia, was not attempted with any degree of success till the sceptre was in the hands of an orthodox emperor."² But Armenia is one of the nations expressly enumerated by Tertullian³ as believing in Christ, and Mr. Gibbon himself, convinced that in this case at least his assertion was not true, expressed his intention of correcting his error in future editions.⁴ "Yet," remarks Professor Porson in the Preface to his Letters to Archdeacon Travis, a Preface in which he pronounces an eulogium with certain exceptions on Mr. Gibbon's history, "to say the truth, I have one censure in reserve. A candid acknowledgment of error does not seem to be Mr. Gibbon's shining virtue. He promised (if I understand him rightly) that in a future edition he would expunge the words, *of Armenia*, or make an equivalent alteration. A new edition has appeared; but I have looked in vain to find a correction of that passage."⁵

But to return to our proof that the early Fathers bear testimony to the wide dispersion of the Gospel in their time; that of Tertullian, which has already been advanced in one instance, does not terminate with that one; on the contrary, it presents itself in many of his works, written no

¹ Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. ii. p. 369, note 177.
² p. 369.

³ Tertullian, Adversus Judæos, c. vii.

⁴ Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works, vol. iv. p. 577. 8vo. 1814.

⁵ Porson's Letters to Travis, p. xxxi.

doubt at considerable intervals of time. One while he tells us, as in his *Apology*, that people were exclaiming, the state was besieged by the Christians; that it was deplored as a misfortune, that every sex, age, condition, rank, was passing over to their name.¹ At another time he talks of the Christians, however unobtrusive their lives, in numbers constituting the major part of every state.² Elsewhere he produces a catalogue of distinguished princes, and shows that they after all only governed limited districts, Solomon, *e. g.* from Dan to Beersheba, "whereas the kingdom and name of Christ extends everywhere, is believed everywhere, is worshipped by all the nations already enumerated;"³ those nations being "the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Armenia, in Phrygia, in Cappadocia, the inhabitants of Pontus, Asia, and Pamphylia; of Egypt and of the country of Africa about Cyrene; Romans, Jews, the various tribes of the Getuli, many districts of the Moors; the whole boundary of Spain; divers nations of the Gauls; and parts of Britain which had been inaccessible to the Romans."⁴ And on another occasion, when arguing that the prophecies which related to the events that were to follow the appearance of Christ, were fulfilled after Jesus of Nazareth, he proceeds, "for behold all the nations emerging out of the vortex of human error, to God the Creator and to God the Christ;" and then having quoted the Psalm, "I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession," he observes that this prediction was not accomplished in David, whose empire was limited to Judæa, but in Christ, "who hath already possessed," says he, "the whole world with a faith in his Gospel."⁵ Some of the treatises in which these passages occur were composed before he was a Montanist; some afterwards; some in which there is no internal evidence to show whether it was before or after; but all of them, we see, concur in the assertion of the extensive dispersion of the Gospel in his time.

Origen in his turn speaks to the same effect. In his treatise against Celsus, one of the works of his maturer age, and perhaps the most sober of them all, in replying to the objection that Christianity is but of yesterday's date, he

¹ Tertullian, *Apol.* c. i.

² *Ad Scapulam*, c. ii.

³ *Adversus Judæos*, c. vii.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Adversus Marcionem*, III. c. xx.

draws a conclusion in favour of Christianity from this very circumstance ; that recent as was its introduction among men, it had made a progress, which nothing could account for but its Divine origin. “And though at the first,” says he, “the kings of the day, and the chief officers under them, and the magistrates, and in short all who were in any post of authority, and the governors in cities, and the military, and the populace, resisted the dispersion of it over the world, it still prevailed, for it could not be hindered, as being the Word of God, and stronger than all its antagonists ; so that it took possession of the whole of Greece, and the greater part of the world of the barbarians, and converted myriads of souls to that form of worship.”¹ And again, in the same treatise, when showing how faithfully our Lord’s prediction was fulfilled, that the Gospel should “be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations,”² Origen remarks, “Who that reverts to the time when Jesus used these words, will not wonder when he perceives that according to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached in all the world under heaven, to Greeks and barbarians, to wise and foolish ? For the Word spoke with power that prevailed over the whole race of mankind ; and one can find no nation amongst them, which has escaped receiving the doctrine of Jesus.”³ And on another occasion in the same treatise, he considers the Churches established all the world over, in every city, as ordained to be the antagonists and correctives of the heathen assemblies (*ἐκκλησίαι* the term applied to both), and challenges a comparison between their respective leaders and governors.⁴ So again in his *De Principiis*, and in a part of that treatise where the Greek is preserved, so that the testimony cannot be that of Rufinus, who might be supposed to speak of the condition of Christianity at a later date, the argument and almost the language is the same. “And if we consider, how in a *very few years* (*ἐν σφίδρα ὀλίγοις ἔτεσι*), whilst those who confessed Christianity were plotted against, and some of them were slain for it, and others were spoiled of their property, and though the teachers of it were not very numerous, the Word

¹ Πάσης μὲν Ἑλλάδος, ἐπὶ πλείον δὲ τῆς βαρβάρου ἐκράτησε, καὶ μετεποίησε μυρίας ὄσας ψυχὰς ἐπὶ τὴν κατ’ αὐτὸν θεοσέβειαν.—Origen, *Contra Cel-*

sum, I. § 28.

² Matt. xxiv. 14.

³ *Contra Celsum*, II. § 13.

⁴ III. § 30.

found means to be proclaimed *everywhere throughout the world*, so that Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish, were added to the religion of Jesus, we cannot hesitate to affirm that the thing was above what was of man."¹ Jacob's prophecy, he afterwards argues, is seen to be fulfilled "by the multitude of the nations who have believed in God through Christ,"² and also that in Psalm lxxii. 8. "His dominion shall be also from the one sea to the other, and from the flood unto the world's end."³

Again, Cyprian in his tract addressed to Demetrianus, a heathen scoffer, still leads us to the same conclusion. The very charge which this antagonist alleges against the Christians is in itself a proof of their numbers. The greater frequency of wars, the greater severity of plague and famine, the long lack of rain and showers were calamities, it seems, according to him, which were imputed to the Christians.⁴ But there would have been nothing even plausible in such an accusation as this, unless the Christians had been so large a portion of the population as materially to affect the number of the worshippers of the heathen gods. And in fact, Cyprian in the course of this essay, hints that the Christians are so formidable a body, that though it was their custom and their glory to take the persecution they suffered, patiently, they were in strength to resent it. "Therefore, it is, that none of us when apprehended resists, none rises against your unjust violence, *quamvis nimius et copiosus noster sit populus*."⁵ And a modest expression in Minucius Felix, perhaps, does not indicate the same fact the less forcibly on account of its unpretending character. "Neither let us pride ourselves upon our numbers, seeing that in the sight of God, before whom the whole world is stretched out, we are few."⁶

It is not, however, merely on phrases of this kind which escape from the Fathers, one and all, that we build; though, considering how uniform their language is upon this point, and how distant from one another are the parties in many instances when they use it, such concurrence in them is in itself very satisfactory; but the *facts*, which these early documents furnish, establish the same conclusion. Asia

¹ De Principiis, IV. § 2.

² § 3.

³ § 5.

⁴ Cyprian, Ad Demetrianum, § ii.

⁵ § xvii.

⁶ Minucius Felix, Octav. c. xxxiii.

Minor was evidently full of Christian communities. The epistles of Ignatius testify it. For though those epistles are addressed directly to five Churches only of that country, yet it is evident that there were in it numbers besides. These five happened to lie on or near the march of Ignatius, when he was conveyed from Antioch to Rome, and so were honoured by his more immediate notice. But he speaks of Churches which did not belong to him forwarding him on his journey city by city¹; and tells Polycarp that as he has not been able to write himself to all the Churches, he trusts he will do it for him to such as were in his own neighbourhood.² Indeed, as on the one hand, several of the Churches to which Ignatius appeals are not mentioned in the Revelation; so on the other, several of those mentioned in the Revelation are not found in the list of the Ignatian Churches. Then, Polycrates, a Bishop of Ephesus in the second century, writes a synodical epistle to Victor, Bishop of Rome, on the subject of Easter,³ of which epistle a fragment is come down to us in Eusebius. Now in this fragment it is said, that if the names of the Bishops assembled at that convocation were put down, they would be found to be great multitudes (*πολλὰ πλήθη*). The same ecclesiastical history contains a portion of an epistle addressed by Serapion, a Bishop of Antioch of the same date, to Rhossus, a city of Cilicia, on the subject of a spurious Gospel of St. Peter⁴; and mention is made in it too of a Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia. Again, the epistle from the Churches of Lyons and Vienne is written to the Churches of Asia and Phrygia; not merely showing that Churches there were in Asia and Phrygia, but vigorous Churches, Churches holding close connection with the Churches of Gaul, and deeply interested in their sufferings—all this still within the second century.⁵ The work of Irenæus who was eventually Bishop of Lyons, as he had been previously Presbyter of the same Church, gives us the impression of having been composed in a country where the Gospel was not weak even then, or confined to very narrow bounds. It bespeaks its author not to be buried alive in a corner of the Church, but to be master of all the great heresies of the day. And though it is true he had

¹ Ignatius, Ad Rom. § ix.

² Ad Polycarpum, § viii.

³ Routh. Rel. Sacr. vol. i. p. 369.

⁴ p. 470.

⁵ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. v. cc. 1, 2, 3.

visited Rome, and no doubt kept up an intercourse with the East, yet the book was composed in Gaul; and though in the preface of it he apologizes for his style, on the plea that he was living among Celts; and was in the habit, therefore, of using a barbarous language, he makes no allusion to any other disadvantage which his position entailed upon him; and it is manifest that he is combating an evil even at his own doors, certain of these Gnostics having been busy even in his own district about the Rhone¹; the proximity of the mischief probably stimulating him to write against and expose them; but there scarcely would have been vigorous heresies subsisting in a country where the Church had not made effectual lodgement. The frequent allusions too, which we find in him, to ritual and ecclesiastical organization lead to the same conclusion. Indeed, we shall presently see, that by the time of Cyprian there is evidence indisputable, that there were numerous sees in Gaul. Again, fragments of writers of the second century, preserved by Eusebius, still continue to afford occasional glimpses of this wide dispersion of the Gospel over districts I have not yet touched; nor can we read them without feeling, how much evidence on this question must have perished together with the early Christian documents which contained it, and without lamenting the loss of them for this as for many other reasons. Thus Dionysius, a Bishop of Corinth of that period, writes Catholic epistles to the Lacedæmonians, to the Athenians, to the Nicomedians, to Gortyna and the Gnossians, Churches in Crete, as well as to Churches in other regions of which I have spoken already.² And Serapion, whilst communicating with two correspondents on the subject of the Montanists, incidentally speaks of a Bishop of Debelum in Thrace, and also of a Bishop of Anchialus in the same country. But what need is there to pick up the state of religion in Greece piecemeal? Tertullian in a manner the most incidental, for when he writes he is a Montanist, and is engaged in defending the assemblies of the Montanists, extra-scriptural though they might be—Tertullian in self-defence tells us that “Councils of all the Churches (*i. e.* the orthodox Churches) were held in stated places throughout Greece (*per Græcias*), at which all weightier matters were discussed; and the representation of the whole Christian com-

¹ Irenæus, I. c. xiii. § 7.

² Rel. Sacr. vol. i. p. 170.

munity took place with vast solemnity."¹ Irenæus twice refers to the Church in Æthiopia as first established by the eunuch,² and in such terms as would indicate that it could then be appealed to for the orthodox doctrine, that no other God was taught by the Apostles save God the Father, nor any Christ but Jesus. What stronger proof again is it possible to have of the vigorous condition of Christianity at Alexandria and in that region, than the writings of Clemens Alexandrinus afford, or those of Origen who succeeded him for a time? The greater part of the works of both these authors, and especially of the former and earlier, is characteristic not merely of the Gospel having taken the deepest root among all classes, but even of very refined and transcendental views of it prevailing amongst them—so far was it even then from being in the cradle of its existence in that district. And once in possession of Alexandria and its schools, what could stop its wide and rapid diffusion over the world? For if there was one place more than another calculated as a propitious starting-point for a new doctrine, it was Alexandria. Its position secured full and free intercourse with Asia, Africa, and Europe; and it seems to have been a neutral ground on which all sects and opinions met together—Eastern sophists who probably introduced by that channel their Gnostic doctrines into circulation in the West, Platonists, Jews in very great numbers, speculative teachers of all sorts, abounding there; and the great library of the Ptolemies furnishing magazines of materials for all. In a society such as this, would not Clemens have been exposing himself to ridicule in the use of such language as the following, if he spoke without good grounds for what he said? He is encouraging the heathen to embrace the truth by reminding them that they might infer the Gospel to be from God by reason of the rapidity with which it had overrun the world. "The power of God," says he, "illuminating the earth with amazing speed and a benevolence within the reach of all hath *filled the universe*, (*ἐνέπλησε τὸ πᾶν*), with the seed of salvation. For the Lord did not achieve so great a work as this in so short a time without the Divine Providence. . . . He was the true wrestler, and wrestled in conjunction with the creature; and very quickly *distributed to all mankind* (*τάχιστα δὲ*

¹ Tertullian, De Jejuniis, c. xiii.

² Irenæus, III. c. xii. § 8; IV. c. xxiii. § 2.

εις πάντας ἀνθρώπους διαδοθεῖς), and rising according to his Father's will more swiftly than the sun," (the wrestler probably referring to the giant, to whom the sun is compared in the 19th Psalm,) "he readily made the Godhead to shine upon us, showing us whence he was and who he was by the things which he taught and exhibited; the Maker of the Covenant, the Reconciler, our Saviour the Word, the Fountain which giveth life, which giveth peace, Himself poured *over the whole face of the earth*; through whom in short *all things are become a sea of good.*"¹ So much for Alexandria and that region. Again, what a surface does Cyprian represent directly and indirectly as occupied by Christianity. He talks to Stephanus of Faustinus, a Bishop of Lyons, and of the other brother Bishops of the same province.² He communicates with the Clergy and people of Spain³; with Firmilianus, a Bishop of Cæsarea in Cappadocia,⁴ in which latter communication the elders and overseers of the Church are described as meeting together once a year to settle grave matters at a common Council.⁵ And he actually assembles no less than 87 Bishops at Carthage from the province of Africa, Numidia, and Mauritania, to discuss the subject of heretical Baptism.⁶

In short, the evidence on this question derived from the early Fathers alone can leave no doubt, that the countries bordering on the Mediterranean and Euxine seas were full of Christians long before Constantine was born. And is it possible to believe, that occupying such a region as this, the choicest that can be imagined for commanding the world, it could be confined to it? Indeed, there is proof that it was not. Such a document, *e. g.* as the spurious letter of King Abgarus to Jesus given in Eusebius,⁷ being in itself enough to show that Christianity had been established from an ancient date in the kingdoms beyond the Euphrates: as the memorandum in Hippolytus of the countries, to which the Apostles were scattered, bespeaks the same fact; for it assigns India to Bartholomew, and Albanus a city in Armenia for the scene of his martyrdom; to Thomas it gives Parthia, Media, Persia,

¹ Clem. Alex. Cohort. § x. p. 86.

² Cæteris coepiscopis nostris in eadem provinciâ constitutis.—Cyprian, Ep. Ixvii. § i.

³ Ep. Ixviii.

⁴ Ep. Ixxv.

⁵ § 4.

⁶ Concil. Carthag. sub Cypriano, VII. Procem.

⁷ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. i. c. 13.

Hyrkania, the Bactri, the Mardi, and Calamina, a city of India, for the place where he suffered death; to Lebbæus Mesopotamia¹: as a passage of Origen gives Scythia to St. Andrew.² And whatever may have been the authority on which such tradition rested, there can be no doubt that when these documents were written which have preserved it, Christianity must have extended itself to the countries enumerated in them as the fields of the Apostles' labours.³ And numerous touches of early ecclesiastical history found in Eusebius all support the same conclusion.⁴

The manner, in which the Gospel actually worked its way over the earth, is not easily traced. It came not of observation. The direct preaching of the missionary, though the obvious, was probably very far from being the only, or perhaps even the most ordinary channel; an expression which drops from Origen in a passage I have already cited, perhaps intimates as much—the rapid dispersion of the Gospel marking its Divine origin, says he, the more, as the number of its teachers was limited.⁵ Justin Martyr finds a prediction of the unobtrusive character of the advent of the Gospel in the Lord smiting Amalek with a *secret hand* (ἐν χειρὶ κρυφαίᾳ),⁶ and certainly this expression is very indicative of its noiseless yet effectual course. It was so from the very beginning. When Paul approaches Italy the first time, he finds it already inhabited by many Christians. The brethren at Puteoli desire him to tarry with them; and the brethren from Rome come to meet him. How or when they had been converted to the Gospel is a mystery. Again, the interval between his release from his first confinement at Rome and his return to that place is uncertain, it might be three years, or it might be more.⁷

¹ Hippolytus, De Duodecim Apostolis, Ed. Fabr. Append. p. 30.

² Origen, vol. ii. p. 24, Bened. Ed.

³ Eusebius enumerates several of Hippolytus' works; and though this memorandum is not specified amongst them, he says that there were very many other writings of his in different hands, πλείστα τε ἄλλα καὶ παρὰ πολλοῖς εὐροῖς ἀν σωζόμενα.—Eccles. Hist. vi. c. 22.

⁴ E. g. he speaks of Pantænus having penetrated even to India, and of Bartholomew having preceded him, as report said.—Eccles. Hist. v. c. 10.

⁵ Οὐδὲ τῶν διδασκάλων πλεονάζοντων.—Origen, De Principiis, IV. § 2. This may possibly refer to the number of the first Apostles. Compare IV. § 5.

⁶ So the LXX. Exod. xvii. 16.

⁷ Lardner releases him from Rome in the early part of 63, and puts him to death in 65. Credibility, Part II. Supplement, c. xi. §§ xi. xii. Cave makes the former date 59, the latter 63, Hist. Lit. p. 6; Burton, the former 58, the latter 67 or 68, Hist. of the Christian Church, pp. 203. 241, 3rd Ed.; Pearson, the former 63, the latter 68,

But how active seems to have been the progress of the Gospel there during that interval; an interval during which this great Apostle himself at least, having been absent from Rome, could not personally have contributed to the movement, yet, I say, how active does its progress seem to have been during that brief interval! Both St. Paul's visits were made during the reign of the same emperor, Nero; yet how different is the reception at the one and at the other! In the first he "was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him," "to dwell in his own hired house, and to receive all that came in unto him;" and then he made a favourable impression on some even "of Cæsar's household."¹ In the second he "suffered trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds,"² he was "ready to be offered, and the time of his departure was at hand;"³ and in accordance with these anticipations of his own, he was actually put to death. For the success of the Gospel had been such within this short space of time, that the powers of the empire, indifferent to it in the first instance, had meanwhile taken alarm; and it had begun to be perceived that Gallio's view of the question at any rate could no longer be maintained. Yet how silently had the heaven been working all this while. Justin tells us the history of his own conversion: it was apparently quite accidental, as we should say. He had retired to a secluded region near the coast for the indulgence of uninterrupted meditation, being then engaged in the study of Plato's philosophy. Here an old man of mild and venerable aspect, who was on the look-out for some friends whom he had lost, met with him and fell into conversation with him. He proved to be a Christian; and accordingly in the course of the dialogue which ensued between them, he drew Justin's attention to the Scriptures, and to the dispensation of the Gospel, of which they spake; and, his discourse ended, he went away, and Justin saw him no more. Yet the effects of this encounter did not terminate here.⁴ This casual adventure had predisposed Justin to examine the Scriptures; and having done so, he became converted and a Christian. Probably this is the history of thousands. There is another account of a conversion in

Minor Theological Works, vol. i. pp. 391. 396.

¹ Philippians iv. 22.

² 2 Tim. ii. 9.

³ iv. 6.

⁴ Justin Martyr, Dial. §§ 3-8.

Minucius Felix—indeed it forms the plot of his Dialogue—which again may be considered characteristic of the incidental manner in which it was effected in numberless instances. Minucius tells us that there was nothing, which he remembered of his friend Octavius (whose name gives the title to his little work) so vividly, as a conversation which Octavius had held with one Cæcilius a heathen, at which he was himself present; a conversation at which Octavius won Cæcilius to the Gospel.¹ This Cæcilius, it happened, had come to Rome on a visit to Minucius; and after they had spent a few days there together in talking over old times, they all three repaired to Ostia for sea-bathing, Minucius having occasion to recruit his health, and the vacation during the short vintage having caused the courts to be shut, for Minucius was a lawyer. Here it chanced, as they were pacing the shore, that on passing an image of Serapis, Cæcilius put his hand to his lip and saluted it, as was the practice with the superstitious vulgar.² Whereupon, says Octavius to Minucius, “it is not the part of a good man, my brother, to allow his friend and companion to continue in such darkness, as that he should be left to stumble against a stone in broad day—a stone fashioned, and anointed, and crowned with garlands, it is true—seeing that the disgrace falls upon you as much as upon him.” Meanwhile, the party pursued their walk along the shore in desultory conversation; and as they returned paused, where the boats were drawn up on the beach, to watch some boys playing at ducks and drakes on the surface of the water.³ Whilst they were amusing themselves with looking at the sport, Minucius remarked that Cæcilius took no interest in it, but, on the contrary, was silent and thoughtful. What ails you? said he. I am annoyed, replied Cæcilius, at the observation of Octavius, which conveyed to me a reproach of ignorance. Now I am prepared to debate this subject with him, and I will show him that it is an easier matter to babble among friends than to argue with philosophers. Suppose, therefore, we seat ourselves on the mole, and discuss the question. Accordingly they took their places, and the argument proceeded.⁴ I have produced the passage somewhat at full, because all the details of it answer the purpose for which I cite it; viz. to point out the very casual manner in which the Gospel was often propagated, and

¹ Minucius Felix, Octav. c. i.² c. ii.³ c. iii.⁴ c. iv.

the multitude of channels it was stealing through, besides the direct one of missionary exertions. The accidental visit of the heathen to his friend at Rome—their going together to the coast at vacation time, all of them, perhaps, being lawyers, one of them certainly being so—the passing salutation of the image—the apparatus so different from a pulpit and a congregation—the whole, I mean, serving to show, what numerous springs of all sorts were in motion to disperse Christianity, and to account for the very rapid progress it made; so many hands, it appears, forwarding it who were not expressly charged with the work, nor even suspected of being engaged in it.

Moreover, the very nature of Christianity was such as to excite attention and awake discussion wherever it planted itself. It was a disturbing force. It could not exist, and not make itself felt. Even so early as the Canonical Epistles, one detects this feature of it. From a passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, we find there was already felt to be a difficulty about carrying on legal suits, when the tribunal was heathen and the litigants Christian. “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust?”¹ In the same Epistle (for the social character of many of the questions handled in that Epistle causes it to supply us with much evidence of the qualities there were in the Gospel to make it talked about), in that same Epistle, I say, we have another contingency provided for, which must have been of constant occurrence, that of unequal marriage, one party a believer, the other an infidel.² What a fruitful field of discussion would either of these occurrences furnish, the one bringing the question of Christianity under consideration in all its bearings on property and person, the other in all its bearings on the social relations of life. And it is this view of the *stirring* nature of the Gospel, the vibration, as it were, which it occasioned throughout the system into which it was admitted, that is, perhaps, the true key to a passage in the Epistle to the Philippians, often quoted for another purpose. “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel (*i. e.* his imprisonment); so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 1.

² 1 Cor. vii. 12, 13.

other places ; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some, indeed, preach (*κηρύσσουν*) Christ even of envy and strife ; and some also of good will : the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds : but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the Gospel. What then ? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached (*καταγγέλλεται*) ; and therein do I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice"¹—the terms *κηρύσσω* and *καταγγέλλω* not used in any *technical* sense, I apprehend, or having here the meaning of *preach* as usually understood ; but simply conveying the idea, that St. Paul's imprisonment had excited a strong sensation (as we say in these days), and led to the discussion of the merits of the cause for which he suffered ; one party assailing and vilifying it and him, and another party warmly defending both ; and thus both parties, whether actuated by spite or by charity still serving by their disputes to spread the knowledge of Christ and to proclaim Him ; a good result at all events, in which St. Paul rejoices. The passage, thus explained, holds out no sanction for heretical preaching, as it is often made to do. These commotions, which attended on the progress of the Gospel, and which we thus see had begun in the Apostles' days, increased in an enormous ratio, as it proceeded and gathered strength ; and by consequence interfered more and more with all the habits, and arrangements, and laws, and occupations, and amusements of mankind : so that the subject soon forced itself upon all who came within the range of its influence, whether they would or not : it could not be blinked ; and thus overran the world with a rapidity, which nothing could stop. The absence of the Christians from all public spectacles,² from executions,³ their scruples about wearing garlands at a feast,⁴ and ointments⁵ ; their care about their own poor⁶ ; their hesitation to take a heathen oath⁷ ; their reluctance to burn their dead⁸ ; their refusal to partake of meats which had

¹ Philippians i. 12-18.

² Clem. Alex. Pæd. III. c. xi. p. 298.

³ Athenagoras, Leg. pro Christianis, § 35.

⁴ Clem. Alex. Pæd. II. c. viii. p. 213.

⁵ p. 205.

⁶ Stromat. I. § i. p. 319.

⁷ Tertullian, De Idololatriâ, c. xvii.

⁸ De Coronâ, c. xi. ; Epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne, Routh. Rel. Sacr. vol. i. p. 290.

been offered at heathen altars¹; their objections to having their children taught at school heathen mythology²; their use on all occasions of the sign of the Cross,³ on their beds, on their persons; all these peculiarities and numbers more of the same kind, great and small, which might be mentioned, must have been so many challenges to the curiosity of the world they mixed with; must have drawn attention to them and their doctrines: the feeling which accompanied their march, go where they would, must have been more or less that of the people of Thessalonica, "these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also."⁴ We saw from Minucius, that the casual salutation of an image of Serapis was the primary cause of a discussion on the merits of Christianity and of the conversion which ensued; how much more likely would the casual crossing of the person (to take the least of the peculiarities of the Christians I enumerated) be a trifle calculated to lead to similar results!

The ordinary progress of the Gospel promoted through all these unobtrusive channels, must have been greatly accelerated by the frequent resort of the people in those days, in multitudes, to the public games. The mere union of persons from all quarters with little to do, whilst the games lasted, but to talk over the events of the day, was propitious to the diffusion of the knowledge of this rising sect. The case was similar in this respect to the feast of the Passover, and the effects were similar. We learn from St. John the active inquiries, which were made about Jesus by the crowds assembled at that feast. "Many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover," and they "spake among themselves as they stood in the temple, what think ye, that he will not come to the feast?"⁵ But in the case of these shows, there were other reasons why this topic, the dispersion of Christianity, should be eagerly and zealously discussed at them; such seasons being often chosen for the execution of the Christians, none other being better suited for making a public example. Thus we read, that the soldiers who had the custody of Ignatius were not content with simply discharging their office and conveying him to Rome, but were anxious to do so "before the

¹ Minucius Felix, Octav. c. xxxviii.

² c. xxii.

³ Tertullian, Ad Uxorem, II. c. v.

⁴ Acts xvii. 6.

⁵ John xi. 55, 56.

games were over ;”¹ and it was at a great festival of this kind at Smyrna, that Polycarp was burned.² And the voice which issued from aloft, when the old man entered the arena, “Be of good heart, and play the man, Polycarp,” sustained as it was by the courageous carriage of the martyr, probably preached a sermon which made more converts, and circulated far more widely than appeared—lighted up a candle which would not readily be put out.

¹ Acts of Ignatius, § v. considered genuine by Pearson, Vind. Ign. Part I. | cc. v., vi.
² Acts of Polycarp, § ix.