

LECTURE XV.

Use of the Fathers in unfolding the *meaning* of Scripture : III. Prevailing mistake of applying a modern standard of interpretation to passages which should be explained by reference to an ancient one. The information which the Fathers give on early heresies the true key to much of the New Testament. The method of Dr. Hammond substantially correct. Succession of heresies. Observation of Tertullian. Illustration of it from the writings of St. John. St. Paul explained with reference to the Gnostic heresy by Irenæus. Application of the same method by Tertullian. Further allusions to the doctrines and phraseology of the Gnostics discoverable in the Apostolical Epistles. IV. Interpretation of individual texts by the Fathers. Their comments not always to be relied on ; yet often superior to those of modern days. Illustrations.

III.

THERE is another bias which affects the general interpretation of Scripture perhaps as much as the Socinian or the Calvinistic does ; and that is, a disposition to regulate the meaning of Scripture by a modern rather than an ancient standard ; to contemplate it from a late rather than an early position ; and refer it to events of a contemporary rather than a primitive period—a bias the more to be provided against, because it suits the indolent ; is easy and natural ; requires little or no reading, study or penetration to follow : and accordingly it has made itself felt on the theology of the day, and especially on our Scripture commentators, with disastrous effect.

The Fathers prove of eminent use as guides to the interpretation of Scripture by moderating this principle : and this they do, as in other ways which I have noticed, so by furnishing us with accurate information concerning the heresies which prevailed in the Sub-Apostolic, and even the Apostolic times ; that information supplying the true key to much of the New Testament. I have already touched from time to time on probable conclusions which such knowledge enables us to draw incidentally with respect to questions of great importance both ecclesiastical and religious ; though I might have done so to a

much greater extent : as, that the Episcopal form of Church government was that sanctioned by Scripture, since even the heretics adopted it, only in their case futile, because wanting the succession¹ : that the doctrine of the Trinity was scriptural, even Simon Magus, so primitive a heretic, caricaturing it in his crazy system² : that the Sacrament of Baptism was according to Scripture a mystery of the highest virtue, seeing that the heretics had their Initiation corresponding to it, their Redemptio or ἀπολύτρωσις, as they called it,³ and which, as some of them pretended, gave exemption from natural death⁴ : that the Sacrament of the Eucharist was, according to Scripture, sanctified by the peculiar presence of God ; even the heretics representing that Charis of their Pleroma dropped her blood into the cup, and imparted herself in it to her worshippers⁵ : that faith and the Cross enter largely into the scheme of Scripture, since even the heretics must have amongst their Æons πίστις and σταυρός⁶ : that the miraculous Conception must have been an acknowledged and well-known Scripture doctrine, since the same parties, instead of denying the fact, taught that Jesus passed through Mary as water through a tube.⁷ But, besides these broader features of revelation, which the heresies of primitive times serve to illustrate, confirm and fix ; they further act as exponents of many of the more obscure parts of holy Writ, and particularly of many passages in the Gospel of St. John, and in the Epistles whether of him or of other of the Apostles, passages which require the most delicate investigation, and often experience the most trivial. Indeed, Dr. Hammond, you are aware, considered the Gnostic heresy to be the solvent of almost all the difficulties of those portions of Scripture ; as though St. John and St. Paul had it constantly in contemplation. Here again, as in a former instance, the principle of interpretation may have been occasionally overstrained ; and may have been exercised on texts which possibly were to be explained by some other theory. But our own common sense must tell us, that the early heresies of the Church could not fail to enter largely into the views of the Apostles ; and that though the question of more or less may admit of debate, the

¹ Irenæus, V. c. xx. § 1. Tertullian, De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, c. xxxii.

² Irenæus, I. c. xxiii. § 1.

³ I. c. xxi. §§ 1, 2, 3.

⁴ I. c. xxiii. § 5.

⁵ c. xiii. § 2.

⁶ c. i. § 2 ; c. iii. § 5.

⁷ c. vii. § 2.

substantial fact can admit of none : heresies begun by Simon Magus, the founder, as he is ever represented to be, of Gnostic doctrines, which prevailed so widely over Christendom¹; pursued successively by Menander²; Saturninus³; Basilides⁴; Carpocrates⁵; Cerinthus⁶; the Ebionites⁷; the Nicolaitans⁸; Cerdon⁹; Marcion¹⁰; Tatian with his *Ἐγκρατεῖς* or Continentals¹¹; and consolidated and reduced to a system by Valentinus¹²; against whom, as the champion of the whole, the Fathers level their chief attacks.¹³ I have given a short pedigree of heresy, in order to show how very soon after the publication of the Gospel, it became active; and how sure, therefore, it was to draw to itself the attention of the Apostolic writers. “*Fabulas . . . quas Apostoli spiritus, his jam tunc pullulantibus seminibus hæreticis, damnare prævenit,*” as Tertullian expresses it¹⁴; “*Fables which the spirit of the Apostle (for the germs of these heresies were even then beginning to sprout), condemned by anticipation.*”

Thus take the opening of the Gospel of St. John: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” But the Gnostic theory was that the Word was not “*in the beginning,*” but was an *Æon*, one of a succession of beings, which originated from Bythus, the primeval God of all—was not “*with God,*” for according to that, he did not even fully know God—was not “*God,*” for he was produced by him, and there was a time when he was not; hence St. John’s repetition of the assertion, “*the same was in the beginning with God.*” Again, “*All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*” But the Gnostic creed was that all things were made by Demiurgus, an *Æon* far lower in the scale than even the Word. “*In him was life.*” But Life or *Ζωή* in the Gnostic genealogy was the mate of the Word, not itself the Word; the two being one of the earliest *Æonic* couples or syzygies. “*And the life was the light of men.*” But the Gnostic would have the Light to be a substance which Acha-moth attempted to grasp in vain, being hindered by Horus.¹⁵

¹ Irenæus, I. c. xxiii. § 4.

² § 5.

⁴ § 3.

⁶ c. xxvi. § 1.

⁷ § 2.

⁹ § 1.

³ c. xxiv. § 1.

⁵ c. xxv. § 1.

⁸ § 3.

¹⁰ § 2.

¹¹ c. xxviii. § 1.

¹³ IV. Præf. § 2.

¹⁴ Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos*, c. iii.

¹⁵ Irenæus, I. c. iv. § 1.

¹² c. xxxi. § 3.

I simply touch on these features of the Gnostic hypothesis in order to turn your thoughts to a further investigation of the relation between that hypothesis and the Gospel of St. John ; and to apprise you of the quarter to which you must direct your attention in order to develop much of the mystical language which prevails in the opening of that Gospel.

Or take the first Epistle of the same Apostle ; and observe how obscure is the following phraseology, when considered without any reference to the peculiar condition of the religious world at the time ; and how strongly it shows the need there is for commentators on the Epistles to make themselves acquainted with primitive ecclesiastical history. "Who is a liar, but he that denieth that *Jesus* is the Christ?"¹ "Whosoever shall confess that *Jesus* is the Son of *God*, *God* dwelleth in him, and he in *God*."² "Whosoever believeth that *Jesus* is the Christ is born of *God*."³ But if we recollect that in the earliest intimations we have of the doctrines of the Gnostics, we find those heretics making a separation between *Jesus* and *Christ* ; affirming the former to be a mere man, the latter to be a superior being which entered him by an illapse at his Baptism, and quitted him before his death ; we may well believe that the same or similar sentiments prevailed even in St. John's own time, and were probably the sentiments which called forth from him these emphatic declarations of the unity of the Godhead and the Manhood in one *Jesus Christ*.⁴

Again, in the Epistles of St. Paul there should seem to be still more allusions to this Gnostic heresy, so amply developed by the Fathers, but of which we at present know nothing except through them. Irenæus constantly speaks in a manner which shows that he entertained no doubt whatever, that St. Paul had the Gnostic in his mind when he offers so many cautions against the search after spurious knowledge. Thus, as one instance out of many. "It is better," says Irenæus, "that men should continue ignorant and unlearned, and yet by reason of charity be near to *God*, than have the appearance of being learned and skilful, and yet be found blasphemers of their Lord, by fashioning for themselves another *God the Father*. And therefore Paul exclaimed, 'knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth ;' not that he would blame a

¹ 1 John ii. 22.² iv. 15.³ v. 1.⁴ Irenæus, III. c. xvi.

real knowledge concerning God, for in that case he would be his own accuser ; but that he knew some persons who under a pretence of knowledge were puffed up so as to fall from the love of God ; and thus to imagine themselves to be perfect, whilst they were introducing an imperfect Demiurgus ; therefore, the Apostle, with a view to abate their pride about knowledge of this sort, says, ‘knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.’”¹ I bring forward this passage simply to show, that Irenæus made no question whatever of St. Paul having the Gnostics in his eye, in many of his observations in his Epistles ; and to prove it is not merely a fancy of modern times that we may find the key to much of the Apostle’s meaning in the sentiments of these heretics. Thus in the first Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul uses the following language,² “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and *oppositions of science falsely so called*, which some professing have erred concerning the faith.” This is a passage, which amongst others Irenæus recognises as referring to this Gnostic heresy. He adopts the terms of it indeed for the title of his work, as the preface to his fifth book indicates. “In hoc libro quinto operis universi quod est de traductione et eversione *falsò cognominatæ agnitionis*.” And surely nobody can read the strange speculations of the Gnostics, their Pleromas and their Æons, having no foundation in facts, and dethroning both God and Christ, without admitting that they could not be more aptly described than “as profane and vain babblings ;” or remark the antagonistic principles of which their scheme is full, Light and Darkness, God and Matter, a Supreme Deity and a refractory Demiurgus ; without acknowledging that the term *ἀντιθέσεις* was descriptive of its character. But if so, is it not an affair of great practical importance that the real enemy, against which the Apostle was in the first instance contending, should be thus unmasked ; and that it should be no longer supposed that his argument was meant to encourage in Timothy and his successors a contempt for human learning, as many have imagined, and lead ignorant teachers to shelter their incapacity to instruct under the precepts of an Apostle ?

¹ Irenæus, II. c. xxvi. § 1.

² Ἀντιθέσεις τῆς ψευδονύμου γνώσεως.—1 Tim. vi. 20, 21.

Again, in the Epistle to Titus,¹ St. Paul cautions him to “avoid *foolish questions, and genealogies*, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable,” says he, “and vain. A man that is an *heretic*,” he then proceeds, “after the first and second admonition, reject:” as though there was some connection between the former and the latter clause: between the “foolish questions and genealogies” and “heresy;” which there would be, if by these foolish questions and genealogies we understand the Gnostic doctrines and the genealogies of the Æons, which form so prominent a feature of that school; for the Apostle could scarcely condemn any attention that might be paid to *Jewish genealogies*; in which sense some have understood the passage, when two of the Gospels have been careful to preserve such, and when St. Paul himself appears to have been anxious in his preaching to establish the descent of Jesus Christ from David and from Abraham.² The “contentions and strivings about the law” therefore which succeed to the “foolish questions and genealogies,” may be very well supposed, consistently with the view I am now taking of this passage of St. Paul, to be those fables about successive emanations from God of which the Jewish Cabbala was full, and which fraternized with the dreams of the Gnostics. At any rate interpreters of St. Paul should be perfectly aware of these things, whatever weight they may attach to them; and not come to their work, the most difficult work of explaining these Epistles, and one which requires every help that can be found, unacquainted with any times but their own, and unimbued with any spirit but that of their own day.

Again, what can be the meaning, it may be asked, of St. Paul’s saying to Timothy,³ “And their word will eat as doth a canker, of whom is Hymenæus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the *resurrection is past already*: and overthrow the faith of some?” Possibly this passage also is to be explained by taking into account a tenet of the Gnostics, some of whom made a resurrection to be synonymous with Baptism as administered by them, when

¹ Titus iii. 9, 10.

² 2 Tim. ii. 8; Acts xiii. 23; Rom. i. 3; ix. 5; Heb. vii. 13, 14. See Dr.

Burton’s Bampton Lectures, p. 114.

³ 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

raised up from their previous state of ignorance, the parties who submitted to it became filled with knowledge, and in a certain sense died no more.¹ Indeed, Tertullian expressly affirms that St. Paul is contemplating a tenet of the Valentinians when he uses these expressions, as he is contemplating extravagancies of other sects of the Gnostic heretics when he uses other peculiar terms elsewhere. The whole paragraph is curious as proving even more conspicuously than the one I have just quoted from Irenæus, that the early Fathers regarded, as I have said, these primitive heresies, as the true key to much of the writings of the Apostles. It will be observed, it glances at some portions of those writings, which have already furnished me with examples. "Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians," says Tertullian, "takes note of those who *denied or doubted a resurrection*; an opinion proper to the Sadducees: Marcion, Apelles and Valentinus adopted it in part, and such other persons as dispute the resurrection of the flesh. In writing to the Galatians he inveighs against the observers of *circumcision and the law*: this is the heresy of Hebion. To Timothy he complains of those who *forbid marriage*: Marcion and Apelles his follower, held this tenet. He also touches those who said, that the *resurrection is already past*; such was the assertion of the Valentinians. Moreover, when he speaks of *endless genealogies*, Valentinus falls under his reprimand; whose Æon of some new name or other, and indeed several names, generates of his own Charis, Sense and Truth; these beget the Word and Life; they, Man and the Church: and such is the Ogdoad of Æons. Thence proceed ten other Æons; and from them twelve more, of strange names to make up the fable of thirty Æons. The same Apostle, when he rebukes those who are in bondage to the *elements*, points to a notion of Hermogenes, who holds that matter was not created, and compares it to God who was not created; and thus making as he does a goddess of the mother of the elements he may very well do service to her whom he likens unto God. John in the Revelation is ordered to reprove those, who ate things *offered to idols* and *committed fornication*: the Nicolaitans of that time are now the heresy of the Cainites. And

¹ Irenæus, I. c. xxiii. § 5. Origen | —Contra Celsum, V. § 22.
probably alludes to the same parties.

in his Epistle he calls those especially *Antichrists*, who denied that Christ had come in the flesh, and who did not think that Jesus was the Son of God: the former opinion Marcion held; the latter Hebion. But the system of sorcery of Simon, which does service to angels, and was itself counted among idolatries, was condemned by the Apostle Peter, in the person of Simon."¹ In other places Tertullian expresses the same sentiment no less confidently. In his "De Carne Christi," "When the Holy Spirit by one prophet says, 'I am God and beside me there is none other,' it looks forward to Marcion. When it exclaims in another to the same purport in the same manner, 'There was no God before me,' it hits the genealogies, as they call them, of the Æons of Valentinus. When, 'born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,' it replies to Hebion. When, 'Whosoever shall preach any other Gospel, even if he should be an angel from heaven, let him be accursed,' it directs its speech to the workings of the evil spirit of Apelles' virgin Philumene. When, 'he who denies that Christ is come in the flesh is antichrist,' it affirms the simple absolute quality of his flesh, in the ordinary acceptance of the term flesh, against all who cavil at it."²

¹ Paulus in primâ ad Corinthios notat negatores et dubitatores resurrectionis. Hæc opinio propria Sadducæorum; partem ejus usurpat Marcion, et Apelles, et Valentinus, et si qui alii resurrectionem carnis infringunt. Et ad Galatas scribens, invehitur in observatores et defensores circumcisionis et legis: Hebionis hæresis est. Timotheum instruens, nuptiarum quoque interdictores suggillat: ita instituunt Marcion et Apelles ejus secutor. Æque tangit eos, qui dicerent factam jam resurrectionem: id de se Valentiniani asseverant. Sed et cum genealogias indeterminatas nominat, Valentinus agnoscitur; apud quem Æon ille nescio qui novi et non unius nominis generat e suâ Charite Sensum et Veritatem; et hi æque procreant duos, Sermonem et Vitam; dehinc et isti generant Hominem et Ecclesiam: estque hæc prima ogdoas æonum. Exinde decem alii, et duodecim reliqui æones miris nominibus oriuntur in meram fabulam triginta æonum. Idem Apostolus, cum improbat elementis ser-

vientes, aliquid Hermogenis ostendit, qui, materiam non natam introducens, Deo non nato eam comparat, et ita matrem elementorum deam faciens, potest ei servire quam Deo comparat. Joannes vero in Apocalypsi idolothyta edentes et supra committentes jubet castigare: sunt et nunc alii Nicolaitæ, Caiana hæresis dicitur. At in epistolâ eos maxime anticristos vocat, qui Christum negarent in carne venisse, et qui non putarent Jesum esse Filium Dei: illud Marcion, hoc Hebion vindicavit. Simonianæ autem magiæ disciplina, angelis serviens, utique et ipsa inter idolatrias deputabatur, et a Petro Apostolo in ipso Simone damnabatur.—Tertullian, De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, c. xxxiii.

² Ideo etiam Marcionem prospiciens: Ego sum, inquit, Deus, et alius absque me non est. Et cum in alio idipsum eodem modo dicit: Ante me Deus non fuit, nescio quas illas Valentinianorum Æonum genealogias pulsat. Et, Non ex sanguine, neque ex carnis et viri

I think these paragraphs clearly prove, that in the opinion of the early Fathers at least, the heresies of their days (which in many of their features were those of the days of the Apostles themselves more fully developed) did impress the writings of the Apostles; that they must accordingly be taken into account by those who would get at the full meaning of those writings; and that to refer them entirely to the events of comparatively modern date, as though no others suited them, is to presume a good deal. Certainly ὕστεροι καιροὶ, "the last times," is a phrase which relates, as it is very well known, to the times which immediately preceded the dissolution of the Jewish commonwealth, the last of that ancient kingdom. And when St. Paul tells Timothy that in those times some should come who would "forbid to marry and command to abstain from meats;"¹ and when we have it on record that these two features were characteristic of a school of the Gnostics so early as Irenæus,² and that the principle which prompted these restrictions was a notion that all matter was radically corrupt, and that the less it was propagated or meddled with the better; we shall at once see the force of the Apostle's remark, which immediately follows, viz. "Every creature of God is good,"³ and the idea which was in his mind at the moment, connecting the former clause with this; his argument taking precisely the same turn as that of Irenæus, where he says, "the followers of Saturninus and Marcion, or Continents as they are called, preached abstinence from marriage and from animal meats, thus showing themselves ungrateful to God who made all things;"⁴ and we shall feel that there is no need perhaps to go further for the solution of the passage, and that if we do so we may fare worse.⁵

voluntate, sed ex Deo natus est, Hebræoni respondit. Æque, etiamsi angelus de cælo aliter evangelizaverit vobis quam nos, anathema sit; ad energema Apelleiæ virginis Philomenes filium dirigit. Certe, qui negat Christum in carne venisse, hic antichristus est; nudam et absolutam et simplici nomine naturæ suæ pronuntians carnem, omnes disceptatores ejus ferit.—De Carne Christi, c. xxiv.

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 1. 3.

² Nubere autem et generare a Satana

dicunt esse. Multi autem ex iis, qui sunt ab eo, et ab animalibus abstinent, per fictam hujusmodi continentiam seducentes multos.—Irenæus, I. c. xxiv. § 2.

³ 1 Tim. iv. 4.

⁴ Ἀπὸ Σατορνίνου καὶ Μαρκίανου οἱ καλούμενοι Ἐγκρατεῖς ἀγαμίαν ἐκήρυξαν . . . καὶ τῶν λεγομένων παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐμψύχων ἀποχὴν εἰσηγήσαντο ἀχαριστοῦντες τῷ πάντα πεποιηκότι Θεῷ.—Irenæus, I. c. xxviii. § 1.

⁵ See Dr. Burton's Bampton Lec-

It is not improbable that the very phraseology of the Apostolical Epistles has been tinged by the technical terms of the Gnostic school, and that, accordingly, some acquaintance with those terms is necessary to the full understanding of much of the language of those Epistles. Thus, "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length, and depth (*βάθος*), and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge (*γινῶναί τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ*), that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God (*εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ Θεοῦ*)."¹ Here *βάθος* akin to *βυθός*, *γνώσις*, *πλήρωμα*, are all of them terms of the most common use in the Gnostic vocabulary: as if the Apostle intended to suggest that the "love of Christ," which he was endeavouring to foster in the Ephesians, would impart to them far higher and nobler thoughts than all these heretical mysteries with their *βυθός* or primeval God, their *γνώσις*, or knowledge, falsely so called, and their *πλήρωμα*, or dwelling-place of their Æons. Or again, these Æons themselves seem to enter into the language of the Apostle, as when he says, "God hath spoken unto us by his Son, by whom also he made *the worlds* (*τοὺς αἰῶνας*):" as though he would imply that Christ was the Maker, not only of the universe, but of the Æons themselves; of all spiritual beings; whether they were, as he expresses it in another place,² "thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers."

IV.

I said that, besides developing the spirit in which the early Church interpreted the Old Testament, especially the ritual and prophetic parts of it; and besides affording a guide to much of the New Testament, by showing the opinions held by the early Church upon many leading questions since made matters of debate; and a key to much more of it by putting

tures, notes 60 and 61, and Bishop Pearson, Minor Theological Works, vol. ii. pp. 41-55. Concio IV. on 1 Tim. iv. 1. It may be here observed that Bishop Pearson, in his *Vindiciæ*, Pt. I. c. vi., understands the *ἀντίθεος πανουργία* mentioned in some verses quoted by Irenæus from a Senior quidam, I. c. xv. § 6, to mean Anti-Christ. He might

have proved that to be the meaning by a reference to I. c. xiii. § 1, where Marcus is called *πρόδρομος τοῦ Ἀντιχριστοῦ*, as in the passage in question he is called *πρόδρομος ἀντιθέου πανουργίας*, Anti-Christ being identified with these early heresies.

¹ Ephes. iii. 18, 19.

² Col. i. 16, 17.

us in possession of the heresies which infested the Church from the most primitive times, to which the Apostles often have an eye; the Fathers were further of use by furnishing many probable expositions of individual texts. I am far from maintaining that their comments are to be received in all instances: the aptness of the comment of course will depend in a great measure on the judgment and ability of the particular commentator: but I do say that, owing to the period at which they lived; following so closely in the wake of the Apostles themselves, as they did; and cast into a social position so similar to that in which the Epistles were written; there is a freshness and spirit in much of their expositions which distinguish them very greatly from those of more modern days; and a charm in the absence of all that manipulation of the meaning, which texts undergo at the hands of schools of theology in later times. I may not be able, on the spur of the moment, to produce the happiest examples of the interpretation of texts which the Fathers supply; but such as I may offer will serve to direct the attention to the kind of assistance they often yield us in mastering Scripture.

Thus, to take a simple case: "The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall *cut him asunder* (*διχοτομήσει αὐτόν*)."¹ The term *διχοτομήσει*, as applied to the servant who had forfeited his trust, and abused his master's property in his absence, finds an illustration in Tertullian, who speaks of an obsolete Roman law, by which the bankrupt debtor was condemned to be cut asunder by his creditors.²

Again, John's caution to the soldiers, "Do *violence* to no man, neither *accuse any falsely*,"³ is shown to be strictly appropriate to that class of his hearers, and in keeping with the times, by another phrase which drops from the same Father. He is enumerating the several enemies truth and the Gospel encountered. "As many as are strangers to it," says he, "are its foes: the Jews indeed naturally out of rivalry; the *soldiers ex concussione*," a legal term, implying extortion by threats or violence.⁴

¹ Matt. xxiv. 51.

² Sed et judicatos retro in partes secari a creditoribus leges erant.—Ter-

tullian, Apol. c. iv.

³ Luke iii. 14.

⁴ Tertullian, Apol. c. vii.

Again, "and they sent unto him their disciples *with the Herodians,*" to put the insidious question to Jesus about the tribute money.¹ Tertullian tells us² (though not in reference to this text) that the Herodians were persons who believed Herod to be the Christ. If so, the selection of these men by the Pharisees for their malicious errand was peculiarly well suited to the end they had in view.

Once more, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and *greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*"³ Thus the disciples were to do greater works than Jesus himself had done, prodigious as were his miracles. How so? Origen, no doubt, gives the true solution; that the spiritual wonders which the disciples would be able to effect on the souls of mankind, after the Comforter should have come, would exceed in dignity the physical ones of the Saviour himself. "I would venture to say that, according to the promise of Jesus, the disciples have done greater things than those sensible ones which Jesus did: for the eyes of the blind in soul are constantly opened; and the ears of those who have been deaf to the accents of virtue, listen eagerly to instruction concerning God and a blessed life with him; and many who were lame in the gait of their 'inner man,' as Scripture terms it, now that the Word hath healed them, not only leap, but leap as a stag, an animal hostile to serpents, and superior to all the poison of vipers; and cured of their former halting, they receive from Jesus authority to trample under their feet—those very feet which were infirm before—the malice of snakes and scorpions, and, in a word, all the power of the enemy, without injury to themselves."⁴

Again, "For this cause ought the woman to have power (or a covering) on her head, because of the angels."⁵ Modern interpreters of this text have resorted to various explanations of the term "angels," in order, apparently, to evade the literal one; the Romish abuse of worshipping angels having, as it should seem, excited a prejudice against acknowledging their

¹ Matt. xxii. 16.

² Prætermitto Phariseos, qui addita-
menta quædam legi adstruendo a Ju-
dæis divisi sunt: unde etiam hoc acci-
pere ipsum quod habent nomen, digni
fuerunt: cum hic etiam Herodianos,

qui Christum Herodem esse dixerunt.
—De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, c.
xlv.

³ John xiv. 12.

⁴ Origen, Contra Celsum, II. § 48.

⁵ 1 Cor. xi. 10.

reasonable presence about men, and their legitimate offices. But the Fathers in general take the text in its strict sense, for the most part evidently unconscious that it would admit of any other, and regard the angels as invisible partakers in the congregations of the faithful¹; present at their prayers²; ministers at their Baptism³; witnesses of their marriage⁴; and, accordingly, the admonition in the Marriage Service of the Salisbury Ritual runs thus: "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, of the angels, and all his saints, in the face of the congregation," &c.; some such form having no doubt existed from the earliest times.

Take one instance more. Few questions relating to the New Testament history have given rise to more intricate controversy than the amount of power left with the Jewish magistrates under the Roman government; whether it extended to the infliction of capital punishment or not. Lardner, in his "Credibility of the Gospel History," at great length denies it.⁵ Mr. Biscoe, in his "History of the Acts of the Apostles," at no less length maintains it.⁶ The texts introduced into the discussion are thoroughly conflicting. Thus we read on the one hand of Saul going with letters from the High Priest to Damascus, and on that authority prepared to bring men and women, who were Christians, bound to Jerusalem: of his "breathing out threatenings and slaughter:"⁷ of his "persecuting that way unto the death."⁸ We read of Tertullus saying concerning Paul, "Whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him out of our hands."⁹ And we read of the Jews declaring, "We never were in bondage to any man."¹⁰ On the other hand, we have these same Jews, when Pilate bid them "take Jesus and judge him according to their law," replying, "it

¹ Irenæus, I. c. viii. § 2. Origen, De Oratione, § 31. Theophylact, it is true, refers to an opinion of Clemens that they were *ροῦς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δικαίους*, but he pronounces it to be too refined a notion.

² Angelo adhuc orationis adstante.—Tertullian, De Oratione, c. xvi.

³ Sed in aquâ emundati sub angelo, Spiritui Sancto præparamur.—De Baptismo, c. vi.

⁴ Unde sufficiamus ad enarrandam

felicitem ejus matrimonii, quod Ecclesia conciliat, et confirmat oblatio, et obsignat benedictio, *angeli renuntiant*, Pater rato habet?—Ad Uxorem, II. c. ix.

⁵ Lardner, Credibility, Pt. I. Bk. I. c. ii.

⁶ Biscoe on the Acts, ch. vi.

⁷ Acts ix. 1, 2.

⁸ Acts xxii. 4.

⁹ Acts xxiv. 6, 7.

¹⁰ John viii. 33.

is not lawful for us to put any man to death.”¹ The circumstances attending the death of Stephen are a practical example of the difficulty of coming to a conclusion on the one side or the other ; some of the incidents seeming to indicate that the proceeding was a legal one ; others, that it was a violent and tumultuous one ; and all of them taken together perhaps arguing that it was a mixture of both. And, accordingly, our Church historians are at a loss what view to give of this transaction. Now there is a passage in Origen’s Epistle to Africanus, which I have not seen noticed by any of the disputants, that appears to me to furnish a clue to the whole question. In this Epistle, Origen is undertaking a sort of hasty defence (for he professes that he was not at the time in a condition to examine the matter with care) of the genuineness of the History of Susanna : and one of the objections to its genuineness urged by his friend being this, “How could they who were in captivity pass a sentence of death” (for sentence of death was passed on the elders²) ? Origen makes answer, “It is no extraordinary thing, when great nations have been conquered, for the victorious sovereign to allow his captives to make use of their own laws and courts. At this moment,” he then adds, “under the empire of the Romans, to whom the Jews are tributary, we know from our own experience what power the Ethnarch is permitted by Cæsar to exercise over them, so that he differs nothing from their king. And they have their trials according to law *by stealth* ; and some are even *condemned to death* : all this not done, to be sure, with perfect boldness ; *but still with the connivance of the Emperor*. Now this we can speak to with confidence, having been ourselves long living in the country of this people. And yet only two tribes, those of Judah and Benjamin, and perhaps that of Levi, are reported to have come under the rule of the Romans : whereas the Israelites consisted of ten other tribes besides Judah ; and it is probable the Assyrians were satisfied with having them captives, and let them retain their own courts.”³ The Jews, therefore, it should seem from Origen’s account, who speaks like one intimately acquainted with the facts of the case, were and were not in the enjoyment of their own laws, and their own tribunals. Their

John xviii. 31.

² History of Susanna, v. 62.

³ Origen, Epist. ad Africanum, § 14.

magistrates acted, but still under sufferance : the Romans at any moment ready to declare their own supreme authority, and suspend their functions. A position like this explains the equivocal language we find used on the subject ; as well as the indecent haste with which the Jew sometimes hurried on the consummation of his own decree. And a phrase in Justin confirms the information furnished by Origen. For in his "Dialogue with Trypho," when applying a reproachful passage of Isaiah to the Jews, against whom that treatise is directed, "And truly," says he, "your hand is lifted up to do evil" (as the prophet had described), "since even when ye had slain Christ, ye do not repent, but hate and *murder* us, who through him believe in the God and Father of the universe, *as often as ye receive the power.*"¹

Who can deny that authors who enable us to clear up obscurities of this kind are of great value ? or fail to see that it is their early date, and that alone, which very often qualifies them for doing this ; and that no substitute or equivalent can be found for that advantage in commentators of modern days, let their sagacity and other accomplishments be what they may ?

¹ 'Οσάκις αν λάβητε εξουσίαν.—Justin Martyr, Dial. § 133.