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**PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.**

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**PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY;**

OR,

**THE RELIGION**

OF THE

**Ancient Christians**

IN THE FIRST AGES OF THE GOSPEL.

IN THREE PARTS.

BY WILLIAM CAVE, D. D.

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ABRIDGED, AND ADAPTED TO MODERN USE,

WITH

**Additional Reflections,**

BY JOHN BREWSTER, M. A.,

RECTOR OF EGGLESCLIFFE, IN THE COUNTY OF DURHAM.

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“ANTIQUAM EXQUIRITE MATREM.”—VIRG.

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1825.

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“ IN the early ages, it was not by preaching alone, even after the cessation of the miraculous powers, that paganism was induced to take up the cross of Christ. It was by observing the surprising effects produced by the gospel in the hearts and lives, not merely of eminent saints and preachers, but of the lowest among those who had embraced it. The christians had a distinguishing character : they believed in Christ, and they bore in their habits the impress of their faith.”—*Bishop Middleton's (of Calcutta) Sermon at Bombay.*

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THE  
EDITOR'S PREFACE.

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A RE-PERUSAL of DR. CAVE'S "Primitive Christianity" has convinced me of its utility in answering many objections of modern unbelievers; of those especially, who, being ignorant of the beneficial effects of the gospel, in the earliest periods of its history, accommodate their reasonings concerning it to the unsound principles, or degenerate practices, of professing christians of the present day. In the original work there is, if I may so say, a superfluity of evidence, extracted from the Fathers of the church, on every topic, more than sufficient to answer the purpose of selection; at least, with any view of making the book a *manual* of information. The reduction of this, without detracting either from the evidence or illustration, has been attempted by the present Editor. Thus the valuable materials are brought within a narrower com-

pass ; and, with a few alterations of language, where particular words or phrases had become obsolete, the Editor trusts, that under the blessing of God, this *primitive* work may be submitted to the candid perusal both of those who doubt, and of those who believe the gospel, in the full assurance of hope, that, in either case, those who seek the truth, *the truth will make them free*, and deliver them from the delusions of sin, and the fatal prejudices of error.

The consideration which leads us to value and to improve the following historical remarks, is, that the beautiful structure of the church of Christ, such as it is here described, rests solely and exclusively on the *faith of Christ* ; and that, unless the foundation had been of the soundest kind,—its motives the purest which were ever delivered to man,—its terms holy, and just, and good,—its means gracious, and its end salvation, no such pleasing picture as that of the *primitive christian* would have delighted the eye, or taken possession of the heart. When we argue back to those golden days of the church, we may well be ashamed of our defective imitation.

But as the infallible word of truth encourages us to look forward to a restoration of

the primitive church, under the well-known figure of the *spiritual Jerusalem*, we may with confidence put forth our hand to the *golden reed which is to measure the city* ; and though we may find no temple built of perishable materials, yet shall we have no reason for regret, for *the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it ; and the glory of God shall lighten it ; and the Lamb is the light thereof : and the nations of them which are saved, shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour into it.\**

\* Rev. c. 21.

THE  
AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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No sooner did I arrive at years capable of discerning, but I began to enquire into the grounds of that religion into which I had been baptized; which I soon found to be so noble and excellent,—in all its laws so just and rational,—in all its designs so divine and heavenly,—so perfective of the principles,—so conducive to the happiness of human nature,—a religion so worthy of God,—so advantageous to man,—built upon such firm and uncontrovertible evidence,—confirmed by such proper and powerful arguments, that I was presently convinced of the divinity that resided in it, and concluded with myself (and I thought I had reason so to do) that surely the disciples of this religion must be the most excellent persons in the world. But, alas! a few years' experience of the world shewed

me that this was the conclusion of one who conversed only with books, and the reasonings of his own mind. I had not been long an observer of the manners of men, but I found them generally so corrupt, and contrary to the rules of this holy religion, that if a modest and honest heathen was to estimate christianity by the lives of its professors, he would certainly determine it to be one of the worst religions in the world. Offended at this, I resolved to "stand in the ways and see, and enquire for the old way," the paths in which the ancient christians walked: for I could not think that this had always been the state of christianity; and that if the footsteps of true christian piety and simplicity were any where to be found, it must be in those times when *the blood of Christ was warm in the breasts of christians, and faith yet glowed in the hearts of the believers.*\*

In pursuance of this design, I applied myself more diligently to the reading of the first Fathers and monuments of the church, especially for the three or four first centuries; and have since endeavoured to exhibit *a specimen of primitive christianity*, in some of the

\* Jerom ad Demet. H. i. p. 68.

most considerable branches and instances of religion. Here the reader will find a piety active and zealous, shining through the blackest clouds of malice and cruelty;—afflicted innocence triumphant, notwithstanding all the powerful or politic attempts of men or devils;—a patience unconquerable under the greatest persecutions;—a charity truly catholic and unlimited;—a simplicity and upright carriage in all transactions;—a sobriety and temperance remarkable to the admiration of their enemies;—and, in short, he will see the divine and holy precepts of the christian religion drawn into action, and the most excellent *genius* and spirit of the gospel breathing in the hearts and lives of these good old christians.

To this representation of their lives and manners, I have added some account of the ancient rites and ceremonies of the church. I have studiously avoided controversies, it being no part of my design to enquire, what was the judgement of the Fathers in disputable cases; but, what was their practice, and by what rules they governed and conducted their lives. I have followed St. Paul's distribution of religion, into piety towards God,

sobriety towards ourselves, and righteousness towards others. If he that reads this, shall reap any delight and satisfaction by it, or be in any way induced to imitate these primitive duties, I shall think my labour well bestowed : and may God give a blessing to it, for Jesus Christ's sake.—Amen.



# Ancient Authorities

ON WHICH THE FOLLOWING ARGUMENT  
IS FOUNDED.

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IT may be of use to those not conversant in these studies, to be informed that the early writers of the church of Christ have generally been styled **THE FATHERS**, from the value attached to the authenticity of their works, and from the veneration due to their characters.

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## First Century.

A. D. 65.

**CLEMENT, BISHOP OF ROME.**

“Clement’s first epistle to the Corinthians was so highly esteemed in the primitive church, that we are told that it was wont to be read in its assemblies.”—*Archbishop Wake*.

## Second Century.

A. D. 101.

IGNATIUS.

“ His epistles are the true *indices* of the piety and divine temper of his mind. Polycarp says, *They contain instructions and exhortations to faith and patience, and whatever is necessary to build up in the religion of our Lord and Saviour.*” — *Cave.*

A. D. 108.

POLYCARP, BISHOP OF SMYRNA.

“ Irenæus speaking of his epistle to the Philippians, says, *It is a most perfect and absolute epistle, whence they that are careful of their salvation, may learn the character of his faith, and the truth which he preached.*” “ It is a pious and truly christian epistle, furnished with short and useful precepts and rules of life, and penned with the modesty and simplicity of the apostolic times, valued by the ancients next to the writings of the holy canon.” — *Cave.*

A. D. 140.

JUSTIN MARTYR,

“ One of the most learned and most early writers of the eastern church, not long after the apostles.” — *Eusebius.*

“ In the deliberate exercise of his best judgement, he embraced christianity, regardless of his interest and reputation in the world. His understanding and his heart were equally convinced and touched; and the remainder of his life corresponded with the beginning.”—*Collinson*.\*

A. D. 167.

IRENÆUS, BISHOP OF LYONS,

“ A disciple of Polycarp, by whom he was sent to preach the gospel among the Gauls, and whose labours were singularly useful to the church. He turned his pen against its internal and domestic enemies, by attacking the monstrous errors which were adopted by many of the primitive christians.”—*Mosheim*.

A. D. 170.

“ ATHENAGORAS

“ deserves a place among the estimable writers of this age. He was a philosopher of no mean reputation, and his ‘Apology for the Christians,’ as well as his ‘Treatise upon the Resurrection,’ afford striking proofs of his learning and genius.”—*Mosheim*.

\* See “ A Key to the writings of the principal Fathers of the church, who flourished during the three first centuries, preached at the Bampton Lectures, Oxford, 1813.—By the Rev. John Collinson, M. A., Rector of Gateshead.”

A. D. 192.

## CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA.

“ To commend this excellent man, after the great things spoken of him by the ancients, were to hold a candle to the sun.”—*Cave*. “ Clement had embraced the eclectic philosophy, and his great object is to make all kinds of learning and knowledge subservient to the purposes of righteousness, and the establishment of christian faith.”—*Collinson*.

A. D. 192.

## TERTULLIAN.

“ This author was the first of the Fathers who wrote in Latin, in a style harsh and abrupt indeed, but keen and sententious, and which sometimes has an impassioned eloquence.”—*Collinson*. “ His works were designed to explain and defend the truth, and to nourish pious affections in the breasts of christians. He was by birth a Carthaginian, who, having first embraced the profession of the law, became afterwards a proselyte of the church, and concluded by *adopting the heretical visions of Montanus*.”—*Mosheim*. “ His errors and unsound opinions are frequently noticed by S. Augustine and the ancients.”—*Cave*. “ That which he borrowed from this sect, for it appears certain that he never embraced the whole of their erroneous and enthusiastic views, does not seem to have exercised any material influence on his theory of scriptural interpretation.”—*Conybeare*. *Bamp. Lect.*

### Third Century.

A. D. 230.

“ORIGEN

“was a pupil of Clement of Alexandria, and a prodigy of intellectual powers. He was the only primitive writer of the times who was educated a christian. He wrote commentaries on every book of scripture, and his testimony is justly deemed of great importance in supporting the present canon of the New Testament: he writes in a figurative and allegorical style. An ancient author has said of him, *Where he is in the right, he has not an equal, since the days of the apostles; and where he is in the wrong, no man errs more shamefully.*”—Collinson. “After all, he was guilty of great mistakes and rash propositions, which the largest charity cannot excuse.”—Cave.

A. D. 250.

CYPRIAN, BISHOP OF CARTHAGE,

“A man of eminent abilities and flowing eloquence. His works breathe such a noble and pathetic spirit of piety, that it is impossible to record them without the warmest feelings of enthusiasm.”—Mosheim. “The authority of this Father has been more appealed to than that of any other writer in the three first centuries; and there have been fourteen editions of his works, which are considered, both by Roman catholics and protestant episcopalians, as a bulwark against schism and dissent in the church.”—Collinson.

## MINUTIUS FELIX.

“ His dialogue, under the name of Octavius, effaces with judgement, spirit, and force, the calumnies and reproaches that were cast upon the primitive christians.”—*Mosheim*.

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THIS short abstract of an account of these primitive Fathers may serve as a specimen of the other well-known writers, whose works illustrate, and whose characters adorn the history of the ancient church.

“ It cannot be doubted,” says Archbishop Wake, in his preface to ‘*The genuine Epistles of the apostolical Fathers*,’ “ that the discourses were truly written by those whose names they bear, that the writers lived near the apostolic times, and that they represent *the doctrine, government, and discipline* of the church, as they received it from the apostles,—the apostles from Christ, and that blessed Spirit, who directed them both in what they taught, and in what they ordained.”

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# PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY;

OR, THE

RELIGION OF THE ANCIENT CHRISTIANS IN THE  
FIRST AGES OF THE GOSPEL.

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## Part First.

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### CHAPTER I.

*Things charged upon the primitive Christians,  
respecting their Religion.*

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NO sooner did the SON OF GOD appear in the world, to establish the most excellent religion that ever was communicated to mankind, but he met with the most fierce and vigorous opposition;—persecuted, and devoted to death as soon as he was born; followed all his life with fresh assaults of malice and cruelty; his credit traduced and slandered,—his doctrine despised and slighted,—and himself, at last, put to death with the most exquisite arts of torture and disgrace. And “if they thus served the master of the house, how much more them of the household? the disciple not being above his master, nor the ser-

vant above his lord:" therefore, when he gave commission to his apostles to publish this religion to the world, he told them beforehand what hard and unkind reception they must expect; that " he sent them forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, that they should be delivered up to the councils, and scourged in the synagogues, and be brought before kings and governors, and be hated of all men for his name's sake;" and so high did the opposition arise upon the account of religion, that men should violate some of the nearest laws of nature, " betray their friends and kinsfolk; the brother delivering up the brother to death, and the father the child; the children rising up against their parents, and causing them to be put to death." This he well foresaw (and the event proved it) would be the fate of its first appearing in the world. And, indeed, considering the present state and circumstances of the world at that time, it could not reasonably be expected that the christian religion should meet with a better entertainment; for the genius and nature of its doctrine was such, as was almost impossible to escape the frowns and displeasure of men. It was a doctrine which restrained their lusts and pleasures, and offered violence to their native inclinations,—that required the greatest strictness and severity of life, obliged them to *deny themselves, to take up their cross, and follow the steps of a poor crucified Saviour*, with little other encouragement than the invisible rewards of another world. It introduced *new* rites and ceremonies, unknown to those of former ages, and such as undermined the

received and established principles of that religion, which, for so many generations, had governed the world; it revealed and brought to light such truths as were not only contrary to the principles of men's education, but many of them above the reach of natural comprehension, too deep for the line of human reason to fathom or find out.

On this account, no sooner did christianity appear in the world, but it was everywhere spoken against. Princes and potentates, and the greatest powers and policies of the world, for some ages, confederated and combined together to extirpate it; and certainly, if arms and armies—if strength and subtilty—if malice and cruelty could have suppressed it, it had been wholly destroyed in its infancy and first delivery into the world. But notwithstanding all these oppositions, it lifted up its head in triumph, and out-braved the fiercest storms of persecution; and, as Tertullian told their enemies, “by every exquisite act of cruelty, they did but tempt others to join their party;—the oftener they were mowed down, the faster they sprang up again, the blood of christians making the soil of the church more fertile.”\*

Upon this, the great enemy of mankind changed his ground, and endeavoured to undermine what he could not openly subdue, by influencing the minds of men with false and unjust prejudices against christianity, charging the christians with all those crimes which could render them, or their religion, infamous

\* Apol. c. ult. p. 40.

and vile. The charges were such as, 1st, respected their religion; 2dly, as concerned their outward state and condition; and, 3dly, such as related to their moral carriage and behaviour.

The first charges against christianity were its *impiety* and *novelty*. With respect to the former of these it was called *atheism*, as an affront to their religion, and undermining the very being and existence of their gods. Julian, the emperor, seldom calls christianity by any other name. In answer to this charge, the christians pleaded especially to these three things:—

First, that the gentiles were for the most part *incompetent* judges of these things, being wholly ignorant of the true state of the christian doctrine, and therefore unfit to pronounce sentence against it. Justin Martyr says of Crescens, the philosopher, that “he talked about things he did not understand, feigning things, to comply with the humour of his disciples, reproaching the doctrine of Christ, and discovering a wicked and malignant temper;—or, if he did understand its greatness and excellency, charging upon it what he knew to be false, and concealing his inward sentiments and convictions.”

Secondly, they were induced to confess the charge, that, according to the vulgar notion which the heathens entertained of their deities, they were atheists, that is, strangers and enemies to them; that the gods of the gentiles were at best but demons and impure spirits, “in whose worship there are many things that deserve to be laughed at, and others that call

for pity and compassion." No wonder that the christians were not ashamed to be called atheists, with respect to such deities, and such a religion as this.

Thirdly, in the strict and proper notion of atheism, they no less truly than confidently denied the charge, and appealed to their severest adversaries, whether those who owned such principles as they did, could reasonably be styled *atheists*? "Although we profess ourselves atheists," says Justin Martyr, "with respect to those whom you esteem gods, yet not in respect of the true God, the parent and fountain of wisdom and righteousness, and all other excellencies and perfections, who is infinitely free from the least contagion, or spot of evil: *Him*, and his *only begotten Son* (who instructed us and the whole society of good angels in these divine mysteries), and the *Spirit of prophecy*, we worship and adore, honouring them in truth, and with the highest reason, and ready to communicate these things to any one that is willing to learn them, as we ourselves have received them."\*

### REFLECTION.

The primitive christians were censured by the heathen, among whom they dwelt, as atheists and unbelievers; let us take care, lest their descendants, the sceptics of the present day, should have occasion to retort upon us, modern christians, a *practical atheism*, no less offensive to the author of

\* Ap. i. p. 56.

our religion. To sin with greater light, and, as it may be thought, with fewer prejudices, is an aggravated guilt. Their answer to their enemies was easy. May ours be the same! Nothing but a pure faith, operating by love, can demonstrate to an insidious world, how a genuine disciple of the gospel should live; and nothing but the same faith, displaying itself through the animating graces of the spirit, in the variety of trying scenes which human life offers to our view, extending even to the grave, can shew us how a christian ought to die.

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## CHAPTER II.

*Of the Novelty that was charged upon Christianity.*

THE charge of atheism proving too weak and ineffectual, the next charge was the *lateness* and *novelty* of christianity.

This charge began betimes; when St. Paul preached at Athens, we find this the first thing charged upon him, that "he was a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection."\* "Even after christianity," says Eusebius,† "had been settled for some hundred years in the world, and was become the prevailing religion, and had in a manner banished all others, yet this

\* Acts xvii. 18.

† Præp. Ev. lib. i. c. 2.

charge still continued." Thus Julian calls christianity the *new doctrine*, the same title which had been given to it by Lucian; when speaking of our Saviour, he calls him the great man that was crucified in Palestina, who introduced that *new religion* into the world.\*

To this indictment, we find the christians made two especial pleas:

First, that the charge was not wholly and universally true; for besides that many principles of christianity were the same with the law of nature, the christian religion was in substance the same with that of the ancient Jews, whose religion claimed the precedence of all others in the world. "The ancient patriarchs," says Eusebius, "were the christians of the old world:"† and again,—“Whatever useful and excellent notions the great masters of religion amongst the heathens had amongst them, it is plain they borrowed, or more truly *stole*, them from the ancient Jews.” Upon this consideration, the accusation was unjust and false, and christianity appears the oldest religion in the world.

Secondly, admit the christian religion, in a more limited and restrained sense, to be of a far *later* standing than the religion of the gentiles, yet, they pleaded, it was infinitely reasonable that they should change for the better, whenever the occasion offered itself to them; that novel truth was better than an-

\* De Mort. Peregrin. tom ii. p. 762.

† Demonst. Ev. lib. i. c. 5.



cient error. “*That old age,*” says Ambrose,\* “has true cause to blush, that is ashamed to reform. It is not multitude of years that makes grey hairs worthy of praise and honour. No age is too late to learn, nor is it shame to grow better.” “It is natural to all mankind to prefer better before what is worse, profitable before what is useless, and to seek after what we are assured is more grateful and excellent: therefore, when you charge us with apostacy from the religion of the ancients, you should rather consider the *cause* than the *action*; and not so much upbraid us with what we have *left*, as examine what it is we have *gained*.”†

To a part of this charge the heathen objected, that, if God’s sending Christ into the world was so great a blessing, why did this Saviour of mankind come no *sooner* to reveal this religion, to lead men into the truth, to tell the world who this true God was, and to reduce us to the adoration of him? To this, the same author replies, that he could not tell; that it were easy to retort the same captious question respecting their own gods. If there was reason in one case, there was also in the other; but to assign a proper and particular reason was impossible; it not being within the power of such a short-sighted creature as man, to fathom the depths of the divine councils, or to discover the ways, or methods, by which he acts; these things being known only to Him who is the grand parent and sovereign lord and governor

\* Ep. 2.

† Arnobius Adv. Gent. Lib. ii. p. 40.

of all things: that although we are not able to assign the cause why a thing comes to pass in any particular manner, yet this does not at all conclude against the thing itself, or that it is less credible, when it possesses otherwise the most clear and unquestionable evidence and demonstration. In particular, he adds, that our Saviour cannot be said to have been lately sent in respect of God, because in respect of eternity there is nothing late; where there is neither beginning nor end, there can be nothing too soon,—nothing too late. Time, indeed, is computed by parts and terms, but these have no place in a perpetual and uninterrupted series of eternal ages. What if that state of things to which he came to bring relief, required that *season* of time to come in? What if the condition of ancient and modern times were not alike in this case; or called for somewhat different methods of cure? It may be, the great God then chose to send Christ, when the state of mankind was more broken and shattered, and human nature became more weak and unable to help itself. This we are sure of, that if what so lately came to pass had been necessary to have been done some thousand years ago, the supreme Creator would have done it; or had it been necessary to have been done thousands of years hence, nothing could have forced God to have anticipated the settled periods of time one moment; for all his actions are managed by fixed and eternal reasons; and what he has once determined, cannot be frustrated by any change or alteration. Thus easily and satisfactorily did the primitive

christians reply to the double imputation of impiety and novelty.

### REFLECTION.

Novelty! there can be no novelty when *the gospel was preached to Abraham*; and when a deliverer (obscurely, perhaps, as to the person, but clearly as to the fact) was promised to our first father as a merciful dispensation, indicative of the restoration of him, and his posterity, from the painful effects of his disobedience. Ignorance there may have been, and sin there may have been, but *novelty* there could not have been, unless we consider all the parts of the moral government of the world, as disjointed and totally independent of each other. There is the purest elegance of connection in all the doctrines of christianity. Scripture is always consistent with itself. The true christian, therefore, should be a consistent creature; for till he become strange to the gospel, the gospel will never become strange to him; for *when the word of the Lord goeth forth, it giveth light and understanding to the simple.*

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### CHAPTER III.

*Things charged upon the Christians, respecting their outward Condition.*

THE second charge which the enemies of christianity made use of to render christians vile and despicable,

related to their external state and condition in the world. This was divided into two parts; first, that they were generally very mean and inconsiderable persons; and, secondly, that they were an useless and unserviceable people, nay pernicious and mischievous to the world.

1. The *sum* of the answer of Origen\* to the first of these charges, that they were men of the lowest and meanest rank, neither considerable for their parts or learning, nor for their quality and estates, was this:—that the *christian doctrine* invites and calls men to wisdom, as appears from the writings of the Jews of old, and the scriptures of the New Testament, wherein we find many singularly eminent for learning—Moses, Solomon, Daniel, &c. of old, and the blessed Jesus made choice of such disciples as those to whom he judged the fittest to communicate the secrets of his religion, and privately opened and explained to them, what he only delivered in parables and similitudes to others; that he promised to “send forth prophets, wisemen, and scribes,”† for divulging and propagating his doctrine; that if he any where seem to reflect severely upon wisdom, or human learning, (which probably may be the first rise of this charge,) he only censures the *abuse*, never intending to blame the thing itself; that when he prescribes the properties of a *true bishop*, or governor of the church, he requires this as one necessary qualification—that “he be *apt to teach*, and *able by sound*

\* P. 137.

† Matt. xxiii. 34.

*doctrine* both to exhort and convince the gainsayers:"\* that we are so far from prohibiting any, that we are ready to receive the wise, the learned, and the prudent, provided the rude [ignorant], simple, and unlearned be not excluded; for to them also the gospel promises, and provides a remedy, making them meet for God. Learning, and the study of the arts, and prudence [wisdom], are so far from being an hindrance to the knowledge of God, that they greatly help and advance it. Christians are so far from admitting all indiscriminately into their society, that they first examine the minds of those they desire to become their hearers, before they receive them into the congregation; and when they perceive them fully resolved to lead a pious and religious life, then they admit them in their *distinct orders*; some, that are newly admitted, but *not baptized*; and others, that have given some evidence and demonstration of their purpose to live as becomes christians. Governors are appointed to inspect and enquire into the life and manners of those who have been thus admitted, that they may expel and dismiss such *candidates* of religion as do not answer their profession; heartily receiving those that do, and, by daily conversations, building them up, and making them better. We reclaim women from immodesty, from separating from their husbands, from the wild extravagances of the sports and theatres, and from all superstition. The youth, who are addicted to luxury and vice, we

\* Tit. i. 9.

restrain, by displaying the divine vengeance for profligate offenders; and openly promise eternal happiness to those who adhere to the rules of the divine law,—who set God always before their eyes, and in all their actions endeavour to approve themselves to him. Arnobius, urging the triumphant power and efficacy of the christian faith, says, “Who would not believe it, when he sees in how short a time it has conquered so great a part of the world; when men of so great understanding, *orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, physicians, and philosophers*, have renounced their former sentiments, and have embraced the doctrines of the gospel.”\*

Nor were the christians then more despised for their weakness and ignorance than for their meanness and poverty. This charge (though the goodness of any religion depends not upon the greatness of its professors) was untrue. Tertullian says,† “though we are men of quite another way, yet we have filled all places among you;—your cities, islands, castles, corporations, councils, nay, your armies themselves,—your tribes, companies, yea, the palace, the senate, and courts of justice, *only your temples we have left you free.*” Pliny, in his letter to the Emperor, tells him, that “christianity had not only overrun city and country, but that it had infected many of every sex, age, and order of men”‡

\* Adv. Gent. lib. ii. p. 21. † Apol. c. xxxvii. p. 30.

‡ Lib. x. Ep. 97. ●

## REFLECTION.

Every age, since the age of Origen, Tertullian, and Pliny, has been adding testimony to the truth of these observations. Perhaps the era of the reformation is that which I would principally select, for instances of genuine learning and pure religion united, and offering to the world the most beneficial effects. So far was the extension of human learning from detracting from the purity of religious faith, or the stability of the evidences of revelation, that every day added one pillar more to their support. That learning, in the hands of some mischievous individuals, might bring some evils with it, will not be denied; but these evils originated more in the heart than in the head: for under every disadvantage, learning and knowledge triumphed still. Though St. Paul says, "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called;" the words *after the flesh* form the distinction. Wisdom and nobility are no invincible obstructions to conversion, and where inveterate depravity of heart does not produce *resistance to the spirit*, it pleases God to make them strong bulwarks of the christian faith; and when we see them marshalled on the side of religion, they add to the weight of argument, and corroborate the historic facts recorded in the writings of the primitive fathers. And further, the pure doctrines of christianity receive their warmest support in the bosoms of the wise, who duly esti-

mate the value of revelation, *as revelation*, as proceeding from the unerring wisdom of an all-wise, all-gracious, and all-powerful God.

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CHAPTER III.—CONTINUED.

*Things charged upon the Christians, respecting their outward Condition.*

THE primitive christians were charged, in the next place, as a very useless and unserviceable people, that contributed nothing to the happiness of the commonwealth; nay, as destructive and pernicious to human society, as the procuring cause of all those mischiefs and calamities that befel the world.

To the first part of this charge Tertullian\* answers, “How can this be, when we live amongst you, have the same diet, habit, manner, and way of life? We are no Brachmans, or Indian Gymnosophists, who live in woods, and banish themselves from all civil life:—we are not unmindful of our Creator, and, therefore, despise none of his creatures, though careful to use them with temperance and sobriety; wherefore, we live not in the world without making use of your markets, shambles, baths, taverns, shops, stables, your marts, and other ways of human com-

\* Apol. c. xlii. p. 33.



merce:—we go to sea with you, bear arms, till, and improve the ground, use merchandise,—we undergo trades amongst you, and expose our works to your use; and how then we can seem unserviceable to your affairs, I see not?” But besides this, they pleaded that their religion was *beneficial* to the world, and, *in its own nature*, contributed to the peace and happiness of mankind. They did not, indeed, deny that some of the primitive christians declined engaging in wars, and were not forward in undertaking places of public authority and power; but these, it is remarked, were only the opinions of some private persons, and not the current practice or determination of the church. Where these things could be done without offering violence to their religion and their conscience, they neither shunned war, nor declined public offices.

They further add, that they sought to reclaim men from vice and sin to a good and virtuous life; by which means, (besides that they provided for men's highest and nearest interest—*the interest of their souls*, and their eternal interest in another life,) they greatly consulted the peace and welfare of the places where they lived; for vicious and wicked men are the pests and plagues of human society. This is the great triumphant argument with which Origen, on all occasions, exalts the *honour of christianity*.\* “Enquire into the lives of some of us,” he says; “compare our former and our present course, and you will ob-

\* Adv. Cels. lib. i.

serve in what filthiness and impieties men were involved before they entertained the *christian doctrine* ;” but since that time, how gentle and moderate, how grave and constant, they are become;—and some so inflamed with the love and purity of christianity, that they forbear even what they lawfully might enjoy ! How extensively are the churches of God, founded by Christ, spread over all nations ; consisting of such as are converted from innumerable evil ways to a better mind. “ The country,” he says, “ is much more beholden to christians than the rest of men, whilst they teach men piety towards God, the tutelar guardian of the country, and shew them the way to that heavenly city that is above, which they that live well may attain to, though here they dwell in the smallest city in the world. Nor do the christians thus employ themselves because they shun the public offices of civil life ; but only reserve themselves for the more divine and necessary services of the church, in order to the good and happiness of men : for they think it very just and reasonable that they should take care of all men ;—of them in their own party in particular, that they may every day make them better ;—of others, that they may draw them to the belief and practice of piety and religion, that, so worshipping God in truth, and doing what they can to instruct others, they may be united to the great God, and to his blessed Son, who is the wisdom, truth, and righteousness, and by whom it is that every one is converted to a pious and religious life.”\*

\* Lib. viii.

## 18 THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS TRADUCED

And where the gospel did not reclaim men from their vices and vanities, and convert them to the religion of the crucified Saviour, it refined their understandings, and filled their minds with more practical notions respecting it than they had before. The philosophers wrote in a diviner strain, entertained more honourable and worthy sentiments about God and religion, and the duties of men in their several capacities, than those of their sect that were before them. The genius and spirit of the gospel, indeed, seemed to fly abroad, and to breathe in a freer air, and thus could not but leave some tincture and savour upon the spirits of men, though its most inveterate enemies.

Secondly, the christians replied that they ordinarily wrought such miracles as were incomparably beneficial to the world—in curing diseases, raising the dead, and rescuing possessed persons from the cruelty of the devil; for in the primitive times possessed persons were more numerous than in the ages before or since; divine providence permitting it to be so, by these means to recommend christianity to the world. “Innumerable,” says Irenæus,\* “are the gifts which God has everywhere bestowed upon the church, by which, in the name of the crucified Jesus, many and great miracles are daily done, to the great advantage of the world. Though I do not agree to all the miracles which are reported by S. Hierom in the lives of Hilarion, Paulus, &c., yet

\* Adv. Hæres. lib. ii. p. 57.

doubtless many were true and real; God withdrawing this extraordinary power as christianity gained faster footing in the world, and leaving those standing methods by which it was to be managed and governed to the end of the world.

### REFLECTION.

“ In the religion of Christ, we see a spirit of meekness, mercy, gentleness, humanity, and kindness, which has been for more than eighteen hundred years contending with the evils generated by paganism, has actually banished some of them from the face of the earth, has greatly mitigated and softened others, is gradually undermining all the rest, and has already given so different a colour to the whole system of human affairs, has introduced so large a portion of benevolence and mutual good-will into the minds and manners of men, into all the various relations of social, civil, and domestic life, as plainly shews the sacred source from whence it springs. Philosophy (both ancient and modern) is cruel, and could not be the author of such blessings as these. There could be but one author of them, THE GOD OF ALL CONSOLATION AND JOY.”—*Beneficial Effects of Christianity, by Bielby Porteus, D. D., late Bishop of London.*

## CHAPTER IV.

*The Charges brought against the Christians,  
respecting their Lives and Manners.*

THE general charge against the primitive christians was in respect to their moral carriage and behaviour; and, in particular, they were continually accused of sacrilege, sedition, and high treason;—of incest, and promiscuous mixtures;—of murder, and eating the flesh of infants at their sacramental feasts. The particular answers to these horrid charges shall be considered hereafter; but their general vindication is comprised in a narrow compass.

First, their religion, and way of life, were admired by all. “Who,” says S. Clement to the Corinthians,\* “did ever dwell among you, that did not approve of your excellent and unshaken faith—that did not wonder at your sober and moderate piety in Christ? You were forward to every good work, adorned with a most virtuous and venerable conversation, doing all things in the fear of God, and having his laws and commands written upon the tablets of your hearts.” Clemens, of Alexandria,† says, “As the fairest possession, we give up ourselves to God; entirely loving him, and reckoning this the great business of our lives. No man is with us *a christian*, or accounted truly rich, temperate, and generous, but

\* Part ii. c. 4.

† Admonit. ad Gent. p. 76.

he that is pious and religious; nor does any further bear the image of God, than he speaks and believes what is just and holy. *So that this is in short the state of us who follow God*; such as are our *desires*, such as are our *discourses*; such as are our *discourses*, such as are our *actions*; such as are our *actions*, such is our *life*; so, universally good is the whole life of *christians*. Certainly none were ever greater enemies to a naked profession, and the covering of a bad life under the *title of christianity*. 'Do any live otherwise than Christ hath commanded? It is a most certain argument that they are no *christians*, though with their tongues they never so smoothly profess the christian doctrine; for it is not *mere professors*, but those who live according to their profession, that shall be saved,\* as Justin Martyr declares before Emperors. "Let no man impose upon himself with inconsiderate words," says Basil,† "saying, though I be a sinner, yet I am a *christian*, and I hope that title will be my shelter. But hearken, *sinner!* all wicked men shall be bundled up together, and in the great day of divine vengeance shall be indifferently thrown into merciless and devouring flames." So careful were they to avoid all sin, that they stood at a wide distance from any thing that (though lawful in itself, yet) seemed to carry an *ill colour* with it.‡ This was the true reason, as Origen tells Celsus, why they refused to do any honour to an image,

\* Ap. ii. p. 63.

† Comment. in c. i. Esa. to ii. p. 28.

‡ Ibid.

lest they should give occasion to others to think that they ascribed divinity to it. For the same reason, they shunned all community of rites and customs of the heathens, avoided *public baths, sights, and shows*, because they seemed to owe their original to *idolatry*.

Secondly, the primitive christians were so conscious of their innocence, that they required a scrutiny of their conduct, and were willing to undergo the severest penalties, if found guilty of those crimes which were charged upon them.\* But no such favour, they say, is shewn to us, but we are condemned without any inquiry: and good reason that they should do so, as they could find nothing to condemn them for, but *for being christians*. This appears strange amongst a people so celebrated for justice and equity as the Romans; yet, in these times, nothing was more common. When Attalus, the famous French martyr, was led about the Amphitheatre, that he might be exposed to the hatred and derision of the people, he triumphed in this, that a tablet was carried before him with this inscription—**THIS IS ATTALUS, THE CHRISTIAN.**† Julian endeavoured to suppress the name of christian, when he could not exterminate the profession, by making a law that all christians should be called Galileans.‡

Thirdly, the christians appealed to the judgement and consciences of their impartial enemies, and were acquitted. Pliny the younger, being commanded

\* Just. Mart. Ap. ii. p. 54. † Eus. Hist. Eccl. lib. v. c. 1.

‡ Naz. *invect.* in Julian, i. p. 81.

by the Emperor Trajan, to give an account of the christians, tells him,\* that “after the best estimate he could take, and the strictest inquiry that he could make by tortures, he found no worse of them than this—that they were wont to meet early, for the performance of their solemn devotions, and to bind themselves under the most sacred obligations to commit no vice or wickedness, and that their religion was nothing else but an untoward and immoderate superstition.” When Justin Martyr† asked Trypho, the Jew, whether he disliked the christians’ manners and way of life, and whether he *really believed* that they eat men’s flesh; and, putting out the candles, ran together in promiscuous mixtures? The Jew answered, that those things of which they were accused by many, were unworthy of belief, as being so extremely abhorrent to human nature; and that the precepts which are commanded in their gospel (which his curiosity had prompted him to *read*) were so *great* and *admirable*, that he supposed no man could be able to keep, and to obey them.

From hence it appears how innocent the christians were of those things of which they were charged by the gentiles;—how infinitely strict and unblamable in their lives, and, therefore, triumphed over the heathen in the innocency of their conversations. Origen tells Celsus,‡ that “the churches of God, which had taken upon them the discipline of Christ,

\* Pliny Ep. xcvi. lib. 10.

† Dial. p. 227.

‡ Lib. iii. p. 128.



if compared with the common societies of men, *were amongst them as lights in the world.*" "It is with *your party,*" says Minutius Felix,\* "that the prison is filled,—*no christian is there,* unless such a one as is either a shame to his religion, or an apostate from it."

### REFLECTION.

Can any christian peruse this character of a primitive brother without improvement? Can any christian contemplate the high degree of purity which he attained, and the glorious faith which laid this bright foundation, without a deep confession of a conscious inferiority? In a christian country, we call ourselves christians, as we designate ourselves in the possession of any rank, dignity, or description of life; but do we exhibit in our own persons a striking picture of our primitive model? Alas!—Let us then dwell, for one moment, on the remark of Tertullian,† "When men depart from the discipline of the gospel, they so far cease *amongst us* to be accounted *christians.*"

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### CHAPTER V.

*Of the positive Parts of their Religion ;—and first,  
of their Piety towards God.*

HAVING thus seen with how much clearness the an-

\* P. 29.

† Apol. c. xlvi. p. 36.

cient christians vindicated themselves from those unjust aspersions which their malicious adversaries had cast upon them, we proceed to take a more direct and positive view of their religion, which, according to St. Paul's division, we shall first consider as to their *piety* towards God; those *virtues* which more immediately concerned *themselves*, and those which respected their behaviour and carriage towards *others*. Their piety towards God appeared in those two chief instances of it—a serious and hearty detestation of idolatry, and a religious care about the concerns of divine worship.

Idolatry, in those times, was the prevailing sin of the world, the principal crime of mankind, the great guilt of the age, and the almost sole cause of men's being brought into judgement; as what, in a manner, as Tertullian expresses it,\* contains *all sins under it*.

It is necessary to enquire, first, what was the notion they entertained of idolatry. They then accounted a man guilty of idolatry, who gave divine adoration to any thing that was *not God*; not only when he worshipped a material idol, but when he vested any creature with that religious respect and veneration that was due only to God. It might have been supposed that angels, who bear the first rank of created beings, might have challenged this distinction: but Origen says,† “we indeed speak *well* of them, and think them *happy* that they are intrusted by God to manage the conveniences of man's life;

\* De Idol. c. i. p. 85.

† Lib. viii.

but yet do not give them that honour that is due only to God :” and again, “ the great God only is to be adored, and prayers to be delivered up to none but his only begotten Son, *the first-born of every creature*, that, as our High Priest, he may carry them to his Father and our Father,—to his God and our God. It is true the worship of angels did (and that very early, as appears from the apostle’s *caveat* against it, in his epistle to the Colossians,) creep into some parts of the christian church, but was always disowned, objected against, and at last publicly and solemnly condemned, by the whole Laodicean council.”—*Canon 35.*

Nor were they more decided in denying divine honours to *angels*, than they were to *martyrs* and *departed saints* ; for though they entertained great honour and respect for martyrs, as for those who had maintained the truth of their religion, and sealed it with their blood, yet were they far from doing so under any impression of religion, or divine adoration. The church of Smyrna, writing to the churches of Pontus with an account of the martyrdom of Polycarp their bishop, tells them\* “ that after he was dead, many of the christians were desirous to possess the *remains* of his body, to have given them decent and honourable burial, but were prevented by some Jews, who importuned the Pro-consul to the contrary; suggesting that the christians, leaving their crucified master, might henceforth worship Polycarp. *This*

\* Eus. Hist. Eccl. lib. iv. c. 10.

*they did,"* say they, "not considering how impossible it is that ever we should either forsake Christ, who died for the salvation of mankind, or that we should worship any other. We adore him as the Son of God; but the martyrs, as disciples and followers of our Lord, we deservedly love for their eminent kindness to their own prince and master; whose companions and fellow disciples we also, by all means, desire to be." This was the testimony, not of any one private person, but of the whole church of Smyrna, as it had been trained up under the doctrine and discipline of Polycarp, the immediate disciple of St. John.

But the great instance in which the primitive christians manifested their detestation of idolatry was, with respect to the idolatrous worship of the heathen world, the denying and abhorring any thing of divine honour that was done to their gods. "No art, no profession, no service whatsoever, that is employed either in making or ministering to idols," says Tertullian,\* "can come short of idolatry." If a christian (in a public character) did but allow the charges of sports and sights, though he did not sacrifice, he was to undergo a severe penance for it all his life.† Every master of a family was commanded to suffer no *little idols*, or *images*, to be kept in his house, and to be worshipped by his children and servants.

The heathens accused the christians as idolaters, as worshipping the sun, the cross, and an ass's head. "The first," Tertullian‡ says, "was an entire mis-

\* Cap. ii.

† Canon iii.

‡ Apol. c. xvi. p. 16.

take; they prayed to the *east*, or *sun-rising*, which the heathens did, but upon different grounds; and also worshipped on the *Sunday*, which the heathens considered as worshipping the sun." With respect to the cross, Octavius in Minutius Felix says, "as for crosses, we neither desire nor worship them. Christians, indeed, talk much of their crucified master, and are in the constant use of the sign of the cross, but never paid any adoration whatever to a *material* cross." The charge respecting the ass's head is too absurd for further observation.

Thus the ancient christians manifested and maintained their love and piety towards God, by a most vigorous and hearty opposition of that idolatry that reigned so uncontrollably in the heathen world.

### REFLECTION.

This chapter bears strongly upon some practices of the Roman Catholic church, which, as consistent protestants, we must unequivocally condemn. The usage of the primitive church is decidedly inimical to the superstitious customs, which that church maintains. I do not enter into controversy; and therefore only call our attention to the subject. But protestants though we be, we may still be guilty of idolatry. When we bow down before *vanity*, whatever may be its title, we commit idolatry. Whether riches, or power, or beauty, or fortune, or fashion, or any other thing which enchains or seduces the mind, so as to occasion its deviations from the worship of the true God, and JESUS CHRIST whom he hath

sent, become the cause of idolatry, and implicate the worshippers in all its dreadful consequences. Spiritual idolatry is as clearly adverse to pure religion, as idolatry of a material kind.\*

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## CHAPTER VI.

### *Of Churches and Places of public Worship in the primitive Times.*

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THE primitive christians were not more zealous against the idolatrous worship of the heathen gods, than they were religiously observant of whatever concerned the honour and worship of the true. This will easily appear, if we consider their care about

\* “ Even at the early period of the beginning of the third century, it is easy to observe the unseemly fabric of superstitious ceremony gradually rising upon the ruins of genuine piety. The far greater part of those corrupt doctrines and vain superstitions, which formerly occasioned the separation of our ancestors from the communion of the Romish church, and of which we still continue to entertain a just abhorrence, were introduced and established during the darkness of this and the succeeding ages. An extravagant veneration for departed saints and martyrs, the idolatrous worship of images and relics, and, lastly, the absurd and fanciful notion of a fire destined to purify the soul after death from the pollution it had contracted while in the body; these opinions, which are still held sacred and essential by the church of Rome, were the successive progeny of the ignorance and superstition of these ages.”—*White's Bampton Lecture, Sec. 3.*

the *place, time, persons*, and both the *matter and manner* of the worship that they performed to God.

1. *Place* is an inseparable circumstance of religious worship. That the primitive christians met together for the discharge of their common duties, and had fixed and appropriate churches for that purpose, is easily demonstrated. In the sacred story we find more than probable footsteps of some determinate places for their solemn conventions, and peculiar only to that use. Of this nature was that *υπερωκυ*, or *upper room*,\* into which the apostles and disciples entered after their return from the ascension of our Saviour, as into a place commonly known, and separate to that use. Ancient tradition supposes this to have been the *same room* wherein our Saviour, the night before his death, celebrated the passover, and instituted the Lord's Supper. Such an one, if not the same, was that *one place*† wherein they were all assembled with one accord upon the day of pentecost, when the Holy Ghost visibly came down upon them. This is the more probable, as the multitude, and they, *strangers of every nation under heaven*, came so readily to the place upon the first report of so strange an accident. Thus learned men interpret Acts ii. 46, "They continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread, *κατ' οικον* (not *from house to house* as we render it, but) *at home*, as in the margin, or *in the house* they eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart:" that is, when.

\* Acts i. 13.

† Ibid. ii. 1.

they had performed their daily devotions, at the temple, at the accustomed hours of prayer, they returned home to this upper room, there to celebrate the holy Eucharist, and then go to their ordinary meals. Mede conjectures that, when the first believers "sold their houses and lands, and laid the money at the apostles' feet," to supply the necessities of the church, some of them might give houses for the church to meet in, and perform their sacred duties. Thus the apostle, writing to particular christians, mentions *the church that was in their house*. Again,—“What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or, despise ye the *church* of God?”—not the persons, but the *place*, as it is previously mentioned *their coming together in the church*, verse 18; which is expounded by *coming together into one place*, verse 20.

In the ages after the apostles, and especially in the second century, we find that the christians had fixed and definite places of worship. Clemens assures us\* that Christ did not only appoint the times *when*, the persons by *whom*, but the places *where*, he would be solemnly served and worshipped. “Upon Sunday,” says Justin Martyr,† “all christians, whether in town or country, used to assemble together in *one place*,” which could hardly be done, had not that place been fixed and settled. And Tertullian‡ observes, of their going into the water to be baptized, that “they first went to the church to make their solemn renunciation before the bishop.” The hea-

\* Ad Corinth. † Ap. ii. p. 98. ‡ De Coron. Mil. c. iii.



thens, indeed, charged them with atheism and impiety, for having no temples; but as *their notion* of a temple was of a place ornamented with statues and images, wherein their deities were inclosed and shut up, they confessed that they had none, for the true God did not *dwell in temples made with hands*: they, therefore, abstained from the word *temple*—a word not used by any christian writer for near three hundred years.

Afterwards their churches began to rise apace, as they met with more quiet and peaceable times. “Even before the time of Constantine,” Eusebius says,\* “who shall be able to reckon up the innumerable multitudes that daily flocked to the faith of Christ, the number of congregations in every city, those famous meetings of theirs in their oratories or sacred places, so great, that, not being contented with those old buildings which they had before, they erected from the very foundations more fair and spacious churches in every city.” In the reign of Dioclesian, which succeeded this serene and sun-shiny season, the christians were persecuted; by an imperial edict, the Bible was ordered to be burnt, and their churches to be demolished and laid level with the ground. This order was again changed under Constantine; “In a short time, the world was beautified with churches and sacred oratories, both in cities and villages, and in the most barbarous and desart places, called *κυριακα* (hence kirk, or church,)

\* Hist. Eccl. lib. viii. c. 1.

*the Lord's house*, because erected not to men, but to the honour of our Lord and Saviour.\*

The plan and arrangement of churches in the primitive times, though described by our author, do not seem essential to this work. It is sufficient to remark, that the christians of those days spared no convenient cost in founding and adorning public places for the worship of God; yet were they careful to keep a decent mean between a sordid *slovenliness*, and a too curious and over-nice *superstition*. The first christians had only in their churches decent tables of wood, upon which they celebrated the holy Eucharist. In answer to the heathens who charged them with the want of decorative altars, they acknowledged that it was so; observing, that the only true sacred altar, was a pure and holy mind; and that the best and most acceptable sacrifice to God, was a *pious heart*, and an innocent and religious life. *Hæc nostra sacrificia, hæc Dei sacra sunt.*

When churches were built and beautified, consistent with the ability and simplicity of those days, they were *consecrated*; when this first began does not appear. In the Theodosian Code, it appears that they were then usually consecrated only by placing a cross in them, as the venerable ensign of the christian religion.

I shall conclude by observing what *respect* and *reverence* they paid to churches in those days, as the solemn place of worship, and where God more pecu-

\* Orat. de laud. Constant. c. vii.

liarily manifested his presence. They conducted themselves with the most profound silence and devotion; even the emperors dismissed their guards, and laid down their arms, when they entered the church, rejecting *there* all ostentation, either of power or greatness.

### REFLECTION.

It is pleasing to draw a comparison between the primitive church of Christ, and the reformed church established in this country. The resemblance indeed is striking, as we shall see more clearly as we proceed. The pure principle of christian truth animates both: it would be happy if the same practical consequences followed. "Formed upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone," it might be supposed that the latter church, like the former, would bring forth abundant fruits of righteousness. I will not hesitate to declare that many *ancient christians may* be found in the modern church of Christ; but I must ever lament that so many profess the name, without even feeling the distinguishing piety of *a child of God, a member of Christ, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.* "Let both grow together till the harvest"—though not our consolation—is a remark which silences all incurious disquisitions on the subject. Let the church *within*, be like the church *without*, so far as regards the pleasantness of its appearance. *The hill of Zion is a fair place.* "The house of our dove-like religion," says Ter-

tullian,\* “ is simple, built on high and in open view, and reflects the light, as the figure of the Holy Spirit, and the east, as the representation of Christ.” May the light of salvation be thus universally diffused by the visible church of Christ! May it shine inward on the hearts of all its votaries,—so shall it also shine upwards to heaven itself, where “ the wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever !”†

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## CHAPTER VII.

### *Of the Lord's Day, and the Fasts and Festivals of the ancient Church.*

2. *TIME* is a circumstance no less inseparable from religious actions than *place*; for man, consisting of soul and body, cannot always be actually engaged in the service of God; that is the privilege of angels, and souls freed from the fetters of mortality. So long as we are here, we must worship God with respect to our present state; and, consequently, of necessity have some definite and particular time to do it in. That we may not be left to a floating uncertainty, in a matter of so great importance, in all ages and nations men have been guided by the very

\* Adv. Valentin.

† Dan. xii. 3.

dictates of nature to pitch upon some *certain seasons*, in which to assemble and meet together, to perform the public offices of religion. This was the case with the primitive christians: and, first, with respect to the observation of the Lord's day. The name of this day of public worship, both by Justin Martyr and Tertullian, was called **Sunday**, because it happened upon that day of the week, which was by the heathens dedicated to the *sun*; and, therefore, as best known to them, the fathers made use of it in their apologies to the heathen emperors. This title continued long after the world became christian. But the more proper and prevailing name was *κυριακη*, or *Dies dominica*, *the Lord's day*, as it is called by St. John himself,\* being that day of the week on which our Lord made his triumphant return from the dead. "Upon Sunday," says Justin Martyr,† "we all assemble together, as being the first day wherein God, parting the darkness from the rude chaos, created the world; and the same day on which Jesus Christ our Saviour rose again from the dead; for he was crucified the day before *Saturday*, and the day after (which is *Sunday*) he appeared to his apostles and disciples. By this mean, observing a kind of analogy and proportion with the Jewish sabbath, which had been instituted by God himself. For as that day was kept as a commemoration of God's sabbath, or resting from the work of creation; so was this set apart to religious uses, as a solemn

\* Rev. i. 10.

† Ap. ii. p. 99.

memorial of Christ's resting from the work of our redemption in this world, completed upon the day of his resurrection."

"The primitive christians had a custom of praying, *standing*, on the Lord's day, though they *kneeled* at other times; that, by this mean," says Justin Martyr, "we may be put in mind both of our fall by sin, and our resurrection, and restitution, by the grace of Christ."\*

The apostles and primitive christians *thus* observed the *first day of the week*. On *this day*, our Saviour appeared to them; and on the same day of the week following. They were assembled on *this day*, when the Holy Ghost fell on them. [See also various other instances in scripture.]

Pliny, writing to Trajan, tells him that "the christians were wont to meet together, to worship Christ *stato die*, which can reasonably be understood to mean no other than *the Lord's day*. He tells the same emperor, that they assembled at other times, *before day-light, to sing morning hymns to Christ.*"†

They looked upon the Lord's day to be celebrated with great expressions of joy, and restrained whatever might savour of sorrow and sadness; therefore, they prohibited fasting on that day.

On the conversion of Constantine,‡ his principal care was about the Lord's day. He commanded it to be solemnly observed by all; he made it to all a

\* Resp. ad quæst. 115.

† Lib. x. Ep. 97.

‡ Euseb. De Vita Constant. lib. iv.

day of *rest*, that men might have nothing to do but to worship God, and be better instructed in the christian faith, and spend their time, without any thing to hinder them, in prayer and devotion, according to the custom and discipline of the church; and that none might pretend their own inability, he himself composed and gave them a short *Form of Prayer*, which he enjoined them to make use of every Lord's day.

No courts of judicature were allowed to be open on this day; no trials at law were permitted; but works of mercy, emancipating slaves, &c. might be done. *Public shows, sights, and spectacles*, were prohibited, and the *theatres* shut up, in every place.

They did not think it enough to read, and pray, and praise God at home, but made conscience of appearing in public assemblies, from which nothing but sickness and absolute necessity did detain them. No trivial pretences, no light excuses were then admitted for any one's absence from the congregation; but, according to the merit of the case, severe censures were passed upon them.

They allowed no separate assemblies, no congregations, but what met in the public church; and severely condemned those who taught that the house of God might be despised; or any one that should take upon him, out of the church, to preach at home; and, making light of the church, shall do those things that belong only to the church.\* “Let every one,”

\* Counc. at Gangra, A. D. 340.

says Ignatius,\* “ that loves Christ, keep the Lord’s day festival—the resurrection day—the queen and empress of all days, in which our life was raised again, and death conquered by our Lord and Saviour.”

It is not necessary to enumerate all the fasts and festivals of the ancient church, in which the eastern and western churches differed from each other; but it is necessary to remark, that the ancient christians had two sorts of solemn fasts—weekly and annual. Their *weekly fasts* were kept on Wednesdays and Fridays; on the former day, our Lord was betrayed by Judas; on the latter, he was crucified by the Jews. Their *annual fast* was that of Lent, by way of preparation to the feast of our Saviour’s resurrection. The last week of it they consecrated to more peculiar acts of prayer, abstinence, and devotion. It was called the *hebdomada magna*, the *great or holy week*; for, at this time, truly great and ineffably good things were purchased for us; within this time, death was conquered, the curse destroyed, the devil’s tyranny dissolved, his instruments broken, heaven opened, angels rejoiced, the partition-wall broken down, and God and man reconciled.†

In the first ages of the church, there were other festivals observed; namely, Easter, Whitsuntide, and Epiphany, which last comprehended two, namely, Christmas, and the Epiphany, properly so called. [These are so well known, and so well explained in

\* Ep. ad. Mag.

† Chrysostom, Hom. 30.



the church of England, that it is here unnecessary further to describe them.] They observed also the eves of festivals; as well as another sort of festivals in commemoration of martyrs. That such should have arisen in those sad and bloody times, when the christian religion triumphed over persecution, is no wonder. The day of martyrdom was styled their *birth-day*—the true day of their nativity, in which they were freed from this valley of tears, these regions of death, and born again into the joys and happiness of an endless life. These anniversary commemorations, though, in their primitive institution, highly reasonable and commendable, were after made to minister to great superstition and idolatry. Hence sprung the doctrine and practice of *prayer and invocation of saints*, and their intercession with God; their worshipping of *relics, pilgrimages*, and *visiting churches*, and offering at the *shrines* of particular saints, with other superstitious practices, which, in after ages, overrun so great a part of the christian church;—things utterly unknown to the simplicity of those purer and better times.

### REFLECTION.

The institution of the Lord's day is well known, and we are not ignorant of our obligation to observe it. We see also the diligence of the ancient christians in its observation. But I will not so much recommend an imitation of their example as to its outward observance, as an attempt, by the means of grace, to attain that uncontrollable faith, that invin-

cible piety, which induced them, in so exemplary a manner, to *sanctify this day of the Lord*. The habit is good, but the principle which forms the habit is better. The impulse must originate in the sanctification of the spirit; and then shall we frequent holy assemblies at the same time, and with the same mind, that the primitive christians did. Thus also shall we avoid the same superstitions into which too many of their successors fell; but while we blame their fall, let us not forget the unaccountable perverseness of the human heart: we, like them, may be led into many *strange delusions to believe a lie*. The long period of the history of the church has not altogether removed this error. May the almighty God bestow upon us rectitude of understanding, and stability of heart; and, whilst we have the venerable figures of the first christians before our eyes, and the evangelical record, which was *their* monitor as well as *ours*, in our possession, may He direct our goings in the way through all the mazes of this seducing world, till we are safely landed on that shore, where sorrow and sighing, and anxiety and sin, and error and delusion of every kind, shall cease from us for ever!

With respect to the commemoration of *saints* and *martyrs*, it is necessary to remark, that the church of England, in her wisdom, has thought proper to retain certain sacred festivals. "They are few, and they are important; so few, that the necessary prosecution of secular business is not too much broken in upon; so important, that nothing seems to have

been appointed in vain. They visit us in their annual course with messages from above, each teaching us something to believe, and, in consequence, something to do;—they bring repeatedly to our remembrance truths, which we are apt to forget;—they secure to us little intervals of rest from worldly cares, that our hearts with our hands may be lifted up to God in the heavens;—they revive our zeal and fervour in performing the offices of religion;—they cheer the heart with sentiments of gratitude and thankfulness;—they confirm us in habits of obedience to the institutions of the church, and the injunctions of our superiors;—they stir us up to an imitation of those who have gone before us in the way of holiness; they minister an occasion to our children of enquiring into the meaning of the institution, and afford us an opportunity of explaining the several doctrines and duties of christianity to which they refer.”  
 —*Bishop Horne’s Sermon on the Purification.*\*

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## CHAPTER VIII.

*Of the Persons constituting the Body of the Church,  
 both People and Ministers.*

4. THE *persons* that constituted their religious assemblies, were either the *body of the people*, or those

\* See particularly Nelson’s *Fasts and Festivals*; that *standard Writer*, as Bishop Horne calls him, on the *Festivals of our Church*.

who were peculiarly *consecrated* and set apart for the public ministration of religion.

With respect to the former, as christianity gained admission into great towns and cities, all the *believers* of that place usually assembled and met together; the christians also of neighbouring villages resorting thither at times of public worship. But as religion increased, the assembly in great cities became too numerous to be conducted with order and conveniency; they were, therefore, obliged to divide the body into particular *congregations*, who had their *pastors* and spiritual guides set over them, but still were under the superintendency and care of him that was the *president*, or *bishop*, of the place. And according as the church could form and establish its discipline, the people, either according to their seniority and improvement, or according to the *quality* of their present condition, began to be distinguished into ranks and *classes*, which had their distinct places in the church, and their gradual admission to the several parts of public worship. The first of these were the *catechumens*—the *more perfect*, such as were ripe for baptism; these might stay the reading of the scriptures, and to the end of the first service: and the *imperfect*, who stood only amongst the hearers, who were to depart the congregation as soon as the lessons were read; these were as yet accounted *heathens*, who applied themselves to the christian faith, and were catechised and instructed in the more plain grounds and rudiments of religion. Casaubon\*

\* Exercit. 16, Ad Annal. Bar.

has noted from the Fathers three reasons for this concealment. 1. The nature of the things themselves, so sublime and remote from vulgar apprehensions, that they would signify little to pagans and catechumens not yet fully instructed and confirmed in the faith, which would either be lost upon them, or derided by them. 2. That the younger christians might be excited to a greater desire of partaking of the mysteries and privileges of the faithful. To assist them in this, Augustin\* tells us, that, in their public prayers, they were wont to beg of God to inspire the catechumens with a desire of baptismal regeneration. 3. To beget in men's minds the higher esteem and veneration for their religious mysteries; nothing producing a greater contempt, even in sacred things, than too much openness and familiarity.†

The next class of people were the *penitents*, who were under the censures of the church, and were gradually to obtain absolution from it. Of these, five sorts are mentioned by Gregory.‡ 1. Those who *wept* and *lamented*, and were candidates to be received into the order of penitents; these usually stood mournfully at the church door. 2. The *hearers*,

\* Ad Vital. 107.

† I do not consider here whether these reasons are satisfactory. They resided amongst heathens; we amongst nominal christians: we, therefore, can be no judges of their expediency. St. Paul says, If I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian; and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.—1 Cor. xiv. 11.

‡ Ep. Canon. 11.

who were admitted to hear the scriptures read and explained; these occupied the next place in the church, and were to depart with the catechumens. 3. The *prostrate*, who, at the end of service, fell down before the bishop, who, with the congregation, made confession for them, and raised them up, and laid his hands upon them; these stood near the pulpit, and departed with the catechumens. 4. Those who stayed with the rest of the congregation, and did not depart with the others, joined in prayer and singing, but did not receive the sacrament with the faithful; after a time, they were advanced into the 5th and last order of communicants. The last rank was that of the *faithful*, who having been baptized and confirmed, and having approved themselves by a long train and course of a strict pious life, were then admitted to the participation of the *Lord's supper*, which, being the highest and most venerable mystery of the christian religion, was not then rashly given to any; but to such only as had passed through all the other degrees; and, by a course of piety, evidenced themselves to be such real and faithful christians, as that the higher mysteries and most solemn parts of religion might be committed to them.

### REFLECTION.

The proceeding, respecting catechumens, rests upon this observation of our Lord. "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are *without* (an expression denoting generally the heathens and unconverted), all these

things are done in parables.”—Mark iv. 11. “When the errors and prejudices of those whom we instruct are, in some measure, subdued, and when their minds have been gradually prepared for a fuller delineation of evangelical truth, we may *then*, and then only, venture to propose those doctrines which are of a more mysterious and recondite nature. We must disclose them gradually, and with a spirit of the most enlarged toleration, to those persons whose scruples cannot be entirely vanquished, and whose errors cannot be *at once* removed.”—*White’s Bampton Lecture*, sec. 10. Though I allow the general propriety of this observation, I must protest against any jesuitical compromise of the gospel. It must stand on its own foundation.

The discipline of the *penitents* displays a most striking instance of warm devotion. Though, probably, not applicable to all times, it is consistent with a well-known truth that *gradual improvement* is a surer indication of steady reformation than sudden impulse. This is generally the case, but not exclusive of the power and grace of God.

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## CHAPTER VIII.—CONTINUED.

*Of the Persons constituting the Body of the Church,  
both People and Ministers.*

WE are now to enquire what *persons* there were in

the primitive church, that were peculiarly set apart to manage the affairs, and to attend upon the public offices and ministrations of it. God always had a *peculiar* people whom he selected for himself out of the rest of mankind. As first, the patriarchs, and after them the Jews, among whom a particular tribe was appointed to stand before the Lord, to wait at his altar, and to minister in the services of his worship; and after the expiration of the economy of the Jews, persons peculiarly consecrated and devoted to the service of God in the christian church, were appointed to the ministry of the gospel. These (taking it within the compass of the first four hundred years) consisted of two sorts of persons,—the *sacred*, who were peculiarly consecrated to the more proper and immediate acts of the worship of God; and the *inferior ministers*, or *servants*, who were set apart for the more mean and common services of the church. Of the first class, were bishops, priests, and deacons.

1. The first and principal officer of the church was the president, or bishop, usually chosen out of the presbyters [or priests]. It is clear (to avoid controversy) that bishops were distinct from, and superior to presbyters, in the *second* century, or the *next age to the apostles*.\* The chief work, and office of a bishop, was *to teach and instruct* the people,—to *administer* the sacraments,—to *absolve* penitents,—to *eject* and *excommunicate* obstinate and incorrigible

\* Acknowledged by Blondal and Salmasius, the most learned defenders of presbytery.



offenders,—to *preside* in the assemblies of the clergy,—to *ordain* inferior officers in the church,—to *call them to account*, and to *suspend* or deal with them according to the nature of the offence,—to *urge* the observance of ecclesiastical laws,—and to *appoint* and institute such indifferent rites, as were for the decent and orderly administration of his church. In short, according to his name, he was *σκοπος*, a *watchman* and *sentinel*; and, therefore, obliged *επισκοπειν*, to *inspect* and observe, and diligently and carefully superintend and provide for those that were under his charge.\*

Upon the multiplying of country churches, in large districts, subordinate or suffragan bishops were set apart to superintend and inspect them. These were chosen in imitation of the seventy disciples, whom our Lord made choice of to send up and down the countries, to preach the gospel. Their authority was greater than that of presbyters, and yet much inferior to the bishops.† They were not allowed to ordain either presbyters or deacons, though they might inferior officers, without a licence from their bishop. As there was a bishop in every great city; so in the *metropolis*, or *mother city*, of every province in the Roman empire, there was an *archbishop*, or metropolitan, who had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over all the churches within that province. He was superior to all the bishops within those limits. It was his duty to ordain, and *ratify* the elections and or-

\* In Canon Apost. 58.

† Conc. Antioch, Can. 1.

dinations of all the bishops within his province. He held synods, and directed all ecclesiastical affairs within his province.

After this, *primates* and *patriarchs* sprang up with an authority superior to the metropolitan: but of these it is unnecessary to enquire.

The next office to that of *bishops* was that of *presbyters*, to whom it belonged to preach to the people, to administer baptism, consecrate the Eucharist, and to be assistant to the bishop in public ministrations, and in dispatching the affairs of the church. The presbyters, in every great city, were a kind of ecclesiastical senate, under the care and presidency of the bishop.

After these, came *deacons*; their duty appears from their primitive election;\* the apostles setting them apart to *serve* or *minister to the tables*; that is, to attend upon and take care of those daily provisions that were made for poor indigent christians; but, certainly, it implies their peculiar attendance at *the Lord's table*. Hence it was part of the deacon's office to take care of the poor, and to distribute the monies given for their relief; and to attend upon the celebration of the Eucharist, which, being consecrated by the bishop or presbyter, the deacon delivered the sacramental elements to the people: besides this, they were wont also to preach and to baptize; and were employed in many parts of the public service, especially in guiding and directing the people. The

\* Acts vi.

number of them in any one place was usually restrained to seven, being the number originally instituted by the apostles. As the presbyters were to the bishop, so the deacons were to the presbyters, to be assistant to them, and to give them all due respect and reverence. Out of the body of these deacons, there was usually one chosen to overlook the rest—the *archdeacon*, an office supposed to be of antiquity in the church, and of great authority in after times, being generally styled *the eye of the bishop*, to inspect all parts and places of the diocese.

Several other officers of the ancient church are mentioned in early writers, but as they are decidedly servile, though respectable, they will not come within our consideration; they consisted of the following orders, whose names bespeak their offices:—Sub-deacons; acolyths (followers or attendants); exorcists (who prayed over possessed persons, but never used charms, or unchristian forms and rites); readers; ostiarii (door-keepers), &c. These were set apart by the solemn rites of prayer and imposition of hands: but there was a considerable distinction between the superior and inferior orders; there was a *double imposition of hands* in setting apart ecclesiastical officers—the one, by consecration, which was the way of ordaining bishops, priests, and deacons; the other, by way of blessing; hands being laid upon them only, as in the absolution of penitents, by way of solemn benediction, as in the case of sub-deacons and deaconesses, &c. All orders under bishops were ordained by the bishop, and the bishop himself by all

the bishops of that province, who used to meet for that purpose; in cases of necessity, two, instead of three, with the consent of the absent, were allowed to officiate, to be confirmed by the metropolitan. For the ordination of priests and deacons, &c. one bishop might suffice; as no more than one was required, so no more than one was necessary; the power of conferring *order* being, even by those who otherwise have had no great kindness for episcopacy, acknowledged an unquestionable *right* of the episcopal office.

At all ordinations, especially of superior officers, the people of the place were always present, and ratified the action with their approbation and consent.\* The manner of the lives of those set apart for ordination were strictly examined.† None were suffered to *leap* into the ecclesiastical orders in those days, but by the usual steps, and waiting the appointed time. “They did not commence *divines* and *bishops* in a day,” (at once becoming holy in character, and learned in divinity,) as Nazienzen elegantly says.‡ The ages of ordinations, according to the apostolic canon, were—a bishop, above fifty years of age; a presbyter, thirty; a deacon, twenty-five.

I take no notice of *monks*, *hermits*, &c., because, though they were under a kind of *ecclesiastical* relation, yet, they were not usually in *holy orders*, and were of no early standing in the church. *Deaconesses* were employed in many offices of religion. Their

\* Cyp. Ep. 68. Constit. App. lib. viii. c. 4.

† Basil. Nicene Counc. Can. 9.

‡ Orat. 1.

original was very early, equal with the infancy of the church.—Rom. c. xvi. v. 1. They were either *widows* above *sixty years* of age; or *virgins*, who were educated for this purpose; and, having given testimony of a chaste and sober conversation, were admitted at *forty*. They were assistants to females at the time of *baptism*; were sometimes employed in the instruction of ignorant women in the principles of christianity; attended upon women that were sick, and were engaged in other *offices of humanity*.

Bishops and ministers were then looked upon as the common parents of christians, whom, as such, they honoured and obeyed, and to whom they repaired for counsel and direction in all important cases. “When Chrysostom was driven into banishment by the Empress, the people, as he went along, burst into tears, and cried out, *It was better the sun should not shine, than that John Chrysostom should not preach*; and when he was recalled, the people universally met him, and conducted him to his church with all expressions of reverence and veneration.”\* So sacred and venerable did they then account the persons and concerns of those who ministered in the affairs of divine worship!

### REFLECTION.

The *sanctity of the persons* who ministered in the christian church, implied the *sanctity of the doctrines* which they were commissioned to deliver; and, as

\* Chry. Ep. 125. Socrat. Hist. lib. vi.

both originated in the word of God, promulgated by the blessed author of our religion and his apostles, through the influence of the Spirit, no body of men can possibly assemble under the christian dispensation, as *a true christian church*, without these indispensable marks of the validity of their professions. The *truth* of the doctrines of the gospel is the only sound foundation: implicit obedience to its precepts, the characteristic proof of belief. Had no minister, or order of ministers, been necessary, our Lord would not have said to his disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach:" and if his meaning had been restricted to themselves, he would not have said, "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." But no where in the New Testament, nor any where during the three first centuries, nor indeed for several hundred years afterwards, even in the most ignorant and depressed ages of the church, were we ever directed to a church without regularly appointed ministers, much less to one of self-constituted preachers.

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## CHAPTER IX.

*Of their usual Worship, both private and public.*

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THUS far have we remarked the piety of those ancient times, with respect to those necessary *circumstances* which relate to the worship of God. We

proceed to consider wherein their worship itself consisted. This was both private and public; that is, the duty which they performed at home, and that which was done in their solemn and *church-assemblies*.

1. The duties of their private worship were of two sorts; either such as were more solemn and stated, and concerned the whole family; or such as were discharged *alone*, or at least not at stated periods.

Family duties were usually performed in this manner. At their first rising in the morning, they met together and betook themselves to prayer, to praise God for the protection and refreshment of the night, and to beg his grace and blessing for the following day.\* This was done by the master of the house, unless a minister of religion were present. It is probable they recited the creed, or some confession of faith, and read some parts of scripture. In imitation of the Jews, they had set hours for prayer,—the third, sixth, and ninth hours;† but it does not appear that in succeeding times this order was punctually attended to. About *noon*, some portions of scripture were read; and meat being set upon the table, a blessing was solemnly begged of God, as the fountain of all blessings. Lifting up their eyes to heaven, they prayed thus—“Thou that givest food to all flesh, grant that we may receive this food with thy blessing; thou, Lord, hast said that if we drink any thing that is deadly, if we call upon thy name, it

\* Chrysost. Hom. i. Basil Ep. ad Greg. tom 3.

† Cyprian. Clem. Alexandrinus.

shall not hurt us; thou, therefore, who art the Lord of all power and glory, turn away all evil and malignant quality from our food, and whatever pernicious influence it may have upon us." At dinner, they sang hymns and psalms. After dinner, they did the same, and had the scriptures read. Every time they took the cup to drink, they made the sign of the cross, and called upon Christ.\* They concluded the meal with prayer, giving *thanks to God for their present refreshment, and begging his continued provision of those good things which he had promised to them.* So great a place had religion in those days even in men's common and natural actions, and so careful were they not to *starve* the soul, while they were feeding the body. In the same manner they spent the rest of the day. When night approached, before going to rest, the family was again called to prayer; about midnight, they were wont to rise to pray and sing hymns to God. This custom arose in the times of persecution, when they durst not meet in the day, and continued for some time.

Besides their stated hours, the early christians were accustomed to spend other times, when alone, in acts of piety and religion. Constantine the Great, burthened as he was with the cares of a vast empire, retired at his wonted hours from all the company of his court to his closet; and upon his knees offered up his prayers to God.† Their great care was diligently and seriously to read the scriptures;—to be

\* Clemens Alex.

† Vita Constant.



mighty in the divine oracles. Nazianzen reproveth his friend Gregory Nyssen for having laid aside the Holy Scriptures for the study of foreign and profane authors, desirous rather to be accounted an *orator*, than a *christian*. In the study of this book they were principally engaged, thinking they could never sufficiently understand it, or imprint it too deeply upon their memories. This was the mine where they enriched themselves with divine *treasures*; and Jerom says of Nepotian, "that, by daily reading and meditation, he had made his soul a *library of Christ*."

Nor did they covetously hoard up and reserve this excellent knowledge to themselves, but freely *communicated* it to others; they were particularly careful to catechise and instruct their children and servants in the principles of religion. The historian of the life of Constantine says, "that his first and greatest care towards his sons, was to secure the happiness of their souls, by sowing the seeds of piety in their minds, which he did both by instructing them himself in the knowledge of divine things, and appointing such tutors as were most approved for religion."

This was the discipline under which christians were brought up in those times. Religion was instilled into them betimes, which grew up, and mixed itself with their ordinary labours and recreations; insomuch, that the most rude and illiterate persons, instead of profane and wanton songs, which vitiate and corrupt the minds of men, used nothing but spiritual and divine hymns, so that (as Jerom relates of the place where he lived) *in every field you might*

*hear the ploughman at his halleluiahs, the mower at his hymns, and the vine-dressers singing the psalms of David.*

### REFLECTION.

This beautiful picture of the lives of primitive christians needs no commentary. The more we contemplate the scene, the better will our hearts respond to the description. And after all, what is required which may not be accomplished? The influence of the Holy Spirit is still powerful, the faith of the gospel is still pure and mighty in principle, and the heart of man is still recipient of the divine will. Put in our breasts, blessed Lord! a softened heart, water it with the dew of thy Spirit, and then shall the holy plant bear fruit unto everlasting life.

It appears that the *sign of the cross* was in early use in the christian church. In itself it is an harmless instrument of devotion, particularly as it is indicative of a momentous scriptural truth. But perverted as we have seen it to superstitious purposes, which it is unnecessary to describe, it has been almost wholly disused in the reformed church of England: but when religiously employed, let it not be treated with contempt. We retain crosses on our churches as appropriate ornaments; even the presbyterian church of Scotland now does the same. We use the symbol of the cross in baptism; for an explanation of which, see *Canon 30*.

## CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED.

*Of their usual Worship, both private and public.*

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2. THEIR practice in public, upon the Lord's day, appears to have varied according to time and place. At their first coming into their congregations, Tertullian says, they began with prayer. After this, according to Justin Martyr, followed the reading of the scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments; both the commentaries of the apostles, and the writings of the prophets. It does not appear how much was read, as their meetings were often disturbed by the heathens; therefore, both Justin and Tertullian observe that they only read as much as occasion served, and the condition of the present time required. Afterwards, *set portions* were assigned, both out of the Old and New Testaments,—two lessons out of each.\* Other writings, too, were publicly read in the church; namely, those of apostolical men eminent for place and piety. "To-day," says Dionisius, bishop of Corinth, [circ. A. D. 172] "we keep holy the Lord's day, wherein we read your epistle, [that of Soter, bishop of Rome,] which we shall *constantly* read for our instruction; as we also do the first epistle Clemens'wrote to us." Eusebius says the same of *the pastor of Hermas*. About this

\* Apostol. Constitut. lib. ii. c. 57.

part of the service, they sung hymns and psalms. This was in use in the very infancy of the christian church, as mentioned by St. Paul. Pliny reports it as the *main* part of christian worship, that *they met together before day, to join in singing hymns to Christ as God.*\* These hymns were either extemporary, so long as immediate inspiration lasted, or set compositions from the Holy Scriptures; or, as Tertullian says, of their own composing. But the council of Laodicea afterwards ordered that no psalms, composed by private persons, should be recited in the church. In this duty the whole congregation bore a part, joining all together in the common celebration of the praises of God: sometimes they sang in courses, *alternatim*. "The reader having done (they are the words of Justin the Martyr), the president of the assembly makes a sermon, by way of instruction and exhortation, to the imitation and practice of the excellent things they had heard." The sermons were expositions of the parts of scripture which had been read, with exhortations to the people to obey the doctrines; they were commonly upon the lessons which had been last read, and were freshest in the memory. Sometimes there were two or three sermons in the same assembly; the presbyters first, and then the bishop.† Nor was this course held in the morning only, but likewise in the afternoon. Chrysostom assures us of this in an homily on this subject, in commendation of those "who came to church *after*

\* Lib. x. Ep. 97.

† Aug. Serm. 237.

*dinner*, who, instead of *sleeping*, came to hear the divine laws expounded; instead of *walking upon the Exchange*, and entertaining themselves with idle talk, came and stood amongst their brethren, to converse with the discourses of the prophets.\*

But how many discourses soever there were, the people were ready to hear them; flocking to them as to their spiritual meals and banquets. "We meet together," says Tertullian, "to hear the Holy Scriptures rehearsed to us, that so (according to the quality of the times) we may be either forwarned, or corrected, by them; for certainly with these holy words, we nourish our *faith*, support our *hope*, seal our *confidence*, and by these are the better established to the divine commands.† Nazienzen‡ tells us, "what numbers used to meet in his church at Constantinople, of all sexes, of all sorts and ranks of persons, rich and poor, honourable and ignoble, learned and simple, governors and people, soldiers and tradesmen." Chrysostom says of the church at Antioch, "It was the honour of the city, not so much that they had large suburbs, and great numbers of people, or fine houses with gilded dining-rooms, as that it had a *diligent* and *attentive* people."

Sermon being ended, prayers were made with and for the catechumens, penitents, possessed, &c. according to their respective qualifications. Each rank departing as soon as *the prayer particularly concerning them* was done. When the service had thus far

\* Hom. 10. ad Pop. Antioch.

† Apol. c. 39.

‡ Orat. 32.

proceeded, all that were under [instruction for] baptism, or under the discipline of penance, that is, all that might *not* communicate at the Lord's table, were commanded to depart. The words in the Latin church were—*ite, missa est*,—go, you may depart, or, you are dismissed. Hence the service, from the beginning to that time, was called *missa catechumenorum*, the *mass* or service of the catechumens. Thus also the celebration of the Eucharist was called *missa fidelium*, the mass or service of the faithful, because none but they were present at it. Hence the word *mass* is made use of by the church of Rome, to denote that which they peculiarly call *the mass*, or the propitiatory sacrifice of the altar, at this day. This they do, though they cannot produce one place where the word is so used, in any genuine or approved writer of the church, for at least the first 400 years.

The catechumens, &c. being departed, and the doors shut, they proceeded to the Lord's supper, at which the faithful only might be present, wherein they prayed for all states and ranks of ~~men~~, gave the kiss of charity, prayed for the consecration of the Eucharist, then received the sacramental elements, and made their offerings. Such was the form of public worship in those ancient times, which, though it might somewhat vary according to times and places, was generally in sum and substance the same.

The conduct of the primitive christians, in the discharge of these solemn duties, was singularly reverent and devout, with such gestures and actions as they conceived might express the greatest piety and

humility. Clemens of Alexandria says, "Let both men and women come to church in *comely* apparel, with a *grave* pace, with a modest *silence*, with a *love* unfeigned, *chaste* both in body and mind, so that they may be fit to put up prayers to God." Cyprian says, "Let our *speech in prayer be under discipline*, observing a decorous calmness and modesty:—it becomes a sober man to pray with a *modest voice*."

The men prayed with their heads bare; the women, covered. Their hands they did not only lift up to heaven, but expand them abroad, to denote an image of the cross, in resemblance of Christ crucified. In praying they either kneeled or stood; *sitting was ever esteemed a posture of great rudeness and irreverence*. They prayed constantly towards the *east*. The remark is universal, but the reasons for it various. Basil says, "It respected *Paradise*, which was planted in the east." Clemens of Alexandria says, that "It had respect to Christ, the true sun of righteousness, who is in scripture styled *the east*." Athanasius gives this account: "We do not worship towards the east," says he, "as if we thought God any ways shut up in those parts of the world, but because God is in himself, and is so styled in scripture, *the true light*; in turning, therefore, towards that *created light*, we do not worship it, but the great *creator* of it; taking occasion from that most excellent element, to adore that God who was before all elements and ages of the world."\* They heard the

\* The Editor has observed, in many churches of the present day, the custom of turning towards the east in rehearsing the creed.

scriptures read and preached with all gravity and attention; and that they might do this the better, they stood all the time the sermon continued; none sitting then but the bishop, and the presbyters that were about him. The posture of their bodies had respect to the elevation of their minds, lifting up their thoughts from low and sordid objects to those spiritual and divine things, about which they were then conversant. They constantly stood up at the reading of the gospel,—a custom generally embraced in all parts of the christian world.

In the discharge of these holy exercises, as they behaved with all seriousness and gravity, so they *continued* in them till they were completely *finished*; there was no rude disorderly departing of the congregation till the whole office and service of God was over. In later ages, the council of Orleans [Can. 22] established the primitive devotion by this Canon, that, *when the people came together for the celebration of divine service, they should not depart till the whole solemnity was over, and the bishop or presbyter had given the blessing.*

### REFLECTION.

The private and public worship of the early christians is sufficiently defined without any further reflection; except, as their outward practice indicates the inward disposition of their hearts, and evinces the pure source of their warm and spiritual devotions. What could elevate the affections of such supplicants to such an height of piety, but the assurance of faith



that their prayers would be accepted by the God of mercy, through the merits and intercession of a kind Redeemer. In the earliest of the primitive times, the spirit of immediate inspiration had not ceased; and at a later period, the ordinary influence of the same spirit supported them, as it does us, with all joy and peace in believing. And what was the happy consequence? To them, an ineffable devotion, and a thorough prostration of mind, suitable to the great illumination which they enjoyed;—to us, a worship of God, transmitted through the same pure channel, in the same spirit, and almost, if not altogether, in the same words with the faithful followers of Christ. But, my soul! let not the spirit of devotion evaporate in the form. The forms, indeed, thus transmitted, and thus received, are excellent; and, when animated with the life-blood of true religion, they effect all that the most aspiring mind can desire. True it is, we are not yet *all-spiritual*, we are compassed with infirmity; we must not, however, be disappointed if we are not able to accomplish what flesh and blood cannot attain. We must not be discouraged; we must go on unto perfection; we must *covet earnestly the best gifts*, the spirit of devotion and prayer, the spirit of piety and attention, the spirit of profound meditation on all the sanctifying graces of the gospel, and the spirit of uniting all in the purified and corrected life of a primitive christian.

## CHAPTER X.

*Of Baptism, and the Administration of it in the primitive Church.*

Our Lord having instituted baptism and the Lord's supper, as the two great sacraments of the christian law, they have accordingly ever been accounted principal parts of public worship in the christian church. Baptism, being the door by which persons enter in the great and solemn rite of our initiation into the faith of Christ, I shall treat first of it; particularly in these four respects, namely, the *persons* by and upon whom,—the *time* when,—the *place* where,—and the *manner* how,—this sacrament was administered in the ancient church.

1. The *persons by whom* this sacrament was administered were the *ministers of the gospel*, the *stewards of the mysteries* of Christ, baptizing and preaching the gospel, being joined together by our Saviour in the same commission. It was usually done by the bishop,\* without whose leave neither presbyters nor deacons might take upon them to baptize, except in cases of necessity. As christianity increased, this became a more familiar part of the presbyters and the deacons' office, and had doubtless been executed by them from the beginning.—[See Acts viii. 38.]

\* J. Martyr and Tertullian.

It was also considered necessary, not only that baptism should be conferred by a person called to the ministry, but one that was orthodox in the faith. This occasioned a controversy concerning the re-baptizing of those who had been baptized by heretics.\* A custom had prevailed that *lay-men* might baptize others in cases of necessity, provided they were christians, and baptized themselves. A council† declared that, if the persons so baptized lived, they should receive *confirmation* from the bishop. There is no doubt that this opinion arose from their belief of the *absolute and indispensable necessity* of baptism, without which they scarce thought a man's future condition could be safe; and, therefore, that it was better that it should be had from *any*, than to depart this life without it. At the same time, it was ever denied to *women*, whom the apostle has so expressly forbidden to exercise any ministry *in the church of God*. However, it crept in in some places, and is allowed and practised by the church of Rome at this day, in cases of necessity.

2. The *persons on whom* baptism was conferred were infants and adults. The baptism of *infants* was a constant practice in the church; and if those who immediately succeeded the apostles be the best interpreters of the laws of *Christ*, the dispute concerning infant-baptism should be at an end; for that it was always the custom to receive the children of christian parents into the church by baptism, we

\* Cyprian's Works.

† Illiberine Coun. Can. 38.

have sufficient evidence from the greatest part of the early writers.\* Cyprian, sitting in council with sixty-six bishops, declared that "it was their universal judgement, that the mercy and grace of God was not to be denied to any, though as soon as he was *born*." "This," said Augustine, "was no new decree, but kept the faith of the church most firm and sure."

But those who made up the main body of the baptized in those days were *adults*, who, flocking over daily in great numbers to the faith of Christ, were received in at this door. They were usually for some considerable time catechised and trained up in the principles of the christian faith, till having given testimony of their proficiency in knowledge to the bishop or presbyter, and of their sober and regular conversation they then became *candidates* for baptism.

3. With respect to *time*.—At first all times were alike, and persons were baptized as occasion served; but when the discipline of the church became a little settled, it began to be restrained to two solemn and stated times [or seasons] of the year, namely, Easter and Whitsuntide; the former, in memory of Christ's death and resurrection, represented in baptism, dying unto sin, and rising again unto newness of life; the latter, in memory of the Holy Ghost's being shed upon the apostles; the same being, in some measure, represented and conveyed in baptism. At the same

\* Irenæus, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, &c.

time, if there was a necessity (as in case of sickness and danger of death) they might be baptized at any other time. It was usual in those times (though solemnly discountenanced by the Fathers) for persons to defer their being baptized till they were near their death, out of a kind of *Novatian principle*; that, if they fell into sin after baptism, there would be no place for repentance, mistaking that passage of the apostle, where it is said, that, "if they who have been once *enlightened* (which the ancients understood of baptism) fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance."

4. As to the *place* of baptism, it was at first unlimited; any place where there was water, in pools or lakes, at springs or rivers,\* but always near the place of their public assemblies, as it was seldom done without the presence of the *congregation*. Indeed it was forbidden, except with the leave and approbation of the bishop, that they might be witnesses of that profession and engagement which the person baptized then took upon him. Afterwards they had their baptisteria, or *fonts*, built at first near the church, then in the church-porch, to represent baptisms being the entrance into the mystical church; afterwards they were placed in the church itself. They were usually very large and capacious, not only that they might correspond with the custom of persons baptized, being *immersed* or put under water, but because the stated times of baptism returning so

\* Justin Martyr and Tertullian.

seldom, great multitudes were usually baptized at the same time. In the middle of the font there was a *partition*, the one part for men, the other for women, that they might be baptized asunder. In cases of necessity they dispensed with private baptism, as in the case of those that were sick, or shut up in prison, of which there were frequent instances in times of persecution.

5. As to the *manner* of the celebration of this sacrament; in the apostle's age, baptism was administered with great simplicity, probably without any more formality than a short prayer, and repeating the words of the institution, which indeed could not well be otherwise, from the numbers to be baptized at once; but after ages added many rites, differing according to time and place. It is not necessary to notice these variations; but I add a primitive form of interrogating the baptized. The bishop.—Dost thou renounce the devil, and all his works, powers, and service? *Ans.*—I do renounce them. *Ques.*—Dost thou renounce the world, and all its pomps and pleasures? *Ans.*—I do renounce them. *Ques.*—Dost thou believe in God the Father, Almighty, &c; in Jesus Christ his only Son, who, &c.; dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, and in one baptism, of repentance for the remission of sins, and life everlasting? *Ans.*—I do believe. This form of interrogation seems to have been very ancient in the church, and the apostle is justly thought to refer to it, when he styles baptism *the answer of a good conscience towards God*. The an-

swers of adults were given by themselves; in children by their sponsors, as Tertullian calls them, their sureties and undertakers. After this, there was a kind of exorcism, and an *insufflation* or breathing upon the person baptized (which Augustin calls an ancient *tradition* of the church), signifying the expulsion of the evil spirit, and breathing in the good Spirit of God; not that they thought every one before baptism was *possessed by the devil*, but only that *we are by nature children of wrath*, enemies to God, and slaves to Satan. Then followed *unction*, which was a ceremony of an early date, intimating (among other reasons) that a christian should be anointed as a spiritual king and priest. A sign of the cross was made upon the forehead of the person baptized; supposed to be derived from the days of the apostles, to shew that they were not *ashamed of the cross of Christ*, nor unwilling to engage in the service of a *crucified* master.

The immersion which followed (being done three times, in adoration of the three persons of the blessed trinity),\* the custom was, in repeating the words of the institution, at the naming of every person, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to plunge the person under water; † also significantly expressing the *three great ends and effects of baptism*, representing Christ's *death, burial, and resurrection*; and in conformity thereto, our *dying* unto sin, the *destruction*

\* Dionys. Arcop. Eccl. Hierarch. c. ii.

† Tertullian and Ambrose.

of its power, and our *resurrection* to a new course of life. The persons being put under water, represented the putting off the sins of the flesh, and being washed from the filth and pollution of them; his abode under it, was a kind of burial in the water, his entering into a state of death or mortification, like as Christ remained for some time under the state or power of death; therefore, "as many as are baptized into Christ, are said to be baptized into his death, and to be buried with him by baptism into death, that the old man being crucified with him, the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth he might not serve sin, for that he that is dead is freed from sin;" and his emersion, or rising up out of the water, signified his entering upon a new course of life, differing from that which he lived before, that, "like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Though for these reasons *immersion* was the common practice, yet they did not hold *sprinkling* to be unlawful, especially in cases of necessity, as weakness, danger of death, &c. Upon this account it is, that immersion is now generally disused in these parts of the world, because the tender bodies of infants could not be put under water in these cold northern climates, without apparent prejudice to their health or lives.

The person baptized, was a second time anointed, and clothed in a *white* garment, to denote his resolution to maintain a life of unspotted innocence and



purity; "that as many as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." The white garment was delivered to them with such a charge as this—"Receive the white and immaculate garment, and bring it forth without spot before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayest have eternal life.—Amen."\* From the wearing of these white vestments, Pentecost, one of the two annual times for baptism, came to be called *Whitsunday*; and the Sunday after Easter, the other time, *Dominica in Albis*, because then they laid this white robe aside.

These were the principal circumstances with which baptism was administered in the primitive church; some of these became disused, and other rites were substituted, till they increased so fast that the usage and number of them became absurd and burthensome, as may appear by the office for baptism in the Romish ritual at this day.

I had thought to have considered the office of *confirmation*, which was ever a constant appendage to baptism, but shall supersede that labour as it has been so fully done by others. All persons baptized in the ancient church (according to their age and capacity,—persons *adult*, some little time after their baptism; children, when arrived to competent ripeness and maturity;) were brought to the bishop, to confirm and ratify that compact which they had made with God in baptism, and by some solemn acts of his ministry, to be confirmed and strengthened, by

\* Gregor. Sacram. tom ii. p. 269.

having the grace and blessing of God conferred upon them, to enable them to discharge that great promise and engagement which they had made to God. This was usually performed with the ceremony of *unction*, sometimes without it. It was performed by the solemn imposition of the bishop's hands, and by devout and pious prayers, that the persons confirmed might *grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ*; and be enabled to perform those vows and purposes, and that profession of faith, which they had before embraced in baptism, and then again acknowledged before the whole congregation: till this was done, they were not accounted complete christians, nor admitted to the holy communion. Almost exactly according to the primitive usage, it is still retained and practised in our own church at this day. Happy were it for us, if it were preserved in its due power and vigour: it would heal many of our unhappy breaches and controversies in religion, which arise from a neglect and contempt of this [primitive and] excellent usage of the church.

### REFLECTION.

The perpetual and indispensable obligation of baptism is clearly evident from this primitive representation of it: its sanctifying graces are allowed by the performance. In the practice of the ancient christians, we readily perceive the motive which produced so unequivocal an expression of their belief on this subject. It is clear that all who were baptized according to the institution of Christ, *put on Christ*; it

is also clear that those who afterwards denied Christ, either in faith or practice, *fell from the grace of baptism*. But as grace and mercy are always to be found in the bosom of the Almighty, it is provided in the gospel that such might be renewed through faith, repentance, and obedience, and once more received into the flock which they had basely deserted. One instance from the history of primitive christianity will be sufficient to shew their warm feelings upon this subject. An ancient and pious christian being condemned, in the Arian persecution, to suffer the torture of the rack, by a person who had apostatized from the faith, produced before him the white vestment in which he had been clothed at his baptism, and with tears addressed him—"These are the garments that shall accuse thee, when thou shalt appear before the majesty of the Great Judge;—these will I diligently keep as a testimony of that ruin that shall depress thee down into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone;—these are they that were girt upon thee, when thou camest *pure out of the holy font*; and these are they that shall bitterly pursue thee, when thou shalt be cast into the place of flames; because thou hast clothed thyself with cursing as with a garment, and hast *cast off the sacred obligation of thy baptism*, and the true faith which thou didst then profess and take upon thee."\*

\* Victor Utic. de persecut. Vand. lib. iii. fol. 43.

## CHAPTER XI.

*Of the Lord's Supper, and the Administration of it in the ancient Church.*

THE holy Eucharist, or supper of our Lord, a rite so solemnly instituted, and of such great importance in the christian religion, had place accordingly among the ancients in their *public* offices and devotions. I shall treat of this in the same method that I did concerning baptism,—considering the *persons*, the *time*, the *place*, and the *manner* of its celebration.

1. The persons *administering* were the ordinary *pastors* and governors of the church, those who were set apart for the ministration of holy offices; the institution was begun by our Lord himself, and the administration of it, *by him* committed to his apostles and to their ordinary successors to the end of the world. Tertullian says,\* “they never received it from any but the hand of the *president*,” meaning either a particular custom of that church where he lived, or of *consecration* only. Otherwise the custom was, when the bishop, or president, had by solemn prayers and blessings consecrated the sacramental elements, for the *deacons* to distribute them to the people, as well to the absent as the present.†

The persons *communicating* were, at first, the

\* De Cor. Mil. c. 3.

† Justin Martyr.

*whole* church, or body of christians, within a certain space, who had embraced the doctrine of the gospel, and been baptized into the faith of Christ. As christians multiplied, and a more exact discipline became necessary, none were admitted to this ordinance till they had arrived at the degree of the *faithful*. Catechumens, who were under instruction for baptism, those under the censures of the church, or who had not passed through the several stages of *penitents*, were not admitted. For the Lord's supper being the highest and most solemn act of religion, they thought that they could not be sufficiently careful in dispensing it. Some were debarred from the communion for different periods, and some were not admitted till they had continued their repentance to their death-bed. It was customary to send the Eucharist by the deacons, or inferior officers, to such as were sick, or were absent from any other just cause. A custom also arose to give the sacrament to the *dead* upon this ground, that they might give some kind of evidence that these persons died in the *peace* and *communion* of the church, but this was afterwards abrogated and laid aside; they gave it also to *new-baptized* infants. In some cases it was kept in their houses, to fortify and strengthen their faith in times of persecution, and to increase kindness and amity with one another.\*

\* The causes of these early aberrations from the primitive institution, and the primitive practice, are too obvious to require a remark; but surely they are sufficient to put us upon our guard that we may not be led astray by the delusion even of our best intentions.

2. With respect to *time*;—it was in general at their public assemblies, on the *Lord's day* always, or the first day of the week, as we find in the history of the apostles' acts, besides other days, especially Saturday, on which day all the churches in the world (except those of Rome and Alexandria) used to celebrate the sacrament.\* The time of the day was uncertain; our blessed Saviour and his apostles celebrated it at night, the time of the Jewish passover: the church of Corinth, according to St. Paul, probably in the morning. It is called a *supper*, Chrysostom thinks, not because it was done in the evening, but to remind them of the time when our Lord instituted these holy mysteries. Pliny says, "in the morning *before day*;" thus accommodating to times of persecution. With respect to *how often* they communicated;—while the spirit of christianity was warm, *every day*, or as oft as they came together for public worship. The canons apostolical, and the synod of Antioch, required every one of the faithful who came to church to hear the Holy Scriptures, under pain of excommunication, if they remained not to participate of the Lord's supper; the eye of their minds being then almost wholly fixed upon the memory of their *crucified Saviour*; and the oftener they fed at his table, the stronger and healthier they found themselves, and the better able to encounter opposition. Cyprian says, "We receive the Eucharist every day, as the food that nourishes us to salvation." In the time of Basil,

\* Socrates, c. v. 22.

they communicated four times a week,—on the Lord's day, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, and upon festivals. Afterwards, as the power of religion began more sensibly to decline, this sacrament was more rarely frequented, and from once a day, it came to once or twice a week; afterwards to once a month, and after to thrice a year,—at the three great solemnities of Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide; to so great a coldness and indifference did the piety and devotions of christians grow, after once the true primitive temper and spirit of the gospel left the world.

3. The *place* where this holy supper was kept, was always, during public worship, in their religious assemblies. It was instituted by our Saviour in a private house, because of its analogy to the Jewish pass-over, and the necessity of the time. By the apostles and christians, in the houses of believers, generally in an *upper room* set apart for the uses of the church. During persecutions, they fled to the mountains, and to the crypts and vaults, and celebrated the sacrament at the tombs of martyrs, and over the ashes of the dead. Churches assuming some beauty and regularity, several parts of divine offices began to have several *places* assigned to them; the communion service being removed to the upper or east end of the church, and there performed upon a table of wood, which afterwards was changed into one of stone, sometimes *metaphorically* styled *altars*; and the Eucharist itself, in later times especially, *the sacrament of the altar*. This place was fenced with rails, within

which the clergy received the sacrament, as the laity did without.

4. We now consider the *manner* how the Eucharist was celebrated in the ancient church. After the service of the catechumens, and before that of the faithful, when the Eucharist was administered, the custom was to present their offerings, every one according to his ability, which was by the minister laid upon the communion table,\* for the uses of the church, for the maintenance of the ministry, and the relief of the poor; out of these, probably, they took (at least sent provisions extraordinary) to furnish the common feast, which, in those days, they constantly had at the celebration of the sacrament, where the rich and poor feasted together at the same table. These were called agapæ, or love-feasts, which were considered not only as a seal of our peace with God, but a sign and pledge of our communion and fellowship with one another. These feasts were continued till great inconveniences being found in them, they were prohibited to be kept in churches by several councils.†

The sacramental elements being prepared, the deacons brought water to the bishop and presbyters, signifying the purity that ought to be in those that draw nigh to God, and then directed mutually to embrace each other. The holy kiss was ancient, commonly used in the apostles' times, and succeeding

\* Irenæus, Justin Martyr, Cyprian.

† Laodicean, Carthage, Trullan.



ages of the church, as a sign of reconciliation : after this, the whole congregation joined the minister in prayer, for the universal peace and welfare of the church, for the tranquillity and *quietness* of the world, for the *prosperity* of the age, for *wholesome weather* and *fruitful seasons*, for all sorts of *persons*, for *kings and emperors* and *all in authority*, for *soldiers and armies*, for *believers and unbelievers*, for *friends and companions*, for the *sick and distressed*, and, in short, for all that *stood in need of help* : after this, followed the mutual salutation of the minister and people. Minister.—*The Lord be with you.* People.—*And with thy spirit.* Minister.—*Lift up your hearts.* People.—*We lift them up unto the Lord.* Minister.—*Let us give thanks unto the Lord.* People.—*It is meet and just so to do.* Upon this, the minister proceeded to the prayer of consecration, in which he expressed great thankfulness to God, for the death, resurrection, and ascension of his Son, for the shedding of his blood for us, and the celebration of it in this sacrament; for condescending to admit them to such mighty benefits, and praying for a closer unity to one another in the same mystical body, concluding with the Lord's prayer, and the hearty and universal acclamation of *amen* by all that were present. The minister then said, *holy things belong to holy persons.* People.—*There is one holy, one Lord Jesus Christ.* Then he exhorted them to a due participation of the holy mysteries, which Cyril tells us was by a divine hymn—“*Come taste and see that the Lord is good.*”

The bishop, or presbyter, took the sacramental

elements and sanctified them by a solemn benediction.

The form of consecration is from S. Ambrose:—\*

*“ Lord, make this oblation now prepared for us to become a reasonable and acceptable sacrifice; this, which is the figure of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, the day before he suffered, took the bread in his sacred hands, looked up to heaven, giving thanks to thee, O holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, blessed it, and having broken it, gave it to his apostles and disciples, saying, Take, eat all of it, for this is my body which is broken for many. Likewise also after supper, he took the cup, that very day before he suffered, looking up to heaven, giving thanks to thee, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, and having blessed it, gave it to his apostles and disciples, saying, Take, and drink ye all of it, for this is my blood.”*

After this, he first brake the bread, and delivering it to the deacon, he distributed it to the communicants; and after that, the cup, which was likewise delivered to them.† Their sacramental wine was generally mixed with water‡ [said to be from tradition; if so, it might arise from the *strong* wines of the east, but being *indifferent* in itself, it could not be obligatory to the church]. The posture was not always the same. The apostles, at its institution, received it in

\* De Sac. lib. iv. c. 5.

† The custom of communicating in one kind only, as it is used in the church of Rome, was then unknown, and for above 1000 years after Christ. In some cases, they dipped the bread in the wine, as in the case of *baptized infants*, weak persons, &c.

‡ Justin Martyr, Irenæus, &c.

a reclining posture, lying on their sides upon couches around the table: afterwards, the custom was to stand at the Lord's table;\* and according to the prudence and piety of the governors of the church, other gestures, that were deemed decent and proper for so solemn an occasion, were introduced. The bread and wine were delivered into the *hands* of the communicants, and not put into their mouths.

During the time of administration, they sung hymns and psalms (particularly the 33d), which being done, the whole was solemnly concluded with prayer and thanksgiving, that *God had thought them worthy to participate of such sacred mysteries*; and the people, being blessed by the bishop or the minister of the assembly, and having again saluted each other with a *kiss of peace*, the assembly broke up, and returned to their own houses.

### REFLECTION.

It is pleasing to observe how exactly the office of the holy communion in the church of England accords with the primitive model, not only in form, but in spirit: for, be it remembered that, if the spirit be wanting, no form can give it value. Every christian society, with the exception of one of very modern date, has thought this memorial of the Saviour's passion an essential duty of religion. That it is often neglected, is a mark of degeneracy in principle, not of disbelief in its efficacy. This is not the place to enforce the

\* Dionysius Alexand. apud Euseb. lib. vii. c. 9.

duty ; but every professor of christianity must be arrested by some solemn visitings of conscience, when he reflects that our Lord said “ *This do—drink ye all of this,*” and departs *to his farm or to his merchandize,* as if no such injunctions had been given. Christ makes no exceptions ; but expects obedience to be as universal as his offered salvation. “ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that *doeth the will* of my Father which is in heaven.” Let the blood of Christ touch *faithfully* your lips, and every evil spirit will vanish from your hearts !

# PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY ;

OR, THE

RELIGION OF THE ANCIENT CHRISTIANS IN THE  
FIRST AGES OF THE GOSPEL.

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## Part Second.

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OF THE RELIGION OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS AS TO  
THOSE VIRTUES THAT RESPECT THEMSELVES.

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### CHAPTER I.

*Of the Humility of the primitive Christians.*

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AFTER *piety towards God*, succeeds that part of religion that immediately respects *ourselves*, expressed by the apostle under the general name of SOBRIETY, or the keeping of ourselves within the bounds and measures which God has set us;—virtues for which the primitive christians were celebrated as well as for the others. Amongst these they are distinguished for their humility, their contempt of the world, their temperance and sobriety, their courage and constancy, and their exemplary patience under sufferings.

Humility is a virtue that seems more peculiar to the gospel; for though philosophers sometimes speak well of it, it made no impression on their lives; they were generally *animalia gloriæ*, creatures that *sacrificed* only to their own praise and honour. But the doctrines of the gospel tend to level all proud aspiring thoughts, to plant the world with mildness and modesty, and “to clothe men with humility, and the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.” By these we are taught to dwell at home, to converse more familiarly with ourselves, to be acquainted with our own deficiencies and imperfections, and rather to *admire* others than *advance ourselves*; *not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think*, nor being unwilling that others should value us at the same rate that we thus esteem ourselves.

That this was the excellent spirit of the primitive christians will appear from their earnestly protesting against all ambitious and vain-glorious designs. How cheerfully they condescended to the meanest offices and employments, declining all advantages of applause and credit, being more willing to give praise to others than take it to themselves, *in honour preferring one another*. Clemens\* highly commends his Corinthians that “they were of an humble temper, and exhorts them (after they were fallen into a little faction and disorder) *still* to be humble-minded, to lay aside all haughtiness and pride, foolishness and anger, and *not to glory in wisdom, strength, or riches*,

\* Ep. p. 3.

*but to let him that glories, glory in the Lord ; and to follow the example of our Lord, the sceptre of the majesty of God, who came not in the vain boasting of arrogancy and pride, although able to withstand whatsoever he pleased, but in great meekness and humility of mind, appearing in the world without any form or comeliness, or any beauty that he should be desired, suffering himself to be despised and rejected of men, who esteemed him not, and hid, as it were, their faces from him; who counted himself a worm and no man, and was accordingly made a reproach of men, and the derision of the people ; all they that saw him, laughing him to scorn, shooting out the lip and shaking the head at him. Now if our Lord himself was so humble-minded, what should we be, who are come under the yoke of his grace?" Thus does Clemens describe and recommend the meek and excellent spirit of the gospel.*

Justin Martyr\* treads in the very same steps. He tells us, that " we are to shun all *sinister suspicions* of others, and to be careful of the *opinion* we entertain of them; that we are to be of a meek and unpassionate mind, not envying the good esteem and respect which others have, and ambitiously exalting ourselves, humbly submitting, not in words only, but in all our actions, so as that we may appear to be not impostors or dissemblers, but mild and undesigning persons." When some, in the time of Cyprian,† had made a noble and resolute confession of

\* Ep. ad Zen. and Seren. p. 505.

† p. b. Presb. and Diacon. p. 13.

Christ in the face of the greatest danger, lest they should be exalted *above measure* in their own thoughts, he bids them “remember, according to the discipline of the gospel, to be humble, and modest, and quiet, and be as glorious in their *actions*, as they had been in their *confessions* of Christ; that they should imitate their Lord, who was not more proud, but more humble at the time of his passion, *washing his apostles’ feet*; and to follow the counsel and pattern of St. Paul, who, in his greatest sufferings, continued meek and humble, and did not arrogate any thing to himself, even when he had been honoured with a translation into *paradise* and *the third heaven*.”

Nazianzen\* reports of his father (a bishop), that “his humility consisted not in his *dress*, but in the *constancy* of his mind; not in *the hanging down of his head*, or the *softness* of his tone, or the *demureness* of his look, or the *gravity* of his beard, or the shaving of his head [the cropping of his hair], or the manner of his gait; but in the frame and temper of his soul, being as humble in his mind as he was *sublime* and excellent in his life. Both in his garb and diet he equally avoided *pomp* and *sordidness*; and though a great restrainer of his appetite, would not yet seem to do it, lest he should be thought plainly to design glory to himself by being *needlessly* singular above other men.” Justin Martyr† “declines the commendation of his adversaries for the acuteness and elegance of his reasonings, resolving all into the *grace of God*

\* Oratio 19 in laud. pat. p. 300.

† Dial. ad Tryph. p. 280.



that enabled him to understand and expound the scriptures, of which grace he persuades all men, freely and fully, to become partakers with him." The primitive christians would not call themselves, or suffer others to call them, *martyrs*; they acknowledged themselves at best but vile and despicable *confessors*, and with tears begging their brethren to be instant with God by prayer, that they might perfect all by a *real* martyrdom.\* Memorable was the humility of the great Constantine, who checked the language of one who praised his greatness, desiring him to turn his praises into prayers to God for him, that both here and hereafter he might be thought worthy to be numbered amongst the servants of God.†

I add one instance more, namely, their ready condescending to any office or employment, though never so mean, about the persons of the poorest christians, to provide victuals for them, to *visit* the imprisoned, to dress their wounds, and to wash their feet.—1 Tim v. 10. The Empress Placilla‡ replied to some of her court who reproved her *for condescending to visit the hospitals, and curing the lame and the sick with her own hands, and for preparing and giving them provisions, as much below her state and grandeur*, that, "to distribute gold became the *Emperor*; but, for her part, she thought herself obliged to do this for *God*, who had advanced her to that honour and dignity."

\* Eus. Hist. lib. v. c. 2.

† De Vita Const. lib. iv. c. 48.

‡ Theod. H. Eccl. lib. v. c. 18.

## REFLECTION.

Humility is a trying grace of the gospel. Do we find irritation of mind, or swelling of heart, when we are opposed in any of our darling inclinations? We are assured, by such ungenial feelings, that corruption still stirs within us, and would prevent the approach of invaluable blessings. Let us check the interruption, and remember that humility is a *peculiar* grace of the gospel, and that a due apprehension of it tries our spirit *whether it be of God*. *Pride*, with its attendants vanity and presumption, *was not made for man*,—for man in his regenerate state; and consequently is in no way compatible with the character of a restrained christian. A subdued mind is the test of christianity. See it in the primitive christian: see it also in his christian successor; for the same holy cause will produce the same holy effect. Let the same mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, so shall we rise with him from this “low earth,” to partake of that true exaltation which is to be found only in heaven!

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 CHAPTER II.

*Of the Heavenly-mindedness of the primitive Christians, and their Contempt of the World.*

THE soul of man being *heaven-born*, cannot but

partake of the nature and disposition of *that country*, and have a native inclination to that place from whence it borrows its *original*; and though it is true that, in this corrupt and degenerate state, it is deeply sunk into *matter*, clogged and overborne with the earthly and sensual propensities of the lower appetites, the desires and designs of men moving up and down like *shadows* upon the surface of the earth; yet does it often, especially when assisted with the aids of religion, attempt its own rescue and release. The mind of a good man is actuated by manly and *generous* impulses; it dwells in the contemplations of heaven, tramples upon those little projects of profit or pleasure, which *ensnare* and *enslave* other men, and makes all its designs subservient to the interests of a better country;—a temper of mind, never more triumphant in any than in the christians of old, *whose conversations were in heaven*, and whose spirits breathed in too free an air to be caught with the charms of the best enjoyments this world could afford. They looked upon the delights and advantages of this life, as things not worthy to arrest their affections in their journey to a better.

Justin Martyr tells Trypho the Jew, that “they were careful to converse with men *according to the scriptures*, not greedily desiring riches, &c.; and that they did not live like the great men of *his people*, of whom God himself has left this reproachful character, that their *princes were companions of thieves*, every one *loving gifts, and following after rewards*.” The Jew retorts with a sneer, that “having, from a vain re-

port, chosen Christ to be their master, they *did for his sake* foolishly undervalue and throw away all the enjoyments and advantages of this world.”\* And indeed, in those times, friends and relations, houses and lands, were cheerfully parted with, when they stood in competition with Christ; they could content themselves with the most naked poverty, so that it might but consist with the profession of the gospel.

The virgin martyr Agatha, descended of rich and illustrious parents, being asked, why she condescended to such mean offices as she took upon her, replied, “Our glory and nobility lies in this—that we are the servants of Christ.”† A Roman citizen and son of a senator being asked, why he adopted such a *superstition*, and worshipped *him* for a God whom the Jews had *crucified*, answered, that “it was the highest honour and nobility to know and serve God; that the christian religion, which he called *superstition*, ought not to be traduced by so base a name, seeing it immediately guided its followers to the highest degrees of happiness; for herein it is that the omnipotent God is revealed, the great Creator of heaven and earth, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom all things were made, and who is in all things equal to the Father.”‡

The simplicity of christians then kept them from aspiring after honour and greatness; and, when advanced to them, their great care was *to keep themselves unspotted from the world*. Nazianzen§ reports

\* Dial. contra Trypho, p. 308. † Martyreum.

‡ Martyreum.

§ In laud Cæsar. frat. Oratio 10.

of his brother, chief physician to the emperor, that, though advanced every day to greater honours and dignities, "he suffered not the *nobility of his soul to be corrupted* by that glory and those delights that were about him, but accounted this his chiefest honour, that he was a *christian*;" regarding that *piety especially*, which is most inward and unseen to the world.

Not that the christians of those days thought it *unlawful* to possess estates, or to use the blessings of divine providence. Although in times of persecution they were often forced to quit their estates and habitations, yet did they preserve their *property* entire; and industriously attended to the *necessary* conveniences of this life, so far as was *consistent* with their care of a better. Some indeed there were (but they were accounted heretics) who gave themselves up to a voluntary poverty, holding it not lawful to possess any thing. [These appear to have been the primitive founders of the mendicant orders in the church of Rome.]

The primitive christians were not more desirous of *pleasures* and recreations abroad, than of indulgences at *home*. They did not frequent public *shows* and *feasts* that were made for the entertainment of the people. This was alleged against them as a *crime* by the heathen, [as resisting their idolatry, and their impure rites and sacrifices]. Octavius answers,\* that he grants all this to be true; and there was

\* Minutius F.

good reason for the adoption of this conduct, as they could not be present without great sin and shame, without offering an affront to their modesty, and horror to their minds; that they were particularly obliged by their baptismal vow *to renounce the devil and all his works, pomps and pleasures*; that is, as Cyril says, the sights and sports of the *theatre* and such like *vanities*. The truth is, they looked upon the public sports and pastimes of those days as the scenes, not only of *folly* and *lewdness*, but of great *impiety* and *idolatry*.

With this disposition towards the world, they were ready to part with any thing that was dearest to them—friends, estate, liberty, or life itself. “Being inflamed,” says Justin Martyr,\* “with the desire of a pure and an *eternal* life, we breathe after an *intimate* converse with God, the great Parent and Creator of the world, and make haste to *seal* our confession with our *blood*; being certainly persuaded that they shall attain to this state, who, by their actions, study to approve themselves to God that they follow after him, and are heartily desirous of communion with him in that life, where no malice or wickedness shall be found.” So much were their thoughts fixed upon the regions of blessedness and immortality; so often did they use to comfort one another by discoursing of that *kingdom* which they expected hereafter, that their intentions were misunderstood, and they were accused as *treasonable affectors of the empire*.†

\* Apol. 2.

† Ibid.

In short, it was their care then continually to *keep company* with *dying* thoughts, and to dwell within the prospect of eternity. “ They are indeed *in the flesh*, but do not *live after* the flesh; they dwell upon earth, but *their conversation is in heaven* :\* as the soul lives *in* the body, but is not *of* the body, so they dwell *in* the world, but are not *of* the world; an *immortal* spirit dwells in a *mortal* tabernacle, and christians, while they sojourn in these *corruptible* mansions, expect and look for an *incorruptible* state in heaven.

### REFLECTION.

The early christians, being deeply impressed with the truth of the gospel, the dignity of revelation, and the gracious promise of salvation to every true believer, felt themselves compelled, as it were, to *live as became the gospel*. This is the only mystery why *their* conduct is superior to our *own*. We must acknowledge ourselves deficient in these essential points; and, therefore, we have greater difficulty in conversing with God in the purity of our hearts: and yet we have the same God, the same Saviour, the same protecting and prevailing Spirit to direct and sanctify us which they had; but we have not, generally speaking, the same power of faith. It is so mixed up with worldly concerns, so broken into parts by distracting cares or delusive pleasures, that we do not rest upon it as *the anchor of our hope*. Is it wonderful then that we have not the same fervour

\* Ep. ad Diognet.

of devotion, the same warm feeling of the presence of God, the same apprehension of his providential care, the same lively gratitude for his inestimable mercies? We are, doubtless, capable of all these things, and *God's grace is sufficient for us.* Though many miss the way, I trust many find it;—many experience that sweet tranquillity of soul which consists in the contemplation of heaven, and assimilates the obedience of christians with the earnest expectation of heavenly comforts. *To seek heaven and contemn the world* are parts of the same system; but they neither imply abstraction from moral duties, or a total disrelish of earthly pursuits, when those pursuits are consistent with a spiritual end. But they certainly imply a rejection of every worldly and base design, an abhorrence of sin under every beguiling shape, and a resolution to follow Christ firmly and consistently through the various and intricate mazes of human life; to love him, to walk with him, and thus, finally, to ascend, *by him* and *with him*, to God the Father—the Father Almighty! Give us then, blessed Lord! grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.



## CHAPTER III.

*Of the Sobriety of the primitive Christians, in Respect of their Garb and Apparel.*

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THE primitive christians being thus eminent for their contempt of the world, it is easy to imagine that they were very *temperate* and *abstemious* in the use of all the pleasures and conveniences of human life, particularly in their sobriety in respect of garb and apparel, their temperance in regard of food and diet, and in their continence or chastity.

1. Care about our garb and dress is one of those instances of sobriety, which are to be conducted by the rules of religion and reason, and which indicate a virtuous or a vicious temper. “There are three things, as the son of Sirach well observes, that shew a man what he is,—his attire, excessive laughter, and his gait:”\* there is not certainly a more open evidence of a *vain mind* than a *vain garb* and habit. “The habit that does best beseem a christian,” says S. Basil, “ought to be such as expresses the meekness and humility of the mind.” “It is not enough,” says Tertullian,† “that a christian be chaste and modest, but he must *appear* to be so;—a virtue, of which he should have so great a store and treasure, that it should flow from his *mind* upon his *habit*, and

\* Eccl. xix. 15.

† De Cultu Fœmin. lib. ii. c. 13.

break from the retirements of his *conscience* into the superficialities of his *life*." Basil says, "the habit of a christian ought to be suitable to the two great ends of clothing instituted by God; namely,—*honesty* and *necessity*." In Paradise, *innocency* was man's only robe; sin brought in other clothing. This should induce us to be modest in our apparel, and to remember that our clothes are the monitors of our apostacy, and that we have little reason to pride ourselves in that which covers our wickedness. Clemens Alexandrinus mentions a third end of clothing, and that is, not only a distinction of sexes, but of ranks and degrees of men, such as are suitable to men's age, persons, shape, and nature, or to their several states and employments; in these respects, they may use different and distinguishing habits.

The ancient christians governed themselves by such rules as these; and avoided, in these respects, both *singularity* and *excess*; conforming to the decent and orderly customs and fashions of the times and places *where* they lived. Justin Martyr\* describes them as not differing from other men, either in their country, or their speech, or in the usages of common life. "They dwell," he says, "in their own cities, use the same language with other men, nor have they any singular and extraordinary way of life; they are not in any thing affected or fantastic, but inhabiting partly among Greeks, and partly in barbarous cities, as every one's lot is fallen; they follow the custom

\* Ep. ad Diogn. p. 496.

of their country, and, both in clothes and diet, and in all other affairs of outward life, shew the excellent and admirable constitution of their discipline and conversation."

It had been made a question—Whether, when they turned christians, they left off the *toga*, the Roman gown, and took up the *pallium*, or cloak, which was worn by those who entered on a life of more than ordinary strictness? But that there was any such change of habits when men became christians, there is no reason to believe: but in the case of Tertullian, who wrote an apology for himself, he altered his habit, and assumed the *cloak*, not when he became christian, but when he was made *presbyter* of the church of Carthage.

From hence it appears, that, although the clergy, and such as entered upon a more strict and *ascetic* course of life, had a habit peculiar to themselves, yet the generality of christians differed not from the common garb. They were indeed very careful to avoid all costliness and finery in their appearance, but chose such a dress as expressed the greatest lowliness and innocency. "The garments that we should wear," says Clemens Alexandrinus, "ought to be mean and frugal, not *curiously* wrought with divers colours (the emblem of *craftiness* and *deceit*), but *white*, to denote our embracing and professing simplicity and truth."

The fathers indeed often complained of, and smartly reprov'd, the vanity and folly, particularly of female dress, which they adopted out of an emu-

lation of the heathen ladies among whom they lived, probably in respect of its excessive and unbounded nature: [using the well-known injunctions of the apostles]. They were to recollect, that, though they were rich, yet they were to consult the honour and modesty of their situations; they must not go to the utmost bounds of what was lawful, some things being *lawful* which were not *expedient*; they were not to imitate *wantonness* in themselves, or excite *desire* in others. Their arguments are particularly strong against the employment of *artificial beauty*. “These arts,” they say, “are *injurious to God*, and a *disparagement* to his workmanship: it is a bold and a sacrilegious design, and a high contempt of God, to *reform* what God has *formed*; to alter and change his work; and, as much as they can, to *disfigure* that person which *God has made after his own image and likeness*.”

The whole of this argument may be summed up in these words. The *true* beauty of a christian, in those days, lay not in *external* and adventitious ornaments, but in the *goodness* and *purity* of the mind. “The beauty of the body,” says Clemens of Alexandria,\* “consists in a good complexion, and in an *apt symmetry* and proportion of its parts; but the greatest beauty in the world is that of the *soul*, when it is *adorned with the Holy Spirit*, and the excellent graces of it—*justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance, the love of goodness and modesty*, which is the brightest

\* Pædag. lib. iii. c. 11.

and most lovely ornament that the eye of man can behold. It is not the exterior aspect of the man that is to be regarded, but the mind that is to be furnished and *adorned with goodness and virtue.*"

## REFLECTION.

The garb, or apparel, is no indifferent circumstance in the system of christianity; not that it is otherwise essential to the conduct of a christian, than as it is an indication of the sobriety and stability of his mind. We cannot at the same time be *clothed with humility, or the ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit*, and with gay and fantastic, not to say loose and indecorous, clothing: all such deviation from the established rules of orderly society, must be considered as irreligious and profane. A true christian ought to abstain from all *appearance of evil*, of course from all unnecessary imitations, even of doubtful customs. This maxim was inculcated by St. Paul, and is illustrated in the pure life and holy habits of the Son of God. It is an indispensable duty to walk without offence in the midst of a sinful generation: at the same time, *singularity of clothing* is no mark of christian morals; on the contrary, it too frequently suggests a disposition to say,—“stand apart, for I am holier than thou.” God forbid that I should impute the application to any order of men whose customs differ from my own. The *pureness of faith* is consistent with singularity of garb; and it must equally be conceded that it is not inconsistent with a different arrangement of outward clothing, Many

eyes are intent on the conduct and behaviour, consequently on the visible tokens of christian manners; but it is not for this reason only, that I would recommend attention to the outward as well as the *inward man*. There is a duty attached to the performance. Our blessed Lord directs us to "let our light so shine before men," that the christian character may appear under the most amiable impressions; not for any advantages of a worldly nature, but to induce the unthinking straggler, in the wilderness of the world, to check his wandering and desultory steps, and his still more wavering and unstable mind; *to turn to the Lord with all his heart*, who is ever seeking those of his flock who have gone astray, and who earnestly entreats them, by all the motives of redeeming love, to come unto Him, the shepherd and bishop of their souls. Give us, blessed Lord! *modesty of heart*, the chaste and pure effect of thy holy religion, and then we shall neither disparage or disgrace ourselves, by habits of folly and ostentation, nor seduce others to shame and contempt by our example!

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#### CHAPTER IV.

*Of the great Temperance and Abstinence of the primitive Christians.*

AMONGST the many temptations that besiege the life of man, there is scarce any into which we are more

easily betrayed than into a vicious curiosity about meats and drinks, and the excesses of an unruly appetite; therefore it is, that the christian religion so frequently inculcates upon us the precepts of SOBRIETY and TEMPERANCE—to “*be temperate in all things, to watch and be sober, to cast off the works of darkness, to walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in excess of wine, revellings, and banquetings; to take heed that our hearts be not at any time overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and that we be not as men of the old world, brutishly taken up with eating and drinking, when the flood came and swept all away.*” The law of Christ commands us *to fast often, to keep under the body, and to make no provision for the flesh;* if nature, regularly governed, be content with *little*, religion will teach us to be content with *less*. These rules the first christians exactly transcribed into their lives, affording the greatest instances of real abstinence and mortification, which they both practised themselves and pressed upon others; they knew very well that God had given men a *charter* of freedom indifferently to use the creatures, and to enjoy them in some degree, not only for necessity, but delight; but yet were afraid to go so far as they might, or to do any thing that might look like excess, or display an irregular and unsober mind; they contented themselves with such provisions as were conducive to health and strength, without any inordinate desire after those that were luxurious and delightful.

Basil\* truly observes, that, "by reason of men's different ages and course of life, their different tempers and constitutions of body, and other circumstances, no one fixed and certain rule can be prescribed in this case; but yet our food and diet ought to be regulated by the general end of it, which is, not wantonly to please the palate, but to minister to health, and to repair the weakness and decays of nature." Clemens Alexandrinus† says, "Many live only that they may eat; but, *for us*, we are commanded to eat, that we may live; for food and pleasure is not the work and design for which we live in the world, *our residence here being in order to an incorruptible life*; and, therefore, our nourishment ought to be easy and simple, and such as is subservient to the two main ends of life,—health and strength." "Wine," says Justin Martyr,‡ "is neither to be drunk daily to excess, nor to be used as commonly as water; both indeed are God's creatures, but water necessary, wine given only to help and relieve the body. Of all men in the world, it least becomes us [christians], as if we were votaries to luxury, to abuse the creatures of God, and to make use of *thirst* as a pretence to drunkenness. We ought to drink no more than will satisfy our thirst; not like those who, swallowing down wine, as men drink in a burning fever, quickly make an end of themselves through their intemperance. Nor are we less to take heed of

\* Reg. Jus. Disput. Interrog. 19, tome ii. † Pædag. lib. ii. c. 1.

‡ Ep. ad Zen.



*gluttony*, contenting ourselves with a *spare* diet, and such only as is necessary, not giving way to the infinite and unsatisfied cravings of a nice and imtemperate appetite, which will have a thousand pretences to defend itself; but ruling ourselves according to the wise sentence of him who said, that *we are to eat only to satisfy our hunger.*" "It is true," says Clemens Alexandrinus, "all things were made for man's sake, yet it is not convenient to make use of all, and at some times less than at others; for the advantageous use of any thing, respect should be had, not only to the thing itself, but to the *time, occasion, and manner* of using it: that, therefore, our meals should be light and easy, not mixed with variety of dainties, but such as may prepare for *fasting* and the exercises of religion." Cyprian\* directs his presbyters and deacons to "eat and drink soberly, lest their minds should be less *watchful unto prayer.*" "The chief care of christians then was," says Clemens Alexandrinus, "to become partakers of that *divine food that is from above*; and *that only* is capable of giving real satisfaction, little regarding what provisions they had (so they had but any) for that part that dwelt here below." It was the great end of their signal abstinence in those days, that, by subduing the flesh, they might better restrain the inordinate motions of *corrupt nature.* "In all our abstinence, according to Origen,† we do it only to *keep under the body* and *bring it into subjection*, endeavour-

\* Ad Presb. and Diac. Ep. 7. † Cont. Cels. lib. v.

ing to *mortify the deeds of the body, to expel and extinguish in our members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, and every evil concupiscence and desire.*" Christians, in their abstemiousness and temperance, observed it, not out of any vain and foolish affectation, any nice and singular opinion, any base and sordid, morose or unsatiable temper, but were careful to keep the *mean*, and to avoid sordidness as well as luxury; they did not, therefore, profess themselves enemies to the provisions of human life, any further than as they were inconsistent with the ends of sobriety and religion. It is observed by Tertullian,\* that "If they had any feast, it was a love-feast, and whatever cost was laid out upon it, was expended, not for vain-glory, but upon the accounts of piety and religion; not to nourish parasites and flatterers, but to refresh the poor: that the order of the feast was as sober and regular, as the cause was honest, going no further than modesty would admit;—they prayed to God before they ventured upon his creatures, eat but what sufficed hunger, drank no more than what consisted with sober and modest men, and fed so as remembering they were to rise at night to worship God; when they had done, they sung psalms, either of their own composure, or out of the holy volumes, and as they began, so they ended the feast with prayer, and then departed with the same care to preserve their modesty and chastity; so they appeared,

\* Apol. c. 39.

† P. 23.

not so much to have feasted at supper, as to have fed upon discipline and order." Our feasts, as the christian says, in Minutius Fælix,\* are not only chaste but sober; we indulge not ourselves with banquets, nor make our feasts with wine, but temper our cheerfulness with gravity and seriousness.

## REFLECTION.

Who does not expect all this in the character of a christian? Who is a christian, and indulges in the contrary extreme? Alas! we are all children of temptation. But this consideration, so far from being an apology for sin, should be a motive for resistance. We must strive *for the mastery*, if we would shew the integrity of our faith. Basil uses the word *continnence*, when speaking of temperance; which is, indeed, its largest and most comprehensive sense. The eye of the world is on the christian; and, however defective in its own conduct, it will not endure transgression in one who professes the religion of the gospel in its purest state. Other virtues are exercised in secret. A man's own breast is his confidant: but purity of behaviour, in so ordinary a state of human life, is conspicuous as the day. A man may be an hypocrite in many outward respects, but in this he hardly can. As he who assumes the character of a champion must be of an athletic frame, and possessed of a strong constitution of body, so he who aspires after the character of an ancient chris-

\* P. 26.

tian, must first subdue himself; he must vanquish his flesh with its affections and lusts; he must be a champion only for the commands of Christ; he must contend and conquer in the cause of piety and virtue; for the only field of true conquest is—the field of gospel-righteousness.

This passage of Milton, *spiritually considered*, exalts both his poetry and his religion:—

- “ But is there yet no other way, besides  
 “ These painful passages, how we may come  
 “ To death, and mix with our connatural dust?  
 “ There is :————— if thou well observe  
 “ The rule of *not too much* ; by temperance taught  
 “ In what thou eat’st and drink’st ; seeking from thence  
 “ Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight ;  
 “ Till many years over thy head return.  
 “ So may’st thou live ; till, like ripe fruit, thou drop  
 “ Into thy mother’s lap ; or, be with ease  
 “ Gather’d, not harshly pluck’d, for *death mature*.  
 “ This is OLD AGE.”—————

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## CHAPTER V.

*Of the singular Continnence and Chastity of  
 the primitive Christians.*

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A THIRD considerable instance of that sobriety and moderation for which the christians were so renowned of old, was their *continnence*, and abstaining from all manner of uncleanness, which is properly called

*chastity.* So far were they from indulging in any unchaste conduct, that they frequently abstained even from *lawful* pleasures, and kept themselves even from the honourable and undefiled bed, never marrying all their life. "We are chaste in our speech, and chaster in our bodies," says Octavius;\* "many of us preserving inviolably a perpetual virginity." "It is very easy," says another apologist,† "to find many amongst us, both men and women, who remain unmarried, even in *old age*; conceiving that in this state they shall have fitter opportunities of drawing near to God." Not that they who persevered in this course of celibacy, separated themselves into distinct societies, and did bind themselves under an oath of perpetual virginity [as the custom was in after ages]; for of this, not the least shadow appears in any of the writings of those days; they lived promiscuously till towards the end of the *third century*, applying themselves to the business of their place and station, and they only lived single, that, in those troublesome and hazardous times of persecution, they might be less ensnared with the entanglements of the world, and be more free in the exercises of religion.

2. When they did marry, they generally professed that it was to comply with the ends of the institution. Hence it was that they seldom married more than *once*, which was a great subject of admiration with the gentiles among whom they dwelt. On such an

\* Min. Fæl. p. 26.

† Athenag. leg. pro Christian. p. 7.

occasion, one exclaimed, “ *Behold what brave women there are among the christians.*”\* The truth is, such was the heavenly zeal and temper of the first ages of christianity, that they would have no more to do with the world than they could help, and industriously avoided all its burthens and incumbrances, amongst which they reckoned marriages. It must indeed be allowed that many of the ancient fathers, Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerom, and others, carried this argument too far, and improperly pressed many passages of scripture to serve this purpose. “As for those,” says Clemens Alexandrinus, “to whom God has given the gift of absolute continence, we think them happy; but compassion ought to be had of others, and that we should bear one another’s burthens, lest *he who seems to stand fair do fall himself*; and as for second marriages, the apostle says, *if they cannot contain, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn.*”

3. They were infinitely careful to shun all *occasions* and appearances of lightness and immodesty, whatever might tend to seduce their senses, and debauch their minds and manners; nay, whatever might give a suspicion of wantonness and incontinence. They declined, as much as might be, going to all public meetings, such as feasts, plays, shows, &c.—[Many laws, ecclesiastical and civil, were made to protect the modesty of women, and general decency and decorum; promiscuous baths were forbidden, and clan-

\* Chrysost.

destine marriages disallowed.]—As they were careful not to give offence to others, so they were not willing themselves to come within the shadow of a temptation; they avoided whatever was offensive either to their *eyes* or *ears*,—immodest pictures and discourse. Nazianzen's sister "Gorgonia," he says, "for modesty and sobriety exceeded other women; she reconciled the opposite states of human life,—celibacy and marriage; the one, more sublime and divine, but more dangerous and troublesome; the other, more humble, but more safe: she avoided the inconveniences of each, and chose what was most excellent out of both,—the sublimity of one, and the security of the other."

4. They valued their innocency and their honour above their lives; and, therefore, chose to undergo the greatest dangers; to die, yea, rather *to kill themselves*, than that any violence should be offered to their chastity. During Maximinus's fury, christian women generously despised death, and made light of the fury of the tyrant; the men underwent all sorts of punishments; the women submitted rather to death than to dishonour. Whether it were lawful to lay violent hands upon themselves on such occasions, it is not very pertinent for me to enquire; but it is enough to observe, that they were evidences how highly they prized chastity and integrity, which they were willing to secure at so dear a rate.

5. Whenever any was found guilty of the least uncleanness, it was looked upon and bewailed as a very heinous sin, and a great dishonour to the chris-

tian name. "What is it that I hear," says Cyprian;\* "how detestable should it be to you, what with the greatest grief and affliction of my mind-I have understood, that there are some amongst you who have defiled their bodies, the temples of God, even after they were sanctified by confession and cleansed by baptism!"

6. But in addition to good words and persuasion, when not effectual, they joined the discipline of the church. They punished the breach of chastity by inflicting severe penalties upon incontinent persons. Amongst all the sins that were most sharply punished in the ancient church, *adultery* was one of the chief; whoever was convicted of it, was immediately cast out of the church. The censures of the church indeed, in this case, very much varied according to time and place; but, in all, they shewed abundantly their hearty enmity to all filthiness and impurity.

### REFLECTION.

The modern professor of christianity may look upon this picture of primitive chastity with a corrected and an humble mind. He must not shelter himself under the decorum of modern manners, which habitually removes from polished society whatever is offensive to the *eye*. The unsuspecting person may perhaps travel far, and not be offended: but God seeth not as man seeth; the veil must be removed, and the prospect is appalling. I do not

\* Ad Rogat. and Conf. Ep. 6.



wish to enter behind such a scene, but it becomes me to warn the true christian that such an one exists. No sin more easily besets us. The temptation is universal, and resistance weak. Here reflection, accompanied with prayer, should act as a beacon; and "KEEP THYSELF PURE" should be written on the heart, as with a sunbeam. Evil comes from various quarters; but there is no evil more seductive, more dangerous than this. It is unnecessary to transcribe the language of scripture, or to produce instances of this fatal delusion. If a dreadful *woe* is denounced against those who *look upon* a favoured person with a lustful and impure intention, how shall he escape the severity of punishment, who not only attempts, but *completes*, a crime thus marked by the divine displeasure? It is in vain to compromise on such a subject. Smooth words will not erase vicious actions; neither will a gay countenance cover an aching heart. It is the duty of every son of primitive christianity to bear testimony against the heinousness and extensive evils of such promiscuous intercourse. Be not deceived: *neither fornicators nor adulterers shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

It must be further remarked, that there are various stages in the commission of this offence, all of which demand an appropriate censure; and the offender should be told that all arts, whether of dress or manner, which tend to destroy primitive innocence and virtue, are, in one degree or other, denounced by our blessed Saviour. *May the Almighty preserve us by his grace both from the commission and the appearance of evil!*

## CHAPTER V.—CONTINUED.

*Of the singular Continnence and Chastity of the primitive Christians.*

WHAT has been advanced respecting the modesty, the chaste and sober conduct of the primitive christians, will receive further light, if we consider how clearly they vindicated themselves from the malicious charges of *incest* and *adultery*, which were generally charged upon them by the heathen; so generally, that we find hardly any of the ancient apologists who do not notice and confute them.

The charges stated at some length by the heathen in Minutius. Felix, it is unnecessary to recapitulate. They end with the observation that if the christians be not all alike guilty of incest, it is not the fault of their *will*, but the good fortune of their *chance*, seeing what *actually* happens to one is *intentionally* the lot of all. This alludes to a supposed promiscuous meeting in darkness. The tale is both absurd and incredible; but strangely found belief, or at least was pretended to be believed, amongst the enemies of christianity. To these they pleaded four things in vindication.

1. Had the charges been true, yet the heathen had little reason to object them to the christians, being notoriously themselves guilty in these respects. "They feign those things of us," says Athenagoras,\* "which

\* Legat. pro Christian. p. 35.

they themselves report of their own *gods*, whose lusts and wantonness it is no wonder they style *mysteries*." Their histories are full of them; their plays and tragedies, which they frequented every day with great applause, represented them as lawful and commendable.\* Justin Martyr thus freely and passionately addresses the senate in his apology,—“ It were to be wished that some one, ascending unto an high place, should thus exclaim, *Be afraid, be afraid to charge those things, of which you yourselves are openly guilty, upon the innocent and undeserving; to attribute what belongs only to yourselves and to your gods, to those with whom there is not a shadow of any such thing to be found. Learn to be more wise and sober, and repent of such injuries.*”

2. The heathens themselves tacitly confess the christians to be innocent of this accusation, by endeavouring to corrupt them in this very manner, and making it a part of their severest punishment to expose them to such violence and rudeness, which they never would have inflicted, had they been in reality such as they represented them. “ When you chuse,” says Tertullian, “ rather to condemn a woman to prostitution than to the lions, you plainly acknowledge that the violation of chastity is accounted by us a *heavier* penalty than any punishment, or kind of death, which you can inflict upon us.”

3. They confidently assured the heathen, that among christians it was not only unlawful to be actu-

\* Tertul. Apol.

ally unclean, but *to look after a woman with wanton and unchaste desires*. “ We are not, therefore,\* allowed, they said, to use our eyes to any other purposes than those for which God created them; namely, to be *lights* to the body. To abuse them to wantonness, is to be guilty of adultery; for as much as they know they were made for other ends, and cannot but be conscious to themselves of their own thoughts; and how is it possible for men under such limitations [restrictions] to be otherwise than chaste and sober? For we have not to deal with human laws, under which a man may be wicked, and yet escape; but our discipline was delivered by God himself. We have a law which makes ourselves the rule and measure of righteousness towards others: according, therefore, to the difference of age, we account some as *sons and daughters*, others as *brethren and sisters*; the more aged we honour in the place of *parents*; those, therefore, whom we account as *sisters*, or as allied to us in any other relation, we consider it as a matter of great concern that they should be chaste and incorrupt.”

4. They said further, that the objection would easily cease, if their opponents would but consider what a strange change and alteration was wrought in this respect upon persons at their first *conversion* to christianity. They became immediately of another temper and spirit from what they were before. “ We who before time,” says Justin Martyr, speaking of

\* Athenagoras.

the converting power of the christian doctrine, “ did please ourselves in fornications and uncleanness, do now solely embrace temperance and chastity. What an innumerable company could I name of those who have left their luxury and intemperance, and adopt this kind of life ; *for Christ came, not to call the chaste and righteous* [they needed it not], *but the wicked, the incontinent, and the unrighteousness, to repentance.*” “ *They,*” Origen\* observes, “ must confess the excellency and *divinity* of Christ’s doctrine, who look into the *lives* of those who adhere to it; comparing their former course of life with that they now lead, and considering in what impurities, lusts, and wickednesses, every one of them were engaged before they embraced this doctrine; but since they have adopted it, how much more grave, moderate, and constant they have become: insomuch, that some of them out of a desire of more *transcendent* purity, and that they may worship God with a chaster mind, deny themselves even lawful indulgences.” Lactantius† makes this triumphant challenge, when discoursing of the prevalency which the commands of God had upon the minds of men, as demonstrated by daily experience:—“ Give me a man that is “ angry, furious, and passionate, and with a few “ words from God, I will render him as meek and “ quiet as a lamb; give me one that is lustful, filthy, “ and vicious, and you shall see him sober, chaste, “ and continent: so great is the power of divine wis-

\* Ad Cels. lib. 1.

† Lib. 3. de fals. Sapient.

“ dom, that, being infused into the breast of a man,  
“ it will soon expel that folly which is the grand  
“ parent of all vice and wickedness.”\*

### REFLECTION.

I would gladly pass over a reflection on such infamous lusts as are intimated in this chapter, as an unnecessary admonition for a follower of Christ. I might have said, with the good and pious Bishop Taylor, “ Stay, reader, and read not the advices of the following section, unless thou hast a chaste spirit, or desirest to be chaste, or, at least, art apt to consider whether you ought or no.” But, alas! while uncleanness walks among us almost unmolested, the purity of christianity demands support. Chaste thoughts and actions ought not to be sullied with the breath of impurity. *The wife of Cæsar should not be suspected*; and the immaculate church of Christ should stand free from pollution. But whilst the public prints shamelessly offer to the view of the world secrets of seduction, which should be buried beneath the depth of the earth;—whilst courts of justice are called upon for damages as a civil offence, on what constitutes the most depraved and licentious conduct;—whilst the legislature pass bills of divorce

\* The author thinks it probable that many of the infamous reports relative to the primitive christians, originated in the character and conduct of some of the early heretics, whose manners and customs differed as much from those of the true believer as they did in doctrines.

as matters of daily occurrence,—the mind duly impressed with a deep sense of christianity in the abstract, with its doctrines and its duties, its sanctions and its ordinances, must not only be filled with sorrow, but too often indignation. One sign of depravity remains, which is the only one I shall mention;—crimes, of a nature which cannot be described, are committed as *venial faults*; if they even, in the estimation of the offender, amount to that distinction. They do not stay to enquire at the oracle of God, whether those who do, or do not, these things, shall inherit the kingdom of God? “They study cases of conscience in the matter of carnal sins, not to avoid, but to learn, ways how to offend God and pollute their own spirits; and search their houses with a sunbeam, that they may be instructed in all the corners of impurity.” “But abstinence and continence,” says the same excellent author\* in glowing language, “is the life of angels—the enamel of the soul—the huge advantage of religion—the great opportunity for the retirements of devotion; and being empty of cares, it is full of prayers; being unmingled with the world, it is apt to converse with God; and by not feeling the warmth of a too forward and indulgent nature, flames out with holy fires, till it be burning like the cherubin and the most extatic order of holy and unpolluted spirits.”

\* Bishop Taylor.

## CHAPTER VI.

*Of the Readiness and Constancy of the primitive Christians in professing their Religion.*

WHEN our blessed Saviour sent out his disciples to preach the gospel, he acquainted them with the *difficulties* that were like to attend their message, but bade them at the same time arm themselves with constancy and resolution, and not to regard the scoffs and reproaches, the miseries and sufferings, that might befall them; *not to fear them that could only kill the body, but to make a free and bold confession of his name before the world, and cheerfully to take up their cross, and follow him.* And St. Paul, though himself then in chains at Rome, exhorts the christians to *stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, being in nothing terrified by their adversaries, it being given them on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake*; which made it very necessary for them to have their *feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.* And certainly, if ever true courage and greatness of mind appeared in any persons in the world, it was in the *christians* of those times, who, with such a generous and unterrified mind, defied dangers and torments, owned and gloried in the profession of christianity, against all



the threats, reproaches, and persecutions, which the worst of their adversaries could make against them.

Justin Martyr,\* speaking of the successful propagation of the gospel, immediately after Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven, says, "The apostles of Christ, going forth from Jerusalem, preached the powerful word in every place, although it were capital either to preach or profess the name of Christ, which yet we do everywhere embrace and teach; which if you (as enemies) obstruct, the worst you can do is to *kill* us, by which you will do us no great harm, but will purchase to yourselves, and to all those that unjustly persecute us, and persist in their impenitent proceedings, the vengeance of eternal flames." And again,—“They rather chose to die than renounce their religion; and cheerfully underwent death, being fully assured that what God had promised through *Christ*, he would infallibly perform.” And again,—“As for us that have entertained the religion of the holy Jesus, you yourselves know very well that there is none throughout the world that is able to subdue and affright us out of our profession; nay, the more these things happen to us, the faster others flock over to the name of Jesus, and become pious and devout followers of Christ; it being with us in this case, as with a vine, which, being pruned and trimmed, and its luxurious excrescences pared off, brings forth more fruitful and flourishing branches.”

\* Apol. ii. p. 83.

Nor were these *big words* which the christians used in the sight of their enemies: they made them good by their actions. How freely and impartially did they speak their minds even to their bitterest enemies! When Maris, bishop of Chalcedon, a man blind with age, met the Emperor Julian, he boldly charged him with his *atheism* and *apostacy* from the christian faith. Julian reproached him with his blindness, and told him, his Galilean God would never cure him. To which the good old man presently answered, *I thank my God who has taken away my sight, that I might not behold the face of one that has lapsed into so great impiety.\**

When the officers were sent to apprehend S. Polycarp,† and had with great industry and cruelty found out the place where he was, though he had timely notice to have escaped by going to another house, yet he refused, saying, *the will of the Lord be done*; and coming down out of his chamber, saluted the officers with a cheerful and pleasant countenance. As they were carrying him back, two men of eminence and authority, that met him in their way, took him into their chariot, and endeavoured to persuade him *to do sacrifice*; but not succeeding, they threw him with such violence from the chariot that he was greatly bruised with the fall. As he went cheerfully on his way, a voice was heard, as it were from heaven, —*Polycarp, be strong, and quit thyself like a man.*

\* Socrat. Eccl. Hist. lib. iii. c. 12.

† Eus. Hist. Eccl. lib. iv. c. 25.

When he came before the pro-consul, and was urged to deny Christ, he replied, *These four score and six years have I served Christ, and he never did me any harm; and how then can I blaspheme my master and my Saviour?* After further conversation, he was threatened with a cruel death (which soon afterwards befel him); but he was so far from being terrified, that he was filled with joy and cheerfulness, and a certain grace and loveliness overspread his countenance.

Thus also when Cyprian was brought before the pro-consul, he said, *Thou art Thascius Cyprian, who hast been a ringleader to men of a wicked mind; the emperor commands thee to do sacrifice; and, therefore, consult thy welfare.* He replied, *I am Cyprian, I am a christian, and I cannot sacrifice to your gods; do, therefore, what you are commanded; as for me, in so just a cause there needs no consultation.* When sentence was pronounced against him, he cried out, *I heartily thank Almighty God, who is pleased to free me from the chains of this earthly carcass.\**

By this free and cheerful endurance of the greatest miseries rather than deny, or prejudice, their religion, christians evidently demonstrated the goodness of their principles. "Malefactors," as Tertullian† argues, "desire to be concealed; being apprehended, they tremble; being accused, they deny; being racked, they do not always confess the truth. But what is there like this to be found in christians? Amongst them, no man is ashamed, none repents of being a

\* Act. Passion Cypr. in Vita ejus.

† Apol. c. 1.

christian, unless that he was not *sooner* so; if marked out, he *glories*; if accused, he does not *defend* himself; being interrogated, he *confesses*; being condemned, he *gives thanks*. What evil can that be, of which he that is guilty *rejoices*—of which to be accused, is his *desire*—and for which to be punished, is his *happiness* and *felicity*?" Pliny himself bears testimony\* to this strenuous conduct of the primitive christians; when speaking of some who had been accused for being christians, and shewing that this was not the case, as they blasphemed Christ and sacrificed to the gods, he adds, "*None of these things those who are truly christians can be compelled to do.*"

### REFLECTION.

No modern christian, in any civilized society, whether truly believing or professing a belief in Christ, is likely to be called to such severe sufferings as the early christians were, under the Roman emperors. Doubtless some have suffered, and suffered *well*, for religion's sake. The circumstances of those times required it. The blood of martyrs was the seed of the church even in late ages; but the inveteracy of heathen tyranny on the subject of christianity, was as much beyond calculation as it was above experience. And how was this? Was it not the painful test of the truth of christian faith, permitted and directed by the will of God himself? Was not the patient endurance of torture a miraculous attestation of divine

\* Ep. xvii. lib. 10.

providence for the complete establishment of his revealed will? *The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

But though we may not be called to such sufferings, a tyranny still reigns over us which requires the influence of the same Spirit to subdue. The tyranny of sin, the allurements of a wicked world, the seductions of error, the temptations of the flesh, are all so many heathen emperors drawing us from the faith; and if our own powers were the only powers to preserve us in this war of elements, we should not return from the battle, like an early christian; but consider, who says, *My grace is sufficient for thee.* Blessed Lord! give me thy grace, that I faint not in so severe a conflict; preserve me from apostacy, both from within and from without: if thou dost not lessen torture, give stability! *I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost: oh! seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments!*

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## CHAPTER VII.

*Of the exemplary Patience under Sufferings of the primitive Christians.*

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THAT the christian religion, at its first appearing in the world, was likely to engage its followers in miseries and sufferings, could not be unknown to any

that considered the nature of its *doctrine* and the tendency of its *design*. The severity of its precepts, so directly opposite to the corrupt and vicious inclinations of men; the purity of its worship, so entirely contrary to the loose and licentious rites and solemnities of the heathens; its absolute inconsistency with those religions which had obtained for so many ages, which then had such firm possession of the minds of men, and all the powers and policies of the world to secure and protect them, could not prophesy to it any kind of welcome entertainment. This *sect* (for so they called it) was everywhere, not only *spoken*, but *fought*, against; for, since men have a natural veneration for antiquity, especially in matters of religion, they thought themselves concerned to defend the religion of their ancestors. It became, therefore, the object of the great and powerful, as well as of the Roman emperors, to oppress and *stifle this infant religion*, and banish it out of the world. Hence those imperial orders that were daily issued, to command and empower their governors to ruin and destroy the christians in every part of the empire.

“ We understand,” said a rescript of Valerian, “ that the precepts of the laws are violated by those, “ who, in these days, call themselves christians: “ wherefore, we will that, apprehending them, un- “ less they sacrifice to our gods, you expose them “ to divers kinds of punishments; that so both jus- “ tice may have place without delay, and vengeance, “ in cutting off impieties, having attained its end, “ may proceed no farther.” In consequence, the

sufferings of the christians in these primitive persecutions were beyond all imagination great, which yet did but so much the more exercise and advance their *patience*; the bitterness of their sufferings making their patience more eminent and illustrious. This will be more manifest, if we consider the *greatness* of their *torments*, and the *manner* in which they sustained them.

1. Into the former, I will not harass the feelings by a minute enquiry. It is sufficient to observe, that the methods of execution consisted principally of these six; namely,—the cross, the rack, the wheel, burning, wild beasts, and condemnation to the mines. To what purpose is it to insist on these things? Sooner may a man count the stars than reckon up all those methods of misery and suffering which the christians endured. It is better to consider what was their behaviour and carriage under them. This we shall find to have been the most sedate and calm, most constant and resolute; they neither *fainted* nor *fretted*; neither railed at their enemies, nor sunk under their hands; but bore up under the heaviest torments, under the bitterest reproaches, with a meekness and patience that was invincible, and such as every way became the mild, and yet generous, spirit of the gospel. Even women were as courageous as the men; many of them undergoing the same conflicts, and reaping the same rewards of their constancy and virtue.

Whenever they were sought for in order to condemnation, they were not solicitous for opportunities

to escape. And if they did not run away from suffering, much less did they oppose it, and make tumults and parties to defend themselves. No! *they were led as lambs to the slaughter; and as the sheep before the shearers are dumb, so opened they not their mouths, but committed their cause to him that judges righteously, and who has said, Vengeance is mine; and I will repay it.*

It must at the same time be acknowledged, that, in some cases, they held it lawful and convenient to *fly* in times of persecution; namely, first,—When persons were of more than ordinary use and eminency, whose lives would be advantageous to the church. Thus St. Paul was let down the wall in a basket, when the governor of Damascus sought his life. Thus Cyprian withdrew from Carthage, and lay hid for two years together, during which time he gave secret orders for governing the church. Thus Athanasius withdrew, vindicating himself from the example of Jacob, Moses, David, and Elias; and from those of Christ himself and the apostles, *when they persecute you in one city, flee unto another*: and when Jerusalem was encompassed by the Roman armies, the christians were directed to *fly unto the mountains*. It was necessary for the apostles to shun the storm, as they were instruments immediately deputed to propagate and convey the gospel to the world. In this they were imitated by the primitive saints and martyrs, who *wandered about in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth*; being equally careful to avoid the two extremes of rashness



and of cowardliness, they would neither thrust themselves upon danger, nor basely run from death when called to it.

Secondly,—They also accounted it lawful for persons to retire from persecutions, when they were new converts, and as yet *weak* in the faith, not being able to bear the shock of persecution; in that case, they judged it better for them to withdraw. This they did not consider as any impeachment of their zeal and readiness for suffering, but only gaining a little respite, that they might suffer with greater advantage afterwards.

2. But so far were they from declining suffering, or being terrified with those miseries which they saw others undergo, that they freely, and in great multitudes, *offered* themselves to the rage and fury of their enemies, embracing death as the greatest honour that could be done to them. Sulpicius Severus\* in the ninth persecution observes, “they strove which should rush first upon these glorious conflicts. Men in those days, he says, much more greedily sought martyrdom in the cause of Christ, than in after times they did for bishoprics and preferments in the church.” “I am quite tired out,” says Tiberianus, President of Palestine, in his relation to the Emperor Trajan,† “in punishing and destroying the Galileans (called here by the name of christians), according to your commands, and yet they *cease not* to offer themselves to be slain; nay, though I have laboured both

\* Sac. Hist. lib. ii.

† Apud Usses. App. Ignat.

by fair means and threatenings to make them conceal themselves from being known to be christians, yet can I not preserve them from persecution.”

And when they were condemned, though it was by a most unjust sentence and to a most horrid death, they were so far from repining, that, instead of bitter and harsh reflections, they *gave thanks* to their enemies for condemning them. No more joyful message could be told them than that they must die for the sake of Christ. Babylas, the martyr,\* commanded that the chains which he had worn in prison should be buried with him, to shew that those things which seem most ignominious, are, for the sake of Christ, most splendid and honourable; imitating therein the great apostle, who was so far from being ashamed of, that he took pleasure in, *bonds, chains, reproaches, persecutions, distresses for Christ's sake, professing to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ.*

Whenever they were actually under the bitterest torments, they never discovered the least sign of a furious or impatient mind. Cyprian,† exhorting the martyrs to courage and constancy, tells them, that “those who had gone before them never stirred in the hottest conflict, but maintained their ground with a *free* confession, an *unshaken* mind, a *divine* courage, destitute indeed of *external* weapons, but armed with the *shield of faith.*” They were ambitious of no gift but the crown of righteousness, nor sought after any other glory but what was heavenly;

\* Chrysost. lib. de Bab. tom i.

† Ep. 8.

they feared no torments but those of hell, and that fire that was truly terrible. Such was the temper, such the support of these christian soldiers—these *true champions* of the christian faith! Indeed this consideration was one of the greatest cordials that kept up their spirits under the severest sufferings, that they were *assured* of a reward in heaven. “Amongst us,” says Cyprian,\* “there flourishes a strength of *hope*, firmness of *faith*, a mind *erect* amongst the ruins of a tottering age, an *immoveable* virtue, a *patience* serene and cheerful, and a soul always *secure* and *certain of its God*.”

## REFLECTION.

Blessed martyrs and confessors! Who can imitate *the patience of the saints*? Who can possess so firm, so pure a faith, as to tread, even remotely, in your steps? I look with awe on these great examples, and depress myself even to the earth, under the conviction of my inadequacy to follow or to adopt such illustrious *marks of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. Yet even to this am I called as a *christian disciple*. My *disposition*, at least, should be to take up this cross. *Let the same mind be in me which was also in Christ Jesus!* He will accept my mind, though my body may not suffer. But, blessed Lord! make me *ready to suffer*,—and my spirit, soul, and body shall be thine.

\* Ad Demet.

Even in modern days, many blessed martyrs have fallen—fallen, even as their primitive masters fell: and at this hour, the true christian is often called, if not to similar sufferings, to a painful endurance of the truth. How many still suffer reproach for the cross of Christ! How many have the *sentence* of death in themselves! How many labour through *honour and dishonour*, through *evil report and good report*! But, happy and consistent christian! go on your way rejoicing;—be thou *faithful unto death*, and *in death*, and the Spirit of glory and of God will assuredly give you rest!—Amen.

# PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY;

OR, THE

RELIGION OF THE ANCIENT CHRISTIANS IN THE  
FIRST AGES OF THE GOSPEL.

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## Part Third.

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### CHAPTER I.

*Of the Justice and Honesty of the primitive Christians.*

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HAVING considered the religion of the ancient christians, both as it respected their *piety* towards God, and their sober and virtuous carriage towards *themselves*, we proceed, in the last place, to examine it in reference to their conduct towards *others*, which the apostle describes under the title of *righteousness*. Under this head, he comprehends all that duty and respect which we *owe* to others, and which we shall consider in the following instances; namely,—their justice and integrity in matters of commerce and traffic;—their mutual love and charity to one another;—their unity and peaceableness;—and their submission and subjection to civil government.

1. With respect to their just and upright carriage in their *outward* dealings. One great design of the *christian* law is, to establish and confirm that great *principle*, which is one of the prime and *fundamental* laws of nature, *to hurt no man, and to render to every one his due*; to teach us to conduct ourselves as becomes us in our relations towards men. Next to our duty towards God, the gospel obliges us to be *righteous* to *men*, sincere and upright in all our dealings, “*not going beyond nor defrauding one another in any matter, to put away lying, and to speak truth to each other, as fellow members of the same christian brotherhood and society.* It settles that *golden rule* as the fundamental law of all just and equitable commerce, that “*all things whatsoever we would that men should do to us, we should even so do to them, this being the sum of the law and the prophets;*” as no rule could have been more equitable in itself than this, so none could possibly have been contrived more *short* and plain, and more accommodate to the common cases of human life.

So strong an impression did these excellent precepts make upon the mind of Alexander Severus, the Roman Emperor, that he resolved to build a temple to our Saviour, and to receive him into the number of their gods.\* This was not executed; but his historian says, he placed the image of Christ in his private chapel, amongst those of noble heroes and deified persons, to whom he paid religious adoration

\* Lamprid. in vit. Alex. S. c. 43.

every morning; particularly on account of the precept, that *what we would not have done to ourselves, we should not do to others.*

So great a reverence had the very *enemies* of christianity for the gospel on this account, that it so admirably provides for the advance of civil righteousness and justice among men, which, however it has been slighted by some, even amongst christians, under the notion of *moral* principles; yet, without it, all other *religion is but vain*; it being an extraordinary folly to think of being *godly* without being *honest*, or imagine to be a disciple of the *first*, while we continue *enemies* of the *second* table. Sure I am, the christians of old looked upon honesty, and an upright carriage, as a considerable part of their religion; and that to speak *truth*, to keep their *words*, to perform *oaths* and *promises*, to act sincerely in all their *dealings*, was as sacred and as dear to them as their lives and beings. *Speech*, being the great instrument of mutual commerce and traffic, shall be considered as the first instance of their integrity; they ever used the greatest candour and simplicity in expressing their mind one to another, not pretending what was *false*, nor concealing what was *true*; *yea, yea*, and *nay, nay*, was the usual measure of their transactions; a *lie* they abhorred as *bad* in all, as *monstrous in a christian*, as directly opposite to that truth to which they had consigned and delivered up themselves in baptism, and therefore would not tell one though it were to *save* their lives. In answer to the charge of folly when they might secure their

consciences by *mental reservation*, Tertullian says,\* that “they rejected the suggestion with the highest scorn, as the plain artifice and invention of the devil.” “When we are most severely examined,” says Justin Martyr,† “we never *deny* ourselves, counting it *impious* to dissemble, or deny the truth;—we scorn to live upon any terms by which we must be forced to maintain our lives by *lies* and *falsehood*.”

This honest and ingenuous simplicity they practised with so much exactness and accuracy, that for a christian to be put to his oath, was accounted a disparagement to his fidelity and truth. “How shall any one,” says Clemens Alexandrinus,‡ “that is faithful, so far render himself *unfaithful*, or unworthy of belief, as to need an oath, and not rather make the course of his life a *testimony* to him as firm and positive as an oath, and demonstrate the truth of his assertion by the constant and immutable tenor of his words and actions?”

For this and some other reasons, but especially from some mistaken places of scripture, where it is said *swear not at all*, some of the ancient fathers held all taking of any oath *unlawful*; but besides that, those few that did, were not herein constant to themselves; the far greater part were of another mind, and understood the prohibition either of swearing by creatures (which was the case with the Jews, and which our Saviour and St. James principally intend), or of light, rash, and false swearing. For otherwise

\* Apol. c. 27.

† Ap. 1. and 2.

‡ Stromat. lib. 7.



that the primitive christians did not think it unlawful to take an oath, in serious and necessary cases, is most evident. Athanasius desires his accusers *to be put to their oath*, “for this,” says he,\* “is the form of swearing which we christians are wont to use.” The primitive christians served in the wars, and frequently bore arms under the heathen emperors, which they could not do without taking a *military oath*. S. Chrysostom† (though himself no good friend to taking oaths) sufficiently assures us, “it was customary to come into church, and to swear upon the communion table, taking the book of the *holy gospels* into their hands.” Their caution in taking an oath, too, arose from the danger or *possibility* of perjury.‡

How exact soever the primitive christians were respecting their *words*, they were no less careful about the conduct of their *actions*, whether of *distributive* or *communicative justice*. The former, indeed, they had little opportunity of exercising till the empire became christian, and then we find them executing their places with unbiassed uprightness and integrity. Of the latter, they were strict observers, taking no advantage of any man’s ignorance or unskilfulness. In reply to a charge of sacrilege, brought by the heathen against the christians, Tertullian§ answers, “You look upon us as sacrilegious persons, and yet never found any of us guilty

\* Apol. ad Constantium Imp. tom 1.

† Ad Pop. Antioch. Hom. 15. ‡ Clem. Alex. § Ad Scap. 2.

of wrong or injury, of any rapine and violence, much less of sacrilege and impiety. We deny not any pledge that is left with us;—we adulterate no man's marriage-bed;—we piously educate and train up orphans, and relieve the necessities of the indigent, and *render no man evil for evil.*" Pliny's testimony\* to the Emperor Trajan is a confirmation of this character:—"After the strictest examination, he found this to be the greatest fault they were guilty of, that they used harmlessly to meet to worship Christ, and at those meetings to bind themselves by a sacrament (or an oath), that they would not do any wickedness, that they might be more firmly obliged not to commit theft, robberies, adulteries, not to falsify their words, or to deny any thing with which they were intrusted, when it was required of them."

### REFLECTION.

The christian of modern days, too often unsanctified and unrenewed for his master's service, may look with an humbled spirit on the character of the high-minded primitive christian. They have both been called upon to occupy prominent stations in the world; the cross of Christ has passed over the brows of both; the law of Christ has been offered to the hearts of both. The Spirit of the Lord is as vivid now as it was in the assembly of the disciples; and the experience of many ages has confirmed the truth, Alas! how shall we account for the difference in the

\* Lib. x. Ep. 97.

spiritual effect? While corruption has been subdued by grace in the breast of one, the want of grace has prevented its extirpation from the breast of the other. *Who then shall deliver us from the body of this death—* from the fatal consequences attending so destitute a condition? I answer, in the words of St. Paul, *I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Here we have the remedy, as well as the solution. We acknowledge, indeed, a *moral principle*, but it is, and must be, a principle which arises from this source; for *by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he hath saved us.* But how is this? Are good works without effect? God forbid! They are essential to salvation; not, indeed, as contributing in the smallest degree to eke out the merit of an unprofitable servant, but as flowing purely, sweetly, and necessarily from a sound and saving faith. This is the moral principle which the true christian professes;—this is the *load-star* both of the ancient and modern believer. The spiritual mind super-induces a natural habit; and we hear no more of distinctions, which separate, as it were, *chosen friends*; and designate a man as *godly* without being *honest*, or calling him both *good* and *moral* without the characteristic marks of true religion.

When we see christian society actuated by motives pure as these, when the harmony of moral feeling prevails through the delights of christian love, the disciple of the gospel then knows how to estimate his situation in the world. He breathes a softer and a

purser air, and anticipates his removal to a diviner region, *where all is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

“ He hears the unexpressive nuptial song,  
“ In the blest kingdoms, meek of joy and love.  
“ *There* entertain him all the saints above,  
“ In solemn troops and sweet societies,  
“ That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
“ And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.”

I must pursue this reflection a little farther, to remark another branch of my subject. *Words* are, in many cases, as discriminative as actions. I need not here be particular, as the subject at large would be too extensive: but I cannot pass by observing, not only the necessity of oaths on many occasions of civil occurrence, but on the *solemnity* of administering an oath. That it is *civilly* binding is, I fear, almost the only consideration: but its spiritual obligation is much more transcendent. To a true believer, the solemnity of an oath is awful and almost overwhelming; and, in many cases, it has been found appalling even by an infidel. Why then administer an oath, as we do in courts of justice, in a careless and confused manner? It is at once blasphemous and unproductive—blasphemous, I mean, so far as regards the irreligious taker of an oath, which of course renders the oath unproductive as to all the purposes of sound and substantial justice. In frivolous cases, oaths ought to be discontinued altogether: in affairs of greater moment, the judge himself should be the

administrator; or the solemnity should be further enforced, by placing the juror before the altar of the Lord, as in the days of primitive christianity.

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## CHAPTER II.

*Of the admirable Love and Charity of the  
primitive Christians.*

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THAT the christian religion was immediately designed to improve and perfect the principles of human nature, appears as well from many other instances as from this, that it strictly enjoins, cherishes, and promotes that natural *kindness and compassion*, which is one of the prime and essential inclinations of mankind. Wherever the gospel is cordially received, it produces such a sweet and gracious temper of mind, as makes us humble, courteous, affable, and charitable, readily disposed to every good work, prompt to all offices of humanity and kindness; it *files* off the ruggedness of men's natures, banishes a rude, churlish and *pharisaical* temper, and infuses a more calm and tractable disposition. It commands us to *live and love as brethren, to love without hypocrisy, to have fervent charity amongst ourselves, and to be kindly affectioned one towards another*. It rests the sum of our duty towards others in this,—*to love our neighbour as ourselves*. This our Saviour seems to own as

his proper and peculiar law, and has ratified it with his own solemn sanction,—“*a new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another;*” and then makes this the great visible *badge* of all those who are truly christians,—“*by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another.*”

And thus, indeed, it was in the first and best ages of religion. No sooner was the gospel dispersed abroad in the world, but the love and charity of christians became notorious, even to a proverb; the heathens themselves observing, *See how these christians love one another!*\* They were then united in the most happy *fraternity*, or brotherhood, (a word frequent amongst them); they lived as *brethren*, and accounted themselves such, not only as derived from one common parent (for in this they acknowledged the heathen as brethren), but that they had one and the same God for their *father*; *drank* all of the same spirit of holiness; were brought out of the same womb of darkness and ignorance, into the same light of truth; that they were partakers of the same faith, and co-heirs of the same hope. Lucian† allows this, that “it was one of the great principles of their master that they should become brethren, after they had thrown off the religion of the gentiles, and had embraced the worship of their great *crucified* master, and given up themselves to live according to his laws.”

\* Tert. Ap. c. 39.

† De mort. peregrin. p. 764.

In their personal intercourse, they embraced one another with all the demonstrations of an hearty and sincere affection.

But the love and kindness of the primitive christians did not consist only in smooth and complacent compliments, or in good words, as *depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled*, but in the *real* exercises of charity and mercy.

The two great objects of charity are, the good of men's souls, and the welfare of their bodies. In both these the primitive christians were highly eminent. 1. The soul, being of a much higher and nobler nature, consequently infinitely more precious and valuable than the body, they were, therefore, infinitely careful and solicitous to save men's souls, to recover them *out of the snare of the devil* and the paths of ruin, by making them *christians*, and bringing them to the *knowledge of the truth*. This was the object of their daily and earnest prayer. "We pray to God," says Cyprian,\* "night and day, not only for ourselves, but for all men." Justin Martyr† tells the Jew, that "he prayed for the Jews, and all others; that, repenting of their wickedness, they should *cease to blaspheme Jesus Christ!* that, believing in him, they might, together with christians, be saved by him at his second glorious coming." "We pray for you," says he, "that Christ would have

\* Pass. Cyp. Vitæ ejus Annex. p. 17.

† Dial. cum Trypho. p. 254.

mercy upon you, for he has taught us to *pray for our enemies, to love them, and be merciful to them.*"

In pursuance of this design they spared neither pains nor cost, that they might instruct men in the way to heaven. It is said of Pamphilus, the martyr,\* that, amongst other instances of his charity, he used *freely and readily to bestow bibles upon all that were willing to read*; for which purpose he had always great numbers of those holy volumes by him, that, as occasion served, he might distribute and bestow them. By these means, mercifully furnishing those with these divine treasures, whose purses could not otherwise reach to the price of the scriptures; far dearer in those days than they have been since printing was introduced into the world.

Chrysostom† was so zealous in converting the gentiles to christianity, that, for this very end, he maintained many presbyters and monks in *Phœnicia*, partly at his own charge, and partly by the assistance of pious and well-disposed persons; whose only work it was to *catechise* and instruct the heathen in the principles of the christian faith.

I might easily shew that this principle had a great influence on the sufferings of the primitive martyrs, who were willing to endure any misery or run any hazard in gaining others to the faith, and preventing their eternal ruin. But the celebrated story of St. John, the apostle, must serve as the sum of many

\* Hier. adversis. ex Euseb. Ruffin. 2. p. 199.

† Theod. Hist. Eccl. lib. v. c. 29.



others: \*—Coming to a place near Ephesus, in his visitation of the churches, he met with an engaging young man, whom he presented to the bishop, with a charge that he should be attended to with great care and diligence, and *that* in the presence of Christ and the church. The bishop undertook the charge, instructed, and at last baptized him. Having remitted a little of his care, the young man fell into bad company, and at length became the captain of a band of highwaymen. Upon the return of the apostle, at some distance of time, he demanded the *pledge* he had left. The old man, with a dejected look and tears, replied, that *he was dead*. Being asked as to the nature of his death, he answered, *he is dead to God*. He has become a villain; and, instead of the church, he has fled to the mountains, to be a companion of robbers. The apostle soon pursued him to the mountains, where, being made prisoner, he requested to be brought before the captain. When the leader saw him, he attempted to fly from him, but the aged apostle followed him, and addressed him with these passionate exclamations:—*Why, my son, dost thou fly from thy aged and unarmed father! Take pity of me, and fear not; there is yet hope of salvation for thee; if need be, I will freely die for thee, as our Lord did for us, and lay down my own life to ransom thine; only stay, and believe me, for I am sent by Christ*. At this, he stayed, threw away his arms with a dejected look, trem-

\* Eus. Eccl. Hist. lib. iii. c. 23.

bled, and dissolved into tears. He embraced the aged apostle, with sincere expressions of sorrow and lamentation, as if again *baptized* with his own tears. St. John assured him of pardon, consoled his disconsolate and afflicted mind, and restored him to the church.

Monica,\* the mother of Augustine, bestowed infinite and unremitting pains on the conversion of her husband Patricius; nor were her care and solicitude less for her son Augustine, who had been seduced into the lewdnesses of youth, as well as into the impieties of the Manichean heresy. He was the hourly subject of her prayers and tears; so much so, that Ambrose assured her for her consolation under so much distress, that *it was not possible the child of so many tears should perish.*

Such was the good spirit and *genius* of those primitive days, that they entirely studied and designed the happiness of men, and were willing and desirous freely to impart the treasures of the gospel, and wished that, in that respect, all men were as rich and happy as themselves.

### REFLECTION.

To promote the *good of souls*, not only by diffusing the salvation of the gospel through all our immediate connections, but by bringing the Jew, the Turk, the infidel, and heretic within the fold of Christ, is the appropriate occupation, the consummate obligation of the christian. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and

\* Conf. lib. ix. c. 9.

prayer to God for Israel is, *that they might be saved.*" This is the admirable gift of love and charity so plentifully bestowed upon the primitive christians. There was great scope for their kindness, residing, as they did, in the vortex of heathen nations. God blessed the means; and *there were daily added to the church such as should be saved.* The long continuance in the world of so large a portion of infidels and misbelievers is, indeed, a *mystery of godliness*, to be developed only by the Almighty who permits it. But happily for us, he has made it a *duty*—and so far it discloses a solemn use of such anomalies in the history of christianity—he has made it a duty of perpetual obligation to *open the gentile eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Him.* We must not then mistake our obligation: it is as incumbent upon us (to an extent limited by circumstances) as it was upon the primitive christians. There have been doubtless dark ages of the church, when this great duty has been misapplied or neglected. But in the preceding chapter, there are two things peculiarly interesting and appropriate to the well-directed zeal at present animating this nation. I speak generally; for some will always be found who possess a zeal *not according to knowledge.* I refer particularly to the distribution of bibles by Pamphilus, the martyr; and the society of missionaries, or society for the propagation of the gospel, of the venerable Chrysostom.

Primitive example is productive of primitive manners; and if a cup of cold water, given in the name of a disciple, draws forth the *well-done* of the Saviour, what may not be his reward, who turns a full-flowing and living spring upon a barren land—and who, if he does not visit heathen countries with the book of the everlasting gospel in his *own* hand, delegates the SWARTZES, the BUCHANANS, and the HENRY MARTYNS of the age, to spread the glad tidings of salvation from the equator to the poles?

And what praise is not due to that government which sends out, however late, zealous and pious bishops, and a learned and pious clergy, to the remote and long-neglected settlements of the East and West Indies, with our Lord's urgent and never-ending injunction—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature?" The reflection warms the heart, and brings forth sympathetic feelings in every christian breast. May the prayers of the faithful accompany these pious labours, and may the dew of the Spirit fall grateful on the heads of the pious labourers, whilst the invigorating grace of the gospel (the dew of the Spirit) is breaking up the fallow ground in those regions, where the sun indeed shines, but where the blessed seed has never yet been sown.

## CHAPTER II.—CONTINUED.

*Of the admirable Love and Charity of the primitive Christians.*

II. HAVING seen what kindness and charity the ancient christians expressed to the *souls* of men, we proceed to enumerate that which respected their *bodies*.

1. They took particular care to provide, in the first instance, for the *poor*. Cyprian,\* in his retirement, gave especially in charge to the presbyters and deacons of his church, that by all means they should attend to the poor, and furnish them with whatever was necessary for them. Decius, the emperor,† demanded of Laurentius, the deacon of the church of Rome, the church's treasures: he promised to produce them after three days. In the mean time, he gathered together the blind and the lame, the infirm and the maimed, and at the appointed time brought them to the palace. When the emperor demanded of him the *treasures*, he presented to him the company he had brought. *Behold!* said he, *these are the treasures of the church, those eternal treasures which are never diminished, but increase, which are dispersed to every one, and yet found in all.* A similar story‡

\* Ep. 5.

† Acta Laurentii.

‡ Hist. Laus. c. 6.

is told of Macarius, a presbyter and governor of the hospital at Alexandria, and a rich lady, but covetous and uncharitable. She had entrusted a considerable sum of money to him, to buy rich jewels, emeralds, and jacinths, which he had told her of. After some time, she enquired what had become of the jewels? He desired her to come and see them, and if the purchase did not please her, she might refuse it. He conducted her to the hospital, and shewed her the upper rooms of the women, and the lower rooms of the men. He asked her, whether she would see first the jacinths or the emeralds? Conducting her to the female apartments, he said, *See! the jacinths that I spoke of*; then to the apartment of the men, and said, *These are the emeralds that I promised, and jewels more precious than these, I think, are not to be found:—and now, if you like not your bargain, take your money back again.* She heartily thanked Macarius, and reformed her uncharitable life.

2. The charity of the primitive christians next appeared in *visiting* and assisting the sick; contributing to their necessities, refreshing their wearied bodies, and curing their wounds with their own hands. “If any say,” says Justin Martyr,\* “I have never learnt to serve and give attendance, that is no excuse; for he that shall make his delicacy or tenderness, as unaccustomed to such hardships, an excuse for not performing them, may soon have the case his own.” Fabiola,† a Roman lady of birth and fortune, sold

\* Ep. ad Zen. and Seren. † Epitaph Fabiolar ad Ocean. tom. 1.

her estate, and built an *hospital* (and was the *first* that did so), maintaining and curing the sick and miserable that she happened to meet in the streets. “Many of the brethren,” says Eusebius, “out of the excessive abundance of their kindness and charity, without any regard to their own health and life, boldly ventured into the thickest dangers, daily visiting, attending, instructing, and comforting their sick and infected brethren. And that this work of charity might be the better managed, certain persons were appointed,\* whose proper office it was to attend and minister to the sick.

3. A third instance of their love and charity (and which S. Ambrose calls the *highest* piece of liberality) was their care of those who were in *captivity*, groaning under the merciless tyranny and oppression of their enemies, and to relieve them under and redeem them out of their bondage and slavery. They contributed large sums to this purpose; and further, in many instances, some parted with their own liberty to purchase freedom for others.

4. A fourth instance of primitive charity was the great care they took about the *bodies of the dead*, giving them *decent*, and where they could *honourable*, burial. Man’s body has been the mansion of an *immortal* tenant; and besides that, it is the cabinet of an invaluable jewel—it is a curious piece of artifice, *fearfully and wonderfully made*, the excellent con-

\* Called Parabolani, from *παραβαλλεσθαι*, to cast themselves into hazard.—Cod. Theod. lib. 16.

trivance of the divine omniscience, and in that respect requires not to be thrown aside, or rudely trampled in the dust. This was eminently the case of christians; no dangers or threatenings could affright them from doing this last office to their deceased brethren, especially such as had been martyrs or champions for the truth. They bestowed costly spices upon the bodies of their dead, because they looked upon death as the entrance of a better life, and laid up the body as the candidate for, and expectant of, a better and happy resurrection. A society of men was also appointed to this office—persons who were reckoned, if not, *clergymen*, were at least in a clergy-relation, being, by the laws of Constantius, invested with the same immunities. Their care was also extended, not only to prepare a funeral, but to provide a sepulchre, generally in the fields or gardens, as it was prohibited by the Roman laws, and especially by an ancient law of the XII Tables, to bury within the city walls. During the *first* ages of christianity, their cemeteries [catacombs] were generally under ground, for the purpose of greater secrecy.

Many other instances of their charity might be mentioned; their ready entertaining of strangers, providing for those that laboured in the mines, marrying poor virgins, &c. In the earliest days of christianity, there was a community of goods for these purposes; but this did not last long. In St. Paul's days, there were *weekly* offerings for the saints; a custom still continuing in the days of Justin Martyr,\* In the

\* Apol. 2.



age of Tertullian, they were reduced to *monthly* offerings; every one, according to his ability, laid by somewhat for charitable purposes, which they put into a kind of *poor man's box*, called *arca*, that stood in the church.\*

The expression of their love and charity, though of universal extent, was shewn more especially to those that were of *the household of faith*; that is, to christians. They did not confine their bounty within the narrow limits of a party, this or that sect of men; but embraced an object of love and pity wherever they met it. They were kind to all men, even to their bitterest enemies, and that with a charity as large as the *circles* of the sun that visits all parts of the world, and shines as well upon a dreary prospect as upon a pleasant garden. "This is the proper goodness and excellency of christianity," says Tertullian; † "it being common to all men to *love* their friends, but peculiar only to christians to *love their enemies*."

Lactantius sums up these primitive works of mercy and charity in an elegant discourse: ‡—"Being all created by one God, and sprung from one common parent, we should reckon ourselves akin, and obliged to love all mankind; and (that our innocency may be perfect) not only not to do an injury to ano-

\* Hence the origin of the poor's box in churches, the use of which has been much discontinued since the institution of the poor laws.

† Ad Scap. c. 1.

‡ Ep. c. 7.

ther, but not to revenge one when done to ourselves; for which reason, we are commanded to *pray for our very enemies*. We ought, therefore, to be kind and sociable, that we may help and assist each other; for being ourselves obnoxious to misery, we may the more comfortably hope for that help, in case we need it, which ourselves have given unto others. And what can more effectually induce us to relieve the indigent, than to put ourselves into *their stead* who beg help from us? If any be *hungry*, let us *feed* him; is he naked, let us clothe him; if wronged by a powerful oppressor, let us *rescue* and receive him. Let our doors be open to *strangers*, and such as have not where to lay their head. Let not our assistance be wanting to *widows* and *orphans*: and (which is a mighty instance of charity) let us *redeem* the captivated; *visit* and assist the sick, who are able to take no care of themselves; and for strangers and the poor (in case they die), let us not suffer them to want the conveniency of a *grave*. These are the offices and the works of mercy, which whoever does, offers up a true and grateful sacrifice to God, who is not pleased with the *blood of beasts*, but with the *charity of men*; whom, therefore, he treats upon their own terms; has *mercy* on them whom he sees *merciful*; and is *inexorable* to those who *shut up their bowels* against them that ask them. In order, therefore, to our thus pleasing God, let us make light of money, and transmit it into the heavenly treasures, *where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal*, nor tyrants are able to seize and

take it from us; but where it shall be kept to our eternal advantage, under the custody of God himself."

### REFLECTION.

I have little to add to this ample chapter and its elegant conclusion. But it may be necessary to remind those whose charity may yet be abundant, that to make it acceptable to the great keeper of our treasures, they must *first give themselves up to the Lord*. Without this presentation of ourselves in the spirit of faith and piety, our charity may be more profitable to the objects of our bounty than to ourselves. "*The fruit of the Spirit is love.*" We must, at the same time, be aware of a false interpretation of the passage that *charity will cover a multitude of sins*. Those who expect to *merit heaven* by the most abundant charity, much less when they balance one against the other, will be miserably disappointed. I say not this to restrain the hand of charity, or to derogate from its scriptural value; but as genuine charity was not known in the world, at least in its full extent and with all its assemblage of graces, till the gospel of Christ was diffused abroad, a true christian ought to offer up his charity, as he offers up *himself*, to the *Lord*; both, when thus offered, will be accepted for Jesus Christ's sake.

## CHAPTER III.

*Of the Unity and Peaceableness of the  
primitive Christians.*

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THE primitive christians being of such a meek, compassionate, and benevolent temper as we have seen, it necessarily follows that they were of a quiet disposition and *peaceable* conversation. When our blessed Saviour came to establish his religion in the world, he gave a *law* suitable to his *nature*, and to the design of his coming into the world, and to the exercise of his government, as he is *Prince of Peace*—a law of mildness and gentleness, of submission and forbearance towards one another. We are commanded *to follow peace with all men, to follow after the things that make for peace, as much as in us lies to live peaceably with all men.* We are forbidden all feuds and quarrels, enjoined *not to revenge ourselves, but to give place unto wrath; to let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from us, with all malice; to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, forgives us.* These are the laws of christianity, which, whenever they are received, produce the most gentle and good-natured principles,—the most innocent and quiet behaviour. This eminently appeared in the life of our blessed Saviour, who was the most incomparable instance of

*kindness and civility*, of peace and quietness. We never find him, in all his life, treating any with sharpness and severity, except the scribes and pharisees, whose conduct required it; in all other respects, his mildness and humility, his affable and obliging conversation, his remarkable kindness to his greatest enemies, were sufficiently obvious both in his life and death; and such was the temper of his disciples and followers; this excellent spirit, like leaven, spread itself over the whole body of christians, turning the *briar into a myrtle tree, and the vulture into a dove.*

“ We, who once hated one another,” says Justin Martyr,\* “ and delighted in mutual quarrels and slaughters, and refused to sit at the same fire with those who were not of our own tribe, since the appearance of Christ, live familiarly together, pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those that unjustly hate us, to live according to the excellent precepts of Christ, that so they may have good hope to obtain the same rewards with us from the great Lord and Judge of all things.

The alteration which the christian religion made in this respect in the world was most remarkable. Great and almost implacable animosities subsisted between the Jews and gentiles, till the Romans came and *took away both their place and nation.* The arrival of the Prince of Peace broke down, by his death, the *partition-wall* between them. He healed their natures by the tendency of his doctrines; and

\* Apol. 2.

the peaceable demeanour of his followers extirpated and removed their mutual feuds and animosities, and silenced their quarrelsome and vindictive divisions; according to the prophet, that there should *be righteousness and abundance of peace in his days; that they should beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; that nation should not lift up sword against nation, nor learn war any more.* This is considered, by Eusebius,\* as an uncontrovertible argument of the truth and excellency of the christian doctrine. Such was the temper, and such the character of christians in these respects: they lived in the strictest amity, and abhorred all division. But because men's understandings are not all of one size, nor all truths alike plain and evident, differences in men's judgements and opinions will arise; but no schism ever arose in the church about any of the more considerable principles of religion, but it was presently bewailed by all pious and good men, and the breach endeavoured to be healed. No way was left unattempted, no methods of persuasion omitted, that might contribute to it. He that rends the unity of the church, destroys the *faith*, disturbs the *peace*, dissolves charity, and profanes the *holy sacrament*. How severely they condemned all schism and division in the church, how industriously they laboured to take up all controversies amongst christians, and to reconcile *dissenting brethren*, to maintain concord and agreement amongst themselves, and to prevent

\* Præp. Ev. lib. i. c. 4.

all occasions of quarrel and dissension, might be easily made to appear out of the writings of those times.

Hence the canonical and other epistles were written when brethren removed into other districts, testifying the soundness of their faith, and the innocency of their lives. Hence synods and councils, to settle differences of opinion, to explain or define articles of faith, to condemn and suppress disturbers of the church, and innovators in religion. When some contests arose in the see of Constantinople, Gregory Nazianzen,\* then in possession of the see, stood up in the midst of the assembly, and told the bishops "how unfit it was that they, who were *preachers of peace* to others, should *fall out* amongst themselves; and entreated them, even by the *sacred trinity*, to conduct their affairs calmly and peaceably; and *if I,*" says he, "*be the Jonas that raises the storm, throw me into the sea, and let these storms and tempests cease.*" Accordingly he resigned his bishopric, though legally settled in it by the command of the emperor, and the universal desires and acclamations of the people. When good men were most zealous about the main and foundation articles of faith, so as sometimes rather to hazard peace than to betray the truth, yet in matters of *indifferency*, and such as only concerned the rituals of religion, they mutually bore with one another, without any violation of that charity which is the great law of christianity.

\* Vita Greg. Naz. per Greg. Presb.

## REFLECTION.

Whilst the primitive members of the church of Christ were *contending earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints*, and which they were willing to maintain, and did maintain, through life and through death, the Spirit of divine love and peace so occupied their minds, that they were desirous, in all things not essentially necessary to the pure establishment of the religion of their master, to remit such differences of opinion on mere ritual observances, as tended to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. This is an example worthy of imitation; and, indeed, if we are led by the same spirit, we must *mind the same things*. But a breach of *church-unity* they never did concede; for a mere difference of opinion in *non-essentials*, is no just ground for separation. I am not tempted to enter upon a controversial subject founded on this principle, because it admits of no discussion, as the faith of the gospel admits of no compromise. “*Is Christ divided?*” The fundamental doctrines of the christian faith must remain inviolate: and as I would not lead myself into error, by cherishing a spirit of conciliation unworthy of the faith of that church of which God has made me a minister, nor yet *give place by subjection, no not for an hour*, to any principles inconsistent with the pure and unadulterated gospel of Christ, so I would not indulge in any uncharitable thoughts of my brethren; but pray earnestly that the grace of God may visit all our hearts,



remove all films from these mortal eyes, that, in the day when the Lord *gathers up his jewels*, we may be found acceptable in his sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

*Of the Obedience and Subjection to civil Government  
of the primitive Christians.*

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How much *the christian religion, transcribed into the lives of its professors*, contributes to the happiness of men, not only in their single and private capacities, but as to the *public* welfare of human societies, and to the common interests and conveniences of mankind, we have already shewn in many instances. But because magistracy and civil government is the great support and instrument of external peace and happiness, we shall, in the last place, consider how eminent the first christians were for their submission and subjection to civil government.

There is scarce any particular instance in which the primitive christians did more triumph in the world, than in their exemplary obedience to the powers and magistrates under which they lived; honouring their persons, revering their power, paying their tribute, obeying their laws, where they were not evidently contrary to the laws of Christ; and where they were, submitting to the most cruel penalties they laid upon them, with the greatest calmness and serenity of soul.

The truth is, one great design of the *christian law* is to secure the interests of civil authority. Our Saviour has expressly taught us that we are to *give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, as well as unto God the things that are God's*; and his apostles spoke as plainly as words could speak it, "*Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God, &c.*" —Rom. xiii. 1—7. The *strictness and universality* of this charge is very evident, as well as (which is very material to be observed) that it was given to the Romans, when Nero was their emperor, who was not only a heathen magistrate, but the *first persecutor* of christians. The same apostle, in his directions to Titus for the due discharge of his office, bids him "*put the people in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates.*" St. Peter delivers the same doctrine, "*Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, to the king, &c.*" —2 Pet. xiii. 13—15.

Such are the commands, and such the practice of Christ and his apostles. Our Lord himself, by the help of a miracle, paid tribute to Cæsar; and at the bar of Pilate, freely owned his authority, and submitted to an unrighteous sentence, though able to command twelve legions of angels for his deliverance. When the apostles were unjustly scourged, *they went away rejoicing*; and when Herod had beheaded James, and put Peter into prison, what arms did the christians use to vindicate themselves? Did they promote an insurrection? Did they scatter libels, or

raise tumults and factions in the city? Oh, no! the church's weapons were prayers and tears, their only refuge in those evil times.

Nor did this excellent spirit die with the apostles. The same temper ruled in the succeeding ages of christianity. "The christians," says Justin Martyr,\* "obey the laws that are made, and *by the exactness of their lives, go beyond that accuracy which the law requires of them*; they love all men, though all men study to afflict and persecute them." Polycarp,† a little before his martyrdom, wrote to the christians at Philippi, earnestly exhorting them all to obey their rulers, and to exercise all patience and long-suffering towards them. When he stood before the pro-consul, he told him that this was the great law of christianity, that we are commanded by God to give all due honour and obedience to princes and potentates, such as is not *prejudicial* to us; that is, not contrary to the principles of our religion. Tertullian‡ tells us, that "it was a solemn part of the *church service* to pray for the happiness and prosperity of the princes under whom they lived." "A christian," he adds, "being an enemy to *no man*, is much less so to *his prince*." When Celsus§ seemed to object to Origen, that the christians refused to assist the emperors in their wars, he replied, that "they did assist and help them, and that rather with divine than human weapons; according to the command of the apostle, *I exhort that first of all, supplications be made for*

\* Epist. ad Diogn. p. 497.

† Apud Eus. lib. iii. c. 36.

‡ Apol. c. 39.

§ Lib. viii.

*kings and all that are in authority.*" "The more eminent," he says, "any man is for piety and religion, he will be able to afford greater assistance to his prince, than a great many armed soldiers that stand ready to fight for him, and to destroy his enemies." When the Emperor Julian urged his army, which consisted almost wholly of christians, to wicked councils and the practices of idolatry, they withstood him only with prayers and tears, accounting this to be the only remedy against persecution. The story of the celebrated Thebæan legion is well known: being commanded by Maximianus Cæsar, the colleague of Domitian, to swear by the altars of the gods that they would unanimously fight against their enemies, and persecute the christians as enemies to the gods, they refused, as they were themselves christians, and withdrew a little distance that they might avoid the wicked and sacrilegious command. The band consisted of six thousand six hundred and sixty-six persons. The inhuman commander ordered them to be decimated, which was accordingly executed, and every tenth man slain. The legion still resisting, the order was repeated, and a second decimation took place. The christians being resolved to die rather than submit to the idolatrous command, Maximianus ordered his whole army to fall upon them, which they did, without any distinction of age or person, and destroyed them all. Thus they died with swords in their hands, when they might have resisted, and probably saved their lives.

The primitive christians were accused of promoting *seditious meetings*, which was the case with several factions under the Roman states. To this the christians answered,\* that “their meetings could not be accounted unlawful, having nothing common with them; that indeed the wisdom and providence of the state had justly prohibited such factions, to prevent seditions; but that no such thing could be suspected of the christian assemblies, who were averse from any ambitious designs of honour and dignity, strangers to nothing more than public affairs, and had renounced all pretensions to *external* pomps and pleasures; that if the christian assemblies were like others, there might be some reason to condemn them of faction; but to whose prejudice did we ever *meet* together? We are the same when *together* that we are *asunder*; the same *united*, as is every single person; hurting no man, grieving no man: therefore, when such honest, good, pious, and chaste men met together, it was rather to be called a *council* than a faction.”

#### REFLECTION.

The consideration on this subject is not so much, whether the christian religion quells insurrection and disorganizes faction, as that its true, pure, and genuine principles tend, by *preventing grace*, to avert the first motions of such iniquity, and to render the mind of their possessor indisposed for such a sweeping destruction as must necessarily be contemplated

\* Tert. Apol. c. 38.

on such occasions, and will inevitably follow. Treason is a complicated, a deceiving, and deceitful crime. It involves thousands in its snares, or in its consequences, who were not at all concerned in its original conception—thousands of unhappy persons, who were rather the objects, than the subjects, of its wickedness. It originates, either in a false calculation of probable advantages, or in the malignant mind of uncontrollable ambition. It watches for errors, and seizes a moment of peril and danger. It prompts some aspiring spirit, or some dark band of conspirators, to assume an illegal rule, and scatter firebrands and death over a peaceful and unresisting country.

But the religion of Jesus Christ, *transcribed into the minds* of an orderly and sober people, diffuses a glow of content, founded on a belief of the providential care of the Almighty, and turns every constitutional and political event to a spiritual blessing. It becomes the best policy of a wise nation to *promote the knowledge of the Lord*, and to send teachers of such a religion into the remotest corners of the empire: and this, not merely on temporal motives, which of themselves are fleeting and momentary, but on the safe and immutable principle, that those who have the faith of the gospel more firmly established in their minds, who *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, looking for and accepting the salvation of their souls, by means of a kind and an atoning Saviour, will be the best subjects of any state or government, inasmuch as they are the best candidates for the kingdom of heaven.

## CHAPTER V.

*Of the Penance enjoined the primitive Christians, and the Discipline of the ancient Church.*

HAVING travelled through the different stages of my subject, I should here have ended my journey, but that one thing remained unnoticed, namely, the discipline of the ancient church towards offenders. The christian church being founded and established by Christ, as a society and corporation distinct from that of the commonwealth, is, by the very nature of its constitution (besides the positive ground and warrant there is for it in scripture), invested with an inherent power, besides that which is borrowed from the civil magistrate, of censuring and punishing its members that offend against its laws, in order to maintain its peace and purity.

I shall briefly mention (for the purpose of understanding what this power was, and how exercised in the first ages of the church) what were the usual *crimes* that came under the discipline of the ancient church; what *penalties* were inflicted upon offenders; in what *manner* they were punished; and *by whom* the discipline was administered.

1. The *crimes* consisted of offences against the christian law, any *vice* or *immorality* that was either public in itself, or made known to the church. The holy and good christians of those days were infinitely careful to keep the honour of their religion unspotted, to stifle every sin in its birth, and, by bringing offenders to public shame and penalty, to keep them from pro-

pagating the malignant influence of bad example. They watched over each other, told them privately of their faults and failings, and when that would not do, brought them before the congregation of the church.

2. The *penalties* and punishments were such as were agreeable to the nature and constitution of the church, which, as it engages only in spiritual matters, inflicts no other than spiritual censures and chastisements. The apostles, indeed, had power to inflict *bodily* punishments, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, and of Elymas, the sorcerer; and this doubtless was primarily intended by *delivering such over to Satan*. How long this miraculous power lasted in the church is not known, or whether at all beyond the apostles' age. The common and standing punishment they made use of was excommunication, or suspension from the communion of the church, till, by repentance and wholesome discipline, the sinner was cured and restored, and then he was re-admitted into church-society, and to a participation of the ordinances and privileges of christianity.

3. How and in what *manner* offenders were dealt with, both as to their *suspension* and *penance*, and as to their *absolution*, were these, as we find in Tertullian.\* Among other parts of their holy exercises in their public assemblies, there were exhortations and reproofs, and a *divine censure*; for the judgement is given with great weight, as amongst those that are sure that God beholds what they do. This was considered as one of the highest preludes and fore-run-

\* Apol. c. 39.



ners of the judgement to come, when the delinquent person is banished from the *communion of prayers, assemblies, and all holy commerce*. During this period, they appeared with all the expressions and demonstrations of a dejected mind. They made open *confession* of their faults, which was accounted the very spring of repentance. After this humiliation, they addressed themselves to the governors of the church for *absolution*. When the repentance was found real and sincere, they were openly re-admitted into the church, by the imposition of the hands of the clergy; the party to be absolved kneeling down between the knees of the bishop, or, in his absence, of the presbyter, who, laying his hand on his head, solemnly blessed and absolved him. He was embraced by his brethren, who blessed God for his return, and wept for the joy of his recovery.\*

4. The fourth and last circumstance concerns the *persons* by whom this discipline was administered. Though the whole of these transactions took place in the public congregation, and seldom or never without their consent, as Cyprian more than once observes, yet was it ever accounted a *ministerial* act, and properly belonged to them. By the bishop it was primarily and usually administered; the determining the time and manner of repentance, the conferring pardon upon the penitent sinner, being acts of the highest power and jurisdiction, were therefore reckoned to belong to the highest order in the church. In cases of sickness, &c., by leave and command of

\* Cyprian, Ep. 27.

the bishop, the presbyter or deacon might impose penance and absolve.\* But though, while the numbers of christians were small, and the bounds of particular churches little, bishops were able to manage these and other parts of their office in their own persons; yet, soon after, the task began to grow too hard for them. A public penitentiary, a grave and prudent presbyter, was appointed, whose office was to take the confession of those sins which had been committed after baptism, and prepare the penitents for absolution.

But besides the ordinary and standing office of the clergy, we find even some of the laity, *the martyrs and confessors*, who assisted in absolving penitents, and restoring them to the communion of the church.

Having taken this view of the severity of discipline in the ancient church, nothing remains but to admire and imitate their piety and integrity, their infinite hatred of sin, their care and zeal to keep that strictness and purity of manners that had rendered their religion so renowned and triumphant in the world; — a discipline which, how happy were it for the christian world, were it again re-settled in its due power and vigour; which particularly is the judgement and desire of our own church concerning the solemn penances and humiliations of Lent. “In the PRIMITIVE CHURCH,” says the preface to the commination service, “there was a godly discipline; that, at the beginning of Lent, such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin, were put to open penance, and punish-

\* Cyprian, Ep. 12.

ed in this world, that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, might be the more afraid to offend; which said discipline it is much to be wished might be restored again."

### REFLECTION.

Before so salutary a discipline could be restored, the minds of professing christians must be raised to the primitive standard. For, observe, though the persons of offenders were cut off from the communion of the church, by the exertion of its spiritual jurisdiction, their restoration depended upon their own sincere conviction of their offence, their ardent faith, their confirmed hope, and their extensive charity. All these spiritual gifts are united, under the divine grace, to accomplish one great end: therefore, till we find great modesty of heart, conscious sincerity, pure and unadulterated piety, and a true veneration for the inestimable treasures of the gospel, whether to preserve us from falling, or to restore us when fallen, church discipline will fail of its effect. The gospel doubtless is able to bring forth the same happy fruits in these days, that it did in the days of the apostles, and I have no doubt that it does so in many a christian breast; but, take the world as it is, divided into numerous sects and parties, both within and without the pale of the church; many, though professing one principle, yet militating against one another; some, numerous and restrained by no law; others, more contracted, and directed by regulations

which become nugatory when extended to a larger scale; we are constrained to lament what we cannot correct, and to recommend as salutary what the experience of the world will not allow us to adopt. The benefit, however, of a right application of church discipline is obvious. It sprung from a pure apostolic source, and never became polluted till its streams were dispersed.

I conclude in the words of the venerable and judicious HOOKER, whose life was a model of primitive manners and rectitude; and whose book, on Ecclesiastical Polity, remains an uncontroverted monument of wisdom and knowledge; and whilst that exists, the church of England, under God, requires no better defence.

*“ The Nature of spiritual Jurisdiction.*

“ THE spiritual power of the church being such as neither to be challenged by right of nature, nor could by human authority be instituted, because the forces and effects thereof are supernatural and divine, we are to make no doubt or question, but that from Him, who is the head, it has descended unto us that are the body now invested therewith. He gave it for the benefit and good of souls, as a mean to keep them in the path which leadeth unto endless felicity; a bridle to hold them within the due and convenient bounds; and, if they go astray, a forcible help to reclaim them. Now, although there be no kind of spiritual power, which our Lord Jesus Christ did not give both permission to exercise, and direction

how to use the same,—although his laws in that behalf, recorded by the holy evangelists, be the only ground and foundation whereupon the practice of the church must sustain itself; yet as all multitudes, grown to the form of societies, are even thereby naturally warranted to enforce upon their own subjects particularly, those things which public wisdom shall judge expedient for the common good; so it were absurd to imagine the church itself, the most glorious amongst them, abridged of this liberty; or to think that no law, constitution, or canon can be further made, either for limitation or amplification in the practice of our Saviour's ordinances, whatsoever occasion be offered through variety of times and things, during the state of this inconstant world, which bringeth forth daily such new evils as must of necessity by new remedies be redressed; did both of old enforce our venerable predecessors, and will always constrain others, sometime to make, sometime to abrogate, sometime to augment, and again to abridge sometime; in sum, often to vary, alter, and change customs, incident unto the manner of exercising that power which doth itself continue always one and the same. I therefore conclude, that spiritual authority is a power which Christ hath given to be used over them which are subject unto it, for the eternal good of their souls, according to his own most sacred laws and wholesome positive constitutions of his church."

—*Eccl. Pol. Book VI.*



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