

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

Jerusalem, broke up his winter quarters before the end of winter. For since he took that city in Sivan, the third Jewish month (our June) after he had besieged it *five* months, the end of winter at that time must have occurred at about the beginning of our February.

In respect therefore to the month and day of Christ's birth, we are brought to the conclusion that the *day* must be left undecided; and that of the *months*, the *close of December* together with *January and February* should be taken into consideration, of which, however, *December has the least, January a greater, and February decidedly the greatest probability in its favor.*

---

### ARTICLE III.

#### A PHENOMENON IN CHURCH HISTORY.

By Rev. Leonard Withington, Newbury, Mass.

*Sapientia praeedit; religio sequitur.*—Lactantius, Lib. IV. c. 4.

IN order to understand the spirit of antiquity, it seems necessary for us, not only to receive single customs and insulated impressions, but to trace their associated ideas as they are connected in the whole mental chain. This is very difficult; and here is the source of our inevitable ignorance. We are told by Niebuhr, in his prelections on Roman history, that "as there is nothing the Asiatics find it harder to conceive than the idea of a republican constitution, as the Hindoos are utterly unable to look upon the India-Company as an association of proprietors, as in any other light than princes, so it fares with the acutest of the moderns in the history of antiquity, unless by critical and philological studies they have stripped themselves of their habitual associations.—P. 20, Introd., ed. 1835, Philadelphia. This is true in insulated cases. But this is not all. Though our moral ideas are far more permanent than the impression of material objects, and an ancient description of the one more easily comprehended than that of the other, yet our moral conceptions are linked in a chain; they reflect each other's hue and color, and we must almost comprehend the whole spirit of a given age to understand fully any single term presented to our contemplation.

Take the words for example: *virtue, patriotism, slavery, for-*

nication, marriage; and who would suppose at first sight that ancient manners could form any connection between them that should modify our ideas of the merit or delinquency expressed? Yet so it is. The ancients, like all other men, received their ideas and painted them from their own condition and circumstances. The world, in the primitive ages of dawning civilization, was divided into a number of small States; in Greece, into free cities and commonwealths, often at war with each other, and struggling with a self-denying energy for their own existence. In such a state of society, every man was necessitated to feel a strong love for his country; to lose his benevolence in his patriotism; and to feel, and applaud himself in feeling, an attachment to the little section of humanity which demanded all his efforts to shield it from destruction. To an Athenian, a citizen of Sparta was an object of terror; he met him often on the field of battle; and he was frequently alarmed lest by his luck or valor, he should overthrow his own city. But Athens, on the other hand, his own beloved Athens, was the citadel of his pride and the source of his protection. Its roofs sheltered him; its walls defended him; its laws regulated his public conduct, and the morals of its teachers ruled him in private life. Hence we see that everything tended to narrow down the love of man to a love of a small portion of man, that is to a love of country. The image of their country was not a political abstraction, as is often the case with us, but it was a tangible and visible form, always near, always conceivable, always felt, seen in the temples and towers, courts and citadels and deliberative assemblies of a single city. Patriotism was the absorbing virtue. A man was obliged, in proportion as he loved his country, to hate her enemies; and hence courage became the chief ingredient in their notions of virtue.

It has often been remarked that the word *virtue* in the ancient language means *courage*. It is not exactly true; or at least the naked remark does not give a full representation of the case. Virtue then meant, as now, a disposition to do good and doing good from the disposition. But a great part of doing good was then (at least in common apprehension), from the very circumstances of the time, *defending one's country*. Hence the strong affinity between the names. As we call the seven united provinces Holland, from one of the largest ones in the collection, so virtue was denominated thus from its most striking component. When enemies were all around them, when every year presented their forces, wasting their fields, surrounding their walls and

shouting at their gates, what was it that made a man an available citizen? It was certainly his courage. By this he hazarded his life and defended his country and preserved his wife and children:

Οὐτ' ἂν μνησαίμην, οὐτ' ἐν λόγῳ ἄνδρα τιθέιμην,  
 Οὔτε ποδῶν ἀρετῆς, οὔτε παλαισμοσύνης,  
 Οὐδ' εἰ Κυκλώπων μὲν ἔχοι μέγεθός τε βίην τε,  
 Νικῶη δὲ θεῶν Θρηϊκίον βορέην.  
 Οὐδ' εἰ Τιθωνοῖο φηὴν χαρίστερος εἶη,  
 Πλουτοίη δὲ Μίδεω καὶ Κινύρεω βᾶθιον,  
 Οὐδ' εἰ Τανταλίδεω Πέλοπος βασιλεύτερος εἶη,  
 Γλώσσαν δ' Ἀδρήστου μελιχόγηρον ἔχοι.  
 Οὐδ' εἰ πᾶσαν ἔχοι δόξαν, πλὴν θούριδος ἀλκῆς.

Tyrtæus, Elegy, III.

Qualities are valued in proportion as they are demanded; and, as in that day, they knew little about immortality, as worth was not measured by its self-denying march to the mansions of future glory, it was estimated by its visible effects in this temporal state, and as he was constantly called to defend his country and as the option was between freedom on one side, and death and slavery on the other; hence arose the idea—*vir-tue*; manfulness, policy, resolution, courage.<sup>1</sup> It was the quality which, judging from their scale, was most frequently demanded and therefore the brightest ornament of human nature.

In Gospel times, when a future state became a positive conception and had a decided influence, we find different views prevailing. People enlarged their conceptions of virtue as they contemplated its growing rewards. A soldier was the realization of the first idea, a monk of the second; and both, though partially false, exceedingly natural.

To this we may add, that a certain kind of courage is necessary for the opening of a scope to the exercise of all the virtues. To be fearless of man is often necessary in order to obey God. Even Christ taught it; even the martyrs walked calmly to the stake.

With these views their ideas of slavery were closely connected. As it was necessary to defend one's country at the expense of life, and as it was very disgraceful to survive its overthrow, the man who had submitted to this disgrace had forever, as they conceived,

<sup>1</sup> Atqui vide, ne, cum omnes rectæ animi affectiones, virtutes appellentur, non sit hoc proprium nomen omnium: sed ab ea, quæ una cæteris excelebat, omnes nominatæ sint, appellata est enim ex viro virtus.—*Tusc. Quæst. Lib. 11. s. 18.*

forfeited his claims to the reputation of virtue. He was no longer a man. He was degraded from his rank; and held his life at the will of a valiant master. A slave, in that day, was not a foreign victim, imported from a distant coast, whom nature had thrown into a degraded class, and on whom a tropical sun had imprinted a flatter nose and a darker skin. He was a captive taken in war; he was a poltroon who had not courage enough to defend his country, or resolution enough not to survive its fall. Slaves were guilty men, according to their code of morals, who, not having acted with the spirit of freemen, were fit only to fall into bondage. Suicide, the last refuge of unfortunate patriotism, stood in the line of these associated virtues. The first duty of a great man, was to conquer his enemies; the second, to kill himself. Hence a Roman conqueror once told a captive king, who was lamenting his degraded condition in being dragged in a Roman triumph: "Sir; that is at your option; you have the power to prevent it!"<sup>1</sup> Thus all their ideas in the ancient code of morals were connected and grew out of each other; virtue, courage; patriotism, war, slavery, suicide. Christianity had not shed her light over their rocky prospects; and the passive virtues were scarcely known. It would have been a monstrous paradox to them to have said: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

It would seem at first view as if these political speculations could scarcely approach and color the retired morality of private life; but unthought of influences rule our minds and direct our judgments. When the Apostles by the solemn decree of the first assembled council declare, *that it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from FORNICATION; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well;*—it has seemed strange to some commentators that, in an evangelical decree, so obvious a vice as fornication should need a special prohibition from so solemn a body. Some have proposed to amend the reading; some have given the word a figurative interpretation, referring to idolatry and forbidding that worship; though that construction would make the sentence grossly tautological. Some have told us that this decision derives its importance from the fact that, in the laxity of pagan morals, incontinence in unmarried people was scarcely regarded as a crime. Now such an unconditional remark as the last, though

<sup>1</sup> See Plutarch's *Life of Paulus Emilius*.

partially true, is grievously misleading. It is true that heathen manners were immorally free and grossly licentious; it is true also that a great empire in its national decline, like Rome, breaks over all laws and violates its own established standard. But the peculiar ideas of the ancients on this subject were modified by slavery. It appears from Terence's plays, who is but a translator of Menander, that the laws of Athens on this subject, between legal citizens, were uncommonly strict; more so than our own. It was not uncommon for a wealthy youth to form a licentious connection with a beautiful slave;<sup>1</sup> and such immoralities were tolerated by the perverted liberality of public opinion. But if it could be proved that the woman so seduced was the daughter of a free citizen, the obligation was imperious to marriage. Several of the catastrophes of Terence's comedies turn upon this fact; and show the strictness of the theory of ancient morals, when not relaxed by the conventional inequalities which a stern ambition had introduced among mankind. Something of this kind of thinking we find among the Hebrews. The harlot was generally the strange woman, i. e. the foreigner. "If a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins," Exodus 22: 16, 17. We are told, Deut. 23: 17, "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel;" and Lev. 19: 29, "Do not prostitute thy daughter to cause her to be a whore, lest the land fall to whoredoms and the land become full of wickedness." I am far from thinking that these passages countenance the conclusion, that the crime became venial when committed with a foreigner. But every one must see the associated ideas of the moral code; and the very structure of society reflects its influences on the recesses of our hearts.

Our judgment of the ancient Christians has been modified by arraigning them before a modern tribunal and trying them by laws which they never knew. *Their* ideas also existed in a chain; and each link loses part of its weakness when we cease to sever it from the place it first occupied. We take up the fathers; we are struck with an insulated opinion; we sever their religion from their philosophy; their logic from their rhetoric; their residue-errors from those they have renounced; their conservatism from their innovations, and their creed from their age, and

---

<sup>1</sup> See the *Andria* of Terence, Act V. scene 4th.

then allow ourselves to be astonished at their absurdities. We forget that the human mind has always enjoyed some portion of reason ; that reason has no affinity with error, and man no innate love of nonsense ; that earnest men have read the Bible before us ; and that no man's mistakes are to be correctly estimated until we understand the whole of his system. Let us testify that, however imperfect our investigations, and however poor our treasures of patristical lore, every step in our progress has diminished our wonder, and increased our respect for those writers who have felt our contempt partly from our not understanding them.

One of their strangest opinions is, the universal exaggeration with which they regard ritual piety. The views of baptismal regeneration, prevalent in the Romish and Episcopal churches, are exceedingly ancient, and sanctioned by the testimony of a host of fathers. The sanctity of days and places, the efficacy of the bones of martyrs, the reverence due to a bishop, the sending of the host to the sick, the participation of infants in the communion, the power of exorcism and the reverence of holy relics, all attest the leanings of superstitious minds to these dangerous delusions. The antiquity and uniformity of these opinions are remarkable ; and the more remarkable, as Christianity in its commencement, was an antagonist power to the overwrought ritualism of the Jewish church. Religion seemed to revolve back to a cold and cheerless error which she had just escaped ; even as a stream, whose surface is floored with ice, comes to an opening near the rapids, to glitter for a moment in a January sun, and then hastens to flow on under the same frozen concealment in its imprisoned passage to the sea.

Between the earliest writers and the inspired pages there is an absolute contrast. Perhaps it was permitted by the deep providence of God, that man might be rescued from the danger of confounding human wisdom however ancient and venerable, with divine inspiration. How earnest was St. Paul in drawing this line ! " Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." So to the Hebrews : " Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared for me ; in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come, (in the volume of the book

it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God." Indeed, our Saviour's declaration that man must be born again to enter the kingdom of God, was placing reformation on the opposite pole to all the ritualists. It is not rites that must transform the heart, but it is the heart that must give value to all the rites.

Now it is remarkable that when this great battle had just been fought with the ritual creed, and the victory apparently won, that the ground should have been lost under the very dispensation whose object was to keep it. But old errors often change their dress and paint their cheeks under a new coloring. The doctrine of Justification by faith was itself a barrier against the return of these experienced delusions. But this doctrine was soon clouded and forgotten. The Pelagian tendencies of most of the early Fathers is manifest and must be confessed. Pelagianism is older than Pelagius; and the tendency of that theory is strongly to the ritual. Perhaps it is natural in the course of religious development, that the infantile error should go before the truth of manhood; even as in astronomy certain errors must precede certain corrections; as the cycles and epicycles of Hipparchus and Ptolemy must pave the way for the noble discoveries of Kepler and Galileo.

Christianity in its origin was a bright sun shining on a dark object. Civilization was then comparatively in its infancy; education was not common; the world was not explored; navigation and geography were very imperfect; a false philosophy misled them, and the rays of revelation had to struggle through a hazy atmosphere to meet a half-opened eye. No wonder that error was the consequence. No wonder that this particular error, *leaning to the ritual*, was prevalent. In the apostolic Fathers, we find traces of it. Hermas who wrote the Pastor, lived, according to Lardner, when Clement was Bishop of Rome; about the close of the first century, A. D. 91 or 92. He seems to have attempted, in his rude way, to do what Addison and Steele did afterwards, to illustrate moral truth by allegories and visions; and by comparing his imperfect conceptions with the Spectator we may mark the natural progress of the human mind. He was probably the *fine writer* in the church of his age. If his works be genuine, he leaned to the ritual error. He is relating a conversation between himself and "a certain man who came in to him with a reverend look, in the habit of a shepherd, clothed with a white cloak, having a bag on his back and his staff in his hand." It was a celestial messenger speaking infallible truths: "And I

said unto him, I have even now heard from certain teachers that there is no other repentance beside baptism, when we go down into the water and receive the forgiveness of our sins; and that after that we must sin no more, but live in purity. And he said unto me thou hast been rightly informed."—Shepherd of Hermas, Vision IV. v. 18, 19, Wake's Translation. Barnabas was a Levite of the country of Cyprus and one of those Christians who soon after the resurrection of Jesus sold their goods and lands and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. He afterwards preached the Gospel in divers parts, together with the apostle Paul. He was older than Hermas and a companion of the apostle. Yet he says: "There was a river running on the right hand and beautiful trees grew up by it; and he that shall eat of them shall live forever. The signification of which is this: that we go down into the water full of sins and pollution; but come up again bringing forth fruit; having in our hearts the fear and hope which is in Jesus, by the spirit."—Epistle of Barnabas, X. 14. Ignatius was a martyr in 107. He had seen and conversed with the apostles. "Of the seven Epistles," says Lardner, "mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome, there are two editions; one called the larger and oftentimes the interpolated, and another called the smaller. And except Mr. Whiston and perhaps some few others, who may follow him, it is the general opinion of learned men, that the larger are interpolated, and that the smaller have by far the best title to the name of Ignatius."—Lardner's Credibility, Vol. I P. 2. 152. In the smaller edition, Wake's Translation, we find these words: "It is not lawful without the Bishop neither to baptise nor to celebrate the holy communion; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing unto God; that whatsoever is done may be sure to be well done."—Ignatius to the Smyrneans, Chap. III 5. Such respect for the sacerdotal character is a never failing indication of reliance on the efficiency of rites. When we descend lower the proofs multiply. Tertullian discusses the question at large, why the waters of baptism have such a moral power. "Wherefore," says he, "all waters, from the ancient privilege of their origin, obtain, after prayer to God, the sacrament of sanctification. For the Spirit straightway cometh down from the Heavens above, and is over the waters, sanctifying them from himself; and so sanctified they imbibe the power of sanctifying. Besides, for the simple act the similitude of the things may suffice, so that since we are defiled by sins as though by dirt, we should be cleansed by water. But

as our sins do not appear upon the flesh, (for no man carrieth upon his skin the stain of idolatry or adultery or theft,) so persons of this sort are filthy in the spirit, which is the author of sin. For the spirit ruleth, the flesh serveth; nevertheless each shareth the guilt, the one with the other, the spirit for commanding, the flesh for obeying. Wherefore the waters being in a certain manner endowed with power to heal by the intervention of the Angel,<sup>1</sup> the spirit is washed in the water after a carnal manner, and the flesh cleansed in the same, after a spiritual manner."—Tertullian De Baptismo, Sect. IV; Rev. C. Dodgson's Translation Library of the Fathers, Oxford, 1842.

Even Augustine, the most spiritual of all the fathers, who has given us his own deep experience in his Confessions, (and the more a spiritual man the less a formalist,) has fallen into the same snare; the wings of his faith are always glutinized and impeded by the *mucus* and the birdlime of his materialized authorities. The following remarkable passage is found in the City of God, Lib. I c. 27. He is discussing the question whether it was lawful, during the irruption of the Goths, for the nuns to avoid violation by a voluntary death. He takes the negative and uses this remarkable argument: "Restat una causa, de qua dicere coeperam, qua utile putatur, ut se quisque interficiat, scilicet ne in peccatum irruat, vel blandiente voluptate, vel dolore saeviente. Quam causam si voluerimus admittere, eò usque progressa perveniet, ut hortandi sint homines tunc se potius interimere, cum lavacro sanctae regenerationis abluti, universorum remissionem acceperunt peccatorum. Tunc enim tempus est cavendi omnia futura peccata, cum omnia sunt deleta praeterea. Quòd si morte spontanea rectè fit, cur non tunc potissimum fit? Cur baptizatus sibi quisque parcat? Cur liberatum caput tot rursus vitae hujus periculis inserit, cum sit facillimae potestatis illata sibi nece omnia devitare, scriptumque sit: *Qui amat periculum, incidit in illud?* Cur ergo amantur tot et tanta pericula, vel certè etiamsi non amantur, suscipiuntur, cum manet in hac vita, cui abscedere licitum est?" When a man assumes a point as established as the ground of further conclusions, he evinces two things; first, his own faith in it; and, secondly, that it is the conceded opinion of his age. It is remarkable too that Augustine knew well the danger of trusting to an *opus operatum* without its

<sup>1</sup> He supposes elsewhere in this treatise, that, as the pool of Bethesda derived its power, *Angelo medicante*, so the waters of Baptism were sanctified by an Angel sent down from Heaven.

spiritual power. He could separate the seal from the instrument, and reproaches the pagans with their confidence in sacrifices and the unspirituality of their religion. How strange that he should so eloquently rebuke the very error into which himself was falling!

It is unnecessary to multiply quotations. This cold and desolate fog is spread over all the regions of antiquity. The Fathers lift up one united voice, and though able to see the yoke of Judaism and the materialized worship of their pagan rivals, they all lay the foundations of a new edifice, made out of the rubbish of that which they were attempting to overthrow. "Hast thou fallen after Baptism," says Laurentius, bishop of Novaria, A. D. 507. "What then? is hope perished? Not so. Thou hast in the font received the sign, not of despair but of mercy. From that day and hour that thou camest forth from the laver, thou art to thyself a perpetual fountain, an abiding remission. Thou hast no need of a teacher or the hand of a priest. As thou wentest up from the sacred font, thou wert clothed with a white robe and anointed with the mystic ointment; the invocation was pronounced over thee and the three-fold-power came upon thee, while, into thee, a new vessel poured this new teaching." The relics of these deceptions, ripened into all the superstitions of Romish and Greek churches, still continue to burden the earth and impede the march of a sublime religion in her path to enlighten and bless mankind.

Now when a modern reader is brought to read the pages deformed with such puerility, he is apt to think his efforts to understand early Christianity very ill repaid; and to treat all antiquity with promiscuous contempt. But let us remember to estimate men by their difficulties and their station. It is a hard thing to condemn a whole age; still harder, successive ages. Let us rather contemplate the causes which led to such common results. When we walk down to Plum Island,<sup>1</sup> we do not expect to see the awful oaks, the flowery magnolias which shade a southern or western valley. The stunted plum-tree surprises us when we see the sand-heaps on which it grew; and, in an autumnal day, when wearied with toiling over this miniature desert, we are inclined to bless God for its limited shade and its imperfect fruit.

Let us once more revert to our chain. Let us see how their ideas were combined together and how they stood rank and file with the spirit of their age. Whoever reads the Fathers with the expectation of finding himself edified by their direct senti-

<sup>1</sup> A place near Newburyport, Mass.

ments, will often be disappointed; in this point of view they write uniformly worse than the moderns. We have profited by their errors and we have been taught by time. But surely it is something to trace the progress of opinions and the effect of speculation on practice. Antiquity, with all its imbecilities, is a rich mine whose ore will reward us when we know how to use it.

In the first place, then, we may say that ritual impressions actually were far more effectual than they can be in the present age. They are like poetry addressed to an imaginative people. They are generally the material concrete of some intellectual abstraction; and they become more pernicious when they have survived their age. As men reason less they feel more; and such solemn symbols are addressed to the feeling. When a papist and a protestant debate about the efficacy of pictures, the cross, a relic, lighted candles in the churches, etc., they are both partly right. These things are not to the Protestant what they are to the Catholic; they are not to the well educated man what they are to the Irish laborer. They neither awaken the same emotion nor are viewed with the same veneration. How different their effects in past ages; when they had all the freshness of novelty and were hailed with all the credulous simplicity of a first love!

But secondly, we should always remember the philosophy to which revelation presents her dogmas, and which forms the groundwork on which her pencil spreads the picture. Religion is presented to man; and we must form some conception of that nature to which it is presented. As a ray of light from the sun becomes visible only when intercepted by some opaque and reflecting object, so a doctrine of Scripture becomes intelligible only when it is seen to meet some want, or craving, or passion, or conception, in human nature. Our views of human nature and its duties we call (at least an important part of our) philosophy; and hence it is impossible wholly to separate our philosophy from our religion. The apostle Paul warns against a false philosophy; and no doubt much of the ancient philosophy was false; but they did not know it. Now our conceptions of human nature unconsciously tincture our religious speculation; just as the modern writers tell us that bringing a sensation and idea together forms our opinions, though the effect of the one on the other, being seldom remembered, is scarcely ever known.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> It is in vain to protest and say you will have no philosophy to back your religion and blend with it. Religion never can be understood without some views of that nature to which it is addressed; and some people will call these

The ancient philosophy was remarkable for never drawing the line between materialism and spirituality with the accuracy now demanded; and this first confusion runs through all their derived speculations. In the Platonic philosophy sin is an evil half voluntary, half material. The infections of the soul may be washed out by water or purged out by fire; as the poet tells us:

Quin et supremo quam lumine vita reliquit,  
 Non tamen omne malum miseria, nec funditus omnes  
 Corporeae excedunt pestes: penitusque necesse est  
 Multa diu concreta modis inolescere miris.  
 Ergo exercentur poenis, veterumque malorum  
 Supplicia expendunt. Aliae panduntur inanes  
 Suspensae ad ventos; aliis sub gurgite vasto  
 Infectum eluitur scelus, aut exuritur igni.

Enead, VI. line 735—742.

Nor death itself can wholly wash their stains  
 But long contracted filth ev'n in the soul remains.  
 The relics of inveterate vice they wear;  
 And spots of sin in every face appear.  
 For this are various penances enjoined;  
 And some are hung to bleach upon the wind,  
 Some plunged in waters, others purged in fires,  
 Till all the dregs are drained and all the rust expires.

Nay the very soul itself was a kind of ethereal matter; it existed in space; Tertullian taught that even God was a body—*Deum esse corpus contra Marcion, Lib. II. c. 16*—indeed that there is no substance that was not corporeal.<sup>1</sup> Spirit was only a more ethereal kind of matter. These impressions were universal. Their ideas of light as used by the followers of Zoroaster agree with the Manicheans in their account of the origin of evil; the ideas of future punishment were a singular jumble of moral and material ideas. It is remarked by Bayle that Des Cartes was the first philosopher that clearly saw and steadily drew the line which

---

views philosophy. Zuingli in Switzerland and Calvin in Geneva both began their teaching with a determination to cashier philosophy, and they were both obliged to alter their course. See Mosheim, Antt. XVI. sect. III. P. 2. Religion is a kind of moral ratio between objective truths and our inner nature; and as an arithmetical ratio cannot be understood without two quantities, so moral ratio is confusion, is nothing, without both the objects between which it exists. What is religion without MAN? And what is man but a system of Psychology or Anthropology, or whatever other learned name you may choose to give. I am not partial to pedantic names, but the thing itself must exist.

<sup>1</sup> He wrote a treatise also to prove that the human soul was corporeal and of human shape: *ostendam est mihi anima corporaliter*. See his treatise *De Anima*.

separates our material from our spiritual contemplations. Before his day these objects were always confounded.<sup>1</sup>

If the soul itself, then, was a kind of semi-corporealism, no wonder if its qualities were confounded with those of the body. We generally receive the universal testimony of mankind without much suspicion or inquiry. Plato, the most spiritual of all the Grecian philosophers, had already taught the doctrine of half material guilt cured by a half material punishment. In his *Phaedo*, he says: "A soul with such affections," (i. e. a pure and pious soul,) "does it not fly away to something divine and resembling itself? To something divine and immortal and wise? Whither, when it arrives, it becomes happy, being freed from error, ignorance, fear, love and other human evils. But if it departs from the body, polluted and impure, with which it has been long linked, in a state of familiarity and friendship, and by whose pleasures and appetites it has been bewitched, so as to think nothing else true but what is corporeal and what may be touched, seen, drank and used for the gratification of lust; at the same time, if it has been accustomed to hate, fear and shun whatever is dark and invisible

<sup>1</sup> We must beware of supposing, because the ancient philosophers sometimes defined the soul with tolerable correctness, that therefore they carried out the idea and did not again fall into a semi-materialism. Thus Cicero after defining to soul as having *nihil admixtum, nihil concretum, nihil copulatum, nihil coagmentatum, nihil duplex*, (*Tusculan Questions, Lib. I. sec. 29*), he goes on to teach that we philosophize best when we *maxime a corpore abducimus*. The fact is, the foundation (i. e. the philosophic foundation) of all the austerities of monkery is laid in his writings. The Fathers called abstraction from the body a celestial life; and Cicero calls it the same—*erit illis caelesti vitae simile*. The philosophers it is true did not live in so fervent an age and never dreamed of reducing his principles to practice. So Aristotle defines the soul beautifully: *Aristoteles longe omnibus (Platonem semper excipio) praestans et ingenio et diligentia, cum quatuor illa genera principiorum esset complexus, e quibus omnia orirentur, quintam quandam naturam censet esse, e qua sit mens; cogitare enim et providere et discere et docere et invenire aliquid, et tam multa assidue meminisse, amare, odire, cupere, timere, angere, laetari: haec et similia eorum, in quorum quatuor generum nullo inesse putat; quintum genus adhibet, vacans nomine: et sic ipsum animum, ἐντελέχεια appellat novo nomine, quasi quandam continuatam motionem et perennem*. The etymology of the remarkable word *ἐντελέχεια* has been greatly disputed. Evidently it has a very anti-material meaning. But from whatever derived and however defined, it is certain that this beautiful and just definition did not prevent the ideas of the ancients from wavering when they reasoned on the soul and its qualities. Nothing is so soon forgotten as a metaphysician's definition;—generally by his readers and not unfrequently by himself.

The subject is learnedly discussed by Cudworth in his *Intellectual System*, p. 774. Birch's Edition, 1743. Is he not too favorable to the spiritualists?

to the human eye, yet discerned and approved by philosophy; I ask if such a soul so disposed will go sincere and disincumbered from the body? By no means. And will it not be, as I have supposed, infected and involved with corporeal contagion, which an acquaintance and converse with the body, from a perpetual association, has made congenial? So I think. But my friend we must pronounce that substance to be ponderous, depressive and earthy, which such a soul draws with it; and therefore it is burthened with such a clog and again is dragged off to some visible place for fear of that which is hidden and unseen (i. e. spiritual objects), and as they report, returns to tombs and sepulchres, among which the shadowy phantasms of those brutal souls, being loaded with somewhat visible, have often actually appeared. Probably, O Socrates. And it is equally probable, O Cebes, that these are the souls of wicked, not virtuous men, which are found to wander amidst burial places, suffering the punishment of an impious life." Such were Plato's speculations. We find Cicero adopting similar sentiments. It is the body according to him that clouds the intellect, and impels the unwilling spirit to ignorance and a sensual life. The world consists of four elements, each of which have their appropriate places; the earthy and humid sink downward into the angles and holes of the ground; into the bed of the sea; the remaining two mount aloft; as the first by their weight are borne down; the others ascend to the celestial regions, either by nature seeking higher places or crowded up by more ponderous bodies; hence it is evident that minds whether composed of air or fire must mount according to the tendencies of universal nature. In this world, however, the corporeal dregs keep it down. This lower world is embraced by the thick and drowsy air, which clouds the tenant, obstructs sight and inflames appetite: *Accedit, ut eo facilius animus evadat ex hoc aëre, quem saepe jam appello, eumque perumpat, quod nihil est animo velocius; nulla est celeritas; . . . necesse est ita feratur, ut penetret et dividat omne coelum hoc, in quo nubes, imbres ventique coguntur; quod et humidum et caliginosum est, propter exhalationes terrae; quam regionem cum superavit animus, naturamque sui similem contigit et agnovit. Junctis ex anima tenui, et ex ardore solis temperato, ignibus insistit, et finem altius se efferendi facit, cum enim sui similem et levitatem, et calorem adeptus, tamquam paribus examinatus ponderibus, nullam in partem movetur, eaque ei demum naturalis est sedes, cum ad sui similem penetrauit, in quo nulla re egens aletur, et sustentabitur iisdem rebus, quibus astra*

sustentantur at aluntur. Cumque corporis facibus inflammari solemus ad omnes fere cupiditates, eoque magis incendi, quod iis memulemur, qui ea habeant, quae nos habere cupiamus: profecto beati erimus, cum, corporibus relictis, et cupiditatum et aemulationem erimus expertes: quodque nunc facimus, cum laxati curis sumus, ut spectare aliquid velimus et visere, id multo tum faciemus liberius, totosque nos in contemplandis rebus perspicendisque ponemus, propterea, quod et natura inest mentibus nostris insatiabilis quaedam cupiditas veri videndi; et orae ipsae locorum illorum, quo pervenerimus, quo faciliorem nobis cognitionem rerum coelestium, eo majorem cognoscendi cupiditatem dabunt. Tusculan Questions Lib. I. sect. 19.<sup>1</sup> This is the exact mixture of ideas which seems to have prevailed in the ancient philosophy. It was not confined to Platonism; for not to mention that Platonism itself came from ancient tradition, we find that all the philosophers had a similar connection of thought. First, contemplation and virtue were united in one name—philosophy; secondly, both were impeded by the use of our bodily faculties; thirdly, the first object in study is to mortify the body; to free the soul from the carnal clog; and lastly, he is the best philosopher who can come near to the freedom from passion employed by a disembodied being after death. Such were the views of human nature universally presented previous to the publication of the Gospel. Such was the Psychology of the ancient world.

When the Bible spoke to man it must accommodate itself in some degree to his conceptions; though its subjects are divine its language must be earthly; and there are certain metaphors necessary when treating of things which transcend the material

<sup>1</sup> Even Philo, taught by revelation as he was, and desirous to raise man to the highest spiritual nature, has scarcely escaped from the semi-materialism of the philosophers. He gives to man a higher and lower soul,—the first is *ἀωράτου πνεύματος δόκιμον εἶναι νόμισμα*,—and the other is *ἀπὸ γῆς ληφθὲν*. See Eusebius' Preparatio, Lib. VII. chap. 18. Now the very highest soul is *ἀίθεριον φύσεως*, of an aethereal nature, the impress of God's seal, and the second is still more corporeal. In the twenty-second chapter of this book we have a long discourse quoted from Philo, that matter is not the cause of evil, and yet it is the cause; for the corporeal soul reduces the higher. See the Preparatio of Eusebius Lib. VII. chap. 22. The image of the aethereal soul is the ETERNAL REASON, *ἀίδιος λόγος*.

It is impossible to draw the line more clearly between matter and mind than Plato has done in his tenth book of laws, where he contends that mind and all its qualities are prior to matter and all its qualities. What is prior in existence, must of course be distinct and separate in nature. Yet Plato, we see, relapses back to a material taint and a material purification. See the Phaedo, sect. 44.

world, which are very liable to be misunderstood. Thus when the apostle compares immortal happiness to a tree bearing twelve manner of fruits, or the prophet compares the influence of the Gospel to a river gushing from the foundation of the temple, fertilizing the desert and freshening the waters of the Dead Sea, there is no need of confounding the metaphor with the meaning; the remoter the ideas yoked together, the more easily are they understood. But when heaven is called a city, with golden streets and pearly gates, and when gospel illumination is compared to light; when the place where the wicked suffer is a lake of fire and brimstone, and when the summons to the solemnities of the last day is a trumpet, we are very apt, even in this age, to read without stating to ourselves exactly whether the language is metaphorical or not. We receive a loose analogy; and, satisfied with moral impression, leave the strict conception to be revealed by future light. So in the beginning of revelation, when Paul told them that "they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Rom. 8: 5, 6, 7, 8; and in another place: "The works of the *flesh* are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like", it seemed to the half-materialized psychology of the times, as if sin was literally the product of matter, τὴν κακίαν δὲ βλάστημα τῆς ὕλης;<sup>1</sup> at least it seemed to arise from certain adhesions (προσαρτήματα) of the flesh to the spirit. Although they did not, and indeed could not, wholly exclude the voluntary power from man's direction to virtue and vice, yet the *inclination* comes from the strange action of matter on mind. Well did the Apostle warn us against the seductive influence of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Interpret his phraseology concerning the *flesh*, etc., according to Hebrew conceptions, and we are left to the truest orthodoxy; but take the language according to the vocabulary of the schools, and it generates Gnosticism, Manicheism and most of the other heresies that disfigured the ancient church and impeded the progress of the revealed system.

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch; See Beausobre Hist. Manichees, Vol. II. p. 148.  
That is, *false* philosophy.

It should always be remembered that their notions of spirit, will, virtue, action, were mixed and partial; and the more deceptive perhaps on that very account. They did not state to themselves that the soul was a kind of refined matter, that virtue and vice were pure physical actions; if they had, it is probable they would have started from their own conclusions. But a floating idea left them to ward off all objections, and yet conducted them to the most preposterous results. A proposition taken in a double sense is of course doubly deceiving; especially if the mind is unconscious of this double sense. We waver between the literal meaning and the figure. When an objection is urged we evade it by flying to the figure and yet we urge our belief in the literal sense. The history of philosophic and religious opinions is full of such delusions; more current the more we rise into the poetic world.

As the disease then was partly corporeal, was it wonderful that the cure should be accomplished by corporeal action? Observe how these semi-formed ideas exactly tallied with each other. Plato's souls were infected with a kind of material evil; the rivers that purify them, the floods of water and floods of fire, are in the future world.<sup>1</sup> The whole composition of that world is far less gross than ours; and they are washed and burned into purity just according to the nature of their corruption. The same double idea runs through both processes. So, on the other hand, God has united the soul with matter; in this union it sins. He unites too his own spirit with the baptismal water; it gives wonderful power to the material act. It has marvellous simplicity; it is a wonderful instance of the goodness of God. So it seemed to them. Nor was the seeming, in that age and those relations, altogether unnatural. "In truth," says Tertullian, "there is nothing which so hardeneth the minds of men, as the simplicity of the divine works as visible in the act, and their greatness promised in the effect; so that in this case also, because a man going down into the water, and being with a few words washed

<sup>1</sup> In the following passage, Lactantius teaches expressly that the fire of hell is not like our fire: "At ille divinus per seipsum semper vivit, ac viget sine ullis alimentis, nec admistum habet fumum, sed est purus ac liquidus, et in aquae modum fluidus; non enim vi aliqua sursum versus urgetur, sicut noster, quem labes terreni corporis, quo tenetur, et fumus intermistus exsilire cogit, et ad coelestem naturam cum trepidatione mobili subvolare. Idem igitur divinus ignis una eademque vi atque potentia et cremabit impios et recreabit, et quantum e corporibus absument, tantum reponet."—*Lact. Inst. Lib. VII. c. 21.*

therein, with so much simplicity, without pomp, without any novel preparation, and finally without expense, riseth again not much or not a whit the cleaner, therefore his gaining eternity is thought incredible. I am much mistaken if the rites and mysteries pertaining to idols, on the contrary, build not their credit and authority on their equipments and their outward show and their sumptuousness. O wretched unbelief! who deniest to God his own proper qualities, simplicity and power! What then? Is it not wonderful that death should be washed away by a mere bath? Yea, but if because it is wonderful, it be therefore not believed, it ought on that account the rather to be believed.<sup>1</sup> For what else should the works of God be but above all wonder? We ourselves also wonder but because we believe, while unbelief wondereth and believeth not, for it wondereth at simple things, as foolish, and at great things, as impossible."—De Baptismo, ch. 2. Dodgson's translation.

Thus the union of philosophy and religion led the primitive Fathers into this dangerous mistake. In it they seemed to hear the general voice of revelation and reason. "Although," says Beausobre, giving an account of the opinions of the Basilidians, "Clemens Alexandrinus did not have exactly the same opinions as they, (i. e. the material appendages which weighed the soul down to sensuality and sin,) yet he conceived that there were certain impure spirits, which he called material energies, *ἐνέργειαι ἑλικαί*, attached to the soul, to be separated by baptism. The Spirit of God separated them, as the wind separates the chaff from the grain. He did not suppose them to be demons, but *passions*, which are called spirits, since they act on the soul, and produce the motions not conformed to reason."—History of the Manichees, Tom. II. Lib. IV. c. 2. Heresy was but the excess of what the orthodox believed.

Man is a being made for advancement, but his very progression sometimes deceives him. Looking back from our age, rich with all the accumulated instructions of past teaching and even past error, we can easily see the deficiencies of this philosophy and this religion. But it was not so obvious then. The very advancement which the more spiritual religion of the Gospel had made on paganism and Judaism, contributed to blind them to their remaining errors. They were conscious of their progression, but not of the road still to be passed over.<sup>2</sup> We have no doubt that

<sup>1</sup> The translator has here wonderfully softened Tertullian's language.

<sup>2</sup> It is not unlikely also that the superiority of the orthodox Fathers over the

the Athenian constitution was one of the best specimens of civil liberty and social happiness which that age had seen; though we survey it as a system of cruelty, turbulence, strife and oppression. The Romans regarded the toga not only as comfortable but honorable; to us it would be little better than an Indian's blanket. It needs a very comprehensive mind, after manifest improvement, to grasp the idea of final perfection. Augustine argues beautifully against the folly of hoping to appease the gods with earthly victims: "*Sacrificium ergo visibile invisibilis sacrificii sacramentum, id est, sacrum signum est.*"—*De Civitate Dei Lib. X. c. 5.* Tertullian protests that the water has no power save by its union with the Holy Ghost. In a word, as a man that has separated his observations of nature from many theories, is still unconscious of some latent ones that still cleave to his mind; and his attention to his own victories over his errors makes him more unconscious of what remains to be done, so the Fathers were also honestly deceived; they stood in the natural line of human progression; they accomplished all that could justly be demanded of their age; they were progressive but not perfect, and they were to be honored for what they achieved, and pardoned for what they left undone.

When a modern for example takes into his hand such a writer as Tertullian, (especially if he be a New-Englander,) and reads the questions he discusses; the quaintness of his language, the remoteness of his comparisons, the credulity of his faith, the perversity of his creed; his quibbles, puns and historical mistakes, the strength of his assertions and the weakness of his arguments, he is tempted almost to wonder how such a leaden genius floated down even on the rapid and dense tide of ecclesiastical admiration. What would have been the loss had he sunk to merited oblivion? We forget, however, that every man is the product of his own age, is to be estimated by the tax he has paid to the general sum of human knowledge. We must beware

---

Gnostics and Manichees might tend to deceive them. They did not notice that their own cups retained the dregs of that matter of which the heretics' cups were full. In the material world, there are various kinds of *non-spiritual substances*, as rocks, earth, water, fire, air, ether, light, and perhaps the thinner fluid in which planets revolve. Now, in mounting from one to another, we are apt to imagine we have escaped from *the material* when we have only surmounted its grosser forms; and, if we find a sect that have confounded these things more than we have, we are very apt, in detecting their confusion, to overlook our own. It is the mote and the beam over again; only the beam is in our neighbor's eye and the mote in our own.

how we despise our instructors, when perhaps their very lessons have contributed to elevate us over them, and taught us to detect their errors. Tertullian discussed questions which were vastly important when he was on the stage. His work *De Corona* appears especially barren to us. But how different then! A soldier tore his military crown and renounced his profession; other Christians were in the army; all were liable to impressment. What shall we do? Shall we obey God or man. Is the military profession lawful to a soldier of Christ? These are great questions; and I can easily imagine what a vast interest they gave to his works in that age. At any rate, Tertullian instructs us by his errors. He carried his own system to its practical development. Justification by works naturally leads to austerity; and every page of Tertullian shows us how precious it is to cast the trembling soul on the simplicity of free justification by faith.

But there is a still deeper reason which led the ancient Christians into this overweening confidence in religious rites. It is founded not in philosophy but nature; and if all memory of the past were swept away and the experiment to be renewed, let human nature be the same, and the same mistake would be again inevitable. Everybody knows that religion began in the highest fervor and enthusiasm; it burst like a stream from a steep mountain side, and its rapidity was immense as soon as it began to flow. Now it is a remarkable fact, that the power of a rite when addressed to a congenial heart, is not to be estimated in its application to an uncongenial one. When it meets the congenial principle it may be powerful; when it does not it may be remarkably powerless. The tomb that draws the widows tears and agitates her heart, is gazed at by the passing stranger without emotion. The sight of the places in Palestine drew tears from Peter the Hermit, and through him excited the indignation of all Europe. But their Mohammedan foes regarded them only as so much barren earth. A lock of hair, a picture, a ring, when given by a faithful lover and viewed in his absence, may kindle the most tender emotions in a maiden's heart. To another they are nothing. The sacrament we say is calculated, if there be a spark of piety in the heart of the communicant, to kindle it into a flame; but it will not convert the sinner; when he comes it sinks into a formality and hardens him in his crimes. Look through all nature and all life, and you will scarcely find a greater contrast than between the power of the rite or ceremony, addressed to its appropriate sentiment, and its perfect inefficacy when no

such sentiment meets it. The sunbeams refracted by a burning-glass and falling upon a solid substance, metallic or combustible, consume or melt it away; but they are cold and powerless when collected in water. The shower that fertilizes the garden scarcely moistens the sand; the sunbeam that paints its crimson on the cloud, returns colourless from the blackened forest; and even the institutions of God lose their power, when they are not directed by his coöperating spirit, on the susceptibility which gives them efficacy in the human mind.

Now the rites of religion, when first performed, were met by this powerful susceptibility in the candidates for their reception. There was no coldness, no remissness; no separating of the antagonist principles which God had joined together. The first converts were from Judaism or Heathenism; it was some powerful principle, some ardent feeling that brought them to the baptismal water. The sign and the thing signified almost always work together. Even when the hypocrite was baptized, it was under the strong emotion of a temporary deception. When John came preaching in the wilderness, there went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, *confessing their sins*. Even in that formal age, the rite enforced the confession. When Peter preached at Jerusalem, they were pricked in their hearts and cried, Men and brethren, what shall we do? and they were baptized to the number of three thousand souls. Amidst the deep emotion of such solemn scenes, when the tears of repentance mingled with the waters of baptism, how could they foresee the day of coldness and metaphysical abstraction, the day when the rites would lose their power, because the Gospel had lost its glory and the heart its love. The foreigner that has seen our landscapes only in the vernal season, cannot estimate the naked desolation of a winter prospect.

We see that this mistake, though obvious on retrospection, has deceived thousands of reflecting minds before speculation has been instructed by experience. When Charles I. was imposing his hated liturgy on Scotland, the whole nation was roused to opposition; and, as usual, they betook themselves to formulas and ran to subscribe the covenant. It filled the whole nation with fire; it was a central point of strength, a bond of union. Nothing like the covenant; and so great was its power that the king thought that he must have *his* covenant; but as Guizot has remarked: "en-

thusiasm is not a matter of imitation,"<sup>1</sup> the covenant of Charles was a powerless affair when not expressing the will of an excited people. In our American revolution, it was thought that a few watchwords would always have the same effect; and it is well worthy of the reflection of those who repose such a trust in the efficacy of the temperance pledge, whether it must not like other symbols fall into the rear of time; whether its first and last power will be equal; whether its dominion over cool reason will equal its power when backed by enthusiasm, and whether even Father Matthews will always be able to lead Ireland by a ribbon and a seal. A ball is a fatal implement in a cannon with gunpowder behind it; but without the gunpowder it is nothing but a harmless mass of inert iron.

The first Christians were in the exact place where wise men might be deceived. Their views were all prospective, and they were untaught by experience. The very grace of God was operating through a new dispensation, and how could they foresee what honor it might please him to put upon his own appointed means? Their little experience was all in favor of the new rites; they had found them exceedingly affecting to their own souls. They saw a new generation growing up to be educated under their power. We naturally incorporate our spiritual ideas; our visible actions must express something. The ancient Christians did not separate their rites from the power. Thus Tertullian teaches that the spirit of God mixes with the baptismal water. Thus their own experience deceived them; and thus the strongest enthusiasm led them into the errors of the coldest formality.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Guizot's *English Revolution*, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> In looking forward to the rising generation, it was extremely natural for the ancient church to be betrayed into this overweening trust in ritual performances. Here was a new class of people, namely the children of the faithful to be educated somehow, under the wing of the church. Now all piety is divided into two kinds, the inward and outward, experimental religion and that sober performance of its instituted worship which might be expected and demanded where there is no inward conversion. Where we cannot produce the one, we are glad to see the other. In a race of children, the last would be likely gradually to supervene on the first. There is always a tendency in religion for the vital spirit to steal away from the outward forms; just as the sap is gone from the tree before its wood decays. Neander says, that the strong church government in the second ages was the *reaction* of the excessive and disorderly democracy of the first. He has over-painted this democracy, for there always was a clergy; nevertheless, it seems to us there is much truth in his theory. If so, how natural as an accompaniment, that formality should follow enthusiasm; that such a spirit as Paul rebukes in 1 Cor. chap. 14 should die

Such then are the allowances with which every candid man will survey the general spirit of the early church and its writers. He will consider the philosophy which modified their speculations; the gradations by which they approached their opinions; the conclusions in which they stand; the light which they reflect on each other; their congeniality to the spirit of the age, and the emotions of the heart, as well as to the form of the mind in which they originated. If thus candid and thus patient he explores their dogmas, I do not say he will adopt their opinions, but every step of his inquiry will diminish his contempt for them. A few practical remarks will now close this protracted discussion.

First, Let us avoid the extremes of either worshipping or despising antiquity. Mankind have almost universally fallen into the one or the other of these errors; and, when they cease to worship, they are very apt to pass to an indiscriminating contempt. Before the reformation it was the practice to regard the fathers with the deepest reverence. Their precedents bound; their arguments convinced; their sophistry was not seen; their word was law. The spirit of the age was one of timid conservatism. Aristotle and Augustine were equally dominant, the one in philosophy, the other in religion. The age before Luther, resembled a people gathered at the foot of a venerable mountain, looking up with profound veneration, to the woods and shades that waved over their heads; and paying more deference to the cliffs that overshadowed them, than to the very heavens towards which they pointed. But now we have got on the summit ourselves, and see all antiquity prostrate at our feet. Our learning is less, our power of speculation greater. But there is a middle point, which we have not yet reached. The fathers stand in the natural line of progression, and it is needful to know what they say. Despising past ages leads to an over-valuation of our own. If you worship the past, you will be a Roman Catholic; if you despise it, you will be an infidel. In the metropolis of this State, we may find a melancholy exemplification of the truth of this remark. Mr. Bronson worships antiquity; Mr. Parker despises it. See his late installation sermon. A true Protestant will aim to hit the medium. He will not destroy, by his distrust, the unity of the church, or the lessons of time.

Secondly, Let us feel the folly of judging hastily on insulated opinions. The dogmas of the fathers are too often presented to  
away, and leave the sanctification of the heart to be accomplished by the priest, the sacramental bread and the waters of baptism.

us, like pillars torn out of their place in the temple; we meet them in single quotations; we seldom enter into the habits of thinking in which they were embedded, or into the feelings from which they arose. We lose sight of the philosophy of the age; and hence we find absurdities where perhaps there are only plausible errors and sometimes positive truths.

Thirdly, we may remark that the credibility of an ancient opinion as well as of an extraordinary event, arises from *the ideal* in which it originated. The battle of Salamis or Marathon, the proscription of Sylla, the cruelty of Robespierre, are almost incredible until we see the general spirit which produced them. So some of the opinions of the fathers are perfectly astounding, until we go back to their causes. The Story of Symeon Stylites—how incredible! until we trace the progressive austerities of the church, and the combined religion and philosophy which justified them. The story then becomes a natural emanation of the prevailing faith.

Fourthly, We may learn from this subject to estimate those writers who have given us compendiums of ancient opinions; such as Daillé, Beausobre, Mosheim, Middleton, Gibbon. They have all of them judged the fathers by their weakness and not by their strength.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Warburton's estimation of the fathers, in his *JULIAN is restorative* and, for him, uncommonly judicious. After observing that we must not try their *abilities*, though we may try their *logic*, by the standard of our own times, he goes on to prefer them generally to their pagan contemporaries. "Chrysostom" he says, "has more good sense than Plato, and the critic may find in Lactantius almost as many good works as in Tully." The learned critic, in the last remark, must free his own credit; I would hardly be responsible for such an opinion. If Chrysostom has any superiority over Plato, it is owing more to the light of revelation, than to the force of his own genius. The question is, who paid the greatest quota to the mass of human knowledge? Milton's view of the fathers is not injudicious; he points out their true use: "He that thinks it the part of a well-learned man to have read diligently the ancient stories of the church, and to be no stranger in the volumes of the fathers, shall have all judicious men consenting with him; not surely to control and new fangle the Scriptures, God forbid! but to mark how corruption and apostasy crept in by degrees, and to gather up wherever we find the remaining sparks of original truth, wherewith to stop the mouths of our adversaries and to bridle them with their own curb, who willingly pass by what is orthodoxal in them, and studiously cull out that which is commentitious and best for their turns, not weighing the fathers in the balance of Scripture, but Scripture in the balance of the fathers. If we, therefore, making first the gospel our rule and oracle, shall take the good which we light on in the fathers and set it to oppose the evil that other men seek from them, in this way of skirmish we shall easily master all

Fifthly, and more than all, we may see the folly of attempting to restore a rite or ceremony, an opinion or practice, which has had its day and was not originally established by divine authority. This is the error of a learned but dreamy sect, now springing up in England and America. The origin of the Puseyites is probably the *reaction* of the democratic tendencies of the age. They are most of them cloistered students, better acquainted with books than men, yet acquainted with men enough to see, that reform-bills, universal suffrage, free trade, and political economy, have a vast tendency to abate our reverence for kings and priests, and to throw the whole frame-work of ritual piety into desuetude and oblivion. Democracy is in its very nature, dry, unceremonious, unreverential; delighting in its own affections, and more intent on discoveries than on precedents and proscriptions. Such is the powerful tendency of this age. We examine all things; we reverence nothing. Even the Deity himself hardly holds his throne in conformity to the social contract and the rights of man. Now certain studious men nurtured among the books and cobwebs of Oxford, have taken the alarm; and seem to think that the best way to check our excesses is, to saddle on us the whole spirit of antiquity. The plan is about as wise and as feasible, as it would be to go to a military engineer who was trying his Paixhan cannon, and advise him to take the helmets, the habergeons, the shields and broad-swords of the age of chivalry. Surely it must be seen that these rites do not stand in the connection, nor produce the impressions they once did. Whatever wisdom may have once attended them, they have lost their power now; and Capt. Bobdil's method of conquering an army is just as wise and practical, as these methods of restoring the piety of a democratic age. "I would select," says Ben Jonson's hero, "nineteen more to myself throughout the land; gentlemen they should be of good spirit, strong and able constitution; I would chose them by an instinct, a character that I have; and I would teach these members the special rules, as your Punto, your Reverso, your Stoccata, your Imbroccata, your Passada, your

superstition and false doctrine; but if we turn this our discreet and wary usage into a blind devotion towards them and whatsoever we find written by them, we both forsake our own grounds and reasons which led us first to part from Rome, that is, to hold to the Scriptures against all antiquity; we remove our cause into our adversaries', own court, and take up there those cast principles which will soon cause us to sodder up with them again, inasmuch as believing antiquity for itself in any one point, we bring an engagement on ourselves of assenting to all that it charges upon us."—Prelatical Episcopacy, page 90.

Montonto; till they could all play very near or altogether as well as myself. This done, say the enemy were forty thousand strong, we twenty would come into the field the tenth of March, or thereabouts; and we would challenge twenty of the enemy; they could not in their honor refuse us! Well, we would kill them; challenge twenty more, kill them; twenty more, kill them; twenty more, kill them too; and thus would we kill, every man his twenty a day; that is twenty score; twenty more, that is two hundred! two hundred a day, five days a thousand; forty thousand, forty times five, five times forty, two hundred days kill them all up by computation."

Lastly,—Let us trace the ancient errors to their radical mistake. *A want of a clear perception of the truth, and practical bearing of the doctrine of Justification by faith.* The church has its infancy as well as the life of man; and it was perfectly natural that a kind of unformed but implicit Pelagianism should be the first mistake. We teach our children to be Pelagians in our first religious lessons. We say to them, Be good and God will love you. We generate a kind of meritorious justification, in order to present an antagonist principle when the mind shall become capable of it. The historical argument against Calvinism, which has distressed some of its defenders, is far from being so conclusive as has been supposed. If this system be the Gospel, it has been asked, how is it that all the writers previous to Augustine missed it? Without contesting the fact, we may say, that in the order of progression it was a most natural mistake. And then as to influence, we see what it generated. A priesthood, an infallible church, baptismal regeneration, transubstantiation, exorcism, extreme unction, indulgences, and the whole round of this mechanical piety. Justification by faith cuts up these errors by the roots. When this doctrine was recovered to the church, by impressing real holiness on the heart, it gave inward peace; it turned the attention of men from the rites of the chancel to the affections of the soul; for the unmeaning ceremony it substituted the powerful motive; it took the worshipper from the servitude of the priest and made him at once the free man of God.