

THE
IGNATIAN EPISTLES ENTIRELY SPURIOUS

A Reply
TO

THE RIGHT REV. DR. LIGHTFOOT,
BISHOP OF DURHAM.

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“As the Account of the martyrdom of Ignatius may be justly suspected, so, too, the letters which presuppose the correctness of this suspicious legend do not wear at all a stamp of a distinct Individuality of character, and of a man of these times addressing his last words to the Churches.”

AUGUSTUS NEANDER.

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PREFACE.

THIS little volume is respectfully submitted to the candid consideration of all who take an interest in theological inquiries, under the impression that it will throw some additional light on a subject which has long created much discussion. It has been called forth by the appearance of a treatise entitled, "*The Apostolic Fathers*, Part II. S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp. Revised Texts, with Introductions, Notes, Dissertations, and Translations, by J. B. Lightfoot, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D., Bishop of Durham." In this voluminous production the Right Reverend Author has maintained, not only that all the seven letters attributed by Eusebius to Ignatius are genuine, but also that "no Christian writings of the second century, and very few writings of antiquity, whether Christian or pagan, are so well authenticated." These positions, advocated with the utmost confidence by the learned prelate, are sure to be received with implicit confidence by a wide circle of readers; and I have felt impelled here openly to protest against them, inasmuch as I am satisfied that they cannot be accepted without overturning all the legitimate landmarks of historical criticism. I freely acknowledge the eminent services which Dr. Lightfoot has rendered to the Christian Church by his labours as a Commentator on Scripture, and it is therefore all the more important that the serious errors of a writer so distinguished should not be permitted to pass unchallenged. All who love the faith once delivered to the saints, may be expected to regard with deference the letters of a martyr who lived on the borders of the apostolic age; but these Ignatian Epistles betray indications of a very different original, for they reveal a spirit of which no enlightened Christian can approve, and promulgate principles which would sanction the boldest assumptions of ecclesiastical despotism. In a work published by me many years ago, I have pointed out the marks of their imposture; and I have since seen no cause to change my views. Regarding all these letters as forgeries from beginning to end, I have endeavoured, in the following pages, to expose the fallacy of the arguments by which Dr. Lightfoot has attempted their vindication.

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THE
IGNATIAN EPISTLES ENTIRELY SPURIOUS.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE question of the genuineness of the Epistles attributed to Ignatius of Antioch has continued to awaken interest ever since the period of the Reformation. That great religious revolution gave an immense impetus to the critical spirit; and when brought under the light of its examination, not a few documents, the claims of which had long passed unchallenged, were summarily pronounced spurious. Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, names only seven letters as attributed to Ignatius; but long before the days of Luther more than double that number were in circulation. Many of these were speedily condemned by the critics of the sixteenth century. Even the seven recognised by Eusebius were regarded with grave suspicion; and Calvin — who then stood at the head of Protestant theologians — did not hesitate to denounce the whole [2]* of them as forgeries. The work, long employed as a text-book in Cambridge and Oxford, was the *Institutes* of the Reformer of Geneva; and as his views on this subject are there proclaimed very emphatically — “There is,” says Calvin, “nothing more abominable than that trash which is in circulation under the name of Ignatius”¹ — we may presume that the entire body of the Ignatian literature was at that time viewed with distrust by the leaders of thought in the English universities. But when the doctrine of the Divine Right of Episcopacy began to be promulgated, the seven letters rose in the estimation of the advocates of the hierarchy; and an extreme desire was manifested to establish their pretensions.

So great was the importance attached to their evidence, that in 1644 — in the very midst of the din and confusion of the civil war between Charles I. and his Parliament — the pious and erudite Archbishop Ussher presented the literary world with a new edition of these memorials. Two years later the renowned Isaac Vossius produced a kindred publication. Some time afterwards, Daillé, a learned French Protestant minister, attacked

* Original page numbers are in brackets

¹ *Instit.*, 1.13.29.

them with great ability; and proved, to the satisfaction of many readers, that they are utterly unworthy of credit. Pearson, subsequently Bishop of Chester, now entered the arena, and in a work of much talent and research — the fruit of six years' labour — attempted to restore their reputation. This vindication was not [3] permitted to pass without an answer; but, meanwhile, the dark prospects of the Reformed faith in England and the Continent directed attention to matters of more absorbing interest, and the controversy was discontinued. From time to time, however, these Epistles were kept before the eyes of the public by Archbishop Wake and other editors; and more recently the appearance of a Syriac copy of three of them — printed under the supervision of the late Rev. Dr. Cureton — reopened the discussion. Dr. Cureton maintained that his three Epistles are the only genuine remains of the pastor of Antioch. In a still later publication Bishop Lightfoot controverts the views of Dr. Cureton, and makes a vigorous effort to uphold the credit of the seven letters quoted by Eusebius and supported by Pearson.²

Dr. Lightfoot has already acquired a high and deserved reputation as a scholar and a commentator, and the present work furnishes abundant evidence of his linguistic attainments and his perseverance; but it is somewhat doubtful whether it will add to his fame as a critic and a theologian. In these three portly octavo volumes — extending to upwards of 1800 pages of closely printed matter — he tries to convince his readers that a number of the silliest productions to be found among the records of antiquity are the remains of an apostolic Father. [4] He tells us, in his preface, that the subject has been before him “for nearly thirty years;” and that, during this period, it has “engaged his attention off and on in the intervals of other literary pursuits and official duties.” Many, we apprehend, will feel that the result is not equal to such a vast expenditure of time and labour; and will concur with friends who, as he informs us, have complained to him that he has thus “allowed himself to be diverted from the more congenial task of commenting on S. Paul’s Epistles.” There is not, we presume, an evangelical minister in Christendom who would not protest against the folly exhibited in these Ignatian letters; and yet it appears that the good Bishop of Durham has spent a large portion of his life in an attempt to accomplish their vindication.

² J.B. Lightfoot, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D., Bishop of Durham, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part II, London, 1885

To Dr. Lightfoot may be justly awarded the praise of having here made the reading public acquainted with the various manuscripts and versions of these Ignatian letters, as well as with the arguments which may be urged in their favour; and he has thus rendered good service to the cause of historical criticism. Professor Harnack, in a late number of the *Expositor*,³ states no more than the truth when he affirms that "this work is the most learned and careful Patristic Monograph which has appeared in the nineteenth century." To any one who wishes to study the Ignatian controversy, it supplies a large amount of valuable evidence, not otherwise easily [5] accessible. Some, indeed, may think that, without any detriment to ecclesiastical literature, some of the matter which has helped to swell the dimensions of these volumes might have been omitted. Everything in any way associated with the name of Ignatius seems to have a wonderful fascination for the learned prelate. Not content with publishing and commending what he considers the genuine productions of the apostolic Father, he here edits and annotates letters which have long since been discredited by scholars of all classes, and which he himself confesses to be apocryphal. The *Acts of Martyrdom of Ignatius* — which he also acknowledges to be a mere bundle of fables — he treats with the same tender regard. Nor is this all. He gives these acts, or large portions of them, in Latin and Greek, as well as in Coptic and Syriac; and annotates them in addition. He supplies, likewise, English translations. It may be argued that the publication of such a mass of legendary rubbish is necessary to enable the student to form a correct judgment on the merits of the subject in debate; but surely the question might be settled without the aid of some of these auxiliaries.

Dr. Lightfoot has long been known as one of the most candid and painstaking of scriptural commentators; but it must always be remembered that he is an Episcopalian, and the ruler of an English diocese. He would be something almost more than human were he to hold up the scales of testimony with strict impartiality when weighing the claims of [6] his own order. It strikes us that, in the work before us, his prejudices and predilections reveal their influence more conspicuously than in any of his other publications. He can see support for his views in words and phrases where an ordinary observer can discover

³ Dec. 1885, p. 401.

nothing of the kind; and he can close his eyes against evidence which others may deem very satisfactory. Even when appraising the writers who have taken part in this controversy, he has presented a very one-sided estimate. He speaks of those who reject the claims of these Epistles as forming "a considerable list of *second and third rate* names,"⁴ and he mentions Ussher and Bentley among those who espouse his sentiments. According to our author, there cannot be a "shadow of doubt" that the seven Vossian Epistles "represent the genuine Ignatius."⁵ "No Christian writings of the second century," says he, "and very few writings of antiquity, whether Christian or pagan, are so well authenticated."⁶ He surely cannot imagine that Ussher would have endorsed such statements; for he knows well that the Primate of Armagh condemned the Epistle to Polycarp as a forgery. He has still less reason to claim Bentley as on his side. On authority which Bishop Monk, the biographer of Bentley, deemed well worthy of acceptance, it is stated that in 1718, "on occasion of a Divinity Act," the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, "made a speech *condemning* the Epistles of S. Ignatius." His address created a "great ferment" [7] in the university.⁷ It is further reported that Bentley "refused to hear the Respondent who attempted to reply." We might have expected such a deliverance from the prince of British critics; for, with the intuition of genius, he saw the absurdity of recognising these productions as proceeding from a Christian minister who had been carefully instructed by the apostles. Bentley's refusal to hear the Respondent who attempted to reply to him, was exactly in keeping with his well-known dictatorial temper. Does Dr. Lightfoot bring forward any evidence to contradict this piece of collegiate history? None whatever. He merely treats us to a few of his own *conjectures*, which simply prove his anxiety to depreciate its significance. And yet he ventures to parade the name of Bentley among those of the scholars who contend for the genuineness of these letters! He deals after the same fashion with the celebrated Porson. In a letter to the author of this review⁸ Dr. Cureton

⁴ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 316.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Monk's *Life of Bentley* [1833], ii, p. 44. Monk adds that the affair was "the talk of a long vacation" – a clear proof that the truth of the statement was indisputable.

⁸ See my *Old Catholic Church*, 398,

states that Porson “rejected” these letters “in the form in which they were put forth by Ussher and Vossius;” and declares that this piece of information was conveyed to himself by no less competent an authority than Bishop Kaye. Dr. Lightfoot meets this evidence by saying that “the *obiter dictum* even of a Porson,” in the circumstances in which it was given, might be “of little value”⁹ [8] It was given, however, exactly in the circumstances in which the speaker was best prepared to deliver a sound verdict, for it was pronounced after the great critic had read the *Vindiciæ* of Pearson.

It would be hopeless to attempt to settle a disputed question of criticism by enumerating authorities on different sides, as, after all, the value of these authorities would be variously discounted. We must seek to arrive at truth, not by quoting names, but by weighing arguments. Not a few, however, whose opinion may be entitled to some respect, will not be prepared to agree with Bishop Lightfoot when he affirms that those who reject these Ignatian letters are, with few exceptions, only to be found in the “list of second and third rate names” in literature¹⁰. We have seen that Bentley and Porson disagree with him — and he can point to no more eminent critics in the whole range of modern scholarship. If Daillé must be placed in the second rank, surely Pearson may well be relegated to the same position; for there is most respectable proof that his *Vindiciæ*, in reply to the treatise of the French divine, was pronounced by Porson to be a “very unsatisfactory” performance.¹¹ “The most elaborate and ingenious portion of the work” is, as Bishop Lightfoot himself confesses, “the least satisfactory.”¹² Dr. Lightfoot, we believe, will hardly pretend to say that Vossius, Bull, and Waterland stand higher in the literary world than Salmasius, John Milton, and Augustus Neander; and he will [9] greatly astonish those who are acquainted with the history and writings of one of the fathers of the Reformation, if he will contend that John Calvin must be placed only in the second or third class of Protestant theologians. In the presence of the great doctor of Geneva, Hammond, Grotius, Zahn, and others whom Dr. Lightfoot has named as his supporters, may well hide their diminished heads.

⁹ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 321, note.

¹⁰ *Idem*, p. 316.

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 321.

¹² *Idem*, p. 320.

In the work before us the Bishop of Durham has pretty closely followed Pearson, quoting his explanations and repeating his arguments. Some of these are sufficiently nebulous. Professor Harnack — who has already reviewed his pages in the *Expositor*, and who, to a great extent, adheres to the views which they propound — admits, notwithstanding, that he has “overstrained” his case, and has adduced as witnesses writers of the second and third centuries of whom it is impossible to prove that they knew anything of the letters attributed to Ignatius.¹³ As a specimen of the depositions which Dr. Lightfoot has pressed into his service, we may refer to the case of Lucian. That author wrote about sixty years after the alleged date of the martyrdom of Ignatius, and his Lordship imagines that in one of his works he can trace allusions to the pastor of Antioch under the fictitious name of Peregrinus. “Writing,” says he, “soon after AD 165,” Lucian “caricatures the progress of Ignatius through Asia Minor in his death of Peregrinus.”¹⁴

[10] This Peregrinus was certainly an odd character. Early in life he had murdered his own father, and for this he was obliged to make his escape from his country. Wandering about from place to place, he identified himself with the Christians, gained their confidence, and became, as is alleged, a distinguished member of their community. His zeal in their cause soon exposed him to persecution, and he was thrown into prison. His incarceration added greatly to his fame. His co-religionists, including women and children, were seen from morning to night lingering about the place of his confinement; he was abundantly supplied with food; and the large sums of money, given to him as presents, provided him with an ample revenue. After his release he forfeited the favour of his Christian friends, and became a Cynic philosopher; but he could not be at peace. He at length resolved to immortalize himself by voluntary martyrdom. Meanwhile he despatched letters to many famous cities, containing laws and ordinances; and appointed certain of his companions — under the name of death-messengers — to scatter abroad these missives. Finally, at the close of the Olympian games he erected a funeral pile; and when it was all ablaze, he threw himself into it, and perished in the flames. “There is very strong reason for believing,” says Dr.

¹³ *Expositor*, Dec. 1885, p. 403.

¹⁴ Lightfoot, Vol. 2.1, p. 436.

Lightfoot, "that Lucian has drawn his picture at least in part, from the known circumstances of Ignatius' history."¹⁵

The bishop returns again and again to the parallelism [11] between Ignatius and Peregrinus, and appears to think it furnishes an argument of singular potency in favour of the disputed Epistles. "Second only," says he, to certain other vouchers, which he produces, stands this testimony."¹⁶ From such a sample the judicious reader may form some idea of the conclusiveness of the bishop's reasoning. Peregrinus begins life as a parricide, and dies like a madman; and yet we are asked to believe that Lucian has thus sketched the history of an apostolic Father! When Lucian wrote, Ignatius had been dead about sixty years; but the pagan satirist sought to amuse the public by sketching the career of an individual whom he had himself heard and seen,¹⁷ and who must have been well known to many of his readers. About the middle of the second century the Church was sorely troubled by false teachers, especially of the Gnostic type; and it may have been that some adventurer, of popular gifts and professing great zeal in the Christian cause, contrived to gather around him a number of deluded followers, who, for a time, adhered to him with wonderful enthusiasm. It may be that it is this charlatan to whom Lucian points, and whose history he perhaps exaggerates. But there is nothing in the life of Peregrinus which can fairly be recognised even as a caricature of the career of one of the most distinguished of the early Christian martyrs.

Were we to maintain that the pagan satirist was referring to the Apostle John, we might be able to show almost as many [12] points of resemblance. The beloved disciple travelled about through various countries; acquired a high reputation among the Christians; was imprisoned in the Isle of Patmos; wrote letters to the seven Churches of Asia; and was visited in his place of exile by angels or messengers, who probably did not repair to him empty-handed. John died only a few years before Ignatius, and was connected with the same quarter of the globe. We have, however, never yet heard that Lucian was suspected of alluding to the author of the Apocalypse. If Bishop Lightfoot thinks that he can convince sensible men of the genuineness of the Ignatian Epistles by bringing forward such witnesses as Lucian and his hero

¹⁵ Vol. 1, p. 345.

¹⁶ Idem, p. 331.

¹⁷ See Lightfoot, vol. 1, p. 131.

Peregrinus, we believe he is very much mistaken. The argument is not original, for it is pressed with great confidence by his predecessor Pearson, and by others more recently. But its weakness is transparent. Professor Harnack, whilst admitting the weight of much of the evidence adduced in these volumes, scornfully refuses to acknowledge its relevancy. "Above all," says he, "Lucian should be struck out. I confess I cannot imagine how writers go on citing Lucian as a witness for the Epistles."¹⁸ There is, however, an old adage, "Any port in a storm"; and before the close of this discussion it may perhaps be found that Lucian is as good a harbour of refuge as can be furnished for the credit of the Ignatian Epistles in the whole of the second century.

[13] It is obvious that, even according to his own account of the history of his present work, Dr. Lightfoot has not entered on its preparation under circumstances likely to result in a safe and unprejudiced verdict: "*I never once doubted*," says he in the preface (page 5), that we possessed in one form or another the genuine letters of Ignatius." This is, however, the very first point to be proved; and the bishop has been labouring throughout to make good a foregone conclusion. No wonder that the result should be unsatisfactory. If he has built on a false foundation, nothing else could be expected. There is not, we are satisfied, a particle of solid evidence to show that Ignatius of Antioch left behind him any writings whatever. This may be deemed a very bold statement, but it is deliberately advanced. I hope, in a subsequent chapter, to demonstrate that it is not made without due consideration.

CHAPTER II.

THE TESTIMONY OF POLYCARP TO THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES EXAMINED.

THE Bishop of Durham affirms, in a passage already quoted, that "no Christian writings of the second century, and very few writings of antiquity, whether Christian or pagan, are *so well authenticated*" as the Epistles attributed to Ignatius. This assuredly is an astounding announcement, made deliberately by

¹⁸ *Expositor* for Dec. 1885, p. 404.

a distinguished author, whose attention, for nearly thirty years, has been directed to the subject. The letter of Polycarp to the Philippians is a writing of the second century, and it is by far the most important witness in support of the Ignatian letters; but we must infer, from the words just quoted, that it is not "so well authenticated" as they are. It is difficult to understand by what process of logic his Lordship has arrived at this conclusion. In an ordinary court of law, the witness who deposes to character is expected to stand on at least as high a moral platform in public estimation as the individual in whose favour he bears testimony; [15] but if the letter of Polycarp is not "so well authenticated" as these Ignatian letters, how can it be brought forward to establish their reputation?

Nor is this the only perplexing circumstance connected with this discussion. There was a time when, according to his own statement in the present work, Dr. Lightfoot "accepted the Curetonian letters as representing the genuine Ignatius";¹⁹ and, of course, when he regarded as forgeries the four others which he now acknowledges. In the volumes before us, as if to make compensation for the unfavourable opinion which he once cherished, he advances the whole seven of the larger edition to a position of especial honour. The letter of Polycarp, the works of Justin Martyr, the treatise of Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, and other writings of the second century, have long sustained an honest character; but now they must all take rank below the Ignatian Epistles. According to the Bishop of Durham, they are not "so well authenticated."

In his eagerness to exalt the credit of these Ignatian letters, Dr. Lightfoot, in his present publication, has obviously expressed himself most incautiously. In point of fact, the letter of Polycarp, as a genuine production of the second century, occupies an incomparably higher position than the Ignatian Epistles. The internal evidence in its favour is most satisfactory. It is exactly such a piece of correspondence as we might expect from a pious and sensible Christian [16] minister, well acquainted with the Scriptures, and living on the confines of the apostolic age. It has, besides, all the external confirmation we could desire. Irenaeus, who was personally well known to the author, and who has left behind him the treatise *Against Heresies* already mentioned, speaks therein of this letter in terms of high approval. "There is,"

¹⁹ See Lightfoot, Preface, p. vi.

says he, "a very sufficient Epistle of Polycarp written to the Philippians, from which those who desire it, and who care for their own salvation, can learn both the character of his faith and the message of the truth" (*AH* 3.3.4). Could such a voucher as this be produced for the Epistles ascribed to Ignatius, and were the external evidence equally satisfactory, it would be absurd to doubt their genuineness. But whilst the internal evidence testifies against them, they are not noticed by any writer for considerably more than a century after they are said to have appeared.

The date commonly assigned for the martyrdom of Ignatius, and consequently for the writing of the letters ascribed to him, is the ninth year of Trajan, corresponding to A.D. 107. This date, Dr. Lightfoot tells us, is "the one fixed element in the common tradition."²⁰ It is to be found in the *Chronicon Paschale*, and in the Antiochene and the Roman "Acts," as well as elsewhere.²¹ This same date is assigned by the advocates of the Ignatian Epistles for the writing of Polycarp's letter, "Only a few months at the [17] outside" says Dr. Lightfoot, "probably only a few weeks, after these Ignatian Epistles purport to have been written, the Bishop of Smyrna himself addresses a letter to the Philippians."²² (In due course it will be shown that Polycarp was at this time only about four-and-twenty years of age; and any intelligent reader who pursues his Epistle can judge for himself whether it can be reasonably accepted as the production of so very youthful an author. It appears that it was dictated in answer to a communication from the Church at Philippi, in which he was requested to interpose his influence with a view to the settlement of some grave scandals which disturbed that ancient Christian community. Is it likely that a minister of so little experience would have been invited to undertake such a service? The communication is rather such an outpouring of friendly counsel as befitted an aged patriarch. In a fatherly style he here addresses himself to wives and widows, to young men and maidens, to parents and children, to deacons and presbyters.²³

There are other indications in this letter that it cannot have been written at the date ascribed to it by the advocates of the

²⁰ Lightfoot, Vol. 2.1, p. 446.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Vol. 1, p. 380. He says elsewhere "almost simultaneously," vol. 1, p. 382.

²³ §§ 4, 5, 6. It is worthy of remark that Eusebius notices the letter of Polycarp not along with the Ignatian Epistles, but in connection with the beginning of the reign of Marcus Aurelius. See Eusebius, *EH* 4.14).

Ignatian Epistles. It contains an admonition to “pray for *kings* (or *the kings*), [18] *authorities, and princes*.”²⁴ We are not at liberty to assume that these three names are precisely synonymous. By kings, or *the kings*, we may apparently understand the imperial rulers; by authorities, consuls, proconsuls, praetors, and other magistrates; and by princes, those petty sovereigns and others of royal rank to be found here and there throughout the Roman dominions. Dr. Lightfoot, indeed, argues that the translation adopted by some — “*the kings*” — is inadmissible, as, according to his ideas, “we have very good ground for believing that the definite article had no place in the original.”²⁵ He has, however, assigned no adequate reason why the article may not be prefixed. His contention that the expression “pray for kings” has not “anything more than a general reference”²⁶ cannot be well maintained.²⁷ In a case such as this, we must be, to a great extent, guided in our interpretation by the context; and if so, we may fairly admit the article, for immediately afterwards Polycarp exhorts the Philippians to pray [19] for their persecutors and their enemies — an admonition which obviously has something more than “a general reference.” Such an advice would be inappropriate when persecution was asleep, and when no enemy was giving disturbance. But, at the date when Ignatius is alleged to have been martyred, Polycarp could not have exhorted the Philippians to pray for “the kings,” as there was then only *one* sovereign ruling over the empire.

That this letter of Polycarp to the Philippians was written at a time when persecution was rife is apparent from its tenor throughout. If we except the case of Ignatius of Antioch — many of the tales relating to which Dr. Lightfoot himself rejects as fabulous²⁸ — we have no evidence that in A.D. 107 the Christians were treated with severity. The Roman world was then under the

²⁴ The words “for kings” of this part of the letter are extant only in a Latin version = *Orate etiam pro regibus et potestatibus et principibus*.

²⁵ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 576.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ In support of this view Dr. Lightfoot appeals to 1 Tim. 2.2, where the apostle says that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks,” as circumstances required, should be made “for kings and all that are in authority.” Paul is here giving general directions suited to all time; but Polycarp is addressing himself to the Philippians, and furnishing them with instructions adapted to their existing condition.

²⁸ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 407.

mild government of Trajan, and the troubles which afflicted the disciples in Bithynia, under Pliny, had not yet commenced.

The emperor, so far as we have trustworthy informaton, had hitherto in no way interfered with the infant Church. But in A.D. 161 two sovereigns were in power, and a reign of terror was inaugurated. We can therefore well understand why Polycarp, after exhorting his correspondents to pray for "the kings," immediately follows up this advice by urging them to pray for their persecutors and their enemies. If by "kings" we here understand emperors, as distinguished from "princes" or inferior potentates, it must be obvious that Polycarp here refers to the two reigning [20] sovereigns. It so happened that, when two kings began to reign, persecution at once commenced; and the language of the Epistle exactly befits such a crisis.

The whole strain of this letter points, not to the reign of Trajan, but to that of Marcus Aurelius. Polycarp exhorts the Philippians "to practise all endurance" in the service of Christ (§ 9). "If," says he, "we should suffer for His name's sake, let us glorify Him" (§ 8). He speaks of men "encircled in saintly bonds" (§ 1) and praises the Philippians for the courage which they had manifested in sympathizing with these confessors. He reminds them how, "with their own eyes," they had seen their sufferings (§ 9). All these statements suggest times of tribulation. A careful examination of this letter may convince us that it contains no reference to the Epistles attributed to Ignatius of Antioch. Of the seven letters mentioned by Eusebius, four are said to have been written from *Smyna* and three from *Troas*. But the letters of which Polycarp speaks were written from neither of these places, but from *Philippi*. In the letters attributed to Ignatius of Antioch, the martyr describes himself as a solitary sufferer, hurried along by ten rough soldiers from city to city on his way to Rome; in the letter of Polycarp to the Philippians, Ignatius is only one among a crowd of victims, of whose ultimate destination the writer was ignorant. A considerable time after the party had left Philippi, Polycarp begs the brethren there to tell him what [21] had become of them. "Concerning Ignatius himself, and those *who are with him*, if," says he, "ye have any sure tidings, certify us" (§ 13).²⁹ In

²⁹ This part of the letter is only extant in the Latin version. Its words are: *De ipso Ignatio, et de his qui cun eo sunt; quod certius agnoveritis, significate*. Dr. Lightfoot admits that "it was made from an older form of the Greek" than any of the existing Greek MSS (Vol. 2, §2, p. 201). He vainly tries to prove that the words

the Ignatian Epistle addressed to Polycarp, he is directed to “write to the Churches,” to “call together a godly council,” and “to elect” a messenger to be sent to Syria (§ 7). Polycarp, in his letter to the Philippians, takes no notice of these instructions. He had obviously never heard of them. It is indeed plain that the letter of the Philippians to Polycarp had only a partial reference to the case of Ignatius and his companions. It was largely occupied with other matters; and to these Polycarp addresses himself in his reply.

The simple solution of all these difficulties is to be found in the fact that the Ignatius mentioned by Polycarp was a totally different person from the pastor of Antioch. He lived in another age and in another country. Ignatius or Egnatius — for the name is thus variously written — was not a very rare designation;³⁰ and in the neighbourhood of Philippi it seems to have been common. The famous *Egnatian* road (several hundred miles in length), which [22] passed through the place, probably derived its title originally from some distinguished member of the family. We learn from the letter of Polycarp that *his* Ignatius was a man of Philippi. Addressing his brethren there, he says, “I exhort you all, therefore, to be obedient unto the word of righteousness, and to practise all endurance, which also ye saw with your own eyes in the blessed Ignatius, and Zosimus, and Rufus, and IN OTHERS ALSO AMONG YOURSELVES” (§ 9).” These words surely mean that the individuals here named were men of Philippi. It is admitted that two of them, viz. Zosimus and Rufus, answered to this description; and in the Latin Martyrologies, as Dr. Lightfoot himself acknowledges,³¹ they are said to have been natives of the town. It will require the introduction of some novel canon of criticism to enable us to avoid the conclusion that Ignatius, their companion, is not to be classed in the same category.

It is well known that when Marcus Aurelius became emperor he inaugurated a new system of persecution. Instead of at once consigning to death those who boldly made a profession of Christianity, as had heretofore been customary in times of trial, he employed various expedients to extort from them a recantation. He threw them into confinement, bound them with

qui cum eo sunt must be a mistranslation. They do not suit his theory. They imply that Ignatius and his party were still living when the letter was written.

³⁰ See Dr. Lightfoot, vol. 1, p. 23, and Zahn, *Ignatius von Antiochien*, pp. 23 and 401.

³¹ Vol. 2, sec. 2, p. 921, note.

chains, kept them in lingering suspense, and subjected them to sufferings of different kinds, in the hope of overcoming their constancy. It would seem that Ignatius, Zosimus, Rufus, and their [23] companions were dealt with after this fashion. They were made prisoners, put in bonds, plied with torture under the eyes of the Philippians, and taken away from the city, they knew not whither. It may be that they were removed to Thessalonica, the residence of the Roman governor, that they might be immured in a dungeon, to await there the Imperial pleasure. It is pretty clear that they did not expect instant execution. When Polycarp wrote, he speaks of them as still living; and he is anxious to know what may yet betide them.

Let us now call attention to another passage in this letter of Polycarp to the Philippians. Towards its close the following sentence appears somewhat in the form of a postscript. "Ye wrote to me, both ye yourselves and Ignatius, asking that, if any one should go to Syria, he might carry thither the letters *from you*." We have here the reading and translation adopted by Dr. Lightfoot; but it so happens that there is another reading, perhaps, on the whole, quite as well supported by the authority of versions and manuscripts. It may be thus rendered: "Ye wrote to me, both ye yourselves and Ignatius, suggesting that if any one is going to Syria, he might carry thither *my letters to you*."³² The sentence, as [24] interpreted by the advocates of the Ignatian Epistles wears a strange and suspicious aspect. If Ignatius and the Philippians wished their letters to be carried to *Antioch*, why did they not say so? Syria was an extensive province — much larger than all Ireland — and many a traveller might have been going there who would have found it quite impracticable to deliver letters in its metropolis. When there was no penny postage, and when letters of friendship were often carried by private hands, if an individual residing in the north or south of the Emerald Isle had requested a correspondent in Bristol to send his letters by "any one" going over to Ireland, it would not have been extraordinary if the Englishman had received the message with amazement. Could "any" passing over to Ireland be expected to

³² *Si quis vadit ad Syriam, deferat literas meas, quas fecero ad vos.* This is the reading of the old Latin version, which, as Dr. Lightfoot tells us, "is sometimes useful for correcting the text of the extant Greek MSS" (Vol. 2, sec. 2, p. 901). Even some of the Greek MSS. read, not *par hymôn*, but *par hêmon*. This reading is found in some copies of Eusebius and in Nicephorus, and is followed by Rufinus.

deliver letters in Cork or Londonderry? There were many places of note in Syria far distant from Antioch; and it was preposterous to propose that “any one” travelling to that province should carry letters to its capital city. No one can pretend to say that the whole, or even any considerable part of Syria, was under the ecclesiastical supervision of Ignatius; for, long after this period, the jurisdiction of a bishop did not extend beyond the walls of the town in which he dwelt. If Ignatius meant to have his letters taken to *Antioch*, why vaguely say that they were to be carried to Syria?³³ [25] Why not distinctly name the place of their destination? It had long been the scene of his pastoral labours; and it might have been expected that its very designation would have been repeated by him with peculiar interest. No good reason can be given why he should speak of Syria, and not of Antioch, as the place to which his letters were to be transmitted. Nor is this the only perplexing circumstance associated with the request mentioned in the postscript to this letter. If the Philippian, or Ignatius, had sent letters to Polycarp addressed to the Church of Antioch, was it necessary for them to say to him that they should be forwarded? Would not his own common sense have directed him what to do? He was not surely such a dotard that he required to be told how to dispose of these Epistles.

If we are to be guided by the statements in the Ignatian Epistles, we must infer that the letters to be sent to Antioch were to be forwarded with the utmost expedition. A council was to be called forthwith, and by it a messenger “fit to bear the name of God’s courier” (*Ign. Poly.* § 7) was to be chosen to carry them to the Syrian metropolis. There are no such signs of haste or urgency indicated in the postscript to Polycarp’s Epistle. The letters of which he speaks could afford to wait until some one happened to be travelling to Syria; and then, it is suggested, he *might* take them [26] along with him. If we adopt the reading to be found in the Latin version, and which, from internal evidence, we may judge to be a true rendering of the original, we are, according to the interpretation which must be given to it by the advocates of the Ignatian Epistles, involved in hopeless bewilderment. If by Syria we understand the eastern province, what possibly can be the meaning of the words addressed by Polycarp to the

³³ The apostles and elders assembled at Jerusalem directed their letters to the brethren “in *Antioch*, and Syria, and Cilicia” (Acts 15:28), but, according to Dr. Lightfoot and his supporters, Ignatius ignores his own city, though one of the greatest in the empire, and remembers only the province to which it belonged!

Philippians, “If any one is going to Syria he might *carry thither my letters to you*”? Any one passing from Smyrna to Philippi turns his face to the north-west, but a traveller from Smyrna to Syria proceeds south-east, or in the exactly opposite direction. How could Polycarp hope to keep up a correspondence with his brethren of Philippi if he sent his letters to the distant East by any one who might be going there?

It is pretty evident that the Latin version has preserved the true original of this postscript, and that the current reading, adopted by Dr. Lightfoot and others, must be traced to the misapprehensions of transcribers. Puzzled by the statement that letters from Polycarp to the Philippians were to be sent to Syria, they have tried to correct the text by changing *par hymôn* into *par hêmôn* — implying that the letters were [27] to be transmitted, not from Polycarp to the Philippians, but from the Philippians to Antioch. A very simple explanation may, however, remove this whole difficulty. If by Syria we understand, not the great eastern province so called, but a little island of similar name in the Aegean Sea, the real bearing of the request is at once apparent. Psyria³⁴ — in the course of time contracted into Psyra — lies a few miles west of Chios, and is almost directly on the way between Smyrna and Neapolis, the port town of Philippi. A letter from Smyrna left there would be carried a considerable distance on its journey to Philippi. Some friendly hand might convey it from thence to its destination. Psyria and Syria are words so akin in sound that a transcriber of Polycarp’s letter, copying from dictation, might readily mistake the one for the other; and thus an error creeping into an early manuscript may have led to all this perplexity. Letters in those days could commonly be sent only by special messengers, or friends travelling abroad; and the Philippians had made a suggestion to Polycarp as to the best mode of keeping up their correspondence. They had probably some co-religionists in Psyria; and a letter sent there to one or other of them, could, at the earliest opportunity, be forwarded. But another explanation, [28] perhaps quite as worthy of acceptance, may solve this mystery. Syria was the ancient name of another island in the Aegean Sea, and one of the Cyclades. Though it is not so much as Psyria in the direct course between Smyrna and Philippi, it is a place of greater celebrity and of more

³⁴ Mentioned by Homer in the *Odyssey* (lib. iii, 271), see J.B. Friedreich, *Iliad and Odyssey*, p. 64; also Dunbar’s *Greek Lexicon*, art. Ψύρια.

commercial importance. Like Psyria, in the course of ages its name has been contracted, and it is now known as Syra. Between it and Smyrna there has been much intercourse from time immemorial. It has been famous since the days of Homer,³⁵ and it was anciently the seat of a bishop — an evidence that it must soon have had a Christian population.

It is at the present day the centre of an active trade; and a late distinguished traveller has told us how, not many years ago, in an afternoon, he and his party “left Syra, and next morning anchored in front of the town of Smyrna.” Syria is not, as has been intimated, in the direct route to Philippi; but the shortest way is not always either the best or the most [29] convenient. At present this place is the principal port of the Greek archipelago; and probably, in the days of Polycarp, vessels were continually leaving its harbour for towns on the opposite coasts of the Aegean. A Christian merchant resident in Syria would thus have facilities for sending letters left with him either to Smyrna or Philippi. Ignatius or his friends may have heard of an offer from such a quarter to take charge of their correspondence, and may have accordingly made the suggestion noticed at the close of Polycarp’s letter. As the island of Syria was well known to them all, the Smyrnæans could not have misunderstood the intimation.

This explanation throws light on another part of this postscript which has long been embarrassing to many readers. After adverting to the request of Ignatius and the Philippians relative to the conveyance of the letters, Polycarp adds, “ which request I will attend to if I get a fit opportunity, either personally, or by one whom I shall depute to act likewise on your behalf.”³⁶ According to the current interpretation, Polycarp here suggests the proba-

³⁵ See Homer, *Odyssey*, xv. 402. In the Latin version of Strabo we have these words: *Videtur sub-Syriae nomine mentionem facere Homerus his quidem verbis - “Ortygiam supra Syria est quaedam insula.”* (Strabo, *Rer. Geog.* lit. x. p. 711, Oxford 1807). The passage in Homer is thus rendered by Chapman:

“There is an isle above Ortygia,
If thou hast heard, they call it Syria.”

The present inhabitants of this island call themselves Surianoï or Syrians. See *Smith’s Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, “Syros”

³⁶ Dr. Lightfoot imagines that he has discovered a wonderful confirmation of his views in the word “likewise” which here occurs (Vol. 1, p. 574). It is not easy to see the force of his argument; but, with the explanations given in the text, the word has peculiar significance. It implies that whilst the messenger was to carry the letters from Smyrna to Syria, he was also, or likewise, to bring back to Smyrna the letters sent to Syria from Philippi.

bility of a personal visit to the eastern capital, if he could find no one else to undertake the service. The occasion [30] evidently called for no such piece of self-sacrifice on the part of this apostolic Father. The Church of Antioch, after the removal of its pastor Ignatius, was, we are assured, delivered from farther trouble; and was now at peace (*Ign. Smyrn.* § 11). The presence of the minister of Smyrna there was utterly unnecessary (Zahn speaks of the mission to Antioch as “senseless, even considering the time of year”); the place was very far distant; and why then should he be called on to undertake a wearisome and expensive journey to Antioch and back again? Polycarp admits that his visit was not essential, and that a messenger might do all that was required quite as well. But if by Syria we understand one of the Sporades or Cyclades, we are furnished with a ready solution of this enigma. The little island of Psyria was distant from Smyrna only a few hours’ sail; and as it was perhaps the residence of some of his co-religionists, Polycarp might soon require to repair to it in the discharge of his ecclesiastical duties. He could then take along with him, so far, the letters intended for Philippi. Or if by Syria we here understand the little island anciently so called, near the centre of the Cyclades, the explanation is equally satisfactory. The letter of Polycarp was written, not as Dr. Lightfoot contends, in A.D. 107, but, as we have seen, about A.D. 161, when, as the whole strain of the Epistle indicates, he was far advanced in life. There is reason to believe that about this very juncture he was contemplating a [31] journey to Rome, that he might have a personal conference with its chief pastor, Anicetus. His appearance in the seat of Empire on that occasion created a great sensation, and seems to have produced very important results. If he now went there, any one who looks at the map may see that he must pass Syria on the way. He could thus take the opportunity of leaving there any letters for Philippi of which he might be the bearer. At a subsequent stage of our discussion, this visit of Polycarp to Rome must again occupy our attention.

The facts brought under the notice of the reader in this chapter may help him to understand how it has happened that so many have been befooled by the claims of these Ignatian Epistles. A mistake as to two of the names mentioned in the letter of Polycarp, created, as will subsequently appear, by the crafty contrivance of a manufacturer of spurious documents, has led to a vast amount of blundering and misapprehension. Ignatius, a man of Philippi, has been supposed to be Ignatius, the pastor of

Antioch; and Syria, the eastern province of the Roman Empire, has been confounded with Psyria or Syria — either of these names representing an island in the Aegean Sea not far from Smyrna. Ignatius, the confessor of Philippi, when in bonds wrote, as we find, a number of letters which were deemed worthy of preservation, but which have long since perished; and some time afterwards an adroit forger, with a view to the advancement of a favourite ecclesiastical system, concocted a series of [32] letters which he fathered upon Ignatius of Antioch. In an uncritical age the cheat succeeded; the letters were quite to the taste of many readers; and ever since they have been the delight of High Churchmen. Popes and Protestant prelates alike have perused them with devout enthusiasm; and no wonder that Archbishop Laud, Bishop Jeremy Taylor, Bishop Hall, and Archbishop Wake have quoted Ignatius with applause. The letters ascribed to him are the title-deeds of their order. Even the worthy Bishop of Durham, who has never permitted himself to doubt that we possess in some form the letters of the pastor of Antioch, has been the victim of his own credulity; and has been striving “off and on” for “nearly thirty years” to establish the credit of Epistles which teach, in the most barefaced language, the gospel of sacerdotal pretension and passive obedience.

CHAPTER III.

THE DATE OF THE MARTYRDOM OF POLYCARP.

TO many it may appear that there can be no connection between the date of the martyrdom of Polycarp and the claims of the Ignatian Epistles. All conversant with the history of this controversy must, however, be aware that the question of chronology has entered largely into the discussion. If we defer to the authority of the earliest and best witnesses to whom we can appeal for guidance, it is impossible to remove the cloud of suspicion which at once settles down on these letters. Their advocates are aware of the chronological objection, and they have accordingly expended immense pains in trying to prove that Eusebius, Jerome, and other writers of the highest repute have been mistaken. In his recent work, the Bishop of Durham has exhausted the resources of his ability and erudition in attempting to demonstrate that the only parties from whom we can fairly

expect anything like evidence have all been misinformed. He has secured a verdict in his favour from a number of reviewers, who have [34] apparently at once given way before the formidable array of learned lore brought together in these volumes; but, withal, the intelligent reader who cautiously peruses and ponders the elaborate chapter in which he deals with this question, will feel rather mystified than enlightened by his argumentation. It may therefore be proper to state the testimony of the ancient Christian writers, and to describe the line of reasoning pursued by Dr. Lightfoot.

“The main source of opinion,” says the bishop, “respecting the year of Polycarp’s death, among ancient and modern writers alike, has been the *Chronicon* of Eusebius. . . After the seventh year of M. Aurelius, he appends the notice, ‘A persecution overtaking the Church, Polycarp underwent martyrdom’ . . . Eusebius is here assumed to date Polycarp’s martyrdom in the seventh year of M. Aurelius, i.e., A.D. 167.”³⁷ Dr. Lightfoot then proceeds to observe that “this inference is unwarrantable,” inasmuch as “the notice is not placed opposite to, but after this year.” He adds that it “is associated with the persecutions in Vienne and Lyons, which we know to have happened A.D. 177.”³⁸ So far the statement of the bishop is unobjectionable, and, according to his own showing, we might conclude that Polycarp [35] suffered some time after the seventh year of M. Aurelius. But this plain logical deduction would be totally ruinous to the system of chronology which he advocates; and he is obliged to resort to a most outlandish assumption that he may get over the difficulty. He contends that Eusebius did not know at what precise period these martyrdoms occurred. “We can,” says the bishop, “only infer with safety that Eusebius *supposed* Polycarp’s martyrdom to have happened *during the reign* of M. Aurelius.” “As a matter of fact,” he tells us, “the Gallican persecutions took place some ten years later [than AD. 167], and therefore, so far as this notice goes, the martyrdom of Polycarp might have taken place *as many years earlier*.”³⁹

These extracts may give the reader some idea of the manner in which Dr. Lightfoot proceeds to build up his chronological edifice. Eusebius places the martyrdom of Polycarp and the

³⁷ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 629.

³⁸ Vol. 1, pp. 629, 630.

³⁹ Vol. 1, 630.

martyrdoms of Vienne and Lyons after the seventh year of M. Aurelius; and therefore, argues Dr. Lightfoot, he did not know when they occurred! Because the martyrdoms of Vienne and Lyons took place ten years after A.D. 167, therefore the martyrdom at Smyrna may, for anything that the father of ecclesiastical history could tell, have been consummated in A.D. 157! Dr. Lightfoot himself, however, supplies proof that such an inference is inadmissible; for he acknowledges that, according to Eusebius, the pastor of Smyrna finished his career in the reign of M. Aurelius. But, in A.D. 157 M. Aurelius [36] was not emperor. Such are the contradictions to which this writer commits himself in attempting to change the times and the seasons.

It is quite clear that Eusebius laboured under no such uncertainty, as Dr. Lightfoot would fondly persuade himself, relative to the date of the martyrdom of Polycarp. He directs attention to the subject in his *History* as well as in his *Chronicon*, and in both his testimony is to the same effect. In both it is alleged that Polycarp was martyred in the reign of Marcus Aurelius. It must be remembered, too, that Eusebius was born only about a century after the event; that from his youth he had devoted himself to ecclesiastical studies; that he enjoyed the privilege of access to the best theological libraries in existence in his day; that from his position in the Church as bishop of the metropolis of Palestine, and as the confidential counsellor of the Emperor *Constantine*, he had opportunities of coming into personal contact with persons of distinction from all countries, who must have been well acquainted with the traditions of their respective Churches; and that he was a man of rare prudence, intelligence, and discernment. He was certainly not a philosophical historian, and in his great work he has omitted to notice many things of much moment; but it must be conceded that, generally speaking, he is an accurate recorder of facts; and in the case before us he was under no temptation whatever to make a misleading statement. We must also recollect that his testimony is corroborated by [37] Jerome, who lived in the same century; who, at least in two places in his writings, reports the martyrdom; and who affirms that it occurred in the seventh year of M. Aurelius.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Lightfoot, vol. 1, p. 632.

Dr. Lightfoot, indeed, asserts that Jerome “derived his knowledge from Eusebius,”⁴¹ and that, “though well versed in works of Biblical exegesis, he was otherwise *extremely ignorant* of early Christian literature.”⁴² We have here unhappily another of those rash utterances in which the Bishop of Durham indulges throughout these volumes; for assuredly it is the very extravagance of folly to tax Jerome with “extreme ignorance of early Christian literature.” Those who are acquainted with his writings will decline to subscribe any such depreciatory certificate. He was undoubtedly bigoted and narrow-minded, but he had a most capacious memory; he had travelled in various countries; he had gathered a prodigious stock of information; he was the best Christian scholar of his generation; he has preserved for us the knowledge of not a few important facts which Eusebius has not registered; and he at one time contemplated undertaking himself the composition of an ecclesiastical history. We cannot, therefore, regard him as the mere copyist of the Bishop of Cæsarea. “Every one acquainted with the literature of the primitive Church,” says Dr. Dollinger, “knows that it is precisely in Jerome that we find a *more exact knowledge of the more ancient* [38] *teachers* of the Church, and that we are indebted to him for more information about their teaching and writings, than to any other of the Latin Fathers.”⁴³ Dr. Dollinger is a Church historian whom even the Bishop of Durham cannot afford to ignore — as in his own field of study, he has, perhaps, no peer in existence — and yet he here states explicitly, not certainly that Jerome was extremely ignorant of early Christian literature, but that, in this very department, he was specially well informed. The learned monk of Bethlehem must have felt a deep interest in Polycarp as an apostolic Father: he was quite capable of testing the worth of the evidence relative to the time of the martyrdom; and his endorsement of the statement of Eusebius must be accepted as a testimony entitled to very grave consideration. Some succeeding writers assign even a later period to the death of Polycarp. It is a weighty fact that no Christian author for the first eight centuries of our era places it before the reign of M. Aurelius. The first writer who attaches to it an earlier date is Georgius Hamartolus, who flourished about the middle of the ninth century. Dr. Lightfoot confesses that what he

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Vol. 1, p. 148.

⁴³ Dollinger, *Hippolytus and Callistus*, Edinburgh 1876,

says cannot be received as based on “any historical tradition or critical investigation.” It is, in fact, utterly worthless.

The manner in which Dr. Lightfoot tries to meet [39] the array of evidence opposed to him is somewhat extraordinary. He does not attempt to show that it is improbable in itself, or that there are any rebutting depositions. He leaves it in its undiminished strength; but he raises such a cloud of learned dust around it, that the reader may well lose his head, and be unable, for a time, to see the old chronological landmarks. (Dr. Lightfoot is not supported in his chronology by his favourite Zahn, who places the date of the martyrdom of Polycarp after the death of Peregrinus, in A.D. 165.) He rests his case chiefly on a statement to be found in a postscript, of admittedly doubtful authority, appended to the letter of the Smyrnæans relative to the martyrdom of Polycarp. He argues as if the authority for this statement were unimpeachable; and, evidently regarding it as the very key of the position, he endeavours, by means of it, to upset the chronology of Eusebius, Jerome, the *Chronicon Paschale*, and other witnesses. As the reader peruses his chapter on “The Date of the Martyrdom,” he cannot but feel that the evidence presented to him is bewildering, indecisive, and obscure; and it may occur to him that the author is very like an individual who proposes to determine the value of two or three unknown quantities from one simple algebraic equation. His principal witness, Aristides, were he now living, and brought up in presence of a jury, would find himself in rather an odd predicament. He is expected to settle the date of the death of Polycarp, and yet he knows nothing either of the pastor of [40] Smyrna or of his tragic end. It does not appear that he had ever heard of the worthy apostolic Father. Aristides was a rhetorician who has left behind him certain orations, entitled *Sacred Discourses*, written in praise of the god Aesculapius. It might be thought that such a writer is but poorly qualified to decide a disputed question of chronology. Our readers may have heard of Papias — one of the early Fathers, noted for the imbecility of his intellect. Aristides, it seems was quite as liable to imposition. “The credulity of a Papias,” says Dr. Lightfoot, “is more than matched by the credulity of an Aristides.”⁴⁴ Such is the bishop’s leading witness. Aristides was an invalid and a hypochondriac; and, in the discourses he has left behind him, he describes the course of a long illness, with an account of his

⁴⁴ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 451.

pains, aches, purgations, dreams, and visions — interspersed, from time to times with what Dr. Lightfoot estimates as “valuable chronological notices”!⁴⁵

The reader may be at a loss to understand how it happens that this eccentric character has been brought forward as a witness to the date of the martyrdom of Polycarp. He has been introduced under the following circumstances. In the post-script to the Smyrnæan letter — an appendage of very doubtful authority — we are told that the martyrdom occurred when Statius Quadratus was proconsul of Asia. From certain incidental allusions made by Aristides in his discourses, the bishop labours hard to prove that this Statius [41] Quadratus was proconsul of Asia somewhere about AD 155. The evidence is not very clear or well authenticated; and we have reason to fear that very little reliance can be placed on the declarations of this afflicted rhetorician. His sickness is said to have lasted seventeen years; and it is possible that, meanwhile, his memory as to dates may have been somewhat impaired. Dr. Lightfoot cannot exactly tell when his sickness commenced or when it terminated. But he has ascertained that this Quadratus was consul in AD 142 and, by weighing probabilities as to the length of the interval which may have elapsed before he became proconsul, he has arrived at the conclusion that it might have amounted to twelve or thirteen years. Nothing, however, can be more unsatisfactory than the process by which he has reached this result. According to the usual routine, an individual advanced to the consulate became, in a number of years afterwards, a proconsul; and yet, as everything depended on the will of the emperor, it was impossible to tell how long he might have to wait for the appointment. He might obtain it in five years, or perhaps sooner, if “an exceptionally able man”⁴⁶ or he might be kept in expectancy for eighteen or nineteen years. The proconsulship commonly terminated in a year; but an individual might be retained in the office for five or six years.⁴⁷ He might become consul a second time and then possibly he might again be made proconsul. Dr. Lightfoot, as we have seen, has proved [42] that Statius Quadratus was consul in AD 142; and then, by the aid of the dreamer Aristides, he has tried to show that he probably became proconsul of Asia about AD 154 or AD

⁴⁵ Vol. 1, p. 635.

⁴⁶ Vol. 1, p. 640.

⁴⁷ Vol. 1, pp. 639, 640.

155. His calculations are obviously mere guesswork. Even admitting their correctness, it would by no means follow that Polycarp was then consigned to martyrdom. The postscript of the Smyrnæan letter is, as we have seen, justly suspected as no part of the original document. Dr. Lightfoot himself tells us that it is “generally treated as a later addition to the letter, and as coming from a different hand”;⁴⁸ and, whilst disposed to uphold its claims as of high authority, he admits that, when tested as to “external evidence,” the supplementary paragraphs, of which this is one, “do not stand on the same ground” as the rest of the Epistle.⁴⁹ And yet his whole chronology rests on the supposition that the name of the proconsul is correctly given in this probably apocryphal addition to the Smyrnæan letter. Were we even to grant that this postscript belonged originally to the document, it would supply no conclusive evidence that Polycarp was martyred in AD 155. It is far more probable that the writer has been slightly inaccurate as to the exact designation of the proconsul of Asia about the time of the martyrdom.⁵⁰ [43]

He was called *Quadratus* — not perhaps *Status*, but possibly *Ummidius Quadratus*.⁵¹ There is nothing more common among ourselves than to make such a mistake as to a name. How often may we find John put for James, or Robert for Andrew? *Quadratus* was a patrician name, well known all over the empire; and if *Status Quadratus* had, not long before, been proconsul of Asia, it is quite possible that the writer of this postscript may have taken it for granted that the proconsul about the time of Polycarp’s death was the same individual. The author, whoever he may have been, was probably not very well acquainted with these Roman dignitaries, and may thus have readily fallen into the error. Dr. Lightfoot has himself recorded a case in which a similar mistake has been made — not in an ordinary communication

⁴⁸ Vol. 1, 610.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Even the manuscript authorities of this postscript differ as to the name. According to some, the prenomen was *Status*; according to others, *Stratius*; according to another, *Tatius*; whilst in another the name is omitted altogether. See Lightfoot, vol. 1. p. 656, note vol. 2. sec. 2. p. 984.

⁵⁰ It is probable that the postscript was written many years after the event; and, under these circumstances, the writer may have mistaken the name of the proconsul at the time. Eusebius seems to have known nothing of this postscript, and it is now impossible to tell when it was added.

⁵¹ *Ummidius Quadratus*, in AD 67, was associated with the Emperor Lucius Verus in the consulship; and it would appear that about AD 169 — on the ground of exceptional ability and influence — he was appointed to the proconsulship of Asia.

such as this, but in an Imperial ordinance. In a Rescript of the Emperor Hadrian, *Licinius Granianus*, the proconsul, is styled *Serenus Granianus*.⁵² If such a blunder could be perpetrated in an official State document, need we wonder if the penman of the postscript [44] of the Smyrnæan letter has written *Staius Quadratus* for *Ummidius Quadratus*? And yet, if we admit this very likely oversight, the whole chronological edifice which the Bishop of Durham has been at such vast pains to construct, vanishes like the dreams and visions of his leading witness, the hypochondriac *Aristides*.⁵³

Archbishop Ussher and others, who have carefully investigated the subject, have placed the martyrdom of Polycarp in AD 169. The following reasons may be assigned why this date is decidedly preferable to that contended for by Dr. Lightfoot.

1. All the surrounding circumstances point to the reign of Marcus Aurelius as the date of the martyrdom. Eusebius has preserved an edict, said to have been issued by Antoninus Pius, in which he announces that he had written to the governors of provinces "not to trouble the Christians at all, unless they appeared to make attempts against the Roman government" (*EH* 4.13). Doubts — it may be, well founded — have been entertained as to the genuineness of this ordinance; but it has been pretty generally acknowledged that it fairly indicates the policy of Antoninus Pius. "Though [45] certainly spurious," says Dr. Lightfoot, "it represents the conception of him entertained by Christians in the generations next succeeding his own."⁵⁴ In his reign, the disciples of our lord, according to the declarations of their own apologists, were treated with special indulgence. Melito, for example, who wrote not long after the middle of the second century, bears this testimony. Capitolinus, an author who flourished about the close of the third century, reports that Antoninus Pius lived "without bloodshed, either of citizen or foe,"

⁵² Lightfoot, Vol. 1, pp. 460, 463. Elsewhere, *Sergius Paullus* is styled incorrectly *Servillius Paullus*, vol. 1, p. 494.

⁵³ It is stated in this same postscript, that "Philip of Tralles was high priest," or Asiarch, at the time of the martyrdom of Polycarp. From this fact Dr. Lightfoot has endeavoured to derive support for his chronology. His argument is, however, quite inconclusive. The dignity of Asiarch could be enjoyed only by the very rich, as none others could sustain the expense of it; and the same individual might hold it for years together, as well as again and again. The Philip of whom Dr. Lightfoot speaks, had a son of the same name, who may also have been high priest or Asiarch. See Lightfoot, vol. 1, pp. 612, 613, 615, 616.

⁵⁴ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 443.

during his reign of twenty-two years.⁵⁵ Dr. Lightfoot strives again and again to evade the force of this evidence, and absurdly quotes the sufferings of Polycarp and his companions as furnishing a contradiction; but he thus only takes for granted what he has elsewhere failed to prove. He admits, at the same time, that this case stands alone. "The only recorded martyrdoms," says he, "in Proconsular Asia during his reign [that of Antoninus Pius] are those of Polycarp and his companions."⁵⁶ It must, however, be obvious that he cannot establish even this exception. We have seen that the chronology supported by the Bishop of Durham is at variance with the express statements of all the early Christian writers; and certain facts mentioned in the letter of the Smyrnæans concur to demonstrate its inaccuracy. The description there given of the sufferings endured by those of whom it speaks supplies abundant evidence [46] that the martyrdoms must have happened in the time of Marcus Aurelius. Dr. Lightfoot himself attests that "persecutions extended throughout this reign"; that they were "fierce and deliberate"; and that they were "aggravated by cruel tortures."⁵⁷ Such precisely were the barbarities reported in this Epistle. It states that the martyrs "were so torn by lashes that the mechanism of their flesh was visible, even as far as the inward veins and arteries"; that, notwithstanding, they were enabled to endure the fire; and that those who were finally "condemned to the wild beasts" meanwhile "suffered fearful punishments, being made to lie on sharp shells, and buffeted with other forms of manifold tortures" (*Poly. Phil.*, 2). These words attest that, before the Christians were put to death, various expedients were employed to extort from them a recantation. Such was the mode of treatment recommended by Marcus Aurelius. In an edict issued against those who professed the gospel by this emperor we have the following directions: "let them be arrested, and unless they offer to the gods, let them be punished with divers tortures."⁵⁸ "Various means," says Neander, "were employed to constrain them to a renunciation of their faith; and only in the last extremity, when they could not be forced to submit, was the punishment of death to be inflicted."⁵⁹ This,

⁵⁵ See Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 343.

⁵⁶ Vol. 1, pp. 443-4.

⁵⁷ Vol. 1, p. 510.

⁵⁸ See Neander, 1, p. 147.

⁵⁹ *Idem*, p. 146.

undoubtedly, was the inauguration of a new [47] system of persecution. In former times, the Christians who refused to apostatize were summarily consigned to execution. Now, they were horribly tormented in various ways, with a view to compel them to abandon their religion. This new policy is characteristic of the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Nothing akin to it, sanctioned by Imperial authority, can be found in the time of any preceding emperor. Its employment now in the case of Polycarp and his companions fixes the date of the martyrdom to this reign.

2. We have distinct proof that the visit of Polycarp to Rome took place after the date assigned by Bishop Lightfoot to his martyrdom! Eusebius tells us that, in the first year of the reign of Antoninus Pius, who became emperor in AD 138,⁶⁰ Telesphorus of Rome died, and was succeeded in his charge by Hyginus (*HE*, 4.10). He subsequently informs us that Hyginus, dying "after the fourth year of his office," was succeeded by Pius; and he then adds that Pius, dying at Rome, "in the fifteenth year of his episcopate," was succeeded by Anicetus (*HE* 4.11). It was in the time of this chief pastor that Polycarp paid his celebrated visit to the Imperial city. It is apparent from the foregoing statements that Anicetus could not have entered on his office until at least nineteen, or [48] perhaps twenty years, after Antoninus Pius became emperor, that is, until AD 157, or possibly until AD 158. This, however, is two or three years after the date assigned by Dr. Lightfoot for the martyrdom. Surely the Bishop of Durham would not have us to believe that Polycarp reappeared in Rome two or three years after he expired on the funeral pile; and yet it is only by some such desperate supposition that he can make his chronology square with the history of the apostolic Father.

It is not at all probable that Polycarp arrived in Rome immediately after the appointment of Anicetus as chief pastor. The account of his visit, as given by Irenaeus, rather suggests that a considerable time must meanwhile have elapsed before he made his appearance there. It would seem that he had been disturbed by reports which had reached him relative to innovations with which Anicetus was identified, and that, apprehending mischief to the whole Christian community from anything going amiss in a Church of such importance, he was prompted, at his advanced age, to undertake so formidable a journey, in the hope that, by the weight of his personal influence with his brethren in the

⁶⁰ Lightfoot, 1, p. 703.

Imperial city, he might be able to arrest the movement. It is not necessary now to inquire more particularly what led the venerable Asiatic presbyter at this period to travel all the way from Smyrna to the seat of empire. It is enough for us to know, as regards the question before us, that it took place sometime during the pastorate of Anicetus; [49] that Polycarp effected much good by his dealings with errorists when in Rome; and that its chief Christian minister, by his tact and discretion, succeeded in quieting the fears of the aged stranger. That the visit occurred long after the date assigned by Dr. Lightfoot for his martyrdom, may now be evident; and in a former chapter proof has been adduced to show that it must be dated, not, as the Bishop of Durham argues, about AD 154, but in AD 161. Neither is there any evidence whatever that Polycarp was put to death immediately after his return to Smyrna. This supposition is absolutely necessary to give even an appearance of plausibility to the bishop's chronology; but he has not been able to furnish so much as a solitary reason for its adoption.

3. We have good grounds for believing that the martyrdom of Polycarp occurred not earlier than AD 169. This date fulfils better than any other the conditions enumerated in the letter of the Smyrneans. Archbishop Ussher has been at pains to show that the month and day there mentioned precisely correspond to and verify this reckoning. It is unnecessary here to repeat his calculations; but it is right to notice another item spoken of in the Smyrnæan Epistle, supplying an additional confirmatory proof which the Bishop of Durham cannot well ignore. When Polycarp was pressed to apostatize by the officials who had him in custody, they pleaded with him as if anxious to save his life – “Why, what harm is there in saying *Cæsar is Lord*, and offering incense?” and they urged [50] him to “swear by the genius of Cæsar” (§ 8, 9). These words suggest that at the time of this transaction the Roman world had only one emperor. In January AD 169, L. Verus died. After recording this event in his *Imperial Fasti*, Dr. Lightfoot adds, “M. Aurelius is now sole emperor.”⁶¹ When he is contending for AD 155 as the date of the martyrdom, he lays much stress on the fact that “throughout this Smyrnæan letter the singular is used of the emperor.” “Polycarp,” he says, “is urged to declare ‘Cæsar is Lord’; he is bidden, and he refuses to swear by the ‘genius of Cæsar.’” “It is,” he adds, “at least a matter of surprise

⁶¹ Vol. 1, p. 703.

that these forms should be persistently used, if the event had happened during a divided sovereignty."⁶² The bishop cannot, at this stage of the discussion, decently refuse to recognise the potency of his own argument.

The three reasons just enumerated show conclusively that AD 155, for which the Bishop of Durham contends so strenuously, cannot be accepted as the date of the martyrdom. For some years after this, Anicetus was not placed at the head of the Church of the Imperial city; and he must have been for a considerable time in that position when Polycarp paid his visit to Rome. We have seen that the aged pastor of Smyrna suffered in the reign of Marcus Aurelius; and that AD 169 is the earliest period to which we can refer the martyrdom, inasmuch as that was the first year in which Marcus Aurelius was sole emperor. [51] All the reliable chronological indications point to this as the more correct reckoning.

It has now, we believe, been demonstrated by a series of solid and concurring testimonies, that Arch-bishop Ussher made no mistake when he fixed on AD 169 as the proper date of Polycarp's martyrdom. The bearing of this conclusion on the question of the Ignatian Epistles must at once be apparent. Polycarp was eighty-six years of age at the time of his death; and it follows that in AD 107 — or sixty-two years before — when the Ignatian letters are alleged to have been dictated, he was only four-and-twenty. The absurdity of believing that at such an age he wrote the Epistle to the Philippians, or that another apostolic Father would then have addressed him in the style employed in the Ignatian correspondence, must be plain to every reader of ordinary intelligence. No wonder that the advocates of the genuineness of these Epistles have called into requisition such an enormous amount of ingenuity and erudition to pervert the chronology. Pearson, as we have seen, spent six years in this service; and the learned Bishop of Durham has been engaged "off and on" for nearly thirty in the same labour. At the close of his long task he seems to have persuaded himself that he has been quite successful; and speaking of the theory of Dr. Cureton, he adopts a tone of triumph, and exclaims: "I venture to hope that the discussion which follows will extinguish the last sparks of its waning life."⁶³ It [52] remains for the candid reader to ponder the statements submitted to him in this chapter, and to determine how many sparks of life now remain in the bishop's chronology.

⁶² Vol. 1, p. 650.

⁶³ Vol. 1, p. 273.

CHAPTER IV

THE TESTIMONY OF IRENAEUS, AND THE
GENESIS OF PRELACY1. *The Testimony of Irenaeus*

THE only two vouchers of the second century produced in support of the claims of the Epistles attributed to Ignatius, are the letter of Polycarp to the Philippians and a sentence from the treatise of Irenæus *Against Heresies*. The evidence from Polycarp's Epistle has been discussed in a preceding chapter. When examined, it has completely broken down, as it is based on an entire misconception of the meaning of the writer. The words of Irenæus can be adduced with still less plausibility to uphold the credit of these letters. The following is the passage in which they are supposed to be authenticated: "One of our people said, when condemned to the beasts on account of his testimony towards God — 'As I am the wheat of God, I am also ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God' (AH 4.28.4). It is worse than a mere begging of the question to assert that Irenæus here [54] gives us a quotation from one of the letters of Ignatius. In the extensive treatise from which the words are an extract, he never once mentions the name of the pastor of Antioch.

Had he been aware of the existence of these Epistles, he would undoubtedly have availed himself of their assistance when contending against the heretics — as they would have furnished him with many passages exactly suited for their refutation. The words of a man taught by the apostles, occupying one of the highest positions in the Christian Church, and finishing his career by a glorious martyrdom in the very beginning of the second century, would have been by far the weightiest evidence he could have produced, next to the teaching of inspiration. But though he brings forward Clemens Romanus, Papias, Justin Martyr, Polycarp, and others to confront the errorists, he ignores a witness whose antiquity and weight of character would have imparted peculiar significance to his testimony.

Dr. Lightfoot seems to have been in a condition of strange forgetfulness when he asks, "Why does not Irenaeus quote Polycarp's Epistle?" (vol. 1., p. 828). The simple answer is that

he does mention the Epistle, and quotes Polycarp by name as a witness against the heretics (*AH* 3.3.4).

To say that though he never names him elsewhere, he points to him in this place as “one of our people,” is to make a very bold and improbable statement. Even the Apostle Paul himself would not have ventured to describe the evangelist John in this way. He would have alluded to him more respectfully. Neither would the pastor of a comparatively uninfluential church in [55] the south of Gaul have expressed himself after this fashion when speaking of a minister who had been one of the most famous of the spiritual heroes of the Church. Not many years before, a terrific persecution had raged in his own city of Lyons; many had been put in prison, and some had been thrown to wild beasts (Eusebius, *EH* 5.1); and it is obviously to one of these anonymous sufferers that Irenæus here directs attention. The “one of our people” is not certainly an apostolic Father; but some citizen of Lyons, moving in a different sphere, whose name the author does not deem it necessary to enrol in the record of history. Neither is it to a *written* correspondence, but to the *dyiny words* of the unknown martyr, to which he adverts when we read — “One of our people *said*, As I am the wheat of God, I am also ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God.”

The two witnesses of the second century who are supposed to uphold the claims of the Ignatian Epistles have now been examined, and it must be apparent that their testimony amounts to nothing. Thus far, then, there is no external evidence whatever in favour of these letters. The result of this investigation warrants the suspicion that they are forgeries.

Professor Harnack says: “If we do not retain the Epistle of Polycarp, then we must allow that the external evidence on behalf of the Ignatian Epistles is exceedingly weak, and hence is highly favourable to the suspicion that they are spurious” (*Expositor* for Jan. 1886, p. 11). We have seen, however, that the Epistle of Polycarp furnishes no evidence in their favour.

[56] The internal evidence abundantly confirms this impression. Any one who carefully peruses them, and then reads over the Epistle of Clemens Romanus, the Teaching of the Apostles, the writings of Justin Martyr, and the Epistle of Polycarp, may see that the works just named are the productions of quite another period. The Ignatian letters describe a state of things which they totally ignore. Dr. Lightfoot himself has been at pains

to point out the wonderful difference between the Ignatian correspondence and the Epistle of Polycarp: "In whatever way," says he, "we test the documents, the contrast is very striking — more striking, indeed, than we should have expected to find between two Christian writers who lived at the same time and were personally acquainted with each other."⁶⁴ He then proceeds to mention some of the points of contrast. Whilst the so-called Ignatius lays stress on Episcopacy "as the key-stone of the ecclesiastical order," Polycarp, in his Epistle, from first to last makes "no mention of the Episcopate," and "the bishop is entirely ignored." In regard to doctrinal statement the same contrariety is apparent. Ignatius speaks of "the blood of God" and "the passion of my God," whilst no such language is used by Polycarp. Again, in the letter of the pastor of Smyrna, there is "an entire absence of that sacramental language which confronts us again and again in the most startling [57] forms in Ignatius."⁶⁵ "Though the seven Ignatian letters are many times longer than Polycarp's Epistle, the quotations in the latter are incomparably more numerous as well as more precise than in the former." In the Ignatian letters, of "quotations from the New Testament strictly speaking, there is none."⁶⁶ "Of all the Fathers of the Church, early or later, no one is more incisive or more persistent in advocating the claims of the threefold ministry to allegiance than Ignatius."⁶⁷ Polycarp, on the other hand, has written a letter "which has proved a stronghold of Presbyterianism."⁶⁸ And yet Dr. Lightfoot would have us to believe that these various letters were written by two ministers living at the same time, taught by the same instructors, holding the closest intercourse with each other, professing the same doctrines, and adhering to the same ecclesiastical arrangements!

The features of distinction between the teaching of the Ignatian letters and the teaching of Polycarp, which have been pointed out by Dr. Lightfoot himself, are sufficiently striking; but his Lordship has not exhibited nearly the full amount of the contrast. Ignatius is described as offering himself voluntarily that he may suffer as a martyr, and as telling those to whom he writes that his supreme desire is to be devoured by the lions at Rome.

⁶⁴ Vol. 1, p. 578.

⁶⁵ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 579.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 580.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 583.

"I desire," says he, "to fight with wild beasts." "May I have joy of [58] the beasts that have been prepared for me. . . I will entice them that they may devour me promptly" (*Ign Rom*, 5). "Though I desire to suffer, yet I know not whether I am worthy" (*Ign. Tral.* 4). "I delivered myself over to death" (*Ign Smyr.* 4). "I bid all men know that of my own free will I die for God" (*Ign. Rom.* 4). The Church, instructed by Polycarp, condemns this insane ambition for martyrdom. "We praise not those," say the Smyrnæans, "who deliver themselves up, *since the gospel does not so teach us*" (*Ign. Smyr.* 4, relating to the death of Polycarp).

In these letters Ignatius speaks as a vain babbling, drunken with fanaticism; Polycarp, in his Epistle, expresses himself like an humble-minded Presbyterian minister in his sober senses. Ignatius is made to address Polycarp as if he were a full-blown prelate, and tells the people under his care, "He that honoureth the bishop is honoured of God; he that doth aught against the knowledge of the bishop, rendereth service to the devil" (*Ign. Smyr.*, 9). Polycarp, on the other hand, describes himself as one of the elders, and exhorts the Philippians to "submit to the presbyters and deacons," and to be "all subject one to another." When their Church had got into a state of confusion, and when they applied to him for advice, he recommended them "to walk in the commandment of the Lord," and admonished their "presbyters to be compassionate and merciful towards all men" (*Poly. Phil.*, 1.5.10) — never hinting that the [59] appointment of a bishop would help to keep them in order; whereas, when Ignatius addresses various Churches — that of the Smyrnæans included — he assumes a tone of High Churchmanship, which Archbishop Laud himself would have been afraid, and perhaps ashamed, to emulate. "As many as are of God and of Jesus Christ," says he, "they are with the bishop." "It is good to recognise God and the bishop." "Give ye heed to the bishop, that God may also give heed to you" (*Ign. Phil.*, 3).

The internal evidence furnished by the Ignatian Epistles seals their condemnation. I do not intend, however, at present, to pursue this subject. In a work published by me six and twenty years ago⁶⁹ I have called attention to various circumstances which betray the imposture; and neither Dr. Lightfoot, Zahn, nor any one else, so far as I am aware, has ever yet ventured to deal with my arguments. I might now add new evidences of their fabrica-

⁶⁹ *The Ancient Church*, part 2.

tion, but I deem this unnecessary. I cannot, however, pass from this department of the question in debate without protesting against the view presented by the Bishop of Durham of the origin of Prelacy. "It is shown," says he, referring to his *Essay on the Christian Ministry*,⁷⁰ "that though the New Testament itself contains as yet no direct and indisputable notices of a localized episcopate in the Gentile Churches, as [60] distinguished from the moveable episcopate exercised by Timothy in Ephesus and by Titus in Crete, yet there is satisfactory evidence of its development in the later years of the apostolic age, . . . and that in the early years of the second century the episcopate was widely spread and had taken firm root, more especially in Asia Minor and in Syria. If the evidence on which its extension in the regions east of the Aegean at this epoch be resisted, *I am at a loss to understand what single fact relating to the history of the Christian Church during the first half of the second century can be regarded as established.*"⁷¹

In this statement, as well as in not a few others already submitted to the reader, Dr. Lightfoot has expressed himself with an amount of confidence which may well excite astonishment. It would not be difficult to show that his speculations as to the development of Episcopacy in Asia Minor and Syria in the early years of the second century, as presented in the Essay to which he refers, are the merest moonshine. On what grounds can he maintain that Timothy exercised what he calls a "moveable episcopate" in Ephesus? Paul besought him to abide there for a time that he might withstand errorists, and he gave *him* instructions as to how he was to behave himself in the house of God (1 Tim 1:3, 3:5); but it did not therefore follow that he was either a bishop or an archbishop. He was an able man, sound in the faith, wise and energetic; and, as he was thus a host in himself, Paul expected that [61] meanwhile he would be eminently useful in helping the less gifted ministers who were in the place to repress error and keep the Church in order. That Paul intended to establish neither a moveable nor an immoveable episcopate in Ephesus is obvious from his own testimony; for when he addresses its elders — as he believed for the last time — he ignored their submission to any ecclesiastical superior, and committed the Church to their own supervision (Acts 20:28, 31). And if he left Titus in Crete to take charge of the organization of

⁷⁰ Lightfoot, *Epistle to the Philippians*, pp. 181-269.

⁷¹ Vol. 1, p. 377.

the Church there, he certainly did not intend that the evangelist was to act alone. In those days there was no occasion for the services of a diocesan bishop, inasmuch as the Christian community was governed by the common council of the elders, and ordination was performed "with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery" (1 Tim 4:14). Titus was a master builder, and Paul believed that, proceeding in concert with the ministers in Crete, he would render effectual aid in carrying forward the erection of the ecclesiastical edifice. And what proof has Dr. Lightfoot produced to show that "the episcopate was widely spread in Asia Minor and in Syria" in "the early years of the second century"? If the Ignatian Epistles be discredited, he has none at all. But there is very decisive evidence to the contrary. The *Teaching of the Apostles*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Epistle of Polycarp* prove the very reverse. And yet Dr. Lightfoot is at a loss to understand what single fact relating to the history of the Christian Church during the first half of the second century can be regarded as established, if we reject his baseless assertion!

2. *The Genesis of Prelacy*

Jerome gives us the true explanation of the origin of the episcopate, when he tells us that it was set up with a view to prevent divisions in the Church.⁷² These divisions were created chiefly by the Gnostics, who swarmed in some of the great cities of the empire towards the middle of the second century. About that time the president of the Presbytery was in a few places armed with additional authority, in the hope that he would thus be the better able to repress schism. The new system was inaugurated in Rome, and its Church has ever since maintained the proud boast that it is the centre of ecclesiastical unity. From the Imperial city Episcopacy gradually radiated over all Christendom.

The position assumed by Dr. Lightfoot — that it commenced in Jerusalem — is without any solid foundation. To support it, he is obliged to adopt the fable that James was the first bishop of the mother Church. The New Testament ignores this story, and tells us explicitly that James was only one of the "pillars," or ruling spirits, among the Christians of the Jewish capital (Gal 2:9). The very same kind of argumentation employed to establish the prelacy of James, may be used, with far greater [63] plausibility, to demonstrate the primacy of Peter. Dr. Lightfoot himself

⁷² *Comment. in Titum.*

acknowledges that, about the close of the first century, we cannot find a trace of the episcopate in either of the two great Christian Churches of Rome and Corinth.⁷³ “At the close of the first century,” says he, “Clement writes to Corinth, as at the beginning of the second century Polycarp writes to Philippi. As in the latter Epistle, so in the former, there is no allusion to the episcopal office.”⁷⁴ He might have said that even after the middle of the second century, it did not exist either in Smyrna or Philippi. He admits also, that “as late as the close of the second century, the bishop of Alexandria was regarded as distinct, and yet not as distinct from the Presbytery.”⁷⁵ “The first bishop of Alexandria,” says he, “of whom any distinct incident is recorded on trustworthy authority, was a contemporary of Origen,⁷⁶ who flourished in the third century. Dr. Lightfoot tells us in the same place that “at Alexandria the bishop was nominated and apparently ordained by the twelve presbyters out of their own number.”⁷⁷ Instead of asserting, as has been done, that no single fact relating to the history of the Christian Church during the first half of the second century can be regarded as established if we deny that the episcopate was widely spread in the early years of the second century [64], in Asia Minor and elsewhere, it may be fearlessly affirmed that, at the date here mentioned there is not a particle of proof that it was established ANYWHERE.

Irenaeus could have given an account of the genesis of Episcopacy, for he lived throughout the period of its original development; but he has taken care not to lift the veil which covers its mysterious commencement. He could have told what prompted Polycarp to undertake a journey to Rome when burthened with the weight of years; but he has left us to our own surmises. It is, however, significant that the presbyterian system was kept up in Smyrna long after the death of its aged martyr.⁷⁸ Dr. Lightfoot has well observed that Irenaeus was probably the most leaned Christian of his time;⁷⁹ and it is pretty clear that he contributed much to promote the acceptance of the episcopal theory. When arguing with the heretics he coined the doctrine of

⁷³ Lightfoot, *Philippians*, Essay, pp. 216, 218.

⁷⁴ As we have seen, Dr. Lightfoot here completely mistakes the date of the Epistle of Polycarp.

⁷⁵ Lightfoot, *Philippians*, p. 226.

⁷⁶ *Idem*, 227.

⁷⁷ *Idem*, 226.

⁷⁸ See my *Ancient Church*, 4th edition, New York, 1883, pp. 470-471.

⁷⁹ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 377.

the apostolical succession, and maintained that the true faith was propagated to his own age through an unbroken line of bishops from the days of the apostles. To make out his case, he was necessitated to speak of the presidents of the presbyteries as bishops, and to ignore the change [65] which had meanwhile taken place in the ecclesiastical constitution.⁸⁰

Subsequent writers followed in his wake, and thus it is that the beginnings of Episcopacy have been enveloped in so much obscurity. Even in Rome, the seat of the most prominent Church in Christendom, it is impossible to settle the order in which its early presiding pastors were arranged. "Come we to Rome," says Stillingfleet, "and here the succession is as muddy as the Tiber itself; for here Tertullian, Rufinus, and several others, place Clement next to Peter. Irenaeus and Eusebius set Anacletus before him; Epiphanius and Optatus, both Anacletus and Cletus; Augustinus and Damasus, with others, make Anacletus, Cletus, and Linus all to precede him. What way shall we find to extricate ourselves out of this labyrinth?"⁸¹ The different lists preserved attest that there was no such continuous and homogeneous line of bishops as the doctrine of the apostolical succession implies. When Irenaeus speaks of Polycarp as having "received his appointment in Asia from apostles as bishop in the Church of Smyrna," he makes a statement which, literally understood, even Dr. Lightfoot hesitates to endorse.⁸² The Apostle John may have seen Polycarp in his boyhood, and may have predicted his future eminence as a Christian minister — just as Timothy was pointed [66] out by prophecy (1 Tim 1:18) as destined to be a champion of the faith. When Episcopacy was introduced, its abettors tried to manufacture a little literary capital out of some such incident; but the allegation that Polycarp was ordained to the episcopal office by the apostles is a fable that does not require refutation. Almost all of them were dead before he was born.⁸³

⁸⁰ It is quite clear that the bishops of whom Irenaeus speaks were not a distinct order from presbyters. Thus he says, "It is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church; those who possess the succession from the apostles, and who together with the succession of the episcopate have received the certain gift of truth... It behoves us... to adhere to those who... hold the doctrine of the apostles, and, who, together with the order of the presbytery, display sound speech and blameless conduct" (AH 4.26.2, 4).

⁸¹ *Irenicum*, part 2, ch. 7.

⁸² Lightfoot says, "It is at all events not likely," vol. 1, p. 425.

⁸³ If he was eighty-six years of age at the time of his martyrdom in AD 169, he was born in AD 83.

CHAPTER V.

THE FORGERY OF THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES.

IF there is every reason to believe the Ignatian Epistles are forgeries from beginning to end, various questions arise as to the time of their appearance and the circumstances which prompted their fabrication. Their origin, like that of many other writings of the same description, cannot be satisfactorily explored; and we must in vain attempt a solution of all the objections which may be urged against almost any hypothesis framed to elucidate their history. It is, however, pretty clear that, in their original form, they first saw the light in the early part of the third century. About that time there was evidently something like a mania for the composition of such works — as various spurious writings, attributed to Clemens Romanus and others, abundantly testify. Their authors do not seem to have been aware of the impropriety of committing these pious frauds, and may even have imagined that they were thus doing God service.⁸⁴

Several circumstances suggest that Callistus — who became Bishop of Rome about 219 — may, before his advancement to the episcopal chair, have had a hand in the preparation of these Ignatian Epistles. His history is remarkable. He was originally a slave, and in early life, he is reported to have been the child of misfortune. He had at one time the care of a bank, in the management of which he did not prosper. He was at length banished to Sardinia to labour there as a convict in the mines; and when released from servitude in that unhealthy island, he was brought under the notice of Victor, the Roman bishop. To his bounty he was, about this time, indebted for his support.⁸⁵ On the death of Victor, Callistus became a prime favourite with Zephyrinus, the succeeding bishop. By him he was put in charge of the cemetery of the Christians connected with the Catacombs; and he soon attained the most influential position among the Roman clergy. So great was his popularity, that, on the demise of his patron, he was himself unanimously chosen to the episcopal office in the chief city of the empire. Callistus was no ordinary man. He was a kind of original in his way. He possessed a

⁸⁴ Even Eusebius has given some countenance to this practice. See his *Evangelical Preparation*, 12.31.

⁸⁵ Düllinger's *Hippolitus and Callistus*, p. 113.

considerable amount of literary culture. He took a prominent part in the current theological controversies — and yet, if we are to believe Hippolytus, he could accommodate himself to the views of different schools of doctrine. He had great versatility of talent, restless activity, deep cunning, and much force of character. Hippolytus [69] tells us that he was sadly given to intrigue, and so slippery in his movements that it was no easy matter to entangle him in a dilemma. It may have occurred to him that, in the peculiar position of the Church, the concoction of a series of letters, written in the name of an apostolic Father, and vigorously asserting the claims of the bishops, would help much to strengthen the hands of the hierarchy. He might thus manage at the same time quietly to commend certain favourite views of doctrine, and aid the pretensions of the Roman chief pastor. But the business must be kept a profound secret; and the letters must, if possible, be so framed as not at once to awaken suspicion. If we carefully examine them, we shall find that they were well fitted to escape detection at the time when they were written.

The internal evidence warrants the conclusion that the Epistle to the Romans was the first produced. It came forth alone; and, if it crept into circulation originally in the Imperial city, it was not likely to provoke there any hostile criticism. It is occupied chiefly with giving expression to the personal feelings of the supposed writer in the prospect of martyrdom. It scarcely touches on the question of ecclesiastical regimen; and it closes by soliciting the prayers of the Roman brethren for “the Church which is in Syria.” “If,” says Dr. Lightfoot, “Ignatius had not incidentally mentioned himself as the Bishop ‘of’ or ‘from Syria,’ the letter to the Romans would have contained no [70] indication of the existence of the episcopal office.”⁸⁶

It is worthy of note that in this Epistle to the Romans *Antioch* is not named. Ignatius speaks of himself and “the Bishop from Syria (§ 2). He thus seeks to identify himself with the Ignatius mentioned in the Epistle of Polycarp, who speaks of sending letters to Syria.

Whilst observing this studied silence on the subject which above all others occupied his thoughts, the writer was craftily preparing the way for the more ready reception of the letters which were to follow. The Epistle to the Romans tacitly embodies

⁸⁶ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 383.

their credentials. It slyly takes advantage of the connection of the name of Ignatius with Syria in the letter of Polycarp to the Philippians; assumes that Syria is the eastern province; and represents Ignatius as a bishop from that part of the empire on his way to die at Rome. It does not venture to say that the Western capital had then a bishop of its own — for the Epistle of Clemens, which was probably in many hands, and which ignored the episcopal office there — might thus have suggested doubts as to its genuineness; but it tells the sensational story of the journey of Ignatius in chains, from east to west, in the custody of what are called “ten leopards.” This tale at the time was likely to be exceedingly popular. Ever since the rise of Montanism — which made its appearance about the time of the death of Polycarp — there had been an increasing tendency all over the Church to exaggerate the merits of martyrdom. This tendency reached its fullest development in the early part of the third century. The letter of Ignatius to the Romans exhibits [71] it in the height of its folly. Ignatius proclaims his most earnest desire to be torn to pieces by the lions, and entreats the Romans not to interfere and deprive him of a privilege which he coveted so ardently. The words reported by Irenaeus as uttered by one of the martyrs of Lyons are adroitly appropriated by the pseudo-Ignatius as if spoken by himself; and, in an uncritical age, when the subject matter of the communication was otherwise so much to the taste of the reader, the quotation helped to establish the credit of the Ignatian correspondence. Another portion of the letter was sure to be extremely acceptable to the Church of Rome, for here the writer is most lavish in his complimentary acknowledgments. That Church is described as “having the presidency in the country of the region of the Romans, being worthy of God, worthy of honour, worthy of felicitation, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy in purity, and having the presidency of love, . . . filled with the grace of God, without wavering, and filtered clear from every foreign stain.”

“The Epistle to the Romans,” says Dr. Lightfoot, “had a wider popularity than the other letters of Ignatius, both early and late. It appears to have been circulated apart from them, sometimes alone.”⁸⁷ It was put forth as a feeler, to discover how the public would be disposed to entertain such a correspondence; and, in case of its favourable reception, it was intended to open the way for additional Epistles. [72] It was cleverly contrived. It employed

⁸⁷ Vol. 2, sec. 1, p. 186.

the Epistle of Polycarp to the Phlippians as a kind, of voucher for its authenticity, inasmuch as it is there stated that Ignatius had written a number of letters; and it contained little or nothing which any one in that age would have been disposed to controvert. The Christians of Rome had long enjoyed the reputation of a community ennobled by the blood of martyrs, and they would be quite willing to believe that Ignatius had contributed to their celebrity by dying for the faith within their borders. It is very doubtful whether he really finished his career there; some ancient authorities attest that he suffered at Antioch;⁸⁸ and the fact that, in the fourth century, his grave was pointed out in that locality, apparently supports their testimony.⁸⁹ The account of his hurried removal as a prisoner from Antioch to Rome, in the custody of ten fierce soldiers, whilst he was permitted, as he passed along, to hold something like a levee of his coreligionists at every stage of his journey, wears very much the appearance of an ill-constructed fiction. But the disciples at Rome about this period were willing to be credulous in such matters; and thus it was that this tale of martyrdom was permitted to pass unchallenged.

In due time the author of the letters, as they appeared one after another, accomplished the design of their composition. The question of the constitution of the Church had recently [73] awakened much attention; and the threat of Victor to excommunicate the Christians of Asia Minor, because they ventured to differ from him as to the mode of celebrating the Paschal festival, had, no doubt, led to discussions relative to the claims of episcopal authority which, at Rome especially, were felt to be very inconvenient and uncomfortable. No one could well maintain that it had a scriptural warrant. The few who were acquainted with its history were aware that it was only a human arrangement of comparatively recent introduction; and yet a bishop who threatened with excommunication such as refused to submit to his mandates, could scarcely be expected to make such a confession. Irenaeus had sanctioned its establishment; but, when Victor became so overbearing, he took the alarm, and told him plainly that those who presided over the Church of Rome before him were nothing but presbyters.⁹⁰ This was rather an awkward disclosure; and it was felt by the friends of the new order that some voucher

⁸⁸ See Lightfoot, vol. 2, sec. 1, pp. 435, 445.

⁸⁹ Lightfoot, Vol. 1, p. 46.

⁹⁰ Eusebius, *EH* 5.24.

was required to help it in its hour of need, and to fortify its pretensions. The letters of an apostolic Father strongly asserting its claims could not fail to give it encouragement. We can then understand how at this crisis these Epistles were forthcoming. They were admirably calculated to quiet the public mind. They were comparatively short, so that they could be easily read; and they were quite to the point, for they taught that we are to "regard the bishop as the Lord Himself," [74] and that "he presides after the likeness of God" (Ign. *Eph.* 6, *Mag.* 6). Who after all this could doubt the claims of Episcopacy? Should not the words of an apostolic Father put an end to all farther questionings?

Hippolytus, who was his contemporary, has given us much information in relation to Callistus. He writes, indeed, in an unfriendly spirit; but he speaks, notwithstanding, as an honest man; and we cannot well reject his statements as destitute of foundation. His account of the general facts in the career of this Roman bishop obviously rest on a substratum of truth. As we read these Ignatian letters, it may occur to us that the real author sometimes betrays his identity. Callistus had been originally a slave, and he here represents Ignatius as saying of himself, "I am a slave" (Ign. *Rom.*, 4). Callistus had been a convict, and more than once this Ignatius declares, "I am a convict." May he not thus intend to remind his co-religionists at Rome that an illustrious bishop and martyr had once been a slave and a convict like himself? Callistus, when labouring in the mines of Sardinia must have been well acquainted with ropes and hoists; and here Ignatius describes the Ephesians as "hoisted up to the heights through the engine of Jesus Christ," having faith as their "windlass," and as "using for a rope the Holy Spirit" (Ign. *Eph.*, 9). Callistus had at one time been in charge of a bank; and Ignatius, in one of these Epistles, is made to say, "let your works [75] be your *deposits*, that you may receive your *assets* due to you" (Ign. *Poly*, 6). Callistus also had charge of the Christian cemetery in the Roman Catacombs; and Ignatius here expresses himself as one familiar with graves and funerals. He speaks of a heretic as "being himself a bearer of a corpse," and of those inclined to Judaism "as tombstones and graves of the dead" (Ign. *Smyrn.* 5; *Phild.* 6).

It is rather singular that, in these few short letters, we find so many expressions which point to Callistus as the writer. There are, however, other matters which warrant equally strong suspicions. Hippolytus tells us that Callistus was a Patripassian.

“The Father,” said he, “having taken human nature, deified it by uniting it to Himself, . . . and so he said that the Father had suffered with the Son.” Hence Ignatius, in these Epistles, startles us by such expressions as “the blood of God,” and “the passion of my God.” Callistus is accused by Hippolytus as a trimmer prepared, as occasion served, to conciliate different parties in the Church by appearing to adopt their views. Sometimes he sided with Hippolytus, and sometimes with those opposed to him; hence it is that the theology taught in these letters is of a very equivocal character. Dr. Lightfoot has seized upon this fact as a reason that they are never quoted by Irenaeus. “The language approaching dangerously near to heresy might,” says he, “have led him to [76] avoid directly quoting the doctrinal teaching.”⁹¹ A much better reason was that he had never heard of these letters; and yet their theology is exactly such a piebald production as might have been expected from Callistus.

It is not easy to understand how Dr. Lightfoot has brought himself to believe that these Ignatian Epistles were written in the beginning of the second century. “*Throughout the whole range of Christian literature,*” says he, “no more uncompromising advocacy of the episcopate can be found than appears in these writings . . . It is when asserting the claims of the episcopal office to obedience and respect that the language is strained to the utmost. The bishops established *in the farthest part of the world* are in the counsels of Jesus Christ.”⁹² It is simply incredible that such a state of things could have existed six or seven years after the death of the Apostle John. All the extant writings for sixty years after the alleged date of the martyrdom of Ignatius demonstrate the utter falsehood of these letters. It is certain that they employ a terminology and develop Church principles unknown before the beginning of the third century, and which were not current even then. The forger, whoever he may have been, has displayed no little art and address in their fabrication. From all that we know of Callistus, he was quite equal to the task. Like the false Decretals, these letters exerted much influence on the subsequent history of the [77] church.

⁹¹ Vol. 1, p. 329.

⁹² Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 236.

Cyprian, though he never mentions them speedily caught their spirit.⁹³ His assertion of episcopal authority is quite in the same style. Origen visited Rome shortly after they appeared; he is the first writer who recognises them; and it is worthy of note that, of the three quotations from them found in his works, two are from the Epistle to the Romans. It is quite within the range of possibility that evidence may yet be forthcoming to prove that they emanated from one of the early popes. They are worthy of such an origin. They recommend that blind and slavish submission to ecclesiastical dictation which the so-called successors of Peter have ever since inculcated. "It need hardly be remarked," says Dr. Lightfoot, "how subversive of the true spirit of Christianity, in the negation of individual freedom and the consequent suppression of direct responsibility to God in Christ, is the *crushing despotism* with which" the language of these letters, "if taken literally, would invest the episcopal office."⁹⁴ And yet, having devoted nearly thirty years off and on to the study of these Epistles, the Bishop of Durham. maintains that we have here the genuine writings of an apostolic Father who was instructed by the inspired founders of the Christian Church!

In this Review no notice is taken of the various forms of these Epistles. If they are all forgeries, it is not worth while to spend time in discussing the merits of the several editions.

APPENDICES.

LETTER OF THE LATE DR. CURETON.

IMMEDIATELY after the appearance of the second edition of *The Ancient Church*, a copy of it was sent to the late Rev. W. Cureton, D.D., Canon of Westminster — the well-known author of various publications relating to the Ignatian Epistles. It was considered only due to that distinguished scholar to call his attention to a work in which he was so prominently noticed, and in which various arguments were adduced to prove that all the

⁹³ Cyprian could not sympathize with this Ignatius in his passion for martyrdom. The Bishop of Carthage incurred some odium by retiring to a place of safety in a time of persecution.

⁹⁴ *Philippians*, Essay, 237.

letters he had edited are utterly spurious. In a short time that gentleman acknowledged the presentation of the volume in a most kind and courteous communication, which will be read with special interest by all who have studied the Ignatian controversy. I give the letter entire — just as it reached me. It was published several years ago, appended to my *Old Catholic Church*.

DEANS YARD, WESTMINSTER, Sept. 24, 1861.

DEAR SIR,— I beg to thank you very much for your kindness in sending me a valuable contribution to [80] Ecclesiastical History in your book, *The Ancient Church*, which I found here upon my return to London two or three days ago. How much would it contribute to the promotion of charity and the advancement of the truth were all who combated the opinions and views of another to give him the means of seeing what was written fairly and openly, and not to endeavour to overthrow his arguments without his knowledge. This will indeed ever be the case when truth is sought for itself, and no personal feelings enter into the matter.

I have read your chapters on Ignatius, and you will perhaps hardly expect that I should subscribe to your views. It is now about twenty years since I first undertook this inquiry, and constantly have I been endeavouring to add some new light ever since. I once answered an opponent in my present brother canon, Dr. Wordsworth, but since that time I have never replied to any adverse views — but have only looked to see if I could find anything either to show that I was wrong or to strengthen my convictions that I was right. And I have found the wisdom of this, and have had the satisfaction of knowing that my ablest opponents, after having had more time, to inquire and to make greater research, have of their own accord conformed to my views and written in their support.

I attach no very great importance to the Epistles of Ignatius. I shall not draw from them any dogma. I only look upon them as evidence of the time to certain facts, which indeed were amply established even without such evidence. I think that in such cases, we must look chiefly to the historical testimony of facts; and you will forgive me for saying that I [81] think your arguments are based upon presumptive evidence, negative evidence, and the evidence of appropriateness — all of which, however valuable, must tumble to the ground before one single fact. You notice that Archbishop Ussher doubted the Epistle to Polycarp. But why? simply because its style (not having been altered by the forger) was different from the rest. But you know he says there was more *historical* evidence in its favour than for any of the rest. It thus becomes an argument in support of the Syriac text instead of against it. Can you explain how it happens that the Syriac text, found in the very language of Ignatius himself, and transcribed many hundreds of years before the

Ignatian controversy was thought of, now it is discovered, should contain only the *three Epistles* of the existence of which there is any historical evidence before the time of Eusebius, and that, although it may contain some things which you do not approve, still has rejected all the passages which the critics of the Ignatian controversy protested against?

You go too far to say that Bentley rejected the Ignatian Epistles — he only rejected them in the form in which they were put forth by Ussher and Vossius, and not in the form of the Syriac. So did Porson, as Bishop Kaye informed me — but he never denied that Ignatius had written letters — indeed, the very forgeries were a proof of true patterns which were falsified.

A great many of the ablest scholars in Europe, who had refused to accept the Greek letters, are convinced of the genuineness of the Syriac. But time will open. Believe me, yours faithfully,

WILLIAM CURETON.

THE REV. DR. KILLEN

[82] Some time after this letter was written, ecclesiastical literature sustained a severe loss in the death of its amiable and accomplished author. Though Dr. Cureton here expressed himself with due caution, his language is certainly not calculated to reassure the advocates of the Ignatian Epistles. One of their most learned editors in recent times - so far from speaking in a tone of confidence respecting them — here admits that he attached to them “no very great importance.” Though he had spent twenty years chiefly in their illustration, he acknowledges that he was constantly endeavouring “to add some new light” for his guidance. To him, therefore, the subject must have been still involved in much mystery.

It is noteworthy that, in the preceding letter, he has not been able to point out a solitary error in the statement of the claims of these Epistles as presented in *The Ancient Church*. He alleges, indeed, that the arguments employed are “based upon presumptive evidence, negative evidence, and the evidence of appropriateness”; he confesses that these proofs are “valuable;” but, though he contends that they must all “tumble to the ground before *one single fact*,” he has failed to produce the one single fact required for their overthrow.

Dr. Cureton had obviously not been previously aware that Dr. Bentley, the highest authority among British critics, had rejected the Ignatian Epistles. Had he been cognisant of that fact

when he wrote the *Corpus Ignatianum*, he would have candidly announced it to his readers. The manner in which he here attempts to dispose of it is certainly not very satisfactory. He pleads that, though Bentley condemned as spurious the letters edited by Ussher and [83] Vossius, he would not have pronounced the same decision on the Syriac version recently discovered. Why not? This Syriac version is an edition of *the same Epistles* in an abbreviated form. If Bentley denounced *the whole* as a forgery, it seems to follow, by logical inference, that he would have pronounced the same verdict on the half or the third part. Dr. Cureton is mistaken when he affirms in the preceding communication that his Syriac version has rejected “*all the passages*” against which “the critics of the Ignatian controversy” had protested. The very contrary has been demonstrated in *The Ancient Church*. A large number of the sentences which had provoked the most unsparing criticism are retained in the Curetonian edition. It is right to add that Archbishop Ussher more than “doubted” the Epistle to Polycarp. He discarded it altogether. Without hesitation he set it aside as spurious. Whilst he disliked its style, he felt that it wanted other marks of genuineness.

When writing *The Ancient Church* — now nearly thirty years ago — I was disposed to think that the Ignatian Epistles had been manufactured at Antioch; but more mature consideration has led me to adopt the conclusion that they were concocted at Rome. They bear a strong resemblance to several other spurious works which appeared there; and the servile submission to episcopal authority which they so strenuously inculcate was first most offensively challenged by the chief pastor of the great Western bishopric. These Epistles tended much to promote the progress of ecclesiastical despotism.

Any one who studies the two chapters on the Ignatian Epistles in *The Ancient Church*, must see that what is there urged against them is something [84] more than “presumptive evidence, negative evidence, and the evidence of appropriateness.” It is shown that their anachronisms, historical blundering, and false doctrine clearly convict them of forgery.

II

At this point professor Killan appended a copy of the Ignatian *Epistle to the Romans*.