

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

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

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



Buy me a coffee

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



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

LECTURE II.

The insinuation of Gibbon respecting the *rank and character* of the early Christians, originally advanced by the heathen opponents of Christianity, and answered by the Apologists. The fact, that many persons of wealth and education were Christians, proved, from the acquirements of the Fathers, from their specific assertion of it, from their addressing themselves to the rich and intelligent, from the fund at the disposal of the Church. Variety of demands upon the pecuniary resources of the Christians. Remarks on the Libellatici.

WE saw in the last Lecture that the authority of the Fathers tends to establish the fact, that the Gospel was dispersed very widely indeed before Constantine, and that the numbers of the Christians were already very great; an inference to which they cannot minister without fairly winning for themselves our esteem, as being at least valuable contributors to the Evidences. But they have further claims on us of the same kind from the light they throw on the rank, condition, and character of the early Christians, a point to the illustration of which, I am anxious to make these Lectures tributary. For the sceptic, you are well aware, has used this weapon against the faith, and insinuated, that they consisted "almost entirely of the dregs of the populace, of peasants and mechanics, of boys and women, of beggars and slaves"; and that accordingly the Christian missionaries were as "loquacious and dogmatical in private", as they were slow to encounter philosophers and persons of education in debate.¹

Now in the first place this accusation is almost or altogether founded on information supplied by the Fathers themselves; and it is scarcely credible that they would have volunteered it, had they thought it formidable to the cause they advocated. It has come down to us, in fact, as an objection found by them in infidel publications, to which they are replying, and which their replies have so far preserved, or as an objection, which in the treatises they sometimes drew up in the form of dialogues, they put into the mouths of their ignorant adver-

¹ Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 372.

saries. Origen, *e. g.* gives it to Celsus in more places than one¹; and Minucius Felix assigns it almost in the terms I have stated it in, and which are nearly those of Gibbon, to Cæcilius the Heathen antagonist of his friend Octavius.² I need scarcely tell you, how very ill-informed on the affairs of the Christians these heathens are represented to have been; and how apt they were to undertake to refute them, without giving themselves any previous pains to master the character and tenets of those they were bent on overthrowing. Justin complains of this in the case of Crescens. The description he gives of him is this: "It is not fit to call the man a philosopher," says he, "testifying against us, as he does, publicly, facts of which he knows nothing; charging the Christians with being atheists and impious persons; and acting thus in order to curry favour with the multitude who have been led astray. For if he calumniates us without having read the precepts of Christ, he is utterly base, and worse than the boors; for they generally have scruples about talking and telling lies on subjects with which they are unacquainted. Or if he has read them, then he does not understand the majesty there is in them. Or if he understands this, and acts as he does in order that no suspicion may attach to himself, he is still more infamous and mean; for he is truckling to an ignorant and senseless prejudice, and to fear."³ And Theophilus makes a similar complaint of Autolytus, the friend to whom he addresses his defence of the Christians; very greatly surprised that one who spared no pains in mastering all the profane and worthless books that came out, would give himself no trouble about the Christian writings⁴; and though, in other matters, he was so curious as to investigate them all with the utmost care, he should feel no concern about Christianity.⁵ And Origen expresses himself in very similar terms of Celsus, alleging that "whoever would examine the uniform purport of our Scriptures, would perceive that Celsus, whose hatred to the Christians was like that of the most ignorant vulgar, brought these charges of his against them without inquiry or regard for truth."⁶ It need not therefore be a case for wonder, if, under such circumstances,

¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, III. § 44.

² Minucius Felix, c. viii.

³ Justin Martyr. *Apol.* II. § 3.

⁴ Theophilus ad Autolytum, III. § 1

⁵ § 4.

⁶ *Ἀνεξετάστως καὶ ψευδόμενος.*—

Origen, *Contra Celsum*, III. § 53. See also V. § 20. *Κέλσου μήτε νοήσαντος τὸ παρ' ἡμῶν γεγραμμένον, μήτε κρίναι δυναμένον, κ.τ.λ.*

we find many idle imputations cast upon the Christians, and much exaggeration and distortion of features, that might really in some degree belong to them, attempted. For philosophers, it seems, to which class all these men belonged,¹ were in no other way difficult to deal with, than as they were totally ignorant of the subject they were disputing about. Certainly, the canonical Scriptures of the New Testament imply that in the first instance Christians were in general, though by no means exclusively, of the poorer ranks; and Origen, in replying to this charge, for it is one which Celsus advances, remarks on one of these occasions when he does so, that it must needs be so, inasmuch as the ignorant and uneducated being more in number than the literate, there must be among the multitudes converted to Christianity, more ignorant and uneducated persons than intelligent ones; but he adds, that even Celsus confessed that there were temperate and gentle, and understanding persons among them, and persons capable of penetrating allegories,² that though the Churches had few wise men (*σοφούς*) who abandoned that wisdom which was after the flesh to come to them, yet that such persons they had who left the carnal for the divine³: and in another passage in the same treatise he inverts the objection, and in language bespeaking in a very remarkable manner the impression the Gospel had then made upon the best informed, says, “More-over, how could a mere man and no more,” (the Jew in Celsus having been representing Jesus as such,) “how could a mere man and no more, effect the conversion of such multitudes, not of *thoughtful persons* merely, for there would have been no wonder in that (*καὶ οὐ θαυμαστὸν εἰ τῶν φρονίμων*), but even of the most unreasonable and the most enslaved to their passions, and through such want of sense, the most difficult to turn to a course of greater sobriety?”⁴ “I have no wish,”

¹ Origen speaks of Celsus as such, **Ἀρά σου προσάγων ἀνθρώπους φιλοσοφία*.—*Contra Celsum*, III. § 74, et alibi. He was an Epicurean (I. § 8; III. § 75), though apparently unwilling to avow it, *ἀγωνισάσθω οὐν μηκέτι κρύπτων τὴν ἑαυτοῦ αἵρεσιν, ἀλλ’ ὁμολογῶν Ἐπικουρείος εἶναι, κ.τ.λ.*—III. § 80; and again IV. § 4. And how imperfectly informed on the affairs of the Christians were even the most curious of these infidel philosophers, appears

from many of the objections of Celsus, probably the least ignorant of them all; and which as they are generally given by Origen as quotations in Celsus’ own words cannot be misrepresented; *εἰ δὲ διὰ τὰ μὴ ἀρέσκοντα Κελοφ Χριστιανῶν καὶ Ἰουδαίων δόγματα, ἃ μηδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐπίστασθαι φαίνεται, κ.τ.λ.*—IV. § 26.

² I. § 27.

³ VI. § 14.

⁴ II. § 79.

says he again on another occasion, "that the ranks of the Christians should be made up of dolts, on the contrary, I seek for the lively and acute, as persons better able to attain to the meaning of mysteries (*αἰνυμάτων*) and of such things as are spoken darkly in the law and the prophets and the Gospels, writings which you, Celsus, despise, as containing nothing worthy of a thought; because you do not fathom the sense, nor try to penetrate the intention of the writer:"¹ to be sure a system which applied to the feelings and wants of the poor above all others, and was so constructed as only to find favour with the humble of heart, would naturally in the first instance meet with acceptance from them rather than from others: but its own intrinsic excellence soon recommended it to all; and the writings of the Fathers most abundantly testify that in a very short time it made an effectual inroad amongst the most intelligent and opulent.

The great acquirements of many of the Fathers themselves, to which their works bear witness, would indeed be enough to show that there were many amongst the early Christians of sound education and liberal attainments: Gibbon, indeed, himself, allows that "the faith of Christ" "was embraced by several persons who derived some consequence from the advantages of nature and fortune;"² at the same time himself offering a catalogue of them, such as it is—but undoubtedly the fair way of regarding each of the Fathers is, that he was a type of numbers, who being of like circumstances with himself adopted a like course. Justin Martyr, for instance, had been under the hands of teachers of almost every school of philosophy that existed, and found, as he tells us, satisfaction in none; nor could he rest, till directed to the writings of the prophets he discovered in them at last a footing on which he could fix.³ From the account that Tatian gives of his own conversion we see that he went through the same process. He too, after having examined the creeds of various sects of the heathens, and after meeting with evil in them all, at length fell in with the Scriptures, and felt that then at length he had arrived at truth which he was in search of.⁴ What was there in the cases of these two persons to make them peculiar? They

¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, III. § 74.

² Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 372.

³ Justin Martyr, *Dial.* § 2, *et seq.*

⁴ Tatian, *Oratio contra Græcos*, §§ 28, 29, Paris Ed.

happen to be specific instances of learned men who turned Christians, but is it not reasonable to suppose that multitudes did the same, of whom no records remain; particularly as the course of incidents which led to the change in the instances we are contemplating, is the most natural and ordinary that can be imagined?

Again, the passages in the Fathers, which directly and without circumlocution assert that many among the Christians were of superior birth and breeding—one or two of which, indeed, Gibbon notices,¹ though in a manner to attach to them little weight—would not be so easily disposed of by a candid inquirer after truth as he thinks. Tertullian in one place speaks of it as an alleged popular grievance that “persons of every sex, age, condition, and now,” he adds (as if that was a more recent feature of the case) “rank, are passing over to the Christians.”² There is something characteristic of accuracy of statement in the introduction of the “jam”; the titled were not the very earliest converts; and if we adopt the other reading “etiam,” the inference would not be very different. Again, in his appeal to Scapula, the president of Africa, in behalf of the Christians, Tertullian, whilst reminding this magistrate of others in authority, who had acted mercifully towards the Christians, speaks of Severus “having left unharmed certain most illustrious women, and most illustrious men, who belonged to this sect.”³ Gibbon refers to a passage in this short tract, where Tertullian asks how Carthage could bear the *decimation*, if Scapula should proceed to despatch the Christians, seeing that it contained so many thousands of them of all ranks⁴; and yet using it as he does for a purpose of his own, he takes no notice of the phrase I have just cited; nor yet by the by (for I will name it in passing, though it rather belongs to the subject of my last Lecture, the number of the early Christians), of another which occurs in that tract, and which would serve to qualify the conclusion he draws from the one he does quote. “Even Tertullian’s rhetoric” (such this conclusion is) “rises no higher than to claim a *tenth* part of Carthage”⁵—the term *decimate* taken literally. But it should

¹ Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 375.

² Omnem sexum, etatem, conditionem, et jam dignitatem transgredi ad hoc nomen.—Tertullian, Apol. c. i.

³ Clarissimas feminas et clarissimos viros.—Ad Scapulam, c. iv.

⁴ c. v.

⁵ Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 374, note 189.

seem to be a term loosely used, and as equivalent to "put to death;" for only the page before, Tertullian had described the Christians as "pars pene major civitatis cujusque,"¹ "almost the majority of every state," that of Carthage, therefore, included, as it needs must be from the nature of the argument, which is to show Scapula how inoffensive they were, notwithstanding their numbers. Perhaps neither the one expression nor the other was meant to be construed rigorously; all I contend for is, that if Gibbon chose to draw an inference from the word *decimate*, that Tertullian in his flights did not dream of more than a tenth of the population of Carthage being Christian, he should not have suppressed his other assertion in the very same treatise, that they were almost a majority. But to return: again, in his treatise "De Fugâ in Persecutione,"² one of the questions which Tertullian entertains is, whether it is lawful to buy off persecution; for he had already determined that it was not lawful to flee from it: and this, also, for various reasons which he assigns, good and bad, he decides in the negative. But in arguing the question, it evidently never enters into his account that funds would be wanting for such a purpose, which would have been a thought at any rate likely to present itself to him when treating on such a subject, had any such difficulty occurred to his mind; in the absence, therefore, of it, we must conclude that there was no such difficulty, or in other words, that the Christians were not altogether of the mean condition ascribed to them. But on this point I shall have more to say after a while. In the Epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne, describing to their friends in Asia the persecution that had befallen them, one of the victims, whose name is given, Vettius Epagathus, is expressly spoken of as a person of distinction.³ And it appears incidentally in Origen's "Exhortatio ad Martyrium," that Ambrosius, one of the two persons to whom he addresses that treatise, as indeed he does other of his writings,⁴ was a man of large possessions; it being one of Origen's arguments that those who are called to suffer of such a class have reason to rejoice at having greater sacrifices to make, and greater enjoyments to resign than others; and by consequence, according

¹ Ad Scapulam, c. ii.

² De Fugâ in Persecutione, c. xii.

³ Καὶ γὰρ ἦν ἐπίσημος.—Reliq. Sac.

I. p. 270.

⁴ Origen, Prefatio ad Libros contra Celsum, § 1.

to our Lord's promise,¹ at having higher rewards to receive.² Nay, in his treatise against Celsus, when defending the early Christian teachers against the charge of having been influenced in their views by the hope of gain, he says, "In these days, perhaps, when by reason of *the multitude of converts to the word, rich persons, and some in offices of dignity and distinction, and delicate and noble women,* receive the Christian teachers; one or other may dare to affirm that some undertake the task of teaching Christianity for the credit of the thing (*διὰ τὸ δοξάριον*), but no such suspicion can attach to the first teachers, when the risk they ran was great: and even now the ill name they get amongst the rest of mankind is more than an equivalent to the credit they acquire with those of the same way of thinking as themselves; nor indeed do they get this credit universally."³

But the fact itself may be established upon much broader grounds. Let us look at much of our early ecclesiastical literature, and gather from that the condition of the parties to whom it addresses itself. It will be evident to every candid reader of it that they could have been no mere peasants or artisans, but must have been, to a very large extent, persons of refinement and easy circumstances. The writings of Clemens Alexandrinus bear most ample testimony to this fact—the *Pædagogue* especially. It would be impossible for any one to peruse this treatise, which professes to instruct the converts to Christianity in the application of their new faith to the details of every-day life, without being convinced that its author had in his eye principally, almost exclusively, converts of the upper classes of society. Why else should he lay down the rules he does for the regulation of the table? If he was writing for the poor, why caution them against the use of recondite dishes drawn from the most remote corners of the world? "Lampreys from Sicily; eels from the Mæander; kids from Melos; mullets from Sciathus; shell-fish from Pelorum; oysters from Abydos; anchovies from Lipara; turnips from Mantinea; beets from Ascra"; "soles from Attica; thrushes from Daphne; Chelidonian figs"; "fowls from Phasis (pheasants); quails from Egypt; peacocks from Media"⁴? or against indulgence in exquisite wines?—"Be not over curious about the Chian, nor

¹ Matt. xix. 27.

² Exhortatio ad Martyrium, § 14.

³ Contra Celsum, III. § 9.

⁴ Clem. Alex. *Pædag.* II. c. i. p. 164.

yet about the Ariusian : thirst only claims a supply to meet it, not delicate liqueurs. Foreign wines are for an appetite palled through satiety. The Thasian, the fragrant Lesbian, the sweet Cretan, the luscious Syracusan, that of Mendes in Egypt, and that of the insular Naxos, and the odoriferous wine of Italy, all these are many kinds, but to a temperate liver all wines are one, the produce of one God. For why should not the wine of the country serve to satisfy the taste?"¹ His restrictions on furniture still lead to the same inference. "Away," says he, "with Thericlean and Antigonian cups, with tankards and saucers and shells, and vessels of ten thousand other sorts ; coolers and flagons ; silver and gold, both in private and public, are an invidious possession—a possession hard to acquire, not easy to retain, and inconvenient to use. Furthermore, vain and curious manufactures of glass, the more easily broken by reason of the delicacy of the fabric, teaching you to fear for them whilst you drink out of them, must be banished from our system—and couches of silver, and ewers, and cruets, and plates and dishes, and other utensils of silver and gold . . . tripods of ivory, and sofas inlaid with the same, and with silver feet ; chamber doors studded with gold, and variegated with tortoiseshell ; counterpanes of purple, and other rare colours, emblems of unseemly luxury, superfluities conducing to envy and sloth, ought all to be put away as not worthy our notice ; for 'the time,' saith the Apostle, 'is short.' . . . Will not a table-knife cut without golden rivets and an ivory handle ? Cannot a joint be carved without steel from India ? What if the ewer be of earthenware, will it not hold the water for washing the hands ? and the foot-bath that for the feet ? . . . Furniture of all kinds should be in harmony with the character of the Christian, and be duly adapted to the person, the age, the pursuits, the season"³ . . . ill-regulated wealth is an arsenal of mischief . . . all property is given us to be used rightly . . . the best riches is to have few wants ; the truest magnanimity not to take pride in wealth, but to despise it."⁴ Surely it would be wasting words to talk thus to labourers and mechanics. Tertullian's treatise "De Cultu Fœminarum," on female dress, reads us the

¹ Clem. Alex. Pædag. II. c. ii. pp. 184, 185.

² c. iii. p. 189.

³ p. 190.

⁴ p. 191.

same lesson. It could not have entered that author's head to compose such a treatise on such a subject, if Christian women had consisted exclusively, or anything like it, of the poorer orders. The occasion of the essay was this. The Christian females, jealous of the superior ornaments of the heathen, were indulging a taste for personal decoration beyond what Tertullian thought was seemly, and accordingly they provoke him to address to them a word of advice. He disparages silver, gold, and jewels, to the utmost. "Silver and gold are less noble than earth; for they are earth wrought by the hands of wretches in the mines; earth transmuted from purposes of torment to purposes of ornament; from affliction to affectation; from ignominy to honour."¹ "The pearl is but the pustule of a bad oyster. Gems are extracted from the forehead of the snake This forsooth was lacking to the Christian woman, to owe her toilet to the serpent! Thus was she to bruise its head by drawing forth a decoration for her own!"² "Ten thousand sesterces shall be strung on a single thread. A delicate neck shall carry about it woods and islands."³ The slender skin of the ear shall bear a whole ledger; and every left-hand finger play with bags of coin."⁴ It is needless to make further extracts from this characteristic appeal. Cyprian follows the same subject up in his "De Habitu Virginum;" the whole of which offers the clearest testimony to the superior rank and condition of the Christians. "But some *women are rich and affluent*, who are not for concealing the fact, but contend that they ought to make use of their wealth. Let such be assured that that woman is truly rich who is rich in God and in Christ—that those are the true riches which are heavenly, and which are laid up for us with God as a perpetual possession. *You say you are rich.* Paul meets your case, and prescribes moderation in your ornaments. Let your 'women adorn themselves in modest apparel,' says he, 'with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with brodered

¹ Tertullian, De Cultu Fœminarum, I. c. v.

² c. vi.

³ It is curious to find a coincidence between this passage and the paper in the Spectator where Sir Roger de Coverley tells of the ornaments and presents he meant to lavish on the widow, had she consented to be his wife. "He

had disposed of an hundred acres in a diamond ring . . . upon her wedding-day she should have carried on her head fifty of the tallest oaks upon his estate . . . he would have given her a coal-pit to keep her in clean linen . . . he would have allowed her the profits of a windmill for her fans."—No. 295.

⁴ De Cultu Fœminarum, I. c. ix.

hair or gold.'¹ Peter writes after the same fashion² and if they lay such restraints even upon married women, who have the excuse of having husbands to please, what defence can be set up for virgins? . . . *You say you are rich.* But all things are not expedient that are lawful. If you adorn your persons so as to attract and inflame young men, you cannot be said to be of a chaste mind yourselves. Neither can you be reckoned among the virgins of Christ, whilst you live to be admired. *You say that you are rich,* and ought to make use of the goods which God has given you. Do so in the manner God wishes. Let the poor know that you are rich. Lend to God your estate. Secure to yourselves the prayers of many. Lay up treasure in heaven. You offend against God, if you abuse his gifts, instead of using them for the purposes he intends. The voice is God's gift; but it is not to be used in lewd songs. Iron is God's gift; but it is not to be turned to murder. Let chaste virgins flee such decorations as are only the emblems of a brothel. Those who put on silk and purple, cannot put on Christ. Those who are adorned with gold and pearls and necklaces, have lost the ornaments of the heart."³ Is it fair to affect to reply to the objection, that the early Christians were of mean station, by producing three or four solitary instances to the contrary, and leave unnoticed whole treatises like these? quite a section of Christian literature? which, by their very nature and subject, prove to demonstration, though in a manner the most incidental and satisfactory, that there must have been multitudes of a higher grade? Indeed, as far as Mr. Gibbon is concerned, there are passages in his autobiography where he touches upon the course of his studies, which would lead us to suspect that his acquaintance with the Fathers, though he does speak of them as entering into the plan of his reading, was limited; that this was a mine of materials for his history, which he did not labour with the same care as some others; and that of their writings, the Apologies, or such treatises as without bearing the name are of the nature of Apologies, were those he had chiefly consulted; naturally expecting to find in that division of their works the chief information of which

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 9.² 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

³ Cyprian, De Habitu Virginum, §§ vii. viii. ix. xi. xii. xiii.

he was in search¹: but I have often observed in the course of my Lectures, how much of the knowledge you derive from the Fathers, comes upon you by surprise; and, as in the present instance, how frequently you are able to draw most important conclusions from treatises, the titles of which promise no such results: and accordingly I believe that Mr. Gibbon, in reckoning upon the Apologies as containing most or all the facts which would be of value to him, if he did so reckon, was deceived; and did not fully apprehend the miscellaneous character of the writings of the Fathers in general. But this by the way.

Then the very style of many of the early Christian writings is indicative of the position of those to whom it speaks, and for whom it is adopted. We naturally judge of the condition of a party to whom a letter is addressed, in the opinion at least of his correspondent, by the language in which he communicates with him, and the subjects he chooses for his communication. And judging of the early Christians by this test, they will not appear to have been, as a body, mean and ignorant, but far otherwise. Take, for instance, the treatise of Athenagoras on the Resurrection. We may gather from a passage near the close of it, that it was delivered before a congregation; was perhaps a kind of sermon. He had endeavoured, he there says, to point out in a summary way to those who were assembled (*τοῖς συνελθοῦσιν*), what they ought to think of a resurrection; and to suit his argument to the capacity of his hearers (*τῇ δυνάμει τῶν παρόντων*²). That these hearers were a mixed audience is certainly probable; that there were unbelievers present as well as Christians: indeed, in the beginning of the address, he speaks of some persons being altogether incredulous on the subject of the resurrection; others doubtful; and even of those who received certain hypotheses (*i. e.* of the Christian faith), some being in difficulty about this one; their hesitation the result of feeling more than of reason.³ But it was not a *heathen* audience. He quotes in one place a verse from the first Epistle to the Corinthians⁴; founds his argument in

¹ See Gibbon's *Life*, pp. 135. 224. 287, | Paris Ed.
Milman's Ed. | ² § 1.

² Athenagoras, *De Mort. Resur.* § 23, | ⁴ § 19.

part upon a future judgment, when the sins of which both body and soul have partaken having to be accounted for, it is only just that both body and soul should be present to receive sentence¹; and those sins he refers to the breach of God's commandments as revealed in Scripture, which he quotes.² I say, therefore, that all this bespeaks the audience not to have been heathen, or not to have been exclusively heathen. It was made up at all events of a class which either actually were Christians, or were likely to become such. But who can read this essay without being satisfied that it could not have consisted of unlettered boors? It is evidently delivered to a very intelligent audience. I cannot afford to give you even a summary of the treatise, for it is a summary itself, and therefore must be produced at length, if it is to have its just effect; but there are not many objections which can be urged against the resurrection of the body which it does not encounter and remove; nor many arguments which can be advanced in its favour (for it takes both lines) which it does not press; many of them too refined ones, and such as would be lost upon an unlettered assembly. Or take the case of the *Stromata* of Clemens, its very principle is a transcendental one. It leads to the truths of revelation through *philosophy*.³ It purposes to contain truth under a disguise⁴; under a disguise which none will be able to penetrate but the thoughtful and reflecting.⁵ How could Clemens contemplate any other readers than sagacious ones for a work constructed upon a plan like this? Again, "We have no desire," writes Origen, who is actuated by the same views as Clemens, "we have no desire to divert the young from the study of philosophy, but such as have been already trained in the cycle of the sciences, we endeavour to elevate to that majestic and sublime eloquence, hidden though it be from the vulgar, which discusses questions the greatest and most important of all, and shows that their philosophy is founded on the prophets of God, and the Apostles of Jesus."⁶ And turn to the treatise of this same Father *περὶ Εὐχῆς*, in which he gives a copious commentary on the Lord's Prayer, and consider whether it would be level to the capacity of the uninformed and ignorant;

¹ Athenagoras, *De Mort. Resur.* §§ 20, 21.

² § 23.

³ *Clem. Alex. Stromat. I.* § i. p. 326.

⁴ § xii. p. 348.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, III. § 58.

whether his metaphysical disquisition, for instance, characteristic enough of its author, on the term *οὐσία* or essence, when he is employed in explaining the term *ἐπιούσιος*, which occurs in that prayer; or his discussion on the right posture of prayer, where he comments on the text, "Every knee shall bow of things in heaven," &c., and gives it a spiritual meaning; taking that opportunity to be sure of announcing that all who had treated of heavenly bodies with most accuracy, had demonstrated that they were spherical, and consequently concluding that they cannot be understood to have knees in a literal sense¹—whether speculations like these could possibly be meant for artisans? I do not think it worth while to illustrate this proposition by further examples of the writings of the Fathers, though nothing would be more easy than to multiply them to any extent.

I will add another consideration quite distinct from any of the previous ones, which still leads us to the same result. If the body of Christians in very early times was composed so exclusively of the meanest of the people as some pretend, whence were the funds derived which ministered to its support and extension, for that they must have been very considerable indeed, is clear?

In the first place, the clergy had to be maintained. They were in general supported by a monthly fixed payment,² as we learn from Cyprian, who directs it in the instance of certain clergy under accusation to be suspended. The same Bishop seems to be speaking of his own share in the Church revenues, when he uses on one occasion the term "*sua propria quantitas*;" desiring it, when he was in concealment, to be distributed amongst the widows, sick, and poor; and perhaps distinguishing it from an additional sum which he remits for the same purpose, but which he calls "*portio*;"³ as on another occasion he speaks of "*quantitas propria nostra*," as distinguished from the "*summulæ*" of his colleagues and brother-priests⁴; and on a third he talks of having sent alms "*de sumptibus propriis*,"⁵ and of a Deacon who was with him having done the same.⁶ The amount of the provision for the clergy, though it would be a matter of great curiosity to

¹ Origen, *De Oratone*, § 31, vol. i. p. xxviii.
268, Benedict. Ed.

² *Divisio mensurna*.—Cyprian, *Ep.*

³ *Ep.* xxxvi.

⁴ *Ep.* vi.

⁵ *Ep.* lx.

⁶ *Ibid.*

ascertain it, I do not think we have the means of determining from testimony afforded by any of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. Indeed it is singular, when you come to investigate the minute details of social life in ancient times, how difficult it is to arrive at any certain conclusions: so much less does the most learned antiquary now know than the veriest peasant, who was an actor in the scene. The single fact which has been referred to, in elucidation of the question now before us, is one incidentally mentioned by Eusebius, who tells us that certain heretics at Rome, in the reign of Severus, about the end of the second century, or beginning of the third, persuaded one Natalius to be their Bishop, with a salary of 150 denarii a month,¹ or some 60*l.* a year. It has been argued that this may give us some idea of the salary of a Bishop of the Church in those days. The humanitarian heretics, however, to which class these belonged, we must remember, were a very insignificant number of persons—*τινές* as opposed to *πλείστοι* the orthodox²—and probably, therefore, had very limited means at their command. And even apart from this, we must bear in mind, in estimating the force of the Christian exchequer, which is the object for which I am bringing forward the case of Natalius, that even £60 was the representative then of very much more value than it would be now.³

Moreover, the number of these Bishops was very great; every town of any size possessing one—as again, the Presbyters and Deacons who were subject to him, apparently bore a much larger proportion to their congregations than they would do at present. Every one of the epistles of Ignatius addressed to an Asiatic Church, seems to contemplate a plurality of Presbyters and Deacons⁴; and so does the epistle of Clemens addressed to the Church of Corinth⁵; so that the payments, though individually they may have been small, must have been collectively very great. Add to this, that certainly in Cyprian's time, and probably down from the time of the Apostles (for we find the distinction between the clergy and the laity obtaining even so early as the epistle

¹ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. v. c. 28.

² Justin Martyr, Dial. § 48.

³ See Greswell on the Parables, vol. iv. p. 334, note.

⁴ Ignatius, Ad Trall. § iii. Ad Ephes.

§§ ii. iii. iv.; Ad Magnes. § vi.; Ad Philadelph. § iv.; Ad Smyrn. § viii.; Ad Polycarp. § vi.

⁵ Clem. Rom. Ad Corinth. I. §§ xl. xlv. lvii.

of Clemens,¹ nay, probably in the use of the word *ιδιώτης* by St. Paul himself,²) the clergy properly so called were exclusively devoted to the work of the ministry, and were not concerned in secular business, so that the whole of their maintenance must have devolved upon the fund. Indeed, so rigorous was the rule of the Church upon this point, that the clergy of the Church of Carthage at least were not allowed to be executors of wills; and Cyprian complains loudly of a particular instance in which this injunction had been violated³; expressly affirming that the minister of God ought to be wholly occupied in serving at the altar, and alleging that it was in order that the clergy might so devote themselves that they had their wants supplied by the brethren; such supply being an equivalent for tithes of old, as the position of the clergy was similar to that of the Levites. But the view here propounded, that the ecclesiastical fund, out of which the clergy were paid, was a substitute for the tithes under the law, would seem to lead to the inference that there was some resemblance in the amount.

I think, too, there were some peculiar circumstances in the position of the clergy in those primitive times, which would serve to increase their expenditure. So many difficulties and unforeseen contingencies were then arising in the Church from the novelty of its action, that a good deal of conference and intercourse between distant branches of it, was necessary in order to meet them, and establish uniformity in its proceedings, or even to provide for its wants. This had to be effected very generally by personal interviews; and accordingly long and expensive journeys had perpetually to be taken by parties intrusted with the management of ecclesiastical affairs. Thus it is probable that Clemens had been appealed to by deputation from the Church of Corinth to advise respecting the schisms in that Church.⁴ It is certain that when after an interval he returned it his answer, it was done not merely by letter, but also by three messengers who bore that letter, and whom he desires the Corinthians to send back with all the speed they could, in order that he might the sooner learn

¹ Τοῖς ἱερέουσιν ἴδιος ὁ τόπος προστάκται, καὶ λευίταις ἴδιαι διακονίαι ἐπίκεινται ὁ λαϊκὸς ἄνθρωπος τοῖς

λαϊκοῖς προστάγμασιν δέδεται.—§ xl.

² 1 Cor. xiv. 16. ³ Cyprian, Ep. lxvi.

⁴ Clem. Rom. Ad Corinth. I. § 1.

from them the condition of the Corinthian Church.¹ From a fragment of a work written by Serapion, a Bishop of Antioch of the second century (the same to whom I have before had occasion to refer), and preserved by Eusebius² on the Gospel of Peter, we find that Serapion had visited in person the Church of Rhossus in Cilicia, and that having then dropped a hasty opinion respecting this Gospel, which he afterwards discovered needed correction, and which had been acted upon by some heretically-disposed persons in the Church to the damage of religion, he meant to visit the Church again to redress the mistake. I am mentioning these incidents as showing the locomotion to which the duties of these primitive Bishops gave occasion. From another imperfect document by the same author, we conjecture that Sotas, a Bishop of Thrace, had travelled to Phrygia to satisfy himself with respect to the pretensions of the Montanists on the spot where their chief strength lay.³ Again, a manuscript had been circulated by a heretic as containing a disputation which he had held with Origen, greatly misrepresenting his sentiments; and accordingly Origen tells us that the brethren in Palestine despatched a messenger to Athens, where he was staying, to procure from him a correct copy of the dialogue.⁴ Irenæus was charged with a mission to Eleutherus, Bishop of Rome, from the suffering Church of Lyons, probably in reference to this same heresy of Montanus, which at that time was convulsing Christendom.⁵ Ignatius entreats Polycarp to call together a Council at Smyrna on the subject of the Church of Antioch: and this Council was to be assembled by messengers despatched by Polycarp to the neighbouring Churches; who in their turn were to depute representatives in person (*πρεζβύς*) to Antioch, when they were able; or otherwise to send letters⁶—perhaps the distinction made with reference to economy. These congresses of clergy not amounting to General Councils appear to have been of frequent occurrence. The light in which Irenæus represents the interview of St. Paul with the elders of the Church at Miletus is no doubt characteristic of such assemblies in his own day. “And from

¹ Clem. Rom. Ad Corinth. I. § lix.

² Eccles. Hist. vi. 12.

³ v. 19.

⁴ Origenis Epist. ad quosdam amicos

Alexandrinus, vol. i. p. 6, Benediet. Ed.

⁵ Euseb. Eccles. Hist. v. c. 4.

⁶ Ignatius, Ep. ad Polycarp. § viii.

Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the Church,"¹ is the account of it in the Acts: but Irenæus construes this to mean that the "Bishops and Presbyters who were of Ephesus and all the neighbouring cities were called together at Miletus."² We have an intimation of a synod of clergy at Cæsarea in the second century, met to take measures with respect to the Easter controversy; and a fragment of the circular letter they concocted.³ We have a portion of another similar epistle of about the same date, on the same subject, addressed to Victor, Bishop of Rome, by a synod of Bishops assembled at Ephesus, they having been called together by Polycrates, a Bishop of that place.⁴ Tertullian, in a passage I have already cited, speaks of Councils of all the Churches held at stated places throughout Greece, which represented the whole Christian community in those parts, and where great questions were settled⁵; and in another of his treatises⁶ he intimates that the Canon of Scripture was one, and no doubt a most important subject of discussion at those Councils. I could bring numberless passages from Cyprian (from whose writings we derive a fuller insight into the organization of the Church than from those of any other of the Ante-Nicene Fathers), to show the personal intercourse which subsisted both between scattered members of the same Church, and between distant Churches; the care with which the accredited parties were convened to confer on critical ecclesiastical questions, such *e. g.* as the readmission of the lapsed to communion⁷; or the zeal with which messengers were sent even to very remote quarters for intelligence, to witness, for instance, the consecration of a Bishop,⁸ that there might be no loophole left to schismatics for denying its validity⁹; but I shall forbear, feeling that I have already said enough to establish my point, which was to show, that the locomotion which was called for in the early Church was such as to entail on it a peculiar expenditure; for whether all these journeys were to be borne by the private finances of the parties, or by the Church's exchequer, the conclusion is equally valid,

¹ Acts xx. 17.

² Irenæus, III. c. xiv. § 2.

³ Reliq. Sacr. vol. i. p. 359. Euseb.
Eccles. Hist. v. c. 25.

⁴ Reliq. Sacr. vol. i. p. 372. Euseb.
Eccles. Hist. v. c. 24.

⁵ De Jejuniis, c. xiii.

⁶ De Pudicitia, c. x.

⁷ Cyprian, Ep. xi.

⁸ Ep. xli.

⁹ Ep. xlii.

that there must have been many opulent persons in the Church to furnish the means.

But it was not a numerous clergy only that had to be maintained, or peculiar duties which then devolved upon them to discharge, which drew upon this fund. It was applied to many other purposes—to the relief of the orphans, the widows, the sick, the indigent, the prisoners, the strangers, who happened to be sojourning within its reach; and in short, as Justin Martyr tells us, to all who were in want,¹—Tertullian adds, to burying as well as feeding the poor; and enumerates among the objects to whom it extended its aid, aged servants, shipwrecked persons, those condemned to the mines or to exile for the sake of religion.² And if the details of this expenditure were followed up, they would still serve to aggravate our notions of its amount. Thus we learn from one of the Constitutions,³ that it entered into the Church's notion of the care of an orphan, that he should be taught a trade, and be enabled to buy tools and discharge himself from being longer burdensome to the Church: and from a passage in Cyprian, that the Church comprehended within its idea of 'indigent,' persons whom it was desirable to release from an unlawful calling, and for whom it was necessary to make a provision under prudent restrictions, to which I may hereafter have occasion to advert, as players for example⁴; and from another passage in the same author, we have a glimpse afforded us of the drain upon the purse of the Church, which the redemption of Christians from captivity amongst barbarian nations proved; for we find on one single occasion of this kind there recorded, no less a sum than 800*l.* (*sestertia centum millia nummorum*)⁵ sent by the Church of Carthage to the Bishops of Numidia to be applied to this charitable purpose.⁶ And besides all these demands upon the Church's chest, there was another which must have eventually become a very heavy tax on individuals; for as the act it involved was not sanctioned by the Church, it would not of course provide for it out of its exchequer; that of buying off the victims of persecution from the fate that awaited them—a provision, which probably in

¹ Justin Martyr, *Apol.* I. § 67.

² Tertullian, *Apol.* c. xxxix.

³ *Constitutionum Apost.* IV. c. ii.

⁴ Cyprian, *Ep.* lxi.

⁵ See Evans' *Biography of the Early Church*, vol. ii. p. 196.

⁶ Cyprian, *Ep.* lx. § 3.

part defeated its own end, the prospect of a bribe often no doubt stimulating the persecution. Symptoms of this abuse had shown themselves even during the lives of the Apostles; Felix "hoped that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him; wherefore he sent for him the oftener."¹ Tertullian, indeed, in a treatise, to which I have already had occasion to refer, gives the Roman government credit for never having extorted, officially at least, a fund from the Christians by allowing them to redeem their lives at a fixed sum, various as its modes were of raising a revenue, and profitable as such an impost might be made owing to the vast numbers of Christians²; and he ascribes it to the over-ruling Providence of God, in whose hand is the heart of the Prince, that it had so come to pass. But the time afterwards arrived, as we learn from Cyprian, when, whether overtly or clandestinely, large sums were received by the Roman magistrates on this account, the *Libellatici*, or persons who had purchased certificates of exemption from suffering, proving to be a considerable class in the Church, Bishops even amongst the number; and the proper manner of dealing with them becoming one of the most serious difficulties of the early Church³—a difficulty, which evidently perplexes Cyprian, who, though in one of his earlier letters treating it with a certain degree of indulgence or at least forbearance,⁴ is induced at length (the abuse probably becoming flagrant, and the persons, who took advantage of it, numerous), to denounce the practice with great warmth, accounting it equivalent to apostacy.⁵ My object in referring to it is distinct from any consideration of its lawfulness or the contrary; and is simply to prove, that the early Christians had pecuniary resources to a greater amount than is sometimes supposed.

¹ Acts xxiv. 26.

² Tertullian, *De Fugâ in Persecutione*, c. xii.

³ Ep. lxviii.; *De Lapsis*, § xxvii.

⁴ Ep. lii. §§ 17. 22.

⁵ *De Lapsis*, § xxvii.