

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 VIII.*

Use of the Fathers in settling the *Canon* of the New Testament. Appeal to them in the sixth Article. Method of establishing the Canon stated by Jones. Illustration of this method with reference to the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, the Revelation. Discussion of questions, whether the autographs of the Apostles existed in the time of Tertullian; whether any Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians is missing; whether the Epistle to the Ephesians is rightly so entitled; whether St. Paul was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Use of the Fathers in proving that the *substance* of the Canonical books, the beginnings and endings of the Gospels, the incidents of our Lord's ministry, the circumstances recorded in the Acts, the tenour of the Epistles, were the same in their times as they are now.

THE next subject on which the use of the Fathers will discover itself—a subject indeed which may still be ranged under the head of Evidences, if we take that term in an extended sense—is the *Canon*, the *substance*, the *text*, and the *meaning*, of Scripture. On these points the writings of the Fathers will be found to give us most invaluable information.

I can only undertake to call your *attention* to a question so prolific; a question, which in itself and alone would require volumes to exhaust. But far less than this will suffice to convince you, that these most important topics cannot be investigated fully, and some of them scarcely at all, without the help of the Fathers.

Thus, with respect to the *Canon*, our sixth Article challenges an examination of early ecclesiastical authors for the purpose of establishing it. “In the name of the holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church,” is its language. Our Church, therefore, directs

* I might here have introduced a Lecture on the use of the Fathers as ministering to our knowledge of our Liturgy and showing that the foundations of our Prayer Book were laid in Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic times; but as I did this at length in my Lectures on the Prayer Book, and shall do it again when I repeat that course, I shall proceed to another topic.

or at least encourages us to acquaint ourselves with ecclesiastical antiquity, in order to see what Scriptures were received from the earliest times without hesitation, and what were rejected; and so to satisfy ourselves of her own catalogue. And Mr. Jeremiah Jones, who discusses this question with great learning and ability, sets out with this proposition; that "the principal means whereby we can know whether any books be canonical is by tradition; or the well-approved testimonies of those who lived in or near the time of their being first written."¹

Thus amidst the number of *Gospels* which swarmed in the first ages, many of them apparently as early as St. Luke himself, who alludes to them in the Preface to his own Gospel, we learn from ecclesiastical antiquity, there were four, and four only, canonical; and those four we further learn, as I shall presently show, were the same we now possess. You are, no doubt, aware of the remarkable testimony to this effect, of Irenæus; who maintains that as there are four cardinal points, and as the Church is dispersed over the whole earth, there must be four pillars to support it; and that, therefore, the Word gave four Gospels.² The theory, to be sure, is puerile, but the fact is conclusive; as may be the reason assigned by the same author for the omission of the tribe of Dan from the number of the sealed—viz. that Antichrist was to come of that tribe—still the testimony is complete, that in the time of Irenæus the text of the Revelation in this instance was what it now is.³ And Clemens Alexandrinus in a paragraph, which I brought before you on a former occasion, confirms the statement of Irenæus; and in a manner no less incidental; for having cause to reply to a passage in a document which professed to report a saying of our Lord, Clemens observes, "in the first place we do not find this saying in our four Gospels;"⁴ as though no others were of authority.

The same Irenæus clearly announces the *Acts of the Apostles* as a canonical book; assigns it to St. Luke⁵; quotes it largely as furnishing the sentiments of the Apostles, to the confusion of those of his heretical antagonists, and to the support of

¹ Jones on the Canon, Part I. ch. vii.

² Irenæus, III. c. xi. § 8.

³ V. c. xxx. § 2.

⁴ Πρῶτον μὲν οὐκ ἐν τοῖς παρα-

δεδομένοις ἡμῖν τέτταρσιν εὐαγγελίοις οὐκ ἔχομεν τὸ ῥητόν. — Clem. Alex. Stromat. III. § xiii. p. 553.

⁵ Irenæus, III. c. xv. § 1.

his own.¹ He speaks of the *Epistles of Paul* as among the Scriptures; objecting to the heretics the mutilation of these Epistles, as the mutilation of the Scriptures.² He ascribes the Epistle to the Romans to St. Paul³; both the Epistles to the Corinthians to the same author⁴; the Epistle to the Galatians⁵; the Epistle to the Ephesians⁶; the Epistle to the Philippians⁷; the Epistle to the Colossians⁸; still to the same. The first Epistle to the Thessalonians he quotes more than once, and introduces the quotation by the phrase "the Apostle in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians;" doubtless meaning St. Paul by the Apostle, though in these cases not happening to name him, as would probably be our own way of reference to that Scripture.⁹ The second Epistle to the Thessalonians, however, which he quotes yet more frequently, he actually assigns to St. Paul; and by calling it the second Epistle, which he does, proves that he knew the first to be by the same hand.¹⁰ The first Epistle to Timothy he cites, as in the last case, under the general designation of the Apostle's.¹¹ The second Epistle also as in the last case he cites, giving it to St. Paul as its author¹²; and in one passage comprises the two under the term *ἐν ταῖς πρὸς Τιμόθεον ἐπιστολαῖς*.¹³ The Epistle to Titus he refers to as St. Paul's.¹⁴ To the Epistle to Philemon he has no allusion, the only Epistle of St. Paul of which this can be predicated: but the extreme brevity of that Epistle, and its unfitness for controversial purposes, which were those of Irenæus, may very well account for the omission. The Epistle to the Hebrews he appeals to, but without happening to name either its title or its author¹⁵; though in another of his works entitled *περὶ διαλεξεων διαφόρων*, "concerning different dissertations," now lost, Eusebius tells us he did make positive mention of the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹⁶ The Epistle of St. James he also quotes from; but, as in the last instance, neither names the title nor the writer.¹⁷ The commentators, indeed, assign but one reference to this Epistle;

¹ Irenæus, III. c. xii. §§ 1, 2, 3.

² III. c. xii. § 12.

³ II. c. xxii. § 2; IV. c. xxxiv. § 2.

⁴ I. c. viii. § 2; II. c. xxvi. § 1; V. c. xiii. Compare § 1 and § 3; and compare IV. c. xxviii. § 3.

⁵ III. c. vii. §§ 1, 2.

⁶ I. c. viii. § 4.

⁷ V. c. xiii. Compare § 2 and §§ 3, 4.

⁸ Compare V. c. xiv. § 2; I. c. iii. § 4.

⁹ V. c. vi. § 1.

¹⁰ III. c. vii. Compare §§ 1, 2.

¹¹ I. Præf. § 1; IV. c. xvi. § 3.

¹² III. c. xiv. § 1. ¹³ III. c. iii. § 3.

¹⁴ I. c. xvi. § 3; III. c. iii. § 4.

¹⁵ II. c. xxx. § 9; III. c. vi. § 5.

¹⁶ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. v. c. 26.

¹⁷ Irenæus, IV. c. xvi. § 2.

I think, however, there is clearly a second.¹ The first Epistle of St. Peter he produces, and gives it to that Apostle²; and adopts a phrase from the second Epistle without saying from whence he took it.³ The first and second Epistles of St. John he cites, assigning them to that Apostle.⁴ To the third Epistle he has no allusion; probably for the same reason as he has none to the Epistle to Philemon: nor yet to the Epistle of St. Jude. The book of the Revelation he uses very largely, and as the writing of St. John.⁵

Only observe, therefore, of how great value is even this single Father in assuring our minds with respect to the Canon, the groundwork of everything⁶; who, without the most remote intention of conveying to us any information on this most important matter, and merely quoting such Scriptures as happened to be of use to his argument, actually bears testimony, and in most of the cases very abundant testimony, to every book of the New Testament included in our Canon, except the Epistle to Philemon, the third Epistle of St. John, and the Epistle of St. Jude; all of which would not occupy more than a couple of octavo pages; and for which, short as they are, similar testimony may be gathered from other quarters, but those quarters still the Fathers.

Thus a phrase in Theophilus, and a very remarkable phrase, bears every appearance of having been borrowed from one in the Epistle to Philemon; though I do not perceive any notice taken of it by the Editors of Theophilus. "You object to me," says he to Autolyucus, "the name of Christian, as though it were a bad name to bear. But I confess myself a Christian, and I bear that name which is beloved of God, for I hope to be acceptable to God (εὐχρηστος τῷ Θεῷ). For it cannot be, as you suppose, that the name of God should be an evil. But, perhaps, you think as you do concerning God, being yourself unacceptable to God" (ἀχρηστος τῷ Θεῷ). The play of the words is exactly the

¹ Irenæus, I. c. iv. § 4. Compare James iii. 11.

² IV. c. ix. § 2.

³ V. c. xxiii. § 2. As it may be observed, by the way, Theophilus does also, Ad Autolyceum, II. § 13. Τοῦτό ἐστιν ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ, φαίνων ὡσπερ λύχνος ἐν οἰκήματι συνεχομένῳ.—Com-

pare 2 Pet. i. 19.

⁴ III. c. xvi. § 5; I. c. xvi. § 3; III. c. xvi. § 8.

⁵ IV. c. xx. § 11.

⁶ Hooker's Eccles. Pol. III. c. viii. §§ 13, 14.

⁷ Theophilus, Ad Autolyceum, I. § 1.

same as in the 11th verse of the Epistle to Philemon. "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds, which in time past was to thee unprofitable (τόν ποτέ σοι ἄχρηστον) but now profitable to thee and to me" (νυνὶ δέ σοι καὶ ἐμοὶ εὐχρηστον). Tertullian, however, furnishes still clearer evidence to this book of Scripture, short and domestic as it is. For when making himself merry with the absurdities of the Valentinians, he supposes that at the final consummation one of their choice partisans, Marcus or Caius, by a spiritual conjunction with the angels (according to the Valentinian theory) may chance to bring forth an Onesimus¹; in evident allusion to St. Paul's phrase with respect to him which he uses to Philemon, that he had "begotten Onesimus in his bonds."² Moreover, there is the strongest reason for believing that some words, which made mention of the Epistle to Philemon, have dropped out of the text of this same author in the conclusion of his fifth book against Marcion³; the paragraph immediately following such lacuna being this, "The brevity of this Epistle alone" (no Epistle having been previously named as the text now stands) "has saved it from the mutilating hands of Marcion. Yet I wonder, when he admits a letter addressed to one individual, why he should reject two addressed to Timothy, and one to Titus, all composed on the state of the Church. But he affected, I presume, to innovate as to the number of the Epistles." It is difficult to understand this paragraph in any other way, than as containing a reference to the Epistle to Philemon: for it is clearly a reference to some *brief* Epistle of St. Paul addressed to an *individual*, and that individual neither Timothy, nor Titus; of which Epistle mention had been previously made, which mention, therefore, must have escaped from the text. It is to our present purpose also to observe, that the expression, "but he affected, I presume, to innovate as to the number of the Epistles," in this passage of Tertullian, clearly shows that the number of the Canonical Epistles of St. Paul was fixed and notorious when Tertullian wrote; for he intimates, we see, that as Marcion was in other respects a mutilator of Scripture, so might he be disposed to have an opinion of his

¹ Tertullian, Adv. Valentinianos, c. xxxii.

² Philemon, 10.

³ Tertullian, Adv. Marcionem, V. c. xxi.

own, and contrary to that commonly entertained, on the Canon of that Apostle's Epistles.

But to proceed; I doubt whether any reference, unquestionably such, can be found to the third Epistle of St. John in any Ante-Nicene Father. For the phrase, εἰρήνη σοι, "Peace be to thee," which occurs, and apparently as a quotation, in Clemens Alexandrinus,¹ and is by some supposed to be taken from the 14th verse of the third Epistle of St. John, is so short and so trivial a one, that it may be disputed whether it bears out the reference. Clemens, however, certainly speaks of what John says "in his greater Epistle,"² thus implying that there was another, or others: and Origen (who by the way speaks of the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament in the familiar phrase of our own day,³ and pronounces the inspiration of the one as emphatically as of the other,⁴) in Eusebius expressly makes mention of the third.⁵ The Epistle of St. Jude is quoted abundantly and under the name of the author both by Clemens,⁶ and Tertullian.⁷

This may suffice to show the manner in which the Fathers may be made tributary to establishing the Canon of Scripture: I say the manner, for I have done little more than take the case of one of them for an example. It could not, indeed, be otherwise. The Fathers were living (those at least whom I am particularly contemplating), whilst the Canon was in the act of formation—witnesses, perhaps agents in the process: The hand-writing of St. Paul, for instance, was probably still known and preserved. He had himself expressly drawn attention to it, as a pledge of the authenticity of the documents that presented it. "The salutation of Paul," says he in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians,⁸ "with mine own hand (τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ), which is the token (σημεῖον) in every Epistle"—a notice, it may be observed, which when dropped in this place supplies an undesigned coincidence; for in an earlier part of the same Epistle St. Paul had been cautioning the Thessalonians against a fictitious letter circulated as from him.⁹ This familiar signature then authenticated the Epistles

¹ Pædag. II. c. vii. p. 203.

² Ἐν τῇ μείζονι ἐπιστολῇ.—Stromat. II. § xv. p. 464.

³ Origen, De Principiis, III. c. i. § 16; IV. § 1.

⁴ De Principiis, IV. §§ 9, 10.

⁵ Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. vi. c. 25.

⁶ Clem. Alex. Pædag. III. c. viii. p. 280; Stromat. III. § ii. p. 515.

⁷ Tertullian, De Cultu Fœminarum, I. c. iii.

⁸ 2 Thess. iii. 17.

⁹ ii. 2.

at the first; and whether the original manuscripts had survived to the times of the Fathers, or not, the traditional value of it must have reached them. But many understand the expression of Tertullian, when speaking of the Epistles which subsisted in the Apostolical Churches to which they were severally addressed, "*ipsæ authenticæ litteræ*," of the autographs of the Apostles.¹ Dodwell so understood it; and is evidently under the impression that no other sense could be put on it.² Bishop Kaye, however, leans to the notion that nothing more was here meant than the genuine unadulterated Epistles³; and he produces a passage from the "*De Monogamiâ*"⁴ of Tertullian, where the term "*in Græco authentico*" simply means in the original Greek, as contradistinguished from a translation; and other passages in the same author where "*originalia instrumenta Christi*," "*originale instrumentum Moysi*"⁵ merely signify the Gospels and the Pentateuch, as they were originally written, not the autographs. Still Bishop Kaye may be thought not to have taken sufficiently into account the force of the word "*ipsæ*" in the paragraph in question, for the emphasis does not rest on the word "*authenticæ*" altogether—" *ipsæ authenticæ litteræ*" certainly seeming to point to something more than correct copies—and undoubtedly in Cyprian, whose Latin bears resemblance to Tertullian's, and who, as we learn from Jerome, was a constant reader of him,⁶ I have met with a passage where the term "*authentica epistola*" is used to express the *autograph* of the writer. Cyprian is replying to the Presbyters and Deacons of Rome who had sent him a letter informing him of the death of the Bishop of Rome. "I have read also other letters," says he, not, however, clearly expressing who wrote them or to whom they are written. "And since in these same letters" (*i. e.* both that which he had received from the Priests and Deacons, and these which had reached him from other quarters) "both the writing, the sense, and the

¹ Percurre ecclesias apostolicas, apud quas ipsæ adhuc cathedræ Apostolorum suis locis præsent; apud quas ipsæ authenticæ litteræ eorum recitantur, sonantes vocem et representantes faciem unius cujusque.—De Præscript. Hæret. c. xxxvi.

² Dissert. in Irenæum, I. § xli. p. 74.

³ Bishop Kaye on Tertullian, p. 293,

3rd Ed.; Porson's Letters to Travis, pp. 276-7. See some remarks on the same side in Hug's Introduction, vol. i. p. 105, in Mr. Wait's translation.

⁴ Tertullian, De Monogamiâ, c. xi.

⁵ De Carne Christi, c. ii.; Adv. Heremogenem, c. xix.

⁶ See Porson's Letters to Travis, pp. 262-3.

very paper have made me anxious to ascertain that nothing has been added to the truth, or diminished therefrom, I have sent back the same original letter (eandem authenticam epistolam) to you, that you may know whether it is that very one which you gave to Crementius the Subdeacon to bear. For it is a very grave matter, if the truth of a clerical epistle be corrupted by any lie or fraud. In order, therefore, to satisfy us, see whether the writing and subscription be yours, and write us word back what is the fact."¹ The meaning of the term "authentica" therefore here is indisputable; and therefore there is nothing in the *Latin* of Tertullian which should deter us from understanding that the autographs of the Apostles were preserved in the Apostolic Churches in the days of Tertullian. And though the establishment of this fact is not *necessary* in order to give the testimony of the Fathers to the construction of the Canon authority and weight; for under any circumstances their date would give it them, if nothing else; still it is not to be denied, that such testimony would derive additional importance from any opportunity they might have of examining the manuscripts of the Apostles, or of conferring with others who had examined them.

Nor is this all. There are many difficulties and doubts which arise collaterally out of the subject of the Canon of Scripture, which are still to be resolved in a great measure by the same means, an appeal to the primitive Fathers.

For instance, it has been contended from an expression which occurs in 1 Cor. v. 9. "I wrote unto you in an epistle" (such is our translation, ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ, in the Greek), that an Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians must have been lost, and that to this lost Epistle it is that reference is here made. Bishop Middleton, however, contends² that the translation should be, "I write unto you in my epistle," *i. e.* in the Epistle then under his hand; and that there is no allusion in the passage to any other Epistle. For this rendering he gives grammatical and philological reasons, and these are confirmed and supported by Professor Scholefield.³ But independently of these, how strong is the external evidence, even if we rest that evidence on Irenæus alone, that

¹ Cyprian, Ep. iii.

² On the Greek Article, note on 1 Cor. v. 9.

³ Hints for an Improved Translation, p. 56.

no Epistle of St. Paul's to the Corinthians can be missing ! For it is scarcely possible to imagine that he should have quoted the first and second Epistles to the Corinthians so largely as he does, and yet should not have made the slightest reference to another of his Epistles, written to the same Church, prior to these, had any existed in his time, or at least had he ever heard of any other ; especially as he lays under contribution *every* other Epistle to a Church according to our Canon, which St. Paul wrote, as well as the two to the Corinthians.

Again, it is well known that another question has been agitated relating to one of the Epistles of St. Paul, viz. whether the Epistle to the Ephesians is properly so entitled —whether the Epistle which we call that to the Ephesians is not in fact an Epistle to the Laodiceans ; the same to which allusion is made in Col. iv. 16, “Cause . . . that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea ;” as if St. Paul had said, “Cause the epistle, which I sent to Laodicea with directions that it should be forwarded to Colossæ, to be read in your congregation at Colossæ.” But it is plain that Irenæus has no such understanding of the passage ; but only knows of an Epistle to the Ephesians, whilst his quotations from it plainly identify it with our own of the same title. Still less does he afford any ground for the notion that a distinct Epistle to the Laodiceans ever existed, which has since disappeared. For copious as are his extracts from the various writings of St. Paul, his very plan, as I shall show presently, leading him to overlook none of them, there is not one that is not to be found in our present copies of them. And in another of the Fathers, Tertullian, we have more than negative evidence upon this question ; for in his treatise against Marcion, in the fifth book of it,¹ in which he is refuting that heretic out of the Epistles of St. Paul, on arriving at the Epistle to the Ephesians, he observes, “We now come to yet another Epistle, which we entitle the Epistle to the Ephesians, but *the heretics entitled it, to the Laodiceans.*” And he afterwards adds,² that it was Marcion's pleasure to change the title of this Epistle, as a proof of his own profound in-

¹ Adv. Marcionem, V. c. xi.

² Ecclesiæ quidem veritate epistolam istam ad Ephesios habemus emissam, non ad Laodiceos ; sed Marcion ei ti-

tulum aliquando interpolare gestiit, quasi et in isto diligentissimus explorator.—c. xvii.

vestigation of the subject. With respect to the text, therefore, in the Epistle to the Colossians, which gave occasion to the doubt we are now discussing, we may be disposed to conclude with Bishop Middleton,¹ that nothing is more probable than Macknight's conjecture, viz. that the Apostle sent the Ephesians word by Tychicus, who carried their letter, to send a copy of it to the Laodiceans, with an order to them to communicate it to the Colossians. "This hypothesis," continues the Bishop, "will account for the want of those marks of personal acquaintance which the Apostle's former residence at Ephesus might lead us to expect; for everything *local* would be purposely omitted in an Epistle which had a further destination"—a difficulty which had induced Dr. Paley, in his "*Horæ Paulinæ*," to adopt the theory of our Epistle to the Ephesians being, in fact, the Epistle to the Laodiceans. So important is the testimony of a Father in such a controversy as this about the Canon.

I do not say that questions of this kind, arising out of the Canon, can always be *settled* by the simple authority of the Fathers; but I do say that by rejecting all help from that quarter, we are depriving ourselves of one very important means of settling them.

Again, we are all aware that the Epistle to the Hebrews has been a very fruitful subject of controversy; who was its author, and what its authority? No doubt many ingredients will enter into this discussion besides patristical evidence; but it is obvious that if the discussion be conducted to the exclusion of that evidence, there will be infinite difficulty in coming to any result. The repeated reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews, though not by name, in the Epistle of Clemens, marks at least its very early circulation, and the weight attached to it. It is true that the absence of the ordinary salutation with which all St. Paul's other Epistles begin, may have caused its establishment in the Canon to be more tardy; especially when to this circumstance we add, that being addressed to no particular Church, the original copy would not be necessarily kept in the archives of that Church, or be publicly read in any, at least as having a local interest. But Clemens Alexandrinus in his Hypotyposes, as Eusebius informs us,² assigns a very probable reason for this omission

¹ On the Greek Article, note on Ephes. i. 1.

² Eccles. Hist. vi. c. 14.

of the salutation; viz. that as Paul wrote it to the Hebrews who had contracted prejudices against him, and held him in suspicion, he prudently avoided revolting them by putting his name at the beginning. Under these circumstances it might well enough be ascribed by Tertullian,¹ yet uncertain about its author, to Barnabas; and (as though the Church of Carthage was less informed on the subject than other Churches) it might not be once quoted by Cyprian, who nevertheless quotes all the other Epistles of St. Paul, except the short one to Philemon. Still, as time advanced, and gave opportunity for further investigation of its claims, the ascription of it to St. Paul, we find (but still we find it from the testimony of the Fathers), became more positive; so that Clemens Alexandrinus, in his *Stromata*, cites it not only as St. Paul's, but in such a manner as to imply that the Church of his day fully acquiesced in that judgment. For says he, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,"² according to the Divine Apostle,"³ as though the author of the passage was perfectly known, and as though there was no need to name St. Paul. For of St. Paul he was thinking beyond a doubt, since, in another place, after adverting to a paragraph in the Epistle to the Hebrews beginning,⁴ "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope," and ending,⁵ "made an high-priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," he adds, "And the book of Proverbs speaks in language similar to that of Paul"⁶; evidently implying that Paul was the author of the passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews he had just been quoting. An intimation of this kind is more than an assertion, and betrays that on Clemens' mind there was no question about the writer.

Again, we find Origen, in his Epistle to Africanus, quoting the Epistle to the Hebrews,⁷ "they were stoned, they were *sawn asunder*, . . . were slain with the sword," in proof of Isaiah having suffered by the saw; to which circumstance, says he, reference is made in this verse; though possibly, he then adds, the Jews (who were interested in suppressing a fact disgraceful to themselves) might here demur to the autho-

¹ De Pudicitia, c. xx.

² Heb. xi. 1.

³ Stromat. II. § ii. pp. 432-3.

⁴ Heb. vi. 11.

⁵ vi. 20.

⁶ Stromat. II. § xxii. p. 501.

⁷ Heb. xi. 37.

rity, "availing themselves of the decision of those who reject this Epistle, as one which was not written by Paul. However, as this objection," continues Origen, "requires of me a distinct argument in order to demonstrate that Paul's it is (*εἰς ἀπόδειξιν τοῦ εἶναι Παύλου τὴν ἐπιστολήν*), I will proceed, for the present, to another authority, that of Jesus Christ himself, as witnessed in the Gospel."¹ Origen's own judgment would seem here to be clear that it was Paul's. However, in a paragraph of his Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews, preserved by Eusebius,² for the Homilies themselves are lost, he expresses himself to this effect, "that the thoughts are the Apostle's, but the phraseology rather that of one who had noted down at his leisure what the Apostle had said"—and then he concludes as follows—"If, then, any Church holds this Epistle to be Paul's, let it be commended for so doing; for the men of old time have not delivered it down to us as his without a reason for it. Who, however, did write the Epistle, truly God knows. The history which has reached us is, according to some, that Clemens, Bishop of Rome, wrote it; according to others, Luke, who wrote the Gospel and the Acts." There may seem to be some difference in the tenour of these two passages of Origen; the former more decided than the latter in favour of Paul's being the sole author of the Epistle. Which of the two is the later in date, and consequently the passage which conveys Origen's maturer judgment (often a matter of importance to establish, where we are dealing with his writings), I am not able to say. But in his treatise against Celsus, probably one of his latest (indeed he frequently refers in it to other of his writings), and certainly one of the soberest, and best advised, and most valuable of all his works, he quotes the Epistle to the Hebrews as St. Paul's without the least symptom of hesitation; indeed, on the contrary, in a manner which satisfies us that it was the habitual feeling of his mind; for having had occasion to cite a passage from St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, he goes on to confirm that text by a second to the same effect from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which he introduces with this preface, "and the same Apostle says" (*ὁ δ' αὐτὸς φησί*),³ thus incidentally be-

¹ Origen, *Epist. ad Africanum*, vol. i. p. 20.

² *Eccles. Hist.* vi. c. 25.

³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, III. § 53.

traying, as we have seen Clemens doing before him, that he regarded the Epistle to the Corinthians, and that to the Hebrews, as by the same author, and that author Paul, for he actually names him. And in his treatise "De Principiis," which also appears to have been one of his later works,¹ he again alludes to the Epistle to the Hebrews in a way which would lead us to the conclusion that he then entertained no doubt about the author, simply saying, "the Apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews;"² as if it was unnecessary to name him; and which accordingly Rufinus actually renders, "in epistolâ ad Hebræos Apostolus Paulus;" as he also makes Origen in another place, where the Greek, however, is lost, ascribe the same Epistle expressly to that Apostle³; and in another⁴ yet more casually, and therefore more satisfactorily, Origen, according to him, refers to this Epistle, saying, "And John declares that God is light, and Paul intimates that the Son is the brightness of the eternal light."⁵ But indeed, in Book IV. § 13, we have the Greek itself as a voucher to the same fact.

Moreover, Eusebius himself, who must have been aware of the whole controversy, and in a position to review all the facts which bore upon it, uses an expression which appears to convey, that by his time it had subsided into a general acquiescence in the Epistle being the work of St. Paul. "There hath also come down to us," says he, "a disputation of Gaius, a very eloquent man, held at Rome in the time of Zephyrinus against Proclus, who contended for the Cathphygian heresy, in which, whilst rebuking the temerity and audacity of his adversaries in composing new Scriptures, he makes mention of only thirteen Epistles of the holy Apostles,

¹ From De Principiis, I. c. ii. § 6, it should seem according to Rufinus to have been written before his Commentary on Genesis, "De quo diligentius, favente Deo, cum locum ipsum in Genesi exponere cœperimus, videbimus." Yet from I. c. iii. § 3, it would appear to have been written after it, "Spiritus igitur Dei qui super aquas ferebatur, sicut scriptum est in principio facturæ mundi, puto quod non sit alius quam Spiritus Sanctus, secundum quod ego intelligere possum, sicut et cum ipsa loca exponeremus ostendimus;" and still more

from II. c. iii. § 6, "verum de hujusmodi opinionibus plenus in illo loco tractavimus, cum requireremus quid esset quod in principio fecit Deus cœlum et terram:" so that Rufinus probably mistranslated the first passage. Moreover in II. c. x. § 1, Origen refers to other publications which had preceded the De Principiis, "de quo in aliis quidem libris, quos de Resurrectione scripsimus, plenus disputavimus."

² De Principiis, III. c. i. § 10.

³ Præf. lib. I. § 1.

⁴ IV. § 28.

⁵ Heb. 1. 2.

not counting that to the Hebrews with the rest; And even to this day," continues Eusebius, "among certain Romans (*παρὰ Ῥωμαίων τισίν*), it is not thought to be that Apostle's;"¹ a form of expression which evidently leads us to conclude that there were few who did not then believe it to be St. Paul's. But there is a further circumstance to be remarked in this paragraph of Eusebius. The party who is here represented as omitting the Epistle to the Hebrews from the list of St. Paul's Epistles is a man who was engaged in controversy against the Montanists. Now the Montanists defended their dogma, that persons who had been guilty of great crimes were not to be readmitted into the Church, by a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews,² "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, . . . if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance," their chief argument; and this, perhaps, may in some degree account for even orthodox Churchmen, whose lot it was to be brought often into conflict with these heretics, being less anxious than they would otherwise have been to acknowledge this Epistle as Canonical.

Enough, therefore, I trust, has been said, to show that it is impossible to settle the question of the authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews (so far as it admits of being settled), without careful reference to *external* evidence, such as this which I have been adducing, as bearing upon it; whatever may be the internal. So much for the *Canon*.

Then with regard to the *substance* of the Canonical books, and the proof that it was in the earliest times what it is now—a very weighty question—where are you to turn for evidence of it, but to the Fathers, and what can be more satisfactory than the result? Thus, for the identity of our Gospels with those of the first centuries, who can dispute it, who looks at such facts as the following? When Irenæus is demonstrating how entirely the Gospel of Mark upheld the doctrine of the unity of God, he quotes three verses as the beginning "initium" of that Gospel—they *are* the beginning of our own; and one verse as at the end, "in fine"—it *is* the penultimate verse of our own.³ And more fully yet he speaks of the *four* forms of the Cherubim—the lion, "giving

¹ Eccles. Hist. vi. c. 20.

² Heb. vi. 4. 6.

³ Irenæus, III. c. x. § 6.

token of the active, directive, and regal character of him who sitteth on the Cherubim; the calf, of his priestly and sacrificial office; the man, of his incarnate presence; the eagle, of his spirit rushing upon the Church—forms characteristic of the four Gospels; that of St. John, which relates his princely and glorious generation, saying, ‘In the beginning was the Word’ . . . that of St. Luke, his sacerdotal office, commencing with Zacharias the priest, and his sacrifice . . . that of St. Matthew, teaching his birth as a *man*, and saying, ‘The book of the generation of Jesus Christ,’ . . . that of St. Mark, opening with the announcement of the prophetic Spirit coming upon man from above, ‘The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is written’ in Isaiah the prophet.”¹ The entire correspondence of these headings of the several Gospels according to Irenæus with those of our own is obvious.

Again, when refuting the Gnostic opinion that Jesus preached but one year after his Baptism, Irenæus investigates the number of Passovers he attended, as he could gather his facts from the Gospel of St. John, after this manner. “After having made the water wine, he went up to a Passover² . . . After his conversation with the woman of Samaria, and the cure of the Centurion’s son, he went up to another Passover, and healed the paralytic at the pool³ . . . ‘Six days before a Passover he came to Bethany’⁴; then went up to Jerusalem to eat the Passover; and the day following suffered.”⁵ Now all these facts here enumerated as marking the several journeys of our Lord, as occurring before and after them, precisely agree with the particulars in our own Gospel of St. John.

So again, when he is exposing the abuse of certain texts of Scripture by the Gnostics to the support of certain theories of their own respecting the number of their Æons, or of the combinations of their Æons, such as 12, 30, &c., he asks them why they do not deal with the number 5, *e. g.* in the same manner; for though that number does not enter into their system of Æons, it occurs just as frequently in Scripture as other numbers. He then proceeds to give proof of this. Thus the Lord took five loaves, fed five thousand men, had five persons with him at his transfiguration, was the fifth person

¹ Irenæus, III. c. xi. § 8.

² John ii. 13. 23.

³ iv. 7, *et seq.*; iv. 46, *et seq.*; v. 1.

⁴ xii. 1.

⁵ Irenæus, II. c. xxii. § 3.

present at the raising of the girl from the dead ; then the rich man in hell had five brethren ; the pool had five porches¹ ; all of them incidents in perfect accordance with those of our own Gospels, except in the single instance of the number of persons present at the raising of the maiden,² where, probably by lapse of memory, he seems to have overlooked John, for he omits his name in the quotation of St. Luke, as by a similar lapse Origen affirms that Jesus is nowhere called in the Gospels received by the Churches the carpenter (τέκτων³), though the evidence is overwhelming that our Gospels were his ; still the substantial fact is agreeable to our own record of it. There is another passage in the same author so very decisive of the question before us, that I cannot forbear producing it. The heretics, against whom he was contending, were playing fast and loose, it appears, with the authority of the Gospel of St. Luke ; rejecting it in part, and yet building on it as a whole. To these, he remarks, that they must either do one thing or the other ; either accept or discard it altogether ; and in the latter case they must be content to forego the knowledge of a great many incidents which are related by St. Luke exclusively. He then goes on to enumerate these incidents, as the generation of John, the history of Zacharias, the visitation of the angel to Mary, and the exclamation of Elizabeth, the descent of the angels to the shepherds, and the salutation they uttered ; the testimony of Anna, and of Simeon, to Christ ; the fact of Jesus being left behind at Jerusalem when twelve years old ; John's baptism, and at what age our Lord was baptized, and that it was the fifteenth year of Tiberius ; and his denunciation of woe to the rich, and the miracles of the fishes which Peter and his companions caught, and many more circumstances ; for he goes through the whole Gospel of St. Luke, detaching from it the incidents which belonged peculiarly to that Evangelist.⁴ Now what an invaluable testimony have we here to the substance of the Gospels being the same now that it was in the days of Irenæus ! For the passage points out to us not merely what was recorded by one of the Evangelists, but what was omitted by the other three ; and we find both the conditions

¹ Irenæus, II. c. xxiv. § 4.

² Luke viii. 51.

³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VI. § 36.

See Mark vi. 3.

⁴ Irenæus, III. c. xiv. §

fulfilled in every particular by the Gospels we at present possess.

Or if you turn to Justin Martyr, you will discover in him also similar incidental evidence of the substantial identity of the Gospels with which he was acquainted, and those with which we are. This appears, indeed, throughout his works; but more especially in his long comment on the 22nd Psalm, which occurs in his Dialogue with Trypho,¹ where, whilst pressing the Jew with the peculiar aptness of the details of that Psalm to the events of our Lord's life, death, resurrection and return to his disciples, he reviews to a very great extent indeed the scenes described in the Gospels, so as to leave no reasonable doubt on the mind of any man, that the documents from which he draws his knowledge of these incidents are the same as those which furnish it to ourselves. Nay, more, a passage in Origen would lead us to infer, that he knew of no authentic sources of information whatever respecting Jesus except the Gospels, our own Gospels. Celsus (or the Jew in whose person he here speaks) had been vapouring "that he had many things to tell of Jesus, and true things too, though not like those which had been committed to writing by his disciples; which, however, he would not trouble himself to produce. What, then, may these true things be," replies Origen, "which are not like those written in the Gospels, and which Celsus's Jew will pass over? Are we to suppose," he then adds, "that he makes use of a rhetorical figure of speech, and only pretends that he has something to tell; having all the while nothing to produce which is not in the Gospels, that could strike any reader as true, or as conveying any charge against Jesus or his doctrine?"² So much for the Gospels.

In like manner, and from the like authorities, we can prove the substance of the Acts of the Apostles to be now what it was in the second century. For here again we have Irenæus, whilst pursuing his argument in demonstration of there being no other God besides God the Father, nor any other Christ besides Jesus who died and rose again, and whom the prophets foretold; in opposition to the Gnostics who held a primeval God distinct from the Creator, and a Jesus who suffered, and a Christ who escaped from the

¹ §§ 98-106.

² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II. § 13.

Passion—we have Irenæus, I say, refuting these notions by a series of appeals to the Acts of the Apostles; to the scene of the election of Matthias in the first chapter; to St. Peter's speech in the second chapter; to the cure of the impotent man by Peter and John in the third chapter with all the circumstances of it; to the cry of exultation of all the brethren, when, in consequence of this miracle, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, "Lord, thou art God," &c., in the fourth chapter; and so on,¹ the quotations too, often extending to half a chapter at a time.

The identity of the substance of the present Epistles with that of those bearing the same name in the Primitive Church, admits of proof of the same kind more or less copious. For you will bear in mind that the task which Irenæus imposes on himself in his fifth book is this: after having refuted the heretics by authorities drawn from other quarters, to do it now by portions of our Lord's own teaching, which he had not as yet touched, and by the Apostolical Epistles "ex reliquis doctrinæ Domini nostri et ex apostolicis epistolis conabimur ostensiones facere:"² so that his subject led him to range largely over those Epistles, and lay them liberally under contribution. And this circumstance accounts, as well for the very full testimony he supplies on the question of the Canon of Scripture, as on that other question, no less important, with which we are now engaged, the identity of the substance of the Epistles we at present possess, with that of those familiar to this Father.

The controversies of those days place us exactly in the same advantageous position for drawing information on this subject from Tertullian. For besides his innumerable references to the Epistles, throughout his writings in general, in his fifth book against Marcion he conducts his argument upon precisely the same principle as Irenæus in *his* fifth book against the Gnostics in general; viz. on the principle of proving his case out of the Epistles of St. Paul. He will show that "as Christ himself had made no such revelation respecting God as Marcion contended for, there was the more need it should be made by that Apostle; and he had arranged his reasonings in the order he had done, for the purpose of demonstrating, that as no other God besides the

¹ Irenæus, III. c. xii.

² V. Præf.

Creator had been set forth by Christ, so had none other been set forth by the Apostle ; as will appear," says he, "from the Epistles themselves of Paul ; which however, like the Gospel, had been mutilated by the heretics, because they were perceived to be against them."¹ Here, therefore, as before, the very plan of the argument of the Father develops, not the Canon only of the Epistles, but the substance of them, which is what we are now considering ; proving to a demonstration, and by quotations so ample and so numerous, that it is out of the question to recite them, the substance of the Epistles known to us, to be the substance of the Epistles known to Tertullian.

Before I make an end, I cannot forbear once more drawing your attention to the folly of those, for I can call it by no gentler term, who would drive the Fathers out of the field of ecclesiastical literature, and regard all such as take an interest in them with suspicion ; pregnant as you see they are with conclusions of such enormous importance as those which I have been deducing from them to-day.

¹ Sive nihil tale de Deo Christus revelaverat, tanto magis ab apostolo deberat revelari, qui jam non posset ab alio ; non credendus sine dubio, si nec ab apostolo revelatus. Quod ideo pręstruximus, ut jam hinc profiteamur nos proinde probaturos, nullum alium

Deum ab apostolo circumlatum, sicut probavimus, nec a Christo ; ex ipsis utique epistolis Pauli, quas proinde mutilatas etiam de numero, forma jam hæretici Evangelii præjudicasse debet. — Adv. Marcionem, V. c. i.