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*Methods of Early Church History*¹

THE study of the history of the early church is distinguished alike for its difficulty and uncertainty. The intimate bearing that it must have on current controversy and the paucity of material combine to produce the very widest divergence of opinion, and suggest to many thoughtful readers the doubt whether any conclusion is possible. Even in the last decade, critical opinions have undergone a great change, and current histories have been mostly written on the basis of a criticism which has become discredited. It is the purpose of the following pages to review as far as is possible the development of historical criticism concerning the origin of Christianity. Such a review will suggest the limits within which there has been real progress and advance, and the methods by which it has been attained. It will make it abundantly clear that if a sufficiently long epoch is taken the advance has been real and undoubted, and that progress has depended on the adoption of certain methods; while it will suggest the lines which must be followed in the future. A short survey, such as is attempted here, must necessarily be incomplete. Many names must be passed over, and the attention concentrated on those writers or schools that are typical of a certain set of opinions, or have made definite contributions to the problems before them either by collecting material, or by originating new methods, or by seeing more clearly the real question which should be asked.

1. The critical study of church history dates from the later

¹ This article contains the material of two lectures delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge, as Birkbeck lecturer in ecclesiastical history. The books to which I have been most indebted are Seebohm's *Oxford Reformers* and Mark Pattison's *Life of Casaubon*. The nature of the article makes detailed references unnecessary.

renaissance, but if we wish to gain some knowledge of its starting-point we must turn to an earlier period. Two writers will help us to understand the conceptions of the middle ages. The Norman Ordericus Vitalis, in the twelfth century, prefaced his chronicles of his own country with a description of the beginnings of Christianity. His materials are ample, for he is able to supplement from a long list of lives of the apostles, from the Pseudo-Clementine writings, and other similar sources the meagre accounts which are given us in the canonical Scriptures. He appears to us most uncritical, yet he writes history without any dogmatic purpose. We are reminded that the great wealth of apocryphal literature, the lives of the apostles and of the saints, the apocalypses and visions which were accepted without a whisper of suspicion through the middle ages, however valueless from what we are accustomed to call a scientific point of view, played a great part in the imaginative life of that time. Harnack's 'Dogmengeschichte' has become possible, but we have lost the belief which inspired the 'Divina Commedia.'

Very different and more actively uncritical is the church history of Ptolemæus of Lucca, who was a Dominican and papal librarian at the beginning of the fourteenth century. He opens his work with a life of the Founder of Christianity as the first pope. No higher dignity could apparently be ascribed to him than that of first of the pontiffs, and who could doubt the prerogatives of St. Peter and his successors when it is narrated how 'after the passion of the Lord the blessed Peter, by special appointment, obtains the papal chair,' when full proofs of his peculiar dignity are given on the authority of the Decretals, when it is further told how he instituted the fasts of Lent and Advent, how he consecrated Linus and Cletus as his coadjutors, that he might give himself up to a life of prayer, and left Clement as his successor; and how, besides the three bishops, he ordained seven deacons and ten presbyters?

We need not illustrate further. These two works show clearly enough the two types of false elements which have to be eliminated, the imaginative and the dogmatic, the apocryphal writings and the pseudo-Decretals. Both are to us uncritical, but they were not necessarily so in themselves. For every statement Ptolemæus cites an authority with the precision of a lawyer accustomed to defend his case in court. The whole was systematically worked out on accepted data. A history which was miraculous and papal was the only one which would have gained a moment's credence. A complete transformation of men's minds was necessary to enable them to learn what was genuine and what was forged, to distinguish between the true and the false. A mass of unused material had to be published, critical principles evolved, the whole sifted and dated, and, above all, what we are accustomed to call the historical

sense developed, that men might learn to realise the distinction between their own time and times that were past.

2. The incentive to new ideas came first, as it always has come, through the application to church history of the methods which had been acquired in secular learning and the study of the classics. The earlier renaissance was absorbed in pagan literature, and was itself half pagan; but when once the idea took hold of the learned that there had been a time when men thought differently, and that truth, at any rate historical truth, must be sought in the origin of a system, they were not slow to apply the same methods to religion. A frank paganism could not satisfy the needs of their heart. The barbarism of scholasticism could no longer feed the souls of those who had learnt the humanism of Plato. The monastic ideal had ceased to be an inspiring creed; men were learning that philosophy did not begin by meaning asceticism. It was a Roman cardinal who first suggested that the Decretals were not genuine, and a papal historian was the first to incorporate, or at any rate suggest, these ideas. There were other motives besides learning which prompted Laurentius Valla to question the 'Donation' of Constantine; but criticism had now been started. It was from the side of Plato and the Platonic academy that the problem first attracted the learned men of Florence, and Plotinus, Macrobius, and the Pseudo-Dionysius were the masters of Ficino when he lectured on the Christian religion. Savonarola had taught men what religion was; Laurentius Valla had lectured on the New Testament; and Colet had returned to Oxford in 1496 a lover of Dionysius and of St. Paul, eager to preach the Gospel and ardently desirous to promote reform.

Colet began to lecture at Oxford on the Epistle to the Romans, and gave the first example of an historical method of exposition. Grocyn discovered that the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite could not be by a pupil of St. Paul, and was obliged to accept the suggestions of Valla which he had hoped to combat; but it was Erasmus who learnt in England not only Greek, but the historical method which Colet and his companions were developing, and by his wit and learning transformed into a great movement what had been only a small stream of academic opinion. It was in 1516, the year before Luther published his theses, that Erasmus finished his Greek Testament and his edition of Jerome. That year saw the beginning of sober church history. To achieve this was clearly and definitely the purpose of Erasmus, a purpose to which he adhered tenaciously all his life. The aim was the same which had inspired Colet twenty years before, when he lectured on the Romans, and during those twenty years a small body of men, who met first at Oxford, had matured and developed it. The publication of Jerome would teach men to study the Bible as he had

studied it, and not as Augustine had done; the publication of the Greek text with historical notes would overthrow the conventional treatment of the Vulgate: the study of the life of Christ would gradually produce that reform in life which would mean reform in the church. Men had learnt, Erasmus reminds us, to seek the true Aristotle in his own writings: in the same way you will find the true Christ. No one would be called a Platonist who had not read Plato; no man deserves the title of Christian who has not studied the words of Christ. It is disgraceful for a philosopher not to know the mind of his master; it is still more disgraceful for us, bound by so many sacraments to Christ, not to know teaching which will bring the most certain felicity.

But the New Testament was not only to be read, it had also to be interpreted. There was a recognised method of doing so which had prevailed when Erasmus wrote, a method which was supposed to be bound up with orthodoxy. Erasmus had different methods. All branches of knowledge must be brought to bear—natural philosophy, geography, history, classics. ‘If you refer to commentaries, choose out the best, such as Origen (who is far above all others), Basil, Jerome, Ambrose, &c.; and even these read with discrimination and judgment, for they were men ignorant of some things and mistaken in others.’² It is from Origen that he gives an example of what he means by the historical method. ‘Thus, but more at length and more elegantly, are these things related by Origen, I hardly know whether more to the pleasure or profit of the reader; although, be it observed, they are construed *altogether according to the historical sense*; nor does he apply any other method to the Holy Scriptures than that which Donatus applies to the comedies of Terence when elucidating the meaning of the classics.’ And these sound and sober methods were gradually to influence mankind. ‘I have never attempted anything else than to arouse the study of good literature, to recall men from Jewish ceremonies to the Gospel, to substitute the Scriptures for scholastic subtleties.’ And learning will in the end prevail.

If princes will not admit wise councils, if churches prefer the authority of the world to that of Christ, if theologians and monks will not relinquish the synagogue, there is one path left. Sow the good seed. A crop will come up. Educate youth. Encourage the study of antiquity. Religion without piety, and learning without letters will vanish away.

When Jerome published his Vulgate, Augustine dwelt on the danger which would result. ‘If any error should be admitted to have crept into the Holy Scriptures, what authority would be left to them?’ Martin Dorpius repeated these words against the modern Jerome, and the revised version of the New Testament has

² Seebold, p. 330.

received exactly the same criticism from those who imagine that truth will find its support chiefly in ignorance and error. Certainly the work of Erasmus was not followed by a period of lessened respect for the Bible.

The life of Erasmus has two sides. His biographers represent him as one engaged in correspondence with the leading men of Europe, and historians are accustomed to denounce his weakness in not taking a side. Even the most friendly hint that at any rate he was not the stuff of which martyrs are made. Such critics completely misunderstand him. We must remember that his public life was not the principal work on which he was engaged. His most arduous labours were expended on books which many of his biographers hardly mention. It is perfectly true that his name was affixed to editions of the fathers, to which his contribution was slight; but an historian of learning must remember that during the years in which he was rebuking Luther for his violence, and the monks for their ignorance, he was laying the foundation of an historical study of Christianity, helping in editions of the fathers, contributing prefaces and criticisms, distinguishing between the false and the genuine, hoping that the gradual spread of true religion and sound learning might extinguish, by the subtle process of intellectual influence, the barbarous errors of the schoolmen and the violent half-truths of the protestants.

History has followed a very different track from that marked out for it by Erasmus. He deplored how the changes which he was accused of fostering were even more injurious to learning and true religion than had been the old order. He worked for a rational, a sober and orderly progress. He found even before he died that the truths which he saw (if darkly) had to be beaten out for most men by the hard blows of controversy and discussion. He had to endure the fate of almost every man of learning. His carefully balanced conclusions were only half understood. Statements which bore the same relation to his words that many a sermon bears to the Gospel were spread widely through Europe. It is not the first time, nor the last, that a scholar has felt that his ideas seem very different when translated into the language of the people. Crude statements are repeated without their limitations; concessions introduced for precision of language are magnified into definite assertions; the desire to see all sides is transformed into attacks on the fundamental position. This must be the fate of scholars. Bishop Lightfoot was obliged to write concerning his essay on 'The Christian Ministry': 'I need hardly say here what I have said on other occasions, that I do not hold myself responsible for the interpretations which others (whether friends or opponents) have put upon my language, or for the inferences which they have drawn from my views.'

3. Luther used Erasmus's Greek Testament almost as soon as it came out. He even then discovered that it conflicted with his dogmatic opinions, and he expressed a dislike of history unless it corroborated his teaching. Protestantism was based on a supposed appeal to history, but it was a history very imperfectly understood; it has always considered history a good servant, but a bad master, and has never formed its opinions on historical lines. The ideals of Erasmus were inherited only by a small and diminishing body of scholars; those of Luther and his opponents divided the world.

The latter half of the sixteenth century produced the two typical protestant and catholic histories. The Magdeburg Centuriators, with Matthias Flacius at their head, succeeded in transforming ecclesiastical history into a dry and dogmatic subject. In their criticism on their predecessors they show how their conception of the subject had been modified by the events of the Reformation. Previous historians had neglected the development of doctrine. The neglect had been natural. When it was believed that there had been no change since the days of our Lord, what need to write the history? But protestantism was based—or fancied itself based—on an appeal to history, on the theory that the teaching of the apostolic age was different from that of the middle ages, and a history of church doctrine became a necessity. The same may be said of church ceremonies and of church organisation. When men ceased to look upon St. Peter as a pope they had learnt that there was a change. We recognise that a new conception was arising. We are astounded at the contrast between the meagre performances of their predecessors and the huge folios which the Centuriators produced, but it is impossible to ascribe to them much share of the true spirit of research. They are dogmatic historians, writing with a dogmatic purpose. Lutheranism had once to be discovered, now it must be defended, and history must be written to do this. We need not ascribe to them dishonesty any more than to their opponents, but we can be certain that their investigations were not likely to teach them anything. They speak of the great advantage that a desire for truth will give them in studying the history of the Roman claims and doctrines, but this means that they will be able to see the various stages in the growth of Antichrist; they do not think that any one is competent to investigate the origins of Christianity unless he first understands the doctrine of justification by faith, and they begin their address to the king of Bohemia with a reference to the fanatical and blinded men who had been hired by the devil to disfigure the truth of Christianity with philosophic trifles.

Not only did the Centuriators substitute doctrinal disquisitions for picturesque stories, but their dogmatic purpose was also shown

in another direction. A history had always been looked upon as a narrative of facts. But the narrative had now become subordinate. Instead of a continuous history the reader finds his subject divided into centuries, and in each century the matter is subdivided under fifteen headings. This method, entirely destructive of the real value of history, has been imposed upon all historians who have had their inspiration from Germany. The reader will find it (if to a modified extent) in Mosheim, in Neander and Gieseler, in the handbooks of Kurtz and Schaff.

The rival work to the Magdeburg Centuriators was the history of Caesar Baronius. It is one of the greatest monuments of individual diligence, of uncritical accumulations, of a blind credulity, that even the Roman church has produced. The task was entrusted to Baronius by his superior, St. Philip Neri, when he was a young man of twenty. He worked at it with unwearied industry for fifty years, and produced thirteen folio volumes. They had an immense sale. The devout mind had complained that all that was picturesque and attractive had been banished from history; the catholic reaction demanded an historical authority—we can chronicle so much advance—for the revival of belief which had become fashionable. Both these desires Baronius gratified. There were few apocryphal stories that he failed to insert, even if he himself disbelieved them. No one could complain that he was prevented by any gift of the historical sense or any excessive development of the critical faculty from being true to the catholic faith. The confession of Peter was made at a church council, at which he gave the first decision on matters of faith, as an example to all future pontiffs. The history of Baronius is as dogmatic as that of the Centuriators, but the dogmatism is more subtle. It is not asserted, it is implied. The narrative is constructed with the belief underlying it, but the work is a history and not a dogmatic treatise. Few ordinary readers who expected to be entertained would attack the dissertations on the doctrines of the apostolic age which the Centuriators provide, but when they read how, in a certain year, Peter moved his chair from Antioch to Rome, they begin to think that history supports papal claims. Baronius, after all, wrote a history, and is without doubt the parent of the French school. Making use of his material, Fleury has produced the most popular and readable church history that has appeared, and Renan, brought up in the French school and with its literary models, is about the only critical writer who appears to have realised that the business of an historian is to write history and not a treatise on doctrine or philosophy.

Neither protestantism nor catholicism, engaged as they were in a life-and-death struggle, was able to realise the ideal which Erasmus had depicted, that history was to be the teacher and not

the servant, that truth was to be gained by studying it, *not* that it was to be learnt in defence of truth; but the representation of two rival theories of the history of the church must make thoughtful minds realise that some method was necessary to decide between them, and we find again a humanist, whose protestant training had given him a religious interest, and whose career had involved him in ecclesiastical controversies, putting once more before us the ideal of ecclesiastical history.

Isaac Casaubon had, like Erasmus, learnt in his classical training the methods and aims of criticism. 'Why,' he asked, 'should a pagan like Polybius have realised that truth is the end of history, and not Christian writers?' 'History, which among the pagans has been the test of truth, amongst Christians has become the instrument of falsehood.' The object of history is to give a true representation of what was taught in the beginning. The Magdeburg centuries were often most luminous, but failed through their excessively controversial character. A true historian has three qualifications necessary for his task—diligence, judgment, and good faith. No one could doubt the diligence of Baronius. It was in critical training that he was defective. Neither side, in fact, could be trusted. To one party, nothing is ancient except what they have already decided to be orthodox; to the other, everything they approve of is primitive, even the discoveries of yesterday and the day before.

Casaubon himself was in some ways the most distinguished scholar of his day. Of his critical capacity there could be no doubt. He had shown his good faith by being willing to suffer for his opinions, and by being willing to change them. Born a protestant he had had every inducement held out to him at the court of Henry IV to abandon his faith, as so many of his friends had done. He had refused. He preferred to leave the books and manuscripts of Paris rather than consent. But his refusal had never been blind or prejudiced. He had studied the fathers, and he had studied them sufficiently to learn that an appeal to antiquity could not support the religion in which he had been brought up. He had the courage to adopt an independent attitude. He was already an old man, who had wasted on Athenaeus work which one may reasonably think might have been better spent in more edifying matter, when he approached church history. Yet, whatever faults, or rather inadequacies, there may have been in the execution, in his 'Exercitationes in Baronium' he gave a sample of true critical principles applied to the study of the Gospel narrative and early Christianity.

4. During the century that followed, the churches of England and France took the lead in ecclesiastical learning. The English church, with its somewhat insular form of theology, has built itself

up on the basis of history. Although the influence is hard to trace, we cannot suppose that the conservative reformation of Colet and More and Erasmus was without effect. Many of the apparent vacillations of Cranmer come as much from superior knowledge as from a weak character. The Anglican church became what it is because its clergy studied. Mark Pattison has all the qualifications which Renan considered necessary for properly understanding it, and he assures us that

Anglo-catholic theology is not a system of which any individual thinker can claim the invention. It came necessarily, or by natural development, out of the controversy with the papal advocates, so soon as that controversy was brought out of the domain of pure reason into that of learning. That this peculiar compromise or *via media* between Romanism and Calvinism developed itself in England and nowhere else in Christendom, is owing to causes which this is not the place to investigate. But that it was a product not of English soil, but of theological learning, wherever sufficient learning existed, is evidenced by the history of Casaubon's mind, who now found himself, in 1610, an Anglican ready made, as the mere effect of reading the fathers to meet Du Perron's incessant attacks.

Clericus Anglicanus stupor mundi. The leader of the school is Ussher, whose discovery of the genuine Ignatius was not a happy accident, but the result of deep and critical learning. Savile's Eton Chrysostom was probably the best edition of any one of the fathers which had yet been published. The dispossessed clergy of the church produced in their years of exile Bryan Walton's Polyglot. Hammond in his paraphrase showed how the New Testament could be treated in an historical spirit. Pearson's 'Vindiciæ Ignatianæ' appeared in 1672, Beveridge's 'Synodicon' in the same year, Cave's 'Primitive Christianity' and 'Lives of the Fathers and Apostles' between 1672 and 1677, Bingham's 'Antiquities' 1708-22. When latitudinarianism became in the ascendant, it destroyed, as it always does, religious freedom, and the eighteenth century attracted its best minds to philosophic studies.

It is strange how the great names of English church history have, partly by accident, partly by the necessity of their position, been attracted to the criticisms of the Ignatian epistles, and the history of this controversy is the most typical of critical studies in the fathers. The pioneer in the half-light of the middle ages was Bishop Grosseteste of Lincoln, to whom perhaps we owe the Anglo-Latin version of the genuine letters. The spurious correspondence with the Virgin vanished at once with the rise of learning. The Latin of the 'Long Recension' was published in 1498, the Greek text in 1556, and produced a problem which increased in difficulty as knowledge increased. The Jesuit Petavius had doubted their integrity, but protestants did not deny a genuine nucleus. Whit-

gift, Hooker, and Andrewes accepted them. Milton denounces as impiety 'the confronting and paralleling the sacred verity of St. Paul with the offals and sweepings of antiquity that met as accidentally and absurdly as Epicurus his atoms to patch up a Leucippean Ignatius.' Ussher published the medieval English-Latin version in 1644, Isaac Voss the original Greek in 1646, and the two thus solved the problem. Pearson defended the work against Dailé and the French protestants, the genuineness was accepted by Grotius, Bull, Hammond, and Le Clerc, and the question might be considered settled. But with the rise of the critical school in Germany this, like many other questions, was reopened. The discovery of the Curetonian Syriac drew a false scent across the track, and partisanship then, as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, confused the issue, and again it is one of the greatest of English scholars who has finally settled the question. If we review the whole discussion we shall find how often it is a partisan motive which has acted as a spur to critical investigators, but partisanship has never gained anything against criticism, and in the course of the controversy the true methods of historical criticism have been worked out and defined.

The Ignatian epistles are an exceptionally good training-ground [writes Bishop Lightfoot] for the student of early Christian literature and history. They present in typical and instructive forms the most varied problems, textual, exegetical, doctrinal, and historical. One who has thoroughly grasped these problems will be placed in possession of a master key which will open to him vast storehouses of knowledge.

In the development of critical methods the English school have taken the lead, but in magnitude of work and in literary power they fall far behind their great French rivals and friends. The list is headed by Natalis Alexander. Bossuet's 'Universal History' has the reputation of being the only work of its name and character which any one would care to read. The 'Nouvelle Bibliothèque des Auteurs Ecclésiastiques' of Du Pin, the correspondent of Archbishop Wake, is one of the most stupendous works of a single writer, and, if occasionally inaccurate, has the reputation of being among the fairest books of any age. 'Integrity, love of truth, and moderation distinguish this ecclesiastical history perhaps beyond any other,' is the judgment of Hallam; and perhaps it is a still greater testimony to him that although the author was a Jansenist, a Jesuit periodical confessed that his abridgment of church history was free from prejudice and passion: *Il est historien, il raconte et rien de plus.* If Fleury drew his matter from Baronius he did not derive his criticism from the same source, while his dissertations were far in advance of his age, the most philosophical in church history which had yet appeared, and his style among the purest

examples of the best French prose. Hallam almost grew eloquent in his praise, and Liddon thought it the best church history which has yet been written. 'It cannot be a crime,' writes the former, 'that these dissertations contain a great deal which after more than a century's labour in historical inquiry has become more familiar than it was.' Tillemont is one of the writers who, like Bingham, have provided material for many since their day, and in the opinion of Renan does not require a successor; Cotelier, editor of the 'Apostolic Fathers,' reached the highest standard of accuracy yet attained in editing an ecclesiastical writer.

Our list has been a long one, but we have not yet approached the labours of the Benedictines of the congregation of St. Maur. What Erasmus had done imperfectly, what Casaubon had dreamed of, what no one since has had the courage to attempt, they accomplished—the production of critical editions of the great fathers of the church. There are two preliminary stages in the study of history without which any scientific work is impossible, the correct editing of documents and the criticism of their genuineness. The Benedictines did within these limits what the 'Rolls Series' has done for English history; in doing it they first put on a scientific, or at any rate methodical, basis the subsidiary knowledge which had as yet hardly existed. Mabillon established the principles of the science of diplomatics (1681), Montfaucon of Greek palæography (1708). What Scaliger has done for chronology was continued and widened in 'L'Art de vérifier les Dates.' New documents were published by D'Achery, by Mabillon, by Martene and Durand, and by Montfaucon. Montfaucon laid the foundation of a critical study of the Hexapla, and Sabatier of the Latin versions, while the Benedictine editions of the fathers are the delight of the collector and the armoury of the scholar. Almost the only critical work that has been done over wide areas is in the Benedictine editions. It is extraordinary how small a field the mass of later scholarship has covered.

The same vastness of conception and scale which seems only possible in the present day with the assistance of a government, distinguishes a series of other works which we owe to the industry of members of the Roman church. The 'Acta Sanctorum' of the Bollandists, the collection of church councils of Labbe, of Hardouin, and of Mansi, the Jesuit edition of the Byzantine historians which puts to shame the work of German scholars in the same field, the liturgical collections of Renaudot, the eastern collection of Assemani, are the indispensable assistants of every scholar, while the collections of Mai and Pitra have reproduced in the nineteenth century the methods and aims—and shall we say the critical ideals?—of the Benedictine travellers and collectors of an older generation.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the universities

of Holland had become the refuge of those whom the catholic reaction had banished from other countries. The foundation of Christian and profane chronology was laid by Scaliger, who was, like Erasmus and Casaubon, a scholar of the world rather than of any particular country. The name of Grotius is great in many directions, and not least as the assessor of a true historical method in biblical studies, against a protestant tradition which was in danger of becoming fixed. The publication of '*Critici Sacri*' marked the point which philological studies had attained up to 1660, while, at the end of the century, Le Clerc, who occupied a leading position as an oracle of public opinion, became the champion and defender of criticism. He was hampered, perhaps, somewhat by protestant limitations; he found it necessary to explain with some precision the value of the study of church history; he drew a hard and fast line between the canon and the fathers, but he was exact in his aims and wide in his sympathies. He republished Cotelier's '*Apostolic Fathers*.' He was the friend of Du Pin and of Locke, the editor of Erasmus. His history, although dry and uninteresting, is exact, scholarly, and fair-minded. Yet the Dutch school was even then, perhaps, tainted with that fatal preciseness which allows but little play for the imagination, and the confusion of mind which fancies that incredulity is always synonymous with criticism.

5. Renan has told us that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could never understand origins. Lessing tells us that 'historical truth, which is accidental in character, can never become the proof of the truths of reason, which are necessary.' Reason took the place of history, and controversy had worn itself out. Scholarship had ceased to be a new discovery, and therefore had lost its interest; the conflict of theologians became intolerable. Hume and Rousseau and Voltaire became the dominant forces, and the eighteenth century, which produced some great histories, contributed little to the study, or the advance, or the conception of history. A considerable number of names of ecclesiastical writers are enumerated, but there are few which would now be consulted, and none which can be said to have contributed much to the study of the subject. A student of early Christian literature may often be attracted or even compelled to consult writers of the seventeenth century; he will rarely find any one to turn to in the eighteenth. Even Mosheim belongs in many ways to an earlier epoch, and he is rather a judicious recorder than a leader. But one name may be mentioned as first asking a new question, and starting a line of future investigation. The question which Gibbon asked when he proposed five causes for the spread of Christianity, first introduced a new problem, and a completely new method of treatment. To suggest that the laws of cause and effect should be applied in the

region of ecclesiastical history shocked the commonplace orthodoxy of the day, and has given rationalists a considerable amount of weak-minded pleasure. But both those who feared and those who greeted the new discovery might have learnt from the philosophy of Aquinas, that in man and in nature alike, a study of causes does not take away the omnipotence of God, for God works through human and natural agencies. Gibbon was too keen-sighted not to see the limitations of his own theory, and, whatever may have been his own belief, he was probably quite sincere in speaking only of secondary causes, while his somewhat severe remarks on the frailty of Christians are a useful corrective of the unreality of tone which mars so much theological literature.

To the early nineteenth century belong a number of church histories, some of which are remembered, some forgotten, but none can be considered as marking epochs. The most prominent is that of Neander, which, published in 1824, has never been superseded, but has long been antiquated. A reader of it will admire the piety if he is wearied with the monotony of the treatment, but when he feels how little it answers the questions which are in his mind, and how much, in some directions, later research has expanded it, he will be able to estimate the advance, or at any rate the change, in the study of church history, or of its origins, since his day. It would be easy to enumerate names of writers such as that of Gieseler, who has provided many subsequent historians with original authorities; or Döllinger, whose church history was published in 1836, but whose historical researches came afterwards; or Möbler, the leader of an older school of Roman Catholics; or Milman, who has produced the most considerable church histories in England, but who, as is so often the case, was surpassed by many of his own country in profundity and knowledge; but it is more important to turn to the writers and events that have produced the changes in thought which have made so much in these books seem antiquated.

6. The fourth decade of the nineteenth century, the decade of the Reform Bill and the accession of the present queen, saw the beginning of two movements, both of which strongly affected and were influenced by the study of church history. The dissertation of Baur on the history of the church party at Corinth, and the assize sermon of Keble, initiated movements, in many ways entirely different, both of which appealed to history, both added fresh interest to the study of church history, and both have profoundly influenced the religious thought of the last sixty years.

It has become commonplace now to say that Baur disguised, under an appeal to history, an *a priori* method; that his inspiration was Hegelianism and not unbiassed research; that his conclusions are erroneous, and have now been shown to be so. It is perfectly true that hardly any leading conclusion in the domain of early

church history that he arrived at is accepted ; that the dates which he or his followers assigned to the different early Christian documents are rejected, except by writers who have been blind to recent developments and discoveries ; that no one can consider a contest between Ebionism and Gnosticism an adequate explanation of the origin of Christianity ; yet it is equally true that the study of Baur has distinctly affected church history. Every student of the New Testament or early Christian works will be astonished if he once realises how the statement of almost any question which he has to discuss leads him back to Baur ; and although he will seldom accept Baur's solution he will almost always feel that Baur's statement of the problem has illuminated the whole subject.

It is more important to ask what Baur did than where he failed, and the answer is summed up in stating that if his methods were not historical his question was historical. He asked clearly and definitely, How did it happen ? It was a question which had been, perhaps, asked before, but not so clearly, and with prepossessions which prevented it from being altogether understood. Baur had prepossessions, but they were such as compelled him to look on the origin of the church as something very different from what it was supposed to be, and made him ask the question in a form which had not hitherto been suggested. A vigorous personality, and the interest of new views, created a school, and promoted the study of the origins of Christianity ; and for the last sixty years the theological mind of Germany has been discussing the questions which he raised. To enumerate the names or the schools would be a long and tedious task ; it will be more convenient to sum up at the conclusion of our survey the solid advantages which the last sixty years have brought us. For it must be confessed that much of German criticism has brought us little fruit. A very large number of writers have confined themselves within a curiously narrow range of problems, and within that range their progress has been in a circle round a fixed centre. A certain number of fixed ideas have held them tightly, and however much they may have desired to get away, it has been as impossible for them to gratify their longings as for a horse, exercised round a ring, to break out into the hunting field. How much Baur's conclusions are modified, even by his followers, may be seen in the last edition of Weizsäcker's 'History of the Apostolic Age,' or the dates of Jülicher's 'Introduction.'

While Germany produced a movement, it has produced little that is permanent. The same critical wave in France has contributed one good history. There is, of course, much that Renan has written which will be profoundly distasteful to every devout or even serious mind. There is an element in his writings which we

would gladly eliminate. Yet his merits are very great. He took his criticism from Germany. It would have been much better had he lived twenty years later; yet it is interesting to notice the literary tact—and Renan has much of that tact—which makes him modify extravagant theories. The introductions to his several volumes are always lucid, and often just. But it is in narrative that he excels, for he has realised that history should narrate, and that it deals with persons and places as well as with ideas. The German historian represents the early history of the church as a succession of metaphysical and philosophical theories, and the world in which they are propounded also as a world of theories. No doubt it is perfectly true that the history of Christianity is that of an idea, or ideas, but those ideas were always exhibited through the medium of persons, and those persons were largely influenced by the external conditions under which they lived. If we read the history of Weizsäcker we never get free from the criticism of sources; we are always recalled to some real or imagined contentions and parties; the name of Antioch recalls nothing but the dispute with Peter; but Renan banishes his discussions to an introduction, and the mention of Antioch leads to a brilliant description of the city on the Orontes, which played so great a part in Christian history. Persons, with Weizsäcker, are masks with dogmatic opinions; with Renan they are the living agents in the spread of Christianity, with all the marks of personal distinction. If Christianity is an idea it is also a force building up individual character and revealed in life, not merely confined to abstractions. No church history will fulfil its purpose that does not tell, with all the wealth of illustration that modern knowledge has provided, the story of Christianity.

About the same year which saw the beginning of the Tübingen school of theology saw the beginning of a very different movement in Oxford. It is a common judgment to say that the Tübingen school was historical, the Oxford school dogmatic, and to contrast the latter unfavourably with the former. Baur sought to find truth, Newman to defend error. But both judgments are only half true. It was the study of history which taught the founders of the Oxford movement, if it was also the dread of rationalism. Newman was brought up in a very different theology; he studied the records of the early church, and a new world of thought and ideas was revealed to him. Evangelicalism and liberalism had both made up their minds that, whatever might be true, the system called catholic was not. Newman approached the records of the early centuries, and found catholicism exhibited, and the world was astonished to find that the historic record which they imagined was Rome's greatest enemy, seemed to say much for it. His followers have gone in very different directions, but when he

won W. G. Ward by the statement that catholicism could never have developed out of modern protestantism he was really setting in his way the same problem that Baur set so differently.

A writer in the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica' has told us that the 'tractarian movement has stimulated a certain amount of antiquarian research.' This is a very inadequate judgment. It roused a very keen if one-sided interest in church history, and a considerable amount of work in editing and translating the fathers, in studying and illustrating the history of their period. Newman's 'Arians' is not in the first rank of historical literature, but it is a very remarkable and penetrating book. The work begun was never completed. 'The Library of the Fathers' and the 'Bibliotheca Patrum' were never finished. Yet the movement developed men of great power in many directions. One of them, who became the historian of the events in which he had played a part, exhibits a perfect historical discipline and temper. It largely influenced the greatest English historians, it produced the scholastic enthusiasm of Mark Pattison. The school was broken up. Rome attracted some, rationalism others. Practical work more and more absorbed those who remained. Academic liberalism, the most sterile of all modern creeds, cast its shadow over Oxford. But the interest that was aroused in the problems of early Christianity has not died, and men have begun to realise that catholic Christianity, whether Roman or Anglican, is not merely the offspring of ignorance and prejudice.

7. Our review has revealed to us ecclesiastical history as the prey of controversial interests as much in the nineteenth as in the sixteenth century, although the questions are wider and the problems more complex. Scholars are at any rate beginning to ask the question, 'How did Christianity arise? What was Christianity like?' Not, 'What proofs are there for catholics or protestants?' But are there no scholars on whom the mantle of Erasmus or Casaubon has descended?

The strife of contending opinions has made the need of scientific investigation more and more apparent, and three different schools in England, France, and Germany have developed in a distinguished degree historical methods. One is Anglican, a second Romanist, a third protestant or rationalist in its origin. With one is associated the name of Lightfoot, with the second that of Duchesne, with the third that of Harnack. It is not necessary to dwell in this country on the work of Lightfoot or of those associated with him. There may be some who are attracted more by the subtlety and versatility of Hort, but there is a greatness in the profound simplicity of Lightfoot to which Hort does not rise: we must judge men by their productions, and the edition of the New Testament is not the equal of what Harnack calls the greatest patristic monograph of the

century—a monograph which has been the most important factor in changing the current of critical opinion.

The Abbé Duchesne has preserved the French neatness and lightness of touch; the edition of the ‘*Liber Pontificalis*’ is a work of the most exact and scientific scholarship, and the ‘*Histoire du Culte Chrétien*’ is the most luminous and cultivated work on the history of the church services. His name may be taken as representative of a cultivated and liberal school of Romanist students who in France and South Germany are investigating the Bible and church history in a scientific spirit.

If the Anglican appears sometimes in Lightfoot, the papist in Duchesne, Professor Harnack is as clearly possessed of prejudices and is certainly inferior to the other two in judgment, in balance of mind, and in critical methods; he is superior to both in fertility of thought and creativeness of ideas. He has succeeded in transforming the temper and methods of modern German theology, and lifted it out of the rut in which it was getting fixed. He has laid down clearly and well for the benefit of English readers the qualifications of an ecclesiastical historian.

In taking up a theological book we are in the habit of inquiring first of all as to the author’s point of view. In an historical work there is no need for such inquiry. The question here is whether the author is in sympathy with the subject about which he writes, whether he can distinguish original elements from those that are derived, whether he has a thorough acquaintance with his material, whether he is aware of the limits of historical knowledge, and whether he is truthful. These requirements constitute the categorical imperative for the historian; but they can only be fulfilled by an unwearied self-discipline. Hence any historical study is an ethical task. The historian ought to be faithful in every sense of the word: whether he has been so or not is the question on which his readers have to decide.

What is striking about Professor Harnack is the width of his reading and the interest that he takes in literature which is not German—a great change in itself. He is honourably distinguished for the frankness and honesty with which he admits that he has been wrong. As his opportunities have increased his conceptions and aims have grown larger. The ‘*Texte und Untersuchungen*’ implied that the dogmatic and speculative methods of the older German school were to be given up, and that research for the future was to begin with documents. In the chronology of Christian literature the test of genuineness and date is placed primarily in external evidence rather than on the internal ideas, which rarely fail to be subjective. The newly started series of ante-Nicene writers is an enterprise worthy of the Benedictines and the Berlin Academy.

The existence of these three schools, approaching the same problems by the same methods, but from very different starting-

points, is the best guarantee for the future of church history and the development of an historical theology. Yet the example of Erasmus warns us that the future will always be very different from what scholars long for, and that they must be content with knowing that their influence will be a secret force that modifies the movements which passion and prejudice and material needs arouse.

8. An attempt has been made in the preceding pages to review the lines upon which the study of church history has progressed. Two questions remain. What definite advance has there been in the subject in recent years? And what methods and principles are suggested by the review which has just been concluded?

There are three main divisions in the study of history—the collection and publication of material, the criticism of documents, and finally the constructive work which is the end and result of the previous studies, the narrative of events and the picture of life in past time. Under the first heading it is wonderful how large have been, and continue to be, the gleanings of recent years. Even the younger among us have seen large additions made to our material for studying the origins of Christianity, and have felt the thrill of interest which is one of the indirect advantages of a new discovery. It is hardly necessary to give a catalogue of what is well known. One instance will suffice. Let any one compare the volume of the writings of Hippolytus recently published by the Berlin Academy with the editions of Fabricius or even Lagarde, and he will realise the advance that has been made. A new manuscript found in the Levant, an old Slavonic version for the first time brought to light, fragments in many languages from all the libraries of Europe, catenae properly examined and edited, have all contributed to its enrichment. This is only one and not the most obvious instance. And not only have new documents been discovered, but also those which we already possessed can be presented in a very much better form. When Bishop Lightfoot produced his first edition of the epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, he had only the one Greek manuscript which had been used by his predecessors for two hundred years, a manuscript imperfect and in many places undecipherable. Since that time a second Greek manuscript, a Syriac and a Latin version have been added to our materials, and the text, then most uncertain, is now made by these very varied authorities in most places absolutely trustworthy. And these discoveries have a further interest. The suspicion sometimes suggests itself to a critical student of the history of the early church, that the texts which we possess have been tampered with. The suspicion is not ungrounded, for instances could be named in which this has happened. But the gradual extension of the material which we possess compels us in almost all cases to lay aside such suspicions. In classical books we rarely possess more

than one class of testimony, that of Greek or Latin manuscripts, as the case may be : in the case of Christian writings we can often add, especially in the case of the earlier and more important documents, the testimony of versions necessarily made at an early date. The limits within which any tampering with the text is scientifically possible, are very small.

To the fresh information obtained by the study of documents must be added the results of archæological research. There are few names that deserve a higher place in the record of church history than that of De Rossi. As a sagacious explorer and a keen-sighted investigator he has added a chapter to our knowledge, and has exhibited in a high degree soundness of judgment. It is true, indeed, that among a very large number of conclusions there are some which will not stand, and that his fault is credulity rather than incredulity ; but he is far more trustworthy than his English and German critics, whose very far-fetched theories and conjectures do not command assent. His discoveries were not indeed new, but he first introduced an element of scientific method into researches into the catacombs. In another direction archæology has introduced a completely new source of information, and the inscriptions of Asia Minor which have been discovered and illustrated with very great acuteness by Professor Ramsay have added both to our information and conception of early Christianity. It is possible without accepting all the methods and conclusions of ' St. Paul the Traveller ' to be grateful for the new material provided for us and to admire the brilliance and originality with which it has been illustrated.

Our sources of information have increased, but how have we edited and used them ? The work done has been singularly disproportionate, but textual criticism has been made into a science, and it only remains to apply accepted methods over a wider field. How important this may be many who write on church history fail to realise. They consider the labour expended in forming a correct text thrown away, and do not trouble to make use of its conclusions. There are, of course, editors who seem almost to think a correct text is an end instead of a means ; but a moment's thought will show us that unless our documents are given in the most correct form possible we may as well give up considering that there is any connexion between truth and history, and an instance will show how far-reaching may be the effects of an apparently small corruption.

When Pearson defended the Ignatian letters his work was recognised by competent critics to be conclusive, but there was one weak spot which the more exact among his opponents detected and of which he was himself fully conscious. In one passage the text in the then known manuscripts contained the following expression :

'the eternal Word who came not forth from Silence.'³ This expression, it may be stated, avoiding as much as possible technicalities, described the Son of God as the eternal Word who did not proceed as an emanation from *Sige* (Silence). It seemed, in fact, to be directly combating the teaching of the well-known heretic Valentinus, who had attempted to explain the universe as the result of a series of emanations from the Deity, in which the divine attributes were personified. These emanations were called Aeons, and from one of them *Sige*, or Silence, had come forth the Word, or *Logos*. Now Valentinus lived later than the supposed date of Ignatius, and this passage was, therefore, urged as an argument against the genuineness of the epistles. Pearson's defence was learned but not conclusive. But Bishop Lightfoot was able to point out that the oriental versions showed that the correct text should be 'the Word from Silence,'⁴ leaving out the negative. This expression meant that the divine revelation of the Word came to break the Silence and Ignorance in which the world lay. The expression had nothing to do with Valentinianism, but at a later date it was considered to favour it, and so a later copyist altered it. So far from the expression in its correct form being indicative of a late date, it implies an early date. The writer of the epistles could never have used it if there had been any fear of its having an heretical sound. Whatever else he may have been, according to his knowledge he was strongly orthodox.

It has been worth while to dwell somewhat long on what may seem a mere detail, because of the principles that it illustrates. In the first place it makes it clear how absolutely essential to the study of a document in at all a scientific spirit is a correct text. The variation may seem small, but its effect may be very great. There are a certain number of crucial instances which might be added; every scholar might contribute some. The interest in the text may indeed become too absorbing, and deadening to higher interests. There has been a tendency to make textual criticism take too prominent a place in theological education; but if truth be the end of our investigations no brilliancy will be of any value, if we have not sound and good texts to work on. However great may be the labour to form them, it is necessary. A second point that this instance illustrates is the limits within which our texts are trustworthy. There is no doubt that interpolations and corruptions have existed, and quotations might be made from early writers to prove it. The anathema at the end of the Revelation is not isolated. How far, then, can we trust our texts? The answer is that where they rest on a single authority the reading may be in any isolated passage or statement doubtful, but where there are many different lines of tradition, as, for example, in these Ignatian

³ *λόγος αἰθεῖος οὐκ ἀπὸ σιγῆς προελθών.*

⁴ *λόγος ἀπὸ σιγῆς.*

letters, the danger of undetected corruption is almost non-existent. But, thirdly, the same instance suggests a very important point which may bear on future investigation. Pearson, when he published his '*Vindiciae Ignatianae*,' made it quite clear that all the balance of argument was in favour of the genuineness of the epistles; yet here was undeniably a difficulty which might furnish an argument to his opponents. There are some minds so constituted that they allow a single difficulty to overpower a dozen good arguments. Yet this instance—and many others like it might be quoted—ought to show us that single difficulties generally arise from defective knowledge. Good criticism does not consist in discovering a single flaw and rejecting the document accordingly, but in balancing the evidence and then arriving at a conclusion which future research or discovery will corroborate. Our knowledge is always imperfect, and in that lies the difficulty of the subject.

The principles of textual criticism have been put on a scientific basis. Some few works have been adequately edited. It remains to apply them to those many other works whose texts are often imperfect. But what of the higher criticism, as it is the fashion to call it? Has there been any real advance in material? Are we more certainly able to distinguish the false and the true? The advance has been twofold. First, every book of the New Testament and of early Christian literature has been doubted; and secondly, the period of confusion thus created is now coming to an end. Until the genuineness of a book has been doubted, until every argument that can be discovered against it by some one with an interested motive has been brought forward, there will probably be no scientific grounds for pronouncing it genuine. The first benefit, then, that all the various movements of the last sixty years have conferred is that there is no conceivable hypothesis which has not been put forward, and no view, however untenable, which has not been defended by some writer. There is much controversy which may have seemed almost fruitless, yet it has not been so; for although learned opinion may have ultimately reverted to the point from which it started, yet the old opinions are held in a very different way. The same opinion may prevail now concerning the genuineness of the Epistle to the Philippians as prevailed before it was questioned, yet our point of view is very much changed. This much at any rate, then, has been gained. Every conceivable theory has been suggested, every point of criticism raised. If a document is still accepted it is not blindly. But, secondly, everything having been thrown into confusion, reason and order are now being restored. In 1885, in his preface to the first edition of the Ignatian letters, Bishop Lightfoot wrote: 'To the disciples of Baur the rejection of the Ignatian Epistles is an absolute necessity of their theological position. The ground would otherwise be

withdrawn from under them, and their reconstructions of early church history would fall in ruins on their heads.' It has taken just about ten years to make this clear to scholars; it will take some little time longer to convince those writers who are so ready to inform English theologians how antiquated are their methods and how ignorant they are of the newest speculations. It is as well to emphasise the general agreement with which that work has been greeted. Harnack first accepted the genuineness but doubted the date; he now accepts the results as fully established. His pupil Von der Goltz, investigating the question from another side, has strengthened Lightfoot's position. M. A. Reville in France, who has written a somewhat speculative work on the origin of the Christian ministry, accepts Lightfoot's conclusions as axiomatic. When Dr. Fairbairn said that Dr. Lightfoot by the mass and masterliness of his learning had overborne judgment rather than carried conviction, we can only feel surprise at a remark which casts discredit, not on the author, but on his critic. If the letters of Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement are genuine, then it follows that there must have existed before them a Christian literature similar to that contained in the Canon. It is not merely that these writings testify to individual books of the New Testament, although this testimony is considerable. The Johannine literature, most of St. Paul's Epistles, and a Gospel narrative are implied. It is that the theology and Christian life represented in them will be conceivable if the canonical literature represents the first century, but will not be so otherwise. On the basis of ordinary laws of historical research it forms an adequate and substantial cause. The preface of Harnack's 'Chronology of Early Christian Literature,' which in the main outline and in most of the details restores to us the traditional dates for the greater part of early Christian literature, is not a mere *jeu d'esprit* by a vigorous writer, but is the necessary and logical outcome of the acceptance of the Ignatian letters and of working out the problem by a sound scientific method.

Another force which has been working in the same direction is the influence of secular research represented by such writers as Professor Mommsen, Professor Ramsay, and, we might add, Professor Blass. Again and again in ecclesiastical history a return to truer methods, sometimes in one direction, sometimes in another, has been due to the influence of humanist studies. It was so in the case of Erasmus; it was so in the case of Casaubon. The reason is natural. In classical literature sound methods can be developed with comparatively little injury from controversial bias. In theology and ecclesiastical history there is always a motive, positive or negative. When Professor Mommsen approaches a document like the Acts of the Apostles

he does so in quite a different spirit from that of a rationalist critic. He wishes to make what he can of the document; the rationalist critic thinks that he shows his criticism by discovering mistakes. When Professor Ramsay took up the Acts of the Apostles as a geographical document he began gradually to discover that it bore all the marks of being written by some one acquainted with the district he describes: when he finds a difficulty he seeks an explanation; he does not begin by assuming that there is a mistake, or that he knows more about the first century than his documents. Of course in both cases an error may be discovered, but judgment is required in estimating the inference to be drawn from a single mistake. In almost all cases where he has touched on church history Professor Mommsen has introduced scientific methods and has brushed away the cobwebs.

Recent years have, in fact, produced a great change in criticism. It is due partly to a change of method, the substitution of the scientific for the *a priori*; it is due largely to the influence of Bishop Lightfoot's 'Ignatius;' and it is due also to the work on church history done by secular historians. Recognising this, it may be convenient to ask what are the accepted results? What points are accepted we cannot say universally, for there will always be individual eccentricities, but by the great majority of critics of different schools?

Of the Pauline epistles ten may be accepted. Professor Harnack has some doubts about the Ephesians, but they will probably vanish, and other critics who are not too old to learn will have to fall in with him. Of the exact date there will always be a certain amount of dispute, for we have not the materials for constructing a certain chronology. The Pastoral Epistles are still under dispute. Whatever a critic's personal opinion may be, he cannot appeal to them as undoubted documents. The favourite theory at present is to see in them evidence of interpolation; there is a genuine Pauline nucleus which has been added to. The advantage of this theory is that it enables the early quotations from the Epistles to be explained, and the evidence for what is supposed to be an advanced ecclesiastical organisation eliminated. The Epistle to the Hebrews is certainly by some one who had come under the influence of St. Paul, and is certainly earlier than the letters of Clement. It is placed by Harnack in the reign of Domitian, and cannot be later.

Passing to other groups of writings, the Acts and St. Luke's Gospel must have been written by a companion of St. Paul, and cannot be later than the year 90 A.D. The other two synoptic gospels date probably from the years 65-75; but the existence of late additions cannot be disproved, although it may be doubted. Not later than the age of Domitian must come the First Epistle of

St. Peter. The theory of Harnack that the name of Peter was added by a later forger is hardly likely to gain credence. Christian tradition is now being again accepted, and the Apocalypse is placed in the reign of Domitian, while the other Johannine writings cannot be placed later than the year 110. Who wrote them? What is their historic value? These remain questions on which there is not yet agreement. The same may be said of the date of the Second Epistle of St. Peter and the Epistles of St. Jude and St. James. It is obvious, however, that as far as these last are concerned, however interesting they may be, they are not indispensable for constructing a history of Christian development.

To write early Christian history, putting aside documents which can only be used with hesitation and caution, we have the following groups:—

- (1) The accepted Pauline letters belonging to the years 45–60.
- (2) A group of writings belonging to the next generation, 60–90—the three synoptic gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the First Epistle of St. Peter.
- (3) The Johannine writings, which cannot be later than the year 110.
- (4) The Apostolic Fathers, representing the beginning, and the Apologists, the middle of the second century.
- (5) The great ante-Nicene writers, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, besides many less known names (180–230).

Later than this we need not go, for later there has never been any substantial doubt about the writings which may be used. The above list up to that date, omitting, of course, minor fragments, represents the fixed documents which a writer has to go upon in attempting as far as he can to build up church history on a secure foundation.

A third division of our subject remains. How far has this historical reconstruction been carried? Here the deficiency is very marked. When it was stated that the history of Neander was antiquated, but had never been superseded, the want of a history of the early church was implied. There is no such book. The reason is obvious. The course of criticism had thrown the whole subject into confusion, and a great deal of preliminary work had to be done again. Lightfoot had dreamed of writing a history of Christian literature, but his labour on the apostolic fathers consumed all his powers. But although no church history has been written which can claim to be authentic, much preliminary work of a very valuable character has been accomplished, and to enumerate it will be the best survey of the actual gains of the labours of recent years.

First we may, I think, put the ‘Dictionary of Christian Biography.’ It is, of course, unequal, as such works must necessarily

be, but it has gained almost universal acceptance both in England and abroad. It has made almost all work infinitely easier, for it has summed up in every direction the research of the last fifty years. Its companion volumes, the 'Dictionary of Christian Antiquities,' are of less value, and most would prefer to consult the dictionary of Krause, to whom we owe by far the best history of Christian art. For the history of Christian worship we have Duchesne's 'Origines du Culte Chrétien' and the first volume of Brightman's 'Liturgies,' a book which, referring principally to a later age, is indispensable for the study of the earliest period; for the beginning of Christian worship can only be understood if its later developments are known.

In another direction a correct conception of the origin and growth of Christianity has been facilitated by the knowledge that we have acquired of the history of its environment. The combination of legal, of antiquarian and historical knowledge, the discovery and investigation of inscriptions and of coins, the immense labour expended upon the copies of Latin inscriptions, all associated with the name of Professor Mommsen, have given us an intimate knowledge of the life and constitution of the Roman empire, of all the conditions under which Christianity rose and opened. A knowledge of contemporary Judaism is even more essential, and for that Schürer has systematised an immense mass of work, and scholarly editions are appearing of many of the apocryphal writings. We are still asking for some one to make Philo intelligible and for some master hand which may sift for us the wheat from the chaff in that strange and unapproachable subject, rabbinical literature.

It would be beside our purpose to enumerate all the special editions, monographs, and investigations which have appeared. They are of varying merit, and often not final. Conspicuous among them are the investigations which Professor Harnack throws out with such amazing fertility. Their conclusions often need correcting, but their collection of material is admirable. His chronological investigations are not by any means always sound, but he is the first who has attempted for long to construct a comprehensive scheme. His introduction to Christian literature has replaced Fabricius, while his 'Dogmengeschichte,' as summing up a series of monographs and the conclusions of the long line of German histories, may form an adequate basis for future investigators with saner views. It is often the mission of Harnack to suggest theories that others may refute them, but those who least agree with him will often have learnt most from his writings; he is only dangerous to his own followers.

If the time ever comes when a good history is written with all the advantages of modern research, it will be much better than anything which has yet appeared. Yet to put together the result of all this labour, and to write a book which should within a readable

compass tell us how Christianity came into the world, what the message that it had to give sounded like when it was first preached, what were the meanings of the words and ideas used, how it gradually gained depth and took form as the Christian church, would be a task of the very greatest difficulty. The church historian will have to possess great diligence, complete knowledge, critical acumen; he should have a philosophic temper and spirit; he should possess a wide acquaintance with classical antiquity and with the hopes and aspirations of Judaism; he must have a calm and judicial and believing mind. Renan told us that we could not write the history of a religion unless we had first believed in it and then ceased to do so. That might be correct if Christianity were already proved to be untrue, but not otherwise. We must distinguish investigation and construction. If he investigates the history of Christianity a man cannot hope to be unbiassed; his early training must influence him; but whether he start from belief or unbelief he must at any time be prepared to ask himself the question, Is this true or is it not? remembering that whatever be his hopes the issue at stake is tremendous, and that he will neither wish to believe without good evidence or to disbelieve what perhaps after all may be true. That is the temper in which to investigate.

But when the constructive history begins he must have made up his mind, and if as the result of his investigations he finds that there are good grounds for believing in the truth of Christianity, then the true temper in which to write is that of the man who believes, believes simply and honestly and reverently, but who has looked disbelief in the face and can exhibit in his style and thought the chastened mind which realises and sympathises with and understands the opinions of those from whom he differs. He must always write as an historian and not as a controversialist. He must write so that his history may be accepted even by those who do not share his beliefs.

9. There are two special difficulties in church history of the early periods: one is the poverty of the material, the other is the peculiar character of the subject matter. The fact that it is connected with present needs in a way which exposes it in a special degree to the dangers of a controversial treatment, and that it deals with a subject matter which claims to be supernatural and is believed to be so by the great majority of those interested in it, makes agreement difficult, and demands great care in investigation.

It is recognised at once that fairness of mind and freedom from prejudice are required. A history written with the object of proving that Anglicanism or Protestantism or Romanism is true would be admitted to be prejudiced. A writer who begins by assuming the truth of Christianity will probably end by proving it. These propo-

sitions would generally be admitted, but the negative to them is, curiously enough, ignored. Strange as it may seem, it is necessary to point out that to assume that any form of Christianity is untrue, or that the supernatural is impossible, or that some particular form of thought which is not orthodox is true—any of these assumptions is equally a sign of prejudice. The difference in conclusion between orthodox and unorthodox investigators is often very great, and it is sometimes assumed that all the bias is on the side of the orthodox. A very few quotations will show that this is not the case.

In one of his early essays, an essay written at a time when he was collecting his material for his '*Vie de Jésus*,' Renan writes: 'Criticism has two methods of attacking a story which contains a miraculous element; for as to accepting the history as it is, that is impossible, since the very essence of criticism is the negation of the supernatural.' Here is a definite statement that his researches were started on the assumption that the miraculous cannot be true. Is it marvellous, then, that he succeeds in proving that these assumptions were correct? Is it any more marvellous than that the Christian apologist succeeds in proving that his assumptions also are correct? The latter is supposed to be prejudiced; why not the former? The above statement is followed by a note to the effect that the only true use of the word 'rationalist' is of a person who studies Jewish or Christian literature without any presuppositions at all. Quite so. But it is as much a dogmatic presupposition to disbelieve as to believe. Research asks whether a thing is or is not true. It does not begin by assuming that it is not so. The fault of Renan was not, of course, that after investigation he wrote with the presupposition that Christianity is untrue, but that he confesses that he even investigated with a conclusion ready formed, and considers that it is the province of criticism to do so. His method is vitiated from the beginning.

The article in the '*Encyclopædia Britannica*' on church history will give us another instance. 'No one,' it is said, 'will expect scientific church history from a Roman catholic.' If a Roman catholic were to preface his remarks by saying, 'No one would expect scientific history from a protestant,' he would be called bigoted and prejudiced; yet the two remarks are exactly of equal value. Both, of course, assume that certain conclusions must be necessarily false, and if we appeal to our history of the subject we shall find that there is very little ground for believing the one more than the other. It is, of course, perfectly true that an immense mass of historical writing which is thoroughly unscientific has been produced by Romanists, but the same is certainly true of protestant writers. Science means a capacity for arriving at correct conclusions, and certainly in many cases the ultimate

decision has not been in favour of what we may call the orthodox protestant history. A dislike of episcopacy produced vigorous attacks on the Ignatian letters, but those attacks have not been sustained. Opposition to the papal claims caused the visit of St. Peter to Rome to be doubted, certainly against the balance of probability, as is now being recognised. Bunsen was a very aggressive and assertive champion of protestantism, yet his opinions concerning Hippolytus were certainly less scientific than those of his Roman catholic antagonist. The conclusions of hundreds of critical writers who would claim to be scientific have been proved to be incorrect, and often absurd, while Du Pin, Tillemont, Hefele, and Duchesne are all in the front rank of scientific historians. It is not necessary to accept the point of view of these writers on all points, or to believe that every statement of theirs is correct, or that they have sufficient evidence to justify their historical position on every point; what is maintained is that they have as great a right to be called scientific historians as any one else who has written on ecclesiastical history. Nor, again, is it necessary to deny that there have been a number of exceedingly uncritical and unscientific writers in the Roman church from the days of Baronius to the present time; but few statements that they have made are more uncritical—or shall we say ignorant?—than that of Daillé, which ascribed the rise of episcopacy to the third century; or that of a Dutch writer who asserts that the Ignatian letters were the work of a Cynic philosopher.

The fact is that the word scientific is used in all these cases in an absolutely incorrect manner. A scientific history is supposed to mean one the conclusions of which are in accordance with what are imagined to be the conclusions of science. A history which proves that miracles did not exist, or that evolution—a word very loosely used—will account for the rise of Christianity, is considered scientific, however incorrect its methods may be, because its conclusion is believed to be in accordance with science; an historian who is Roman catholic is supposed to be unscientific because his conclusions are unscientific. But the only true meaning of the word 'scientific' must be that of scientific method. Science never gets beyond the investigation and arrangement of facts even in its own domain; its explanations and hypotheses are not scientific, and the philosophy reared upon those explanations is as much in the air as any more credulous system. A similar criticism is suggested by the use of the word 'historical' in a school of writers who are represented in the 'Revue de l'Histoire des Religions.' Their motto is that Christianity is to be investigated like any other religion; their practice is to assume that it has already been found to have no higher claim on the human race than any other creed. Their motto is quite true, their practice is inconsistent with it, or

rather they are guilty of a confusion of thought. The only historical method of studying Christian origins is to begin by studying documents according to ordinary historical rules, without any presumptions, negative or positive. A negative prejudice is just as likely to vitiate our conclusions as a positive one.

It would be tedious to enumerate other instances at length. Dr. Hatch is claimed to be an unbiassed writer. He had indeed great claims on our respect as a very industrious investigator ; but when he states in the Hibbert Lectures that his purpose is to explain how the Nicene Creed developed out of the Sermon on the Mount he is guilty of great confusion of thought, and he sets the problem in a manner which begs the question to be discussed. There were other elements in the New Testament out of which the Nicene Creed developed, and arbitrarily to select the Sermon on the Mount as typical of the teaching of our Lord is to assume a one-sided view of the Christian revelations. The value of the book, which is considerable, is largely vitiated by this incorrect and biassed assumption. In Professor Harnack's writings a similar bias is often latent. His purpose is not an attack on Christianity, as has been unjustly supposed, but an attempt to reduce Christianity to what he believes to be its primitive simplicity, in order to take away the supposed difficulty of accepting it ; to banish, in fact, ecclesiasticism, catholicism, and the supernatural in order to preserve its spiritual significance. This is not the place to discuss the question how far legitimate or wise that aim may be ; our only purpose is to recognise the existence of a bias both positive and negative in the study of Christian history and to guard ourselves against both.

It may be thought that too much stress has been laid on this point ; but any knowledge of current criticism will correct that view. There is a very common theory that belief is biassed and unbelief is not biassed ; that if a man writes in favour of episcopacy he is prejudiced, that if he writes against it he is not so ; that no Roman catholic can see things clearly, but that most protestants can ; that if a man starts with the belief that there is nothing in Christianity he is historical, that if he assumes the latest theory of science he is scientific. But no one can claim freedom from bias. Bias is inherent in our nature. All our conclusions can be only modifications of inherited views. What a writer and an investigator can do is to make an effort to exhibit always 'good faith,' to be true to himself and to others, and to devote himself to acquiring as far as he can a scientific method. In matters of history mathematical demonstration is almost always an impossibility ; it is seldom that anything can be proved, and therefore what is essential is a trained judgment. It should acquire its method as far as possible by being trained on classical and other models ; and it should add

to that an ethical discipline. An ecclesiastical historian must have the trained habits of the scholar, and he must have the capacity of self-criticism and self-judgment. We cannot hope that every one will agree; the starting-point of many minds is too different, but the general influence of good methods of study will make agreement much more possible. It is not the most educated that differ most.

10. The second cause of the difficulty of early church history is the scantiness of the evidence in comparison with the importance of the question. The study of origins is always fascinating and always uncertain. There must always, of course, be many doubtful facts in history, because there are many events of which the true cause was not known even to contemporaries, or no contemporary written account has come down to us. With regard to Christianity, the history of its origin is certainly in a better position than that of any other religion, for we know the historical setting in which it appeared. The history of Judaism and the history and organisation of the Empire in the first century are better known than any other period in the ancient world. Even of the origin of Christianity the evidence is fuller and more certainly authentic than that of the beginnings of most similar movements. Compare, for example, what we know of the beginnings of Buddhism, and notice how slight it is. But yet on many questions to which we desire an answer the evidence is very slight, the arguments either way are not conclusive, and therefore personal bias and religious conviction will always operate strongly. Did St. John the apostle live and die in an old age at Ephesus? The arguments for it are strong, but they are not conclusive. Our opinion on the subject must almost necessarily be influenced by extraneous considerations. What is the origin of episcopacy? How easy it is when the evidence is so conflicting for the final conclusion to be the result of convictions already formed! What was the position of the bishop of Rome in the first three centuries? It is easy to state the same facts very differently, according to our bias. Different opinions in succession may seem plausible, and, as Dr. Hort is reported to have said concerning the genuineness of the Second Epistle of St. Peter, 'one reads all the arguments against its genuineness and is convinced, and then, after all, one begins to doubt one's conclusions.'

What is the best method of avoiding the uncertainty caused by this absence of conclusive evidence? Is there any way of limiting at all the personal bias? One method may be suggested as a wise one to pursue, that of advancing from the known to the unknown. The great advance in the study of Roman constitutional history has been made by working back from the known and developed constitutions of the later republican and imperial time to the earlier periods. In a similar way the only true method for the study of

church history is to start from the developed constitution and work back to the earlier period. Modern investigation has generally started from the most obscure. The real method of setting the problem should be : We know what Christianity was like in the fourth century ; we know very fairly well what it was like at the end of the second : we have to interpret the more fragmentary remains of an earlier period in a way which will explain and account for the later developments. There must be caution in such an investigation. We must be on our guard against reading the mind of the late age into the earlier : we must correct ourselves by looking at these subjects from other points of view ; but we shall at any rate arrive at a picture of the church of the apostolic age much less incongruous with its future developments than some of the theories which have been propounded.

This somewhat tedious discussion has been prolonged far enough. Its object has been to show that there has been, in spite of many inconsistencies, definite advance in the study of church history ; that this advance has arisen from the substitution of the historical for the controversial method of writing, and by applying to theological studies the scientific methods which are developed and learnt in the study of classical subjects. It will always be difficult, owing to the influence of bias, either positive or negative, and it is necessary for every one to be constantly on his guard against it in himself as well as in others. No one can claim to be free from this, and those who make the most definite assertion of their own freedom are often the least deserving of our confidence. But although he cannot be free from bias, the ecclesiastical historian can make every effort to be honest and scientific in his methods, and can trust that by the gradual progress of knowledge and the conflict of different opinions, a truer method and conclusions more certain and more largely agreed upon will be discovered. The fabric of knowledge is built up by the work of many schools and many writers, and all work, if it be true and honest, will contribute to the final result.

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