

VI. THE EPISTLE TO THE SMYRNÆANS.

[Smyrna was one of the oldest of the Greek cities on the west coast of Asia. During the first and second centuries A.D. it vied with Ephesus and Pergamos in claiming the title 'first city of Asia.' Of the foundation of the Church at Smyrna we have no record in the New Testament, but it may possibly be placed at some period during St. Paul's three years' residence at Ephesus, as it was within easy reach of that city and was a great centre of trade. We have a picture of the Church in this city in Rev. ii. 8-11. That passage contains an allusion to persecution (ii. 10), and also to the hostility and calumnies of the Jews (ii. 9). Ignatius had stayed at Smyrna and had received a warm welcome from the Church and its bishop Polycarp. The number of salutations would point to his having made many friends there. The present letter was written from Troas. The rapid transition, immediately after the opening salutation, to the subject of the Docetic heresy (cc. 1-7) seems to show that the Church at Smyrna had been endangered by its presence. Moreover in c. 7 Ignatius warns his readers against associating with these heretics. The epistle contains the most detailed account of Docetism to be found in the Ignatian writings. From c. 6 we learn that these heretics had neglected the practical duties of Christianity. From cc. 7, 8 it appears that they had formed into separatist communities (see notes). Hence the heresy is probably of a more developed character than that referred to in the epistles to the Ephesians and Trallians. There are, however, no allusions to Judaism unless we except cc. 5, 7. The opening words of c. 1 indicate that as yet the Church had remained steadfast. In cc. 7, 8 there is a strong statement of the unity of the Church. Of special interest is the occurrence for the first time in Christian literature of the phrase 'the Catholic Church']

IGNATIUS, who is also Theophorus, to the Church of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Beloved,¹ to her that has been mercifully blessed with every gift, filled with faith and love, lacking in no gift, most highly revered, the bearer of sacred vessels,² to the Church

¹ Cf. Eph. i. 6.

² ἀγιόφορος, 'fruitful in saints,' Wake, following Pearson. Probably, however, the idea is the same as in Eph. 9, and contains an

which is at Smyrna in Asia, in a blameless spirit and in the word of God heartiest greeting.

I. I render glory to Jesus Christ the God¹ Who has given you such wisdom. For I have perceived that you are firmly settled in unwavering faith, being nailed, as it were, to the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ² in flesh and spirit, and firmly planted in love in the blood of Christ, being fully convinced as touching our Lord that He is truly of the race of David after the flesh, and Son of God after the Divine will and power,³ truly born of a virgin, baptized by John, that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him,⁴ under Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch⁵ truly nailed for us in the flesh (of Whose fruit are we,⁶ even of His most blessed Passion); that

allusion to the heathen ceremonial. 'The "sacred vessels" which the Church of Smyrna bears are its Christian graces and virtues.' —LIGHTFOOT.

¹ The Armenian and Coptic versions omit the words 'the God.' On the other hand, the Greek text and the Latin version contain them, and the passage is quoted by two Fathers of the sixth century with the words inserted. On Ignatius' use of the word 'God' as applied to Jesus Christ see *Introd.* § 4.

² Cf. Gal. ii. 20. But here the idea is faith in the reality of the sufferings and death of Christ upon the Cross. Cf. *Polyc. Phil.* 7.

³ Cf. Eph. 18, note.

⁴ Cf. Matt. iii. 15.

⁵ Cf. Luke xxiii. 7-12; Acts iv. 27; and see *Introd.* p. 17.

⁶ Cf. *Trall.* 11. The Cross here, as in that passage, is represented apparently as a tree.

The words ἀφ' οὗ καρποῦ are rendered by Wake, following the Latin translator, 'by the fruits of which we are, even by His most blessed Passion,' the 'which' referring to the tree of the Cross. Zahn takes a similar construction, but refers the relative pronoun to Christ. In this case the fruit would be the Christian converts, in whom Christ 'sees of the travail of His soul,' and the meaning would be further explained by the following words, 'even of His most blessed Passion.' In illustration Zahn quotes John iv. 36, Rom. i. 13, I Cor. ix. 19 sq. This seems preferable to Lightfoot's rendering, 'from which fruit are we,' which requires us to represent Christ Himself as 'the fruit hanging upon the tree.' Possibly, however, the text is corrupt and we should read καρποί, 'of Whom we are the fruits.' This would find a parallel in a passage from

He might raise up an ensign¹ to the ages through His resurrection, for His saints and believers, whether among Jews or Gentiles, in one body of His Church.²

II. For all these sufferings He endured for our sakes [that we might be saved]. And He truly suffered, as also He truly raised Himself up.³ Nor is it the case, as some unbelievers affirm, that He suffered in semblance—it is they who are semblance.⁴ And according to their opinions, so shall it happen unto them, for they are unsubstantial and spirit-like.⁵

III. For I know⁶ and believe that He was in the flesh even after the resurrection. And when He came to

Clement of Alexandria quoted by Zahn, where the church is called 'His fruits' (*καρποί*).

The whole clause 'of whose fruit . . . Passion' is a parenthesis. The following words 'that He might raise' belong to the preceding sentence.

¹ A reference to Isaiah v. 26; cf. also xlix. 22, lxii. 10. In all these passages the reference is to the rallying of the nations round the standard of Jehovah, set up among the chosen people. Ignatius sees a fulfilment of the prophecy in the Passion crowned by the Resurrection. Jerome states that some Christian writers understood the passage Is. v. 26 to refer to the Cross. The symbolism is certainly found earlier than the time when Constantine adopted the Cross as his standard, and may have been suggested by the language of John xii. 32.

² The language of this passage clearly recalls the teaching of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. Cf. Eph. ii. 16, iii. 6, i. 23 etc.; Col. i. 18

³ In c. 6 Ignatius speaks of Christ as being raised by the Father, and this is the more general language of the N. T. But with the present passage cf. John x. 18.

⁴ Cf. Trall. 9, 10, where there is a similar play on the word *δόκησις*, 'seeming,' from which these teachers derived their name Docetæ.

⁵ The denial of the reality of the human nature of the Lord involved the denial of the resurrection of the body. There is probably an allusion to this in these last phrases. Ignatius has also in view, probably, the quotation which follows in the next chapter, 'I am not a spirit without body.'

⁶ The Latin version here reads 'I have seen' in place of 'I know.' This was probably due to a careless translation found in Jerome (*Vir. Illustr.* 16), who is plainly quoting at second-hand from Eusebius.

Peter and those who were with him, He said to them, 'Take, handle me and see that I am not a spirit without body.'¹ And straightway they touched Him and believed, being united with His flesh and spirit.² Therefore also they despised death, and were found to rise above death. Moreover after His resurrection He ate with them and drank with them,³ as living in the flesh, although spiritually united with the Father.

IV. Now these things I urge upon you, beloved, knowing that you also are thus minded. But I watch over you to guard you from wild beasts in the form of men, whom you must not only refuse to receive, but, if possible, not even meet [them]. Only pray for them, if haply they may repent. Though this⁴ is difficult, yet Jesus Christ, our true Life, has power to effect it. For if these deeds were wrought by our Lord in mere semblance, then too are my bonds mere semblance. Why moreover have I surrendered myself

¹ The incident recorded here bears a strong resemblance to that in Luke xxiv. 36-42. But there are striking differences, which show that it comes from a different source. Especially interesting is the phrase 'an incorporeal spirit,' whereas St. Luke has 'a spirit hath not flesh and bones.' Whether Ignatius derived the quotation from some apocryphal Gospel or from tradition, it is difficult to say. Eusebius quotes this passage of Ignatius (*H. E.* iii. 36), but admits his ignorance of the source of it. The words are ascribed by Origen to the apocryphal 'Doctrine of Peter,' and by Jerome to the Gospel according to the Hebrews. In any case the words would appear to represent a later tradition than the simpler and more natural words of St. Luke.

² Reading 'spirit' with the Greek text and the Latin and Coptic versions. The Armenian version, however, reads 'blood,' which Lightfoot prefers. Against the argument (see Lightfoot) that 'spirit' might easily be substituted for 'blood,' may be set the counter-argument that the difficulty of understanding how the disciples could be 'joined to His Spirit' may have led to the alteration 'blood.' The invitation to feel the nail-prints might suggest the word 'blood.' On the other hand it is possible that Ignatius had in mind John xx. 20-22 and the incident of the gift of the Spirit of the risen Christ.

³ Luke xxiv. 30, 35, 42; John xxi. 13.

⁴ *i. e.* their repentance.

to death, to face fire, sword, wild beasts? Yet he that is near to the sword is near to God,¹ in the presence of wild beasts, in the presence of God—only may it be in the name of Jesus Christ, that we may suffer with Him. All things I endure,² since He, the perfect Man, makes me strong.³

V. Yet Him certain persons ignorantly deny, or rather they have been denied by Him,⁴ for they are advocates of death⁵ rather than of the truth. They have not hearkened unto the prophecies nor the law of Moses,⁶ nor even up till now to the Gospel, nor to the sufferings which we severally endure.⁷ For they have the same thoughts also about us.⁸ For what profit is it to me, if a man praises me, but speaks evil of my Lord, refusing to confess that He has borne our flesh? But he that will not assert this has completely denied Him, and himself bears about with him a corpse.⁹ Now their names, since they are unbelievers, I have not thought good to write. May I not even remember them, until they have repented and turned to the Passion, which is our resurrection.

¹ Cf. a saying attributed to our Lord, recorded by Didymus on Ps. lxxxviii. 8: 'He who is near Me is near the fire, he that is afar from Me is far from the Kingdom.'

² Cf. 2 Tim. ii. 10.

³ Cf. Phil. iv. 13.

⁴ Cf. 2 Tim. ii. 12; Gal. iv. 9.

⁵ That is, by denying Christ's death and resurrection they deny the Christian hope of immortality.

⁶ This need not refer to Judaistic teaching, but may equally well be said of any error which ignored the testimony of the prophets and the facts of the Lord's life. For the Christian attitude to Old Testament prophecy see Magn. 9, Philad. 5, 8, 9.

⁷ Their sufferings are a testimony to Christ's death and resurrection.

⁸ Cf. c. 4. Their view of Christ's death and resurrection leads them to think of Christ's martyrs as idle visionaries.

⁹ See note above on c. 2. According to their teaching the body which they bore about with them was already practically a corpse, since they had undermined the belief in the resurrection.

VI. Let no man be deceived. Even the heavenly powers and the glory of the angels and the principalities both visible and invisible,¹ except they believe in the blood of Christ [Who is God],² have a judgment awaiting them. *Let him that receiveth receive.*³ Let not office puff up any man. For faith and love are everything, and there is nothing better than these. Mark those who hold strange doctrine with regard to the grace⁴ of Jesus Christ, which came unto us, how opposed they are to the mind of God. They have no thought for love, nor for the widow,⁵ the orphan, the afflicted, the prisoner,⁶ the hungry nor the thirsty. They withhold themselves from Eucharist⁷ and prayer, because they confess not⁸ that the Eucharist is the

¹ Cf. Trall. 5 with notes.

² The words in brackets are found apparently in two quotations of this passage in writers of the fifth and sixth centuries, but they are omitted by the Greek text and the Latin, Armenian, and Coptic versions. Against their genuineness is the fact that Ignatius never speaks of Christ as 'God' in this absolute way. See *Intro.* § 4.

³ Matt. xix. 12.

⁴ χάρις, 'the gift of Christ's incarnation and passion.'—LIGHT-FOOT.

⁵ For the 'order' of widows see 1 Tim. v. 9 and cf. Acts vi. 1, ix. 41; see also Polyc. 4. From early times the Church organized with the greatest care her benevolent work. About 250 A.D. Cornelius claimed that in the Church of Rome there were 'fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress, all of whom the grace and kindness of the Master nourish' (Euseb. *H.E.* vi. 43).

⁶ Cf. Heb. x. 34. The Greek text and the Latin version add after 'prisoner' the words 'or him that has been released.' But they are probably spurious.

⁷ On the word 'Eucharist' see Philad. 4 note. By 'abstaining from Eucharist' Ignatius means that they abstained from the authorized, public Eucharist of the Church. None of the Gnostic sects appear to have altogether ceased from holding Eucharistic feasts in their own assemblies. But according to Ignatius such Eucharists would not be regular or 'valid.' See c. 8.

The prayer refers to the public prayer of the Church, especially that connected with the Eucharist.

⁸ The reality of Christ's humanity was denied by these heretics.

flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which flesh suffered for our sins, and which in His loving-kindness the Father raised up.

VII. So then they who speak against the gift of God¹ die by their disputing. It were better for them to exhibit love, that they may also rise again. Therefore it is fitting to withhold yourselves from such, and to say nothing either in private or in public about them, but rather to give heed unto the prophets,² and especially to the Gospel, wherein the passion is manifested to us and the resurrection is accomplished.

VIII. Avoid divisions,³ as the beginning of evil. Follow, all of you, the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father; and follow the presbytery as the Apostles.⁴ Moreover reverence the deacons as the commandment of God.⁵ Let no man do aught pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop. Let that eucharist be considered valid⁶ which is under the bishop or him to whom he commits it. Wheresoever the bishop appears, there let the people be, even as wheresoever Christ

Such denial involved a disbelief in the virtue of the Sacrament which was a means of communion with the divinely exalted humanity of Christ. Cf. the language of John vi. Similarly Irenæus argues that the Gnostics are inconsistent in offering the Eucharistic gifts, holding such views as they do upon the human nature of Christ (Iren. iv. 18. 5).

¹ That is, the Incarnation and its issues, including a reference to the Eucharist.

² Cf. above, c. 5, and Philad. 5, 9.

³ Ignatius here warns them against separatism, as above he has been warning them against heresy. The Docetæ were guilty of both.

⁴ Cf. *antea*, Magn. 6, 7, 13; Trall. 2, 3.

⁵ *i. e.* 'as the voice of God enjoining you.'—LIGHTFOOT.

⁶ The word translated 'valid' (*βέβαιος*) is found in Rom. iv. 16, Heb. ii. 2, ix. 17, and also in Ign. *Rom.* 3. It expresses the idea of security, and is used of the ratification of a promise or the validity of a covenant. It is the opposite of that which is precarious and insecure. Ignatius emphasizes the sacramental, no less than the doctrinal, unity of the Church. Cf. his language on the 'one altar' in Magn. 7, Philad. 4, and see *Introd.* § 4.

Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church.¹ It is not lawful apart from the bishop either to baptize² or to hold a love-feast.³ But whatsoever he approves, that also is

¹ 'The bishop, argues Ignatius, is the centre of each individual Church, as Jesus Christ is the centre of the universal Church.'—LIGHTFOOT.

This is the earliest occurrence in Christian literature of the phrase 'the Catholic Church' (ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία). The original sense of the word is 'universal.' Thus Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 82) speaks of the 'universal or general resurrection,' using the words ἡ καθολικὴ ἀνάστασις. Similarly here the Church universal is contrasted with the particular Church of Smyrna. Ignatius means by the Catholic Church 'the aggregate of all the Christian congregations' (Swete, *Apostles' Creed*, p. 76). So too the letter of the Church of Smyrna is addressed 'to all the congregations of the Holy Catholic Church in every place.' And this primitive sense of universal¹ the word has never lost, although in the latter part of the second century it began to receive the secondary sense of 'orthodox' as opposed to 'heretical.' Thus it is used in an early Canon of Scripture, the Muratorian fragment (*circa* 190–210 A.D.), which refers to certain heretical writings as 'not received in the Catholic Church.' So too Cyril of Jerusalem, in the fourth century, says that the Church is called Catholic not only 'because it is spread throughout the world,' but also 'because it teaches completely and without defect all the doctrines which ought to come to the knowledge of men.' This secondary sense arose out of the original meaning because Catholics claimed to teach the whole truth, and to represent the whole Church, while heresy arose out of the exaggeration of some one truth and was essentially partial and local. The use of the word in this passage by Ignatius has been urged as an indication of the late date of the epistles. But the fact that it is used in its primary sense is on the contrary an indication of early date.

² Ignatius is writing at a time when the extent of a bishop's administration did not exceed that of a town parish at the present day, and when the clergy worked in much closer connection with him than is possible now. (See note, Rom. 2.) The principle underlying his statement, however, is the general necessity of due authorization of ministerial acts by the bishop.

³ ἀγάπην. The earliest use of the word in this sense is Jude 12 (cf. 2 Pet. ii. 13, where ἀγάπαις is read by some MSS. in place of ἀπάταις, 'deceivings'). The name was given to the social meals, in which the early Church sought to give expression to the unity and brotherly love of its members. There are analogies to the custom in Jewish life and in the club feasts of Greek and Roman life. The fact that our Lord instituted the Eucharist in connection with a common meal may explain the association of the two at Corinth in the time of St. Paul (1 Cor. xi. 17 f.), though the name Agapé

well-pleasing to God, that everything which you do may be secure and valid.

IX. It is reasonable that henceforth we should awake and live soberly,¹ while we have opportunity to repent and turn to God. It is good to acknowledge God and the bishop. He that honours the bishop is honoured of God. He that does anything without the knowledge of the bishop serves the Devil. Let all things then abound unto you in grace, for you are worthy. In

is not found in that passage. Some scholars have seen a similar combination of Eucharist and Agapé in the *Didachē* (cc. ix, x), though others refer the account there given to the Eucharist alone, the Agapé being mentioned in c. xi.

Lightfoot thinks that in the present passage Ignatius includes the Eucharist in the Agapé, since he appears to describe the two most important functions in which a bishop could bear a part, and it is difficult to explain the omission of the Eucharist, if it is not included in the phrase. Hence he argues that in the time of Ignatius the separation of the two had not yet taken place (see *Introd.* p. 18). But this argument is weakened by the fact that the connection of the bishop with the Eucharist has already been sufficiently indicated in what precedes. In the almost contemporary letter of Pliny to Trajan (c. 112 A.D.), after describing how the Christians met before daylight and sang a hymn to Christ as God and bound themselves by an oath (*sacramento*) to live a strict life, the writer goes on: 'After this was done, their custom was to depart and meet again to take food, which was, however, quite ordinary and harmless.' In this description Lightfoot sees a reference to the celebration of the Eucharist (*sacramentum* may mean 'oath' or 'sacrament') before daylight followed by a later meeting for the Agapé, and he argues that in Bithynia the two were at this date distinct. But the early history of the Agapé is involved in great obscurity, and the problem of its connection with the Eucharist is the more difficult owing to the sacred character given to other meals than the Eucharist in early Christian times, and the fact that religious exercises were associated with them. See *e.g.* the description of an evening meal (which appears to have been an Agapé) in Tertullian, *Apology*, c. 39, and the account of the Service of the Evening Lamp in the so-called Egyptian Church Order (attributed by some recent scholars to Hippolytus) in Horner, *Statutes of the Apostles*, pp. 188 f. On the whole question see Bishop Maclean, art. 'Agapé' in Hastings' *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*.

¹ Cf. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

every way you have refreshed me, and Jesus Christ shall refresh you. Alike in my absence and presence you have cherished me. May God reward you, and as you endure for His sake, so shall you attain unto Him.

X. You did well in receiving as ministers of [Christ Who is]¹ God, Philo and Rhaius Agathopus, who accompanied me for the sake of God; who also give thanks unto the Lord for you, because you refreshed them in every way. You shall surely lose nothing. My spirit devotes itself for you,² as also my bonds which you did not scorn, and of which you were not ashamed. Nor shall He be ashamed of you, Who is perfect faithfulness, Jesus Christ.

XI Your prayer has gone forth unto the Church which is at Antioch in Syria. From thence I come, bound with the godly adornment of these chains, and I salute you, not as though I am worthy to belong to that Church, since I am the very last among them. In accordance with the will of God I have been deemed worthy, not of my own conscious act, but by God's grace, which I pray may be given to me completely, that by your prayer I may attain unto God. In order then that your work may be made complete, on earth as well as in Heaven, it is fitting that your Church should appoint for the honour of God an ambassador of God,³ to visit Syria and congratulate them because they are at peace and have received again their proper stature,⁴ and have had restored to them the proper measure of their body.⁵ It seemed then to me a

¹ Probably these words are corrupt.

² Cf. Polyc. 2 and Eph. 21 (note).

³ Cf. Philad. 10, and the fuller account in Polyc. 7.

⁴ The Church had been diminished by the effects of persecution.

⁵ In this and in the preceding phrase the Church at Antioch is compared to a fully developed human body, which for a time had been attenuated by persecution. The word *σωματεῖον*, translated

worthy act for you to send some one of your number with a letter, to give glory with them for the calm which by God's appointment has set in for them, and because through your prayer they were now reaching the haven. Inasmuch as you are perfect, set your aims also on that which is perfect.¹ For if you desire to act well, God is ready to aid you.

XII. The love of the brethren who are at Troas salutes you. Hence also I am writing to you by the hand of Burrhus,² whom you sent in my company together with the Ephesians your brethren. In everything he has refreshed me. And I would that all imitated him, for he is a pattern of the ministry of God. The Divine grace shall wholly requite him. I salute your godly bishop and revered presbytery, and my fellow-servants the deacons, and all of you both individually and in common, in the name of Jesus Christ, and in His flesh and blood, in His Passion and Resurrection which was both of the flesh and spirit, in the unity³ wherewith God binds you all. Grace, mercy, peace, patience be unto you always.

XIII. I salute the households of my brethren with their wives and children, and the virgins who are called widows.⁴ I bid you farewell in the power of the Father.

'the measure of their body,' is found in Eusebius, *H.E.* x. 5 and in the Code of Justinian in the legal sense of 'a body corporate.'

¹ *i. e.* to fulfil the 'work' referred to above.

² On the question whether this refers to the scribe or the bearer of the epistle see Rom. 10, Philad. 11 (notes).

³ Notice how Ignatius sums up in this sentence the warnings contained in this epistle. The mention of the resurrection as being 'of both flesh and spirit' is an allusion to Docetic views. The mention of 'unity' is an allusion to the separatism of the heretics.

⁴ There have been several interpretations of these words. The most convincing is that of Lighfoot. According to him the words refer to those women who, 'though by name and in outward condition they are widows,' yet are here called virgins, because they

Philo, my companion, salutes you. I salute the household of Gavia, and pray that she may be established in faith and love both in flesh and spirit. I salute Alce,¹ a name dear to me, and the excellent Daphnus and Eutecnus and all by name. Farewell in the grace of God.

are 'such in God's sight by their purity and devotion.' There is an allusion to the order of widows, on which see note, c. 6.

¹ Cf. Polyc. 8, and also the letter of the Church of Smyrna, c. 17, where the same name is found. Both passages may refer to the same person.