

### III. THE EPISTLE TO THE TRALLIANS

[Tralles was situated on the high-road which passes from Ephesus through Magnesia and Laodicea to the East. It was about seventeen or eighteen miles from Magnesia, which is almost midway between Ephesus and Tralles. Like Magnesia, Tralles probably owed its Christianity to the preaching of St. Paul's disciples. The Trallians had sent their bishop to meet Ignatius at Smyrna, and he writes to thank them. He takes occasion to warn them against false teaching and separatism, without, however, accusing them personally of these errors. The main part of the epistle (cc. 6—11) contains a strong protest against a Docetic error, of which we see a more strongly-developed form in the heresy attacked in the Epistle to the Smyrnæans. At the same time he urges upon them the duty of outward unity and obedience to their Church officers, as their best security against error. Of special interest in this connection are cc. 3, 7. There is no mention of the Judaic error condemned in the Epistle to the Magnesians.]

IGNATIUS, who is also Theophorus, to her that is beloved by God, the Father of Jesus Christ, to the holy Church which is at Tralles in Asia,<sup>1</sup> elect and worthy of God, having peace in flesh and spirit<sup>2</sup> through the passion of Jesus Christ, Who is our hope through the resurrection unto Him; which Church I salute in the fulness of God, after the Apostolic manner,<sup>3</sup> and bid her heartiest greeting.

I. I have learned that you exhibit a mind which is blameless and unwavering in patient endurance, not from habit but naturally. For so your bishop, Polybius,

<sup>1</sup> *i. e.* the Roman province of Asia.

<sup>2</sup> The text is in some confusion, the Greek text and Armenian Versions reading 'blood' for 'spirit.' Probably, however, the longer Greek recension has preserved the correct reading, 'spirit.' The Armenian version omits 'through the passion.' This would give the sense 'being at peace through faith in, and union with, the flesh and spirit of Jesus Christ.'

<sup>3</sup> *i. e.* in the Apostolic epistles.

has informed me, who by the will of God and Jesus Christ has been with me at Smyrna, and has so greatly shared my joy in my bonds in Christ Jesus, that in him I beheld your whole number. So then I welcomed your godly kindness manifested through him, and gave glory to God, when I found you to be, as I had learned, followers of God.

II. For whenever you are subject to the bishop as unto Jesus Christ, you appear to me to be living not the ordinary life of men, but after the manner of the life of Jesus Christ,<sup>1</sup> Who died for our sakes, that believing in His death you might escape death. It is necessary therefore that you should act, as indeed you do, in nothing without the bishop. But be subject also to the presbytery,<sup>2</sup> as unto the Apostles of Jesus Christ our Hope. For if we live in Him we shall be found [in Him].<sup>3</sup> Those, too, who are deacons of the mysteries<sup>4</sup> of Jesus Christ must in every way be pleasing unto all. For they are not deacons of meats and drinks,<sup>5</sup> but are servants of the Church of God. So then they must be on their guard against blame<sup>6</sup> as against fire.

III. In like manner<sup>7</sup> let all reverence the deacons as

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Magn. 7.      <sup>2</sup> On this comparison see note on Magn. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Lightfoot's reading has been followed.

<sup>4</sup> This probably refers to their work as teachers, rather than to their assistance at the Eucharist. St. Paul similarly uses 'mystery' in the sense of a revealed truth. (Cf. *e. g.* Rom. xvi. 25.) The passage which follows treats of the duties of the deacon's office, not of the respect which is due to him.

<sup>5</sup> The original duties of the deacon's office (Acts vi. 2) involved a considerable amount of attention to mere external business, such as the distribution of alms. Yet there was a higher aspect of the office, as from the first we find the deacons engaged in teaching (cf. Acts viii.). It is this higher aspect which Ignatius emphasizes.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. I Tim. iii. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *i. e.* there must be mutual consideration. The deacon must regard the people's wishes; the people must respect the deacon's office.

Jesus Christ,<sup>1</sup> as also the bishop, [regarding him] as a type of the Father,<sup>2</sup> and the presbyters as the Council of God and the band of the Apostles.<sup>3</sup> Without these there is no church deserving of the name.<sup>4</sup> Concerning these matters I am persuaded that you are thus disposed. For I have received, and still have with me, in the person of your bishop, the pattern of your love. His very demeanour is a striking lesson, and his gentleness is power—a man whom I think even those who are without God revere. It is for love of you that I thus refrain, although I might have spoken of this with greater urgency. But I thought not myself sufficient for this task of enjoining you, condemned man that I am, as though I were an apostle.

IV. I have many thoughts in God. But I keep myself within bounds, that my boasting may not prove my ruin. For now must I needs fear the more, and not give heed unto them that are puffing me up. For they who speak to me<sup>5</sup> act as a scourge to me. For I welcome suffering, yet I know not whether I am worthy.

<sup>1</sup> On this comparison cf. Magn. 6, note. Ignatius is thinking of the relation to the Father of Jesus Christ as Son of Man, 'Who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister' (Matt. xx. 28).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Magn. 6, note. The whole passage from 'deacons' to 'Father' exhibits great variation of text. In the first clause the Latin Version reads 'as the commandment of Jesus Christ.' In place of the word 'type,' which is read by the Syriac version and the longer Greek recension, the Greek text and Latin version read 'Son.'

<sup>3</sup> For the ideas which suggested this twofold comparison of the presbyters, see Magn. 6, note. The word 'council' is suggested by the arrangements of the churches in early times, while the word 'band' is suggested by the earthly ministry of the Lord and His Apostles.

<sup>4</sup> On the Ignatian conception of the ministry and the unity of the Church, see *Intro.* § 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ignatius suppresses the flattering words which he fears may 'puff him up.' It is possible, however, that some words may have fallen out.

For the envy of Satan is not visible to the eyes of many,<sup>1</sup> but it makes war on me [the more]. I desire therefore gentleness, by which the prince of this world<sup>2</sup> is overthrown.

V. Am I not able to write unto you heavenly things? But I fear lest I may inflict harm upon you, since you are babes.<sup>3</sup> Indeed bear with me, lest being unable to contain them, you be choked. For even though I am in bonds and am able to understand<sup>4</sup> heavenly things and the ordering of angels and the musterings of heavenly rulers, things visible and invisible, yet am I not thereby already a disciple. For we suffer lack of many things, that we may not come short of God.

VI. I urge you therefore, yet not I, but the love of Jesus Christ, use only Christian food, and abstain from strange herbage,<sup>5</sup> which is heresy. For they even mingle poison<sup>6</sup> with Jesus Christ, imposing on men by their false professions of honesty, giving as it were a deadly drug along with honied wine, and he that is ignorant of this fearlessly drinks in death with fatal pleasure.

VII. Be on your guard then against such persons. And this will be, if you are not puffed up, and if you are inseparable from [God, even] Jesus Christ and the bishop and the commandments of the Apostles.<sup>7</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* those who were seeking to procure a respite. (Cf. Rom. 7.)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Eph. 17, note.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2.

<sup>4</sup> The interest in angelology was a characteristic of the Jews in the apostolic and post-apostolic ages. From them it spread to Judaizing Christians and to Christians generally. Cf. Eph. 1. 20, 21, Col. i. 16, ii. 18. Cf. Smyrn. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Eph. 10, Philad. 3.

<sup>6</sup> The text is corrupt. The longer Greek recension suggests the emended reading which has been here translated. The metaphor is that of a physician who infuses poison into his drugs, and disguises them by giving to them a sweet flavour.

<sup>7</sup> In these last words Lightfoot sees a reference to the institution



that is within the precincts of the altar<sup>1</sup> is pure, he that is without the precincts of the altar is not pure. That is, he who acts in anything apart from the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons is not pure in conscience.

VIII. I write not this, because I have learned that any such evil has happened among you, but I keep guard over you beforehand, since you are my beloved, and I foresee the snares of the devil. Take up then the armour of gentleness and renew yourselves in faith,<sup>2</sup> which is the flesh of the Lord, and in love, which is the blood of Jesus Christ. Let no one among you have aught against his neighbour. Give not occasion to the heathen, that the godly multitude be not evil spoken of on account of a few foolish men. For, '*Woe*<sup>3</sup> *unto him through whom My Name is idly blasphemed before some.*'

IX. Stop your ears then when any one speaks unto you apart from Jesus Christ, Who is of the race of

of the episcopate. An early tradition found in Clement of Alexandria (*Quis dives salvetur*, c. 42) and Tertullian (*adv. Marc.* iv. 5) attributes the establishment of episcopacy in Asia Minor to St. John. Irenæus (iii. 3, 4) says of Polycarp that he was appointed by apostles as bishop of the Church in Smyrna, certainly meaning to include St. John in the word 'apostles.' See Lightfoot, *Philippians*, p. 212.

<sup>1</sup> See note Eph. 5. The figure is derived from the Jewish tabernacle or temple. The man who cuts himself off from the congregation of the faithful and the common sacrifices becomes as a Gentile and outcast (Cf. Matt. xviii. 17). The congregation is here represented as gathered together under its proper officers.

<sup>2</sup> Faith is said to be the flesh of Christ, because it identifies itself with the incarnate Christ, and rests upon the facts of His outward manifestation (cf. Philad. 5). Love is said to be the blood of Christ, because Christ's death and sacrifice are the crowning expression of love, and the life which results from them is a life of love. Cf. Rom. 7. The words 'flesh' and 'blood' are doubtless suggested by the Eucharist both here and in Philad. 5. There is a somewhat similar mystical application of the words 'flesh and blood' in Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* i. 6.

<sup>3</sup> A free quotation of Isaiah lii. 5. The words are quoted in the same form in Polyc., *Phil.* 10.

David, the child of Mary, Who was truly<sup>1</sup> born, and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died, before the eyes of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth ;<sup>2</sup> Who also was truly raised from the dead, since His Father raised Him up, Who in like manner will also raise up us who believe on Him—even His Father will raise us in Christ Jesus, apart from Whom we have not that life which is life indeed.

X. But if it be, as some godless men, that is, un'believers, assert, that He suffered in semblance—it is they who are semblance<sup>3</sup>—why am I in bonds? Why moreover do I pray that I may fight with the wild beasts?<sup>4</sup> Then I die for naught. Then I lie against the Lord.

XI. Flee therefore those evil offshoots which bear deadly fruit, whereof if a man taste, he straightway dies. For these are not a planting of the Father.<sup>5</sup> For if they were, they would have been seen to be branches of the Cross,<sup>6</sup> and their fruit would have been incorruptible.

<sup>1</sup> Docetism denied the reality of Christ's human life and sufferings. To these heretics it seemed impossible to believe that God could have come into such close contact with matter as was involved in the Incarnation. Hence the outward, earthly manifestation of Christ was explained away as an apparition. This explains Ignatius' insistence on the reality of the birth, passion and resurrection of the Lord. The word 'truly' is a watchword in this connection. (See Add. Note 1.)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Phil. ii. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Smyrn. 2, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. I Cor. xv. 32. The whole passage is modelled on St. Paul's words.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matt. xv. 13.

<sup>6</sup> For the metaphor, cf. Smyrn. 1. 'The symbolism of the tree of life planted in Paradise, as referring to the Cross of Christ, dates from a very early time.'—LIGHTFOOT. The language of Rev. xxii. 1, 2, would render the application easy. The fine hymn, attributed to Venantius Fortunatus, 'Pange lingua gloriosi,' exhibits the same imagery, and contains an allusion to the tradition that the tree from

For through His Cross by His Passion He calls us unto Him, being His members. It is not possible then that a head should be born without members,<sup>1</sup> since God promises union, which union is Himself.

XII. I salute you from Smyrna, together with the Churches of God now present<sup>2</sup> with me, men who have refreshed me in every way both in flesh and spirit. My bonds exhort you, which I wear for Jesus Christ's sake, asking that I may attain unto God. Abide in your concord and in your prayer with one another. For it is meet that you should severally, and especially the presbyters, refresh the bishop to the honour of the Father and [to the honour] of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. I pray that you may give heed to me in love, lest by having written unto you I become a testimony against you. Moreover, pray for me too, for I have need of your love in the mercy of God, that I may be deemed worthy of the lot which I eagerly press on<sup>3</sup> to attain, that I be not found reprobate.

XIII. The love of the Smyrnæans and the Ephesians salutes you. Remember in your prayers the Church in

which the Cross was taken sprang from the seed of the Tree of Life.

De parentis protoplasti  
Fraude facta condolens,  
Quando pomi noxialis  
Morsu in mortem corrui,  
Ipse lignum tunc notavit  
Damna ligni ut solveret.

<sup>1</sup> The denial of the Passion by these heretics cut them off from Christ and from the Divine ideal of unity appointed by God through the Cross. Ignatius is full of the thought and language of St. Paul, and especially of the Epistle to the Ephesians. (Cf. also John xvii. 21—23.)

<sup>2</sup> *i. e.* present in the persons of their representatives. (Cf. Eph. I, Magn. 2.)

<sup>3</sup> The rendering given follows the text of Lightfoot, who adopts Bunsen's emendation, reading *ἐγκειμαι* for *περίκειμαι*. With the latter reading the meaning is, 'to obtain the lot with which I am invested.'

14 Syria, whereof I am not worthy to be called a member, since I am the very last of them. Farewell in Jesus Christ, submitting to the bishop as unto the commandment,<sup>1</sup> likewise also to the presbytery, and severally love one another with an undivided heart. My spirit devotes itself for you,<sup>2</sup> not only now but also whenever I attain unto God. For I am still in danger.<sup>3</sup> But the Father is faithful in Jesus Christ to fulfil my petition and yours. In Him may we be found blameless.

<sup>1</sup> Used absolutely for God's commandment. They are to obey the bishop as they are to obey God.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Eph. 8, note.

<sup>3</sup> He still fears that his own weakness, or the efforts of others to procure his respite, may rob him of the martyr's crown.