

An
HISTORICAL DISCOURSE
on the
APOCALYPSE¹

The Canon of the books of the New Testament formed as it were casually and irregularly by the zeal of individuals. The bad effect of this liberty. A diversity of sentiments concerning several Epistles. The Apocalypse, a proof of the irregularity with which the Canon of the New Testament was formed.

SECT. 1.

It ought not to be imagined that the canon of the sacred books, such as we now have it, was formed all at once in the days of the apostles. The first books, which came to the knowledge of the Christians, were undoubtedly the Gospels; then the Epistles, some sooner, others later. The churches to which they had been written communicated them reciprocally to one another the Romans to the Corinthians, the Corinthians to the Romans, and this was the case of *[illegible]* in proportion as an intercommunity *[illegible]* Christians enlarged. No shadow appears *[illegible]* a council or a pope, or of foreign *[illegible]*, which settled the canon of the scriptures. This was the work of time. Today, they added one book; tomorrow, another, “and this was done, says M. Basnage², by certain individuals, who finding a composition conducive to piety, produced it to their church; and, adds he, they ever gave themselves such a liberty on this head, that they numbered among the canonical books, writings that were manifestly superstitious. The churches were divided in their sentiments, as well as individuals. Some rejected a book at the same time that others adopted it. They contested, they examined efore they admitted. The second Epistle of St. Peter was not at first in the canon: several, says Eusebius, judged it useful, and they began to read it very carefully. He asserts the same with regard to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude. Very few of the ancients have spoken of these two compositions as divine. Some churches determined to read them. Hesitation continued a long time, but at last it was abolished. St. Jerom also says of the Epistle of St. James, that it had acquired its authority gradually in a succession of time. The Epistle to the Hebrews, the second and third of St. John, became canonical in the same manner. Thus it was that the canon of scripture perfected itself in an insensible manner. This appears with greater clearness from the history we are going to give on the Apocalypse, and of the contradictions it hath experienced.

Sect 2. Of all the writings which we composed immediately after those of the apostles, none remains to us but the first Epistle of St. Clement Romanus, which is the production of a very ancient writer, the book of Hermas, the Epistles which bear the name of Ignatius, with that of Polycarp.

Sect. 3. *Silence of Writers.*

In all these compositions we perceive no trace of the Apocalypse. It is true, their silence does not conclude against this book in particular, since neither have they spoken of the four gospels, or of the greatest part of the books of the New Testament.

Sect 4. *Suppositions of Prochorus.*

The false Prochorus, who styled himself a disciple of the apostles, knew it much better: and this is what

1 The following treatise was drawn up at the request of William Burnet, esq. Governor of New York, at the time when several literati in England applied themselves to the study of the Apocalypse.

2 History of the Church, book viii.

he relates concerning the life of St. John. This apostle acquainted the Christians of Ephesus, that he had revelation of Jesus Christ. They begged him to commit it to writing. The apostle dictated his gospel to Prochorus in the midst of lightnings, thunders, and earthquakes. Afterwards he wrote his Apocalypse with his own hand, as if he had set a greater value upon it than upon his gospel. But the pretended Prochorus, who here inserts himself among the agents on this occasion, was one of those honest Christians who sported with the credulity of the public, and, who decorating themselves with an excessive zeal for religion, did not even hide their derision under the mask of a heathen probity. His book is full of fables and absurdities. The term *hypostasis*, *consubstantial*, and others of the fame nature, sufficiently mark the time when it was fabricated.

Sect 5. *Cerinthus suspected of being author of the Apocalypse*

After the death of the apostles³ appeared Cerinthus, a man infatuated with the notion of the temporal kingdom of a thousand years. This was an opinion which came originally from the Jews, and spread among the Christians. He founded his hypothesis upon the Apocalypse, which he maintained to be the work of St. John. But what reason soever he had to talk in this manner, several orthodox Christians did not fail to suspect him of being the father of this production himself, because it appeared to them that this work favoured the reign of a thousand years, as we shall see hereafter.

Sect 6. *Other heretics against the Apocalypse*

In the meantime other heretics, Cerdon and Marcion, as Tertullian informs us⁴, and even the Alogiens⁵, according to Epiphanius, rose up against the Apocalypse, which they asserted was not written by St. John, because, among other reasons which they alleged, they said, in the time of this apostle there was no Christian church in Tyatira. This Epiphanius frankly allows them, and at the same time supposes, that when St. John writes to the church of Thyatira, he speaks not as if it was then existing, but by the spirit of prophecy.

Sect 7. See then on the subject of the Apocalypse, heretics against heretics, while the orthodox as yet did not intermeddle in the question. At least we are entirely ignorant in what light they regarded this dispute.

Sect 8. *Justin Martyr, the first advocate for the Apocalypse.*

Justin Martyr, who wrote about the year 170 of Christ, is the first of our divines, who hath made mention of the Apocalypse and what is remarkable is, he attributes it to the apostle St. John. In his Dialogue with Trypho, this Jew asks him, if he thought Jerusalem would one day be rebuilt? Justin answers, that with regard to himself, he believed it would, as all the Christians too believed who thought justly, and adds "There was amongst us a certain person called John, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ he hath predicted in his Apocalypse, that the faithful shall dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem." This is the only time that Justin cites the Apocalypse in his works, and he cites it to prove the reign of a thousand years.

Sect. 9. It does not appear by the expressions of this Divine, that it was then received in all the churches he seems here only to offer his own particular opinion, or at most the opinion of those Christians who thought justly on this subject, that is, who believed the reign of a thousand years. But it cannot be doubted but he cites of his own head a false gospel, when he says in this very Dialogue, "that upon Jesus going down into Jordan, a fire was kindled there, and they heard this voice from heaven, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*" He asserts that the apostles, *wrote these things*, which however

3 Eusebius Hist. Lib. in. cap. 28. and lib. Vii. Cap. 25

4 Tertullian contra Marcionem, lib. iv.

5 Epiphanius Haeres, 51.

are not found but only in the gospel of the Ebionites.

Sect. 10. *His Character.*

Not that he gave himself no trouble to be informed of the truth of facts. He had traveled a great deal, not as a common person, but as a curious antiquarian. We owe to him the tripod of the old sibyl of Cumae, the three large and beautiful tubs in which she bathed, the sepulchre where her remains were deposited, and the books in which she spake of Jesus Christ. A new subject of banter and derision to the Heathens, who treated the Christians as *Sibyllists*, to who Justin Martyr does not fail to address this grave admonition⁶ “O Greeks, give credit to the old venerable Sibyl, whose books are spread throughout the world, and who was inspired in an extraordinary manner by the Almighty.” He declares his own firm persuasion of the truth of the story of the LXX translators of the Bible, and of their divine version which they made in the time of king Herod, of the seventy cells where every one separately translated; and of their most wonderful agreement even in the smallest particles. Every circumstance of which Jerom treats as fabulous, but on which our Divine insists in favour of religion “Do not imagine, O Greeks, that what we now tell you is a story framed at pleasure. I myself saw, in the Pharos of Alexandria, the vestiges of those little mansions.” Now was not this a demonstration, that the LXX. Translators who were shut up in these apartments were really inspired? The statue erected by the Romans to Simon Magus, with an inscription that enrolls him among the gods; though in the judgment of those antiquarians who have seen it, Justin unfortunately read *Simon* instead of *Semon*, a god of the Sabines, is another discovery resulting from these researches, worthy such a philosopher as Justin Martyr. And is not this a specimen of what his genius would have done, if he had employed it in the Apocalypse?

Sect. 11. *Irenaeus, the second advocate.*

Irenaeus, who flourished afterwards, often quotes⁷ it under the name of John, the disciple of our Lord. He was of a different character from Justin, and the strength of testimony almost entirely depends on the qualities of the witness. Justin visited places in person, he chose to see things with his own eyes, though his sight was not the acutest in the world. Irenaeus, on the contrary, only saw with the eyes of others. To authenticate what he says, he scarce ever produces any thing but the tradition or testimony of a certain old man whom he never knew, and whose memory old age had unquestionable impaired, otherwise, among other fables, he never would have asserted that Jesus Christ died in the fiftieth year of his age, in order that he might pass through all the various stages of life and sanctify them. However, Irenaeus does not fail to avail himself of the Apocalypse towards the end of his third book, where, he endeavours to establish the reign of a thousand years. And in this very place he establishes his opinion also on the prophecy of Baruch as a book of sacred scripture. This approbation which he gives to the Apocalypse, would undoubtedly have great weight, if he did not allow the same authority to the Apocryphal books. *The scripture hath declared*, says he, but after this solemn beginning we find that this scripture is in a passage of Hermas, a book cited as canonical by the ancients. The book of Hermas appears at first sight not unlike the Apocalypse, only that one begins with marality and ends with vision, whilst the other begins with visions and ends with morality.

Sect. 12. Besides, it is not manifest from Irenaeus that the Apocalypse was received by all the Christians of his time. We meet only with simple allegations of passages, without his telling us how he knew that it was composed by St. John, or even what his old man thought of it, whom he often introduces, and for things of much less importance.

Sect. 13. But one may judge what he was capable of doing on this subject, by the method which he

⁶ Admonit ad Graecas

⁷ Irenaeus, lib. iv. Cap. 37, &c.

took to convince the world of the truth of the four gospels. What method was this think you? Did he visit all the churches, consult the archives, and verify the originals? This *[illegible]* would have been too tedious. Behold what he, with great modesty, calls a demonstration, for it contains several of them “There are four quarters of the world, and four cardinal winds, consequently there are four gospels in the church, as there are also four pillars that support it, and four breaths of life which render it immortal. The four animals in Ezekiel's vision mark the four states of the Son of God. The lion, is his royal dignity, the calf, his priesthood, the beast with the face of a man, his human nature; the eagle, his spirit which descends on the church. To these four animals correspond the four gospels, on which our Lord is seated. John, who teaches his celestial origin, is the Lion, his gospel being full of confidence, Luke, who begins with the priesthood of Zacharia, is the Calf, Matthew, who describes the genealogy of Jesus Christ according to the flesh, is the Animal resembling a man, Mark, who begins with the prophetic spirit, coming from above, that is, with a passage from the prophet Isaiah, is the Eagle. This gospel is the shortest of all, because brevity is the character of prophecy. Another demonstration of the four gospels – There have been four covenants, the first under Adam, the second under Noah, the third under Moses, the fourth under Jesus Christ; from whence Irenaeus concludes, agreeably to the rules of his logic, that those are vain, rash, and ignorant, who receive more or less than four gospels.

Sect. 14. Modern divines, however, highly value the testimony of this Father. He had seen, say they, Papias and Polycarp, both disciples of St. John, and through their channel truth could easily flow as far as him. But the way is much longer than they imagine, before the Apocalypse can be made to pass into the hands of Irenaeus. Papias was dead before Polycarp, and Irenaeus speaks of the last as of a person very ancient, whom he just remembers to have seen when he was very young. Thus he never alleges their conversation, but only their writings, and in those writings there is no mention made of the Apocalypse. In the second place, Polycarp suffered martyrdom⁸ in the year 167 of Christ. Suppose him to be then 86, which is a very great age, since in 158 he took a journey to Rome, from whence he afterwards returned to Asia, he must have been but a child in St. John's time, taking the supposition as certain, that this apostle lived to an extreme old age. Thus neither he nor Papias could hardly be able to know anything at all of St. John, but by the tradition of persons who were older than them.

Sect. 15. But without recurring to calculations, let us hear Papias himself who was a little older than Polycarp⁹. “ When I met, says he, with any disciples of the ancients, I studiously derived what information I could from their conversation. I asked them what Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew, or any other of the disciples of Christ had said: for I found the reading of books less useful than personal instructions.” Papias shews us the source from which he drew. He does not say that he had conversed with St. John. Most certainly he would have done himself this honour, in order to give the greater credit to his collections. He only says, that he interrogated those who had seen St. John, or some other apostle. Papias styled himself the disciple of John, surnamed the Priest, who must not be confounded with the Evangelist, and to whom some of the ancients have attributed the Apocalypse. These reflections are not mine, but Eusebius's, who had read the writings of Papias; and it was doing no injury to St. John to deprive him of a pupil whom this historian treats as a man of *very indifferent abilities, and extremely credulous*, who swallowed all kinds of stories, and made the apostles say what they never thought of.

Sect. 16. *Melito.*

Before Irenaeus I ought to have name Melito, among whose works there was a treatise, entitled, *Concerning the Devil in the Apocalypse*, as Eusebius¹⁰ relates. As the work is lost, we know no more of

8 Eusebius Chronies

9 Eusebius Chronic. Lib. Iii. Cap. 39.

10 Hist lib. iv. Cap. 26,

it, and are ignorant whether he there spoke well or ill of the Apocalypse. It was in effect attacked in books written on purpose by some of the ancients, which Dionysius of Alexandria cites without naming them. Perhaps Melito was of this number, perhaps he was not. It is a question, like many others, which probably can never be cleared up.

Sect. 17. *Apollonius, Theophilus.*

The case is not the same with Apollonius and Theophilus of Antioch. Eusebius¹¹ informs us, that the first made use of the Apocalypse in a treatise against Montanists; and amongst the works of the second, there is, says the same Eusebius, *a book against the heresy of Hermongenes, to which he employs proofs drawn from the Revelation of John*. If these books were not lost, one might there see in what manner they quote the Apocalypse against their adversaries, and if they ascribed it to St. John the Evangelist.

Sect. 18. “The first fathers, says M. Simon¹², sometimes adopt in their disputes the method of rhetoricians, who very often employ arguments purely plausible, and doubtful actions, by which one must not always be governed.” It is for this that St. Jerom commends them, far from imputing it to them as anything culpable. “Disputation, says he, hath no law. One must oppose to one's adversary, sometimes this, sometimes that, and argue in the best manner one can, say one thing and do another, make a shew of offering bread and yet all the while grasp a stone. He confesses that this was his custom as well as that of the ancients¹³” “See here, he adds, their manner of disputing what suppleness and blandishment do they employ to defeat the plots of the devil, they asserted not what they thought, but what the necessity of the argument obliged them to assert. Hence those frequent distinctions of speaking *according to truth and speaking according to management*. Hence that vast number of quotations from Apocryphal pieces, and other frauds, which are now styled *pious*, out of complaisance to them.”

Sect. 19. But to return to Theophilus; how should he have scrupled to allege against heretics the Apocalypse, who quotes against the heathens¹⁴ the verses of the Sibyl as true prophecies, in which the actions of the emperors are historically related, and in which there is in express terms mention made of Christ, of Antichrist, of the name of Jesus, which makes 888, of the number of Rome, namely, 948, of the second destruction of Jerusalem, of the destruction of Rome, of the resurrection, of the reign of a thousand years, of the fire of hell, and other predictions of the Apocalypse. It is true that Theophilus and other fathers have brandished these arms with an air of confidence, which seems rather to manifest their honesty than their judgment. Justin himself suffered his fancy to be dazzled with them when they were just fresh and new from the forge of the impostor who fabricated them, who, according to all probability was some Christian Montanist.

Sect. 20. *End of the second century. St. Clemens.*

Clemens Alexandrinus who closes the second century, gives also his testimony to the Apocalypse. To shew that a Christian ought not to wear fantastic apparel and cloaths embroidered with gold, he alleges that vision in which white robes are given to the martyrs. He does not say that the book was written by the apostle St. John, but he amply recompenses for this omission by informing us that there was an Apocalypse of St. Peter. “The scripture informs us, says he¹⁵, that exposed children are under the protection of a guardian angel. They shall live, it asserts, to an hundred; and St. Peter in his Apocalypse

11 Ibid. lib. v. cap. 8.

12 Critical History of the New Testament, chap 23.

13 Jerom Epis. Ad Paren.

14 Ad Autolycu.

15 Stromaiiz, 841.

says, there issued from these children a flash of lightning which dazzled the eyes of the women.” This Apocalypse of St. Peter, which as Sozomen informs us, they read in the churches of Palestine, was so much esteemed by St. Clement, that not only he gave it a place among his select prophecies, but he also in his instructions commented upon it as a sacred book. He calls the prophecy of Baruch, *divine scripture*, when the angel reveals to Hermas, *a divine communication*, and the book of Tobit, *scripture by way of eminence*. He draws his authorities from the book of Wisdom, from Ecclesiasticus, from the Epistles of Clemens Romanus, and from Barnabas, which he quotes as canonical books. He cites in the same manner the preaching of St. Peter, the travels of St. Paul, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the Gospel according to the Egyptians, the traditions of Matthias, of Hydastus; in short, it is hard to say what he does not quote. Could not a man, who had read all these curiosities, believe in the Apocalypse? I do not know where he picked up this anecdote, that St. Paul exhorted the world to read the books of the Sibyls. “In fine, says father Simon¹⁶, he employed every expedient against the Pagans, and cared little whether the books from which he computed them were true or false, provided they were conformable to his own sentiments. However this father was in the opinion of St. Jerom, that wisest man that ever flourished among the Christians. I do not think these remarks unuseful, as they have for their object the estimate we ought to form of the testimony of the fathers.

Sect. 21. *Tertullian*

But of all the ancient divines Tertullian is the most explicit, and as he was a zealous advocate for the Millenarians, whom he had defended in a book purposely written on this subject, so he very frequently declares himself in favor of the Apocalypse, which he ascribes to St. John the Evangelist, and on which he grounds certain opinions which have no less need of such an authority. If he wants to prove, for example, that the foul is corporeal, and that it falls under the senses he alleges¹⁷ that passage of the Apocalypse, “I saw under the altar of souls of those who had been slain for the word of God”. In another place¹⁸ he intends to demonstrate to the Marcionites, that the Gospel according to St. Luke hath not been corrupted, for the truth of this he appeals to the churches, whose doctrine was conformable to this very Gospel: “We have churches also, which were formed by St. John, for though Marcion rejects his Apocalypse, yet the succession of bishops, if we go back to the source, proves that St. John is the author.” It is true, these last words are equivocal, and one does not know, whether this succession of bishops tends to make St. John acknowledge for the author of the Apocalypse, or for the author and first bishop of the churches of Asia, which last sense is more agreeable to Tertullian's design. The question between the Marcionites and him, was not to discover whether St. John was the author of the Apocalypse, but if the Gospel of St. Luke, which the churches of Asia made use of, was authentic and in no respect altered. The testimony of these churches must be of considerable authority. They had been formed and trained up in the doctrine of St. John, and to be convinced of it, it was sufficient to have read the first chapter of the Apocalypse. But as the Marcionites rejected this book, Tertullian refers them to the succession of the bishops, who called themselves the successors of St. John, and who acknowledged him to be the founder of their churches.

Sect. 22. let this be as it may, it is certain from the words themselves of this father, that far from rejecting the Apocalypse, after the example of the Marcionites, he regarded it as the work of St. John, the founder of the seven churches of Asia. Whoever doubts of it need only read this other passage in the same author concerning the new Jerusalem, which is described in the twenty-first chapter of the Apocalypse. “We acknowledge that we have a reign of a thousand years on earth, namely, the resurrection for a thousand years in the city of Jerusalem, built by the hand of God, and coming down from heaven. Ezekiel knew it, St. John saw it, and the new prophecies, in which we believe, have even

16 Castigatinus ad Opus Vossi.

17 Lib de Anima

18 Lib iv contra Marcionitas.

represented the plan of it before it was constructed, to serve as a sign when it should appear. In truth, this sign did appear a little while ago, by a phaenomenon exhibited in the East, of which the heavens themselves are witnesses. There was seen in Judea, some forty days together in the morning, a city hanging in the air, whose walls diminished in proportion as these encreased, and at last disappeared¹⁹”

Sect. 23. These words need comment, except that, the new prophecies which Tertullian here puts on the same [*illegible*] with the Apocalypse, were the revelations of Prisca and Maximilla, women, who to the number of ten, exercised the function of prophetesses. The city hanging in the air, of which the [*illegible*] themselves had been eye witnesses, and which resembled the Jerusalem in the Apocalypse, is a very singular event, which would prove at once the divinity of this book. It is an unlucky circumstance that the phaenomenon happened to disappear at the point of day, [*illegible*] when the spectators were beginning to see it.

Sect. 24. It cannot be [*illegible*], that this great divine had too much fondness for visions: those of the shepherd Hermas must be extremely to this taste. Thus he cites them as a book of holy scripture. He also heavily complains that the Jews had excluded from their canon the prophecy of Enoch, and several other pieces of this kind.

Sect. 25. *Origen.*

Origen, another Millenary, in his preface to the Gospel of St. John, and in his seventh Homily on Joshua, makes mention of the Apocalypse, under the name of the apostle St. John, and in his Commentaries on St. Matthew, he calls it the *Oracles of the Apocalypse*. It is rather a disadvantage that he adopted, and took under his protection the *Oracles of the Sibyl* in his books against Celsus, where he ought to have been more circumspect and exact than in his Commentaries and in his Homilies. His honesty even transports him to challenge this Pagan to cite the ancient copies of the Sibylline books, in which, what the Christians alledge, is not found which it was not possible for him to do, but what would have been much easier for him, was to shew the falsehood of these Oracles.

Sect. 26. And in order to be the better assured of the critical exactness of Origen, in distinguishing the true and genuine writings, for before we credit a witness we ought to know him, let us remark, that this father had a very high esteem for the visions of Hermas; that not only he believed them to be very useful, but calls them an inspired scripture of God. Did he ever say as much of the Apocalypse? This very Apocalypse, why might he not have acknowledge it, on the credit of the title, to be the production of St. John? He received many others of the same kind with much less scruple. He doubted not but the Epistle, which bears the name of St. Barnabas, was truly his, and the book of Wisdom to be really written by Solomon. He hath [*illegible*] the Apocalypse of Elias, and the Apocalypse of St. Paul. He even asserts that this apostle hath inserted in his Epistle several [*illegible*] of the Apocalypse of Elias. To these two Apocalypses add that of St. Peter, which Clemens Alexandrinus hath canonized, you will then have three Apocalypses to add to this of St. John, which could not escape the researches of Origen. He expressly places the prophecy of Baruch in the number of the canonical books. He alleges the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the book of the twelve Apostles, the Testament of the twelve Patriarches, the doctrine of St. Peter, the acts of St. Paul, the dispute between Joseph and Jacob, which he cites with the same eulogy, the book of Jaunes and Mamtres, and such like, from which it is his custom to borrow his authorities. He had learned this method from his master Clemens, and it was not uncommon to the divines of this century. He attributed to Daniel the story of Susannah, which he defended in a book composed expressly on the subject.

19 Lib. Iii. Contra Marcion.

Sect. 27. Posterity would have been under greater obligations to him if he had employed his criticism to prove that the Apocalypse is in reality St. John's, though he should only have told us that it was acknowledge by all the Christians of his time, for to cite a book, is not to declare it canonical. St. Jude alludes the *prophecy of Enoch*, and even the *assumption of Moses*, in which the author had spoken of the combat of Michael the archangel with the Devil; two books which however were not in the catalogue of the Jews. Origen and other fathers might make use of the Apocalypse, though it might not have yet been in the canon.

Sect. 28. *St. Hippolytus.*

The authority of Hippolytus, the friend of Origen, would be more considerable. Father Combesis hath published a little treatise of his upon the twelve apostles, the article respecting St. John is the following "John was banished by Domitian into the isle of Patmos, where he wrote his Gospel, and where he had the vision of the Apocalypse. He fell asleep at Ephesus, they searched for his remains, but could not find them." You have not here a rhetorician who transiently cites the Apocalypse, as the fathers do, but you have an historian, who informs himself of facts, and relates them.

Sect. 29. But to speak my sentiments freely, I have difficulty in believing this treatise to be Hippolytus's. Though it consist but of twelve little articles, it does not fail to cite at least as many little fables.

Sect. 30. This is not however the reason that would hinder us from ascribing it to Hippolytus. This is pretty much the character of antiquity. "Everybody knows, says M. Dupin on another subject, that the books of the first Christians are full of fables, that the fathers applied themselves entirely to things of the greatest importance at the time, that they gave credit to several acts of the apostles, and to a number of other monuments undoubtedly supposititious."

Sect. 31. Father Combesis sees in these words, *They searched for the remains of St. John, and found them not*, the true spirit of Hippolytus, who sincerely believed that St. John never died. With regard to myself, with this critics permission, I think I see the genius of an author, who lived at soonest in the fourth century, since they then began to search for relics, and raise a dust in the graves of deceased saints.

Sect. 32. St. hippolytus, as Eusebius says, had written a treatise on the Apocalypse: this is all we know of it. But we have an Homily of his against Christians, in which he thus speaks, "He, who said, In the beginning was the word, hath afterward said in his apocalypse, His name is the word of God." It could not be declared in more express terms, that the Apocalypse is the writing of St. John the Evangelist. It is also true, that in this fame Homily, he styles the pretended prophecy of Baruch, *Scripture, by way of excellency*.

Sect. 33. *Homilies*

Now I have mentioned Homilies, it is proper to know something of them, and what expence the fathers were at to satisfy their people. St. Jerom had one day consulted his master, St. Gregory Nazianzen, a grave man, about his finding such a deficiency of wisdom in general councils: "Come to my sermon, said he to him, I will teach you what you are ignorant of. The people will not fail to applaud me; and you yourself be forced to surrender, unless you choose to pass for a brute. Any empty prating coxcomb can impose upon his auditory, the less they comprehend, the more they admire." It is Jerom, who hath preserved this little anecdote concerning Gregory, and the Homily of Hippolytus sufficiently illustrates

Sect. 34. *St. Cyprian.*

St. Cyprian, to return to the Apocalypse, is not so explicit as Hippolytus, though he often cites it, especially in his books to Quirinus, which are only extracts from scripture, in which he ranks Tobit, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, Baruch, the Maccabees, as divinely inspired books, without making any difference between them and the Apocalypse. If he cites it, it is always without naming the author, but in exchange he informs us that Ecclesiastes, and Wisdom are the books of Solomon. It is true, that in his *Treatise on the apparel of virgins*, he produces a passage of the Apocalypse under the denomination of *Divine Scripture* but a few lines above, he had just said, The scripture saith, "Of what use hath pride been to us, or what have we profited by the vain glory of riches?" Words that are taken from the apocryphal book of Wisdom, *in which the Holy Spirit*, says he another place, *teaches us by the mouth of Solomon*. So true is it, that there was not then among Christians a settled canon of the scriptures.

Sect. 35. In his exhortation to martyrdom, after having applied the mysterious number seven to the seven days of creation, to the seven thousand years of the duration of the world, to the seven spirits which are before God, to the seven lamps of the tabernacle, to the seven candlesticks of the Apocalypse, to the seven pillars of wisdom, to the seven children of the barren woman, to the seven women who took one man for their husband, and all this to come at the seven brothers of the Maccabees, he adds, that St. Paul hath made mention of the number seven as of a privileged number, and this is the reason why he did not write but to seven churches. This is probably what St. Cyprian had picked up in some apocryphal book of this apostle, or by a particular revelation. For he had often in the night, as he says himself, visions and dreams, which he rehearsed the next morning to his church as intelligence from heaven, or in default of visions, he made little children come to him, who in their trances instructed him in the truth. Such was the fruit of a too frequent converse with the writings of Tertullian, into which he had thrown himself without being previously fortified with proper preservatives against the most contagious imagination that ever existed.

Sect. 36. These are the fathers of the first rank, and if I may so speak, the body-guards of tradition, giving their depositions in favour of the Apocalypse. I do not think I have omitted any one in that period of time that flowed from Justin Martyr to the middle of the third century. Exactness was so much the more necessary, as those who came later, do not shew as good letters of credit as the ancients who lived nearer the time of St. John among these, some, as hath been justly remarked, allege the Apocalypse without naming the author; others allege it without saying whether it is St. John's the Apostle, or St. John's the Priest, in fine, the greatest part, who are Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Hippolytus, cite it as a work of the apostle St. John.

Sect. 37. *A list of the Anti-Apocalypsarians.*

But before we proceed farther, it is but just also to interrogate their contemporaries. One has already seen heretics divided, we shall see the same division among the defenders of truth.

Sect. 28. *St. Ignatius*

To go back even beyond Justin Martyr, we do not perceive a single trace of the Apocalypse in the seven Epistles of St. Ignatius, of which there are three that are directed to the churches of Ephesus, Philadelphia, and Smyrna, the same, to which the author of the Apocalypse addresses himself. Ignatius greatly extols the Ephesians in that they had been instructed by St. Paul, why not honour them on account of the long residence of St. John at Ephesus, the particular care he had taken of them, the

20 Epist ad Nepot.

writings he had deposited with them, to put, say they, the last hand to the Canon of the New Testament? The memory of it must have been quite recent, since Ignatius wrote his letters in the year 107 of Christ. This silence is rather remarkable, especially in a disciple of St. John. There might arise some suspicion against the truth of these facts, which should come to us from a source less pure, and much more suspected.

Sect. 39. *Papias.*

Papias almost reached the time of St. John. He also does not mention the Apocalypse. Eusebius particularizes the books of the New Testament to which Papias gave testimony. The Apocalypse does not appear amongst them. And in another place, when this historian runs over the witnesses of the Apocalypse, he again omits Papias, whose writings however he had read. He even remarks that this Divine taught the reign of a thousand years, and that he did not support his system but on an unwritten tradition. A Millenarian, not to cite the Apocalypse in the same book in which he would establish his opinion, is a little singular. But let us proceed so something more explicit.

Sect. 40. *Ancient Divines.*

Several Divines, who lived before Dionysius of Alexandria, as he assures us himself in a long fragment which Eusebius preserved to us, made critical and particular remarks on the Apocalypse. These Theologians must have been very ancient, since Dionysius, who had read them, and who quotes them, wrote about the middle of the third century: nor did they merely reject the Apocalypse; they also refuted all the chapters of it step by step, as being a composition, they said, destitute of sense and reason. In the second place, they maintained that the inscription of it was false, that this book was not written by St. John, nor even by any apostolic person. They added that Cerinthus was the author of it, and that he had made use of a great name to give the more weight to his reveries and the better to insinuate his opinion concerning the reign of a thousand years. In fine, they drew their last difficulties from the nature of revelation, which ought to be clear and intelligible, since it is not given but with this design from whence they concluded, that a book, such as the Apocalypse is, covered with a thick veil, cannot have proceeded from the Spirit of God.

Sect. 41. One sees that these ancients, whose writings are lost, entered into a pretty large detail, and that all their criticism confined itself to two kinds of remarks, the one drawn from plain reason, and the nature itself of things, the other of an external nature, respecting facts and authorities. One ought not much to regret the loss of the first one is always in a condition to repair them with the aid of that universal reaction, which belongs to all times and to all places. Every one is able to read the Apocalypse, to judge of the work by the work itself, to see if it is as obscure, as impenetrable, as destitute of sense and reason as these authors pretend. The knowledge of facts, which they might have at hand, would be at this day more necessary, and would deliver us from that uncertainty into which the want of monuments throws us. This part of their criticism which had for its object to prove that the Apocalypse was the composition of Cerinthus, would in some measure supply the profound silence which reigns in history from St. John to Justin, the first witness for the Apocalypse. Perhaps also amidst all that they advanced, and to the stock itself of their objections we might find wherewith to answer them and satisfy ourselves at the same time. This would not be the first time that truth would be defended with the arms destined to militate against it. It was not merely in the time of Julian the emperor, and in the fort even of his attacks, that she discovered and borrowed new succours.

Sect. 42. *Caius the Latin Priest.*

To these Divines, who were Greeks, must be joined a Latin author, who was in reputation about the year 200 of Christ. This was the priest Caius, the oracle of the church of Rome, who set himself as a buckler against the heretics of that time. In a dispute which he had with the Millenarians, he thus

speaks: "Cerinthus alleging certain revelations, as written by a great apostle, vends prodigies, which he himself hath feigned, as if they had been discovered to him by angels. He asserts that after the resurrection there will be a reign of Jesus Christ on earth, and that men shall enjoy bodily pleasures in Jerusalem." He adds, that they shall spend a thousand years in nuptial and continual festivals.

Sect. 43. There is no doubt but by these supposed revelations to a great apostle, as having received them from angels, Caius denotes the Apocalypse, which he believed to be Cerinthus's and not St. John's. There is mention there of a first resurrection, of a reign of a thousand years, which was to ensue it, of a new Jerusalem, and of the nuptials of the Lamb, to which men would be invited. Now these things are explained by the Millenarians of a temporal felicity, and particularly supported on the authority of the Apocalypse, which Caius here rejects without distinction, as chimeras vended by Cerinthus, under the name of a great apostle.

Sect. 44. One must then in truth confess that Caius had in view the Apocalypse: and it is thus Eusebius²¹ understands him, who had read the work of this divine. For after having cited the words which we have just related, he immediately subjoins another passage of Dionysius of Alexandria, *who alleges an ancient tradition left to the church, that Cerinthus chose the title of THE APOCALYPSE OF ST JOHN, as a great name, to give the greater credit to his reveries.* I should not have insisted on a thing, which appears to me as clear as the day, if M. Dupin had not affected to throw in some scruples without necessity, to insinuate that Caius meant, perhaps, a false revelation, different from the Apocalypse. Truly it is pleasant to see the church of Rome, which styles herself the sole pillar of truth, entrust at that time her interests to a man who spoke so disrespectfully of a divine book, without being disavowed either by the pope or by any ecclesiastical assembly.

Sect. 45. *His Character.*

Everyone does not know perhaps what sort of man this Caius was. It will not be unuseful to make him better known. The church was full of forgers, who counterfeited the style of the apostles, some as the heretics, with a design to insinuate their errors with the greater ease; and others, under the pious pretence, that devout fables would attract more veneration to Christianity. One then saw nothing appear but false Gospels, false Acts, false Epistles, false Apocalypses, and other phantoms of revelation which fraud produced, and which it was capable of animating with the spirit of antiquity to that degree, that the wisest and most intelligent gave into the illusion. Our Caius would not augment the number of dupes, and like sensible spectators of the drama, who are not wholly occupied by the outward decorations, he went behind the scenes to examine the cords and springs which played off the imposture.

Sect. 46. But whether it were that experience had rendered him too dissident, as we learn from Eusebius, or whether he reasoned from partly interest, which is far from being unnatural to the human mind, he became very troublesome in the dispute. If they denied his principles, he banished his adversaries; and without using any discretion he laid a heavy hand upon every thing that opposed him.

Sect. 47. There are but few of the Ancients who have not enlarged the Canon of Scripture with some apocryphal piece, he reduced it as much as he could. Happy, had he done nothing but cleared the crop, but with tares he pulled up the good grain. Disputing one day in the presence of Pope Zepharin against the Montanists, who objected to him a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, he had the boldness to maintain, that it was neither St. Paul's, nor was canonical, and he averred it with so peremptory an air, that he not merely confounded these good people who did not expect any such thing, but he came at

21 Euseb. Lib. Iii. Cap. 18.

last to influence by his authority the Western churches, who would not admit this epistle. Is this then the tradition that is now so much boasted, and of which the fathers must have been the faithful depositaries? Some who supposed false productions, others who stripped the churches of their proper writings?

Sect. 48. It is strange, that in order to combat with more advantage, Caius should reduce himself to such an extremity, as to exclude the Apocalypse from the number of the sacred books. He needed only to have given a spiritual meaning to the reign of a thousand years, have said, for instance, with St. Cassian, that Jerusalem might be understood four ways: according to history, for the city of the Jews; according to allegory, for the church of Jesus Christ; according to analogy, for the heavenly city, according to anthropology, for the foul of man. These were the strong batteries against Jerusalem, which the Millenarians expected, and so much the stronger, as an allegory tolerably conducted, or any comparison how little specious soever, made at that time greater impression than the most conclusive arguments would have done. After all, he had only to entrench himself in the obscurity of the book, and this is the part which St. Dionysius of Alexandria is going to take.

Sect. 49. *St. Dionysius of Alexandria.*

Not that he had no inclination to reject the Apocalypse he was strongly against the reign of a thousand years; and in his work, which he entitled *Of the Promises*, he answers the objections of Nepos, the principal of the Egyptian Millenarian. The Apocalypse embarrassed him a little, but he was not so hardy as Caius. He is not willing, however, that the Millenarians should be ignorant that it was a book very much contested. "Some of my predecessors, says he, have rejected it entirely, and have refuted it chapter by chapter, making it appear that it was destitute of sense and reason, that the inscription of it was false, that it was not composed by St. John, but by Cerinthus, who had a mind to avail himself of a great name to give the greater wight to his reveries." and other motives which we have produced above.

Sect. 50. After setting out in this manner, and if I may so speak, sent out his forlorn hope, as it were to check the onset of the Millenarians who pressed him, he comes to tell us his own sentiments of this book, or at least what he affects to think of it. "With regard to myself, adds he, I dare not absolutely reject this book, especially because several of my friends receive it. I regard it as vastly above my reach. I believe it contains an admirable sense, but a sense mysterious and recondite for though I understand nothing of it, I suspect, however, that there is some meaning latent under the words, and yielding more to faith than my own understanding, I esteem it too sublime to be understood by any man like me. Thus I guard against condemning what I do not understand, and I do admire much what I cannot comprehend."

Sect. 51. I do not know what judgment my reader will form of the reflections of St. Dionysius with regard to myself, I find in them more of compliance than of conviction, more compliance than persuasion. He begins with declaring the authority of the Apocalypse to be problematical; he exhibits the objections of its adversaries, and what is worse, he gives himself no trouble to answer them. After such preliminaries, which do not appear hazarded without design, there remained nothing for him but to reject openly the Apocalypse, but reasons of politeness and civility prevent him: several of his friends respected this book, he could not think of disobliging them. The politeness of this Divine surpassed the simplicity of his time; and though the opinion of the Millenarians appeared dangerous to him, he does not fail to treat Nepos with great regards he esteems him, he honours him, and nothing is more flattering than the eulogies he gives him. A man who conducted himself in this civil manner towards his adversaries, what would he not have done for his friends? Thus he dares not absolutely reject the Apocalypse, it is only in another respect that he came to know the beauties of it, he honestly owns that he understands nothing of it; he believes the sense to be admirable, but it is concealed. He

yields more to faith than to his own judgment, meaning, to the faith of his friends, for his own faith was not a thing distinct from his own judgment, at least, it was not that faith of scripture, which is an evidence of things not seen. The faith of St. Dionysius proceeded only to a mere suspicion; and if this suspicion was blended with admiration, one cannot regard it but as an additional compliment which he pays his friends. One might indeed ask in effect, how it is possible to admire what one does not understand? But this would be using incivility towards a man who carried his complaisance so far.

Sect. 52. He will return you a more plain and explicit answer, if you interrogate him concerning the author of the Apocalypse, though he was by no means of a contradicting disposition, yet he says, a little farther, "I could not easily be induced to think that this book is the work of St. John." he even endeavours to prove to you the contrary, by a kind of contrast which he institutes between the writings of this apostle and the Apocalypse, which he attributes to another John. But for fear his friends should be displeas'd at this thus weakening the authority of this book, "I believe, however, adds he, that this John was a person inspired by the Holy Ghost." He observes, that besides the Evangelist, there have been several persons of the same name, among others, John, surnamed Mark, who is mentioned in the Acts. He does not, however, mean him, but another, who lived in Asia, as well as the apostle, both being buried at Ephesus, where their tombs, as they say, were to be seen. See here the reasons, which he alleges to show, that the Apocalypse was not written by St. John the Apostle: 1. The former does not prefix his name to his books, and always speaks of himself in the third person, whilst the author of the Apocalypse hath put his name to it, speaks always of himself in the first person, and names himself two or three times. 2. The Gospel and Epistles begin in the same manner; one finds there the same thoughts repeated almost in the same terms, in fine, it is the same genius, the same style: but the genius and style of the Apocalypse are very different. 3. The apostle never speaks of the Apocalypse in his Epistles. 4. It is full of solecisms and barbarous expressions, but the compositions of St. John are written in much better Greek.

Sect. 53. This is, in short, the criticism of St. Dionysius, which is much commended by Eusebius and Jerom. Much might be said on this topic, if one undertook to write a Dissertation. Every one allows that John the Evangelist was inspired of God, but how did Dionysius know, that the other Dionysius was so too? Was it by the book itself of the Apocalypse? St. Dionysius meant no such thing.

Sect. 54. None can deny that the style of the Gospel and of the Epistles of St. John is purer than that of the Apocalypse. However, one finds here sometimes the same expressions. It is laid in the Gospel, ch. Xix. 35, *He that saw, bare witness* and in ch. Xxi. 24 *This is the disciple that witnesseth these things*. And in 1 Epist. ch. 1. 1,2 *What we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, that do we testify*. The same manner of [*illegible*] is found in the beginning of the Apocalypse: *His servant John, who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw*. Which contains also an allusion to the Word which is described in the first chapter of the Gospel. And not merely does the Apocalypse give the name of Word to Jesus Christ, it also calls him the Lamb, who hath loved us, and who hath washed away our sins with his blood – terms peculiar to St. John, which are found in his Epistles and in his Gospel.

Sect. 55. Certainly if the author of the Apocalypse was not St. John, at least he intended that he should be taken for him, therefore what opinion must one have of his sincerety? And how could St. Dionysius believe, that he was a man inspired of God?

Sect. 56. The rash Carius, who took him for an impostor, supported himself much better. He acted also more frankly than St. Dionysius, whom I very much suspect of dissimulation. This method, the honour of which St. Jerom gives to the ancients, was then very common: but that which entirely confirms me

in this belief, is the account of one of his successors to the Patriarchate of Alexandria: "St. Dionysius, these are St. Athanasius's words, did not frankly speak what he thought: he accommodated himself to times and persons; like a skilful gardener, who prunes, plants, pulls up, according to the quality of the trees and of the soil. This different demeanour, which is a proof of address, render him worthy of admiration. He wrote, continues Athanasius, with studied discretion, and what one writes in this manner, ought never to be taken literally, nor as every person would with it.

Sect. 57. After this, I believe it is useless to dispute any more with a man who did not speak what he thought, it is much better to deduce from his words a consequence which will have more relation to our subject. He does not reject the Apocalypse, especially because several of his good friends receive it. He does not say, all the churches, if several in his time received it, it means that several also rejected it. The favourable judgment of some does not prove that it was then in the canon, since the persons who cite it, have also alleged as divine books, a number of pieces undoubtedly apocryphal. Now, from the circumstance that some reject it, not in secret, but in the face of the churches, without passing for heretics, it follows, that it was not then as yet in the canon.

Sect. 58. What evinces it in a manner still more explicit is, that collection entitled, *Apostolical Canons*, not that the apostles were the authors of them, but because that this code of the ancient church was composed by apostolical men. Thus it was, that formerly they gave it the name of *Ancient Canons*, *Ecclesiastical Canons*, a title which they bear in several manuscripts, as Cotelier has remarked. Not only Justinian praises them in the 6th of his *Novellae*, but they are also quoted in the Theodosian code, in the synod of Constantinople, anno 394, and even six times in the council of Nice. At farthest, they are late in the third century, as Aubepine, Beveridge, and Dupin have proved, who judges with reason, that it is a collection of canons of several councils, held before that of Nice. We find then in the 85th article of this collection, a catalogue of books in the Old and New Testament. In this catalogue the Apocalypse does not appear: and this is in some measure the whole church that speaks, at least, that approves.

Sect. 59. There is even this difference between the fathers who admitted the Apocalypse, and those who have excluded it, that the first contented themselves with citing it, without saying how it came down to them from the hands of the apostle John. They appear not to doubt of anything: possession is to them instead of a title; and this honesty of theirs would prove a favourable prejudice, if it had not led them so far as to give an asylum to supposititious writings. Others, on the contrary, more dissident, scrupulously examined, descended into critical detail and exactness, searched literary monuments and brought them to the severe test of scripture. If they are unhappy enough to have wandered from the truth, they are however entitled to our commendations for the pains they employed to prevent themselves from being deceived.

Sect. 60. That which weakens a little the authority of these fathers is, that they disputed at the same time against the reign of a thousand years; and as this question ought naturally to be decided by the Apocalypse, perhaps they only refused this tribunal, because they thought it too favourable to the Millenarians: for what is not the spirit of parry capable of? Church history furnishes but too many examples of it; and without going farther, have we not seen Caius reject the Epistle to the Hebrews, under this pretence, that it taught the rigid doctrine of the Montanists? We must not, however, push this reflection too far, for fear it should happen to rebound against the advocates for the Apocalypse, themselves Millenarians, and consequently interested in the defence of this book, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, the most ancient and most illustrious of the fathers, have never spoken more worthily of it, than when the point in question has been to establish their favourite dogma, the foundation of their brightest hopes. Origen alone, who came after them, and to whom time had given

greater illumination, rejected this dogma, and at the same time received the Apocalypse. He possessed the mythical sense in perfection, and with this talent he turned all the scripture into allegory, except the only place which ought least of all to be understood literally. If in Balaam's ass he could see Jesus Christ loaded with our sins, if he could mysteries even in the cauldrons of the tabernacle, the thousand years in the Apocalypse could hardly embarrass such a genius.

Sect. 61. *St. Mehodius*

We have brought our witnesses and their opponents to the middle of the third century, let us now endeavour to arrive at the reunion of their suffrages. St. Methodius, who concludes this century, presents himself as a witness in the eighth discourse of his *Festival of the ten Virgins*, where St. Thecla delivers a panegyric on virginity. After having taken for her theme and twists on all sides to weave beautiful allegories out of it, she concludes, I do not know how, that her female companions ought to keep their virginity, and that, if they resemble not the woman in the Apocalypse, who had a child, it is their duty to imitate her courage and her constancy, and to resist as she did, the attacks of the serpent. One sees that Mehodius highly esteemed the Apocalypse, since he introduces it where there was but little necessity for it, but it was of indispensable necessity to those who believed the reign of a thousand years, and these Divines seldom lost sight of the Apocalypse.

Sect. 62. *Victorinus*

At last behold what I have been searching for. In the index of the Bibliotheque of the Fathers, we find a commentary of Victorinus on the Apocalypse: it is the first work of this kind. There will be a preface, prolegomena, a dissertation, as well upon the Apocalypse as its author – whether it was John who composed it – at what time – on what occasion – why, and with what view – to what good a revelation so obscure, which nobody understand – answers to objections – new explanations. What a satisfaction to us! Truth is not ungrateful, it recompenses those who investigate it.

Sect. 63. I turn then to the page which the index marks. What first exhibits itself is a preface of St. Jerom, in which he is in a bad humour with one of his friends, who had obliged him to go in search of a book, so very inconsiderable – a bad omen. Perhaps the chagreen of being interrupted in his studies might be intermingled with his displeasure against this comment. Let us therefore proceed, “Victorinus, says Jerom, had no learning, but he was very desirous to have some. He has not even the ability to express his own ideas.” Unhappily the perusal of the commentary confirms but too well Jerom's judgment. One does not know if it is Victorinus who comments the Apocalypse, or if it is the Apocalypse which comments Victorinus. Of preliminary dissertations we must be silent. He scarce names the apostle St. John in the body of the work. He appears not to have suspected that there were other persons of the same name, so far he dealt honestly. In fine, it was the destiny of the first commentator of the Apocalypse, to have the reputation of a Divine who had only attained mediocrity.

Sect. 64. This little accident will oblige us to collect our witnesses with care, in order that if they are not all authors of weight, they may at least form a number.

Lactantius

I have therefore taken care not to forget Lactantius, a man undoubtedly eloquent, but one who hardly ever entered into the examination of facts. He was also a Millenarian as well as Victorinus. For the Apocalypse, in these first ages, experienced almost the same fate with the reign of a thousand years. Lactantius, however, makes only simple allusions to some passages in this book. The reason is, that it is his custom to quote very seldom the Scripture, and very often the Sibyl, even for truths of the most capital importance in religion. “The Son of the great and supreme God, says he in the seventh chapter of

his Institutes, will come to judge the living and the dead, according to the testimony of the Sibyl. But when he shall have destroyed all injustice, instituted the great judgment, and raised all the righteous who have lived from the foundation of the world, he will dwell a thousand years among men, whom he will govern with the greatest equity." And in the Epitome, which is the marrow and quintessence of his Institutes, he says, "that one cannot doubt of these truths, because they are predicted by Trismegistus, Hydaspes, and the Sibyls." This Divine is called the Christian Cicero: but when one sees Cicero make a derision of the Sibyls and the Pagan divinations, one thinks one is reading a Christian philosopher, whereas when one beholds Lactantius paying so much honour to the Sybils, and so little to Scripture, one is much tempted to take him for an heathen writer.

Sect. 65. Besides, these three Divines, Methodius, Victorinus, and Lactantius, are classed by St. Jerom in the rank of those who spoke with studied discretion. But let them have believed what they would, they here only deliver their own private opinion, which they had not given themselves even the trouble to examine.

Sect. 66. *Eusebius*

Let us hear Eusebius, their contemporary, who had made more researches than any one on this subject, and who speaks of the creed of his times not like a rhetorician, but an historian. "As for the Apocalypse, says he, people to this day still doubt of its genuineness, just as the Ancients, as I have observed, had their doubts concerning it, which I have shewn in another place, by alleging their own words and it is proper here I should exhibit the catalogue of the books of the New Testament of which I have spoken. One must then class it in the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of St. Paul, the first of St. John, and the first of St. Peter. To these may be added at last, if any person pleases, the Apocalypse of St. John, what the ancients thought of it, we will reserve to its proper place. The abovementioned books are received with general consent, the following are those which are doubted by some and received by others: the Epistle which they say was written to St. James, that of Jude, the second of Peter, the second and third of John. In fine, continues Eusebius, one must place in the number of books absolutely false, the Acts of St. Paul, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of St. Peter, the letter of St. Barnabus, and the Apostolical Constitutions; add to these, if you please, the Apocalypse of St. John, which some exterminate from the books of scripture, and others place among those which are acknowledged for true." Nothing is clearer than these words of Eusebius, who in another place conjectures that the Apocalypse was written by John surnamed the Priest.

Sect. 67. Certainly the Arians cited it in the council of Nice, as we learn from St. Athanasius who was there. But it does not follow that it was received into the canon. They alleged also the book of Hermas, which certainly was not canonical. St. Athanasius himself, who hath written so much against them, does not cite it but once, as it were by virtue of reprisals only; moderation as much the more singular, as there is no book of scripture which furnishes a greater number of weapons against these heretics.

Sect. 68. *St. Athanasius.*

There is among the works of Athanasius the fragment of a letter which contains a catalogue of the books of the Old and New Testament, at the end which is found the Apocalypse, and to it are added, as books proper to be read by catechumens, the Apostolical Constitutions and the Visions of Hermas. M. Basnage adds, that the author of this piece was one of those who doubted, for he is contented with saying, that the Apocalypse itself was subjoined to the other sacred books. Though this remark should not prove sufficiently solid, it is however certain, that this ancient did not speak in the name of the whole church, since he admits into his catalogue several books which Eusebius places in the number of

doubtful, and among others the Epistle of the Hebrews, which was still rejected by the Latin churches.

Sect. 69. *The Synopsis.*

The famous work, entitled the *Synopsis*, or Abridgment of Scripture, which comes from an author in the time of Athanasius, if this saint be not the author of it, presents us with a catalogue which is the same as the preceding, at the end of which are these words: "There is moreover the Apocalypse of John the Divine, revised and approved as being his by the holy fathers, who were endowed with the Spirit of God." On which M. Basnage remarks again, that this author was one of those who rejected it. For he asserts positively that some ancients had regarded this work as a production of St. John : this was denoting pretty openly, continues M. Basnage, that he did not adopt the same opinion. But I beg my readers to substitute in the room of this reflection that which I made on the preceding article. Besides, if the author of the *Synopsis*, at I cannot cherish the least doubt, received the Apocalypse, he only utters the respectful echo of the judgments of those who preceded him, and his modesty chooses not that we should reckon his name in the list of authorities. He entirely acquiesces in St. Justin, St. Irenaeus, and the other fathers, who were, says he, imbued with the Spirit of God, but who notwithstanding were very often mistaken. They even taught doctrines very dangerous, which it is better entirely to pass over in silence, for fear the world should accuse us of troubling the repose of the just, and searching for impieties in their sacred repositories.

Sect. 70. *Council of Laodicea.*

But what evinceth that the Apocalypse was not in the canon of scripture, is the council of Laodicea, the first that we know to have instituted a catalogue of the sacred books, held about the year 360, by thirty-two bishops of Asia, and whose decrees were ever entered in the code of the church universal. The 59th of these decrees imports, that none but the canonical books of the Old and New Testament ought to be read in the church : and the subsequent decree exhibits a list of them from Genesis to Jude. The Apocalypse here is left out, which is a circumstance rather surprising, as St. John, according to the present belief, committed it to writing at the request of the Christians of Asia, and left it with them as a sacred deposit, after having lived amongst them. This very Apocalypse is not acknowledged in the place of its birth, it is banished and proscribed by those very bishops of Asia, who boasted themselves the heirs and successors of St. John, assembled at Laodicea in the midst of those seven churches to which the book was directed, and to which it even rendered so illustrious a testimony.

Sect. 71. You will think, perhaps, that such a judgment could not but be derived from a large fund of incredulity. St. Augustin, by a single sketch, will pourtray the character of these Asiatics. He says, in his note on these words of the Gospel of St. John, *that this disciple should not die*, that the people of Ephesus, who possessed a great deal of understanding, and who did not believe any thing lightly, had assured him, that St. John was not dead, but was in his grave like a man who is asleep in his bed, and that in the same manner as one sees the cloak and coverlet rise and fall as the person asleep respire, so one could plainly perceive, at intervals, the earth of the grave rise and fall which covered the sacred body of the apostle. These people, who, as St. Augustin says, did not believe any thing lightly, were not however, as this instance shows, the greatest unbelievers in the world, and yet they rejected the Apocalypse.

Sect. 72. *St. Macarius.*

I know not whether the decision of the council of Laodicea reached the old St. Macarius, who passed his life in the deserts. He hath not failed to cite to his anchorets a passage in the Apocalypse. His

authority has so much the more weight, as he was a saint of miracles; not such miracles as are in the legend, but miracles attested by contemporary authors. It is true, history does not tell us, that he wrought any miracles to prove the genuineness of the Apocalypse, but it records his anecdote, that an officer upon seeing Macarius, cried out, *You saints are very fortunate to have so much enjoyment in this world.*

Sect. 73. *St. Gregory Nyssene, St. Basil, &c.*

St. Gregory of Nyssia had not the gift of miracles, but then his relations and his friends wrought them, and he esteemed them as his own. This he declares himself in his harangue on the day of his ordination, immediately after having applied to the unbelievers that passage: "Would to God you were cold or hot." This is the only time that Gregory cites the Apocalypse. Neither does St. Basil, his brother, cite it, any more than Didymus and St. Ephrem, supposing we have any work of his now remaining. But after all, to quote a book, as hath been often remarked, is not to declare it canonical in the name of the church. Here are only orators, who inserted into their compositions apocryphal books, and who in this, as well as in other things, made use of the privilege which rhetoric takes.

Sect. 74. *St. Cyril.*

It is better to pass to those of their contemporaries, who have expressly treated of the canon of Holy Scripture. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, the antagonist of Julian the apostle, in his fourth Catachesis enumerates the sacred books, and after having named the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the seven canonical Epistles, the fourteen Epistles of St. Paul, "All the rest, adds he, are out of the canon: we do not read them in our churches." The Apocalypse was then out of the canon; they did not read it in public. Remember it is a patriarch who assures us of this; he must be well acquainted with the opinion and practice of the churches.

Sect. 75. *St. Gregory Nazianzen.*

St. Gregory of Nazianzum details the same list of the books of the New Testament. He reckons the four Gospels, the book of the Acts, the fourteen Epistles of St. Paul, St. James, two of Peter, three of John, and concluding at St. Jude, says, "These are the only authentic and Divine books; all the rest ought to be ranked in the number of apocryphal."

Sect. 76. *St. Amphilochus.*

St. Amphilochus, bishop of Iconium, after having given a catalogue of the sacred books says, "As for the Apocalypse, it is received by some, but it is rejected by far the greatest number."

Sect. 77. *The Alogians.*

The Alogians, who could not believe that it was written by St. John, had made a critical observation; among other things they objected, that in the time of this apostle, there was not as yet a church at Thyatira. As they are only heretics, there is no great account made of what they find. The question is with regard to Epiphanius, who refutes them, though but very unsatisfactorily, and in a manner that gives them to understand, that if they would but allow him the Gospel, he would with all his heart let them do what they pleased with the Apocalypse. "If, says he, they admitted the Gospel, and rejected only the Apocalypse, one might then say, that they did this one of too much critical exactness and from an unwillingness to receive an apocryphal book." What an amiable moderation does St. Epiphanius

here discover; he, who every where else was a man, of all the world, the most stiff and the farthest from making any concessions. In his estimation, if the Alogians had only rejected *such* a book as the Apocalypse was, one could only reproach them with too critical an exactness. M. Basnage thinks this is speaking very softly and complaisantly, when a Divine book is in question: but it is worse; he must have been an arrant prevericator.

Sect. 78. *Latin authors.*

But if the Easterns and the Greeks were not very favourable to the Apocalypse, the Latins, especially those who were the farthest west, were better disposed in its regard. Among those who cite it in the fourth century, they reckon Firmicus Maternus in the twentieth chapter of his work against idolatry, Phoebades, bishop of Agen, in his treatise against the Arians, Pacian, bishop of Barcelona, in his first Epistle; the poet Prudentius, in his sixth hymn for those who are going to fall asleep; St. Hilary, in his Commentary on the Psalms, in which, if the reader will allow me a transient observation, he cannot comprehend how there should be willows on the brink of rivers, which obliges him to explain these trees *allegorically*, on which the Jews hung their musical instruments. They reckon also St. Paulinus in his 24th letter, the same who made St. Felix hide himself under a *cobweb*, that his persecutors might not be able to see him. Victorinus of Africa, a Platonic philosopher, whom St. Jerom regards with sovereign contempt, and who had not sat down to the reading of the scriptures but in the last stage of life all Spanish authors, or those in the neighbourhood of the Garonne, except the first and second, but all without exception, far remote from the country which gave birth to the apostle.

Sect. 79. *St. Ambrose.*

The famous St. Ambrose must not be forgotten, who had a kind of conjuring stick, not to discern genuine writings, but to discover the bodies of saints and the relics of martyrs, which he distinguished from the false, by certain sensations that were excited in him, as he has taken care to inform posterity. He had also during the night time, as St. Augustin, his disciple, as well as Paulinus, relate, visions and dreams which were sent him from heaven, and which told him what every body else knew not: yet, though blessed with such aid, neither he or others do any thing but merely quote the Apocalypse, no one gives a reason for the credit that he pays to it.

Sect. 80. *Philaster.*

Philaster, the friend of St. Ambrose, without having revelation, like him, does not fail to be much more decisive; for he treats those as heretics who in his time rejected the Apocalypse. From this censure it would be wrong to infer, that all the churches in a body had decreed to receive it. St. Augustin was astonished that Philaster, who possessed much less knowledge than St. Epiphanius, should yet have enumerated many more heresies than him, and upon this he makes a very sage remark, that both these authors had not the same idea of heresy, because in effect it is very difficult to give a just definition of it. The good Philaster, who thought of nothing but enlarging his Catalogue, often calls that heresy which is not so, and sometimes even opinions that are very true. Out of his special grace, he ranks in the number of heretics those who say that the Psalms are not all David's, those who assert that the number of years from the Creation is not certainly known, those who maintain that there are more than seven heavens, those who look upon earthquakes as natural effects, those who believed the stars fixed and the firmament immoveable, instead of conceiving the Deity as drawing them forth every night out of his treasury, and spreading his toilet, so to speak, which he folds up carefully the next morning. I believe that a number of honest people were not of the same opinion as Philaster, and failed not to have the reputation of orthodox.

Sect. 81. *Severus.*

Neither ought we to be alarmed at a little sally of Sulpitius Severus, when he treats as fools and impious those who reject the Apocalypse. As he was Millenarian, to deprive him of his book would be to overturn his kingdom of a thousand years, and the vexation of seeing his party diminish, which began to be no longer fashionable, without doubt must have extorted from him this fulminating sentence. The fathers have a language peculiar to themselves. Do they commend any one? He is an angel, do they blame him? He is worse even than the devil. St. Ignatius calls those murderers of Jesus Christ who fast on Sunday or on a Saturday; this ought to be candidly interpreted. St. Fulgentius declares him an enemy to the Christian faith, whoever does not damn infants that die unbaptised; this is not saying, that there were not then a number of people sufficiently charitable to save them. St. Jerom labels marriage an impurity, a debauch. I believe however that people then married. Pope Stephen treats St. Cyprian as a false Christ, who [*illegible*] had on his side half the church; he styles him false apostle, deceitful worker. St. Cyprian himself decries those as unbelievers, who held in question the divinity of his dreams and visions. Ought one to be surprised that Severus hath taxed with folly and impiety those who doubted of the Apocalypse? But what is farther to be remarked is, that these fools and these impious wretches were by far the greatest number “The *majority*, says Severus, *reject the Apocalypse.*”

Sect. 82. *Council of Carthage.*

In the mean time, the party that espoused the Apocalypse soon prevailed in the West, especially from the time that the Council of Carthage, held in 397, had inserted it in the catalogue of the sacred books and though Severus had just told us that the majority rejected it, he means principally the Greeks and Esterns, who were attached to the Council of Laodicea, held near forty years before.

Sect. 83. You now see council against council on the subject of the Apocalypse; the council of Laodicea rejects it, the council of Carthage receives it, but whilst the former too much restricted the canon of scripture, the latter too much enlarged it. Together with the Apocalypse they also introduced Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, Judith, and the two books of the Maccabees.

Sect. 84. The fathers of this council have not judged it proper to inform us why they acted in this manner; it sufficed those of Laodicea, in order to make no mention of it themselves, that in their traditions, or in their archives in Ephesus, and in the seven churches amongst which Laodicea was one, there was no trace nor memory of the Apocalypse, in the same manner as to reject Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus, the Maccabees, it was sufficient that they did not see them in the catalogue of the Jews. To doubt of a book, it suffices that we have no proof of its genuineness, but to make it to be regarded as divine, one must have a positive reason. If this council of Carthage acts thus, it is with councils as it is with sovereigns, who do not think themselves obliged to give an account of their conduct.

Sect. 85. *Augustin.*

But as St. Augustin, who was then in great reputation, was the foul of the councils of Africa, and made his opinions circulate there, it will not be difficult to penetrate the reasons of the council of Carthage, in consulting this Divine himself who was present; he was ignorant of the Hebrew, and hence proceeded his great contempt for the Jewish canon: he made the authority of the sacred books depend not merely on the number, but also on the grandeur and majesty of the Christian churches which had received them, and by these criteria, which vary often according to the point of view in which they are placed, he acknowledged for canonical such and such a book. He says indeed that we ought to see, whether the

apostolical churches, who received this book from the hand of the apostles, regarded it as such; but in short, as he knew no more Greek than he did of Hebrew, he did not much trouble himself whether this composition originally came from the Greeks or the Jews; the moment it was contested, he inclined as usual to the Latin churches, who, on their side, paid to his merit all the justice that was due to it. Thus it is that he admits as canonical, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, the Maccabees, and the Apocalypse, books already received by the Latins, though he was not ignorant that they were rejected by the Greeks. Without once regarding its antiquity, he receives the book of Wisdom, “because, says he, the Christians have for these several years past heard it in their churches with all the respect due to a canonical book. It creates him no difficulty that the Jews rejected the Maccabees; it is quite sufficient for him that the Western church admits them, on account of the glorious sufferings of their martyrs. There were martyrs who suffered for the truth, one must therefore receive their histories as canonical books. Thus he reasons, or taught the churches to reason, his practice was conformable to his principles; he read *ex cathedra* the acts of the martyrs, he instituted a kind of inventory of the miracles which their relics had effected, he publicly read a lecture on the subject, even on the Lord's day. A priest cured of the gravel, and afterwards raised from the dead by his shirt being carried to a martyr's shrine – Item, two gouty persons cured, one entirely, the other relieved every time the gout seized him; moreover, one of the most obstinate of the unbelievers converted by flowers put under his bolster, which they had taken from the top of the altar: sometimes the martyr appeared to a woman to comfort her, to console her, sometimes he would not grant the favour they requested him to bestow, and other such curiosities.

Sect. 86. I love to see these great geniuses, who are so infinitely elevated above us, descend to a level with the vulgar, and reason sometimes as badly as they. By what mode of information did Christians come to know better than the Jews, what were the genuine books of the Old Testament? And since the question now is concerning the New, how, among Christians, were the Latins better judges than the Greeks with regard to books, of which the Eastern churches were the depositories, and which the Latins themselves did not receive but from the hands of the Greeks? This method of referring himself to his nearest neighbours, teaches us that St. Augustin lived on very good terms with them. It was without doubt the most convenient, but not the most safe, for he run the risk of making his court at the expence of truth. Was it that he fought for numbers, grandeur, and majesty of churches to determine him? All this was found in the Greek churches, at least as much as in the Latin. But the Latins highly revered this father, they enjoyed his opinions on effectual grace, whilst the Greeks were heinously offended with them: now the most considerable are those always who openly declare themselves of our opinions; not that I peremptorily assert that St. Augustin was capable of yielding to this snare of self-love. Though he believed not the doctrine of sufficient grace, to which the Greeks were strongly attached, his own merit was sufficient for him without his having occasion for the applauses of the Latins. Was it then that he had examined, whether the churches, who received such and such a book from the hand of the apostles, regarded it as canonical; this was to let the Greeks gain the cause. The Apocalypse, if it was St. John's, must have been produced among them; they were the true judges of this, and St. Augustin must have abode by their decision, as in a like case he referred it to the Latins, to determine if St. Paul's Epistle to the *Romans* was in effect the apostle's.

Sect. 87. *Jerom*

St. Jerom, though a better critic than St. Augustin, does not enlighten us more than the other. He was easy, as he says, in receiving the Apocalypse on the credit of the ancients who have cited it. The reader already knows what one may conclude from these citations. If one party among the ancients have given credit to this book, another party hath doubted of it, as Eusebius informs us, who is more ancient than St. Jerom. He acted not amiss to pass over in silence this trifling opposition: besides, he very much

extols the Apocalypse, asserting that there is not a word which does not comprise several meanings, *if we were but happy enough*, adds he, *to find them out*. The modest St. Dionysius contented himself with one single meaning which he did not understand. St. Jerom admits several, which without doubt he understands most marvellously. See here how peace may be established amongst the interpreters of the Apocalypse, if however, says our author, they are but happy enough to find them out. This is very much the language of *management* and wise economy, that excellent art of speaking, out of complaisance, what one does not really believe, a science which appeared so important to St. Jerom, that he thought it his duty to reduce it into system, and to give the world both the rule and the *example* of it. He manifests a great esteem for the visions of Hermas; and one would think that he made as much account of them as of the Apocalypse, if unfortunately a single expression had not just escaped him, that it was a foolish story. In his preface to Daniel, he ranks in the number of fables the Story of Susanna, and the Song of the Three Children, with the Story of Bel and the Dragon. But when they reproached him for his unholy temerity, he replied very coolly, *I did not then speak what I really thought*. One day he was most severely curried by angels, for having such a fondness for profane authors: *It was not a vain dream*, says he, *my shoulders are at this instant black and blue with them*. Some persons taking it heinously that after such an accident, he should relapse again into his old sin of reading these authors, “It is very pleasant truly, says he, to object against me my own *dreams*” He had published as his own, a thought quite new on the dispute of St. Paul with St. Peter; it was only, as he pretends, a dispute by way of *management*, at the very time these two apostles were never better friends; but they had privately agreed among themselves, for the highest utility of the Gospel, that St. Peter, in order to gain the Jews, should make a pretence of approving circumcision, and that St. Paul, on account of the Gentiles, should practice a little roguery on his side, in order that they might *together* bring all the world to Jesus Christ by this holy hypocrisy²². True it is, that St. Augustin, who had a great deal of gravity, complained that this was making the apostles act a farce. But St. Jerom, who looked upon him as a scholar who had the assurance to teach his master, rids himself of him in a jocular manner. After having said that his custom²³ was to copy indiscriminately all sorts of authorities, and that he did *not* remember if such a thought was his or some other person's, he adds, “It therefore became your wisdom, before you had blamed my explication, to turn over especially the Greek authors, and to see if the thing is not found there, in order that you might place it to my own account.” This task was no easy one to poor St. Augustin, to send him in this manner to an infinite number of books, for the most part in Greek, which he did not understand. What would it then be with regard to us, who have not all those works, to which St. Jerom referred Augustin? Ought one to be surprised at this rate with the numberless contradictions which are found in the writings of this father? His was a foul that was always fluctuating between two extremities, without being ever able to seize on a fixed point. To return to the Apocalypse, you have seen the judgment which he passed on it, take care it do not escape you, for in his catalogue of illustrious men, he says that St. Dionysius composed a very exact critical work on the Apocalypse: now you know the nature of this critical work; it robbed this book of its true author, and aimed at nothing less than destroying its authority.

Sect. 88. Since then St. Jerom, the wisest of the Latin fathers, will not tell us plainly what he thinks, it will be of more importance to hear him as a witness of the creed of his times, of which he will give us a better account, as it is this properly that we are investigating. “The Greek churches, says he, do not receive the Apocalypse,” and this prejudice was then so very much in vogue, that he calls it the *custom of his age*. No one could be better acquainted with it than himself; he had run over all the churches in the world, he had even frequented the Greek churches more than the Latin, but when he speaks only of the Greek churches as having rejected the Apocalypse, it is publicly declaring, methinks, that the Latin churches received it.

22 St. Jerom Comment in Epst. Ad Galat.

23 [illegible] Augustinum.

Sect. 89. *Innocent the First.*

In effect, Innocent, the first of the name, bishop of Rome, who opens the fifth century, places it in his catalogue of sacred books; but along with Tobit, Judith, the Maccabees, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus. This conformity with the council of Carthage, held some years before, would make me think, that every pope, as Innocent was, was only an echo of this council, which, after having canonized the Apocalypse, greatly contributed to circulate it in the West. If this is not so, both these two will have drawn from one common source, which could only be the most general opinion and practice of the churches.

Sect. 90. *The Apocalypse gains credit gradually*

Thus it was that the Apocalypse, in proportion as it was propagated from one country and one century to another, acquired a powerful protection, capable of resisting all the combined power of opposition. During the three first centuries, there were only some individuals who militated against it. Greeks and Latins, all were indiscriminately engaged in the fray. But when after the action the troops come to rally, the Greeks, especially after the council of Laodicea, gradually united to reject it, as the Latins, after the council of Carthage, combined to espouse it. From that time, one sees the Christian world fall into a kind of schism, and divide themselves into two opposite squadrons. The Apocalypse, exiled from its own native country, sought an asylum among strangers, and one might apply to it that proverb, *A prophet has no honor in his own country.*

Sect. 91. Such is the ordinary process of religious disputes; they begin with individuals, and from individuals they pass to the public. Parties form and support themselves, till at last the strongest prevail, and the weaker are obliged to submit to their jurisdiction.

Sect. 92. *St. Cyril*

Things remained a long time in a perfect equality, but how great forever the vigilance be of two parties who are watching one another, there will always be some deserter that will pass from one camp to another – such as Cyril, whose memory will be forever fragrant and dear to the devotees of the Virgin, for having had the address and wisdom of dignifying her with the title of the Mother of God. If this father, who was a man of intrigue and a great caballer, had been agitated with the like religious ardor in favor of the Apocalypse, he would infallibly in the end have effected its reception among the Greeks. On a certain urgent occasion, he suffered even in his own person, witness the courage he displayed at the head of a mob which rose to drive the Jews out of Alexandria, in which however, they were protected by the government. Cyril, in this action, was hurt with a blow from a stone, and his life would have been in imminent danger if his guards had not come to succour him.

Sect. 93. *The false Dionysius*

About this time, an obscure Greek dignified himself with the name Dionysius the Areopagite, in order to give his fictions weight and age of truth. Though he had kind intentions towards the Apocalypse, and it were not his fault if his countrymen did not believe it to be a Divine book, the mystery remained concealed for several years, before it arrived at its maturity however, as the supposition of its being genuine showed ignorance and rudeness, it was not at first relished in its native country; but it found a more propitious climate in the West; popes, councils, sovereigns received it with great respect, and the Latin world admired the profound erudition of the pretended Areopagite for the Greeks had a very inventive mind, and the Latins one much more credulous. Nothing was ever better suited to each other – the Greeks forged writings, and the Latins vended them.

Sect. 94. But in our age all these impostors have been miserably shipwrecked, and especially the false Dionysius hath been so completely unmasked, that he cannot appear without exposing himself to

insults. He explains the Gospel of St. John and the Apocalypse, which were hardly composed during the life-time of the real Dionysius. A judge of the Areopagus, as he was, must have arrived at man's estate about the 54 year of Christ, which was the era of his conversion. He then could not have seen the Apocalypse but in his old age; and the impostor, who studied to palm himself on the world, represents himself as young at the time that he wrote. He quotes the Apocalypse as a canonical book, concerning which there was no doubt. It is Dupin who says this, and yet in the first ages of the church, people had very great doubts whether it was canonical or not.

Sect. 95. *Junilius*

Not merely did they doubt of it during the five first centuries, but they had their scruples also in the sixth, at which we are now arrived. It is Junilius, a Latin writer, who assures us of it. "The Easterns, says he, very much question the genuineness of the Apocalypse." This is rather surprising. The vision of the reign of a thousand years was now fallen, it could no longer be a motive of opposition, and yet doubts still subsisted.

Sect. 96. Junilius himself, bishop of Africa as he was, deserted the council of Carthage to follow the standard of the Easterns.²⁴ He arranges all the books of scripture under different classes, according to the nature of the subjects. After having enumerated the historical books, he comes to the prophetic; of these he reckons seventeen, which he distinctly names; but in this catalogue he places not the Apocalypse. He classes it in another, that is, according to him, that hold a middle station between books certainly canonical and books certainly false.

Sect. 97. This author, who is very observant of method, investigates the means by which we may be assured of the Divinity of the sacred books. Without attending at all to the testimony of tradition, or to the judgment of the church, it makes their authority depend on the characters of Divinity which are found in them, on the truth of the doctrine, on the admirable harmony of the precepts, the noble simplicity, and the purity with which they are written, or on the accomplishment of the predictions, if the book is prophetic. To these marks he adds the character of the authors – common men, who entertain the most worthy ideas of the Deity – people without education, and of low extraction, who teach however a most exalted doctrine – people without art, without study, who discover truths unknown to the ablest philosophers, and who could not have been taught themselves but by the Holy Spirit – the success of the doctrine contained in these books, its establishment in spite of the powerful opposition of its adversaries – in sine, the miracles which supported and seconded it. "and if at present these miracles are no more, it is, says Junilius, that there is no occasion for them, because the establishment of this doctrine is a miracle more than sufficient to prove it."

Sect. 98. Observe here, that there never was an age that carried their credulity farther than this. They talked of nothing but miracles, and a man must have had a very sound head not to catch a contagion which passed from the multitude to the divines.

Sect. 99. I confess that I have been surprised to see an author reason with such good sense, and at the same time to find him so little known and still less read. One hardly ever finds him but in the enormous Biblio heca of the fathers, where he lies overwhelmed with an infinity of authors, that ought never to have been rescued from oblivion. It is true, that with his principles, which are ultimately the same as those of the Protestants, he is very zealous for contracting the canon of the scripture, and people will be displeased with him for retrenching the book of Chronicles, those of Job, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. He goes so far as to represent five of the Epistles of the New

24 Junil. Lib. I. Cap. 4-7.

Testament as doubtful, without reckoning the Apocalypse. I think, after having studied this author, that if he were to return to the world, he would address the Protestant divines, nearly in the following manner:

Sect. 100. "I have always wished, gentlemen, to be united in friendship with men as rational as you are, who make a profession of examining things by your own judgment, and believing nothing blindly and implicitly. You do not adopt the miracles of your times, not did I adopt the miracles of that century in which I lived. I affected to cite neither fathers nor councils, and I know you regard them as little as I did. Your principles especially are so agreeable to my own, in regard to the authority of scripture, that we have reason to applaud ourselves that they have been drawn from the common source of good sense, which is not deceived, and cannot deceive. There is no probability that you ever borrowed them from me. I question much whether I have the honor to be known to any of you, gentlemen. Stepping lately into a bookseller's, to know what figure I made in the world, I asked for the little volume of Junilius, and I suffered for my curiosity. Nobody knew it, though there were people there whom I took for divines, for they were dressed like you, gentlemen, who now do me the honor of being my hearers. But I easily console myself for the obscurity into which I am fallen, very happy to find myself live once again in you. I had rather that truth should reign of itself, that if it groaned under the weight of my authority. In fine, that I may avoid the fault with which the ancients are reproached, of forgetting their subject in order to run into digressions, I come to the point intended, gentlemen, which is to recall your attention to what I have asserted in my book, that faith ought to be founded on reason; and that to believe reasonably, one ought clearly to discern the laws which are Divine. I see nothing but uncertainty and contradiction in fathers and councils, when they want to determine the number of canonical books. The most ancient doctors vary so much, that if one were to abide by the judgment of each of them, one should see in the canon a vast miscellany of apocryphal writings, which, far from being dictated by the Holy Spirit, have not even a spark of common sense to enlighten them and as for councils, I assure you, on the faith of an ancient, that they are nothing less than what they are reputed to be. Gregory Nazianzen had never seen one, as he declares, that in the end had done any good. My friend Primasus gave me a thorough disgust against them. He was deputed by our churches to the fifth general council, and strove, but ineffectually, to establish peace in an assembly where the spirit of a court had much more influence than the Spirit of God : besides, what side are we to join? The council of Laodicea was in direct opposition to our council of Carthage : it rejected several books which the other regarded as canonical. No other way was left me than to have recourse to these books themselves, to search in them themselves the proofs of their truth, a method, which Protestant divines, whom I now have the honor of addressing, judge to be the safest and best : the result of my examination was such that I thought I discerned three kinds of books, the true, false, and the doubtful. The agreement of the first was natural reason, an air of simplicity and sincerity, which charmed me whilst I read them, caused me to receive them as true, in order to be the rule of my faith and practice. The contariety of the second to these books, which I have just taken for my guides, joined to a spirit of fable and affectation, obliged me to reject them as false; and of this number are those, which you style apocryphal, except Ecclesiasticus, which appeared to me to contain good principles, and excellent exhortations to virtue. At last I classed in the number of doubtful books, those which seemed to me neither true nor false. They were in number fourteen, which you now hold in the rank of canonical books. Here therefore it is, gentlemen, that I shall have occasion for your indulgence : perhaps the dread I was in of taking the word of men for the word of God, proceeded less from a wise circumspection than an unenlightened diffidence; all that I can say is, that it appeared to me that I searched for truth with the same sincerity and uprightness that you do yourselves. We cannot acknowledge a book to be Divine, but in proportion to the characters of Divinity which appear obvious to our minds in them : we both agree as to this principle. As then you have banished from the canon of your ancestors those books which seemed to you destitute of these characters, I have made the same attempt with respect to diverse books, to which

you now give credit; and I really durst not admit them because I discovered not in them any traces of the finger of God. We are perfectly agreed in principle, but not always in the application. I have as yet only spoken of the sacred books in general, I will conclude with reflection on the prophetic books. They have a character that is peculiar to them, and which depends on the truth of the things predicted. The accomplishment of the prophecies of the Old Testament evinced to me their Divinity, but I had not the same success in the examination of the Apocalypse. On one hand I saw it very much contested, on the other I saw nothing appear which served to terminate the controversy; I therefore laid it aside, as it were in a state of sequestration, till the even verify it. I learn, gentlemen, that you have this book in high estimation, and that this is not without reason. You regard it as a *lettre de cachet*, dispatched from the cabinet above, investing you with full power to seize the body of the pope, impeached in form, and proved to be antichrist. In my time nothing like this was ever suspected. It was a sealed letter to us, and the glory of opening and deciphering it was reserved to your age. I hope, gentlemen, that you will initiate me into your mysteries, you will find in me a docile disposition, and though you profess not to take the ancients for your masters, I shall esteem it a great honor to learn something from the moderns. I beg of heaven to grant you always additional knowledge, and me the grace to profit by it.”

Sect. 101. *Andrew of Caesarea*

While Junilius is searching in our writers for the key of the Apocalypse, we will pass to a Greek of reputation, St. Andrew of Caesarea, who, without losing his time in reasoning, embraces the Apocalypse the moment he sees it, contested or not, no matter which. Some ancients, on which he had casually stumbled, had examined the thing for him, he wanted to know no more about it, and if a contrary wind had chanced to have blown him to another region, he would have reposed his faith in it with the same honesty. They are people who are not formed for the fatigue of thinking, and while others torment themselves and perhaps at the end of their laborious researches find only doubts and perplexities, these put themselves in the easy situation of believing, and no beings on earth are happier truth, like some people's fortune, comes to them while they are asleep, or falls on them by inheritance. “It is useless, says Andrew in his preface to the Apocalypse, to examine the authority of this book, for it is certain that our fathers, Gregory the Theologian, Cyril of Alexandria, and before them Papias, Irenaeus, Methodius, and Hippolytus, assert in more than one place of their writings, that it is a Divine book, and worthy of credit.

Sect. 102. There are here but two false citations. Papias hath not spoken a word of the Apocalypse; but what deceived St. Andrew was, that in truth Papias was a Millenarian. He had drawn his opinion of the reign of a thousand years from an unwritten tradition, and not from the Apocalypse. This opinion, by the way, is treated by St. Jerom as a Jewish fable as to Gregory Nazianzen, or the Theologian, it is false that he ever called the Apocalypse a Divine book, on the contrary, he formally excluded it from the canon of scripture. See then how the creed of St. Andrew is founded; for if unluckily he had read the ancients with more care, the seeds of incredulity would have been sown in his soul. It is useless, he would then have said, to pay attention to the authority of this book, for it is certain that our fathers, Gregory the Theologian, Cyril of Jerusalem, and several others, assert, in more than one place of their writings, that it is an apocryphal and contested book. But St. Andrew had a commentary quite ready on the Apocalypse, the first work of the kind among the Greeks; and he was not so lost to all natural affection, as to stifle a child that was to do so much honor to its father. He hath not failed, according to the custom of the ancients, to extol his original. He declares that the Holy Spirit hath here lavished, with greater exuberance than on any other book, the riches of the mystical and allegorical sense : in truth, the comment is very despicable. The author reckoned much on the assistance of St. John, whom he invokes at the beginning, but it does not appear that his prayer was ever heard. He had composed his work at the *[illegible]* of several persons, and the number of believers must have been now augmented among the Greeks, since they denied a comment on the Apocalypse. The work was relished. Areras, a

long time afterwards, made one like it, or rather, took care to copy his predecessor. And as St. Andrew had implicitly taken the word of some of the ancients, Areras might surely take St. Andrews's.

Sect. 103. *St. Maximus.*

Thus was the Apocalypse introduced gradually, especially from the time that the false Dionysius the Areopagite, who classed it in the number of the sacred books, began to pass among the Greeks for the true Dionysius : St. Maximus, in the seventh century, impressed great importance on this author : they did not fail to believe him; and soon a great number of other people were determined by his authority; for as soon as opinion is once acknowledged, it becomes, of all authorities, the greatest and strongest.

Sect. 104. After this we need give ourselves no farther trouble as to the rest, though from so slight and trifling a beginning, yet assure yourself every thing will go on prosperously. Figure to yourself a little piece of snow, which the least breath of wind hath loosened from the summit of a mountain, a ball is formed, and by rolling becomes so enormous a mass, that it bears down every thing that it meets.

Sect. 105. Such is the omnipotence of current opinion. Let it support itself and roll for some time, it will soon have the whole world in its train. "I have seen, said one, the birth of various reports in my time, and though they were stifled as soon as born, we did not fail to foresee the course they would have taken, if they had lived their time. For it is only finding the end of the thread, one winds off as much as one pleases, and there is a greater remoteness from nothing to the smallest atom, than there is from this atom to the largest thing in the world. Private opinion often constitutes public opinion, and public opinion in its turn constitutes private opinion. Thus this great building advances, accumulating and forming itself from hand to hand, in such a manner, that the most distant spectator is better acquainted with it than the nearest, and the last more convinced than the first. Let a certain Divine, Justin Martyr for example, advance a thing without thinking, it is not of less value for that, let it not despair, it is sure to make its fortune. By only throwing the die at random, it meets the favorable point, gains the multitude, and engrosses the public belief, witness the statue of Simon Magus. This public faith, raised at first from the system of an individual, becomes afterwards itself to the individual a new degree of credibility, and the fact now is much better believed than before. See here the circle of human opinions, not merely of false, but also of true. Where comes this? It is that truth, however immutable, cannot become opinion, that it does not pass through the hands of men, and every thing that passes through this channel is subject to such revolutions.

Sect. 106. *The fourth council of Toledo*

But if the Apocalypse made conquests among the Greeks, it also found in the West, where its empire was better established, Divines, who refused to submit to it, whether this was a new sect, or whether it was the remainder of the ancient unbelievers above mentioned. For though from the time of pope Innocent it had been confirmed in 494 by pope Galasus, these sorts of decrees did not constitute the general law of the western churches. There were priests, who, to the great scandal of good souls, despised this book, and would not read it in public. The disorder went so far, that the fourth council of Toledo, held in 633, and the first council of Europe that hath explained its sentiments on this head, thought it its duty to remedy it, and institute the following canon, fitter than the best reasons to make an impression on the mind of the refractory. "The authority of several councils, faith the 27th canon, and the synodical decrees of the most holy bishops of Rome import, that the Apocalypse was written by St. John Evangelist, and that it must be received among the divinely inspired books." There are wanting here a few lines, where mention was made of those Divines, who vouchsafed not, says the council, to preach it in the church of God. If any one then for the future, refuse to receive it, or to preach it in the church, at the time of mass, from Easter to Whitsunday, he shall incur the sentence of

excommunication.²⁵

Sect. 107. The greatest part of the western Divines, who had given this book credit in the fourth century, the era of its general reception among the Latins, were Spaniards, or those in the neighborhood of the Pyrenees, as hath been before remarked. Behold here a council of Spain, which signalizeth itself by its zeal, and which comes from the extremity of the globe to give testimony to the genuineness of the Apocalypse, whilst it had as yet so little credit among the Greeks, who ought to have been the first to acknowledging it : and one may with truth declare, that the remotest testimony is better acquainted with the state of things than the nearest, and the last informed more persuaded than the first.

Sect. 108. We gather from this council, that they are accustomed to read it in public from Easter to Whitsunday : – perhaps the council itself was the author of this establishment, which did not obtain any where but in Spain. But what is of the greatest import to remark is, that in receiving it among the divine books, it sounds its decisions on the decrees of popes and the authorities of councils : by these popes he means undoubtedly Innocent I. And Gelasus. I am very much afraid that the pretended decree of Gelasus is not rather the production of an impostor. It was never cited till after the year 840, and the reasons of some critics appear to me rather strong to convict it of being supposititious : but one does not comprehend why the fathers of Toledo give themselves the honor of several councils. One has never heard speak but of once council of Carthage; and if there were some other which approved the Apocalypse, they did wrong not to name them. For it is not the time now to believe them on their word, experience of what is past renders us a little more distrustful. “It is a method, says M. Basnage, which is but too common with councils, as well as with particular Divines, to amplify their arguments, and detail them in the plural number, persuaded that they will gave time to dazzle and confound their opponents before they are called upon to make an enumeration of them.” Let the council of Toledo have used fraud, or let it have acted sincerely, which I rather think, it is however certain, that the method which it employed was of wonderful service to the Apocalypse. The menaces of excommunication perfectly enlightened the understandings, and from that time one sees not among the Latins the smallest trace of opposition.

Sect. 109. This was not the case among the Greeks, who, for want of a remedy as speedy and efficacious as this, did not emerge from their old prejudices but very slowly. The way of persuasion is much longer, and St. Maximus, who employed it to convert them from their error, notwithstanding the esteem he had acquired among them, made no great progress. We have already seen, that the false Dionysius often quotes the Revelation. St. Maximus, who indefatigably studied this author as if he were the genuine Dionysius, says in a note: *Observe, St. Dionysius receives the Apocalypse as the work of St. John the Evangelist.* This information was intended for the Greeks, who rejected it, and in order to convince the more effectually, he gives them to understand that nobody could be so well informed of this as St. Dionysius. “You will see by the tenth letter, adds he, that the Divine Evangelist was well known to St. Dionysius during his residence in the isle of Patmos, where he had the vision of the Apocalypse” This pretended letter of St. Dionysius, of which Maximus speaks, was written to St. John, to predict to him the end of his exile at Patmos, and his return to Ephesus. Thus at the same time that the apostle had extraordinary visions, by means of which he penetrated into the remotest futurity, he had however occasion to be informed that his banishment would soon be at an end. The fiction was but ill contrived, however it must have produced its intended effect upon the minds of the Greeks, the

25 I will here relate the fact which will serve to show the spirit of this council of Toledo. One of its canon expressly says, that one ought to use force to retain those among Christians, whom one has made to enter into the church by force. The reason it gives is, the fear there is that these relapsing may render the faith contemptible. One sees that force was then a law of the church, and that Spain especially was a territory excellently cultivated and prepared to receive the inquisition. *Editor's note.*

greatest part of whom then took the false Dionysius for an oracle, – and truly he had all the obscurity of one.

Sect. 110. *The general council of Constantinople*

I thought at first that the council of Constantinople, assembled in the palace of the emperor, in the year 692, would put an end to this dispute, and I am not the only one who have herein been deceived. They have groundlessly imagined, that it had drawn out a catalog of the sacred books. Nothing like it is found in the acts we now have of it, but this error arose from its having approved several councils, which did in effect institute these sorts of catalogs. This agreement is undoubtedly insufficient, and by wanting to approve too much, this council approves nothing. It receives the council of Carthage, but at the same time it receives the council of Laodicea; it receives both the one and the other without reserve, without restriction, that is, by approving the council of Carthage, it admits the Apocalypse; and by approving the council of Laodicea, it rejects the Apocalypse. It is the peculiar privilege of councils then to draw up contradictory articles, but for fear that such a privilege should in future happen to prescribe to them, they have taken the precaution to make a public act of it, and to renew it from time to time, as this council of Constantinople here does. The assembly was composed of four patriarchs, of two hundred and twenty bishops, and of a legate, who represented the western church : however, there was nobody found among them who could remind them of the contradiction, and if through misfortune, as it might very well happen, no mention had been made but only of the council of Carthage, who is there but would believe that a general council had adopted the Apocalypse? Alas, how many histories does the world believe, on appearances less strong! So true it is, that in regard of facts, even at the time that we follow the most exact rules, we are often determined to pronounce wrong judgments.

Sect. 111. We are, therefore, you see as little advanced as before, unless one would say, that the council of Constantinople is rather contrary than favorable to the Apocalypse, because, besides the council of Laodicea, it moreover approves the eighty-five apostolical canons, the last of which refuted it; and with regard to the council of Carthage, it would not be impossible that, in the East, they might then have had unfaithful translations of it, or mutilated copies, in which the Apocalypse might not be found. Nothing was more common than these sorts of falsification, and without going in search of further examples, behold here two remarkable ones, which obtrude themselves. The council of Carthage forbids ecclesiastics to dress their hair and cut their beards; this canon was afterwards inserted in the decretals, but the article of the beard was left out; – Why? – because the priests had then begun to shave. The second example is, that the council of Laodicea had directed to read in the churches only the canonical books, the catalog of which it immediately after rehearses. Dionysius, the small Latin author of the fifth century, hath rightly inferred in his collection of canons this prohibition to read the Apocrypha, but he hath omitted the catalog, without doubt because he did not see the Apocalypse in it, nor several other books which the Latins received. The Greeks in their turn treated the Latins in the same manner, and they accuse them of having corrupted and mutilated the western councils. Thus in their translation of the council of Carthage, perhaps they retrenched the Apocalypse, and the other books which the Greek church rejected. Falsification, begun of ancient date, acquired by this means a kind of title, and the fathers of Constantinople, who did not look so near, never intended to derogate from their council of Laodicea by approving that of Carthage. But this is only a conjecture, which I leave to the judgment of the critics.

Sect. 112. *John of Dmascus Nicephorus*

The following century, which is the eighth, does not enlighten us the more. Here one only sees John of Damascus, who classes the Apocalypse in the number of sacred books. But though this divine had a great authority among the Greeks, and his example hath not a little contributed to determine their future judgment, it was not however full of sentiment of the Greek church. One may be convinced of it by the

Stichometria of Nicephorus, who was at the head of this church about the beginning of the ninth century. This patriarch of Constantinople, here distinguishes three sorts of books in the Old and New Testament, some which the church receives as canonical, and the Apocalypse is not found here; others which are doubtful and contended, and others, lastly, which are false and apocryphal. The Apocalypse was included in the second class, for Anastasius the Librarian, who lived a little while after, and who translated this piece of Nicephorus, reckons among the contested books the Apocalypse of St. John, the Apocalypse of St. Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews.

Sect. 113. Afterwards came those times of ignorance, so sterile in writers, those iron ages of literature, so fit to *digest* all the absurdities which the preceding ages had but just *tasted*, and in which the grossest imposture walked boldly abroad by favor of a credulity that knew no bonds. One here loses fight of the Apocalypse through default of monuments, and it is impossible to trace it distinctly : all that one can presume with reason is, that by insensitive degrees it got as far as the door, and at last, taking advantage of a very dark night, it entered quietly, and without noise, into the canon of the Greek church, to hold a place there among divinely inspired writings.

Sect. 114. *The triumph of the Apocalypse*

Thus it was, that the ray of Divinity, which were hardly perceptible to the preceding centuries, struck with irresistible splendor the eyes of the whole Christian world, and in ages of the thickest darkness, they saw with greater clearness than ever they did before. Ancient doubt was construed into ignorance, and the new creed into most certain information. What the fathers assembled at Laodicea knew nothing of, and what they had not been able to find in the archives, nor in the tradition of the churches of Asia, which were the depositories of the writings of St. John, came to the knowledge of their posterity, who were better instructed in these things. It was on these new lights, that at last, at the end of a thousand years, they held the Apocalypse to be abundantly authenticated, to be the work of this apostle, and consequently worthy to be received as a canonical book. One cannot mark the precise time, nor the circumstances of this reception. What is certain is, that it was about the tenth century, very quietly, and if I may so express it, quite in the Huguenot way, not by any decree of a council, nor by any of those modes which, in order to be more ostentatious, are not always the more honorable to truth.

Sect. 115. From that time, there does not appear the least contest on this subject, neither among the Greeks, nor among the Latins : for one ought to reckon as nothing a MS. Of five hundred years old, which Dr. Burnet had seen, and which contained, with figures, the visions of the Apocalypse joined to Aesop's Fables; whence it is concluded, that the author of this MS believed one no more than the other : be it as it may, one might contrast it with the story of the emperor Otho II. Who, out of devotion, wore an habit, on which he had ordered all the Apocalypse to be embroidered. This certainly is as good as the picture of that unknown person, who was professedly a libertine. If ever book was indebted for some luster to its commentators, most certainly it is not the Apocalypse. I speak of the whole time that preceded the Reformation, besides them being so inconsiderable in number, they are such pitiful commentators, that one dares not attribute them to those whole names they bear; such are those of St. Ambrose, St. Anselm, St. Thomas, and St. Bernard.

Sect. 116. But from the time of the great revolution that happened in the sixteenth century, a new interest of religion hath put the minds of men in motion, and greater application than ever hath been employed to investigate all the meaning of the Apocalypse. From this era, yielded up as a prey to all sorts of commentators, great and small, it hath proved the subject of disputes and controversies between the Catholics and Lutherans, between the Calvinists and the English.

Sect. 117. As in the opinion of every one this book contains the destiny of the church, every sect in

particular has not failed to make an application of it to themselves, and often to the exclusion of others. The English find here the revolutions of Great Britain, the Lutherans, the troubles of Germany, and the French refugees, what happened to them in France. In sine, each church boasts of finding itself here, according to the rank that it thinks it holds in the plan of Providence, and which you may be sure is always the first place. There is only the Catholic church which hath circumscribed it within limits of the three first centuries, during which it maintains, that every thing was accomplished; as if it were afraid, left descending lower, it should see Antichrist in the person of its metropolitan. 24 OC 62

FINIS.