

## SAINT IGNATIUS vs. THE HISTORICISTS.

BY WILLIAM BENJAMIN SMITH.

IN the recently published Vol. IV of his *Cultes, Mythes et Religions*, the distinguished savant, Mr. Salomon Reinach, devotes pp. 189-206 to a consideration of some phases of Docetism and reaches certain "grave conclusions that seem to offer the equivalent of a Palestinian document of the first century in support of the uncompromising scepticism of Benjamin Smith." To appreciate the full force of the archeologist's reasoning, one must read the relevant memoirs in their entirety, along with the rejoinder of M. Paul Louis Couissin, generously included in the same volume.

The argument turns on the testimony of Ignatius.<sup>1</sup> At mention of this name a cold shiver may seize the reader, for the Ignatian question is one of the most difficult and desperately contested that have ever puzzled the critical understanding, and seems even now almost as far as ever from complete and satisfactory answer. For precisely this reason, not to entangle the thought in such a knotty skein, little use was made in *Ecce Deus* of the witness of Ignatius, —it was merely declared (p. 206) that he "has his heart set on a strict historic interpretation of the Gospel," and "has the ardent zeal of one that is advancing something comparatively new, not the calm confidence of a conservative upholding the old." So much at least might be safely affirmed, without prejudging any disputed point concerning the Longer and the Shorter Recension and the still shorter Syriac version discovered and preferred by Cureton.

It is a nearly parallel thought that Reinach has skilfully developed. He distinguishes two forms of Docetic doctrine, a milder and a more radical; it is with the latter that he is particularly concerned. This "extreme Docetism," he holds, was born in Palestine, is attested by the learned Alexandrians and by the Acts of

<sup>1</sup> Second Bishop of Antioch in Syria, sent by Trajan (according to Eusebius, *H. E.*, III, 36) to Rome to be devoured by wild beasts in the amphitheater, A. D. 108. *En route*, he is supposed to have written his "Epistles."

St. John (first half of second century), and dates back to the age of the Apostles themselves; for Jerome declares in a familiar passage,<sup>2</sup> that "while the Apostles were still living on earth, while the blood of Christ was still fresh in Judea, the body of the Lord was declared to be a phantasm." According to Mgr. Batiffol (*Revue biblique*, 1911, 180-181) this is what Ignatius calls "Judaizing." Contrasted with this radical Judaizing Docetism, the milder Christian Docetism appears to M. Reinach as an attempt "to conciliate the Christian idea of the divine and spiritual Christ, without which—no Christianity, with a Judaic *x*." But what was this *x* that so vexed the Docetic Christians? Reinach answers: "A circumstantial denial of the existence of Jesus at the epoch where the Christians placed his life and his death." To the Jews of Palestine who denied the historicity *exactly on the supposed scene of that historicity*, the Christian Docetist replied: "Yes, you did not see Jesus in his flesh, because he did not exist fleshwise; but the Apostles and the throngs of the faithful both saw and heard him; they beheld him on the cross at the time of Pilate, they beheld him re-risen. It was a divine phantom, an aerial being, wholly spiritual, whom their eyes saw, whose voice their ears heard, but who was not palpable to the touch."

In this way Docetism becomes intelligible and explains many things. It was a polemical device, an artifice to turn the edge of the unbelieving Jew's denial. Why did not the Christian appeal to historic evidence, to carefully preserved archives, or to some other form of documentary proof? M. Reinach replies, "perhaps there was no authentic document."

Up to this time Docetism has not been understood. On current suppositions it is hard or impossible to understand it. Why should any Christians who were preaching with so much zeal and emphasis the doctrine of the saving suffering of Jesus yet turn right round and teach that he did not suffer at all, that he merely seemed to suffer, that it was all merely a phantasm, his whole earthly life and death? Such a strange doctrine does not seem to emerge naturally from the early Christian consciousness as commonly conceived. By Reinach's hypothesis it is made thinkable, it appears as a *dernier ressort* in the exigencies of controversy.

Without further elaboration of this ingenious theory, let us turn to the witness itself of Irenæus and see what it may teach us

<sup>2</sup> "Apostolis adhuc in saeculo superstitibus, adhuc apud Judæam Christi sanguine recenti, phantasma Domini corpus asserebatur."—*Dial. adv. Lucif.* § 23.

in any and every case, independently both of this theory and of the particular view that one may take of the origin and original form of the Ignatian Epistles.

The first hint of the great interest of Ignatius in the historicity is given in the word "true" (real, genuine) in the address of *Ephesians*: "Elect through the true passion by the will" etc. The same word is repeatedly emphasized in other Epistles of Ignatius. Evidently he has in mind certain Christians who did not think there had been a *true* passion. But the all-important passage is found in chapters XVIII and XIX:

"Offscouring my spirit is of the cross, which is an offence to the unbelieving but to us salvation and life everlasting. Where is a sage? Where a disputer? Where boasting of those called prudent? For our God Jesus the Christ was conceived by Mary according to dispensation (of God), as well of David's seed as of holy spirit, who was born and was baptized, that by the passion he might purify the water.

"XIX. And hid from the Prince of this æon was the virginity of Mary and her bringing forth, likewise also the death of the Lord. Three mysteries of shout, which in stillness of God were wrought. How then were they [or was he] manifested to the ages? A star in heaven shone beyond all the stars, and its light was ineffable, and its novelty produced amazement; and the other stars along with sun and moon became chorus for the star, but itself in its light was far surpassing all; and perplexity there was, whence the novelty so unlike them. Whereby was dissolved all magic, and every bond of vileness vanished away, ignorance was annulled, the ancient kingdom was destroyed, God being humanly manifested unto newness of eternal life, and its beginning received what with God had been prepared. Hence were all things commoved by taking death's abolition in hand."

What natural, what inevitable reflections arise on reading these verses thus literally rendered? Surely none can fail to ask, what has Ignatius in mind? Is he stating historic facts? Or even what he himself in his heart regards as historic? Is he telling what happened publicly in Judea, known and observed of all men, notorious throughout all Palestine, proclaimed by apostolic witnesses throughout the world? If so, then his language could hardly have been more unfortunately chosen. If so, why does he call these three events, conception, birth and death, "three mysteries of clamor"? Why does he say they "*escaped the notice* of this age's prince," of Satan, who is commonly regarded as a keen, accurate, and up-to-date

observer, especially of matters in which he is particularly interested? And what of the heavenly manifestation and of the starry choir? If this be meant as literal history, what would be meant as poetical symbolism? Notice too the results of this manifestation. Are they anything but the overthrow of idolatry, with all that is implied therein? Is not this "cosmic" "eschatologic" revolution, following straight upon this revelation, is it not the conversion of the whole world from heatheness to the worship of the One God, of "our God Jesus the Christ"? About the details there may be room for wrangling; concerning the general import there seems to be none. Ignatius seems conscious that he is *not* dealing with matters of earthly experience, with a human life in Palestine, but with celestial happenings, with spiritual doctrines enveloped in the sensuous robes of figurative speech.

In the letter to the Magnesians, the Bishop of Antioch, whose main insistence is that one should "do naught without the Bishop," finds time to speak in an unfinished sentence of "deacons... entrusted with the deaconship of Jesus, who before [the] ages with [the] Father was and in [the ages'] end appeared." Here the "cosmic" "eschatologic" element so accented by Weiss and Schweitzer is visible. The end of the ages coincides with the appearance of Jesus, with the final revelation of "our God Jesus Christ" to all the world. It was not at all strange that the conversion of all Pagandom to the "monotheistic Jesus-cult" (Deissmann) should seem to be the consummation of history.

In c. VIII we read: "For the most divine prophets lived according to Christ Jesus. Therefore also they were persecuted, being inspired by his grace fully to convince the disobedient that there is one God who manifested Himself through Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Logos proceeding from Silence, who in every way well pleased the one that sent him."

Here we note that the Christ Jesus is treated as active during the pre-Christian ages, as inspiring the prophets, whose mission was and is to convince the disobedient (heathens) of monotheism, as realized in the revelation of "our God Jesus Christ." "Proceeding from Silence" seems to be a Gnostic notion, and the whole color of the passage is strongly dogmatic and metaphoric, not at all historic.

In c. IX we read of "His death which (or whom?) some deny," which would show a marked diversity of christological theory in Antioch.

In c. XI the Magnesians are exhorted "to be fully persuaded

in the birth and the passion and the resurrection that occurred in [the] time of the governance of Pontius Pilate: accomplished truly and surely by Jesus Christ our hope, from which to turn aside may none of you befall."

Note carefully the historic element here and compare it with the Long Recension, which declares explicitly that "the Christ was begotten by the Father before all ages but was afterwards born of the Virgin Mary without any intercourse with man. He also lived a holy life, and healed all manner of sickness and disease among the people, and wrought signs and wonders for the good of men, and to such as had fallen into the error of polytheism he made known the one and only true God, his Father, and underwent the passion and endured the cross at the hands of Christ-killing Jews, under Pontius Pilate the governor and Herod the King. He also died, and rose again, and ascended into the heavens to the one that sent him, and sat down at his right hand and shall come at the age's end with his Father's glory, to judge the living and the dead, and to render to every one according to his works."

Compare the earlier with the Longer, and later, Recension and this with the so-called Apostles' Creed. Is it possible not to recognize that here are three stages, that the dogma of the historicity is growing, growing under our very eyes?

The Trallians appear (c. II) "to live not according to man but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us, that having believed on his death ye may escape dying" (in the Longer Recension, "ye may by baptism be made partakers of his resurrection"). We note the significance of the belief. It is conceived magically. Moreover this latter "dying" is clearly not to be taken literally. Why then should the first "death" be taken literally? Are we not moving here in "spheres of magic, dream, and vision"? Is not the indication against the historicity in question? In the third verse we read of "the deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ." These "mysteries" have already been defined (in Eph. xix) as three dogmas concerning quasi-historical facts. If these be really historical, there can be no mystery about them; only on the supposition that they are not historical, but are religious symbols, can they be called mysteries.

Certainly Ignatius strives hard enough to teach that all is simple history. In c. IX we read: "Be deaf then whenever any speak to you apart from Jesus Christ, him [born] of David's stock, him [born] of Mary, who was truly born, both ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died, those in heaven and on earth and under earth beholding; who also

was truly raised from the dead, his Father having raised him, according to the likeness whereof us also that believe in him shall his Father raise up in Jesus Christ, apart from whom true life we have none.

“X. But if, as some that are godless, that is, unbelieving, assert, his suffering was semblance only, themselves being the semblance, then I wherefore am bound? and why even long to fight with beasts? etc.”

The Longer Recension is far more elaborate, introducing much that is found in the Gospels, and again illustrating vividly the growth of the “history.” The important thing is that Ignatius attaches the weightiest moment to the historicity, he affirms it with exceeding emphasis and explicitness. One would think that in such a vital matter he would do something more, that he would hint at some form or semblance of proof. But nay! He does naught of the kind; apparently he has no evidence of any order to submit. Neither has the Longer Recensor. Except a few inapposite citations from Scripture, he has nothing to offer in support of his central thesis. The question must force itself upon the reader’s mind: How can these things be? How is it that a Bishop of Antioch, that great center of early Christianity—who might as a boy have seen Paul and Barnabas, James and Peter, the most intimate witnesses of the earliest Gospel and the Galilean ministry—when grappling in a life-and-death contest with heresy, is yet unable to produce a single bit of historical evidence, where even a trifle would be sufficient, but where *something* is absolutely necessary? Strange, when we reflect that Antioch was only a very moderate distance from Galilee (about 230 miles as the crow flies), and that intercourse between the two was lively.

Passing by a few scattering phrases that have interest but allow no confident conclusions, we come to a noteworthy passage (Philadelphians VIII, 2), on which M. Reinach lays great and merited stress: “But I entreat you do naught in factiousness but in love of Christ. For I heard some saying, that ‘unless in the archives I find [it] in the Gospel I do not believe [it], and when I said to them that *It is written*, they answered me, That is the question [*prokeitai*, it lies before, it is open for discussion]. But for me archives are Jesus Christ, the untouched archives his cross and his death and his resurrection and the faith that is through him, in which I wish through your prayers to be justified.” The accepted text *archeiois* (archives) is rendered “charters” by Kirsopp Lake as well as by Lightfoot, but *ta archeia* means properly *the public*

*records*, and hence more generally *original documents*. Understood in the strict sense it would refer, as Reinach shows, to the official papers at Cæsarea, though others think it means the Old Testament Scriptures. Doubtless the report of such an execution by Pontius Pilate would have been filed at Cæsarea, the "head of Palestine" (Tacitus, *Hist.* II, 79) and seat of the Roman government. Its absence from such records would have been a rare occasion for a victory of faith. The argument would seem to be that some doubters urged, "Unless it be found in the archives (at Cæsarea), the account in the Gospel I will not accept." Had there been such an official record, it could have been produced, and that would have been the end of controversy. But what did Irenæus reply? "*Gegraptai*, it is written." This means, it is Scripture, and refers regularly to the Old Testament, to which accordingly Irenæus made his appeal. So too did the early Christians in general. When Philip would convert the eunuch he never hinted at archives, he expounded the Isaian passage concerning the Servant of Jehovah, he preached Jesus. When the "Apostle" would demonstrate the Gospel proclaimed unto the Corinthians, he tells them he delivered them what he had himself received, namely, that "Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, that he was buried, and rose again *according to the Scriptures*." Similarly Justin proves whatever history he needs by finding it predicted in the Scriptures, and Chrysostom holds that the testimony of the prophets is superior to that of any historian,—nay, "prophecy outweighs even the historical facts themselves," If the facts did not agree with prophecy, so much the worse for the facts. Such a universal frame of proto-Christian mind seems impossible, if the real basis of the primitive faith had been history; it seems natural and intelligible, only if that original was a body of dogma, and the historical element a later accretion, which could not support the dogma but which the dogma itself had to support.

To return to Irenæus. The proof from prophecy, from the Old Testament Scriptures, was all that he produced (or at least has mentioned) but the Docetists would not admit the validity; they answered, "There's the rub." Do the Scriptures really prove that there must have been a virgin birth and a passion and a resurrection, all of the flesh? Of course, to call in question was to end this proof, hence Irenæus apparently abandons all reasoning and betakes himself to passionate assertion. "But for me archives are Jesus Christ etc." Obviously such is the device of a man that is at his wits' end for argument and puts his trust in declamation

alone. For the Bishop the only archives are the sacred dogmas in his own mind.

Well, then, at the beginning of the second century, the Bishop of the greatest Asiatic church, which had given name to Christians themselves, and was situated within easy reach of the supposed Palestinian site of the historical Gospel, has nothing but prophecy to call to his help when the historical reality of his central and most vital doctrine is called in question. Is this state of case consistent with the hypothesis of the historical verity of the dogmas doubted? The reader may decide.

For the sake of completeness we must append the passage in the Epistle to Smyrneans (c. I): "I glorify Jesus Christ, the God that hath thus made you wise,—who are fully persuaded as to our Lord, as being of David's stock according to flesh, son of God according to will and power (of God), born truly of a virgin, baptized by John, that there be fulfilled all righteousness by him; truly under Pontius Pilate and Herod (the) Tetrarch nailed for us in flesh, from whose fruit (are) we from his God-blessed passion, that he might set up an ensign unto the ages through his resurrection, for his Saints and Faithful, whether among Jews or among Gentiles, in one body of his Church." The next chapter protests in the now familiar fashion against such as hold "his passion was in semblance." Chapter III adduces the speech to Peter, "Take, handle me, and see that I am not a demon incorporeal," referred by Jerome to the Gospel of the Nazarenes, and closely paralleled by Luke xxiv, 39.

This passage is important as attesting the comparative primitiveness of the Docetic theory. For no critic will contend that the incident is historic or deny that it must be understood precisely as Irenæus employs it, as a protest against the Docetist. A similar attestation is found in the similar story in John xx. 26-29. A doctrine thus witnessed in three Gospels (to say nothing of others still) representing as many widely diverse phases of early Christianity, must itself have been much older than any of the three and have been widely diffused.

Moreover, we have here a vivid illustration of the method of controversy prevalent in those circles. If a doctrine displeased, its opponent did not have recourse to a common basis of historic fact from which he could proceed to confutation,—the one and only such accepted basis was the Old Testament, which perhaps had only very remote bearing on the case. Nor could he in general fall back on some received philosophic or theosophic dogma and thence de-



duce the contradiction of the doctrine opposed. For there was no such clearly defined and fruitful dogma, and the path of deduction was long and narrow and intricate. It was much easier and more effective as well as more congenial with his modes of thought and feeling to *state* his own view so eloquently, plausibly, persuasively as to carry conviction to the heart of his hearers or readers—a method still in the highest favor in the most respectable circles. The most captivating form that he could give to such a statement was the historic. After a fashion endlessly exemplified in the Talmud, he invented an incident as a setting or framework for his idea; he enlivened the dull shades of the dogmatic statement with the bright hues of anecdote, he composed the figures subtly, with an eye to dramatic effect. In this way a whole body of doctrine may be set forth under the garb of historic events. There is no understanding early Christianity without keeping this favorite method in mind.

But we should do the ancient scribe a great injustice in supposing that he was trying to deceive. The literary-argumentative method in question was well-known and generally approved. It was like returning the answer "Not at home" to the caller, who takes the symbol as it is meant and is neither offended nor misled. Such a method may not please the Western European; but the proto-Christians were Western Asiatics.

The zeal of Ignatius leads him to declare of these Docetists, perhaps the followers of the ascetic Saturninus, c. VII: "From Eucharist and prayer they abstain, through not confessing the Eucharist to be flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, which in his goodness the Father raised up." Here the bread is actually the flesh, the flesh that suffered and was raised up by God. Of course, here as elsewhere the Longer Recension is still more emphatic and has gone much further along the same road. In chapter XII the writer returns to the passion, but without adding anything new.

Naturally the Bishop of Antioch does not presume to instruct Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna. But in c. III he exhorts the latter not to "let those that seem to be trustworthy and teach other doctrine overthrow thee. Stand firm as an anvil smitten,"—the finest sentence in the Ignatians. We note that these early Docetists (for such they must have been, since other forms of error receive little attention from Ignatius) are described as "seeming to be worthy of faith." They are not denounced as innovators, but merely as "other-teaching" (not "teaching strange doctrines," as Lightfoot

and Kirsopp Lake render it. Of course, the word came to mean *teaching error*). The indications are that they were highly respectable, representing more or less perfectly the elder form of the faith, which the ardent reformer Ignatius would supplant with the crass materialism that has dominated the church for nearly 1800 years.

The reader might think that the Bishop is wholly concerned with obvious errors touching matters of historic fact, and that he is using plain speech of daily life, to be taken literally at its face value. And yet his speech is shot through and through with the boldest and baldest metaphors. A single example: In Trallians (c. VIII) we read, "Do ye, therefore, adopting meekness renew yourselves in faith, which is flesh of the Lord, and love, which is blood of Jesus Christ." No hint of the meaning is given. Surely such an exhortation must be addressed to a consciousness familiar with parabolic, allegoric, and other figurative modes of speech, such a consciousness as would not stumble at any of the symbolisms interpreted in *Ecce Deus*. Could such a consciousness have been nurtured on the artless matter-of-fact Gospels that people the fancy of the critics who are set for the defense of the historical character of Jesus?

It has not escaped the notice of the reader that we seem to have discovered at various points in these Ignatians a more or less primitive phase of thought and form of expression, the author falls into phrases and notions that betray a Gnostic tinge in his mind (as when he speaks of "proceeding from Silence" and in the long description of the manifestation of Jesus, Eph. IV). Once and again he seems to pass over at least towards the Docetism he so insistently combats.<sup>3</sup> Yet there can be no doubt that he is intensely earnest in his battle. He is fighting the heresy with passionate zeal and launches against it all the shafts of his orthodox fervor. Whence then his own taint of the heterodoxical expression?

The answer does not seem difficult. Ignatius is a bishop, a shepherd of the fold of God. In some way he has come to regard the historical view of the Gospel and of the Christ as by all means the safest for his flock and for all such flocks. He is not a philosopher, not a liberal thinker, not in the least democratic. He has

<sup>3</sup>This is no mere conceit of the writer's. Bishop Lightfoot speaks of the "Gnostic colouring" of the Ephesian passage and asks (*A. F.*, I, 388): "Will not the suspicion cross our minds that Ignatius may have moved more or less in the same circles from which Valentinianism sprung?" Pfeleiderer declares, "This conjecture" of the Coryphæus of English orthodox scholarship "is doubtless well founded" (*Prim. Christianity*, III, 350).

no faith whatever in human reason, none in freedom of thought, nor in the process of the suns, nor in the long result of time, neither does he care a straw for the education of the masses. His ideal is a thoroughly harmonious and devoted hierarchy of bishops and other officers, all caring zealously for the souls committed to their charge, and a laity of unquestioning worshipers, accepting everything at the hands of their clergy and official superiors as from the hand of God himself. The more priest-ridden the better. In no other way could perfect unity of faith and practice be attained or preserved. To this end the simple historical view of the Gospels seemed alone suited. To this end he inculcates it with unwearied insistence and denounces fiercely even the most respectable opponents. But Ignatius had not always been such an uncompromising historicist; it is even doubtful whether in his inmost mind he was even then so convincingly historical as he seemed. The historical view appeared to him best suited to the people, the only one in fact that promised the unity and harmony that he craved, the only one that could *catholicize* (unify and universalize) the church. On this his heart was set, and he seized upon the apparently single effective means. His own thought, his own knowledge in the matter he counted but dross, as "offscouring" to be cast aside. If then he occasionally lapses into other fashions of thought and language, he must not be judged harshly, nor his essential sincerity impeached.

The case of Irenæus is not at all strange or peculiar. It has been repeated millions of times in the history of church and state. It is notorious that a wide chasm separates the dialect of the parlor and the pulpit, of the hustings and the home. Over twenty years ago a popular and able clergyman, a very successful evangelist and builder of churches, and withal an excellent man, remarked to me: "I dare not tell the people the best that I know. That sounds pretty bad. A *suppressio veri* is very nearly a *suggestio falsi*. It gives me great distress. I don't know what to do about it." What he did do, was to keep on preaching "what the people can bear," fanning the flames of orthodox zeal and arousing congregations to enthusiasm. How many such there are even now in every established form of polity, we shall never know till the books are opened.

The hypothesis of M. Reinach is seductive and calls for gratitude.<sup>4</sup> But in any case the witness of Irenæus is distinctly against

<sup>4</sup>In general it seems certain that Docetism was one of the oldest and most wide-spread phenomena of the Christian faith. It was practically universal in Gnosticism, which is now admitted to have been pre-Christian. It is combatted in the Gospels and in the Epistles. It tinged even the learned

the dogma of historicity, which he so pertinaciously forces to the front. "Methinks the lady doth protest too much." It is incredible (if Jesus was historical), that a bishop of the Mother Church of Gentile Christianity, within a day or two's journey of the shores of Galilee, where witnesses of the wondrous life and death would have been still alive,—a bishop who must have known the first disciples or their immediate followers, who could not have failed to learn from them a large body of biographical details,—should yet when confronted with an abhorred heresy denying *in toto* the historical reality of that wonderful career, when there was the most imperative need for just one little fact of history to confute the hated heretics,—it is incredible that such a bishop under such extreme urgency should not be able to produce a single item of evidence, not even the smallest, but should have to content himself with repeated assertions of the dogma in question and should find his *only* testimony in the thousand-year old prophecies of the Old Testament! We repeat, then, the witness of Irenæus is distinctly *against the historicity of Jesus*. It attests cumulatively in the Shorter and still more in the Longer Recension, the *gradual growth of the dogma* of the humanity of Jesus as opposed to an older Docetic faith dating from the apostolic age, which did not recognize the historical reality of the human life. This Docetism was itself in all likelihood *not* the very earliest form of Christianity (which was the still purer proclamation of the One Saviour-God), but in any case its existence negatives the notion that the first preaching proclaimed a man Jesus. We are exploring the tossed ruins of worlds on worlds of thought. Like Dörpfeld we may expect to find stratum piled on stratum, Troy heaped on Troy.

We have cited the Ignatians exactly, at all significant points,

Clement of Alexandria. What is still more important, it is the *later forms* that incline most towards the orthodox historical view (as Lightfoot, followed by Pfeleiderer, admits in these words: "The tendency in docetism was to become less pronounced as time went on."—*A. F.* I, 382); the oldest forms of which we have any knowledge are the clearest and sharpest in their definition, in their simple direct dogma that Jesus was God, that the human form was wholly unreal, at most a phantasm. Such was the assertion (says Jerome) even in the days of the Apostles. *But even this was not the most primitive phase.* Behind the Apostles, behind the New Testament Gospels, lies the still earlier Gospel ("older than the Gospels is the Gospel"—Zahn). According to psychology, to history, to common sense, it must have presented a still simpler form, which spoke of Jesus as the Saviour-God, in patent anthropomorphic terms, much as the Old Testament speaks of Jehovah.—The facts of Docetism, and of Gnosticism in general, are decisive against the historicity and were among the first to engage my attention and to employ my pen. But they are so many, so immense in range, so complicate, and often so obscure as to make any adequate statement and discussion both tedious and difficult in the extreme.

but no amount of citation can present the argument in its full strength. The reader should peruse the whole "Ignatian Body" at a sitting, should yield himself to the general impression, laying aside all prepossession, and should then ask himself the question: Is this the defence of a rather recent, well-ascertained, well-established, and indubitable historical fact against the extravagant fancies of errorists? or is it a special pleading for a new construction of ancient symbols of faith and doctrine? The reader's impartial judgment will hardly hesitate long, for truly, Ignatius, thy speech bewrayeth thee.