

THE
INFALLIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

A COURSE OF LECTURES

DELIVERED IN THE
Divinity School of the University of Dublin

BY

GEORGE SALMON, D. D.

PROVOST OF TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN SOMETIME REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

Author of

A Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament

SECOND EDITION

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET .

1890

Lecture X.

HERMENEUTICAL TRADITION.

SOMETHING must now be said as to a lower claim that has been made for tradition; it has been put forward by some, not as an independent source of information, but as an interpreter of Scripture. Modest as that claim sounds, it might easily be so used as to supersede Scripture altogether. If we had a guide who could only speak to us in a language we did not understand, the interpreter who translated for us his directions would be our real guide. In the reign of Charles the First there were some who professed readiness to obey the commands of the king, *as notified to them by Parliament*; but, practically, it amounted to exactly the same as refusing to obey the king, if Parliament were recognized as his only mouthpiece. Accordingly, it was one of Cardinal Newman's not least surprising feats of ingenuity, and yet in real truth not the most difficult, to show that, on the subject of the Sixth Article, the difference between the true meaning of the Church of England and the Church of Rome. was more apparent than real. Writing to Dr. Pusey, he says: 'The opposing parties attach different meanings to the word "proof" in the controversy whether the whole faith is or is not contained in Scripture. Roman Catholics mean that not every Article is so contained there, that it may thence be legally proved, independently of the teaching and authority of tradition. But Anglicans mean that every Article is so contained there, that it may thence be proved, provided that there be added the illustrations and compensations of tradition; and it is in this latter sense that I conceive that the Fathers also speak. I am sure, at least, that St. Athanasius frequently adduces passages in proof of points in controversy which no one could see to be proofs unless Apostolic tradition were taken into account, first as suggesting, then as authoritatively ruling, their meaning. Thus you Anglicans do not deny that the whole is not in Scripture, in such sense that pure unaided logic can draw it from the Sacred Text, nor do Roman Catholics deny that the faith is in Scripture in an improper sense, that tradition is able to recognize it, and determine it there.'¹

The opinions which Newman ascribes here to Anglicans may have been those of Dr. Pusey, whom he was addressing, but I am sure they were not those of the framers of our Article, nor do I believe they were those of the Fathers whom I have quoted. It is highly ingenious, but far from satisfactory, to oppose the practice of Athanasius to his theory. His theory was expressed in the words, 'The Holy and Inspired Scriptures are sufficient of themselves for the preaching of the Truth.'² 'These [canonical books] are

¹ See also Newman, *On the Development of Christian Doctrine*, chap. vi. sec. 1.

² *Cont. Genies*, i. 1. In this place Athanasius teaches the doctrine we have laid down,

the fountains of salvation, so that he who thirsts may be satisfied with the oracles contained in them: in these alone the school of piety preaches the Gospel: let no man add to or take from them' (*Fest. Ep. 39*). Against this we are asked to set the fact that some of the Scripture proofs which he himself offers are not what to our minds would be conclusive; and thence to infer that when he undertakes to give Scripture proof, he only means something which, in his own mind, might pass for proof, but be quite incapable of standing logical examination. In what a light is this to represent the venerable Father! When Abraham refused to accept land from the Hittite chieftain as a gift, but insisted on paying its value, we are told that he weighed the price in silver current money with the merchant; but if Abraham had given bad weight in money that would not pass, Ephron would feel that he had been much worse dealt with than if his land had been taken without payment. And so it would be much more straightforward dealing for a Church to ask that we should take her word without any proof, than to offer to give us proof, and then let us find out that we had got to take her word what was proof, and what was not. You may be sure that Athanasius did not offer any Scripture proofs that, according to his own principles of interpretation, he did not believe to be good. We are offered every day by Protestants Scripture proofs, which in our judgments are not good proofs; but that gives its no right to suppose that it is only in some non-natural sense they hold the sufficiency of Scripture. Nay, rather it is the firmness with which they hold that principle which urges them, in their deep conviction of the necessity of offering Scripture proofs for their doctrines, sometimes to press into their service texts which to a sober judgment do not seem conclusive.

Is tradition, then, of no use in the interpretation of Scripture? I believe it has its uses, and important uses, both positive and negative, though its range is more limited than its advocates would have us believe. To speak first of its negative use, we must grant that a new-fangled interpretation of Scripture has to encounter a great presumption against it, arising from the probability that if this were the true interpretation it would not be left for this generation to discover it. I don't say that it is more than a presumption, or that previous students have so sounded all the depths of Scripture as to make it impossible for a late commentator to discover any thing which his predecessors have overlooked; but still it is a presumption, and one which, in some cases, may rise to something like certainty. Take the text, 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church.' According to modern Romanists this is the charter text of the whole constitution of the Church. By it Peter and his successors were made the governors of the Church, to whom

both as to the sufficiency of Scripture and as to the advantage of human instruction in it.

it was to resort for the decision of every dispute, and the solution of every problem. Well, if that had been the true meaning of the text, the other Apostles would have so understood it, at least after their minds had been enlightened by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; and they would have taught its meaning to the Churches which they founded. The whole Church would have acted on this rule from the first, and the trite meaning of the text on which the rule was founded could never have been forgotten. When we find then, on the contrary, that this is a text on which the greatest diversity of interpretation prevailed among the early Fathers, that a great majority of them do not find in the text a bestowal of personal prerogatives even on Peter, and that none of them find the Bishop of Rome there, then we can confidently say that historical tradition excludes the modern Roman interpretation, because it is absolutely incredible that, if this had been the right one, it should be entirely lost and forgotten, and not recovered for four or five centuries.

Then, again, I believe that, in matters of ritual or other positive institution, tradition can do more useful service than in matters of abstract doctrine. An illustration or two will make my meaning plainer. One example is often brought forward by Roman Catholic writers. When our Lord washed His disciples' feet He said to them, 'If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done unto you.' We interpret this precept in the spirit, not in the letter. We hold that our Lord, by performing a menial office for His disciples, designed to impress on them more forcibly by a visible sign the precept by which He had before rebuked their ambitious conflicts, 'The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them, but it shall not be so among you, but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' But we are asked, how do we know that we are not to interpret this precept literally. May it not be the case that, in omitting actually to wash one another's feet, we are neglecting a Sacramental rite instituted by our Lord Himself? I think we must here concede to the Roman Catholic that the usage of the Church is not without weight in settling this question, and that we are all affected by it in our judgment on this matter, even if we are not aware of it. For suppose that the usage had been different—suppose that from time immemorial it had been the practice at Christian meetings for worship that this precept of our Lord's had been read out, and that then some proceeded to wash the feet of others—I do not think that we should then hesitate to give a literal meaning to the words recorded by St. John, and that we should have scrupled to

think it sufficient, as we do now, to comply with the spirit of the command.

Something of the same kind may be said with reference to the Sacraments. If we are asked why we think that sprinkling is sufficient compliance with our Lord's command to baptize, it seems to me that it is practically a good answer to say that the Church has always so understood it, for the question cannot be determined either way without an appeal to tradition in some form or another. For, after all, lexicons are only an embodiment of tradition, and it is an appeal to tradition which must settle what is the meaning of the Greek word *baptiso*. One example more. The Council of Trent, as I already told you, informs us that the Church has learned by tradition, that in the words of St James are taught the matter, the form, the proper minister, and the effect of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. Well, if in place of taking the word of the Council of Trent, we examine into the tradition for ourselves, we find the facts quite the opposite to the assertion of the Council. We find that the anointing of the sick, whose recovery was not aimed at or expected, was a comparatively modern practice, arising not out of a traditional, but quite a private, interpretation of the well-known words of St. James, and that those who first introduced the practice were quite at sea as to the proper way of carrying it out, with regard to points on which they would have needed no instruction if this had been a Sacrament of Apostolic institution. I will freely own that my judgment on this so-called Sacrament would be quite different from what it is now if there had been historic evidence of the descent of the practice from the Apostolic age. Other instances of the same kind might be given, but I have said enough to show that, in rejecting tradition, it is not our wish arbitrarily to cut ourselves off from using any source of initiation that may be accessible to us. We are willing to give its due weight to anything that can be established on sufficient evidence, but we will not set aside the obvious meaning of Scripture, on the mere presumption that the currency of doctrines opposed to Scripture must have originated in tradition.

It remains for me to speak of the province of hermeneutical tradition on points, not of ritual, but of abstract doctrine. And here a very obvious remark may be made—that the use of a text at any time, to prove a doctrine, if it does not prove that use of the text to be the right one, at least shows that those who so employed it believed the doctrine which they alleged that text to prove. Thus, in modern Roman Catholic books of devotion, you may find a text from Canticles cited in the form, 'Thou art all fair, my love, and there is no spot of original sin in thee,' and used to prove the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. We are not bound to believe that to be the true meaning of the text; but we cannot deny that its being now so used would prove at any future time that the Church of Rome in the nineteenth century believed in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. It gains lit-

tle for a doctrine to prove that the Church of the nineteenth century believed it, but it is of great importance to know how the Church of the first century believed, for it is reasonable to think that any doctrines in which the Churches that were taught by the Apostles agreed, were part of the Apostles' teaching. And so at any time the current interpretations of Scripture are an excellent index to the doctrine of the Church at the time; and the nearer the age is to the Apostles, the more valuable is the knowledge what the doctrine was. I make this remark with reference to a class of interpretations which, no doubt, Newman had in his mind when he spoke of some of the interpretations of Athanasius as not being logically defensible.

There is a class of interpretations with such antiquity to recommend them, that if any interpretations can make a claim to have been imposed by tradition, these can. The doctrine of them is in perfect agreement with our own, and yet there are many of them to which we should not now like to pledge ourselves—at least we should not like to use them in controversy against opponents, as some of the ancient Fathers did not scruple to do. To the early Fathers all the Old Testament spoke of ChriSt. They found Him in a number of places where, without their help, we should not discover Him; We have every reason to think that the Book Of Psalms furnished a large part of the Christian service from the very earliest times. There is no part of the Old Testament which the early Fathers seem to have so completely at their fingers' ends, or quote so accurately and so frequently. And here in particular they recognize our Lord as the subject of every Psalm. Now, though we may be willing to admit some of their Messianic interpretations of the Old Testament as certain, others as probable, it is impossible for a modern mind to accept them all. Take, for example, this one, which by reason of its venerable antiquity has as good a right to be accepted an interpretation imposed by tradition as any that can be named. I refer to a discovery made in the Epistle of Barnabas, which many learned men have accepted as by the Apostle of that name; and though I do not myself agree with their opinion, the work is certainly one of the earliest of uninspired Christian writings. Finding in his Greek Bible the number of servants with whom Abraham pursued the kings to be three hundred and eighteen, or in Greek numeral letters $\tau\eta$, Barnabas in the last two letters, i , h , at once discovers Jesus. But what then is *Tau*? *Tau* is the cross, which in shape it resembled. Barnabas declares this to be one of the most valuable pieces of instruction he had ever communicated, but says that those whom he addressed were worthy of it. And, accordingly, several who came after him thought it worth stealing from him. But I need not say that modern critics are not able to believe in a Messianic prophecy committed to the Old Testament, but intended to remain an impenetrable secret until its Hebrew came to be translated into Greek.

There are other Patristical Messianic interpretations, the case for rejecting which is not quite so clear as this one, yet clear enough to make us absolutely refuse to allow early tradition to impose on us interpretations of Scripture. In fact, if a man gives a far-fetched interpretation of Scripture we are not bound to receive it because it is a long time ago since he did it, and because a great many people have repeated it after him. I am quite satisfied to take as illustrating my principles the texts which Cardinal Newman (*Development*, p. 324) instances as brought forward by Nicene and ante-Nicene writers as palmary proofs of our Lord's Divinity. The first is the beginning of the 45th Psalm, of which the Septuagint [Greek] translation is *Ἐξηρέεατο ἡ καρδία μου λόγον ἀγαθόν*. If hermeneutic tradition is entitled to impose an interpretation on us, we are certainly bound to understand this passage as referring to the Eternal Generation of the Divine Logos. But I observe that the late revisers of the Old Testament have not materially altered the old rendering, 'My heart is inditing a good matter'; and certainly I should feel much embarrassed in controversially maintaining the views I hold concerning our Lord's Divinity if I had no better proof of them than this passage. Newman's second example is the passage (Prov. viii. 22), *κύριος ἐκτυτε με ἀρχὴν ὁδοῦ αὐτοῦ*. Orthodox and Arian interpreters agreed that these words related to our Blessed Lord, their only point of difference being how the word rendered *ἐκτυτε* was to be understood. But looking on hermeneutic tradition as a guide, but not as an infallible guide, I feel myself free to decline to accept some Messianic interpretations which are supported by a very strong consensus of early opinion.

If, however, without insisting on details, we look to the general spirit of the early Patristical interpretation of the Old Testament, we find what I think may be granted to be an Apostolic tradition; I mean the principle that the Old Testament is not contrary to the New—the principle that it was Jesus of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write—He whom in a thousand types the Mosaic institutions, nay, the Old Testament history, was in God's providence ordained to foreshadow. Here it is quite possible for a Christian reader to recognize types that he could not urge in controversy against a Jew or a Socinian. In the investigations of last Term I found, in many cases, that there were verbal coincidences between the language of very early writers and that of our Gospels, which left no doubt on my own mind that these writers had used the Gospels; and yet, it was not possible to demonstrate that anyone was wrong who might choose to say that the coincidence was only accidental. There is nothing illogical in this method of proceeding. If we have independent evidence that a book was in circulation, or that a doctrine was current, at the time when a particular author wrote, then a very slight casual allusion might suffice to convince us that he had read the book, or that he held the doctrine, though, without independent

confirmation, the evidence might not be at all conclusive. So, if we have independent evidence that our Lord was such as no other man was, and that He came to do a work such as no other man did or could have done, then it becomes more probable than not that He did not burst on the world without having His coming prepared for; and if we believe in the Divine inspiration of the Old Testament Prophets, we are at once ready to believe that they were commissioned to speak of Him. That this was the attitude of mind in which the Apostles had trained the Churches which they founded is, I think, demonstrated by the general tone of the Old Testament interpretations of the early Church and in establishing this point hermeneutic tradition does us valuable service. And if we are compelled to acknowledge that the disciples often outran their masters, and pushed their principles to indefensible extremes, we are not obliged to follow to those extremes guides whom we do not consider infallible; yet the evidence remains unshaken of the Apostolic character of that tradition of the dignity of Christ's person and work which lies at the foundation of these interpretations.

We might, indeed, use the early hermeneutical tradition to draw a doctrinal conclusion of a negative character. As the early Church saw Christ everywhere in the Bible, so the modern Church of Rome sees the Virgin Mary everywhere. One example I mentioned incidentally just now. Well, I think it is a very significant fact that early Patristical interpretation is altogether blind to indications of the dignity of the Blessed Virgin. In the Book of Revelation, the woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, who brought forth the man child, and then was made to flee into the wilderness (chap. xii.), in which description modern Romanists find a prediction of the glory of the Virgin, is by the ancient commentators, with absolute unanimity, understood of the Church.³ You know what meaning the phrase 'the Virgin Mother' would bear in a modern book, in an ancient writer it would as certainly mean the Church,⁴ and he would not seem to dream that any other meaning could be put on his words. We cannot help inferring that the Virgin Mary did not fill the place in the thoughts of men of those days that she has come to fill in recent times. The examples I have given will show that, while we hold ourselves perfectly free to criticize very ancient interpretations of Scripture, and so hold what is called hermeneutic tradition to be as far as possible from being an infallible guide, yet the study of these interpretations may throw most important light on the doctrinal principles of the ancient Church.

I must not pass from this subject of Patristical interpretation without adding a little to a few words I said last Term about the two great schools

³ See, for example, Hippolytus, *On Christ and Antichrist*, § 61.

of interpretation, the Alexandrian and the Syrian. Alexandria was the home of the allegorical method. It had flourished there from pre-Christian times. Homer was the Bible of the Greeks yet, as culture advanced, the stories told of the gods, both by the great poet and by other authorities who had gained popular belief, were felt to be such as could not be reconciled with the honour of the divinities. Then apologists invoked the aid of allegory. Jupiter only meant the upper air, Poseidon was the sea, Apollo the sun. We were not to suppose that Apollo descended in person to shoot his arrows for seven days; what was intended was that the sun beat with his rays on the damp ground, and so caused a pestilence which was destructive to the Grecian host; and in like manner other myths apparently degrading to the character of the gods were explained away, as mere modes of expressing certain physical facts. Thus the Jewish apologists found the method of allegory ready to their hands when cavils were made by the heathen philosophers of Alexandria against statements in the Jewish sacred books. The great Alexandrian Jew, Philo, whose works largely remain, freely had recourse to allegorical explanations when objections were made to the morality of parts of the Mosaic narrative so freely, that the historic character of the narrative was in danger of disappearing. In this school were brought up some of the greatest ornaments of the Alexandrian school of Christian philosophy. Clement was a careful student and a warm admirer of Philo. Clement's successor, Origen, carried to still greater lengths the allegorical method. The spiritual meaning was the soul; the literal, only the body; and in his hands the literal meaning often ran the risk of being quite evaporated away. If ever the literal sense presented a difficulty, or what looked like a contradiction, allegory afforded an immediate solution of it. If hermeneutic tradition had a right to force interpretations on our acceptance, it would be in the case of some of those allegorical interpretations of the Alexandrian school; so early was their origin, so wide was the acceptance they gained, so generally were their principles adopted.

I look upon St. Ambrose as one of the chief agents in naturalizing many of these expositions in the WeSt. From being a heathen magistrate he was made a bishop; but he was an able man and a good Greek scholar, and he speedily laid some of the most celebrated Greek theologians under contribution for his sermons and treatises. From Origen he drew much, both directly and indirectly; and what he drew he passed on to his pupil St. Augustine, and through him to the Western Church generally. St. Augustine constantly adopts the principle that an apparent contradiction between two texts of Scripture is to be regarded as an index pointing out that allegorical interpretation must be resorted to. If I were to think of giving you examples

⁴ See the letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons (Euseb. *H. E.* v. 1.).

of interpretations of this school, in which all regard to the context or to the circumstances of the sacred writer is lost sight of, specimens are so abundant that there is great difficulty in selection. Here is an explanation from St. Jerome of a difficult passage in Ecclesiastes (xi. 2) of which we should certainly be glad to welcome a good explanation. The text is: 'Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.' St. Jerome's explanation is: 'The number seven denotes the Old Testament, because of the Sabbath therein enjoined to be celebrated on the seventh day; the number eight denotes the New Testament, because the Saviour rose on the eighth day. The text, then, directs us not to restrict our faith, as the Jews do, to the Old Testament; nor, as do the Marcionites, Manichees, and other heretics, to the New. We must believe both Testaments, for "we know not what evil shall be upon the earth"; that is to say, we cannot comprehend now the merited tortures and punishments reserved for those who are upon earth, namely, for the Jews and heretics who deny either Testament.' This book of Ecclesiastes does not strike us as the most Messianic of Old Testament books: but Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome find Christ and the Gospel in every line. Thus, 'There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity' (Eccles. iv. 8). Here is the commentary: 'This is Christ; for He is one, and there is not a second, for He came to save the world without any companion. He has not a brother; for, though many sons of God are by adoption brethren of Christ, none could be joined with Him in the work of Redemption. Of His labour and suffering for our sins there is no end; man cannot comprehend the greatness thereof.' "The eye is not satisfied," &c., means that Christ is never weary in seeking our salvation. The text goes on, "Two are better than one"; that is to say, it is better to have Christ with us than to be alone, open to the snares of the enemy. "If two lie together, they shall have heat; but how can one be warm atone?" that is, if any should lie in the grave, yet, if he have Christ with him, he shall be warmed, and, being quickened, shall live again. Other passages, directing to eat bread with a merry heart, &c., plainly refer to the use of the Sacraments.

I take a few other examples from a collection of answers to heathen objections made by a Greek disciple and admirer of Origen, from whom these answers were derived.⁵ The objection is: 'No Christian now has faith, even as much as a grain of mustard seed; for not one is able to say to a mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea.' Answer^{3/4} 'Mountain here does not mean a literal mountain, but a devil, as in Jer. li. 25 "Behold I am

⁵ Macarias Magnes, *Apocritica*.

against thee, O destroying mountain, which destroyest all the earth.” He does not say, if thou shalt say to a mountain, but unto *this* mountain, namely, the devil, which had been just cast out.’ This was one of the Eastern comments imported by Ambrose (in Ps. xxxvi. 35). So, again, the heathen objects to the credibility of Paul’s statement that we shall be caught up in the clouds. The apologist explains that ‘clouds ‘ does not mean literal clouds, but angels, as in the texts, ‘I will charge the clouds that they rain no rain upon it,’ or ‘Clouds and darkness are round about Him.’ Once more, the heathen objects that the agony in the garden shows our Lord to have been weaker in courage than many men have proved themselves in like circumstances. The apologist answers, that our Lord’s display of weakness was made only to lure the devil on to the last assault, in which his power would be broken for ever. The devil had been holding back, suspecting our Lord’s divinity. Our Lord, therefore, not really wishing that His cup might pass, but that He might drink it as soon as possible, enticed the devil On, and caught him by baiting the hook of His divinity with the worm of His humanity; and this is the meaning of the verse, Psalm xxii. 6, ‘I am a worm, and no man.’ This interpretation is certainly Origen’s; and I need not give other examples to show why, with every admiration for the ability and ingenuity of Fathers of this school, we think it better to do without their help in the interpretation of Scripture, believing that, as lord Bacon says, ‘a lame man on the right road will come to his journey’s end sooner than the fleetest runner on a wrong one.’ Thus, there are thirty-five books of Gregory the Great’s Commentary on Job. They may be very valuable to anyone who cares to know what were the opinions of Gregory upon various subjects, but to a person anxious to know the meaning of the Book of Job they are absolutely worthless. I own, however, I look with some envy on those who can adopt these principles of interpretation; for it is immensely more easy for an ingenious man to write sermons if he uses a principle of interpretation which will enable a preacher to get any doctrine out of any text.

The founder of a healthier system of interpretation is said to have been Diodorus of Tarsus; but scarcely anything of his remains; and it is Theodore of Mopsuestia whom we have the means of knowing as the initiator of the literal school of interpretation. I do not say he had not predecessors. Besides his master Diodorus, Lucian the Martyr is said to have been one. But Theodore wrote a special treatise against Origen and the Allegorists, and founded a school of interpretation to which belonged some of the greatest ornaments of the Syrian Church. His principle was to look carefully to the context, and to the circumstances of the sacred writer; consequently he interprets passages of David, or Solomon, or Hezekiah, which his predecessors had understood of ChriSt. You may imagine, therefore, that his system had much violent opposition to encounter; and it may very

possibly be true that Theodore, in his reaction against the allegorizers, went into the other extreme, and insisted too mechanically on his rule that, if one part of a passage related to a contemporary person, a spiritual explanation must not be given to any other part; or that, if there was any one verse in a Psalm which was not applicable to Christ, none of it could be so. However this may be, it is the commentators of this school who have produced the only exegetical works which a modern student can read continuously with pleasure and profit. Great part, for instance, of Chrysostom's Homilies have not been superseded as intelligent and successful attempts to bring out the true meaning of the author on whom he comments. This is far indeed from being Cardinal Newman's opinion, and the language in which he expresses his aversion to the Syrian school of exegesis is strong enough to meet the demerits of any heresy.⁶ He traces Arianism to the influence of the methods of Lucian, already mentioned, though it is certain that Diodorus was free from any Arian taint. But it cannot be denied that the leading Nestorians were disciples of Theodore. It will be useful for you to bear in memory that Nestorianism is a Syrian, as Eutychianism is an Alexandrian heresy. The rationalizing tendencies of the Syrian school harmonize with the Nestorian accentuation of the human nature of our Lord. Independently of this, from the nature of the case, the Syrian interpreters, being obliged to reject a multitude of explanation that had been long current and had the support of venerable names, were on the side of human reason against traditional authority; and so we can understand Newman's antipathy to those who were the Protestants of their day.

It is not my purpose to trace at length the history of mediæval interpretation. Origen had counted three senses of Scripture—the literal, the moral, and the mystical—which he compared to the trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit in the nature of man. In the middle ages these three had increased to four—the literal, the moral, the allegorical, and the anagogical—this last being appropriated to those allegorical explanations which relate to the future state. Thus, according to an example commonly given, the Sabbath, according to the moral sense, would mean, a resting from sin; according to the allegorical, the rest of our Lord in the grave; and, according to the anagogical, the future rest in the kingdom of God. These were summed up in the memorial lines—

‘Littera gesta docet; quid credas allegoria;
Moralis quid agas; quo tendis anagogia.’

In truth, the latter three senses are but subdivisions of what we should

⁶ See the passage in the essay *On Development*, already referred to; and *Arians of the Fourth Century*, chap. i., and Appendix.

simply describe as allegorical, without feeling any need of subdivision.

But my main object now is to point out the necessity of extreme caution in the use of the allegorical method. If this be relied on as singly sufficient to prove a doctrine of which no other valid proof can be found, then tradition really becomes the mistress of Scripture; for then, though we profess to deduce our doctrine from Scripture, we really bring it into it first, according to the lines—

‘Hic liber est in quo quærit sua dogmata quisque,
Invernit et pariter dogmata quisque sua.’

Roman Catholic controversialists have called the Bible a nose of wax, which any man can twist as he pleases. This is true if you adopt the allegorical method of interpretation; or rather then, if it had been a nose of iron, it would make no difference, so powerful is the wrenching instrument employed. Origen’s Commentary on St. John contains copious extracts from the previous commentary by the Valentinian Heracleon; for it is curious that the earliest known continuous commentary on a New Testament book is by this heretic. And Heracleon, who was evidently a disciple of the same school of allegorical interpretation, has no difficulty in finding Valentinianism in St. John’s Gospel, by interpretations which seem to me not a whit more forced or unnatural than many which are used by Origen himself to deduce orthodox doctrine.

I am not now lecturing on the interpretation of Scripture, and therefore cannot enter into some discussion which would properly come before us if this were my main subject. But I have thought it necessary to say something about different schools of interpretation, because the question we have been discussing between Scripture and tradition becomes practically unimportant if allegorical interpretation be freely employed. When this method is used, a proof may pretend to be derived from Scripture alone; but, in real truth, tradition is the foundation of the fabric.