

Introductory Note to the Syriac Version of the Ignatian Epistles

When the Syriac version of the Ignatian Epistles was introduced to the English world in 1845, by Mr. Cureton, the greatest satisfaction was expressed by many, who thought the inveterate controversy about to be settled. Lord Russell made the learned divine a canon of Westminster Abbey, and the critical Chevalier Bunsen⁶⁴⁹ committed himself as its patron. To the credit of the learned, in general, the work was gratefully received, and studied with scientific conscientiousness by Lightfoot and others. The literature of this period is valuable; and the result is decisive as to the Curetonian versions at least, which are fragmentary and abridged, and yet they are a valuable contribution to the study of the whole case.

The following is the original Introductory Notice:—

Some account of the discovery of the Syriac version of the Ignatian Epistles has been already given. We have simply to add here a brief description of the mss. from which the Syriac text has been printed. That which is named α by Cureton, contains only the Epistle to Polycarp, and exhibits the text of that Epistle which, after him, we have followed. He fixes its age somewhere in the first half of the sixth century, or before the year 550. The second ms., which Cureton refers to as β , is assigned by him to the seventh or eighth century. It contains the three Epistles of Ignatius, and furnishes the text here followed in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Romans. The third ms., which Cureton quotes as γ , has no date, but, as he tells us, “belonged to the collection acquired by Moses of Nisibis in a.d. 931, and was written apparently about three or four centuries earlier.” It contains the three Epistles to Polycarp, the Ephesians, and the Romans. The text of all these mss. is in several passages manifestly corrupt, and the translators appear at times to have mistaken the meaning of the Greek original.

[N.B.—Bunsen is forced to allow the fact that the discovery of the lost work of Hippolytus “throws new light on an obscure point of the Ignatian controversy,” i.e., the *Sige* in the Epistle to the Magnesians (cap. viii.); but his treatment of the matter is unworthy of a candid scholar.]

649 See the extraordinary passage and note in his *Hippolytus*, vol. i. p. 58, etc.

The Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp⁶⁵⁰

Ignatius, who is [also called] Theophorus, to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, or rather, who has as his own bishop God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ: [wishes] abundance of happiness.



650 The inscription varies in each of the three Syriac mss., being in the first, “The Epistle of my lord Ignatius, the bishop;” in the second, “The Epistle of Ignatius;” and in the third, “The Epistle of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch.”

Chapter I.

Because thy mind is acceptable to me, inasmuch as it is established in God, as on a rock which is immoveable, I glorify God the more exceedingly that I have been counted worthy of [seeing] thy face, which I longed after in God. Now I beseech thee, by the grace with which thou art clothed, to add [speed] to thy course, and that thou ever pray for all men that they may be saved, and that thou demand⁶⁵¹ things which are befitting, with all assiduity both of the flesh and spirit. Be studious of unity, than which nothing is more precious. Bear with all men, even as our Lord beareth with thee. Show patience⁶⁵² with all men in love, as [indeed] thou doest. Be stedfast in prayer. Ask for more understanding than that which thou [already] hast. Be watchful, as possessing a spirit which sleepeth not. Speak with every man according to the will of God. Bear the infirmities of all men as a perfect athlete; for where the labour is great, the gain is also great.

651 For “vindicate thy place” in the Greek.

652 Literally, “draw out thy spirit.”

Chapter II.

If thou lovest the good disciples only, thou hast no grace; [but] rather subdue those that are evil by gentleness. All [sorts of] wounds are not healed by the same medicine. Mitigate [the pain of] cutting⁶⁵³ by tenderness. Be wise as the serpent in everything, and innocent, with respect to those things which are requisite, even as the dove. For this reason thou art [composed] of both flesh and spirit, that thou mayest entice⁶⁵⁴ those things which are visible before thy face, and mayest ask, as to those which are concealed from thee, that they [too] may be revealed to thee, in order that thou be deficient in nothing, and mayest abound in all gifts. The time demands, even as a pilot does a ship, and as one who stands exposed to the tempest does a haven, that thou shouldst be worthy of God. Be thou watchful as an athlete of God. That which is promised to us is life eternal, which cannot be corrupted, of which things thou art also persuaded. In everything I will be instead⁶⁵⁵ of thy soul, and my bonds which thou hast loved.

653 Cureton observes, as one alternative here, that “the Syrian translator seems to have read παράξυμα for παροξυσμούς.”

654 Or, “flatter,” probably meaning to “deal gently with.”

655 Thus the Syriac renders ἀντίψυχον in the Greek.

Chapter III.

Let not those who seem to be somewhat, and teach strange doctrines, strike thee with apprehension; but stand thou in the truth, as an athlete⁶⁵⁶ who is smitten, for it is [the part] of a great athlete to be smitten, and [yet] conquer. More especially is it fitting that we should bear everything for the sake of God, that He also may bear us. Be [still] more diligent than thou yet art. Be discerning of the times. Look for Him that is above the times, Him who has no times, Him who is invisible, Him who for our sakes became visible, Him who is impalpable, Him who is impassible, Him who for our sakes suffered, Him who endured everything in every form for our sakes.

656 The Greek has ἄκμων, “an anvil.”

Chapter IV.

Let not the widows be overlooked; on account of⁶⁵⁷ our Lord be thou their guardian, and let nothing be done without thy will; also do thou nothing without the will of God, as indeed thou doest not. Stand rightly. Let there be frequent⁶⁵⁸ assemblies: ask every man [to them] by his name. Despise not slaves, either male or female; but neither let them be contemptuous, but let them labour the more as for the glory of God, that they may be counted worthy of a more precious freedom, which is of God. Let them not desire to be set free out of the common [fund], lest they be found the slaves of lust.



657 The Greek has μετά, “after.”

658 Or, “constant,” “regular.”

Chapter V.

Flee wicked arts; but all the more discourse regarding them. Speak to my sisters, that they love in our Lord, and that their husbands be sufficient for them in the flesh and spirit. Then, again, charge my brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they love their wives, as our Lord His Church. If any man is able in power to continue in purity,⁶⁵⁹ to the honour of the flesh of our Lord, let him continue so without boasting; if he boasts, he is undone; if he become known apart from the bishop, he has destroyed himself.⁶⁶⁰ It is becoming, therefore, to men and women who marry, that they marry with the counsel of the bishop, that the marriage may be in our Lord, and not in lust. Let everything, therefore, be [done] for the honour of God. _____

659 i.e., "in celibacy."

660 Or, "corrupted himself."

Chapter VI.

Look ye to the bishop, that God also may look upon you. I will be instead of the souls of those who are subject to the bishop, and the presbyters, and the deacons; with them may I have a portion in the presence of God! Labour together with one another, act as athletes⁶⁶¹ together, run together, suffer together, sleep together, rise together. As stewards of God, and of His household,⁶⁶² and His servants, please Him and serve Him, that ye may receive from Him the wages [promised]. Let none of you be rebellious. Let your baptism be to you as armour, and faith as a spear, and love as a helmet, and patience as a panoply. Let your treasures be your good works, that ye may receive the gift of God, as is just. Let your spirit be long-suffering towards each other with meekness, even as God [is] toward you. As for me, I rejoice in you at all times.

661 Literally, “make the contest.”

662 Literally, “sons of His house.”

Chapter VII.

The Christian has not power over himself, but is [ever] ready to be subject to God.⁶⁶³

663 These are the only parts of chaps. vii. and viii. in the Greek that are represented in the Syriac.

Chapter VIII.

I salute him who is reckoned worthy to go to Antioch in my stead, as I commanded thee.⁶⁶⁴

664 These are the only parts of chaps. vii. and viii. in the Greek that are represented in the Syriac.