LECTURE IV

Same Subject continued—Arian and Macedonian Controversies (Fourth Century).

THE Monarchian controversies of the third century on the Trinity and the supreme divinity of Christ were but preludes to the great pitched battle of the Arian controversy in the fourth. The fundamental question at issue was how these peculiar assertions of the Christian faith were to be reconciled with the unity of God ; above all, how the relation of Christ to the Father was to be conceived of, so as, on the one hand, not to compromise His true divine dignity, and, on the other, not to endanger the divine *Monarchia.* This question could only be answered, as it was answered, through the stating of all possible alternatives, the testing of each, and the rejection of such as were found inadequate. We are to see this process exemplified with regard to the deity of the Son and Spirit in the controversy now to be reviewed.

Ere the Arian controversy had broken out, a decisive change had taken place in the external fortunes of the Church. The struggle, prolonged through three centuries with the forces of a persecuting paganism, had issued in the decisive defeat of the latter. In 313 A.D., following on the last terrible persecution by Diocletian, came the edict of Milan, giving universal toleration,

and in 323 A.D. Constantine, having overthrown his last rival Licinius, became sole ruler in the empire. The next year, 324 A.D., saw the so-called establishment of the Christian religion, an event which, outwardly favourable, introduced a new factor into the history of the development of dogma—one nearly always hurtful and disturbing — I mean the exercise of imperial authority. Ere, however, this fateful step was taken, the Church was involved in the controversy we are to study.

It was not, however, in external respects only that a change had taken place in the condition of the Church. The Church triumphed because it was already internally the strongest force in the empire. Even in the third century it was formidable—compactly organised, ably directed, influential not only in numbers, but in the rank of many of its members.[1] Its recognition by Constantine in the fourth was but the acknowledgment of a preponderance of influence already won. In an intellectual respect the advance was equally great. Theological tendencies were assuming distinct shape, and marked contrasts had begun to develop themselves in the schools. One such contrast must be referred to here for the sake of the profound influence it exercised on after theology, that, viz., between the schools of Alexandria and Antioch. The commencement of the Alexandrian school has already been described. Its chief representatives during the fourth century were, first, the renowned Athanasius, and after him the three great Cappadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa. Throughout it retained the liberal, speculative, idealising character imparted to it by its master, Origen ; but in its newer

[1] See the evidence in my *Neglected Factors*, etc. (Lect. II.), on the extent to which Christianity had permeated the higher ranks of society.

form it kept clear of, and overcame Origen's subordinationism.[1] The Antiochian school had opposite characteristics. It was sober, literal, grammatical, rational; in Coleridge's phrase, was a school of the understanding rather than of the reason. We have seen the influence exercised in Antioch by Paul of Samosata, and the leaven of his teachings, no doubt, continued to operate after his removal. The true founder of the Antiochian school, however, was Lucian, martyred in 311 A.D., who stamped on it its predominant exegetical, and in part rationalising, character.[2] From this school came Arius and most of the leaders of the party who supported him.[3] Professor Harnack goes further, and gives a very definite and detailed account of the opinions of Lucian, of which I will only say that it seems to me largely hypothetical, and not borne out by the authorities.[4] To Harnack Lucian is simply the Arius before Arius. He adopted the Christology of Paul of Samosata, and combined with it the Logos doctrine. His doctrine is Paul's, with the difference that, instead of a man, it is a created heavenly being who becomes God. The stress is laid on creation out of nothing, and on deification by progressive development. There is, however, no evidence that I know of that Lucian was a disciple of Paul of Samosata,[5] or that he held that the Logos

[1] It kept free also from most of Origen's heretical peculiarities (eternal creation, pre-existence of souls, etc.), though Gregory of Nyssa, nearest to Origen in spirit, follows him in his restitutionism.

[2] A good characterisation of the school is by Neander, iii. p. 497 ff. (Bohn's ed.). Distinguished later representatives were Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Chrysostom, and Theodoret (see Lecture VI.).

[3] Arius calls Eusebius of Nicomedia his "fellow-Lucianist" (Theod. *Ecc. Hist.* i. 5). Philostorgius, the Arian historian, gives a list of Lucian's pupils in this party (ii. 14).

[4] iv. pp. 3-7 (E.T.).

[5] It goes against this connection that Eusebius, the historian, who acted with Eusebius of Nicomedia and other friends of Arius, speaks in

was created out of nothing, or that Christ became God by progressive development.[1] That his views tended in some way to Arianism we may indeed fairly conclude; it is certain, further, that he stood with his school during three episcopates outside the communion of the Church, and was only reconciled to it shortly before his death.[2] This, however, hardly warrants us in attributing to him so fixed a type of doctrine as that just indicated.

I. The Arian dispute took its origin about 318 A.D. in Alexandria, where Arius, a leading presbyter, had come into conflict with his bishop on the subject of the Trinity.[3] Arius is described to us as a tall, spare man, ascetic in habits and dress, with long, tangled hair, and a curious practice of twisting about, but withal of fascinating manners and address, and not without a considerable mixture of craft and vanity.[4] Of this last the introduction to his book called the *Thalia*—"I am that celebrated man who has suffered many things for God's glory, and being taught of God, has obtained wisdom and knowledge"[5]—is sufficient witness. Notwithstanding his apparent smoothness, he was a man of strong and vehement passions. He soon gathered round him a multitude of supporters, and was unwearied in the dissemination of his views. The condemnation

the history in the highest terms of Lucian (viii. 13; ix. 6), but gives the most condemnatory accounts of Paul and his doctrines (vii. 27, 29, 30). Against this the vague expression of Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, in an epistle against Arius—"Whom Lucian, having succeeded" (*διαδεξάμενος*), etc. (Theod. i. 4)—is hardly decisive.

[1] Nothing of this kind is suggested, but the opposite is shown by the the creed ascribed to Lucian at the Council of Antioch, 241 A.D.

[2] Theodoret, i. 4.

[3] The accounts in the histories vary as to the precise circumstances of origin of the quarrel, but admit of being readily harmonised.

[4] Cf. Stanley, *Eastern Church*, iii. 5. [5] In Athan. *Orations*, i. 5.

of his opinions by a local council (321 A.D.) only fanned the flame of controversy. Feeling on both sides became intensely keen. Each party sought to strengthen itself by inviting the support of influential bishops ; the whole Church was soon in turmoil ; the very theatres resounded with ridicule of the disputes of the Christians.[1] Constantine, whose chief anxiety was for the peace of his empire, was deeply chagrined at this unexpected outbreak about matters, as he regarded them, of trifling importance, and wrote urgently to both Alexander and Arius, beseeching them to exercise mutual forbearance. When this failed, and his eyes, perhaps, had become more open to the gravity of the issues, he conceived the idea—by an inspiration of Heaven, as he thought—of summoning a council of the whole Christian world to decide the matter.

The controversy thus opened affords a favourite text for those who are disposed to make light of theological controversy generally. The whole contention, this class would have us believe, was a hopeless logomachy—a dispute about trifles, in which the essence of Christianity was in no way involved. Gibbon has made merry over the whole world convulsed about a diphthong.[2] So, for that matter, it is only a single letter which makes the difference between "theist" and "atheist!" Profounder minds judge the controversy very differently. Harnack, despite his theory of the Greek origin of dogma, makes it very clear that it was Christianity itself that was at stake. "Only," he says, "as cosmologists are the Arians monotheists, as theologians and in religion they are polytheists. Deep contradictions lie in the background : a Son who is no Son ; a Logos who is no Logos ; a monotheism which

[1] Cf. Socrates, i. 6. [2] *Decline and Fall*, xxi.

does not exclude polytheism; two or three *ousias*, who are to be worshipped, while still only one is really distinguished from the creation; an indefinable nature which first becomes God when it becomes man, and which still is neither God nor man. . . . The opponents were right; this doctrine leads back to heathenism. The orthodox doctrine has, on the contrary, its abiding worth in the upholding of the faith that in Christ God Himself has redeemed man, and led them into His fellowship. This conviction of faith was saved by Athanasius against a doctrine which did not understand the inner nature of religion generally, which sought in religion only teaching, and ultimately found its satisfaction in an empty dialectic."[1]

The historical significance of Arianism lay, as I have already hinted, in the fact that it brought to expression certain tendencies already working in theology, and compelled the Church to face them and give judgment upon them. We saw how, in the preceding period, there were influences tending to exalt the divine "Monarchia" at the expense of the distinct hypostasis of the Son; how, on the other hand, as the result of Origen's influence, there was a strong current of subordinationism on the part of those who held that hypostasis. This tendency, I remarked, was strengthened by—if it had not its main cause in—the Platonising way of regarding God as the self-caused, unspeakably

[1] *Grundriss*, i. p. 141; cf. *Hist. of Dogma*, iv. p. 41 (E.T.). Mr. Froude tells us that in earlier years Mr. Carlyle had spoken contemptuously of the Athanasian controversy, of the Christian world torn to pieces over a diphthong, but later told him that he perceived Christianity itself to have been at stake. If the Arians had won it would have dwindled away to a legend (*Life in London*, ii. p. 462). I may add the judgment of Professor Schultz in his *Gottheit Christi*. "The Arian Christology," he says, "is inwardly the most untenable and dogmatically worthless of all the Christologies that meet us in the history of dogma" (cf. ii. p. 65).

exalted, incomprehensible Being, who alone was God in the highest sense. This led, first, to God being put at an infinite distance from His creation; next, to the necessity of interposing some middle being to effect the transition to the latter; third, to the Son who was begotten for this purpose being put in the second rank, as not having those attributes which were supposed to constitute absolute Godhead. Subordinationist tendencies of this kind were active in the Church before Arius, *e.g.*, in Lactantius, in Eusebius of Cæsarea, probably in Lucian; but it was only when definite expression was given to them, and their logical consequences were fairly drawn out by Arius, that their import was fully seen. In brief, Origen had spoken of the Son as occupying a secondary relation to the Father, while at the same time upholding His eternal generation and identity of essence with God. These two tendencies could not but come ultimately into collision. If the identity of nature with the Father was maintained, full and true Godhead must be granted to the Son, and the subordinationist elements, so far as in conflict with this conception, must be eliminated. If, on the other hand, the subordinationist standpoint was adhered to, in combination with the abstract, Platonising view of God, the Arian doctrine was the logical outcome.

It is not so much my object to enter into the details of the history of this controversy—which my limits do not permit—as rather to bring out the great issues involved, the principles at work, the logic, as I venture to call it, of the movement. It will help to this end if, before looking at the proceedings of the Nicene Council, we glance at the parties involved, and at the positions they severally occupy. This will show with tolerable clearness the course which the historical development was bound to follow.