CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THERE are few more interesting figures on the great canvas of the history of Christian Doctrine than that of the learned, eloquent, and austerely religious abbot of the monastery of Euprepius outside the city of Antioch, called unexpectedly to the see of Constantinople, like a second Chrysostom; eagerly setting to work to make the Christian faith a reality in the life of the capital of the Empire; suddenly charged with heretical teaching and involved in a merciless doctrinal controversy; deposed from his bishoprick, excommunicated, deserted by friends who really shared his beliefs, banished to a remote spot in the deserts of Egypt, dying in exile.

It is a figure that seizes our attention and wins at least some measure of admiration and compassion. Such learning and enthusiasm in the cause which he firmly believed to be a life and death struggle for the doctrine of the Incarnation; so staunch a determination to accept no theory which seemed to him to obscure the true humanity of the Lord of human life, the Saviour—as he says—not of angels but of men; such a firm grip on the human appeal of manhood to men; so eager a desire to expound without fear or favour the teaching of Gospels, Epistles, and Creeds, and to make the doctrine of the Bible and the Church intelligible to men:—and yet such a fate.

It is certainly an edifying picture which ecclesiastical history has painted for us; and, if its colours had become

somewhat dim through the lapse of time and we did not see its details very clearly, we might well be loth to attempt to touch it up or restore it in any way, lest we should only spoil it. But, as a matter of fact, many of the details have really become more clear to us than they were to most of those who played their various parts in the drama, and some of them seem to belong to another picture. They rouse the suspicion that the artist of the traditional picture has exercised the license, which all artists claim, to leave out some of the details which do not compose well with their interpretation of the subject before them, and to heighten or lower the tones in order to produce the effect they want.

The tale of the controversy has been told so often and so fully that there is little to add to the received account of the various stages through which it passed or of the incidents which took place. It is rather the inner history that needs rewriting. Nearly all that we know has come down to us through the medium of those who were hostile to Nestorius at the time or concerned to maintain the ecclesiastical tradition in later times, without any attempt to form an independent judgement and usually without the means of doing so, had they had the wish.

The external history, so far as it concerns us, can be very briefly told. The questions of doctrine that arise must be examined at greater length.

Nestorius when we first hear of him was a member of the monastery of Euprepius near Antioch in priest's orders. Of his earlier life we know nothing except that he was a native of Germanicia, in the Euphrates district, within the patriarchate of Antioch. To Antioch evidently he belonged by theological lineage and point of view. By his zeal for careful biblical exegesis, his insistence on the recognition of the full manhood of our Lord, by his dread of any mode of thought or expression which might obscure the reality of the human experiences

of the historic Christ, by his desire to make the doctrine of the Church intelligible to men's minds, he shews his kinship to the leaders of the theological school for which Antioch was famous. At Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians, where the Gospel was first preached to Gentiles, which had been the centre from which the evangelization of the Empire had begun, which early in the second century had had as its bishop the Ignatius who had insisted with such passionate earnestness on the reality of the human nature and experiences of Jesus, who had made his appeal above all else to the actual facts of the Gospel history—at Antioch the historical tradition had never been allowed to fade. Theosophy never had a chance of success where the influence of Antioch could reach. Paul of Samosata and Lucian and the Arians who were an offshoot of his school, so far as they diverged from the Trinitarian doctrine of the Godhead, were probably led into heresy by their conviction that at all hazards they must maintain the distinction between the human and the Divine. They could admit no doctrine of the Deity of Christ which would in any way obscure the fact that He lived upon earth the life of men. They started from the one quite certain fact that He lived as a man among men[1]. They reasoned from the known to the unknown. They tried to find some means of reconciling the traditional faith in the Godhead of Jesus with their conviction that God was one, and they did it in terms that seemed to endanger the traditional faith. The definition of Nicaea prevailed and the Trinitarian conception triumphed. The full Godhead of Jesus was recognized, and the oneness of the Godhead in three modes of being. So far the question had been theological, it was the definition of the doctrine of God that had been at stake.

[1] This, I think, is true of Arians, in spite of their Christology that excluded a really human soul; and though they thus made the historical Person a demi-god.

But the same interest in the recognition of the distinction between man and God was seen again in the Christological question which the theories of Apollinarius brought to the fore. Again the theologians of Antioch shewed their native bent. In the discussion of the problem of the relation between the Godhead and the manhood in the Person of our Lord they would tolerate no teaching that seemed to merge the one in the other. Again they started from the manhood; again they laid stress on all the passages in Scripture which seemed to emphasize the human consciousness of the Lord. At all hazards they insisted on the recognition in His Person of a genuine human element—by whatever term it was described, in virtue of which a genuine human experience was possible. They did not for a moment call in question, or fail to recognize, the equally genuine Divine element, in virtue of which Divine experience and power was His. They did not doubt that the historical Jesus Christ was both God and man. They took their stand on history, on the primitive record, on apostolic testimony and interpretation.

Theological traditions such as these were the inheritance of Nestorius. There is no reason to suppose that he intended at any time to introduce new doctrines or to make innovations of any kind. In an eloquent passage in his book he deplores the attack that was made on Diodore and Theodore, who had been held in the highest esteem as Fathers by all the Church, until it was found that he was only teaching what they had taught before. Basil and Gregory and Athanasius and Ambrose must all, he declares, come under the same condemnation[1]. And he joins himself with Athanasius and Eustathius and numberless others who 'were deserted by those who were 'really orthodox'[2]. It is indeed as the champion of a great

[1] *Bazaar of Heraclides* pp. 330 ff.
[2] *ib.* p. 150.

religious and historical tradition that he figures[1]. And we shall altogether misjudge him if we fail to realize his strong religious interest and his fervent pastoral spirit. It was as one who had consecrated himself to the religious life, a monk of unusual devotion, and an earnest preacher in the cathedral church of the great city of Antioch, with its teeming masses of men and women with souls to be saved from the temptations of life in a great centre of the world's traffic, that he first won fame. The *ex tempore* preacher whom men crowd to hear is exposed, no doubt, to subtle spiritual risks. He is liable, moreover, to slips of the tongue and the peril of the "telling" phrase that seldom tells the whole of the truth, but once uttered cannot be recalled and is never forgiven by those at whose views it is aimed. Nestorius was a master of the art of speaking, as the art was taught and practised in his days; and the pulpit was the recognized medium of theological instruction and discussion. The twentieth century, weary of controversy, is disposed to claim for the pulpit a kind of *trève de Dieu*; but daily papers and magazines and journals of every kind are at the disposal of the disputants. In the fifth century the sermon afforded the chief, and certainly the readiest, way to the public ear, and Nestorius used it with conspicuous ability and great success. He had a fine voice, a keen dialectical mind, and a vigorous personality: he could present his views effectively, and his views were hard to refute: he could hit hard, and he did so freely, with all the rhetorical tricks that met the taste of the time—the taste which permitted a congregation to punctuate a preacher's points by loud applause, so that on one occasion, when Chrysostom had declaimed against the custom, the congregation shewed their admiration of his eloquent rebuke by a spontaneous outburst of the same applause. His opponents brought the usual charges against

[1] It was, of course, commonly the case that "heretics" claimed the support of tradition for their doctrines. Each case must be judged on its merits.

him. He was too fond of his own voice; he was proud of his powers of speaking: he mistook fluency for learning and rhetoric for argument[1]. These charges must be judged by the standards of the time. The same kind of thing is said of men today. Nestorius was at all events transparently honest and all in earnest. His opponents used, according to the measure of their powers, the same means to promote their own ideas; and they used many other means to which Nestorius never resorted.

His sermons at Antioch were no doubt taken down by shorthand writers and collections of them published. The "innumerable tracts on various subjects" which we are told[2] he composed at Antioch were probably these sermons revised for publication. Some of them must have reached the other great cities of the Empire, and in securing him as bishop the Church of Constantinople thought they had found another Chrysostom. A graphic picture is given, in the Emperor's address to Dalmatius recorded by Nestorius, of the difficulties which were experienced in finding a bishop who would be acceptable[3].

[1] Socrates *H. E.* vii 32 professes to give an impartial judgement. He has read his writings and repudiates the view that he held the doctrines either of Paul of Samosata or of Photinus (popularly understood to be that the Lord was a mere man): he says, however, that he was naturally fluent and puffed up by his own eloquence and anxious for applause, but unwilling to study the ancient teachers and ill-informed and ignorant, though he thought himself well educated, and so he made a "bug-bear" of the term *Theotokos* which abler men than himself had freely used in the past. Socrates also (*ib.* vii 29), on the evidence of his first utterance at Constantinople, speaks of him as superficial, impetuous, and vainglorious.

[2] Vincent of Lerinum, who was contemporary with the Council of Ephesus, (*Comm.* i 11) speaks of his daily discourses on the Divine Scriptures in public; and Gennadius (*de viris illustribus* liii) writing fifty years later, says 'he composed innumerable tracts on various subjects in which with subtle malice he distilled the poison of his heresy—which betrayed itself afterwards, though for the time his high moral character hid it'.

[3] 'The Emperor said to him [sc. Dalmatius]: I find no evil in this man [i.e. Nestorius], nor any cause deserving of deposition. I testify to thee and to all men that I am innocent. For I have no love for this man

Not a breath of suspicion of unorthodox teaching had touched his fame, though discussions had already taken place at Antioch

through any human inclination that I should act thus and be criticised and condemned as one who withstands God and arrogates to himself the rights of the priests. Never did I insist upon his ordination that punishment and vengeance should be exacted (of me) because of his election, but through the concurrence of you all I of necessity introduced this man, though he was much beloved in his own country and among his own people. You were the cause of this and not I. Thee thyself, Dalmatius, I begged to undertake this office, and I besought thee with many words not to refuse the ministry of God. But thou didst refuse, and didst beg of me in turn saying: "compel me not for I am an ignorant man." And another also of the monks, a man who was thought to be somewhat and was well esteemed for his religiousness, did I entreat, and he also refused as not knowing how to conduct this ministry because he was unlearned. Then you said: "Constantinople requires a bishop who for his words and his conduct shall be agreeable to all, who shall be a teacher in the church and a mouth to every one in all things." But when you refused for these reasons, did I do aught by my own authority? Did I not again beg of you to choose one of this character? Did I not implore of the clergy of Constantinople to choose one who was fitting? Did I not speak these same things to the bishops, saying: "It is yours to choose and to make a bishop"? And you also I implored in like manner. Did I not leave the matter in your hands all this time, being patient in order that you should choose quietly, lest through haste some mistake should be made as to him who should be chosen? But did you choose and I not receive your choice? Dost thou wish me to say something against you? Shall I speak of their violence and bribery and presents, and their promises and oaths, and how they sought to turn the whole affair into a sale. Which of these men did you wish to be bishop? But I pass on: which choice did you wish should be made? Was it to be thyself, or that other of whom I spoke, or yet another? For some chose one, some another; not according to fitness did they choose, but rather those that were unsuitable. Every one recommended his own choice and spoke ill of him whom others chose, bringing damaging charges against him. You could not agree upon one man; but whom the people agreed upon you would not accept. I read before you what the people said of each one that was selected. What then ought I to have done that I did not do? You, the monks, did not agree with the clergy: the clergy were not of one mind: the bishops were divided: and the people in like manner disagreed. Each was contending for a different man. Yet not even so did I assume to myself the authority, but I left the choice to you. But when you

as to the propriety of the term which became the battle-cry of his opponents, and its use had already been denounced by Theodore, the accepted representative of the best theological thought of Antioch.

It was, indeed, as an impetuous opponent of heresy of every kind that he first impressed himself on the people of Constantinople. 'Give me' he said on his reception by the Emperor: 'Give me, Emperor, the world free from heretics, 'and I will give thee heaven in return: help me to destroy the 'heretics and I will help thee to destroy the Persians!' Finding that the Arians still had a chapel in which they met, he at once began to pull it down. They themselves set fire to it, and burnt down with it many of the adjacent buildings. The odium aroused by this conflagration was turned on to Nestorius, and within a week of his consecration as bishop the nickname of "Incendiary" or "Firebrand" was invented for him. It seems unjust that, because the Arians set fire to their own church and destroyed the property of their neighbours, Nestorius should be called a firebrand. It was an omen of the future. But the energy with which he combated the laxity of life as well as the errors of thought which were rife in his diocese naturally made him enemies as well as friends, and many were ready to take advantage of any opening for attack that he gave. His reception of the Western bishops exiled on the charge of Pelagian heresy, when they came to Constantinople, and the

were all at a loss you came to me and deputed me to choose whom I would. And even then I scarcely consented, though you all begged of me. Now I considered that it was not right to appoint any one from here, lest he should have to contend against enmity and opposition, for every one hated, and was hated by, the others, as though each were covetous of the office; so I sought to find a foreigner who should be unknown to those here and should not know them, one who should be a clear speaker and of good morals. And I was told that Nestorius of Antioch was such a one. Him I sent for and took, thereby causing sorrow to his whole city, and I brought him hither for your advantage—since this I held to be of more importance than that of the others. But when he was appointed this was not your estimate of him' (*Bazaar of Heraclides* pp. 279—281).

letters which he wrote to the bishop of Rome asking for information about them, as a bishop to a brother bishop, alienated at once the sympathy of the chief ecclesiastic of the West. *Roma locuta est*, and her decisions ought to have been received without question. And Rome was already affronted by the growing power of the upstart see of the *Nova Roma* of the East and the canon of the Council which had placed it on a level with the great and ancient apostolic sees. Official prejudice was reinforced by personal displeasure. When the controversy broke out, the representative of the West was in the mood to think and to believe the worst that his opponents could say of the bishop of Constantinople: his discomfiture would be a personal satisfaction as well as an official triumph for the bishop of Rome. Nor, if he ever got into trouble, could he hope for an unbiassed judgement from the leader of the Church of Alexandria. A certain rivalry had existed from old time between the sees of Antioch and Alexandria, and the theological schools connected with them. The mystic tendency prevailed at Alexandria, the practical and historical at Antioch; and these different tendencies shewed themselves in different methods of study and different ways of expounding Scripture and presenting doctrine. At the same time, though the Church of Alexandria had her own battles to fight with the Church of Rome, and was not averse on occasion from soliciting and accepting the support of Constantinople, she really shared to the full the prejudice of Rome against the new Eastern see. She would gladly have played in relation to other Churches in the East the dominant rôle that Rome aspired to play in the whole of Christendom; and she had at this time a bishop who, if he had few equals in theological insight and learning, was surpassed by none in official arrogance and unscrupulous use of means to compass his ends. To satisfy a personal animosity, Theophilus, Cyril's uncle and predecessor as bishop of Alexandria, had fomented the scandalous attack on Chrysostom which resulted in his deposition from the bishoprick of Constantinople. Cyril had worked at Alexandria

in close association with Theophilus, and the fierce and domineering spirit of his uncle lived in him. It was only after a tumultuous contest that he was enthroned as bishop, and his episcopate was inaugurated by deeds of violence and unsparing use of the great powers which the patriarch of Alexandria could put in motion. He was urged not to perpetuate a private feud under the pretext of piety, but he could scarcely be induced to atone for the great wrong that had been done to Chrysostom, and to place his name on the diptychs of his Church, though all the rest of Christendom had made such reparation as it could, and only on these terms could communion with Rome and the West be reestablished. Was it likely that a successor of Chrysostom, both at Antioch and at Constantinople, would meet with fair treatment at the hands of a bishop of Alexandria of Cyril's type? "History repeats itself." A painful family likeness can be traced in all controversies about religion: we see in them all the same zeal for the truth as each side understands it, the same inability in all the disputants to conceive the possibility that they may be mistaken, the same mixture of the highest with the lower aims and motives. And in many ways Cyril's treatment of Nestorius recalls the attack of Theophilus on Chrysostom. Without in the first instance addressing enquiries or protests to Nestorius himself, he circulated reports of the erroneous teaching of the bishop of Constantinople, and by letters to the Emperor's sister and other ladies and officials of the court—and handsome presents such as are customary in the East, whether they be regarded as bribes or not—had won over to his side many of the most influential of the Emperor's advisers. The bribery then and later (for whatever Cyril's apologists may say, no one who reads the letter of Cyril's archdeacon and chancellor to the patriarch, who was appointed in place of Nestorius after the council[1], can doubt that it was

[1] The letter of Epiphanius to Maximianus preserved in the *Synodicon adv. trag. Iren.* ch. 203 (Mansi *Concilia* tom. v p. 987 and Theodoret *Opp.* Migne *P. G.* lxxxiv. 826).