

BOOK I

1. Nothing I have previously written against Marcion is any longer my concern. I am embarking upon a new work to replace an old one. My first edition, too hurriedly produced, I afterwards withdrew, substituting a fuller treatment. This also, before enough copies had been made, was stolen from me by a person, at that time a Christian but afterwards an apostate, who chanced to have copied out some extracts very incorrectly, and shewed them to a group of people. Hence the need for correction. The opportunity provided by this revision has moved me to make some additions. Thus this written work, a third succeeding a second, and instead of third from now on the first, needs to begin by reporting the demise of the work it supersedes, so that no one may be perplexed if in one place or another he comes across varying forms of it.

The sea called Euxine, or hospitable, is belied by its nature and put to ridicule by its name. Even its situation would prevent you from reckoning Pontus hospitable: as though ashamed of its own barbarism it has set itself at a distance from our more civilized waters. Strange tribes inhabit it—if indeed living in a wagon can be called inhabiting.¹ These have no certain dwelling-place: their life is uncouth: their sexual activity is promiscuous, and for the most part unhidden even when they hide it: they advertise it by hanging a quiver on the yoke of the wagon, so that none may inadvertently break in. So little respect have they for their weapons of war. They carve up their fathers' corpses along with mutton, to gulp down at banquets. If any die in a condition not good for eating, their death is a disgrace. Women also have lost the gentleness, along with the modesty, of their sex. They display their breasts, they do their house-work with battle-axes, they prefer fighting to matrimonial duty. There is sternness also in the climate—never broad daylight, the sun always niggardly, the only air they have is fog, the whole year is winter, every wind that blows is the north wind. Water becomes water only by heating: rivers are no rivers, only ice: mountains are piled high up

1. ¹ On the customs of the Massagetae, Herodotus i. 216.

with snow: all is torpid, everything stark. Savagery is there the only thing warm—such savagery as has provided the theatre with tales of Tauric sacrifices, Colchian love-affairs, and Caucasian crucifixions.

Even so, the most barbarous and melancholy thing about Pontus is that Marcion was born there, more uncouth than a Scythian, more unsettled than a Wagon-dweller, more uncivilized than a Massagete, with more effrontery than an Amazon, darker than fog, colder than winter, more brittle than ice, more treacherous than the Danube, more precipitous than Caucasus. Evidently so, when by him the true Prometheus, God Almighty, is torn to bits with blasphemies. More ill-conducted also is Marcion than the wild beasts of that barbarous land: for is any beaver more self-castrating than this man who has abolished marriage? What Pontic mouse is more corrosive than the man who has gnawed away the Gospels? Truly the Euxine has given birth to a wild animal more acceptable to philosophers than to Christians: that dog-worshipper Diogenes carried a lamp about at midday, looking to find a man, whereas Marcion by putting out the light of his own faith has lost the God whom once he had found.² His followers cannot deny that his faith at first agreed with ours, for his own letter proves it: so that without further ado that man can be marked down as a heretic, or 'chooser', who, forsaking what had once been, has chosen for himself that which previously was not. For that which is of later importation must needs be reckoned heresy, precisely because that has to be considered truth which was delivered of old and from the beginning. But a different work of mine will be found to maintain this thesis against heretics, that even without discussion of their doctrines they can be proved to be such by this standing rule concerning novelty. At present however, seeing that a contest cannot be refused—for there is sometimes a danger that frequent recourse to the short-cut of that standing rule may be put down to lack of confidence—I shall begin by sketching out my opponent's doctrine, so that no one may be unaware of this which is to be

our principal matter of contention.

1. ² Sinope, Marcion's birthplace, was a Greek city, founded 756 B.C., and therefore far from barbarous. Tertullian may have remembered that certain Cimmerians from the north, pursued by Scythians, had settled at Sinope: Hdt. iv. 12. Diogenes the Cynic was born there: Diog. Laert. vi. 41.

1.2

ADVERSUS MARCIONEM

7

2. This man of Pontus presents us with two gods, as it were the two Clashing Rocks on which he suffers shipwreck: the one the Creator, whom he cannot deny, which is our God: the other, whom he cannot prove, a god of his own.¹ The unhappy man became afflicted with the idea of this wild guess in consequence of that plain statement which our Lord made, which applies to men, not to gods, the example of the good tree and the bad, that neither does the good tree bring forth bad fruit nor the bad tree good fruit^a—that is, that a good mind or a good faith does not produce evil actions, nor an evil mind and faith good ones. For, like many even in our day, heretics in particular, Marcion had an unhealthy interest in the problem of evil—the origin of it—and his perceptions were numbed by the very excess of his curiosity. So when he found the Creator declaring, *It is I who create evil things*,^b in that he had, from other arguments which make that impression on the perverse, already assumed him to be the author of evil, he interpreted with reference to the Creator the evil tree that creates evil fruit—namely, evil things in general—and assumed that there had to be another god to correspond with the good tree which brings forth good fruits. Discovering then in Christ as it were a different dispensation of sole and unadulterated benevolence, an opposite character to the Creator's, he found it easy to argue for a new and hitherto unknown divinity revealed in its own Christ, and thus with a little leaven has embittered with heretical acidity the whole mass of the faith.^c He was acquainted also with a certain Cerdo, who gave shape to

this outrage.² And so the blind were easily led to think they had a clear prospect of two gods, in that they had no accurate view of the one God. To the blear-eyed a single lamp looks double. So then the one God, whose existence he was forced to admit, Marcion has overthrown by slandering him as responsible for evil: the other, whom he constrained himself to invent, he has set up on a scaffolding of goodness. My own answers will make it clear in what specific terms he has portioned out these two sets of attributes.

2. ¹ In this translation 'God', 'Lord', 'Creator' (with capital letters) refer to the God of the Old and the New Testaments: with small letters 'god' and 'lord'

refer either to heathen gods or to Marcion's imagined superior or 'stranger' god.

² Cerdo, active in Rome about A.D. 130, was in some sense the *informator* of Marcion: Irenaeus, *A.H.* I. xxiv (with Harvey's notes), quoted by Eusebius, *H.E.* iv. 10.

3. The principal, and consequently the entire, matter of discussion is one of number, whether it is permissible to suggest the existence of two gods. Perhaps so, by poets' or painters' licence, and now by heretical licence for a third. But Christian verity has decisively asserted that if God is not one only, he does not exist: because it is more reasonable to admit the non-existence of that which does not exist in such manner as it ought. If you would know that God must needs be one only, inquire what God is, and you will find no other answer. In so far as human limitation¹ can make any definition concerning God, I give that definition which all men's common sense will accept, that God is the supremely great, firmly established in eternity, unbegotten, uncreated, without beginning and without end. For this status,¹ I say, has to be assigned to that eternity by virtue of which God is supremely great, that in God it is itself supremely great, and

so are the other attributes besides: so that God is supreme greatness in both form and reason and power and authority. Since there is universal agreement on this—for no one can deny that God is an entity supremely great, except perhaps one who can by contrariety pronounce God an entity moderately little, so as to deny his godhead by depriving him of all that is characteristic of God—what then must be the character of that entity itself supremely great? Surely that it has nothing to equal it, that is, that there exists no other thing supremely great: because if there is it will have an equal, and if it has an equal it can no longer be the supremely great, except by a reversal of that condition¹ and, so to speak, that law which precludes anything being accounted equal to that which is supremely great. Therefore that which is supremely great is of necessity singular, as having no fellow: else it will not be supremely great. And therefore it can only exist as being what it has to be, entirely singular. Consequently, as God is the supremely great, rightly has our <Christian> verity pronounced that if God is not one God, he is no god. Not as though we doubt God's existence when we say that if he is not one alone he is not at all, but because, convinced that he does exist, we define him as being that which if he is not he is not God, namely the supremely great. But the supremely great must needs be singular. And so also God has to be singular: for he is God only by being the supremely great, as he is supremely great only by

3. ¹ On *conditio, status, condicio* and other technical terms see Appendix I.

having no fellow, and he can have no fellow only by being one and alone. Truly, whatever other god you suppose exists, you can on no other plea defend his divinity, but only by ascribing to him that essential attribute of divinity, eternity, and with it supreme greatness. How then can there co-exist two things supremely great, when it is of the essence of supreme greatness to have no fellow, while to have no fellow is contingent upon unity, and in duality is utterly impossible?