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Darwin Thoreau Twain  
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**The Ignatian Epistles Entirely  
Spurious A Reply to the Right  
Rev. Dr. Lightfoot**

W. D. (William Dool) Killen

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# THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES ENTIRELY SPURIOUS.

A Reply to The Right Rev. Dr. Lightfoot, Bishop of Durham.

BY

W. D. KILLEN, D.D.

Professor of Ecclesiastical History, and  
Principal of the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland.

"As the account of the martyrdom of Ignatius may be justly suspected, so, too, the letters which presuppose the correctness of this suspicious legend do not wear at all a stamp of a distinct individuality of character, and of a man of these times addressing his last words to the Churches." — AUGUSTUS NEANDER.

EDINBURGH 1886.



## PREFACE.

This little volume is respectfully submitted to the candid consideration of all who take an interest in theological inquiries, under the impression that it will throw some additional light on a subject which has long created much discussion. It has been called forth by the appearance of a treatise entitled, "*The Apostolic Fathers, Part II. S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp. Revised Texts, with Introductions, Notes, Dissertations, and Translations, by J. B. Lightfoot, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D, Bishop of Durham.*" In this voluminous production the Right Reverend Author has maintained, not only that all the seven letters attributed by Eusebius to Ignatius are genuine, but also that "no Christian writings of the second century, and very few writings of antiquity, whether Christian or pagan, are so well authenticated." These positions, advocated with the utmost confidence by the learned prelate, are sure to be received with implicit confidence by a wide circle of readers; and I have felt impelled here openly to protest against them, inasmuch as I am satisfied that they cannot be accepted without overturning all the legitimate landmarks of historical criticism. I freely acknowledge the eminent services which Dr. Lightfoot has rendered to the Christian Church by his labours as a Commentator on Scripture, and it is therefore all the more important that the serious errors of a writer so distinguished should not be permitted to pass unchallenged. All who love the faith once delivered to the saints, may be expected to regard with deference the letters of a martyr who lived on the borders of the apostolic age; but these Ignatian Epistles betray indications of a very different original, for they reveal a spirit of which no enlightened Christian can approve, and promulgate principles which would sanction the boldest assumptions of ecclesiastical despotism. In a work published by me many years ago, I have pointed out the marks of their

imposture; and I have since seen no cause to change my views. Regarding all these letters as forgeries from beginning to end, I have endeavoured, in the following pages, to expose the fallacy of the arguments by which Dr. Lightfoot has attempted their vindication.

ASSEMBLY COLLEGE, BELFAST,  
July 1886.

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## THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES ENTIRELY SPURIOUS.

### CHAPTER I.

#### PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

The question of the genuineness of the Epistles attributed to Ignatius of Antioch has continued to awaken interest ever since the period of the Reformation. That great religious revolution gave an immense impetus to the critical spirit; and when brought under the light of its examination, not a few documents, the claims of which had long passed unchallenged, were summarily pronounced spurious. Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, names only seven letters as attributed to Ignatius; but long before the days of Luther, more than double that number were in circulation. Many of these were speedily condemned by the critics of the sixteenth century. Even the seven recognised by Eusebius were regarded with grave suspicion; and Calvin—who then stood at the head of Protestant theologians—did not hesitate to denounce the whole of them as forgeries. The work, long employed as a text-book in Cambridge and Oxford, was the *Institutes* of the Reformer of Geneva; [Endnote 2:1] and as his views on this subject are there proclaimed very emphatically, [2:2] we may presume that the entire body of the Ignatian literature was at that time viewed with distrust by the leaders of thought in the English universities. But when the doctrine of the Divine Right of Episcopacy began to be promulgated, the seven letters rose in the estimation of the advocates of the hierarchy; and an extreme desire was manifested to establish their pretensions. So great was the importance attached to their evidence, that in 1644—in the very midst of the din and confusion of the civil war between

Charles I. and his Parliament—the pious and erudite Archbishop Ussher presented the literary world with a new edition of these memorials. Two years later the renowned Isaac Vossius produced a kindred publication. Some time afterwards, Daillé, a learned French Protestant minister, attacked them with great ability; and proved, to the satisfaction of many readers, that they are utterly unworthy of credit. Pearson, subsequently Bishop of Chester, now entered the arena, and in a work of much talent and research—the fruit of six years' labour—attempted to restore their reputation. This vindication was not permitted to pass without an answer; but, meanwhile, the dark prospects of the Reformed faith in England and the Continent directed attention to matters of more absorbing interest, and the controversy was discontinued. From time to time, however, these Epistles were kept before the eyes of the public by Archbishop Wake and other editors; and more recently the appearance of a Syriac copy of three of them—printed under the supervision of the late Rev. Dr. Cureton—reopened the discussion. Dr. Cureton maintained that his three Epistles are the only genuine remains of the pastor of Antioch. In a still later publication, [3:1] Bishop Lightfoot controverts the views of Dr. Cureton, and makes a vigorous effort to uphold the credit of the seven letters quoted by Eusebius and supported by Pearson. Dr. Lightfoot has already acquired a high and deserved reputation as a scholar and a commentator, and the present work furnishes abundant evidence of his linguistic attainments and his perseverance; but it is somewhat doubtful whether it will add to his fame as a critic and a theologian. In these three portly octavo volumes—extending to upwards of 1800 pages of closely printed matter—he tries to convince his readers that a number of the silliest productions to be found among the records of antiquity, are the remains of an apostolic Father. He tells us, in his preface, that the subject has been before him "for nearly thirty years;" and that, during this period, it has "engaged his attention off and on in the intervals of other literary pursuits and official duties." Many, we apprehend, will feel that the result is not equal to such a vast expenditure of time and labour; and will concur with friends who, as he informs us, have complained to him that he has thus "allowed himself to be diverted from the more congenial task of commenting on S. Paul's Epistles." There is not, we presume, an evangelical minister in Christendom who would not protest against the folly exhib-