

(FOR THE CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.)

## APOSTOLIC FATHERS.

The term Apostolic Fathers is employed to designate those men who were companions of one or other of the Apostles, and whose writings have come down to our day. They are usually said to be five in number—Barnabas, Thomas, Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp. But the writings of Barnabas and Thomas are now very generally regarded as forgeries of the third century, abounding with absurd and childish reasonings, and even, occasionally, with doctrines subversive of the gospel. We shall, therefore commence our account.

I. With CLEMENT. He was a companion of the Apostle Paul, and is referred to in Philippians iv 3. Nothing is known with certainty of his country, whether he was of Jewish or Gentile extraction, the exact time he was minister of the Church of Rome, and whether he suffered martyrdom under the emperor Trajan or Vespasian. After Paul's death, however, those dissensions which had been partially healed, razed anew in the Corinthian church; and "every one said, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." Clement wrote an excellent epistle in the name of the Roman church, in which he endeavours "to compose their dissensions", and to unite them into one spiritual body, of which Christ is the head. Its commencement is truly Apostolic. "The Church of God, which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God which sojourns at Corinth, to the called, to the sanctified by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace be multiplied, from the Almighty God through Jesus Christ." Clement first endeavours to heal the divisions which had crept into the Corinthian church, and then to confirm them in some doctrines which the heretics of that age had called in question.

1. He endeavours to compose their dissensions. He praises the unity, humility, and other Christian graces which they exemplified previous to the introduction of those dissensions which had torn their church into factions. "They were subject to those net over them in the Lord, and they treated the presbyters who were among them with deserved honour. Their young men were temperate and honest; their women without blame, honest and chaste, loving their own husbands, as duty required. But this pleasing state of things soon came to a close. The mean rose against the honourable, the foolish against the wise, and youth against the elders. Clement next shows the many evils that result from envy and malice—the bad passions from which dissensions flow. This was the reason why Cain slew Abel—why Jacob fled from Esau—why Joseph was sold into slavery; together with many other instances mentioned in the Old Testament. And then, speaking of his own times, he says—"Let us place before our eyes the good Apostles. On account of wicked zeal, Peter did not sustain one or another, but many labours, and so, having suffered martyrdom, departed into the allotted place of glory. On account of zeal, Paul also received a reward, was seven times cast into chains, fled, was stoned. Being the herald of the gospel in the east and west, he obtained the greatest reputation for his faith, instructing the whole world in righteousness, and going to the borders of the west, and suffering martyrdom under the prefects, so he emigrated from the world, and departed into the holy place, being the greatest example of patience." By the remotest boundaries of the west, some understand Britain; and others, with far more probability, think that Spain is referred to, a country which Paul certainly did visit in his third Apostolic journey. But humility is essentially necessary that we may maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of perfectness, and therefore Clement adduces the example of Christ, as the noblest instance of humility. The sceptre of the majesty of God, says he, the Lord Jesus Christ, came not in the boasting of pride and arrogance, though he was able, but in humility.

2. Clement endeavours to prove the truth of the resurrection. Some false teachers, arguing from those passages in which conversion is spoken of as a spiritual resurrection, maintained that the resurrection is past, and that it is the regeneration of the soul effected by the gospel. Others, misled by heathen philosophy, affirmed that the resurrection-body is an ethereal vehicle, by which the soul acts, and that a proper resurrection can not take place. To counteract these dangerous errors, Clement reminds the Corinthians that Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection, and he proves this important doctrine by the alterations of day and night, by

the seed which, after being buried, rises up in a more glorious form—and chiefly by the supposed case of the Phoenix. The other historians allege that the phoenix is a solitary bird, without a mate, which was supposed to live fifty years. It collected various aromatic herbs, as if to embalm its body, and then died. From its ashes a worm rose, and feeding upon the body of the dead animal, became a bird. When sufficiently grown, it carried the body of its parent from Arabia into Egypt, to the city of the sun, when it deposited it there; and so regularly did this occur, that the priests employed it as a measurement of time. But naturalists have sufficiently proved that such a bird as the Phoenix never existed—a fact which demonstrated that though Clement was the companion of Paul, yet he was not inspired. He does not insist, like Paul, upon the resurrection of Christ as the proof and pledge of our resurrection; and one of his proof passages from the third psalm, "I laid me down and slept, I awaked, for God sustained me," has no relation whatever to the subject. These facts clearly show, that though this epistle is a faithful historical record, and though it was, at one time, read in the church as though it had formed part of the New Testament canon, yet it can lay no claim whatever to inspiration.

II. JONATHAN. Nothing is known with certainty of the birth, age, or country, of this distinguished individual, though some have asserted on the testimony of a rather doubtful tradition, that he was one of the little children whom Christ took into his arms and blessed, when he said "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." He was a disciple of the Apostle John, and was ordained by him over the Church of Antioch. He suffered martyrdom in the persecution raised by the Emperor Trajan against the Christians, after he had obtained a signal victory over the Scythians and Dacians—barbarians who constantly attacked the northern parts of the empire. In his journey to Rome, where he suffered martyrdom about the year 115, he wrote seven epistles to various churches, and one to Polycarp, another disciple of John. He was torn to pieces by wild beasts in the theatre, on the last day of the Roman games. The faithful gathered up a few bones that remained, and gave them decent burial. We have a long account of his martyrdom by an unknown writer, but it is evidently not in accordance with Roman usages, and is largely intermixed with fable.

The writings of Ignatius have been greatly corrupted by those who, in a later age, wished to uphold priestly domination by the authority of a name; for we find mention made of bishops, priests and deacons, as distinct from each other—a scheme which was not perfected before the end of the third century. In confirmation of this opinion, William Cureton, a minister of the Church of England, discovered a Syriac version of three of Ignatius' epistles, in which, the bishop-idolizing passages, as they have been termed, are all omitted. Ignatius was minister of the Church of Antioch when Syriac was spoken; and therefore these epistles, if written in Greek, would be translated into the language best known by his own converts. Thus, the expression so often appealed to by high-churchmen, "It is necessary that ye should do nothing without the bishop," is shown to be a forgery, introduced at a late period by some one who endeavoured to seduce the church from the simplicity of the gospel. This correct edition of Ignatius' epistles was published in 1845, and produced a perfect storm of indignation from the Puseyite party in the Church of England.

Ignatius wrote against two classes of heretics; against those who affirmed that circumcision was necessary to salvation, and those who denied that Christ was both God and man. The first class of heretics are sufficiently known from Paul's epistles; and he himself declared that if any submitted to circumcision for the purpose of meriting the divine favour, he had fallen from grace, and Christ could profit him nothing. "There is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian or Scythian, bond or free, but a new creature, in Christ Jesus." "Be not deceived," says Ignatius, "with foreign doctrines, neither with ancient fables, which are useless. For, if we still live according to the Jewish law, we confess that we have not received grace." The second class of false teachers maintained, that though Christ was the supreme God, yet he was not a perfect man, and that he merely assumed the appearance of a body. Now, Ignatius proves that Christ was truly born of Mary, that he ate and drank, that he suffered, was crucified, and rose again—facts which could only be affirmed of a true and proper body. "Close your ears," says he, "when any one shall speak to you without Jesus Christ, who is truly born