

The Church Guardian

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Special Notice.

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CALENDAR FOR JANUARY.

JAN'Y 1st—CIRCUMCISION.

" 1st—1st Sunday after Christmas. [*Notice of Epiphany*].

" 6th—Epiphany. [*Athanasian Creed*].

" 8th—1st Sunday after Epiphany.

" 15th—2nd Sunday after Epiphany.

" 22nd—3rd Sunday after Epiphany. [*Notice of Conversion of St. Paul*].

" 25th—Conversion of St. Paul.

" 29th—Septuagesima. [*Notice of Purification*].

WAS ST. PETER EVER BISHOP OF ROME?

BY THE REV. DR. LITLEDALE.

It is well known that the Roman Catholic Church rests its claim to supremacy over all Christians upon the alleged inheritance of St. Peter's privilege and primacy by the Pope of Rome, on the ground that St. Peter, by finally settling in Rome and dying there as its Bishop, constituted his successors in the See his heirs, not only to his local authority in Rome itself, but to his universal jurisdiction over the whole Church, bestowed upon him by Christ Himself, over and above the apostolic commission which was common to the rest of the Twelve. It is needless to do more than briefly point out that no trace of any such exceptional commission to St. Peter as that of ruling the entire Church is mentioned in Scripture directly, or is indirectly to be discovered there by the fact of actual exercise; and that even if this were otherwise, the very fact of such an exceptional authority being conferred makes the privilege a "personal" as distinguished from an "official," one, and for that reason not transmissible by its holder, but dying with him, and incapable of being exercised by any other person without a fresh grant from the original grantor. This is the rule strictly laid down by Roman Catholic ecclesiastical law in all cases of claim by privilege; that a personal privilege does not admit of the introduction of any name or names except such as explicitly occur in the deed of grant; that such a privilege dies with the decease of the person or persons thus expressly named; and that no power of delegation or transmission can exist in the case of privilege, unless such additional power is expressly given in and by the deed of grant. And, yet again, if this were not so, it would at least be necessary that any person claiming to exercise the privilege in right of any sub-grant or delegation from the original holder should be able to produce evidence that such sub-grant had really

been made, and that in such a public and binding manner as to disable objection.

Not so much as one of these conditions is satisfied in the case of the Roman claim of supremacy. For besides the absence of any proof in Scripture that St. Peter actually did exercise authoritative jurisdiction over the other Apostles and the whole Church, there is further to be noted that not one syllable occurs in the three texts alleged to embody the Petrine Privilege (St. Matt. xvi. 18, 19; St. Luke xxi. 31, 32; St. John xxi. 15, 16, 17) which empowers St. Peter to convey the privilege, whatever be its nature, to any other person. And if this plain fact be set aside, there remains the additional difficulty that not one scrap of evidence is producible that he ever did confer and transmit his peculiar privilege and authority. No hint of the sort is discoverable for centuries after his death, and then it begins in the most suspicious quarter; the assertion of Popes in their own interest, instead of coming from any external and independent source.

Added to all these flaws in the Roman claim, there comes up the crucial question, Is it true, as a matter of historical fact, that St. Peter ever was Bishop of Rome at all? If it be true, there must be something to show for it—something that would be accepted nowadays in a court of justice as proof of any claim of heirship. But here comes in a difficulty. Very few people who have not been specially trained seem to understand what is evidence in proof of anything, and what must be rejected by a judge as having nothing to do with the matter. But it may briefly be said that mere hearsay, second and third hand, is no evidence at all; and that evidence dating long after the time concerned is, if not to be entirely rejected, yet weaker and weaker as the time is longer, and less to be relied on. If people who lived at the time when some event is said to have taken place never say anything about it, and we hear of it first a hundred years or so later, we do not pay much heed to it; and the only thing that would make us pay heed to it is the discovery of some unknown or forgotten papers written by people who did live at the time and had opportunities for getting information, and who thus confirm the later statements for us.

Now, let us see how the facts stand as to the evidence for St. Peter having ever been Bishop of Rome. If it is really such an enormously important fact in the history of Christianity, if the salvation of hundreds of millions is bound up with it, if the vast temporal and spiritual powers claimed and exercised by the Popes depend upon it, we are fairly entitled to expect that the proof of it will be early, clear, and abundant. Is this so? Not in the least.

First, if we search the New Testament, we find Rome mentioned by name just nine times, of which seven have to do with St. Paul and one with his friends Aquila and Priscilla; while the only one that has any connexion with St. Peter is the mention of "strangers of Rome," (Acts ii. 10) amongst his hearers on the day of Pentecost.

"No," a Roman Catholic disputant replies, "there is that other text of St. Peter's own penning: 'The Church that is in Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you' (1 Peter v. 13), and Babylon means Rome, as has been held from the time of St. Papias, a contemporary of the Apostles." But at any rate, St. Peter does not say Rome, but Babylon, and the rest of the Epistle wherein the word occurs is written in a plain straightforward style, without any similar figures of speech, so that it is much more natural to suppose that he means just what he said, for Babylon was in his time still inhabited, and that largely by Jews, who were strong enough to defeat a powerful band of robbers that infested the neighborhood, about twenty years before St. Peter wrote the Epistle somewhere about A.D. 63, (Josephus, "Antiquities," xviii. 9). Next, it is a mistake to suppose that the very early testimony to the guess that Babylon means Rome does really ex-

ist, for it has arisen from a mistake as to the meaning of a passage in the ancient Church historian Eusebius, where one writer after another has copied the blunder, without verifying the original passage, which proves to consist of two clauses, the first of which gives Clement of Alexandria and Papias as authorities for the tradition that St. Peter gave his sanction and approval to St. Mark's Gospel, and for that point only; while the identification of Rome and Babylon on the ground of the text already cited is placed after the reference to these two authors, as an independent statement, not as warranted by them, but as a current opinion in Eusebius' own day. Put the case, however, that the guess is right, and there remains the difficulty that there is nothing said about St. Peter's personal relation to this Babylon or Rome, certainly not that he was Bishop there, any more than we take for granted that St. Paul must have been Bishop of the "Churches in Asia" whose salutation he sends to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xvi. 19), which no one has hitherto asserted. And St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (written in A. D. 58) obviously takes for granted that no Apostle had yet reached them (Rom. xv. 20), while his silence about St. Peter in his other Epistles written from Rome itself as late as A. D. 63 or 65, shows that St. Peter had not arrived there even then. When we come to the age next to that of the Apostles, we are met by the silence on the point at issue in the letter of St. Clement, Pope of Rome, to the Corinthians, written in the last quarter of the first century. Though he twice refers to St. Peter, on neither occasion does he say a word to connect him with Rome; while this is exactly what would be the most natural thing for him to do in the circumstances if the fact were so, since it is hardly credible that he should fail to appeal to the teaching of the Apostle as still resting in some degree in the Church he had ruled. And the like silence is found in the Epistle of St. Ignatius to the Romans, written in the first quarter of the second century, when he was actually on his road to martyrdom at Rome itself. He says, indeed, to the Romans, "I do not issue commands to you, as did Peter and Paul," but (apart from the obvious remark that "commands" may be sent by letter and do not imply oral utterance only) he does not say a word implying that he was hoping to fulfil his own course in the same place where St. Peter had done, and in a like fashion; and yet it is most difficult to suppose him to have omitted such a reference, if the fact of St. Peter's episcopate and martyrdom at Rome had been known to him. The earliest attention of St. Peter in connection with Rome is in a fragment of an Epistle to the Romans from St. Dionysius of Corinth, wherein he says that St. Peter and St. Paul both went to Corinth as well as to Rome, "and taught us in the same way as they taught you when they went to Italy." But this makes against St. Peter's episcopate at Rome, since it is not pretended that he or St. Paul were ever Bishop of Corinth, and there is a clear line of difference between the teaching attitude of a passing missionary and of a resident Bishop of a Church. They may teach the same things, but they do not teach in the same way, any more than an occasional lecturer teaches in the same way as the head master of a school. Next after this comes the evidence of St. Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, about A. D. 190, and that is decisive against St. Peter's episcopate at Rome. For he says, that St. Peter and St. Paul preached at Rome, and laid the foundations of the Church there, and after doing so "committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate." The particular Greek word here used cannot be made to mean "handed on" or "handed down," as if the word meant that Linus succeeded either or both of them after they died, but must mean that they, in their lifetime, appointed him to the office; which, consequently, cannot have been held by St. Peter when he died. There are altogether fifteen