

**THE CHURCH OF THE  
EARLY FATHERS:  
EXTERNAL HISTORY**

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The church of the early fathers: external history by Alfred Plummer

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# Epochs of Church History

EDITED BY

MANDELL CREIGHTON, D.D., LL.D.

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THE EARLY FATHERS

THE CHURCH  
OF THE  
EARLY FATHERS

*EXTERNAL HISTORY*

BY

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ANALYSIS

## PREFACE.

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THE Christian Church has three ideals set before it in Scripture—to be Universal, to be Holy, and to be One. It is to ‘make disciples of all the nations.’ It is to be ‘without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.’ It is to ‘become one flock’ with a union between its members admitting of no lower standard than the Unity of the Divine Persons in the Godhead. The external history of the Church is the history of the attempt to realise the first of these three ideals; its internal history tells of the attempt to realise the second and third. The three taken together sum up what is meant by ecclesiastical history—the history of the spread of Christianity and of the development of Christian life and Christian doctrine. Thus a convenient division of the subject is at once suggested. Only the first of these three points is treated in this handbook—the progress of the Church in the attempt to become universal, including all that impeded that progress, especially literary attack and civil persecution. The worship and



discipline of the Church and the development of its doctrine, though often touched upon, are reserved for treatment in a separate volume.

The present sketch is limited to the Ante-Nicene period, and indeed to only a portion of that. Neither the Apostolic Age nor the history of Arianism falls within its scope. Its limits are, roughly speaking, the second and third centuries, or, more exactly, the period from the death of St. John, about A.D. 100, to the Edict of Toleration published at Milan by Constantine and Licinius A.D. 312 or 313.

It is obvious that in a volume of this size nothing more than a sketch can be attempted; but help will be offered to the student who desires to have fuller information and to examine original sources for himself. A list is given of some of the best and most easily accessible authorities, especially in the English language, together with the chief ancient witnesses from whom the information given by modern writers is ultimately derived. Perhaps in no branch of history is it more important to study original authorities than in the history of Christianity during the second and third centuries. Neither in number nor in bulk are these sources so formidable as in the later periods of Church history; so that the ordinary student may hope to do a good deal in the attempt to make himself acquainted with primary materials. Moreover, nearly all these early writings have been translated; so that even those

who are unable to read Latin or Greek are nevertheless able to obtain fairly accurate knowledge of what these early writers in their own words tell us. This handbook will have failed in one of its objects if it does not lead some of those who use it to check its statements by a comparison with standard works, and above all by an appeal to the original authorities.

As references are almost entirely forbidden by the plan of this series, the compiler of this volume is unable to express in detail his obligations to other writers. They are very numerous to a large number of the works mentioned below, especially to those of Bishop Lightfoot and Dr. Schaff, and to the 'Dictionary of Christian Biography' edited by Smith and Wace. An asterisk is prefixed to the name of modern writers whose writings are of special importance.

#### ORIGINAL SOURCES.

1. THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS.—Editions of Jacobson (1863), Gebhardt, Harnack, and Zahn (1876), Funk (1881). \*Lightfoot's Clement (1869, 1877), Ignatius and Polycarp (1885). Translations in the *Ante-Nicene Library* (1868), and of portions by Hoole (1885).

2. THE APOLOGISTS AND OTHER CHRISTIAN WRITERS.—Greek: Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Origen. Latin: Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Cyprian, Arnobius, Lactantius. Translations in the *Ante-Nicene Library* (1868-1872). Fragments of early Christian writers in Grabe's *Spicilegium Patrum* (1714), Routh's *Reliquiæ Sacræ* (1846-1848), Pitra's *Spicilegium Solesmense* (1852-1860), Bunsen's *Christianity and Mankind*, vols. v.-vii. (1854).

3. HEATHEN CONTROVERSIALISTS, whose works for the most part exist only in extracts: Lucian, Celsus, Porphyry, Hierocles.

4. CLASSICAL AUTHORS who notice Christianity: Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, Suetonius, Dion Cassius.

#### ANCIENT HISTORIANS.

GREEK.—Eusebius of Cæsarea. Translations of his *Ecol. Hist.* by Crusè (1838), in Bohn's *Ecclesiastical Library*, and in the *Greek Ecclesiastical Historians of the First Six Centuries* (1843-1847).

LATIN.—Rufinus (an inaccurate translation of Eusebius) and Jerome. The latter's *De Viris Illustribus* or *De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis* contains 135 Christian biographies from St. Peter to Jerome's own day; often very meagre, but of great value. From Jerome's translation and continuation of the *Chronicon* of Eusebius and from Rufinus's translation and continuation of his *Ecol. Hist.* Western Christendom during the Middle Ages derived most of its historical knowledge. See articles on these writers in the *Dict. of Christ. Biog.*, esp. that on Eusebius by Bishop Lightfoot.

#### MODERN WRITERS.

ENGLISH.—\*Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, esp. chaps. xv., xvi.; biassed against Christianity, but full of well-grouped information (best ed. Smith's Milman's, 1862). Kaye's *Ecol. Hist. of the Second and Third Cents. illustrated from Tertullian* (1845); also his *Justin Martyr* and *Clement of Alexandria*. Jeremie's *Hist. of Christ. Church in the Second and Third Cents.* (1852). Maurice's *Lectures on the Ecol. Hist. of the First and Second Cents.* (1854). Blunt's *Hist. of the Christ. Church during the first three Cents.* (1856). Pusey's *Councils of the Church from A.D. 51 to 381* (1857). Merivale's *Conversion of the Roman Empire* (1864). Milman's *Hist. of Christianity to the Abolition of Paganism* (1867). Mossman's *Hist. of the Cath. Church from the Death of St. John to the Middle of the Second Cent.* (1873). Neale's *Patriarchate of Antioch* (1873); also his *Hist. of the*