

# **THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS, VOL. II**

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The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. II by Edward Burton

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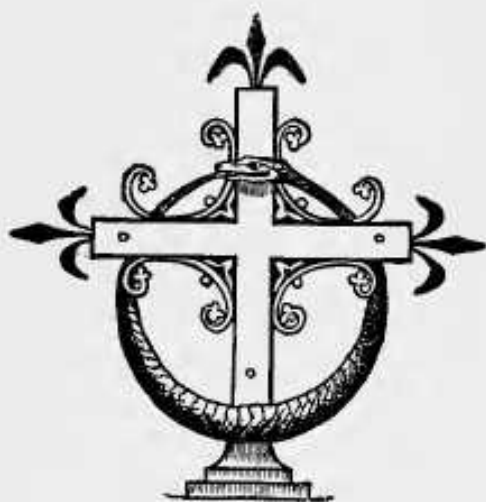
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**EDWARD BURTON**

**THE APOSTOLIC  
FATHERS, VOL. II**



# THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS



The Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature.

II.

A.

*B.*

# THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

THE EPISTLES OF  
ST IGNATIUS AND ST POLYCARP

WITH A HISTORY OF  
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE SECOND CENTURY

BY EDWARD BURTON, D.D.

LATE BRIGGS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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## CONTENTS.

|                                                                                          | PAGE |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| INTRODUCTION . . . . .                                                                   | 7    |
| THE EPISTLES OF ST IGNATIUS . . . . .                                                    | 51   |
| THE EPISTLES OF ST POLYCARP . . . . .                                                    | 127  |
| THE EPISTLE OF THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA CONCERNING<br>THE MARTYRDOM OF ST POLYCARP . . . . . | 147  |
| THE TEACHING OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES . . . . .                                            | 167  |
| THE EPISTLE TO DIOGNETUS . . . . .                                                       | 179  |
| AN ESSAY ON THE RIGHT USE OF THE FATHERS . . . . .                                       | 193  |





# INTRODUCTORY PREFACE,

COMPRISING A

## History of the Church in the Second Century,

BY THE LATE PROFESSOR BURTON.

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### CHAPTER I.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT—SUCCESSORS OF THE APOSTLES—CONTINUANCE OF MIRACULOUS POWERS—DEATH OF SYMEON, BISHOP OF JERUSALEM—DEATH OF IGNATIUS, BISHOP OF ANTIOCH—LETTER OF PLINY TO TRAJAN—PERSECUTION IN BITHYNIA—REVOLT OF THE JEWS—DEATH OF TRAJAN.

**I**T was a melancholy moment for the Church when she was left to herself, without any of that "glorious company of the apostles," who had seen their Redeemer while He was in the flesh, and had received from His own lips the charge to feed His flock. He had committed the trust to faithful hands. They were few in number, and weak in worldly resources; but, guided and strengthened from above, they went forth into all lands, and planted the banner of the cross upon the ruins of heathenism. One by one they were withdrawn from their earthly labours; and it was mercifully provided by God, that the Church did not feel all at once the severity of her loss. The apostles had also zealous companions, who assisted them in their ministry, and who were placed by them over the churches in different countries. We have seen the Ephesian converts committed by Paul to Timothy, and those in Crete

to Titus. Luke appears to have resided for some time at Philippi; and Mark was sent by Peter to watch over the flock at Alexandria. These may serve as examples of what was done in other churches. So long as the apostles who founded the churches were alive, and able to visit them in person, it was not necessary to have one fixed superintendent in each city or town. The apostles themselves continued to watch over their converts; and Paul, though residing at Ephesus, was consulted, and gave directions as head of the Church of Corinth. Even in his lifetime he seems to have found the care of all his churches too great for him; and we can well understand the earnest charge which he gave to Timothy not long before his death, that he would commit the things which he had heard to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also.

The state of the Asiatic churches, when John was residing at Ephesus, may explain the system which had now been generally established for governing Christian communities. The apostle, in his Apocalypse, mentions seven churches in that part of the world, with which he seems to have been intimately acquainted. Two of them, those of Ephesus and Laodicea, are known to have been planted some years before the death of Paul; and the five others were in countries which he frequently visited. Nearly half a century may therefore have elapsed between their first foundation and the notice they received from John. At the latter period, they were all of them under the same form of church government. One person was put over each of them, who is called by John the Angel of his respective church; but within a very few years, the heads of the same churches were spoken of as bishops, the meaning of which term, in Greek, is simply *an overseer*; and this name, which had been applied by the apostles to presbyters, as being persons appointed by themselves to overlook their flocks, came at length to be applied to the successors of the apostles, who did not follow them in travelling from country to country, but resided permanently in some one city or town. In one sense, therefore, there were several bishops or overseers in each church, for every presbyter might have borne that name: but as soon as the system became general which was established in the seven Asiatic churches, and which we have seen to have been adopted also at Antioch, and Rome, and Alexandria, of

selecting one man to superintend the church, the term bishop was limited to this one superintendent of the whole body. In most cases a bishop had only the charge of the Christians in one single town.

The term *diocese* was not then known; though there may have been instances where the care of more than one congregation was committed to a single bishop, of which we have a very early example in all the Cretan churches being intrusted by Paul to Titus. The name which was generally applied to the flock of a single pastor, was one from which our present word *parish* is derived, which signified his superintendence over the *inhabitants* of a particular place; and if we add to the two orders of bishops and presbyters, the one which was more ancient than either of them, that of deacons, we shall have the form of church government which appears to have been generally established at the beginning of the second century.

It is interesting to think that many of the persons who were now presiding over churches, had been appointed to their important stations by apostles, or at least had seen the men who had been personally acquainted with our Lord. They form the connecting link between the first or apostolic age, and that which immediately succeeded it. There is also one circumstance connected with their history which must not be forgotten,—that the apostles were able, by laying on their hands, to convey those preternatural gifts of the Spirit which enabled persons to work miracles. There must have been many persons living, at the beginning of the second century, upon whom some apostle had thus laid his hands. The Angels or Bishops of the seven Asiatic churches may all have had this advantage, and may all have been appointed to their bishoprics by John. One of them, the Bishop of Smyrna, was probably Polycarp, who certainly held this station a few years later, and is always said to have received his appointment from an apostle, as well as to have been personally acquainted with John. His interesting life will occupy our attention later in the century; and he is mentioned now, as showing that there must have been many persons still alive, though the apostles were withdrawn, who possessed some portion of miraculous power; and that miracles did not cease suddenly and abruptly with the last of the apostles, but were still exerted occasionally