

**OXFORD CHURCH TEXT
BOOKS. THE APOSTLES'
CREED. [1906]**

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Oxford Church Text Books

The Apostles' Creed

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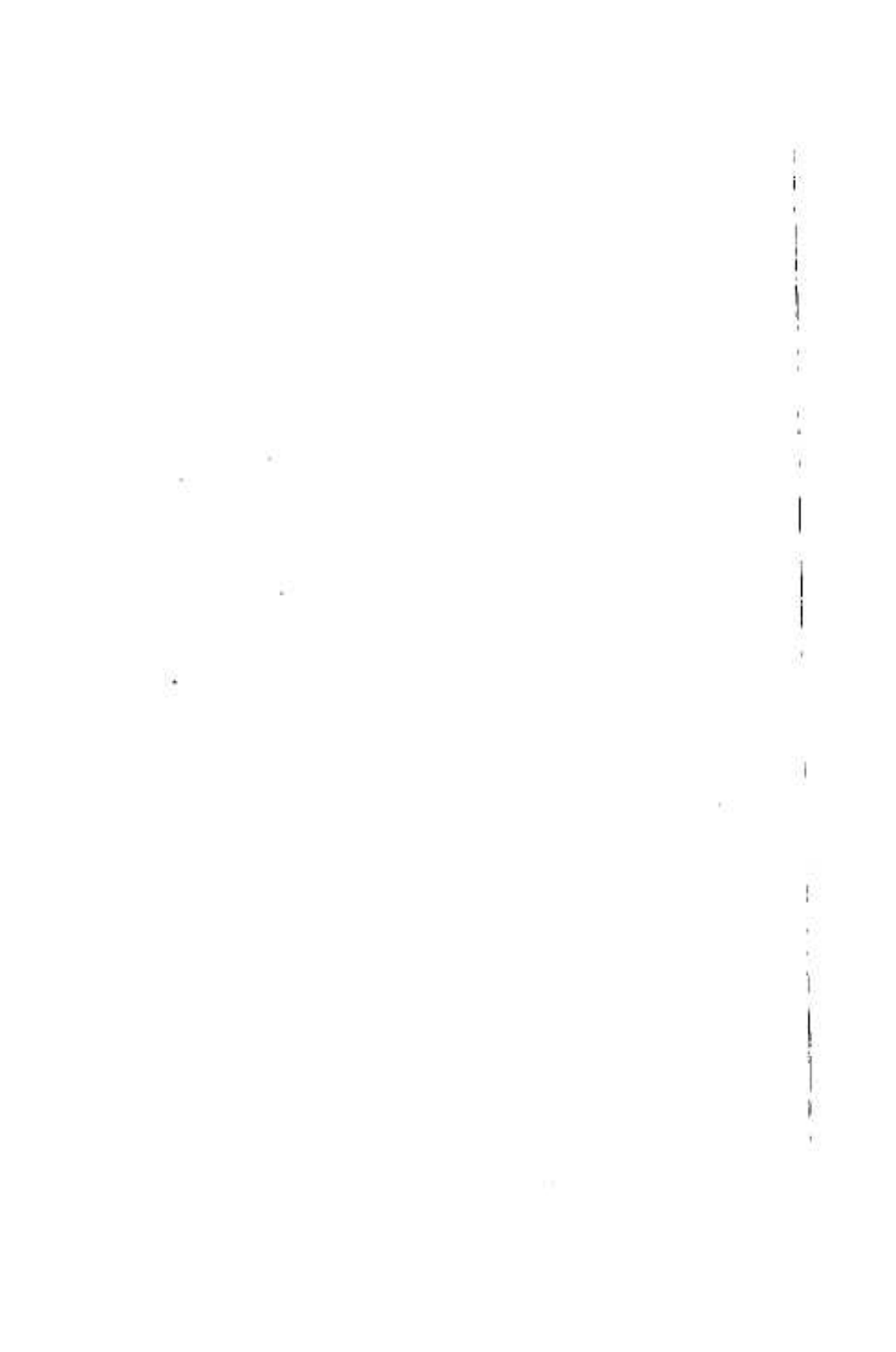
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TO
MY MOTHER

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THE APOSTLES' CREED

PART I. THE HISTORY

CHAPTER I

THE EARLIEST HISTORY OF THE CREED

It is difficult to write a short history of the Apostles' Creed because, in its various stages of development, the Creed is bound up with the whole history of the Church from Apostolic times. To use one ancient interpretation of its Latin name, *symbolum*, it has been the banner carried at the head of the victorious army of Christ. As regimental banners display emblazoned the names of the great battles in which the regiment has won distinction, so do the creeds of particular Churches sum up in phrases added to the original form the history of dire conflicts in which Truth has painfully battled with Error. It is one thing to give the skeleton record of a series of campaigns with the dates and the names of commanders on both sides, and quite another to narrate the story of endurance and bravery which was shown on the toilsome march, and through night battles, and in the suffering of hardships, no less than in the clash of battle and the hour of victory. Just so we may in the compass of a few pages put together a record of skeleton creed-forms, with approximate dates and a few appropriate reflections. But this would be to leave the heart of the subject untouched. We desire to revivify the memories of the great crises when champions of Truth have been betrayed into inconsistencies, feebleness, and

folly, and nevertheless Truth has conquered. In a short history we must be content with mention of a few battles, which were decisive. This will suffice if the reader is led on to the study of the great issues involved in larger works, both on the creeds and on Church history in general.

Again, it is bewildering to a beginner to find out how many in number and how various in shape the early creed-forms are. So many new forms also have been found quite recently that it seems as if a large volume were needed to contain them, even without note or comment. Surely it is impossible to do justice to their manifold variety in a short work.

Further study, however, reveals the fact that they all follow one main line of development, that they can be easily classified, and that for beginners it is only necessary to know the chief types. The main line of development consists in the progressive interpretation of the Baptismal Formula 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' The three chief classes are Baptismal Creeds, Conciliar Creeds, and Private or Individual Theological Professions. Our Apostles' Creed belongs to the first class, our Nicene Creed to both the first and the second, our (so-called) Athanasian Creed to the third. We are only at present concerned with the Apostles' Creed, so a very few words of explanation must suffice to show how the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds are related to it.

When the Nicene Council met in A.D. 325 Eusebius, the learned Bishop of Cæsarea, presented to it a form of faith which no doubt contained many phrases of the Baptismal Creed of Cæsarea, since he quoted it as such. But it really represented a theological essay, if I may use the term, designed by Eusebius to settle current disputes, both in the description given of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the abrupt termination of the form at the words 'And in the Holy Ghost.' There was no

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controversy pending on the teaching of the third division of the Baptismal Creed. Eusebius therefore dropped the usual mention of the Church and the forgiveness of sins. The form in which it was proposed was not the form in which it was passed by the Council. It was emended and enlarged notably by the addition of the words 'of one substance' (*homoousios*) and 'of the substance of the Father,' round which controversy raged for a long time. A series of anathemas was also added condemning the main propositions of Arian theology.

Thus the original Nicene Creed was the first of a distinct class of Conciliar Creeds, which add to the simple statements of the ancient Historic Faith theological interpretations of a more or less intricate and speculative character. Many conservative theologians, of whom Eusebius himself was one, objected strongly to the use of any term such as *homoousios* (of one substance) because it was not found in Holy Scripture. But as time went on the wisdom of the Council was justified. A simple-minded bishop like Cyril of Jerusalem, whose first interest was in pastoral work, not in the region of speculative theology, came to see that such terms, though not Scriptural, were necessary to guard the sense of Scripture. So he revised the Creed of Jerusalem by the insertion of a section cut out of the Creed of the Nicene Council. His revision was received with approval by the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. At the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 it was quoted side by side with the original Nicene Creed as the profession of the Council of Constantinople. They were referred to as the Creeds of 'the 318 holy fathers' and 'the 150 fathers' respectively. In their later history they were often confused, and their texts were altered by copyists to make them correspond more closely. But it was the revised Creed of Cyril which came into use as the Baptismal Creed of Constantinople and so of the whole