

severe life of penance, but privately so as not to arouse suspicion among the Moslems. His reason for this secrecy was that he wanted to make his recantation as public as his apostasy had been, and the king would be absent from Tunis until the beginning of April 1460. On his return Anthony appeared before him wearing a scapular lent him by Fr Novaro over his civil dress. It was Palm Sunday, 6 April 1460, and denouncing the Moslem faith as impious, he urged the king to accept the faith of Christ. The king, not surprisingly, was very angry, and sent him back to prison, to be brought the next day before the *cadi* or judge and condemned as an apostate Moslem to be publicly stoned to death. The sentence was carried out on Maundy Thursday, 10 April, with great brutality; but before the executioners stripped him of his clothes, he begged a bystander of his charity to carry back his scapular to Fr Novaro. Then he willingly offered himself to death. A vain attempt was made to burn his body, which was eventually thrown into a sewer. It was retrieved by the Genoese, and as money talked as eloquently in the fifteenth century as it does today, they were allowed to bury it in the colony's chapel. It was translated nine years later to his shrine at Ripoli. His cult was confirmed in 1767 by Clement XIII.



## THE APOCRYPHAL LETTER OF KING ABGAR OF EDESSA TO JESUS

Translated by JOSEPH BOURKE, O.P.

*A legend, once extremely widespread and influential both in the Eastern and Western Churches, relates that Abgar V, king of Edessa (4 B.C. to 58 A.D.) once exchanged messages with our Lord. Two main versions of Abgar's letter and our Lord's reply have been preserved: the first in Eusebius' History of the Church, the second in the fourth-century Syriac document known as the Doctrine of Addai. It is from the latter that my translation is taken. Addai, so the legend goes, was the disciple sent to King Abgar at Edessa after the Ascension, in fulfilment of our Lord's promise. Edessa was from a very early date the centre of Syriac-speaking Christianity, and it was thither that St*

*Ephraem transferred his school in 363, when Nisibis, his native town, fell into the hands of the Persians. Even by that time the legend must already have been well established. It is valuable, not of course as an historical record, for it is completely apocryphal, but as a very early witness to the spirit of direct and simple piety which is characteristic of the best traditions of Syriac Christianity.*

**A**BGAR would have liked to make the journey to Palestine in person, and to see with his own eyes all the things that Christ was doing. But he could not travel to a territory of the Romans other than his own, lest this should provide an occasion for the malice of his enemies. For this reason he wrote a letter, and sent it to Christ by the hand of Hannan, the scribe. Hannan left Edessa on the fourteenth of March, and arrived at Jerusalem on the twelfth of April, in four weeks. Having found Christ at the house of Gamaliel, a great man among the Jews, he read the letter before him. This is what it said:

Abgar the Black, to Jesus the good healer, who has appeared in the country of Jerusalem. Greetings, my Lord!

I have heard of you and of your healing; how you heal, not by medicines or by herbs, but by your word you make the blind to see, the lame to walk, lepers to become clean, the deaf to hear, and unclean spirits to depart. By your word you heal lunatics from the spirits which torment them. The dead, too, you raise to life. Hearing these great wonders which you work, I have made up my mind that you are either God, come down from heaven to perform these things, or else the Son of God, since you are doing all this. Therefore I have written to ask you to come to me here, for I adore you. Whatever illness I am suffering from, you will cure, as I believe in you. Besides, I have heard this too: that the Jews are murmuring against you and persecuting you—that they even seek to crucify you, and watch for opportunities to injure you. Now I have a city which is small, but it is beautiful, and it would be large enough for the two of us to live quietly here.

When Jesus had received this letter at the house of the chief priest of the Jews, he said to Hannan, the scribe:

Go and take this message to your master who sent you to me: Blessed are you who, when you had not seen me, believed in me. For it is written of me that those who see me will not believe in

me, while those who do not see me will believe in me. As to what you have written to me about coming to you there, the work for which I was sent hither is now accomplished, and I will ascend to my Father who sent me. When I do ascend to him I will send you one of my disciples to heal you, and whatever illness you are suffering from, he shall cure. And all those who are with you he shall convert to everlasting life. And your city shall be blessed; no enemy shall ever again gain possession of it. While Jesus was saying all this to him, Hannan the scribe was watching him. And with his skill as the king's painter, he set and painted a likeness of Jesus, in superb colours. This he took back with him to King Abgar his master. And when King Abgar saw the portrait, he received it with great delight, and set it in a place of high honour in his palace. Then Hannan the scribe related to him all the things he had heard from Jesus.



**'I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH'**  
(JOB XIX, 25)

**From St Gregory's Commentary on Job, Bk XIV**

*Translated by E.H.*

**B**Y saying redeemer, not creator, he is clearly announcing one who appeared amongst us in the flesh, long after he had created all things, in order to redeem us from captivity, one who delivered us by his sufferings from never-ending death. And notice with what strong faith in the power of Christ's godhead he pulls himself together; just as St Paul says: 'Even though he was crucified through weakness, yet he lives through the power of God' (2 Cor. xiii, 4), so Job says here: 'I know that my redeemer lives', as much as to say, more openly, 'Any unbeliever can know about his being scourged, laughed at, knocked about, crowned with a crown of thorns, smeared with spittle, crucified, and dead; but I believe with the certainty of faith and I freely and openly declare that he lives after death. For my redeemer lives, whom the hands of wicked men slew.'