

# The Church Guardian,

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## THE EARLY BRITISH CHURCH.

It was said by the present Premier of England, in his celebrated pamphlet, "The Vatican Decrees," that Rome had "refurbished and paraded anew every rusty tool she was fondly thought to have disused." We may, with propriety, apply Mr. Gladstone's scathing sentence to the subject under discussion on reading a report of a lecture recently delivered by a Roman Catholic dignitary, and also note with what a strange mixture of mingled fear and disdain she essays to do battle in support of her pretensions and claims. One striking feature of every encounter is the evident seeking to convey the impression that her position is unassailable and has never been controverted, or that, if assailed, her opponents have always, and everywhere, been ignominiously defeated. It may, however, on the other side be safely affirmed that the Church of Rome has always had these claims of hers disputed, and has always suffered loss of prestige after every conflict.

Perhaps no subject has received greater attention at the hands of English Roman controversialists, and none has been so thoroughly and ably defended by champions of the Church of England, than the question of the separate existence and independence of the Early British Church. We can readily understand how anxious the Roman Church in our Mother Land and in this country would be to have people accept as a fact that through her instrumentality Christianity was introduced into England, (although if this were proved, it is doubtful if the Papal Church of to-day can be identified as the Church of Rome of that day, for developments of doctrine have greatly changed her character since those first centuries), but it will be difficult to overcome

the indubitable testimony of many reliable early writers, who declare that a Church, duly organized, with Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, whose usages were certainly not Western, existed in England, and was represented in the early Councils, and had her martyrs and confessors hundreds of years before Augustine, the Roman monk, landed on British shores. To give the testimony of these writers, and to show in as brief space as possible the utter lack of proof in support of the Roman position, will be our object in this and some future articles.

How Christianity first came to Britain is not certainly known, although the evidence in favour of St. Paul or some other of the Apostles having brought it thither, is stated by several of the early writers. For example, Eusebius asserts that some of the Apostles passed over to Britain. Tertullian, who lived in the 2nd century, speaks of Britain and other places inaccessible to the Romans having been subjugated to Christ. Origen, who lived in the next age, speaks of Britain consenting to the worship of the true God. Theodoret says the Britons were converted by the Apostles. Jerome says "St. Paul having been in Spain, sailed from one ocean to another as far as the extremity of the earth;" and again, "Paul, after his imprisonment, preached in the Western parts." Clement, Bishop of Rome, and contemporary with St. Paul, says "St. Paul preached righteousness throughout the whole world and travelled to the utmost bounds of the West." That the term "utmost bounds of the West" includes Britain, we know from the classical and contemporary use of the expression. For example, Plutarch, speaking of the invasion of Britain, says Cæsar was the first who carried a fleet into the Western Ocean. Theodoret mentions the people of Spain, Britain, and Gaul as those who dwelt in the extreme parts of the West. When Eusebius speaks of the British Ocean, he calls it the Western Ocean. Tacitus uses the expression "utmost bounds of the earth" to denote the Britons, the subject of his biography being the commander of the Roman forces in Britain. The Greek geographers always speak of the Celtæ as the Western people, and of these the Britons are farthest West, *i. e.*, at the extremity of the then known world. We find Horace falling into the same mode of expression, "the Britons the remotest people of the world." While it may be admitted as far from being proof positive, still enough has been said to show that there is much to warrant the supposition that the Church was planted in Britain by the Apostle Paul himself. However that may be, we may regard it as historically certain that not later than the end of the second or the very beginning of the third century there was already a Church in Britain, equipped and furnished in every particular, although not certain how long it had been there, or how it had come there. It is beyond doubt certain that when the Roman Emperor Diocletian (A. D. 303) persecuted the Christians his cruelties extended even to Britain. It was then that St. Alban suffered martyrdom in the town of Verulam, and on which account it afterwards received its name. Both Gildas, and Bede, who followed him, give the names of British martyrs who suffered in the third and fourth centuries, the former saying, "God lighted for us most bright lamps of holy martyrs, Alban, Aaron, Julius, who, with others of both sexes, in various places, suffered with great courage." It is also

certain that a Church, duly constituted and organized, was established in Britain at that time, from the fact that three British Bishops were summoned to attend the Council of Arles in Gaul (now France) in A. D. 314, of whom one was Bishop of York, the second Bishop of London, and the third Bishop of Caerleon, in Monmouthshire. Moreover, these three Bishops subscribed their names to the Canons of that Council just as all the other Bishops did, plainly showing that the orders of our British Episcopate were not disputed. A Priest, named Sacerdos, and a Deacon, Arminius, accompanied the Bishops, as appears from the records. It is also certain from the fact that they are specified among others by the Emperor in his Encyclic after the Council, and by Athanasius in a subsequent letter to the Emperor Jovian, that if they were not actually present at the Council of Nice, the first of the great General Councils recognized by the whole Church, they, at any rate, accepted the Nicene Faith, and the allusion to them is in itself an evidence of the importance of their Church. At the Council of Ariminum (A. D. 359) we have the express testimony of Sulpicius Severus that the British Episcopate was represented. It thus appears undoubted that in the fourth century the British Church was a fully recognized part of the Great Catholic body, with an organized hierarchy and a voice in Councils; and also that it continued orthodox in that age of controversy.

## CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION.

As an independent Church Journal we need not apologize for not having given a personal tone to the discussion of Confession and Absolution in connection with the recent Mission held in Halifax. Our own views upon the subject we care not to thrust upon our readers, especially as we have had but little personal acquaintance with the facts. As to the Church's doctrine, the extracts published in our issue of the 12th inst., demonstrate pretty clearly what those high in authority believe to be the meaning of the Prayer Book on the subject, and we have no disposition to question their judgment.

With reference to Mr. Davenport's request that we publish Mr. Matwin's sermon, we can only repeat our reason for not doing so, *viz.*, that it was too long for our limited space, and that it was not a verbatim report of the sermon actually preached in St. Luke's, not containing certain expressions upon which much of the contention had arisen. We thought at the time that it was an unwise step of Mr. Davenport's to have it published under the circumstances, and upon more mature reflection that conviction has been deepened. We heartily sympathize with Mr. Davenport when he says, "outsiders would get a very false impression of what was done at Halifax, if they concluded that the fifty sermons, meditations, instructions, etc., given in St. Luke's Church, (and a similar number in the other two Churches), during the twelve days, were all occupied with this subject." We may be permitted to say, as a fact known to the writer, that a large amount of good has resulted from the Mission, and that very many even among those who disapprove of the teaching upon the question of Confession and Absolution, thankfully acknowledge the benefits which they and others received from the earnest sermons and addresses, and the words of loving counsel and