

## CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

A FEW WORDS ON THE ANCIENT  
BRITISH CHURCH.

"THE Church of England is the only true representative of the ancient British Church." This statement was recently made by one of the Clergy of Brockville. It has been denied by a Presbyterian minister of that controversial town, who affirms that "If there are any representatives of the British Church, we ought surely to look for them in those Christian bodies in Wales, Ireland and Scotland, which hold most closely to the faith and ecclesiastical constitution of the primitive British Church," these bodies, says the writer, "are not identical with the modern Anglican Church."

We propose to show briefly that the Church of England is not merely the *only* true representative in England of the ancient Church of Britain, but that it is *identically the same Church*, further that "those Christian bodies in Wales, Ireland and Scotland, which hold most closely to the constitution of the primitive British Church," are not, as the Brockville minister writes, the Presbyterian bodies in those countries, but the Episcopal Catholic Church in Scotland, in Wales and in Ireland, Churches constitutionally and historically identical with the Anglican Church. The question at issue turns upon the answer which history gives to two questions:—First. Was the ancient British Church localized in what is now called England, a recognised branch of the Catholic Church? Second. Was the Church governed by bishops? We must explain that we use the word "England" to signify the present geographical area so called, so also "Wales," so also "Scotland," so also "Ireland." The word "British" we use as a general term including all these countries. Those familiar with the geography of early times will know the necessity of this definition in this controversy.

If then, we can show first that the British Church localized in England, was a recognised branch of the Catholic Church, it follows that it was in fact the Catholic Church of England. If next we can prove that this Church was governed by bishops, we have demonstrated the identity of that Church with the Church of England of to-day, which is called the Anglican Church for, in the very nature of things, it is a truism, there can never have been but one Catholic Church episcopally governed in existence at any time. To speak of a Catholic Church existing to-day as not identical with a Catholic Church in some other era is a contradiction in terms—it is an absurdity. A man does not lose his identity by the scars of conflict, by being overpowered by force, by falling into error, by becoming soiled, so neither does the Church lose its identity by such misfortunes. But the whole argument of those who deny the historic continuity of the Church of England since Apostolic days, or soon after, rests upon this strange theory, that she in her struggles for centuries with a superior power, was in a measure and for a time over-borne by

force, that in this glorious conflict she became scarred, that she was compelled to fall into error, that she became soiled with contact with an unclean adversary. So far from these experiences being dishonour, they are her proud claims to the reverence of all men who are capable of recognising the nobility, the heroism, the sublime courage of a Church asserting for centuries, her independent life in the face of an usurper bent upon its annihilation! He who sneers at our Church for her scars would mock his mother for her wrinkles and grey hairs.

Our answer to question the first answers both. It is this, the British Church in England during its occupation by Imperial Rome sent three Bishops, also a Presbyter and a Deacon to the Council of the Catholic Church at Arles, A.D., 314. Although it sent no delegates to that of Nicea, we are told by Constantine that the British Bishops accepted the ruling of that Council. Bishops from the British Church in England were present at the Catholic Church Council at Ariminum in A.D., 359. Hilary of Poitiers in A.D., 358, speaks in praise of British Bishops, so also does St. Athanasius. The Bishops at Arles, were those of London, York, Caerleon or Lincoln. Stubbs writes, "In the early Anglo-Saxon Church bishoprics were founded first, then parishes." This great authority also refers to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons of the British Church and to the popular election of Bishops. Haddan, also a high authority, speaks of the Bishops, Priests and Deacons of the primitive British Church.

Thus we have demonstrated, First, that the British Church in England, Wales and Scotland, was recognised as a branch of the Catholic Church; Second, that that Church was governed by Bishops, therefore that ancient Church was identical in constitution with the existing Catholic episcopacy governed Church of England, Wales and Scotland. As to Scotland, the record is an over-whelming proof of our position and utterly explodes the Presbyterian theory. That the British Church had Bishops has been proved, and that Church was the ancient Church of Scotland! Scottish Bishops from the 5th to the 12th century were missionaries in Italy and Spain. An ancient writer says, "to Scotland pertains the glory of supplying Bishops to the very home of letters, to Italy, thus Scottish Bishops have an undying fame in the Church of Christ." A visible evidence of the continuous identity of the ancient Church of Britain and our Church to-day, is seen at every ordination of a Deacon. Let our Presbyterian friends attend that service, and they will see the Bishop hand a copy of the Gospels to the newly made Deacon. "This custom comes down direct from the ancient British Church, from the Church which wrested Britain from idolatry in the days of Imperial Rome, a custom which stood the shock of Saxon invasion, and the liturgical changes in the Middle ages to symbolize in brighter times, the one Church which retains an open and accessible Bible."

One word as to the relation of the Church of

England in the early days to the Church of Rome. We will simply give a few quotations from Haddan, Freeman, Hallam and Stubbs, authorities supreme in this field of research. "The romantic reverence felt by the Anglo-Saxon towards the distant and civilized Church of Rome. The Church of Britain grew from its roots, a Church beyond all others *national*." "The Saxon line of Bishops contains great names." "Gregory sought to ensure the security of the British Church by re-establishing two Archiepiscopates with their dependent Sees." So writes Haddan. In his Norman Conquest Freeman says, "When Pope and Caesar held each other in the death grasp, (that is in the 11th century,) the British Church which had hitherto maintained a sort of insular and barbaric independence." Again "the English Church revered but did not slavishly bow down to Rome." From this period to the final break with the Papacy at the Reformation, the history of the Church of England is mainly the narrative of struggles to maintain its independence against the usurping power of the Papacy backed up by its over-whelming political influence in Europe. But not for one hour did the Church of England ever so far succumb as to lose its national character and title. The first clause of Magna Charta, A.D., 1215, confirms the great principle so often appealed to later and earlier, "*quod Anglicana Ecclesia libera sit*." Stubbs writes, "The Parliament of 1399 declared that England had in all time past been so free, that no Pope nor other outside the realm had a right to meddle therein." Hallam says, "The Clergy in Convocation, prior to the final break with the Papacy, in a petition to the king, spoke of themselves as the *Clergy of the Church of England*." How can any sane person believe that a Church which grew from its own roots, intensely national, which for centuries maintained its insular independence, which never slavishly bowed down to Rome, which never lost its national title, which when over-powered by force struggled like a caged lion until its day of oppression was over, how, we ask, can we believe the monstrous falsehood told by the Romanist and their allies the Dissenters that the Church of England did not exist before the Reformation? History gives the lie direct to this shameless assertion. A distinguished writer says, "Presbyterianism has failed to extirpate the Church and has remained a sect." Hence its alliance with the Papacy in seeking to falsify history in order to deprive the Church of England of the unrivalled glory of its history as a Catholic Church. There is a well known picture of two Romish priests laughing immoderately. Those priests no doubt had been reading the absurdities of some Presbyterian writer who attacked the Church of England by firing shot made in the factory of Rome!

The Catholic Apostolic Church of England won England from idolatry for Christ, let no man steal her diadem of glory. The ancient British Church is the brightest jewel in the Redeemer's crown, its five crystal faces are, the Catholic Episcopal Church of England, of Wales, of Ireland, of Scotland, of Britain be-