

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
FROM THE FIRST CENTURY
TO THE REFORMATION**

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A Brief History of the Christian Church, from the First Century to the Reformation by J. S. Bartlett

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"PROUL DUBIO ARCA NON FIGURA EST PEREGRINANTIS
IN HOC SECCULO ECCLESIA, QUE FIT SALVA PER LIGNUM IN
QUO FERENDIT CHRISTUS."—*S. Augustine De Civitate Dei*, xv. 21.

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PREFACE.

THE writer, in endeavouring to describe within the limits of this little Manual the chief events in the history of the Church of Christ, would be understood to disclaim all pretensions to depth or originality of research. The sources from which his historical information has been derived are acknowledged in the notes appended to the respective pages. He is desirous of expressing his great obligations to the History of Dr. Waddington, from which has been adapted the chronological table at the end of this work. He is also indebted for much information on the Early Church to the writings of Cave on the Fathers, Dr. Hook's Ecclesiastical Biographies, and Bingham's Primitive Antiquities; for the history of later times, to the pages of Berington, D'Aubigné, Mr. Churton, and Dr. Wordsworth.

This Manual will be found, it is feared, in

some respects necessarily defective; and an apology is required for any attempt to compress within so small a space the general history of sixteen centuries. The writer trusts that this attempt may be pardoned, in consideration of an imperfect, but not careless, diligence; and that the perusal of the following pages may to some degree teach the true lesson to be gathered from all Church-history,—“faith in the Author of all truth, the Founder and Preserver of that religion of which the Church is His appointed keeper and witness in the world*.”

* Churton.

A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, &c.

THE FIRST CENTURY.

THE earliest records of the Christian Church, which are contained in the Acts of the Apostles, extend from the period of the Ascension to that of St. Paul's first imprisonment at Rome. From their pages we learn the early progress of the faith, the arguments by which its truth was vindicated, and, in some degree, the success which attended its propagation. The history of the Church at Jerusalem, and of those miraculous gifts which were bestowed for its progress and extension; the trials accompanying the first labours of the apostles and early Christians, are clearly recorded by the pen of the Evangelist. Further than this, we read of the subsequent increase of the Church, by the conversion and preaching of the great Apostle of the Gentiles; when the gospel, which had been first proclaimed at Jerusalem, was, in conformity with the injunction of its Divine Founder, "preached unto all nations." We cannot, however, derive from the narrative of St. Luke full information as to the general extension of Christianity. His direct object, as announced in the preface to the Acts of the Apostles, was to confirm the believer in the truth of those doctrines wherein he had been instructed, rather than to inform him of the amount of credence which

Early progress of Christianity. The Acts of the Apostles.

Their design and contents.

FIRST
CENTURY.

they had obtained. Hence, with few and unimportant exceptions, the whole of the volume is (as we have observed) devoted to the history of the Church of Jerusalem, the acceptance of the Gentiles, the conversion, life, and travels of St. Paul; not to any general review of apostolic labours, or record of that unwearied zeal which conveyed the knowledge of the true God to heathen lands.

Propagation
of Chris-
tianity.

From this absence of direct reference to the early extension of the Church, some doubt arises as to the real amount of its progress during the earlier part of the first century. At its close, however, we become enabled to define this progress with more certainty: there is good proof that it had then extended, not only to a great part of Asia, and the north of Africa, but that the voice of truth had been heard in Greece, Italy, France, and in the remoter Spain. Clement, bishop of Rome, who conversed with the apostles, informs the Corinthians in his epistle^a to them, that St. Paul himself had "travelled to the utmost bounds of the west;" an expression from which many have concluded, that he founded the Church in Britain: and we may observe, that indirect evidence tends to confirm the belief, and to shew the extent of that apostolic zeal which surmounted the perils of the distant journey, to convey to an island, situated, as it were, at the extremities of the earth^b, the knowledge and faith of Christ.

Clement.

The British
Church.

The progress of the gospel is adverted to by the early fathers as if they were describing a stream

^a Clemens Rom. ad Corinth., lib. I. c. 13.

^b " Ultimos
Orbis Britannos."—Horace, l. xxxv. 80.

" Penitus toto diviso orbe Britannos."—Virgil, Ecloga I.

whose course flowed upwards, or a vessel which sailed on the waters, with outspread canvas, against wind and tide, and every countervailing force^c. Jewish and pagan hostility were alike directed against a religion which, strictly exclusive in its claims, could only be established upon the ruins of existing superstitions. It was a system adverse to every hope, or passion, or prejudice of the Jew; its doctrines, its principles were entirely subversive of his expectations. Nor was it likely to find more favour with the heathen. It was not, as has been justly observed, a system which might be held without questioning the reality of others; but, uncompromising in its tenets, it boldly denounced the idolatries of Greece and Rome, attacked the strongholds of pagan error, and claimed an authority at once exclusive and divine^d.

FIRST
CENTURY.

Opposition
to the pro-
gress of the
Church;
its cause.

Hence we are not surprised that history records ten persecutions, of greater or less violence, previous to the conversion of Constantine, A. D. 320. The first of these, under Nero, in the year 65, was distinguished by the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul, at Rome. "They departed out of this world," exclaims Clement, in recording this event, "and went unto their holy place; being become a most eminent pattern of patience to all ages^e." Tradition informs us that their bodies were conveyed by weeping disciples to those "subterranean labyrinths, where, through many ages of oppression, the persecuted Church found refuge for the living and sepulchres for the dead^f;" but "their name liveth for evermore;" and their memories are revered, as the great teachers of uni-

1st per-
secution,
A. D. 65.

Martyrdom
of SS. Peter
and Paul.

^c Lyall's Propædia Prophetica, Lect. viii. p. 129.

^d Paley, Evid. of Christianity, c. i.

^e Clem. Rom. ad Cor. iii. 15.

^f Conybeare and Howson's Life of St. Paul, vol. ii. pp. 504, 505.