

**THE CHURCH IN THE BRITISH
ISLES: SKETCHES OF ITS
CONTINUOUS HISTORY FROM
THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE
RESTORATION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649386437

The church in the British Isles: sketches of its continuous history from the earliest times to the restoration by Various

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VARIOUS

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THE CHURCH
IN
THE BRITISH ISLES

Sketches

OF ITS CONTINUOUS HISTORY

FROM

THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE RESTORATION

LECTURES DELIVERED IN 1889 UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
CHURCH CLUB OF NEW YORK

NEW YORK
E. & J. B. YOUNG & CO.,
COOPER UNION, FOURTH AVENUE

1890

1411-3

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PREFACE.

Those who in theory or in practice deny that corporate union of Christians is desirable, undervalue one of the main functions of the Church, albeit one which has for some centuries been but imperfectly fulfilled ; that is, its witness, as a continuous institution, to the verity of the facts of Christianity. An unorganized number of believers, of different confessions, without external or visible association, are witnesses each to his own experience or belief ; and the force of their testimony lies in the concurrence of so many persons.

The Church's existence as an institution is evidence of a different kind. This indicates both the experience or the belief of the individuals who now constitute the organization and the prevalence of that belief when the organization was founded.

It carries back the testimony to contemporaneous witnesses who saw the facts that they declared, and it has perpetuated their testimony, making it speak afresh to each successive generation of men. No other institution has exerted so profound an influence upon human society, and none has shown so wonderful adaptability to the vicissitudes of human experience both social and individual, and no other has maintained its essential character and its vital principles without change or diminution, as this has; and to-day it is witness to the same facts that it testified to eighteen centuries and a half ago.

The corporate organization of the Church has alone made this testimony possible. It has both preserved the formal statement of the Christian faith, and checked individual and sectary deviations from it. Whilst most of the important evangelical bodies of Christians have held to the same facts in general, and even to the form in which the Church

declares them, however far they may have departed from the Church's unity and order, and from her ministry and sacraments, yet who shall say that the Catholic Church's standard has not been their guide? that she has not really marked the channel of the truth, however they may have seemed to be steering their own way? Suppose that at and after the time of the Reformation all Christians had deserted the Church, as so many did in Northern Europe and Great Britain, and had established all over Christendom little or large sects, or independent congregations, each with its own confession, its self-constituted ministry, and its own pride of opinion: would they not have lost themselves and been swallowed up, like the Rhine, in the sands and swamps of philosophical and theological uncertainties, of political and social transformations?

As in all human affairs the most cogent evidence of past transactions is found in their monuments, whether in the chipped

flints of cave-dwellers, the pyramids of Egyptian kings, or the jurisprudence of Justinian, so we, confronted by the monuments of Christianity—the Church, with her sacraments and holy rites, the Lord's Day, and others, and by the effects of Christianity upon mankind,—we believe that Jesus Christ lived, and died, and rose again, and was what He declared Himself to be, the Eternal Son of God.

An invisible Church has no such evidential value. It has neither form nor organization, no connection with the past; it is not a monument nor an institution; it is, in short, not a thing at all: it is but an idea, a philosophical conception, a name. It is not a house built of hewn stones: it is a heap of pebbles.

As time separates the generations of men farther and farther from the events of our Lord's life on earth, the importance of maintaining this monument in all its strength increases; and Churchmen deplore the weak-