



The Early History of the Christian Church - From its foundation to the end of the 3rd century (Illustrated)

Louis Duchesne

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At the time of Diocletian's persecution, when the churches were destroyed, the sacred books burned, and the Christians proscribed, or forced to apostasize, one of their number was quietly working away at the first history of Christianity. His was not a mind of the highest order, but he was patient, hard-working, and conscientious, and during many long years, he had collected materials for his contemplated book. He succeeded in saving these materials from the general shipwreck, and even in turning them to account. Thus Eusebius of Caesarea became the father of ecclesiastical history. And the first duties of those who take up the same task again—so long after, but in days not much less dark—is to recall his name and his incomparable services. But for his unrivalled diligence in searching through those Palestinian libraries, where the learned Origen and Bishop Alexander had collected the whole Christian literature of early days, our knowledge of the first three centuries of the Church's life would be small indeed. We cannot of course but lament the destruction of these libraries, yet, thanks to him, and to the remarkable fragments he preserved, we can appreciate in some measure what they were.

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