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THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH OF ROME.

BY the REV. C. C. DOBSON, M.A., Vicar of St. Mary-in-the-Castle, Hastings.

HISTORIANS other than those of the Roman Catholic Church have to a large extent been content with the negative argument that St. Peter cannot have been the founder of the Church of Rome, but they regard the records of the early days of that Church as being too scanty to allow of any definite constructive view as to its foundation. There is, however, a great deal more information available than is generally realised, and a pamphlet, written a few years ago by Edwin Wilmshurst, giving "very old and secret tradition," which he obtained through two visits to Rome and one to Jerusalem, but the source of which he is not at liberty to disclose, helps us, whether it be correct or not, to piece together the scattered records of those early days, and arrive at an enlightening story of the founding of the Church of Rome.

The story thus unravelled reveals St. Paul as the true founder of that Church, and places its centre as in the Palatium Britannicum, first the home of the exiled British Royal Family of Caractacus, and later of Pudens and Claudia.

It further suggests that St. Peter arrived in Rome about A.D. 66, St. Paul being absent on his journey in the West, and found the Gentile Church in this headquarters presided over by Linus, the first Bishop of the Church already consecrated by St. Paul. In the home of Priscilla, however, outside the Salarian Gate was a small Jewish Christian community. This he assumed charge of, assisted by Clement. These two separate Gentile and Jewish communities were afterwards united into one under Clement who became the third Bishop of the Roman Church, but the fact that St. Peter for a short time presided over the separate Jewish Christians subsequently gave rise to the claim that he was the founder and first Bishop of Rome.

Such is the story which we shall proceed to unravel, and it should prove of special interest since it reveals the unexpected influence of the first British converts on the founding of the Roman Church.

The Church of Rome, we know, claims to have been founded by St. Peter, and that he was himself for twenty-five years its Bishop. The whole subject has been so ably and convincingly discussed in Rev. Charles Elliott's *The Delineation of Roman Catholicism*, and other standard works, that we shall not attempt to cover the same ground. Suffice it to say that his twenty-five years' episcopate is only a late tradition of the fourth century,¹

¹ An earlier remark quoted as from Papias is uncertain.

and is totally at variance with the known Biblical facts as recorded in the Acts and Epistles. In the whole New Testament there is not a single statement that can be truly regarded as evidence that he was ever in Rome. Acts xv. and Galatians ii. prove conclusively that he could not possibly have been there at any rate before A.D. 50, although there may be reason to think that he visited the city later. He writes his Epistles from Babylon, and the whole circumstantial evidence is against regarding this as a pseudonym for Rome. That he was ever Bishop of Rome is also directly contrary to the earliest historians, for both Irenæus and Eusebius definitely tell us that the first bishop was Linus, the second Cletus or Anacletus, and the third Clement.

In A.D. 58 St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, and implies he had not then visited the city (Rom. xv. 22).

In A.D. 60 or 61 he comes as a prisoner to Rome. He then writes *from* Rome the Epistles to Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. During his second imprisonment in A.D. 67 he wrote the second Epistle to Timothy. In not one of these six epistles is there any reference to Peter, nor any hint of his being in the city. Among the large number of Christians at Rome whom he enumerates by name it is unbelievable that he would have omitted the name of Peter had he been in Rome, or actively engaged in founding the Church there, or acting as its first Bishop. If Peter was ever in Rome as the Roman Catholics assert, it can only have been during the last years of Nero, when his martyrdom is said to have taken place in 68, and at least thirty years after Christianity had become established there, and we admit he may have been there then. How, then, and when, did Christianity reach Rome?

On the day of Pentecost among those converted were "strangers of Rome." These must certainly have returned to Rome carrying the Gospel message. In his Epistle to the Romans St. Paul mentions two "kinsmen" at Rome, Andronicus and Junia, as having become Christians before himself. He was converted in 35 or 36, so we have two Christians in Rome before that date. These two we shall show were probably relatives of Pudens, and therefore residents in Rome, and not merely visitors to Rome after their conversion.

In A.D. 58 in his Epistle to the Romans St. Paul speaks of the faith of the Christians in that city as being spoken of throughout the whole world (Rom. i. 8) so that by that date the Church was large and flourishing. In the last chapter he enumerates no less than twenty-six by name as Christians in the city, and of several he speaks of their households, or the church in their house, or the "saints that are with them." In Philippians iv. 22 he speaks of Christians in Cæsar's household.

We have thus clear evidence of Christianity reaching Rome and becoming a great and influential body, including members of the Imperial household, before St. Paul arrived in A.D. 60 or 61, and certainly before St. Peter can possibly have come there. Of

many of the names of Christians mentioned by St. Paul we know nothing.

The names that need our immediate attention are Pomponia, Linus, Claudia, and Pudens. A brief account of these, giving only what may be regarded as assured information, will enable us to summarise the story of the early Roman Church.

Pomponia was a sister of Caractacus, her original name being Gladys. She married Aulus Plautius, the Roman commander of the Claudian invasion, probably about the time of the Claudian Treaty in Britain. She now took the name of Pomponia, the name of the clan or gens to which her husband belonged. Aulus Plautius was recalled to Rome about 47, taking her with him. For forty years she was a leader of the best Roman society, the name Græcina being added to her name Pomponia in recognition of her scholarship in Greek. She was accused of a foreign superstition,¹ but the charge does not seem to have been seriously pressed, since her husband was appointed her judge, and she was naturally acquitted. Dion Cassius informs us that her superstition was Christianity, which persuasion she had professed for forty years at the time of her death. This statement would place her conversion in the forties, while still in Britain.

Linus. We have three of this name to consider and identify. 1. The son of Caractacus who shared his exile at Rome. 2. The Linus who was first Bishop of Rome according to Irenæus and Eusebius. 3. The Linus mentioned by St. Paul in conjunction with Pudens and Claudia in 2 Timothy iv. 21. That all three were the same person is proved by the following evidence. Irenæus writes about A.D. 180: "The Apostles, having founded and built up the Church of Rome, committed the ministry of its supervision to Linus. This is the Linus mentioned by Paul in his Epistle to Timothy." ² Here is definite proof that the Linus of St. Paul and the first Bishop of Rome were the same person. Next we find that Linus was the brother of Claudia. Clement of Rome, who succeeded Linus as Bishop about twelve years after his death, Anacletus holding the office in between, writes "sanctissimus Linus, frater Claudiae" (the very saintly Linus, brother of Claudia). Unfortunately dictionaries quote "the Apostolic Constitutions" as saying son of Claudia. The expression, however, reads "Linus, the — of Claudia was first ordained by Paul." This, of course, might mean son or brother. The dictionaries have overlooked Clement's definite evidence and assumed that it meant son.

Linus, therefore, the first Bishop of Rome, ordained by St. Paul, was brother of Claudia, and therefore a British Prince and son of Caractacus, since, as we shall see, Claudia was the latter's daughter.

Pudens. Here, again, we have a Pudens, son of Pudentinus, praetor Castrorum of the Roman headquarters at Regnum (Chichester) under Aulus Plautius during the Roman invasion in A.D. 42-3. His name is on the "Pudens Stone" at Chichester as having given

¹ Tacitus *Ann.*, xiii, 32. ² Irenæus *Opera*, Lib. III, c. 1.

a site for a temple. He almost certainly returned to Rome at the recall of Aulus Plautius in about A.D. 47.

Then we have the Pudens of 2 Timothy iv. 21, mentioned in conjunction with Claudia.

Finally we have the Pudens, whose marriage to Claudia in about the year 53 is described by the poet Martial in his well-known epigram. Martial tells us that this Claudia was a British maiden (*puella*). He again writes an epigram on the occasion of the birth of her third child in her praise.

The following considerations make it equally clear that all these three bearing the name Pudens were one and the same.

The Pudens of Martial and the Pudens of St. Paul are the same, since the Pudens of Martial marries a British girl Claudia, and the Pudens of St. Paul is mentioned in conjunction with a Claudia whom we have shown to have been the sister of the British Prince Linus, first Bishop of Rome, and who was, therefore, also British. Otherwise there would be two British maidens of high standing of the name of Claudia in Rome. The Pudens of Chichester is a wealthy young senator, of the patrician Pudens family of Rome, with religious instincts, for he gives a site for a temple. Of Martial's friend in Rome we know a good deal. His full name was Aulus Rufus Pudens, the latter being the name of his gens, Rufus being his private family name, or perhaps what we should call his Christian name, and Aulus having been assumed either because of his association with his commander Aulus Plautius, or more probably because the Pomponia clan to which Plautius belonged was related to the Pudens clan. Martial's second epigram is addressed to Pudens' cousin whose name was Quintus Pomponius Rufus, thus showing the interchange of names between the two families. This Pudens like the Pudens of Chichester was of a wealthy patrician family of senatorial rank, who owned large estates in Samnium or Umbria, and in his palace at Rome were no less than 400 slaves of both sexes born and bred on his Umbrian estates. To assume that the Pudens of Chichester and that of Martial are two, you must assume that there were two men of senatorial rank of the same name, one in Britain and the other in Rome, who marry a captive British girl, and both of them of religious instincts. In this case you must explain how a proud patrician of senatorial rank came to marry a captive British girl for apparently no reason, whose language he could not have known. If, however, they are the same, everything, including dates, fits in exactly. Pudens meets Claudia in Britain in A.D. 43 to 47, during which time his commander Plautius marries her aunt Pomponia. He returns to Rome with Plautius about 47, and in due course succeeds to his father's estates. In 52 Claudia arrives as a captive with her father Caractacus residing in the famous Palatium Britannicum. Pudens and Claudia renew their acquaintance, the palace of Plautius, the old commander of Pudens, and Pomponia, the aunt of Claudia, doubtless provides the place of meeting. The marriage takes place in about 53.

It is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that the Pudens of Chichester, Martial, and St. Paul, are all the same person.

Claudia. We have already anticipated much of the information about Claudia. That she was a daughter of Caractacus, captured in his final reverse, and shared his captivity in Rome is stated by leading authorities.¹ Her marriage with Pudens we have already dealt with. She was a girl of great talent and accomplishments. Martial extols her beauty, wit, and fascination. He speaks of her as uniting the accomplishments of Rome and Athens.

“Claudia of the clan of Rufus belongs to the blue-eyed Britons. How popular she is, how she holds the hearts of the Latin folk! How beautiful of figure! Italian matrons might think she was of their own race. Praise be to heaven that she has borne children to her pious husband, that still a girl she may hope for sons and daughters. May it please the powers above that she have joy together with her husband, and ever rejoice herself in her three children.”

In his other epigram he calls her Rufina, Rufus being her husband's name.

There is a subdued tone about this otherwise licentious poet when he refers to Claudia and Pudens, whom he now describes as pious, and both of whom we otherwise know were now Christians. Their home became the resort of the most literary and refined society. Claudia was herself a poetess, the author of a volume of epigrams, a volume of elegiacs, and a volume of sacred poems and hymns. Copies of these were preserved in the library at Verulam as late as the thirteenth century.

We thus have Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and Pomponia, all leading Christians in Rome, three of whom belong to the ancient royal line of Britain from which our King is descended, and the fourth a noble Roman citizen, who made their acquaintance in Britain, and joined the family by marriage.

St. Paul's reference to three of them occurs in his closing words of his last message just after his first appearance before the magistrates at Rome, and while expecting to appear before them again, which he fully realizes will result in his condemnation. They are thus the nearest to him in his last days on earth. They are his comfort in preparing for martyrdom.

Is there anything that suggests a closer bond to have existed than merely that of Apostle and convert?

The remarkable pamphlet referred to above was issued a few years ago by a firm in Chichester entitled *St. Paul and Britain*, by Edwin Wilmshurst, who has since passed away. After recounting some of the information we have recorded above, he writes as follows:

“The preceding statements are extracted from writings and documents which are accessible to any reader; that which follows is from unpublished sources, which two special journeys to Rome, and one to Jerusalem, have

¹ Her Welsh name was Gladys. Her aunt Pomponia bore the same name, which was the Welsh for “Princess.” She took the name of Claudia, when the Emperor Claudius adopted her as his daughter.

enabled me to collect, and are quite conclusive to myself; but as I have no permission to disclose my authorities, I give the following as from very old and secret tradition."

We may well guess the source of his information, and that source itself suggests the reason why it is withheld. The information is not only startling, but is so well supported by circumstantial evidence that the sources of evidence are hardly needed.

He tells us that the grandfather of St. Paul was a wealthy Benjamite of Tarsus, who purchased "with a great sum" Roman citizenship for himself and family, and had added a Roman name to his Hebrew. His son Davidus, father of St. Paul, also assumed a Roman name, that of Appius Tullius. The latter's wife, St. Paul's mother, was a lady named Praxedes or Prasedes. St. Paul confirms part of this when he claims to be a free-born Roman citizen.

Wilmshurst further states that Davidus took service in the Roman army, and rose to the rank of centurion, in which capacity he was drafted into Palestine. He was the centurion who said to Our Lord: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." It was he of whom the Jews said: "He loveth our nation and hath built us a synagogue." The ruins of a synagogue, bearing both Roman and Jewish emblems, have in recent years been excavated at Capernaum, showing that it was built by a Roman Jew. We could hardly expect that any centurion other than a Roman Jew would do so.¹

This information further explains how St. Paul came to be educated at the feet of Gamaliel, when otherwise he belonged to Tarsus. A loyal and patriotic Jew, though inheriting Roman citizenship, Davidus would naturally desire the best Jewish education for his son, and would, therefore, take the opportunity of bringing his son Saul with him, and sending him to the best college at Jerusalem.

Wilmshurst goes on to tell us that Davidus died, leaving St. Paul's mother Praxedes a wealthy widow at Tarsus. Thither came Pudentinus the Roman senator on high civil, not military, duty, and met Praxedes, whose wealth and education gave her a leading position in the city. He married her and took her back with him to Rome. To them was born the Pudens referred to above.

There is remarkable confirmation of this further information to be found in the Bible.

In Romans xvi. St. Paul writes "Salute Rufus (Pudens referred to by his family or "Christian" name) and the mother of him and of me," an expression which commentators from want of knowledge have refrained from taking literally, but which we now see to be literally correct.

Further, St. Paul says, "Salute Andronicus and Junia my kinsmen": "Herodion my kinsman": "Sosipater my kinsman salutes you."

¹ The identity of St. Paul's father with this centurion is somewhat open to question on account of the dates.

How came St. Paul to have so many relatives with Roman names in that city? If by his mother's second marriage he became related to the Pudens gens we can understand it. We find, moreover, that one of the daughters of Pudens and Claudia was named Praxedes, also evidently after her grandmother, thus confirming the fact. We can understand now why St. Paul, as we shall see, resorted to the home of Pudens and Claudia, and why his last message is of them.

The same informant tells us that Priscilla was a sister of Praxedes.

These facts regarding the parentage of St. Paul not only conform in detail with all we otherwise know, but they bear the stamp of truth, since it is impossible to think that they can have been invented.

We shall now proceed to trace out the early story of the Church of Rome with all the foregoing information before us.

Christianity probably reached Rome in about A.D. 37 at the hands of the "strangers of Rome," converted on the day of Pentecost, and a short time before Joseph of Arimathæa is said to have reached Britain, but unlike in Britain, where it received a royal welcome, it was only a few individuals who secretly held it, among whom were Andronicus and Junia of the Pudens gens. Until A.D. 52 it quietly spread, unassisted by any Apostle. Meanwhile in Britain the Royal Family, including Pomponia, Cyllinus, Linus, and Claudia and Eurgain all learnt the truth perhaps at the hands of Joseph of Arimathæa, as did also Pudens, although, from the fact that he presented a site for a temple, he does not appear to have accepted it at so early a date as this. Pudens returns to Rome about A.D. 47 with Aulus Plautius his commander, and tells his mother what he had heard. Her son Paul had doubtless also written her of his conversion, and Praxedes accepts the faith, if she had not already done so. In A.D. 52 the British Royal Family, three at least of whom are Christians, arrive in Rome. Claudia marries Pudens, who, under the influence of his mother as well as that of Claudia herself, joins the faith.

The Palatium Britannicum now becomes the headquarters of the Roman Church. The quiet support of so influential a family as that of Pudens, as well as that of the Plautius gens, gives it a high standing. The Christians gather here for worship and the Church is quietly organised. About the time when St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, Caractacus and Cynon his son, and Eurgain, his elder daughter, a Christian, returned to Britain. His father Bran had already returned, a Christian, and we hear of him in Britain propagating the truth in Siluria.

But the Church in Rome is now well established under the leadership of Pudens and the four members of the British Royal Family.

In A.D. 61 or 62 St. Paul himself arrives, a prisoner, and as such is permitted to live in his own house and see his friends and relatives, whose influence doubtless gained him this kindly treatment and eventually secured his freedom. They gather round him

and are strengthened by his counsel and guidance. After two years he is set free, and makes his home with Pudens his half-brother and Claudia. He now formally consecrates Linus as the first Bishop of Rome, and as we shall see later, Eubulus to be the first Bishop in Britain. In process of time the Palatium Britannicum, which had been the royal residence of Caractacus, was constituted the first Christian Church in Rome by Pudentiana, daughter of Pudens and Claudia, and for 300 years, until Christianity was legalised by Constantine the Great, it was the only Church above ground in the city. It was known first as the Titulus, and now as the St. Pudentiana. In another part of the grounds was what was known as the Bath of Novatus, a son of Pudens and Claudia. This was also constituted by Pius I in about A.D. 150 an oratory, to which he appointed his brother Hermas Pastor, from which it became known as "Pastor." It is now known as the Cætani Chapel, and the ancient chamber in the basement, which still has fragments of fresco plaster, is where St. Peter is said to have ministered.

Outside the Salarian Gate of the city lay property belonging to Priscilla, whom Wilmshurst tells us was sister to Praxedes, St. Paul's mother. Here she constructed extensive catacombs as was customary at the time. In these both she and her two martyred nieces, Pudentiana and Praxedes, were subsequently buried. An ancient third-century fresco depicts these two with St. Peter standing between them. If this is indeed St. Peter it constitutes a very early proof that St. Peter did come to Rome. We see no reason to doubt that he did so, but it must have been after A.D. 63 or 64 when St. Paul was set free, or the latter would have mentioned him in his four Epistles written during his imprisonment. From A.D. 63-4 to A.D. 68, when both are said to have been martyred, St. Paul was away from the city preaching elsewhere, and St. Peter may well have visited the city now, and helped to guide and strengthen its Church. But he was certainly not its founder, nor was he its first Bishop. It has been suggested above that while the home of Pudens and Claudia was the headquarters of the Gentile Church, that of Priscilla was where the Jewish Christians gathered forming a separate community, and that St. Peter, "The Apostle of the Circumcision," presided here, with the help of Clement, and that the two communities subsequently united under Clement, who became the third Bishop. This suggestion would reconcile many apparent discrepancies in the early traditions. Linus was consecrated by St. Paul in about A.D. 63. St. Paul then left for the West. St. Peter arrived about 65, and took charge of the Jewish church in Priscilla's house, with Clement assisting. In 67 St. Paul returned, and both were martyred in 68. In the grounds of the Palatium Britannicum stands another church, that of St. Praxedes. The remains of the two martyred daughters of Pudens and Claudia were removed here from the Catacombs of St. Priscilla, where they are still shown.

As we know, bitter persecution of the Christians broke out in the closing years of Nero's reign, A.D. 66 to 68. From the Roman

martyrologies we learn that Pudens was killed privately in A.D. 96, Pudentiana was martyred in A.D. 107, Novatus in 139, Timotheus in A.D. 150, and Praxedes a month later, on September 2—all four children of Pudens and Claudia. Claudia alone died in peace, on the Pudens estates in Umbria. Linus was also martyred in A.D. 90. He was succeeded by Cletus or Anacletus for a short episcopate. Clement, his successor, as third Bishop, united the two bodies.

When the storm of persecution burst upon the Church, and the Christians were hunted out and thrown to the lions, crucified in the public arena, tied up in the skins of wild animals and worried to death by dogs, or fastened to stakes and smeared with tar that they might provide burning beacons to illuminate Nero's palace grounds by night, Praxedes and Pudentiana with heroic courage feared not to brave the death which they afterwards suffered in order to succour the faithful, and Cardinal Baronius records in his Ecclesiastical annals, when referring to the Palatium Britannicum :

“ On this sacred and most ancient of churches, known as that of Pastor Hermas, dedicated by Sanctus Pius, Papa (Pius I) formerly the residence (as guests) of the Holy Apostles repose the bones of 3,000 blessed martyrs, which Pudentiana and Praxedes, virgins in Christ, with their own hands deposited.”

We have thus traced out the story of the beginnings of the Christian Church at Rome with its headquarters in the palace of Pudens and Claudia, its first Bishop Linus consecrated there by St. Paul. From the fact that Linus, his sister Claudia, and her aunt Pomponia, were members of the British Royal Family, apart from other members of the family whom we know played their part, we might almost say that the early British Church were the means of founding the Church of Rome. The disaster which brought the family in chains to Rome was turned into a blessing. The Hand that sent Joseph as a slave to Egypt that he might become the means of blessing, also sent this family to Rome that they might assist in the establishing of the faith in that city.

One other question is of some importance. Were these members of the British Royal Family Christians on their arrival at Rome, or were they subsequently converted through St. Paul or other Christians in the city?

The statement by Dion Cassius that Pomponia at the time of her death had held the faith for forty years places her conversion in Britain before she went to Rome in A.D. 47.

As regards Linus, Claudia and Eurgain, a piece of indirect evidence leads us to the same conclusion that they too were Christians in Britain before arriving at Rome. During the Exile of Caractacus, his son Cyllinus, who had not been captured with other members of the family, became regent of his father's kingdom of Siluria, or Gwent (S. Wales) during the latter's seven years' exile. An old Welsh record, which we have no reason to question, states that he had all his children baptised, and was the first to introduce the custom of giving Christian names to children. He, therefore, like his aunt Pomponia, was a Christian, and he did not visit Rome.

If two members of this Royal Family were thus converted in Britain, and the others are found soon after their arrival at Rome to be leading Christians, it is safe to assume that they took their faith with them to Rome.

We thus find the Christian faith accepted in Britain by this Royal Family, and Divine Providence sends them to Rome that there, united to one of the leading families, they may be His instrument in establishing the faith in that city with the help of St. Paul.

Two recent additions to the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge are of special interest to our readers. They are *Christianity*, by Edwyn Bevan, LL.D., D.Litt., Lecturer on Hellenistic History and Literature, King's College, London, and *The Spanish Inquisition*, by A. S. Tuberville, M.C., M.A., B.Litt., Professor of Modern History in the University of Leeds (Thornton Butterworth, Ltd., 2s. 6d. net each). Dr. Bevan's brief account of Christianity from the earliest days up to the present day is a remarkable achievement. In the limits of two hundred and fifty pages he has given a vivid impression of the chief features in the history of the various movements that have marked the progress of Christian life and thought. He writes as a Christian yet with a detachment which will not altogether please the various sections of Christendom that find their views in turn subjected to searching criticism. Yet we have all something to learn from the work of an independent scholar, and we must all appreciate his endeavour to be impartial. The chief interest of his book in the earliest portion for our readers is that his account of the origin and the development of the ministry during the first three centuries amply justifies the Protestant view of the Church and its ministry. In this he is, of course, in harmony with the results of recent scholarship, and the conclusions of the best workers in the period under consideration. Mr. Tuberville's account of the Spanish Inquisition is written as a plain historical record of an institution that played a considerable part in the life of the Spanish nation. Its freedom from any religious bias brings out with greater force the system of tyranny and abominable cruelty that the Inquisition represented while posing as the medium of God's love in His care for the salvation of the souls of those suspected of heresy, especially of those possessed of considerable property that might be useful if transferred to the coffers of the Church. Spain in recent years has had a most unenviable reputation for religious intolerance. The tradition of bitter persecution of Jew and Moslem which replaced the former tolerance towards the end of the fifteenth century has been associated with the barbarous methods of the Inquisition. Its elaborate system of secret spying, its mysterious imprisonments, its elaborate and ghastly devised implements of torture ruthlessly used to extract imaginary confessions from victims frequently innocent, constitute a picture of human infamy of which anything that could be described as Christianity ought to be thoroughly ashamed and repent of in tears and ashes.