

## ARTICLE IV.

## THE EARLY BRITISH AND IRISH CHURCHES.

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THAT part of Great Britain known to us as England was occupied by the Romans about four hundred years. The time from the invasion by Julius Caesar, in the year 55 B.C., to the final withdrawal of the Roman army of occupation, in 409 A.D., was four hundred and sixty-four years; but nearly a century passed after Caesar's fruitless attempt at conquest, before their establishment in the island was assured. A full and authentic history of the British people during the time of this Roman occupation would give us important information, not only in regard to their social, industrial, and political condition, but also concerning the introduction of Christianity into the island, and the organization of the early British churches.

But there is no such history. Fragmentary notices of Britain under the Roman rule are found in Tacitus, Suetonius, Pomponius Mela, Fabius Rusticus, and others; but they tell us nothing relative to the introduction of Christianity among the Britons, which is not surprising when we consider that Christianity itself was so insignificant in the eyes of Roman writers, so little comprehended, that scarcely a dozen references to it can be found within the whole range of Roman literature. Bede and the Saxon Chronicle are but little more satisfactory, although it appears in what they say that there were Christians and Christian churches in Britain, three or four centuries previous to the arrival of St. Austin, in 597 A.D., as a missionary-bishop, sent by Rome to the Saxons. The old Welsh books tell us more, for they give what professes to be an accurate account of the beginning of Christianity among the Britons, and say something of the early

Christian churches and schools in Wales. These books are not often quoted, for we have inherited from the Saxons and their Romish priesthood, the custom of not including any portion of the Celtic writings within the pale of authorized literature; and yet it is not easy to show that some of the old Welsh and Irish books are less truthful and trustworthy than Bede and the Saxon Chronicle.

The Welsh writings state that Christianity was introduced into South Wales in the first century; and this cannot be regarded as incredible or improbable when we consider that Britain was then a part of the Roman empire. The early Christian preachers could go there without difficulty; and there is evidence which appears to show that the gospel was preached successfully there, and in most of the Celtic countries, previous to the middle of the second century, and in some of them during the life-time of the apostles. In the last half of the second century there were many Celtic churches, especially in Gaul, Britain, and Ireland, which regarded the pastors of the church at Lyons as their metropolitans; one of these pastors, who was installed there in the year 177 A.D., being the celebrated Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp.

Eusebius<sup>1</sup> says: *Ἐτέρους ὑπὲρ τὸν ὠκεανὸν παρελθεῖν ἐπὶ τὰς καλούμενας Βρετάννικας νήσους.* "Some of the apostles passed over the ocean into those called the British Islands." Clemens Romanus<sup>2</sup> says: Paul preached the gospel "to the utmost bounds of the west" (*ἐπὶ τὸ τέρμα τῆς δύσεως*). Tertullian, writing previous to the year 211 A.D., said, in his work against the Jews: "Some countries of the Britons which have proved impregnable to the Romans, are, nevertheless, subjected to Christ." Theodoret<sup>3</sup> says: *Καὶ Βρετάννους—καὶ ἀπαξᾶπλῶς πᾶν ἔθνός καὶ γενὸς ἀνθρώπων δέξασθαι τοῦ σταυρωθέντος τοῦς νόμους ἀπέπεισαν.* He is speaking of the nations and races converted by the apostles, and includes the Britons among them. He says in another place:<sup>4</sup> "St. Paul brought salvation to the islands that lie in the ocean."

<sup>1</sup> Demonst. Evang. lib. 3, cap. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ep. ad Cor.

<sup>3</sup> Sermo ix. de Legib. Opp. tome 4, p. 610.

<sup>4</sup> Tome 1, in Ps. cxvi.

These are some of the statements made by early Christian writers relative to the introduction of Christianity into Western Europe and the British Islands. They connect Paul with this work ; but it does not necessarily follow that he himself ever went to Britain, for evangelists may have been sent there under his direction. Nevertheless, the following from Rev. Dr. Gibson's edition of Camden's "Britannia," assumes that Paul went to that island in person :

"From these authorities (especially that of Clemens Romanus), it follows, not only that the gospel was preached in Britain, in the time of the apostles, but also that Paul himself was the preacher of it. This is further confirmed by observing that from the time of his being set at liberty, in the fifth year of Nero [59 A.D.], to his return to Rome, was eight years, which the ancient writers of the church generally agree were spent in the western parts ; that having taken his solemn leave of the eastern parts, and assured them that they should see his face no more, it cannot be supposed that he returned thither, but that he employed his time in planting the gospel elsewhere."

While in Rome, after his appeal to Caesar, Paul must have become acquainted with many Gauls and Britons, and learned much of their countries, which would naturally arouse in him, the great apostle to the Gentiles, a lively desire to preach the gospel in those western regions. Therefore the repeated statements that he actually went there are not improbable. It is not certainly *proved* that Paul himself visited Britain ; but he sent other preachers there. At any rate, it seems necessary to believe that Christianity was preached successfully in Britain some time previous to his death ; for what is said on this point by Eusebius and others, is fully confirmed by old British writers of the Celtic race, as will presently be shown.

The venerable Bede was an Anglo-Saxon, and he tells but little of what occurred in Britain previous to the Saxon invasion. All he says of affairs in that island before the arrival of St. Austin, in 597 A.D., seems to have been compiled from

Orosius, Eutropius, and Gildas. His account of Christianity there begins with what occurred in the time of Lleirwg (called Lucius by the Romans), king of South Wales. Lleirwg was one of those British princes who ruled some of the conquered provinces in subordination to the Romans, and whom Tacitus describes as *instrumenta servitutis*. The dates assigned to his reign vary; but all agree in placing it at some period between the years 137 and 199 A.D.; and those who appear to have investigated the point most carefully, agree in saying he reigned from 161 to 180 A.D. Bede says:

“While Eleutherus, a holy man, presided over the Roman church, Lucius [or Lleirwg], king of Britain, sent a letter to him, entreating that by his command he might be made a Christian. He soon obtained the effect of his pious requests, and the Britons preserved the faith which they had received, uninterrupted and entire, in peace and tranquillity, until the time of the emperor Diocletian.”<sup>1</sup>

It is not certain that such a correspondence ever took place. The best criticism is inclined to regard it as one of the “pious” forgeries of the Romanists, who, in later times, sought to connect the Roman church with the first preaching of the gospel in Britain. It is certainly improbable, for the Keltic Christians looked to Lyons, and not to Rome, for direction. At any rate, the reply said to have been made to Lleirwg’s letter shows that the Welsh prince did not ask to “be made a Christian.” It appears, on the contrary, that he merely asked Eleutherus to send him a copy of the Roman laws, as he desired to examine those relating to the Christians. It is manifest in what is said in Bede that there were many Christian churches in Britain three or four centuries previous to the arrival of St. Austin, and that Christians were numerous there about the year 305 A.D., when many of them suffered death in the bloody persecution directed by Diocletian. Speaking of this persecution, Bede’s history says: “At length it reached Britain also, and many persons, with the constancy of martyrs, died in the confession of their faith;”

<sup>1</sup> Book i. chap. 4.

and "when the storm of persecution ceased, the faithful Christians, who, during the time of danger, had hidden in woods, deserts, and secret caves, appeared in public, rebuilt the churches and founded temples of the holy martyrs." <sup>1</sup>

There were Christians in Britain long previous to the time of Lleirwg. An old Welsh book entitled "The Genealogy of Iestyn ab Gwrgant" says: "Cyllin, the son of Caradog [called Caractacus by the Romans], was a very wise and gentle king, and, in his time, were many of the Cymry converted to the Christian faith through the teaching of the Choir of Eurgain; and many godly men from Greece and Rome were in Wales in his time."

This Cyllin, who is sometimes styled "Cyllin the saint," was Lleirwg's grandfather. He began to reign in South Wales some time in the latter part of the first century; and yet there were Christians there before he was king. Gildas, who lived before the time of St. Austin, and whose writings show that he was a Celtic Briton, states that the gospel was received in Britain soon after the middle of the first century, or, as the passage appears in Camden, previous to the defeat of the Britons under Boadicea, which occurred in the year 61 A.D. In the Welsh books there is a particular account of the first introduction of Christianity among the Britons, which appears to be true, for it is wholly free from monkish fables, and is given in connection with other historical facts which are recorded substantially as we find them in Tacitus. In fact this Welsh record completes the Roman history of the defeat and subjugation of Caractacus.

Caradog, or Caractacus, having been carried to Rome, was released by Claudius, and allowed to go home as tributary ruler of South Wales; but hostages were retained in Rome as security for his good behavior, among whom were Bran, his father, and Eurgain, his daughter. Bran was the supreme bard of South Wales, anciently known as Siluria. In the druidical organization of the Celtic countries there were three distinct classes set apart for special studies and services — the

<sup>1</sup> Book i. chap. 8.

bards, who wore sky-blue robes, and were the statesmen, philosophers, poets, and publicists; the druids, who wore white, and, being the priestly class, had charge of the religious ceremonial; and the ovates, who wore green, were devoted to the arts and sciences, practised medicine, and rendered any other services for which the studies and training of their order gave them special preparation. In Siluria, or South Wales, Bran was the foremost personage of the highest of these three orders. He and the other hostages remained at Rome seven years; and the Welsh books tell us that he was converted to Christianity while there, and that after he went home he converted his countrymen. Origen [4 upon Ezekiel], stating that the Britons received the gospel very early, remarks that they were prepared for it by the doctrine of their druids, who had always taught that there is but one Supreme Being. That Bran became acquainted with Christians at Rome, studied their doctrines, and was in this way led to embrace Christianity, is nowise improbable. At any rate, the fact that he became a Christian while there is so constantly asserted in old Welsh books, and so intimately associated with important events in Welsh history, that it seems unreasonable to doubt it.

According to Tacitus, the British captives arrived in Rome in the year 51 A.D. At that time there were many Christians in Rome, and there is mention of "saints of Caesar's household." Paul, having appealed to Caesar against his enemies at Jerusalem, was brought to Rome during the time of Bran's residence there. According to the chronology of Eusebius and Jerome, he arrived in the year 56 A.D. Others fix the time four or five years earlier. But, in either case, Bran might have visited Paul during the time when "he dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came unto him." He could not have failed to do so, if his mind had been awakened to such earnest study of the character and claims of Christianity as led to his conversion. The fact of his conversion is mentioned repeatedly in the Welsh historical Triads, as follows:

“Bran the Blessed brought the faith in Christ first into this island from Rome, where he had been in prison through the treachery of Aregwedd Voeddawg, daughter of Avarwy the son of Lludd.” This Aregwedd was queen of the Brigantes, and lived at York; she betrayed Caractacus, and delivered him to the Romans, when he trusted her friendship after his final defeat. The following Triad is more explicit:

“*The Three Sovereigns of the Isle of Britain who conferred Blessings:*

“Bran the Blessed, son of Llyr Llediaith, who first brought the faith in Christ to the nation of the Cymry, from Rome, where he had been seven years a hostage for his son Caradog, whom the Romans had taken captive after he was betrayed by treachery, and an ambush laid for him by Aregwedd Voeddawg.

“The second, Lleirwg, the son of Coel, who was son of St. Cyllin (surnamed Lleuver Mawr), who made the first church [edifice] at Llandaf, and that was the first in the Isle of Britain, and who bestowed the privilege of country and nation and judgment, and the validity of an oath, upon those who should be of the faith in Christ.

“The third, Cadwaladr the Blessed, who granted the privilege of his land and all his property to the faithful who fled from the infidel Saxons and the unbrotherly ones who wished to slay them.”

We read, also, in the Welsh Genealogies of the Saints of the Isle of Britain, that “Bran was the first of the nation of the Cymry who embraced the faith in Christ,” and “the first who brought the Christian faith to this country.” Rev. John Williams discusses this point very carefully in his *Ecclesiastical Antiquities of the Cymry*. He says:

“The Genealogy of the Saints mentions the names of four Christian missionaries who accompanied Bran on his return to his native country, namely, Ildid, Cyndau, and his son Mawn, who are styled ‘men of Israel,’ and Arwystli Hen, ‘a man of Italy.’” Mr. Williams says, in another place, “Arwystli is supposed to be the same person as Aristobulus, mentioned

in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The formation of the name from the Greek would be in perfect accordance with the analogy of the Welsh language. "But what adds the greatest support to this hypothesis is the fact that, in the Greek Menology, Aristobulus is said to have been ordained by Paul as a bishop for the Britons. In this case, the Greeks and the Welsh are witnesses wholly independent of each other; so that collusion is out of the question."

This statement of the Greek Menology is quoted by Usher in his *Britann. Eccles. Antiq.* p. 9, who adds that "we read in the Synopsis of Dorotheus that Aristobulus was made a bishop of Britain." We shall see presently, however, that the word "bishop" or "*episcopos*," in the early churches with which the Celtic Britons were most intimately connected, did not have the meaning given it in later times by the Romanists and other supporters of diocesan episcopacy.

It is stated in the work of Mr. Williams, that a farmstead in Glamorganshire, called Trevran, is pointed out by tradition as the place where Bran resided; and that not far from it is Llanilid, or the church of Ilid, which is regarded as the oldest church in Britain. Among the British captives who became Christians at Rome were a son and a daughter of Caradog, or Caractacus. This son appears to have been Cyllin, his immediate successor; the daughter, named Eurgain, is described as a woman remarkable for intelligence and force of character. She is celebrated in the Genealogies as "the first female saint among the Britons." It is said that Ilid came to Britain at her request, and that she organized in Wales a Christian establishment, or school, which was long known as "Eurgain's Choir."

Not much that we read as history of Great Britain in the first ten centuries of the Christian era, is more fully warranted by credible records than the fact that Christianity was introduced into that island in the time of the apostles. All the Welsh records assert that it came first into Siluria, or South Wales, and that most of thek ruids there became Christians through Bran's influence. One of the "Cymro



Triads" found in the Myvyrian Archaiology is as follows: "Three ways in which a Cymro is primary above every other nation in the Isle of Britain—primary as a native, primary as regards social rights, and primary in respect of Christianity."

The gospel seems to have been preached successfully in Ireland at a very early period. If, as there is reason to believe, the most eminent of its early preachers in that island was named Patrick, he must have lived several centuries earlier than the legendary Patricius whom the Roman church canonized as St. Patrick. The Romanists tell us that this Patricius was sent to Ireland in the year 431 or 432 A.D.; and the Catholic hagiologies give us marvellous stories of his miracles, and of his amazing success in converting all Ireland. These tales appear to be unwarranted fictions. This pretended mission of Patricius is so little in accordance with known facts, and what is told of it is so incredible, that some learned investigators regard the Irish St. Patrick as "a saint of the imagination." They believe that no such person ever existed. There was a Patricius, in the fifth century, who was made bishop of Auvergne, in Gaul, where he lived and died. It may be conjectured that he, like Palladius, made a brief visit to Ireland; but there is no evidence to support this conjecture. In Usuard's and the Roman Martyrology, the day of this bishop Patricius is the same as that of the Irish St. Patrick.

There seems to be no room to doubt that the St. Patrick of the Romish calendar was manufactured for ecclesiastical uses, as late as the ninth century, if not later. He is not mentioned in the Ecclesiastical History of Bede, who was born in 673 A.D., and wrote his history in the beginning of the eighth century. Bede mentions the brief visit of Palladius to Ireland, but says not a word of Patricius, which would be astonishing if the Romish Patricius had actually done what is alleged; for Bede, who shows that in his time the Irish Christians were not Romanists, could not have failed to mention Patricius, the wonder-working apostle of Ireland in the fifth century,

if he had then been heard of; and he would have explained why the Irish converts of this fabled missionary of Pope Celestine, and the Irish churches he is said to have established, were all invincibly antagonistic to the church of Rome. Ledwich says, in his *Antiquities of Ireland*: "It is an undoubted fact that St. Patrick is not mentioned by any author or in any work of veracity in the fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth century." The Roman priests and monks began their manufacture of a Romish St. Patrick for Ireland, one or two centuries later than the time of Bede, aiming to have him used in aid of their attempt to win over the Irish churches to the papacy.

And yet, according to the uniform testimony of Irish tradition, the most eminent of the early preachers of Christianity in that island was named Patrick, or Padrig. In the *Ulster Annals*, at the year 457 A.D., there is mention of an "old St. Patrick," which is accompanied by the following note: "There can be no doubt that there were two early promulgators of Christianity, of this name, in Ireland, and that their acts and dates have been confounded." The writer of this note felt bound to retain the Romish Patrick of the fifth century, while admitting that the genuine St. Patrick, the "old St. Patrick" of Irish tradition, lived at an earlier period. We read in the Welsh books that Padrig, head of the great Christian college of Illtyd, in Wales, and many others connected with the institution, were captured by the Irish in the fourth century, and carried to Ireland. This Padrig may have distinguished himself as a preacher of the gospel to the Irish; but there were influential Christian churches in Ireland previous to his time. In the *Irish Annals* there is an account of King Cormac Ulfadah, who reigned in Ireland in the third century. It is stated that in the year 257 A.D. he established three colleges at Tara, one for military instruction, one for historical studies, and one for instruction in the laws. The *Annals* add that "Cormac was converted to Christianity seven years before his death." This indicates that Christianity had at that time grown to much importance and influence in the island.

That there were many Christians in Ireland long previous to the fifth century appears to be certain. This fact was recognized in the commission given to Palladius, in 430 A.D., by the Roman bishop, Celestine, who sent him to Ireland as a missionary. This document, which is still preserved, states explicitly that Palladius was sent "to the Scots who believe in Christ." He was sent, not to convert the Irish people to Christianity, but to convert the Irish churches to Romanism; but "the Scots who believed in Christ" would not receive him, and his stay in the island was short. There is no evidence of any kind to show that Patricius went there in the following year, or in any other year. Sir James Ware cites an abundance of testimony to show that the Irish in ancient times were called Scots. They gave their name to Scotland when they went there, at the beginning of the sixth century, and began a political establishment which at length gave them control of the country. The Romans called that country Caledonia, and, previous to their time, its inhabitants called it Albainn.

Celebrated Irish saints, who lived long previous to the missionary attempts of Celestine, have been placed in the Roman calendar, in later times, although they were very far from being Romanists. Sir James Ware says, in his great work on Irish Antiquities: "It is certain there were many Christians in Ireland before the arrival of Palladius, in 431 A.D., or of St. Patrick [meaning Patricius], in the year following. St. Kieran, St. Ailbe, St. Declan, and St. Ibar, whom Usher calls the precursors or forerunners of St. Patrick, are pregnant proofs of this. They were all of the birth of Ireland." These saints, and others of Irish birth who have been feloniously appropriated by the Roman Catholics for use in their calendar, lived long before the time of Palladius. They were all born and bred in districts of Ireland in which Christianity had been established and made influential previous to the age in which their parents lived, and were baptized by pastors of Irish churches. Declan, when seven years old, was placed under the tuition of a faithful Christian man, by

whom he was educated. If Patricius of the legends actually existed and went to Ireland, in the fifth century, he went there, as Palladius went, to Romanize the Irish churches, and had no better success; for the Irish Christians continued to live without either the papacy or diocesan episcopacy until after the beginning of the twelfth century.

In the early Christian ages only a small portion of the churches looked to the Bishop of Rome as their metropolitan, or accepted the Roman discipline and order of worship. If the political history of Southwestern Asia and Northern Africa could have been different, from the close of the fourth century to the beginning of the twelfth, or if the religious and ecclesiastical history of the Teutonic race in Western Europe had been like that of the Celtic people, a Roman Catholic church would have been impossible. As it was, the churches of Asia and Africa became less influential in Europe through the downfall of the Western empire, and were finally swept away by crusading Mahometanism; while in Western Europe, the political predominance of the Teutonic race, after the conquests of Gaul by the German Clovis and his Franks from beyond the Rhine, secured the ecclesiastical predominance of Rome.

In the early times the most important churches were in Asia. The oldest church was at Jerusalem, and others in Syria and Western Asia were older than the church at Rome. Even in the fourth century there were many more churches in Asia and Africa than in Europe. Irenaeus, in the second century, writing against the heretics, and Tertullian, some years later, writing against the Jews, mentioned Libya, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Phrygia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Pamphylia, and "the East," as countries or regions where the gospel had been received. In the year 189 A.D., Pantaeus, a venerable preacher, was sent from Alexandria to Hindustan, where the gospel had already been preached with success; and there he found a valuable copy of the Gospel by Matthew in Hebrew, which he carried back to Alexandria, where it was seen by Jerome. Frumentius, the apostle of Abyssinia,

preached the gospel successfully, it is said, in Southern India; and in 326 A.D. he was made "primate" of the churches in India. But Frumentius was not the first who held this position; for in the Council of Nice, held in 325 A.D., a "primate of India" was present, and subscribed his name. Theophilus, the famous Arian bishop, who established churches in Arabia, was a native of India. In 383 A.D., Marutha, a native of Hindustan, was bishop of Suphara, and was present in the Synod of Sides in Pamphylia. Cosmos Indicopleustes, who visited India about the year 522 A.D., states that there were "churches and pastors with the whole liturgy" in Ceylon, on the Malabar coast, and in the northeastern part of India. The Syrian churches were important and influential in the ages previous to the rise of Mahometanism. The statement that they sent missionaries to China, who preached there with success and established churches, has been confirmed by the discovery of an inscribed monument in China, which preserves the names of some of these missionaries, and gives a brief account of what they did. They went to China as early as the year 635 A.D., and perhaps earlier; and their successors were still there in the year 781 A.D., when the monument was erected. It is said that they found favor at court, but were persecuted in the year 698. It seems not difficult to understand that, if the subsequent history of the Asiatic churches had brought them prosperity, instead of disaster, the ecclesiastical history of the Christian world would have been different; for these churches did not follow Rome any more than the Greek church follows it now.

The gospel was received in all the Celtic countries before the Romans withdrew from Britain; and we can see, in what is known of the Celtic churches, that they looked to Asia Minor for sound doctrine and correct discipline. They spurned the pretensions of the Roman bishops from the beginning, and asserted that their discipline and ceremonial observances had come to them from St. John, through Polycarp, his disciple. The Roman attempt to assume the lead in ecclesiastical affairs made its first appearance towards the

close of the second century, when Victor presided over the church at Rome. This enterprising pastor thought Rome, the capital of the empire, should also be recognized as the supreme head of the Christian world. Therefore he demanded that the rules and ceremonial observances approved by his church should be adopted by all other churches; and, taking a very lofty and imperious tone, he sent forth a letter to the churches in Asia, requiring them to follow the example of Rome in the observance of Easter. In later times, such letters from Rome have been called "bulls."

This bishop Victor was not successful. The Asiatic churches repelled his impertinence with just indignation, whereupon he foolishly menaced them with excommunication, and was answered with ridicule. In Europe his pretensions were moderated by the influence of Irenaeus, pastor of the church at Lyons, who spurned his arrogant demands, and made him feel his impotence. Irenaeus, like Pothinus, his predecessor, came from Asia, where he had been a disciple of Polycarp, and had never admired either the customs or the aspirations of the Roman church. Previous to this time, probably, there had been differences in discipline and ceremonial; but henceforth the distinction between the Romanists, on one hand, and the Asiatic and Celtic churches, on the other, was everywhere recognized. Rome was then in a small minority. The tone and strength of the general antagonism to her innovations may be inferred from the language used by Irenaeus in denouncing them. He spoke of them thus:

"The presbyters who lived before our times, and who were also disciples of the apostles, did in nowise deliver these opinions. I, who saw and heard the blessed Polycarp, am able to protest in the presence of God that if that apostolic presbyter had heard these things, he would have stopped his ears, and cried out, according to his custom: 'Merciful God, for what times hast thou reserved me, that I should suffer such things!' If these things had been uttered in his presence he would have fled from the place where he was sitting or standing."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Eusebius, lib. v. c. 20.

In Great Britain, the Celtic churches continued to reject Rome, and adhere to the Asiatic discipline, for centuries after the time of Victor and Irenæus ; and it was not until the twelfth century that their subjugation to the papacy was completed, the Irish having stood out until Ireland was conquered by Henry Second. The Saxons and Normans were in harmony with Rome from the time of their conversion ; but it was late in the fifth century before the Saxons invaded England, and towards the beginning of the seventh century when St. Austin was sent there to convert them. Bede says he was commissioned for this work "about the hundred and fiftieth year after the coming of the English [Saxons, Angles, etc.] into Britain" ; and that he brought with him "interpreters of the nation of the Franks," whose language was like that of the Saxons, and who had previously received Christianity from Romanists. At Rome, this mission to the pagan Saxons seemed hopeful, because, as Bede tells us, Ethelbert, the Saxon king, had "a Christian wife of the royal family of the Franks, called Bertha."

St Austin's commission made it his business to preach the gospel to the heathen Saxons, Angles, and Jutes, and bring the Celtic churches into harmony with the growing and aspiring papacy at Rome. Bede's history gives some accounts of his proceedings. He began his mission to the Celtic Christians in a very haughty and arrogant way, demanding immediate submission to Rome ; and he was met as his arrogance deserved. He was everywhere rejected and treated as a heretic, unworthy to have the fellowship of good Christians. Nevertheless, St. Austin continued to believe he could either persuade or compel the Celtic churches of Britain to become Romanized, and accept him as their archbishop. Therefore, in the year 603 A.D., through the agency of king Ethelbert, he drew together the Celtic preachers of "the next provinces" for a conference. But neither by his overbearing manner, nor by his pretended miracle, could he bring them to regard him with favor. Bede says : "When, after a long disputation, they did not comply with the entreaties, exhortations,

or rebukes of Augustine (or Austin) and his companions, but preferred their own traditions before all the churches in the world, the holy father, Augustine," proposed to settle the question by a miracle, and thereupon pretended to restore sight to "a blind man of the English race"; but the miracle failed as badly as the entreaties and rebukes.

There was another conference, in which he became more moderate and lowered his demands. Bede says he now addressed the Celtic preachers as follows: "If you will comply with me in these three points, namely, to keep Easter at the due time, to administer baptism, by which we are again born to God, according to the custom of the holy Roman apostolic church, and jointly with us preach the word of God to the English nation, we will tolerate all the other things you do, though contrary to our customs"; and they answered that they "would do none of these things, nor receive him as their archbishop." Submission to the pope and recognition of himself as archbishop he must have at any rate; and to get these he would for the present withdraw everything else in his demand but the three points specified. When the Celts had made him understand that they would have nothing to do with Romanists, he gave way to violent wrath, became prophetic, and menaced them with bloody destruction; knowing very well that his influence with the Saxon king could secure a fulfilment of this prediction. Bede tells us how the Saxons fulfilled it: "they raised a mighty army, and made a very great slaughter of that perfidious people." Attempts have been made to rescue St. Austin from the reputation of having caused this slaughter; but they have not been successful. Bede, a devoted Romanist, could not see that he did anything wrong, and did not suppose such a vindication necessary.

St. Austin's successor, Laurentius, labored very earnestly to Romanize the Celtic churches of Britain and Ireland, but could make no progress whatever. Their antagonism to Rome appears to have been as vehement as that of the most emphatic Protestants of our time. A letter of Laurentius



addressed to the Irish churches shows how strong and uncompromising he found it. He says: "Becoming acquainted with the errors of the Britons, we thought the Scots [so he calls the Irish] had been better; but we have been informed by Bishop Dagan, coming into this aforesaid island [Britain], and the abbot Columbanus in France, that the Scots [Irish] in no way differ from the Britons in their behavior; for Bishop Dagan, coming to us, *not only refused to eat with us, but even to take his repast in the same house where we were entertained.*"<sup>1</sup> Bede states that "Laurentius and his fellow bishops wrote a letter to the priests of Britain, suitable to his rank, by which he sought to confirm them in Catholic unity; but what he gained by so doing the present times still declare." That is to say, he gained nothing. Bede, born in 673 A.D., wrote in the first part of the eighth century.

It strikes one oddly to see that the pope addressed the Saxon kings of the seventh century very much as English prelates of our time might address the ruling chiefs of the New Zealanders. In his eyes they were vigorous barbarians, just beginning to feel the influences of civilization, who could be converted and made useful in extending the sway of the papacy. Two letters written in 625 A.D., by Pope Boniface IV., to King Edwin and his wife Ethelberga, have been preserved. They are full of pious exhortations, and similar in tone to what might at any time, under similar circumstances, be written to any semi-barbarous rulers. In concluding the letter to King Edwin, the pope says: "We have sent you the blessing of your protector, the blessed Peter, the prince of the apostles, that is, *a shirt with a gold ornament, and one garment of Ancyra.*" Peter's "blessing" to the queen consisted of "a silver looking-glass and gilt-ivory comb." Very appropriate presents, it may be, for Saxon princes of that age, in which we see what the pope thought of the Saxons. At any rate, they were received with great satisfaction; but it requires some effort to realize that King Edwin's "palace" was more like a rude hut than a sumptuous dwelling place; and fancy

<sup>1</sup> Bede, Book ii. chap. 4.

him in one corner of it admiring his shirt and awkwardly trying it on, while the queen and her attendants, in another part of it, were catching glimpses of their faces in the looking-glass, and making the "palace" noisy with laughter.

The situation of the Romish preachers in Britain, at that time, was not very comfortable. They had but few followers. The Saxons favored them for political reasons, and they made converts, although some of the converted Saxon princes were terrible backsliders. The old churches of the country treated them as heretics, who should be sternly excluded from fellowship. In a letter to the king of Cornwall, written in 692 A.D., one of the Romish prelates complained of the "enormities" of the Celtic preachers, and described their misdeeds as follows :

"The priests of Southwest Wales, puffed up with a conceit of their own purity, do exceedingly abhor communion with us, insomuch as they will neither join in prayers with us in the church, nor enter into society with us at table. Yea, moreover, the fragments which we leave after refection they will not touch, but cast them to be devoured by dogs and unclean swine. The cups, also, in which we have drunk, they will not make use of until they have rubbed and cleansed them with sand and ashes."

The old documents and records relating to those ages show nothing more clearly than that the Celtic Christians of Britain and Ireland were not Romanists. In this respect, their position was like that of the eastern Christians, most of whom finally became—so far as they were not swallowed up by Mahometanism—what we know as the Greek church. It is equally clear that the early British and Irish churches were not organized according to the method of diocesan episcopacy. They were churches without the clerical orders of the papacy, bound together in the various localities where they existed by the feeling of brotherhood and the need of mutual counsel and support, and having, probably, some customs and peculiarities of organization, borrowed from the druidical times. The bards and druids were the first pastors, and the druid circles

were the first places of their Christian worship. Dr. Jamieson tells us, in his *History of the Culdees*, that in his time the words "going to the stones" were still in use in some districts of Scotland to signify "going to church." It does not appear that a church edifice was constructed in Wales previous to the middle of the second century. Certainly there were no diocesan bishops. The old records and documents still remaining have come down to us through the prejudiced hands of Romanists and English Episcopalians, who have sometimes obscured the facts, and constantly created confusion by changing the meaning of ecclesiastical designations, and using the ecclesiastical terminology of Romish episcopacy, in describing the early churches. Mistranslations of Bede have been used to hide the truth, as Dr. Jamieson shows; nevertheless, the facts remain to be found by those who search for them.

In 1854, Rev. Robert King, diocesan curate of Armagh, Ireland, published a "Memoir introductory to the Early History of the Primacy of Armagh," in which he presented the results of a careful investigation of this subject. Mr. King was a devoted Episcopalian; but he was constrained to admit that no such personage as "the Archbishop of Armagh was ever known, heard of, or mentioned," previous to the year 1105 A.D. He declares it to be an incontrovertible fact, "That the churches of Ireland, in the previous ages, not being subject to episcopal jurisdiction, were subject to the successors (appointed by a certain mode of election, and in many cases from particular families exclusively) of certain eminent early missionaries and founders of churches, venerated as the old saints of Ireland and fathers of the Irish church. These successors were, in the early ages, mostly presbyter-abbots, but sometimes, also, bishops, though not forming regular or continued episcopal successions. To such abbots or successors the bishops, during that period, were subordinate."

This is an important admission from an advocate of diocesan episcopacy; but truth required it, and he was too candid to suppress the truth, although he could not see clearly what was meant by a bishop in those days. In the

early Christian ages, as has been shown again and again, the word "bishop" or "episcopos" meant simply an overseer or pastor. Some of the presbyter-abbots, or presiding presbyters, as they should be called, were pastors, and some were not. In some cases, the presbyters sent forth as missionaries to unconverted pagans were called bishops, because a special work had been committed to their charge. It was in later times that the papal organization succeeded to give this term a new meaning. The conclusions reached by Mr. King are in accordance with those of every candid investigator of the ecclesiastical antiquities of the British Islands. And what was true of Ireland was true, also, of England, Scotland, and Wales. Everywhere, in these countries, the Celtic churches rejected the Romanists, knew nothing of what is now called episcopacy, and admitted no ecclesiastical rank higher than that of presbyter.

All this appears distinctly in the history of the Culdees. The peculiar order or section of the Celtic Christians known in the sixth century, and in several subsequent centuries, as Culdees, or Keldees, consisted of closely-affiliated Christian communities, located in Ireland, Scotland, the northern parts of England, and some of the adjacent islands. Columba, its founder, was an Irish presbyter of royal lineage, eminent for learning, piety, and persuasive eloquence. He was about as far as possible from being a Romanist. This was so well understood in his own time, and so well remembered in the struggle of the Culdees against the papacy, that Rome did not venture to appropriate and canonize him until the year 1741, when they believed his memory sufficiently dim among the living, and his bones no longer in a condition to rattle in their grave. And now this celebrated Christian teacher, who spurned the ways of Rome, is made to figure in the Roman calendar, and do honor to the papacy as a Romish saint. Many other eminent Christians of the early ages have been treated in the same way.

Columba was born in Ireland, in the year 521 A.D., and his first religious establishment was founded in that island, at

Durrogh, when he was twenty-eight years old. The members of this establishment became conspicuous for learning and sanctity of manners. He is described as a man of great ability and wonderful energy of character; and it is said that he acquired great influence, political, as well as religious. One account of him states that he "instigated a bloody war, without just cause, and, being made sensible of its injustice, voluntarily exiled himself, and went on a mission to the unconverted Picts." He went to Britain in the year 563 A.D. Bede fixes the date two years later, and mentions his mission as follows: "In the year 565 A.D., there came out of Ireland into Britain a presbyter and abbot, a monk in life and habit, very famous, by name Columba, to preach the word of God to the provinces of the Northern Picts. King Bridius reigned over the Picts, and it was in the ninth year of his reign that Columba converted this nation to the faith of Christ."<sup>1</sup> The Southern Picts had been previously converted by missionaries from Wales. "The Northern Picts," says Bede, "are separated from the Southern parts by steep and rugged mountains." King Bridius gave Columba the island called I, or Hi, by the Gaelic Scots, and Onas in the ancient Pictish speech, which in the hands of the Culdees became famous as Iona. Columba died there, in 597 A.D.

Dr. Jamieson's History of the Culdees gives the best and most complete account of them. It is said that they had not less than three hundred establishments like that at Iona. In the vocabulary of Romanism these have been called monasteries; but this name misrepresents their character. They were schools of learning, as well as religious establishments, and appear to have had some resemblance to educational and religious institutions of the Druids, who had formerly occupied Iona in the same way. These institutions were each managed by thirteen presbyters, one of whom officiated as principal or president. The actual number was sometimes less than thirteen, but never more. Bede and the Romish writers call these presiding officers "abbots";

<sup>1</sup> Lib. 3, c. 4.

but in the Latin writings of the Culdees themselves they were described as "principes," and sometimes as "seniores." The managing presbyters lived in families, having wives and children; and they were teachers in the schools, as well as preachers and ecclesiastical counsellors. Bede says there were "about five families, according to the English computation," at Iona, which may or may not have been correct when he wrote. In all this, however, the Culdee organization was not materially different from that of other Celtic Christians. The institution at Iona was, doubtless, very much like the famous "Choir of Eurgain," in Wales. Nor was there any material difference in doctrine; for they were never regarded by their Celtic brethren as heretics or schismatics. Their peculiarity appears to have consisted chiefly of some variation of discipline, combined with greater strictness of life. The relation of Columba's establishment at Iona to the churches around it was evidently like that of Eurgain's Choir to the first Welsh churches. What it was is told by Bede, as follows:

"Habere autem solet ipsa insula rectorem semper Abbatem Presbyterum, cujus juri et omnis provincia, et ipsi etiam episcopi, ordine inusitato, debeant esse subjecti, juxta exemplum primi Doctoris illius, qui non episcopus, sed presbyter extitit et monachus.

This passage in Bede's history played an important part in the controversies concerning church organization, which followed the Reformation, and very naturally, for it confounds the false assumption that diocesan episcopacy was coëval with Christianity in the British Islands. It is usually translated as follows:

"That island [Iona] is always accustomed to have for its governor a presbyter-abbot to whose authority both the province and even the bishops themselves, by an unusual rule, must be subject after the example of their first teacher, who was not a bishop but simply a presbyter and monk."

Mr. Pennant, in his *Tour in the Hebrides*, referred to this statement of Bede, and thought the words "omnis provincia"

should be rendered "every province," which increases its significance. The meaning is plain enough when we remember the old meaning of the word "episcopi," and understand that it signified nothing more than pastors of churches. It meant no more than this in the early ages, before the Romish innovations introduced the ecclesiastical terminology, which gave it a meaning wholly new and strange. According to Irenaeus, Polycarp, bishop of the church at Smyrna, was merely a presbyter; Columba the venerated head of the Culdees was nothing more; presbyter-abbots presided at Armagh where archbishops and diocesan episcopacy were unknown until the twelfth century. The word "episcopus," or bishop, is perverted and falsified when it is assumed that its meaning in the early churches was the same as that given it, at a later period, in the lordly system of church government contrived at Rome. Diocesan episcopacy did not exist among the Culdees, nor in the other Celtic churches, nor among the early churches in any part of the globe. It was an invention devised and matured by those who created the papacy.

The Roman Catholic church was a gradual growth from small beginnings. The tendency to create such an institution was disclosed by the Roman bishop Victor; but he could do nothing beyond his own immediate neighborhood. After this, there was a vehement contest for supremacy between the bishops of Rome and Constantinople, which went on until the year 607 A.D., when the usurping Centurion, Phocas, issued an imperial decree, giving the supremacy to the bishop of Rome, who had expressed extravagant joy over his usurpation. Phocas was soon suppressed; but his decree may be regarded as the formal public beginning of the papacy. Boniface, the Roman bishop, now claiming to be pope by the endorsement of imperial authority, found it still impossible to enforce his pretensions among those who refused to accept him. But an influence more effective than impotent edicts of Eastern emperors had begun a century earlier to work in aid of ecclesiastical Rome, which ultimately established the papacy in all the continental countries of Western Europe.

This was the conquest of Gaul by the Salian Franks under Clovis.

These Franks were Germans, similar in race and speech to the Saxons and Angles. They came from beyond the Rhine, where they had heard something of Christianity from Romish missionaries. St. Austin, in 597 A.D., found among them Romanist interpreters, who went with him to Britain. Clovis, the wife of Clovis, was a Christian and a Romanist; and Clovis himself, after his great victory over the Alemanni, or Suabians, near Cologne, with more than three thousand of "the flower of his nation," was baptized at Rheims, on the feast of Christmas, in 496 A.D., with a Roman ceremonial of "all possible pomp and splendor." From this time onward he was supported by the bishop of Rome and by the Romanists in every part of Gaul. Romanism became the principle of unity which gave him strength to complete the conquest, and established his empire. It followed, as a matter of course, that all whom he conquered were compelled to change their ecclesiastical ways, and submit to be Romanized. Thus the political and ecclesiastical history of Western Europe, from the beginning of the sixth century, was determined chiefly by the conquests and the Romanism of Clovis. Without his aid the papacy could not have become what it grew to be in the twelfth century; and without the alliance of the Roman church he might have failed to conquer Gaul.

In Britain, the influence of Rome grew with the growth of Saxon power and predominance. The old Celtic churches, deprived of support in Asia and Gaul, and constrained by the political power of Saxon Romanism, yielded one after another to the subjugating pressure of the papal bishops. The Romish crusade against the Culdees began in the eighth century, and was continued until their organization was suppressed. They had a long experience of oppression; and it is manifest in the history of this struggle, that when they finally submitted, in Scotland, to the papal bishops, they were constrained, but not convinced. The Scottish Culdees never became sincere Romanists; and this, it may be, explains why



the anti-papal rising in Scotland, at the summons of the Protestant Reformation, not only renounced the papacy, but also cast away the whole episcopal system of the Romanists, and established an organization which finally became the Presbyterian kirk. Most of the old churches there had been connected with the Culdees, who were undoubtedly among the purest and most enlightened Christians of their time. In the eighth century their institutions, having suffered no loss or decay of the earnest convictions by which they were supported, were still full of life and vigor; their preachers had great reputation for learning and piety; they were felt as a beneficent power, and some of the best things in Scotland are due to their influence.

In Ireland the old churches were not subjugated by the papacy until the twelfth century, when the island was conquered, almost without a struggle, by the English Henry Second. The power and persuasion of Rome, supported by the English king, seem to have frightened or corrupted most of the Irish clergy, and submission became inevitable. The English conquest was aided, and even sought, by ecclesiastical influences in the island, where Rome had already made some progress, as well as by the wretched political condition of the people at that time. The ecclesiastics who favored the change gained an increase of wealth and power; but in submitting to the English king and his friend, the pope, the Irish people lost both national and ecclesiastical independence. The present condition of Ireland is largely due to this disastrous submission to the papacy. To secure it, Pope Adrian IV., in a formal "bull," gave Ireland to the king of England, claiming a right to do this because, as he asserted, "all islands, of ancient right, belong to the church of Rome by donation from Constantine." This was a notable mixture of papal pretense and romance; nevertheless, his plot to pervert the Irish churches was successful.

The papacy was now a reality. It had acquired power to persecute, overawe, and compel. Submission to Rome was the established rule. There were some secluded Christian

communities, like those in the Vaudois valleys, which contrived to escape the submission demanded, and preserve their ancient freedom and discipline; they found safety in being isolated and obscure. Some of the Culdees kept their freedom and adhered to their old ways. Dr. Jamieson states that there were Culdees in Ireland as late as 1625 A.D., who held considerable religious property at Armagh.

That is a strangely perverted condition of mind which allows any sincere man to prefer the papacy to the doctrine, discipline, and unassuming organization of the early churches. The papacy was a monstrous manufacture of the dark ages, contrived to suppress freedom of thought and action in religion, put authority in the place of reason, and establish a relentless spiritual despotism in the name of Him whose truth brings light and liberty. How unwarranted is the pretense that the ritualism of the Romanists is that of the early Christian ages, and what amazing disregard of historical truth in the assumption that their episcopal organization is apostolic. It may be education, it may be indifference, or it may be some lunatic mood of mental desperation, but it is not reason, nor any unbiassed influence of truth, which disposes any intelligent man to respect these pretensions, and allow them to determine his ecclesiastical relations.