

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. FAGAN'S, GLAMORGANSHIRE.

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I HAVE found it to be impossible to comprise satisfactorily even an epitome of the history of St. Fagan's in a paper which can be read within the twenty minutes to which I am limited. I propose, therefore, reading as much of my manuscript as I can in the time allotted me. I have divided my subject under the following six headings, in chronological order: The Patron Saint, The Church, The Norman Castle, The present Manor House, called St. Fagan's Castle, The Visit of Charles I, The Battle of St. Fagan's.

The Patron Saint.—The following particulars of the patron saint I have chiefly gained from Professor Rice Rees's valuable *Essay on the Welsh Saints*. He derived his information from two independent sources, our national chronicles, the Welsh Triads, and the Venerable Saxon Bede, whose statement was supported by Schelstrate, Prefect of the Vatican Library, by whom a confirmation of it was found in a catalogue of the Popes, written 200 years before Bede's time. A British chieftain or king, Lleurwg, called by the Latins Lucius, who was the great-grandson of Caractacus, and who is said by an archæologist who wrote his life—the Rev. D. Henry—to have lived at Rhydlaer, now a farmhouse, in the upper part of St. Fagan's parish, sent towards the close of the second century to Eleuthery, then Bishop of Rome, an urgent appeal for missionaries to come and “baptise himself and his people”. In 180, Eleuthery sent four men—Dyfan, commemorated in Merthyr or Martyr Dovan, a parish four miles south of St. Fagan's; Medwy, preserved in Trefedwy (Anglicised Medwyton), a place near Newton Nottage in this county, but long ago lost by the encroachment of the sea; and Elfan and Fagan. As no churches, either in England or Wales, were dedicated to the memory of these pioneers of the Gospel into Britain except those in this neigh-

bourhood, we may reasonably infer from that evidence alone that they settled in the woodlands of this fertile vale, and, under the protection and patronage of the enlightened Lleurwg, confined their labours to his domains, making them, it is to be hoped, a Christian oasis in the surrounding pagan desert. Lord Bute having informed me that the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Coire in Switzerland is dedicated to the memory of St. Lucius, I visited it some years ago, when the Bishop of Coire told me that St. Lucius abdicated his throne in Britain and came to Switzerland as a missionary to the heathen, by whom he was stoned to death when preaching. The spot where he was martyred was shown to me, as well as some of his bones preserved in a glass case in the cathedral. Welsh and Saxon authorities, however, traverse this account of him, and agree in stating that he was buried in Gloucester in 201. Enderbie, himself a Roman Catholic, in his *Cambria Triumphans*, published in 1661, after carefully balancing the evidence, concludes that he was buried in Gloucester, and that some other St. Lucius must have been martyred at Coire.

In one of the Chronicles of Caradoc of Lancarvan, who died A.D. 1150, or a little later, is the following: "In 154, baptism was first introduced into Britain, and churches and bishops were instituted through the endowments of Lucius and Pope Eleutherius."

In an ancient Welsh MS., containing a list of the genealogies of the British Saints, which was copied about the year 1670, and which Professor Rees pronounces one of the most interesting Welsh records, the sixth entry is as follows: "Saint Fagan, who came the same time as Dyvan to Britain, having been deputed by Pope Eleutherius, at the request of St. Lucius, to confer baptism on the nation of the Cymry. His church is St. Fagan's in Gwent." The name Gwent appears to have been applied to a district coinciding with that represented by the Latin name Siluria. In another old record, copied in 1783 by our most enthusiastic and indefatigable antiquary, Edward Williams (*Iolo Morganwg*), is this entry: "Saint Fagan was Bishop in Llansanfagan, and there is his church." In another list of the Welsh Saints, copied by Iolo from the book of Mr. Cob of Cardiff, St. Fagan is re-

ferred to thus: "Saint Fagan (Faganus), a man from Italy, who came as a Bishop into Wales, sent by the Pope Eleutherius to the Church of Llansanfagans." The patron saint of my parish is again referred to in the Iolo MSS., where a list is given of the Colleges of Saints: "The College of Fagan in Llansanfagan, and Fagan was Principal." In a subsequent list of the names of those who founded churches in Glamorgan, the fifth mentioned is Fagan, who founded Llanfagan Vawr (great), near Llandaff, and Llanfagan Vach (little), called now Llanvaes, near Llantwit Major.

In the face of all this concordant evidence, which is quite compatible with well-authenticated history, it is hard to be incredulous; still, the monks of old were famed for their aptitude in harmonising their chronicles with their partisan predilections. This, combined with modern researches, has caused many to reject altogether Bede's account of Fagan's coming into Britain at the invitation of Lucius. Assuming, however, the truth of the more recent records, just presented to you, that he first administered the sacrament of baptism in Britain, and that he settled and established a college or religious seminary at St. Fagan's, we have greater grounds than can be claimed in favour of any other locality for suggesting the probability of some hallowed spot in the precincts of St. Fagan's village being invested with the unutterable interest of having witnessed the reception into the Church of the first converts in these realms. If this reasonable deduction is a fact of unwritten history, those of you who visit St. Fagan's to-morrow may felicitate yourselves on having performed a pious pilgrimage to the cradle of Christianity in these "Islands of the West". Very probably, the primitive structure, perhaps of watling or of logs, in which the good St. Fagan taught his catechumens, stood in the sheltered, attractive dingle called the Cwm, which now forms part of the pleasure-grounds in the rear of the castle. On that spot, more than a thousand years afterwards, was erected an ecclesiastical edifice, of which little is known, except what was learnt from its foundations, which were unearthed nearly twenty years ago, under the supervision of Lord Windsor's mother, the late Lady Mary Windsor-Clive, and the late

Mr. John Pritchard, then our diocesan architect. The latter confidently pronounced the foundations to be those of a religious house of some character. The base of a square tower, with thick battering masonry, indicated unmistakably the character of its superstructure. Leland, who visited St. Fagan's, refers to a chapel attached to this institution in these words: "The Paroch Church of St. Fagan is now of our Lady; but there is yet by the village a Chapelle of St. Fagan sumtime the Paroch Chirch." The present parish church was originally Norman, and, we learn from Leland, is dedicated to St. Mary. It appears, therefore, that, prior to its erection in the twelfth century, the chapel referred to was the original British parish church dedicated, as Leland states, to St. Fagan. At the beginning of this century the west gable of this ancient edifice, pierced with a rude lancet window, was still standing. In 1858, a parishioner, then 80 years of age, told me that he had assisted in taking down the crumbling ruins of the venerable fane. In excavating for garden purposes a wide trench a few feet deep on its site, the workmen came upon a rough stone sarcophagus, covered with a massive stone lid. All that was left of the decomposed corpse was a pulpy mass at the bottom; but there was standing in it a small earthen vessel of rough make, with a long rectangular stone, its four sides being quite smooth. The roughness of this sarcophagus, the total disintegration of the bones as well as flesh of the corpse, the earthen vase, and the smooth-sided stone, which probably once bore an inscription, tend to show that this sepulchre, hewn out of a rock, was of the greatest antiquity, and that laid in it was the body of someone held in high honour. Who can tell whether the pulp found in that primeval cist was not composed of the dust of the first Principal of the college—the venerable Fagan himself? Alas! it was in vain that I made every effort at the time to trace out any of these relics, linking the present with so remote a past. About twenty years ago, when some old garden walls standing there, which, doubtless, had been built with the sacred stones of the old church, were taken down, I found several of the stones had been carefully shaped for more influential positions than they had occupied in the garden walls.

One, about 2 ft. square and 9 in. deep, had evidently been either the base or capital of a pillar, as on one face of it projected, in bold relief, a roughly-chiselled round moulding 18 or 20 in. in diameter.

St. Fagan's Church.—Until 1860 it consisted of a south porch containing stone seats, nave, chancel, and tower. The walls of the nave and chancel are chiefly Norman. Embedded in the masonry above the present segmental pointed doorway is the arch of the original Norman entrance, and in the north and south walls of the chancel are preserved the arches of two Norman windows, facing each other. In the Decorated period the Norman chancel arch was replaced by a lofty one, so remarkably pointed as to always attract observation. The chancel was lengthened to an extent clearly marked by the junction of the ashlar masonry with the rubble work composing the older Norman walls, and five beautiful, decorated windows, also three extremely pretty sedilia, with an adjoining fenestilla, containing a piscina and stone credence-shelf, were placed in the chancel. It has a cradled roof, the woodwork of which is well moulded, and is further ornamented with bosses at the points of intersection of the purlins. On the north side of the altar is an aumbrey, and in the south wall of the chancel, near its arch, is a little arched niche, puzzling as to its use, owing to its position. A large Perpendicular window with three lights stands south of the nave; its west jamb intersects the Norman arch of the original window, and, projecting from the top of its east jamb, is a curiously-formed bracket of neatly-carved stone for supporting the rood-loft. The chief portion of a stoup remains near the doorway. Above the doorway outside is a niche. The tower, which stands west of the nave, bears its own date, 1750. In the centre merlon of the embattled parapet facing the west, a large stone is embedded, on which is carved in bold relief a lion rampant. Above the entrance to the porch is a sundial, dated 1622. In 1860, a large north aisle was added to the nave, when, in removing the accumulated coats of white-wash off the old walls, the Lord's Prayer was found in black-letter on the south of the chancel arch, and the Apostles' Creed on the north.

The Norman Castle.—Sir Peter le Sore, one of the

twelve knights who accompanied Fitzhamon into Glamorganshire in 1091, was assigned the manor of Peterston-super-Ely, with the manor of St. Fagan's. He lived at Peterston; hence the name. A Norman family, perhaps related to him, named de Vele, from Tortworth in Gloucestershire, a branch of which had also settled at Charfield in Gloucestershire, came to St. Fagan's as a tenant of the lordship. Robert de Vele appears to have been the first to come, which he did in 1299. In 1320, H. Ligon de Vele was lord of St. Fagan's, who was succeeded in this position by some generations of his posterity. The last of them who occupied the Castle was Sir Peter de Vele. He married Hawise, the third and youngest daughter of Sir Matthew, the last of the le Sores, who was sheriff of this county in 1347. Owen Glyndwr, after laying siege to his Castle, eventually took it, and then celebrated his achievement by taking the poor knight's head off. Sir Peter de Vele, through his wife, who inherited the Castle and manor of St. Fagan's, became their absolute owner on the unhappy death of his father-in-law. By the Reports preserved in the Record Office, relating to the feudal rights of the King for the time being, and of the Earls of Gloucester as lords of Glamorgan, in the consolidated manors of St. Fagan's and Lysworney, it appears that by 1377 Sir Peter had abandoned St. Fagan's to live with his relations at Charfield, doubtless in safer surroundings from the despoiled and implacable Welsh than was afforded him by the ward wall, though stout and high, of his Glamorgan residence. The last mention made of the *Castle* in conjunction with the manor of St. Fagan's in these Reports, which continue down to 1603, is one dated 1412. This proves that, though Glyndwr destroyed Peterston and St. George's Castles on one side, and the Bishop's Palace, with the Archdeacon's house at Llandaff on the other, he must have spared St. Fagan's Castle, as he left this county ten years prior to the date of that Report. Probably he did not think it worth his time to demolish it, seeing that it contained no hated Norman for him to decapitate, but perhaps only a poor Welsh vassal as a caretaker. The Reports referred to show that the de Veles retained possession of the manors of St. Fagan and Lysworney for at least 100

years after the family had withdrawn from this county, as in 1475 it is recorded that Robert Vele, Esq., of Charfield, left a daughter Alice sole heiress of St. Fagan's and Tortworth. She returned to her native neighbourhood by marrying David, or Sir David Matthew of Radyr, an important manor, having one of the few deer parks of that period, two miles north-east of St. Fagan's. Alice died in 1504, leaving four daughters co-heiresses, all of whom married and left this county. When Leland visited St. Fagan's about 1535 he found the Castle partly in ruins. He thus notes:—"The Castelle of St. Fagan standith on a little hille, and a part of it yet standith. It was about a 60 yeare ago in the hands of one Davy Matthew, and then it came by heirs General to divers Copartioners. Beynon of the Forest of Dean hath a part of it." The property in 1578 was sold to a John Gwyn Gibbon, LL.D., a descendant of Sir Gilbert Payn of Pentrepayn, now Pentrebane, a farmhouse a little to the north of St. Fagan's village. He built the present manor house, called St. Fagan's Castle, on the site of the old Norman keep, and, except on the north side, within its outer wall, which is still standing. His grandson, Morgan Gibbon, sold it to William Herbert of the White Friars, Cardiff, who in 1616 again sold it to Sir Edward Lewis of the Van, an ancestor of Lord Windsor. When St. Fagan's Church was restored and enlarged in 1860, large slabs, if I recollect rightly, of slate were found underneath the old Castle pew, bearing inscriptions to members of the Gibbon family.

The most interesting object connected with the present building is a large leaden tank, a few years ago mounted on a stone pedestal in the centre of the walled enclosure fronting the entrance to the Castle. It is round, and measures 20 ft. in circumference by 3 ft. 8 in. in height. It has been pronounced, on good authority, to be "one of the largest and most beautifully executed specimens of ornamental lead-casting to be found anywhere". A panel on one side of it contains the royal arms, with the date 1620; and another, on the opposite side, the arms of Sir Edward Lewis.

The walls of the dining hall and of some of the other rooms are still lined with the old oak wainscoting. The

ceilings of the drawing-room and of the room above it are ornamented with an elaborately designed geometrical moulding. But the most interesting feature in the building is a fine oak mantelpiece in the drawing-room, which reaches to the ceiling. In its centre is a shield bearing twenty-five quarterings of the arms of the Lewis family. This interesting heraldic relic would possibly have been lost but for a Cardiff archæologist, a Dr. Reece, who took charge of it about fifty years ago or upwards, before the Castle had been occupied by any of the Clive family. When Lord Windsor's father came, after his marriage, to reside at St. Fagan's, it was supposed (much to his vexation) that the central ornament of the mantelpiece had been stolen or destroyed, until Dr. Reece, to Mr. Clive's great gratification, produced this remarkable shield in excellent preservation.

Charles I's Visit to St. Fagan's.—On the 29th of July 1645, Charles I, who was then a guest of Sir Philip Morgan of Ruperra Castle, attended by the Duke of Richmond, Earl of Lindsay, High Chamberlain, Earl of Lichfield, Lord Kernwagh, and his regiment of body-guards, came from Ruperra to Cardiff Castle, where he dined with the Governor, Sir Timothy Tyrrell, and in the afternoon proceeded to St. Fagan's, to meet there, by previous appointment, the men of Glamorgan. Great must have been his alarm to find, awaiting his arrival, the gentlemen of the county, in a body, on horseback, with the commonalty to the number of 4,000 (or, according to another account, 5,000), drawn up in battle-array, winged with horse, and having a reserve.

A consciousness of the King's weakness, and of their own strength, emboldened them to make their complaints to his Majesty fearlessly. They demanded in a contumelious manner, as a condition of their taking up arms for him, that the Papists should be driven out of the country, that the Governor and garrison of Cardiff should be replaced by their own men, and that £7,000 arrears demanded by Sir Charles Gerard, Major-General of the King's forces in South Wales, should be relinquished. "The King", it is stated, "answered fair, and said they should have all reasonable contentment." Thereupon one of the countrymen, as stated by a historian of the Par-

liamentary cause then present, boldly declared to the King his distrust of his Majesty's promise, citing former breaches of faith as his warranty. The King then withdrew for the night; but the negotiations were continued for two days more at Cefn On, the mountain to be seen direct north of Cardiff, when terms which are well known were agreed upon, satisfactory to both parties.

Richard Symonds, who was in the King's body-guard, attended his Majesty to St. Fagan's. He was an archæologist, and a good one too, for in his movements with the King he kept a sharp look-out for every object of interest, and noted it down in a neatly written diary now to be seen in the British Museum. He evidently had a greater love of heraldry, genealogy, and kindred subjects, than of blood-shedding. He availed himself of the opportunity, while his Sovereign was parleying with his refractory subjects, to visit the church to see what he could there see, and describes a coat of arms, in the chancel window, of the Clare family. He gives also a sketch of the arms of the Lewis family, and describes a far-famed spring in the Castle grounds in these words: "In the orchard of this howse, under an old ewe-tree, is a spring or well, within the rock, called St. Faggin's Well. Many resort from all parts to drink it for the falling sickness (epilepsy), and cure them at all seasons. Many come a year after they have drunk of it, and relate their cure ever since." The spring is still there, but its pure, sparkling water, which gushes from beneath the rock into a pellucid little pool, has either lost its healing virtues, or this faithless generation has lost all belief in the efficacy.

The Battle of St. Fagan's.—Want of time compels me to make a cursory reference only to the Battle of St. Fagan's. This, however, I regret the less as the particulars are so generally known. The battle was fought a little to the north-west of the village, on May 8th, 1648, between 8,000 raw, ill-armed Welsh royalists, under the command of Major-General Laughan, Col. Rice Powell, and Major-General Stradling of St. Donat's Castle, and 3,000 Parliamentarians, well trained and experienced fighting-men, under the chief command of Captain Horton, who was supported by Col. Okey.

Both sides were hastening to seize St. Fagan's as an advantageous base for the former to attack, and the latter to cover Cardiff, then held by Col. Prichard of Llancaiach for the Parliament. Horton, who had marched from Brecon, forestalled the Royalists by a few hours only, as they had reached St. Nicholas, about three miles west of St. Fagan's, when he entered the village to find in it none but women and children, as the men had joined the Royalist army.

Finding that Horton had gained possession of St. Fagan's, the Welsh withdrew to Fonmon; but seeing that they were not followed, they determined to march at once to St. Fagan's, with the view of disposing of Horton before the arrival of Cromwell, who was hastening to support him, and had already reached Monmouth.

As early as seven o'clock in the morning of Monday the 8th of May they were drawn out in order of battle, in an advantageous position about half a mile from the village. Horton at once gave them battle, and after a terrible slaughter of two hours' duration completely routed them. He took 2,000 prisoners, including many officers, and his cavalry mercilessly cut down all they could overtake of the remainder in a pursuit of some miles. That fell two hours' carnage left seven hundred widows in this county, and sixty-five in St. Fagan's alone. These, it is said, were obliged to reap the corn the ensuing summer, so divested was the neighbourhood of male labour.

Parliament deemed the victory of St. Fagan's of so much consequence that they appointed the Wednesday of the following week as a day of national thanksgiving, and they ordered one Master William Bridge of Yarmouth to preach the sermon before them that day at St. Margaret's, Westminster. Parliament subsequently thanked him for the great pains he took in the sermon, and ordered him to print it. I possess a copy.

The following are some local traditions and particulars I have gleaned of the battle. The glebe field at the back of my house is called "Cae Meirch", or Horses' Field, owing to Horton's cavalry horses having been kept together in it the night before the battle.

The Welsh, it is said, had not seen cannon before that

battle. Some small balls, about seven pounds in weight, have been ploughed up in the battlefield.

A few years before I came to St. Fagan's, a farmer, who loved straight furrows more than archæology, removed from about his fields large stones which marked the spots where some men of distinction had fallen and were buried.

An intelligent old parishioner informed me that he had been told by a farmer who died in 1842, aged eighty-nine, that when he came as a young man to the Stockland Farm, on which the battle was mainly fought, he had occasion, in removing a hedge, to cut down a large hollow trunk of an oak-tree. When it fell to the ground he found, to his surprise, it was full of rusty swords and muskets and other small-arms. My informant, when a boy, was leading horses engaged in ploughing on the field of battle, when something impeded the progress of the plough. On examination it was found to be one of the two-pronged pikes, with a socket for receiving the shaft, with which the country blacksmiths had armed many of the Royalists.

On the outskirts of the battlefield is a tumulus 25 or 30 ft. in diameter. On cutting a trench to the centre of it I found remains of a cremation,—a thick layer of charcoal intermingled with half-charred bones. As it would be most difficult to dig graves there, owing to rock being so near the surface of the ground, the bodies of those slain in that part of the battlefield may have been burnt and then covered with a mound of earth.

There is a story told, and very generally believed in the neighbourhood, of a farmer (recently deceased) who, on taking the Stockland Farm, was obliged to borrow money to stock it. A few months after he came into residence he not only repaid the sum borrowed, but was found afterwards to have a good supply of cash. The explanation given is that the farmer found in the concealed foot of a stocking a large hoard of gold, which is supposed to have been placed there by some one prior to the battle, who was killed in it.

