

## THE ANCIENT CHURCH IN WALES.

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AT the present time, when attention is specially directed to that portion of the Anglican Church which is situate in the Principality of Wales, and when misleading and erroneous statements are made as to its history and the position it occupies, it may be worth while to engage your attention for a short time this evening with a few facts concerning its origin and ancient history; avoiding any topics of polemical or political controversy as not coming within the scope of our deliberations.

There is no reliable information which enables the historian to fix the exact time when Christianity was first preached in Britain and by whom. There are certain traditions which have found favour with the old chroniclers, but they have adopted them tentatively rather than positively. It is said that about the year A.D. 53, Joseph of Arimathea, being sent by Philip the Apostle, after the Christians were dispersed out of Gallia, came into Britain and preached the Gospel there among the Britons, and converted many of them to the true faith, and that he continued there all the residue of his life, obtaining of Arviragus a plot of ground four miles from Wells, and there laid the first foundation of Christianity, in which place was afterwards erected the Abbey of Glastonbury.

Nicephorus writes<sup>1</sup> that Simon Zelotes came into Britain, and Theodoretus (“*De curandis Græcorum affectibus*”) shows that St. Paul being released of his second imprisonment, and suffered to depart from Rome, preached the Gospel to the Britons; and Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, witnessed to the same effect. Tertullian, also writing of these times, says: “Those places of the Britons to which the Romans could not approach were subject unto Christ. Thus it may appear that the

<sup>1</sup> Bk. ii, c. 4.

Christian religion was planted here in this land shortly after Christ's time; although it certainly appeareth not who were the first to preach to the Britains, nor whether they were Greeks or Latins."<sup>1</sup>

Arviragus is supposed to be the same person as Tacitus calls Prasutagus, a King of Britain, and is mentioned by Juvenal as Arviragus. He was the youngest son of Cymbeline, and was admitted King of Britain or of the Icenii, A.D. 45 or 46. He was besieged by Claudius in Winchester, and made a treaty of peace with him, a condition of which was that Claudius should give his daughter Genissa to Arviragus in marriage, and Arviragus should acknowledge that he held his kingdom of the Romans. It is, however, doubtful whether his marriage with Genissa ever took place. He is stated to have embraced the Christian faith, and to have been the possessor of the Roman villa discovered at Chedworth some years ago; and it is worthy of notice that tiles have been found among the ruins of that villa bearing the Christian symbol of the Chi-Rho.

Arviragus died A.D. 73, and was buried at Gloucester, and was succeeded by his son Marius, who died A.D. 78, and was buried at Carlisle, leaving a son behind him named Coil or Coillius, who was made King of Britain A.D. 125. He was brought up among the Romans at Rome, and is said by some to have made the town of Colchester. He reigned fifty-four years, and died at York, leaving a son named Lucius, who succeeded him in the kingdom in A.D. 180, and who is said to have been the first King of Britain who openly professed the Christian religion. The evidences of a very early introduction of Christianity into Britain have been traced by Mr. E. P. Loftus Brock, in a paper he read at the Tenby Congress, entitled "Evidences of the Extent of the Ancient British Church", which is printed in our *Journal* (vol. xli, p. 53), and also by our late Vice-President, Mr. J. W. Grover, in his paper on "Pre-Augustine Christianity in Britain," also printed in vol. xxiii of our *Journal*, p. 221. I will, therefore, avoid going over this ground again, especially as my object is to trace, not so much the introduction of Christianity into

<sup>1</sup> Hollinshed's *History of Britain*.

Britain, as its development into the concrete form of a Church Establishment and its relation with the Civil Government of the country.

The story of Lucius having been converted to Christianity, and having applied to Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome, to send him some ministers to instruct him and his people in the true faith, is thus stated in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: "A. 167.—This year Eleutherius succeeded to the Popedom, and held it fifteen years; and in the same year Lucius, King of the Britons, sent and begged baptism of him, and he soon sent it to him, and they continued in the true faith till the time of Dioclesian."<sup>1</sup>

This legend was introduced by Bede in the eighth century, and expanded by Nennius in the ninth century into the conversion of the whole of Britain. Between that time and the twelfth century it came to be connected with North Wales, and *The Book of Llandaff* (a compilation of the twelfth century) gives the names of Lucius' ambassadors, and describes the foundation of the sees.

According to Bishop Jewell, Eleutherius replied to Lucius thus: "You have received in the Kingdom of Britain, by God's mercy, both the law and faith of Christ; ye have both the old and the new testament, out of the same through God's grace, by the advice of your realm make a law, and by the same through God's sufferance rule you your kingdom of Britain, for in that kingdom you are God's vicar." And he sent Fugatius and Damianus, who baptised the King and all his family and people. There were in those days, within the bounds of Britain, twenty-eight Flamines and three Archflamines, superintendents of the pagan religion, in whose place were instituted twenty-eight bishops and three archbishops of the Christian religion; one of the which archbishops held his see at London, another at York, and the third at Carleon Arwiske in Glamorganshire. To the Archbishop of Carleon was subject all Wales, within which country there were seven bishops.

This account of Lucius' conversion and establishment of the Christian Church in Britain is not considered

<sup>1</sup> *History of Britain*, book iv, ch. 19.

sufficiently authenticated to be of historical value; but it is useful in throwing light on subsequent events which cannot be controverted, and explaining how in the fourth century reliable evidence can be produced of an organised Christian Church establishment in Britain; for in the year A.D. 314 the Council of Arles was convened to consider the question of the Donatist schism in Africa, and in the Acts of the Council are recorded the names of three British bishops who sat in the Council, attended by a priest and a deacon. They were Eborius, Bishop of York; Restitutus, Bishop of London; Adelfius, Bishop of Colonia Londinensium—which has been variously conjectured to be Colchester, Lincoln, and Caerleon-upon-Usk; Sacerdos, a priest, and Arminius, a deacon. There were also British bishops at the Council of Sardica, A.D. 347, and at the Council of Ariminum in A.D. 360. In the middle of the fourth century the British Churches signified, by letter to Athanasius, their adherence to the Nicene faith, and in the latter part of the fourth century (386-400) extracts from the writings of Chrysostom, Jerome, and Sozomon show satisfactorily that there was a settled Church in Britain, with churches, altars, scriptures, and discipline, holding intercourse both with Rome and Palestine;<sup>1</sup> and it is only a fair inference from these circumstances that Christianity had gradually developed into an ecclesiastical establishment, and that the early accounts of its introduction and progress must have had some foundation in reality, though not sufficiently reliable to satisfy the requirements of modern research.

And then the British Church, which had survived the persecution of Diocletian, had to meet the invasion of the Saxons, and was carried by the remnant of the British people who escaped and remained firm to the Christian faith behind the fastnesses of Wales and Cornwall, where it grew and prospered; so that when St. Augustine came to Britain, in 597, to convert the Saxons, he was confronted with this ancient Church—not a mere scattered body of Christians, but an ecclesiastical establishment differing in some respects from the Romish ritual, so that when he was ordained Archbishop of the English

<sup>1</sup> *Turning Points of English Church History*, by Rev. E. I. Cutts.

nation by Vergilius, Archbishop of Arles, and sent questions to Gregory for the solution of some doubts which occurred to him, his seventh question was, "How are we to deal with the Bishops of France and Britain?" and Gregory answers: "We give you no authority over the Bishops of France, because the Bishop of Arles received the pall in ancient times from my predecessor, and we are not to deprive him of the authority he has received. But as for all the Bishops of Britain, we commit them to your care, that the unlearned may be taught, the weak strengthened by persuasion, and the perverse corrected by authority."

The result of this was that Augustine, with the assistance of King Ethelbert, drew together to a conference the bishops or doctors of the next province of Britain, at a place called Augustine's Ac, *i.e.*, Augustine's Oak, supposed to be near Aust in Gloucestershire, and began (says Bede<sup>1</sup>) "to persuade them that preserving Catholic unity with him they should undertake the common labour of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. For they did not keep Easter Sunday at the proper time. Besides, they did several other things which were against the unity of the Church." The Britons confessed that it was the way of righteousness which Augustine taught; but that they could not depart from their ancient customs without the consent of the people. A second synod was therefore decreed, to which came seven bishops of the Britons and many most learned men, particularly from their most noble monastery Bancoburg (now Bangor Iscoed, Flintshire). Augustine said if they would comply with him in three points—*viz.*, to keep Easter at the due time; to administer baptism according to the custom of the Roman Apostolic Church; and jointly to preach the word of God to the English nation—he would tolerate all the other things they did contrary to his customs. They answered they would do none of those things, nor receive him as their Archbishop. Augustine answered them in a threatening manner, which instigated Ethelfrid afterwards to attack the Welsh, A.D. 607, as thus described in the *Saxon Chronicle*: "This year Ethelfrith led his army to Chester and there

<sup>1</sup> Ch. ii.

slew numberless Welshmen : and so was fulfilled the prophecy of Augustine, wherein he saith, ‘ If the Welsh will not be at peace with us they shall perish at the hands of the Saxons.’ There also were slain two hundred priests, who came to pray for the army of the Welsh.” The destruction of the monastery of Bangor Iscoed followed this massacre.

The Welsh Church continued independent of the Church St. Augustine established in England until the reign of Henry I, when Bernard, a Norman, being made Bishop of St. David’s, professed subjection to the Archbishop of Canterbury as metropolitan. So say Godwin and Leland, *Collect.*, vol. ii, p. 108, from Giraldus Cambrensis, and Usher in *Judice Chronolog.*, sub A.D. 1115. But Cressy contends that all the British bishops were subject to the Archbishop of Canterbury from A.D. 982, when Gucan, Bishop of Llandaff, was consecrated by Archbishop Dunstan.<sup>1</sup> According to Archbishop Usher,<sup>2</sup> the Church of Llandaff denied subjection to St. David’s, and that according to the Llandaff Register their Bishops were consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury from the time of Oudouces in the sixth century.

The earliest foundation of a bishopric in Wales was at Caerleon, Dubritius being called by the title of Archbishop of Caerleon, as Archbishop of Wales, at the first establishment of the Christian religion in the British Island. St. David is said, soon after the famous British synod for suppressing the Pelagian heresy, A.D. 519, to have built a monastery at Vallis Rosina (supposed to be near Menevia) for monks to support themselves by the labour of their own hands. This monastery is not taken notice of in the *Monasticon*, as not coming within any of the Orders afterwards known in England, and having had but a short continuance ; for what became of it, or when it perished, is not known.<sup>3</sup> St. David translated the archbishopric of Wales from Caerleon to Menevia in A.D. 577, and the town thereupon took his name soon after his decease, and the Church was commended to his

<sup>1</sup> Collier, vol. i, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiq. Eccl. Brit.*, p. 85, ed. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Dugdale’s *Monast.*, vol. vi, 1629-30, and Stevens’ *Continuation*, vol. i, p. 216.

patronage. This (says Dugdale) is the most general account; but in Spelman's *Councils* (vol. i, p. 25) it is said that Dubritius removed the archbishopric from Caerleon to Llandaff, and St. David removed it from Llandaff to Menevia. Authors differ much about this time. According to Spelman's *Councils*, vol. i, pp. 61-2, it should be shortly after Dubritius' resignation and St. David being made Archbishop. But others place it much later.<sup>1</sup> This see seems to have been generally full, and to have enjoyed the archbishopric till about A.D. 930, when Sampson withdrawing from his province on account of a pestilential distemper which then raged there, carried the pall with him to Dole in Brittany. But the bishops of this see are said to have consecrated the Welsh bishops, and to have been Primates to them till the time of Henry I, as already stated.<sup>2</sup>

Early in the tenth century Howell Dha, King of South Wales, but who then appears to have had supreme rule over the whole country, collected and revised the Laws of Wales, and embodied them into those Codes which bear his name; for which purpose he summoned, besides representatives of the laity, all the clergy of the kingdom possessed of the dignity of the crozier, and when the laws had been all made and completely written, Howel, accompanied by the Princes of Cymru and the Bishops of Menevia, Bangor, and St. Asaph, and the Archdeacon of Llandaff, went to Rome to obtain the confirmation of the laws from Pope Anastatius. This was in the year A.D. 914. One of these Codes, the Dimetian (relating to the southern division of Wales), states (ch. 24) that there were seven bishoprics. One is Menevia, a principal seat in Cymru; the churches of Ismael, Llan Ddagenian, Llan Ussyllt, Llan Deilo, Llan Deulydog, Llan Genese.

The only one of these which has survived as a bishopric is Menevia (St. David's), the rest still exist as parish churches, included in the Clergy List of the present day, as St. Ishmael, near Milford in Pembrokeshire; Roscrowther (St. Decuman's), Pembroke; St. Issell's, near Tenby; Llan Deilo, St. Dogmael's, and Llangan.

<sup>1</sup> Dugdale, *Monast.*, vol. vi, p. 1302, and see Willis' *Survey of St. David's Cathedral*, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Dugdale, *Monast.*, vol. vi.

The four bishoprics mentioned in Howel's Laws—Menevia (St. David's), Bangor, St. Asaph's, and Llandaff, are identical with the present sees.

Of St. David's we have already spoken. The diocese of Bangor, according to Tanner, was probably erected before the middle of the sixth century, by Malgwyn, or Malgo Conan, Prince of North Wales, and Denniel, or Daniel, son of Dinothus, Abbot of Bangor in Flintshire, who had before founded a college or monastery here, was made the first bishop (consecrated by Dubritius, according to Usher). We have very little, or indeed no account of the monastery afterwards, and but a slender one of the bishops till A.D. 1039, after which time there seems to have been a regular succession of prelates in this see; though by reason of the wars they had not a quiet enjoyment.

Dugdale's list of the bishops commences with Herveus in 1007, who was translated to the bishopric of Ely in 1109.

Kentigern, Bishop of Glasgow, says Tanner, being driven out of Scotland, founded an episcopal seat and monastery at St. Asaph, in Flintshire, about the middle of the sixth century, and became the first bishop (but Speed says Kentigern founded the monastery, and Malgo, a British king, made it an episcopal see). Upon his return into Scotland he made Asaph, or Hassaph, his successor, and from him both the church and place have since been called St. Asaph. But from the death of St. Asaph, A.D. 596, there is no account of the monastery, and little or no account of any bishops till A.D. 1143, and there has been a regular and constant succession from that time, notwithstanding the wars between the English and the Welsh, and Owen Glendower's rebellion.

There is much of uncertainty in the history of Llandaff, as well in relation to its see as its bishops, till the latter end of the ninth century. A MS. in the library of the learned Selden is quoted by Dugdale, which speaks of Elvanus as the first bishop, in the time of Lucius, and Bishop Godwin mentions such a tradition, but rejects it. Tanner, after weighing different authorities, says a bishopric was erected here in the time of St. Dubritius, whose death is generally placed in A.D. 522; but Dugdale,



as well as Wharton in the *Anglia Sacra*, says, "A.D. 612 S. Dubricius migravit ad Dominum."<sup>1</sup>

The members of this church, says Tanner, were at first endowed with great possessions, but deprived of most of them shortly after the Conquest, when their first church was destroyed.

It will be seen from this sketch of the early history of the Church in Wales that the Christian religion had steadily increased and developed into an organised Episcopal Church prior to the advent of St. Augustine and his conversion of the Saxons, and that it continued independent of the Anglican Church till at least the end of the tenth century. Its relation with the State appears from Howel Dha's Laws to have been in perfect harmony. The King permitted every ecclesiastical lord, such as the Archbishop of Menevia, or other bishops or abbots, royal privileges for holding pleas among their laics by the common law of Cymru, and he reserved to himself making laws and maintaining the privilege of the croziers of the kingdom.

And so it continued until it merged into the Anglican Church by the professed subjection of Bernard to the Archbishop of Canterbury as metropolitan, in the reign of Henry I; and when Edward I finally conquered Wales and annexed it to England, by the statute of Rhudland, in the twelfth year of his reign (A.D. 1284), no mention of the Church was made in that statute. The privileges and endowments remained, and it has continued until the present time an integral portion of the Anglican Church.

<sup>1</sup> Dugdale's *Monast.*, by Caley Ellis and Bandinel (1830), vol. vi, Pt. 3.