

HISTORICAL AND OTHER EVIDENCES OF THE EXTENT OF THE ANCIENT BRITISH CHURCH.

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THE ancient histories, both of Wales and Britain, speak of the existence of Christianity in very early times as a fact which is not questioned. They go, too, so far as to convey the impression to us that Christianity was widespread, and all but, if not quite, universal. Were we able to place implicit reliance on these ancient records, the present paper would be objectless, since it would be but an endeavour to prove that which was apparent to all. Early, and much of mediæval, history, however, bears on the face of it so many palpable inaccuracies, and fable is so gravely set forth as fact, that there is nothing surprising in the disbelief with which much of it is received, since the tendency of the human mind is to believe in the opposite of that which is detected to be an untrue statement.

A passing reference to the wonderful history of Geoffrey of Monmouth is sufficient to show the extent in which fiction, anachronisms, and gross improbabilities are mixed up in what was once considered reliable history. Many others, with less of the leaven of improbability, have still many statements open to easy question. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the result of history written thus is the disbelief, or nearly so, of many in the existence of any great number of Christians in Roman and early times.

Not one of the least pleasant works of the antiquary is to collect evidences of history, to weigh and to arrange them, and to see how far they support the written records, how the latter should be modified by them, or how even they may be proved to be inaccurate. The existence of Christianity in Roman times can be proved by

the existence of antiquities of many kinds, some of which it will be necessary to refer to. There is a sufficient number for this purpose, and from these I have selected the following as being undoubtedly of Roman date, and as relating to Christianity, and not to Mythraic or Gnostic rites.

At Frampton, Dorset, a Roman villa was excavated many years ago, and some very good tessellated pavements were found. The *chi-rho*, that earliest and most beautiful symbol of Our Lord's name, is worked in mosaics, in a position of honour, in one of them. On another is a mild and beneficent face, probably intended to be a portrait of Our Lord.

In the Alnwick Castle collection is a vase of the well known Roman Caistor ware. It has the *chi-rho* on it in white slip. This emblem occurs also on a silver vase found at Corbridge, Northumberland, and on a leaden plate found at Battersea. It also appears on a leaden *bullæ*, or seal, found in the Roman city of Silchester, in a room off the Forum, during the recent excavations made by the late Duke of Wellington.

At Hartlip, Kent, a Roman sarcophagus was found several years ago. Two palm-branches are carved upon it, being, as Mr. Roach Smith believes, evidence of a Christian interment, since he has found no such emblem relating to any burial of heathen origin.

The Roman villa at Chedworth, Gloucester, has a small enclosed fountain very well adapted for a baptistery; while on the steps of another part of the villa, the figure of the cross is cut in two places.

For the sake of brevity I have excluded from this list all on which any reasonable doubt can be expressed. I make only passing reference to a great number of ancient cemeteries with the interments lying east and west, there being no pagan accompaniments, for a similar reason, except to say that there is such a cemetery beneath Bishops-gate Street, London, on the Roman level, the interments lying close together. It is very difficult to assign this to any other age than to the earliest period after the Roman rule of extra-mural sepulture had lost its power, or to ascribe it to other than Christian date.

The Rev. Dr. Hooppell found, some months since, at Bin-

chester, Durham, a Roman stone figure of a divinity. It was mutilated, and when met with in the remains of the Roman station referred to, it was doing duty as old material, having been used as part of the foundation of some doorsteps, having evidently lost all sacred character.

The entire list shows the occurrence of objects spread pretty generally over the whole of England. The varying nature of these discoveries is sufficient to show very wide-spread use ; but there are still others. Two silver bracelets were found not long since at Fifehead Neville, Dorset. Their Roman date is shown by their workmanship and the place and surroundings where they were discovered ; but their Christian origin is shown by their ornamentation. On one is the monogram, the *chi-rho* ; the other has it, as well as the palm-branches, denoting the victory of the Christian faith. There is a pin of Roman date, such as Roman ladies wore in their hair, in the collection formed by Mr. Roach Smith. The end has the figure of a cross. When emblems of Christianity are thus to be observed as personal ornaments of every day use, we may fairly conclude that its belief was widely extended.

There are, however, some items of proof of the existence of Christianity, more especially in Wales, that deserve our attention, since they have an important bearing on our inquiry.

The Welsh Sees.—Reference is often made in the old histories to the existence of bishops of the British Church. We hear of their presence at early councils ; names are stated ; reference is made to the existence of sees at Caerleon, London, York, and other places ; statements that have been received with more or less credulity ; while there are many references to other bishops, probably all being more itinerant than in later times.

On attentive examination of the histories of the various existing bishoprics of the part of Britain which we now call Wales, we must be struck with one remarkable fact, that is, their origin was in the dim past, only indicated by records more or less open to doubt. The foundation of all the Anglo-Saxon bishoprics is clear and precise. We can tell nearly, if not always, the actual date, while we can turn to all but complete and authentic

records of the bishops. Not so in Wales. If we reject their origin in Roman times, or all but Roman times, apart from all influences of Augustine, which is asserted by the old chroniclers, we are left without any guide of any kind. The history of the transfer of the ancient see of Caerleon to the present site by St. David is, however, as circumstantially related as any event at so early a date can be; but it must be borne in mind that this date is an early one. It is early in the sixth century, while there is some reference to an anterior foundation at Menevia, close to St. David's. Beyond this has to be added the whole period of time when the bishops held their seat within the walls of the ancient metropolis of South Britain (the famed city of legions), a period when history fails us. If we add but one hundred years prior to the transfer, we must be forced to recognise the Roman power and the bishopric as existing together.

The narrative of the spread of the Pelagian heresy is another source of direct information which we possess as to the existence of a large number of British Christians in the fifth and sixth centuries; and the presence of St. Germanus and others, to refute it, is an item of reliable history. If so many were led astray by the erroneous teaching of the learned Briton, Pelagius, how large must have been the number of the believers? The purity of doctrine, too, which they professed is sufficiently attested by the earnestness with which the controversy was conducted.

There is in Wales a series of monuments (and it is a large series) sufficient of itself to attest the existence of Christianity in the country. This is the fine collection of inscribed, sepulchral stones,—a collection unequalled, perhaps, by that of any other district, and which has received such admirable investigation at the hands of Professor Westwood, Professor Rhys, and many others. We have, first, inscriptions of Roman times, with lettering similar to other Roman monuments found all over Britain. We have others still with Roman letters, but with a simple cross, or with inscriptions, “In Pace”, or “Hic jacet”, or with the absence of the old formularies of heathen times, warranting the belief that the person commemorated was a Christian. These continue in an un-

broken series until the Roman lettering gives place to the so-called Hiberno-Saxon minuscule style, with its accompaniment of Celtic interlaced ornament and strap-work. There is no break in the continuity of the series, and it is sufficient to indicate to us that the Christian faith had its beginning in Roman times, and continued to exist through the succeeding centuries.

One of these monuments requires more than passing reference. It is the Carausius Stone, perhaps the most interesting monument in the Principality. Here we have evidence, beyond all controversy, of Christianity in Roman times. The Stone bears the name, a Romanised name, in Roman letters, in the Roman style. It has, too, the cross of Christianity combined with the *chi-rho*. The same occurs also on the Porus Stone at Lech Idris. The position of these Welsh stones is not without its significance. They may have been found in some fence, in the churchyard-wall, in rebuilding the edifice. They may appear to have no connection whatever with the present buildings. Still the fact is patent that in the great majority of cases the stones exist, or have been found, at no great distance from, if not within, the present churches of the country. Were this the case in but a few instances we could draw no conclusion from it. The reverse being so, it warrants the belief that these Christian memorials had some sort of connection with Christian places of meeting on the spot long anterior to the erection of the present buildings, but of the same date as the original ones.

Let us consider some of these stones. The name Sagramus or Sagrammus appears on a well known stone at St. Dogmael's, Pembroke, with a bilingual inscription in Oghams. The Latin inscription is in Roman capitals. The same may be said of the stone in Treillong Church, Brecon, where a wheeled cross is also inscribed, the Roman inscription being cut with great neatness, reading, "Cunocenni filius Cunocenni hic jacit." The stone on the road between Kenbegge and Margam reads "Punpeius Carantorius", there being Oghams to both of these. The Paulinus Stone at Dolau Cothy House has Roman lettering, as has also the Trenactus Stone, the stone found in taking down the old church of Llangefni.

Anglesey, which has been translated, "Culidonis lies here, and Orvrite, the wife of Secundus." That in the churchyard wall at Llandyssul reads, "Velvor, the daughter of Broho." These, and a vast number of others, present us with Roman or Romanised names in succession, and relate often to persons whose names loom through the dim records of the early period in which they lived. Thus the Paulinus referred to in the inscription is, doubtless, the St. Paulinus who was at the synod of Llanddewi Brevi for the confutation of the Pelagian heresy, assigned to A.D. 519. The St. Canna who appears to be referred to by the inscription on the curious chair inscribed with her name, in the churchyard at Llangan, was an Armorican lady, a relative of St. Germanus. The continuity of the Latin language on these stones is worthy of notice; and it may be said with truth that there is no sign of that tongue ever having died out of Wales, so far as lapidary inscriptions are concerned.

It is worthy of remembrance that as the Roman civilisation had permeated British society, so it must have been left when the Roman legions departed. In other countries this state of things is supposed to have been shattered more or less by the rude shock of barbarian conquest. In this respect Wales stands alone among the nations of the Roman world. The Roman civilisation, whatever stage it had reached, was never so extinguished in Wales, for the country was never entirely overrun. To this day the presence of Latin words is remarkable in the old language. The words of agriculture, architecture, religion, literature, the names of the month, and the numbers, show a remarkable resemblance. The late Rev. W. Williams gives a list, occupying twenty-six closely printed pages, of words similar in the Latin and other early languages. Professor Rhys has done very much the same. Doubts have been thrown upon the introduction of these words from ancient Roman sources, as is believed by Mr. Williams; but the consideration of the continuance of the Roman civilisation is amply sufficient to account for at least the largest part of the phenomenon. The force of this consideration is of value to the present inquiry, since it has its relation to the portions of Britain overrun by the Saxons. If Christianity is found to have

had its beginnings in Roman times, and its continuance in Wales through all the later troubles, was it not equally spread over the whole of Britain before those troubles began?

Wales has important evidence of the extent of its ancient Church of another kind besides its lapidary inscriptions. The names of places, from end to end of the Principality, point to this. They consist of the name of a saint, with the common prefix "Llan", or church, before it. The number of such names is remarkable. Sir James Picton has recently shown that at the present day there are four hundred and fifty-one parishes with churches so designated. This is apart from the vast number of places so called, where churches are supposed to have been. The saints to whom they are dedicated demand more notice than the mere affix of "church" to the place-name. They are the same saints who are referred to by name in the old and uncertain records as helping to spread the Christian faith in early times. Among them are the names of Germanus or Garmon, Iltyd, Paulinus, David, and a mass of others, men and women, who flourished in the fifth, sixth, seventh and later centuries. The number of churches remaining for so small a country is remarkable, only equalled by the references in the old records to the vast number of religious and learned men in the various colleges.

If these names were simply given to the parishes at some late period, when parishes were formed, their value in respect to this inquiry is gone. If it can be shown that they were prescribed by some bishop's injunction, to keep up the memory of men who had done so much good in their lifetimes, then we may regard the occurrence of the names with respect; but they would be of no other proof for our inquiry than that such persons were supposed to have lived. No such record is to be found since the twelfth century, and no reference to it earlier. On the contrary, we find at comparatively early date that the names by which we now know the places were then also in common use. As they were then, so are they now. The use made of them shows conclusively that they were then mere place-names in common parlance, used ordinarily as we now do the ordinary names of places, and sufficient to show that they were not then invented, but had been in

use long before. This portion of my inquiry seems never to have been noticed before, and it may be well to dwell upon it. We have clear evidence in proof. The *Brut y Tywysogion* (that most reliable of all the Welsh chronicles, evidently of earlier date than the time of Caradoc of Llancarvan) refers again and again to such names. Many other records may refer to still earlier dates; but these will be sufficient for the present purpose.

The prefix "Llan" before a name occurs so early as the year 720, when it is recorded that the sea breached the church of Llancarvan. Also, in 720, many of the churches of Llandar were broken by the unbelieving Saxons; also those of Llanbaden. In 950 the church of Llan Ildud was broken into. In 980 there was a battle at Llanwenog; 987, Llandydock was ravaged by the Danes, called elsewhere the "black pagans". So on all through the tenth and eleventh centuries, Llanvedwy, Llandudock, Llandathan, and a vast number of others are mentioned. Battles are fought at them, castles are built or taken, and such like events occur. There is no reference to the church, more than the name, which is used merely as a place-name. This use is, however, abundantly sufficient to show that the calling of the place after the name of the saint (and that there was a church actually there) is no mere creation of late date; but that it was firmly rooted, apparently in very early times, long anterior to the date of the history cited.

We may show, too, that this is noticeable also in other districts where the British remained strongest after the departure of the Romans. Cornwall is, like Wales, remarkable for the fact that the great bulk of the churches are dedicated to early saints. From end to end of the county this is so apparent that dedications of saints with familiar names, as in other parts of England, are of such rarity as to give occasion for the belief that they show a foundation anterior to Saxon or Norman times. Monmouth, Herefordshire, and Devon, are districts once occupied by the British race, as well as elsewhere, from which they were expelled at varying dates. We find evidences just as we might expect to find them supposing the truth of my belief be conceded, that such names were fairly general throughout all Britain in early times, in propor-

tion to the spread of Christianity. Amid a number of dedications to saints of familiar names, such as were common in Saxon times, we find here and there some of ancient British names not known in the roll of Saxon saints. This is particularly the case in Monmouth, and to some extent in Hereford. In Devon we find a few dedications to SS. Patrick, Petrock, Germanus, and to St. Martin,—a saint, however, whose name has continued from remote times through the middle ages. I showed at Tavistock, two years ago, that some of these dedications existed in the twelfth century as they now do in the nineteenth.

In addition to the names in the districts lying closest to Wales, Mr. T. Kerslake, F.S.A., has shown that one of the Bristol churches is dedicated to the British St. Ewan, who has also a church at Hereford.

This inquiry widens as we proceed, for it is found that what applies to the districts named does so also to Brittany. Here the Celtic tongue lingers, and the names of the churches sound as they do in Wales. They are dedicated to the same saints, and it can be shown that these saints passed from one country to another, visiting in turn Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and it may be the Isle of Man and Scotland; while from those places visits were paid back again to Brittany, to Wales, Cornwall, and elsewhere. The records of the intercommunication between all these countries is very remarkable, and it points to the existence of common manners and habits between the people. The Cambrian missionaries in Armorica founded the sees of Quimper, St. Paul de Leon, Frequier, St. Briec, St. Malo, and perhaps Dol. St. Cadwan was born in Armorica, and ended his days at Bardsley. St. Malo was educated at St. Iltud's College, as were also Samson, Thelian, Briec, Fragan, and Frugdual. These all had missions in Brittany, as had Paul Aurelian and even St. David. Llandivence, Brittany, was founded by Guenole, Llanninnoch by Ninnoch or Non, St. David's mother. We hear of similar names which are alike in Wales and Brittany, such as Llancarvan and Llaniltud, and many more. St. Patern, born at Llanbadarn in Wales, went to Armorica, and was created Bishop of Vannes.

The evidence of the calling of a place after the name

of the church is common in Ireland; while, as if to prove that this was a regular and fixed custom in the early British Church, we find that at a later period, when its influence in the north of England had merged into the Anglo-Saxon Church, some sort of tradition of it is to be met with. The Danes in this district, on professing Christianity, called their churches by a place-name with the prefix "Kirk". The Saxons hardly ever copied the British Church in this respect; but as if to show that the custom was known to them, a few, and but a few, of the Saxon foundations have the suffix "minster" after a place-name, while in some parts of Hereford and Salop there are Saxon foundations following the older fashion, with "church" after the place-name. The British Church was founded without reference to that of papal Rome, and the evidences of its strength and ability to stand upon the inherent power of its own institution are of great interest; while the references in Bede and other histories, of the absence of intercourse between the two Churches, which he frequently states, may be referred to as further evidence of the existence, and the separate existence, of the British Church.

I have given a brief list of relics of Roman Christianity from all parts of Britain; but I have reserved to the conclusion reference to the actual remains of buildings. A few years ago this would have been a matter of impossibility. It is now capable of proof that at the little church of St. Martin, Canterbury, and also in that of St. Pancras, Canterbury, portions of the walling are of late Roman date. These are all but perfectly orientated. The early dedication of St. Pancras is lost, the present name having been given by Augustine shortly after his landing. It is expressly told us that he found St. Martin's so dedicated on his arrival; and we have thus in Britain evidence of the custom of dedication to a saint as existing anterior to the sixth century, apart from influence of the Church of Rome. In Wales, as in Scotland and Ireland, there are the remains of a few simple buildings whose appearance and position denote very high antiquity. Hen Dinbych (Old Denbigh) or Hen Eglwys (Old Church), as it is variously called, is a small rectangular building standing east and west, the foundations of which exist

within what is apparently a small Roman entrenchment. It forms so integral a portion of the enclosure as to warrant the belief that the banks were thrown up around it, as we see in the later Treen churches of the Isle of Man. At Brownslade, Mr. Laws has found traces of a small building traditionally known as a chapel, lying east and west, 16 feet long by 12 feet wide. It stood close to a cemetery where some of the interments were also orientated. The late Professor Rolleston pronounced these to be not older than the Roman period. A small cross-marked stone was also found.

Some relics of apparently Christian service have been found, believed by Dr. Rock to be spoons used for anointing in baptism. As if in support of his theory, these have been found close to springs or other "living" water, and in couples, one being perforated for the passage of the anointing oil. Be this as it may, the ornamentation of the articles is of Roman-British date, similar to that of the so called British bronze shields, and indicating the rudiments, and no more, of the Celtic style of ornament of a later age.

In conclusion. The consideration of what was passing on the Continent will show that there is nothing whatever unreasonable in the belief that Christianity was fairly widely spread in Britain at the end of the fifth century. The nominal conversion of Constantine the Great was followed by the growth of Christianity on its assuming the position of the state religion, and after that event its progress was rapid. By the fifth century the worship of the deities of antiquity had ceased in Gaul, on the opposite side of the Channel. Is it not more reasonable to believe that Britain kept pace with the progress of civilisation elsewhere than that it did not do so? From the conversion of Constantine to the departure of the Roman legions from Britain there was no less a period than about one hundred years; and we have no reason to believe that the civilisation of the country ceased then and there at that date. The incursion of the Saxon hordes was gradual, and it took one hundred and fifty years before the fall of Chester severed Wales from Elmett (the district around Leeds); longer still before the Northumberland districts were wrested from the Britons; still longer

before the victorious arms of Æthelstan caused the capture of the remainder of Devon and the whole of Cornwall.

NOTES.

For evidences of the intercommunication between Wales and the other districts named, see *Journal of the Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, iv, p. 229.

For further reference to some of the relics of early Christianity named, see "Pre-Augustine Christianity in Britain", by J. W. Grover, Esq., F.S.A., C.E. (*Journal*, as above, xxiii, p. 221.)

There is a notice of the Frampton pavement, also by Mr. Grover, in vol. xxviii, p. 217; while the same gentleman renders some curious notes on the early traditions on Welsh converts of St. Paul in the volume for 1878, p. 1.

The finding of the silver bracelets at Fifehead Neville is reported in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, vol. viii, New Series, p. 543.

The discovery of the Roman *bullæ* at Silchester is named in *Archæologia*, xlvi, p. 363.

The lists of Welsh words occur in various volumes of the *Archæologia Cambrensis*, in which there are also sketches of the inscribed stones. There are other plates of the latter in Professor Westwood's work now being issued.
