

Heroes of the Christian Faith.

S. ALBAN.

TO speak of S. Alban is to speak of one who lived in a very remote period of our history. It carries our thoughts back to those distant days when Britain was first emerging from the night of barbarism.

Strange days they were, as compared to our own. The art of cultivation and the refinements of life were scarcely known. Merely swamps and entangled forests prevailed from one end of this island to the other. Here and there a clearing had been made for a Roman camp; or a few British huts had been erected and called a town. Roman roads, too, were beginning to make travelling possible.

But, beyond this, Britain more resembled an Australian bush district, or some backwoods of America, where Nature is as yet undisturbed by the hand of man. Nor were the inhabitants less rude and barbarous.

Wild, uncouth creatures they were, with their bodies all tattooed blue and green with woad, with girdles round their waists, and metal chains upon their breasts. Not pleasant people to encounter as they went bounding through the brakes and briars, their long hair waving in the wind, and their javelins raised ready to hurl. Sometimes they might be seen riding in rude chariots, with sharp scythes affixed to the axles, to cut down any enemies who crossed their path. Their food was of the simplest, often nothing more than the wild berries of the wood. And as they were a roving, restless people, not of one nation, but of many tribes, a large portion of their time was spent in warring one against another.

The religion of these ancient Britons was Druidism—a dark, mysterious faith with some good tenets and many bad. We all know their reverence for the mistletoe and the oak. It was beneath the latter that the people were wont to assemble to listen to the teaching of the Druid, or to hear him pass

sentence on some criminal. For the Druids, with their long flowing beards and venerable aspect, possessed no small authority. They were judges as well as priests, magistrates as well as teachers. But their creed was barbarous and cruel—one of its terrible features being the sacrifice of human beings. Sometimes they made immense figures of plaited osiers, filled them with prisoners taken in war, and then set them on fire. Hideous indeed must have been such a spectacle, and horrible the sufferings of the victims!

You have heard of Stonehenge. Perhaps you have seen it, with those large massive stones standing in circles in the midst of Salisbury Plain. If so you have gazed upon what is probably a Druid temple, and on the altar stone used for the slaughter of human victims at sunrise.

No wonder Julius Cæsar, when he landed in Britain B.C. 55, was disgusted both with the people and their religion. He thought them rude and barbarians, sunk into the lowest state of degradation. He had little hope of raising their condition; but, to the long Roman rule, the Britons were undoubtedly much indebted. During the two or three hundred years that they were in this island, the Romans busily occupied themselves in teaching the conquered Britons the arts of civilised life. From the Romans the people learned how to build forts and walls, to organise forces, to train soldiers, and to fight. Under them they became an ordered community. The Romans did not, however, furnish them with a system of morality or a religion.

Britain was in some such condition as we have been describing when S. Alban was born. It was yet in a state of moral darkness—a darkness that was to be dispelled only by the true Light. There are many churches in England dedicated to S. Alban. And it is a happy circumstance that it is so. For in the first place the name brings before