

that his object was to avoid offending Jewish* prejudices. Wilfrid then proceeds to quote the traditional authority of S. S. Peter and Paul, in favour of the practice adopted by the Roman and other Churches, but without prejudice to the claim of antiquity for the Jewish method. It may be inferred, not unfairly, from this agreement between the British and Eastern Churches on the Easter question, that Christianity came to Britain, not from a Roman, or even an European, but from an Asiatic source; and, as Gildas asserts that there were Christians in the Island as early as the time of Tiberius, the foundation of the truth may safely be said to have been laid there in the Apostolic age. Possessing, as we do, no contemporary historian,† the notices of the Church at this period which have come down to us, are few, but quite in accordance with what has been said above. We find, for example, British Bishops independent of, and in a position of recognized equality with their foreign brethren, at the earliest Councils, as at Arles, A. D. 314, and Sardica, 347, and probably also at Nice. This fact implies the existence, at these dates, of regular ecclesiastical organization in Britain, and the recognition of her Church by others; and for both these results, a considerable time must have elapsed since Christianity was first planted in the Island. Again, Bede‡ records the tradition of a British King having sent, in the time of the Emperor M. Aurelius, to ask of the Bishop of Rome, admission into the Christian Church. The chronological difficulties involved show that no historical value can be attached to the story; but it may be held to imply the existence, at a very early period, of friendly relations between the British and foreign Churches. But, as might be expected from a people just emerging from barbarism, the fathers of the British Church had not learning sufficient to enable them to cope successfully with the subtleties of heretical teaching, so that we find them at the mercy of Pelagius, and obliged to invoke the aid of foreign divines, in order to refute his dogmas. Hence, we infer that the British Church had a true appreciation of her own position. She looked upon herself as the equal of her continental sisters in ecclesiastical status, and possessed independent representative rights of her own in Councils deliberative on the common affairs of Christendom; but, at the same time, she acknowledged with deference, and was not ashamed to avail herself of, the greater intellectual advantages which

* Bede, *Ecll. Hist.* iii, 25. "*Judaizante adhuc in multis ecclesia, nec subito valentibus apostolis omnem legis observantiam, quæ a Deo instituta est, abdicare.*"

† The scantiness of information respecting the early British Church is deplored by Bingham,—*Antiquities*, bk. ix, cap. 6, section 9.

‡ *Ecll. Hist.* i, 4.