

SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

The Christian religion was introduced into Scotland in the course of the first century. There are several old historians who mention that the Apostles preached in Britain; but there is nothing certain on record as to whether or not they penetrated into Scotland. The most generally received opinion is, that about the year 96, during the persecution carried on against the Christians by Domitian, the Roman emperor, some Christians fled into Scotland, and preached the gospel there, and brought the natives to the knowledge of Christ. These are believed to have been some of the disciples of the apostle John. This opinion is founded, in part, on a tradition which was handed down for several ages amongst the Scottish Christians themselves. Although John and his disciples labored principally in the East, it is not impossible that some of them might travel in the opposite direction, and be driven by persecution into Scotland.

The Scots, at this time, were attached to the idolatry of the Druids, which, at one time, prevailed extensively over the British Isles, as well as over a great part of Europe. The Druids were a sort of priests who performed their rites, and offered up their sacrifices in groves of oak trees, whence their name, (from *drus*, an oak.) The oak was considered by them as the emblem, or rather the residence of the Deity whom they worshipped. In some parts of Scotland, particularly in some of the islands, there remain to this day circles of huge stones or pillars which are supposed to have been erected by the Druids in their groves. Their religion certainly of great antiquity, is supposed to have been the same to which the Jews so frequently revolted in the days of Ahab, Manassah, &c.; and hence such allusions as that in Isaiah i. 29. "They shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired," &c. Their rites were often cruel and bloody, for we read that they sometimes offered up human sacrifices to the Deity. There were several circumstances which caused them to be highly respected, and to give them a most powerful hold on the minds of the people. While they taught the immortality of the soul, they also believed in and taught its transmigration, over which they professed to have the power. They were likewise skilled in several branches of natural philosophy, which enabled them to take advantage of many phenomena, which were the effects of natural causes, to work upon the superstition of the people, and to impress them with the idea that they were possessed of supernatural power. They belonged, moreover, to the best families; and in addition to their being often employed as legislators, they were the judges or arbitrators in all controversies, public and private, and whoever did not submit to their judgement was held as impious and accursed. These things require to be kept in mind, in order to enable us better to estimate the power that Christianity had

to contend with at its first introduction, as well as to appreciate the value of that triumph which the gospel obtained over the dark superstition, and the horrid rites of Paganism.

That the gospel was pretty generally received in Scotland before the close of the second century, is inferred from an incidental expression of Tertullian, who flourished about that time. In speaking of the propagation of the gospel, he includes amongst those countries which were then converted to the faith of Christ, even those parts of Britain which had proved inaccessible to the Roman arms. There can be no doubt as to whom this reference applies, for it is a well known fact that the whole island had at this time been subjected to the Roman arms, except the parts inhabited by the Scots,—the more southern and south eastern districts of what is now called Scotland, into which the Romans had made incursions, being then occupied by the Picts.

In the beginning of the third century, Christianity was publicly professed in Scotland. The first of the Scottish kings who embraced it was Donald I., who, in the year 203, was publicly and solemnly baptized, along with his Queen, and a number of his nobles. This circumstance shows that by whomsoever the gospel was first introduced into Scotland, it must have existed there for some considerable time previous to this period. The gospel does not, in general, lay hold, in the first instance, on the great, or the mighty, or the noble of this world. It most frequently works its way upwards from the humbler classes of society. This would especially be the case at that time in Scotland, where the Druid priests belonged to the highest and most powerful families in the land, and, as might naturally be expected, would give it their most decided opposition; and its being embraced by the King and the nobles, is a pretty correct index to the fact that at least a considerable mass of the people were already leavened by it. The bringing about of such a change as this must have been the work of some considerable time, and, although all other evidence were wanting, this circumstance of itself would prove that the date assigned for the first planting of Christianity in the country is pretty near the truth. And when we consider that, even in the time assigned, such a change was wrought upon a people, who, in common with many other European nations, were in a rude and barbarous state, and were, moreover, engaged in frequent and bloody wars, and who were held in subjection by an artful heathen priesthood, who wielded a powerful influence over their superstitious minds, the fact speaks not a little for the devoted zeal, and unwearied diligence of the first Christian teachers, by whom, under the Divine blessing, such a change was effected.

The interests of Christianity were zealously supported by Donald. He intended to have extirpated the heathen rites and ceremonies of the Druids, and to have planted Christianity in every part of his dominions. The design was favored by the nobility