

HOW BRITAIN BECAME CHRISTIAN.

THE TIME BEFORE AUGUSTIN.

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The exact time of the dawn of Christianity upon the British Islands, as, like the natural dawn, it travelled from the East, cannot be given. That "baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire" which came upon men first in Palestine, poured with the rapidity of actual conflagration along the shores of the Mediterranean, consuming paganism in Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, Spain, North Africa, those sites of ancient culture; but at the same time it scattered its sparks on the wind of a north-moving civilization over the forests of semi-barbaric Germania and across the waters to Britannia, Caledonia, and Hibernia, places which were about as important in the Roman mind as Siberia and Kamschatka are to us.

A tradition asserts that Joseph of Arimathea, driven away from his elegant estates by the persecution which followed the death of Jesus, came to Britain and founded Glastonbury Abbey as a memorial of his love for the Saviour. Until the time of the Puritans (whose incredulity prevented the priests from working miracle) there was shown to visitors at the Abbey a thorn-bush which flowered every Christmas day, and which had grown from the identical staff which Joseph used in his pilgrimage from the Holy Land. The hill upon which he rested the last day of his journey is still pointed out by the peasants. But we cannot root this story deeper in history than the days of the mediæval monks who adorned the world with their sacred romance as Walter Scott poured the glamour of agreeable fiction over his native hills.

A more probable story is that Lucius, an English king, hearing of the Christian doctrine, in the year 161 sent to Rome for information, and that the Christians there sent him a band of missionaries. But unfortunately we have no other evidence than the tradition itself that such a king as Lucius ever sat upon an English throne, though there were so many petty kings in early England that not finding his name among them is not a fatal objection to the story.

Neander, our best authority upon such matters, thinks that British Christianity came directly from the East by means of the extensive commerce in minerals which was carried on between these extremities of Europe. An argument for this view is found in the fact—which we shall show hereafter—that the Roman Church from the first met with opposition from our ancestors, who fought the ground inch by inch against the introduction of its peculiar forms of doctrine and worship.

The English Church is first definitely discerned as it rises through the lurid light of the great persecution which swept over the world in the time of Diocletian, A. D. 302. The present town of St. Albans is a memorial of Alban, the story of whose martyrdom has consecrated it. He was an educated pagan who had been brought to Rome, but met in its Christian doctrine. When the edict for the persecution reached Britain and was being executed by the Governor-General Constantius, the father of Constantine, Alban's natural compassion, sense of right, and English liberty-loving spirit led him to conceal in his house one of the fugitive Christians who was a preacher. He was so impressed with the transforming grace of this man's character that, notwithstanding the danger of death, he confessed conversion. Deeming that such a man as his guest would be more serviceable to God than himself, he exchanged clothing with him and then facilitated his escape. Alban was sentenced to death. His sincerity and courage at the block were so sublime that the executioner threw away his sword and stood as a convert at his side until a new officer cut them both down.

Such scenes as these electrified the young Christianity of Britain, and it thrived marvelously after its baptism of blood. Constantine the Great, the son of the very Roman Governor of Britain under whom this persecution was conducted, on coming to the throne endowed the original cathedral of St. Albans in memory of the proto-martyr of the English Church. A few years later the British Christians were sufficiently numerous to send several delegates to the First Great Council at Nicea. The next hundred years tell us nothing of them until they appear as a source of missionary

movements reaching out to Ireland, Scotland and even to the Northern nations of the continent.

About the year 400 A. D., in a little village between the present Dumbarton and Glasgow in Scotland, was born one Succoth, better known by the Latinized name he afterwards assumed, Patricius, in plain Irish, Patrick. The village still cherishes the honor of his birth, and instead of its original name Bownaven, has taken that of Kilpatrick. His father was a deacon in the almost aboriginal Scotch kirk of the place. When about sixteen years of age he was captured by certain pagan Scottish pirates, who made a raid along the Clyde and carried him away into the wilds of Ireland and there sold him to a chieftain. Six years he spent

as a sheep-tender on the mountains. He shows much of the spirit of the shepherd-boy David. His early affliction, his long hours of meditation among the mountains, rooted the principles of Christianity in his heart and developed a sweet and fragrant spirituality. Escaping from Ireland, he was afterwards captured again by a band of freebooters and sold into Gaul (France). Bought back by some Christian merchants, he determined to give his life as a missionary to the wild Irish people among whom he had spent so much of his youth, and to whom, notwithstanding his sufferings when with them, he was greatly attached. A Pauline "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel" to Ireland seems to have filled him, for he says of those friends who tried to dissuade him, "It was not in my own power, but it was God who conquered in me and withstood them all."

The legends say that he went to Rome for ordination. But the fact that such a journey for such a purpose would have been unnecessary, since, even according to the customs of the Roman Church, he could have been ordained at Rome, and the fact that the

unseen Master stood in strong but winsome contrast with the uncouth, semi-savage, independent, but tyrannical Irish lordships of the day. Such was his zeal in improving public vices that King Dermot, a diminutive Herod, made it advisable for monks to flee the country. He passed in a wicker-boat, with twelve companions, over to Scotland in the year 565.

He found there already the nucleus of a church, namely that of the Culdees—the word meaning, perhaps, "men of seclusion," in allusion to the fact that they were refugees who had been driven northward from England and the Scotch Lowlands, first by the persecution under Diocletian, and

afterward by the invasion of the wild pagans whose blood we inherit, the Angles and the Saxons. Colme gathered about him these men, and established a religious seat on the island of Iona, or Ioulnikill, off the west coast. Over this spot hangs to-day the romance of the ancient kings who are buried in this sacred ground, and whose ghosts still flit among the ruins of the churches and tombs, as Collins tells:

"Yet frequent now, at midnight's solemn hour,
The fitted moulds their yawning cells unfold,
And forth the monarchs stalk with sovereign power,
And on their twilight tombs aerial council hold."

But the religious influence of Iona keeps it perpetually green in the memory of Christian Great Britain.

The Romish writers call the institution at Iona a monastery. It was not in the Romish sense, as even Bede confesses, "It had an unusual constitution. The monks (so called by Romish writers) were often married, resided with their families, and went to the monastery simply for study and spiritual discipline, in order that they might be fitted for missionary work. It was a theological seminary. We find in the teaching of those who came from Iona no trace of the doctrine of Purgatory, Saint-worship, Mariolatry, Auricular Confession, the Mass, nor of any prelacy. The great works of Columba and his pupils was that of transcribing the sacred Scriptures into the dialect of the people—a strange occupation for a body of Romish priests to-day. And, as we shall see, Caldeism was one of the obstacles to the establishment of the Romish Church when it came. For thirty-five years Columba was permitted to labor for his adopted land. Iona sent its rays over Scotland and England, rekindling the knowledge of the truth where the Saxons had extinguished almost every trace of it, and, in conjunction with those of the Irish Church, penetrating Germany.

But as his brethren and disciples were laying Columba's body to rest at Iona there arrived in England the first great missionary of the Church of Rome, Augustin.—*Illus. Chris. Weekly.*



ST. MARTIN'S CROSS. IONA.



RUINS OF THE CATHEDRAL. I. NA.

early Irish Church taught by Patrick, like the early English Church, showed opposition to the claims of Rome when, a century or two later, the Pope sent their emissaries, suggests that this is one of the hundred fables invented by the monks of the Dark Ages, like that, for instance, that the Scotch boy was nephew to St. Martin of Tours, a Hungarian—the only real relation being that he lived in the same century.

At the age of forty-five he returned to Ireland. His method of work seems to have been very much that adopted by the founders of Methodism in reaching the undisciplined masses. He became a field-

preacher. At the least of a drum he gathered a concourse of people and told them the story of the cross. We need not assume the working of miracles, such as the driving out of snakes, to account for the multitude of converts. These legends belittle an otherwise grand life of missionary devotion. The gospel addressed to the hearts of men, under the commission of the Holy Spirit, is fully sufficient, as witness the work of the later field preachers. The Druidical religion, which appealed only to the fears and enjoined the practice of cruel rites, could not stand before the promises of the gospel as exemplified in such a life of devotion as Patricius lived. The petty chieftains or kings of the Irish seconded the apostle of a better civilization, and the Druid lords themselves, moved by the softer doctrine and grander spirit, wrote and sang the themes of Christian faith. Thus Patricius was enabled to found religious institutions, schools, brotherhoods. Doubtless in many respects they were not such as we would commend after the experience of 1,400 years. They partook of some of the superstitions of that age when over Europe was gathering the twilight which ended in the night of the Dark Ages. But Ireland would have been woefully worse, and the annals of human virtue vastly poorer, had Patrick never lived.

Ireland after Patrick's death became so famous for its religious houses that it was called the "Island of the Saints," and from it went forth not merely a missionary impetus, but many of the noblest men of that age. Most prominent among these was Columba, or Colme, an Irishman who became the patron of North Scotland, as Patrick the Scotchman had been the patron of the church in Ireland. This "Apostle of the Fews," as he is called, was an Irish prince, but from childhood his ambition was to show the kingship with which the spirit of Christ invests human character, rather than to carry the sword of petty royalty. A man pure, loving, obedient to

THE PHYSICAL NATURE AND CONDITION OF THE PUPIL.

1. As Sunday-school teachers, we work for eternity, and, therefore, give especial attention to the souls of our pupils.

2. In giving attention to our pupils, it becomes necessary for us to take heed to their bodies.

(1) There is a close relation between soul and body. They come into existence at the same time. They inter-act and are inter-dependent in many ways. The soul receives its knowledge principally through the body. The soul makes its knowledge and power a factor in the world through the body.

(2) There are certain conditions of body which affect the soul, such as health or disease, strength or feebleness, inherited tendencies. The nervous system is especially susceptible and influential.

3. Sunday-school teachers would do well to understand the general laws of physical and psychological inter-dependence, and trace their application to individual pupils.

4. Sunday-school teachers should seek, by acquaintance, visitation, and discreet inquiry to ascertain the physical nature and conditions of their pupils:

(1) With respect to their health.

(2) With respect to their nervous temperament.

(3) With respect to their diet.

(4) With respect to their habits of eating, sleeping, study, exercise, and recreation.

5. Sunday-school teachers may favorably influence the physical conditions of their pupils.

(1) By providing comfortable seats, securing good ventilation, and avoiding undue crowding at school.

(2) By suggestions as to habits, companionships, etc.

(3) By the distribution of good literature.

(4) By judicious warnings against evil tendencies toward dissipation. Growing boys need special attention from judicious, frank, and worthy teachers, in reference to dangers from the use of tobacco and stimulants, the cultivation of appetite, passions, the reading of sensational and obscene literature, remaining on the streets at night, and a proper respect for the advice of parents.—*Living Epistle.*