

Introduction of Christianity into England.

My dear readers, you know, that before the coming of our Saviour, there was only one nation on the earth which had any knowledge of the true God : it was among the Jews only that the one great Jehovah was worshipped. The people of all other nations then living (whom you find in Scripture called by the general name of the Gentiles,) were worshippers of idols and false gods. Many of these people were learned, and brave, and polite ; but on the subject of religion, St. Paul has truly said of them, " Professing themselves to be wise they become fools ;" and the poorest child in our days, who attends to what he is taught at church or chapel, or in a Sunday school, may learn more truth concerning the name and character of God than the richest and wisest of the Greeks and Romans, before the coming of Christ, could be acquainted with.

At that time no nation was in a more savage, or ignorant state, than the people of Great Britain ; the only clothing which they wore was made of the rough skins of beasts ; and they used to paint their bodies and faces with strange colours, to make themselves look terrible to their enemies in battle ; for they were almost constantly engaged in fighting with one another. They did not know how to plough the ground, or to provide themselves with any of those things which we call the comforts of life ; still less had they the comforts of true religion. As that blessed book the Bible was then unknown, they believed all the foolish and wicked things taught them by their priests ; who, being without religion, used the power they had over the people to a very bad purpose. They taught them to believe in a number of false gods, such as Tanaris the Thunderer, Hesus the god of Victory, and Andraste the goddess of Victory. They also pretended to foretell future events by the aid of these gods, and as their servants and favourites, they demanded gifts and offerings from the deceived people.

The priests took a very cruel method to secure the payment of these gifts ; they made the people at the beginning of winter extinguish all their fires in one day, and rekindle them again from the sacred fires of the Druids, which, as they said, would make the houses fortunate for the ensuing year. If any one refused to pay his yearly offering the Druids refused him a spark of fire ; and as none of his neighbours dared to relieve a person who had offended them, he might thus perish with cold or hunger. It was the common custom of the Druids to offer animals as sacrifices to their gods ; but they also on some occasions offered up the life of men in sacrifice to assist them in their pretended works of magic. So far were they from knowing that blessed truth which the Bible hath taught us—that the Almighty God is no respecter of persons and has as much compassion for the lowest as for the highest of his children on the earth.

About the year 55, (that is fifty-five years after the birth of Christ,) the Romans invaded England, and having made the savage people of this country submit to their power, they taught them by degrees many useful arts but they could not teach them true religion, for of that they were themselves still ignorant ; yet these heathen conquerors may be said to have prepared the way for christianity in England, by putting down the religion of the Druids. This they did, not from any dislike to idolatry, for when they first landed in this country they shewed themselves willing to worship the false gods of Britons, along with their own ; but finding that the Druids excited the people to revolt against them, they resolved to destroy their power. Accordingly, a Roman general, at the head of his troops, pursued the Druids and their followers to the Isle of Anglesea, which was the chief seat of their religion, and having cut down their sacred groves, (the dark woods in which they used to practice their secret rites,) and having killed a number of the priests themselves, the