



THE
Early Ecclesiastical
HISTORY OF DEWSBURY,

IN THE WEST-RIDING OF THE COUNTY OF YORK :

INCLUDING A SKETCH OF THE

INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY INTO NORTHUMBRIA.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED, WITH NOTES,

DR. WHITAKER'S ACCOUNT OF DEWSBURY,

FROM HIS "LOIDIS AND ELMETE;"

AND HIS

DISSERTATION ON THE 'ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF DOMESTIC
ARCHITECTURE:

FROM HIS "HISTORY OF WHALLEY:"

AND

AN ACCOUNT OF THE SAVILE FAMILY OF LUPSET, THORNHILL,
AND HOWLEY.

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MDCCCLIX.

P R E F A C E.

A GREAT part of the following Work—p. 1 to p. 111, chap. i. to xviii. inclusive, and without any material alteration—was read by the Author before the Dewsbury Mechanics' Institution, in the Church of England School Room there, on the evenings of January 18th and February 15th, 1859, in the form of Lectures. On the latter of those evenings, as is stated in a printed letter by one who was present, "it was the unanimously expressed wish of the Lecturer's audience, that he should give to the Public in a printed form, the result of his labour and research."

With that wish the Lecturer promised to comply; and the Public have now the opportunity of perusing for themselves, and at leisure, a great deal of matter which the Author has collected from time to time; and he cannot help thinking that the *facts* are worth preserving for the inhabitants of the neighbourhood to which they relate.

It was hoped that the book would have been in the hands of the reader at an earlier period, and much nearer the time when the lectures were delivered; but the multifarious engagements of the Printer, which were altogether unforeseen by the Author, have caused a delay which is to be regretted, but for which the latter is in no respect responsible.

He was not aware, when he read his first lecture, and made a few remarks as to the improbability of any extensive propaga-

tion of Christianity in so remote a province of the Roman empire as Britain, during the period that the Romans occupied this Island, that he was in fact treading on a mine: little did he think that he was laying himself open to the caution given by Horace—

“Periculosæ plenum opus aleæ
Tractas; et incedis per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso.”

But it seems that in the present day there is a sort of suppressed controversy raging (if this be not a contradiction in terms) between the Roman Catholics on the one side, and certain restless individuals with more zeal than discretion, and more enthusiasm than reflection and good sense, on the other side, as to which party—there really being neither of such parties in the early ages of the Church—shall have the credit or the honor of having first introduced Christianity into these Islands.

Now, into this controversy the Author stated, in his second lecture, that he will not enter, and that he will be no party to it: indeed he was not then aware of its existence, or he would have taken care to steer clear of it altogether. All he knew then, and still knows, is, that there is no historical evidence or proof worthy of notice that the Christian religion had made any real footing in Britain before the coming of Augustin; or, at all events, if any Christians had found their way here (which is not improbable), all traces of their footsteps were wiped out before Augustin landed in the Isle of Thanet. No doubt there is a tradition that a species of Christianity, more or less pure and more or less extensively diffused, prevailed in England, and perhaps in Scotland, before his coming;—the author quite concedes this: and no doubt it would be of a purer kind the nearer we approach the fountain, and before the mass of corruptions crept in which disfigured it in later ages.

But there is great obscurity in the earlier annals of the primitive Roman Church itself, which has been increased by the attempt to create a history where, in fact, no authentic materials of history existed: and if we are so much in the dark as to what occurred at Rome in the very early ages of the Church, is it likely that we should be better informed respecting the spread of the religion in so remote a province as Britain?

There is evidence—*some* evidence, certainly—that Christianity, or the name of CHRIST, *may* have found its way here before the Romans withdrew; but after that, it is quite clear that the Christianity (if any) which may have been introduced into Britain in so early an age, was driven into the fastnesses of Wales, or peradventure found shelter in the obscure corner of Iona. So that when Augustin made his appearance, he found a clear coast, and nothing to contend against save the ancient superstitions of the native Britons, or the imported Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon impurities.

A great deal has been attempted to be made of the missionary labours of St. Columba in Iona and in Scotland; as though he had really converted and brought over the whole of the North of Britain, including Northumbria, to a real Christianity, *before* the coming of Augustin and his followers.

Now let us, if possible, and dispassionately, endeavour to import a little common sense into this history—for *the facts* are pretty well ascertained; and in order to do so, let us attend to the dates.

Beyond all doubt, Augustin landed in Kent A.D. 596; and Paulinus performed his labours in Northumbria from A.D. 625 to about 633.

Now, the best authenticated account of St. Columba is this: In the year 563, Colum M'Felim M'Fergus (latinised Columba), a man of high descent and a priest, left Ireland in a fit of dis-

pleasure, and after having involved it in three wars. It is asserted by one of his biographers, that in the year 544, he, being a prince of the royal family, was offered the crown of Ireland; and that Dermot M'Cerbal, his competitor, succeeded only because our holy Abbot preferred the cowl to the diadem. He landed on the south end of Iona in 563. This was the man who, according to his history, *Christianised* all Scotland, the Northumbrian kingdom, Iceland, &c., and founded hundreds of churches, abbeys, and schools: but Iona always remained his head-quarters.

Now as to this, excepting in Lindisfarne or the Holy Island, and Iona, there seems no *authentic* history of the missionary doings of this saint. Certain it is, beyond all reasonable doubt, that Paulinus found Northumbria a desert in a religious point of view only sixty years after the supposed labours of St. Columba are said to have happened, and no traces of any Churches, Abbeys, or Schools were then existing.

The followers of Columba were expelled [Iona] by the Danes in the year 807.

In the 12th century, two orders of monks, the Benedictines, and the Augustines, established themselves in that Island, and flourished there, till the general abolition of monasteries at the Reformation, when it became the property of the noble family of Argyle, to whom it now belongs.

I have no doubt whatever that the extensive ruins which still remain to be seen in Iona, are the work of the Benedictines and religious orders of the 13th century, and that not a trace remains of any *building* of so early a date as the time of Columba; though one Cross, still to be seen there, may be, and probably is, of that early date to which long tradition has assigned it. (See APPENDIX, p. 229.) Indeed I think I shall make this tolerably clear in the course of the following pages.

If we know anything of the sect from which Columba sprung, we must suppose him to have been one of those monkish priests, remarkable, no doubt, for their religious exercises of preaching and praying, who were called by way of eminence *cultores Dei*, which by degrees lapsed into the name of *Culdee*: but whatever their particular tenets may have been, they were too soon driven away and extirpated, to have been able to effect any lasting improvement or influence on the rude state of society in that remote age, or on the hearts of those whom they sought to benefit by their precepts and example.

Now I must desire my readers to apply the above facts, and ask themselves what was likely to be the nature and worth of that Christianity which, introducing itself among an illiterate and dark-minded peasantry, certainly not before A.D. 563, had so entirely disappeared from Northumbria in A.D. 625, that Paulinus discovered no traces of its existence—except possibly in Lindisfarne—for he never seems to have penetrated so far as the remote Iona. As to what were its doctrines, and whence derived, we have little or no account; and a man of good sense and judgment will probably come to the conclusion that little or no permanent effects or civilising influence can have resulted to a nation from so sudden and transient an inroad of even well-intentioned religious zeal.

Indeed, the deplorable state of weakness and barbarism into which the Britons lapsed after the final desertion of their country by the Romans, is the true cause of that total revolution in language, laws, manners, and property, which took place after the Saxon Conquest: and if Christianity had ever possessed a footing during the Roman possession of Britain, it is clear that it must have all but disappeared before the coming of the missionaries sent by Gregory: so that from the middle of the 5th down to nearly the close of the 6th century, the native inhabit-

ants are accused by Gildas and by Bede of having lost not only the power of religion, but even its external form; and of having abolished, except in a few instances, the order of priesthood, and the distinctions of civil society.—*Bede*, l. i., c. 22; *Gildas de excidio Brit.*, s. xxii.

It is quite clear, therefore, that the parties to this controversy, whatever its merits, are fighting with a shadow, and beating the air; and the Author will not further weary the patience of his readers by pursuing so unprofitable a contention.

Nevertheless, perhaps it is only fair to give the version of those who contend for a Christian Church in Britain, even so early as the age of the Apostles; and I shall therefore compress into a note what I have collected as being the argument of those who would have us believe this state of the case. It may excite a smile in some readers, while at the same time it may interest the curious or candid inquirer.*

* That Christianity was early and widely diffused, is a fact established upon the clearest and most satisfactory evidence: but the want of authentic records renders it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to trace its progress beyond the limits assigned by the Scripture history to the labours of the Apostles. If the testimony of Tertullian is to be received—and it was given in such circumstances as appear to entitle it to credit—the name of CHRIST was known and revered in Britain before the conclusion of the 2nd century, and His authority acknowledged in places into which the Roman arms had not penetrated. [*Tertull: adv. Judæos*, c. vii.] There are, indeed, several facts recorded by St. Luke, in his invaluable history of the first planters of Christianity, and many intimations to be found in the Epistles of St. Paul, which may incline us to regard as something more than mere oratorical declamation, the assertion of this ancient Christian apologist, that although Christians were but of yesterday, they had filled every part of the Roman empire, and were to be found in their cities and in their islands, in their palaces and in their camps. It is therefore not incredible that in the legions which came into Britain in the reign of Claudius,—or, if that should be thought too early, in those which were under the command of Agricola,—there were Christian believers whose zeal would lead them to employ such means and opportunities as might present themselves, of imparting the Divine Truth, in the possession of which they themselves rejoiced, to the natives, whom it was the policy of the conquerors to instruct and civilize. Some, indeed, have contended for a much earlier introduction of the Gospel

In a curious old work on the *Chronology of the Actions of the Britons, Romans, &c., and the Lives and Constitutions of the Bishops of all our Sees*, vol. vi., containing "Yorkshire," published in

into this Island, and have claimed for the British Church the honour of having been founded by one of the first disciples of CHRIST, or even by an Apostle. But all that has been advanced in support of this claim, in favour of Joseph of Arimathea, of St. Simon Zelotes, of St. James the Elder, of St. Peter, or of St. Paul, is either inconsistent with undoubted History, or dependent on traditions to which no credit is due, or founded on evidence of a very doubtful and unsatisfactory nature. Upon no firmer grounds rests the well-known story of the conversion of the British King Lucius, and of his embassy to the Bishop of Rome.

If Roman soldiers, or any who might be permitted to accompany them, were instrumental in bringing the knowledge of the Gospel into Britain, York, and the province to which it belonged, could not fail to partake of the benefits of their pious zeal.^(a) The sixth legion was stationed at York in the reign of Antoninus Pius, before the middle of the 2nd century; and at the beginning of the third century, the Emperor Septimius Severus had established in that city the imperial residence. That Emperor, indeed, though at first favourable to the Christians, became a violent persecutor, and caused many of them to be put to death: yet, as in other places, and under more severe opposition, the religion of CHRIST flourished, so in Britain "the Word of God so grew and prevailed," that in the persecution raised by Diocletian at the instigation of his son-in-law Maximianus Galerius, a considerable number of British Christians, it is said, obtained the crown of Martyrdom. The imperial edicts which Constantius Chlorus, then in command at York, received, and which, though not a Christian, he reluctantly enforced, enjoined the destruction of Christian Churches, as well as of those who worshipped in them: and thence we may justly infer, that Christianity had at that period gained a firm and extensive establishment in the Island.^(b) Indeed, it may be sufficient to refer the mere general reader to the 16th chapter of Gibbon, in order to shew how almost universally the Christian religion had spread throughout the legions and the provinces of the empire of Rome at the time of Diocletian's persecution. The persecution ceased on Constantius being proclaimed emperor; and under his son, Constantine, a professed Christian,^(c) and probably a native of York, the Church no doubt flourished in Britain: and as the city of York had long been the seat of the Roman power, it would doubtless take its firmest and deepest root there and in the neighbouring province.

(a) Soldiers, at the present day, are not exactly the class from whom we select our Missionaries: at the same time, no doubt, in our Indian army some of the superior officers, by their precepts and example, have done something towards spreading a knowledge at least of the existence of the Christian religion among the tribes of India, which hereafter, we may hope, will bear fruit,—or at least clear the way for a better faith.

(b) But see p. 10 and 11, *post*, c. i.

(c) Constantine reserved for his death-bed a complete confession of the Christian Faith, and it is too much the fashion to rank him amongst the active agents of the Christian cause during his life; whereas an accurate examination of his actions would lead an impartial observer of history to a different conclusion.

the Savoy, in the year 1731, which lately fell into my hands, (namely, so very lately as 18th May, 1859), I read as follows:—
 “When this Conversion of England [to the Christian faith] happened, we are not certain; yet all historians agree that it was before the year of CHRIST 200; and that the Church thus constituted enjoyed peace till the times of Dioclesian: but we have but a small account [small indeed!] of the Bishops of this See [York], for we find only

“St. Sampson, the first Archbishop, placed in it by King Lucius; but Bishop Godwin thinks it not credible, because it was not so long ago used to impose either Hebrew or Saints’ names in this nation: however, our Historians generally name him for the first Archbishop, and

“Taurinus next to him. . . . After him,

“Pyranus *is said* to have been preferred to this See by the famous King Arthur: but how long every one of these sat, and whether there were not some vacancies, we can’t discover; but it seems probable there must have been some such thing, because, &c.

“Tadiacus, the last Archbishop of York before the Restitution of the Christian Church here by Paulinus, fled into Wales with their Clergy, being forced thereto by the settlement of the heathen Saxons, who having conquered the nation, would not bear with the Christians. This was done anno 553.”

Now this is a very fair specimen of the *History* of this pre-Gregorian Church of England. We had always been accustomed to consider the *History* of King Lucius and King Arthur somewhat fabulous and apocryphal: but we must now leave the reader to find his way through *History* of this sort, and to draw his own conclusions. The Author will not involve himself in such useless and unmeaning controversy.

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