

CHAPTER 6

THE COMING OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

(1) EUSEBIUS, A.D. 260–340, Bishop of Caesarea, and Father of Ecclesiastical History, wrote: “The apostles passed beyond the ocean to the Isles called the Britannic Isles” (*De Demonstratione Evangelii*, Lib. iii). It is worthy of note that Eusebius was at the Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325, where he took a leading part. There he must have met the British bishops.

(2) ST. HILARY OF POITIERS, A.D. 300–367, wrote: “Afterwards the Apostles built several tabernacles, and through all the parts of the earth wherever it was possible to go; even in the Isles of the Ocean they built several habitations for God. (Tract. in XIV. Psalm 8. Haddan and Stubbs, Vol. 1, p. 5.) The most ancient French bishoprics claimed to have been founded by the companions of St. Joseph (*vide* Rabanus, p. 90).

(3) GILDAS THE WISE, ALBANICUS,¹ A.D. 425–512, who was driven by Saxon pirates from the island of Steepholme, near the modern Weston-super-Mare, and took refuge in Glastonbury Abbey, and became a monk there, till he got permission to resume his anchorite life in an adjacent cell, where he founded a little oratory to the Undivided and Blessed Trinity on the site of what is undoubtedly Street parish church, which has a double dedication to the Holy

¹ Alford (*Fides Regia Britannica*, p. 68) under Anno 73 gives three Gildases: (1) Gildas Cambrius who flourished A.D. 73, and is said to have translated Brutus’s prayer to Diana into Latin; (2) St. Gildas (the Wise) Albanicus (A.D. 425–512, here quoted); and (3) Gildas Badonicus (A.D. 516–570). *Vide* later, pp. 97, 98 n.

Trinity and St. Gildas (the latter almost forgotten). He says, "Christ, the True Sun, afforded His light, the knowledge of His precepts, to our island in the last year, *as we know*, of Tiberius Caesar" (*De excidio Britanniae*, Sec. 8, p. 25). *This was in A.D. 37, four years after the crucifixion.* This is the date of the persecution of the Church by Saul of Tarsus, when "they were all scattered abroad except the Apostles", and it fits in with the story of St. Joseph and others being put in a boat. The "as we know" has a special significance arising from one steeped in the lore of Glastonbury. Eusebius (*Ecc. Hist.*, Bk. 2. Cap. 2 and 3) confirms the fact of Tiberius's protection of the Church. Thus Christianity spread rapidly.

(4) ST. AUGUSTINE, writing A.D. 600 to Pope Gregory,² shows how the belief of the founding of the Church of St. Mary at Glastonbury by the Disciples of Christ had grown into something more: "In the western confines of Britain there is a certain royal island of large extent, surrounded by water, abounding in all the beauties of nature and necessities of life. In it *the first neophytes of Catholic Law*, God beforehand acquainting them, found a Church constructed by no human art, but by the Hands of Christ Himself, for the salvation of His people. The Almighty has made it manifest by many miracles and mysterious visitations that He continues to watch over it as sacred to Himself, and to Mary, the Mother of God." This is remarkable testimony as to the apostolic origin of a church that would have nothing to do with the same St. Augustine, who replied to him through Dianothus, its bishop, who was also Abbot of Bangor, "Be it known and declared that we all, individually and collectively, are in all humility

²*Epistolae ad Gregorium Papam.* The Saxon Priest B. quotes it in his very early life of St. Dunstan about A.D. 1000, of which William of Malmesbury saw a copy at Glastonbury. See also Spelman's *Concilia*, pp. 5, 108, 109.

prepared to defer to the Church of God, and to the Bishop of Rome, and to every sincere and godly Christian, so far as to love every one according to his degree, in perfect charity, and to assist them all by word and in deed in becoming the children of God. But as for any other obedience, we know of none that he whom you term Pope, or Bishop of Bishops, can demand. The deference we have mentioned we are ready to pay to him as to every other Christian, but in all other respects our obedience is due to the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Caerlon, who is alone under God our ruler to keep us right in the way of salvation.³

St. Augustine's testimony is all the more wonderful since Bede, A.D. 740, stated: "The Britons are contrary to the whole Roman world, and enemies to the Roman customs, not only in their Mass, but in their tonsure.⁴ . . . The Britons, though they for the most part as a nation hate and oppose the English nation, and wrongfully and from wicked lewdness set themselves against the appointed custom of the whole Catholic Church," etc. (Bede, Bk. 2, C. 23). Bede also complained, writing A.D. 715, that the Britons had refused to convert the English; and that when the latter were converted and adopted Roman customs, "the Britons still persist in their errors, halting and turning aside from the true path, expose their head without a

³ Spelman's *Concilia*, pp. 108, 109; Haddan and Stubbs, Vol. 1, p. 122. Haddan and Stubbs take this reply from Spelman. Spelman got it from a MS. of Mr. Peter Mostyn who thought it to be ancient, or a copy of an ancient one. Two copies exist: (1) Cotton MSS., Cleop., E.1; (2) Claud A.VIII, 76.

⁴ The Romans shaved the top of their head only, and let the hair grow round. The Celts shaved the whole front of the head, and left the hair at the back. Easterns shaved the whole head. Theodore of Tarsus was not allowed to be ordained Bishop, and was sent to Britain in A.D. 668, till his hair had grown and Roman tonsure had been performed.

crown, and keep the feast of Christ apart from the fellowship of the Church of Christ"⁵ (Bede, Bk. V, C. 22-23). In view of this antagonism St. Augustine's testimony is wonderful.

(5) It may be pardonable here to enumerate the points on which the British Church differed from the Roman, differences quite sufficient to suggest a differing origin. Professor Lumby in his *History of the Creeds*, Camb., 1873, says on this subject: "The oriental character of some of the observances of the early British Church points directly to this conclusion"—viz., that when Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in 177 (himself an Eastern Churchman, pupil of St. Polycarp, brought up at the feet of St. John), spoke of the Churches of the Kelts, he was including the Church in Britain. The British Church was part of the Gallican Church, which derived from the East, and not from Rome. Haddan and Stubbs enumerate seven differences (Vol. L, Appendix D, pp. 152-155) as follows:

(a) *Date of Easter*. This difference stresses independence rather than different origin. From the Council of Nicea, A.D. 315, till at any rate 455, they used the same cycle. In 458 Rome changed. In 597 St. Augustine found the Britons using the old cycle.

(b) *Baptism*. Probably one immersion; not three. Both Churches had Chrism and Confirmation. St. Patrick in his letter to Coroticus mentions that he had undergone both.

(c) *Tonsure* different from Greek and Roman. The British tonsure was Druidical, which causes speculation as to whether Druidical monasteries came over wholesale to Christianity about A.D. 167. The Bretons also kept it. A Coly of Saxons at Bayeux had before 590 copied it from

⁵ Abbot Ceolfrid, in his letter to King Naiton of the Picts, A.D. 710 (Bede's *Eccl. Hist.*) urges conformity to Roman custom in the tonsure, but admits that "the Catholic Church does not use one and the same form of tonsure throughout the world".

the Bretons. The Council of Toledo IV, A.D. 633 condemned it.

(d) *Mass*. Peculiar ritual. A multiplicity of Collects.

(e) *Ordination*. Peculiar ritual. Certain Lections taken from a British Latin version. The anointing of the hands of deacons; the anointing of heads of priests and bishops, of the bishops twice; prayer at the giving of the stole to the deacons; delivering of the Gospel to deacons; *investing* the priest with the stole.

(f) *Bishops*. The consecration of bishops by *a single bishop*, as in the cases of Dubricius and Teilo, and in the later Irish Church.

(g) *Churches and Monasteries*. A peculiar way of consecrating.

(6) CHARTERS. I will not press the point of every charter of all the early kings, British or Saxon (including those of Ina and Edgar) calling Glastonbury the first church in the kingdom, and cradle of Christ's religion in Britain, founded by Christ's disciples, as the genuineness of some at least of the charters is suspect. But above has been quoted early Roman, Eastern and British authority.

(7) NICEPHORUS, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Byzantine historian, A.D. 758-820. Michael Alford the Jesuit in his *Fides Regia Britannica* under Anno Christ. 47, Peter 3, Caractaci Regis, 3, Claudii, Imp. 5, wrote: "And speaking carefully there can scarcely be a doubt that one of the Apostles preached there [Britain] if there should be any hesitation in naming the Apostle" (later he definitely names St. Simon Zelotes). Alford then quotes Nicephorus, speaking of the Dispersion of the Apostles: "One reached Egypt and Libya, another reached the extreme regions of the Ocean, and the British Isles" (Nicephorus, Lib. 1, cap. 1).

(8) FLAVIUS DEXTER. Cressy in his *Church History of Brittany* (cap. V) quotes him thus: "In the one and fortieth

year of Christ St. James returning out of Spain visited Gaule, Brittany [Britain] and the Towns of the Venetians where he preached the Gospel, and so came back to Jerusalem to consult with the Blessed Virgin, and St. Peter about matters of very great weight and importance." The statement that St. James, great among the Apostles as first Bishop of Jerusalem, and kinsman of Our Lord, visited Britain five years after the earliest date given for St. Joseph's coming, is of interest. In the year named we know from Acts XI that St. Peter was in Jerusalem contending for the reception of Gentiles into the Church, as he was five years later, when St. James presided there at the first Church Council, which dealt with the same subject. It must be remembered that at four Church Councils it was held that St. Joseph founded the British Church immediately after the Passing of Christ, before St. James founded the Spanish.

(9) RABANUS. Maurus, Archbishop of Mayence, A.D. 776-856. *Life of St. Mary Magdelene*. This claims in the Prologue to be "according to the accounts that our fathers have left us in their writings".

It is highly important to consider the stream of saints to the West so learnedly set forth in Taylor's *Coming of the Saints*. Rabanus tells us French and Spanish traditions. Both nations tell of the occupants of the boat without oars and without sails travelling down the Mediterranean to Marseilles; amongst others, the three Marys—St. Mary Magdalen, Mary wife of Cleophas or Alphaeus, and Mary Salome wife of Zebedee and mother of St. James and St. John—Martha, Lazarus, Maximin, Trophinnus, Eutropius, Marcella the maid who was with Martha at her death, Sara the black woman, and Joseph of Arimathea (who passed on). There are traces of these all along the Rhone Valley right up to the coast of Brittany at Morlaix. Rabanus tells us Trophinnus became the first Bishop of

Arles, Eutropius of Aquitaine. It is interesting that the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, under Arles, says that the earliest Jewish settlers at Arles came in a boat which had been deserted by its captain. (Hence, probably, no sails, no oars.) Drennalus, first Bishop of Treguier and a disciple of St. Joseph, preached the Gospel at Morlaix. Maximain and St. Mary Magdalen went to Aix, where Mary lived and died, and of which Maximain became first Bishop. Parmenas, St. Martha and Marcella went to Avignon and Arles, and finally Martha settled and died at Tarascon, and so on. The whole country breathes memories of these saints. St. Joseph did not remain there. St. Lazarus, said to have been first Bishop of Cyprus before the voyage in the boat, settled and died at Marseilles, where his 1st-century church is shown today. This book of Rabanus was in the catalogue of Glastonbury Abbey books in A.D. 1248, so doubtless William of Malmesbury saw it.

(10) FASTES. *Episcoporum* (Vol. ii, 104). These give the 10th-century Aquitaine tradition that St. Martial and his father and mother, Marcellus and Elizabeth, St. Zacchaeus and St. Joseph of Arimathea arrived at Limoges in the 1st century. St. Joseph does not remain. Rabanus's evidence quoted above that St. Joseph preached at Morlaix on the coast of Brittany opposite Britain, and the evidence of the *Fastes Episcoporum* that he also preached at Limoges and did not remain, and all the above French church evidence fits in with Cardinal Baronius's evidence about the journey by boat of St. Joseph and his companions to Marseilles, and to William of Malmesbury's evidence that St. Joseph was sent from France by St. Philip to Britain.