

The Welsh Baptists

Taken from the book entitled, "History of the Welsh Baptists," 1835

The Welsh, properly called Cumry, the inhabitants of the Principality of Wales, are generally believed to be the descendants of Gomer, the eldest son of Japheth, who was the eldest son of Noah. The general opinion is, that they landed on the Isle of Britain from France, about three hundred years after the flood.

About eleven hundred years before the Christian era, Brutus and his men emigrated from Troy in Asia, and were cordially received by the Welsh. They soon became one people and spake the same language, which was the Gomeraeg, or Welsh; hence the Welsh people are sometimes called the Ancient Britons.

About four hundred years before Christ, other emigrants came from Spain, and were permitted by Gwrgan, the Welsh king, to settle in Ireland, among the Ancient Britons, who were in that country already. They, also, soon became one people, but have not retained either the Welsh or the Spanish language; for the Irish language, to this day, is a mixture of both.

By what means the Christian religion was first introduced into Britain, is a matter which has often engaged the pens of historians, but whose records do not always agree. The tradition that Joseph of Arimathea was the first who preached the gospel in Britain, at a place called Glastonbury, the wicker chapel built for him by the Ancient Britons, and his walking stick growing to a plum tree, might be worthy of the attention of those who can believe any thing. However, we are willing for those who believe that the good man who buried our blessed Redeemer also proclaimed salvation in his name to our forefathers, to enjoy their own opinion. That the apostle Paul also preached the gospel to the ancient Britons, is very probable from the testimony of Theodoret and Jerome; but that he was the first that introduced the gospel to this island cannot be admitted; for he was a prisoner in Rome at the time the good news of salvation through the blood of Christ reached this region. That the Apostle Paul had great encouragement to visit this country afterwards, will not be denied. When we consider the particular inducement he might have from Pomponia, Grecina, and Claudia Ruffina, the saints in Cesar's household; the former the wife of Aulus Plautius, the first Roman governor in Britain, and the latter a Briton born, the daughter of Caractacus the Welsh king, whose husband was Pudence, a believer in Christ.

In this capital, persons of different ranks, employments, and offices, might be found: ambassadors, captive princes, merchants, and mechanics. Many of those would be prompted by curiosity to make inquiries concerning Paul, a noted prisoner at Rome, famed, even before his arrival, as an abetter of a new religion, the principal teacher and propagator of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, who was condemned by Pilate to the death of the cross. As the apostle was permitted to live in his own hired house, guarded by a soldier, he was at liberty to receive all who applied to him for information and instruction; and hereby the gracious purpose of Divine Providence in spreading Christianity through the world was promoted. How pleasing it is to carry our views back into those remote ages, and imagine we see the first missionaries and their disciples, assembled under the shade of the wide-spreading oak, instructing the people in the

knowledge of the true God and of Jesus Christ the Savior of mankind; disputing with the Druids, confuting their absurd notions, their gross conceptions, their confused and complex mythology.

About fifty years before the birth of our Savior, the Romans invaded the British Isle, in the reign of the Welsh king, Cassibellan; but having failed, in consequence of other and more important wars, to conquer the Welsh nation, made peace with them, and dwelt among them many years. During that period many of the Welsh soldiers joined the Roman army, and many families from Wales visited Rome; among whom there was a certain woman of the name of Claudia, who was married to a man named Pudence. At the same time, Paul was sent a prisoner to Rome, and preached there in his own hired house, for the space of two years, about the year of our Lord 63. Pudence and Claudia his wife, who belonged to Cesar's household, under the blessing of God on Paul's preaching, were brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and made a profession of the Christian religion. These, together with other Welshmen, among the Roman soldiers, who had tasted that the Lord was gracious, exerted themselves on the behalf of their countrymen in Wales, who were at that time vile idolaters.

Whether any of the apostles ever preached in Britain cannot be proved, and though it is generally believed that Joseph of Arimathea was the first that preached the gospel in that part of the world, we must confess that we are not positive on that subject. The fact, we believe, is this: the Welsh lady, Claudia, and others, who were converted under Paul's ministry in Rome, carried the precious seed with them, and scattered it on the hills and valleys of Wales; and since that time, many thousands have reaped a most glorious harvest. They told their countrymen around, what a dear Savior they had found; they pointed to his redeeming blood, as the only way whereby they might come to God.

The Welsh can truly say: if by the transgression of a woman sin came into the world, it was through the instrumentality of a woman, even painted Claudia, that the glorious news of the gospel reached their ears, and they felt it to be mighty through God, to pull down the strong holds of darkness.

How rapidly did the mighty gospel of Christ fly abroad! The very year 63, when Paul, a prisoner, was preaching to a few individuals, in his own hired house in Rome, the seed sowed there is growing in the Isle of Britain. We have nothing of importance to communicate respecting the Welsh Baptists, from this period to the year 180, when two ministers by the names of Faganus and Damicanus, who were born in Wales, but were born again in Rome, and there becoming eminent ministers of the gospel, were sent from Rome to assist their brethren in Wales.

In the same year, Lucius, the Welsh king, and the first king in the world who embraced the Christian religion, was baptized.

Faganus and Damicanus were two faithful witnesses, bearing testimony to the truth, and were remarkably successful in winning souls to Christ. Through their instrumentality, the light of the gospel burst forth from the Isle of Anglesea to the Isle of Thanet, like the sun in the morning after the dark night of Druidism; the glorious light of the gospel dispelled the shades of ignorance and error, in which the seed of Gomer had been enveloped from generation to generation. Fired with a sacred zeal for the cause of Christ, and the welfare of immortal souls,

our Welsh apostles followed the superstitions and cruelties of paganism to their most secret chambers, and exposed them in their native deformity.

It is true they had not to stretch on the rack, neither had they to endure the flames; yet they had to encounter with pagan ignorance, and much opposition from Beelzebub the prince of darkness. Though the gospel had been preached in the island since the year 63; yet, as God had not departed from his general way of disseminating his truth among the children of men, by beginning with small things in order to obtain great things, hitherto it had been the day of small things with our forefathers, the inhabitants of the ends of the earth. But now Zion's tent was enlarged, and the curtain of her habitation stretched forth; she broke forth on the right hand and on the left; kings became nursing fathers and queens nursing mothers. Behold King Lucius, not only embracing the religion of Christ himself, but finding the means of propagating the gospel very inadequate, sending a most earnest request to Eleutherus, for additional help. Here the Macedonian cry vibrated from the Welsh throne at Carludd, as well as from the Welsh cabin at the foot of Caderidris or Plimlimon.

About the year 300, the Welsh Baptists suffered most terrible and bloody persecution, which was the tenth pagan persecution under the reign of Dioclesian. Alban had the pain, and honor, to be the first martyr on the British shore. Next to him, were Aaron and Julius, renowned men, who lived at Carleon, South Wales. The number of persons, meeting-houses, and books, that were burnt at that time, is too horrid to relate; but, however, they were not all consumed by the flames. Religion, yes, pure religion, the religion of Christ and his apostles, was yet alive. Here, as well as in many other places, the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the church.

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