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## MISCELLANEOUS—Series A.

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## EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN SCOTLAND :

### A LECTURE.

BY THE REV. JOSEPH STEVENSON, S.J., LL.D.

I PROPOSE this evening to endeavour to weave into something like one connected narrative the various accounts which have come down to us, through tradition and history, as to the introduction of the Christian religion into Scotland. Many theories have been propounded from time to time, more than I have leisure to enumerate, and these may be passed by without notice. It is sufficient for our purpose that I set before you the few facts and inferences which most readily recommend themselves to our acceptance.

But, before we enter upon the subject, I have one or two preliminary observations which I wish here to make to you. Remember, I pray you, dear brethren, that I do not come here as a disputant. I do not come to argue—to raise difficulties, or to meet them, to give answers to puzzling questions, to silence the opponent, or refute the objector. My work lies in a different sphere: I come to tell you facts, not to unravel arguments; and I endeavour to do it, believe me, in kindness. I do not come to sow discord between man and man. I come to endeavour to reconcile souls, which do not know God in His own Church, to see something of the beauty and the glory and the dignity of that Church. I come to make men, as far as I can, brethren in one house, just as it used to be in the old golden days before

heresy and schism split Scotland up into the numerous sects which are now so embittered the one against the other. It is in this spirit that I wish to speak, and in no other. But if, unfortunately, I say anything which might seem to savour of bitterness or harshness, pardon me, and believe I did not intend it.

How, then, shall we trace the origin of the Catholic Church in Scotland? I must begin at the beginning. You are aware that the first time that history throws any clear light on our country is through the agency of the Romans. That grand power came among us and tried to conquer the land, but did not succeed—not from any want of will; not from any want of organisation. The Roman legions, the best in the world, came into Scotland in large numbers. They were well armed, well disciplined, and well officered. They had all the elements of success, and yet they did not succeed. Enlisted in every part of civilised Europe, they had for their leaders men of Roman birth, education, and tastes—men from “Cæsar’s household,” in which, as we know, the Christian faith had taken root at a very early period. These Roman settlers had possession of Scotland for many centuries; for the sake of comparison, let me say for a longer time than Scotland has been Presbyterian. The Romans held Scotland for four hundred years. Can we suppose that among the countless number of men who came from Rome during that period there were no Christians? It is incredible. We know from Tertullian that at this time many such served in the Roman army. I am taking it for granted, therefore, without drawing too largely upon your imagination, that during those four centuries Christians from Rome, Christians from Papal Rome, came and settled, and brought with them the seeds of the faith. I do not give it as an established fact. I do not dare to do so, because it would be unfair, and fairness is the very soul of historical



investigation ; but I put it forward as a reasonable probability —as something not without its weight when we come to balance the whole grand question.

From the purely Roman period, we pass to another in which we shall find ourselves upon firmer ground. During the time of the Roman occupation of Britain, the Pope summoned certain Councils to meet for the transaction of ecclesiastical business. He did this in the plenitude of his power, as the guardian of the Holy Catholic Church ; and those Councils met and deliberated and decided, and the proceedings of some of them have come down to our own time. There are three of them to which I invite your attention : The Council of Arles (A.D. 314), the Council of Sardica (A.D. 347), and the Council of Rimini (A.D. 359). So, then, taking their dates roughly, we may say that they were held from about the year 320 to 360, a very early period. The Pope invited certain bishops from Britain to attend these Councils, and the bishops accepted the invitation of his Holiness. They took part in the conferences. They signed the decrees, and those decrees are still extant. They teach what we teach now, and believe now. The fact is instructive. It tells us that the British Church of those days formed a part of the Universal Church, with which it agreed in doctrine, ritual, and discipline. Would the Pope have invited men who were in heresy and schism ? When the late Pope summoned the Vatican Council, did he summon any of the bishops of the Anglican establishment to confer with him ? Did he invite any of the Presbyterians from the General Assembly ? No ; for to have done so would have been an absurdity. Between him and them there was no unity of faith, no unity of doctrine. If he had invited them, would they have gone ? No ; they would have been too honest to go. Had they gone, they would have found themselves among men with whom they had no

unity of faith, or discipline, or worship. If they had gone, would they have signed the decrees? So far from doing so, they would have protested against them. Therefore, these British bishops, by going to those Papal assemblies, by accepting the invitation, by sitting there, by giving their voices in Council, by affixing their approbation to the decrees, thereby added so many testimonies to the grand fact of the unity of the British Church with the Holy See of Rome.

But they went a step further. After the Council of Sardica, the fathers there assembled (the British bishops among the number) sent a messenger to Rome to give an account of their proceedings to Pope Julius. In him they acknowledged their head, since he was the successor of St. Peter—a remarkable expression, and one which establishes the fact that at this early date the British bishops admitted the truth that the Pope for the time being was the successor of St. Peter, and that to him, as such, it was fitting that they should submit their proceedings for his sanction and approval. The fact is a striking one. Is not that unity? Do not these expressions bring the British Church of that early day into communion and union with the See of Rome? And what is the doctrine of the Catholic Church respecting the principle of Unity? “I believe the Holy Church; One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.” Any branch separated from that stem is separated from the True Vine, “*ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*” (where St. Peter is there is the Church). And here you have the voice of the British Church, acting through its own bishops in Council, acknowledging this doctrine by sending a message to the Pope of the day, and saying: “You are the successor of St. Peter”. We here see how this doctrine of the unity of the Church places the British Church in union with St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Leo—with all the saints who stand around the Throne of God. What they taught St. Peter taught, and St. Peter’s successor taught, and

there was an unbroken unity of doctrine from the time of St. Peter to that of the British bishops who met at Sardica; and from that day to this. So you see the bond of union between us and them; you see the pedigree of your faith; you see how through Sardica your ancestors were one with St. Peter.

So much, then, for Sardica; but as we advance we get now upon firmer ground still. Hitherto we have had to trust to inference, to deduction, and speculation; now, we come to a broader line of argument—we enter upon a new phase of the subject.

About the year 420, there lived in Scotland a man of the name of Ninian. Allow me to interrupt myself for a moment. I used a word which needs explanation. I spoke of Scotland. What is Scotland? My dear brethren, give up your geography; learn to unlearn what you learned in school. The region which, by a certain very convenient division, we now call Scotland has had a varying boundary. The geographical term is useful enough for present purposes, but it becomes useless and is calculated to mislead when you apply it to early history. The Scotland of former days is not the Scotland of the present day. Old Scotland stretched down a long way into England; and the father of this Ninian, who lived in what we call modern Scotland, held, as within his district, what we now call Cumberland and Westmoreland, and probably a considerable part of Yorkshire. Ninian was the son of a prince, and that prince was the Prince of Cumbria. Cumbria extended from Dumbartonshire on the one hand to Yorkshire on the other. This considerable territory was governed by a man of weight and influence, who, at his death, would have left his throne to his son Ninian; but other thoughts than that of an earthly kingdom had sprung up in the mind of Ninian, and it occurred to him that as there was a heavenly kingdom to it he wished to attain. Anxious to carry out his aspirations, this earnest-minded

man inquired where he could learn the full truth, of which some indistinct tidings seem to have reached him. The answer was, "Go to Rome"; and to Rome he went. There he was trained in the doctrine and discipline of the Western Church. There he saw the Pope, and naturally the Pope spoke upon the condition of Britain, and asked him more especially about that part of the island with which he, of course, was best acquainted—about the western part of Scotland and the north-western part of what we now call England. Ninian had an interesting story to tell, but a sad one. He was compelled to admit that his countrymen did not know the true God, or if they knew Him they knew Him very imperfectly. From this conversation sprang the establishment of a Christian Church, extending along the northern bank of the Solway Firth, of which the founder and earliest bishop was Ninian. This account of its origin shows very plainly the connection which existed from the beginning between Rome and the Scottish Picts, whose conversion formed the principal object of the labours of this missionary. His preaching converted many of his countrymen, and seems to have extended from the Grampians to the Solway. He was what we might call a missionary bishop. Although at first he had no distinct place of residence, no defined diocese, yet in process of time the mission prospered so well that about the year 397 Ninian determined to found a cathedral church. It was called *Candida Casa*, or "The White House," and was so named because it was erected according to the model of the buildings with which he had become familiar during his residence in Rome. He built it in memory of Rome, not according to the British plan, with the split trunks of the oak, but according to the Roman plan, with hewn blocks of stone and mortar—a style of architecture which was quite an innovation in our country. And so dignified did the Pictish converts think it, and so marvellous

did it seem in their eyes, that they called it "The White House," now Whithorn, in Wigtonshire. If you look at the map, you will find it so geographically situated as to afford a convenient mode of access to the two sides of the Solway, both of which came within this early Scottish diocese.

St. Ninian left behind him unmistakable tokens of his grand work. The venerable Bede, as well as other writers who lived some time afterwards, speak of him with respect and affection. They tell the story of his going to Rome, of his coming back, of his labours, of his building the Church, and leading many souls to God. He died about the year 432, and his name stands in the old *Scottish Calendar of Saints* under 16th September.

From these details we now have some historical data upon which to build subsequent statements. From the time of St. Ninian, we can point to the existence of a mission at work in Scotland, of which Rome is the origin and the director. We have got missionaries labouring among us, men educated in Rome, ordained in Rome, and in correspondence with the Roman Pontiff. A cathedral church is rising up in which the ritual of Rome is practised, and the only form of doctrine and discipline recognised among these early converts has come direct from the eternal city. Can we believe that these men taught Protestantism?

In connection with St. Ninian and his work, I may mention a curious fact which is not without its interest as bearing on the early literary history of Scotland. A few years ago, there was found in the Public Library at Cambridge a very curious manuscript account of the miracles wrought during the middle ages at the shrine of St. Ninian. It gives details of many wonderful cures wrought in attestation of the merits of the saint, and the value of his intercession in obtaining gifts from God for men. And, as if to make it all the more interesting to us, this collection of

miracles is written in Scottish verse, admirable for its language, and the product of one of the most illustrious of the Scottish poets of whom this country can boast. You have all heard of the *Life of Robert Bruce, King of Scotland*, written by Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen. Take up any history of Scottish literature and you will find that this historical poem occupies a prominent place in it, prominent not only from the interest of the subject, but also from the purity of the language, and the beauty of the style; and at the same time do not forget that this history of St. Ninian is written by the same poet.

Shortly after the time of St. Ninian comes another epoch in the history of our country. You have heard of the great heresy of Pelagianism, introduced into the Christian Church by a Briton. The Pelagius, from whom this heresy was named, was a Welshman, whose real name was Morgan. This man inflicted a great blow upon the doctrine of Divine grace. The whole Catholic Church rose in arms against the Pelagian heresy, and it was condemned as contradictory to the doctrine of the Catholic Church upon the subject of grace. St. Augustine wrote against it, as did many others who were zealous for the preservation of the true faith. While the controversy was at its height there happened to be at Rome, in the court of Pope Celestine, a deacon named Palladius, who was deeply interested in the discussion. His name shows that he was a Roman, and we learn from the direct authority of the Papal secretary that he was a deacon of the Roman Church. He induced Pope Celestine to send into Britain a legate, direct from himself and acting in his name, to whom another prelate was joined, and the two proceeded into Britain to arrest the progress of the heresy. The fact is significant as proving that the Pope for the time being was recognised as the supreme and universal guardian of the Catholic truth; that reference was made to

him in disputed questions, and that his decision upon these questions was held to be final, and accepted as such by our ancestors. This event occurred A.D. 429. Two years afterwards the same Pope, Celestine, ordained Palladius as a bishop, "and sent him to the Scots who believed in Christ". These successive acts on the part of the Holy See are worth your notice as having a very direct bearing upon the settlement of the question now before us. Pope Celestine, as we are told by his secretary, Prosper, gave a special commission to three of his own nominees to do missionary work in Britain. Just as the successor of St. Peter had sent St. Ninian to labour among the men who had never heard of Christ before, so now he sent Palladius to continue the same work in the same direction. Palladius accepted the mission. He came, and he worked, and he died. He died at a place called Fordoun, in the Mearns, and there a church was raised to his memory, and there a shrine entombed his bones; and it was visited year after year by those who had heard of his virtues and longed to preserve his memory. In the year 1409 those relics were so venerated that the Archbishop of St. Andrews came and encased them in a reliquary of pure gold, where they remained until the evil days of the Reformation.

So now, let us try and put together the information which we have obtained, and see the conclusions to which this information leads us. In the first place, we have seen that there is a strong probability that the Roman legions who served in Britain, and the Roman settlers who made it their home, brought Christianity into England. Their dominion continued, remember, for four hundred years. We have the certainty of Councils—three at least—having been held which were attended by British bishops upon the invitation of the Holy Father; and these Councils were summoned and held for the avowed purpose of carrying out

the teaching of the Holy Catholic Church. We have seen that these British bishops acted in harmony and unity with the other fathers of the Council in submitting what they had decided upon to the acceptance and approval of the Holy See of Rome. Without that sanction these decrees would have been invalid and would not have been accepted by the rest of the Christian world. Next, we have seen the Pope of the day sending, first of all, St. Ninian to labour among those who had not heard of God, the nation of the southern Picts. We have seen Palladius coming to work among the Scots who believed in Christ, for the preservation of their faith, and in order to keep them from being polluted by heresy. Put these facts together, and in them we have evidence of the union which in these early days existed between Scotland and Rome, a union, strong, steady, and continuous; a union which implies, on the one hand, the exercise of affectionate authority, and on the other, a ready submission to that authority. And, according to the teaching of the Holy Catholic Church, the unity must be perfect, not an opinion, not a probability, not an acceptance of just so much as is palatable and the rejection of whatever is unpleasant, but a union of faith, doctrine, discipline, and worship.

During this time, if we may believe our good brethren of the Presbyterian persuasion, there was in Scotland a body of men who were opposed to Rome, and who stood outside and looked upon Rome as an unclean and unholy thing. These men were called Culdees. I have already spoken to you upon their history, but the unity of the subject requires that even with the probability of repeating what may have previously been heard by some of you here present, I should go over the same ground again as rapidly as possible in order that I may not seem to leave untouched what many would say is a fundamental difficulty. What I am about



to state is not simply my own opinion. I will tell you where you can learn and read for yourselves, and I shall not quote one single Catholic authority. The subject of the Culdees seems for long to have been misunderstood and misrepresented; and, with hardly an exception, the Scotland of the past generation, up till within the last twenty years, believed that these men were the incipient Protestants who afterwards became the Presbyterians of Knox and Melville. But, as time advanced, there came students who were led to look more carefully into the subject. I ought to mention, in the first place, the name of the late Joseph Robertson, keeper of the Records in Edinburgh, the highest literary appointment which the queen has to give in Scotland, a man selected from his great knowledge of old documents. He published a book upon the Scotch Councils, and in the preface to that book he maintained the same opinion as Cosmo Innes had done before him. Then came a most eminent scholar, Mr. Skene, the late Historiographer Royal of Scotland, who has published a very remarkable book upon Celtic Scotland. These three men were members of the Episcopalian Church of Scotland. The name of Dr. Reeves, the editor of the *Life of St. Columba*, ought not here to be forgotten, who has published a very exhaustive work expressly upon the history of the Culdees, in which their true position in the Scottish Church is clearly established. He fully coincides with the authors whose names I have already quoted. And lastly, there has of late been published a volume of the new edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* which contains an article upon the Culdees which sums up the result of modern investigation. It is published by an eminent Scotch publisher, a Presbyterian I believe—at all events, not a Catholic. This work is conducted chiefly—I think I may say exclusively—by Protestants, and looks at things chiefly from a Presbyterian point



of view. But, although I should not wish to be supposed to agree with every statement or opinion which I find in that work, I am bound to say, in the cause of truth, that it speaks out honestly and fairly upon the question of the Culdees. I refer you, therefore, to it, because it is in such general circulation that you can see it without difficulty in any public library, and in many private ones. Under the article "Culdees," you will find its judgment; and its judgment gives a fair summary of all that has been said by those authors whose names I have already quoted. It says it is a mistake to suppose that these Culdees differed from the teaching of the Latin Church in Scotland and upon the Continent. They were one in doctrine. They differed, however, in their mode of life. The Culdees were not faithful to their vows. They had taken the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They broke them. Poverty they broke by buying and inheriting land, by having it for their private property, and by leaving it to their children. They broke chastity by marrying, and having sons and daughters, and living separate from their brethren, each man in his own house. They broke obedience, for they broke loose from the bond which binds every religious man or woman who takes a vow to the place where his superior tells him to remain, and to the monastic rule to which he has vowed to submit. Lawless, faithless, disobedient, impure; such were the Culdees. This is a hard sentence, but it is not my statement. I merely repeat what is affirmed by others, but I repeat it because I believe it to be true. When, therefore, you hear anything said in praise of the Culdees, I invite you to withhold your approval, and to seek the truth. The Culdees, as we now know them to have been, were men of whom Scotland has no cause to be proud. I may here add that within the last few days has appeared a work entitled, "*The Celtic Church in Scotland,*

by John Dowden, D.D., Bishop of Edinburgh, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," upon which I am unable to express an opinion.

We pass now to a subject, which I must preface by a few words, on what is rather an obscure and a difficult matter. I want to say something about the science of ethnology—bear with the word, I will explain it—I mean the doctrine of races. And I illustrate it by reminding you that a Lowlander is not the same kind of man as a Highlander, and a Highlander is a different man from a Lowlander. The two men differ from each other in many ways. They do not speak the same language, they have not the same ideas upon many points, they have not the same dress, they have not the same traditions, they have not the same ancestry. Now, in Scotland, the distinction between the Highlander who is a Celt, and the Lowlander who is a Saxon, is of very old standing. And this leads me to go yet further back in the history of our nationality. When the Romans came among us, they found Scotland peopled, exclusively I may say, by a Celtic population, what we now call the Highlander. They occupied the whole of Scotland. This unity of the entire people was broken in upon by the Romans, and as the Romans gained possession of the land, so the Celt had to make way for them, and they were gradually driven further and further back until they entrenched themselves in the inaccessible parts of Scotland, where the Romans did not dare to follow them. There they were safe, and there they remained, and there their descendants remain until the present day, a Celtic-speaking population. The Celts who lived further south took refuge in the Isle of Man. Now, the Manx language, as you probably know, is not English. It resembles the Celtic of the Highlands. Further south still—in England—the same people were driven into North and South Wales, where

again you have a Celtic-speaking population. Thousands of the Welsh do not know one word of English, and yet they can understand what a Highlander would say to them. Further south still, they were driven into remote Cornwall, and there they remained, pure Celts in language, manners, and feeling, until a comparatively modern period. We have specimens of this language as it was spoken 150 years ago written down in books, and those books can be understood by the Welshmen, by the Manxmen, and by Highlanders.

You will thus see there was a grand national unity prevailing in Scotland at the early period of which I am now speaking, and this unity remained unbroken during the 400 years of the Roman occupation of Britain. But when the Romans were recalled home, Britain underwent another revolution. It was invaded on the eastern coast by the Saxon, a race entirely different from the Celt. When he came he was a heathen, but a noble one; brave, daring, enterprising, and energetic. And when he landed in England and Scotland, for he came to both, he landed with the intention of making for himself a new home, and he brought his boat, and his wife and his children; and where he landed there he settled. The Saxon spread gradually but surely, and they, and the kindred tribes which followed, soon occupied the land, and drove the Celtic-Roman population into the mountain fastnesses which I have already mentioned. The strife was long and bitter between them, and much blood was shed on both sides, for you may be assured that the Celt would not yield without a struggle, and a bitter one.

So then, you have here two peoples bitterly opposed to each other, fighting to the death the one against the other, and yet in the fulness of time they became united in the doctrine of both being made one in Christ. By whom was

that grand work to be effected? The answer to this question now claims our attention. Here, if I had time, and if you had patience, I should introduce the history of St. Columba, but it touches upon too many questions for me to do more than refer to it now. Here, then, I bid you farewell for the present, promising that by God's blessing I shall resume the subject in the following lecture.











