

# **The Church of England**



**THE REV. G. H. NICHOLSON**

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(The Burghfield Parish Church is on the cover of this publication)

**Some Glimpses of its Earliest History may be gathered from. the words of the following GREAT AUTHORITIES IN BYGONE CENTURIES.**

**Tertullian. A.D. 155-222.** The Church's first great genius after the Apostles wrote "The extremities of Spain, the various parts of Gaul, **the regions of Britain** which have never been penetrated by Roman arms have received the religion of Christ." (Tertullian Def. Fidel, p. 179).

**Eusebius. A.D. 260-340.** The Church's first great historian, wrote: "**The Apostles** passed beyond the ocean to the isles called the Britannic Isles." (De Demonstratione Evangelii, Lib. Ill).

**St. Dorotheus. Bishop of Tyre. A.D. 303** said: "Aristobulus, whom Paul saluted writing to the Romans (Romans ch 16. v. 10) was **Bishop of Britain**" (Synopsis de Apostol. Synops 23 "Aristobulus"). He also mentions by name another Disciple as visiting Britain. **Simon Zelotes** preached Christ through all Mauretania, and Afric the less. At length he was crucified at Brittainia, slain and buried." (Synopsis de Apostol. Synops. 9. "Simon Zelotes.")

**Theodoret the Blessed, Bishop of Cyrus in Syria, writing in A.D. 435,** said, "**Paul**, liberated from his first captivity at Rome, preached the Gospel to the **Britons and others in the West**. Our fishermen and publicans not only persuaded the Romans and their tributaries to acknowledge the Crucified and His laws, but the Britons also and the Cymry" (the Welsh). (D. Civ. Grace Off. Lib. IX).

**St. Athanasius.** An outstanding leader of the Early Church against heretical doctrine, writing A.D. 353, describes **the Churches of Britain** as adhering to the faith of the Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325. (Vide Ussher. De Brit. Ecc. Primord. Cap viii)

**St. Chrysostom. Patriarch of Constantinople, A.D. 347-407,** writes "Though thou shouldest go to the ocean to **the British Isles**, there thou shouldest hear all men everywhere discoursing matters out of the Scriptures with another voice, but not another faith, with a different tongue but the same judgment." (Chrysostomi Orat. O Theos Xristos).

**Gildas, (Albanicus) the Wise. A.D. 425-512,** the early British historian wrote, "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." (be Excidio Britanniae, Sec. 8, p. 25). This was in A.D. 37, only four years after the Crucifixion!

**In the Diocletian Persecution. A.D. 300,** there were martyred in Britain, Stephen and Argulius, both Bishops of London ; Socrates, Bishop of York; Amphibalus, Bishop of Llandaff ; Nicholas, Bishop of Penrhyn (Glasgow); Melior, Bishop of Carlisle; St. Alban; Julius and Aaron, priests of Caerleon; and 889 communicants in different grades of society (Gildas. De Excidio Britanniae, Sec. 10, p. 10. Martyrology of Notker Bolbulus, A.D. 894. Haddan & Stubbs, Vol. 1, p. 32. Also Sozomen, circa A.D. 436. Hist. Eccl. Vol. 1, p. 6).

**The British Bishops.** Eborius of York, Restitutus of London and Adelfius of Caerleon were present at the Church Council of Arles in A.D. 314. British Bishops were also present at the Councils of Nicaea, A.D. 325,

Sardica in Illyria, A.D. 347, and Ariminium in Italy, A.D. 359. (Mansi, Concilia. Vol. II, pp. 476-477. Haddan & Stubbs, Vol. 1 p. 7).

**It was over Five Centuries** after the founding of the early British Church that the first representative of Roman Christianity came to these islands. The Monk, Augustine, sent by Pope Gregory, arrived in Kent in the year A.D. 597

**St. Augustine**, writing to Pope Gregory about the early British Church in A.D. 600 said: "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." (Spelman, Concilia. p. 5).

This refers to **the Tradition** that between the ages of 12 and 30, during which period the Gospels make no mention of Him (compare St. Luke, Ch. 2, vs. 42 and 49, with Ch. 3, v. 23). Christ Himself visited these Islands with Joseph of Arimathea, traditionally supposed to be the Uncle of the Virgin Mary, and came to Ynis-witrin, later called Isle of Avalon, now Glastonbury, Somerset, and part of the mainland.

Tradition and history further assert that, when St. Joseph of Arimathea returned here after the Resurrection and Ascension, he and the Disciples who came with him built a wattle church which was **The First Church above Ground in the World**, and upon the exact site of which the ruined Norman Chapel of St. Mary in the Abbey grounds now stands.

**William of Malmesbury. 1080-1143**, the best British historian of his day, and who was asked by the monks of Glastonbury to write their history, says that after the Crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea came here with I I missionaries and that the King gave them 12 Hides of land. (De Antiquitate Glastoniæ Cap. I).

**Domesday Book** has the following entry which lends support to the above words of St. Augustine and also of William of Malmesbury "The Church

of Glastonbury has its own ville **12 Hides of land which have never paid tax.**"

**Maelgwyn of Llandaff. A.D. 450.** Lord of Anglesey and Snowdonia, and Uncle of St. David of Wales, who forswore his realm in order to become a monk, has left these words: "Joseph of Arimathea, the noble decurion, entered his perpetual sleep with his XI Companions in the Isle of Avalon." (Thick Vellum Cottonian M.S. See also Ussher. Antiq., p. 12. Ed. 1687).

**Polydore Vergil**, a learned Italian historian in England, 1470-1555, wrote "Britain, partly through Joseph of Arimathea was of all kingdoms the first that received the Gospel." (Lib. 11).

**Superior Dignity and Antiquity** was claimed for our National Church at the Church Councils of Pisa 1409, Constance 1417, Sienna 1424 and Basle 1434, on the grounds that "the Churches France and Spain must yield in points of antiquity and precedence to that of Britain as the latter Church was founded by Joseph of Arimathea **immediately after the passion of Christ.**" (Disputatio super Dignitatem Angliæ et Galliae in Concilio Constantiano. Theodore Martin, Lovan, 1517).

## **The Continuity and Independence of the Original British Church may be seen in the following.**

### **SPOT LIGHTS OF HISTORY**

**The British Bishops** replied to St. Augustine in these words. "Be it known and declared that we all, individually and collectively, are in all humility 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 everyone 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 the 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 Caerleon, who is alone under God our

ruler to keep us right in the way of salvation." (Spelman, Concilia. pp. 108-109. Haddon & Stubbs, Vol. 1, p. 122.

**The Venerable Bede (Church of Rome) in A.D. 740** wrote concerning the British Church : " The Britons are contrary to the whole Roman world and enemies to the Roman customs, not only in their Mass, but in their tonsure."—(Bede, Bk. 2, C. 23).

**But the Synod of Whitby, prior to this, in A.D. 664**, marked the first entry of Roman influence into the native Church, which was now of both British and Celtic origin, when it was agreed that Roman usages on three points were to be followed. One Far Reaching Result was that the native Church, distinguished for its evangelistic zeal and piety, but not having acquired centralised control, was to develop this under increasing Roman encroachment.

**A few years later, Theodore of Tarsus** became Archbishop of Canterbury, A.D. 667-690. His great achievement lay in organising the country into dioceses and parishes. "He was the first of the Archbishops whom the whole English Church consented to obey " (Bede). But while a unified system of Church government was thus established when England was still divided into Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the first quotation of Bede shows that there was no spirit of unity, but definite antagonism, between the British and Roman strains of Christianity.

**The First Notable Resistance to Roman usurpation** was made by William the Conqueror. Upon Pope Gregory VII demanding of him homage for his realm of England, he replied "Fealty I have never willed to do, nor will I do it now. I have never promised it, nor do I find that my predecessors did it to yours." Green, Short History of the English People, chap. I I, p. 83.

Later, he refused to allow Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, to go to Rome at the summons of the Pope to answer for his conduct. Freeman, Norman Conquest, Vol. IV, pp. 434, 435.

**King Edward III in refusing to give homage** and to pay the tribute to the See of Rome guaranteed by King John for himself and his heirs, asked Parliament for their advice. The Bishops, Lords, and Commons, after full deliberation gave it in these words, " That neither King John nor any other king could bring himself, his realm and people under such subjection without their assent .... that if done, it was without the consent of Parliament and contrary to his coronation oath, and that in case the Pope should attempt to constrain the King and his Subjects to perform what he lays claim to, they would resist and withstand him to the uttermost of their power." Hansard, Parliamentary Records, Vol. I, p. 129.

**The Continuity of our Church** is seen in **Archbishop Cranmer's** statement to Parliament in 1549 that the Prayer Book, then being authorised, contained the same prayers that had been in use in Britain for over 1500 years—that is from the days of Joseph of Arimathea and the Apostles. The British Reformers, Vol. VIII, p. 271. Also Proceedings in the House of Lords, British Museum.

**The Independence of our Church** was asserted and protected by the following Measures, designed to limit external influence, and in which our Church was designated "**The Holy Church of England.**"

Consuetudines of William I	Statute of Praemunire 1353.	Act of Annates 1532.
Constitutions of Clarendon 1164.	1st Statute of Provisors 1357.	Act of Supremacy 1534.
Statute of Mortmain 1279	2nd Statute of Provisors 1363.	Act of Uniformity 1559.
Statute of Carlisle 1307.	3rd Statute of Provisors 1389.	

**This breach with a foreign system** was made absolute in the words of Article XXXVII, to which Articles all Clergy of the Church of England are still required to subscribe. "**The King's Majesty** hath the chief power in this Realm of England, and other his Dominions, unto whom the chief Government of all Estates of this Realm, **whether they be Ecclesiastical**

**or Civil** in all causes doth appertain, and is not, nor ought to be, subject to any foreign jurisdiction. The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England."

**Convocation were ready in 1531** to acknowledge **the King** as "Protector and Supreme Head as far as the law of Christ Permits." **Parliament** in 1544 confirmed to **the King** in this capacity the title of **Defender of the Faith**, since used by all his successors.

**The Sovereign**, by virtue of his position, undertakes to-day in the **Coronation Oath** "to the utmost of his power to maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel; to the utmost of his power to maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by Law. And to maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government thereof, as by Law established in England."

**Furthermore**, in contradistinction to the headship of a Pope, **the appointment of the Sovereign** to the headship of the Church of England marks **an exact following of scriptural precedent** as the above Article shows. " We give not to our Princes the ministering either of God's Word, or of the Sacraments but that only prerogative, which we see to have been given always to all godly Princes in holy Scriptures by God himself ; that is, that they should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be Ecclesiastical or Temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil-doers."

**Our Island Home** can claim that, from the days when the first wattle church was built at Glastonbury, it has never lacked a Church, subject to no other Church on earth, recognising the apostolic Scriptures alone for its rule of faith, and its form of government, and which has not only received its faith direct from the Apostles, but had reason to believe that the Saviour of the World visited the very place of its foundation.

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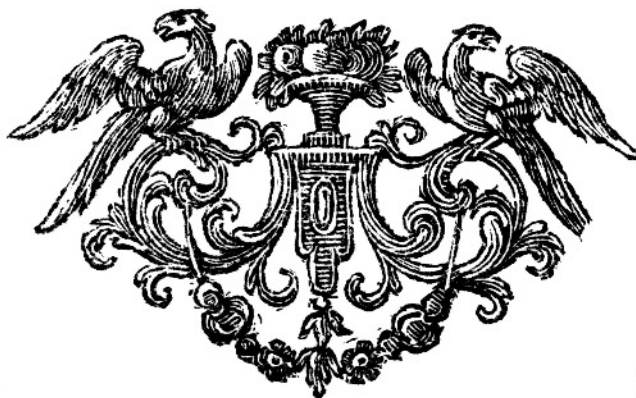
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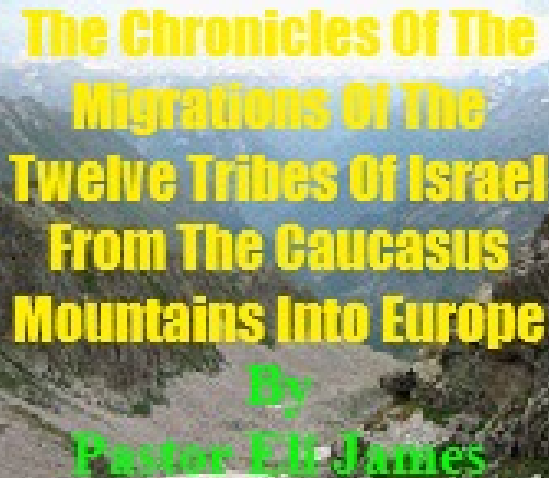
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