The Early British Church

By Rev Gerard Culkin.
London Catholic Truth Society No.h401a (1959)

I. INTRODUCTION.

The Christian Church was first established in these islands of Greater Britain when Britain was still a province of the Roman Empire.

The claim is sometimes made by Anglicans that this ancient British Church was the ancestor of the present Church of England, and accordingly they maintain that they alone are the true Catholic Church in this country. This claim is quite unfounded. The early British Church was not a national and independent body, like the modern Church of England, but was simply that part of the one Catholic Church which was established in Britain. The first British Christians professed the same faith as the rest of the Catholic Church. With Christians everywhere, they acknowledged the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, as Head of the Church in succession to St Peter. That this was so is proved clearly enough by the history of the relations between the Church in Britain and the Roman See in these early days, and by such evidence as we have about the faith and practice of these first British Christians.

II. THE EARLY BRITISH CHURCH AND THE SEE OF ROME.

We know very little about the origins of the Church in Britain. There are many legends about its early history, but no reliable evidence about its first foundation. The first Christians in Britain were probably to be found among the soldiers who garrisoned the country after it was conquered by the Romans in the first century of our era, or among the traders from the lands about the Mediterranean who came here at that time. We first hear of the Church in Britain from Tertullian, an African who wrote about the end of the second century, but he tells us no more than the bare fact, that there were Christians in Britain in his time. There is a reliable tradition that some British Christians were put to death for their faith about a hundred years later. The best known among them is St Alban, but we know little about him beyond the simple fact that he died as a martyr.

The British Church first appears in the records of history in the year 314, when three bishops from this country were present at a council held at Arles in the south of France. During the rest of this century, bishops from Britain were present at other ecclesiastical councils, showing that the British Church was in no way isolated but was in active communion with the rest of the Church in the Empire. In the first part of the fifth century, there is evidence which seems to indicate that the Church in Britain was rapidly expanding. Then came disaster. The city of Rome itself was threatened by the attacks of barbarian invaders from the East. The Roman garrison was withdrawn from Britain. The country was defenceless, and soon it was in its turn invaded and occupied by the Anglo-Saxons, the ancestors of the English people.

The British Christians were driven from their homes and sought refuge in the hills and the waste places of the west, in Wales and Strathclyde and Cornwall. In the rest of the country, as far as we can discover, the Church simply ceased to exist. Not until the Roman monk Augustine landed in

Kent nearly a hundred and fifty years later, in 597, did the conversion of the pagan Anglo-Saxons begin. For all this time, the conquered British were cut off from the rest of the Christian world, and this enforced isolation was to have at least one unfortunate consequence. But this temporary separation from the rest of the Catholic Church was not of their seeking.

One of the results of this great disaster was that most of the records of the early Church in Britain perished, and in consequence, we know very little indeed about its history. But there is enough evidence to show beyond all doubt that for more than a hundred years the British Christians were in active communion with the rest of the Catholic Church in the Roman Empire.

We have already seen that there were three bishops from Britain present at the Council of Arles in the year 314. At this council, which was summoned by the Emperor Constantine to deal with the heresy of the African Donatists, there were present bishops from all parts of the Western Empire. It is significant that from its first appearance in historical records, the British Church appears not as an isolated unit, nor as a national or independent church, but as actively co-operating with other parts of the Church in defence of the common Catholic faith. The bishops at Arles clearly recognized that the decisions they made there would have to be approved by the Pope if they were to be accepted by the rest of the Catholic world. We know little enough of what went on at the council, but when it was over the bishops wrote to Pope [Saint] Sylvester, whose legates had been present at their meetings, to tell him that they had acted “as though you yourself were present,” and asking him, “according to custom.” to send letters to all the churches to inform them of the decisions taken at Arles. Thus, as a recent Anglican historian has remarked, the bishops of the council, and the British bishops among them, clearly acknowledged a right of the Pope “to give a decisive opinion on disputed questions of doctrine and discipline.” (T. Jailand. The Church and the Papacy, London, 1946, page 197.)

For the next hundred and fifty years the Christian faith was under constant attack from heretics. It was to defend the faith against these attacks that the first great ecclesiastical councils were held at this time. Ten years after Arles came the first of the ecumenical councils, held at Nicea to deal with the heretic Arius who denied that Christ was the Son of God. It is not certain that British bishops were present at Nicea, but the decrees of the council were received by the Church in Britain. And the British Church was represented at the later councils of Sardica, in 343, and Rimini, in 359. This great movement in defence of orthodoxy was, at least in its later stages, largely directed and controlled by the Roman See, acting as the Head of the Church and clearly recognized as such throughout the Catholic world. As a result, bishops from both East and West turned increasingly to Rome at this time for decisions on disputed points of doctrine and discipline, and readily accepted the judgments of that See. In the year 404, Victricius, the Bishop of Rouen, wrote to Pope Innocent I asking him for “the rule and authority of the Roman Church” on some disputed questions. In his reply, the Pope emphasized that his ruling was one which every Catholic bishop was bound to observe “in consideration of the divine judgment.” It is possible that Victricius was himself a Briton. It is quite certain that some years earlier he had been asked by the bishops in Britain to settle some serious differences which had arisen there. It seems evident that he was regarded by the British bishops as a pattern of orthodoxy, and it seems clear that they shared his faith in this matter of the Pope’s supreme authority as in everything else! (Mansi, Concilia, III, 1032; see L. Gougaud. Christianity in Celtic Lands, London, 1932, page 22.)

ST GERMANUS AND THE PELAGIANS.

That the Church in Britain did wholeheartedly accept the authority of the Bishop of Rome at this time is conclusively proved by two other incidents which occurred some years later. In the year 421 the teachings of the heretic Pelagius, who was either a Briton or an Irishman, were condemned at Rome. Within a year or so, some of his followers appeared in Britain and began to spread his doctrines there. “Characteristically,” say the authors of the standard work on the history of Roman Britain, “the Britons appealed to the Pope for help against this invasion.” (R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, Roman Britain and the English Land Settlements, 2nd edition, Oxford, 1937, page 312.)

The Pope, Celestine I, sent to Britain as his own representative — “vice sua” — Germanus, the Bishop of Auxerre. Germanus was successful in his mission and brought back to the Catholic faith many who had been led astray by the teaching of the Pelagians. This first mission lasted from 429 to 431. Some years later, the heresy revived, and Germanus was invited to Britain a second time, in 446-7, bringing with him Severus who was probably the Bishop of Treves. The incident is evidence both of the close relations between Britain and Rome and of the complete unity of faith between the churches in Britain and Gaul. The memory of Germanus was long honoured among the British Christians; both St Patrick, the apostle of Ireland, and St Illtud, the first great figure in the British Church in Wales, were taught by Germanus at Auxerre. The great authority of Germanus in this country was certainly due in large part to the fact that he was sent here by the Pope himself, and the honour done to his memory reflects the loyalty of the Church in Britain to the See of Peter. (On Pelagianism and the missions of St Germanus, see Gougaud, Christianity in Celtic Lands, pages 23-26.)

Some years later, in the time of Pope St Leo the Great, 440-461, a new ruling was sent out from Rome about the date on which the Easter festival was to be celebrated. By this time the Roman Empire was already disorganized by the barbarian invasions, communications were difficult, and it was some considerable time before the news of the Pope’s decision reached Britain. But as soon as it was known there, it was “at once obeyed.” (L. Gougaud, page 211.)

This is the last we hear of relations between the Church in Britain and the Roman See for a century and a half. As a result of the invasions and the collapse of the Empire all contact with the Church abroad ceased until the coming of St Augustine in the year 597. These few facts then are all that we know of the relations between the first British Christians and the papacy from the first establishment of the Church in this country until nearly the end of the sixth century. The evidence is scanty indeed, but it is clear enough and can admit of only one conclusion. Far from being a separate unit, with a distinctive doctrine or discipline, the Church in Britain throughout this time appears as simply a part of the one Catholic Church. Its bishops unite with the bishops of other lands in defence of their common Catholic Faith. If they are in difficulties the bishops in Britain appeal to their brethren abroad for advice and help. In cases of special difficulty they turn, as other bishops turn, to Rome. If the Pope issues an instruction or a command, it is obeyed in Britain as it is obeyed elsewhere, because the British Church recognizes the Pope as the Head of the Universal Church. Nowhere in the history of the Church in Britain at this time is there even a shred of evidence that British Christians resented this exercise of papal authority as an intrusion, or ever claimed the right to settle their own affairs in their own way.

THE CELTIC CHURCHES AND ROME.

All that has been said of the relations between the British Church and the Roman See at this time is equally true of the other early Christian communities in these islands, the so-called Celtic Churches.

The faith was first preached in what is now Scotland by St Ninian, early in the fifth century. We know little about him. He was probably a Briton, but it was at Rome that he was instructed in the faith before setting out on his mission, and as a recent non-Catholic author has indicated, there is no doubt that he was a ‘Roman’ Catholic. (W. D. Maxwell, A History of Worship in the Church of Scotland, Oxford, 1955, pages 1-10.)

In the year 431, Pope Celestine I consecrated a certain Palladius and sent him to Ireland as the first bishop of that country. He was soon followed by St Patrick, who was a Briton, and who, after completing the conversion of the greater part of the country instructed his priests that if any difficulty should arise which they could not settle among themselves, they were to refer the matter to “the Apostolic See” in Rome. (The Book of Armagh, edited by J. Gwynn, Dublin, 1913, page 42: see Gougaud, Christianity in Celtic Lands, page 213, note 7.)

The Irish monks, some of whom settled at Iona, off the west coast of Scotland, in the course of the sixth century, and from there sent out missionaries to northern England, and others, led by the great St Columban, who preached the gospel in Gaul, were equally clear about the authority of the Roman See. St Columban called the Pope “the pastor of pastors”, and “the head of the churches in Europe”, and called on him as the guardian of the faith to condemn the practices of some of the clergy in Gaul whom he regarded as schismatics. (L. Gougaud, Christianity in Celtic Lands, page 215.)

(Footnote: the greatest Irish missionary of the sixth century was Columba, the "dove of the Church." At Kells, in County Meath, St. Columba established a monastic settlement. Columba was later excommunicated by an Irish synod of the Catholic Church, accused of starting a civil war. The excommunication was lifted but the sin remained to be expiated. Columba’s penance was to be permanently exiled on mission for Christ. On May 12, 563, he landed on the island of Iona. There he built a monastery. From that monastery, beginning with a mission to the king of the barbaric pagan Picts in druid-haunted Inverness, he undertook the conversion of Britain, which except for Wales was now almost entirely pagan.)

Since they were founded at a time when, owing to the invasions, communication with the rest of the Church was always difficult and sometimes impossible, all these Celtic churches tended to develop certain customs which differed from Roman practice. For example, the Celtic monks wore a different tonsure, there were some variations in their manner of administering baptism and in the date on which the Easter festival was observed. But all these differences were in secondary matters. None of these communities held any distinctive doctrine, or made any claim to be an independent church. We may apply to each of these Christian communities what a leading authority has said of the British Church during the years of its isolation: that, in spite of this isolation, “it never ceased to be Catholic in doctrine and to acknowledge the spiritual supremacy of the successors of St Peter” (S. J. Crawford, Anglo-Saxon Influence on Western Christendom, Oxford, 1933, page 9.).

For the Celts and the British, as for Christians everywhere, to have attempted to repudiate the authority of the See of Rome would have been to cut themselves off from the unity of the one Catholic Church.

ST AUGUSTINE AND THE BRITISH CHURCH.

The argument of those Protestant apologists who claim that this early British Church was in some way a national Church like the modern Church of England, owing no allegiance to Rome and rejecting the papal claims, rests on a single incident only. A year or two after the beginning of his mission to England in 597, St Augustine, following the instructions of Pope Gregory, had two meetings with the British bishops. He appealed to them to co-operate with him in the work of converting the Anglo-Saxons. After some hesitation, and on the occasion of the second meeting, they refused: and this refusal has been taken as an indication that they regarded the Pope as having no authority over them. This difference between the Roman missionaries and the British bishops was real enough, and was to have serious consequences: but, as will be seen, it admits of a very different interpretation to that put forward by Protestant controversialists.

It was in the year 596 that the Pope, Gregory the Great, who had long been concerned about the conversion of the pagan Anglo-Saxons, sent the Roman monk Augustine with forty companions to preach the gospel to the people of Kent. In the first year of his mission, St Augustine baptized Aethelbert, the King of Kent, and several thousands of his people. The way seemed open to the conversion of the other English kingdoms also. Gregory had told Augustine that he must seek the help of the British Church in this task. There was obviously no suspicion in the Pope's mind that, as Christians, the British were any different to Christians in any other country. But when Augustine finally succeeded in meeting the British bishops, they refused to have anything to do with him. According to St Bede, who tells the story, (Bede, Ecclesiastical History, Book II, Chapter 2,) they were unfavourably impressed by what appeared to them to be his high-handed manner and haughty bearing. As a result, they took no part in the subsequent conversion of the English peoples, and indeed, for more than a century they held themselves aloof from all contact with the Christian English.

On this single incident there has been built up the legend of an independent British Church which refused to acknowledge the authority of the See of Rome. What does it all amount to?

In the first place, in so far as we have any record, the British bishops did not on this occasion of their meeting with Augustine refuse to obey an authoritative ruling from Rome, since no such ruling was presented to them. Neither then nor, as far as we know, subsequently, was the doctrine of papal authority in question. In fact, there was no discussion concerning doctrine between Augustine and the British clergy, and no difference in any matter which touched the Catholic faith. They simply refused to work with him in what, according to the mind of the Pope, was to have been a common missionary undertaking. This refusal, which was, surely, little to their credit as Christians, is sufficiently explained, if not excused, by their hatred of their conquerors; and to this, no doubt, they added some suspicion of Augustine himself, who was known to have been well received at the court of Aethelbert. The dispute between the two parties, if such it can be called, was perhaps further exaggerated by the fact that the British now followed certain customs in which they differed from continental practice. These peculiar customs are sufficiently explained by the long isolation, lasting nearly a century and a half, in which they had been living. In any case, Augustine told the bishops explicitly that if they would follow the rest of the Church in the manner of administering baptism and the date of Easter they could continue to keep the rest of their local customs, provided only that they would work with him. But they persisted in their refusal. (Footnote: The British were in fact still observing the ruling on Easter which they had received from Pope Leo!)

WAS THERE A SCHISM?

Yet the fact of their continued isolation for more than a century is still to be explained; for it is clear that for long after the time of Augustine the British Christians continued to go their own way, and were not in active communion with the other Christian communities in the country.

Was there then a schism in the country? All that we can say is that there is no evidence that the leaders of the British Church — which had, as we have seen, earlier given clear proof of its loyalty to the Roman See — ever formally repudiated the authority of the Pope; nor is there any evidence that they were ever formally condemned for their obstinacy. All that we know for certain is that in the course of the next century the Celtic and British communities one by one submitted of their own accord to Roman discipline. The Celts of Northumbria were the first to do so at the Synod of Whitby in 663, after the great St Wilfrid had ably expounded the basis of the Roman claims in the promise of Christ to St Peter. (Footnote: See Bede, Ecclesiastical History, Book III, Chapter 25. Colman and some of the monks from Lindisfarne did not submit at this time. They withdrew to Iona and later to Ireland.).

The Northumbrian Celts were later followed by their brethren in Iona and Ireland. The Britons of Strathclyde were next, early in the seventh century. (L. Gougaud, Christianity in Celtic Lands, pages 185-210.). A few years later, Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne, circa 640-709, wrote to the British Christians of Cornwall appealing to them to abandon their foolish isolation. In a letter to their king, he said: “It is utterly vain for those who reject the doctrine and the rule of St Peter to boast of their Catholicism.” (S. J. Crawford, Anglo-Saxon Influence on Western Christendom, Oxford, 1933, page 10.).

Aldhelm’s warning seems to have had its effect, for shortly afterwards most of the Cornish people accepted the Roman practices which they had so long resisted. The last to submit were the Britons in Wales. Their submission can best be described in the words of a leading authority on early Welsh history, Professor J. E. Lloyd. He writes:

“It was not until 768 that Bishop Elfodd induced his countrymen to abandon the attitude of hopeless isolation, and, by accepting the Roman Easter, to enter into communion with the churches of the West. Henceforth the loyalty of the Welsh to the See of Peter is not in question; their church had many peculiarities, the result of their previous history, but these were not challenged by the Papal power which found its commands as readily obeyed in Wales as in other western regions. (J. E. Lloyd, A History of Wales (Benn’s Sixpenny Series), 1930, pages. 15-16,)

What now are we to conclude from these few facts which are all that we are ever likely to know about the relations between England and Rome in these remote ages?

First of all, it is clear that up to the middle of the fifth century the Church in Britain made no claim to be independent of the rest of the Church. The British bishops showed clearly enough that they shared the common faith of the one Catholic Church throughout the world, and freely accepted the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, as the Head of the Church. Then followed a long period when, through no fault of their own, the British Christians were cut off from all contact with Rome and with the greater part of the Church on the continent. This isolation, and their resentment against their conquerors, are enough to explain the long coolness which undoubtedly existed between the descendants of the defeated Britons in Wales and elsewhere, and the now Christian peoples of England. But this separation was itself ended by the free submission of the British, a tacit if somewhat tardy admission that, in cutting themselves off from the rest of the Church in the country, they had been in error.

Nowhere do we hear of any repudiation of the authority of Rome, nor of any Roman condemnation of the British Church as schismatic. Indeed, one can say with all assurance that, had it not been for the Reformation, nothing would ever have been heard of an ‘independent’ British Church. Until the sixteenth century, when the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury repudiated the Pope’s authority, and so ended the succession of St Augustine, the loyalty and obedience of the Church in England to the See of Rome was never in question.

III. THE EARLY BRITISH CHURCH AND THE EUCHARIST.

There is a further and equally important point of comparison between the doctrine of the early British Church and that of the modern Church of England. In any church or community which claims the name Christian, the central point of faith and worship is to be found in the liturgy, in the celebration of the Eucharist. Now there can be no doubt that in the minds of the men who made the Reformation in England, one set of beliefs about the Eucharist was replaced by another. For the Latin Mass there was substituted a new Communion service in English. But this was more than a mere change in the form of celebration. According to the teaching of the new Book of Common Prayer, the Communion service was now no more than an act commemorating the Last Supper. The minister was instructed to take bread and wine, to bless them and give them to the people, who were told that in receiving them they should “feed on Christ” in their hearts. In other words, the traditional Catholic doctrine, that by the words of consecration the bread and wine are changed into the living Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (the doctrine of Transubstantiation), and that Christ, thus truly present on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine, in some mysterious way renews the sacrifice of the Cross, all this was now denied and done away with. And in doing away with the Mass, which they rejected as blasphemy, and with the doctrine of the Real Presence, which they regarded as no better than idolatry, the Reformers claimed that they were simply restoring the faith and practice of the early Church in this country before it was corrupted by the errors of Rome.

Is there any evidence for this assertion? To answer this question it should be sufficient to compare what can be learned from the service books of the early British Church with the doctrine taught in the Book of Common Prayer.

But unfortunately, this is impossible, since none of these early British service books have been preserved. All that remains at most is a fragment which tells us what we know from other sources, that there were many liturgical variations in use in Britain, as indeed elsewhere, at this time. However, we know that the British Christians were in communion with the Celtic Christians of Ireland, Scotland and northern England: of their liturgies we have abundant evidence, and this evidence shows, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the Celts — and therefore the British — used about the Eucharist and the Mass the very same terms which the Catholic Church has used from the earliest times to our own day. So, for example, the consecrated elements are referred to quite simply as “Corpus Christi”, “the Body of Christ”. When the priest celebrates the Eucharist, he is said “to make the Body of Christ”, “Corpus Christi conficere”.

The Mass is referred to as “the sacrifice”, the priest is said “to consecrate the holy oblation”, and so on. All the words used to describe what is done at the celebration of the Eucharist show clearly a full acceptance of the Catholic doctrine, that there is a substantial change in the elements at the consecration, and that the offering of the Eucharist is a true sacrifice. There is not the slightest evidence that the British Christians ever believed about the Eucharist anything but what the Catholic Church teaches today. Indeed, the evidence on this point is so overwhelming that no

apologist for the Reformation, at least in recent times, has ever attempted to maintain the contrary. The author of a recent and authoritative work on Celtic Christianity, himself a stubborn defender of the alleged Celtic independence of the Holy See, is compelled by the evidence to admit, as he does very fully and frankly, that on this question of the Eucharist the doctrine of the early Church in these islands was Catholic, not Protestant. Speaking of the Celtic liturgies, he says:

“The terms used for the celebration of the Eucharist give abundant evidence of the belief in the sacrificial character of the rite; and of the belief also that, after the consecration, the bread becomes the Body of Christ.” (J. A. Duke, The Columban Church, Oxford, 1932, pages 125-6: and see the same volume, pages 164-5, for the texts quoted above.).

In spite of the varied forms of liturgical use in these islands at this time, the doctrine taught by the liturgy was always the same, and it was Catholic doctrine.

IV. CONCLUSION.

We have now briefly reviewed the evidence for the alleged independence and Protestant character of the early British Church. The evidence available is, as was said at the beginning, very scanty indeed, for this was the beginning of the Dark Ages, an obscure period in our history. But for anyone who will consider the evidence without prejudice it allows of only one conclusion: the early British Christians were one in faith and practice with the universal Catholic Church, they never rejected any article of Catholic belief, and they never set themselves up as a national and independent church on the pattern of the later Protestant churches. Those who have sought to prove the contrary have done so in a vain attempt to justify that revolt against the doctrine and the authority of the Catholic Church which first occurred in England in the sixteenth century.

If further proof of this last statement is required, it can be found in the fact that, in the absence of any real historical evidence in support of their argument, some Protestant controversialists have not hesitated to manufacture the required evidence — or, in other words, to forge it. There exists a letter which is said to have been written by a certain Dinoot, the Abbot of the British Monastery of Bangor Iscoed, to St Augustine of Canterbury. In this letter Dinoot rejects the authority of the Bishop of Rome, who, he says, wrongfully claims to be ‘the father of fathers’, and declares that he owes him no more than the charity and affection which he owes to all other Christians. If this letter were genuine, it would indeed be an impressive witness to the existence of an ‘independent’ British Church; but this letter was, in fact, written not by Dinoot, but by a Welsh controversialist in the sixteenth century. (L. Gougaud, Christianity in Celtic Lands, page 215.)

THE END OF A LEGEND.

It can, however, be said with assurance, that the opinions we have been discussing, all of them the result of a completely uncritical approach to the historical problem, (G. Williams, “Some Protestant Views of Early British History”, in History, volume xxxviii, page 233.) are no longer held by responsible scholars in our own day. The hoary legend of a primitive Protestant British Church has been finally disposed of by the non-Catholic scholars who, in the last generation, have rewritten the history of the origins of the Christian Church in the British Isles. In his History of Wales, the standard work on the subject, Professor E. J. Lloyd states clearly what any impartial student of the question must now accept as a final verdict.

“No theological differences,” he writes, “parted the Roman from the Celtic Church, for the notion that the latter was the home of a kind of primitive Protestantism, of apostolic purity and simplicity,

is without any foundation." (J. E. Lloyd, A History of Wales, 2nd edition, London, 1912, page. 173, quoted in Gougaud, Christianity in Celtic Lands, page 216.)

The same conclusion has been reached independently by other non-Catholic scholars who have made a special study of the problem. The Rev. J. C. McNaught, a Scottish minister, was for long convinced that the Celtic Church was, in fact, independent of Rome; but after studying the evidence, he was compelled to revise his opinion. He writes:

"As a result of our investigation we have come to the conclusion that the early Celtic Church, so far from being independent of Rome in the sense of repudiating the papal supremacy, was simply a part of the Catholic Church, and with the whole of the Church acknowledged the Pope as its visible head." (J. C. McNaught. The Celtic Church and the See of Peter, Blackwell, 1927 page 106.)

Another non-Catholic clergyman, the Rev. S. M. Harris, was led by his study of the evidence to the same conclusion. He says:

"It would be difficult today to discover any recognized authority on Celtic antiquity who would maintain either that the Celtic Churches were not in communion with the See of Rome, or that they differed from the rest of the West in their attitude towards that See, and in their conception of the position occupied by the successors of St Peter, and of the authority claimed and exercised by them. Yet, whether from ignorance or otherwise, the delusion is still sedulously fostered, especially in Anglican circles, that these Churches, even if they did not form (as one writer has asserted) 'a Celtic confederation of Churches in opposition to the claims of Rome,' were at any rate non-Roman in their innocence of papal authority, and in their subsequent rejection of it."

The author then proceeds "to set forth once more the real facts of the matter, and consequently to show how fully and readily the Celtic Christians recognized the Holy See of Peter." (S. M. Harris, What do the Celtic Churches Say, 1933, page 2: quoted in L. Guilly, S.J., The Early British Church One With the Church in Rome (Catholic Truth Society), 1949, page 5.).

Such statements as these need no further commentary. The alleged independence of Rome of the early British Church is a legend for which there is no foundation whatever in the records of history.