

## 13. Celtic Sabbath- Keepers

WE KNOW from several sources that Christianity entered the British Isles in apostolic times. (Colossians 1: 23) Rev. Richard Hart, B. A., Vicar of Catton, says: "That the light of Christianity dawned upon these islands in the course of the first century, is a matter of historical certainty. *"Ecdesiastical Records," p. vii. Cambridge: 1846.* Tertullian, about 200 A. D., included the Britons among the many nations which believed in Christ, and he speaks of places among "the Britons-inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ." *"Answer to the Jews," chap. vii.* Dr. Ephraim Pagit, in his "Christianography," printed in London, 1640, gives an interesting account of the early Christians in these islands.

Before the church in the British Isles was forced under the papal yoke, it was noted for its institutions of learning. The Rev. Mr. Hart says:

"That learning and piety flourished in these islands during the period of their independence is capable of the most satisfactory proof, and Ireland in particular was so universally celebrated, that students flocked thither from all parts of the world." – *"Ecclesiastical Records," p. viii.*

He says, some came to "Ireland for the sake of studying the Scriptures." - *Id., p. xi.*

### The Coming Of Patrick

Patrick, a son of a Christian family in southern Scotland, was carried off to Ireland by pirates about 376 A. D. Here, in slavery, he gave his heart to God and, after six years of servitude, escaped, returning to his home in Scotland. But he could not forget the spiritual need of these poor heathen, and after ten years he returned to Ireland as a missionary of the Celtic church. "He had now reached his thirtieth year [390 A. D]." - *"The Ancient British and Irish Churches," William Cathcart, D. D., p. 70.*

Dr. E. Pagit says that "Saint Patrick had in his day founded there 365 churches." - *"Christianography," Part 2, p.10.*

Dr. August Neander says of Patrick:

"The place of his birth was Bonnaven, which lay between the Scottish towns Dumbarton and Glasgow, and was then reckoned to the province of Britain. This village, in memory of Patricius, received the name of Kil-Patrick or Kirk-Patrick. His father, a deacon in the village church, gave him a careful education." - *"General History of the Christian Religion and Church," Vol. II, p. 122. Boston: 1855.*

Patrick himself writes in his "Confession":

"I, Patrick, . . . had Calpornius for my father, a deacon, a son of the late Potitus, the presbyter. . . . I was captured. I was almost sixteen years of age . . . and taken to Ireland in captivity with many thousand men." - *"The Ancient British and Irish Churches," William Cathcart, D. D., p. 127.*

## Patrick Not A Catholic

To those who have heard of Patrick only as a Catholic saint, it may be a surprise to learn that he was not a Roman Catholic at all, but that he was a member of the original Celtic church. There is no more historic evidence for Patrick's being a Roman Catholic saint, than for Peter's being the first pope. Catholics claim that Pope Celestine commissioned Patrick as a Roman Catholic missionary to Ireland; but William Cathcart, D. D., says:

"There is strong evidence that Patrick had no Roman commission in Ireland."

"As Patrick's churches in Ireland, like their brethren in Britain, repudiated the supremacy of the popes, all knowledge of the conversion of Ireland through his ministry must be suppressed [by Rome, at all cost.]" - *Id.*, p. 85.

The popes who lived contemporary with Patrick never mentioned him. "There is not a written word from one of them rejoicing over Patrick's additions to their church, showing clearly that he was not a Roman missionary. . . . So completely buried was Patrick and his work by popes and other Roman Catholics, that in their epistles and larger publications, his name does not once occur in one of them until A. D. 634." - *Id.*, p. 83.

"Prosper does not notice Patrick. . . . He says nothing of the greatest success ever given to a missionary of Christ, apparently because he was not a Romanist." - *Id.*, p. 84.

"Bede never speaks of St. Patrick in his celebrated 'Ecclesiastical History.'" - *Id.*, p. 85.

But, writing of the year 431, Bede says of a Catholic missionary: "Palladius was sent by Celestinus, the Roman pontiff, to the Scots [Irish] that believed in Christ." - *"Ecclesiastical History," p. 22. London: 1894.*

But this papal emissary was not received any more favourably by the church in Ireland, than was Augustine later received by the Celtic church of Scotland, for "he left because he did not receive respect in Ireland." - *"The Ancient British and Irish Churches," Williant Cathcart, D. D., p. 72.*

No Roman Catholic church would have dared to ignore a bishop sent them by the pope. This proves that the churches in the British Isles did not recognize the pope.

Dr. Todd says:

"The 'Confession' of St. Patrick contains not a word of a mission from Pope Celestine. One object of the writer was to defend himself from the charge of presumption in having undertaken such a work as the conversion of the Irish, rude and unlearned as he was. Had he received a regular commission from the see of Rome, that fact alone would be an unanswerable reply. But he makes no mention of Pope Celestine, and rests his defense altogether on the divine call which he believed himself to have received for his work." - *Id.*, pp. 81, 82.

"Muirchu wrote more than two hundred years after Patrick's death. His declaration is positive that he did not go to Rome." - *Id.*, p. 88.

There are three reasons why Patrick could not have been a Roman Catholic missionary: 1. Early

Catholic historians and popes avoided mentioning Patrick or his work; until later legendary histories represented him as a Catholic Saint.<sup>1</sup> 2. When papal missionaries arrived in Britain, 596 A. D., the leaders of the original Celtic church refused to accept their doctrines, or to acknowledge the papal authority, and would not dine with them. (Compare 1 Corinthians 5: 11; 2 John 8-11) They "acted towards the Roman party exactly 'as if they had been pagans.'" - *"Ecclesiastical Records,"* by Richard Hart, pp. viii, xiv. 3. The doctrines of the Celtic church of Patrick's day differed so widely from those of the Roman church, that the latter could not have accepted it as "Catholic." Patrick must have been a Sabbath-keeper, because the churches he established in Ireland, as well as the mother church in Scotland and England, followed the apostolic practice of keeping the seventh day Sabbath, and of working on Sunday, as we soon shall see. But this was considered deadly heresy by the Papacy.

## Columba

Another leader in the Celtic church deserves to be mentioned: Columba, who was born in Ireland, A. D. 521. Animated by the zeal and missionary spirit he found in the schools established by Patrick, Columba continued the work of his predecessor, and selecting twelve fellow workers, he established a missionary center on the island of Iona. This early Celtic church sent its missionaries not only among the heathen Picts of their own country, but also into the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. This Sabbath-keeping church (as did their Waldensian brethren) kept the torch of truth burning during the long, dark night of papal supremacy, till finally they were conquered by Rome in the twelfth century. Professor Andrew Lang says of them:

"They worked on Sunday, but kept Saturday in a Sabbatical manner." - *"A History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation,"* Vol. I, p. 96. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1900.

Dr. A. Butler says of Columba:

"Having continued his labours in Scotland thirty-four years, he clearly and openly foretold his death, and on Saturday, the ninth of June, said to his disciple Diermit: 'This day is called the Sabbath, that is, the rest day, and such will it truly be to me; for it will put an end to my labors.'" - *"Butler's Lives of the Saints,"* Vol. I, A. D. 597, art "St. Columba," p. 762. New York: P. F. Collier.

In a footnote to Blair's translation of the Catholic historian, Bellesheim, we read:

"We seem to see here an allusion to the custom, observed in the early monastic Church of Ireland, of keeping the day of rest on Saturday, or the Sabbath." - *"History of the Catholic Church in Scotland,"* Vol. I, p. 86.

Professor James C. Moffatt, D. D., Professor of Church History at Princeton, says:

"It seems to have been customary in the Celtic churches of early times, in Ireland as well as Scotland, to keep Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, as a day of rest from labour. They obeyed the fourth commandment literally upon the seventh day of the week." - *"The Church in Scotland,"* p. 140. Philadelphia: 1882.

---

<sup>1</sup> These legendary histories of St. Patrick, written during the Dark Ages, are so full of childish superstition and fabricated miracles, that they have to be rejected as actual history.

But the church of Rome could never allow the light of pure apostolic Christianity to shine anywhere, for that would reveal her own religion to be apostasy. Pope Gregory I, in 596, sent the imperious monk Augustine, with forty other monks, to Britain. Dr. A. Ebrard says of this "mission":

"Gregory well knew that there existed in the British Isles, yea, in a part of the Roman dominion, a Christian church, and that his Roman messengers would come in contact with them. By sending these messengers, he was not only intent upon the conversion of the heathen, but from the very beginning he was also bent upon bringing this Irish-Scotch church, which had hitherto been free from Rome, in subjection to the papal chair." *Bonifacius*, p. 16. *Guetersloh*, 1882. (Quoted in *Andrews' "History of the Sabbath," fourth edition, revised and enlarged, p. 582*).

Through political influence, and with magnificent display, the Saxon king, Ethelbert. of Kent, consented to receive the pope's missionaries, and "Augustine baptized ten thousand pagans in one day" by driving them in mass into the water. Then, relying on the support of the pope and the sword of the Saxons, Augustine summoned the leaders of the ancient Celtic church, and demanded of them: "'Acknowledge the authority of the Bishop of Rome.' These are the first words of the Papacy to the ancient Christians of Britain." They meekly replied: 'The only submission we can render him is that which we owe to every Christian.' - *"History of the Reformation," D'Aubigne, Book XVII, chap. 2*. "'But as for further obedience, we know of none that he, whom you term the Pope, or Bishop of Bishops, can claim or demand.'" - *"Early British History," G. H. Whalley, Esq., M. P., p. 17 (London: 1860): and "Variation of Popery," Rev. Samuel Edger, D. D., pp. 180-183. New York: 1849*. Then in 601, when the British bishops finally refused to have any more to do with the haughty messenger of the pope, Augustine proudly threatened them with secular punishment. He said:

"'If you will not have peace from your brethren, you shall have war from your enemies; if you will not preach life to the Saxons, you shall receive death at their hands.' Edelfred, King of Northumbria, at the instigation of Augustine, forthwith poured 50,000 men into the Vale Royal of Chester, the territory of Prince of Powys, under whose auspices the conference had been held. Twelve hundred British priests of the University of Bangor having come out to view the battle, Edelfred directed his forces against them as they stood clothed in their white vestments and totally unarmed, watching the progress of the battle - they were massacred to a man. Advancing to the university itself, he put to death every priest and student therein, and destroyed by fire the halls, colleges, and churches of the university itself; thereby fulfilling, according to the words of the great Saxon authority called the Pious Bede, the prediction, as he terms it, of the blessed Augustine. The ashes of this noble monastery were smoking; its libraries, the collection of ages, having been wholly consumed." - *"Early British History," G. H. Whalley, Esq., M. P., p. 18. London: 1860. See also "Six Old English Chronicles," pp. 275, 276; edited by J. A. Giles, D. C. L. London: 1906*.

D'Aubigne says of Augustine: "A national tradition among the Welsh for many ages pointed to him as the instigator of this cowardly butchery. Thus did Rome loose the savage Pagan against the primitive church of Britain." - *"History of the Reformation" D'Aubigne, book 17, chap. 2*.

This was a master stroke of Rome, and a great blow to the native Christians. With their university, their colleges, their teaching priests, and their ancient manuscripts gone, the Britons were greatly handicapped in their struggle against the ceaseless aggression of Rome. Still they continued the struggle for more than five hundred years longer, till finally, in the year 1069, Malcolm, the King of Scotland, married the Saxon princess, Margaret, who, being an ardent Catholic, began at once to Romanize the primitive church, holding long conferences with its leaders. She was assisted by her husband, and by prominent Catholic officials. Prof. Andrew Lang says:

"The Scottish Church, then, when Malcolm wedded the sainted English Margaret, was Celtic, and presented peculiarities odious to the English lady, strongly attached to the establishment as she knew it at home. . . . The Celtic priests must have disliked the interference of an English woman.

"First there was a difference in keeping Lent. The Kelts did not begin it on Ash Wednesday. . . . They worked on Sunday, but kept Saturday in a sabbatical manner." - *"History of Scotland," Vol. I, p. 96.*

William F. Skene says:

"Her next point was that they did not duly reverence the Lord's day, but in this latter instance they seem to have followed a custom of which we find traces in the early Monastic Church of Ireland, by which they held Saturday to be the Sabbath on which they rested from all their labours." - *"Celtic Scotland," Vol. II, p. 849. Edinburgh: David Douglas, printer, 1877.*

"They held that Saturday was properly the Sabbath on which they abstained from work." - *Id., p. 350.*

"They were wont also to neglect the due observance of the Lord's day, prosecuting their worldly labours on that as on other days, which she likewise showed, by both argument and authority, was unlawful." - *Id., p. 348.*

## **Scotland Under Queen Margaret**

Professor Andrew Lang relates the same fact thus:

"The Scottish Church, then, when Malcolm wedded the saintly English Margaret, was Celtic, and presented peculiarities odious to an English lady, strongly attached to the Establishment as she knew it at home. . . .

"They worked on Sunday, but kept Saturday in a sabbatical manner. . . . These things Margaret abolished." - *"A History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation," Vol. I, p. 96. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1900.*

The Catholic historian, Bellesheim, says of Margaret..

"The queen further protested against the prevailing abuse of Sunday desecration. 'Let us,' she said, 'venerate the Lord's day, inasmuch as upon it our Saviour rose from the dead: let us do no servile work on that day.' The Scots in this matter had no doubt kept up the traditional practice of the ancient monastic Church of Ireland which observed Saturday, rather than Sunday, as a day of rest." - *"History of the Catholic Church in Scotland," Vol. I, pp. 249, 250.*

Finally the queen, the king, and three Roman Catholic dignitaries held a three-day council with the leaders of the Celtic church. Turgot, the queen's confessor, says:

It was another custom of theirs to neglect the reverence due to the Lord's day, by devoting themselves to every kind of worldly business upon it, just as they did upon other days. That this was contrary to the law, she proved to them as well by reason as by authority. 'Let us venerate the Lord's day,' said she, 'because of the resurrection of our Lord, which happened upon that day, and let us no longer do servile works upon it; bearing in mind that upon this day we were redeemed from the slavery of the devil. The blessed Pope Gregory affirms the same, saying: "We must cease from earthly labour upon the Lord's

day.' . . . From that time forward . . . no one dared on these days either to carry any burdens himself or to compel another to do so. *"Life of Queen Margaret" Turgot, Section 20; cited in "Source Book," p. 506, ed. 1922.*

Thus Rome triumphed at last in Scotland. In Ireland also the Sabbath-keeping church established by Patrick was not long left in peace:

"Giraldus Cambrensis informs us that in the year 1155 [Henry II, King of England, was entrusted by Pope Adrian IV with the mission of] invading Ireland [with devastating war] to extend the boundaries of the church, [so that even the Irish would become] faithful to the Church of Rome." The pope wrote Henry:

"You, our beloved son in Christ, have signified to us your desire of invading Ireland. . . . and that you are also willing to pay to St. Peter the annual sum of one penny for every house. We therefore grant a willing assent to your petition, and that the boundaries of the Church may be extended, . . . permit you to enter the island." – *"Ecclesiastical Records of England, Ireland, and Scotland," Rev. Richard Hart, B. A., pp. xv, xvi.*

Thus we see, that in Scotland an English queen "introduced changes which, in Ireland, came in the wake of conquest and the sword. For example, the ecclesiastical novelties which St. Margaret's influence gently thrust upon Scotland, were accepted in Ireland by the Synod of Cashel (1172) under Henry II. Yet there remained, in the Irish Church, a Celtic and an Anglo-Norman party, 'which hated one another with a perfect a hatred as if they rejoiced in the designation of Protestant and Papist.' – *"History of Scotland," Andrew Lang, Vol. I, p. 97.*

But whether this triumph of Catholicism over the native Celtic faith was accomplished by the devastating wars of Henry II, or by Queen Margaret's appeal to Pope Gregory, and her threat of the civil law, in either case it lacked an appeal to plain Bible facts, accompanied by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. And, while the leaders of the Celtic church might reluctantly yield to the civil authorities, the people, who had kept the Bible Sabbath for centuries, requested divine authority for Sunday-keeping. For some time the papal missionaries, who preached this strange gospel to the Britons, fabricated all kinds of stories about miraculous punishments that had befallen those who worked on Sunday: Bread baked on Sunday, when it was cut, sent forth a flow of blood; a man plowing on Sunday, when cleaning his plow with an iron, had it grow fast to his hand, so that he had to carry it around to his shame for two years.

## **Forged Letters From Christ**

When the Abbot Eustace, 1200 A. D., was continually confronted with requests for a divine command for Sunday-keeping, he finally retired to Europe, and returned the next year with a spurious letter from Jesus Christ, claimed to have fallen down from heaven upon St. Simeon's altar at Golgotha. This letter declared:

"I am the Lord. . . . It is my will, that no one, from the ninth hour on Saturday [3 p. m.] until sunrise on Monday, shall do any work. . . . And if you do not pay obedience to this command. . . . I swear to you . . . I will rain upon you stones, and wood, and hot water, in the night. . . . Now, know ye, that you are saved by the prayers of my most holy Mother, Mary!" - *"Roger de Hoveden's Annals," Vol. II, pp. 526, W, Bohn's edition. London: 1853.*

In that superstitious age such childish fabrications might, to some extent, satisfy some people, but four hundred years later the trouble flared up again.

"Upon the publication of the 'Book of Sports' in 1618, a violent controversy arose among English divines on two points: first, whether the Sabbath of the fourth commandment was in force among Christians; and, secondly, whether, and on what ground, the first day of the week was entitled to be distinguished and observed as 'the Sabbath.' In 1628 Theophilus Brabourne, a clergyman, published the first work in favor of the seventh day, or Saturday, as the true Christian Sabbath. He and several others suffered great persecution." - *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates*,. art. "Sabbatarians," p. 602. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1883.

Several ministers arose in England about this time who defended the Bible Sabbath, and who were bitterly persecuted by the state church. John Trask was put in prison; his wife, a schoolteacher of a devout Christian character, remained in prison for fifteen years. On November 26, 1661, John James, a godly Sabbath-keeping preacher, was hanged for advocating the Sabbath truth, "and his head was set upon a pole opposite the meeting house in which he had preached the gospel." - *History of the Baptists*, Dr. J. M. Cramp, p. 351. London: Elliot Stock, 1868. Dr. Thomas Bampfield,<sup>2</sup> who had been speaker in one of Cromwell's parliaments, wrote two books defending the seventh-day Sabbath (1692, 1693), but he also was imprisoned. In 1664, Edward Stennet, an English minister, wrote a book entitled: "The Seventh Day Is the Sabbath of the Lord." But like the rest, he had to spend a long time in prison. In 1668 he wrote the following letter to his Sabbath-keeping brethren in America:

"Abington, Berkshire, England,  
"February 2nd, 1668.

"Edward Stennet, a poor unworthy servant of Jesus Christ, to the remnant in Rhode Island, who keep the commandments of God, and the testimonies of Jesus, sendeth greeting:

"Dearly Beloved:

"I rejoice in the Lord, on your behalfs that He hath been graciously pleased to make known to you His holy Sabbath in such a day as this, when truth falleth in the streets, and equity cannot enter. And with us we can scarcely find a man that is really willing to know whether the Sabbath be a truth or not, and those who have the greatest parts, have the least anxiety to meddle with it.

"We have passed through great opposition for the truth's sake, repeatedly from our brethren, which makes the affliction heavier; I dare not say how heavy, lest it should seem incredible; but the Lord has been with us, affording us strength according to our day. And when lovers and friends seem to be moved far from us, the Lord was near us, comforting our souls, and quickening us, with such quick and eminent answers to our prayers, has encouraged and established us in the truth for which we suffer. But the opposers of truth seem much withered, and at present the opposition seems declining away; the truth is strong, and this spiritual fiery law will burn all those thorns which men set up before it. For was there ever any ceremonial law given us? But this law was given from the mouth of God, in the ears of so many thousands - written on tables of stone with His own finger - promised to be written on the tables of their hearts and confirmed by a miracle for the space of forty years in the wilderness, the manna not keeping good any other day but the Sabbath. . . .

---

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Cox's "Literature of the Sabbath Question." Vol. II, pp. 86-91

“It is our duty as Christians, to carry it with all meekness and tenderness to our brethren, who, through the darkness of their understanding in this point, differ from us. We have abundant reason to bless our dear Father, who hath opened our eyes to behold the wonders in His law, while many of His dear servants are in the dark; but the Lord has in this truth as in others, first revealed it unto babes, that no flesh shall glory in His presence. Our work is to be at the feet of the Lord in all humility, crying unto Him, that we may be furnished with all grace to fit us for His work; that we may be instruments in His hands, to convince our brethren (if the Lord will) who at present differ from us. . . .

“Truly, dear brethren, it is a time of slumbering and sleeping with us, though God's rod is upon our backs. Oh! pray for us to the Lord, to quicken us, and set us upon watch-towers. Here are, in England, about nine or ten churches that keep the Sabbath, besides many scattered disciples, who have been eminently preserved in this tottering day, when many once eminent churches have been shattered in pieces. The Lord alone be exalted, for the Lord has done this, not for our sakes, but for His own name's sake. My dear brethren, I write these lines at a venture, not knowing how they will come to your hand. I shall commit them and you to the blessing of our dear Lord, who hath loved us, and washed away our sins in His own blood. If these lines come to you safely, and I shall hear from you, hereafter I will write to you more largely. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

“Edward Stennet.”

- *"An Original History of the Religious Denominations," I. Daniel Rupp, p. 71. Philadelphia: 1844.*