

The Early British Church—Her Status on the Coming of Augustine to England.

AN ESSAY READ BEFORE THE DETROIT CLERICUS BY REV. G. FORSEY.

(Continued.)

From all these facts, the candid mind can come to but one conclusion, that the British Church existed previous to the third century. In the fourth she appears, not as some neglected branch, but as a living part of the Church universal, taking her place in the discussion of the great questions of the day. Recognized by the emperor, and by the great Churchmen of the period, she is one of the fairest jewels in the crown of her Lord. Not content with her work among her own people she gives evidence of that true sign of a living Church—a missionary spirit. She sends Ninian, a native of North Wales, on a mission to the heathen Picts, in the south of Scotland. She sends Patrick, a native of Britain, forth as the Apostle of Ireland. Both of those missions were eminently successful, reflected great honor upon the Mother Church, and upon Christianity generally.

A. D., 450, is the year given by Bede and others, as the period of the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Says Freeman, in his *History of England*, "The Jutes, in all likelihood, formed the first permanent Teutonic settlement. The Saxons and Angles settled later; but each of them occupied a far larger part of the island than the Jutes. And each of these last gave a name to the Teutonic settlement as a whole. So far as we can see, it would seem that, at least, within the former Roman province, the profession of Christianity was universal; there is no sign that ought of old British or Roman idolatry still lived. On this Christian land, and this Christian people, came the destroying scourge of a Heathen conquest; the Churches and clergy were the foremost objects of the destroying fury of the invaders." Says Southey, "This new Heathenism bore little affinity to that of either the Britons or the Romans. The Saxons, Angles and Jutes had idols wrought in wood, stone and metals of different kinds, even of gold. They had temples, a virtual worship, and a regular priesthood. Their rites were bloody. The Saxons on the continent were known to have decimated their prisoners by sacrificing them. When the image of their goddess, Hertha, was borne abroad, all hostilities were suspended, and nothing was thought of but festivity and joy. At the expiration of the festival, the garments which covered it, and the idol itself, were washed by slaves in a lake, after which ceremony, the slaves were sacrificed by drowning. They worshiped the sun, moon, the Thunderer, and Odin, the favorite god of those who settled on the island." *Book of the Church*.

It has been, and is, asserted by sectarians, anxious to show that the Anglican branch of the Church Catholic is a comparatively modern creation, that the Anglo-Saxon conquest utterly destroyed the British Church, if it ever existed; that Britain was without Christianity on the arrival of Augustine and his associates. I have shown by unquestionable authorities the baseness of the first contention, that there never was an early British Church; the second supposed sectarian strong-hold offers but a poor defence to the approach of truth. Says Southey, "The Britons, too high-minded to brook that forced and ignominious incorporation to which Gauls, Spaniards and Italians had submitted on the breaking up of the Western Empire, gradually retired to the Western Peninsula, to the Land of Lakes, and to the High Lands of Scotland; the priests and monks of the Bri-

tish Church withdrew with them, their language ceased to be spoken in the part of England, so named from its Anglian conquerors, and Christianity disappeared as a public establishment from the kingdoms of the Heptarchy." *Book of the Church*.

The kingdoms of the Heptarchy were not the whole of Britain; they comprised Kent, Sussex, Wessex, Essex, Northumberland, East Anglia, and Mercia. The statement of Southey is quite consistent with the existence of the British Church in those parts of the land not conquered by the Angles and Saxons. Says Freeman, "The Anglo-Saxon conquest was never completed; there were large parts of Britain which remained untouched by the English occupation, and where the ancient inhabitants, their language laws and manners still lived on." (*History*, page 267.) In those "large parts of Britain" was the living British Church.

During the troublous times of the Anglo-Saxon conquest, two names stand out prominently in British history, viz: King Arthur, and St. David a Bishop of the British Church and patron saint of Wales. Passing by much that is legendary, it is evident they were British Christians, and of great influence in their day. Hole directs attention to four centres of Christian light amid the prevailing darkness, viz: Glastonbury, in England, Bangor in Wales, Bangor in Ireland, and Iona, off the coast of Scotland. In Haddan and Stubbs's *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, vol. 1., it is stated that Theon, Bishop of London, and Thadloc, Archbishop of York, only left their dioceses and fled to Wales in A. D., 587, ten years before the coming of Augustine.

It was in A. D., 597 that Augustine and forty other monks, composing the Italian mission, landed in England. They were favorably received by Ethelbert, King of Kent. Says Canon Perry, "Bertha, the French-born Queen of Kent, and a Christian, was the great support of the monks, but the relics of the old Christianity of the land were also an important help to them. Two Christian Churches, at least, were in existence close to the walls of Canterbury. A large number of Christianized Roman Britons existed as a subject population. The traditions of Christianity survived." The mission party were admitted into Canterbury, the Kentish capital, celebrated worship in St. Martin's, the queen's church, and thus was laid the foundation of the See of Canterbury.

Augustine's meeting with seven Bishops of the British Church is thus described by Bede: "In the meantime Augustine, with the assistance of King Ethelbert, drew together to a conference the Bishops, or doctors, of the next province of the Britons, at a place which is to this day called Augustine's oak; and began by brotherly admonitions to persuade them, that preserving Catholic unity with him, they should undertake the common labor of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. After a long disputation, they did not comply with the entreaties, exhortations, or rebukes of Augustine and his companions. At a second meeting there came seven Bishops of the Britons, and many most learned men. When they came Augustine was sitting on a chair, which they observing, were in a passion, charging him with pride, and contradicting all he said. He said to them, You act in many particulars contrary to our custom, or rather the custom of the universal Church; and yet, if you will comply with me in these three points, viz: to keep Easter at the due time, to administer baptism, by which we are born to God, according to the custom of the Holy Roman Apostolic Church; and jointly with us to preach the word of God to the English nation, we will readily tolerate all the other things you do. They answered they would do none of those things, nor receive him as their archbishop." *Book II., chap. 2.*

Those seven British Bishops represented so many British Sees, and though not probably a fair showing of the Episcopal strength of the

Church, yet gave evidence of vigorous life amid unexampled persecutions.

Bede gives a series of questions submitted by Augustine to Gregory. One of these was, "How are we to deal with the Bishops of France and Britain?" After disposing of the case of the French Bishops, Gregory says in his reply, "But as for all the Bishops of Britain, we commit them to your care." The point of this quotation for our purpose is that both Augustine and Gregory recognize the standing of the British Bishops as such. Neither in Augustine's interview with them, nor at any other time, is the question of the validity of their orders raised, they are regarded from all quarters as rightful Bishops of the Church of God, and if rightful Bishops, the Church over which they presided was an integral branch of the Church universal.

From all that has been advanced, we learn:

1. That on the coming of Augustine to Britain in the sixth century, he found the British Church in active operation, and exercising, in the face of Anglo-Saxon opposition, a gracious influence over the British people.
2. That this Church, so found, was identical with, and the legitimate successor of, the Early British Church, planted in Britain, probably, by Christians from the Church of the Rhone cities in the latter part of the second century.
3. That this Church had, and was admitted to have had, the historic and divine order of a three fold ministry—Bishops, Priests and Deacons.
4. That this Church was living and aggressive, as shown by her missions to the Celts of Ireland and Scotland, and, as in the case of Columbanus, to the barbarians of Gaul and Germany.
5. That this Church was independent of Rome. Her Bishops admitted the equality of Augustine, when consecrated Bishop, and of Gregory, Bishop of Rome, but acknowledged no superiority; hence their indignation when Augustine received them *sitting* while they *stood*, as if they were inferior in his view.
6. That this Early British Church, in her unbroken continuity, was the mother of the Church of England, and of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America.

From her antiquity, her historic ministry, her catholic doctrines and usages, her apostolic and Scriptural liturgy, her stately and reverent worship, her missionary triumphs in all parts of the world—from her rapid progress in this intellectual and highly critical age, growing most where civilization has won her greatest successes, from the high honor placed upon her by her Great Head—we conclude the Anglican to be a true branch of the one Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The Rev. F. Burnside, rector of Hertingsfordbury, and the well-known honorary editor of the *Official Year-book of the Church of England*, has compiled an interesting statement of the contributions to the Hospital Sunday Fund for the past twenty years, which shows the number of collections, and the total amount raised, as well as by whom it was contributed. It is a peculiarly forcible way of exhibiting the proportion in which members of the Church contribute to charities and philanthropic movements as compared with Nonconformist bodies. For instance, the total number of collections was 27,272, of which the Church has to be credited with 15,946, the remainder being divisible among twenty Dissenting bodies, whose names are given, and some eighty-seven others who are lumped as "various." When we come to look at the amount raised, the disproportion is still more striking. In round figures, a total sum of 624,000/ has been raised, and of this sum the members of the Church have given 478,500/, and the twenty denominations and eighty-seven "various" the remaining 145,500/, i.e., the subscriptions of Churchmen are more than three and a quarter times as much as the contributions of all the other bodies combined!