

## CONTRIBUTIONS.

### A CHAPTER OF ENGLISH CHURCH HISTORY.

A lecture delivered by Prof. Glover at the opening of the Theological Faculty.

**T**HE chapter of English Church history which we shall discuss to-night is the first chapter.

I do not propose to go back, as some would, to the age of the Apostles, or to amuse you with mythical tales of the conversion of the earliest inhabitants of the British Isles by St. Peter. To any who would tell you such a tale the best reply is that of Thomas Fuller, the historian, "Fie, fie, thou lying monk." Even supposing St. Peter himself had been the first to preach the gospel in Britain, it was not to the English people that he preached it. With the British Church we are not at present concerned, nor even with the whole of the English Church. To-night we deal with the Church of Northumbria.

Northumbria was settled by the Angles during and after the fifth century, and it rapidly became the greatest kingdom of the Heptarchy. It extended from the Forth to the Humber, and it is worth noting that while we speak habitually of our ancestors as Saxons, contemporaries gave the old country the name it bears to-day—the land of the Angles. It is an interesting thing that though the Italian mission of Augustine did not reach, or at any rate very slightly affected, the Northumbrian kingdom, it was to Northumbria that the mission was originally directed. The story is well known. Somewhere about the year 585, a Roman deacon passing through the Roman market saw some boys offered for sale. St. Gregory the Great, for it was he, was struck by the beauty and the golden hair of the boys. He had long been the friend of slaves, and the unhappy boys at once engaged his sympathy. He asked a merchant, probably a Jew, from what country the boys came. He was told from England, whose inhabitants were all of that beauty. Again he asked whether the Islanders were Christians or were involved in pagan error. On learning that they were pagans he sighed deeply and again asked what was the name of the race. It was answered that they were called Angles. "Well-named," quoth he, "for they have the faces of angels and are such as should be fellow-heirs of the angels in heaven. From what province did they come?" "From Deira." "Good again," he said; "they should be saved from wrath (*de ira*) and called to the mercy of Christ. What is the king of that province called?" "Aelli," and the saint attempted a third pun on Alleluia. He went to the Pope and asked that missionaries might be sent to the Angles in Britain; he would himself go did the Pope per-

mit. But it was not to be. A few years later he became Pope himself and one of his earliest cares was to send others to the mission field he had coveted for himself.

Augustine and his companions landed in Kent in 596, and Kent remained eventually the one sphere of their labour. It is true that Augustine went west in a vain endeavour to secure the co-operation of the British bishops, who with their people had fled to Wales before the conquering Saxons. The story of their meeting is recorded by Bede and is very significant. There were one or two points of practice in which the Roman and British churches differed, such small points as the true date of Easter and the Apostolic tonsure. The British bishops were uncertain what attitude to adopt towards Augustine, and in their doubt had recourse to a pious hermit. The hermit was oracular. If he was a man of God, submit to him. Here was a more difficult question still to decide. How were they to know whether he was a man of God. The hermit's answer is striking. "Let Augustine arrive first at the place of meeting; if, when you come, he arises from his seat to meet you you may count him a man of God. If he does not rise, he who lacks humility is not a servant of God." Fortified with this advice the bishops set out. They successfully delayed their arrival until after Augustine's, and as they came in sight Augustine remained seated. If this was not enough to prove his want of humility, the rest of his conduct was. He was essentially a small man, and his greatness is a borrowed greatness. All that he is he owes to Gregory. In himself he was small, narrow and hard. We may pass over the story of his work in the south of England, and go with his disciple, Paulinus, to York.

At this time Edwin was Bretwalda, the greatest of the English kings, a thoughtful man who had endured adversity and learned its lessons. The missionary preached his new gospel, the king was interested, heard him gladly, continued to hear him and remained undecided. At last he came near a decision. On Easter Eve, 626, he narrowly escaped assassination. On the same night his wife bore him a daughter. Her safety, Paulinus claimed, was the fruit of his prayers. Edwin was meditating vengeance on the king of Wessex, who had hired the would-be assassin. If he should succeed in this, he would give himself to Christ. Wessex was duly punished, and in the winter time of 626-7 Edwin assembled his councillors at Goodmanham, near York, to discuss the claims of Christianity. The chief pagan priest, Coifi, was ready with his answer. "If the old gods had been any good, they would have rewarded their best worshipper; I have been their best worshipper, they have not rewarded me."