

EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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Shortly after Augustine's arrival he had occasion to ask Pope Gregory's advice on various subjects, among others, as to the course to be adopted by him in his intercourse with the bishops of Gaul and Britain, and he was informed by Gregory that all of the British bishops were committed to him—the ignorant for instruction, the weak for persuasive confirmation, and the perverse for authority. It will be seen, therefore, that even in that early day the Pope claimed a sort of lordship over the native bishops. But while we must admit the Pope made the claim, it is also well to see how the native British bishops regarded this claim; and there is, fortunately, an anecdote preserved in the pages of the Venerable Bede which sheds no little light on the point, especially when it is remembered that Bede, who records the story, was himself a devoted adherent of the Pope. The story is this: Some time after his arrival in England, Augustine, being desirous of consolidating and extending his authority, repaired to the confines of Wales and sought an interview with the native British bishops. The place of meeting was afterwards known as "Augustine's Oak." The influence of Ethelbert was used in bringing the parties together, and Augustine declared his principal object to be no other than to secure the co-operation of the British bishops in the great work of converting the Saxons, but he qualified his application for their aid by insisting upon a complete uniformity in religious practices; for although the native British Christians appear to have held the same doctrines as Augustine, they differed in some respects in practice, notably in the time of keeping Easter. What this difference was is, perhaps, not absolutely certain. It is well known that a dispute as to the proper day for keeping Easter arose very early in the Christian Church. The Christians of Asia Minor, on the one hand, observed the day on which the Jews kept the passover, in commemoration of the institution of the Lord's Supper, and three days afterwards, regardless of the day of the week, they celebrated Easter. The western Christians, on the other hand, always kept Easter on the first day of the week. Some writers suppose that this was the difference which prevailed between Augustine and the British bishops, and have hence argued that it indicated that the British Church had been founded by missionaries from the Eastern Church. But this particular dispute (known as the Quartodeciman controversy) appears to have been settled at the Council of Nice, 325, at which British bishops were present, and the better opinion seems to be that the difference

between Augustine's method of keeping Easter and that of the British bishops was due to the latter adhering to a mode of computing the day on which the festival should fall known as the eighty-four years' cycle, which, in the middle of the sixth century, *i.e.*, forty years before Augustine's arrival in England, had been superseded in the Roman Church by another founded on more accurate astronomical calculations. But, whatever the differences may have been between the British bishops and Augustine, the native Christians adhered to their own practices, and refused to give them up. Finding arguments useless, Augustine proposed to resort to a miracle as proof of his superior authority. A man, by birth an Angle, was produced, exhibiting marks of blindness. The Britons were invited to pray for his release from that calamity, and certain British bishops accepted the invitation, and, their prayers having proved ineffectual, Augustine then stepped forward and offered an earnest supplication, and at the end of it the man appeared to have recovered the possession of his eyesight. Among an uncivilized people this test was regarded as conclusive, and Augustine's principles were approved by acclamation. The leading Britons, however, declined to accept them without the general consent of their countrymen, and requested a second conference, at which they might appear more numerous and supported.

To this second conference came seven British bishops and various native divines of learning. On their way to the place of meeting they are said to have consulted a hermit, highly esteemed for prudence and holiness, who advised them, "If Augustine be a man of God to take his advice." They then asked how they were to know if he was a man of God. To this the hermit replied, "This is not difficult; our Lord enjoined 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.' Now, manage to be at the place of meeting after the foreigner, and, if he shall rise at your approach, then you may think him to have learnt of Christ; if he should receive you sitting and show any haughtiness, then maintain your ancient usages." This proved an unfortunate test for Augustine, who, coming as he did from the then centre of civilization, not unnaturally, perhaps, regarded himself as the superior of the native clergy, and when he saw the Britons approach he did not deign to rise from his seat. His demands on this occasion seem to have been confined to four things: One, that the Britons should keep Easter as he did; another, that they should baptize according to the Roman ritual; a third, that they should join him in converting the Angles to the faith; and a fourth, that they should acknowledge him as their archbishop. But the Britons were disgusted with what they regarded as his want of courtesy and his assumption of ecclesias-