

ecclesiastical affairs. From this period to the invasion of the Saxons, few events took place in the ecclesiastical history of England, with the exception of the birth of a new heresy, called from the name of its first promulgator the heresy of Pelagius. This misguided man was a native of Britain, and his tact and ability gained him many adherents. — Amongst other things, he believed that Divine grace was not necessary to enable men to live acceptably to God, and that man, by his own unassisted powers can work out his own salvation: a doctrine which virtually denies the necessity of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and subjects its believers to the imputation of “denying the Lord who bought them.” The harrassing inroads of the Picts and Scots, and the subsequent invasion of the idolatrous Saxons contributed much to the eradication of Gospel Truth from among the natives of Britain; but amongst the fastnesses of Cambria and Cornwall, whither most of the aboriginal inhabitants had been driven, the light of Christianity was preserved unextinguished.

It was in this state of affairs that Augustine, deputed by Pope Gregory the Great, arrived in England, where, by his zeal and active exertions, he made great progress in the spread of Christianity, but his utmost efforts failed in inducing the British clergy to acknowledge the spiritual supremacy of Rome. These latter declared that they knew no other obedience to the person known by the name of the Pope, than what was due in brotherly love from one Christian to another. Far different in spirit was the reply of Augustine, who is reported to have exclaimed, “Since you refuse peace from your brethren, you shall have war from your enemies, and since you will not co-operate with us in the conversion of the Saxons, you shall receive death at their hands.” The Pope rewarded the zeal of Augustine, by appointing him to the metropolitan see of Canterbury, of which he was the first Archbishop.

From this period (the end of the 6th century,) to the time of the Venerable Bede, a host of illustrious men flourished, whose numbers will only permit us to mention the

most remarkable. The name of Sigebert, king of the East Angles, in particular, deserves mention, as being the founder of the University of Cambridge; SS. Aidan, Finan, and others are noted for their labours in the conversion of Northumbria; and Theodore, Brithwald, Tatwin, Northelm, and Cuthbert, the successors of Augustine in the see of Canterbury, were distinguished as much for their piety and exertions in the cause of Christianity as for their extensive acquaintance with the literature and science of the day. Theodore was the first of the English Bishops to whom the whole body of the clergy yielded the right of supremacy. Aldhelm also deserves a place among the literary men of the age. This last name immediately precedes that of the subject of our brief memoir, on which we shall now enter.

The Venerable Bede was born in the year 672 or 673 in the neighbourhood of Wearmouth, in the county of Durham. He entered a monastery at the early age of seven, where he was most carefully educated for twelve years. At the age of nineteen he was ordained deacon, and from that time he taught and studied with unwearied diligence, dividing his time between his books and devotion, and considered by all who knew him as their pattern. But their praises abated neither his application nor his modesty, which latter was as conspicuous as his learning. His unaffected modesty and humility prevented him from ever desiring to change his condition, or to affect the honours to which he might have attained. The fame of his extensive and various erudition and extraordinary abilities was not confined to his own country, but soon reached to distant lands; and it is related that Pope Sergius the first invited him to the court of Rome, where he wished to consult him on many important subjects. But the retiring modesty of Bede would not allow him to accept the invitation, and he remained to prosecute his labours in the seclusion of his monastery, thinking, perhaps, that by remaining in his native country, he could gain more time to make himself master of every branch of literature, that the circumstances of his age would permit; and this not with any view to fame or preferment.