

THE COMING OF AUGUSTINE.

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VII.—AUGUSTINE AND THE WELSH BISHOPS.



AFTER Augustine was made a Bishop, in a letter to Pope Gregory he asked him, "How ought I to deal with the Bishops of Gaul and Britain?"

Concerning the Bishops in Gaul, or France, Gregory told Augustine that he had no jurisdiction over them, but as to the Bishops in Britain—presumably those of the British Church in Wales, as well as the future Bishops of the English Church—Gregory informed Augustine that they were all committed to his oversight and placed under his authority.

Gregory assumed too much in attempting thus to dispose of the obedience and submission of the British Bishops, who had never been subject to the Bishop of Rome, as Augustine found to his cost in trying to enforce his authority over them.

The story of Augustine's unsuccessful efforts to bring the Welsh Bishops under his archiepiscopal jurisdiction is interesting.

Ethelbert in all probability helped to arrange the proposed meeting between Augustine and the Welsh Bishops, and also facilitated Augustine's long and tedious journey to the appointed place

of their interview. This place seems to have been under an oak-tree in the neighbourhood of Chepstow.

Whether the subjects to be discussed at the interview were agreed upon before it took place we are not told.

It is certain, however, that the Welsh Bishops met Augustine with certain feelings of suspicion that his object was to establish his episcopal rule over them.

When they met, as we are told, Augustine sought to persuade them to join him in his efforts to convert the heathen English and to live in Catholic ecclesiastical peace with himself; which meant, no doubt, that he required them to abandon their form of the priestly tonsure, and their time of keeping Easter—points wherein they differed from the Church of Rome, and all churches in communion with her—and henceforth to conform to Roman ecclesiastical uses.

The British Bishops did not see this, and proposed that the discussion of the subject should be adjourned to a subsequent conference when a larger number of Bishops might be present.

The second conference with Augustine was attended by seven Bishops and a number of learned men from the famous British monastery of Bangor Iscoed. But being somewhat unsettled in their minds as to what answer to make to Augustine's request that they should submit themselves to his jurisdiction and conform to the Canterbury uses, they had recourse to the counsel of a religious hermit, famed, no doubt, for his supposed wisdom.

"If Augustine be a man of God," said the hermit, "follow him."

"But how shall we find out whether he is so?" asked the Bishops.

"Our Lord," said the hermit, "spoke of Himself as meek and lowly in heart. If Augustine shows that temper you may believe that he has learned of Christ and taken up His yoke and is offering it to you."

"Whereby shall we discover of what spirit Augustine is?" asked the Bishops.

"Manage," said the hermit, "that he shall be at the meeting-place before you. If, when you approach him, he rises to