

The Coming of Augustine

By Venerable Bede

London Catholic Truth Society No.cts0025 (1897)

Introduction

Much interest is awakened in the mission of St. Augustine to Britain, for he was the first to bring the faith to our Saxon forefathers, and he brought it under the personal direction of the Sovereign Pontiff. Questions are mooted concerning his monasticism, his credentials, the extent of his authority, the vitality and permanence of his work. The settlement of these issues will obviously depend mainly on contemporary records, and these, in an age of turmoil and in the reconstruction of Europe, are by no means plentiful. Hence the writings of Venerable Bede have a special importance in determining the facts of the introduction of Christianity into Saxon England. Speculations about what might have been, or ought to have been, and the dressing up of a bare skeleton with the flesh and clothes of the imagination, must give way to the narrative of a trustworthy witness who lived close to the time of the events in his story. During this year 1897 the thirteen hundredth anniversary of his landing, when attention is directed to St. Augustine, it will be serviceable to place within the reach of every one what Venerable Bede actually states about St. Augustine, so that a just estimate may be formed of both the facts and the value of what is asserted concerning his mission and work.

St. Augustine came to England in 597 and died in 604. Venerable Bede was born in 672 or 673 and finished his Ecclesiastical History about the year 731. He was placed in a monastery on the banks of the Tyne in his early childhood, and thus speaks of himself (Eccl. Hist., V. 24): "I was born in the territory of the same monastery, and through the care of my relatives when I was seven years old I was offered therein to be educated by the most reverend Abbot Benedict and afterwards by Ceolfrid; dwelling from that time in the same monastery I have spent all the days of my life there, giving my whole mind to the study of the Scriptures, and in the intervals of the observance of regular discipline and the daily service of chant in the church it has been my delight to learn, to teach, or to write. In my nineteenth year I received the diaconate and in my thirtieth the priesthood, both from the hands of the most reverend bishop John at the command of Abbot Ceolfrid. From the time that I received the priesthood until the fifty-ninth year of my age I have been engaged in annotating the holy Scriptures from the works of the venerable Fathers according to the requirements of myself and my brethren."

Thus he lived in an atmosphere distinctively ecclesiastical, and in his youth would eagerly pick up the stories of elderly men who had commenced life close upon the days of St. Augustine. Newspapers and telegrams did not then day by day crowd the mind to pander to the rapidity of modern excitement, and the story of the first introduction of Christianity was still fresh and vivid. Bede's Ecclesiastical History and his Lives of saints testify to his care in the collection and description of details. For the account of the conversion of Kent he did not rely on traditions prevalent in Northumbria, but he gathered accurate information from St. Augustine's own monastery at Canterbury. In the Preface to his History he thus writes: "To remove from the hearers

or readers of this History any motive for doubt about what I have written I shall make it a point to mention briefly the authorities to whom I am mainly indebted. The authority above all and the chief helper of this work was the most reverend Father Albinus, a man of the utmost learning, who was created Abbot of the church of Canterbury by Archbishop Theodore of happy memory and by the Abbot Adrian, both of whom were venerable and cultivated men. With much research he made himself acquainted with all that had been done in the province of Canterbury and the neighbouring regions by the disciples of the blessed Pope Gregory, either from written records or the traditions of the elders, and he sent to me all that seemed worthy of note through Nothelm, a holy priest of the church of London, either by letter or by word of mouth of Nothelm himself. Moreover afterwards Nothelm went to Rome, and by the permission of Pope Gregory who now presides over the Church, he examined the archives of the same holy Roman church, and found some letters of the blessed Pope Gregory and other Popes, and on his return brought them to us to be inserted in our history by the advice of the aforesaid most reverend father Albinus. From the beginning of this volume to the time when the nation of the English received the faith of Christ we have learned what we state mainly from previous writings collected here and there. But thence up to the present time what was done in the church of Canterbury by the disciples of blessed Pope Gregory or under different kings we have ascertained through the industry of the aforesaid Abbot Albinus, as we have stated, by the narrative of Nothelm."

The materials for the account of St. Augustine were consequently collected with the utmost care from the scene of his labours by skilled experts, who verified the results as far as possible by reference to the archives at Rome. Few historical documents have so clearly upon them the stamp of accuracy and truth. Whatever may be thought of some details—e.g., the words that issued from the mouth of King Ethelbert, the incident of the miracle of healing at the conference with the Britons, and occasional minor particulars—the outline and substance of the narrative stand out as incontestable as any record of the past. No one can reasonably refuse to admit that the design originated in Rome, that the Holy See itself prompted and organized the mission, that the Pope personally encouraged and facilitated the journey, that the missionaries were monks, that they spread the faith with marvellous rapidity, that they established a hierarchy, that St. Augustine received the pallium, the symbol of jurisdiction from Rome, that he exercised authority over the newly formed Church of England, that he acknowledged his dependence on the Holy See by referring to Rome questions for its decision. Bede thus refers to Pope Gregory in his Ecclesiastical History (ii. i): "It is fitting that we should treat more fully of him in our Ecclesiastical History for by his exertions he converted our nation, that is the English, from the power of Satan to the faith of Christ. For we may, and ought rightly to, call him an apostle, because, whereas he exercised the pontificate over all the world, and was placed over the churches already reduced to the faith of truth, he made our nation—till then given up to the servitude of idols—the Church of Christ, so that it is allowable for us to give him that title of apostle, for though he is not an apostle to others, yet he is so to us; for we are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord."

Bede's narrative is corroborated by the contemporary documents contained in the Registrum of the Holy See, where a portion of the letters of Pope Gregory the Great is preserved. There can be seen the letter "to the brethren on their way to England," and letters to Virgilius of Aries, Pelagius of Tours, Serenus of Marseilles, Desiderius of Vienne, and Syagrius of Autun, begging the good offices of these bishops for the missionaries on their journey. There are letters also to Kings Theodoret and Theodebert, through whose dominions they passed, and to Queen Brunehaut. A letter written to Eulogius of Alexandria expresses St. Gregory's joy at the result of the mission. "And now

by the help of your prayers," he writes, "God put it into my mind to send to it (the English nation) a monk of my monastery to preach the Gospel. By my license he has been consecrated bishop by the bishops of Germany, and by their assistance he went to the above-named nation at the extremity of the world, and news has just reached me of his safety and of his wonderful doings, that either he or those who were sent with him, have been so conspicuous by great miracles amongst this people, that they seem to have the power of the Apostles in the signs they have wrought. On the feast of our Lord's Nativity in the first year of the Indiction, as I hear from our same brother and fellow bishop, more than ten thousand English were baptized" (Ep. viii. 30). On the return of St. Augustine's messengers St. Gregory wrote, as seen in the Registrum, to the Bishops of Toulon, Marseilles, Chalons, Metz, Vienne, Aries, Lyons, Gap, Paris, Rouen, and Angers, and also to Kings Clothaire, Theodebert, and Theodoret, and to Queen Brunehaut, thanking them for past favours and commending the new missionaries to their protection. The Registrum contains his letters to King Ethelbert and Queen Bertha, and his congratulations and warnings to St. Augustine, and the letter announcing the despatch of the pallium and giving directions for the establishment of the hierarchy.

Never, perhaps, did a nation receive its faith more directly and more certainly from Rome than did our Saxon forefathers. It was not that the British Church had no connection with Rome; it was Catholic, and had a regular hierarchy in communion with the Holy See. The leaders of the Church formally dissociated themselves from the work of St. Augustine and left the Saxons entirely to his ministrations. In the account of Venerable Bede no trace of any doctrinal differences can be detected, and the points of disagreement at the Conference turned on questions of discipline and co-operation. Had any divergence in doctrine existed Venerable Bede could not have failed to record it, nor could St. Augustine have sought the co-operation of the British bishops in the conversion of the Saxons with any doubt about their loyalty to the faith. The whole record of the conference assumes unity in doctrine. The hatred in which the Britons held their conquerors and an obvious wish to retain their own ecclesiastical organization will sufficiently account for their refusal to work with St. Augustine. Later, Celtic missionaries came from the north and took an active part in the conversion of the country. They did a noble work, they brought provinces to the faith, they founded monasteries and formed dioceses, and for a time occupied many of the English sees. But their presence was temporary, and in due course the whole ecclesiastical organization of England settled down under the primacy of the see of Canterbury. How much of the conversion of the country can be attributed to the Celtic missionaries, and how much to those who came direct from Rome and their successors, is a matter of research, but it is a significant fact that no Celtic missionary ever sat in the chair of St. Augustine. The succession of the Archbishops of Canterbury remained unbroken in lineage and unbroken in its connection with the Holy See, until at the Reformation a change came, when gentlemen with wives and without Orders acquired the title with such jurisdiction as a lay sovereign could impart.

The following pages will give the reader an opportunity of ascertaining what Venerable Bede exactly states about the work of St. Augustine. They consist of a translation, without note or comment, of the portions of his Ecclesiastical History in reference to St. Augustine. The text adopted is that of Smith as edited by Moberly and printed at the Clarendon Press in 1881. The questions sent by St. Augustine to Rome for solution and the answers to them have been omitted, for they would be uninteresting to the general reader and would interrupt the narrative.

From Ven. Bede's Ecclesiastical History

Book I

Chapter 23. In the year of our Lord 582, Maurice, the fifty-fourth from Augustus, succeeded to the Empire and retained it twenty-one years. In the tenth year of his reign, Gregory, a man eminent for learning and energy, was chosen Pontiff of the Roman and Apostolic See, and reigned thirteen years, six months and ten days. During the fourteenth year of the same prince, and about one hundred and fifty years after the coming of the Angles into Britain, he was prompted by a heavenly impulse to send the servant of God, Augustine, and other God-fearing monks to preach the word of God to the nation of the English. When in obedience to the commands of the Pope they had commenced to undertake this work and had already completed a portion of the journey, they were stricken listless with timidity, and thought it better to return home than to go on to a people uncivilized, fierce, and unbelieving, whose language even they did not know, and by common consent they determined that this was the safer course. In short, they sent back Augustine, whom it was arranged should be their bishop in case they were received by the English, to submit their respectful supplication to blessed Gregory, and to obtain his permission not to continue such a perilous, toilsome, and uncertain journey. He sent them an encouraging letter to induce them to go on with this work of the gospel, and to trust to the assistance of God. The following is the text of the letter:—

"Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to the servants of our Lord. Since it would be better not to begin good works than to think of withdrawing from them when once commenced, it is right, my dearest sons, that you should strenuously make every effort to complete the good work which, by God's help, you have begun. Be not disheartened at the hardness of the journey or the tongues of evil-speaking men, but with all eagerness and fervour carry out what at God's suggestion you have undertaken, knowing that the glory of an eternal reward is given to great labour. With humble reverence obey in all things Augustine your prior, whom on his return to you we have appointed your abbot. Be assured that whatever you do according to his directions will tend to the profit of your souls. May Almighty God shield you with His grace, and grant that I may see the fruits of your exertions in our everlasting country, so that, though I am denied a part in your labours, I may share in the joy of your reward, since, had I my wish, I would labour with you. May God take you, my dearest sons, into His keeping. Dated the tenth day of the Kalends of August, in the fourteenth year of our most religious Emperor our Lord Mauricius Tiberius Augustus, and the thirteenth from the consulship of the same Lord, the fourteenth Indiction."

24. The same venerable Pontiff sent also a letter to Etherius, Bishop of Aries, to request him to receive Augustine kindly on his way to Britain, and this is the text of the letter:—

"To Etherius, his most reverend and most holy brother and fellow bishop, Gregory, servant of the servants of God. Although religious men need no recommendation to priests who are filled with the charity that is pleasing to God, we have taken advantage of a fitting opportunity to notify that we have by the assistance of God directed thither for the good of souls the bearers of these presents, the servant of God, Augustine, to whose zeal we can bear witness, and other servants of God whom your holiness will be ready to assist with priestly affection and to give them hospitality. To make you the more willing to render him assistance we have enjoined him to communicate to you the particulars of his mission, feeling confident that the knowledge will make you anxious for God's sake to help him right cordially, for the business is urgent. We also in all things commend to your

charity the priest Candidus whom we have sent for the management of the patrimony belonging to our church. May God keep you in safety, most reverend brother. Dated the tenth day of the Kalends of August, &c."

25. Encouraged by the support of the blessed Father Gregory, Augustine and his fellow servants of Christ took up afresh the work of the word of God and came to Britain. At that time Ethelbert, the powerful king of Kent, had extended the bounds of his dominions as far as the great river Humber, which divided the southern from the northern tribes of the English. On the eastern coast of Kent lies the island of Thanet, of considerable size, and containing, according to the reckoning of the English, six hundred families, and it is separated from the mainland by the river Wantsum, which is about three furlongs broad, and fordable in two places only, for both ends of the island extend to the sea. At this spot landed the servant of the Lord, Augustine, and his companions to the number, it is said, of about forty. They took with them, according to the instructions of Pope Gregory, some interpreters from the people of the Franks, and they sent to Ethelbert to notify that they had come from Rome and brought a priceless message, and confidently promised to those who availed themselves of it eternal joys in heaven and a kingdom without end with the living and true God. On hearing this announcement the king ordered them to stay upon the island where they had landed, and provided them with necessaries until he should determine what to do with them. For a favourable opinion of the Christian religion had already reached him, inasmuch as he had taken from the royal race of the Franks a Christian wife, by name Bertha, whom he had accepted from her parents on condition that she should have unrestricted permission to practise the rites of faith and her religion, together with a bishop named Luidhard, whom they had given her for the protection of her faith.

After some days the king came to the island, and seated in the open air, ordered Augustine and his companions to draw near for a conference, guarding by an old superstition he took care that they should not come to him in any house, lest if they practised magical arts they might deceive and prevail over him. They came, however, possessed not with diabolical but with heavenly power, carrying a silver cross for a standard and an image of our Lord and Saviour painted on a board, and singing the Litanies they besought the Lord for the eternal salvation of themselves and of those for whom they had come. When they had sat down at the command of the king they preached the word of life to him and all his attendants, to which he replied: "Your words and the promises which you offer are attractive, but since they are new and perplexing I cannot give assent to them and cast aside the opinions which, together with the whole of the English people, I have held for so long. But because you have come here after a long journey, and, as I perceive, you believe what you wish to impart to us is true and precious, we are unwilling to molest you, but would rather receive you kindly with hospitality and shall take care to supply what is necessary for your support: nor do we forbid you from preaching and gaining all you can to fellowship in your religion." He gave them a house in the city of Canterbury, the capital of all his dominions, and according to promise, besides provision for temporal support, he did not withdraw the permission to preach. It is said that as they approached the city bearing, according to custom, the holy cross and the image of our Sovereign King and Lord, Jesus Christ, they sang in concert this chant: "We pray Thee, Lord, in Thy great mercy to avert Thine anger and Thy indignation from this city and from Thy holy house for we are sinners. Alleluia."

26. When they had taken possession of the dwelling assigned to them they began to practise the apostolic life of the early church, devoting themselves to frequent prayer, watching and fasting;

preaching the word of life to whom they could, despising all things of this world as not belonging to them, receiving simply what was necessary for sustenance from those whom they taught, practising themselves everything that they prescribed to others, and with their minds prepared to suffer any adversity, even death, for the truths that they preached. In short, several believed and were baptized, touched at the simplicity of their innocent life and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine. Close to the east side of the city was a church in honour of St. Martin built in the old times, whilst the Romans occupied Britain, in which the Queen who, as mentioned above, was a Christian, used for her devotions. In this church they began first to assemble, to sing, to pray, to say Mass, to preach and to baptize, until on the conversion of the king to the faith they obtained extended permission to preach anywhere and to build and restore churches.

When the king, enchanted with the rest at the unspotted life of the holy men and their consoling promises, the truth of which they confirmed by the witness of many miracles, had believed and been baptized, many began to flock to hear the word of God, and they believed and forsook their pagan rites to join themselves to the unity of the holy church of Christ. Although the king ardently wished for the faith and conversion of his subjects, he did not compel any one to adopt Christianity, but only treated the believers with greater affection as if they were fellow citizens with him in the heavenly kingdom. He had learned from his teachers and spiritual masters that the service of Christ should be voluntary and not compulsory. Nor did he delay in granting to his teachers a residence suitable to their state in his metropolis of Canterbury, and at the same time supplied them with all that was necessary of every description.

27. Meanwhile the man of God, Augustine, went to Aries according to the instructions that he had received from the holy father, Gregory, and was ordained archbishop of the English nation by Etherius, archbishop of that city. He returned to Britain, and forthwith sent the priest Laurence and the monk Peter to report to the blessed Pontiff Gregory that the English race had received the Faith of Christ and that he himself had been made their bishop; at the same time to entreat his decision on certain questions that appeared to be urgent. Without delay he received the requisite answers.

28. The letter which the blessed Pope Gregory mentions in his answers that he had written to the bishop of Aries was delivered to Virgilius, the successor of Etherius, and was as follows:—

"To our most reverend and most holy brother and fellow bishop Virgilius, Gregory, servant of the servants of God. The great affection that should be freely bestowed on brethren on a visit is well known, because they are usually invited by the promptings of charity. Therefore if our common brother the bishop Augustine, should happen to visit you, your friendliness will receive him with such affection and sweetness that it may both sustain him for his own comfort and may teach others how fraternal charity should be put in practice. And since it often happens that those who are placed at a distance see more plainly than others what is to be corrected, if perchance he shall point out to your Fraternity any faults of priests and others, inquire together with him into all things with a thorough investigation, and show yourselves so strict and solicitous about what offends God and incites to anger, that punishment may reach the guilty for their emendation and evil report may not distress the innocent. May God keep you safe, most reverend brother. Given on the tenth day of the Kalends of July, in the nineteenth year of the reign of our most pious Emperor Mauricius Tiberius Augustus, in the eighteenth after the consulship of the same Lord, the fourth indiction."

29. Moreover the same Pope Gregory, because Augustine had suggested to him that the harvest there was great and the labourers few, with his aforesaid messengers he sent back fellow labourers

and ministers of the word of God, amongst whom the chief and most conspicuous were Mellitus, Justus, Paulinus, Rufinianus. By these he sent everything that was necessary for worship and the ministry of the church, that is sacred vessels and altar linen, ornaments for the churches, priestly and clerical vestments, relics of the holy apostles and martyrs, besides many books. He sent a letter also, in which he signified that he had despatched the pallium to him, and at the same time intimated how he should establish bishops in Britain. The following is the text of the letter:—

"To our most reverend and most holy brother and fellow bishop, Augustine, Gregory, servant of the servants of God. Although the ineffable rewards of the heavenly kingdom are reserved for those who labour for Almighty God, we should still bestow upon them tokens of honour in order that they may by a recompense apply themselves more earnestly in their zeal for spiritual work. Since the new church of the English has been brought to the grace of the Almighty God by His assistance and your labours, we grant you the use of the pallium to be worn only during the solemnities of the Mass, insomuch that you ordain twelve bishops in several places who shall be subject to your jurisdiction, and the bishop of the city of London shall in future be ordained by his own synod, and receive the pallium of honour from this Apostolic See, which, by the help of God, I serve. We wish you to send a bishop to the city of York, one whom you shall deem worthy of ordination, so that when the same city and the surrounding country shall have received the word of God, he shall ordain twelve bishops and enjoy the honour of a metropolitan, and to him, too, if we live, we propose to give the pallium by the help of the Lord. We wish him, however, to be subject to the jurisdiction of your Fraternity. After your death he shall preside over the bishops that he ordains, so that he shall be no longer subject to the bishop of London. Between the bishops of the cities of London and York this distinction of honour shall in future hold, that he takes precedence who was ordained first. Let whatever be done for the zeal of Christ, be arranged with common counsel and united action: let all unanimously deliberate, propose, and fulfil what they determine to do for their Redeemer. Your Fraternity shall have jurisdiction not only over the bishops you ordain, nor only over those ordained by the bishop of York, but by the authority of our Lord God Jesus Christ over all the priests of Britain, so that from the mouth and life of your Holiness they may receive a model of believing rightly and living well, and fulfilling their office with faith and observance, may attain, when God wills the heavenly kingdom. May God keep you in safety most reverend brother. Given the tenth day of the Kalends of July, &c."

30. After the departure of the aforesaid messengers the blessed Pope Gregory sent after them a letter worthy of mention, in which he showed clearly how carefully he watched over the salvation of our country, writing thus:—

"To our well beloved son Mellitus, Abbot, Gregory, servant of the servants of God. After the departure of our brethren with you, we were much troubled, for we had heard nothing of the success of your journey. When Almighty God shall have brought you to our most reverend brother Augustine, tell him what I have long deliberated over on the subject of the English, which is this, that the temples of the idols in that country ought not to be demolished, but that the actual idols therein should be destroyed. Bless water, sprinkle the temples with it, and deposit relics in them; for if the temples in question have been well constructed, they should be transferred from the worship of idols to the service of the true God, in order that when the people see that the temples are not destroyed, and putting error from their hearts come to know and worship the true God, they may more readily resort to places with which they are familiar. Moreover, since it is their practice to slay numerous oxen in the service of their devils, for this solemnity substitute some corresponding one:

on the day of the dedication of the church, or of the martyrs whose relics are deposited therein, they may construct tents of the branches of trees near the same churches into which the old temples have been converted, and celebrate the solemnities with religious festivity. Let them no longer sacrifice animals to the devil, but kill them for their own use and the glory of God, and give thanks of their abundance to the Giver of all things; and thus while some external rejoicing is preserved to them, they may the more appreciate interior consolation. For it is undoubtedly impossible to cut off everything from their rude minds at once. He who attempts to climb a height ascends by steps and not by vaulting. Thus the Lord made Himself known to the Jewish people in Egypt, for He reserved to them for His own worship the use of the sacrifices which they were accustomed to give to the devil, so that He ordered them to immolate animals in His own sacrifice, and thus by changing their hearts they would lose one sacrifice and retain another, so that although the animals might be the same that they were accustomed to offer, yet the sacrifice was not the same because they were immolated to God and not to idols. Tell then, beloved, these things to our aforesaid brother, who on the spot may consider how the whole matter should be arranged. May God keep you in safety, my dearest son. Given, &c."

31. At the same time he sent a letter to Augustine about the miracles that he had heard had been wrought by him, exhorting him in these words not to be excited to pride on account of their number:

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"I well know, beloved, that Almighty God hath wrought through you great miracles in the nation that He hath willed to select. In the same heavenly gift there is need for you to rejoice while you fear, and to fear while you rejoice. You can rejoice, indeed, for the souls of the English are drawn through exterior miracles to interior grace. Yet you must also fear, lest amidst the signs that are wrought by you, your feeble mind should be lifted up in presumption in its power, and should fall through vain glory from within according as it is exalted in honour from without. We ought to bear in mind that when the disciples returned from preaching and said to their leader, 'Master, behold even the devils also are subject to us in Thy name,' they were immediately answered: 'But yet rejoice not in this that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice in this that your names are written in heaven.' For they, in rejoicing over miracles, had set their hearts on a joy private and temporal. But from the private joy they are recalled to the public, and from the temporal to the eternal, when He said to them: 'In this rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' All the elect do not work miracles, but all their names are written in heaven. For to the disciples of the truth there should be no joy, except for that good which they have in common with all, and wherein their joy has no end.

"It remains, then, dearest brother, that in the midst of what you do externally by the power of God, you should thoroughly examine yourself within, and should thoroughly understand yourself, who you are, and how much grace is needed in this nation, for whose conversion you have received even the gift of miracles. If you remember that you have offended our Creator in word or deed, keep this always in your mind, that the remembrance of your fault may repress the rising pride of your heart. And whatever power for working signs you shall receive, or have received, set it down as given not to yourself, but to those for whose salvation such gifts are conferred upon you."

32. The same blessed Pope Gregory also sent a letter at that time to King Ethelbert together with many presents of various kinds, striving to speak highly of the king with temporal deference, whom he rejoiced to have brought through his own labour and zeal to the knowledge of heavenly glory. This is a copy of the aforesaid letter:—

"To the most glorious Lord and his most excellent son Ethelbert, King of the English, Gregory, servant of the servants of God. Almighty God raises certain good men to the government of His people, in order that through them He may impart the gifts of His mercy to all under their sway. And such we gather has been accomplished in regard to the English nation, over which your Glory has been placed, in order that, through the favours that are granted to you, the heavenly gifts may be bestowed upon the nation under your rule. Guard then, glorious son, with sedulous care the grace you have received from above; lose no time in extending the faith of Christ among your subjects, in their conversion multiply the zeal of your uprightness, put down the worship of idols, lay low the structures of their temples; by exhortation, by threats, by conciliation and correction, and by the openness of your example, build up your subjects in the utmost purity of life, so that you may receive the heavenly reward from Him whose name and whose knowledge you have spread upon the earth. For He shall render the name of your Glory still more glorious to posterity since you seek to uphold His honour amongst nations.

"Thus of old the most pious emperor, Constantine, bringing the Roman republic from the corrupt worship of idols, subjected it, with himself, to Jesus Christ our Almighty Lord God, and with his people turned to Him with all his heart. Whence it happened that he surpassed the renown of previous princes, and he excelled his predecessors as much in good works as in reputation. Let, then, your Glory hasten to implant in the hearts of all the kings and peoples under you the knowledge of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so that you may surpass the ancient kings of your nation in merits and renown, and according as you blot out the sins of others among your subjects, by so the more securely may you stand for your own sins before the terrible judgment of Almighty God.

"Our most reverend brother, the bishop Augustine, is proficient in the monastic rule, filled with the knowledge of Holy Scripture, and by God's grace endowed with good works. Give a willing ear to his words, devotedly fulfil them, and store them carefully in your memory. If you give heed to him when he speaks to you for Almighty God, the more speedily will Almighty God hear him when he prays for you. If, which God forbid, you disregard his words, how shall Almighty God hear his prayers for you, seeing that you refuse to hear his pleadings for God? With all your mind, then, bind yourself to him in the zeal of faith, and assist his efforts with the power that is given you from on high, that He may make you a partaker of His kingdom, whose faith you have caused to be received and protected in your kingdom.

"Moreover, we wish your Glory to know that we recognize from the words of the Almighty Lord in Holy Scripture that the end of the present world is nigh and the kingdom of the saints is at hand which can never end. At the approach of the end of the world many things shall take place that have not been before, namely, commotions in the air, terrors in the heavens, tempests out of order of the seasons, wars, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, which shall not all come to pass in our day but shall follow after our times. If, therefore, you see any of these things occurring in your land let not your mind be at all disturbed for these signs shall be sent before the end of the world in order that we may be anxious about our souls and solicitous about the hour of death, and that we may be found prepared with good works for the judgment to come. I have briefly told these things to you now, glorious son, that when the Christian faith shall have increased in your kingdom our speech with you may be the more free, and it will gratify us the more to speak with you as the rejoicings in our heart multiply at the complete conversion of your country.

"I have forwarded you a few trifling tokens of esteem, which, however, you will not account trifling when you remember that they come to you with the blessing of the blessed apostle Peter. May God Almighty then vouchsafe to preserve and bring to perfection the grace which He has begun. May He preserve you for a long space of many a year, and after a lengthened term on earth, may He receive you into the assembly of saints in His heavenly country. My Lord and Son, may heavenly grace keep your Excellency in safety. Given on the tenth day of the Kalends of July, &c."

33. In the royal city where, as we have said, he obtained his episcopal seat, Augustine, by means of royal assistance, restored the church which he had learned was built there of old by the labour of the Roman faithful, and consecrated it in the name of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and there established a dwelling-place for himself and all his successors. He also erected a monastery not far from the east of the city, in which, at his request, Ethelbert constructed the church of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, and endowed it with various gifts, in which the bodies of Augustine himself and other bishops of Canterbury, and those also of the kings of Kent might be buried. This church was consecrated not by Augustine, but by his successor, Laurence. The first abbot of the monastery was the priest Peter, who was sent on a mission to Gaul, was drowned in a bay of the sea called Amfleet, and was consigned to an obscure grave by the people of the place; but Almighty God manifested how great were his merits, for a heavenly light appeared every night over his grave, until the neighbours saw it and recognized that a holy man had been buried there, and, inquiring whence he came and who he was, they took the body and placed it in the church of the city of Boulogne, with the honours due to so holy a man.

Book II

Chapter 2. In the meantime Augustine, through the good offices of Ethelbert, called the bishops and learned men of the neighbouring province of the Britons to a conference at a place called today, Augustinasac, that is, the Oak of Augustine, on the borders of the Wiccii and West Saxons. He began to persuade them with fraternal admonition to have the peace of Catholics with him, and to undertake in concert the Lord's work of evangelizing the people. They did not keep Easter Sunday at the same time as he did, but between fourteenth and twentieth of the moon, which reckoning is contained in a cycle of eighty-four years. They held many other things contrary to ecclesiastical unity. After a long discussion they were unwilling to give assent to the entreaties, exhortations, or upbraidings of Augustine and his companions, but preferred their own traditions before what all the churches throughout the world were agreed upon amongst themselves in Christ. The holy father Augustine put an end of this tiresome and tedious contest by saying: "We beseech God who makes all dwell in unity in the house of His Father that He would deign to intimate to us by heavenly signs what traditions should be followed and what ways should lead to the entry into His kingdom. Let a sick person be brought and by whoever's prayers he shall be cured, let that one's faith and practice be accepted as pleasing to God and to be followed by all." His adversaries reluctantly consented to this, and, an Englishman who had been deprived of his eyesight was brought before them. When he was taken to the priests of the Britons, he received neither cure nor healing from their ministry. Then Augustine, impelled by a just necessity, bent his knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, beseeching that He would restore to the blind man the sight that he had lost, and by the corporal illumination of one man, that He would light up in the hearts of the faithful the grace of spiritual light. Without delay the blind man saw, and Augustine was proclaimed by all to be the true herald of the heavenly light. Then the Britons acknowledged, indeed, that they understood that what Augustine preached was the true way of justice, but that they could not relinquish their ancient

customs without the consent and permission of their own people. Therefore they asked that another synod might be held for the attendance of more of their people.

When this was arranged there came, it is said, seven British bishops and a number of learned men principally from their most celebrated monastery, which in the English tongue is called Bangor, and over which at that time the Abbot Dinoot is said to have presided. Before leaving for the aforesaid conference they went to a certain holy and prudent man, who led the life of an anchorite, to consult him whether they ought to desert their traditions for the preaching of Augustine.

"If he is a man of God follow him," he replied.

"How can we be certain of this?" they said.

"The Lord says," he answered, "take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart. If, therefore, this Augustine is meek and humble of heart he is worthy of belief, because he himself bears the yoke of Christ which he offers you to bear, but if he is haughty and proud, it is clear that he is not from God, and his words should be nothing to us."

"How are we to discover this?" they again asked.

"Arrange," he said, "that he and his followers shall arrive first at the place of the synod, and if he rises when you come, know that he is the servant of Christ, and listen to him submissively, but if he shall contemn you, and does not rise up in your presence when you are the greater number, let him be contemned by you."

They did as he told them, and it happened that when they came Augustine remained in his seat. Seeing this, they were at once roused to anger, and, condemning him for pride, strove to contradict everything that he said. He spoke thus to them: "You do many things that are contrary to our customs and those of the Universal Church, yet if you are willing to submit to me in these three things, viz., to celebrate Easter at its proper time, to administer baptism by which we are born again to God, according to the manner of the Roman and Apostolic Church, and together with me to preach the word of God to the nation of the English, all the other things which you do, however contrary to our customs, we shall tolerate them all without interference." They replied that they would do none of these things, and would not have him for archbishop, and they said one to another that "if now he will not rise to us, with how much more contempt will he treat us if we began to be subject to him."

At which the man of God, Augustine, warning them, is said to have foretold that if they were unwilling to accept peace from brethren they would have to accept war from an enemy; and that if they should be unwilling to preach the way of life to the English nation, they should suffer from its hands the avenger of death. All these things, by the judgment of God, came to pass as he had foretold.

Soon after this Edilfrid, the powerful king of the English, of whom we have spoken, collected a large army before the city of the Legions, called by the English Legacaester, but more correctly Carleon by the Britons, and gave up the perfidious people to great slaughter. When before the battle he saw their priests, who had met to beseech God for their army, standing apart in a safer place, he inquired who they were and why they had assembled there. Most of them came from the monastery of Bangor, in which the number of monks is said to have been so large, that when the monastery was divided into seven sections, with priors to rule them, no section had less than three hundred men, who were all accustomed to live by the labour of their hands. Most of them, after a fast of

three days, had met together with others for the purpose of praying at the aforesaid battle, and they had an officer of the name of Brocmail to protect them from the swords of the barbarians while they were intent on prayer. When King Edilfrid understood the cause of their coming, he said: "If they thus cry to their God against us, although they do not bear arms, yet they certainly fight against us, for they beset us with adverse imprecations." Therefore he ordered his arms to be first directed against them, and then he destroyed the other forces of the impious army, but not without great loss to his own. In that battle about twelve hundred of those who came to pray are said to have been killed, and only fifty escaped by flight. Brocmail and his troops fled at the first onset of the enemy, and left those whom he ought to have defended unarmed, and exposed to the blows of the sword. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of the holy Pontiff Augustine, although he himself had been taken to the heavenly kingdom some time before, that the perfidious men should feel the vengeance of temporal destruction, because they had spurned the counsels of fraternal charity that were offered to them.

3. In the year of our Lord's incarnation, 604, Augustine, the Archbishop of Britain, ordained two bishops, Mellitus and Justus; Mellitus for preaching to the province of the East Saxons, which was separated from Kent by the river Thames, and extended as far as the eastern sea. The metropolis, the city of London, was placed on the bank of the aforesaid river, and was the mart of many people resorting to it by land and sea. At that time Saberet, the nephew of Ethelbert by his sister Ricula, reigned over the people, although he was under the control of Ethelbert, who, as mentioned above, ruled the whole English nation to the boundary of the river Humber. When this province received the word of truth by the preaching of Mellitus, King Ethelbert built in the city of London the Church of St. Paul the Apostle, in which he and his successors placed the episcopal throne. Augustine ordained Justus for Kent itself in the city of Durobrevis, which the English called Hrofaescaester from a former chief named Hrol. It is about twenty-four miles distant from Canterbury to the west, and King Ethelbert built in it the church of blessed Andrew the apostle. On the bishops of both these churches he bestowed many gifts, adding territories and possessions for the use of those who lived with the bishops.

The Father Augustine, the beloved of God, died on the twenty-sixth day of May, and his body was placed outside next to the church of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul above mentioned, because it was neither finished nor dedicated. As soon as it was dedicated the body was brought inside and buried honourably in the north porch, in which the bodies of all the succeeding Archbishops were entombed, except those of Theodore and Berctuald, which were placed in the church itself, because the aforesaid porch could contain no more. This has nearly in the centre an altar, dedicated in honour of the blessed Pope Gregory, at which every Saturday a mass is solemnly celebrated by a priest of the place. On the tomb of Augustine this epitaph was written:

"Here rests the Lord Augustine the first Archbishop of Canterbury, who formerly was sent here by blessed Gregory the Pontiff of the Roman city, and gifted by God with the working of miracles, led King Ethelbert and his nation from the worship of idols to the faith of Christ, and having completed the days of his office in peace, died on the seventh of the Kalends of June during the reign of the same king."
