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ST. AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY AND THE SAXON CHURCH IN KENT

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THE Mission of St. Augustine to Kent in A.D. 597 is one of the most important events in the history both of the county and of England as a whole. It had two important results: it established the Christian religion in England whence it had been almost if not completely expelled by the heathen invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries and it re-established cultural contact with the continent and particularly with Rome, still in a certain sense the capital of the Western World, which had been interrupted for some two hundred years. In view of this twofold significance of the Mission, it is surprising that we know so little about its leader and that his story presents many problems upon the solution of which historians are still far from reaching agreement.

SOURCES OF OUR KNOWLEDGE

The only strictly contemporary source for the story of St. Augustine is the Epistles of Pope Gregory. Copies of these have been preserved in the Papal Chancery at Rome but, unfortunately, they have not been preserved in chronological order. Many of them are undated and it is not always possible by internal evidence to date them even to a year. Different editors have arranged them differently and thus give quite different impressions of the order of events or the rapidity of the conversion. The relevant letters thus preserved are either those written by the Pope to Augustine or other members of his Mission, giving instructions and advice, or letters written to others about the Mission commending it to those who might be in a position to aid it or giving news of its achievements.

After Gregory's letters we have no further source until we come to the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, completed about A.D. 731. Bede was a very careful historian and sent to Canterbury and Rome in search of reliable information, but he was writing four generations after the coming of Augustine and we are not aware that he had access to any earlier written sources (apart from Gregory's letters) with the exception of a *Life of St. Gregory* written in Northumbria early in the eighth century which is important as giving the oldest known version of the story of Gregory and the Deiran slaves. Nevertheless it is likely that fairly reliable oral traditions about the Mission were still in existence at Canterbury in the early eighth century and that these were conveyed to Bede by his informants.

Some further details are given by three later medieval chroniclers all writing at Canterbury, who may have recorded Canterbury traditions which have some historical value but naturally they tended to copy from one another. Goscelin, a monk of Canterbury who flourished at the end of the eleventh century, wrote a book in Latin: *On the Life and Translation of St. Augustine*, which has been published in the Bollandist Collection of "Acta Sanctorum" under the date 26th May (St. Augustine's Day). William Thorn, a monk of St. Augustine's, wrote a *History of St. Augustine's Monastery* in 1397 which gives us a number of facts not found in Bede, e.g. the dates of Ethelbert's baptism (Whitsun 597) and of Augustine's consecration (16th Nov., 597). In 1412 Thomas of Elmham wrote another *History of St. Augustine's Monastery* to which he prefixed an elaborate list of dates known as the Chronologia Augustinensis but he seems to have relied largely on Thorn.

MODERN WORKS

With the great revival of historical studies in the nineteenth century and particularly the intense interest which developed in the earlier part of English history, St. Augustine attracted the attention of a number of writers. The series begins with Dean Stanley's *Historical Memorials of Canterbury* published in 1855, a collection of lectures which he had delivered over a period, the first of which was entitled "The Landing of Augustine."

In 1873 Rev. S. Baring-Gould included a brief biography of St. Augustine under the date 26th May in Vol. V of *The Lives of the Saints*, while other writers on early church history give us some relevant material, e.g. Haddon and Stubbs in their *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. III, 1871; Canon Bright in his *Chapters of Early English History*, Oxford, 1878 (revised edition, 1897) and Rev. Wm. Hunt in *A History of the English Church from its Foundation to the Norman Conquest*, 1901, which formed Vol. I of *A History of the English Church*, edited by Stephens and Hunt. These writers, however, were treating the story of St. Augustine as part of a larger theme and not making any very special study of him.

The first modern biography came with the publication in 1895, in the Leaders of Religion series edited by H. C. Beeching, M.A., of *Augustine of Canterbury* by Ed. L. Cutts, D.D.

In 1897 came by far the most important contribution to the study of St. Augustine which had so far appeared. Edited by Canon A. J. Mason, D.D., it was entitled *The Mission of St. Augustine to England according to the Original Documents, being a Handbook for the Thirteenth Centenary*. It gives the Latin text of all the relevant parts of Bede and of Gregory's Epistles, side by side with English translations, thus

making the original sources more conveniently available to students than they had ever been before, together with four "Dissertations" as they are called which examine in considerable detail various aspects of the subject. These are

- (1) The Political Outlook of Europe in 597, by C. W. Oman.
- (2) The Mission of Augustine and his Companions in relation to other Agencies in the Conversion of England, by Canon A. J. Mason.
- (3) The Landing-place of St. Augustine, with a Map, by T. McKenny Hughes (Professor of Geology at Cambridge).
- (4) On some Liturgical Points relating to the Mission of St. Augustine, by Rev. H. A. Wilson, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.

One must note also, in the same year, the article by George Dowker on "The Landing Place of St. Augustine" in Vol. XXII of *Archæologia Cantiana*.

Finally, in 1913, came the most complete study so far, which is likely to remain for a considerable time the authoritative work. This was *St. Augustine of Canterbury*, by Sir Henry Howarth, a volume of 550 pages published by John Murray.

THE STORY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Before discussing various problems connected with St. Augustine's Mission, which is the main purpose of this paper, it is probably desirable to give an outline of the story.

It begins with the familiar tale, which there is no reason for discrediting, of Gregory's meeting with the Anglian slaves in the market place at Rome, probably somewhere in the 580's, and his resolve to undertake a missionary journey to the land of Deira (roughly equivalent to the modern Yorkshire) from which they had come. Some time later Gregory set out on this journey but was recalled by the Pope at the intercession of the Roman populace who did not want to lose their beloved deacon. In 590 Gregory became Pope himself and that naturally put an end to any hopes he might have had of fulfilling his intention at a later date. No doubt he kept the project in mind to be carried out by someone else, but times were troublous, the duties of the papacy, at that time very largely responsible for the civil government of Rome as well as for the affairs of the Church, were heavy, and Gregory did not enjoy the best of health. It was not till six years later that he was able to do anything about the conversion of England.

When in 596 Gregory decided to send a mission to this country, probably various considerations weighed with him in addition to the fulfilment of a ten years' old intention. The prestige and power of the

papacy at that time were at a low ebb. The Churches of Spain and of Gaul had for all practical purposes established their independence. Relations with Constantinople (at that time the capital of the Roman Empire) were strained and Italy was suffering from the effects of the Lombard invasions. The recovery of the "lost" province of Britain by the Roman See would be a big asset in Gregory's great effort to establish the ecclesiastical predominance of that See. We learn further that Gregory had heard that Britain was favourably disposed. How or when he had learned this we do not know: perhaps he had heard of the marriage of the Frankish princess Bertha, who was a Christian, to Ethelbert, King of Kent. Certain it is that Augustine's mission was directed to Kent and not to Deira, the home of the slaves Gregory had seen many years before.

In the year 596, probably in the autumn, Augustine and forty monks, chosen by Gregory from the monastery of St. Andrew which he himself had founded on the Coelian Hill at Rome, set forth on their journey. We have no previous knowledge of Augustine though it has been suggested that he may have been the Prior of the monastery. He was certainly a commanding figure for we are told that he stood a head and shoulders above the other members of his company. The party crossed the Alps into Provence and then, possibly when they had reached Aix, they began to have misgivings about the task they had undertaken. They heard accounts of the length and dangers of the journey, of the barbarism of the English and apparently for the first time realized that none of them could speak English and that the Latin tongue would not be understood in the land to which they were destined. Their hearts began to fail them and they sent Augustine back to Rome to implore Gregory to permit the abandonment of the enterprise. We wonder whether or not Augustine was up to this point the recognized leader of the mission. Anyway, when he delivered his message to Gregory, he received from the Pope a stern reproof for having turned back after setting his hand to the plough, was sent back with his position as leader of the party confirmed and supplied with letters of recommendation to various bishops and rulers in Gaul urging them to give him and his followers every assistance on their journey. The party then proceeded on its journey northward, enlisted some Frankish priests to act as interpreters and in the spring of 597 landed in Thanet.

On arriving in Thanet, Augustine sent a message to Ethelbert, King of Kent, who replied that the newcomers should remain on the island until he could visit them. Shortly afterwards a meeting in the open air (as a precaution against magic) took place between Ethelbert with some of his chief advisers and Augustine and his followers. Ethelbert listened sympathetically and, while not yet ready to abandon

the beliefs of his fathers, gave the Christian missionaries permission to cross to the mainland and to preach their gospel. In due course the party reached Canterbury. Bede gives us a description of the procession as it entered the city chanting a litany and carrying on high a board on which was painted a picture of the Saviour—the figure of Augustine towering a head and shoulders above his companions.

In the city the King provided Augustine's party with lodging by the Stablegate (near the later church of St. Alphege) and the use of St. Martin's Church, on the hill east of the city, which had been restored some years earlier for the use of Queen Bertha. The conversion of Ethelbert seems to have taken place soon after for tradition says that he was baptized at Whitsun, 597, in the font which is still to be seen in St. Martin's Church. About the same time the King gave Augustine a grant of land in the city, the site of the future cathedral and monastery of Christ Church. There seems some reason for thinking that a Christian church had been erected on this site in Roman times.

There is little doubt that Ethelbert's conversion was followed by that of his principal nobles and officials. This rapid success of his mission and the need to give the new Church formal organization were responsible for Augustine's return to the continent, probably in the autumn of 597, to be ordained a bishop by Vergilius, Bishop of Arles. On his return he sent Laurentius the Priest and Peter the Monk to Pope Gregory with a report of the progress of the mission to date and a list of questions, some theological and some administrative, which were bothering him. Meanwhile the christianization of Kent went ahead rapidly for we are told of 10,000 persons being baptized (either in the Swale or the Medway) at Christmas, 597. There seems, however, to have been some opposition, for a quaint medieval legend (quoted in Parker's *Antiquitates Britanniae*) tells that the people in and around Rochester were so much given up to idolatry that the Word of God, as preached by Augustine, appeared to them foolishness; that, not satisfied with denouncing him and his associates in scurrilous language, they besmeared their garments with the tails of fishes. Augustine, says the story, was finally so provoked that in the heat of passion he called down divine vengeance on his detractors who immediately had long tails affixed to them like brute beasts and neither they nor their posterity were freed from this curse till Ethelbert had built at his own cost a church near Rochester bridge and the offenders had been baptized therein. Then by the intercession of Augustine they lost their tails and were restored to human form.

Gregory's reply to Augustine's letter was delayed till 601 for the Pope was ill and preoccupied with the Lombard invasions. When the reply did come it was extremely full and detailed (it is quoted at length in Bede) and confirmed Augustine's authority over other bishops

to be created in England. The reply was brought by Laurentius and Peter and with them the Pope sent a second band of missionaries for it was obvious that more were needed.

In 604 the second Kentish See was established at Rochester with Justus (a member of the second mission) as bishop and, probably soon after, christianity reached the Kingdom of the East Saxons, doubtless through Ethelbert's influence with the East Saxon King Saberht who was his sister's son. London was at that time the capital of the East Saxon realm and on the highest point in that city Ethelbert built the church of St. Paul, Mellitus (another member of the 601 mission) becoming the first bishop.

It must have been about this time, too, that Augustine had his meetings with the British clergy with a view to reconciling them to the Roman communion. Christianity had survived uninterrupted in Wales and Ireland since the period of the Roman Occupation of Britain, but this Celtic Church had long been separated from the rest of Christendom by the heathen invasions and had retained practices which differed from those of Rome such as a different way of calculating the date of Easter and a different form of the tonsure. The Celtic Church, too, was more monastic in its organization and its bishops had no clearly demarcated dioceses. The meetings of St. Augustine with representatives of the Celtic Church took place on the bank of the Severn at a place which Bede tells us was known in his day as St. Augustine's Oak, and may well have been the place now called Aust opposite the mouth of the Wye. At the first encounter the Celtic clergy were loath to abandon the practices of their church but it was finally decided to seek divine indication through a miracle. A blind man was brought: the Celtic priests tried to heal him and failed: Augustine succeeded. Thereupon the Celtic clergy said that they could not give a final answer till they had consulted those whom they represented. A second meeting was therefore arranged. On their way to the second meeting, the Celtic representatives called on an anchorite with a great reputation for holiness and sought his advice. The anchorite said that if Augustine were a man of God they ought to heed his words and when they demanded how they should know this, suggested that they should arrange to arrive at the meeting place after Augustine. If he were a true follower of Christ he would be humble and lowly and would rise to meet them: if he remained seated it would show him to be filled with pride. This advice was followed. Unfortunately Augustine remained seated when the Welsh bishops arrived and in consequence the meeting broke up without achieving anything. The Celtic Church went its own way for several centuries longer.

Augustine died on 26th May, probably in 604, though the year

is not certain, having before his death consecrated Laurentius as his successor, a somewhat irregular procedure but perhaps justified by the circumstances of the time and the desirability of avoiding an interregnum in the infant English Church. He was buried by the roadside on the east side of the city of Canterbury and his remains were later transferred to the abbey named after him when the church of that abbey was ready to receive them. Recent excavations at St. Augustine's Abbey have revealed the tombs of several early archbishops as well as of Saxon kings, but so far the grave of Augustine has not been found. There is indeed documentary evidence for thinking that his shrine was transferred to Chilham Church at the dissolution of the monasteries but so far it has not been found there either.

Having now told in brief the story of St. Augustine's mission we turn to a consideration of some of the problems in connection with it.

WHERE DID ST. AUGUSTINE LAND ?

Where did St. Augustine and his followers land ? Probably the majority of people who could give any answer to this question if asked, would answer : " At Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet." And indeed is there not a commemorative cross there to mark the spot and not far away a St. Augustine's Well ? But no ancient writer mentions Ebbsfleet as the landing place. Bede says merely that it was in the Isle of Thanet. Whence, then, this belief in Ebbsfleet ? For most of us, it is derived probably from J. R. Green's *Short History of the English People* (written in 1874 and possibly on this point under Dean Stanley's influence). Green says : " The missionaries landed in 597 on the very spot where Hengest had landed more than a century before in the Isle of Thanet." And a few pages previously he describes in a well-known purple passage the landing of Hengest and his war-band at Ebbsfleet. (The landing of Hengest at Ebbsfleet rests, by the way, on the rather doubtful identification of the *Ypwines fleet* of the Chronicle with the modern Ebbsfleet.)

Actually the conclusions of those who have considered the question are very much at variance. Dean Stanley, in the lecture already mentioned, discusses four possible landing places and his remarks may be summarized as follows :

1. *Ebbsfleet* ; (a) the usual landing place in Thanet—traditionally used by Hengest, St. Mildred and the Danes ; (b) Bede says Thanet, and not the mainland ; (c) present situation and local tradition support.
2. *The Boarded Groin* ; a spot marked on the then O.S. map as landing place of the Saxons but must have been covered by the sea in the sixth century.

3. *Stonar* ; near Sandwich, supported by a Sandwich MS. quoted in Boys' *History of Sandwich*, but this site, even if not covered by the sea, must have been a mere sandbank.
4. *Richborough* ; claim probably based on Thorn's *Chronicle* which says, "Retesburgh in insula Thaneti," but Richborough is not in the Isle of Thanet. Thorn may have been referring to the whole harbour and not to Richborough itself or he may have confused it with Augustine's later crossing to the mainland which may well have been to Richborough.

T. McKenny Hughes in "The Landing Place of St. Augustine" (Dissertation III in Mason: *Mission of St. Augustine*) discusses as possible landing places the Boarded Groin, Stonar, Ebbsfleet East, Ebbsfleet West, and Richborough, and decides in favour of Richborough.

George Dowker, F.G.S., in an article in *Arch. Cant.*, XXII, mainly on geological evidence, favours Stonar. (McKenny Hughes in a footnote refers to Dowker's paper as having been published after his Dissertation was printed and adds: "His paper does not, however, lead us to alter the opinions above expressed.")

Sir H. H. Howarth says: "I know of no valid reason whatever for making Augustine land at Ebbsfleet, except Dean Stanley's imposing rhetoric." He does not commit himself to any opinion regarding the landing place but goes on: "It is not improbable that this rhetoric and the fact that Lord Granville's Committee committed themselves to the same opinion will continue to impose the fable on innocent people. The Committee just named erected a commemorative cross about half a mile from the farm still called Ebbsfleet, near which is a well (known locally as St. Augustine's Well). This will continue to delude people into the notion that there is a real foundation for the view."

And there the matter remains to the present day. All we can say to those who favour Ebbsfleet as the landing place is that while there is no historical evidence for it, there is equally no historical evidence against it!

WHAT WERE THE RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN KENT AT ST. AUGUSTINE'S ARRIVAL ?

We have already noted Gregory's statement that Britain was favourably disposed to receive Christianity. We do not know on what he based this view. What information can we get from other sources ?

Of the extent of Christianization in Roman Britain, we are strangely ignorant. We know that three British bishops represented the British Church at the Ecumenical Council of Arles in A.D. 314, and that the

Diocletian persecution affected this country, one of its alleged victims being St. Alban. But there are few christian inscriptions and we know that the Roman army of occupation was more influenced by Mithraism. Nor is there much evidence of christian churches. The only one to have been excavated is at Silchester. There may, of course, have been wooden churches of which no evidence remains.

So far as Kent is concerned we have documentary evidence of two churches. The first is St. Martin's at Canterbury of which Bede says that there was a Church built while the Romans were in Britain which was restored for the use of Queen Bertha. Whether any part of the existing building belongs to the Roman period is uncertain. Rev. C. F. Routledge, F.S.A., discusses the matter in an article in *Arch. Cant.*, XXII, and concludes that a considerable part of the existing building is Roman, but many authorities dispute this. Secondly, there was a church on the site of the present Canterbury Cathedral. Bede says that Augustine "regained possession, with the King's support, of a Church there which, he was informed, had been built in the city long before by the Roman believers. This he consecrated in the name of the Holy Saviour, Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, and fixed there a home for himself and all his successors." This certainly suggests that the Roman Church was still to some extent standing when Augustine arrived and that St. Martin's had been sufficiently intact to be capable of restoration. It looks rather as if, at any rate in this part of the country, the christian churches had not been wholly destroyed by the invaders but had been neglected and were therefore semi-ruinous.

On the other hand the Jutes were probably not entirely barbarous. Leaving aside the question of the origin of the Jutes and the possibility of their forming a small minority among a Romano-Celtic population whose way of life was little changed by the invasion, we must observe the following facts :

- (1) Charibert, King of Paris, would be unlikely to permit his daughter Bertha to marry a complete barbarian.
- (2) Ethelbert's tolerant and friendly reception of Augustine suggests that he was a man of some culture.
- (3) Bede's description of Ethelbert is a tribute to his wisdom and education though the former might naturally tend to favour one of the heroes of his story.
- (4) Archæological evidence suggests that the Jutes were more civilized than the invaders of other parts of the country, though one must note that the reception of Paulinus by Edwin of Northumbria a few years later in many ways resembled Ethelbert's reception of Augustine.

ST. AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY AND THE SAXON CHURCH IN KENT

It is true that the christian Britons had apparently made no effort to convert the invaders and indeed Bede blames them for this. But was this lack of missionary effort due to the unwillingness of the newcomers to listen to christian teaching, to lukewarmness on the part of the Britons (it is remarkable that christianity seems completely to have disappeared from what we now call England in the fifth and sixth centuries even though we cannot believe in the complete displacement of the native population), or to a natural unwillingness on the part of the conquered to share their religious beliefs and observances with the conquerors ?

The invaders certainly brought with them a still vital pagan religion. In another of his many works, entitled *De Temporum Ratione*, Bede gives us the names of a few of their deities and some scraps of information about the chief festivals of the heathen year. That this heathen worship was well established in Kent is proved by place-name evidence. Woodnesborough (near Sandwich) and Wormshill (near Sittingbourne) were dedicated to Woden from whom the West Saxon kings claimed descent ; the god Thunor was commemorated in Thunores hlaew (Thunor's Mound) in Thanet ; Wye is derived from "Weoh" meaning an idol or shrine ; while the word "Ealh" meaning a temple is preserved in the first syllable of Alkham (near Dover) and of Ealhfleot (an old name for Faversham Creek). That this heathen faith, introduced in the mid-fifth century, was still vital at the end of the sixth century is proved by Ethelbert's reply to Augustine's preaching, as recorded by Bede : "They are certainly beautiful words and promises that you bring ; but because they are new and unproved, I cannot give my adhesion to them and abandon what I have so long held in common with the whole English race."

WHAT WAS THE ATTITUDE OF AUGUSTINE TO THIS PAGAN FAITH ?

Tolerance does not seem to have been one of Augustine's virtues. His attitude to the Celtic christian church illustrates this, and it is highly probable that if left to himself he would have refused all compromise or association with the heathen worship in Kent and have demanded that converts should break all their connections with the old faith. But Pope Gregory was of a different mind and showed a deeper understanding of human psychology. In his letter to Mellitus (Bede I, XXX) he writes :

"When Almighty God brings you through to our brother the Bishop Augustine, tell him what I have long been turning over in my thoughts in reference to the English ; namely not to let the idol temples be destroyed in that nation, but to have the idols in them destroyed. Holy water should be made and

sprinkled in the temples, altars built and relics placed there. For if the temples are well built, they ought to be converted from the worship of demons to the service of the true God ; so that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may put away error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God may come with more of the sense of being at home to the familiar places. And as they are accustomed to slaughter many oxen in sacrifice to their demons, some change of solemnity should be devised for them in this respect also ; say, that on the dedication festival, or on those of the holy martyrs, whose relics are placed there, they should make themselves booths of boughs round the temples which have been turned into churches and observe the solemnity with religious feasts, and while they no longer slaughter their beasts to the devil, they may kill them to the praise of God for their own food, and thank the Giver of all for satisfying them. So by retaining for them some outward rejoicings, they may the more easily be won to rejoicings of a *spiritual kind*. *It is evidently impossible in the case of hard hearts, to cut off everything at once.*" (*Everyman* translation.)

Gregory sent with the letter a supply of relics so that the new churches might immediately be furnished in this respect.

But what evidence is there as to the carrying out of the Pope's policy ? Evidently Gregory when writing of well-built temples was thinking of buildings of stone such as were familiar in the Mediterranean World. Our Teutonic forefathers, however, built only in wood—their word to build, "getimbrian" means "to construct of timber"—and their worship was generally conducted in the open or in sacred groves. But the advice of Gregory could equally well apply to religious sites of any kind and possibly there were even pagan temples of the Roman period which were still capable of restoration and use or maybe were already being used.

A notable example of the conversion of a building to christian use is given in William Thorn's *History* concerning the church of St. Pancras at Canterbury. He writes :

"Not far from the city, on the eastern side, about midway between St. Martin's Church and the city walls, was situated a temple, or idol house, where King Ethelbert used to pray according to the rites of his nation and in company with his nobles to 'sacrifice to devils and not to God.' This temple Augustine purified from the pollutions and defilements of the Gentiles, and breaking the image which was in it, converted the synagogue into a church, and dedicated it in the name of St. Pancras the Martyr ; and this was the first church dedicated by Augustine. There still exists an altar in the south aisle of that church

upon which Augustine used to celebrate where once the king's image had stood."

The ruins of this church of St. Pancras are still standing to the east of the ruins of the later Abbey church of St. Augustine and during recent excavations an altar in the south aisle was uncovered which may well be the one to which Thorn refers. Thorn goes on to tell us that the east wall of this aisle in his day (i.e. 1397) bore traces of the efforts made by the devil, the first time he saw St. Augustine celebrate mass there, to wreck the building out of which he had been ejected! One must remember that our medieval ancestors had a very lively belief in devils. The baptismal service of the sixth century contains many exorcisms of devils and the water, oil, etc., to be used for the ceremony had to have devils exorcised out of them before use.

In the excavation of the abbey church of St. Augustine a few years ago a monolith was discovered and has now been erected at the west end of the nave. Is this an indication that this church, too, was built on an ancient religious site? (At Rudstone in East Yorkshire the parish church is built alongside a monolith which is higher than the nave roof.)

As we go about the country we notice here and there village churches which are obviously built on prehistoric burial and pagan Saxon mounds. I know of a number of examples in my native county of Surrey, but I am not aware that this matter has received very careful investigation. It would be interesting to know of examples in Kent. Birling and Leybourne seem to be possibilities. At any rate, there seems evidence that the proposal of Pope Gregory that the new religion should be grafted on to the old was in fact pursued.

WHAT WAS THE INFLUENCE OF AUGUSTINE ON KENTISH CHURCH ARCHITECTURE?

It has already been remarked that Roman buildings must still have been standing in Kent at the time of the Jutish settlement and that the invaders knew only the art of building in wood. It is uncertain, however, how much Roman building remained standing at the end of the sixth century apart from the massive walls of the Saxon Shore forts—Richborough, Reculver and Stutfall, of which a good deal remains to the present day. The churches which were built in Kent following the conversion were therefore most likely based on continental prototypes.

Professor Hamilton Thompson in his excellent little manual, *The Ground Plan of the English Parish Church*, points out that the typical christian church seems suddenly to have come into existence, in its fully-fledged form in the fourth century when Christianity secured the official recognition of the Roman Empire. This plan was the basilica

—a rectangular aisled building with an entrance at one end and a semi-circular apse at the other. There was a walled space for the choir at the end nearest the apse and in the apse itself, above the level of the nave, was the altar, behind which, round the wall, were seats for the bishop and assistant clergy.

Was this plan introduced into Britain during the Roman occupation? The only tangible evidence is the little church at Silchester which was roughly of this type. Eadmer, a monk of Canterbury of the late eleventh century, has left us an account of the Saxon Cathedral which was pulled down to make way for Lanfranc's new church and it was of basilican type. But was this Augustine's church or one which replaced Augustine's at a later date? And if it was Augustine's church, did Augustine follow the lines of the Roman church which Ethelbert gave him or was that building so completely ruinous that he built entirely anew?

Of the seven churches connected with Augustine which can still be traced, five ended in apses, generally at the western end. The western apse was a typical Roman feature. The general eastern orientation of christian churches developed later. An eastern apse seems first to have developed in the churches in North Africa.

The Canterbury Cathedral which was burned in 1067 was an aisled basilica with a western apse. But the first Rochester Cathedral was an aisleless building with an eastern apse. St. Pancras, Canterbury, had an eastern apse as termination of the chancel. (It had also north and south nave chapels and a square western porch but these three projections may all have been additions to the original plan.) The seventh century churches at Lyminge and at Reculver followed the Rochester plan which Professor Hamilton Thompson calls "the Kentish plan."

Sir Frank Stenton says: "The plan of these churches" (i.e. St. Augustine's) "was derived from Italy, and surviving fragments show a technical skill in the use of Roman brick which proves that they were the work of foreign, and probably Italian, builders. Outside Kent the only building which plainly belongs to this group is a church built of re-used Roman stonework for Cedd, bishop of the East Saxons, at Bradwell-on-Sea, the site of the Roman fort of Othona."¹ In Northumbria where the permanent conversion (for Paulinus' mission was short-lived) was the work of Celtic missionaries, the oldest surviving churches are of the rectangular Celtic pattern.

It can, therefore, be said that under Augustine's influence a Roman style of church architecture was introduced into this country which was fairly well established in Kent and was later followed elsewhere; for, in addition to Cedd's church at Bradwell, there is in the monastic

¹ Sir Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 111.

church at Brixworth in Northamptonshire what is probably the greatest English building of the pre-Danish period of which Sir Frank Stenton writes that "though far larger in scale than Augustine's churches", it "belongs in character and the essentials of its plan to the Roman tradition which he introduced."

HOW DID ST. AUGUSTINE INFLUENCE THE ECCLESIASTICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH ?

That Gregory was very gratified by the success of Augustine's mission to Kent is evident by a letter he wrote to the Patriarch of Alexandria about it. But his knowledge of the actual situation in such a remote part of the world seems to have been delightfully vague. The letters of commendation to various Gallic bishops given to Augustine when he was sent from Rome the second time show that Gregory had little idea of the route to be followed and in his later plan for the ecclesiastical organization of the country he proposed its division into twenty-four dioceses. In Italy every considerable town had its own bishop. Gregory's plan gave England much larger dioceses than those usual on the continent. We have no reason for thinking that Gregory had any intention of doing this. He presumably intended to provide for England an ecclesiastical pattern similar to the continental one. But if that was the case, we can only conclude that he thought of Britain as a comparatively small island, possibly about the size of Sicily or Sardinia.

When Gregory heard from Augustine that he had a great harvest but few labourers, he sent him, in 601, a body of helpers together with letters (quoted in Bede, Book 1, Chap. XXIX) in which he mentions that he has forwarded Augustine a pall and indicates a scheme for the ecclesiastical organization of the country. This plan provided for archbishoprics at London and York (no doubt known to Gregory or to the officials of the Roman Curia as the principal cities of Roman Britain) each with twelve bishops. London and York were each to enjoy metropolitan dignity. Augustine was to have superiority over all English bishops during his life. He was to send a bishop to York who, if he succeeded in converting northern England, was to ordain twelve bishops and enjoy metropolitan dignity over them. In due course Gregory would send him a pall. After Augustine's death, the Archbishop of York was to preside over the bishops he had ordained without being in any way subject to the Bishop of London. For the future the primacy was to be shared between York and London, that bishop being regarded as superior who had been earlier ordained.

The actual pattern evolved by the English Church differed from that proposed by Gregory in the following respects :

- (1) The southern metropolitan See was established at Canterbury

and not London. It was evident that Gregory was unaware of the political organization of Britain in the sixth century. London was not the southern capital of the country but the capital of the comparatively minor kingdom of the East Saxons. In view of the conversion of Kent and of his relations with Ethelbert, Augustine fixed his See at Canterbury, the capital of the Kentish kingdom. Some years later the bishopric of London was established with Mellitus, a member of the 601 mission, as its first bishop, but in the subsequent heathen reaction among the East Saxons, Mellitus fled to Gaul and London was left without a bishop. The reaction spread to Kent and Justus, Bishop of Rochester, likewise fled to the continent. Laurence, of Canterbury, was deterred from following their example only by a vision of St. Peter scourging him for his cowardice. The fact that Laurence remained and that ecclesiastical continuity was thus maintained at Canterbury, together with the prestige of St. Augustine, doubtless determined the permanent fixing of the southern archbishopric in that city.

(2) Gregory proposed twelve bishoprics subordinate to York and twelve subordinate to London. But the course of christianization in the northern and southern halves of the country was very different. The south had its difficulties but those of the north were much greater : heathen reaction, the conflict between the Roman and Celtic churches and later the Danish invasions ; while the population of the north was smaller and more scattered. Whereas the southern province had achieved its twelfth See by the establishment of the bishopric of Leicester in 737, it was only two years before this that an archbishopric was permanently established at York. The number of English dioceses, it is true, remained at twenty-four until the Reformation but twenty of them were in the province of Canterbury and four in that of York.

(3) The rule as to the priority between York and Canterbury laid down by Gregory resulted in, or at least was followed by, long and unseemly disputes over precedence between the two Sees culminating in the twelfth century in discussions at Rome itself, as a result of which was finally achieved the compromise still prevailing by which the Archbishop of York bears the title of Primate of England while the Archbishop of Canterbury is called Primate of all England.

Arising out of the circumstances of Augustine's mission, the English Church adopted a system for the division of tithes which differed from that on the continent. The continental practice was for the Church's income to be divided into four parts : one for the bishop and his family (for clerical celibacy was not yet an established practice), one for the lesser clergy, one for the poor, and the fourth part for the maintenance of church buildings. But Augustine was a monk and so were Mellitus and Justus. They had no separate households but lived a community

life with their fellow clergy—even though the service of a cathedral church made impossible the strict observance of the monastic rule. Thus arose the customary English division of the tithes : one third for the clergy, one third for the poor and one third for the maintenance of the church fabric.

One of the questions which Augustine submitted to Gregory in the early days of his mission concerned the liturgy. "The faith being one, are there different customs in different churches, and is one custom observed in the masses of the holy Roman Church and another in the Church of Gaul?" No doubt, as he travelled through Gaul on his way to Britain, Augustine had been surprised to find forms of service in use there differing from those which he had always known at Rome and maybe that having been subsequently ordained by Vergilius, Bishop of Arles, he wondered whether he ought, therefore, to follow the Gallic practice. On this matter, as on so many others, Gregory's advice was wise and tolerant : "I should like you carefully to select whatever you have found either in the Church of Rome, or in that of Gaul, or in any other, that may more please God, and to introduce into the Church of the English, which is still new to the faith, what you have gathered from many churches. For things are not to be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things. From all the several churches, therefore, select the things which are pious and religious and right, and gather them as it were into a bundle, and store them in the minds of the English to form a custom." And so it came about that the English Church developed its own liturgical forms. Rev. H. A. Wilson, in the Fourth Dissertation in Mason's *Mission of St. Augustine*, in commenting on the processional litany with which Augustine and his band first entered Canterbury, says that "it may be that the Gallican custom of Rogation processions which we find established as an ancient usage at a time when it was still unrecognized at Rome, was first brought into England by the Roman mission."

Finally may we discover in the circumstances of Augustine's mission the origin of the Establishment of the Church of England as we know it to-day? Ethelbert's conversion made Christianity in a sense the State religion of Kent even though the king made no attempt to compel his subjects to follow his example. The grants of land which he made to Augustine and his followers, however, and the building by the king at his own expense of the Cathedrals of Rochester and London did establish from the very beginning a particularly close relation between Church and State in this country.

THE BURIAL PLACE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

The death and burial of Augustine present us with almost as many

problems as his life. All that Bede tells us specifically is that his death occurred between 604 and 616, for he says that "in the year of our Lord 604, Augustine, archbishop of Britain, ordained two bishops, viz. Mellitus and Justus" and in the next paragraph tells us, "after this, the beloved of God, Father Augustine died." A little further on, he quotes Augustine's epitaph: "Here rests the Lord Augustine, first archbishop of Canterbury, who, being formerly sent hither by the blessed Gregory, bishop of the city of Rome, and by God's assistance supported with miracles, reduced King Ethelbert and his nation from the worship of idols to the faith of Christ, and having ended the days of his office in peace, died the 26th day of May, in the reign of the same king." As Ethelbert died in 616, we thus learn that Augustine died on a 26th May between 604 and 616. It seems probable that his death was nearer the former than the latter date. In the next chapter Bede tells us of some of the activities of Laurentius who succeeded Augustine as archbishop, "having been ordained thereto by the latter, in his lifetime, lest, upon his death, the state of the church, as yet unsettled, might begin to falter, if it should be destitute of a pastor, though but for one hour." (This appointment of his successor by Augustine during his lifetime was irregular but doubtless justified by the circumstances.) "About this time," Bede goes on, after describing Laurentius' correspondence with the Celtic churches, "Mellitus, bishop of London, went to Rome to confer with Pope Boniface about the necessary affairs of the English Church." There was a Boniface III who was pope for a short time in 607 and was succeeded by Boniface IV from 607-615. Bede is clearly referring to the latter, for he goes on to describe a synod of the bishops of Italy assembled by the same pope in which Mellitus was invited to participate and says that it was in the eighth year of the reign of the Emperor Phocas on the 27th February. Now Phocas reigned from 602 to 610. This seems to put the latest date for Augustine's death at 26th May, 609. We know for certain that it was not later than 613 for in that year Archbishop Laurentius consecrated the church of St. Peter and St. Paul (the church of what became known as St. Augustine's Abbey) and the body of St. Augustine which had been temporarily interred outside the uncompleted building was then brought inside. Sir Frank Stenton says: "Augustine died on 26th May in an unknown year between 604 and 609."¹ Most writers have assumed, however, from the context in which Bede mentions the death of Augustine that it followed fairly close upon the ordination of Mellitus and Justus. Possibly his appointment of Laurentius as his successor preceded the ordination of these bishops. Otherwise one would have expected Laurentius, whom Augustine apparently regarded

¹ *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 110.

as the most capable of his associates, to receive one of these appointments. It further seems likely that it was when he felt his own strength failing that he nominated his successor. It is probable, therefore, that we shall not be far wrong in thinking that Augustine died in 604 or 605 and the former date has long been traditionally accepted.

But where was Augustine buried and where are his remains now? This problem was discussed at some length by the late Canon Potts in a lecture in 1925 of which a report was printed in *Arch. Cant.*, XXXVIII, 1926. It is, therefore, necessary only to summarize briefly what is known on the subject.

Bede tells us that Augustine built a monastery on the east side of the city in which, by his advice, Ethelbert built and endowed a church dedicated to the apostles Peter and Paul, wherein the bodies of Augustine and all the bishops of Canterbury and the kings of Kent might be buried. This church as we have seen was not completed at the time of Augustine's death. "His body was deposited without, close by the church of the apostles, Peter and Paul, above spoken of, by reason that the same was not yet finished nor consecrated, but as soon as it was dedicated, the body was brought in and decently buried in the north porch thereof."¹ This, as we have seen, took place in 613. The date is not mentioned by Bede but is given by both Thorn and Thomas of Elmham. Goscelin gives us precise details of the position of the tomb which can be taken as reliable for he was an eye-witness of the translation of the remains of the saint by Abbot Wydo in 1091. He describes the tomb as made of brick or tile, with a wonderful representation of Christ in glory surrounded by angels; and he further tells us that when the tomb was opened the body of Augustine was found intact in his episcopal attire looking as if he were still alive. The body was removed to a temporary resting place in front of the altar of the two apostles and the remains of the tomb were used in the erection of one of the pillars of the northern arcade (the third pillar from the central tower) of the Norman church then in course of construction. This pillar was on the exact spot where Augustine's tomb had been for the intervening 478 years. In due course, Augustine was reinterred in the eastern apse of the new Norman church with Laurentius and Mellitus on either side of him and the high altar was dedicated to the two apostles and St. Augustine.

But it now appears that the saint was not permitted to remain long in his new resting place. Goscelin does not mention this, but if he knew of it there were good reasons for his silence. Thorn tells us that Augustine's body was translated on 6th Sept., 1091, being placed in a stone tomb fastened with iron and lead and bearing the inscription: "Here in the body lies Saint Augustine, the noble and

¹ Bede, *Eccles. Hist.*, II, 3.

holy patron of the English, and their glory on high," but that the very same night, after the ceremony was over, Abbot Wydo and a few of the older brethren, through fear of depredation by Danish raiders, secretly removed the body from the tomb, leaving only a few little bones and some ashes, and hid it in a stone coffin prepared for the purpose in the wall under the eastern window near his shrine. The small bones and ashes that were left were put in a leaden vessel in the lowest part of the shrine while a particle of flesh was put in a small leaden vessel on the top of the silver shrine so that worshippers at the shrine were not wholly deceived! The knowledge of the real resting place of Augustine apparently died with those who had been concerned in his removal, though perhaps a tradition remained, for Thorn relates that in 1221 the then Prior and the senior monks desiring to know where the body had been laid, after prayer and fasting, and acting on the advice of certain brethren to whom a revelation had been made thrice, broke open the middle of the eastern wall below the window near the altar of St. Augustine and there found the stone coffin sealed with iron and lead bearing the inscription given above. The following day the altar itself was broken up with a view to its repair and improvement and in the base of it was found a leaden vessel nearly seven feet long inscribed: "Here is contained part of the bones and ashes of St. Augustine, Apostle of the English, who was of old sent by Gregory and converted the English race to the faith of Christ." The remains were once more interred in three separate places but with the positions changed. The greater part, which had been in the eastern wall, was now put on high in a silver shrine, the lesser bones, which had been at the base of the altar, were put under a marble tomb and the third part (presumably the vessel which had been at the top of the shrine) was now put under the centre east window. But at the suggestion of great persons there present, Abbot Hugh had the head kept outside the shrine and enclosed at his own cost in a reliquary of gold and silver and precious stones. Presumably there was no further change until Thorn's own day, apart from a restoration of and addition to the inscription on the tomb by Abbot Fyndon in 1300. And we may take it that no further change took place until the dissolution of the monastery. It is recorded that in 1526 Cardinal Wolsey gave King John of Portugal some relics of St. Augustine, viz. the chin bone and three teeth. From which receptacle were these taken? In 1628 they were taken to the Cistercian church of St. Salvator at Antwerp.

What happened to the shrine and to the remains of Augustine at the dissolution? Presumably the gold and silver and precious stones, as in the case of the neighbouring shrine of Becket in the Cathedral, passed into the king's hands. And just as it is believed that Becket's remains were secretly removed by some of the monks of Canterbury,

it is not unlikely that the monks of St. Augustine's did the same with their most prized relics.

In the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (Vol. XVIII, Pt. 2, p. 30—Rolls Series) is recorded a Visitation at Chilham at which the Vicar, Dr. Willoughby, was asked: "Why he having special commandment by the King's letters from Hull doth yet keep in his church a certain shrine gilted named St. Austin's shrine; which shrine was conveyed from St. Austin's in Canterbury unto the parish church of Chilham at the suppression of the monastery of St. Austin's." Dr. Willoughby replied: "My lord as concerning the schryne I had never commandment to pull hit down, and also hit his bot anente thenke" (it is but an empty thing); "but Master Thwattes had it at Sent Astens and gave hit to the cherche." This certainly suggests that the remains of St. Augustine were brought from Canterbury to Chilham. It is, of course, unlikely that an empty box was brought and set up at Chilham, but it is not unlikely that Dr. Willoughby removed the bones from their receptacle and hid them when the enquiry was made. In view of the exceptional height of St. Augustine there should be strong presumptive evidence if any bones of the age and size should ever come to light at Chilham.¹

THE CHARACTER OF AUGUSTINE

In conclusion it may be permissible to attempt some estimate of the character of the founder of the English Church. Practically nothing is known of him before he was chosen for the mission to England beyond the fact that he had been a monk, and probably prior, in the Monastery of St. Andrew on the Coelian Hill at Rome. But this was a monastery which Gregory himself had founded in his own family mansion and we can, therefore, conclude that Augustine was very well known to the Pope. Physically Augustine was tall and imposing. But was his moral character comparable to his physical? On this the evidence is conflicting and estimates have differed. Some, recognizing the greatness of Augustine's achievement, argue that it must have been the work of a man of outstanding moral and intellectual qualities. Others argue that he was a man of rather weak character and many failings, and that but for the continual encouragement, support and direction of Gregory he would have achieved little.

What are the faults imputed to him? First, that he lacked

¹ A medieval stone coffin in the north chapel of Chilham Church, traditionally described as the shrine of St. Augustine, was opened in 1948 by the Vicar, the Revd. Guy Courtney, in the presence of our Honorary Editor and others, with the skilled assistance of Mr. C. W. M. Walker, Clerk of the Works to the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral. Apart from a piece of wood upon which were recorded the previous openings, the coffin was empty. It was again sealed and a suitable record made in the church registers.

courage, the outstanding instance of which is his return to Rome from Provence in 596 for which he was severely reprovved by Gregory. Secondly, that he was proud and haughty. The story of his discourtesy to the Welsh bishops at the second meeting seems to point to this. Again, among the queries which he addressed to Gregory was one as to his authority over the bishops of Gaul. This may have arisen from the fact that he had been ordained by Vergilius, Archbishop of Arles, and had subsequently received archiepiscopal authority from the Pope, but it does seem an unwarrantable assumption on his part. Gregory told him bluntly that he had no such authority but that if he happened to be in Gaul he might make friendly comments to the Archbishop of Arles. Lest there should be any misunderstanding, Gregory wrote to Vergilius carefully defining Augustine's position. The chief evidence of Augustine's weakness, however, is to be found in Gregory's admonitory letter, warning him of the dangers of self-exaltation and presumption because of his success and particularly on account of the miracles he had performed. Part of Gregory's letter must be quoted :

"I know, most loving brother, that Almighty God, by means of your affection, shows great miracles in the nation which He has chosen. Wherefore it is necessary that you rejoice with fear . . . viz. that you may rejoice that the souls of the English are by outward miracles drawn to inward grace ; but that you fear lest . . . the weak mind be puffed up in its own presumption, and as it is externally raised to honour, it may thence inwardly fall by vainglory."

Gregory then quotes Christ's rebuke to the disciples when they said : "Lord, in thy name, even the devils are subject to us," and continues, later :

"It remains, therefore, most dear brother, that amidst those things, which through the working of our Lord, you outwardly perform, you always inwardly strictly judge yourself and strictly discern both what you are yourself and what grace there is in that nation for whose conversion you have received the gifts of working signs ; and you should always recall to mind any offences which you remember to have committed against our Maker by word or deed, that the memory of your guilt may crush the risings of pride in your heart ; and whatever power of working signs you may receive or have already received, you must reckon that these things are bestowed, not on you, but on those for whose weal they are conferred on you."

Gregory then goes on to quote illustrations from the Old and New Testaments in support of his argument and concludes : "I say these things because I desire to prostrate the soul of my hearer in humility."

Now it may be argued that all this is in the spirit of that age and that Gregory might have written similarly to anyone in Augustine's

position or even that Gregory, conscious of similar temptations himself, thought it wise to warn Augustine. But it seems unlikely that Gregory would have written so strongly or at such length on this matter, if he had not been aware that Augustine was in fact liable to these weaknesses.

But Augustine's human failings must not blind us to his real achievements. We must try to see his whole work in true perspective and perhaps we cannot better conclude than by quoting the judgment of Sir Frank Stenton, a very great authority on Anglo-Saxon England. He says of Augustine :

"It is easy to emphasize the limitations of his success, his failure to conciliate the British clergy, and occasional signs of weakness in conduct, and to conclude that he was a man of meagre personality associated almost accidentally with a great historic movement. He certainly cannot be given a high place among the leading missionaries of the Dark Ages. There is no sign in his history of the strength and passion which distinguished Willibrord or Boniface. Without the advice and support of Gregory the Great he would have accomplished nothing. But no one who possessed Gregory's confidence should be dismissed as negligible by a modern writer, and Augustine's mission was faced with its own peculiar difficulties. Unlike later missionaries of Germanic stock he was attempting the conversion of a people whose culture he did not understand. In the background of his mission stood the hostile clergy of an ancient church suspicious of his ultimate designs and conscious of justification for refusing their help. Under the conditions which governed his activities it was a notable achievement to secure the establishment of Christianity in one English kingdom and to provide for the training of a clergy who would continue his work."¹

Augustine remains for us, therefore, an outstanding figure of our early history, the founder of the English Church and, in a more particular sense, of the Christian Church in Kent, in some ways a somewhat shadowy and uncertain figure, but nevertheless standing out clearly as the first of that long line of archbishops of Canterbury whose succession continues to the present day.

¹ Sir Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 110-111.