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Gregory sees the little English children in the slave market at Rome and plans to take the Gospel to their homeland.

THE story is familiar to every school-child how Gregory, the Benedictine monk, passing one day from his monastery through the Roman Forum, chanced to see among the slaves exposed for sale three flaxen-haired, fair-complexioned children. Asking the Jewish dealer whence they came, he learned that they were Angles from the land of the Britanni. "Not Angles but angels," exclaimed Gregory, and forthwith proceeded to the Pope to request permission to devote his life to the evangelization of Britain.

He set out secretly on his mission with a number of companions, but when three days on his journey he was recalled and placed upon the papal throne as Gregory I. Unable then to go himself to Britain he delegated the task to Augustine, the prior of his old monastery, who landed at Thanet in Kent among the

monly believed that the present Protestant church of Britain is a delinquent offshoot, an apostate daughter, of the Church of Rome.

Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. Though Catholic writers by intent, and others through ignorance, seldom go back earlier than the Augustinian mission, the church in Britain actually had a history of several centuries when he arrived. In fact, hundreds of years before ever the Bishop of Rome sought to claim for himself the leadership of all the churches, and probably before

there was a bishop of Rome at all, the Gospel was planted in

these isles.

From Apostolic Times

Gildas, the earliest of English church historians, who lived in the first half of the sixth century, traces the roots of the Brit-

Did Rome Convert Britain?

Is the British Church a Child of the Papacy?

By W. L. EMMERSON

No. 1. A Popular Fallacy

pagan Saxons in the year A.D. 590.

On the grounds of this story it is sometimes asserted and quite com-

ish church right back to apostolic times. "We know," he says in his *Ecclesiastical History*, "that Christ, the true Sun, afforded His light to our island in the last year of Tiberius Cæsar." Tiberius died in March, A.D. 37, so that according to Gildas Christianity must have come to Britain less than a decade after the crucifixion, and within a short time of the stoning of Stephen and the scattering of the infant church!

Sir Henry Spelman in his *Concilia* attests this early date: "We have abundant evidence," he says, "that this Britain of ours received the faith . . . soon after the crucifixion of Christ."

Roman Admissions

Nor are such assertions confined to non-Roman authorities. Polydore Vergil in the reign of Henry VII and Cardinal Pole in the sixteenth century have both left on record that Britain was "the first of all countries" to receive the Christian faith. And Robert Parsons, a Jesuit, who wrote a book entitled, *The Three Conversions of England*, to prove that three times Roman missionaries had evangelized our land, admits that, "The Christian religion began in Britain within fifty years of Christ's as-

*Priceless Facts
for Protestant Workers*

cension," and that from a non-Roman source!

When one who is seeking to magnify Rome's part in bringing the Gospel to our land is constrained to acknowledge a fact so antagonistic to his thesis, its veracity is abundantly authenticated.

The question of priority of churches was raised at the Roman Council of Pisa in A.D. 1417, by the French and Spanish ambassadors who ventured to contest the accepted antiquity of the British church. But their protest was defeated. Not satisfied with the decision, they raised the issue again at the Council of Constance in A.D. 1419, and yet again at the Council of Sena, but on each occasion their claim was set aside, it being asserted that the church in Britain was founded "immediately after the passion of Christ."

Testimony of Church Fathers

Among the writings of the church fathers are to be found many indications that the British church at a very early date was well known throughout the Empire.

Tertullian, for example, one of the fathers of North Africa, writing about the year A.D. 200, states that Christianity was to be found even beyond the limits to which Roman arms had penetrated, including the isles of Britain. These are his words:

"The extremities of Spain, the various parts of Gaul, the regions of Britain which have never been penetrated by the Roman arms, have received the religion of Christ."—*"Dei Fidei,"* page 179.

Writing about a quarter of a century later we have Origen, one of the most noted teachers of Alexandria, stating that:

"The divine goodness of our Lord and Saviour is equally diffused among the Britons, the Afri-

cans, and other nations of the world."—*On Psalm 149.*

British in Early Church Councils

From the fourth century we not only have the testimonies of Eusebius, Bishop of Cæsarea (A.D. 320), and Jerome of Jerusalem (A.D. 378), but also catalogues of British representatives attending the earliest of the general councils of the church. Three bishops, a presbyter, and a deacon were present in A.D. 314 at the Council of Arles, convened to discuss the date of Easter, the ceremony of baptism, and the mode of ordination of bishops or elders of the church.

After the Council of Nicæa (A.D. 325), which met to rebut the Arian heresy, Constantine the Great wrote a general letter to the churches in which he included the British bishops in the unity of the faith. Athanasius of Alexandria, corresponding some years later (A.D. 363) with Jovian, mentions that the British bishops "accepted and assented to the faith" as defined at that council.

Then at the Council of Sardica

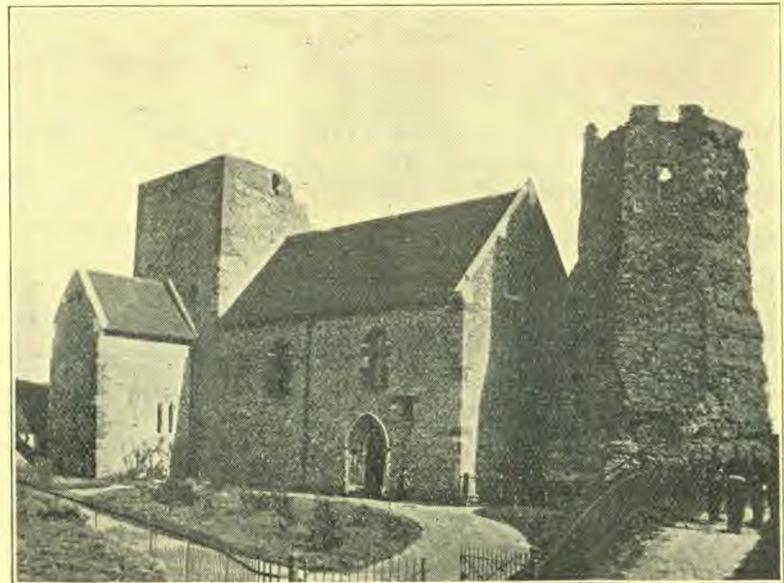
(modern Sofia in Bulgaria) in A.D. 344 or 347, no less than thirty-three bishops from Gaul and Britain were present.

Britain's First Martyrs

The great growth of the British church during the early centuries is further attested by the long list of martyrs to the faith in the Diocletian persecution. Although lasting for only one year in this country as against some eighteen years in other parts of the Empire, as a result of the tolerant attitude of Constantius Chlorus the governor, some thousands of souls laid down their lives. Such numbers and their distribution throughout the country most evidently indicate the existence of a very large church extending over the whole land.

During the terrible persecutions of the second and third centuries it was a common practice of the hunted Christians to use the secret sign "XP" or "Chrisma," as it has been called, upon their meeting places and their tombs. Archæologists have

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St. Mary's Church in Dover Castle. The main portion of this structure dates from the fourth century—two hundred years prior to the arrival of Augustine!

these people, so needy and so dependent on us, have become our life already, and amidst all our fun and laughter, our excitement at going back into civilization again, we wish more than all else that partings were for ever at an end.

Only this morning a man came limping on to the mission begging us to tend his leg, and he had limped many miles and his leg was really in a terrible condition. But how could we? Tomorrow we were going home.

And Phœbe—she is sick and needs constant care. She was intent on sending for the native doctor, but thus far we have succeeded in keeping him away. The question is, What will she do tomorrow?

Indeed, what will any of them do?

A whole family of people come running on to the mission, bringing with them a little boy screaming deafeningly. His skin hangs in watery bags all over his body. Either in a fit of anger or inexcusable carelessness, his mother has thrown a pot of boiling soup and palm oil over him. It is a wonder he is not dead already.

Supposing he had been brought to-morrow.

To say nothing of their deeper, their spiritual ills, and of the glorious, soul-stirring opportunities for service that this great land affords. Deep in our hearts we are finding that the hardest thing we've had to do as yet is to pack up and leave it all.

Yet what to do? It seems that our laughter must always be mingled with our tears. As we say good-bye we encourage our hearts by telling ourselves that at most the parting is not for long, but when the time for returning comes, then, though differently, they will be torn again. We can only look forward, striving the while, because the partings must be hard, to make the

reunions more dear. Soon the greatest reunion of them all will come, and then—

"O what a mighty change
Shall Jesus' followers know,
When o'er the happy plains they
range,
Incapable of woe!

"There all our griefs are past;
There all our sorrows end;
We gain a peaceful rest at last,
With Jesus Christ our Friend.

"No slightest touch of pain,
Nor sorrow's least alloy,
Can violate our rest, or stain
Our purity of joy.

"In that eternal day,
No clouds nor tempests rise;
There gushing tears are wiped
away
For ever from our eyes."

Elele, Nigeria.



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thus been enabled to identify remains bearing this monogram as antedating the Edict of Milan (A.D. 313), when Christianity was at last able to come out into the open.

Numerous remains of pavements, churches, and memorial stones inscribed with the "Chrisma" have been found in this country as widely separated as Cornwall, Dorset, Northamptonshire, Carnarvonshire, Wigtonshire in Scotland, and elsewhere, indicating the existence of Christians in these places prior to the beginning of the fourth century.

In the fifth century many references were made by the fathers to the British church. Augustine of Hippo asks, "How many churches are there not erected in the British Isles which be in the ocean?" (*Works, Paris Ed.*, page 676.) And Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople in A.D. 402, commends British piety in a very striking manner:

"The British Isles which are beyond the sea, and which lie in the ocean," he declares, "have received the virtue of the Word.

Churches are there founded and altars erected. Though thou should'st go to the ocean, to the British Isles, there thou should'st hear all men everywhere discussing matters out of the Scriptures, with another voice indeed, but not another faith, in their different tongue, but the same judgment."

Another reference was made by the same author in his *Homily on Luke's Gospel* to the effect that, "The power of the Saviour is felt even among those who are divided from our world, in Britain."

Visits to Holy Places

Further proof could hardly be asked for, yet one more line of evidence may be mentioned, namely, the records of pilgrimages made by British Christians to the holy places of Palestine. During the years of persecution such visits were impossible, but as soon as Constantine the Great proclaimed liberty to Christianity throughout the Empire, we find fervent British Christians undertaking the long and arduous journey to see for themselves the places made holy by the presence of their Lord.

Jerome who lived near Jerusalem in the latter half of the fourth century mentions in his letters that he frequently came into contact with British pilgrims, and Melania the Elder who died in A.D. 410 refers to visitors from "Persia, and Britain, and all the isles."

Thus while much valuable information relating to the beginnings of the British church has long since disappeared, the fragmentary information still extant abundantly testifies to the birth of Christianity in these isles at a very early date, and to the existence in the second or third, and subsequent centuries of a flourishing church distributed over the whole land.

(Next Time: "The First Evangelists of Britain.")