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THE MISSION OF ST AUGUSTINE TO ENGLAND ACCORDING TO THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS, BEING A HANDBOOK FOR THE THIRTEENTH CENTENARY,

EDITED BY

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PREFACE.

THIS book is compiled by desire of his Grace the late Archbishop of Canterbury. With that love of history and that devotion to detail which marked his character, he sketched out what kind of book he wished to be prepared ‘before that Commemoration.’ It ‘must issue from the University Press.’ It was to consist of ‘a complete collection of authentic documents bearing on Augustine’s coming,’ translations with the Latin close beside, and footnotes. These documents were to be accompanied by ‘investigations on the spot, geographic and hydrographic, Ebbsfleet, Richborough, etc.,’ and by ‘essays short and few, shewing the real bearing of the events on later controversy.’ He thought that this would form ‘a most precious little book.’ ‘It would place,’ he wrote, ‘the real argument between Rome and us on a clear footing at a time when it would be read by all English-speaking races. It would attract an attention which would not let Roman fallaciae et praestigiae
sleep. I believe it would have an immense effect.’ As might be expected, however, of Archbishop Benson, he did not wish the book in any sense to be an *ex parte* statement of special views of the history. He was anxious that everything should be told; that if, as in the Answers of Gregory to Augustine for instance, anything were left out, it should be most clearly indicated what was the nature of the omission, that no reader might have the least reason for suspecting that the omission had any controversial purpose. ‘The Truth,’ he wrote to me, ‘must be the first aim,—to let people see it as it is.’ How far the book, as it now stands, would have satisfied the Archbishop, I do not know; but the desire at least has been to obey the spirit as well as the letter of his injunctions, and to let facts speak for themselves, in all simplicity.

All that is known concerning the Gregorian mission which founded the Church of England is contained in the documents given in this book. The authorities are practically two in number.

First there are Gregory’s own letters, and a few phrases in other works of his. The genuineness of those which concern our present purpose is undoubted, with one exception. Unhappily that acute scholar Paul Ewald was taken away before he could give to the world his edition of Gregory’s Epistles; but he left elaborate and useful materials for the criticism of them in his article in the *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft f. altere deutsche Geschichtskunde* Vol. III., and in his new
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edition of Jaffé’s Regesta Pontificum,—besides work in manuscript, which enabled Ludwig Hartmann in 1891 to edit the first seven Books in his own and Ewald’s name, in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica. The text of the Epistles used in this book is that of Ewald and Hartmann, as far as they have gone; the rest are taken from the text of Haddan and Stubbs in the third volume of their Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents, and (where the letters occur in Bede) from Bede’s Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum. Ewald considered that the superscriptions, endings, and datings of most of the letters as given by Bede, when compared with the form of Gregory’s letters in the three great collections of extracts from the Register which are known to us, proved that Bede’s copies of the letters could not have been taken, as Bede appears to say that they were, from those preserved in the registry at the Lateran, but that they were derived from the originals preserved in England. Dr Bassenge, in his Sendung Augustins (Leipzig, 1890), has suggested a modification of this view. The documents brought from Rome by Nothelm, of which Bede speaks, were, he thinks, the original drafts of the letters, not copies from the letters as entered in the Register; and Bede used these drafts along with the originals existing in England in his time, or with copies of them. It makes very little practical difference which of these views is adopted. The substance of the letters is the same; and it is agreed that Bede is our earliest and best authority for the text of them.
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The only question of any importance is that relating to the genuineness of Gregory's Replies to Augustine's questions. The facts are as follows. Those Replies appear never to have been entered in the registry of the Lateran, where copies of most of the Papal letters were preserved. Writing in 736, or soon after, to Nothelm, Archbishop of Canterbury, St Boniface begs to have a copy sent him 'of that letter in which are contained, they say, the questions of the pontiff Augustine, the first preacher to the English, and the replies of St Gregory the Pope'; 'and be at the pains,' he adds, 'to examine diligently and with scrupulous caution, whether the composition is proved to be our father St Gregory's or not; because, as the registraries affirm, it was not to be found in the registry of the Roman Church, along with the other copies of that Pope's letters, when search was made for it.' It is not in any of the three great collections of excerpts from the letters preserved in the registry; and it only appears in the later MSS. of Gregory's Epistles, into which it passed, no doubt,—sometimes with embellishments,—from Bede. For these reasons Ewald considers its genuineness questionable, though he does not reject it. But it may be urged in reply that the document is not exactly a letter. Bede

1 The letter of Boniface is given in Haddan and Stubbs iii. p. 336. The date of it cannot be earlier than 736, when Nothelm received the pall which is mentioned in it, nor later than 741, which is the latest possible date for Nothelm's death.

2 See Jaffé-Ewald Regest. Pont. i. 206, 207.
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calls it a *libellus*—a little book¹. It may well have been kept with other works of its author, apart from the registry of letters. It is certain also that not all the Papal letters were entered in the registry²; for instance, the indubitable letter (on p. 21) to the missionaries on their way through Gaul was not contained in it. Ewald sees no difficulty in supposing that the original had been sent to England without any copy being kept. And indeed, if the preface to the little work is authentic³, the circumstances in which the work was composed might give a reason for its not being copied out and entered. Though subsequently delayed, the bearers were in haste, and hardly gave the afflicted Pope time amidst his tortures to dictate his answers to the questions. We are unable now to decide whether Nothelm found the document at Rome, though not in the registry, and brought it with the rest to England, or whether the original was preserved at Canterbury and a copy supplied to Bede from thence. But the internal evidence, as well as Bede’s unhesitating acceptance of the document, makes it hard to imagine that these Replies, so characteristic of the mind and of the style of Gregory, could have been forged by some one of the date of Theodore⁴.

Our second great authority for the history of the Augustinian Mission is, of course, the Venerable Bede.

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¹ See below, p. 9.
² Ewald *Neues Archiv* III. p. 438.
³ It has less authority than the rest, as not being given in Bede.
⁴ Which is Duchesne’s contention: see below, p. 67.
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He is not only one of the most attractive of saints, but also one of the most trustworthy of historians. His work was finished in 731. With a carefulness which endears him to the modern student, Bede almost always gives his authorities for the statements which he makes. This is what he says to king Ceolwulf in his Praefatio:

‘In order to remove all occasion of doubting in what I have written, from you or any other hearers or readers of this history, I will briefly state from what authorities my facts are acquired.

‘Before all others, the author and aider of this humble work was the most reverend Abbot Albinus¹, a man of great and encyclopaedic learning, who, having been taught in the Church of Canterbury by those venerable and erudite men, Archbishop Theodore of blessed memory and Abbot Hadrian, had diligently taken note of everything done either in the province of Kent itself, or in the neighbouring districts,

Ut autem in his, quae scripsi, uel tibi, uel ceteris auditoribus siue lectoribus huius historiae occasionem dubitandi subraham, quibus haec maxime auctoribus didicerim, breuiter intimare curabo.

Auctor ante omnes atque adiutor opusculi huius Albinus abba reuerentissimus, uir per omnia doctissimus, extitit; qui in ecclesia Cantuariorum a beatae memoriae Theodoro archiepiscopo et Hadriano abbate, uiris uenerabilibus atque eruditissimis, institutus, diligenter omnia, quae in ipsa Cantuariorum provincia, uel etiam in contiguis eidem regionibus a discipulis

¹ Abbot of St Augustine's, Canterbury.
by the disciples of the blessed Pope Gregory, alike by means of written documents and by the tradition of older men. Those parts of his store which he thought worth recording he transmitted to me by means of that religious presbyter of the Church of London, Nothelm¹, either committed to writing, or to be narrated by Nothelm *viva voce*. Nothelm went to Rome later on, and there, by permission of the pontiff Gregory who now presides over the holy Roman Church, he examined the registry of that Church, and discovered a good many epistles of the blessed Pope Gregory and of other pontiffs likewise; and on his return, by the advice of the most reverend father Albinus, he offered them to me for insertion in my history. Thus, from the beginning of this volume to the date at which the English nation received the faith of Christ, I have learned what there

beatī papaec Gregorii gesta fuere, uel monimentis litterarum, uel seniorum traditione cognoverat; et ea mihi de his, quae memoria digna uidebantur, per religiosum Lundoniensis ecclesiae presbyterum Nothelmum, siue litteris mandata, siue ipsius Nothelmi uiua noce referenda, transmisit. Qui uidelecet Nothelmus postea Romam ueniens, nonnullas ibi beati Gregorii papaee simul et aliorum pontificum epistulas, perscrutato eiusdem sanctae ecclesiae Romanae scrinio, permisso eius, qui nunc ipsi ecclesiae praeest Gregorii pontificis, inuenit, reuersusque nobis nostreæ historiæ inserendas cum consilio præfati Albini reuarentissimi patris actulit. A principio itaque voluminis huic usque ad tempus, quo gens Anglorum fideum Christi

¹ The same who was afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury.
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was to be said in the main from earlier writings brought together from different quarters. Thence to the present time, what was done in the Church of Canterbury by the disciples of the blessed Pope Gregory and their successors, and under what kings, I have ascertained by the industry of Abbot Albinus, through the mediation of Nothelm, as I said. To them also I am in a great measure indebted for my knowledge of the bishops by whom, and of the kings in whose days, the grace of the Gospel was accepted by the provinces of Essex and Wessex, of East Anglia and of Northumbria....The ecclesiastical proceedings in the province of East Anglia I learned partly from earlier writings and traditions, and partly by the communication of the most reverend Abbot Esi.1...With regard to Northumbria, the events percepit, ex priorum maxime scriptis hinc inde collectis ea, quae promeremus, didicimus. Exinde autem usque ad tempora praeientia, quae in ecclesia Cantuariorum per discipulos beat papae Gregorii, siue successores eorum, uel sub quibus regibus gesta sint, memorati abbatis Albini industria, Nothelmo, ut diximus, perferente, cognouimus. Qui etiam provinciae Orientalium simul et Occidentalium Saxorum, nec non et Orientalium Anglorum atque Nordanhymborum, a quibus praesulibus, uel quorum tempore regum gratiam euangelii percepserunt, nonnulla mihi ex parte prodiderunt....Porro in provincia Orientalium Anglorum, quae fuerint gesta ecclesiastica, partim ex scriptis uel traditione priorum, partim reuerentissimi abbatis Esi relatione conperimus....Quae autem in Nordanhymborum

1 Nothing appears to be known about Esi.
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which have taken place in the Church in different localities from the date of the acceptance of the Christian faith till now, I have ascertained not from any single authority, but by the trustworthy statements of numberless witnesses who were in a position to know and remember them, besides what came within the sphere of my own personal knowledge.

It is, as Mr Plummer says in his Notes upon the passage, of deep interest to see that Bede had the help of written documents (besides the Roman letters) with regard to the Augustinian mission, and with regard to East Anglian history. He had also one important written document (which he does not mention) with regard to the life of him whom he calls ‘our Apostle.’ The earliest extant biography of St Gregory is one by a monk of Streaneshalch, or Whitby, at the end of the seventh century, which was discovered at St Gall by Paul Ewald, and partly published by him in 1886, in Historische Aufsätze dem Andenken an G. Waits gewidmet. Extracts from it are given by Plummer in his Bede vol. II. p. 389 foll. Bede

pronuncia, ex quo tempore fidem Christi perceperunt, usque ad praesens per diversas regiones in ecclesia sint acta, non uno quolibet auctore, sed fidelì innumerorum testium, qui haec scire uel meminisse poterant, adsertione cognoui, exceptis his, quae per me ipsum nosse poteram.

1 I have not been able to see the Historische Aufsätze, and owe the reference to Dr Bassenge, and to Mr Plummer.
carefully distinguishes between that which he learns on good authority, and that which he knows only by report, such as the story of the English boys at Rome. Instances will be found in the following pages of his reference to particular persons who had given him information on particular points, especially in reference to matters in the north.

It is scarcely worth while to refer to later authorities. Gocelin, whose Life (or Lives) of St Augustine fills many pages of the Acta Sanctorum (under date May 26), has no historical information to impart. He relates many miracles of St Augustine, especially posthumous ones, and spins out pious reflexions for his brethren the monks of St Augustine's; but the grains of fact amidst all his verbiage are few. He died 1098. A much later member of the same celebrated Abbey, William Thorn, whose Chronicle of his house comes down to the year 1397¹, gathers together some items of real interest from the local traditions of the Kentish city, and makes an intelligent use of them; to which Thomas Elmham, who wrote in the same house a generation later, has nothing to add, though modern writers often refer to him instead of the more deserving Thorn. Thorn's work, at least down to the year 1232, is in all probability little more than a reediting of the Chronicle composed about that date by an earlier monk of St Augustine's, called

¹ It is printed in Twysden and Selden Hist. Angl. Scriptores Decem.
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Thomas Sprott. The Chronicle of Sprott, as an independent work, has disappeared.¹

Among modern works upon the subject it will only be necessary to name Dr Stanley’s Memorials of Canterbury, and Dr Bright’s Chapters of Early English Church History (a new edition is in the press),—works of singular beauty and charm in their various ways; and I may add a grateful mention of the series of little volumes of lectures, published by the S.P.C.K., in which the Bishop of Stepney does so much, year after year, to interest the English public in the beginnings of the Church of England. Bassenge’s Sendung Augustins zur Bekehrung der Angelsachsen has been mentioned already. Potthast’s Wegweiser vol. ii. p. 1186 (ed. 1896) refers to other works. I must here express the gratitude which I, in company with all other students of the period, must feel to the Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland by which the late Mr Haddan and the Bishop of Oxford have lightened the labours of us all; and also to Mr Plummer for his admirable edition of Bede’s Historical Works, with the wealth of well digested learning set forth in its notes. In using it, my only ungratified wish has been that sometimes Mr Plummer would have translated, or at least have commented upon, a bit of Papal Latin, which, from his silence, he evidently understands when others do not.

¹ The Chronica published in 1719 by Thomas Hearne as Sprott’s has no real claim to be his. See Hardwick’s Elmham (Rolls Series) pp. xv, xvi.
I have finally to express my best thanks to the accomplished scholars who have contributed Dissertations to this book: I am sure that Archbishop Benson would have thanked them heartily. One other Dissertation was to have enriched the book, on the Relations between England and Rome until the Norman Conquest. Professor Collins, who had kindly undertaken to do it, has at the last moment been hindered by a sudden illness. Last, but not least, I beg with profound respect to thank the Lord Bishop of Oxford for finding time to look over a large part of the proofs of this book, and Mr Plummer not only for doing the same, but also for allowing me to use his text of Bede, from which I have only departed occasionally in a matter of spelling or of punctuation.

A. J. M.

Jesus College, Cambridge.

St Gregory’s Day, 1897.
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West Coast of Kent in the Sixth Century
This map is available for download from www.cambridge.org/9781107619821
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE.

559 or 560 Accession of Ethelbert.
585-588 Meeting of Gregory with the English boys at Rome.
590 Gregory becomes Bishop of Rome.
596 Augustine and his companions start for Britain (prob. early in June).
597 Arrival of Augustine in Thanet.
   Baptism of Ethelbert (June 2).
   Death of Columba (June 9).
   Consecration of Augustine (Nov. 16).
601 Despatch of Mellitus and others to join Augustine.
602 Consecration of St Saviour’s Cathedral (June 9).
604 Occupation of the Monastery of St Peter and St Paul (Jan. 9).
   Death of Gregory (March 12).
   Death of Augustine (May 26).
610 Deaths of Ethelbert (Feb. 24) and Sabert.
   Flight of Mellitus and Justus.
619 Death of Lawrence (Feb. 2).
624 Death of Mellitus (April 24).
625 Consecration of Paulinus for Northumbria (July 21).
627 Baptism of Edwin (Easter).
   Death of Justus (Nov. 10), and consecration of Honorius at Lincoln
   by Paulinus.
630 Felix in East Anglia under Sigbert.
634 Oswald becomes King of Northumbria.
Chronological Table.

635 Aidan begins his mission in Northumbria.
Cynegils King of Wessex baptized by Birinus.

642 Oswald killed (Aug. 5); succeeded by Oswy.
Oswy married to Eanfled.

644 Death of Paulinus (Oct. 10); consecration of Ithamar, the first
English bishop.

647 Hilda becomes a nun.

651 Death of Aidan (Aug. 31).

653 Baptism of the Mercian Peada; mission of Cedd to the Middle
Angles, and afterwards to Essex.
Death of Honorius (Sept. 30).

655 Consecration of Deusdedit to Canterbury by Ithamar (March 26).

658 Revolt of Mercia against Oswy; Wulfheri becomes King.

664 Death of Deusdedit (July 14).
Conference of Whitby; acceptance of the Roman Easter by Oswy,
and withdrawal of the Scottish bishop Colman.
Consecration of Wilfrid at Compiègne.

668 Consecration of Theodore by Pope Vitalian (March 26).

669 Arrival of Theodore at Canterbury (May 27).

671 Death of Oswy (Feb. 15).

673 or 673 Birth of Bede.

681 Wilfrid in Sussex.
DEPRECAMVR TE, DOMINE, IN OMNI MISERICORDIA TVA,VT AVFERATVR FVROR TVVS ET IRA TVA A CIVITATEISTA ET DE DOMO SANCTA TVA, QVONIAM PECCAVIMVS.AALLELVIA.