

## NOTE ON THE RED BOOK OF EYE.

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There is a MS. in existence of exceptional interest to us in East Anglia, because it may be an extant visible link between the Celtic Church (most probably through the Irish mission at Burgh Castle, under St. Fursey, in the time of St. Felix) and the present day.

It is a MS. book of the Gospels, or rather, of parts of two of the Gospels, St. Luke and St. John, written in a distinctly Irish hand, and apparently in the seventh century. It is now MS. No. 197 in the Library bequeathed by Archbishop Parker to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Where was it before it got into Archbishop Parker's collection of MSS.? In its present state it yields no evidence of any former habitat. There is a note in it by Archbishop Parker, implying that it came from Canterbury, by saying that it was one of the books sent by Pope Gregory to St. Augustine, and "lately thus mutilated." But Archbishop Parker must have made a mistake. The MS. is certainly Irish, and it is impossible that it should have come from Rome.

On the other hand, Bishop Tanner (Chancellor of the Norwich Diocese, 1701, Bishop of St. Asaph, 1732-5) in his "*Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica*," s.v., Fœlix, says that it was the property of St. Felix, the Burgundian, the Apostle of East Anglia, and he gives a reference to John Leland's *Collectanea* Vol iii., p 24.

Leland there makes a statement to the following effect :—

"The Monks of Eye had once a cell at Dunwich, a town on the coast [of Suffolk] anciently called Dumnoc,

and distinguished by the name of 'city,' where Felix Bishop of the East Angles, had his See.

But when the see was transferred elsewhere, the old site was occupied by monks. Now, however, the cell, with much else there, has been swallowed up by the sea. The monks of Eye still preserve a Book of the Gospels, a relic of their ruined cell. It is popularly called the Red Book of Eye, and the people are wont to swear by it. The Monks constantly affirm that it was Felix' Book; certainly that seems likely enough, for besides the fact that it is written in large Lombardic letters, it has an appearance of wonderfully great antiquity."

Now the MS. at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, is not written in Lombardic capitals, but in an Irish semi-uncial hand; but Leland had probably never seen such a handwriting before, and palæographical terms were not used with accuracy in the first half of the sixteenth century.

So, in spite of this, and some other difficulties, it is possible that we still have surviving in this MS. the Red Book of Eye, and a genuine relic of St. Felix; and if so, St. Felix can hardly have brought it with him from Burgundy, but may have got it from the little band of Irish Missionaries headed by St. Fursey. It is impossible that it could have been written for him by a native of East Anglia. East Anglia had not, like Northern and Central England, been sufficiently permeated by Irish influence to make such a supposition possible.

For these facts the writer is largely indebted to Dr. M. R. James' *The Sources of Archbishop Parker's Collection of MSS.*, Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 8vo. Publications No. xxxii. There is a description of the above MS., with excellent coloured facsimiles, in the quarto publications of the same Society, by J. Goodwin, B.D.; vol. for 1847.