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WOMAN UNDER MONASTICISM

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Содержание

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Woman under Monasticism / Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500

PREFACE

The restlessness, peculiar to periods of transition, is a characteristic of the present age. Long-accepted standards are being questioned and hitherto unchallenged rules of conduct submitted to searching criticism. History shows us that our present social system is only a phase in human development, and we turn to a study of the past, confident that a clearer insight into the social standards and habits of life prevalent in past ages will aid us in a better estimation of the relative importance of those factors of change we find around us to-day.

Monasticism during the ten centuries between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500 exhibits phases of vital significance for the mental and moral growth of Western Europe. However much both the aims and the tone of life of the members of the different religious orders varied, monasticism generally favoured tendencies which were among the most peaceful and progressive of the Middle Ages. For women especially the convent fostered some of the best sides of intellectual, moral and emotional life. Besides this it was for several centuries a determining factor in regard to women's economic status.

The woman-saint and the nun are however figures the importance of which has hitherto been little regarded. The woman-saint has met with scant treatment beyond that of the eulogistic but too often uncritical writer of devotional works; the lady abbess and the literary nun have engrossed the attention of few biographers. The partisan recriminations of the Reformation period are still widely prevalent. The saint is thrust aside as a representative of gross superstition, and the nun is looked upon as a slothful and hysterical, if not as a dissolute character. She is still thought of as those who broke with the Catholic Church chose to depict her.

The fact that these women appeared in a totally different light to their contemporaries is generally overlooked; that the monk and the nun enjoyed the esteem and regard of the general public throughout a term bordering on a thousand years is frequently forgotten. Even at the time of the Reformation, when religious contentions were at their height, the nun who was expelled from her home appeared deserving of pity rather than of reproach to her more enlightened contemporaries. As part of an institution that had outlived its purpose she was perhaps bound to pass away. But the work she had done and the aims for which she had striven contributed their share in formulating the new standards of life. The attitude of mind which had been harboured and cultivated in the cloister, must be reckoned among the most civilizing influences which have helped to develop mental and moral strength in Western Europe.

The social value of cloistered life in itself may be disputed. To the Protestant of the 16th century a profession which involved estrangement from family ties appeared altogether harmful. Moreover monasteries and religious houses were bound up in the reformer's mind with the supremacy of Rome from which he was striving hard to shake himself free. Wherever the breach with Rome was effected the old settlements were dissolved and their inmates were thrust back into civic life. To men this meant much, but it meant less to them than to women. In losing the possibility of religious profession at the beginning of the 16th century, women lost the last chance that remained to them of an activity outside the home circle. The subjection of women to a round of domestic duties became more complete when

nunneries were dissolved, and marriage for generations afterwards was women's only recognised vocation.

But even in some of these same Protestant countries where nunneries were summarily dissolved, the resulting complete subjection of women has in modern times been felt to have outlived its purpose. How far this subjection was a needful stage of growth which has helped to develop a higher standard of willing purity and faithfulness need not now be discussed. In certain countries, however, where the monastic system with all the privileges it conferred on women was swept away, we now find a strong public opinion against the restriction of women's activity to the domestic circle, and these countries were among the first to break down the artificial barriers imposed on woman's influence and grant her some share in the intellectual and political life of the community.

The right to self-development and social responsibility which the woman of to-day so persistently asks for, is in many ways analogous to the right which the convent secured to womankind a thousand years ago. The woman of to-day, who realises that the home circle as at present constituted affords insufficient scope for her energies, had a precursor in the nun who sought a field of activity in the convent. For the nun also hesitated, it may be from motives which fail to appeal to us, to undertake the customary duties and accept the ordinary joys of life. This hesitation may be attributed to perversion of instinct, it can hardly in the case of the nun be attributed to weakness of character, for she chose a path in life which was neither smooth nor easy, and in this path she accomplished great things, many of which have still living value.

It is with a view to the better appreciation of the influence and activity of women connected with the Christian religion that the following chapters have been written. They contain an enquiry into the cult of women-saints, and some account of the general position of woman under monasticism. These subjects however are so wide and the material at the disposal of the student is so abundant that the analysis is confined to English and German women.

At the outset an enquiry into the position of women among the Germans of pre-Christian times appeared necessary, for early hagiology and the lives of women who embraced the religious profession after Christianity was first introduced, recall in various particulars the influence of woman and her association with the supernatural during heathen times. The legends of many saints contain a large element of heathen folk-tradition, together in some cases with a small, scarcely perceptible element of historical fact. In order therefore to establish the true importance of the Christian women, whose labour benefited their contemporaries, and who in recognition of their services were raised to saintship, the nature of early women-saints in general had to be carefully considered.

In the chapters that follow, the spread of monasticism is dealt with in so far as it was due to the influence of women, and some of the more representative phases of convent life are described. Our enquiry dealing with monasticism only as affecting women, the larger side of a great subject has necessarily been ignored. There is a growing consciousness now-a-days of the debt of gratitude which mankind as a whole owes to the monastic and religious orders, but the history of these orders remains for the most part unwritten. At some periods of monasticism the life of men and that of women flow evenly side by side and can be dealt with separately, at others their work so unites and intermingles that it seems impossible to discuss the one apart from the other. Regarding some developments the share taken by women, important enough in itself, seemed to me hardly capable of being rated at its just value unless taken in conjunction with that of men. These developments are therefore touched upon briefly or passed over altogether, especially those in which the devotional needs of the women are interesting chiefly in the effect which they had in stimulating the literary productiveness of men. Other phases are passed over because they were the outcome of a course of development, the analysis of which lies beyond the scope of this work. This applies generally to various continental movements which are throughout treated briefly, and especially to convent life in the Netherlands, and to the later history of mysticism. The history of the beguines in the North of France and the Netherlands is full of interesting particulars, marked by the inclusion in the *Acta Sanctorum* of women like Marie

of Oignies († c. 1213), Lutgardis of Tongern († 1246) and Christine of Truyen († 1224), whose fame rests on states of spiritual ecstasy, favoured and encouraged by the Dominican friars. So again the women in Southern Germany, who cultivated like religious moods and expressed their feelings in writing, were largely influenced by the Dominicans, apart from whom it seemed impossible to treat them. In England the analysis of writings such as the 'Revelations' of Juliana of Norwich and of Margery Kempe necessitates a full enquiry into the influence and popularity of Richard Rolle († 1349) and Walter Hylton († 1395).

During the later Middle Ages the study of the influences at work in the convent is further complicated by the development of religious associations outside it. Pre-eminent among these stands the school of Deventer which gave the impulse to the production of a devotional literature, the purity and refinement of which has given it world-wide reputation. These associations were founded by men not by women, and though the desire to influence nuns largely moulded the men who wrote for and preached to them, still the share taken by women in such movements is entirely subordinate.

It is needless to multiply instances of the chapters on convent life which are here omitted; in those which I place before the reader it has been my aim not so much to give a consecutive history of monasticism as it affected women, as to show how numerous are the directions in which this history can be pursued. Having regard to the nature of the subject I have addressed myself in the first place to the student, who in the references given will, I trust, find corroboration of my views. In quoting from early writings I have referred to the accounts printed in the *Acta Sanctorum Bollandorum* and to the edition of Latin writings published under the auspices of Migne in the 'Patrologiae Cursus Completus,' except in those few cases where a more recent edition of the work referred to offered special advantages, and regarding the date of these writings I have been chiefly guided by A. Potthast, *Wegweiser durch die Geschichtswerke des europäischen Mittelalters*, 1862. In accordance with a division which has been adopted by some histories of art and seems to me to have much in its favour, I have taken Early Christian times to extend to the close of the 10th century; I have spoken of the period between 1000 and 1250 as the Earlier, and of that between 1250 and 1500 as the Later Middle Ages. The spelling of proper names in a work which extends over many centuries has difficulties of its own. While observing a certain uniformity during each period, I have as far as possible adhered to the contemporary local form of each name.

While addressing myself largely to the student, I have kept along lines which I trust may make the subject attractive to the general reader, in whose interest I have translated all the passages quoted. There is a growing consciousness now-a-days that for stability in social progress we need among other things a wider scope for women's activity. This scope as I hope to show was to some extent formerly secured to women by the monastic system. Perhaps some of those who are interested in the educational movements of to-day may care to recall the history and arrangements of institutions, which favoured the intellectual development of women in the past.

I cannot conclude these prefatory remarks without a word of thanks to those who have aided me by criticism and revision. Besides the two friends to whom I have dedicated this book, I have to cordially thank Mrs R. W. Cracroft for the labour she has spent on the literary revision of my work in manuscript. To Dr H. F. Heath of Bedford College I am indebted for many suggestions on points of philology, and to Robert J. Parker, Esq. of Lincoln's Inn for advice on some points of law and of general arrangement. Conscious as I am of the many defects in my work, I cannot but be grateful to the Syndics of the University Press, for the assistance they have rendered me in its publication, and I trust that these defects may not deter readers from following me into somewhat unfrequented paths, wherein at any rate I have not stinted such powers of labour as are mine.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY

'Die mit dem goldenen Schuh und dem Geiger ist auch eine Muttergottes.'
Bavarian Saying.

§ 1. The Borderland of Heathendom and Christianity

In order to gain an insight into the causes of the rapid development of monasticism among the German races, it is necessary to enquire into the social arrangements of the period which witnessed the introduction of Christianity, and into those survivals of the previous period of social development which German Christianity absorbed. Among peoples of German race monastic life generally, and especially monastic life which gave scope for independent activity among women, had a development of its own. Women of the newly-converted yet still barbarian race readily gathered together and dwelt in religious settlements founded on their own initiative and ruled independently of men. A reason for this must be sought in the drift of contemporary life, which we shall thus have to discuss at some length.

During the period of declining heathendom – for how long, measuring time by centuries, it is not yet possible to say – the drift of society had been towards curtailing woman's liberty of movement and interfering with her freedom of action. When the Germans crossed the threshold of history the characteristics of the father-age were already in the ascendant; the social era, when the growing desire for certainty of fatherhood caused individual women and their offspring to be brought into the possession of individual men, had already begun. The influence of women was more and more restricted owing to their domestic subjection. But traditions of a time when it had been otherwise still lingered.

Students of primitive history are recognising, for peoples of German race among others, the existence of an early period of development, when women played a greater part in both social and tribal life. Folk-lore, philology, and surviving customs yield overwhelming evidence in support of the few historic data which point to the period, conveniently called the mother-age, when women held positions of authority inside the tribal group and directly exercised influence on the doings of the tribe[1].

This period, the mother-age, is generally looked upon as an advance from an earlier stage of savagery, and considered to be contemporaneous with the beginnings of settled tribal life. It brought with it the practice of tilth and agriculture, and led to the domestication of some of the smaller animals and the invention of weaving and spinning, achievements with which it is recognised that women must be credited.

In matters of polity and sex it established the paramount importance of the woman; it is she who regulates the home, who notes the changes of the seasons, who stores the results of experience, and treasures up the intellectual wealth of the community in sayings which have come down to us in the form of quaint maxims and old-world saws. As for family arrangements, it was inside the tribal group and at the tribal festival that sex unions were contracted; and this festival, traditions of which survive in many parts of Europe to this day, and which was in its earliest forms a period of unrestrained license for the women as well as the men, was presided over by the tribal mothers, an arrangement which in various particulars affords an explanation of many ideas associated with women in later times.

The father-age succeeding to the mother-age in time altogether revolutionised the relations of the sexes; transient sex unions, formerly the rule, were gradually eliminated by capture and retention of wives from outside the tribal group. The change marks a distinct step in social advance. When men as heads of families succeeded to much of the influence women had held in the tribe, barbarous tendencies, such as blood sacrifice, were checked and a higher moral standard was attained. But this was done at the cost of her prerogative to the woman; and her social influence to some extent passed from her.

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[1] The literature on this subject is daily accumulating. Among older authorities are Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht*, 1861; Zmigrodski, *Die Mutter bei den Völkern des arischen Stammes*, 1886; Pearson, K., *Ethic of Free Thought*, 1888.

It must be granted that the character of the mother-age in some of its bearings is hypothetical, but we can infer many of the social arrangements of the period from surviving customs and usages, and its organisation from the part woman played in tradition and saga, and, as we shall see later, from folk-traditions preserved in the legends of the saints. And further, unless we admit that the social arrangements of the earlier period differed from those of the later, we are at a loss to account for the veneration in which woman was held and for the influence exerted by her as we confront her on the threshold of written history. When once we grasp the essentials of these earlier arrangements, we hold the clue to the existence of types of character and tendencies which otherwise appear anomalous.

For at the time when contact with Christianity brought with it the possibility of monastic settlements, the love of domestic life had not penetrated so deeply, nor were its conditions so uniformly favourable, but that many women were ready to break away from it. Reminiscences of an independence belonging to them in the past, coupled with the desire for leadership, made many women loth to conform to life inside the family as wives and mothers under conditions formulated by men. Tendencies surviving from the earlier period, and still unsubdued, made the advantages of married life weigh light in the balance against a loss of liberty. To conceive the force of these tendencies is to gain an insight into the elements which the convent forthwith absorbs.

In the world outside the convent commanding figures of womankind become fewer with outgoing heathendom, and the part played by women becomes of less and less importance. There is less room left for the Gannas of history or for the Kriemhilds of saga, for powerful natures such as the Visigoth princess Brunihild, queen of the Franks, or Drahomir of Brandenburg, queen in Bohemia, who gratify their passion for influence with a recklessness which strikes terror into the breasts of their contemporaries. As the old chronicler of St Denis remarks, women who are bent on evil do worse evil than men. But in the convent the influence of womankind lasted longer. Spirited nuns and independent-minded abbesses turn to account the possibilities open to them in a way which commands respect and repeatedly secures superstitious reverence in the outside world. The influence and the powers exerted by these women, as we shall see further on, are altogether remarkable, especially during early Christian times. But we also come across frequent instances of lawlessness among the women who band together in the convent, – a lawlessness to which the arrangements of the earlier age likewise supply a clue. For that very love of independence, which led to beneficial results where it was coupled with self-control and consciousness of greater responsibility, tended in the direction of vagrancy and dissoluteness when it was accompanied by distaste for every kind of restraint.

In this connection we must say a few words on the varying status of loose women, since the estimation in which these women were held and the attitude assumed towards them affected monasticism in various particulars. It is true that during early Christian times little heed was taken of them and few objections were raised to their influence, but later distinct efforts were made by various religious orders to prevent women from drifting into a class which, whatever may have been its condition in past times, was felt to be steadily and surely deteriorating.

The distinction of women into so-called respectable and disreputable classes dates from before the introduction of Christianity. It arose as the father-age gained on the mother-age, when appropriated women were more and more absorbed into domesticity, while those women outside, who either resented or escaped subjection, found their position surrounded by increasing difficulties, and aspersion more and more cast on their independence. By accepting the distinction, the teachers of Christianity certainly helped to make it more definite; but for centuries the existence of loose women, so far from being condemned, was hardly discountenanced by them. The revenues which ecclesiastical courts and royal households derived from taxes levied on these women as a class yield proof of this[2]. Certainly efforts were made to set limits to their practices and the disorderly tendencies

[2] Kriegk, G. L., *Deutsches Bürgerthum im Mittelalter*, 1868, ch. 12-15.

which in the nature of things became connected with them and with those with whom they habitually consorted. But this was done not so much to restrain them as to protect women of the other class from being confounded with them. Down to the time of the Reformation, the idea that the existence of loose women as a class should be discountenanced does not present itself, for they were a recognised feature of court life and of town life everywhere. Marshalled into bands, they accompanied the king and the army on their most distant expeditions, and stepped to the fore wherever there was question of merrymaking or entertainment. Indeed there is reason to believe, improbable though it may seem at first sight, that women of loose life, as we come across them in the Middle Ages, are successors to a class which had been powerful in the past. They are not altogether depraved and despised characters such as legislation founded on tenets of Roman Law chose to stamp them. For law and custom are often at variance regarding the rights and privileges belonging to them. These rights and privileges they retained in various particulars till the time of the Reformation, which indeed marks a turning point in the attitude taken by society towards women generally.

Different ages have different standards of purity and faithfulness. The loose or unattached women of the past are of many kinds and many types; to apply the term prostitute to them raises a false idea of their position as compared with that of women in other walks of life. If we would deal with them as a class at all, it is only this they have in common, – that they are indifferent to the ties of family, and that the men who associate with them are not by so doing held to incur any responsibility towards them or towards their offspring.

If we bear in mind the part these women have played and the modifications which their status has undergone, it will be seen that the subject is one which nearly affects monasticism. For the convent accepted the dislike women felt to domestic subjection and countenanced them in their refusal to undertake the duties of married life. It offered an escape from the tyranny of the family, but it did so on condition of such a sacrifice of personal independence, as in the outside world more and more involved the loss of good repute. On the face of it, a greater contrast than that between the loose woman and the nun is hard to conceive; and yet they have this in common, that they are both the outcome of the refusal among womankind to accept married relations on the basis of the subjection imposed by the father-age.

In other respects too the earlier heathen period was not without influence on the incoming Christian faith, and helped to determine its conceptions with regard to women. In actual life the sacerdotal privileges, which tribal mothers had appropriated to themselves at the time of the introduction of Christianity, were retained by the priestess; while in the realm of the ideal the reverence in which tribal mothers had been held still lived on in the worship of the tribal mother-divinity. It is under this twofold aspect, as priestess and as tribal mother-goddess, that the power of women was brought face to face with Christianity; the priestess and the mother-goddess were the well-defined types of heathen womanhood with which the early Church was called upon to deal.

We will show later on how the ideal conception prevailed, and how the heathen mother-goddess often assumed the garb of a Christian woman-saint, and as a Christian woman-saint was left to exist unmolested. Not so the heathen priestess and prophetess. From the first introduction of Christianity the holding of sacerdotal powers by women was resented both within and without the Church, and opprobrium was cast on the women who claimed to mediate between the human and the divine.

At the time of the advent of Christianity the Gannas and Veledas of the Roman period are still a living reality; they are the ‘wise women’ who every now and then leave their retreat and appear on the stage of history. A prophetess in gorgeous apparel makes her entry into Verdun in the year 547, drawing crowds about her and foretelling the future. She is in no way intimidated by the exorcisms of prelates, and presently leaves to betake herself to the court of the Frankish queen Fredegund. Again

in 577 we find the Frankish king Guntchramm in consultation with a woman soothsayer, and other cases of the kind are on record[3].

In the ninth century the Church more effectually exercised her influence in the case of the woman Thiota, who coming from Switzerland inflamed the minds of the folk in Mainz; for she was accused of profanity and publicly scourged[4]. But for all the attacks of the Church, the folk persisted in clinging to its priestesses and in believing them gifted with special powers. Grimm shows how the Christian accusers of soothsaying women made them into odious witches[5]; Wuttke and Weinhold, both well-known students of folk-lore, consider that witches were originally heathen priestesses[6]. The intrinsic meaning of the word *hexe*, the German designation for witch, points to some one who originally belonged to a group living in a particular manner, but whose practices made her obnoxious to those who had apprehended the higher moral standard of a later social period. But the Church failed to stamp even the witch as wholly despicable; for in popular estimation she always retained some of the attributes of the priestess, the wise woman, the *bona domina*, the 'white witch' of tradition; so that the doctrine that the soothsaying woman is necessarily the associate of evil was never altogether accepted. Even now-a-days incidents happen occasionally in remote districts which show how the people still readily seek the help of women in matters of wisdom, of leechcraft, and of prescience. It was only under the influence of a scare that people, who were accustomed to consult the wise woman in good faith, could be brought to abhor her as a witch. It was only during the later Middle Ages that the undisputed and indisputable connection of some 'wise women' with licentious customs gave their traducers a weapon of which they were not slow to avail themselves, and which enabled them to rouse fanaticism of the worst kind against these women.

The practices and popularity of witchcraft were in truth the latest survivals of the mother-age. The woman, who devised love-charms and brewed manifold remedies for impotence and for allaying the pangs of childbirth, who pretended to control the weather and claimed the power to turn the milk of a whole village blue, carried on traditions of a very primitive period. And her powers, as we shall see, always had a close parallel in those attributed to women-saints. For example St Gertrud of Nivelles has left a highly prized relic to womankind in the form of a cloak which is still hung about those who are desirous of becoming mothers[7]; and the hair of a saint, Mechthild, is still hung outside the church at Töss in Switzerland to avert the thunderstorm[8]; and again St Gunthild of Biberbach and others are still appealed to that they may avert the cattle plague[9]. What difference, it may be asked, is there between the powers attributed to these saints and the powers with which witches are usually credited? They are the obverse and reverse of woman's connection with the supernatural, which in the one case is interpreted by the sober mind of reverence, and in the other is dreaded under the perturbing influence of a fear encouraged, if not originated, by Christian fanatics.

In the Christian Church the profession of the nun was accepted as holy, but an impassable gulf separated her from the priestess. During early Christian times we come across the injunction that women shall not serve at the altar[10], and that lady abbesses shall not take upon themselves religious duties reserved to men by the Church. When we think of women gathered together in a religious establishment and dependent on the priest outside for the performing of divine worship, their desire to manage things for themselves does not appear unnatural, encouraged as it would be by traditions of sacerdotal rights belonging to them in the past. And it is worthy of notice that as late as the 13th

[3] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Eccles.* 5, ch. 14, 16, 19.

[4] Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythologie*, 1875, p. 78.

[5] Ibid. p. 881 ff.

[6] Wuttke, *Deutscher Volksaberglaube*, 1869, p. 141; Weinhold, K., *Deutsche Frauen*, 1882, vol. 1, p. 73.

[7] Rochholz, E. L., *Drei Gaugöttinnen*, 1870, p. 191.

[8] Menzel, *Christliche Symbolik*, 1854, article 'Haar.'

[9] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Gunthildis, Sept. 12.

[10] Bouquet, *Recueil Hist.*, vol. 5, p. 690. Capitulare incerti anni, nr 6, 'ut mulieres ad altare non ingrediantur.'

century, Brother Berthold, an influential preacher of south Germany, speaks ardently against women who would officiate at divine service and urges the mischief that may result from such a course.

Turning to the question of how far these obvious survivals from a heathen age are determined by time and place, we find broad lines of difference between the heathen survivals of the various branches of the German race, and considerable diversity in the character of their early Christianity and their early women-saints. This diversity is attributable to the fact that the heathen beliefs of these various peoples were not the same at the time of their first contact with Christianity, and that they did not accept it under like circumstances.

For while those branches of the race who moved in the vanguard of the great migration, the Vandals, the Burgundians and the Goths, readily embraced Christianity, it was Christianity in its Arian form. Arianism, which elsewhere had been branded as heresy and well-nigh stamped out, suddenly revived among the Germans; all the branches of the race who came into direct contact with peoples of civilized Latinity readily embraced it. Now one of the distinguishing features of Arian belief was its hatred of monasticism[11]. The Arian convert hunted the monk from his seclusion and thrust him back to the duties of civic life. It is not then among Germans who adopted Arian Christianity that the beginnings of convent life must be sought. Indeed as Germans these peoples soon passed away from the theatre of history; they intermarried and fell in with the habits of the people among whom they settled, and forfeited their German language and their German traditions.

It was otherwise with the Franks who entered Gaul at the close of the fourth century, and with the Anglo-Saxons who took possession of Britain. The essentially warlike character of these peoples was marked by their worship of deities such as Wodan, a worship before which the earlier worship of mother-divinities was giving way. Women had already been brought into subjection, but they had a latent desire for independence, and among the Franks and Anglo-Saxons women of the newly converted race eagerly snatched at the possibilities opened out by convent life, and in their ranks history chronicles some of the earliest and most remarkable developments of monasticism. But the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons, in leaving behind the land of their origin, had left behind those hallowed sites on which primitive worship so essentially depends. It is in vain that we seek among them for a direct connection between heathen mother-divinity and Christian woman-saint; their mother-divinities did not live on in connection with the Church. It is true that the inclination to hold women in reverence remained, and found expression in the readiness with which they revered women as saints. The women-saints of the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks are numerous, and are nearly all known to have been interested in convent foundations. But the legends, which in course of time have crystallised round them, and the miracles attributed to them, though containing certain elements of heathen folk-tradition, are colourless and pale compared with the traditions which have been preserved by saint legend abroad. It is in Germany proper, where the same race has been in possession of the same sites for countless generations, that the primitive character of heathen traditions is most pronounced and has most directly determined and influenced the cult and the legends of women-saints.

Besides the reminiscences of the early period which have survived in saint legend, traditions and customs of the same period have lived on in the worship of the Virgin Mary. The worship of the Virgin Mary was but slightly developed in Romanised Gaul and Keltic Britain, but from the beginning of the sixth century it is a marked feature in the popular creed in those countries where the German element prevailed.

As Mrs Jameson says in her book on the legends of the Madonna: 'It is curious to observe, as the worship of the Virgin mother expanded and gathered in itself the relics of many an ancient faith, how the new and the old elements, some of them apparently most heterogeneous, became amalgamated and were combined into the earlier forms of art…[12].'

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[11] Montalembert, *Monks of the West*, 1, p. 359.

[12] Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, 1857, Introd. xix.

Indeed the prominence given to the Virgin is out of all proportion to the meagre mention of her in the gospels. During the early Christian period she was largely worshipped as a patron saint in France, England and Germany, and her fame continued steadily increasing with the centuries till its climax was reached in the Middle Ages, which witnessed the greatest concessions made by the Church to the demands of popular faith.

According to Rhys[13] many churches dedicated to Mary were built on spots where tradition speaks of the discovery of a wooden image, probably a heathen statue which was connected with her.

In the seventh century Pope Sergius (687-701) expressly ordered that the festivals of the Virgin Mary were to take place on heathen holy days in order that heathen celebrations might become associated with her[14]. The festivals of the Virgin to this day are associated with pilgrimages, the taste for which to the Frenchman of the Middle Ages appeared peculiarly German. The chronicler Froissart, writing about 1390, remarks 'for the Germans are fond of performing pilgrimages and it is one of their customs[15].'

Mary then, under her own name, or under the vaguer appellation of *Our Lady* (Unser liebe frau, Notre Dame, de heilige maagd), assimilated surviving traditions of the heathen faith which were largely reminiscences of the mother-age; so that Mary became the heiress of mother-divinities, and her worship was associated with cave, and tree, and fountain, and hill-top, all sites of the primitive cult.

'Often,' says Menzel[16], 'a wonder-working picture of the Madonna is found hung on a tree or inside a tree; hence numerous appellations like "Our dear Lady of the Oak," "Our dear Lady of the Linden-tree," etc. Often at the foot of the tree, upon which such a picture is hung, a fountain flows to which miraculous power is ascribed.'

In the Tyrol we hear of pictures which have been discovered floating in a fountain or which were borne to the bank by a river[17].

As proof of the Virgin Mary's connection with festivals, we find her name associated in Belgium with many pageants held on the first of May. Throughout German lands the Assumption of the Virgin comes at the harvest festival, and furnishes an occasion for some pilgrimage or fair which preserves many peculiar and perplexing traits of an earlier civilization.

The harvest festival is coupled in some parts of Germany with customs that are of extreme antiquity. In Bavaria the festival sometimes goes by the name of the 'day of sacred herbs,' *kräuterweihtag*; near Würzburg it is called the 'day of sacred roots,' *würzelweihtag*, or 'day of bunch-gathering,' *büschelfrauentag*[18]. In the Tyrol the 15th of August is the great day of the Virgin, *grosse frauentag*, when a collection of herbs for medicinal purposes is made. A number of days, *frauentage*, come in July and August and are now connected with the Virgin, on which herbs are collected and offered as sacred bunches either on the altar of Our Lady in church and chapel, or on hill-tops which throughout Germany are the sites of ancient woman-worship[19]. This collecting and offering of herbs points to a stage even more primitive than that represented by offerings of grain at the harvest festival.

In a few instances the worship of Mary is directly coupled with that of some heathen divinity. In Antwerp to this day an ancient idol of peculiar appearance is preserved, which women, who are desirous of becoming mothers, decorate with flowers at certain times of the year. Its heathen appellation is lost, but above it now stands a figure of the Virgin[20].

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[13] Rhys, J., *Lectures on the origin and growth of religion as illustrated by Celtic Heathendom*, 1888, p. 102.

[14] Frantz, C., *Versuch einer Geschichte des Marien und Annencultus*, 1854, p. 54 ff.

[15] Froissart, *Chronicle*, c. 162, in English translation; also Oberle, K. A., *Ueberreste germ. Heidentums im Christentum*, 1883, p. 153.

[16] Menzel, *Christ. Symbolik*, 1854, article 'Baum.'

[17] Oberle, K. A., *Ueberreste germ. Heidentums im Christentum*, 1883, p. 144.

[18] Menzel, *Christl. Symbolik*, 1854, article 'Himmelfahrt.'

[19] Ibid., article 'Frauenberg'; also Oberle, K. A., *Ueberreste germ. Heidentums im Christentum*, 1883, p. 38.

[20] Rochholz, *Drei Gaugöttinnen*, 1870, p. 81, calls it Walburg; Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Traditions et légendes de la Belgique*, 1870,

Again we find the name of Mary joined to that of the heathen goddess Sif. In the Eiffel district, extending between the rivers Rhine, Meuse and Mosel, a church stands dedicated to Mariasif, the name of Mary being coupled with that of Sif, a woman-divinity of the German heathen pantheon, whom Grimm characterizes as a giver of rain[21]. The name Mariahilf, a similar combination, is frequently found in south Germany, the name of Mary as we hope to show further down being joined to that of a goddess who has survived in the Christian saint Hilp[22].

These examples will suffice to show the close connection between the conceptions of heathendom and popular Christianity, and how the cloak of heathen association has fallen on the shoulders of the saints of the Christian Church. The authorities at Rome saw no occasion to take exception to its doing so. Pope Gregorius II. (590-604) in a letter addressed to Melitus of Canterbury expressly urged that the days of heathen festival should receive solemnity through dedication to some holy martyr[23]. The Christian saint whose name was substituted for that of some heathen divinity readily assimilated associations of the early period. Scriptural characters and Christian teachers were given the emblems of older divinities and assumed their characteristics. But the varying nature of the same saint in different countries has hardly received due attention. St Peter of the early British Church was very different from St Peter who in Bavaria walked the earth like clumsy good-natured Thor, or from St Peter who in Rome took the place of Mars as protector of the city. Similarly the legends currently told of the same saint in different countries exhibit markedly different traits.

For the transition from heathendom to Christianity was the work not of years but of centuries; the claims made by religion changed, but the underlying conceptions for a long time remained unaltered. Customs which had once taken a divine sanction continued to be viewed under a religious aspect, though they were often at variance with the newly-introduced faith. The craving for local divinities in itself was heathen; in course of time the cult of the saints altogether re-moulded the Christianity of Christ. But the Church of Rome, far from opposing the multitude of those through whom the folk sought intercession with the Godhead, opened her arms wide to all.

At the outset it lay with the local dignitary to recognise or reject the names which the folk held in veneration. Religious settlements and Church centres regulated days and seasons according to the calendar of the chief festivals of the year, as accepted by the Church at Rome; but the local dignitary was at liberty to add further names to the list at his discretion. For centuries there was no need of canonisation to elevate an individual to the rank of saint; the inscribing of his name on a local calendar was sufficient. Local calendars went on indefinitely swelling the list of saintly names till the Papal See felt called upon to interfere[24]. Since the year 1153 the right to declare a person a saint has lain altogether with the authorities at Rome[25].

Considering the circumstances under which the peoples of German race first came into contact with Christianity, it is well to recall the fact that a busy Church life had grown up in many of the cities north of the Alps, which were centres of the Roman system of administration previous to the upheaval and migration of German heathen tribes, which began in the fourth century. Legend has preserved stories of the apostles and their disciples wandering northwards and founding early bishoprics along the Rhine, in Gaul and in Britain[26]. The massacres of Christians in the reign of Diocletian cannot be

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p. 286, calls it Fro or Frigg.

[21] Simrock, K., *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, 1887, p. 379; also Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythologie*, 1875, p. 257.

[22] Comp. below, p. 35.

[23] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1, ch. 30.

[24] On English calendars, Piper, F., *Kalendarien und Martyrologien der Angelsachsen*, 1862; Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, 1887.

[25] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858-62, vol. 2, Einleitung.

[26] For France, Guettée, *Histoire de l'Église de France*, 1847-55, vol. 1, p. 1; for England, Bright, W., *Early English Church History*, 1878, pp. 1 ff.; for Germany, Friedrich, *Kirchengeschichte*, 1867, vol. 1, pp. 86 ff.

altogether fabulous; but after the year 313, when Constantine at Rome officially accepted the new faith, until the German invasion, the position of Christianity was well secured.

A certain development of monastic life had accompanied its spread. In western Gaul we hear of Martin of Tours († 400) who, after years of military service and religious persecution, settled near Poitiers and drew about him many who joined him in a round of devotion and work. The monastic, or rather cœnobite, settlement of his time consisted of a number of wattled cells or huts, surrounded by a trench or a wall of earth. The distinction between the earlier word, *coenobium*, and the later word, *monasterium*, as used in western Europe, lies in this, that the *coenobium* designates the assembled worshippers alone, while the monastery presupposes the possession of a definite site of land[27]. In this sense the word monastery is as fitly applied to settlements ruled by women as to those ruled by men, especially during the early period when these settlements frequently include members of both sexes. St Martin of Tours is also credited with having founded congregations of religious women[28], but I have found nothing definite concerning them.

Our knowledge of the Christian life of the British is very limited; presumably the religious settlement was a school both of theology and of learning, and no line of distinction divided the settlements of priests from those of monks. From Gildas, a British writer, who at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasion (c. 560) wrote a stern invective against the irreligious ways of his countrymen, we gather that women lived under the direction of priests, but it is not clear whether they were vowed to continence[29]. But as far as I am aware, there is no evidence forthcoming that before the Saxon invasion women lived in separate religious establishments, the rule of which was in the hands of one of their own sex[30].

The convent is of later date. During the early centuries of established Christianity the woman who takes the vow of continence secures the protection of the Church but does not necessarily leave her home-surroundings.

Thus Ambrosius, archbishop of Milan († 397), one of the most influential supporters of early Christianity, greatly inflamed women's zeal for a celibate life. But in the writings of Ambrosius, which treat of virginity, there is no suggestion that the widow or the maiden who vows continence shall seek seclusion or solitude[31]. Women vowed to continence moved about freely, secure through their connection with the Church from distasteful unions which their relatives might otherwise force upon them. Their only distinctive mark was the use of a veil.

Similarly we find Hilarius († 369), bishop of Poitiers, addressing a letter to his daughter Abra on the beauties of the unmarried state. In this he assures her, that if she be strong enough to renounce an earthly bridegroom, together with gay and splendid apparel, a priceless pearl shall fall to her share[32]. But in this letter also there is no suggestion that the woman who embraces religion should dwell apart from her family. It is well to bear this in mind, for after the acceptance of Christianity by the peoples of German race, we occasionally hear of women who, though vowed to religion, move about freely among their fellows; but Church councils and synods began to urge more and more emphatically that this was productive of evil, and that a woman who had taken the religious vow must be a member of a convent.

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[27] Ducange, *Glossarium*: 'coenobium.'

[28] Dupuy, A., *Histoire de S. Martin*, 1852, p. 176.

[29] Gildas, *Epistle*, c. 66.

[30] In Ireland we hear of nunneries founded by St Bridget in the fifth century, the chief of which was at Kildare; also that this saint crossed the Irish Sea and founded nunneries at Glastonbury in England and at Abernethy in Scotland. The accounts of the work of Bridget are numerous, but have not been subjected to criticism. Comp. *A. SS. Boll.*, St Brigida, Feb. 1, and Lanigan, *Eccles. History of Ireland*, 1829, 1, pp. 377 ff.

[31] Ambrosius, *Opera* (edit. Migne, *Patrol. Cursus Comp.* vol. 16), *De virginibus*, p. 187; (vol. 17) *Ad virginem devotam*, p. 579.

[32] Hilarius, *Opera* (edit. Migne, vol. 10), *Ad Abram*, p. 547.

To sum up; – the peoples of German race, at the time of their contact with Christianity, were in a state of social development which directly affected the form in which they accepted the new faith and the institutions to which such acceptance gave rise. Some branches of the race, deserting the land of their birth, came into contact with peoples of Latin origin, and embraced Christianity under a form which excluded monasticism, and soon lost their identity as Germans. Others, as the Franks and Anglo-Saxons, giving up the worship of their heathen gods, accepted orthodox Christianity, and favoured the mode of life of those who followed peaceful pursuits in the monastery, pursuits which their wives especially were eager to embrace. Again, those peoples who remained in possession of their earlier homes largely preserved usages dating from a primitive period of tribal organization, usages which affected the position of their women and determined the character of their women-saints. It is to Germany proper that we must go for the woman-priestess who lives on longest as the witch, and for the loose women who most markedly retain special rights and privileges. And it is also in Germany proper that we find the woman-saint who is direct successor to the tribal mother-goddess.

§ 2. The Tribal Goddess as a Christian Saint

Before considering the beginnings of convent life as the work of women whose existence rests on a firm historic basis, we must enquire into the nature of women-saints. From the earliest times of established Christianity the lives of men and women who were credited with special holiness have formed a favourite theme of religious narratives, which were intended to keep their memory green and to impress the devout with thoughts of their saintliness.

The Acts of the Saints, the comprehensive collection of which is now in course of publication under the auspices of the Bollandists, form a most important branch of literature. They include some of the most valuable material for a history of the first ten centuries of our era, and give a most instructive insight into the drift of Christianity in different epochs. The aims, experiences and sufferings of Christian heroes and heroines inspired the student and fired the imagination of the poet. Prose narrative told of their lives, poems were written in their praise, and hymns were composed to be sung at the celebration of their office. The godly gained confidence from the perusal of such compositions, and the people hearing them read or sung were impressed in favour of Christian doctrine.

The number of men and women whom posterity has glorified as saints is legion. Besides the characters of the accepted and the apocryphal gospels, there are the numerous early converts to Christianity who suffered for their faith, and all those who during early Christian times turned their energies to practising and preaching the tenets of the new religion, and to whose memory a loving recollection paid the tribute of superstitious reverence. Their successors in the work of Christianity accepted them as patron saints and added their names to the list of those to whose memory special days were dedicated. Many of them are individuals whose activity in the cause of Christianity is well authenticated. Friends have enlarged on their work, contemporary history refers to their existence, and often they have themselves left writings, which give an insight into their lives. They are the early and true saints of history, on whose shoulders in some cases the cloak of heathen association has fallen, but without interfering with their great and lasting worth.

But besides those who were canonised for their enthusiasm in the cause of early Christianity, the Acts of the Saints mention a number of men and women who enjoy local reverence, but of whose actual existence during Christian times evidence is wanting. Among them are a certain number of women with whom the present chapter purposes to deal, women who are locally worshipped as saints, and whose claims to holiness are generally recognised, but whose existence during Christian times is hypothetical. Their legends contain a small, in some cases a scarcely sensible, basis of historic fact, and their cult preserves traits which are pre-Christian, often anti-Christian, in character.

The traveller Blunt, during a stay in Italy in the beginning of this century, was struck with the many points which modern saints and ancient gods have in common. He gives a description of the festival of St Agatha at Catania, of which he was an eye-witness, and which to this day, as I have been told, continues little changed. The festival, as Blunt describes it, opened with a horse-race, which he knew from Ovid was one of the spectacles of the festival of the goddess Ceres; and further he witnessed a mummery and the carrying about of huge torches, both of which he also knew formed part of the old pagan festival. But more remarkable than this was a great procession which began in the evening and lasted into the night; hundreds of citizens crowded to draw through the town a ponderous car, on which were placed the image of the saint and her relics, which the priests exhibited to the ringing of bells. Among these relics were the veil of Agatha, to which is ascribed the power of staying the eruption of Mount Aetna, and the breasts of the saint, which were torn off during her martyrdom[33]. Catania, Blunt knew, had always been famous for the worship of Ceres, and the ringing

[33] Blunt, J. J., *Vestiges of Ancient Manners in Italy and Sicily*, 1823, pp. 56 ff.

of bells and a veil were marked features of her festivals, the greater and the lesser Eleusinia. Menzel tells us that huge breasts were carried about on the occasion[34]. Further, Blunt heard that two festivals took place yearly in Catania in honour of Agatha; one early in the spring, the other in the autumn, exactly corresponding to the time when the greater and lesser Eleusinia were celebrated. Even the name Agatha seemed but a taking over into the new religion of a name sacred to the old. Ceres was popularly addressed as *Bona Dea*, and the name Agatha, which does not occur as a proper name during ancient times, seemed but a translation of the Latin epithet into Greek.

The legend of Agatha as contained in the *Acta Sanctorum* places her existence in the third century and gives full details concerning her parentage, her trials and her martyrdom; but I have not been able to ascertain when it was written. Agatha is the chief saint of the district all about Catania, and we are told that her fame penetrated at an early date into Italy and Greece[35].

It is of course impossible actually to disprove the existence of a Christian maiden Agatha in Catania in the third century. Some may incline to the view that such a maiden did exist, and that a strange likeness between her experiences and name on the one hand, and the cult of and epithet applied to Ceres on the other, led to the popular worship of her instead of the ancient goddess. The question of her existence as a Christian maiden during Christian times can only be answered by a balance of probabilities. Our opinion of the truth or falsehood of the traditions concerning her rests on inference, and the conclusion at which we arrive upon the evidence must largely depend on the attitude of mind in which we approach the subject.

The late Professor Robertson Smith has insisted that myths are latter-day inventions which profess to explain surviving peculiarities of ritual. If this be so, we hold in the Eleusinia a clue to the incidents of the Agatha legend. The story for example of her veil, which remained untouched by the flames when she was burnt, may be a popular myth which tries to account for the presence of the veil at the festival. The incident of the breasts torn off during martyrdom was invented to account for the presence of these strange symbols.

Instances of this kind could be indefinitely multiplied. Let the reader, who wishes to pursue the subject on classic soil, examine the name, the legend and the emblem of St Agnes, virgin martyr of Rome, who is reputed to have lived in the third century and whose cult is well established in the fourth; let him enquire into the name, legend and associations of St Rosalia of Palermo, invoked as a protectress from the plague, of whom no mention occurs till four centuries after her reputed existence[36].

I have chosen Agatha as a starting point for the present enquiry, because there is much evidence to hand of the prevalence of mother-deities in pre-Christian Sicily, and because the examination of German saint-legend and saint-worship leads to analogous results. In Germany too the mother divinity of heathendom seems to survive in the virgin saint; and in Germany virgin saints, in attributes, cult and name, exhibit peculiarities which it seems impossible to explain save on the hypothesis that traditions of the heathen past survive in them. So much is associated with them which is pre-Christian, even anti-Christian in character, that it seems legitimate to speak of them as pseudo-saints.

I own it is not always possible to distinguish between the historical saint and the pseudo-saint. Sometimes data are wanting to disprove the statements made by the legend-writer about time and place; sometimes information is not forthcoming about local traditions and customs, which might make a suggestive trait in saint-legend stand out in its full meaning. In some cases also, owing to a coincidence of name, fictitious associations have become attached to a real personage. But these cases I believe are comparatively few. As a general rule it holds good that a historical saint will be readily associated with miraculous powers, but not with profane and anti-Christian usages. Where

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[34] Menzel, W., *Christl. Symbolik*, 1854, article 'Brust,' makes this statement. I do not see where he takes it from.

[35] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Agatha, Feb. 5.

[36] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Agnes, Jan. 21; St Rosalia, Sept. 4.

the latter occur it is probable that no evidence will be forthcoming of the saint's actual existence during Christian times. If she represents a person who ever existed at all, such a person must have lived in a far-distant heathen past, at a time which had nothing in common with Christian teaching and with Christian tenets.

There is this further peculiarity about the woman pseudo-saint of Germany, that she is especially the saint of the peasantry; so that we rarely hear more of her than perhaps her name till centuries after her reputed existence. Early writers of history and biography have failed to chronicle her doings. Indeed we do not hear of her at all till we hear of her cult as one of long standing or of great importance.

It is only when the worship of such saints, who in the eyes of the common folk are the chief glory of their respective districts, attracts the attention of the Church, that the legend-writer sets to work to write their legends. He begins by ascribing to the holder of a venerated name human parentage and human experiences, he collects and he blends the local traditions associated with the saint on a would-be historical background, and makes a story which frequently offers a curious mixture of the Christian and the profane. Usually he places the saint's existence in the earliest period of Christianity; sometimes at a time when Christianity was unknown in the neighbourhood where she is the object of reverence.

Moreover all these saints are patronesses of women in their times of special trial. Their cult generally centres round a cave, a fountain of peculiar power, a tree, or some other site of primitive woman-worship. Frequently they are connected with some peculiar local custom which supplies the clue to incidents introduced by the legend-writer. And even when the clue is wanting, it is sometimes possible to understand one legend by reading it in the light of another. Obscure as the parallels are in some cases, in others they are strikingly clear.

The recognised holiness of the woman pseudo-saint is in no way determined by the limit of bishopric and diocese; she is worshipped within geographical limits, but within limits which have not been marked out by the Church. It was mentioned above that separate districts of Germany, or rather tribes occupying such districts, clung to a belief in protective mother-goddesses (Gaumütter). Possibly, where the name of a pseudo-saint is found localised in contiguous districts, this may afford a clue to the migration of tribes.

The *Acta Sanctorum* give information concerning a large number of pseudo-saints, but this information to be read in its true light needs to be supplemented by further details of local veneration and cult. Such details are found in older books of devotion, and in modern books on mythology and folk-lore. Modern religious writers, who treat of these saints, are in the habit of leaving out or of slurring over all details which suggest profanity. Compared with older legends, modern accounts of the saints are limp and colourless, and share the weak sentimentality, which during the last few centuries has come to pervade the conceptions of Catholic Christianity as represented in pictorial art.

The names of a number of women whom the people hold in veneration have escaped the attention of the compilers of the *Acta Sanctorum*, or else they have been purposely passed over because their possessors were held unworthy of the rank of saint. But the stories locally told of them are worth attention, and the more so because they throw an additional light on the stories of recognised saints.

The larger number of recognised pseudo-saints are found in the districts into which Christianity spread as a religion of peace, or in remoter districts where the power of the Church was less immediately felt. They are found most often north of the Danube and east of the Rhine, especially in the lake districts of Bavaria and Switzerland, in the marshy wilds of the Low Countries, and in the remote forest regions of the Ardennes, the Black Forest, the Spessart or the Vosges. Where Christianity was established as the result of political subjection, as for example among the Saxons, the woman pseudo-saint is hardly found at all. Perhaps the heathenism of the Saxons differed from the heathenism of other German folk; perhaps, like the Anglo-Saxons in England, the Saxons were

conquerors of the land they inhabited and by moving out of their old homes had lost their local associations and their primitive cult. But, however this may be, it is not where Christianity advanced at the point of the lance, but in the districts where its spread was due to detached efforts of missionaries, that the woman pseudo-saint is most frequently met with.

Wandering away into forest wilds, where scattered clearings lay like islets in an ocean, the missionary sought a retreat remote from the interference of government, remote also from the interference of the episcopate, where he could realise his hope of living a worthier life. Naturally his success largely depended on his securing the goodwill of the people in whose neighbourhood he settled. He was obliged to adapt himself to their mode of thought if he would win favour for his faith, and to realise their views if he wished to modify them in the direction of his own. To bridge over the abyss which separated his standard of life from theirs, he was bound to defer whenever he could to their sentiments and to their conceptions of holiness.

How far these holy men ignored, how far they countenanced, the worship of local divinities, necessarily remains an open question. Rightly or wrongly popular tradition readily coupled the names of these early Christians with those of its favourite women-saints.

Thus Willibrord, the Anglo-Saxon missionary who settled abroad in the eighth century, is said to have taken up and translated relics of the woman-saint Cunera and to have recognised her claim to veneration; her cult is localised in various places near Utrecht. The life of Willibrord († 739), written by Alcuin († 804), contains no mention of Cunera, for the information we have concerning Willibrord's interest in her is to be found in the account of her life written centuries later[37]. This account offers such a picturesque medley of chronological impossibilities that the commentators of the *Acta Sanctorum* have entirely recast it.

The gist of the legend as told in the beginning of the 14th century is as follows[38]. Cunera was among the virgin companions of St Ursula, and the date of her murder, near Cöln, is given as 387, or as 449. Before the murder Cunera was borne away from Cöln by King Radbod of Friesland, who covered her with his cloak, an ancient symbolic form of appropriation. Arrived at Renen he entrusted her with the keys of his kingdom, which incensed his wedded wife to such an extent that she caused Cunera to be strangled and the body hidden away. But the site where the saint lay was miraculously pointed out, and the wicked queen went mad and destroyed herself. In vain we ask why a king of the Frisians, who persistently clung to their heathendom, should be interested in a Christian virgin and carry her off to preside over his household, and in vain we look for the assertion or for the proof that Cunera was a Christian at all. The *Acta Sanctorum* reject the connection between Cunera and St Ursula of Cöln, but the writer Kist, who considers her to have been a real Christian individual, argues in favour of it. In the 12th century we find a certain Adelheid swearing to the rightfulness of her cause on the relics of St Cunera at Renen[39].

Similarly the story goes that Agilfrid, abbot of the monastery of St Bavon in Flanders, afterwards bishop of Liège (765-787), about the year 754 acquired the relics of the woman-saint Pharaildis and brought them to Ghent[40]. When the Northmen ravaged Flanders in 846 the bones of Pharaildis were among those carried away to St Omer by the Christians as their most valued possession, and in 939 they were brought back to Ghent[41].

The legend of Pharaildis gives no clue to the Christian interest in her, nor to the veneration of her, which is localised at Ghent, Hamm, Steenockerzeel, and Loo. We hear that she was married against her inclination, that she cured her husband who was a huntsman of a wound, and that after his

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[37] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Cunera, June 12.

[38] Kist, N. C., in *Kerkhistorisch Archiv*, Amsterdam, 1858, vol. 2, p. 20.

[39] *Vita St Meinwerci*, bishop of Paderborn (1009-39), written about 1155 (Potthast), c. 37.

[40] Hautcœur, *Actes de Ste Pharailde*, 1882, Introduction, p. xc.

[41] *A. SS. Boll.*, Gloria posthuma St Bavonis, Oct. 1, p. 261.

death she dwelt in solitude to an advanced age, and that occasionally she wrought miracles. Further, in popular belief, she crossed the water dryshod, she chased away geese from the corn, and she struck the ground and the holy fountain at Bruay welled up for the benefit of the harvesters – incidents which are not peculiar to her legend. The festival of Pharaildis is kept on different dates at Ghent, Cambray, Maastricht and Breda. At Ghent it is associated with a celebrated fair, the occasion for great rejoicings among the populace. At the church of Steenockerzeel stones of conical shape are kept which are carried round the altar on her festival[42], in the same way as stones are kept elsewhere and considered by some writers to be symbols of an ancient phallic cult. The legend explains the presence of these stones by telling how the saint one day was surreptitiously giving loaves to the poor, when her act would have been discovered but that by intercession the loaves were transformed into stones. This incident, the transformation of gifts secretly given to the poor, is introduced into the legends of other women-saints, but only in this case have I found it mentioned that the transformed food was preserved. We shall have occasion to return to Pharaildis, whose legend and cult offer nothing to support the view that she was an early Christian.

There are numerous instances of a like connection between holy missionary and woman pseudo-saint. A fair example is yielded by Leodgar (St Léger) bishop of Autun († 678), a well-defined historical personality[43], whom tradition makes into a near relative of Odilia, a saint widely venerated, but whose reputed foundation of the monastery on the Hohenburg modern criticism utterly discards[44].

But it is not only Christian missionaries who are associated with these women-saints. Quite a number of saints have been brought into connection with the house of the Karlings, and frequently Karl the Great himself figures in the stories told of them. I do not presume to decide whether the legendary accounts of these women are pure invention; some historic truth may be embodied in the stories told of them. But judging by the material at hand we are justified in disputing the existence of St Ida, who is said to have been the wife of Pippin of Landen and ancestress of the Karlings on the sole authority of the life of St Gertrud, her daughter. This work was long held to be contemporary, but its earliest date is now admitted to be the 11th century[45]. It is less easy to cast discredit on the existence of the saints Amalberga, the one a virgin saint, the other a widow, whom hagiologists find great difficulty in distinguishing. Pharaildis, mentioned above, and the saints Ermelindis, Reinildis and Gudila, are said to be Amalberga's daughters, but together with other saints of Hainault and Brabant they are very obviously pseudo-saints. The idea of bringing Karl the Great into some relation with them may have arisen from a twofold desire to justify traditions concerning them and to magnify the Emperor's importance.

In this connection it seems worth while to quote the passage in which Grimm[46] describes the characteristic traits of the German goddess in his German Mythology, and to consider how these traits are more or less pronounced in the women we have called pseudo-saints.

'It seems well,' he says, in the opening of his chapter on goddesses, 'to treat of goddesses collectively as well as individually, since a common conception underlies them all, which will thus stand out the more clearly. They are conceived essentially as divine mothers, *travelling about* and *visiting mortals*, from whom mankind learn the ways and arts of housekeeping and tilth: *spinning*, *weaving*, *guarding the hearth*, *sowing* and *reaping*' (the italics are his).

The tendency of the goddess to wander from place to place is reflected in many women pseudo-saints who are represented in their legends as inhabiting at various periods of their lives different parts

[42] Wauters, A., *Histoire des environs de Bruxelles*, 1852, vol. 3, pp. 111, 123 ff.

[43] *A. SS. Boll.*, Vita St Leodgarii, Oct. 2.

[44] Roth, K. L., 'St Odilienberg' in *Alsatia*, 1856, pp. 91 ff.

[45] Bonnell, H. E., *Anfänge des karolingischen Hauses*, 1866, pp. 51, 149 etc. It is noticeable that another woman-saint Ida (*A. SS. Boll.*, St Ida, June 20) figures as ancestral mother of the Liudolfings, who became kings in Saxony and emperors of Germany, comp. Waitz, *Jahrbücher des deutschen Reichs unter Heinrich I.* 1863, Nachtrag I.

[46] Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythologie*, 1875, p. 207.

of the district in which they are the object of veneration. Verena of northern Switzerland dwelt first at Solothurn, where a cave, which was her dwelling-place, is now transformed into a chapel. Later she took boat to the place where the Aar, Reuss and Limmat meet, where she dwelt in solitude, and her memory is preserved at a spot called the cell of Verena (Verenazell). Later still she went to dwell at Zurzach, a place which was celebrated for a fair, called Verena's fair, of which more anon. All these places are on or near the river Aar, at no inconsiderable distance from each other. The legend, as told by Stadler, takes them all into account, explaining how Verena came to be connected with each[47].

Similarly the legend of the saint Odilia[48], referred to above in connection with the Hohenburg, explains how the saint comes to be worshipped on both sides of the Rhine, a cruel father having driven her away from home. On the eastern side of the river there is a hill of St Odilia, Odilienberg, where there is a fountain which for its healing powers is visited twice a year and the site of which is guarded by a hermit. At Scherweiler there is also a site hallowed to her worship, and local tradition explains that she stayed there as a child; according to another version she was discovered floating in a wooden chest on the water[49]. Finally she is said to have settled on the Hohenburg west of the Rhine and to have founded a monastery. The critic Roth has written an admirable article on Odilia and the monastery of Hohenburg. He shows that the monastery was ancient and that at first it was dedicated to Christ and St Peter, though afterwards their names were supplanted by that of St Odilia[50]. Here, as on the other side of the Rhine, the folk celebrate her festival by pilgrimages to a fountain which has miraculous healing power, and by giving reverence to a sacred stone, on which Odilia is said to have knelt so long in prayer for the soul of her wicked father, that her knees wore holes in it[51].

We hear that other saints travelled about and stayed now at one place, now at another. St Notburg visited different parts of the Neckar district[52], Godeleva of Ghistelles[53] passed some time of her life in the marshy district between Ostend and Bruges. This Godeleva is addressed in her litany as the saint of marriage; she was buried, we are told, in a cave, which was held holy as late as the present century. The pond, into which she was thrown after death, for which act no reason is given, obtained, and still retains, miraculous healing powers[54]. Her legend in other respects offers the usual traits. She is Godeleva in some parts of the country; in others she is Godeleina, and her life according to Potthast was written in the 11th century by Drago, a monk of Ghistelles.

It is a curious trait in German saint-legend that the saint is often spoken of as coming from afar – from across the sea, from Britain, from Ireland, even from the Orkney Isles. It is thus with Ursula of Cöln, Christiane of Dendermonde (Termonde), Lucie of Sampigny and many others. The idea had taken root at a very early date that St Walburg, whose cult is widespread, was identical with a sister of the missionaries, Wilibald and Wunebald, who went from England to Germany under the auspices of the prelate Boniface in the eighth century. We shall return to her further on[55]. It is sufficient here to point out that there is little likeness between the sober-minded women-missionaries of Boniface's circle and the woman-saint who is localised under such different aspects, sometimes as a saint whose bones exude oil of miraculous power, sometimes as a valkyrie who anoints warriors for battle, sometimes as a witch who on the first of May leads forth her train to nightly riot on hill tops[56].

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[47] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858-82.

[48] *Lebensgeschichte der heil. Othilia.* Freiburg, 1852.

[49] *Alsatia*, 1858-60, p. 268, contains local stories.

[50] Roth, K. L., 'St Odilienberg' in *Alsatia*, 1856, p. 95.

[51] Menzel, *Christliche Symbolik*, article 'Knieen.'

[52] Du Bois de Beauchesne, *Madame Ste Notburg*, 1888, pp. 85, 197 etc. Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, and *A. SS. Boll.* so far, omit her.

[53] Lefebure, F. A., *Ste Godeleine et son culte*, 1888. *A. SS. Boll.*, St Godelewa, July 6.

[54] *Wonderlyk Leven.* Cortryk 1800, anon., pp. 42, 45 etc.

[55] Comp. below, ch. 4, § 2.

[56] Rochholz, L., *Drei Gaugöttinnen*, 1870, pp. 26, 80 etc.

Again the love of home industry, which Grimm claims for mother goddesses, is reflected in the legends of many saints, to whose real existence every clue is wanting. This holds good especially of spinning and of weaving. Lufthildis, whose date and whose very name are uncertain, is represented as dwelling on a hill-top near a village and marking the limits of her district by means of her spindle, which is preserved and can be seen to this day in the chapel of Luftelberg, the hill which is connected with her[57]. Lucie of Sampigny, to whose shrine women who are sterile make a pilgrimage in order to sit on the stone consecrated to her[58]; Walburg, referred to above; Germana, whose cult appears at Bar-sur-Aube[59]; and one of the numerous localised saints Gertrud[60], are all connected with the distaff. In the church of Frauenkirchen, which stands near the site of the celebrated old abbey of Lach, St Genovefa of Brabant, whose legend is most picturesque and who is in some degree akin to Geneviève of Paris, is believed to be sitting behind the altar from which the buzz of her spinning-wheel is audible[61].

Again the protective interest in silk and agriculture, which Grimm claims for the German goddess, comes out in connection with the pseudo-saint. The harvest festival, so often associated with the Virgin Mary, is frequently also associated with the name of a pseudo-saint. Thus we find these saints represented with ears of corn, as Mary too has been represented[62]. The emblem of the three ears of corn was probably accepted owing to Roman influence. Verena of Zurzach, Notburg of Rottenburg, and Walburg, are all pictured holding a bunch of corn in one hand. Through the intercession of Walburg full barns are secured, while Notburg or Nuppurg of Rottenburg, one of the chief saints of Bavaria, to whose shrine many pilgrimages are made, holds a reaping hook as well as a bunch of corn, and throughout the Tyrol is looked upon as patron saint of the peasantry[63].

At Meerbeck in Brabant corn is blessed before it is sown under the auspices of the saint Berlindis, who protects tree planting. She is a saint of many associations and we shall hear more of her later[64]. In some parts of Brabant seed sown at the time of the new moon in the month of June is protected by the saint Alena. We know little of Alena except that her arm was torn off in expiation of an unknown trespass and is kept as a relic in the church of Voorst, and that the archduchess Maria Anna of Spain sent for this relic in 1685 in the hope of securing a son by means of the saint's intercession[65]. To the shrine of Lufthildis corn is also brought as an offering to be distributed among the poor, while St Gertrud in Belgium protects bean and pea sowing[66].

Further traits in saint worship, which suggest woman's connection with the beginnings of settled civilization, are found in the pseudo-saint's frequent association with cattle and dairy produce.

Peasants, men and women, may be seen to this day touching in reverence the udder of the cow which a rudely cut relief in wood represents by the side of the saint Berlindis at Meerbeck[67]. Gunthild, the patron saint of Biberbach in Würtemburg[68], is represented holding in her hand a milk-jug, the contents of which were inexhaustible during her lifetime. The connection of saints with butter-making is frequent. St Radiane, otherwise called Radegund, is chiefly worshipped at Wellenburg near

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[57] Simrock, K., *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, p. 389.

[58] Clouet, *Histoire de Verdun*, p. 180; *A. SS. Boll.*, St Lucie, Sept. 9.

[59] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Germana, Oct. 1; Husenbeth, F. C., *Emblems of the Saints*, 1882.

[60] Rochholz, L., *Drei Gaugöttinnen*, p. 164.

[61] Zacher, J., *St Genovefa Pfalzgräfin*, 1860, p. 55.

[62] Menzel, *Christliche Symbolik*, article 'Aehre,' refers to *Notre Dame de trois épis* in Elsass.

[63] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, St Nothburga, nr 2.

[64] Wauters, A., *Histoire des environs de Bruxelles*, 1, p. 302; Corémans, *L'année de l'ancienne Belgique*, 1844, p. 76.

[65] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Alena, June 19; Menzel, W., *Christliche Symbolik*, 1854, article 'Arm.' Corémans, *L'année de l'ancienne Belgique*, 1844, June 19.

[66] Corémans, *L'année etc.*, p. 77.

[67] Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Traditions et légendes de la Belgique*, 1870, vol. 1, p. 99.

[68] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Gunthildis, Sept. 22.

Augsburg, and her intercession secures milk and butter in plenty to her worshippers. She was torn in pieces by wolves[69].

Judging by her cult and her legends the pseudo-saint practises and protects in endless ways the early arts of settled agriculture and civilization. She herds cattle, she guards flocks of sheep, she weaves and she spins, and she is careful of the dairy. In her representations she is associated with 'emblems' which point to these various interests, and we find her holding corn, a reaping-hook, or a spindle. Domestic animals are pictured by her side, most frequently sheep, geese, cows and dogs. The cat appears rarely[70], perhaps because it was associated with the evil side of woman's power. The besom too, the ancient symbol of woman's authority, is rarely, if ever[71], put into the saint's hands, perhaps for a similar reason.

One other peculiarity remains to be mentioned, which also has its counterpart in the witches' medicinal and curative power. The pseudo-saint's relics (after death) exude oil which is used for medicinal purposes. This peculiarity is noticed of the bones of the saints Walburg[72], Rolendis[73], and Edigna[74], but it is also noticed in connection with the relics of historical saints.

But over and above these traits in the character of the pseudo-saint, legend often points to a heathen custom in connection with her of which we have definite information. Tacitus tells how the image of the German goddess Nerthus was carried about on festive occasions in a chariot drawn by cows. The pseudo-saint either during her lifetime or after her death was often similarly conveyed. Sometimes the animals put themselves to her chariot of their own accord, frequently they stopped of their own accord at the particular spot which the saint wished to be her last resting-place. Legend tells us of such incidents in connection also with historical saints, both men and women, and we hear further that the relics of saints sometimes and quite suddenly became so heavy that it was impossible to move them, a sure sign that it was safest not to try.

So far the parallels between mother-goddess and woman pseudo-saint recall the practices of the heathen past, without actually offending against the tenor of Christianity. But the pseudo-saint has other associations of which this cannot be said, associations which are utterly perplexing, unless we go back for their explanation to the ancient tribal usages when the meeting of the tribe was the occasion for settling matters social and sexual. These associations introduce us to an aspect of the cult of the saints which brings primitive usages into an even clearer light, and shows how religious associations continued independently of a change of religion.

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[69] *Imagines SS. Augustanorum*, 1601; also Stadler and Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, St Radegundis, nr 3.

[70] Pharaildis has been depicted with one, *A. SS. Boll.*, St Pharaildis, Jan. 4; also Verena, comp. below.

[71] Husenbeth, F. C., *Emblems of the Saints*, 1870, mentions one instance.

[72] Rochholz, *Drei Gaugöttinnen*, 1870, p. 7.

[73] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*; *A. SS. Boll.*, St Rolendis, May 13.

[74] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Edigna, Feb. 26.

§ 3. Further Peculiarities of this Type of Saint

The Church, as mentioned above, had put every facility in the way of transforming heathen festivals into its own festal days. The heathen festival in many ways carried on the traditions of the tribal festival; the tribal festival was connected with the cult of tribal goddesses. If we bear in mind the many points mother-goddess, witch, and woman pseudo-saint have in common, the association of the pseudo-saint with practices of a profane character no longer appears wonderful. Both in the turn saint legend takes, and in the character of festivities associated with the saint's name, we discern the survival of ideas which properly belong to differently constituted family and social arrangements, the true meaning of which is all but lost.

On looking through the legends of many women-saints, it is surprising how often we find evil practices and heathen traditions associated with them, practices and traditions which the legend writer naturally is often at a loss to explain in a manner acceptable to Christianity. Thus the father of St Christiane of Dendermonde is said to have set up a temple where girls did service to Venus[75]; doing service to Venus being the usual way of describing licentious pursuits.

In the metrical life of Bilihild, patron saint of Würzburg and Mainz, a description is introduced of the marriage festival as it was celebrated by the Franks in the Main district about the year 600, as this account would have it. Dances took place and unions were contracted for the commencing year. The Christian woman Bilihild was present at the festival, though we are of course told that she found it little to her taste and determined to abolish it[76]. The legend of Bilihild has very primitive traits and is wanting in historical foundation and probability; and it is at least curious that her name should be coupled with a festival which Christian religion and morality must have condemned.

Again it is curious to find how often these women-saints die a violent death, not for conscience sake, nor indeed for any obvious reason at all. Radiane of Wellenburg, as mentioned above, was torn to pieces by wolves[77]; Wolfsindis of Reisbach, according to one account, was tied to wild oxen who tore her to pieces, according to another version of her story she was tied to a horse's tail[78]. St Regina of Alise, in the bishopric of Autun, is sometimes represented surrounded by flames, sometimes in a steaming caldron[79] which recalls the caldron of regeneration of Keltic mythology.

Frequently the saints are said to have been murdered like Cunera of Renen[80], and St Sura otherwise Soteris or Zuwarda of Dordrecht[81]; sometimes their heads are cut off as in the case of Germana worshipped at Beaufort in Champagne[82]; sometimes like Godeleva they are strangled, and sometimes burnt; but Christianity is not the reason assigned for their painful deaths. For even the legend writer does not go so far as to bring in martyrdom at a period and in districts where suffering for the Christian faith is altogether out of the question.

Panzer tells us about a group of three women-saints, to whom we shall presently return. He says in some churches masses are read for their souls and prayers offered for their salvation. Though reverenced by the people in many districts of Germany, they are as often said to have been hostile to Christianity as favourably disposed towards it[83].

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[75] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Christiane, July 26.

[76] Rochholz, L., *Drei Gaugöttinnen*, p. 37.

[77] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858-82, St Radegundis, nr 3.

[78] Ibid., Appendix, p. 998, footnote.

[79] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858, St Regina, nr 4.

[80] Kist, N. C., 'Reenensche Kuneralegende' in *Kerkhistorisch Archiv*, Amsterdam, 1858, vol. 2, p. 5.

[81] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858, St Sura.

[82] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Germana, Oct. 1.

[83] Panzer, F., *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythologie*, 1848, pp. 5 ff., 272 ff.

We find immoral practices and violence ascribed to some of the English women-saints by Capgrave in the 15th century. He says of Inthware or Iuthware, who perhaps belongs to Brittany, that she was accused of being a harlot and put to death. Similarly he says of Osman or Oswen that she was accused of being a witch, but when brought before a bishop she consented to be baptized[84]. Stanton notifies of Iuthware that her translation was celebrated at Shirbourne[85]. Winifred too, who is worshipped in Shropshire, had her head cut off and it rolled right down the hill to a spot where a fountain sprang up, near St Winifred's well. The head however was miraculously replaced, Winifred revived and lived to the end of her days as a nun[86]. The want of information about these women makes it impossible to judge how far their existence is purely legendary; certainly their stories are largely coloured by heathen traditions. The names Iuthware and Oswen are probably not Germanic; and the fact of Winifred's living on the confines of Wales makes it probable that she is a Keltic rather than a Germanic saint.

In connection with the festivals of some women pseudo-saints we find celebrations of a decidedly uproarious character taking place at a comparatively recent time. The feast of St Pharaildis, called locally Fru Verelde, used to be the chief holiday at Ghent, and was the occasion for much festivity and merrymaking[87]. At Lüttich (Liège) stood a chapel dedicated to St Balbine, who is said to have been venerated far and wide in the 14th century. On her day, the first of May, there was a festival called Babilone at which dancing was kept up till late at night[88]. The festival of St Godeleva kept at Longuefort maintained even in the 18th century a character which led to a violent dispute between the populace and the Church dignitaries, who were determined to put it down[89]. Coincident with the festival known as the day of St Berlindis, a saint frequently referred to as a protectress of the peasantry, there is a festival called the Drunken Vespers, in which as early as the 16th century the archbishop forbade his clergy to take part[90].

But by far the most striking and the most conclusive instances of the pseudo-saint's association with heathen survivals are afforded by St Verena of Switzerland and St Afra of Augsburg, whose worship and history we must examine more closely.

Verena's association with various rites has already been referred to; she is represented sometimes with ears of corn, sometimes accompanied by a cat, and sometimes, which is even more suggestive, she is brought into connection with a brothel. The procession of St Verena's day from Zurzach to a chapel dedicated to St Maurice passed an old linden tree which, so the legend goes, marked the spot where the saint used to dwell. Hard by was a house for lepers and a house of ill fame, where on the same day the district bailiff (landvogt) opened the fair. He was obliged by old custom to pass this tree, at which a loose woman stood awaiting him, and to dance round the tree with her and give her money[91].

The legend of St Verena written between 1005 and 1032[92] does not explain these associations. We are told of a woman who came from the east with the Theban legion, which is generally supposed to have been massacred in 287. She is said to have made her home now in one district now in another, and one modern writer goes so far as to suggest that she was zealous in converting the Allemans to Christianity before the coming of Irish missionaries.

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[84] Capgrave, *Catalogus SS. Angliae*, 1516.

[85] Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, 1887.

[86] Capgrave, *Catalogus SS. Angliae*, 1516. Comp. Surius, *Vitae SS.* 1617.

[87] Hautcœur, *Actes de Ste Pharailde*, 1882, Introd. cxxviiii.

[88] Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Traditions et légendes de la Belgique*, 1870, vol. 1, p. 288.

[89] Lefebure, *Ste Godeleine et son culte*, p. 209.

[90] Wauters, A., *Histoire des environs de Bruxelles*, 1852, vol. 1, p. 304.

[91] Rochholz, *Drei Gaugöttinnen*, 1870, p. 154.

[92] Potthast, *Wegweiser durch die Geschichtszwerke des europ. Mittelalters*, 1862; Rochholz, *loc. cit.*, p. 108, prints an early poetic version of the story in the vernacular.

According to folk-custom in districts between the Aar and the Rhine, girls who have secured husbands sacrifice their little maiden caps to Verena. At Zurzach married couples make pilgrimages to the Verenastift in order to secure offspring. Several dukes of the Allemans and their wives made such pilgrimages in the 9th and 10th centuries. It would lead too far to enumerate the many directions in which Verena is associated with heathendom. Her day, which comes at the harvest festival, was a time of unrestrained license in Zurzach, a fact on which the *Acta Sanctorum* cast no doubt.

Rochholz considers Verena to be a tribal mother of heathendom; Simrock in his mythology considers her to be identical with the goddess Fru Frene, in whom he sees a kind of German Venus[93]. Grimm tells how the version of the Tannhäuser saga, current in Switzerland, substitutes the name Frau Frene for that of Frau Venus[94]. The hero Tannhäuser, according to mediæval legend, wavers between a baser and a higher interpretation of love; the acceptance of the name Frene as representative of sensuousness shows the associations currently preserved in connection with this so-called saint.

A similar association occurs in Belgium, where a saint Vreken (*Sint Vreke*), otherwise Vrouw Vreke, in mediæval legend is the representative of sensual as opposed to spiritual love. Corémans describes how in the version of the saga of the faithful Eckhardt (*Van het trouwen Eckhout*) current in Belgium, the hero wavers between spiritual love of Our Lady and sensual love of Vreke. Among the folk Vrouw Vreke is a powerful personage, for the story goes that the Kabauters, evil spirits who dwell on the Kabauterberg, are in her service. In the book *Reta de Limbourg*, which was re-written in the 17th century, the Kabauterberg becomes a Venusberg, and Vreke is no longer a great witch (*eene grote heks*) but a goddess with all the alluring charms of Venus[95]. Grimm includes a Fru Freke among his German goddesses[96]. She retains her old importance among the folk as a protective saint and presides over tree-planting[97].

Like the saints Verena and Vreke, St Afra of Augsburg is associated with licentiousness; Wessely expressly calls her the patron saint of hetairism[98]. Her legend explains the connection in a peculiar manner; as told by Berno, abbot of Reichenau († 1048), it is most picturesque. We hear how Afra and her mother came from Cyprus, an island which mediæval, following the classical writers, associated with the cult of Venus, and how she settled at Augsburg and kept a house of ill fame with three companions. Here they entertained certain Church dignitaries (otherwise unknown to history) who persuaded the women to embrace Christianity and give up their evil practices. They became virtuous, and when persecutions against Christians were instituted they all suffered martyrdom; Afra was placed on a small island and burnt at the stake[99]. The legend writer on the basis of the previous statement places the existence of these women in the early part of the fourth century during the reign of Diocletian. Curiously enough the legend of Afra is led up to by a description of the worship of the heathen goddess Zisa, a description to which Grimm attaches great importance[100]. This goddess was worshipped at or near Augsburg. Velserus[101], who in the 16th century compiled a chronicle of Augsburg, gives us a mass of information about traditions connected with her and her worship, as he also does about St Afra. There is in his mind of course no shadow of a suspicion of any connection between them. But he informs us that the Zizenberg, or hill of Zisa, and the Affenwald which he interprets as Afrawald or wood of Afra, are one and the same place.

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[93] Simrock, K., *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, 1887, p. 393.

[94] Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythologie*, 1875, p. 254, footnote.

[95] Corémans, *L'année de l'ancienne Belgique*, pp. 61, 113, 158.

[96] Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythologie*, 1875, p. 252.

[97] Corémans, *L'année de l'ancienne Belgique*, p. 76; Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, and the *A. SS. Boll.* pass her over.

[98] Wessely, J. G., *Iconographie Gottes und der Heiligen*, 1874.

[99] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Afra, Aug. 5.

[100] Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythologie*, 1875, p. 242.

[101] Velserus, *Antiqua monumenta, Chronica der Stadt Augsp.* 1595; pp. 4, 14, 17, 32, 88.

Berno also wrote a life of Ulrich (St Udalricus), bishop of Augsburg († 973), who boldly defended the town at the time of the invasion of the Hungarians. In this life the bishop has a miraculous vision of St Afra, who takes him on a pilgrimage by night and points out the site where he afterwards founded a monastery, known to later ages as the monastery of St Ulrich and St Afra. The worship of Afra is referred to by the poet Fortunatus as early as the sixth century; the story of the saint's martyrdom is older than that of her conversion. The historian Rettberg is puzzled why so much stress should be laid on her evil ways[102]; but the historian Friedrich, regardless of perplexing associations, sees the beginnings of convent life for women in Augsburg in the fact of Afra and her companions dwelling together between their conversion and martyrdom[103].

There are other traits in saint legend which point to the customs and arrangements of a more primitive period, and tempt the student to fit together pieces of the past and the present which appear meaningless if taken separately.

It seems probable that in early times the term mother was applied to a number of women of a definite group by all the children of the group, and that the word had not the specialized meaning of one who had actually borne the children who termed her mother.

The story of a number of children all being born at once by one woman is possibly due to a confused tradition dating from this period. In local saga, both in Germany and elsewhere, there are stories in which a woman suddenly finds herself in the possession of a number of offspring, and often with direful consequences to herself, because of the anger of her husband. The same incident has found its way into saint legend. Thus Notburg, patron saint of Sulz, had at a birth a number of children, variously quoted as nine, twelve and thirty-six. Stadler says that she is represented at Sulz holding eight children in her arms, a ninth one lying dead at her feet[104]. Lacking water to christen these children, she produced from the hard rock a fountain which even to the present day is believed to retain the power to cure disease.

A similar story is told of Achachildis, popularly known as Atzin, who is held in veneration at Wendelstein near Schwabach. She bore her husband five children at once and then took a vow of continence. Her legend has never been written, but she enjoys a great reputation for holiness, and a series of pictures represent various incidents in her life[105].

Images of women sheltering children, usually beneath their cloaks, are frequently found abroad built into the outer wall of the church, the place where Christian teachers felt justified in placing heathen images[106]. Students of pictorial art will here recall the image of St Ursula at Cöln sheltering 11,000 virgins under her cloak.

Again there are other emblems in saint worship which cannot be easily accounted for, such for instance as the holy combs of Verena and Pharaildis, which remind one of the comb with which the witch Lorelei sat combing her hair, or, on classic soil, of the comb of the Venus Calvata; or the holy slippers of St Radiane, which are preserved to this day in the church of Wellenburg and which, as Stadler informs us, had been re-soled within his time[107]. Slippers and shoes are ancient symbols of appropriation, and as such figure in folk-lore and at weddings in many countries to this day. The golden slipper was likewise a feature at the witches' festival, in which the youthful fiddler also figured[108]. Both the golden slipper and the youthful fiddler form important features in the legend of the saint Ontkommer or Wilgefortis. The images and legend of this saint are so peculiar that they claim a detailed account.

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[102] Rettberg, F. W., *Kirchengeschichte*, 1846, vol. 1, p. 147.

[103] Friedrich, *Kirchengeschichte*, 1867, vol. 1, p. 413.

[104] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858, St Notburg, nr 1. *A. SS. Boll.*, St Notburga, Jan. 26.

[105] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858, Appendix, St Achachildis.

[106] Birlinger, A., *Schwäbische Sagen*, vol. 2, p. 341.

[107] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858, St Radegundis, nr 3.

[108] Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythologie*, 1875, p. 896.

It is evident from what has been said that the legends and cult of many women pseudo-saints have traits in common; indeed the acts ascribed to different saints are often exactly similar. The stories of Notburg of Rottenburg, of Radiane of Wellenburg, and of Gunthild of Biberbach, as Stadler remarks, are precisely alike; yet it is never suggested that these saints should be treated as one; each of them has her place in the *Acta Sanctorum* and is looked upon as distinct from the others.

There is, however, a set of women-saints whose images and legends have features so distinctive that hagiologists treat of them collectively as one, though they are held in veneration in districts widely remote from each other, and under very dissimilar names.

The saint, who is venerated in the Low Countries as Ontkommer or Wilgefortis, is usually considered identical with the saint Kümmerniss of Bavaria and the Tyrol; with the saint Livrade, Liberata or Liberatrix venerated in some districts of France as early as the 9th century when Usuard, writing in the monastery of St Germain-des-Près, mentions her; with Gehulff of Mainz; with Hilp of the Hülfensberg at Eichsfelde; and with others called variously Regenfled, Regenfrith, Eutropia, etc.[109] The name Mariahilf, which is very common in south Germany, is probably a combination of the name of the Virgin Mother with that of St Hilp or St Gehulff.

The legends of this saint, or rather of this assembly of saints, are characterized by Cuper in the *Acta Sanctorum* as an endless labyrinth[110]. Whatever origin be ascribed to them, when once we examine them closely we find explanation impossible on the hypothesis that they relate to a single Christian woman living during Christian times.

A considerable amount of information on this group of saints has lately been collected by Sloet, who deals also with their iconography[111]. The peculiarity of the images of Ontkommer or Kümmerniss consists in this, that she is represented as crucified, and that the lower part of her face is covered by a beard, and her body in some instances by long shaggy fur. Her legend explains the presence of the beard and fur by telling us that it grew to protect the maiden from the persecutions of a lover or the incestuous love of her father; such love is frequently mentioned in the legends of women pseudo-saints.

The fact that Ontkommer or Kümmerniss is represented as crucified might be explained on the hypothesis that the common folk could not at first grasp the idea of a god and looked upon Christ as a woman, inventing the legend of the woman's persecution and miraculous protection in order to account for the presence of the beard. But other accessories of the representations of Ontkommer or Kümmerniss lead us to suppose that her martyrdom, like that of other saints, has a different origin and that she is heiress to a tribal goddess of the past[112].

In many of her representations Ontkommer or Kümmerniss is seen hanging on the cross with only one golden slipper on, but sometimes she wears two slippers, and a young man is sitting below the cross playing the fiddle. Legend accounts for the presence of this young man in the following manner. He came and sat at the foot of the image and was playing on his fiddle, when the crucified saint suddenly awoke to life, drew off a slipper and flung it to him. He took it away with him, but he was accused of having stolen it and condemned to death. His accusers however agreed to his request to come with him into the presence of the holy image, to which he appealed. Again the crucified saint awoke to life and drew off her second slipper and flung it to the fiddler, whose innocence was thereby vindicated and he was set free. Where shall we go for a clue to this curious and complicated legend? Grimm tells us that a young fiddler was present at a festival of the witches, and that he played at the dance in which he was not allowed to take part. Grimm also tells us that one of the witches on

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[109] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858, St Kumernissa.

[110] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Liberata, July 20.

[111] Sloet, *De heilige Ontkommer of Wilgeforthis*, 1884.

[112] I cannot account for the presence of the beard; St Paula, venerated at Avila in Spain, is also represented with one (Stadler und Heim). Macrobius (*Sal.* bk 3, c. 8) tells us that the Venus Barbata was represented in Cyprus in the form of a man with a beard and wearing female clothing, which shows that goddesses of this type were venerated during heathen times.

this occasion wore only one golden slipper[113]. The association of Kümmerniss with a golden slipper is deep-rooted, especially in Bavaria, for the saying goes there that 'She with the golden slipper and with the youthful fiddler is also a mother of God[114].'

Many years ago Menzel wrote[115]: 'Much I believe concerning this saint is derived from heathen conceptions.' Stories embodying heathen traditions are preserved in connection with this saint in districts abroad that lie far apart.

Thus the image of her which is preserved in North Holland is said to have come floating down the river, like the images of the Virgin referred to above. At Regensburg in Bavaria an image is preserved which is said to have been cast into the water at Neufarn. It was carried down by the river and thrown on the bank, and the bishop fetched it to Regensburg on a car drawn by oxen. In the Tyrol the image of the saint is sometimes hung in the chief bed-room of the house in order to secure a fruitful marriage, but often too it is hung in chapel and cloister in order to protect the dead. Images of the saint are preserved and venerated in a great number of churches in Bavaria and the Tyrol, but the ideas popularly associated with them have raised feelings in the Church against their cult. We hear that a Franciscan friar in the beginning of this century destroyed one of the images, and that the bishop of Augsburg in 1833 attempted in one instance to do away with the image and the veneration of the saint, but refrained from carrying out his intention, being afraid of the anger of the people[116].

It has been mentioned above that associations of a twofold character survive in connection with Verena and Vreke, who are to this day popularly reckoned as saints, but who are introduced in mediæval romance as representatives of earthly love as contrasted with spiritual. Associations of a twofold character have also been attached to the term Kümmerniss. For in the Tyrol Kümmerniss is venerated as a saint, but the word Kümmerniss in ordinary parlance is applied to immoral women[117].

Other heathen survivals are found attached to the Ontkommer-Kümmerniss group of saints. At Luzern the festival of the saint was connected with so much riotous merrymaking and licentiousness that it was forbidden in 1799 and again in 1801. The story is told of the saint under the name Liberata that she was one of a number of children whom her mother had at a birth[118].

Sloet, on the authority of the philologist Kern, considers that the various names by which the saint is known in different districts are appellatives and have the same underlying meaning of one who is helpful in trouble. According to him this forms the connecting link between the names Ontkommer, Kümmerniss, Wilgefortis, Gehulff, Eutropia, etc., of which the form Ontkommer, philologically speaking, most clearly connotes the saint's character, and on this ground is declared to be the original form. The saint is worshipped at Steenberg in Holland under the name Ontkommer, and Sloet is of opinion that Holland is the cradle of the worship of the whole group of saints[119]. But considering what we know of other women-saints it seems more probable that the saints who have been collected into this group are the outcome of a period of social evolution, which in various districts led to the establishment of tribal goddesses, who by a later development assumed the garb of Christian women-saints.

The cult of women-saints under one more aspect remains to be chronicled. Numerous traditions are preserved concerning the cult of holy women in triads, who are locally held in great veneration and variously spoken of as three sisters, three ladies, three Marys, three nuns, or three women-saints.

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[113] Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythol.* 1875, p. 896.

[114] Sloet, *De heilige Ontkommer of Wilgeforthis*, 1884, p. 36.

[115] Menzel, W., *Christl. Symbolik*, 1854, article 'Bart.'

[116] Sloet, *De heilige Ontkommer of Wilgeforthis*, 1884, pp. 31, 33, 36, 42 etc.

[117] Ibid. p. 32.

[118] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858, St Liberata, footnote, p. 807.

[119] Sloet, *De heilige Ontkommer of Wilgeforthis*, 1884, pp. 5, 50 etc. Ellis, H., *Original Letters*, series III, vol. 3, p. 194, quotes the following sentence from Michael Woddes, *Dialogues*, 1554: '… if a wife were weary of her husband she offered Otes at Poules (St Paul's) at London to St Uncumber,' a proof that the veneration of Ontkommer had found its way into England.

The three holy women have a parallel in the three Fates of classic mythology and in the three Norns of Norse saga, and like them they probably date from a heathen period. Throughout Germany they frequently appear in folk-lore and saga, besides being venerated in many instances as three women-saints of the Church.

In stories now current these three women are conceived sometimes as sisters protecting the people, sometimes as ladies guarding treasures, and sometimes as a group of three nuns living together and founding chapels and oratories, and this too in places where history knows nothing of the existence of any religious settlement of women.

Panzer has collected a mass of information on the cult of the triad as saints in southern Germany[120]; Corémans says that the veneration of the Three Sisters (*dry-susters*) is widespread in Belgium[121], but the Church has sanctioned this popular cult in comparatively few instances.

The story is locally current that these three women were favourably disposed to the people and bequeathed to them what is now communal property. Simrock considers that this property included sites which were held sacred through association with a heathen cult[122]. 'In heathen times,' he says, 'a sacred grove was hallowed to the sister fates which after the establishment of Christianity continued to be the property of the commune. The remembrance of these helpful women who were the old benefactresses of the place remained, even their association with holiness continued.' By these means in course of time the cult of the three goddesses was transformed into that of Christian saints.

Besides bequeathing their property to the people it was thought that these three women-saints protected their agricultural and domestic interests, especially as affecting women. In Schlehdorf in Lower Bavaria pilgrimages by night were made to the shrine of the triad to avert the cattle plague; the shrine stood on a hill which used to be surrounded by water, and at one time was the site of a celebrated fair and the place chosen for keeping the harvest festival[123]. At Brusthem in Belgium there were three wells into which women who sought the aid of these holy women cast three things, linen-thread, a needle and some corn[124]. Again in Schildturn in Upper Bavaria an image of the three women-saints is preserved in the church which bears an inscription to the effect that through the intercession of these saints offspring are secured and that they are helpful at childbirth[125]. In the same church a wooden cradle is kept which women who wished to become mothers used to set rocking. A second cradle which is plated is kept in the sacristy, and has been substituted for one of real silver[126].

In some districts one of these three saints is credited with special power over the others either for good or for evil. The story goes that one of the sisters was coloured black or else black and white[127].

In many places where the triad is worshipped the names of the individual sisters are lost, while in districts far apart from one another, as the Tyrol, Elsass, Bavaria, their names have considerable likeness. The forms generally accepted, but liable to fluctuation, are St Einbeth, St Warbeth and St Wilbeth[128]. The Church in some instances seems to have hesitated about accepting these names, it may be from the underlying meaning of the suffix *beth* which Grimm interprets as holy site, *ara*, *fanum*, but Mannhardt connects it with the word to pray (beten)[129]. Certainly the heathen element is strong when we get traditions of the presence of these women at weddings and at burials, and stories of

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[120] Panzer, F., *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythologie*, 1848, pp. 5 ff., 272 ff.

[121] Corémans, *L'année de l'ancienne Belgique*, 1844, p. 149.

[122] Simrock, K., *Handbuch der deutschen Myth.*, 1887, p. 344.

[123] Panzer, F., *Beitrag zur deutschen Myth.*, 1848, p. 23.

[124] Corémans, *L'année de l'ancienne Belgique*, 1844, p. 148.

[125] Panzer, F., *Beitrag zur deutschen Myth.*, 1848, pp. 69 ff.

[126] Cradles are frequently kept in churches in Bavaria, and form, I am told, part of the furniture which was formerly used at the celebration of the Nativity play at Christmas (Weihnachtskrippenspiel).

[127] Panzer, F., *Beitrag zur deutschen Myth.*, 1848, p. 273.

[128] Simrock, K., *Handbuch der deutschen Myth.*, 1887, pp. 344, 349, gives lists of their names.

[129] Grimm, *Wörterbuch*, 'Bett'; Mannhardt, W., *Germanische Mythen*, 1858, p. 644.

how they went to war, riding on horses, and achieved even more than the men[130]. Where their claim to Christian reverence is admitted by the Church, the stories told about them have a very different ring.

According to the legend which has been incorporated into the *Acta Sanctorum*, St Einbetta, St Verbetta, and St Villbetta were Christian maidens who undertook the pilgrimage to Rome with St Ursula, with whose legend they are thus brought into connection. The three sisters stayed behind at Strasburg and so escaped the massacre of the 11000 virgins[131].

The tendency to group women-saints into triads is very general. Kunigund, Mechtund and Wibrandis are women-saints who belong to the portion of Baden in the diocese of Constance[132]. The locus of their cult is in separate villages, but they are venerated as a triad in connection with a holy well and lie buried together under an ancient oak[133]. We hear also of pilgrimages being made to the image of three holy sisters preserved at Auw on the Kyll in the valley of the Mosel. They are represented as sitting side by side on the back of an ass(?), one of them having a cloth tied over her eyes. The three sisters in this case are known as Irmina, Adela and Chlotildis, and it is said they were the daughters or sisters of King Dagobert[134]. Irmina and Adela are historical; they founded nunneries in the diocese of Trier.

In another instance the sisters are called Pellmerge, Schwellmerge and Krischmerge, *merg* being a popular form of the name Mary which is preserved in many place-names[135].

I have been able to discover little reference to local veneration of saints in a triad in England. But there is a story that a swineherd in Mercia had a vision in a wood of three women who, as he believed, were the three Marys, and who pointed out to him the spot where he was to found a religious settlement, which was afterwards known as Evesham.

A curious side-light is thrown on the veneration of the three women-saints abroad by recalling the images and inscriptions about Mothers and Matrons, which are preserved on altars fashioned long before the introduction of Christianity under heathen influence.

These altars have been found in outlying parts of the Roman Empire, especially in the districts contiguous to the ancient boundary line which divided Roman territory from Germania Magna. They bear inscriptions in Latin to the effect that they are dedicated to Mothers and Matrons, and sometimes it is added that they have been set up at the command of these divine Mothers themselves. The words *imperio ipsarum*, 'by their own command,' are added to the formula of dedication, and as it seems that they never occur on altars set up and dedicated to specified Roman or Gallo-Roman divinities, they yield an interesting proof of the wide-spread character of the worship of tribal goddesses[136].

At one time it was supposed that these altars were of Keltic origin, but some of the tribes mentioned in their inscriptions have been identified with place-names in Germany. Altars found in outlying parts of the Empire primarily served for the use of the soldiery, for sacrifice at the altar of the gods was a needful preliminary to Roman military undertakings. The view has been advanced that, as the altars dedicated to pagan divinities served for the devotions of the Roman and Gallo-Roman troops, it is possible that these other altars dedicated to Mothers served for the devotions of the German heathen soldiery, who were drafted from districts beyond the Rhine, and at an early date made part of the Roman legions.

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[130] Panzer, F., *Beitrag zur deutschen Mythol.*, 1848, p. 180.

[131] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Einbetta, Sept. 16.

[132] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Kunegundis, June 16.

[133] Panzer, *Beitrag zur deutschen Myth.*, 1848, p. 379.

[134] Menck-Dittmarsch, *Des Moselthals Sagen*, 1840, pp. 178, 258.

[135] Grimm, *Wörterbuch*, 'Marge.'

[136] Lersch, *Centralmuseum rheinl. Inschriften*, vol. 1, p. 23; also *Jahrbücher des Vereins von Altertumsfreunden im Rheinlande*, Bonn: J. 1852, Freudenberg, 'Darstellungen der Matres oder Matronae'; J. 1853, 'Neue Matronensteine'; J. 1857, Eick, 'Matronensteine'; J. 1858, Becker, 'Beiträge' etc.

The parallels between the mothers of the stones and the three women-saints are certainly remarkable.

Where a representation, generally in rude relief, occurs on the altar stones, the Mothers are represented in a group of three, holding as emblems of their power fruit, flowers, and the spindle. These recall the emblems both of the heathen goddess of mythology and of the pseudo-saint. Moreover one of the Mothers of the altars is invariably distinguished by some peculiarity, generally by a want of the head-dress or head-gear worn by the two others, perhaps indicative of her greater importance. This has its parallel in the peculiar power with which one member of the saint triad is popularly credited.

The erection of the altars belongs to a time before the introduction of Christianity; our information about the three women-saints dates back earlier than the 12th century in a few cases only; it chiefly depends on stories locally current which have been gleaned within the last hundred years. If the hypothesis of the mother-age preceding the father-age holds good, if the divine Mothers imaged on the stones are witnesses to a wide-spread worship of female deities during the period of established Roman rule, these tales told of the triad carry us back nearly twenty centuries. The power ascribed to tribal goddesses in a distant heathen past survived in the power ascribed to Christian women-saints; the deep-rooted belief in protective women-divinities enduring with undying persistence in spite of changes of religion.

In conclusion, a few words may be acceptable on the names of pseudo-saints, which I believe to be largely epithetic or appellative. Grimm holds that the names of the German goddesses were originally appellatives. In a few cases the name of the goddess actually becomes the name of a saint. Mythology and hagiology both lay claim to a Vrene and a Vreke; but from the nature of things these cases are rare. The conception of the protective divinity is ancient; her name in a philological sense is comparatively new.

With few exceptions the names are German; sometimes in contiguous districts variations of the same name are preserved. The saint Lufthildis is sometimes Linthildis[137]; Rolendis is sometimes Dollendis[138]; Ida, Itta, Iduberga, Gisleberga are saints of Brabant and Flanders, whom hagiologists have taken great trouble to keep separate. In some cases the name of a real and that of a fictitious person may have become confounded. The names are all cognate with the word *itis*, an ancient term applied to the woman who exercised sacred functions.

The attempt to connect the group Ontkommer-Wilgefortis by the underlying meaning of the several names has been mentioned. It has also been mentioned that this saint is sometimes spoken of as a mother of God. Similarly St Geneviève of Paris is worshipped as Notre-Dame-la-petite, and again the saint Cunera of Reenen is popularly known as Knertje, which signifies little lady[139].

On every side the student is tempted to stray from the straightforward road of fact into the winding paths of speculation. The frequent association abroad of female deities with hill tops suggests a possible explanation why the word *berg*, which means remoteness and height, so often forms part of the name of the woman pseudo-saint, and of women's names generally. For the beginnings of tilth and agriculture are now sought not in the swampy lowlands, but on the heights where a clearance brought sunlight and fruitfulness. Hill tops to this day are connected with holy rites. Is it possible that the word *berg*, designating hill top, should have become an appellative for woman because the settlements on the hills were specially connected with her?

Philology hitherto has been content to trace to a common origin words cognate in different languages, and on the conceptions attaching to these words, to build up theories about the state of civilization of various peoples at a period previous to their dispersion from a common home. But the

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[137] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, 1858, St Lufthildis.

[138] Ibid. St Rolendis.

[139] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Cunera, June 12.

study of local beliefs and superstitions in western Europe tends more and more to prove that usages pointing to a very primitive mode of life and to a very primitive state of civilization are indissolubly connected with certain sites; and that the beginnings of what we usually term civilization, far from being imported, have largely developed on native soil.

Thus, at the very outset of our enquiry into saint-worship and the convent life of the past, we have found ourselves confronted by a class of women-saints who must be looked upon as survivals from heathen times, and who are in no way connected with the beginnings of Christianity and of convent life; their reputation rests on their connection with some hallowed site of the heathen period and the persistence of popular faith in them. But the feeling underlying the attribution of holiness to them, the desire for localized saints, yields the clue to the ready raising to saintship of those women who in England, in France, and in Germany, showed appreciation of the possibilities offered to them by Christianity, and founded religious settlements. In some cases superstitions of a heathen nature which are of value to the hagiologist, if not to the historian, cling to these women also, but fortunately a considerable amount of trustworthy material is extant about their lives. These women during the earliest period were zealous in the cause of Christianity, and it is to them that our enquiry now turns.

CHAPTER II
CONVENTS AMONG THE FRANKS, A.D. 550-650

'Sicut enim apis diversa genera florum congregabat, unde mella conficiat, sic illa ab his quos invitabat spirituales studebat carpere flosculos, unde boni operis fructum tam sibi quam suis sequacibus exhiberet.'
The nun Baudonivia on St Radegund (Vita, c. 13).

§ 1. At the Frankish Invasion [140]

The great interest of early monastic life among the Franks lies in the conversion of this hardy and ferocious people to Christianity just at the moment of their emergence from a state of barbarism. Fierce, warlike and progressive, the Franks were brought face to face with cultured Latinity. The clerical student who claimed direct descent from the Gallo-Roman rhetorician, and the bishop who was in possession of the municipal government of the town, found themselves confronted by shaggy-haired, impetuous men from forest wilds. At the outset an all but immeasurable distance separated the social and intellectual development of the Gallo-Roman from that of these strangers. Compared with the cultivated man of letters and with the veteran, grown grey in imperial service, the German invader was little more than a savage; nevertheless he succeeded in holding his own. At first his standards of life and conduct gave way before those of the Gallo-Romans. The lives of early Frankish princes, as their contemporary, the historian Gregory of Tours, depicts them, are marked by ceaseless quarrels and feuds, by numberless instances of murder, perjury and violence. The bonds of union among them were forcibly relaxed, as often happens in those periods of history when restraint and responsibility are broken through by a sudden and overwhelming inrush of new ideas. A prey to intemperance and greed, the descendants of the great Merovech dwindled away. But other men of the same race, stronger than they in mind and less prone to enervating luxury, pressed in from behind. And after the temporary mental and moral collapse which followed upon the occupation of Gaul by the Franks, the race rose to new and increased vigour. New standards of conduct were evolved and new conceptions of excellence arose, through the mingling of Latin and German elements. For the great Roman civilization, a subject of wonder and admiration to all ages, was in many of its developments realized, appropriated, and assimilated by the converted Germans. Three hundred years after their appearance in Gaul, the Franks were masters of the cultivated western world; they had grasped the essentials of a common nationality and had spread abroad a system of uniform government.

The Franks at first showed a marked deficiency in the virtues which pagan Rome had established, and to which Christianity had given a widened and spiritualized meaning. Temperance, habitual self-control and the absorption of self in the consciousness of a greater, formed no part of this people's character. These virtues, together with peaceableness and a certain simplicity of taste, laid the groundwork of the monasticism which preceded the invasion. Persons who were vowed to religion were averse to war, because it disturbed study and industry, and they shrank from luxury of life, because it interrupted routine by exciting their appetites. An even tenor of life was the golden mean they set before themselves, and in some degree they had realized it in Roman Gaul before the barbarian invasion.

The Frank at first felt little tempted in the direction of monastic life. His fierce and warlike tendencies, love of personal predominance and glory, and impatience of every kind of restraint, were directly opposed to the uniform round of devotion and work to which the religious devotee conformed.

The attitude of Frankish men towards monasticism was at best passive; on the other hand convent life from the first found sympathy among Frankish women. Princesses of pure German blood and of undisputed German origin left the royal farms, which were the court residences of the period, and repaired to the religious houses, to devote themselves to religion and to the learning of cultured Latinity. Not one of the princes of the royal Frankish race entered a convent of his own accord, but their wives, widows, and daughters readily joined houses of religion.

Meekness and devotion, self-denial and subservience are not the most prominent features in the character of these women. The wives and daughters of men to whom Macaulay attributes all

[140] Fustel de Coulanges, *L'invasion germanique*, 1891; Gérard, P. A. F., *Histoire des Francs d'Austrasie*, 1864; Ozanam, *Civilisation chrétienne chez les Francs*, 1855.

vices and no virtues, are of a temper which largely savours of the world. What distinguishes them is quick determination and clear-sighted appreciation of the possibilities opened out to them by the religious life. Fortunately the information which we have concerning them is not confined to the works of interested eulogists. Accounts of women whom posterity estimated as saints lay stress on those sides of their character which are in accord with virtues inculcated by the Church. But we have other accounts besides these about women who had taken the vows of religion, but whose behaviour called forth violent denunciations from their contemporaries. And over and above these, passages in profane literature are extant which curiously illustrate the worldly tone and temper of many women who had adopted religion as a profession.

These women were driven to resort to convents chiefly as the result of their contact with a great civilization, which threw open unknown and tempting possibilities to men, but raised many difficulties in the way of women.

The resources of the districts acquired by the Franks were immeasurably greater than those of the lands they had left. Wealth and intemperance readily join hands. The plurality of recognised and unrecognised wives in which the Frankish princes indulged resulted in great family difficulties. The royal farms and the ancient cities, where these petty kings resided, were the scenes of continual broils and squabbles in which royal wives and widows took the leading parts. From the chequered existence which this state of things implies, convent life alone afforded a permanent refuge. Sometimes a princess left home from a sense of the indignities she was made to suffer; sometimes a reverse of fortune caused her to accept, willingly or unwillingly, the dignified retirement of the cloister.

During the centuries preceding the Frankish conquest the development of religious and monastic life in Gaul had been considerable, for the Church had practically appropriated what was left of the Roman system of organization, and since this system had been chiefly municipal, the municipal bodies were largely composed of bishops and clerks.

The monastic life of men in Gaul had a number of independent centres in the western provinces, due to the enthusiastic zeal of St Martin of Tours († 400), to whom reference has been made.

In the beginning of the 6th century a settlement of nuns was founded in the south, where monasteries already existed, perhaps as the result of direct contact with the east. A rule of life was drafted for this convent shortly after its foundation.

Caesarius, bishop of Arles (501-573), had persuaded his sister Caesaria to leave Marseilles, where she dwelt in a convent associated with the name of Cassian. His plan was that she should join him at Arles, and preside over the women who had gathered there to live and work under his guidance.

Caesarius now marked out a scheme of life for his sister and those women whom she was prepared to direct. He arranged it, as he says himself, according to the teachings of the fathers of the Church and, after repeated modifications, he embodied it in a set of rules, which have come down to us[141]. Great clearness and directness, a high moral tone, and much sensible advice are contained in these precepts of Caesarius. 'Since the Lord,' he says, addressing himself to the women, 'has willed to inspire us and help us to found a monastery for you, in order that you may abide in this monastery, we have culled spiritual and holy injunctions for you from the ancient fathers; with God's help may you be sheltered, and dwelling in the cells of your monastery, seeking in earnest prayer the presence of the Son of God, may you say in faith, "we have found him whom we sought." Thus may you be of the number of holy virgins devoted to God, who wait with tapers alight and a calm conscience, calling upon the Lord. – Since you are aware that I have worked towards establishing this monastery for you, let me be one of you through the intercession of your prayer.'

Caesarius goes on to stipulate that those who join the community, whether they be maidens or widows, shall enter the house once for all and renounce all claims to outside property. Several paragraphs of the rule are devoted to settling questions of property, a proof of its importance in the

[141] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Caesaria, Jan. 12, *Regula*, pp. 730-737; also *A. SS. Boll.*, St Caesarius episcopus, Aug. 27.

mind of Caesarius. There were to be in the house only those who of their own accord accepted the routine and were prepared to live on terms of strictest equality without property or servants of their own.

Children under the age of six or seven were not to be received at all, 'nor shall daughters of noble parentage or lowly-born girls be taken in readily to be brought up and educated.'

This latter injunction shows how the religious at this period wished to keep the advantages to be derived from artistic and intellectual training in their own community. They had no desire for the spread of education, which forms so characteristic a feature of the religious establishments of a later date.

After their safe housing the instruction of the nuns at Arles was the most important matter dealt with in the 'rule.' Considerable time and thought were devoted to the practice of chants and to choir-singing, for the art of music was considered especially fitted to celebrate God. In an appendix to the rule of Caesarius the system of singing is described as similar to that adopted in the cœnobite settlement at Lerins[142]. Apparently following Keltic usage, the chant was taken up in turn by relays of the professed, who kept it up night and day all the year round in perpetual praise of the Divinity. At this period melody and pitch were the subjects of close study and much discussion. The great debt owed by the art of music to the enthusiasm of these early singers is often overlooked.

The women who joined the community at Arles also learned reading and writing ('omnes litteras discant'). These arts were practised in classes, while domestic occupations, such as cooking, were performed in turns. Weaving, probably that of church hangings, was among the arts practised, and the women also spun wool and wove it into material with which they made garments for their own use.

There are further injunctions about tending the infirm, and stern advice about the hatefulness of quarrels. Intercourse with the outside world is restricted, but is not altogether cut off.

'Dinners and entertainments,' says the rule, 'shall not be provided for churchmen, laymen and friends, but women from other religious houses may be received and entertained.'

In the year 506 Caesarius, the author of this rule, was present at the synod of Agde at which it was decreed that no nun however good in character should receive the veil, that is be permanently bound by a vow, before her fortieth year[143]. This decree, taken together with the rule, proves the sober and serious spirit of these early settlements and the purpose which their founder set before him.

The teaching of Caesarius generally reflects the spirit of cautious reserve characteristic of the rule instituted by the great St Benedict of Nursia for the monks he had assembled together on Monte Casino in Central Italy. His efforts like those of Caesarius were directed to the creation of conditions favourable to the devoutly disposed, not to the leavening of the outside world by the spread of Christian doctrine.

It was part of the plan of Caesarius to secure independence to the communities he had founded; for in his capacity as bishop he addressed a letter to Pope Hormisda († 523) in which he asked the Pope's protection for his monasteries, one of which was for men and one for women, against possible interference from outside. He also begged that the Pope would confirm the grants of property which had already been made to these establishments. In his reply to this letter the Pope declared that the power of the bishop in regard to these settlements should be limited to visitation[144].

It must be borne in mind that Arles and the southern parts of Gaul were overrun by the Goths, who inclined to Arianism and opposed the Church of Rome. Fear of this heresy induced the prelates of the Church to favour Frankish rule. After the alliance of the Frankish kings with the Church

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[142] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Caesaria, Jan. 12, *Regula*, c. 66.

[143] Guettée, *Histoire de l'Église de France*, 1847, vol. 2, 46; Labbé, *Sacr. Conc. Collectio*, Conc. Agathense, canon nr 19.

[144] Guettée, *Histoire de l'Église de France*, 1847, vol. 2, p. 109.

the religious establishments in the land remained undisturbed, and numerous new monasteries were founded.

It is evident from what we know of the nuns at Arles, and of other bands of women whom the Church took under her protection, that they readily accepted life on the conditions proffered and were content to be controlled and protected by men. It is only when the untamed German element with its craving for self-assertion came in, that difficulties between the bishops and heads of nunneries arose, that women of barbarian origin like Radegund, Chrodield, and others, appealed to the authority of ruling princes against the bishop, and asserted an independence not always in accordance with the usual conceptions of Christian virtue and tolerance.

§ 2. St Radegund and the Nunnery at Poitiers

Certain settlements for women in northern France claim to have existed from a very early period, chiefly on the ground of their association with Geneviève, patron saint of Paris, and with Chrothild (Clothilde, † 545), wife of the first Christian king of the Franks. The legend of St Geneviève must be received with caution[145]; while bands of women certainly dwelt at Paris and elsewhere previously to the Frankish invasion, under the protection of the Church, it is doubtful whether they owed their existence to Geneviève.

A fictitious glamour of sanctity has been cast by legendary lore around the name and the doings of Queen Chrothild, because her union with King Clovis, advocated by the Gallo-Roman Church party, led to his conversion to Christianity[146]. In the pages of Gregory's history the real Chrothild stands out imperious, revengeful and unscrupulous. It is quite credible that she did service for a time as deaconess (diacona) at the church of Tours, and that she founded a religious house for women at the royal farm Les Andelys near Rouen, but we can hardly believe that the life she lived there was that of a devout nun.

Radegund of Poitiers and Ingetrud of Tours are the first Frankish women who are known to have founded and ruled over nunneries in France. Their activity belongs to the latter half of the 6th century, which is a date somewhat later than that of the official acceptance of Christianity, and one at which the overlordship of the Franks was already well established throughout France. The settlements they founded lay in close proximity to cities which were strongholds of Church government. Poitiers had become an important religious centre through the influence of St Hilary, and Tours, to which the shrine of St Martin attracted many travellers, was of such importance that it has been called the centre of religion and culture in France at this period.

The historian Gregory, afterwards bishop of Tours, to whom we are largely indebted for our knowledge of this period, was personally acquainted with the women at Tours and at Poitiers. He probably owed his appointment to the bishopric of Tours in 573 to the favour he had found with Radegund[147]. He has treated of her in his history and has written an account of her burial at which he officiated[148], whilst a chapter of his book on the *Glory of Martyrs* praises the fragment of the Holy Cross[149], which had been sent to Radegund from Constantinople and from which the nunnery at Poitiers took its name.

Besides this information two drafts of the life of Radegund are extant, the one written by her devoted friend and admirer the Latin poet Fortunatus, afterwards bishop of Poitiers, the other by the nun Baudonivia, Radegund's pupil and an inmate of her nunnery[150]. Fortunatus has moreover celebrated his intercourse with Radegund in a number of verses, which throw great light on their interesting personal relations[151].

A letter is also extant written by Radegund herself and preserved by Gregory in which she addresses a number of bishops on the objects of her nunnery. She begs the prelates of the Church to protect her institution after her death and, if need be, assist those who are carrying on life there in her spirit against hindrance from without and opposition from within. The letter is in the usual wordy style of the Latin of that day.

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[145] Keller, Ch., *Étude critique sur le texte de la vie de Ste Geneviève*, 1881; also *A. SS. Boll.*, St Genovefa, Jan. 3.

[146] Darboy, Mgr, *Sainte Clothilde*, 1865; also *A. SS. Boll.*, St Chrothildis, June 3.

[147] Giesebrecht, W., *Fränkische Geschichte des Gregorius*, 1851, Einleitung xviii.

[148] Gregorius Tur., *De Gloria Confessorum*, ch. 106 (in Migne, *Patrol. Cursus Completus*, vol. 71).

[149] Gregorius Tur., *De Gloria Martyrum*, ch. 5 (in Migne, *Patrol. Cursus Compl.*, vol. 71).

[150] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Radegundis, Aug. 13 (contains both these accounts).

[151] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, edit. Nisard, 1887.

'Freed from the claims of a worldly life, with divine help and holy grace, I,' she says, 'have willingly chosen the life of religion at the direction of Christ; turning my thoughts and powers towards helping others, the Lord assisting me that my good intentions towards them may be turned to their weal. With the assistance of gifts granted me by the noble lord and king Clothacar, I have founded a monastery (monasterium) for maidens (puellae); after founding it I made it a grant of all that royal liberality had bestowed on me; moreover to the band assembled by me with Christ's help, I have given the rule according to which the holy Caesaria lived, and which the holy president (antistes) Caesarius of Arles wisely compiled from the teachings of the holy fathers. With the consent of the noble bishop of this district and others, and at the desire of our congregation, I have accepted as abbess my sister, dame Agnes, whom from youth upwards I have loved and educated as a daughter; and next to God's will I have conformed to her authority. I myself, together with my sisters, have followed the apostolic example and have granted away by charter all our worldly possessions, in fearful remembrance of Ananias and Sapphira, retaining nought of our own. But since the events and duration of human life are uncertain, since also the world is drawing to its close (mundo in finem currente), many serving their own rather than the divine will, I myself, impelled by the love of God, submit to you this letter, which contains my request, begging you to carry it out in the name of Christ[152].'

Radegund was one of an unconquered German race. Her father was Hermafried, leader of the Thüringians, her mother a grandniece of the great Gothic king, Theodoric. She was captured as a child together with her brother in the forest wilds of Thüringen during one of the raids made into that district by the Frankish kings Theuderic (Thierry) of Metz, and Clothacar (Clothair) of Soissons. Clothacar appropriated the children as part of his share of the booty and sent Radegund to a 'villa' in the neighbourhood of Aties, in what became later the province of Picardie, where she was brought up and educated. 'Besides occupations usual to those of her sex,' her biographer says, 'she had a knowledge of letters' (litteris est erudita). From Aties she vainly tried to make her escape, and at the age of about twelve was taken to the royal farm near Soissons and there married to Clothacar[153]. In the list of King Clothacar's seven recognised wives Radegund stands fifth[154].

From the first Radegund was averse to this union. She was wedded to an earthly bridegroom but not therefore divided from the heavenly one[155]. Her behaviour towards her husband as described by her biographers can hardly be called becoming to her station as queen. She was so devoted to charitable work, we are told, that she often kept the king waiting at meals, a source of great annoyance to him, and under some pretext she frequently left him at night. If a man of learning came to the court she would devote herself to him, entirely neglecting her duty to the king[156]. Quarrels between the couple were frequent, and the king declared that he was married to a nun rather than to a queen[157]. The murder of her younger brother finally turned the balance of the queen's feelings against the king. With fearless determination she broke down all barriers. She was not lacking in personal courage, and had once calmly confronted a popular uproar caused by her having set fire to a sacred grove[158]. Now, regardless of consequences, she left the court and went to Noyon, where she sought the protection of Bishop Medardus († 545), who was influential among the many powerful prelates of his day[159]. But the bishop hesitated, his position was evidently not so assured that he could, by acceding to the queen's request, risk drawing on himself the king's anger[160]. However Radegund's stern admonition

[152] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.* bk 9, ch. 42.

[153] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.* bk 3, ch. 7; Fortunatus, *Vita*, ch. 2-4.

[154] Giesebrecht, W., *Fränkische Geschichte des Gregorius*, 1851, appendix.

[155] Fortunatus, *Vita*, ch. 3.

[156] Ibid., ch. 10.

[157] Ibid., ch. 5.

[158] Baudonivia, *Vita*, ch. 2.

[159] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Medardus, June 8.

[160] Commentators are much exercised by this summary breaking of the marriage tie; some urge that Radegund's union had not

prevailed: 'If you refuse to consecrate me,' she cried, 'a lamb will be lost to the flock[161].' Medardus so far consented as to consecrate her a deaconess, a term applied at the time to those who, without belonging to any special order, were under the protection of the Church.

In the oratory of St Jumer Radegund now offered up the embroidered clothes and jewelry she was wearing, her robe (indumentum), her precious stones (gemma), and her girdle weighty with gold. Both her biographers[162] lay stress on this act of self-denial, which was the more noteworthy as love of gorgeous apparel and jewelry was characteristic of early Frankish royalty. Kings and queens were content to live in rural dwellings which were little more than barns; life in cities was altogether uncongenial to them, but they made up for this by a display of sumptuous clothes as a mark of their rank. Already during her life with the king Radegund is described as longing for a hair-cloth garment as a sign of unworldliness. She now definitely adopted the raiment of a nun, a dress made of undyed wool.

She subsequently wandered westwards from Noyon and came into the district between Tours and Poitiers, where she settled for some time at a 'villa' her husband had given her called Sais[163]. She entered into friendly relations with the recluse Jean of Chînon (Johannes Monasteriensis[164]), a native of Brittany, who with many other recluses like himself enjoyed the reputation of great holiness. Jean of Chînon is represented as strengthening Radegund in her resolution to devote herself to religion, and it is probable that he helped her with practical advice.

Radegund now devoted herself to the relief of distress of every kind, her practical turn of mind leading her to offer help in physical as well as in mental cases. Her biographer tells us how – like a new Martha, with a love of active life – she shrank from no disease, not even from leprosy[165].

When she saw how many men and women sought her relief the wish to provide permanently for them arose. She owned property outside Poitiers which she devoted to founding a settlement for women; in all probability she also had a house for men near it[166]. Various references to the settlement show that it extended over a considerable area. Like other country residences or 'villae,' it was surrounded by walls and had the look of a fortress, although situated in a peaceful district. As many as two hundred nuns lived here at the time of Radegund's death[167]. When the house was ready to receive its inmates, they entered it in a procession starting from Poitiers. We hear that by this time the doings of Radegund 'had so far increased her reputation that crowds collected on the roofs to see them pass.'

King Clothacar, however, did not calmly submit to being deserted by his wife; he determined to go to Poitiers with his son to find her and to take her back. But the queen, firm in her resolve, declared she would sooner die than return to her husband. She notified this resolution to Bishop Germanus of Paris, who besought the king not to go to Poitiers. His entreaties were successful. Clothacar left his wife unmolested, and seems to have come to some kind of agreement with her. In her letter to the bishops, Radegund speaks of him as the noble lord, King Clothacar, not as her husband.

Radegund did not herself preside over the women in her nunnery. With their consent the youthful Agnes, the pupil of Radegund, but by no means her intellectual equal, was appointed abbess. Difficulties very soon occurred between Radegund and the bishop of Poitiers, who was probably jealous of her attracting religious women from himself. Radegund is said to have gone to Arles in

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been blessed by the Church. In the *A. SS.* it is argued that the Gallic bishop Medardus in pronouncing her divorce acted in ignorance of certain canons of the Church.

[161] Fortunatus, *Vita*, c. 10.

[162] Ibid., ch. 11; Baudonivia, *Vita*, ch. 6.

[163] Ibid., *Vita*, ch. 12.

[164] Stadler und Heim, *Vollständiges Heiligenlexicon*, Johannes, nr 52; Gregorius Tur., *De Gloria Confessorum*, ch. 23.

[165] Fortunatus, *Vita*, ch. 26.

[166] Lucchi, *Vie de Venantius Fortunatus*, ch. 85 (in Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, edit. Nisard, 1887).

[167] Gregorius Tur., *De Gloria Confessorum*, ch. 106.

order to learn about the life of the women gathered together there. Against the accuracy of this statement it is urged[168] that a written copy of the rule, together with an eloquent exhortation to religious perfection and virtue, was forwarded from Arles by the Abbess Caesaria († c. 560), the second of that name.

The rule was established in Poitiers in 559. In the previous year King Clothacar, Radegund's husband, through the death of his brothers and their sons, had become sole king of France[169]. His monarchy thus included the whole of what is now called France, the contiguous districts of Burgundy and Thüringen, and the lands which had been taken from the Goths in Italy and Spain. This great kingdom remained united for a few years only. In 561 Clothacar died and his realm was divided by his four sons, with whose reigns a tempestuous period begins in the history of the Franks. During more than forty years the rivalry and jealousy of the monarchs, aggravated by the mutual hatred of the queens Brunihild and Fredegund, overwhelmed the country with plots, counterplots, and unceasing warfare.

An eloquent appeal to the kings was called forth from the historian Gregory by the contemplation of this state of things. It is contained in the preface to the fifth book of his history. Calling upon them to desist from the complications of civil war, he thus addresses them:

'What are you bent on? What do you ask for? Have you not all in plenty? There is luxury in your homes; in your storehouses wine, corn, and oil abound; gold and silver are heaped up in your treasuries. One thing only you lack; while you have not peace, you have not the grace of God. Why must the one snatch things from the other? Why must the one covet the other's goods?'

Living at Poitiers Radegund was close to the scene of these turmoils. The cities of Tours and Poitiers had fallen to the share of Charibert. When he died in 562 his kingdom was divided between his three brothers by cities rather than by districts. Tours and Poitiers fell to Sigebert of Rheims, who was comparatively peace-loving among these brothers. But his brother Chilperic of Soissons, dissatisfied with his own share, invaded Touraine and Poitou and forced Poitiers to submit to him. He was subsequently made to give way to Sigebert, but this did not bring their feuds to an end. In 575 Sigebert was raised on the shield and proclaimed king of Neustria (the western part of France), but on being lifted down from the shield he was forthwith assassinated. New complications resulted and new factions were formed. In the interest of her son, Brunihild, the powerful widow of Sigebert, pursued with inveterate hatred Chilperic and his wife, the renowned Fredegund, for she looked upon Fredegund as the assassin of Sigebert her husband and of Galesuith her sister.

Radegund had close relations with these impetuous, headstrong and combative persons. King Sigebert was throughout well disposed towards her.

'In order to show his love and affection for her,' says Gregory[170], 'he sent a deputation of ecclesiastics to the Emperor Justinus II and his wife Sophia at Constantinople.' The Franks entertained friendly relations with the imperial court, and the surviving members of Radegund's family had found a refuge there. In due course gifts were sent to Radegund, – a fragment of the Holy Cross set in gold and jewels, together with other relics of apostles and martyrs. These relics arrived at Tours some time between 566 and 573[171]. It was Radegund's wish that they should be fetched from Tours to her nunnery by a procession headed by the bishop of Poitiers. But Bishop Maroveus, who was always ready to thwart the queen, forthwith left for his country seat when he heard of her request[172]. Radegund, much incensed, applied in her difficulty to King Sigebert, and Eufronius, bishop of Tours, was ordered to conduct the translation.

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[168] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, edit. Nisard, 1887, note 111, 3, p. 214.

[169] Gérard, P. A. F., *Histoire des Francs d'Austrasie*, 1864, vol. 1, p. 272.

[170] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.* bk 9, ch. 40.

[171] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, edit. Nisard, 1887, note 11, 1, p. 76.

[172] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.* bk 8, ch. 40.

Radegund's adoption of the religious profession in no way diminished her intercourse with the outside world or the influence she had had as queen. We find her described as living on terms of friendship with Queen Brunihild 'whom she loved dearly.' Even Queen Fredegund, Brunihild's rival and enemy, seems to have had some kind of intimacy with her. Fortunatus in one of his poems suggests that Fredegund had begged Radegund to offer prayers for the prosperity of her husband Chilperic.

It seems that Radegund's word was generally esteemed, for in a family feud when a certain Gundovald claimed to be the son of Clothacar and aspired to the succession, we find him coupling the name of Radegund with that of Ingetrud in asseveration of his statements.

'If you would have the truth of what I declare proven,' Gundovald exclaimed, 'go and enquire of Radegund of Poitiers and of Ingetrud of Tours; they will tell you that what I maintain is the truth[173].'

In an age of endless entanglements, Radegund evidently did her best to mediate between contending parties. 'She was always favourable to peace and interested in the weal of the realm whatever changes befell,' writes the nun Baudonivia[174]. 'She esteemed the kings and prayed for their welfare, and taught us nuns always to pray for their safety. If she heard that they had fallen out she felt troubled: and she appealed in writing, sometimes to one, sometimes to another, in order that they should not fight and war together, but keep peaceful, so that the country might rest securely. Similarly she exhorted the leaders to help the great princes with sensible advice, in order that the common people and the lands under their rule might prosper.'

What is here said of her peace-loving disposition is corroborated by traits in her character mentioned by Gregory and Fortunatus. The friendly intercourse between Radegund and Fortunatus necessitates a few remarks on the life and doings of this latter-day Roman poet before he came to Poitiers and entered the Church.

For years Fortunatus had lived the life of a fashionable man of letters at Ravenna, but about the year 568 the occupation of that city by the Langobards forced him to leave Italy. He wandered north from court to court, from city to city, staying sometimes with a barbarian prince, sometimes with a Church-prelate, who, one and the other, were equally ready to entertain the cultivated southerner. In return for the hospitality so liberally bestowed on him he celebrated his personal relations to his benefactors in complimentary verses. He has good wishes for prelates on the occasion of their appointment, flattering words for kings, and pleasant greetings for friends. In some of his poems he gives interesting descriptions of the districts through which he has travelled, his account of a part of the Rhine valley being specially graphic[175]. He glorifies the saints of the Church in terms formerly used for celebrating classic divinities, and addresses Bishop Medardus of Noyon as the possessor of Olympus[176]. He even brings in Venus to celebrate a royal wedding, and lets her utter praises of the queen Brunihild[177].

Besides these poetical writings Fortunatus has left prose accounts of several of his contemporaries. An easy-going man of pleasant disposition, he combined in a curious way the traditions of cultured Latinity with the theological bent peculiar to the Christian literature of the day. His poems, though somewhat wanting in ideas, show a ready power of versification and a great facility in putting things politely and pleasantly. He wrote some hymns for church celebration which became widely known. The one beginning 'Pange, lingua, gloriosi' was adopted into the Roman Liturgy for the adoration of the Cross on Good Friday, and it was repeatedly modified and re-written during the Middle Ages. Another hymn written by him is the celebrated 'Vexilla regis prodeunt,' the words

[173] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.* bk 7, ch. 36.

[174] Baudonivia, *Vita*, c. 11.

[175] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, edit. Nisard, 1887, bk 10, nr 9.

[176] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, edit. Nisard, bk 2, nr 16.

[177] Ibid., bk 6, nr 1.

of which are comparatively poor, but the tune, the authorship of which is unknown, has secured it world-wide fame[178].

The relic of the Holy Cross kept at Poitiers may have inspired Fortunatus with the idea of composing these hymns; in a flattering epistle, written obviously at Radegund's request, he thanks Justinus and Sophia of Constantinople for the splendour of their gift to her[179].

Fortunatus had come to Tours on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St Martin, to whose intercession he attributed the restoration of his eyesight. Passing through Poitiers he made the acquaintance of Radegund, who at once acquired a great influence over him.

'Radegund wished me to stay, so I stayed,' he writes from Poitiers to some friends[180], and he enlarges on the superiority, intellectual and otherwise, of the queen, whose plain clothing and simple mode of life greatly impressed him. Naming Eustachia, Fabiola, Melania, and all the other holy women he can think of, he describes how she surpasses them all. 'She exemplifies whatever is praiseworthy in them,' he says; 'I come across deeds in her such as I only read about before. Her spirit is clothed with flesh that has been overcome, and which while yet abiding in her body holds all things cheap as dross. Dwelling on earth, she has entered heaven, and freed from the shackles of sense, seeks companionship in the realms above. All pious teaching is food to her; whether taught by Gregory or Basil, by bold Athanasius or gentle Hilary (two who were companions in the light of one cause); whether thundered by Ambrose or flashed forth by Jerome; whether poured forth by Augustine in unceasing flow, by gentle Sedulius or subtle Orosius. It is as though the rule of Caesarius had been written for her. She feeds herself with food such as this and refuses to take meat unless her mind be first satisfied. I will not say more of what by God's witness is manifest. Let everyone who can send her poems by religious writers; they will be esteemed as great gifts though the books be small. For he who gives holy writings to her may hold himself as giving to the accepted temples (templa) of God.'

Judging from this passage, Nisard, the modern editor of Fortunatus, thinks it probable that Radegund was acquainted with Greek as well as with Latin[181], a statement which one cannot endorse.

The queen was much interested in the poet's writings. 'For many years,' he writes in one poem, 'I have been here composing verses at your order; accept these in which I address you in the terms you merit[182].'

Radegund too wrote verses under Fortunatus' guidance. 'You have sent me great verses on small tablets,' he writes. 'You succeed in giving back honey to dead wax; on festal days you prepare grand entertainments, but I hunger more for your words than for your food. The little poems you send are full of pleasing earnestness; you charm our thoughts by these words[183].'

Among the poems of Fortunatus are found two which modern criticism no longer hesitates in attributing to Radegund. They are epistles in verse written in the form of elegies, and were sent by the queen to some of her relatives at Constantinople. Judging by internal evidence a third poem, telling the story of Galesuith, Queen Brunihild's sister, who was murdered shortly after her marriage to King Chilperic, was composed by her also; though Nisard claims for her not the form of the poem but only its inspiration[184]. 'The cry,' he says, 'which sounds through these lines, is the cry of a woman. Not of a German woman only, who has in her the expression of tender and fiery passion, but a suggestion of the strength of a woman of all countries and for all time.' The lament in this poem is intoned by several women in turn. Whoever may have composed it, the depth of feeling which it displays is certainly most remarkable.

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[178] Mone, F. J., *Lateinische Hymnen des Mittelalters*, 1853-5, vol 1, 101; Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, edit. Nisard, note, p. 76.

[179] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, Appendix, nr 2.

[180] Ibid., bk 8, nr 1.

[181] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, note 9, p. 213.

[182] Ibid., Appendix, nr 16.

[183] Ibid., nr 31.

[184] Nisard, Ch., *Des poesies de Radegonde attribuées jusqu'ici à Fortunat*, 1889, p. 5.

One of these poems written by Radegund is addressed to her cousin Hermalafred, who had fled from Thüringen when Radegund was captured, and who had afterwards taken service in the imperial army of Justinian[185]. Hermalafred was endeared to Radegund by the recollections of her childhood, and in vivid remembrance of events which had made her a captive she begins her letter[186] in the following strain:

'Sad is condition of war! Jealous is fate of human things! How proud kingdoms are shattered by a sudden fall! Those long-prosperous heights (culmina) lie fallen, destroyed by fire in the great onset. Flickering tongues of flame lapped round the dwelling which before rose in royal splendour. Grey ashes cover the glittering roof which rose on high shining with burnished metal. Its rulers are captive in the enemy's power, its chosen bands have fallen to lowly estate. The crowd of comely servants all dwelling together were smitten to the dust in one day; the brilliant circle, the multitude of powerful dependents, no grave contains them, they lack the honours of death. More brilliant than the fire shone the gold of her hair, that of my father's sister, who lay felled to the ground, white as milk. Alas, for the corpses unburied that cover the battle-field, a whole people collected together in one burial place. Not Troy alone bewails her destruction, the land of Thüringen has experienced a like carnage. Here a matron in fetters is dragged away by her streaming hair, unable to bid a sad farewell to her household gods. The captive is not allowed to press his lips to the threshold, nor turn his face towards what he will never more behold. Bare feet in their tread trample in the blood of a husband, the loving sister passes over her brother's corpse. The child still hangs on its mother's lips though snatched from her embrace; in funeral wail no tear is shed. Less sad is the fate of the child who loses its life, the gasping mother has lost even the power of tears. Barbarian though I am, I could not surpass the weeping though my tears flowed for ever. Each had his sorrow, I had it all, my private grief was also the public grief. Fate was kind to those whom the enemy cut down; I alone survive to weep over the many. But not only do I sorrow for my dead relatives, those too I deplore whom life has preserved. Often my tear-stained face is at variance with my eyes; my murmurs are silenced, but my grief is astir. I look and long for the winds to bring me a message, from none of them comes there a sign. Hard fate has snatched from my embrace the kinsman by whose loving presence I once was cheered. Ah, though so far away, does not my solicitude pursue thee? has the bitterness of misfortune taken away thy sweet love? Recall what from thy earliest age upwards, O Hermalafred, I, Radegund, was ever to thee. How much thou didst love me when I was but an infant; O son of my father's brother, O most beloved among those of my kin! Thou didst supply for me the place of my dead father, of my esteemed mother, of a sister and of a brother. Held by thy gentle hand, hanging on thy sweet kisses, as a child I was soothed by thy tender speech. Scarce a time there was when the hour did not bring thee, now ages go by and I hear not a word from thee! I wrestle with the wild anguish that is hidden in my bosom; oh, that I could call thee back, friend, whenever or wherever it might be. If father, or mother, or royal office has hitherto held thee, though thou didst hasten now to me, thy coming is late. Perhaps 'tis a sign of fate that I shall soon miss thee altogether, dearest, for unrequited affection cannot long continue. I used to be anxious when one house did not shelter us; when thou wast absent, I thought thee gone for ever. Now the east holds thee as the west holds me; the ocean's waters restrain me, and thou art kept away from me by the sea reddened by the beams of the sun (unda rubri). The earth's expanse stretches between those who are dear to each other, a world divides those whom no distance separated before.'

She goes on to speculate where her cousin may be, and she says if she were not held by her monastery she would go to him; storm and wind and the thought of shipwreck would be nothing to her. The fear of incriminating her, she says, was the cause of the death of her murdered brother. Would that she had died instead of him! She beseeches Hermalafred to send news of himself and of his sisters, and ends her letter with these words: 'May Christ grant my prayer, may this letter reach

[185] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, edit. Nisard, 1887, note 111, 2, 3, etc., p. 284.

[186] Ibid., 'De Excidio Thoringiae,' Appendix, nr 1.

those beloved ones, so that a letter indited with sweet messages may come to me in return! May the sufferings wrought by languishing hope be alleviated by the swift advent of sure tidings!'

This poem expresses great and lasting affection for her race. But her relatives were a source of continued grief to the queen. She received no reply to her letter to Hermalafred, and later she heard of his death. She received this news from his nephew Artachis, who sent her at the same time a present of silk, and Radegund then wrote another letter[187] which is addressed to Artachis and is even sadder in tone. In it she deplores the death of Hermalafred, and asks the boy Artachis to let her have frequent news of himself sent to her monastery.

It is pleasant to turn from the sad side of Radegund's life which these poems exhibit to her friendly intercourse with Fortunatus, which was no doubt a source of great comfort to her during the last years of her life. With the exception of short intervals for journeys, the Latin poet lived entirely at Poitiers, where he adopted the religious profession, and dwelt in constant communication with Radegund and the abbess Agnes, in whose society he learned to forget the land of his birth. The numerous poems and verses which he has addressed to these ladies throw a strong light on his attitude towards them and their great affection for him.

Radegund was wont to decorate the altar of her church with a profusion of flowers[188]. Again and again the poet sends her flowers, accompanying his gift with a few lines. With a basket of violets he sends the following[189]:

'If the time of year had given me white lilies, or had offered me roses laden with perfume, I had culled them as usual in the open or in the ground of my small garden, and had sent them, small gifts to great ladies. But since I am short of the first and wanting in the second, he who offers violets must in love be held to bring roses. Among the odorous herbs which I send, these purple violets have a nobleness of their own. They shine tinted with purple which is regal, and unite in their petals both perfume and beauty. What they represent may you both exemplify, that by association a transient gift may gain lasting worth.'

The interchange of gifts between the poet and the ladies was mutual, the nuns of Ste Croix lacked not the good things of this world and were generous in giving. Fortunatus thanks them for gifts of milk, prunes, eggs, and tempting dishes[190]. On one occasion they send him a meal of several courses, vegetables and meat, almost too much for one servant to carry, and he describes his greedy (gulosus) enjoyment of it in graphic terms[191]. Are we to take the lines literally which tell us that when they entertained him at dinner the table was scarcely visible for the roses with which it was strewn, and that the foliage and flowers spread about made the room into a bower of greenery[192]?

Sometimes a fit of indigestion was the result of the too liberal enjoyment of what his friends so freely provided[193]. The poet was evidently fond of the pleasures of the table, and accentuates the material rather than the spiritual side of things. Once addressing Agnes he tells her that she shines in the blending of two things, she provides refreshment for the poet's mind and excellent food for his body[194].

But the 6th century poet is generally somewhat plain-spoken on delicate topics. In a poem addressed to Radegund and Agnes he openly defends himself against the imputation that the tone of his relations to them is other than is signified by the terms mother and sister by which he is wont

[187] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, Appendix, nr 3.
[188] Ibid., bk 8, nr 8.
[189] Ibid., bk 8, nr 6.
[190] Ibid., bk 11, nr 10.
[191] Ibid., bk 11, nr 9.
[192] Fortunatus, *Opera poetica*, bk 11, nr 11.
[193] Ibid., bk 11, nr 22.
[194] Ibid., bk 11, nr 8.

to address them[195]. Still these platonic relations do not preclude the use of expressions which border on the amorous, for he tells them that they each possess one half of him[196], and he calls Radegund the light of his eyes[197].

'My dear mother, my sweet sister,' he writes, 'what shall I say, left alone in the absence of the love of my heart[198]?..' And again[199], 'May a good night enfold my mother and my sister; this brings them the good wishes of a son and a brother. May the choir of angels visit your hearts and hold sweet converse with your thoughts. The time of night forces me to be brief in my greetings; I am sending only six lines of verse for you both!'

The vocabulary used to denote the different kinds of human affection contains, no doubt, many terms common to all, and if the poems of Fortunatus sometimes suggest the lover, it must be remembered that as poems of friendship they are among the earliest of their kind. They are throughout elegant, graceful, and characterized by a playful tenderness which a translator must despair of rendering.

Radegund died in the year 587, and her death was a terrible loss to the inmates of her settlement. Gregory, bishop of Tours, who officiated at the burial, gives a detailed description of it, telling how some two hundred women crowded round the bier, bewailing her death in such words as these[200]:

'To whom, mother, hast thou left us orphans? To whom then shall we turn in our distress? We left our parents, our relatives and our homes, and we followed thee. What have we before us now, but tears unceasing, and grief that never can end? Verily, this monastery is to us more than the greatness of village and city… The earth is now darkened to us, this place has been straitened since we no longer behold thy countenance. Woe unto us who are left by our holy mother! Happy those who left this world whilst thou wast still alive…!'

The nun Baudonivia says that she cannot speak of the death of Radegund without sobs choking her. Her account was written some time after Radegund's death during the rule of the abbess Didimia to whom it is dedicated; Didimia probably succeeded Leubover, who witnessed the serious outbreak of the nuns at Poitiers. This outbreak throws an interesting light on the temper of professed religious women at this period, and illustrates how needful it was that a religious establishment should be ruled by a woman of character and determination at a time when the monastic system was only in its infancy.

[195] Ibid., bk 11, nr 6.

[196] Ibid., Appendix, nr 21.

[197] Ibid., bk 11, nr 2.

[198] Ibid., bk 11, nr 7.

[199] Ibid., Appendix, nr 15.

[200] Gregorius Tur., *De Gloria Confessorum*, ch. 106.

§ 3. The Revolt of the Nuns at Poitiers [201] . Convent Life in the North

The revolt of the nuns at Poitiers, which happened within a few years of the death of Radegund, shows more than anything else the imperious and the unbridled passions that were to be found at this period in a nunnery. Evidently the adoption of the religious profession did not deter women from openly rebelling against the authority of the ministers of the Church, and from carrying out their purpose by force of arms. The outbreak at Poitiers, of which Gregory has given a description, shows what proud, vindictive, and unrelenting characters the Frankish convent of the 6th century harboured.

Already during Radegund's lifetime difficulties had arisen. King Chilperic had placed his daughter Basina in the nunnery, and after a time he asked that she should leave to be married. Radegund refused and her authority prevailed, but we shall find this Basina taking an active part in the rebellion. Other incidents show how difficult it was for Radegund even to uphold discipline. A nun escaped through a window by aid of a rope and, taking refuge in the basilica of St Hilary, made accusations which Gregory, who was summoned to enquire into the matter, declared to be unfounded. The fugitive repented and was permitted to return to the nunnery; she was hoisted up by means of ropes so that she might enter by the way she had gone out. She asked to be confined in a cell apart from the community, and there she remained in seclusion till the news of the rebellion encouraged her to again break loose.

Agnes the abbess appointed by Radegund died in 589. The convent chose a certain Leubover to succeed her, but this appointment roused the ire of Chrodield, another inmate of the nunnery.

Chrodield held herself to be the daughter of King Charibert, and relying on her near connection with royalty persuaded forty nuns to take an oath that they would help her to remove the hated Leubover and would appoint her, Chrodield, as abbess in her stead. Led by Chrodield who had been joined by her cousin Basina, the daughter of Chilperic mentioned above, the whole party left the nunnery. 'I am going to my royal relatives,' Chrodield said, 'to inform them of the contumely we have experienced. Not as daughters of kings are we treated but as though we were lowly born[202].'

Leaving Poitiers the women came to Tours where Chrodield applied for assistance to the bishop and historian Gregory. In vain he admonished her, promising to speak to Bishop Maroveus of Poitiers in her behalf, and urging her to abide by his decision, as the penalty might be excommunication.

The feeling of indignation in the women must have been strong, since nothing he could say dissuaded them from their purpose. 'Nothing shall prevent us from appealing to the kings,' said Chrodield, 'to them we are nearly related.'

The women had come on foot from Poitiers to Tours, regardless of hardships. They had had no food and arrived at a time of year when the roads were deep in mud. Gregory at last persuaded them to postpone their departure for the court till the summer.

Then Chrodield, leaving the nuns under the care of Basina, continued her journey to her uncle, King Guntchram of Orléans, who at the time was residing at Chalôns-sur-Saône. She was well received by him and came back to Tours there to await the convocation of bishops who were to enquire into the rights of her case. But she found on her return that many of her followers had disbanded, and some had married. The arrival too of the bishops was delayed, so that she felt it expedient to return with her followers to Poitiers where they took possession of the basilica of St Hilary.

They now prepared for open hostility. 'We are queens,' they said, 'and we shall not return to the monastery unless the abbess is deposed.'

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[201] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, bk 9, chs. 39-44; bk 10, chs. 15-17, 20.

[202] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, bk 9, ch. 39.

At this juncture they were joined by other dissatisfied spirits, 'murderers, adulterers, law-breakers and other wrong-doers,' as Gregory puts it[203]. The nun too who had previously escaped and been taken back, now broke loose from her cell and returned to the basilica of Hilary.

The bishop of Bordeaux and his suffragan bishops of Angoulême, Perigueux, and Poitiers, now assembled by order of the king (Guntchram), and called upon the women to come into the monastery, and on their refusal the prelates entered the basilica of St Hilary in a body urging them to obey. The women refused, and the ban of excommunication was pronounced, upon which they and their followers attacked the prelates. In great fear the bishops and clergy made off helter-skelter, not even pausing to bid each other farewell. One deacon was so terrified that in his eagerness to get away he did not even ride down to the ford, but plunged with his horse straight into the river.

King Childebert († 596), the son and successor of King Sigebert, now ordered Count Macco to put an end to the rebellion by force of arms, while Gondegisel, bishop of Bordeaux, sent a circular letter to his brethren, describing the indignity to which he had been exposed. Chrodield's chance of success was evidently dwindling, when she determined to carry her point by a bold assault, the account of which may fitly stand in the words of Gregory[204].

'The vexations,' he says, 'which sown by the devil had sprung up in the monastery at Poitiers, daily increased in troublesomeness. For Chrodield, having collected about her, as mentioned above, a band of murderers, wrong-doers, law-breakers, and vagrants of all kinds, dwelt in open revolt and ordered her followers to break into the nunnery at night and forcibly to bear off the abbess. But the abbess, on hearing the noise of their approach, asked to be carried in front of the shrine of the Holy Cross, for she was suffering from a gouty foot, and thought that the Holy Cross would serve her as a protection in danger. The armed bands rushed in, ran about the monastery by the light of a torch in search of the abbess, and entering the oratory found her extended on the ground in front of the shrine of the Holy Cross. Then one of them, more audacious than the rest, while about to commit the impious deed of cutting her down with his sword, was stabbed by another, through the intercession I believe of Divine Providence. He fell in his own blood and did not carry out the intention he had impiously formed. Meanwhile the prioress Justina, together with other sisters, spread the altar-cover, which lay before the cross, over the abbess, and extinguished the altar candles. But those who rushed in with bared swords and lances tore her clothes, almost lacerated the hands of the nuns, and carried off the prioress whom they mistook for the abbess in the darkness, and, with her cloak dragged off and her hair coming down, they would have given her into custody at the basilica of St Hilary. But as they drew near the church, and the sky grew somewhat lighter, they saw she was not the abbess and told her to go back to the monastery. Coming back themselves they secured the real abbess, dragged her away, and placed her in custody near the basilica of St Hilary in a place where Basina was living, and placed a watch over her by the door that no one should come to her rescue. Then in the dark of night they returned to the monastery and not being able to find a light, set fire to a barrel which they took from the larder and which had been painted with tar and was now dry. By the light of the bonfire they kindled, they plundered the monastery of all its contents, leaving nothing but what they could not carry off. This happened seven days before Easter.'

The bishop of Poitiers made one more attempt to interfere. He sent to Chrodield and asked her to set the abbess free on pain of his refusing to celebrate the Easter festival. 'If you do not release her,' he said, 'I shall bring her help with the assembled citizens.' But Chrodield emboldened by her success said to her followers: 'If anyone dare come to her rescue, slay her.'

She seems now to have been in possession of the monastery; still we find defection among her party. Basina, who throughout had shown a changeable disposition, repented and went to the imprisoned Leubover, who received her with open arms. The bishops, mindful of the treatment they

[203] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, bk 9, ch. 41.

[204] Ibid., bk 10, ch. 15.

had received, still refused to assemble in Poitiers while the state of affairs continued. But Count Macco with his armed bands made an attack on the women and their followers, causing 'some to be beaten down, others struck down by spears, and those who made most strenuous opposition to be cut down by the sword.'

Chrodield came forth from the nunnery holding on high the relic of the Cross; 'Do not, I charge you, use force of arms against me,' she cried, 'I am a queen, daughter to one king and cousin to another. Do not attack me, a time may come when I will take my revenge.' But no one took any notice of her. Her followers were dragged from the monastery and severely chastised. The bishops assembled and instituted a long enquiry into the grievances of Chrodield, and the accusations brought against Leubover by her. They seem to have been unfounded or insignificant. Leubover justified herself and returned to the monastery. Chrodield and Basina left Poitiers and went to the court of King Childebert.

At the next Church convocation the king tendered a request that these women should be freed from the ban of excommunication. Basina asked forgiveness and was allowed to return to the monastery. But the proud Chrodield declared that she would not set foot there while the abbess Leubover remained in authority. She maintained her independence and went to live in a 'villa' which the king had granted her, and from that time she passes from the stage of history.

The revolt of the nuns at Poitiers, which for two years defied the efforts of churchmen and laymen, is the more noteworthy in that it does not stand alone. Within a year we find a similar outbreak threatening the nunnery at Tours where a certain Berthegund, similarly disappointed of becoming abbess, collected malefactors and others about her and resorted to violent measures. The circumstances, which are also described by Gregory, differ in some respects from those of the insurrection at Ste Croix[205].

Ingetrud, the mother of Berthegund, had founded a nunnery at Tours close to the church of St Martin, and she urged her daughter, who was married, to come and live with her. When Berthegund did so, her husband appealed to Gregory, who threatened her with excommunication if she persisted in her resolve. She returned to her husband, but subsequently left him again and sent for advice to her brother who was bishop of Bordeaux. He decreed that she need not live with her husband if she preferred convent life. But when this bishop of Bordeaux died, his sister Berthegund and her mother Ingetrud quarrelled as to the inheritance of his property, and Ingetrud, much incensed against her daughter, determined at least to keep from Berthegund her own possessions at the nunnery and succession to her position there. She therefore appointed a niece of hers to succeed her as abbess after her death. When she died the convent of nuns looked upon this appointment as an infringement of their rights, but Gregory persuaded them to keep quiet and abide by the decision of their late abbess. Berthegund however would not agree to it. Against the advice of the bishop she appealed to the authority of King Childebert, who admitted her claim to the property. 'Furnished with his letter she came to the monastery and carried off all the moveable property, leaving nothing but its bare walls,' Gregory says. Afterwards she settled at Poitiers, where she spoke evil of her cousin the abbess of Tours, and altogether 'she did so much evil it were difficult to tell of it all.'

From the consideration of these events in central France we turn to the religious foundations for women in the northern districts. With the beginning of the 7th century a change which directly influenced convent life becomes apparent in the relations between the Frankish rulers and the representatives of Christianity. Influential posts at court were more and more frequently occupied by prelates of the Church, and kings and queens acted more directly as patrons of churches and monasteries. Hitherto the centres of religious influence had been in southern and central France, where the Gallo-Frankish population and influence predominated, and where monasteries flourished close to cities which had been strongholds of the Roman system of administration. New religious

[205] Gregorius Tur., *Hist. Franc.*, bk 9, ch. 33; bk 10, ch. 12.

settlements now grew up north of the rivers Seine and Marne, where the pure Frankish element prevailed and where Christianity regained its foothold owing to the patronage of ruling princes.

Whatever had survived of Latin culture and civilisation in these districts had disappeared before the influence of the heathen invaders; the men whose work it was to re-evangelise these districts found few traces of Christianity. Vedast (St Vaast, † 540), who was sent by bishop Remigius (St Rémy) of Rheims († 532) into the marshy districts of Flanders, found no Christians at Arras about the year 500, and only the ruins of one ancient church, which he rebuilt[206]. The author of the life of Vedast gives the ravages made in these districts by the Huns as the reason for the disappearance of Latin culture and of Christianity. But the author of the life of Eleutherius, bishop of Tournai († 531), holds that the Christians had fled from these districts to escape from the inroads of the heathen Franks[207].

It was chiefly by the foundation of monasteries in these districts that Christianity gained ground during the 7th century. 'Through the establishment of monasteries,' says Gérard[208], 'the new social order gained a foothold in the old Salic lands.' Among the names of those who took an active part in this movement stand the following: Wandregisil (St Vandrille, † 665) founder of the abbey of Fontenelle; Waneng († c. 688) founder of Fécamp; Filibert († 684) founder of Jumièges; Eligius bishop of Noyon († 658) and Audoenus (St Ouen, † 683) archbishop of Rouen. These men were in direct contact with the court and were much patronised by the ruling princes, especially by the holy queen Balthild. Early and reliable accounts concerning most of them are extant[209].

With regard to political events the 7th century is the most obscure period of Frankish history, for the history of Gregory of Tours comes to an end in 591. Feuds and quarrels as violent as those he depicts continued, and important constitutional changes took place as their result. The vast dominions brought under Frankish rule showed signs of definitely crystallising into Austrasia which included the purely Frankish districts of the north, and Burgundy and Neustria where Gallo-Frankish elements were prevalent.

The latter half of the life of the famous Queen Brunihild[210] takes its colouring from the rivalry between these kingdoms; during fifty years she was one of the chief actors in the drama of Frankish history. At one time she ruled conjointly with her son Childebert, and then as regent for her grandsons, over whom she domineered greatly. In the year 613, when she was over eighty years old, she was put to a cruel death by the nobles of Austrasia.

The judgments passed on this queen are curiously contradictory. Pope Gregory († 604) writes to her praising her great zeal in the cause of religion, and thanks her for the protection she has afforded to Augustine on his passage through France, which he considers a means to the conversion of England[211]. On the other hand the author of the life of St Columban[212], whom she expelled from Burgundy, calls her a very Jezebel[213]; and the author of the life of Desiderius, who was murdered in 608, goes so far as to accuse her of incestuous practices because of her marriage with her husband's nephew[214]. Indirect evidence is in favour of the conclusion that Queen Brunihild disliked monasticism; she was by birth of course a princess of the Gothic dynasty of Spain who had accepted Christianity in its Arian form.

During the reign of Brunihild's nephew Clothacar II († 628), under whose rule the different provinces were for a time united, a comprehensive and most interesting edict was issued, which

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[206] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Vedastus, Feb. 6.

[207] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Eleutherius, Feb. 20, *Vita* 1, ch. 3 (Potthast, Wegweiser: '*Vita auctore anonymo sed antiquo*').

[208] Gérard, P. A. F., *Histoire des Francs d'Austrasie*, 1864, vol. 1, p. 384.

[209] Comp. throughout *A. SS. Boll.*, St Wandregisilus, July 22; St Waningus, Jan. 9, etc.

[210] Drapeyron, L., *La reine Brunehilde*, 1867.

[211] Gregorius, Papa, *Epistolae*, liber 9, epist. 109 (in Migne, *Patrol. Cursus Compl.* vol. 77).

[212] St Columban who went abroad and died in 615 should be kept distinct from St Columba who died in 597, sometimes also called Columban. Both of them wrote rules for monks (cf. *Dictionary of Nat. Biography*).

[213] Bouquet, *Recueil Hist.*, vol. 3, p. 478.

[214] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Desiderius, May 23.

affords an insight into the efforts made to give stability to the relations between princes and the representatives of religion. In this edict, under heading 18, we are told that 'no maidens, holy widows or religious persons who are vowed to God, whether they stay at home or live in monasteries, shall be enticed away, or appropriated, or taken in marriage by making use of a special royal permit (praeceptum). And if anyone surreptitiously gets hold of a permit, it shall have no force. And should anyone by violent or other means carry off any such woman and take her to wife, let him be put to death. And if he be married in church and the woman who is appropriated, or who is on the point of being appropriated, seems to be a consenting party, they shall be separated, sent into exile, and their possessions given to their natural heirs[215].'

From these injunctions it can be gathered that the re-adjustment of social and moral relations was still in progress; women who were vowed to a religious life did not necessarily dwell in a religious settlement, and even if they did so they were not necessarily safe from being captured and thrown into subjection. Clothacar II had three wives at the same time and concubines innumerable; plurality of wives was indeed a prerogative of these Frankish kings.

Monastic life in northern France at this period was also in process of development. It has been mentioned how Radegund adopted the rule of life framed and put into writing by Caesarius at Arles. The rule contemporaneously instituted by Benedict at Nursia in central Italy spread further and further northwards, and was advocated by prelates of the Romish Church. It served as the model on which to reform the life of existing settlements[216].

During the first few centuries religious houses and communities had been founded here and there independently of each other, the mode of life and the routine observed depending in each case directly on the founder. Many and great were the attempts made by the advocates of convent life to formulate the type of an ideal existence outside the pale of social duties and family relations, in which piety, work and benevolence should be blended in just proportions. The questions how far the prelates of the Church should claim authority over the monastery, and what the respective positions of abbot or abbess and bishop should be, led to much discussion.

During the period under consideration the rules drafted by different leaders of monastic thought were not looked upon as mutually exclusive. We are told in the life of Filibert († 684), written by a contemporary[217], that he made selections from 'the graces of St Basil, the rule of Macarius, the decrees of Benedict and the holy institutions of Columban.' Eligius, bishop of Noyon, says in a charter which he drafted for the monastery founded by him at Solemny that the inmates of the settlement shall follow the rules of St Benedict and of St Columban[218].

Towards the close of the 6th century Columban came from Ireland into France and northern Italy and founded a number of religious settlements. What rule of life the inmates of these houses followed is not quite clear, probably that drafted by Columban. The convents in Elsass, Switzerland and Germany, which considered that they owed their foundation to Irish monks, were numerous and later became obnoxious to the Church in many ways. For in after years, when the feud arose between the Romish and the Irish Churches and the latter insisted on her independence, the houses founded by Irishmen also claimed freedom and remained separate from those which accepted the rule of St Benedict.

The property granted to religious foundations in northern France went on increasing throughout the 7th century. The amount of land settled on churches and monasteries by princes of the Merovech dynasty was so great that on Roth's computation two-thirds of the soil of France was at one time in

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[215] Guettée, *Histoire de l'Église de France*, vol. 1, p. 317.

[216] Opinions differ as to the original form of the rule of St Benedict. Comp. Benedictus, *Opera*, pp. 204 ff. (in Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Complet.*, vol. 66).

[217] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Filibertus, Aug. 20.

[218] Roth, P., *Geschichte des Beneficialwesens*, 1850, Appendix, gives the Charter.

the hands of the representatives of religion[219]. Under the will of Dagobert, who first became king of Austrasia in 628 and afterwards of the whole of France, large tracts were given away. Through the gifts of this king the abbey of St Denis became the richest in France, and his great liberality on the one hand towards the Church, on the other towards the poor and pilgrims, is emphasized by his biographer. His son Chlodwig II, king of Neustria and Burgundy, followed in his footsteps. He was a prince of feeble intellect and his reign is remarkable for the power increasingly usurped by the house-mayor, who grasped more and more at the substance of royal authority while dispensing with its show.

Chlodwig II was married to Balthild, who is esteemed a saint on the strength of the monastery she founded and of the gifts she made to the Church. There are two accounts of her works; the second is probably a re-written amplification of the first, which was drafted within a short period of her death[220]. As these accounts were written from the religious standpoint, they give scant information on the political activity and influence of the queen, which were considerable. They dwell chiefly on her gifts, and concern the latter part of her life when she was in constant communication with her nunnery.

Balthild was of Anglo-Saxon origin, and her personality and activity form the connecting link between the women of France and England. It is supposed that she was descended from one of the noble families of Wessex, and she favoured all those religious settlements which were in direct connection with princesses of the Anglo-Saxon race.

She had been captured on the north coast of France and had been brought to Paris as a slave by the house-mayor Erchinoald, who would have married her, but she escaped and hid herself. Her beauty and attractions are described as remarkable, and she found favour in the eyes of King Chlodwig II who made her his wife. The excesses of this king were so great that he became imbecile. Balthild with Erchinoald's help governed the kingdom during the remainder of her husband's life and after his death in the interest of her little sons. From a political point of view she is described as 'administering the affairs of the kingdom masculine wise and with great strength of mind.' She was especially energetic in opposing slavery and forbade the sale of Christians in any part of France. No doubt this was due to her own sad experience. She also abolished the poll-tax, which had been instituted by the Romans. The Frankish kings had carried it on and depended on it for part of their income. Its abolition is referred to as a most important and beneficial change[221].

During the lifetime of Chlodwig and for some years after his death the rule of Balthild seems to have been comparatively peaceful. The house-mayor Erchinoald died in 658 and was succeeded by Ebruin, a man whose unbounded personal ambition again plunged the realm into endless quarrels. In his own interest Ebruin advocated the appointment of a separate king to the province Austrasia, and the second of Balthild's little sons was sent there with the house-mayor Wulfoald. But the rivalry between the two kingdoms soon added another dramatic chapter to the pages of Frankish history. At one time we find Ebruin ruling supreme and condemning his rival Leodgar, bishop of Autun, to seclusion in the monastery of Luxeuil. An insurrection broke out and Ebruin himself was tonsured and cast into Luxeuil. But his chief antagonist Leodgar was murdered. Ebruin was then set free and again became house-mayor to one of the shadow kings, *rois fainéants*, the unworthy successors of the great Merovech. His career throughout reflected the tumultuous temper of the age; he was finally assassinated in the year 680.

Queen Balthild had retired from political life long before this. She left the court in consequence of an insurrection in Paris which led to the assassination of Bishop Sigoberrand, and went to live at a palace near the convent of Chelles, which she had founded and which she frequently visited. In the account of her life we read of her doing many pious deeds[222]. 'A fond mother, she loved the nuns

[219] Roth, P., *Geschichte des Beneficialwesens*, 1850, p. 249.

[220] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Bathildis, Jan. 26 (contains both accounts).

[221] Roth, P., *Geschichte des Beneficialwesens*, 1850, p. 86.

[222] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Bathildis, Jan. 26; *Vita* 11., ch. 14.

like her own daughters and obeyed as her mother the holy abbess whom she had herself appointed; and in every respect she did her duty not like a mistress but like a faithful servant. Also with the humility of a strong mind she served as an example; she did service herself as cook to the nuns, she looked after cleanliness, – and, what can I say more, – the purest of pearls, with her own hands she removed filth's impurities…'

At various times of her life Balthild had been in friendly intercourse with many of the chief prelates and religious dignitaries of the day. She had taken a special interest in Eligius, bishop of Noyon, who was a Frank by birth and the friend and adviser of King Dagobert.

We hear how Eligius took a special interest in monastic life; how at Paris he collected together three hundred women, some of whom were slaves, others of noble origin; how he placed them under the guidance of one Aurea; and how at Noyon also he gathered together many women[223].

On receiving the news that Eligius was dying, Balthild hurried with her sons to Noyon, but they came too late to see him. So great was her love for him, that she would have borne away his body to Chelles, her favourite settlement, but her wish was miraculously frustrated. The writer of the life of Eligius tells that the holy man's body became so heavy that it was impossible to move it.

When Eligius appointed Aurea as president of his convent at Paris she was living in a settlement at Pavilly which had been founded by Filibert, an ecclesiastic also associated with Queen Balthild. On one occasion she sent him as an offering her royal girdle, which is described as a mass of gold and jewels[224]. It was on land granted to him by Balthild and her sons that Filibert founded Jumièges, where he collected together as many as nine hundred monks. At his foundation at Pavilly over three hundred women lived together under the abbess Ansterbert[225].

It is recorded that Ansterbert and her mother Framehild were among the women of northern France who came under the influence of Irish teachers. The same is said of Fara († 657)[226], the reputed founder of a house at Brie, which was known as Faremoutiers, another settlement indebted to Queen Balthild's munificence. Similarly Agilbert and Theodohild[227] († c. 660) are supposed to have been taught by Irish teachers who had collected women about them at Jouarre on the Marne. This house at Jouarre attained a high standard of excellence in regard to education, for we are informed that Balthild summoned Berthild[228] from here, a woman renowned for her learning, and appointed her abbess over the house at Chelles.

Yet another ecclesiastic must be mentioned in connection with Balthild, viz. Waneng, a Frank by birth. He was counsellor for some time to the queen who gave the cantle of Normandy, the so-called Pays de Caux, into his charge. He again founded a settlement for religious women at Fécamp which was presided over by Hildemarque.

The foundation and growth of so many religious settlements within so short a period and situated in a comparatively small district shows that the taste for monastic life was rapidly developing among the Franks.

'At this period in the provinces of Gaul,' says a contemporary writer, 'large communities of monks and of virgins were formed, not only in cultivated districts, in villages, cities and strongholds, but also in uncultivated solitudes, for the purpose of living together according to the rule of the holy fathers Benedict and Columban[229].'

This statement is taken from the life of Salaberg, a well written composition which conveys the impression of truthfulness. Salaberg had brought up her daughter Anstrud for the religious life.

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[223] *A. SS. Boll.*, ibid., St Aurea, Oct. 4.

[224] Ibid., St Filibertus, Aug. 20, *Vita*, ch. 5.

[225] Ibid., St Austreberta, Feb. 10.

[226] Regnault, *Vie de Ste Fare*, 1626.

[227] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Teclechildis, Oct. 10.

[228] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Bertilia, Jan. 3.

[229] Ibid., St Salaberga, Sept. 22, *Vita*, ch. 8.

Her husband had joined the monastery at Luxeuil and she and other women were about to settle near it when the rumour of impending warfare drove them north towards Laon where they dwelt on the Mons Clavatus. This event belongs to the period of Queen Balthild's regency. It was while Anstrud was abbess at Laon that the settlement was attacked and barely escaped destruction in one of the wars waged by the house-mayor Ebruin. This event is described in a contemporary life of Anstrud[230].

It is interesting to find a connection growing up at this period between the religious houses of northern France and the women of Anglo-Saxon England. We learn from the reliable information supplied by Bede that Englishwomen frequently went abroad and sometimes settled entirely in Frankish convents. We shall return to this subject later in connection with the princesses of Kent and East Anglia, some of whom went to France and there became abbesses. The house at Brie was ruled successively by Saethrith (St Syre), and Aethelburg (St Aubierge), daughters of kings of East Anglia, and Earcongotha, a daughter of the king of Kent. About the same time Hereswith, a princess of Northumbria, came to reside at Chelles[231].

We do not know how far the immigration of these women was due to Balthild's connection with the land of her origin, nor do we hear whether she found solace in the society of her countrywomen during the last years of her life. Her death is conjectured to have taken place in 680.

With it closes the period which has given the relatively largest number of women-saints to France, for all the women who by founding nunneries worked in the interests of religion have a place in the assembly of the saints. They were held as benefactors in the districts which witnessed their efforts, and the day of their death was inscribed in the local calendar. They have never been officially canonised, but they all figure in the Roman Martyrology, and the accounts which tell of their doings have been incorporated in the Acts of the Saints.

[230] Ibid., St Austrudis, Oct. 17.

[231] Bede, *Hist. Eccles.*, bk 3, ch. 8; bk 4, ch. 23. Comp. below, ch. 3, § 1.

CHAPTER III
CONVENTS AMONG THE ANGLO-SAXONS, A.D. 630-730

'Ecce catervim glomerant ad bella phalanges
Justitiae comites et virtutum agmina sancta.'

Ealdhelm, De laude Virginum.

§ 1. Early Houses in Kent

The early history of the convent life of women in Anglo-Saxon England is chiefly an account of foundations. Information on the establishment of religious settlements founded and presided over by women is plentiful, but well-nigh a century went by before women who had adopted religion as a profession gave any insight into their lives and characters through writings of their own. The women who founded monasteries in Anglo-Saxon England have generally been raised to the rank of saint.

'In the large number of convents as well as in the names of female saints among the Anglo-Saxons,' says Lappenberg[232], 'we may recognise the same spirit which attracted the notice of the Roman army among the ancient Germans, and was manifested in the esteem and honour of women generally, and in the special influence exercised by the priestess.'

A great proportion of the women who founded religious houses were members of ruling families. From the first it was usual for a princess to receive a grant of land from her husband on the occasion of her marriage, and this land together with what she inherited from her father she could dispose of at will. She often devoted this property to founding a religious house where she established her daughters, and to which she retired either during her husband's lifetime or after his death. The great honour paid by Christianity to the celibate life and the wide field of action opened to a princess in a religious house were strong inducements to the sisters and daughters of kings to take the veil.

We have trustworthy information about many of the Anglo-Saxon women who founded and presided over religious settlements and whom posterity reverenced as saints; for their work has been described by writers who either knew them, or gained their information from those who did. But there are other women whose names only are mentioned in charters, or correspondence, or in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Historians however welcome such references as chronological evidence and as proofs of these women's real existence; without them they would have nothing to rely upon but accounts dating from a later period and often consisting of little more than a series of incidents strung together in order to explain the miracles with which the saints' relics were locally credited. There is a certain similarity between these later accounts and those we have of pseudo-saints, but they differ from those of an earlier date, for the writers of the 8th and 9th centuries were not actuated like those of a later period by the desire to give a miraculous rendering of fact. Bede († 735) stands pre-eminent among the earlier writers, and our admiration for him increases as we discover his immense superiority to other early historians.

Most of the women who were honoured as saints in England belong to the first hundred years after the acceptance of Christianity in these islands. A few other women have been revered as saints who lived in the 10th century and came under the influence of the monastic revival which is associated with the name of Dunstan († 988). But no woman living during Anglo-Norman times has been thus honoured, for the desire to raise women to saintship was essentially Anglo-Saxon and was strongest in the times which immediately followed the acceptance of Christianity.

It was more than two hundred years after the Anglo-Saxons first set foot on British shores that they accepted Christianity. The struggles between them and the inhabitants of the island had ended in the recognised supremacy of the invaders, and bands of heathen Germans, settling at first near the shore, for the sake of the open country, had gradually made their way up the fruitful valleys and into adjoining districts till they covered the land with a network of settlements. After the restlessness of invasion and warfare the Anglo-Saxons settled down to domestic life and agriculture, for compared with the British they were eminently tillers of the soil. Under their régime the cities built by the Romans and the British fastnesses alike fell into decay. The Anglo-Saxons dwelt in villages, and the

[232] *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, transl. Thorpe, 1845, vol. 2, p. 247.

British either lived there in subservience to them or else retired into districts of their own which were difficult of access.

The re-introduction of Christianity into these islands is associated with the name of Pope Gregory. Zealous and resolute in his efforts to strengthen the papal power by sending forth missionaries who were devoted to him, he watched his opportunity to gain a foothold for the faith in Kent.

Tradition connects the first step in this direction with the name of a Frankish princess, and Bede in his Church History tells how the marriage of Berhta, daughter of King Charibert of Paris (561-567), to King Aethelberht of Kent (586-616) brought an ecclesiastic to Canterbury who took possession of the ancient British church of St Martin: this event was speedily followed by the arrival of other ecclesiastics from Rome, who travelled across France under the leadership of Augustine.

At the time of Augustine's arrival the position of Kent was threatened by the growing supremacy of Northumbria. Through the activity both of Aethelfrith († 617) and of Eadwin his successor, the land extending from the Humber to the Firth of Forth had been united under one rule; Northumbria was taking the lead among the petty kingdoms which had been formed in different parts of the island. The king of Kent strengthened his independent position by accepting the faith which had proved propitious to the Franks and by entering into alliance with his neighbours across the Channel; and it was no doubt with a view to encouraging peaceful relations with the north that Aethelburg the daughter of Aethelberht and Berhta was given in marriage to King Eadwin of Northumbria during the reign of her brother Eadbald (616-640).

Again the marriage of a Christian princess was made an occasion for extending the faith; an ecclesiastic as usual followed in her train. Paulinus, the Roman chaplain who came north with Aethelburg, after various incidents picturesquely set forth by Bede, overcame King Eadwin's reluctance to embrace Christianity and prevailed upon him to be baptized at York with other members of his household on Easter day in the year 627. The event was followed by an influx of Christians into that city, for British Christianity had receded before the heathen Angles, but it still had strongholds in the north and was on the alert to regain lost ground. The city of York, during Roman rule, had been of great importance in affairs of administration. The Roman Eboracum nearly died out to arise anew as Anglian Eoforwic. King Eadwin recognised Paulinus as bishop and a stone church was begun on part of the ground now occupied by the Minster[233].

Bede loves to dwell on the story of this conversion, which was endeared to all devout churchmen by many associations. Eanflaed, the child of Eadwin and Aethelburg, whose baptism was its immediate cause, was afterwards a staunch supporter of Roman versus British Church tendencies. She was the patron of Wilfrith, in his time the most zealous advocate of the supremacy of Rome.

Among the members of Eadwin's household who were baptized on the same Easter day in 627 was Hild, a girl of fourteen, who afterwards became abbess of Whitby. She was grand-niece to Eadwin through her father Hereric, who had been treacherously made away with; her mother Beorhtswith and her sister Hereswith were among the early converts to Christianity. Hereswith afterwards married a king of the Angles, and at a later period was living in the Frankish settlement of Chelles (Cala), where her sister Hild at one time thought of joining her. Nothing is known of the life of Hild between the ages of fourteen and thirty-four, but evidently she had not dwelt in obscure retirement, for the Scottish prelate Aidan in 647, knowing that she was living in the midlands, begged her to return to the north. It is a noteworthy circumstance if, in an age when marriage was the rule, she remained single without taking the veil, but she may have been associated with some religious settlement[234].

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[233] Raine, *Historians of the Church of York*. Rolls series, vol. 1, Preface, p. xxiii.

[234] It is probable such settlements existed. Dugdale, *Monasticon*, vol. 3, p. 302, holds a religious foundation to have existed in Tinmouth founded 617-33, but in Bede, *Life of Cuthbert*, transl. Stevenson, T., 1887, ch. 3, it is referred to as a monastery formerly of men, now of 'virgins.'

It was only a few years after the acceptance of Christianity at York that the days of King Eadwin's reign, 'when a woman with her babe might walk scatheless from sea to sea,' came to an abrupt close. Eadwin was slain in 633 at the battle of Hatfield, a victim to the jealousy of the British king Caedwalla, who combined with the heathen king Penda of Mercia against him. Queen Aethelburg with her children and Paulinus fled from York to the coast and went by sea to Kent, where they were welcomed by her brother King Eadbald and by Archbishop Honorius.

At the beginning of his reign Eadbald of Kent had been in conflict with the Church owing to his marriage with his father's relict, a heathen wife whom Aethelberht had taken to himself after the death of Berhta. It is characteristic of the position held at first by Christian prelates in England that they depended entirely on the ruling prince for their position. Paulinus fled from York at the death of Eadwin, and Eadbald's adherence to heathen customs temporarily drove the Kentish prelate abroad. The king of Kent had, however, found it well to repudiate his heathen wife and to take a Christian princess of the Franks in her stead. This act restored him to the goodwill of his prelate, who returned to English shores.

Eadbald had settled a piece of land at Folkestone on his daughter Eanswith, and there about the year 630 she founded what is held to be the first religious settlement for women in Anglo-Saxon England[235]. The fact of this foundation is undisputed, but all we know of Eanswith's life is in the account given of her by Capgrave, an Augustinian monk who lived in the 15th century[236]. He tells us how she went to live at Folkestone and how a king of Northumbria wished to marry her, but as the king was a heathen, she made their union conditional on his prevailing upon his gods to manifest their power by miraculously lengthening a beam. In this he failed and consequently departed. There follows a description how Eanswith made a stream to flow 'againste the hylle,' from Smelton, a mile distant from Folkestone, possibly by means of a well-levelled water conduit. Capgrave also describes how she enforced the payment of tithes.

Eanswith's settlement was in existence at the close of the century, when it was destroyed or deserted during the viking invasion. A charter of King Athelstane dated 927 gives the land where 'stood the monastery and abbey of holy virgins and where also St Eanswith lies buried' to Christ Church, Canterbury, the house having been destroyed by the 'Pagans[237].' Capgrave says that its site was swallowed by the sea, perhaps in one of the landslips common to the coast; the holy woman's relics were then transferred to the church of St Peter. A church at Folkestone is dedicated conjointly to St Mary and St Eanswith, and a church at Brensett in Kent is dedicated solely to her[238].

Queen Aethelburg coming from the north also settled in Kent at a place called Liming[239]. Bede knows nothing of her after her departure from the north, and we have to depend on Canterbury traditions for information concerning her and the religious house she founded. Gocelin, a monk of Flanders who came into Kent in the 11th century, describes Queen Aethelburg as 'building and upraising this temple at Liming, and obtaining the first name there and a remarkable burial-place in the north porch against the south wall of the church covered with an arch[240].' Modern research has shown that the buildings at Liming were so arranged as to contain a convent of monks as well as of nuns. The church is of Roman masonry and may have been built out of the fragments of a

[235] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Folkestone,' vol. 1, p. 451.

[236] Hardy, Th. D., *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, 1862, vol. 1, p. 226: 'the life of Eanswith cannot be traced to any earlier authority than John of Tinmouth († c. 1380) whose account Capgrave († 1484) embodied in his collection of saints' lives.' The work of Capgrave, *Catalogus SS. Angliae*, was printed in 1516; the *Kalendre of the newe Legende of Englande*, printed 1516 (Pynson), from which expressions are quoted in the text, is an abridged translation of it into English.

[237] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Folkestone,' vol. 1, p. 451, nr 2.

[238] Smith and Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 1880, 'Eanswitha'; also *A. SS. Boll.*, St Eanswida, Aug. 31.

[239] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Liming,' vol. 1, p. 452.

[240] Jenkins, R. C., in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1862, August, p. 196 quotes this statement; I do not see where he takes it from.

villa, such as the Anglo-Saxons frequently adapted to purposes of their own, or it may have been a Roman basilica restored.

Queen Aethelburg, foundress of Liming, is not usually reckoned a saint; she has no day[241] and collections of saints' lives generally omit her. The identity of name between her and Aethelburg († c. 676), abbess of Barking at a somewhat later date, has caused some confusion between them[242]. Gocelin mentions that both Queen Aethelburg and 'St Eadburga' were buried at Liming[243]. A well lying to the east of the church at Liming is to this day called St Ethelburga's well, and she is commonly held to be identical with Queen Aethelburg[244].

At a somewhat later date another religious settlement for women was founded at Sheppey in Kent by Queen Sexburg, the wife of Earconberht of Kent (640-664), the successor of Eadbald. We know little of the circumstances of the foundation[245]. Sexburg was a princess of East Anglia, where Christianity had been accepted owing to the influence of King Eadwin of Northumbria[246] and where direct relations with France had been established.

'For at that time,' says Bede, writing of these districts[247], 'there being not yet many monasteries built in the region of the Angles, many were wont, for the sake of the monastic mode of life, to go from Britain to the monasteries of the Franks and of Gaul; they also sent their daughters to the same to be instructed and to be wedded to the heavenly spouse, chiefly in the monasteries of Brie (Faremoutiers), Chelles, and Andelys.'

Two princesses of Anglia, Saethrith and Aethelburg, who were sisters or half-sisters to Sexburg, remained abroad and became in succession abbesses of Brie as mentioned above. Sexburg's daughter Earcongotha also went there, and was promoted to the rank of abbess. Both Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle speak in praise of her. For her other daughter Eormenhild, who was married to Wulfhere, king of Mercia, Queen Sexburg of Kent founded the house at Sheppey; she herself went to live at Ely in her sister Aethelthrith's convent.

The statement of Bede that women at this time went abroad for their education is borne out by the traditional records of Mildthrith, first abbess of a religious settlement in Thanet which rose to considerable importance[248]. A huge mass of legend supplements the few historical facts we know of Mildthrith, whose influence, judging from the numerous references to her and her widespread cult, was greater than that of any other English woman-saint. Several days in the Calendar are consecrated to her, and the site where her relics had been deposited was made a subject of controversy in the 11th century. As late as 1882 we find that some of her relics were brought from Deventer in Holland to Thanet, and that Pope Leo XIII granted a plenary indulgence on the occasion[249]. Churches in London, Oxford, Canterbury and other places are dedicated to St Mildred[250], and Capgrave, William of Malmesbury and others give details of her story, which runs as follows:

Her mother Eormenburg, sometimes called Domneva, was married to Merewald, prince of Hacanos, a district in Herefordshire. King Ecgberht (664-673) of Kent gave her some land in Thanet as a blood-fine for the murder of her two young brothers, and on it she founded a monastery. She

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[241] Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, 1887, p. 144.

[242] Hardy, Th. D., *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, 1862, vol. 1, p. 475.

[243] Gocelinus, *Vita St Wereburgae*, c. 1 (in Migne, *Patrol. Cursus Compl.*, vol. 155).

[244] Bright, W., *Early English Church History*, 1878, p. 130 footnote.

[245] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Sheppey,' vol. 2, p. 49.

[246] Bright, W., *Early English Church History*, 1878, p. 123.

[247] Bede, *Hist. Eccles.*, bk 3, ch. 8, transl. Gidley, 1870.

[248] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Thanet,' vol. 1, p. 447; Hardy, Th. D., *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, 1862, on lives of St Mildred, vol. 1, p. 376; *A. SS. Boll.*, St Mildreda, July 13.

[249] Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, 1887, July 13.

[250] Smith and Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, article 'Mildred' by Bishop Stubbs.

asked for as much land as her tame deer could run over in one course, and received over ten thousand acres of the best land in Kent[251].

Besides Mildthrith Eormenburg had two daughters, Mildburg and Mildgith, and a boy, the holy child Merwin, who was translated to heaven in his youth. Mildburg presided over a religious house at Wenlock in Shropshire, and her legend contains picturesque traits but little trustworthy information[252]. We know even less of the other daughter Mildgith. It is doubtful whether she lived in Kent or in the north, but she is considered a saint[253]. An ancient record says that 'St Mildgith lies in Northumbria where her miraculous powers were often exhibited and still are,' but it does not point out at what place[254].

According to her legend, Mildthrith, by far the best known of the sisters, was sent abroad to Chelles for her education, where the abbess Wilcoma wished her to marry her kinsman, and on the girl's refusal cast her into a burning furnace from which she came forth unharmed. The girl sent her mother a psalter she had written together with a lock of her hair. She made her escape and arrived in England, landing at Ebbsfleet. 'As she descended from the ship to the land and set her feet on a certain square stone the print of her feet remained on it, most life-like, she not thinking anything; God so accomplishing the glory of his handmaid. And more than that; the dust that was scrapen off thence being drunk did cure sundry diseases[255].' It appears that a stone to which a superstitious reverence was attached was walled into the Church of St Mildred in Thanet.

Other incidents told of her influence are not without their humorous side. One day a bell-ringer, forgetful of his duties, had dropped asleep, when Mildthrith appeared to him and gave him a blow on the ear, saying, 'Understand, fellow, that this is an oratory to pray in, not a dormitory to sleep in,' and so vanished.

Thus writes the author of her legend. The fact remains that Mildthrith was presiding over a settlement in Kent towards the close of the 7th century. For in a charter of privileges granted between 696 and 716 by King Wihtred and Queen Werburg to the churches and monasteries of Kent granting them security against interference, her name is among those of the five lady abbesses who place their signatures to the document.[256] These names stand after those of the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Rochester and are as follows; 'Mildritha, Aetheldritha, Aette, Wilnotha and Hereswytha.' The settlements mentioned in the body of the charter[257] as being subject to them are Upminstre (or Minstre) in Thanet, afterwards known as St Mildred's, Southminstre, a colony of Minstre, Folkestone, Liming and Sheppey, the foundation of which has been described.

Thus at the close of the 7th century there existed in the province of Kent alone five religious settlements governed by abbesses who added this title to their signatures, or who, judging from the place given to them, ranked in dignity below the bishops but above the presbyters (presbyteri), whose names follow theirs in the list. From the wording of the charter we see that men who accepted the tonsure and women who received the veil were at this time classed together. Those who set their signatures to the charter agreed that neither abbot nor abbess should be appointed without the consent of a prelate.

The charter is the more valuable as it establishes the existence of the Kentish convents and their connection with each other at a period when we have only fragmentary information about the religious houses in the south. We must turn to the north for fuller information as to the foundation and growth of religious settlements presided over by women during the early Christian period.

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[251] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Thanet,' vol. 1, p. 447.

[252] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Milburga, Feb. 23.

[253] Ibid., St Mildwida, Jan. 17.

[254] Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, Jan. 17.

[255] 'Lives of Women Saints' (written about 1610) p. 64, edited by Horstman for the Early Engl. Text Soc., London, 1887.

[256] Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, 1869, vol. 3, p. 240.

[257] 'Upmynstre, Suthmynstre, Folcanstan, Limming, Sceppeis.'

§ 2. The Monastery at Whitby [258]

A temporary collapse of the Christian faith had followed the death of King Eadwin of Northumbria, but the restoration of King Oswald, who was not so strong as his predecessor in administrative power but whose religious fervour was greater, had given it a new impulse and a new direction.

Oswald had passed some time of his life in Iona or Hii, the great Scottish religious settlement and the stronghold of British Christianity in the Hebrides. Here he had made friends with the ecclesiastic Aidan, who became his staunch supporter. Soon after his accession Oswald summoned a monk from Iona 'to minister the word of the faith to himself and to his people,' and when it was found that the monk made no progress, Aidan was moved to go among the Angles himself. In preference to York he chose the island Lindisfarne for his headquarters, but he spent much of his time with Oswald, helping him to set the practice and teaching of religion on a firmer footing.

It was during this part of Aidan's career that he consecrated Heiu[259], according to Bede 'the first woman who took the vow and the habit of a nun in the province of Northumbria.' Heiu presided over a congregation of women at Hartlepool in Durham, from which she removed to Calcaria of the Romans, which is perhaps identical with Healaugh near Tadcaster, where apparently Heiu's name is retained. Further details of her career are wanting.

Aidan's labours were interrupted for a time. Again the fierce and impetuous King Penda of Mercia invaded Northumbria, and again the Christian Angles fled before the midland heathens. King Oswald fell in battle (642) and Aidan retired to his rocky island, from which he watched the fires kindled all over the country first by the raids of Penda, and afterwards by civil strife between the two provinces of Northumbria, Deira and Bernicia. This arose through the rival claims to the throne of Oswiu, Oswald's brother, and Oswin, who was King Eadwin's relative.

An understanding was at length effected between them by which Oswiu accepted Bernicia, while Oswin took possession of Deira, and Aidan, who found a patron in Oswin, returned to his work.

He now persuaded Hild[260], who was waiting in Anglia for an opportunity to cross over to France, where she purposed joining her sister, to give up this plan and to return to the north to share in the work in which he was engaged. Hild came and settled down to a monastic life with a few companions on the river Wear. A year later, when Heiu retired to Calcaria, Hild became abbess at Hartlepool. She settled there only a few years before the close of Aidan's career. He died in 651 shortly after his patron Oswin, whose murder remains the great stain on the life of his rival Oswiu.

A 12th century monk, an inmate of the monastery of St Beeves in Cumberland, has written a life of St Bega, the patron saint of his monastery, whom he identifies on the one hand with the abbess Heiu, consecrated by Aidan, and on the other with Begu, a nun who had a vision of Hild's death at the monastery of Hackness in the year 680. His narrative is further embellished with local traditions about a woman Bega, who came from Ireland and received as a gift from the Lady Egermont the extensive parish and promontory of St Beeves, which to this day bear her name[261].

There has been much speculation concerning this holy woman Bega, but it is probable that the writer of her life combined myths which seem to be Keltic with accounts of two historical persons whom Bede keeps quite distinct. There is no reason to doubt Bede's statements in this matter or in others concerning affairs in the north, for he expressly affirms that he 'was able to gain information

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[258] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Whitby,' vol. 1, p. 405.

[259] Bede, *Eccl. Hist.*, bk 4, ch. 23 transl. Gidley, 1870. Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Hartlepool,' vol. 6, p. 1618, places the foundation about the year 640.

[260] Bede, *Eccl. Hist.* bk 3, chs. 24-25; bk 4, chs. 23-24.

[261] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Bega, Sept. 6; Tomlinson, G. C., *Life and Miracles of St Bega*, 1839.

not from one author only but from the faithful assertion of innumerable witnesses who were in a position to know and remember these things; besides those things,' he adds, 'which I could ascertain myself.' He passed his whole life studying and writing in the monasteries of SS. Peter and Paul, two settlements spoken of as one, near the mouth of the river Wear, close to where Hild had first settled. He went there during the lifetime of Bennet Biscop († 690), the contemporary of Hild and a shining representative of the culture the Anglo-Saxons attained in the 7th century.

Hild settled at Hartlepool about the year 647. Eight years later Oswiu finally routed the army of Penda, whose attacks had been for so many years like a battering ram to the greatness of Northumbria. And in fulfilment of a vow he had made that the Christian religion should profit if God granted him victory, he gave Hild the charge of his daughter Aelflaed 'who had scarcely completed the age of one year, to be consecrated to God in perpetual virginity, besides bestowing on the Church twelve estates.' Extensive property came with the child into the care of Hild, perhaps including the site of Streaneshalch[262], which is better known as Whitby, a name given to it at a later date by the Danes. Bede says that Hild here undertook to construct and arrange a monastery.

Bede thus expresses himself on the subject of Hild's life and influence during the term of over thirty years which she spent first as abbess of Hartlepool and then as abbess of Whitby[263]:

'Moreover, Hild, the handmaid of Christ, having been appointed to govern that monastery (at Hartlepool), presently took care to order it in the regular way of life, in all respects, according as she could gain information from learned men. For Bishop Aidan, also, and all the religious men who knew her, were wont to visit her constantly, to love her devotedly, and to instruct her diligently, on account of her innate wisdom, and her delight in the service of God.

'When, then, she had presided over this monastery for some years, being very intent on establishing the regular discipline, according as she could learn it from learned men, it happened that she undertook also to construct and arrange a monastery in the place which is called Streanshalch; and this work being enjoined on her, she was not remiss in accomplishing it. For she established this also in the same discipline of regular life in which she established the former monastery; and, indeed, taught there also the strict observance of justice, piety, and chastity, and of the other virtues, but mostly of peace and charity, so that, after the example of the primitive Church, there was therein no one rich, no one poor; all things were common to all, since nothing seemed to be the private property of any one. Moreover, her prudence was so great that not only did ordinary persons, but even sometimes kings and princes, seek and receive counsel of her in their necessities. She made those who were under her direction give so much time to the reading of the Divine Scriptures, and exercise themselves so much in works of righteousness, that very many, it appeared, could readily be found there, who could worthily enter upon the ecclesiastical grade, that is the service of the altar.'

In point of fact five men who had studied in Hild's monastery were promoted to the episcopate. Foremost among them is John, bishop of Hexham (687-705) and afterwards of York († 721), the famous St John of Beverley, a canonised saint of the Church, of whose doings Bede has left an account. In this[264] we hear of the existence of another monastery for women at Watton (Vetadun) not far from Whitby, where Bishop John went to visit the abbess Heriburg, who was living there with her 'daughter in the flesh,' Cwenburg, whom she designed to make abbess in her stead. We hear no more about Watton till centuries later, but Bede's remark is interesting as showing how natural he felt it to be that the rule of a settlement should pass from mother to daughter.

Cwenburg was suffering from a swollen arm which John tells us was very serious, 'since she had been bled on the fourth day of the moon,' 'when both the light of the moon and the tide of the

[262] *Carthularium abbathiae de Whiteby*, publ. Surtees Soc., 1879.

[263] Bede, *Eccles. History*, bk 4, ch. 23, translat. Gidley, 1870, with additions and alterations.

[264] Bede, *Eccles. History*, bk 5, ch. 3.

ocean were on their increase. And what can I do for the girl if she is at death's door?' he exclaims. However his combined prayers and remedies, which were so often efficacious, helped to restore her.

Aetla, another of Hild's scholarly disciples, held the see of Dorchester, though perhaps only temporarily during the absence of Aegilberht. A third, Bosa, was archbishop of York between 678 and 686; Bede speaks of him as a monk of Whitby, a man of great holiness and humility. Oftfor, another of Hild's monks, went from Whitby to Canterbury, to study 'a more perfect' system of discipline under Archbishop Theodore († 690), and subsequently became bishop of Worcester.

The career of these men shows that the system of discipline and education under Hild at Whitby compared favourably with that of other settlements. At the outset she had followed the usages of the Scottish Church, with which she was familiar through her intercourse with Aidan, but when the claims for an independent British Church were defeated at Whitby, she accepted the change and adopted the Roman usage.

The antagonism which had existed from the first appearance of Augustine in England between Roman Christianity and British Christianity as upheld by the Scottish and Welsh clergy took the form of open disagreement in Northumbria. On one side was the craving for ritual, for refinement and for union with Rome; on the other insistence by the Scottish clergy on their right to independence.

Aidan had been succeeded at Lindisfarne by Finnan, owing to whose influence discussion was checked for the time being. But after his death (661) the latent antagonism came to a head over the practical difficulty due to the different dates at which King Oswiu and Queen Eanflaed kept Easter. Thus the way was cleared for the Whitby synod (664), a 'gathering of all orders of the Church system,' at which the respective claims of Roman and of British Christianity were discussed.

The British interest was represented among others by Colman, Finnan's successor at Lindisfarne, who temporarily held the see at York, and by Aegilberht, bishop of Dorchester. The opposite side was taken by the protégé of Queen Eanflaed, Wilfrith, abbot of Ripon, whose ardour in the cause of Rome had been greatly augmented by going abroad with Bennet Biscop about the year 653. Besides these and other prelates, King Oswiu and his son and co-regent Ealhfrith were present at the synod. The abbess Hild was also there, but she took no part in the discussion.

The questions raised were not of doctrine but of practice. The computation of Easter, the form of the tonsure, matters not of belief but of apparently trivial externals, were the points round which the discussion turned. Owing chiefly to Wilfrith's influence the decision was in favour of Rome, and a strong rebuff was given for a time to the claim for an independent British Church in the north.

The choice of Whitby as the site of the synod marks the importance which this settlement had attained within ten years of its foundation. Those who have stood on the height of the cliff overlooking the North Sea and have let their gaze wander over the winding river course and the strand below can realize the lordly situation of the settlement which occupies such a distinguished place among the great houses and nurseries of culture at Hexham, Wearmouth, Jarrow, Ripon and York.

The property which the monastery held in overlordship extended along the coast for many miles, and the settlement itself consisted of a large group of buildings; for there are references to the dwellings for the men, for the women, and to an outlying house for the sick. These dwellings were gathered round the ancient British Church of St Peter, which was situated under the shelter of the brow of the cliff where King Eadwin lay buried, and which continued to be the burial-place of the Northumbrian kings. Isolated chapels and churches with separate bands of religious votaries belonging to them lay in other parts of the monastic property, and were subject to the abbess of Whitby. We hear of a minor monastery at Easington (Osingadun)[265] during the rule of Aelflaed, Hild's successor, and at Hackness (Hacanos) on the limit of the monastic property, thirteen miles south of Whitby, a monastery of some importance had been founded by Hild[266]. Bands of men and

[265] Bede, *Life of St Cuthbert*, ch. 10; Dugdale, *Monasticon*, vol. 1, p. 233, mentions Easington only as a manor of Durham.

[266] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Hackness,' vol. 3, p. 633.

of women dwelt here under the government of Frigith, and it was here that the nun Begu had a vision of Hild on the night of her death, when she saw her borne aloft by attendant angels[267].

The name of Hild and the monastery at Whitby are further endeared to posterity through their connection with Caedmon, the most celebrated of the vernacular poets of Northumbria and the reputed author of the Anglo-Saxon metrical paraphrases of the Old Testament[268]. It was his great reputation as a singer that made Hild seek Caedmon and persuade him to join her community. Here the practice of reading Holy Scripture made him familiar with the stories of Hebrew literature in their grand and simple setting, and he drank of the waters of that well to which so many centuries of creative and representative art have gone for inspiration.

Caedmon's power of song had been noticed outside the monastery.

'And all concluded that a celestial gift had been granted him by the Lord. And they interpreted to him a certain passage of sacred history or doctrine, and ordered him to turn it if he could into poetical rhythm. And he, having undertaken it, departed, and returning in the morning brought back what he was ordered to do, composed in most excellent verse. Whereupon presently the abbess, embracing heartily the grace of God in the man, directed him to leave the secular habit, and to take the monastic vow; and having together with all her people received him into the monastery associated him with the company of the brethren, and ordered him to be instructed in the whole course of sacred history. And he converted into most sweet song whatever he could learn from hearing, by thinking it over by himself, and, as though a clean animal, by ruminating; and by making it resound more sweetly, made his teachers in turn his hearers[269].'

These passages are curious as showing that a singer of national strains was persuaded to adapt his art to the purposes of religion. The development of Church music is usually held to have been distinct from that of folk-music, but in exceptional cases such as this, there seems to have been a relation between the two.

Excavations recently made on several of the sites of ancient northern monasteries have laid bare curious and interesting remains which add touches of reality to what is known about the houses of the north during this early period[270]. In a field called Cross Close at Hartlepool near Durham skeletons of men and women were found, and a number of monumental stones of peculiar shape, some with runic inscriptions of women's names. Some of these names are among those of the abbesses inscribed in the so-called 'Book of Life of Durham,' a manuscript written in gold and silver lettering in the early part of the 9th century[271]. Again, an ancient tombstone of peculiar design was found at Healaugh; and at Hackness several memorial crosses are preserved, one of which bears the inscription of the name Aethelburg, who no doubt is the abbess of that name with whom Aelflaed, Hild's successor at Whitby, in 705 travelled to the death-bed of King Ealdfrith[272].

Finally on the Whitby coast on the south side of the abbey a huge kitchen-midden was discovered. A short slope here leads to the edge of the cliff, and excavations on this slope and at its foot, which was once washed by the tide, have revealed the facts that the denizens of the original monastery were wont to throw the refuse of their kitchen over the cliff, and that the lighter material remained on the upper ledges, the heavier rolling to the bottom.

Among the lighter deposits were found bones of birds, oyster, whelk and periwinkle shells, and two combs, one of which bears a runic inscription. Among the heavier deposits were bones of oxen, a few of sheep, and a large number of the bones and tusks of wild swine, besides several iron pot-hooks

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[267] Bede, *Eccles. History*, bk 4, ch. 23.

[268] *Dictionary of Nat. Biography*, article 'Caedmon' by Henry Bradley.

[269] Bede, *Eccles. History*, bk 4, ch. 24, transl. Gidley, 1870.

[270] Haigh, D. H., 'On the monasteries of St Heiu and St Hild,' *Yorksh. Archaeolog. Journal*, vol. 3, p. 370. I do not know on what authority Haigh designates Heiu as saint.

[271] Gray, de Birch, *Fasti Monastici Aevi Saxonici*, 1872, p. 15.

[272] Comp. below, p. 106.

and other implements; a bone spindle and a divided ink-horn are among the objects specified. An inscribed leaden bulla found among the refuse is declared by experts to be earlier than the 8th century; it is therefore proof that these remains were deposited during the earlier period of the existence of Hild's monastery, possibly during her lifetime.

Hild died after an illness of several years on November 17, 680. Would that there were more data whereby to estimate her personality! The few traits of her character that have been preserved, her eagerness to acquire knowledge, her success in imparting it to others, her recognition of the need of unity in the Church, the interest she took in one who could repeat the stories of the new faith in strains which made them intelligible to the people, are indicative of a strong personality and of an understanding which appreciated the needs of her time.

Various myths, of which Bede knows nothing, have been attached to her name in course of time. According to a popular legend she transformed the snakes of the district into the ammonites familiar to visitors to those parts. And it is said that at certain times of the day her form can be seen flitting across the abbey ruins[273].

At her death the rule of the settlement passed to Aelflaed, the princess who had been given into her care as a child. After King Oswiu's death in 670 Queen Eanflaed joined her daughter in the monastery. The princess and abbess Aelflaed proved herself worthy of the influence under which she had grown up, and we shall find her among the persons of importance who took up a decided attitude in regard to the disturbances which broke out through the action of Bishop Wilfrith. The beginnings of these difficulties belong to the lifetime of Hild: we do not know that she took any interest in the matter, but judging from indirect evidence we should say that she shared in the feeling which condemned the prelate's anti-national and ultra-Roman tendencies.

[273] Charlton, L., *History of Whitby*, 1779, p. 33.

§ 3. Ely and the influence of Bishop Wilfrith

The further history of the monastery of Whitby and the history of the foundation of Ely are closely connected with the prelate Wilfrith, and for this reason his actions and attitude claim our attention. In him we recognise a direct advocate of the principle that a queen could if she chose leave her husband and retire to a religious settlement, and that such a course would secure her the favour of the Church.

It has been said of him that he was the most important man in Northumbria for forty years after the Whitby synod[274]. He owed his education to Queen Eanflaed, whose attention he had attracted when quite a youth, and who had sent him into Kent to complete his education; there he imbibed strong Roman sympathies. He lived for some years in France and Italy in the society of Bennet Biscop, and he was already held in high esteem at the time of the Whitby synod, which he attended in the character of abbot of the monastery at Ripon, a house he had founded with the help of Ealhfrith.

When Colman and his adherents beat a rapid retreat to the north in consequence of the decision of the synod, Wilfrith became bishop of York, an appointment which meant ecclesiastical supremacy over the whole vast province of Northumbria. His intellectual brilliancy gained him many admirers, but an innate restlessness of disposition and a wilful determination to support the power of Rome to the national detriment launched him into repeated difficulties with temporal and spiritual rulers. He was at the height of prosperity and popularity when Ecgfrith succeeded Oswiu in 670 after the death of Ealhfrith. Wilfrith had hitherto been on good terms with Ecgfrith, but a breach in their relations soon occurred, partly owing to the conduct of Ecgfrith's wife, Aethelthrith, whom Wilfrith supported against the king.

Aethelthrith, known to a later age as Etheldred or Awdrey, was the daughter of King Anna of the East Angles (635-645), whose province, including the present shires of Norfolk and Suffolk, was removed from direct intercourse with others by the almost impassable reaches of the fens. Anglia has not left any annals of her own, and we have to depend for the names and dates of her kings on the slight information which other provinces have preserved.

Written legends generally consider Anna as the father also of Sexburg, the foundress of Sheppey, and of Aethelburg and Saethrith, two princesses who had settled in France, as well as of Wihtburg, a woman-saint of whom very little is known, and who was associated with a religious foundation at East Dereham in Norfolk[275]. We further learn from legend that King Anna was married to Hereswith, sister of Hild of Whitby, and Aethelthrith is spoken of as niece to the great abbess Hild. But this connection is discredited by a statement in Bede which suggests that Hild's sister Hereswith was married not to King Anna but to his successor King Aethelhere (654-664). It is difficult to decide to which of the kings of the East Angles Hereswith was married, but Anna was certainly not her husband[276].

The princess Aethelthrith at the time of her marriage with the king of Northumbria was the widow of Tunberht prince of the South-Gyrvi, or fen-country men. Anglia stood at this time in a relation of dependence to Northumbria, and in 664, four years before the Whitby synod, Aethelthrith a woman of over thirty was married to Ecgfrith a boy of fifteen, the heir-apparent to the throne of Northumbria. The marriage was no doubt arranged for political reasons.

The consequences which followed render these facts worthy of notice. For Aethelthrith on her arrival in the north at once conceived a great admiration for the prelate Wilfrith, while she treated her

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[274] Raine, *Historians of the Church of York*, Rolls series, vol. 1, Preface p. xxvii. This volume contains reprints of several accounts of the life of Wilfrith, including the one by Eddi.

[275] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Withburga, March 17; Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'East Dereham,' vol. 2, p. 176.

[276] Haigh, D. H., 'On the monasteries of St Heiu and St Hild,' *Yorkshire Archaeol. Journal*, vol. 3, p. 352, decides in favour of Aethelric.

husband with contumely. She bestowed on Wilfrith the extensive property at Hexham which she had received from her husband, and on which Wilfrith built the church which was spoken of in his days as the most wonderful building on this side of the Alps[277]. Judging from what Wilfrith himself told him about the queen's attitude Bede says 'the king knew that she loved no man more than Wilfrith.'

The events that followed bear out this statement, for after living about ten years with the king, Aethelthrith left him and repaired to the monastery of Coldingham (Coludesburg) in Berwickshire, which had been founded and was ruled over by Aebbe, sister, or perhaps half-sister, of the kings Oswald and Oswiu[278]. King Ecgfrith may or may not have agreed to this step. Eddi, the friend and biographer of Wilfrith, maintains a judicious silence on the relations of the king and queen, while Bede represents[279] that Aethelthrith had always had an aversion to the married state and describes how he had been told by Wilfrith himself that Ecgfrith promised much land and money to the prelate if he persuaded the queen to allow him conjugal rights.

At Coldingham Wilfrith gave Aethelthrith the veil; this act involved her breaking all marital ties. But she cannot have deemed her position secure, for she presently left Coldingham, which was within her husband's territory, and went to Ely, the island in the fens which her first husband Tunberht had bestowed on her.

Under the date 673 stand in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle these words: 'And Aetheldryth began the monastery at Ely.' It was situated on a hill prominent above the flatness of the surrounding fen-land, which at that time consisted of a wilderness of marsh and water. Men and women readily flocked thither to live under the guidance of the queen. We hear that she received material aid from her cousin King Ealdwulf of Anglia, that Hunna acted as her chaplain, and that Bishop Wilfrith stayed with her on his passage from Northumbria to Rome. Thomas of Ely (fl. c. 1174) has embellished the account of Aethelthrith's flight and journey south by introducing into the story various picturesque incidents, which Bede does not mention. She, with her companions Sewenna and Sewara[280], was saved from her pursuers by water rising round a rock on which they had taken refuge, and she was sheltered by an ash-tree which grew in one night out of her pilgrim's staff and which can still be seen at a place called Etheldredstowe[281]. As Aethelthrith of Ely is a favourite saint of English legend it is interesting to find water and the tree miraculously associated with her.

Shortly after Aethelthrith's departure Ecgfrith summoned Theodore, archbishop of Canterbury, to the north to divide the diocese of York into three separate districts. Wilfrith resented these proceedings as an infringement of his rights, but as he was unable to influence the king he determined to seek the intervention of the Pope and set out for Rome. His absence extended over several years.

It was at this time, Bede tells us, that Aethelthrith 'having built a monastery at Ely began both by example and by admonition of heavenly life to be a virgin mother of very many virgins[282].' The particulars he gives of her life show that she had renounced the splendours which constituted so essential a feature of royalty and had willingly devoted herself to humility and self-denial. She wore no linen, only wool, rarely used a warm bath, save on the eve of great festivals, and assisted at the washing of others. When she fell ill of a tumour in her throat, she told the physician Cynefrith, who lanced it, that she looked upon it as a chastisement for her love of wearing necklaces in her youth. And on her death-bed she desired to be buried in a wooden coffin in the nun's ordinary cemetery.

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[277] Bright, W., *Early English Church History*, 1878, p. 235.

[278] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Coldingham,' vol. 6, p. 149. The promontory of St Abb's Head retains her name. She is believed to have founded another religious settlement at a place in Durham on the river Derwent called Ebbchester, and the village church there is dedicated to her (*Dict. of Nat. Biog.*).

[279] Bede, *Eccles. History*, bk 4, ch. 19.

[280] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Etheldreda June 23, Thomas of Ely, *Vita* ch. 41.

[281] Bright, W., *Early English Church History*, 1878, p. 252 footnote.

[282] Bede, *Eccles. History*, bk 4, ch. 19.

The fame of Aethelthrith spread rapidly. She was looked upon as a virgin, and her name with the epithet virgin was inscribed at an early date in both the Anglo-Saxon and Roman Calendars, and to this day it is to be found in the Book of Common Prayer. Later writers of her legend say that she lived with Ecgfrith 'not as a wyfe but as a lady,' and add as a fitting pendant to this story that she maintained similar relations with her first husband Tunberht[283]. She died in the year 679, having presided over her monastery only six or seven years, but during that time it had gained marked importance. Many women had come to live there with her, and among them her sister Sexburg, widow of the king of Kent, who had founded the monastery at Sheppey and now succeeded Aethelthrith as abbess of Ely.

The chief event of Sexburg's rule at Ely was the exhumation of the bones of Aethelthrith in 695, which were transferred to a stone coffin of antique workmanship which had been opportunely, or miraculously as contemporaries thought, discovered at the old Roman colony of Grantchester near Cambridge[284]. This translation took place on the 17th of October, a day on which the relics were again transferred in 1106, and which is the date of the important fair of Ely[285].

In a supplement to the History of Ely by Bentham, Essex gives an account of the ruins of the conventual church begun by Aethelthrith[286]. Judging from his investigations the church consisted of two parts, the nave and the choir, the windows of the nave outside being ornamented with pillars and arches, and the choir being arched with stone. Traces were still left of the apartments of the abbess from which she could enter the church in a private manner, and of a building opposite of equal dimensions which served as a dormitory for the nuns. At a little distance the remains of another large building were discovered, one room of which, near the entrance to the settlement, was a parlour for the reception of strangers, and the apartment over it a dormitory for the men.

We know little more than the name of the next abbess of Ely. She was Sexburg's daughter Eormenhild, wife of King Wulfhere of Mercia, who had hitherto dwelt in the monastery of Sheppey. Eormenhild in her turn was succeeded by her daughter, the celebrated St Werburg of Chester, who was never married. Various stories are preserved about Werburg's influence, but without reference to her work at Ely. We are indebted to Gocelin for the oldest account of her[287]. He tells us that her uncle King Aethelraed of Mercia entrusted her with the care of all the monasteries in his kingdom, that she had founded religious houses at Trentham and at Hanbury, besides turning a palace at Wedon-le-Street into a monastery[288]. He speaks of her as a person of great cheerfulness and benevolence, and of a peaceful and happy disposition. Several accounts of her are extant in manuscripts of different dates, and as late as the 15th century her life was made the subject of a most graceful metrical epic by the poet Henri Bradshaw († 1513)[289].

We are told that Werburg died at Trentham and that the society of that place wished to keep her body, but the nuns of Hanbury carried it off by force and enshrined it at Hanbury where the day of her deposition was kept[290]. During the viking invasion in 875 the body for the sake of safety was conveyed to Chester, of which town St Werburg then became patron saint. This incident gave rise at a later date to the story that the saint had founded the monastery and the chief church at Chester on land given to her by her father. Livien mentions that nine churches in England are dedicated to St Werburg, who appears to have been a person of considerable importance[291].

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[283] *Kalendre of the newe Legende of Englande*, printed 1516 (Pynson) fol. 39 b.

[284] Bede, *Eccles. History*, bk 4, ch. 19.

[285] *Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Etheldreda, Saint.'

[286] Bentham, *History of Ely*, 1817, p. 9.

[287] Gocelinus, *Vita St Wereburgae* (in Migne, *Patrol. Cursus Compl.* vol. 155).

[288] Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, 1887, p. 49, calls it Weedon in Northamptonshire; Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Wedon,' vol. 6, p. 1051, doubts its existence.

[289] *Life of St Werburgh*, 1521, reprinted for the Early Engl. Text Soc., 1887.

[290] Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, 1887, p. 49.

[291] Livien, E. 'On early religious houses in Staffordshire,' *Journal of the British Archaeolog. Assoc.*, vol. 29, p. 329. (The widespread

Once more we must return to the north and to the work of Bishop Wilfrith, as he came into contact with various other religious women. When he returned to England after an absence of several years Aethelthrith was dead, but King Ecgfrith's hatred of him had not abated. Insulted in his person and nation he caused Wilfrith to be thrown into prison, offering to give him back part of his bishopric and other gifts if he would submit to royal authority and disclaim the genuineness of the document brought from Rome[292]. Queen Eormenburg, whom Ecgfrith had taken to wife in place of Aethelthrith, further embittered the king against the unlucky prelate. She appropriated the reliquary Wilfrith had brought from Rome and wore it as an ornament. For nine months the prelate was kept imprisoned, and the story how he regained his liberty brings us back to Aebbe, abbess at Coldingham, who had formerly sheltered Aethelthrith[293].

According to the account of Eddi, Wilfrith's biographer, the king and queen of Northumbria were staying at Coldingham when the queen was suddenly taken ill. 'At night she was seized like the wife of Pilate by a devil, and worn out by many ills, hardly expected to see the day alive.' The abbess Aebbe went to King Ecgfrith and represented to him that the reason of this seizure was their treatment of Wilfrith.

'And now, my son,' she said, 'do according to the bidding of your mother; loosen his bonds and send back to him by a trusty messenger the holy relics which the queen took from him and like the ark of God carried about with her to her harm. It were best you should have him as your bishop, but if you refuse, set him free and let him go with his followers from your kingdom wherever he list. Then by my faith you will live and your queen will not die; but if you refuse by God's witness you will not remain unpunished.'

Aebbe carried her point and Wilfrith was set free. He went into Mercia which was at war with Northumbria, but he was not suffered to stay there, for Queen Ostrith, the sister of King Ecgfrith, shared her brother's hatred of him. Forced to fly from Mercia he went into Wessex, but King Centwin's wife prevented him from staying there. It is curious to note the hatred with which these married women pursued him while lady abbesses were his friends. At last he found protection among the south Saxons, who fifteen years before had nearly killed him, but their king Aethelwalch († 686) had lately been converted to Christianity and gave him a friendly reception. Wilfrith is represented as joining his civilizing influences to those of the Irish monks who had settled on the coast. An interesting episode of his sojourn here was his intercourse with Caedwalla, afterwards king of Wessex (685-688), who at the time was living as an outlaw in the forests of Sussex[294].

We get further glimpses of Aebbe and the settlement at Coldingham. She entertained a great admiration for the holy man Cuthberht († 687), one of the most attractive figures among the evangelizing prelates of the north, of whom Bede has left an account.

Cuthberht was brought both by birth and education under Scottish influences. He was prior at Melrose before the Whitby synod, but after it came to Lindisfarne where his gentleness of temper and sweetness of disposition won over many to accept Roman usages. Overcome by the longing for solitude and contemplation which was so characteristic of many early Christian prelates, he dwelt as a recluse on the desert island of Farne from 676 to 685. There are many accounts of his life and of his wanderings[295].

At the time when Cuthberht's fame was spreading, Aebbe of Coldingham 'sent to this man of God, begging him to come and condescend to edify both herself and the inmates of her monastery

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cult of St Werburg may be due to there having been several saints of this name; comp. Stanton, R., *Menology*.)

[292] Eddi, *Vita*, c. 34 (in Raine, *Historians of the Church of York*, Rolls series).

[293] Bright, W., *Early English Church History*, 1878, p. 300, casts discredit on this story, which is told by Eddi, *Vita*, c. 38.

[294] Bright, W., *Early English Church History*, 1878, pp. 301 ff.

[295] Hardy, Th. D., *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, 1862, vol. 1, pp. 297 ff.

by the grace of his exhortation. Cuthberht accordingly went thither and tarrying for some days he expounded the ways of justice to all; these he not only preached, but to the same extent he practised[296].'

It is recorded that during his stay at Coldingham Cuthberht went at night to pray on the deserted beach, and the seals came out of the water and clustered around him.

The first instance mentioned by Bede of a lapse of monastic discipline was at Coldingham where disorders occurred during Aebbe's rule[297]. An Irish monk who was on a visit to the monastery had a vision of its destruction by fire, and when questioned about it by the abbess interpreted it as an impending retribution for the tenor of life of those assembled there.

'For even the dwellings,' he said, 'which were built for praying and reading are now converted into places of revelling, drinking, conversation and other forbidden doings; the virgins who are vowed to God, laying aside all respect for their profession, whenever they have leisure spend all their time in weaving fine garments with which they adorn themselves like brides, to the detriment of their condition, and to secure the friendship of men outside.'

Through Aebbe's efforts things somewhat improved, but after her death, the date of which is uncertain, the monastery really was destroyed by fire[298]. The story is told that Cuthberht at Lindisfarne forbade women to cross the threshold of his conventual church on account of the life of the nuns at Coldingham[299], but another version of his doings considers that his attitude was due to an episode with a Scottish king's daughter which turned him against the sex[300].

Cuthberht was also the friend of Aelflaed, abbess of Whitby, who entertained unbounded reverence for him. On one occasion[301] she had fallen ill and, as she herself told the monk Herefrid, suffered so from cramp that she could hardly creep along. 'I would,' she said, 'I had something belonging to my dear Cuthberht, for I believe and trust in the Lord that I should soon be restored to health.'

In compliance with her wish the holy man sent her a linen girdle, which she wore for a time and which entirely cured her. Later a nun by the help of the same girdle was relieved of a headache, but after that the girdle of miraculous power miraculously disappeared. The reason given for this disappearance illustrates naïvely enough how divine power was considered to be justified in making itself manifest with a reservation. 'If this girdle had remained present,' Bede argues, 'the sick would always flock to it; and whilst some one of these might not be worthy to be healed, its efficacy to cure might have been denied, whereas their own unworthiness was perhaps to blame. Therefore, as was said above, Heaven so dealt its benevolence, that, after the faith of believers had been confirmed, then immediately the opportunity for detraction was entirely withdrawn from the malice of the unrighteous.'

Contemporary witnesses bear testimony to the wisdom and prudence of the abbess Aelflaed of Whitby, for Bede says in the life of Cuthberht that 'she increased the lustre of her royal lineage with the higher nobility of a more exalted virginity'; whilst Eddi speaks of her as 'the most virtuous virgin who is actually a king's daughter,' and in another passage characterizes her as 'ever the comforter and best counsellor of the whole province.'

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[296] Bede, *Life of St Cuthbert*, ch. 10.

[297] Bede, *Eccles. History*, bk 4, ch. 25.

[298] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle gives 679 as the date of the fire; Eddi's account represents Aebbe as alive in 681. Perhaps she died in 680; comp. Smith and Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 1877, Ebba, nr 1; also Bright, W., *Early English Church History*, 1878, p. 300, footnote.

[299] Bright, W., ibid., p. 255, footnote.

[300] Hardy, Th. D., *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, 1862, vol. 1, p. 312.

[301] Bede, *Life of St Cuthbert*, ch. 23.

We find her in Cuthberht's society on more than one occasion. Once he met her at the monastery of 'Osingadune' (Easington) where he went to dedicate the church, and while sitting by her at table he had a prophetic vision of the death of one of her servants[302].

The abbess Aelflaed directly appealed to this prophetic insight of Cuthberht's when troubled in her mind about her brother King Ecgfrith, whose expedition against the Picts filled her with apprehension[303]. In the words of Bede: 'At another time, the same most reverend virgin and mother of Christ's virgins, Aelflaed, sent to the man of God, adjuring him in the name of the Lord that she might be allowed to see him, to converse on some pressing affairs. Cuthberht accordingly went on board ship, accompanied by some of the brethren, and came to the island which from its situation opposite to the river Coquet receives its name, and is celebrated for its community of monks; there it was that the aforesaid abbess had requested him to meet her. When she was satisfied with his replies to her many enquiries, on a sudden, while he was yet speaking, she fell at his feet and adjured him by the sacred and venerable Name of the Heavenly King and His angels, to tell her how long Ecgfrith, her brother, should live and rule over the kingdom of the Angles; "For I know," she said, "that you abound in the spirit of prophecy, and that you can tell me this, if you will." But he, trembling at her adjuration, and yet not wishing openly to reveal the secret which she asked for, replied, "It is marvellous that you, a woman wise and well-instructed in the Holy Scriptures, should speak of the term of human life as if it were long, seeing that the Psalmist says, 'Our years shall be considered as a spider[304],' and that Solomon warns us that, 'If a man live many years and have rejoiced in them all, he must remember the darksome time and the many days, which, when they shall come, the things passed shall be accused of vanity[305].' How much more then ought he, to whom only one year of life remains, to be considered as having lived a short time, when death shall stand at his gates?"

'The abbess, on hearing this, lamented the dreadful prophecy with floods of tears, and having wiped her face, with feminine boldness she adjured him by the majesty of the sovereignty of God to tell her who would be the heir of the kingdom, since Ecgfrith had neither sons nor brothers. Cuthberht was silent for a short time, then he replied, "Say not that he is without heirs, for he shall have a successor whom you may embrace with sisterly affection as you do Ecgfrith himself." But she continued: "Tell me, I beseech you, where he is now." And he said, "You see this mighty and wide ocean, how it abounds with many islands. It is easy for God from one of these to provide a ruler for the kingdom of the Angles." Then she understood that he spoke of Ealdfrith (Aldfrid) who was said to be the son of Ecgfrith's father, and who at that time lived in exile, in the islands of the Scots, for the sake of studying letters.'

This meeting, if we credit the historian, took place in 684, and Aelflaed's forebodings were realized. Ecgfrith lost his life, and part of his kingdom was taken by the Picts. In consequence of his defeat the settlement Whithern, set up as a religious outpost in the territory south of the Firth of Forth, was destroyed. Trumwin who had been entrusted with it was forced to fly. He and his friends sought refuge at Whitby where he remained and had much intercourse with Cuthberht and Aelflaed. Bede says that the abbess found 'great assistance in governing and also comfort for her own life' in Trumwin[306].

Northumbria had now passed the zenith of her greatness as a political power, for the territory in the north which was lost through Ecgfrith's defeat was not regained, while in the south the province of Mercia began to shake off the Northumbrian yoke. King Ecgfrith had been succeeded by his half-brother Ealdfrith († 705) and owing to his attitude Wilfrith's exile came to an end. Theodore,

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[302] Bede, *Life of St Cuthbert*, ch. 34.

[303] Ibid., ch. 24.

[304] Psalm lxxxix. 10 (The Vulgate here follows the LXX.; it would be interesting to know what sense they or indeed Bede gave to the passage).

[305] Eccles. xi. 8.

[306] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.*, bk 4, ch. 26.

archbishop of Canterbury, wrote a letter in his behalf to Ealdfrith and also one to Aelflaed of Whitby begging her to be at peace with him[307]. The prelate left Sussex for the north, where he remained for five years in undisturbed possession of his see[308]. But again the old quarrels revived, and Wilfrith in consequence of a council assembled by order of Ealdfrith at Eastrefield was robbed of his episcopal dignity and reduced to his abbacy at Ripon. He again insisted that the king and bishops should submit to the Pope, and at the age of well-nigh seventy he undertook another journey to Rome. But it was in vain he sent envoys to the king on his return. Ealdfrith was determined not to relent, but afterwards approaching death intimidated him. Feeling his end draw nigh he sent for Aelflaed of Whitby, who with the abbess Aethelburg (probably of Hackness) came to where he lay ill at Driffield in the East Riding. Aelflaed received the king's dying words, and at a council of prelates subsequently assembled on the river Nidd bore testimony that he had spoken in favour of making peace. Wilfrith regained part of his influence but remained in retirement at his monastery.

Aelflaed outlived him and her friend Cuthberht who died in 687. It is probable that she assisted at the translation of Cuthberht's body in 698, for in the inventory of the church at Durham one of the linen cloths or outer envelopes of his body, which was taken from it in 1104, is described as 'a linen cloth of double texture which had enveloped the body of St Cuthbert in his grave; Elfled the abbess had wrapped him up in it[309].'

Aelflaed is the last abbess of Whitby known by name. Her death is supposed to have taken place in 713. Her monastery, like so many houses in the north, which had grown to prosperity with the rising power of Northumbria, sank into insignificance with the decadence of that power. This decline was partly due to political reasons, but the dislike which the later kings of Northumbria felt towards monasteries may have had something to do with it. For as we shall see later on the example Queen Aethelthrith had set was probably followed by two other Northumbrian queens, Cyneburg, the wife of Ealhfrith, and Cuthburg, wife of Ealdfrith († 705), who returned to their own countries and there founded monasteries.

[307] Eddi, *Vita*, c. 43.

[308] Bright, W., *Early English History*, 1878, p. 448, from 686-691.

[309] Haigh, D. H., 'On the monasteries of St Heiu and St Hild,' *Yorksh. Archaeol. Journal*, vol. 3, p. 375.

§ 4. Houses in Mercia and in the South

From the north we turn to Mercia and Wessex, the central and south-western provinces of England. Mercia had clung longest to her heathen beliefs, for Christianity was not accepted there till after the defeat of Penda in 655 when Northumbria gained supremacy. Penda, king of Mercia, remained faithful to his gods to the end himself, but his children adopted the new faith. His son Peada had already been baptized in Northumbria by Finnan who sent four ecclesiastics back with him to evangelise the Midlands, and Wulfhere (c. 658-675) Peada's brother and successor was married to the Christian princess Eormenhild of Kent, for whom Queen Sexburg had made the religious foundation at Sheppey. Peada had founded a religious settlement at Burh or Medehampstead which is better known as Peterborough, a name bestowed on it after its restoration in 970. The charter of the foundation of Burh is dated 664, and besides the signatures of Wulfhere and other princes and thanes it bears those of Wulfhere's sisters Cyneburg and Cyneswith[310].

Cyneburg and Cyneswith were esteemed as saints on the strength of their religious foundations at Castor, a village some miles distant from Peterborough; the name Cyneburg is held by the local historian to survive in the appellations of Lady Connyburrow Walk and Coneygreve Close[311]. Cyneburg had been married to Ealhfrith, who was for some time co-regent of Northumbria, but little is known of him after his presence at the synod of Whitby in 664. The charter of the Medehampstead foundation above referred to establishes beyond a doubt that Cyneburg had left her husband to found and preside over her monastery; for she is designated as 'formerly a queen who had resigned her sway to preside over a monastery of maidens[312].' Her legend, which is not older than John of Tinmouth[313], enlarges on this fact, and like Aethelthrith of Ely, Cyneburg together with her sister Cyneswith has found a place in the Calendar as a virgin saint[314].

The legend which tells of Cyneburh and Cyneswith also refers to St Tibba or Tilba, their kinswoman, who dwelt at Ryhall not far from Castor. The same day was kept in commemoration of all these three saints at Peterborough, to which place their bodies were transferred at an early date. For the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (972) says of Aelfsi, abbot of Peterborough: 'And he took up St Kyneburg and St Kyneswith who lay at Castor, and St Tibba who lay at Ryhall, and brought them to Burh, and offered them all to St Peter in one day.' Camden[315] speaks of Tibba as a 'saint of inferior order, who was worshipped as another Diana by fowlers, a patroness of hawking,' and adds information which shows that she was popularly connected with heathen survivals.

Mercia was the birthplace of many picturesque legends about the conversion of members of the ruling family and about their religious foundations. When once Christianity was accepted the activity which kings, queens and prelates displayed in its favour was great, but the historical information we have about them is meagre.

Thus Repton (Repandune) in Derbyshire, a monastery for women, had gained considerable importance when the noble youth Guthlac repaired thither in 694 to devote himself to learning under the abbess Aelfthrith[316]. Nothing is known about the beginnings of the house, and if the abbess Aelfthrith founded it she has not on this account been accepted as a saint like the founders of other houses. This omission may however be due to the difficulties which arose between Aelfthrith

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[310] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Peterborough,' vol. 1, p. 377, nr 2, prints the charter.

[311] Gough, R., *Parochial History of Castor*, 1819, p. 99.

[312] 'Cum beatissimis sororibus meis Kyneburga et Kyneswida, quarum prior regina mutavit imperium in Christi ancillarum praesidens monasterio … etc.'

[313] Hardy, Th. D., *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, 1862, vol. 1, p. 370.

[314] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Kineburga et St Kineswitha, virgines, March 6, argue the existence of a third sister.

[315] Camden, *Britannia*, edit. 1789, vol. 2, pp. 219, 223.

[316] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Repton,' vol. 6, p. 429; the abbesses he mentions should stand in this order: Alfritha, Edburga.

and the prelates of Mercia. We do not know their nature, but in 705 a council of Mercian clergy assembled to consider the re-admission of Aelfthrith to Church privileges[317]. A letter is also extant from Bishop Waldhere of London to Archbishop Brihtwald of Canterbury in which he mentions that a reconciliation has taken place[318].

The noble youth Guthlac who came to study at Repton afterwards became famous, and many accounts of his life have been written[319]. The earliest version, drafted by his friend Felix, supplies some interesting details of the life at Repton and the studies there[320].

We are told that Guthlac's progress was wonderful. 'When he had been there two years he had learnt the psalms, the canticles, the hymns and prayers after the ecclesiastical order,' but he met with disapproval in the monastery by refusing to drink wine. The accounts which he read of the solitary life of the older monks filled him with a longing for solitude, and he left Repton and wandered about till he found the place of his heart's desire at Crowland in the fen country, where he determined to settle. He had received the tonsure at Repton and returned there on a visit before finally settling at Crowland. He did not break his connection with Repton, for we hear that the abbess Ecgburh who succeeded Aelfthrith sent him as a gift a coffin made of wood and lead, together with a linen winding-sheet, and asked who should be warden of the place after him, as though she regarded Crowland as a dependency of Repton[321].

The abbess Ecgburg was the daughter of King Ealdwulf of East Anglia († 714)[322], and an eloquent letter which is quoted later in my account of Boniface's correspondents was probably written by her[323].

In connection with Guthlac's solitary life we hear of a woman Pega, who had also chosen a retreat in the fen country, at a place afterwards known as Peykirk, which is now situated on a peninsula formed by the uplands of Northamptonshire and connected with the mound on which Guthlac dwelt by a ridge of gravel, but which at that time formed an island[324]. One version of Guthlac's life tells how 'he had a sister called Pega whom he would not see in this life, to the intent that they might the rather meet in the life to come'; and another manuscript life says that the Evil One appeared to the saint in the form of Pega. Mr W. de Birch Gray who has reprinted these accounts notices that the tone in which Florence of Worcester speaks of Pega suggests that to him at least she appeared more famous than Guthlac[325].

Different accounts of Guthlac agree that at his death his companions at once departed to fetch Pega. In the celebrated series of drawings of the 12th century, which set forth the story of St Guthlac, the holy woman Pega is depicted twice[326]. In one picture she steps into the boat, in which the companion of Guthlac has come to fetch her, and in the other she is represented as supporting the saint, who is enveloped in his shroud.

The connection between Guthlac and Pega is at least curious, and the authority she at once assumed is noteworthy. 'For three days' space with sacred hymns of praise she commended the holy man to God,' says the Anglo-Saxon prose version of his life[327]. And further, 'After his death when he

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[317] Haddon and Stubbs, *Councils and Eccles. Documents*, 1869, vol. 3, p. 273.

[318] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 274.

[319] Birch, W. de Gray, *Memorials of St Guthlac of Crowland*, 1881.

[320] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Guthlac, April 11; Felix, *Vita*, c. 12.

[321] Felix, *Vita*, c. 33.

[322] Ibid., 'Egburgh abbatissa, Aldulfi regis filia'; Smith and Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 1877, call her 'Eadburga (nr 3)'; two abbesses Ecgburh occur in the Durham list of abbesses, comp. Gray, W. de Birch, *Fasti Monastici Aevi Saxonici*, 1872, p. 70.

[323] Comp. below, ch. 4, § 1.

[324] Holdich, B., *History of Crowland Abbey*, 1816, p. 2.

[325] Gray, W. de Birch, *Memorials of St Guthlac of Crowland*, 1881, Introd. p. l, footnote.

[326] Brit. Mus. MS. Harleian Roll, Y 6, reproduced Gray, W. de Birch, *Memorials of St Guthlac of Crowland*, 1881, pp. 14, 16, etc.

[327] Goodwin, C. W., *The Anglo-Saxon version of the life of St Guthlac*, 1848, p. 93.

had been buried twelve months God put it into the heart of the servant of the Lord that she should remove the brother's body to another tomb. She assembled thither many of the servants of God and mass-priests, and others of the ecclesiastical order… She wound the holy corpse, with praises of Christ's honour, in the other sheet which Ecgbriht the anchoress formerly sent him when alive for that same service.'

The Acts of the Saints give an account of St Pega or Pegia and tell us that she went to Rome where she died[328]. Her reputation for holiness, as far as it is preserved, is based chiefly on her connection with Guthlac, but these accounts leave room for much that must necessarily remain conjecture.

Other women-saints who were reputed to have lived about this period, and who were brought into connection with the rulers of Mercia, claim a passing attention, although their legends written at a much later date supply the only information we have about them. Thus there is St Osith[329] of Colchester, whose legend written in the 13th century is full of hopeless anachronisms. The house of Augustinian canons at Chich[330] in the 12th century was dedicated conjointly to the saints Peter and Paul and to the woman-saint Osith; a canon of this house, Albericus Veerus, probably wrote her legend. Perhaps St Osith of Aylesbury is identical with her[331].

Our information is equally untrustworthy concerning St Frideswith, patron saint of Oxford, for it dates no further back than the 12th century[332]. The chief interest in her legend is that its author establishes a connection between incidents in the life of Frideswith, and the dread which the kings of England had of entering Oxford; a dread which as early as 1264 is referred to as an 'old superstition[333].'

All these women are credited in their legends with founding monasteries and gaining local influence, and excepting in the case of St Tibba, I have come across no coupling of their names with profane cults. Other women-saints who may perhaps be classed with them, though little survives except their names, are St Osburg of Coventry[334], St Modwen of Strenhall in Staffordshire and Burton-on-Trent[335], and St Everhild of Everingham in Yorkshire[336].

Other names which occur in local calendars will be found in the *Menology* of Stanton, who has compiled a very complete list of men- and women-saints in England and Wales from a number of local calendars.

In contrast to the uncertainty which hangs about the settlements under woman's rule in the Midlands and around their founders, two houses founded in the south of England during the 7th century stand out in clear prominence. Barking in Essex, and Wimbourne in Dorsetshire, attained a considerable degree of culture, and the information which has been preserved concerning them is ample and trustworthy.

Bede has devoted several chapters of his history to stories connected with Barking[337]. It owed its foundation to Earconwald sometime bishop of London (675-693) who, after founding a settlement at Chertsey in Surrey under the rule of an abbot, in 666 made a home for his sister Aethelburg at

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[328] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Pega sive Pegia, Jan. 8.

[329] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Ositha, Oct. 7.

[330] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Chich Priory,' vol. 6, p. 308.

[331] Hardy, Th. D., *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, vol. 1, pp. 524 ff.

[332] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Frideswida, Oct. 19; Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Christ Church,' vol. 2, p. 134.

[333] *Dictionary of National Biography*, Frideswide.

[334] Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, 1887, p. 137: 'we have no records of Osburg till 1410.'

[335] Ibid., p. 310: 'there is much obscurity in the history of St Modwenna. It seems that she must be distinguished from one or perhaps two other Irish saints…' Also Livien, E., 'On early religious houses in Staffordshire' in *Journal of the British Archaeol. Association*, vol. 29, p. 333; Hardy, Th. D., *Descriptive Catalogue of Materials*, pp. 94 ff.

[336] Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, 1887, p. 328.

[337] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.*, bk 4, chs. 7-10.

Barking[338] where 'he established her excellently in the regular discipline.' Aethelburg appears to have been an energetic person, and has been raised to the rank of saint[339]. Her settlement included men as well as women, and young children seem to have been entrusted to her care for their education.

Bede says that 'having taken the rule of the monastery she showed herself worthy of her brother the bishop in all respects, both by living rightly herself, and by the pious and prudent course she took to rule those who were subject to her; this was proved by celestial miracles.'

A number of these miracles are described by him with considerable power. Between 664 and 684, a great pestilence, the earliest on record in Christian times, visited England and carried off many of the inmates of Barking. First a boy of three years fell ill and in dying called by name the nun Eadgith, who presently died. Another nun called Torctgith[340] also had a vision of impending death. 'One night at the beginning of dawn, having gone forth from the chamber in which she abode, she saw plainly as it were a human body, which was brighter than the sun, carried up on high, wrapped in fine linen, and lifted apparently from the house in which the sisters were usually placed to die. And when she looked more intently to see by what means the apparition of a glorious body which she beheld was raised on high, she saw that it was lifted up into the upper regions as it were by cords brighter than gold, until being introduced into the opening heavens it could no longer be seen by her.'

This imagery foretold the death of Abbess Aethelburg, who was carried off by the pestilence. She was succeeded at Barking by Hildelith, whom Boniface refers to as a very estimable person and who has also found a place among the saints[341]. Capgrave speaks of her having been educated in France, whence she came to Barking at the desire of Bishop Earconwald to help in establishing the foreign system of discipline.

It was for the abbess Hildelith and her companions at Barking that the scholar Ealdhelm († 709) wrote his great treatise on Virginity, a long and elaborate composition which sets before these women the beauties of the virgin life with a mass of illustration taken from religious and classical literature. From the point of view of women's religious life, it is worth while to describe this treatise at some length, for it shows what a high degree of culture had been attained at Barking towards the close of the seventh century.

Ealdhelm, born of noble parentage about the year 640, is the representative in southern England of the classical revival which was about this time engrafted on Christian teaching. He studied first at Malmesbury under the learned Scot Maidulf and then at Canterbury where Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian were attracting many students, and where he perfected his Latin and musical studies and acquired in some measure the rare and much esteemed knowledge of Greek. 'A wonder of erudition in liberal as well as in ecclesiastical writings,' Bede calls him[342]. From Canterbury he returned to Malmesbury, which owing to his influence attained a fame which it kept till the Middle Ages. In 705 when Wessex was divided into two bishoprics, Ealdhelm was made bishop of the see of Sherbourne.

The interest Ealdhelm took in women was so great that posterity pictured him as continually in their society[343]. Besides his great treatise, passages in his other works bear witness to this interest. In a letter addressed to Sigegith[344], he gave advice about the baptism of a nun who had been received into her community while still a heathen; to another nun whose name is not mentioned he sent a letter

[338] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Barking,' vol. 1, p. 436.

[339] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Ethelburga, Oct. 11; Stanton, R., *Menology of England and Wales*, p. 485.

[340] Stanton, R., *Menology*, calls her Theorigitha but says, p. 36, that she has no day.

[341] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Hildelitha, March 24.

[342] Bede, *Eccles. Hist.*, bk 5, ch. 18.

[343] Capgrave, T., *Catalogus SS. Angliae*, 1516, fol. 10, b.

[344] *Monumenta Moguntina*, edit. Jaffé, Epist. nr 2, written between 675 and 705; Giles (Aldhelm, *Opera Omnia*, 1844, p. 90) calls her Osgith, a name which occurs several times in the Durham 'Liber Vitae.'

together with several poems[345]. He composed verses in praise of a church which Bugga, a daughter of King Centwin (670-685), had built[346]. And besides the prose treatise on virginity addressed to the sisterhood of Barking, he wrote a long poem in heroic hexameters on the same subject called the 'Praise of Virgins'; it has a preface addressed to the abbess Maxima, and is followed by a poem on the 'Eight chief Sins,' likewise intended for the perusal of nuns[347].

Ealdhelm opens his prose work on virginity[348] with thanks to the women of Barking for the writings they have sent to him. Hildelith, Justina, Cuthburg, Osburg, Ealdgith, Scholastica, Hidburg, Burngith, Eulalia and Tecla are addressed by name. He praises them as gymnosophists, as scholars and as fighters in the arena of discipline (c. 2). Like unto bees, he says (c. 4), they collect everywhere material for study.

Sometimes, he says, you study the Prophets, sometimes the Books of the Law, 'now skilfully tracking the fourfold wording of the gospel story, expounded in the mystic commentaries of the Catholic fathers, and spiritually bared to the kernel, and disposed fitly according to the four-square pattern of ecclesiastical usage, namely according to the letter, allegory, tropology and anagogy[349]; now carefully searching into the writers of history and into the collections of chronographers, who have handed down the changing events of the past in wording that impresses the mind. Sometimes you carefully examine the rules of grammarians, the laws of accentuation measured by tone and time, fixed in poetic feet by marks of punctuation, that is divided into parts of verse consisting of two and a half and three and a half feet, and changed in endless varieties of metre.'

Ealdhelm then enlarges on the beauties of the virgin's life, and dwells especially on the charms of peaceful companionship which it secures. Again in their dwelling and working together the women are likened to bees.

The charms of the virgin's life are then set forth in language redundant of imagery, verbose and grandiloquent in the extreme. We are told of the temptations which those who have adopted a religious life must guard against (c. 11). There are eight sins as to which they are especially warned; the chief of these is pride. Women are then directed as to the books they should make a special subject of study, and are recommended to peruse the works of Cassian (who in the 5th century wrote the 'Duties of Monastic Life') and the 'Moralities' of Gregory the Great (which contain reflections suggested by the book of Job), and they are advised to study the Psalms to avoid unhappiness (c. 14). With the love of contrast peculiar to early writers, Ealdhelm shows how the women who serve God and those who do not are different in their bearing and outward appearance, and enlarges on the relative value of different estates (c. 17): virginity is of gold, chastity is of silver; marriage (jugalitas) is of brass; and again: virginity is wealth, chastity is sufficiency, marriage is poverty, etc.

He then displays the wide range of his learning by adducing many writers in support of his views (c. 20-40), in passages which are elaborate and instructive but wearisome through their reiterations. He enumerates all the women famous for their religious lives. The Virgin Mary comes first and she is followed by many women-saints of Italy and the East, on whom there is in some cases much, in others little, comment. In this list we in vain look for the names of religious women living on this side of the Alps. Helen the mother of Constantine (c. 48) is referred to, but her British origin is not mentioned and the idea of it had probably not arisen in Ealdhelm's time.

The writer again turns to those who are devoted to religion, and in passages which are full of interest as a study of the times complains of the personal appearance of the clergy and of those women who have chosen religion as a profession. These passages are among the most instructive

[345] Aldhelm, *Opera*, edit. Giles, 1844, p. 103.

[346] Ibid., p. 115, *De Basilica*, etc.

[347] Ibid., p. 135, *De Laudibus Virginum* (it is not known over which house Maxima presided); p. 203, *De octo Principalibus Vitiis*.

[348] Ibid., p. 1, *De Laudibus Virginitatis* (chapter references in the text are to this edition).

[349] Mediaeval exegesis interpreted in these four ways, comp. Cassian Erem., *De Spiritu Sc.*, c. 8.

in regard to women and clearly show how completely life in a nunnery at the beginning of the 8th century differed from what it was later on.

'It shames me,' he says, 'to speak of the bold impudence of conceit and the fine insolence of stupidity which are found both among nuns (sanctimoniales) who abide under the rule of a settlement, and among the men of the Church who live as clergy under the rule of the Pontiff. These act contrary to canonical decrees and to the rule of regular life, for with many-coloured vestments[350] and with elegant adornments the body is set off and the external form decked out limb by limb. The appearance of the other sex agrees with it; a vest of fine linen of a violet colour is worn, above it a scarlet tunic with a hood, sleeves striped with silk and trimmed with red fur; the locks on the forehead and the temples are curled with a crisping iron, the dark head-veil is given up for white and coloured head-dresses which, with bows of ribbon sewn on, reach down to the ground; the nails, like those of a falcon or sparrow-hawk, are pared to resemble talons'… This state of things Ealdhelm strongly condemns. But he adds the remark that he is addressing no one in particular, evidently to avoid any umbrage his women friends might take at these remarks. His reference to luxurious clothing does not stand alone. The description Bede gives of the women at Coldingham has been quoted, and Boniface in a letter[351] to Cuthberht of Canterbury speaks of 'the adornment of clothes, trimmed with wide edging of purple,' which, he says, is deteriorating the young men in the monasteries, and foretells the coming of Antichrist. Sumptuous clothes as vestments during religious service remained in use, but in all other respects they were condemned as prejudicial to the welfare of those who were vowed to religion.

Ealdhelm's work on virginity closes with an affectionate greeting to his women friends in which he addresses them finally as 'Flowers of the Church, sisters of monastic life, scholarly pupils, pearls of Christ, jewels of Paradise, and sharers of the eternal home.'

His work was greatly prized and widely read both by his own and by later generations. It is extant in several copies of the 8th century[352], and maintained its reputation throughout the Middle Ages. William of Malmesbury († 1141) in his account of Ealdhelm specifies the work on virginity as one 'than which nothing can be more pleasing[353].' It still held its own when printing was introduced, for it was published at Deventer in Holland in 1512, and has since been reprinted for devotional purposes[354].

Among those on whom the book made a profound impression was Cuthburg, sister of King Ina of Wessex (688-725). She was at one time an inmate of the Barking settlement and was probably one of those to whom the work was addressed.

Cuthburg was held as a saint for founding a settlement at Wimbourne in Dorset[355], where the cult of her sister Cwenburg was associated with hers. Cuthburg as mentioned above was said to have left her husband Ealdfrith of Northumbria († 705) from religious motives. Her being held in veneration as a virgin saint may be due to her name being coupled with that of a virgin sister[356]. Missals printed at Rouen in 1515, and at Paris in 1519 and 1529, have an office prescribed for Cuthburg as a virgin[357]. The statement that she was the mother of Osred, afterwards king of Northumbria (706-717), is perhaps unfounded.

There is no doubt as to Ealdhelm's friendly relations both with Cuthburg and her husband. He dedicated his enigmas to Ealdfrith under the title 'Adcircius[358],' and in a letter dated 705 he declares

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[350] I take 'crustu' to go with 'crusta,' comp. Ducange.

[351] *Monumenta Moguntina*, edit. Jaffé, Epist. nr 70.

[352] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Sherbourne,' vol. 1, p. 331, footnote K.

[353] Will. of Malmesbury, *History*, c. 31.

[354] *Dict. of Nat. Biography*, 'Aldhelm.'

[355] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Wimbourne,' vol. 2, p. 88.

[356] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Cuthberga, Aug. 31.

[357] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Wimbourne,' vol. 2, p. 88.

[358] *Opera* edit. Giles, 1844, p. 216; *Dict. of Nat. Biog.*, 'Aldfrith,' he is sometimes called Alfred.

that liberty of election is granted to all congregations under his government including that called 'Wimburnia,' over which Cuthburg, the king's sister, presides[359]. A manuscript of the 14th century, preserved in the nunnery of Romsey, contains a collection of saints' lives, and gives a full account of a conversation Cuthburg had with her husband previous to their separation[360]. It further relates how she placed the basilica of her settlement under the protection of the Mother of God, and was herself buried in it. She died some time between 720 and 730, probably nearer the earlier date, for several abbesses are said to have ruled between her and Tetta. The name of Tetta has been brought into connection with a place named Tetbury, but we know nothing definite concerning a monastery there[361]. As abbess of Wimbourne she was the teacher of Lioba, called also Leobgith, who went abroad at the desire of Boniface as we shall see further on.

In the life of Lioba we get a description of the settlement of Wimbourne[362], which may be somewhat coloured to show the result of Tetta's strict and beneficent rule, but which deserves attention as yielding a fair example of the arrangements which in the eyes of its author appeared desirable for a monastery of women. The author, Rudolf of Fulda, was a monk who wrote between 800 and 850, and who compiled his work from notices which Magno († c. 838) had collected from women pupils of Lioba[363].

'There were two settlements at Wimbourne, formerly erected by the kings of the country, surrounded by strong and lofty walls and endowed with ample revenues. Of these one was designed for men, the other for women; but neither, for such was the rule of their foundation, was ever entered by any member of the other sex. No woman had permission to come among the congregation of the men, no man to enter into the dwellings of the women, with the exception of the priests who entered to celebrate mass and withdrew at once when service was over. If a woman, desirous of quitting the world, asked to be admitted to the sisterhood (collegium), she joined it on condition that she should not leave it unless a reasonable cause or a special occasion took her out with the leave of the abbess. The abbess herself, when she gave orders in affairs of the settlement or tendered advice, spoke through a window and there gave her decision…'

Wimbourne stands last in the list of well authenticated monastic foundations made by women during the early Anglo-Saxon period; of such foundations more than twenty have been mentioned in the course of this chapter. Others no doubt existed at this time, but we only hear of them at a later date. We find among them some of the centres most influential in enabling the Anglo-Saxons to attain a high degree of culture within a hundred years of their conversion to Christianity.

[359] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Wimbourne,' vol. 2, p. 89, nr 2.

[360] *Brit. Mus. MSS. Lansdowne*, 436 f., 38 b.

[361] Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 'Tetbury,' vol. 6, p. 1619.

[362] *A. SS. Boll.*, St Lioba, Sept. 28, c. 2.

[363] Arndt, W., Introd. to translation into German (in Pertz, *Geschichtsschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit*, Jahrhundert 8, Band 2), p. xix.

CHAPTER IV
ANGLO-SAXON NUNS IN CONNECTION WITH BONIFACE

'Et ut dicitur, quid dulcius est, quam habeas illum, cum quo omnia possis loqui ut tecum?'
Eangith to Boniface.

§ 1. The Women corresponding with Boniface

In the course of the 6th and 7th centuries a number of men left England and settled abroad among the heathen Germans, partly from a wish to gain new converts to the faith, partly because a change of affairs at home made them long for a different field of labour. Through the influx of the heathen Anglo-Saxons, the British Christians had been deprived of their influence, and when Christianity was restored it was under the auspices of princes who were favourably inclined towards Rome. Men who objected to the Roman sway sought independence among the heathens abroad in preference to dependence on strangers at home, and it is owing to their efforts that Christianity was introduced into the valleys leading up from the Rhine, into the lake districts of Bavaria, and into Switzerland.

A century later the Church had so far extended the limits of her power that it was felt desirable at Rome that these Christian settlers should be brought into subjection. For the tenets which they held and the traditions which had been handed down to them differed in many ways from what Rome could countenance. They were liberal in tolerating heathen practices, and ignorant of matters of ritual and creed which were insisted on in the Church of Rome. The bishops, who were self-appointed, were won over by the promise of recognising the title to which they laid claim, but the difficulty remained of weaning them from their objectionable practices. Efforts were accordingly made to reconvert the converted districts and to bring some amount of pressure to bear on the clergy.

The representative of this movement in South Germany was Boniface, otherwise called Wynfred, on whom posterity has bestowed the title Apostle of Germany, in recognition of his services in the twofold character of missionary and reformer. He was a native of Wessex, and his mission abroad has an interest in connection with our subject because of the friendly relations he entertained with many inmates of women's houses in England, and because he invited women as well as men to leave England and assist him in the work which he had undertaken.

Boniface had grown up as an inmate of the settlement of Nutshalling near Winchester and first went abroad in 716, but proceeded no further than Utrecht. Conjecture has been busy over the difficulties which took him away, and the disappointments which brought him back. Utrecht was an old Roman colony which had been captured from the Franks by Adgisl, king of the Frisians, who gave a friendly reception there to Bishop Wilfrith in 678. But King Radbod, his successor, was hostile to the Franks and to Christianity, and it was only in deference to the powerful Frankish house-mayor Pippin that he countenanced the settling of Willibrord, a pupil of Wilfrith, with eleven companions in 692. However, owing to Radbod's enmity the position of these monks was such that they were obliged to leave, and it is possible that Boniface when he went to Utrecht was disappointed in not finding them there.

Two years later Boniface went on a pilgrimage to Rome, where the idea of bringing his energies to assist in the extension of Papal influence originated. The Pope furnished him with a letter[364] in which he is directed to reclaim the faithless, and armed with this he travelled in the districts of the Main. But as soon as the news of the death of Radbod the Frisian († 719) reached him he went to Utrecht, where Willibrord had returned. We do not know what afterwards prompted him to resume his work in Germany, but perhaps the proposal of Willibrord that he should settle with him altogether awakened Boniface to the fact that he was not working for the Pope as he proposed. His reception at Rome, where he again went in 722, and the declaration of faith he handed in, are in favour of this view. But Gregory II who was aware of the abilities of Boniface forgave him, and on the strength

[364] Epist. nr 12. The only edition of the letters of Boniface which attempts chronological order is that of Jaffé, Ph., *Monumenta Moguntina*, 1866, the numeration of which I have followed. Additional remarks on the dates of some of the letters are contained in Hahn, H., *Bonifaz und Lull, ihre angelsächsischen Correspondenten*, 1883.

of his declaration provided him with further letters. One of these was addressed to the Christians of Germany, to the representative clergy and to the Thüringians, and another to the house-mayor, Karl Martel, who had succeeded Pippin; both letters commanded that the authority of Boniface was to be everywhere recognised.

From this time for a period of over thirty years Boniface devoted his energies to extending, organizing and systematizing the power of Rome in Germany. His character appears in different lights varying with the standpoint from which he is regarded. Judging from his letters he is alternately swayed by doggedness of purpose, want of confidence in himself, dependence on friends, and jealous insistence on his own authority. He has a curious way of representing himself as persecuted when in fact he is the persecutor, but his power of rousing enthusiasm for his work and for his personality is enormous.

His biographer Wilibald describes this power as already peculiar to him during his stay at Nutshalling, where many men sought him to profit by his knowledge, 'while those who on account of their fragile sex could not do so, and those who were not allowed to stay away from their settlements, moved by the spirit of divine love, sought eagerly for an account of him[365]…'

The interest Boniface had aroused at home accompanied him on his travels. He remained in friendly communication with many persons in England, to whom he wrote and who wrote to him. Among the friends and correspondents whose letters are preserved are churchmen, princes, abbesses, clerics of various degrees, and nuns. From the point of view of this book the letters addressed to women are of special interest, since they bring us into personal contact so to speak with the abbesses and inmates of English convents, and we hear for the first time what they personally have to tell us of themselves.

Among Boniface's early friends and correspondents was Eadburg[366], abbess of the monastery in Thanet. She was a woman of great abilities, zealous in the pursuit of knowledge, and her influence secured several royal charters for her settlement. She had probably succeeded Mildthrith, but at what date is not known. Her letters to Boniface unfortunately have not been preserved, but the letters he wrote to her are full of interesting matter. The earliest of these was written between 718 and 719; in it Boniface does not yet address her as abbess[367].

In this letter Boniface in compliance with a wish Eadburg had expressed, describes a vision of the future life which a monk living at Mildburg's monastery at Wenlock had seen during a state of suspended animation. Boniface had first heard of this vision from the abbess Hildelith of Barking, and he writes a graphic and eloquent account of it, parts of which are put into the mouth of the monk himself. The account gives curious glimpses of that imagery of the future life which early Christians dwelt upon and elaborated more and more. Nuns at this time as well as later took a special interest in the subject.

First the monk is carried aloft through flames which enwrap the world. He sees many souls for the possession of which angels and devils are fighting. Impersonations of his sins confront and accost him, but his virtues arise also and enter into conflict with the sins. The virtues are supported by angels and the fight ends to the monk's advantage. He also sees fiery waters flowing towards hell: and souls like black birds which hover over waters from whence proceed the wails of the damned. He sees Paradise, and a river of pitch over which a bridge leads to Jerusalem, and souls are trying to cross it. Among others suffering torments he catches sight of King Ceolred of Mercia. At last the angels cast the monk down from the height and he re-awakens to life.

Such descriptions of a future life multiply as one nears the Middle Ages. By the side of the one which Boniface sent to Eadburg should be read another by him, a fragmentary one, which supplements

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[365] Willibaldus presb., *Vita Bonifacii*, edit. Jaffé, Ph., *Monumenta Moguntina*, 1866, pp. 422-506, c. 2.

[366] Whether Eadburg of Thanet is identical with St Eadburga buried at Liming (comp. p. 84), is uncertain.

[367] Epist. nr 10.

it[368]. The sufferers in hell mentioned in this are Cuthburg, Ceolla and Wiala (of whom nothing is known), an unnamed abbot and Aethelbald, king of Mercia († 756).

The description of the after life given by Boniface agrees in various ways with one contained in the works of Bede. According to this account there was a man in Northumbria named Drycthelm, who died, came to life again, and described what he had seen of the world to come.

The other letters which Boniface addressed to Eadburg are of later date and were written when he had settled abroad and was devoting his energies to converting the Hessians and Thüringians. At this time he asked her to send him through the priest Eoban the letters of the apostle Peter, which she was to write for him in gold characters. 'Often,' he says, 'gifts of books and vestments, the proofs of your affection, have been to me a consolation in misfortune. So I pray that you will continue as you have begun, and write for me in gold characters the epistles of my master, the holy apostle Peter, to the honour and reverence of holy writ before mortal eyes while I am preaching, and because I desire always to have before me the words of him who led me on my mission…' He ends his letter by again hoping that she will accede to his request so 'that her words may shine in gold to the glory of the Father in heaven[369].'

The art of writing in gold on parchment was unknown to Scottish artists and had been introduced into England from Italy. Bishop Wilfrith owned the four gospels 'written in purest gold on purple-coloured parchment,' and a few of the purple gospels with gold writing of this period have been preserved. The fact that women practised the art is evident from the letter of Boniface. Eadburg must have had a reputation for writing, for Lul, one of Boniface's companions, sent her among other gifts a silver style (*graphium argenteum*) such as was used at the time for writing on wax tablets[370].

Boniface received frequent gifts from friends in England. Eoban, who carried his letter asking Eadburg for the Epistles of St Peter, was the bearer of a letter to an Abbot Duddo in which Boniface reminding him of their old friendship asked for a copy of the Epistles of St Paul[371]. Again Boniface wrote asking Abbot Huetberht of Wearmouth for the minor works (*opuscula*) of Bede[372], and Lul, who was with him, wrote to Dealwin to forward the minor works of Ealdhelm, bishop of Sherbourne, those in verse and those in prose[373].

Judging from the correspondence the effective work of Boniface resulted in the execution of only a small part of his great schemes. His original plan was repeatedly modified. There is extant a letter from the Pope which shows that he hoped for the conversion of the heathen Saxons and Thüringians[374], and the idea was so far embraced by Boniface that he wrote a letter to the bishops, priests, abbots and abbesses in England asking them to pray that the Saxons might accept the faith of Christ[375]. But the plan for their conversion was eventually abandoned.

At this period belief in the efficacy of prayer was unbounded, and praying for the living was as much part of the work of the professed as praying for the dead. Settlements apparently combined for the purpose of mutually supporting each other by prayer. A letter is extant in the correspondence of Boniface in which the abbot of Glastonbury, several abbesses and other abbots agree to pray at certain hours for each other's settlements[376].

[368] Epist. nr 112.
[369] Epist. nr 32, written 735 (Jaffé); after 732 (Hahn).
[370] Epist. nr 75.
[371] Epist. nr 31.
[372] Epist. nr 62.
[373] Epist. nr 76.
[374] Epist. nr 22, written 722 (Jaffé).
[375] Epist. nr 39.
[376] Epist. nr 46.

In his times of trouble and tribulation Boniface wrote to all his friends asking for prayers. 'We were troubled on every side,' he wrote to the abbess Eadburg, quoting Scripture[377], 'without were fightings, within were fears.' She was to pray for him that the pagans might be snatched from their idolatrous customs and unbelievers brought back to the Catholic mother Church.

Eadburg had liberally responded to his request for gifts. 'Beloved sister,' he wrote[378], 'with gifts of holy books you have comforted the exile in Germany with spiritual light! For in this dark remoteness among German peoples man must come to the distress of death had he not the word of God as a lamp unto his feet and as a light unto his paths[379]. Fully trusting in your love I beseech that you pray for me, for I am shaken by my shortcomings, that take hold of me as though I were tossed by a tempest on a dangerous sea.' This consciousness of his shortcomings was not wholly due to the failure of his plans, for Boniface at one period of his life was much troubled by questions of theology. The simile of being tempest-tossed is often used by him. In a letter addressed to an unnamed nun he describes his position in language similar to that in which he addresses Eadburg. This nun also is urged to pray for him in a letter full of biblical quotations[380].

Among the letters to Boniface there are several from nuns and abbesses asking for his advice. Political difficulties and the changed attitude of the ruling princes of Northumbria and Mercia towards convents brought such hardships to those who had adopted the religious profession that many of them wished to leave their homes, and availed themselves of the possibility of doing so which was afforded by the plan of going on pilgrimage to Rome.

The wish to behold the Eternal City had given a new direction to the love of wandering, so strong a trait in human nature. The motives for visiting Rome have been different in different periods of history. To the convert in the 8th and 9th centuries Rome appeared as the fountain-head of Christianity, the residence of Christ's representative on earth, and the storehouse of famous deeds and priceless relics. Architectural remains dating from the period of Roman rule were numerous throughout Europe and helped to fill the imagination of those dwelling north of the Alps with wonder at the possible sights and treasures which a visit to Rome itself might disclose. Prelates and monks undertook the journey to establish personal relations with the Pope and to acquire books and relics for their settlements, but the taste for travelling spread, and laymen and wayfarers of all kinds joined the bands of religious pilgrims. Even kings and queens, with a sudden change of feeling which the Church magnified into a portentous conversion, renounced the splendour of their surroundings and donned the pilgrim's garb in the hope of beholding the Eternal City in its glory.

Among the letters which are preserved in the correspondence of Boniface there is one from Aelflaed, abbess of Whitby, in which she writes to the abbess Adolana (probably Adela) of Pfälzel (Palatiolum) on the Mosel near Trier, recommending to her care a young abbess who is on her way to Rome. This letter shows that Aelflaed was well versed in writing Latin. The name of the abbess in whose behalf the letter was penned is not known, but she may be identical with Wethburg, who lived and died at Rome[381].

'To the holy and worshipful abbess Adolana, a greeting in the Lord of eternal salvation.

'Since we have heard of your holiness from those who have come from your parts, and from widespread report, in the first place I pray for your warm affection, for the Lord has said: This is my command, that ye love one another[382].

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[377] Epist. nr 72, 2 Cor. vii. 5.

[378] Epist. nr 73.

[379] Comp. Ps. cxix. 105.

[380] Epist. nr 87.

[381] Epist. nr 8; written between 709 and 712 (Hahn). Boniface is known to have travelled in the district of the Mosel; there is no other reason why this letter should be included in the correspondence.

[382] John xv. 12.

'Further we make humble request that your holy and fervent words may commend us worthily to God Almighty, should it not be irksome to you to offer devotion in return for ours; for James the Apostle has taught and said: Pray for one another, that ye may be saved.

'Further to your great holiness and usual charity we humbly and earnestly commend this maiden vowed to God, a pious abbess, our dear and faithful daughter, who since the days of her youth, from love of Christ and for the honour of the apostles Peter and Paul, has been desirous of going to their holy threshold, but who has been kept back by us until now because we needed her and in order that the souls entrusted to her might profit. And we pray that with charity and true kindness she may be received into your goodwill, as well as those who are travelling with her, in order that the desired journey with God's help and your willing charity may at last be accomplished. Therefore again and again we beseech that she may be helped on her way with recommendations from you to the holy city Rome, by the help of the holy and signbearing leader (signifer) of the apostles Peter; and if you are present we hope and trust she may find with you whatever advice she requires for the journey. May divine grace watch over your holiness when you pray for us.'

The desire to go southward was strengthened among religious women by the increasing difficulties of their position at home. Monastic privileges were no longer respected by the kings of Mercia and Northumbria, and the Church lacked the power of directly interfering in behalf of monks and nuns. There is in the correspondence a letter which Boniface wrote in his own name and in that of his foreign bishops to Aethelbald, king of Mercia (716-756); he sharply rebukes him for his immoral practices and urges on him the desirability of taking a lawful wife. He accuses the king of indulging his wicked propensities even in monasteries and with nuns and maidens who were vowed to God; following the example of Tacitus, he praises the pure morals of the heathen Germans. The passages which bear on the subject are worthy of perusal, for they show how uncertain was the position of monasteries and how keenly Boniface realized the difficulties of nuns. He tells the king 'that loose women, whether they be vowed to religion or not, conceive inferior children through their wickedness and frequently do away with them.' The privileges of religious houses, he says, were respected till the reign of King Osred (706-17) of Northumbria, and of King Ceolred (709-16) of Mercia, but 'these two kings have shown their evil disposition and have sinned in a criminal way against the teaching of the gospels and the doings of our Saviour. They persisted in vice, in the seduction of nuns and the contemptuous treatment of monastic rights. Condemned by the judgment of God, and hurled from the heights of royal authority, they were overtaken by a speedy and awful death, and are now cut off from eternal light, and buried in the depths of hell and in the abyss of the infernal regions[383].' We have seen that in the letter written by Boniface to Eadburg, Ceolred is described as suffering torments in hell, and that King Aethelbald at a later date is depicted in the same predicament.

With his letter to Aethelbald Boniface forwarded two others to the priest Herefrith, probably of Lindisfarne[384], and to Ecgberht (archbishop of York, 732-66), requesting them to support him against Aethelbald. 'It is the duty of your office to see that the devil does not establish his kingdom in places consecrated to God,' he wrote to Ecgberht, 'that there be not discord instead of peace, strife instead of piety, drunkenness instead of sobriety, slaughter and fornication instead of charity and chastity[385].' Shortly afterwards he wrote to Cuthberht, archbishop of Canterbury (740-62), telling him of the statutes passed at the Synod of Soissons[386], and severely censuring the conduct of the layman, 'be he emperor, king or count, who snatches a monastery from bishop, abbot, or abbess.'

These admonitions show that the position of the religious houses and that of their rulers depended directly on the temper of the reigning prince. In the correspondence there are several letters

[383] Epist. nr 59; written 745 (Hahn).

[384] Epist. nr 60.

[385] Epist. nr 61.

[386] Epist. nr 70; written after 748 (Hahn).

from abbesses addressed to Boniface bearing on this point, which give us a direct insight into the tone of mind of these women. Their Latin is cumbersome and faulty, and biblical quotations are introduced which do not seem always quite to the point. The writers ramble on without much regard to construction and style, and yet there is a genuine ring about their letters which makes the distress described seem very real.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.