**BOOK TWO**

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CHAPTER I: *On the death of Pope Gregory*

BO UT this time, in the year of our Lord *605,* having ruled the apostolic Roman Church most illustriously for thirteen years, six months, and ten days, the blessed Pope Gregory died and was taken up to his eternal home in heaven. And it is fitting that he should receive fuller mention in this history, since it was through his zeal that our English nation was brought from the bondage of Satan to the Faith of Christ, and we may rightly term him our own apostle.\* For during his pontificate, while he exercised supreme authority over all the churches of Christen­ dom that had already long since been converted, he transformed our still idolatrous nation into a church of Christ. So, we may rightly describe him by the term apostle; for if he is not an apostle to others, yet doubtless he is to us, and we are *the seal of*

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*his apostleship in the Lord.*

Gregory was Roman-born, son of Gordian, and descended from ancestors not only noble but devout. Among them was Felix, once bishop of the same apostolic see, a man of high distinction in the Church of Christ, and Gregory maintained this family tradition by the nobility and devotion of his religious life. By God's grace, he turned his aptitude for worldly success wholly to the attainment of heavenly glory . For he suddenly retired from secular life and sought admission to a monastery. There he entered upon a life of such perfection in grace that in later years he used to recall with tears how his mind was set on high things, soaring above all that is transitory , and how he was

*Pope Gregory's early career* [II. I

able to devote himself entirely to thoughts of heaven. Remain ­ ing in the body, he could yet transcend its limitations in contemplation, and looked forward to death, which most men regard as a punishment, as the gateway to life and reward of his labours. He used to mention this, not in order to call attention to his increase in virtue, but lamenting rather the decrease in virtue that he believed himself to have suffered through his pastoral responsibilities. One day, in private conversation with his deacon Peter, Gregory described his former spiritual state, then sadly continued: 'My pastoral responsibilities now compel me to have dealings with worldly men, and after the unclouded beauty of my former peace, it seems that my mind is bespattered with the mire of daily affairs . For when it has squandered itself in attention to the worldly affairs of numberless people, even though it turns inward again to meditate on spiritual things, it does so with unmistakably lessened powers. So when I compare what I now endure with what I have lost , and when I weigh that loss, my burden seems greater than ever.'

Holy Gregory spoke in this way from deep humility. Yet we cannot but believe that he lost none of his monastic perfection through his pastoral cares, and indeed made greater spiritual progress by his labours for the conversion of souls than in his former peaceful life, especially since, even when he became Pope, he ordered his house as a monastery. When he was first summoned from his monastery, ordained to the ministry of the altar, and sent to Constantinople as representative of the apos­ tolic see, he never abandoned his spiritual exercises even amid the concourse of an earthly palace. For some of his fellow­ monks were so devoted to him that they accompanied him to the Imperial city, and he began to maintain a regular religious observance with them. In this way, as he records, their example proved an anchor-cable that held him fast to the peaceful shore of prayer while he was tossed on the restless waves of worldly affairs, and his studies in their company enabled him to refresh a mind distracted by earthly concerns. By their fellowship he was not only strengthened against the temptations of the world, but inspired to ever greater spiritual activity.

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II.1] *Pope Gregory's writings*

When these companions urged him to write a mystical commentary on the often obscure book of Job, he could not refuse a task imposed on him by brotherly affection, which would be of help to many people. So in a work of thirty-five sections he gave a marvellously clear exposition, showing first the literal meaning of the book, then how it refers to th e sacraments of Christ and the Church, and in what sense it applies to each one of the faithful. He began this work when papal representative in the Imperial city, and completed it in Rome after he became Pope. During his stay in Constantinople he encountered a new heresy about our state at the resurrection and aided by the grace of Catholic truth crushed it in the very moment of birth. For Eutychius, bishop of that city, was proclaiming that our bodies will then be impalpable, of finer texture than wind and air: but when Gregory heard this, he proved both by the light of reason and by the example of our Lord's Resurrection that this opinion is utterly opposed to orthodox belief. For the Catholic belief is that the body, when transfigured in the glory of immortality, is indeed made finer by the operation of spiritual power, but remains palpable by reason of its nature. This is exemplified in our Lord's risen body, of which he said to the disciples: *'Handle Me, and see;for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have.'* In defence of the Faith, our venerable father Gregory contested this rising heresy so effectively that, with the help of the devout Emperor Tiberius

' Constantine, it was entirely suppressed, and no one has since been found to revive it.

Gregory also wrote a notable book, *The Pastoral Office,* in which he describes in clear terms the qualities essential in those who rule the Church, showing how they should live; with what discernment they should instruct their various pupils; and with what constant awareness they should daily call to mind their own frailty. He also compiled forty *Homilies* on the Gospel, which he divided into two volumes of equal size. He wrote four books of *Dialogue,* in which, at the request of his deacon Peter, he assembled the most splendid achievements of saints in Italy known or reported to him, to serve as patterns of holy life for

*His genius and sanctity* [II. I

posterity. So, whereas in his *Commentaries* he showed what virtues we should strive for, in describing the miracles of the saints he made clear the splendour of those virtues. In twenty­ two homilies he also revealed the illumination latent in the early and latter parts of the prophet Ezekiel, which had hitherto remained very obscure. Further, he compiled a book of answers in reply to the questions of Saint Augustine, first bishop of the English nation, which I have already mentioned and quoted in full in this history. In conjunction with the bishops of Italy he also compiled the short *Synodical Book,* which deals with the administration of the Church. To these must be added his personal letters. The extent of his writings is all the more amazing when one considers that throughout his youth, to quote his own words, he was often in agony from gastric pain, perpetually worn out by internal exhaustion and frequently troubled by a slow but chronic fever. But in all these afflictions he reflected that holy scripture says: *'The Lord scourgeth every son whom he receiveth',* and the greater his worldly sufferings, the greater his assurance of eternal joy.

Much might be said of his imperishable genius, which was

unimpaired even by the most severe physical affiictions; for while other popes devoted themselves to building churches and adorning them with gold and silver, Gregory's sole concern was to save souls. Whatever money he had he bestowed zealously to relieve the poor, in order that *'his righteousness might endure for ever, and his horn be exalted with honour' .* Like Job, he might justly claim, *'When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me, because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my judgement was as a robe and a diadem . I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor; and the cause which I knew not I searched out . And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.'* And again, *'I have not withheld the poor from their desire, nor caused the eye of the widow to fail; nor have I eaten my morsel*

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II.1] *Pope G regory's concern for the English*

*myself alone , and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof. For in my youth compassion grew up with me, and it came forth with me from my mother's womb.'*

Among his deeds of kindness and justice, this also finds a place, that he saved our nation from the grasp of the ancient enemy by the preachers whom he sent us, and brought it into the abiding liberty of God. He was full of joy at its conversion and salvation, as he mentions with fitting commendation in his Commentary on Job: 'The tongue of Britain, which formerly knew only the utterance of barbarity, has som e time since begun to cry the Hebrew *Alleluia* to the praise of God. The once restless sea now lies quiet beneath the feet of His saints, and its ungovernable rages, which no earthly princes could tame by the sword, are now quelled at the simple word of His priests in the fear of God. Heathen nations who never trembled before armed hosts now accept and obey the teachings of the humble. For now that the grace of the knowledge of God has enlightened them and His heavenly words are received and miracles too are published abroad, the fear of God restrains them from their former wickedness, and they desire with all their hearts to win the prize of eternal life.' In these words Gregory proclaims that the holy Augustine and his companions guided the English nation to knowledge of the truth not only by their preaching but also by the display of miracles.

Among many other matters, blessed Pope Gregory decreed that Mass should be said over the tombs of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul in their churches. He also introduced into the Canon of the Mass three petitions filled with the utmost perfection: *Order our days in Thy peace, preserve us from eternal damnation, and number us in the.flock of Thine elect.*

Gregory ruled the Church during the reigns of the Emperors Maurice and Phocas, and in the second year of the latter's reign he passed from this life and entered the true life of heaven. His body was laid to rest on March the twelfth in the church of Saint Peter the Apostle before the sanctuary, whence he will one day rise in glory with other shepherds of Holy Church. On his tomb was inscribed this epitaph:

*The story of the English slave-boys* [II. I

Receive,0 earth, the body that you gave, Till God's lifegiving power destroy the grave.

Over his heaven-bound soul death holds no sway Who steps through death into a fairer day.

The life of this high Pontiff, here at rest, With good deeds past all reckoning was blest. He fed the hungry, and he clothed the chill, And by his teaching shielded souls from ill.

Wisdom was in his words, and all he wrought Was as a pattern, acting what he taught .

To Christ he led the Angles, by God's grace Swelling Faith's armies with a new-won race.

0 holy pastor, all your work and prayer To God you offered with a shepherd's care.

Triumphant now you reap your just reward, Raised to high place, the consul of the Lord .

I must here relate a story, handed down to us by the tradition of our forebears, which explains Gregory's deep desire for the salvation of our nation. We are told that one day some mer­ chants who had recently arrived in Rome displayed their many wares in the market-place. Among the crowd who thronged to buy was Gregory, who saw among other merchandise some boys exposed for sale. These had fair complexions, fine-cut features, and beautiful hair. Looking at them with interest, he enquired from what country and what part of the world they came. 'They come from the island of Britain,' he was told, 'where all the people have this appearance.' He then asked whether the islanders were Christians, or whether they were still ignorant heathens. 'They are pagans,' he was informed . 'Alas!' said Gregory with a heartfelt sigh: 'how sad that such bright-faced folk are still in the grasp of the author of darkness, and that such graceful features conceal minds void of God's grace! What is the name of this race?' 'They are called Angles,' he was told. 'That is appropriate,' he said, 'for they have angelic faces, and it is right that they should become joint-heirs with the angels in heaven. And what is the name of the province from which they have been brought?' 'Deira,' was the answer.

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II.2] *S . Augustine makes overtures to the British*

'Good. They shall indeed be rescued *de ira* - from wrath - and called to the mercy of Christ. And what is the name of their king?' 'Aelle,' he was told. 'Then,' said Gregory, making play on the name , 'it is right that their land should echo the praise of God our Creator in the word *Alleluia.'*

Approaching the Pope of the apostolic Roman see - for he was not yet Pope himself - Gregory begged him to send preachers of the word to the English people in Britain to convert them to Christ, and declared his own eagerness to attempt the task should the Pope see fit to direct it. This permission was not forthco ming , for although the Pope himself was willing, the citizens of Rome would not allow Gregory to go so far away from the city. But directly Gregory succeeded to the Papacy himself, he put in hand this long cherished project. He sent other missionaries in his place; but it was his prayers and encouragement that made their mission fruitful. And I have thought it fitting to include this traditional story in the history of our Church.

CHAPTER 2: *Augustine urges the British bishops to cement Catholic unity, and performs a miracle in their presence. Retribution follows their refusal* [A.D. 603]

EAN W HI LE, with the aid of King Ethelbert, Augustine summoned the bishops and teachers of the nearest British province\* to a conference at a place still known to the English as Augustine's Oak, which lies on the border between the Hwiccas and the West Saxons. He began by urging them to establish brotherly relations with him in Catholic unity, and to join with him in God's work of preaching the Gospel to the

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heathen.

Now the Britons did not keep Easter at the correct time, but between the fourteenth and twentieth days of the moon - a calculation depending on a cycle of eighty-four years . Further­ more, certain other of their customs were at variance with the

*S. Augustine makes overtures to the British* [11. 2

universal practice of the Church . But despite protracted discus­ sions, neither the prayers nor the advice nor the censures of Augustine and his companions could obtain the compliance of the Britons, who stubbornly preferred their own customs to those in universal use among Christian Churches. Augustine then brought this lengthy and fruitless conference to a close, saying: 'Let us ask our Lord, *who makes men to be of one mind* in His Father 's house, to grant us a sign from heaven and show us which tradition is to be followed, and by what roads we are to hasten our steps towards His kingdom. Bring in some sick person, and let the beliefs and practice of those who can heal him be accepted as pleasing to God and to be followed by all.' On the reluctant agreement of his opponents, a blind English­ man was led in and presented to the British priests, from whose ministry he obtained no healing or benefit. Then Augustine, as the occasion dem anded , knelt in prayer to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, imploring that the man's lost sight be restored and prove the means of bringing the light of spiritual grace to the minds of countless believers. Immediately the blind man's sight was restored, and all acknowledged Augustine as the true herald of the light of Christ. The Britons declared that, while they had learnt that what Augustine taught was the true way of righteousness, they could not abandon their ancient customs without the consent and approval of their own people, and therefore asked that a second and fuller conference might be held.

This was arranged, and seven British bishops and many very

learned men are said to have attended, who came mainly from their most famous monastery which the English call Bancorna­ burg,1 then ruled by Abbot Dinoot. Those summoned to this council first visited a wise and prudent hermit, and enquired of him whether they should abandon their own traditions at Augustine's demand. He answered : 'If he is a man of God, follow him.' 'But how can we be sure of this?' they asked. 'Our Lord says, *Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me,for I am meek*

1 Bangor-is-y-Coed, Clwyd.

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Il.2] *S. Augustine's demands anger the Britons*

*and lowly in heart,'* he replied. 'Therefore if Augustine is meek and lowly in heart, it shows that he bears the yoke of Christ himself, and offers it to you. But if he is haughty and unbend­ ing, then he is not of God, and we should not listen to him.' Then they asked, 'But how can we know even this?' 'Arrange that he and his followers arrive first at the place appointed for the conference,' answered the hermit. 'If he rises courteously as you approach, rest assured that he is the servant of Christ and do as he asks. But if he ignores you and does not rise, then, since you are in the majority, do not comply with his demands.' The British bishops carried out his suggestion, and it hap­ pened that Augustine remained seated in his chair. Seeing this, they became angry, accusing him of pride and taking pains to contradict all that he said. Augustine then declared: 'There are many points on which your customs conflict with ours, or rather with those of the universal Church. Nevertheless, if you will agree with me on three points, I am ready to countenance all your other customs, although they are contrary to our own. These points are: to keep Easter at the correct time;\* to complete the Sacrament of Baptism, by which we are reborn to God, according to the rites of the holy, Roman, and apostolic Church; and to join with us in preaching the word of God to the English.' But the bishops refused these things, nor would they recognize Augustine as their archbishop, saying among them­ selves that ifhe would not rise to greet them in the first instance, he would have even less regard for them once they submitted to his authority. Whereupon Augustine, that man of God, is said to have answered with a threat that was also a prophecy: if they refused to accept peace with fellow-Christians, they would be forced to accept war at the hands of enemies; and if they refused to preach to the English the way of life, they would eventually suffer at their hands the penalty of death. And, by divine

judgement, all these things happened as Augustine foretold.

Some while after this, the powerful king Ethelfrid, whom I have already mentioned, raised a great army at the City of Legions - which the English call Legacestir 1, but which the

1 Chester.

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*S. Augustine consecrates Mellitus and Justus* [II. 3

Britons more correctly named Carlegion - and made a great sla ghter of the faithless Britons. Before battle was joined, he noticed that their priests were assembled apart in a safer place to pray for their soldiers, and he enquired who they were and what they had come there to do. Most of these priests came from the monastery of Bangor, where there are said to have been so many monks that although it was divided into seven sections, each under its own head, none of these sections contained less than three hundred monks, all of whom supported themselves by manual work. Most of these monks, who had kept a three­ day fast, had gathered to pray at the battle, guarded by a certain Brocmail, who was there to protect them from the swords of the barbarians while they were intent on prayer. As soon as King E\_thelfrid was informed of their purpose, he said: 'If they are crymg to their God against us, they are fighting against us even if they do not bear arms.' He therefore directed his first attack against them, and then destroyed the rest of the accursed army, not without heavy loss to his own forces. It is said that of the monks who had come to pray about twelve hundred perished in this battle, and only fifty escaped by flight. Brocmail and his men took to their heels at the first assault, leaving those whom they should have protected unarmed and exposed to the sword-strokes of the enemy. Thus, long after his death, was fulfilled Bishop Augustine's prophecy that the faithless Britons, who had rejected the offer of eternal salvation, would incur the punishment of temporal destruction.

CHAPTER 3: *Augustine consecrates Mellitus and Justus as bishops: his own death* [A. D. 604]

IN the year of our Lord 604, Augustine, Archbishop of Britain, consecrated two bishops, Mellitus and Justus. Mellitus was

appointed to preach in the province of the East Saxons, which is separated from Kent by the river Thames, and bounded on the east by the sea. Its capital is the city of London, which stands

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II.3] *Death of S. Augustine*

on the banks of the Thames, and is a trading centre for many nations who visit it by land and sea. At this time Sabert, Ethelbert's nephew through his sister Ricula, ruled the province under the suzerainty of Ethelbert, who, as already stated , governed all the English peoples as far north as the Humber. When this province too had received the faith through the preaching of Mellitus, King Ethelbert built a church dedicated to the holy Apostle Paul in the city of London, which he appointed as the episcopal see of Mellitus and his successors. Augustine also consecrated Justus as bishop of a Kentish city which the English call H ro fescaestir 1 after an early chieftain named Hrof. This lies nearly twenty-four miles west of Canter­ bury, and a church in honour of Saint Andrew the Apostle was built here by King Ethelbert, who made many gifts to the bishops of both these churches as well as to Canterbury; he later added lands and property for the maintenance of the bishop's household. When our father Augustine, the beloved of God, died, his body was laid to rest just outside the church of the holy A postlcs Peter and Paul, since the church was not yet completed or consecrated. But as soon as it was dedicated, his body was brought inside and buried in the north chapel with great honour. This is also the last resting-place of all succeeding archbisho ps except Theodore and Bertwald, whose bodies lie inside the church, no space remaining in the chapel. Almost in the centre of the church stands an altar dedicated in honour of blessed Pope Gregory, at which a priest of the place says solemn mass in their memory each Saturday. On the tomb of Augustine is inscribed

this epitaph:

'Here rests the Lord Augustine, first Archbishop of Canter­ bury, who, having been sent here by blessed Gregory, Pontiff of the City of Rome, and supported by God with miracles, guided King Ethelbert and his people from the worship of idols to the Faith of Christ. He ended the days of his duty in peace, and died on the twenty-sixth day of May in the above King's reign.'\*

' Rochester.

CHAPTER 4: *Laurence and his fellow-bishops urge the Irish to main­ tain the unity of the Church, particularly in the observance of Easter: Mellitus visits Rome* [A.D. 605-10]

UGUS TI N E was succeeded in the archbishopric by Laurence, whom he had consecrated during his own lifetime; for he feared that even a short interval without a pastor might cause a setback to the newly established Church. In so doing, he followed the precedent set by the Church's first Pastor, blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, who, having established the Church in Rome, is said to have consecrated Clement as his assistant and successor. On receiving the dignity of archbishop, Laurence gave constant encouragement and a holy example to his flock, working tirelessly to perfect the edifice of the Church whose foundations he had seen so nobly laid. Nor was his interest limited to the Church newly recruited from the English; for he sought also to extend his pastoral care to the original inhabitants of Britain, and to the Irish of Ireland adjacent to this island of Britain. For having learned that in their own country the life and practice of the Irish and of the Britons were in many respects unorthodox - particularly in the observance of Easter, which, as previously explained, they did not keep at the right time, but between the fourteenth and twentieth days of the moon - he wrote them a letter jointly with his fellow-bishops, urging them to join in maintaining the unity, peace, and Catholic customs of the Christian Church established through­

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out the world. This letter commences:

'To our dear brothers the lord bishops and abbots throughout Irish lands: from Laurence, Mellitus, and Justus, servants of the servants of God.

'When, in accordance with its custom, which holds good

throughout the world, the apostolic see sent us to the western lands to preach the Gospel to the heathen peoples, we came to this island of Britain. Until we realized the true situation, we had a high regard for the devotion both of the Britons and of the Irish, believing that they followed the customs of the universal Church. On further acquaintance with the Britons,

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*The English bishops' letter to the Irish*

we imagined that the Irish must be better. We have now, however, learned through Bishop Dagan on his visit to this island, and through Abbot Columbanus in Gaul, that the Irish are no different from the Britons in their practices. For when Bishop Dagan visited us, he refused not only to eat with us but even to take his meal in the same house as ourselves.'

Laurence and his fellow-bishops also wrote a dignified letter to the British bishops, in which he tried to bring them into Catholic unity; but the present state of affairs shows how little he succeeded.

At this time Mellitus, Bishop of London, visited Rome to acquaint the Pope with the affairs of the Church of the English. This most reverend Pope had summoned a council of the bishops of Italy to draw up regulations for monastic life and discipline, and Mellitus sat with them at this council, which took place on the twenty-seventh of February 61o in the eighth year of the Emperor Phocas. The presence of Mellitus enabled him to subscribe to all the regular decisions of the council and confirm them with his authority, and to convey them to the Churches of the English for their acceptance and promulgation on his return to Britain. He also brought back letters from the Pope both to God's beloved Archbishop Laurence and all his clergy, and to King Ethelbert and his people. This Pope was Boniface (IV], third bishop of Rome after Gregory, who persuaded the Emperor Phocas to give the Christian Church the Roman temple anciently known as the *Pantheon,* as though it were emblematic of all the gods. After solemn purification, Boniface consecrated it as the Church of the Holy Mother of God and all Christian Martyrs; and once its company of devils

had been cast out, it became a memorial to the company of Saints.

CHAPTER 5: *At the deaths of Ethelbert and Sabert their successors revive idolatry: on this account, both Mellitus and Justus leave Britain* **[A.O.** 616]

N the year of our Lord 616 - the twenty-first year after Augustine and his companions were dispatched to preach to the English nation - King Ethelbert of the Kentish folk died after a glorious earthly reign of fifty-six years, and entered the eternal joys of the kingdom of heaven. He was the third English king to hold sway over all the provinces south of the river Humber, but he was the first to enter the kingdom of heaven. The first king to hold such overlordship was Aelle, King of the South Saxons; the second was Caelin, King of the West Saxons, known in the speech of his people as Ceaulin; the third, as I have mentioned, was Ethelbert, King of the Kentish folk; the fourth was Redwald, King of the East Angles, who in the lifetime of Ethelbert acted as the military leader of his own people. The fifth was Edwin, King of the Northumbrians, that is, the people living north of the Humber, who was a powerful king, and ruled all the peoples of Britain, both Angles and Britons, with the exception of the Kentish folk. He also brought under English rule the British Mevanian Isles, 1 which lie between Ireland and Britain. The sixth was Oswald, also King of the Northumbrians but a most Christian one, who main­ tained the same frontiers; the seventh was his brother Oswy, who for a while ruled the same territory, and to a large extent conquered and made tributary the Picts and Irish in the northern

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parts of Britain. But I shall speak of these kings later.\*

King Ethelbert died on the twenty-fourth of February, twenty-one years after embracing the Faith, and was buried in Saint Martin's chapel in the Church of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, where Bertha his queen also rests. Among the many benefits that his wisdom conferred on the nation, he introduced with the consent of his counsellors a code of law inspired by the example of the Romans, which was written in

1 Man and Ang lesey.

IIO III

**11.5)** *King Eadbald rejects the faith*

English, and remains in force to this day. The first of his laws is designed to protect those whose persons and doctrines he had embraced, and prescribes what satisfaction must be made by any person who steals property from the Church, the bishop, or other clergy.

Ethelbert was son of Irminric, son of Octa, and after his grandfather Oeric, surnamed Oise, the kings of the Kentish folk are commonly known as Oiscings. The father of Oeric was Hengist, who first came to Britain with his son Oeric at the invitation ofVortigern, as I have already related.

The death of Ethelbert and the accession of his son Eadbald proved to be a severe setback to the growth of the young Church; for not only did he refuse to accept the Faith of Christ, but he was also guilty of such fornication as the Apostle Paul mentions as being unheard of even among the heathen, in that he took his father's (second) wife as his own. His immorality was an incentive to those who, either out of fear or favour to the king his father, had submitted to the discipline of faith and chastity, to revert to their former uncleanness. However, this faithless king did not escape the scourge of God's punishment; for he was subject to frequent fits of insanity and possessed by an evil spirit.

The death of the Christian King Sabert of the East Saxons aggravated the upheaval; for, when he departed for the heavenly kingdom he left three sons, all pagans, to inherit his earthly kingdom. These were quick to profess idolatry, which they had pretended to abandon during the lifetime of their father, and encouraged their people to return to the old gods. It is told that when they saw Bishop Mellitus offering solemn Mass in church, they said with barbarous presumption: 'Why do you not offer us the white bread which you used to give to our father Saba (for so they used to call him), while you continue to give it to the people in church?' The Bishop answered, 'If you will be washed in the waters of salvation as your father was, you may share in the consecrated bread, as he did; but so long as you reject the water of life, you are quite unfit to receive the Bread of Life.' They retorted: 'We refuse to enter that font and see no

*Laurence converts King Eadbald* [11.6

need for it; but we want to be strengthened with this bread.' The Bishop then carefully and repeatedly explained that this was forbidden, and that no one was admitted to receive the most holy Communion without the most holy cleansing of Baptism. At last they grew very angry, and said: 'If you will not oblige us by granting such an easy request, you shall no longer remain in our kingdom.' And they drove him into exile, and ordered all his followers to leave their borders.

After his expulsion, Mellitus came to Kent to consult with his fellow-bishops Laurence and Justus on the best course of action; and they decided that it would be better for all of them to return to their own country and serve God in freedom, rather than to remain impotently among heathen who had rejected the Faith. Mellitus and Justus left first and settled in Gaul to await the outcome of events. But the kings who had driven out the herald of truth did not long remain unpunished for their worship of demons; for they and their army fell in battle against the West Saxons. Nevertheless, the fate of the instigators did not cause their people to abandon their evil practices, or to return to the simple faith and love to be found in Christ alone.

CHAPTER 6: *Laurence is reproved by Saint Peter, and converts King Eadbald to Christ. Mellitus and Justus are recalled* [A.D. 616)

N the very night before Laurence too was to follow Mellitus and Justus from Britain, he ordered his bed to be placed in the Church of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, of which we have spoken several times. Here after long and fervent prayers for the sadly afflicted Church he lay down and fell asleep. At dead of night, blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, appeared to him, and set about him for a long time with a heavy scourge, demanding with apostolic sternness why he was aban­ doning the flock entrusted to his care, and to which of the shepherds he would commit Christ's sheep left among the wolves when he fled. 'Have you forgotten my example?' asked Peter. 'For the sake of the little ones whom Christ entrusted to

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*Death of Laurence; succession of Mellitus*

me as proof of His love, I suffered chains, blows, imprisonment, and pain. Finally, I endured death, the death of crucifixion, at the hands of unbelievers and enemies of Christ, so that at last I might be crowned with Him.' Deeply moved by the words and scourging of blessed Peter, Christ's servant Laurence sought audience with the king early next morning, and removing his garment, showed him the marks of the lash. The king was astounded, and enquired who had dared to scourge so eminent a man; and when he learned that it was for his own salvation that the archbishop had suffered so severely at the hands of Christ's own Apostle, he was greatly alarmed. He renounced his idolatry, gave up his unlawful wife, accepted the Christian Faith, and was baptized, henceforward promoting the welfare of the Church with every means at his disposal.\*

The king also sent to Gaul and recalled Mellitus and Justus, giving them free permission to return and set their churches in order: so, the year after they left, they retu rned. Justus came back to his own city of Rochester; but the people of London preferred their own idolatrous priests, and refused to accept Mellitus as bishop. And since the king's authority in the realm was not so effective as that of his father, he was powerless to restore the bishop to his see against the refusal and resistance of the pagans. After his conversion, however, he and his people were zealous to observe the teachings of our Lord, and in the monastery of the most blessed prince of the Apostles he built a church to the Holy Mother of God, which was consecrated by Archbishop Mellitus.

CHAPTER 7: *The prayers of Bishop Mel/itus put out a fire in his city*

[A.O. 619]

N the second d y of February in the same king's reign, the blessed Archbishop Laurence passed to the kingdom of heaven, and was buried in the monastery church of the holy Apostle Peter next to his predecessor. Mellitus, Bishop of London, became the third Archbishop of Canterbury in the

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**II4**

*Death of Mellitus* [II.7

succession of Augustine, while Justus, who was still living, ruled the Church of Rochester. While these bishops were guiding the Church of the English with great care and energy, they received letters of encouragement from Boniface, Bishop of the apostolic Roman see, who succeeded Deusdedit in the year of our Lord 619. And although Mellitus became crippled with the gout, his sound and ardent mind overcame his trouble­ some infirmity, ever reaching above earthly things to those that are heavenly in love and devotion. Noble by birth, he was even nobler in mind.

I record one among many instances of his virtue. One day the city of Canterbury was set on fire through carelessness, and the spreading flames threatened to destroy it. Water failed to extinguish the fire, and already a considerable area of the city was destroyed. As the raging flames were sweeping rapidly towards his residence, the bishop, trusting in the help of God where man's help had failed, ordered himself to be carried into the path of its leaping and darting advance. In the place where the flames were pressing most fiercely stood the Church of the Four Crowned Martyr s.\* Hither the bishop was borne by his attendants, and here by his prayers this infirm man averted the danger which all the efforts of strong men had been powerless to check. For the southerly wind, which had been spreading the flames throughout the city, suddenly veered to the north, thus saving the places that lay in their path: then it dropped altogether, so that the fires burned out and died. Thus Mellitus, the man of God, afire with love for him, because it had been his practice by constant prayers and teaching to fend off storms of spiritual evil from himself and his people, was deservedly empowered to save them from material winds and flames.

Having ruled the Church five years, Mellitus likewise departed to the heavenly kingdom in the reign of King Eadbald, and was laid to rest with his predecessors in the same monastery church of the holy Apostle Peter on the twenty-fourth day of April, in the year of our Lord 624.

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CHAPTER 8: *Pope Boniface* [*VJ sends the* pallium *with a letter to Justus, Mellitus' successor* [A. D. 624]

USTUS , Bishop of Rochester, at once succeeded Mellitus as archbishop . He\_ consecr ted Roman s as Bishop of Ro hester m his place, havmg received authonty to consecrate bishops from Pope Boniface, successor to Pope Deusdedit. This letter

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of authority runs as follows:

'BONIFACE, to his well beloved brother Justus. The contents of your letter and the success granted to your work are double evidence of your devotion and diligence in spreading the Gospel of Christ. Almighty God has not been unmindful of the honour due to His Name, or of the reward due to your labours; for He has faithfully promised the preachers of the Gospel, *" Lo, I am with you always , even unto the end of the world ."* This pro mise He has of His mercy especially fulfilled in your own ministry, opening the hearts of the nations to receive the mystery of the Gospel through your preaching. For He has crowned the wonderful progress of your good work with His blessing, and has granted a plentiful increase to the faithful employment of the talents entrusted to you, which will set your seal on many generations to come. This is the just reward of the constancy with which you have held to your appointed mission·, while with commendable patience you await the redemption of this nation, so that it may profit through the merits of those who work for its salvation; for our Lord Himself has said, *"He that endureth to the end shall be saved."* By your patient hope an d courageous endurance you have been saved, so that you may cleanse the hearts of the heathen from the ills implanted by nature and by superstition, and obtain mercy for them from their Saviour. We learn, furthermore, from the letters of our son King Ethelwald, 1 how your profound knowledge of God's holy word has guided him to a real conversion and acceptanc e of the true Faith. We firmly trust in God's patience and mercy, and are confident that your preaching and ministry will effect a

1 i.e. Eadbald.

*Edwin King of the Northumbrians*

complete conversion of his own people and also of their neighbours. In this way, as the Scripture says, will you receive the reward of a task well done from the Lord and Giver of all good things, and the universal profession of the nations, after receiving the mysteries of the Christian Faith, will proclaim: *"Their sound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."*

'Moved by your devotion, my brother, we are sending you by the bearer of this letter the *pallium,* which we grant you the privilege of wearing only when you celebrate the Holy Myster­ ies. We also grant you authority, under the guiding mercy of our Lord, to consecrate bishops as occasion may require, in order that the Gospel of Christ may be diffused by the mouths of many preachers among all nations as yet unconverted . We are confident that you will maintain with whole-hearted sin­ cerity this dignity granted you by the favour of the Apostolic See, bearing in mind all that is symbolized by this highest of honours which you have received to wear on your shoulders. And, as you implore God's mercy, endeavour so to live and labour that when you stand before the judgement seat of God, you may display this honour which we grant you not only unstained but enhanced by the witness of all the souls which you have won.

'God keep you in safety, my dearest brother.'

CHAPTER 9 : *The reign of King Edwin: Paulinus comes to preach the Gospel to him, and first ad ministers the Sacrament of Baptism to his daughter and others* [A.D . 625]

T this time, the people of the Northumbrian , the n\_glish living north of the Humber, under Edwm their kmg received the Faith through the ministry of Paulinus, whom I have already mentioned. As a sign that he would come to the Faith and the heavenly kingdom, King Edwin received wide additions to his earthly realm, and brought under his sway all the territories inhabited either by English or by Britons, an

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*Edwin marries a Christian princess*

achievement unmatched by any previous English king. He also brought the Isles of Anglesey and Man under English rule: of these, the southern island is the larger and more fertile, and by English reckoning, extends to nine hundred and sixty hides, while the other island extends to rather more than three hundred.\*

The Northumbrian people's acceptance of the Faith of Christ came about through heir king's alliance with the kings of Kent by his marriage to E helberga, known as Tata, a daughter of King Ethelbert. Edwin \sent an embassy of nobles to her brother

Eadbald, then king of *t* Kentish folk, to request her hand in

marriage, but received t e reply that it was not permissible for a Christian maiden to e given in marriage to a heathen husband, lest the Christian' Faith and Sacraments be profaned by her association with a king who was wholly ignorant of the worship of the true God. When Edwin's messengers returned with this reply, he gave an assurance that he would place no obstacles in the way of the Christian Faith, and would afford complete freedom to Ethelberga and her attendants, both men and women, priests and servapts, to live and worship in accordance with Christian belief and practice. He also professed himself willing to accept the religion of Christ if, on examina­ tion, his advisers decided that it appeared more holy and acceptable to God than their own.

On this understanding, the maiden was betrothed and sent to Edwin; and in accordance with the agreement Paulinus, a man beloved of God, was consecrated bishop, so that he could accompany the princess as her chaplain and by daily Mass and instruction preserve her and her companions from corruption by their association with the heathen.

Paulinus was consecrated bishop by Archbishop Justus on July 21st, 625, and came to Edwin with the princess as her spiritual counsellor in the marriage. But he was further deter­ mined to bring the nation to which he was sent to the knowl­ edge of the Christian truth, and to fulfil the Apostle's saying, *'to espouse her to one husband, that he might present her as a chaste virgin to Christ'.* Therefore, directly he entered the province he began

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*An attempt on Edwin's life* [JI.9

to toil unceasingly not only by God's help to maintain the faith of his companions unimpaired, but if possible to bring some of the heathen to grace and faith by his teaching. But although he laboured long, yet as the Apostle says, *'the god of this world blinded the minds of them which believed not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine unto them'.*

During the following year, an assassin named Eumer was sent into the province by Cuichelm, King of the West Saxons, in order to rob Edwin both of his kingdom and his life. This man had a double-edged, poisoned dagger, to ensure that if the wound itself were not mortal, the poison would complete its work. On Easter Day Eumer arrived at the royal residence by the Derwent, and was admitted into the king's presence on the pretext of delivering a message from his master. And while he was artfully delivering his pretended message, he suddenly sprang up, and drawing the dagger from beneath his clothes, attacked the king. Swift to see the king's peril, Lilla, his thegn\* and best friend, having no shield to protect the king, interposed his own body to receive the blow; but even so, it was delivered with such force that it wounded the king through the body of his warrior. The assassin was immediately attacked on all sides, but killed yet another of the king's men named Fordhere in the ensuing struggle.

On the same holy night of Easter Day, the queen was delivered of a daughter, to be named Eanfled; and as the king thanked his gods in the presence of Bishop Paulinus for the birth of his daughter, the bishop gave thanks to Christ, and told the king that it was Christ who had given the queen a safe and painless delivery in response to his prayers. The king was greatly pleased at his words, and promised that if God would grant him life and victory over the king his enemy who had sent the assassin, he would renounce his idols and serve Christ; and as a pledge that he would keep his word he gave his infant daughter to Paulinus to be consecrated to Christ. Accordingly, on the Feast of Pentecost this infant, together with twelve others of her household, was the first of the Northumbrians to receive Baptism.

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II. IO] *Character of Edwin*

When the king had recovered from the assassin's wound, he summoned his forces, marched against the West Saxons, and in the ensuing campaign either slew or forced to surrender all those who had plotted his murder. Returning home victorious, the king would not receive the Sacrament of Christian Baptism at once or without due consideration, although he had already abandoned idol-worship when he promised that he would serve Christ. But he wished first to receive a full course of instruction in the Faith from the venerable Paulinus, and to discuss his proper course **with** those of his counsellors on whose wisdom he placed most reliance. For the king was by nature a wise and prudent man, and often sat alone in silent converse with himself for long periods, turning over in his inmost heart what he should do and which religion he should follow.

CHAPTER 1 o: *Pope Boniface writes to the king, urging him to accept the Faith*

BO UT this time, the king received a letter from Boniface,

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Bishop of the apostolic Roman see, urging him to accept the Faith. Here follows a copy of this letter, sent by the blessed and apostolic Pope Boniface of the Church and City of Rome to the illustrious Edwin, King of the English:

'To the illustrious Edwin, King of the English: Boniface, Bishop, servant of the servants of God.

'The words of man can never express the power of the supreme Divinity, abiding in His own greatness, invisible, inscrutable, eternal, such that no human intelligence can under­ stand or define how great it is. Nevertheless, God's humanity having opened the doors of man's heart to admit **Him,** merci­ fully infuses into their minds by secret inspiration some knowl­ edge of Himself. Accordingly, we have undertaken to extend our priestly responsibility to disclose to you the fullness of the Christian Faith, in order that we may impart to your sense also the Gospel of Christ, which our Saviour commanded to be

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*Letterfrom Pope Boniface to Edwin* [II. IO

preached to all nations, and may offer you the medicine of salvation.

'The clemency of the Divine Majesty, who by His Word alone created and established the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that in them is, has ordained the laws by which they subsist; and by the counsel of His co-eternal Word in the unity of the Holy Spirit He has formed man after His own image and likeness from the dust of the earth. He has further granted him a most excellent prerogative, placing him above all other creatures in order that he may inherit eternal life by obedience to His commandments. This God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - the undivided Trinity - is adored and worshipped by the human race from east to west, which confesses Him by the faith that brings salvation as Creator of all things and Maker of all men. To him are subject all imperial power and authority; for it is by him that kingship is conferred. Of His ·bountiful mercy and for the well-being of all his creatures, He has been pleased to warm with His Holy Spirit the frozen hearts of the most distant nations of the world in a most wonderful manner to knowledge of Himself.

'We presume that Your Majesty has heard in fuller detail, as from a neighbouring territory, how our Redeemer in His mercy has brought light to our excellent son Eadbald and the nations subject to him. We therefore trust that Heaven's mercy will grant this wonderful gift to you as it has to him, more especially as we understand that your gracious Queen and true partner is already endowed with the gift of eternal life through the regeneration of Holy Baptism. In this letter we affectionately urge Your Majesties to renounce idol-worship, reject the mum­ mery of shrines and the deceitful flattery of omens, and believe in God the Father Almighty, and in His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. This Faith will free you from Satan's bondage, and through the liberative power of the holy and undivided Trinity you will inherit eternal life.

'The profound guilt of those who perversely cling to perni­ cious superstition and idolatrous worship is clearly shown by the damnable example of those they adore. Of such the Psalmist

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II.IO] *Letter from Pope Boniface to Edwin*

says: *"All the gods of the nations are idols; but the Lord made the heavens."* And again: *"Eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not; they have hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not. They that make them are like unto them; so is everyone that trusteth in them."* How can such objects have power to help you, when they are made for you from perishable materials by the labour of your own subjects and servants? Even their inanimate resem­ blance to living shapes is due solely to man's craftsmanship. Unless you move them they cannot move, but are like a stone fixed in its place: they are manufactured, but have no intelli­ gence, being utterly insensible and having no power to hurt or help. We cannot understand how people can be so deluded as to worship as gods objects to which they themselves have given the likeness of a body.

'Accept therefore the sign of the Holy Cross, by which the

entire human race has been redeemed, and exorcize from your heart the damnable crafts and devices of the Devil, who jealously opposes all the workings of God's goodness. Overthrow and destroy these artificial gods of your own making; and the very destruction of these things, which never drew the breath of life and could never receive understanding from their makers, will itself afford you clear evidence of the nothingness of these objects of your former worship. Consider, you yourselves, to whom God has given the breath of life, are nobler than these man-made things; for Almighty God has ordered your descent through countless generations from the first man that He created. Therefore accept the knowledge of your Creator, who breathed into your frame the breath of life, and who sent His only-begotten Son for your redemption, that He might deliver you from original sin and the evil power of the Devil, and grant you the prize of Heaven.

'Accept the message of the Christian teachers and the Gospel that they proclaim. Believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His Son and in the Holy Spirit, the inseparable Trinity. Spurn the temptations of the Devil, and reject all the suggestions of our malicious and deceitful enemy. Thus, born

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*Pope Boniface's letter to Queen Ethelberga* [II. I I

again by water and the Holy Spirit, you will be empowered by God's generous aid to abide in the splendour of eternal glory with Him in whom you shall come to believe.



'We impart to you the blessing of your protector, blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles. With it we send you a tunic with a golden ornament, and a cloak from Ancyra, asking Your Majesty to accept these gifts with the same goodwill as that with which we send them.'

CHAPTER 11: *The Pope writes to the Queen, urging her to exert her influence to obtain the king's salvation*

H E Pope also wrote to Queen Ethelberga as follows. **A** copy of the letter of the blessed and apostolic Boniface, Pope of the City of Rome, to Ethelberga, Queen of King

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Edwin:

'To his illustrious daughter, Queen Ethelberga, from Bishop Boniface, servant of the servants of God.

'In His great providence, our loving Redeemer has offered a saving remedy to the human race, which He has saved from the Devil's enslaving tyranny by the shedding of His own precious Blood. Christ has made His Name known to the nations in various ways, so that they may acknowledge their Creator by accepting the mysteries of the Christian Faith. God in His mercy has revealed this truth to Your Majesty's own mind in your own mystical cleansing and regeneration. We have been greatly encouraged by God's goodness in granting you, through your own profession of faith, an opportunity to kindle a spark of the true religion in your husband; for in this way He will more swiftly inspire not only the mind of your illustrious Consort to love of Him, but the minds of your subjects as well.

'We have been informed by those who came to report the laudable conversion of our glorious son King Eadbald that Your Majesty, who has also received the wonderful sacrament of the Christian Faith, shows a shining example of good works,

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II.II) *Pope Boniface's letter to Queen Ethelberga King Edwin is moved to accept the Faith* [II. 12

pleasing to God. We also know that you carefully shun idol­ worship and the allurements of temples and divinations; and that, having given your allegiance to Christ, you are unshake­ ably devoted to the love of our Redeemer and labour constantly to propagate the Christian Faith. Out of pastoral affection, we particularly enquired about your illustrious husband and learned that he still serves abominable idols and is slow to listen to the teaching of the preachers. It has caused us deep grief to hear that your partner remains a stranger to the knowledge of the most high and undivided Trinity. Our paternal responsibility moves us to urge Your Christian Majesty, imbued with the force of divine inspiration, not to avoid the duty imposed on us in season and out of season, in order that, with the assistance and strength of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the King also may be added to the Christian fold. Only in this way will you enjoy the full privileges of marriage in perfect union; for the Scripture says, *"The two shall become one flesh."* But how can it be called a true union between you, so long as he remains alienated from the daylight of your Faith by the barrier of dark and lamentable error?

'Let it therefore be your constant prayer that God of His mercy will bless and enlighten the King, so that you, who are united in one flesh by the ties of bodily affection, may after this fleeting life remain united for ever in the bond of faith. My illustrious daughter, persevere in using every effort to soften his heart by teaching him the commandments of God. Help him to understand the excellence of the mystery that you have accepted by believing and the marvellous worth of the reward that you have been accounted worthy to receive in this new birth. Melt the coldness of his heart by teaching him about the Holy Spirit, so that the warmth of divine faith may set his mind on fire through your constant encouragement and remove the numbing and deadening errors of paganism. If you do this, the witness of the Holy Spirit will most certainly be fulfilled in you, that *"the unbelieving husband shall be saved through the believing wife."* For this is why you have received our Lord's merciful goodness, in order that you may restore to your Redeemer with increase the

fruits of faith and of the boundless blessings entrusted to you. We shall not cease from constant prayer that God will assist and guide you to accomplish this.

'Having mentioned this matter, as fatherly duty and affection demands, we beg you to inform us, as soon as a suitable messenger is available, what measure of success God's goodness grants you in the conversion of your husband and the people over whom you reign. Good news will greatly relieve your mind, which anxiously awaits the longed-for salvation of you and yours. And when we see the glory of the divine atonement spreading ever more widely among you, we shall give glad and heartfelt thanks to God, the Giver of all good things, and to blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles.

'We impart to you the blessing of your protector, blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles. With it we send you a silver mirror, together with a gold and ivory comb, asking Your Majesty to accept these gifts with the same goodwill as that with which we send them.'

CHAPTER l 2: *King Edwin is moved to accept the Faith by a vision seen during his exile* [A.D. 625)

UC H was the letter written by Pope Boniface on the salvation of King Edwin and his people. But the principal factor influencing the king to study and accept the truths of salvation was a heavenly vision which God in his mercy had once granted the king when he was an exile at the court of Redwald, King of the Angles. For although Paulinus found it difficult to bring the king's proud mind to accept the humility of the way of salvation or to acknowledge the mystery of the life-giving Cross, he nevertheless continued, by words of exhor­ tation addressed to men and words of supplication addressed to the divine compassion, to strive for the conversion of the king and his nation. It seems most likely that Paulinus finally learnt in the spirit the nature of the vision previously vouchsafed to the king. Whereupon he lost no time in urging the king to

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**II.12]** *Edwin's desperate flight as an exile*

implement the promise that he had made at the time of the vision, and which he had undertaken to fulfil should he be delivered out of his troubles and ascend the throne of the kingdom.

Now the vision was this. When his predecessor Ethelfrid was

persecuting him, Edwin wandered as an unknown fugitive for many years through many lands and kingdoms, until at length he came to Redwald and asked him for protection against the plots of his powerful enemy . Redwald gave him a ready welcome and promised to do everything he asked. But as soon as Ethelfrid heard that he had arrived in that province and that he and his companions were living at the king's court as his friends, he sent messengers to offer Redwald a large sum of money to murder him. Obtaining no satisfaction , he sent a second and third time, offering even heavier bribes and threat­ ening war if his demand were refused. At length Redwald, either intimidated by his threats or corrupted by his bribes, agreed to his demand and promised either to kill Edwin or to surrender him to Ethelfrid's envoys. This plot was discovered by a loyal friend of Edwin, who went to his room early one night when he was about to retire and, calling him out, warned him of the king's wicked intentions, adding: 'If you are willing, I will guide you at this very hour out of this province and take you to some place where neither Redwald nor Ethelfrid can find you. ' Edwin replied: 'Thank you for your goodwill. But I cannot act as you suggest. I cannot be the first to break th e agreement that I have made with so great a king, who has so far done me no harm nor shown any hostility towards me. If I must die, I would rather die by his hand than by a hand less noble. For what refuge remains for me, who have alread y wandered for so many years in every comer of Britain, tr ying to escape the machinations of my enemies?' When his friend had left, Edwin remained, sitting sadly alone outside the palace, tossed upon conflicting tides of thought, and not knowing what to do or where to turn.

He had remained for a long time in silent thought, tormented by inward fires that brought no light, when suddenly, at dead

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*Edwin's vision and promise* [II. I 2

of night, he saw a man approaching whose face and appearance were strange to him and whose unexpected arrival caused him considerable alarm . But the stranger came up and greeted him, asking why he was sitting sadly on a stone, wakeful and alone at an hour when everyone else was at rest and asleep . Edwin asked what concern it might be of his whether he passed the night indoors or out of doors. In reply, the man said: 'Don't think that I am unaware why you are sad and sleepless and why you are keeping watch outside alone. I know very well who you are, what your troubles are, and what impending evils you dread. But tell me this: what reward will you give the man, whoever he may be, who can deliver you from your troubles and persuade Redwald not to harm you or betray you to death at the hands of your enemies?' Edwin answered that he would give any reward in his power in return for such an outstanding service. Then the other went on: 'And what if he also promised, and not in vain, that you should become king, crush your enemies, and enjoy greater power than any of your forbears, greater indeed than any king who has ever been among the English nation?' Heartened by these enquiries, Edwin readily promised that, in return for such blessings, he would give ample proofs of his gratitu de. The stranger then asked a third question: 'If the man who can truthfully foretell such good fortune can also give you better and wiser guidance for your life and salvation than anything known to your parents and kinsfolk, will you promise to obey him and follow his salutary advice? ' Edwin at once promised that he would faithfully follow the guidance of anyone who could save him out of so many troubles and raise him to a throne. On this assurance, the man who addressed him laid his right hand on Edwin's head, saying: 'When you receive this sign, remember this occasion and our conversation, and do not delay the fulfilment of your promise. ' Hereupon, it is said, he vanished, and Edwin realized that it was not a man but a spirit who had appeared to him.

The young prince was still sitting there alone , greatly heart­ ened by what he had heard, but puzzling over the identity and origin of the being who had talked with him, when his loyal

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11.12] *Edwin's succes s*

friend approached with a cheerful greeting, and said : 'Get up and come inside. You can now cast aside your cares and sleep without fear; for the king has had a change of heart . He now intends you no harm, and means to keep the promise that he made you. For when he privately told the queen of his intention to deal with you as I warned, she dissuaded him, saying that it was unworthy in a great king to sell his best friend in the hour of need for gold, and worse still to sacrifice his royal honour , the most valuable of all possessions, for love of money.' In brief, the king did as she advised, and not only refused to surrender the exiled prince to the envoys of his enemy but assisted him to recover his kingdom. As soon as the envoys had gone home, he raised a great army to make war on Ethelfrid and allowing him no time to summon his full strength, encoun­ tered him with a great preponderance of force and killed him. In this battle, which was fought in Mercian territory on the east bank of the river Idle, Raegenhere, son of Redwald, also met his death. So Edwin, as his vision had foretold, not only escaped the plots of his enemy but succeeded to his throne at his death.

While **King** Edwin hesitated to accept the word of God at Paulinus' preaching, he used to sit alone for hours, as I have said, earnestly deliberating what he should do and what religio n he should follow. On one of these occasions, the man of God came to him and, laying his right hand on his head, enquired whether he remembered this sign. The king trembled and would have fallen at his feet; but Paulinus raised him and said in a friendly voice: 'God has helped you to escape from the hands of the enemies whom you feared, and it is through His bounty that you have received the kingdom that you desired. Remem ­ ber the third promise that you made, and hesitate no longer. Accept the Faith' and keep the commands of Him who has delivered you from all your earthly troubles and raised you to the glory of an earthly kingdom. If you will henceforward obey His will, which he reveals to you through me, he will save you likewise from the everlasting doom of the wicked and give you a place in His eternal kingdom in heaven.'

CHAPTER 1 3 : *Edwin holds a council with his chief men about accepting the Faith of C hrist . The high priest destroys his own altars* (A. O. 627]

H E N he heard this, the king answered that it was his will as well as his duty to accept the Faith that Paulinus taught, but said that he must still discuss the matter with his principal advisers and friends,\* so that, if they were in agree­ ment with him, they might all be cleansed together in Christ the Fount of Life. Paulinus agreed, and the king kept his promise. He summoned a council of the wise men, and asked each in turn his opinion of this strange doctrine and this new way of worshipping the godhead that was being proclaimed to

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them.

Coifi, the chief Priest, replied without hesitation: ' Your Majesty, let us give careful consideration to this new teaching; for I frankly admit that, in my experience, the religion that we have hitherto professed seems valueless and powerless. None of your subjects has been more devoted to the service of our gods than myself; yet there are many to whom you show greater favour , who receive greater honours, and who are more suc­ cessful in all their undertakings. Now, if the gods had any power, they would surely have favoured myself, who have been more zealous in their service. Therefore, if on examination you perceive that these new teachings are better and more effectual, let us not hesitate to accept them.'

Another of the king's chief men signified his agreement with this prudent argument, and went on to say: 'Your Majesty, when we compare the present life of man on earth with that time of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banqueting-hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter 's day with your thegns and counsellors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside, the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from che winter storms; but after a few m'oments of comfort, he

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II. I 3] *Coi\_fi's conversion*

vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came. Even so, man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what follows, we know nothing. Therefore, if this new teaching has brought any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it.' The other elders and counsellors of the king, under God's guidance, gave similar advice.

Coifi then added that he wished to hear Paulinus' teaching

about God in greater detail; and when, at the king's bidding, this had been given, he exclaimed: 'I have long realized that there is nothing in our way of worship; for the more diligently I shought after truth in our religion, the less I found. I now publicly confess that this teaching clearly reveals truths that will afford us the blessings of life, salvation, and eternal happiness. Therefore, Your Majesty, I submit that the temples and altars that we have dedicated to no advantage be immediately dese­ crated and burned.' In short, the king granted blessed Paulinus full permission to preach, renounced idolatry, and professed his acceptance of the Faith of Christ. And when he asked the Chief Priest who should be the first to profane the altars and shrines of the idols, together with the enclosures that surrounded them, Coifi replied: 'I will do this myself; for now that the true .God has granted me knowledge, who more suitably than I can set a public example and destroy the idols that I worshipped, in ignorance?' So he formally renounced his empty superstitions and asked the king to give him arms and a stallion - for hitherto it had not been lawful for the Chief Priest to carry arms or to ride anything but a mare - and, thus equipped, he set out to destroy the idols. Girded with a sword and with a spear in his hand, he mounted the king's stallion and rode up to the idols. When the crowd saw him, they thought he had gone mad; but without hesitation, as soon as he reached the shrine, he cast into it the spear he carried and thus profaned it. Then, full of joy at his knowledge of the worship of the true God, he told his companions to set fire to the shrine and its enclosures and destroy them. The site where these idols once stood is still shown, not far east of York, beyond the river Derwent, and is

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*Baptism of Edwin* [II.14

known today as Goodmanham. Here it was that the Chief Priest, inspired by the true God, desecrated and destroyed the altars that he had himself dedicated.

CHAPTER I 4: *Edwin and his people accept the Faith, and are baptized by Paulinus* [A.D. 627)

o King Edwin, with all the nobility of his kingdom and a large number of humbler folk, accepted the Faith and were washed in the cleansing waters of Baptism in the eleventh year of his reign, which was the year of our Lord 627, and about one hundred and eighty years after the first arrival of the English in Britain. The king's baptism took place at York on Easter Day, the 12th of April, in the church of Saint Peter the Apostle, which the king had hastily built of timber\* during the time of his instruction and preparation for baptism; and in this city he established the see of his teacher and bishop Paulinus. Soon after his baptism, at Paulinus' suggestion, he gave orders to build on the same site a larger and more noble basilica of stone, which was to enclose the little oratory he had built before. The foundations were laid, and the walls of a square church began to rise arond this little oratory; but before they reached their appointed height, the cruel death of the king left the work to be completed by Oswald his successor. Thenceforward for six years, until the close of Edwin's reign, Paulinus preached the Word in that province with the king's full consent and approval, and as many as were predestined to eternal life believed and were baptized. Among these were Osfrid and Eadfrid, sons of King Edwin, who were both born to him in exile of Coenburg,

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daughter of Cearl, King of the Mercians.

At a later date, other children of his by Queen Ethelberga were also baptized: these included a son, Ethelhun; a daughter, Ethelthryd; and another son, Wuscfrea. The two former were snatched from life while still wearing their white baptismal robes, and were buried in the church at York. Yffi, son of Osfrid, was also baptized, and many others of noble and

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**11.15]** *Sigbert suceeds to the Kingship*

princely rank. Indeed, so great was the fervour of faith and desire for baptism among the Northumbrian people that Pauli­ nus is said to have accompanied the king and queen to the royal residence at Ad-Ge frin1 and remained there thirty-six days constantly occupied in instructing and baptizing. During this period, he did nothing from dawn to dusk but proclaim C hrist' s saving message to the people, who gathered from all th e surrounding villages and countryside; and when he had instructed them, he washed them in the cleansing waters of Baptism in the nearby River Glen. This residence was aban­ doned by the later kings, who built another at a place called Maelmin.

These events took place in the province of Bernicia. In the province of Deira, where Paulinus often stayed with the king, he baptized in the River Swale, which flows near the village of Catterick; for during the infancy of the church in those parts it was not yet possible to build oratories or baptisteries. A basilica was built at the royal residence of Cam podonum; 2 but this, together with all the buildings of the residence, was burned by the pagans who killed King Edwin, and later kings replaced this seat by another in the vicinity of Loidis. 3 The stone altar of this church survived the fire, and is preserved in the monastery\_ that lies in Elmet Wood and is ruled by the most reverend priest and abbot Thrydwulf.

CHAPTER 1 5: *The Province of the East Angles accepts the Christian Faith* [A. D. 627]

o great was Edwin's zeal for the true Faith that he persuaded King Earpwald, son of Redwald, King of the East Angles,

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to abandon his superstitious idolatry and accept the Faith and Sacraments of Christ with his whole province. His father Redwald had in fact long before this received Christian Baptism

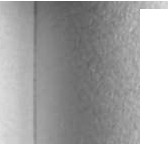
*Sigbert suceeds to the Kingship* [II.15

in Kent, but to no good purpose; for on his return home his wife and certain perverse advisers persuaded him to apostatize from the true Faith. So his last state was worse than the first: for, like the ancient Samaritans, he tried to serve both Christ and the ancient gods, and he had in the same shrine an altar for the holy Sacrifice of Christ side by side with a small altar on which victims were offered to devils. Aldwulf, king of that province, who lived into our own times, testifies that this shrine was still standing in his day and that he had seen it when a boy. This King Redwald was a man of noble descent but ignoble in his actions: he was son of Tytila, and grandson of Wuffa, after

whom all kings of the East Angles are called Wuffings. \*

Not long after Earpwald's'acceptance of Christianity, he was killed by a pagan named Richert, and for three years the province relapsed into heathendom, until Earpwald's brother Sigbert succeeded to the kingship. Sigbert was a devout Chris­ tian and a man of learning, who had been an exile in Gaul during his brother's lifetime, and was there converted to the Christian Faith, so that when he began his reign, he laboured to bring about the conversion of his whole realm. In this enterprise he was nobly assisted by Bishop Felix, who came to Archbishop Honorius from the Burgundian region, where he had been brought up and ordained, and, by his own desire, was sent by him to preach the word of life to this nation of the Angles. Nor did he fail in his purpose; for, like a good farmer, he reaped a rich harvest of believers. He delivered the entire province from its age-old wickedness and infelicity, brought it to the Christian Faith and works of righteousness and - in full accord with the significance of his own name- guided it towards eternal felicity. His episcopal see was established at Dunwich; and after ruling the province as its bishop for seventeen years, he ended his days there in peace.

1 Yeavering, in Glendale.

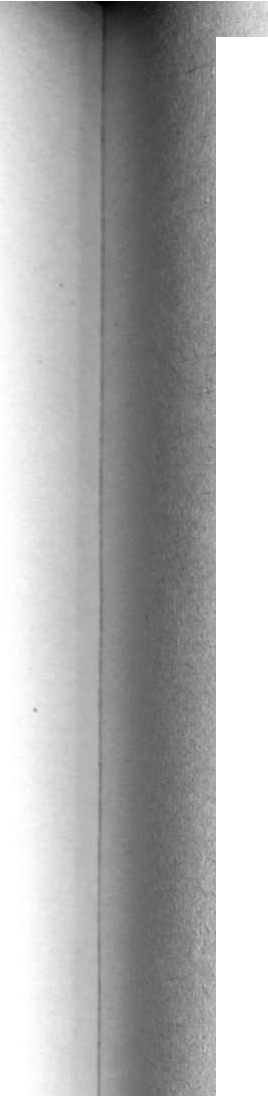


2 Possibly Doncaster, or Slack near Huddersfield.

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3 Leeds.

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CHAPTER 16: *Paulinus preaches the Word of God in the Province of*

*Lindsey. The reign of King Edwin* **[A.O.** 628)

AULI N US also preached the word of God to the province of Lindsey, which lies immediately south of the Humber, and extends to the sea. His first convert was Blaecca, Reeve of the

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city of Lincoln, with all his family. In this city he also builta stone church of fine workmanship, which today, either through neglect or enemy damage, has lost its roof, although the walls are still standing. And each year miracles of healing occur in this place for the benefit of those who seek it in faith. When Justus had departed to Christ, it was in this church that Paulinus consecrated Honorius as bishop in his stead, as I will describe in due course. '

The priest Deda, abbot of the monastery of Partney and a most reliable authority, when relating the story of the Faith in this province, told me that one of the oldest inhabitants had described to him how he and many others had been baptized by Paulinus in the presence of King Edwin, and how the

ceremony took place at noon in the river Trent, close to the city which the English call Tiowulfingacaestir.\* He used to

paint a verbal portrait of Paulinus as a tall man having a slight stoop, with black hair, an ascetic face, a thin hooked nose, and a venerable and awe-inspiring presence. Paulinus was also assisted in his ministry by the deacon James, a man of great energy and repute in Christ's Church, who lived until our own day .

So peaceful was it in those parts of Britain under King Edwin's jurisdiction that the proverb still runs that a woman could carry her new-born babe across the island from sea to sea without any fear of harm. Such was the king's concern for the welfare of his people that in a number of places where he had noticed clear springs adjacent to the highway he ordered posts to be erected with brass bowls hanging from them, so that travellers could drink and refresh themselves. And so great was the people's affection for him, and so great the awe in which he was held, that no one wished or ventured to use these bowls for

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***Pope*** *Honorius' letter to Edwin* [II.17

any other purpose. So royally was the king's dignity maintained throughout his realm that whether in battle or on a peaceful progress on horseback through city, town, and countryside in

**the** company of his thegns, the royal standard was always borne

before him. Even when he passed through the streets on foot, the standard known to the Romans as a *Tufa,*\* and . to the English as a *Tuf,* was carried in front of him.

**CHAPTER** 1 7= *Pope Honorius sends a letter of encouragement to King Edwin, and the* pallium *to Paulinus* **[A.O.** 634]

T this time, Honorius had succeeded Boniface as Bishop of the apostolic see. Learning that the Northumbrian people

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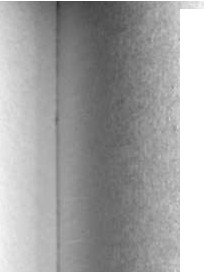
and their king had been converted to the Faith and confession of Christ by the labours of Paulinus, he sent him the *pallium* and wjth it a letter of encouragement to King Edwin, urging him with fatherly affection to ensure that his people maintained and made progress in the true Faith that they had received. This letter ran as follows:

'To his most excellent son, the most illustrious Edwin, King of the English, from Bishop Honorius, servant of the servants of God, Greeting.

'Your sincere Christian character, afire with ardent faith in the worship of your Creator, has shone out far and wide. It has been spoken of throughout the world and has reaped a rich harvest for your labours. For you who are kings acknowledge your kingship when by your worship of God you express belief in your own king and creator according to the true teaching which you have received about Him and, so far as human nature allows, serve Him with a sincere and devout mind. And what more can we offer God than our perseverance in doing good, our worship and confession of Him as Creator of the human race, and the zealous fulfilment of our vows? Accordingly, most noble son, our paternal love rightly moves us to urge you to labour with vigilant mind and constant prayer to preserve yourself wholly in that state of grace to which God in His mercy

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II.18] *Pope Honorius sends the* pallium *to Paulinus*



has called you. He who in this world has deigned to deliver you from all error, and led you to the knowledge of His Name, will thus also prepare a place for you in our heavenly home. Make a regular study of the writings of your teacher and my master Gregory of apostolic memory, and constantly bear in mind the loving teaching which he so gladly gave for the benefit of your souls, so that his prayer may obtain an increase in your kingdom and people, and bring you blameless to Almighty God.

'We are glad to accede to your requests on behalf of your bishops without delay, and in so doing we pay tribute to the sincerity of your own faith, which has often been mostly high praised by the bearers of this letter. Accordingly, we have sent two *pallia,* one to each of the Metropolitans, Honorius and Paulinus, so that, whenever either of them shall be summoned from this world to his Maker, the survivor may have our authority to appoint another bishop in his place. We have been induced to grant this privilege not only out of regard for you, but also in the realization of the great and wide pr-ovinces that separate us, so that we may show our recognition of your devotion in all matters and accede to your pious wishes.

'May the grace of God preserve Your Majesty in safety.'

CHAPTER 18: *On succeeding Justus in the See of Canterbury* [A.O.

627-3 **1**], *Honorius receives the* pallium *and a letter from Pope Honorius* **[A.O.** 634]

EAN W HI LE, Archbishop Justus was tak n up into the heavenly kingdom on November the tenth, and Honor­

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ius was elected to the see in his place. He therefore came to Paulinus to be ordained and, meeting him at Lincoln, was there consecrated fourth successor to Augustine in the See of Canter­ bury. Pope Honorius sent him the *pallium* and a letter confirm­ ing the arrangement already made in his letter to King Edwin: namely, that on the death of either of the Archbishops of Canbterbury or York, the survivor was to have authority to appoint a successor in place of the deceased archbishop, which

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*And to Archbishop Honorius* (11. I 8

privilege would obviate the necessity of a wearisome sea and land journey to Rome on every occasion for consecration. I have thought it proper to include the text of the letter in this history.

'Honorius, to his well-beloved brother Honorius.

'Among the many good gifts which the mercy of our Redeemer has deigned to grant His servants, His generous love is never more evident than when He permits us to display our mutual love in brotherly converse, as it were face to face. For this blessing we constantly give thanks to His Divine Majesty and earnestly pray that He will confirm your loving labours in preaching the Gospel with constant and lasting results and that, in following the rule of your master and patron the holy Gregory, you may bear fruit, so that, through your ministry, God will bless His Church with ever-increasing strength; that the souls already won by you and your predecessors, beginning with the Lord Gregory, may be established and grow ever stronger in faith and good works, and in reverence and love for God; and that in due time the promises of our Lord Jesus Christ may be fulfilled in you, and His voice summon you to eternal joy, saying: *"Come to Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."* And again, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."* Our constant love urges us to offer you these preliminary words of encouragement, dearest brothers, and we shall not fail hereafter to grant any privileges that we think likely to benefit your churches.

'In response to your request and that of our sons your kings, we hereby, in the name of blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, grant that whenever God's mercy shall summon either of you to Himself, the survivor shall have authority to appoint a bishop in his place. As proof of this authority we have sent to each of your Lordships the *pallium* to wear at such a consecration, so that by our permission and direction you may perform it in a manner acceptable to God. The great expanses of land and sea that separate us make it necessary for us to grant you this

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III.22] *The East Saxons are re-converted*



hated and despised any whom he knew to be insincere in their practice of Christianity once they had accepted it, and said that any who despised the commandments of the God in whom they professed to believe were themselves despicable wretches. This Christian mission was begun two years before Penda's death. And when Penda was killed, and was succeeded by the Christian King Oswy, as I shall tell later, Diuma, one of these four priests, was consecrated Bishop of the Middle Angles and Mercians by Bishop Finan, since a shortage of priests made it necessary for one bishop to preside over two peoples. During his short episcopate, Diuma converted many to the Faith, and died among the Middle Angles in the district known as In-Feppin­ gum. He was succeeded by Ceollach, an Irishman who relin­ quished the see after a short time and returned to the Isle of Iona, the chief and mother-house of many Irish monasteries. His successor was Bishop Trumhere, a devout man trained as a monk, English by race but consecrated bishop by the Irish. This

, took place during the reign of King Wulfhere, of whom I shall

speak later.

CHAPTER 22: *The East Saxons, who had apostatized from the Faith under King Sigbert, are re-converted by the preaching of Cedd* **[A.O.** 653)

BO UT this time also, the East Saxons, who had once rejected the Faith and driven out Bishop Mellitus, again accepted it under the influence of King Oswy. For Sigbert their king, successor to Sigbert the Small, was a friend of Oswy and often used to visit him in the province of the Northumbrians. Oswy used to reason with him how gods made by man's handiwork could not be gods, and how a god could not be made from a log or block of stone, the rest of which might be burned or made into articles of everyday use or possibly thrown away as rubbish to be trampled underfoot and reduced to dust. He showed him how God is rather to be understood as a being

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*Progress of the Faith among the East Saxons* [III.22

of boundless majesty, invisible to human eyes, almighty, ever­ lasting, creator of heaven and earth and of the human race. He

. told him that he rules and will judge the world in justice, abiding in eternity, not in base and perishable metal; and that it should be rightly understood that all who know and do the will of their Creator will receive an eternal reward from him. King Oswy advanced these and other arguments during friendly and brotherly talks with Sigbert, who, encouraged by the agreement of his friends, was at length convinced. So he talked it over with his advisers, and with one accord they accepted the Faith and were baptized with him by Bishop Finan in the king's village at At-Wa ll, so named because it stands close to the wall which the Romans once built to protect Britain, about twelve miles from the eastern coast.

Having now become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, Sigbert returned to the capital of his earthly kingdom after asking Oswy to send him teachers to convert his people to the Faith of Christ and baptize them. Accordingly Oswy sent to the province of the Middle Angles and summoned the man of God, Cedd, whom he dispatched with another priest as companion to evangelize the East Saxons. When these priests had visited the entire province and established a strong Christian com­ munity, Cedd returned home to Lindisfarne for consultations with Bishop Finan . When the latter learned the great success of his preaching, he invited two other bishops to assist him, and consecrated Cedd Bishop of the East Saxons. And when Cedd had been raised to the dignity of bishop, he returned to his province and used his increased authority to promote the work already begun. He built churches in several places and ordained priests and deacons to assist in teaching the Faith and baptizing the people, especially in the city which the Saxons call Ythan­ caestir\* and that called Tilaburg. 1 The former place stands on the bank of the River Pant, the latter on the River Thames. Here Cedd established communities of the servants of Christ

1 Tilbury.

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# IIl.22] *Progress of the Faith among the East Saxons*



and taught them to maintain the discipline of the regular life so far as these untutored folk were then capable of doing.

To the great joy of the king and all his people, the Gospel of eternal life made daily headway throughout the province for a considerable time until, at the instigation of the Enemy of all good men, the king was murdered by his own kinsmen. This horrid crime was committed by 't wo brothers who, on being asked their motive, had no answer to make except that they hated the king because he was too lenient towards his enemies and too readily forgave injuries when offenders asked pardon. This then was the fault for which the king was killed, that he sincerely observed the teachings of the Gospel. Yet in this undeserved fate he was overtaken by punishment for his real fault, as the man of God had once foretold. For one of the nobles who murdered him had contracted an illicit marriage, and the bishop, being unable to prevent or correct this, had therefore excommunicated him, forbidding anyone to enter his house or eat at his table. But the king had disregarded this ban and had accepted the noble's invitation to a feast. As he was leaving the house, the bishop met him, and the king immedi­ ately dismounted from his horse and fell trembling at his feet, begging pardon for his fault. The bishop, for he too had been on horseback, also dismounted in great anger and, touching the prostrate king with the staff in his hand, exercised his pontifical authority and said: 'I tell you that, since you have refused to avoid th house of a man who is lost and damned, this very house will be the place of your death.' However, since the death of this religious king was due to his loyal obedience to Christ's commandments, we may believe that it atoned for his earlier offence and increased his merits.

Sigbert was succeeded as king by Swidhelm, son of Sexbald, who had been baptized by Cedd in the province of the East Angles at the king's country-seat of Rendlesham, that is Rendil's House: his godfather was Ethelwald, King of the Eas Angles, brother of King Anna.

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# CHAPTER 2 3: *Cedd receives the site for a monastery from King* Ethelwald, and hallows it to our Lord with prayer and fasting: his death [A. D. 659]

URI NG his episcopate among the East Saxons, God's servant Cedd often visited his own province, that is the province of the Northumbrians, to preach. Ethelwald, son of King Oswald; who ruled in the region of Deira, knowing Cedd to be a wise, holy, and virtuous man, asked him to accept a grant of land to found a monastery, to which he himself might often come to pray and hear the word of God and where he might be buried: for he firmly believed that the daily prayers of t ose who ':o ld serv\_e Go there would be of great help to him. The mg s chaplam had been Cedd's brother, a priest named Caelin, a man equally devoted to God, who had minis­ tered the Word and Sacraments to himself and his family, and it was mainly through him that the king came to know and love the bishop. In accordance with the king's wishes, Cedd chose a site for the monastery among some high and remote hills, which seemed more suitable for the dens of robbers and haunts of wild beasts than for human habitation. His purpose in this was to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: *'in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass, with reeds and rushes',* so that the fruits of good works might spring up where formerly lived only wild

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beasts, or men who lived like wild beasts.

The man of God wished first of all to purify the site of the monastery from the taint of earlier crimes by prayer and fasting and make it acceptable to God before laying the foundations. He therefore asked the king's permission to remain there throughout the approaching season of Lent, and during this time he fasted until evening every day except Sunday according to custom . Even then, he took no food but a morsel of bread, a hen's egg and a little watered milk. He explained that it was the custom of those who had trained him in the rule of regular discipline to dedicate the site of any monastery or church to God with prayer and fasting . But ten days before the end of Lent a messenger arrived to summon him to the king. So in

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III .23] *Death of Cedd*

order that the king's business should not interrupt the work of dedication, Cedd asked his brother the priest Cynibil to com­ plete this holy task. The latter readily consented, and when the period of prayer, and fasting came to an end, he built the monastery now called Laestingaeu, 1 and established there the observance of the usages of Lindisfarne where he had been trained.

When Cedd had been bishop of the province for many years and ruled the monastery through the priors he had chosen, he happened to visit the monastery during a time of plague, and there fell sick and died. He was first buried in the open, but in the course of time a stone church was built, dedicated to the blessed Mother of God, and in it his body was reinterred on the right side of the altar.

The bishop bequeathed the abbacy of the monastery to his brother Chad, who subsequently became a bishop as I shall record later.\* The four brothers I have mentioned - Cedd, Cynibil, Caelin, and Chad - all became famous priests of our Lord, and two became bishops, which is a rare occurrence in one family. When the brethren of Cedd's monastery in the province of the East Saxons heard that their founder had died and been buried in the province of the Northumbrians, about thirty of them came there visiting wishing either. God willing, to live near the body of their Father, or else to die and be laid to rest at his side. They were kindly welcomed by their brothers and fellow-soldiers of Christ, and all of them died there of the plague with the exception of one little boy who must surely have been preserved from death by the prayers of his Father Chad . For many years afterwards, when this boy was still alive and applying himself to the study of the Scriptures, he suddenly learned that he had never been baptized; so he at once sought salvation in the waters of the font, and was subsequently admitted to the priesthood and proved himself a support to many in the Church. So I have no doubt that, when the boy visited the tomb of his beloved Father, he was saved from

1 Lastingham, near Whitby.

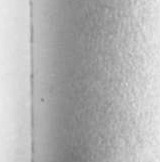
*Conversion of Mercia* [IIl . 24

imminent death by his prayers, in order that he might escape eternal death and by his witness exercise a ministry of life and salvation to the other brethren.

CHAPTER 24: *On the death of Penda, the Province of the Mercians accepts the Faith of Christ: in gratitude for his victory, Oswy gives endowments and lands to God for the building of monasteries* [A. O. 655)

T this period King Oswy was subjected to savage and intolerable attacks by Penda, the above-mentioned King of

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the Mercians who had slain his brother. At length dire need compelled him to offer Penda an incalculable quantity of regalia and presents as the price of peace, on condition that he returned home and ceased his ruinous devastation of the provinces of his kingdom. But the treacherous king refused to consider his offer, and declared his intention of wiping out the entire nation from the highest to the humblest in the land. Accordingly Oswy turned for help to the mercy of God, who alone could save the land from its barbarous and godless enemy; and he bound himself with an oath, saying: 'If the heathen refuses to accept our gifts, let us offer them to the Lord our God.' So he vowed that, if he were victorious, he would offer his daughter to God as a consecrated virgin and give twelve estates to build monas­ teries. This done, he gave battle with an insignificant force to the pagan armies, which are said to have been thirty times greater than his own and comprised thirty battle-hardened legions under famous commanders. Oswy and his son Alchfrid, trusting in Christ as their leader, met them, as I have said, with very small forces. His other son Egfrid was at the time held hostage at the court of Queen Cynwise in the province of the Mercians. But Oswald's son Ethelwald, who should have helped them, had gone over to the enemy and had acted as guide to Penda's army against his own kin and country, although during the actual battle he withdrew and awaited the outcome in a place of safety . When battle had been joined , the

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III.24] *Early bishops of the Mercians Aidan succeeded at Lindisfarne by Finan* [III.24

pagans suffered defeat. Almost all the thirty commanders who had come to Penda's aid were killed. Among them Ethelhere, brother and successor of King Anna of the East Angles, who had been responsible for the war, fell with all his men. This battle was fought close by the River Winwaed, which at the time was swollen by heavy rains and had flooded the surround­ ing country: as a result, many more were drowned while attempting to escape than perished by the sword.\*

In fulfilment of his vow to the Lord, King Oswy gave thanks to God for his victory and dedicated his daughter Aelffied, who was scarcely a year old, to his service in perpetual virginity . He also gave twelve small grants of land, where heavenly warfare was to take the place of earthly, and to provide for the needs of monks to make constant intercession for the perpetual peace of his nation. Six of these lay in the province of Deira, and six in Bernicia, each of ten hides in extent, making one hundred and twenty in all. The daughter whom King Oswy had in this way dedicated to God entered the monastery of Heruteu1 or Hart's Island, at that time ruled by Abbess Hilda. Two years later, the Abbess acquired a property of ten hides at a place called Streanaeshalch,2\* where she founded a monastery. In this the king's daughter became first a novice and later a mistress of the monastic life, until at fifty-nine years of age this holy virgin departed to the wedding-feast and embrace of her heavenly Bridegroom. In the church of this monastery, dedicated to the holy Apostle Peter, she herself, her father Oswy, her mother Eanfled, her mother's father Edwin, and many other noble folk are buried. This battle was won by King Oswy in the region of Loidis3 on the fifteenth of November in the thirteenth year of his reign, to the great benefit of both nations. For not only did he deliver his own people from the hostile attacks of the heathen, but after cutting off their infidel head he converted the Mercians and their neighbours to the Christian Faith.

The first Bishop in the province of the Mercians, together

with the people of Lindsey and the Middle Angles, was the

1 Hartlepool. 2 Whitby. - 3 Leeds.

above-mentioned Diuma, who died and was buried among the Middle Angles . The second was Ceollach, who resigned the bishopric and returned to the land of the Irish; for both he and Diuma were of Irish race. The third was Trumhere, an English­ man trained and ordained by the Irish, who was abbot of the monastery of In-Ge tlingum.1 As I have said, this was the place where King Oswin had been killed and where his kinswoman Queen Eanfled, in expiation for his unjust death, petitioned King Oswy to grant God's servant Trumhere, who was also a near relative of the king, land on which to build a monastery; in this way, prayer could be offered for the eternal salvation of both kings, slayer and slain alike. For three years after the death of Penda, King Oswy ruled both the Mercians and the other peoples of the southern provinces; he also subjected most of the Picts to English rule.

At this time he granted Peada, son of Penda, because he was his kinsman, the Kingdom of the South Mercians, which consists of five thousand hides of land and is divided by the River Trent from the land of the North Mercians, which consists of seven thousand hides. In the following spring, however, during the Festival of Easter, Peada was foully assas­ sinated through the treachery, it is said, of his own wife. And three years after Penda's death the Mercian leaders Immin, Eafa, and Eadbert rebelled against Oswy and proclaimed as king Wulfhere, son of Penda, a youth whom they had kept hidden; and having driven out the representatives of a king whom they refused to acknowledge, they boldly recovered their liberty and lands. Free under their own king, they gave willing allegiance to Christ their true King, so that they might win his eternal kingdom in heaven. King Wulfhere ruled the Mercians for seventeen years and, as I have said, had Trumhere as his first bishop. The second bishop was Jaruman; the third, Chad; the fourth, Wynfrid. All these in turn held the bishopric of the Mercians under King Wulfhere.

1 Gilling, near Richmond.

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CHAPTER 2 5: *Controversy arises with the Irish over the date of Easter* [A.D. 664]

H EN Bishop Aidan departed this life, he was succeeded in the Bishopric by Finan, who had been consecrated and

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sent by the Irish. He built a church in the Isle of Lindisfarne suitable for an episcopal see, constructing it, however, not of stone, but of hewn oak, thatched with reeds after the Irish manner. It was later dedicated by the most reverend Archbishop Theodore in honour of the blessed Apostle Peter. But Eadbert, a later Bishop of Lindisfarne, removed the thatch, and covered both roof and walls with sheets of lead.\*

About this time there arose a great and recurrent controversy on the observance of Easter, those trained in Kent and Gaul maintaining that the Irish observance was contrary to that of the universal Church. The most zealous champion of the true Easter was an Irishman named Ronan, who had been instructed in Gaul and Italy in the authentic practice of the Church. He disputed against Finan and convinced many, or at least per­ suaded them to make more careful enquiry into the truth. But he entirely failed to move Finan, a hot-tempered man whom reproof made more obstinate and openly hostile to the tru th. James, formerly the deacon of the venerable Archbishop Pauli­ nus, of whom I have spoken, kept the true and Catholic Easter with all whom he could persuade to adopt the right observance . Also Queen Eanfled and her court, having a Kentish priest named Romanus who followed the Catholic practice, observed the customs she had seen in Kent. It is said that the confusion in those days was such that Easter was sometimes kept twice in one year, so that when the King had ended Lent and was keeping aster, the Queen and her attendants were still fasting and keeping Palm Sunday. During Aidan's lifetime these differ­ enc s of Easter observance were patiently tolerated by everyone; for !t was realized that, although he was in loyalty bound to retam the customs of those who sent him, he nevertheless laboured diligently to cultivate the faith, piety, and love that marks out God's saints. He was therefore rightly loved by all,

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even by those who differed from his opinion on Easter, and was held in high respect not only by ordinary folk, but by Honorius of Canterbury and Felix of the East Angles.

When Finan, who followed Aidan as bishop, died, he was succeeded by another Irishman, Colman, under whom an even more serious controversy arose about Easter and also about other rules of Church discipline. This dispute rightly began to trouble the minds and consciences of many people, who feared that they might have received the name of Christians in vain. Eventually the matter came to the notice of King Oswy and his son Alchfrid. Oswy thought nothing could be better than the Irish teaching, having been instructed and baptized by the Irish and having a complete grasp of their language. But Alchfrid, who had been instructed in the Faith by Wilfrid - a very learned man who had gone to Rome to study the doctrine of the Church, and spent a long time at Lyons under Dalfin,\* Arch­ bishop of Gaul, from whom he had received the tonsure - knew that Wilfrid's doctrine was in fact preferable to all the traditions of the Irish. He had therefore given him a monastery with forty hides of land at In-Hrypum. 1 Actually, he had given this not long previously to the adherents of the Irish customs; but since, when offered the alternative, these preferred to give up the place rather than alter their customs, he then offered it to Wilfrid, whose life and teaching made him a worthy recipient. About this time, Agilbert, Bishop of the West Saxons, whom I have mentioned, had come to visit the province of the Northumbri­ ans. He was a friend both of King Alchfrid and of Abbot Wilfrid and stayed with them for some time, and at the king's request he made Wilfrid a priest in his monastery. He also had with him a priest named Agatho. So when discussion arose there on the questions of Easter, the tonsure, and various other church matters, it was decided to hold a synod to put an end to this dispute at the monastery of Streanaeshalch,\* which means The Bay of the Beacon, then ruled by the Abbess Hilda, a woman devoted to God. Both kings, father and son, came to this synod,

1 Ripon .

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and so did Bishop Colman with his Irish clergy, and Bishop Agilbert with . the priests Agatho and Wilfrid. James and Romanus supported the latter, while Abbess Hilda and her community, together with the venerable bishop Cedd, sup­ ported the Irish. Cedd, who as already mentioned had long ago been ordained by the Irish, acted as a most careful interpreter for both parties at the council.

King Oswy opened by observing that all who served the One

God should observe one rule of life, and since they all hoped for one kingdom in heaven, they should not differ in celebrating the sacraments of heaven. The synod now had the task of determining which was the truer tradition, and this should be loyally accepted by all. He then directed his own bishop Colman to speak first, and to explain his own rite and its origin. Then Colman said: 'The Easter customs which I observe were taugh t me by my superiors, who sent me here as a bishop; and all ou r forefathers, men beloved of God, are known to have observed these custo ms. And lest anyone condemn or reject them as wrong, it is recorded that they owe their origin to the blessed evangelist Saint John, the disciple especially loved by our Lo rd, and all the churches over which he presided.' When he had concluded these and similar arguments, the king directed\_ Agil­ bert to explain the origin and authority of his own custo ms. Agilbert replied: 'May I request that my disciple the priest Wilfrid be allowed to speak in my place? For we are both in full agreement with all those here present who support the tradition s of our Church, and he can explain our view in the English langu age more competently and clearly than 1 can do thro ugh an interpreter . ' When Wilfrid had received the king's command to speak, he said: 'Our Easter customs are those that wr; have seen universally observed in Rome, where the ble sed Apos tles Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered, and are buried. We have also seen the same customs generally observed throughout It aly and Gaul when we travelled through these countries for stud y and prayer. Furthermore, we have learnt that Easter is observed by men of different nations and languages at one and the same time, in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, and throughout the world

wherever the Church of Christ has spread. The only people who stupidly contend against the whole world are those Irish­ men and their partners in obstinacy the Picts and Britons, who inhabit only a portion of these the two uttermost islands of the ocean.'\* In reply to this statem ent , Colman answered: 'It is strange that you call us stupid when we uphold customs that rest on the authority of so great an Apostle, who was considered worthy to lean on our Lord's breast, and whose great wisdom is acknowledged throughout the world. ' Wilfrid replied: 'Far be it from us to charge John with stupidity, because he literally observed the Law of Moses at a time when the Church followed many Jewish practices, and the Apostles were not able immedi­ ately to abrogate the observances of the Law once given by God, lest they gave offence to believers who wereJews (whereas idols, on the other hand, being inventions of the devil, must be renounced by all converts). For this reason Paul circumcised Timothy, offered sacrifice in the Temple, and shaved his head at Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla, for no other reason than that of avoiding offence to the Jew s. For James said to Paul: *"Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the la w."* But today, as the Gospel spreads throughout the world, it is unnecessary and indeed unlawful for the faithful to be circumcised or to offer animals to God in sacrifice. John, following the custom of the law, used to begin the Feast of Easter on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month, not caring whether it fell on the Sabbath or on any other day. But Peter, when he preached in Rome, remembering that it was on the day after the Sabbath that our Lord rose from the dead and gave the world the hope of resurrection, realized that Easter should be kept as follows: like John, in accordance with the Law, he waited for moonrise on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month. And if the Lord's Day , then called the morrow of the Sabbath, fell on the following day, he began to observe Easter the same evening, as we all do today . But, if the Lord's Day did not fall on the day following the fourteenth day of the moon, but on the sixteenth, seventeenth, or any other day up to the twenty-first, he waited

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until that day, and on the Sabbath evening preceding it h began the observance of the Easter Festival. This evangelical and apostolical tradition does not abrogate but fulfil the Law, which ordained that the Passover be kept between the eve of the fourteenth and twenty-first days of the moon of that month. And this is the custom of all the successors of blessed John in Asia since his death, and is also that of the world-wide Church. This is the true and only Easter to be observed by the faithful. It was not newly decreed by the Council of Nicaea, but reaffirmed by it, as Church history records. It is quite apparent , Colman, that you follow neither the example of John, as you imagine, nor that of Peter, whose tradition you deliberately contradict . Your keeping of Easter agrees neither with the Law nor with the Gospel. For John, who kept Easter in accordance with the decrees of Moses, did not keep to the first day after the Sabbath; but this is not your practice, for you keep Easter only on the first day after the Sabbath. Peter kept Easter between the fifteenth and twenty-first days of the moon; you do not, for you keep it between the fourteenth and twentieth days of the moon. As a result, you often begin Easter on the evening of the thirteenth day, which is not mentioned in the Law. Nor did our Lord, the Author and giver of the Gospel, eat the old Passover or institute the Sacrament of the New Testament to be cel­ ebrated by the Church in memory of His Passion on that day, but on the fourteenth. Furthermore, when you keep Easter, you totally exclude the twenty-first day, which the Law of Moses particularly ordered to be observed. Therefore, I repeat, you follow neither John nor Peter, the Law nor the Gospel, in your keeping of our greatest Festival.'

Colman in reply said: 'Do you maintain that Anatolius, a holy man highly spoken of in Church history, taught contrary to the Law and the Gospel, when he wrote that Easter should be kept between the fourteenth and twentieth days of the moon? Are we to believe that our most revered Father Columba and his successors, men so dear to God, thought or acted contrary to Holy Scripture when they followed this custom? The holiness of many of them is confirmed by heavenly signs, and their

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virtues by miracles; and having no doubt that they are Saints, I shall never cease to emulate their lives, customs, and discipline.' 'It is well established that Anatolius was a most holy, learned, and praiseworthy man,' answered Wilfrid; 'but how can you claim his authority when you do not follow his directions? For he followed the correct rule about Easter, and observed a cycle of nineteen years; but either you do not know of this general custom of the Christian Church, or else you ignore it. He calculated the fourteenth day of the moon at Easter according to the Egyptian method, counting it on the evening as the fifteenth day; similarly, he assigned the twentieth to Easter Sunday, regarding it after sunset as the twenty-first day. But it appears that you do not realize this distinction, since you sometimes keep Easter before full moon, that is, on the thirteenth day. And with regard to your Father Columba and his followers, whose holiness you claim to imitate and whose rules and customs you claim to have been supported by heavenly signs, I can only say that when many shall say to our Lord at the day of Judgement: *"Have we not prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils, and done many wonde,ful works?"* the Lord will reply, *"I never knew you. "* Far be it from me to apply these words to your fathers; for it is more just to believe good rather than evil of those whom one does not know. So I do not deny that they are true servants of God and dear to Him, and that they loved Him in primitive simplicity but in devout sincerity. Nor do I think that their ways of keeping Easter were seriously harmful, so long as no one came to show them a more perfect way to follow. Indeed, I feel certain that, if any Catholic reckoner had come to them, they would readily have accepted his guidance, as we know that they readily observed such of God's ordinances as they already knew. But you and your colleagues are most certainly guilty of sin if you reject the decrees of the Apostolic See, indeed of the universal Church, which are confirmed by Holy Writ. For, although your Fathers were holy men, do you imagine that they, a few men in a corner of a remote island, are to be preferred before the universal Church of Christ throughout t e world? And even if your Columba - or, may I say, ours also if

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he was the servant of Christ - was a Saint potent in miracles, can he take precedence before the most blessed Prince of the Apostles, to whom our Lord said: *"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven"?'*

When Wilfrid had ended, the king asked: 'Is it true, Colman, that these words were spoken to that Peter by our Lord?' He ans wered: 'It is true, Your Majesty.' Then the king said: 'Can you show that a similar authority was given to your Colu mba?' 'No,' replied Colman . 'Do you both agree' , the king contin ued, 'that these words were indisputably addressed to Peter in the first place, and that our Lord gave him the keys of the kingdo m of heaven?' Both answered: 'We do.' At this, the king con­ cluded : 'Then, I tell you, Peter is guardian of the gates of heaven, and I shall not contradict him. I shall obey his com­ mands in everything to the best of my knowledge and ability; otherwise, when I come to the gates of heaven, there may be no one to open them, because he who holds the keys has turned away.'\*

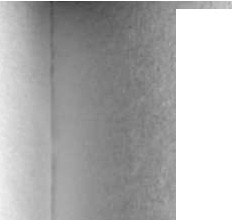
When the king said this, all present, both high and low, signified their agreement and, abandoning their imperfect cus­ toms, hastened to adopt those which they had learned to be\_ better.

CHAPTER 26: *After his defeat Colman returns home and Tuda succeeds to his bishopric* [A.D. 664]: *the condition of the C hurch under these teachers*

N this way the controversy was terminated, the company dispersed, and Agilbert returned home. Colman, seeing his teachings rejected and his following discounted, took away with him all who wished to follow him, that is, all who still dissented from the Catholic Easter and tonsure\* - for there was no small argument about this as well - and returned to the land of the Irish1 in order to consult his compatriots on their future course

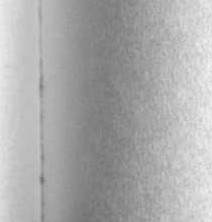
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*Austerity of the Irish monks* [IIl.26

of action. Cedd, on the other hand, having abandoned the Irish customs and accepted the Catholic, returned to his own bish­ opric. This Synod took place in the year of our Lord 664, which was the twenty-second year of King Oswy's reign, and the thirtieth anniversary of the coming of the Irish bishops to England, Aidan having held his bishopric for seventeen years, Finan for ten, and Colman for three.

On Colman's return to his own land, the servant of God, Tuda, became bishop of the Northumbrians in his place. He had been trained and consecrated . bishop by the southern Irish, and had worn the ecclesiastical tonsure according to the customs of the province, and observed the Catholic Easter customs . He was a good devout man, but ruled the diocese only for a short time. He had arrived from the land of the Irish during Colman's episcopate, and taught the truths of the Faith diligently in word and deed. Then Eata, abbot of the monastery ofMailros,1 a gentle man and greatly revered, was appointed Abbot ofLindisfarne to rule the brethren who elected to remain there when the Irish withdrew. It is said that before Colman left, he asked and obtained this favour from King Oswy, because Eata had been one of the twelve English boys whom Aidan received to be taught the Christian Faith when he first became bishop; for the king greatly loved Bishop Colman for his innate discernment. This is the same Eata who not long afterwards was raised to the bishopric of the church of Lindisfarne. On his return home, Colman took with him a portion of the bones of the most reverend Father Aidan; but he left some of them in the church over which he had ruled, directing that they be enshrined in the sanctuary.

So frugal and austere were Colman and his predecessors that when they left the seat of their authority there were very few buildings except the church; indeed, no more than met the bare requirements of a seemly way of life. They had no property except cattle, and whenever they received any money from rich folk, they immediately gave it to the poor; for they had no need to amass money or provide lodging for important people, since

1 Ion,a 1 Melrose,

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IIl.27) *Egbert becomes a monk in Ireland*

such visited the church only in order to pray or hear the word of God. Whenever opportunity offered, the king himself used to come with only five or six attendants; and when he had completed his prayer in the church, he used to leave. But if they happened to remain for a meal, they were content with the plain daily food of the brothers and asked nothing more. For in those days the sole concern of these teachers was to serve God, not the world; to satisfy the soul, not the belly. Accordingly the religious habit at that time was held in high esteem. Wherever any priest or monk paid a visit, he was joyfully welcomed by all as the servant of God. And if people met him on the road, they ran to him and bowed, eager to be signed by his hand or receive a blessing from his lips. Whenever he spoke a word of encouragement, he was given an attentive hearing. On Sundays the people flocked to the churches and monasteries, not to obtain food, but to hear the word of God. When a priest visited a village, the people were quick to gather together to receive the word of life; for priests and clerics always came to a village solely to preach, baptize, visit the sick, and, in short, to care for the souls of its people. They were so free from the sin of avarice that none of them would accept lands or gifts for the building of monasteries unless expressly directed to do so by the secular authorities. This continued to be the general practice fo some years among the churches of the Northumbrians. But enough has been said on such matters .\*

CHAPTER 27= *Egbert, an Englishman of holy life, becomes a monk in Ireland*

N the same year of our Lord 664 an eclipse of the sun occurred about ten o'clock in the morning on the third of May; and a sudden plague, which first decimated the southern parts of Britain and later spread into the province of the Northumbrians, raged for a long time and brought widespread death to many people. Bishop Tuda fell a victim to this plague, and was buried with honour in the monastery of Paegnalaech. The plague was

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*Egbert becomes an 'exile for Christ'* [IIl.27

equally destructive in Ireland.. At this period there we\_re many English nobles and lesser folk m Ireland who had left their own



)and during the episcopates of Bishops Finan and Colman, either to pursue religious studies or to lead a life of stricter discipline. Some of these soon devoted themselves to the monastic life, **while** others preferred to travel, studying under various teachers in turn. The Irish welcomed them all kindly, and without asking for payment, provided them with daily food, books, and

instruction.

Among these English nobles were Ethelhun and Egbert, two young men of outstanding ability . The former was brother of Ethelwin, a man no less dear to God, who at a later date also travelled to study in Ireland and, after a full course of instruc­ tion, returned home and was made Bishop of Lindsey, where he enjoyed a long and illustrious episcopate. These two young men, who were studying in the monastery which the Irish call Rathmelsigi, having lost all their companions either through the plague or through their dispersal to other places, were them­ selves stricken by the same disease and fell dangerously ill. And I am told by a most dependable priest of venerable age, who says that he learnt the story at first hand, that Egbert,\* believing himself about to die, went out one morning from the room where the sick were lying and, sitting down in a place by himself, began seriously to examine his past life. Tears fell from his eyes as he sorrowfully recalled his sins, and he begged God from the bottom of his heart not to let him die until he could atone for the offences of his boyhood and youth, and exert himself to better purpose in good deeds. He also made a vow that he would remain an exile and never return to his native island of Britain; and that, unless prevented by sickness, in addition to the canonical hours of prayer, he would recite the entire Psalter daily to the praise of God and would fast oncea week for a day and a night . When he had ended his tears, vows and prayers, he returned to the house where he found his companion asleep; and lying down on his pallet, he co pose himself to rest. When he had lain there a short while, his companion awoke, and looking at him, said : 'O brother Egbert,

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