

Clay, Rotha Mary., The Hermits and Anchorites of England. Methuen & Co. London, 1914.

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THE HERMITS AND ANCHORITES OF ENGLAND

I. ISLAND AND FEN RECLUSES

When saynt Jone was in the yle of Pathmos, than God schewed hym his pryvytees.—Richard the Hermit

No self-imposed barrier was so complete as that of the island-recluse. Surrounded as he was by an expanse of sea and sky, "the secrecy of solitude" was his. Only a devoted friend or an earnest penitent would venture forth to visit him who was sea-bound, or encircled by some wellnigh impassable morass. The hermit-inhabited islands of England and Wales include Farne and Coquet, in the north ; and in the west, Bardsey, off the coast of Carnarvon, and Holmes, St. Tiriac's Rock, and the other islets of the Severn.

I. ISLES OF THE SEA

(a) *Farne and Croquet*.—About two miles from the Northumbrian coast lay a bare inhospitable rock which became famous as the abode of solitary saints. When St. Aidan, the island-monk of Iona, was Bishop of Lindisfarne, he used occasionally to retire to Farne for undisturbed prayer. Cuthbert afterwards sought in this spot the secret solitude for which he longed. It was a desert island, and ill-suited for human habitation. At the presence of the man of God, however, the evil

sprits fled ; at his prayer water bubbled out of the rocky ground ; and by his manual labour he raised from the barren soil plentiful crops of barley. With the help of the brethren he built himself a small dwelling and an oratory, which are thus described by Bede :—

“The building is almost of a round form, from wall to wall about four or five poles in extent : the wall on the outside is higher

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than a man, but within, by excavating the rock, he made it much deeper, to prevent the eyes and the thoughts from wandering, that the mind might be wholly bent on heavenly things, and the pious inhabitant might behold nothing from his residence by the heavens above him. The wall was constructed, not of hewn stones or of brick and mortar, but of rough stones and turf. . . There were two chambers in the house, one an oratory, the other for domestic purposes.”

This simple beehive-hut was not the only building on the island, for it proved necessary to make a large guest-house to accommodate those who came continually to visit the saint. Many came, not only from Lindisfarne, but from the more remote parts of Britain :—

“At first, indeed, when the brethren came to visit him, he would leave his cell and minister to them At length, as his zeal after perfection grew, he shut himself up in his cell away from the sight of men, and spent his time alone in fasting, watching, and prayer, rarely having communication with anyone without, and that through the window, which at first was left open, that he might see and be seen ; but after a time he shut that also, and opened it only to give his blessing, or for any other purpose of absolute necessity.”

When Cuthbert was elected bishop he would not consent to leave Farne, but the king and others went across and “drew him, weeping, from his retreat”. At length he yielded to their entreaties. Faithfully did the Bishop of Lindisfarne fulfil the duties which he had undertaken. “He protected the people committed to his care with frequent prayers, and invited them to heavenly things . . . by first doing himself what he thought to others.” Amid the turmoil by which the hermit-bishop was surrounded, he ceased not to observe the severity of a monastic life. His mission was manifold. He visited parishes and religious houses, healed the sick, comforted lonely survivors of the plague, and protected the needy from the oppressor. As the shepherd was visiting his folds, he came one day to a wild spot, where many people were gathered that he might lay his hands upon them. Among the mountains no fit church or other building could be found, but at night the bishop and his flock were sheltered in tents and in booths roughly formed of boughs from the neighbouring wood. “Two

days did the man of God preach to the assembled crowds, and minister the grace of the Holy Spirit by imposition of hands.”

After two years of strenuous labour, Cuthbert returned to Farne, knowing that the time of his departure was at hand. He used now to leave the cell frequently and converse with those who came to visit him. He died after a short illness on 20 March, 687—on the same day as his friend, St. Herebert (p.12). He had earnestly desired to be buried on his island, but finally yielded to the wish of the brethren, who accordingly buried his body in Lindisfarne—a spot which became so sacred as to win thereafter the name of Holy Island.

Cuthbert’s successor, Aethelwald, a priest of Ripon, was in seclusion at Farne for twelve years. When he arrived, he found the cell in a dilapidated condition. Crevices made by the violence of the winds had been roughly filled up with timber, hay, or mud ; and the walls were crumbling. Aethelwald therefore begged the brethren who came thither to bring him a calf-skin, which he fastened in the spot where he, like Cuthbert, was wont to pray.

Bede relates how Aethelwald stilled a tempest when Guthfred and certain other brethren were in peril. The story was told to Bede by Guthfred himself. When the monks were returning to Lindisfarne a tempest arose, so great that neither sails nor oars availed aught :—

“Looking out as far as we could see, we observed, on the island of Farne, Father Oidiluald [Aethelwald], beloved of God, who had come out of his cell to watch our course ; for, hearing the noise of the storm and the raging of the sea, he had come out to see what would happen to us. When he beheld us in distress and despair, he bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in prayer for our life and safety ; whereupon the swelling sea was calmed, so that the violence of the storm ceased on all sides, and a fair wind attended us even to the very shore.”¹

When they were safely landed the storm immediately returned and raged throughout the day, so it was clear that the brief cessation had been granted at the hermit’s request. It was this Aethelwald who with Billfrith assisted in illuminating the Lindisfarne Gospels (see chapter XIII).

During the time of Felgeld, the third inhabitant of the place, the hermitage was rebuilt from the foundations by Bishop Eadfrid. “By means of the ruins of the holy oratory,” Felgeld himself was said to have been cured of a dreadful disease and deformity. In early life he had been subject to the swelling ; “but now that he was living alone, and bestowed less care on his person, whilst he practiced still greater rigidities, and, like a prisoner, rarely enjoyed the sun or air, the malady increased”. When the cell was again restored, devout persons begged of Feldeld relics of his predecessors. Having cut into pieces the calf-skin which Aethelwald had nailed in the corner where the hermits used to pray, Felgeld

determined to apply the relics to his own need. Steeping a piece of the covering in water, he washed his face therein, and the blemish was removed. When Bede wrote his account of St. Cuthbert (before 721), Felgeld, then seventy years of age, was still dwelling on the island.

For a considerable period history is silent about Cuthbert's cell, but Gaufridus, the twelfth-century chronicler, states that the island lapsed into a wild state, until at length the desecrated, time-worn oratory was cleansed and repaired by the monk Edulf.

Bartholomew of Farne, the most famous of Cuthbert's followers, was born at Whitby about the year 1120. His life was written by Gaufridus,² the contemporary biographer of the famous hermits of Finchale and of Farne. He seems to have been of Saxon origin ; but as his name Tosti met with disfavour he adopted that of William. He was a careless youth, and does not appear to have been awakened to spiritual things even by two vision which were vouchsafed to him. Desiring to travel, William sailed to Norway, where he came under religious influences and was ordained priest. When the wanderer came home to Northumbria, his zeal led him to seek the stricter life of a monk. On entering the monastery of Durham, William assumed the name Bartholomew. Before long St. Cuthbert appeared to him, bidding him become a hermit at Farne. In obedience to the vision, Bartholomew went thither, and there he spent the remainder of his days.

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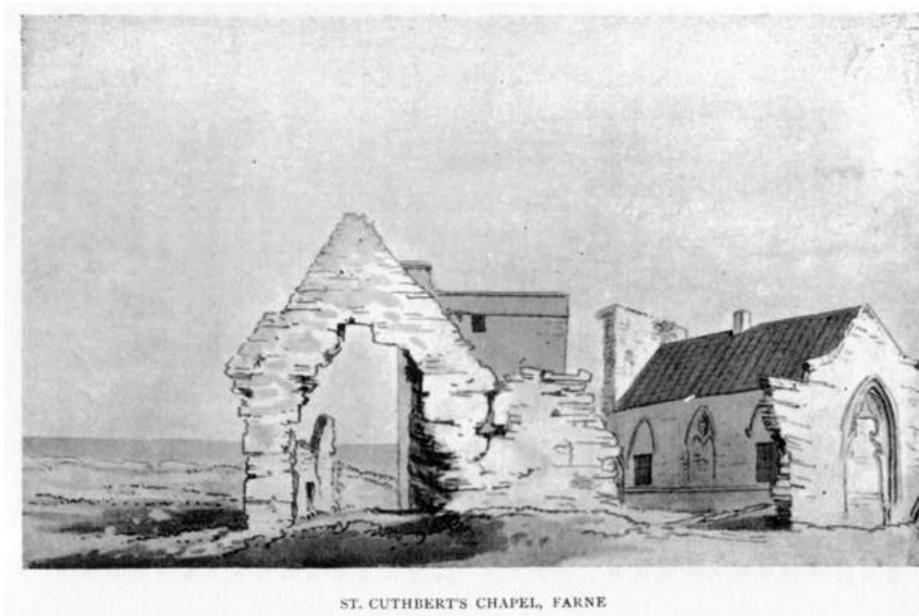


Plate I : St. Cuthbert's Chapel, Farne

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Like St. Cuthbert he lived frugally by his own labour, and devoted himself to meditation. Farne became once more a spiritual centre, and the guest-house was in constant use. Fishermen from the mainland and seamen from all parts visited the solitary, and relied on his advice, whether it concerned their ships or their souls.

In this convenient harbour sailors and traders were frequently detained by stress of weather. Sometimes the hermit-host suffered from a scarcity of provision, but so hospitable was he that upon one occasion he killed his only cow to supply the needs of his guests. Pirates frequently carried off his slender stores. During the reign of Stephen, Aeistan, King of Norway, ravaged the English coast, and landing on Farne he killed and roasted the sheep of the hermits Bartholomew and Aelwin, and even repaired his ships with the timbers of their cell.

Bartholomew lived at Farne for over forty-two years, and he persevered in ascetic habits to old age. He would have no couch, no pillow, no prop to support his body. As long as he was able, he would sit upright, or walk round the island, and all the while he never ceased from prayer. During the last nine days he was very ill ; but, despite the diseases of his body, he kept all the faculties of his mind, nor did the brave old man shrink from dying in solitude. When, therefore, the brethren had administered the last holy rights, they left him ; and on their return from Lindisfarne they found his body lying not far from the stone coffin which he had prepared for himself. It was remembered that when the coffin had first arrived, Bartholomew, finding it too short, had with his own hands hewn it out to fit his body. He was buried in the oratory on the south side, in the spot where his great predecessor had desired to lie. The monks would gladly have carried the remains to Lindisfarne, but Bartholomew's love for his island-home was strong, and he had expressed a wish that he should be buried there in order that the place might not again become deserted. Echoing the words of St. Cuthbert, he declared : "I would have my body lie here, where I hope that my spirit will be received by its Creator, and where I have fought during a very little time for the Lord".

The medieval chapel shown in Plate I is still standing.

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It has been restored, and services are occasionally held there or the lighthouse men.

South of Farne, near the mouth of the river Coquet, was another sanctuary of the sea. In the days of St. Cuthbert, who visited Coquet Island, it was remarkable for the number of its monks. Little is known of the place, however, before the time of St. Henry, early in the twelfth century. This young Dane of noble family was about to be forced into marriage, when, in obedience to a vision, he determined to serve God all the days of his life upon a certain rock on the Northumbrian coast. Sailing, therefore, from Denmark, he obtained permission of the prior of Tynemouth to build a small cell on Coquet Island. Messengers followed him, urging him to return to the land of his birth, where there were deserts to which he might withdraw. Strong was the longing of the exile, but before making his decision he cast himself down before the crucifix set up in his oratory, and implored a revelation of the Divine will. It seemed to him that the

lips of the figure moved, and that Christ, reminding him of his call, promised eternal life if he should persevere. "Play the man, and strengthen thine heart, and in nowise abandon this place of solitude unto thy life's end." Fearing lest he should again be tempted to forsake the island, the hermit prayed to be stricken with some infirmity which should render this impossible. He was afterwards afflicted with a loathsome disease in his knee, which he bore with fortitude. Leaning on a crutch, he continued to cultivate his plot of land. The ulcerated leg caused him agony, but he refused assistance. Alone in his cell, without fire or light, Henry passed the winter, until one night (January, 1127), there was heard a choir of angels singing. The music ceased, and suddenly a bell tolled. When a monk reached the hermitage, he found Henry in the sleep of death, seated on a stone, holding the bell-rope, and beside him burned a candle lit by no human hand.³

In the thirteenth century the office of "keeper of the island" was held by an energetic recluse named Martin, who raised thereupon at great expense a windmill. But Robert Fitz Roger, considering Martin's act as detrimental to the

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Plate II : Coquet Island

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overlord, sent thirty men with axes and mattocks to destroy the mill. The terror-stricken hermit made no protest, and when his servant ventured to remonstrate, they treated him so ill that he barely escaped with his life. This curious story of enterprise and persecution breaks off abruptly with these words : "Moreover, the

said Martin was blamed by no one in that he was wont to prefer to lead the solitary life. He desired to attract neither the approach nor the noise of people of either sex, because often in mills and play-houses irregular and unlawful things are done.”⁴

The island was under Tynemouth Priory, which in its turn was subject to St. Albans. When the latter convent was replying to a Benedictine inquiry in 1253, it was noted that no monk dwelt apart, save one hermit in a certain little island called Coquet, and another in a wood. A tower, possibly used as a lantern, adjoined the chapel. It is mentioned in 1415 as belonging to the prior of Tynemouth. At the Dissolution of Monasteries the buildings included a chapel served by a chaplain. Medieval remains may still be traced in and about the modern lighthouse. The tower shown in Plate II was standing a century ago.

(b) *Isles of the West*.—The West, like the North, had her isles of saints ; nor can the recluses of the Welsh coast be excluded, although not strictly within the scope of this volume. The ascetic life was eagerly embraced by the fervent-natured Celt, and from shadowy traditions it would seem that many a rocky islet had its cell.

The “Book of Llandaff” opens with an account of Elgar, hermit of Yns Enlli (Bardsey), a native of Britain, who had been carried off as an infant from his home in Devon, and became a slave in Ireland. After serving King Roderic in the office of executioner, Elgar obtained freedom and became a sailor. Being wrecked on Bardsey, a holy island where many martyrs were buried, he resolved to stay there and to lead the contemplative life.

“Having spent the space of seven years with a religious community of brethren, and sometimes in solitude, led a holy, glorious, and chaste life, with scant food, slight clothing, and an emaciated

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countenance, he, in the following seven years . . . dwelt in his hermitage, and had nothing for his maintenance except the support which he received, through the providence of God, from the fish of the sea, and what the eagles, or as we may say, angels, brought to him.”

By the ministry of the eagles, Elgar’s table was prepared in the wilderness with fishes, herbs, and water ; and once when he was hungry he found a large white stag which supplied him with food for some time. The hermit “led his life, present to the Lord, and unknown to man”. At length, having prepared a grave for himself in the oratory, he lay down beside it and expired ; and the sailor-saint was afterwards buried by sailors. The details of his life were told by him at the entreaty of the teacher Caradoc who came to visit him.⁵

Upon a rocky promontory on the coast of Glamorgan dwelt Kenyth, a Welsh prince cast adrift on the waves in an osier coracle. Friendly sea-birds bore the hapless babe to Ynys Weryn—Worms Head, which is an island at high tide—where they made him a nest of feathers, and drove the serpents from the place. According to the legend, an angel brought a brazen bell, which was regularly

replenished with milk by a doe. The child was found and taken home by a shepherd, but when the sea-gulls gathered in flocks and attacked his home, the affrighted rustic carried him back to his rocky nursery. There, on the ledge of rock, the little cripple grew up with no companions save the gulls. An early Celtic representation of this legend is found on the Cumberland cross-shaft of Dearham, near Maryport. It is strange that the story of a solitary of the Severn Sea should thus reach the shores of the Solway. The rude but graphic sculpture (Fig. I) shows a sea-bird with a bundle in its claws, and a deformed human figure holding out a bell-shaped vessel.⁶

Kenyth, who after eighteen years of solitude found a companion to share his ascetic life, spent the rest of his days at Burry Holmes, an island-promontory on the north shore of Rhosilly Bay. He built a cell of osiers and thatched it with

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reeds. The hermit was revered by all. Once some starving robbers, coming to those parts, said among themselves :—

“There is a certain saint not far from here, who loves and instructs all, and he refreshes the strong as well as the weak ; he invites the destitute and wayfarers, and even to evil-doers he is gentle. Let us go, therefore, to him that he may succour our need. And when they arrived there they were quickly received into the hospice.”

After the hermit’s death, his remains were removed to a neighbouring church. William Worchester records his “translation” to St. Keneth’s in Gowerland. Many centuries later a custom prevailed of taking solemn oaths upon his relics. In a quarrel which arose in 1472, the arbitrator adjudged that the claimant should swear to the rightfulness of his title “in the chirche of Langenytt upon Seint Kenythis hedde”.⁷



FIG. 1.—The Hermit and the Seagull.

Hermits and Anchorites of England, Rotha Mary Clay

Illustration: Fig. I.—The Hermit and the Seagull.

The cell at Burry Holmes was inhabited from time to time. Possibly the oratory there was the “deserted church of St. Kined,” to which Caradoc retired early in the twelfth century.⁸ The hermitage of St. Kenyth “atte Holmes in Gowers-

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land” was still occupied during the fifteenth century, when Philip Lichepoll, William Bernard, etc., were hermits.⁹

Steep Holme, Flat Holme, and Barry, were often inhabited by solitaries—not always as permanent abodes, but for periods of seclusion between missionary journeys or during Lent. These islands of Severn were a wilderness to which it was easy to retire, and a centre from which work could be resumed. Two famous friends abode upon Ronech and Echni (The Holmes), namely, Cadoc, who chose the flat island nearest to Wales, and Gildas, who inhabited the craggy rock lying off the English shore. Gildas built a cell and an oratory in honour of the Blessed Trinity, but his rocky bed was under the precipitous cliff, where he was wont to watch and pray until midnight. These holy men used to visit one another during their seven years’ sojourn in the Severn. Being troubled by pirates, however, St. Gildas left Steep Holme, and went to Glastonbury, where he became abbot and wrote his history (chapter XIII.). Not far from Glastonbury, on the river, he built a church, and there he lived once more as a hermit, clad in a hair-shirt. People came from remote parts of Britain to hear his wisdom and his teaching. St. Cadoc, returning to Wales, became Abbot of Llancarvan. One of his disciples, Barroc, gave his name to Barry, near Cardiff. “His remains,” says Giraldus de Barri, “are deposited in a chapel overgrown with ivy.” This “fair little chapel of St. Barrok” was a place of pilgrimage in Leland’s day.¹⁰

Prince Fremund was the son of the Saxon King Offa. Whilst his father was yet alive the pious youth was crowned as his successor ; but, fired with love of God, he determined to leave home and country and seek the desert. Fremund and his two companions set out for Caerleon. When they reached the sea they took a little barge, and without oar and without food committed their passage to God’s ordinance (Plate III). Driven to and fro by the wind for five days, they came to land “up an yle froward to kome to”—deserted of inhabitants, but with fair mountains, running rivers, crystal

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THE VOYAGE TO ILEFAYE



BUILDING THE CHAPEL
ST. FREMUND

Plate III: The Voyage to Ilefaye ; St. Fremund

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wells, green meadows, and trees laden with wholesome frutes—a place divinely ordained for them.

...And Ilefaye men that yle calle
Off old tyme desolat and sauage
More agreable than was his stalle
To hooly Fremund throuh he were yong off age
And ther he bilte a litel hermytage
Be side a ryuer with al his besy peyne

He & his fellowis that were in noumbre tweyne.

...A lytil chapel he did ether edifie
Day be day to make in his praiere
In the reuerence only of marie
And in the worshepe off hir sone deer
And the space fully off seuene yeere
Hooly Fremund lik as it is found
Leued be frut and rootis off the grounde.

Despite privation, trial, and temptation, Fremund kept to his purpose : “Stable as a wal he stood in his degree”. At length Offa, hearing of the arrival of the Danish chieftains Hinguar and Hubba, and of the death of St. Edmund (his queen’s brother), sent to seek his son through that region and all strange isles. The messengers told the prince of the desolation brought by the paynims and besought his aid. Then stood Fremund in a sore plight. By his profession he was pledged to live apart and to eschew bloodshed ; yet in that world which he had forsaken, the helpless were oppressed, the Church despoiled, and Christ’s faith brought to destruction. Perplexed, the hermit fell to prayer, and he was bidden in a vision to hasten home to his country, and be strong in spirit like Christ’s champion. Fremund straightway left Ilefaye, and was victorious when he led his people against “the miscreants of Denmark”. Whilst he knelt in thanksgiving, however, he was murdered by a Saxon renegade to the faith who was in league with the Danes. The hermit-martyr’s story is depicted in the beautiful MS. of Lydgate’s “Life of St. Edmund.”¹¹

Near the old passage of Severn, at the mouth of the Wye, is Chapel Island with its “chapel of St. Tiriac the anchorite”. The earliest known record concerning this place is a license of the Bishop of Hereford, given in 1290 to Brother John Sterre, a Benedictine monk, to officiate in the chapel of St. Tryak of

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Beachely.¹² In the year 1405 “a multitude, both of English and Welsh,” were wont to resort thither on pilgrimage. In the time of Henry VIII, the *capella S. Triaci*, standing in the sea, is described as being worth nothing. The ruined oratory, which measured 31½ feet by 14½ feet, was drawn by Miss Eleanor Ormerod many years ago (Plate IV).

There is no clue as to the identity of the dedication-saint. *St. Triaculus* occurs on one Patent Roll. William Worcester refers to *Sanctus Tiriacus anachorita*, and to *Rok Seynt Tryacle*. Leland speaks of *S. Tereudacus Chapel*. Modern maps complete the confusion by printing St. Tecla.

II. INLAND ISLES

(a) *In Lakes*.—Many a saint sought solitude upon some inland-islet, shut

off from the world by the waters of the mere, the marsh, or the river. The holy Herebert dwelt upon an island in Derwentwater :—

“There was a certain priest, venerable for the probity of his life and manners, called Herebert, who had long been united with the man of God, Cuthbert, in the bond of spiritual friendship. This man, leading a solitary life in an island of that great marsh from which the Derwent flows, was wont to visit him every year, and to receive from him advice concerning his eternal salvation.”

In the year 696 Cuthbert and Herebert met in Carlisle for the last time. The bishop told his friend of his approaching death, and the hermit won from him the assurance that his own soul should depart at the same time.

More than eight centuries later, Leland writes of “St. Herebert’s Isle wher is a Chapel”. It had long been visited as a hallowed place. In 1374 Bishop Appleby of Carlisle offered an indulgence to such parishioners of Crosthwaite as should accompany the vicar thither when the mass of St. Cuthbert was celebrated on St. Herbert’s Day (the 13th of [the calends of][sic] April, i.e. 20 March). “What a happy holyday must that have been for all these vales ; and how joyous on a fine spring day must the lake have appeared, with the boats and banners from every chapelry, and how must the

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Plate IV : Chapel of St. Tiriach the Anchorite

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chapel have adorned that little isle, giving a human and religious character to the solitude!” “Its ruins are still there,” adds Southey, “in such a state of total

dilapidation that they only make the island, mere wilderness as it has now become, more melancholy.”¹³ One of Wordsworth’s *Inscriptions* was written for the spot where the hermitage stood :—

...Stranger ! not unmoved
Wilt though behold this shapeless heap of stones,
The desolate ruins of St. Herbert’s Cell.
Here stood his threshold ; here was spread the roof
That sheltered him, a self-secluded Man,
After long exercise in social cares
And offices humane, intent to adore
The deity, with undistracted mind,
And meditate on everlasting things.
In utter solitude.—But he has left
A Fellow-labourer, whom the good Man loved
As his own soul. And, when with eye upraised
To heaven he knelt before the crucifix,
While o’er the lake the cataract of Lodore
Pealed to his orisons, and when he paced
Along the beach of this small isle and thought
Of his companion, he would pray that both
(Now that their earthly duties were fulfilled)
Might die in the same moment. Nor in vain
So prayed he :—as our chronicles report,
Though here the Hermit numbered his last day
Far from St. Cuthbert, his beloved Friend,
Those holy Men both died in the same hour.

There was an island cell “within the water of Windermere,” on Lady Holm near Bowness. The earliest known reference is to “the hermit brethren of St. Mary’s” (1272). The Chapel, also described as hospital or chantry, was served by two priests, some of whom came from Segden hermitage, near Berwick-upon-Tweed. After the Dissolution of Religious Houses, the Survey mentions “a Fre Chapel within the parishinge of Wynondermere called our ladie Chapelle of Tholme”. According to local legend it was a monk of Lady Holm who silenced for ever the ghostly “Crier of Claife”. Travellers from Kendal to Hawkshead crossed the narrow lake by ferry. The fell between Windermere and Esthwaite is called Claife Heights. Thence one stormy night a fateful voice cried “Boat!” The ferryman

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rowed across expecting some passenger, but he was some dreadful apparition, and returned speechless to die. The story of the boatman’s last voyage struck terror into all hearers, and after nightfall none would venture upon the lake. At length a priest of St. Mary’s went forth to lay the ghost [at rest], and henceforth the awful “Crier” was heard no more.

(b) *In the Fens*.—Encircled by fenny swamp or flooded river, Saxon solitaries took up their bode at Crowland, Peakirk, Thorney, Huneia, Bethney, and other islands.

Felix himself a monk of Crowland, describes the terrible marsh which Guthlac made his home—with its stagnant pools, its spongy moss, its wreaths of dark vapour, its watercourses winding between woods and islands. Now when the young monk of Repton heard of this huge desert he went straight thither. Inquiring of the inhabitants their knowledge of this vast solitude, Guthlac heard of a more uncultivated part of that wide wilderness. One of those who stood by, Tatwine by name, declared that he knew another island in the hidden parts of yet more remote desert, which many who had tried to live there disliked on account of unknown monsters and terrors of different kinds. Guthlac, who in his youth had ever been ready for a wild raid, was still eager fro holy adventure. He was guided by Tatwine to the place of dreadful desolation. The voyage to Crowland is shown upon the fine Harley Roll (Plate V), which also depicts the construction of the chapel under the hermit's direction.

Traces of Guthlac's church and cell remained until last century on a mound not far from the abbey.¹⁴ The cistern or well mentioned by the eighth-century chronicler has also been uncovered. A cottage here was known in the eighteenth century as "Anchor Church House."

Pega, Guthlac's famous sister, settled as a recluse at Peakirk, "being the first dry land she reached after coming by water from Croyland." On the traditional site of her dwelling stands a chapel, which was formerly known as the hermitage of St. Bartholomew—the saint who appears constantly in the life of Guthlac as his patron. According to the continuator

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ST. GUTHLAC'S VOYAGE TO CROWLAND

Plate V: St. Guthlac'--

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of Ingulph's Chronicle, the chapel of St. Pega was rebuilt by Abbot John Wysbech about 1469, "after the same had been for many years levelled with the ground". If this be true, the nave (now used as a reading-room) may represent the abbot's work. The chancel is older, dating probably from the latter part of the thirteenth century.

At Thorney (once Ancarig, island of anchorites) dwelt, according to uncertain tradition, Thorncred, Thortred, and Bosa. To this spot in the tenth century Athelwold, Abbot of Abingdon, and Bishop of Winchester, was wont to retire at certain seasons, and a monastery was afterwards founded there. In Thorney Abbey were preserved the relics of Huna, the chaplain of St Etheldreda. The priest had long practiced great austerity of life, and after he had performed the last offices of the holy abbess, he spent the rest of his days in seclusion upon a small island near Ely, called Huneia after the saint. Near Hunney farm, on the borders of Chatteris, traces have been found of an ancient building, supposed by some to have been the chapel where Huna was buried, before the translation of his body to Thorney.

(c) *In Rivers*.—Bertellin or Berthelm (by some identified with Beccel or Beccellin, Guthlac's disciple) a wild young prince who had become a penitent recluse, went in disguise to his father, the King of Mercia, and begged from him a little island in the river Sow, where now is Stafford. After his father's death, the hermit was dispossessed, and, leaving Bethney, he returned to the desert places of the mountains. This last retreat is supposed to have been Dovedale, possibly near Ilam, where the shrine and well of St. Berthram are still to be seen, and also certain ancient cross-shafts which may once have marked the saint's grave.¹⁵

Modwen is said to have dwelt upon a plot of ground between two branches of the river, near Burton-on-Trent. "Returning to England from Rome, she came to the place which is called Scaleclif, by the hill where the river Trent makes, as is were, an island. Having built an oratory in honour of St. Andrew, she lived the anachroitical life for seven years." A sixteenth-century rental mentions "Andrew's Isle, alias Mud-

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win's chappell". The story of St. Modwen's hermit-friend, Hardulch, is told in chapter III.

Plegmund, the learned friend of King Alfred, once lived the solitary life upon "an island of Chester, called by the inhabitants Plegmundensham"—probably Plemondstall, about four miles from Chester. The good priest was summoned from his place of retirement by Alfred, whose instructor and counsellor he became (chapter XIII.) The Saxon Chronicle for the year 890 records that : "This year was Plegmund chosen of God, and of all the people, to

the Archbishopric of Canterbury". "At this time," says another historian, "Archbishop Plegmund, so faithful and so famous, ruled the Church of Christ ; a reverend man, bright with fruits of wisdom." He is said to have crowned Edward the Elder, and to have died at an advanced age in 914. The memory of the hermit-archbishop was treasured in his former retreat, where his name was adopted. The "Christening Well, near the church of Plemstall, was called "St. Plegmund's Well" in the time of Edward VI.¹⁶

An island called Andersey, by the river Parrett in Somerset, was inhabited during the twelfth century by Herduin, a venerable solitary ; the place was granted to him by charter, and he afterwards presented it to Athelney Abbey. The Wye had a hermit's isle near Winforton, in Herefordshire ; it was about a quarter of a mile south of the church, and had a chapel dedicated to St. Kenedr. The first occupant of the cell was Walter the priest. His successor, Brother Stephen, planted a quickset hedge about the hermitage, finding, perhaps, that even the river did not protect him sufficiently.

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Footnotes ~

1. Bede, *Ecc. Hist.*, ed. Stevenson, 492-3.
2. Printed in Roll Series (75), as Appendix to *Symeon of Durham*, I. 295-325. See also *English Saints*, 111.
3. Roscarrock's *Life* ; *Nov. Leg.* II. 22-6.
4. *Chr. S. Alb., Annales, Edw. I.* (Rolls, 28, II), 447-8.
5. *Liber Landav.*, ed. W. T. Rees, 281-7.
6. W. S. Calverley and W. G. Collingwood, *Early Sculp. Crosses*, 127-30.
7. *Nov. Leg.* II. 105-9 ; J. D. Davies, W. Gower, Pt. III ; Birch, *Penrice and Margam MSS.* v. 114.
8. Caradoc left the court of Rhys, became a monk at Llandaff, then a hermit on the Isle of Ary. His final retreat was near Haverfordwest. He died in 1124. *Nov. Keg.* ii. 105-9.
9. See *Pat. Rolls*, 1398, 1428, 1482, etc.
10. Possibly the same saint to which the fine old Derbyshire church of Norbury was dedicated, "St. Barlock," mentioned in Fitzherbert wills, and commemorated in the glass of the S. chapel.
11. B.M. Harl. MS., 2278.
12. *Reg. Sinfield (Cant. and Yk. S.)*, 238-9. Beachley is in Tidenham, near Chepstow.
13. Southey, *Colloquies (More)*, I. 337.
14. *Brit. Archæol. Journal*, XXXV, facing p. 133.
15. Bishop of Bristol, *St. Bertram's Shrine at Ilam*.
16. Hook, *Archbishops*, I. 312 sq. ; E. Conybeare, *Alfred in the Chroniclers*, 106, 127, 156, 203 ; *Chester and N. Wales Hist. S., N.S.*, XVI, 56, 67.

-end chapter one-