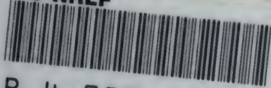

UC-NRLF
B 4 007 733

The
University of California
Library

H. Morse Stephens

University of California

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/legendofstkenelm00hartrich

Prof: Morse Stephens 2

with the writer's compliments

The Legend of St. Kenelm.

By E. SIDNEY HARTLAND, F.S.A., *President*.

HENRY MORSE STEPHENS

Reprinted from the "Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archæological Society." Vol. XXXIX.

THE LEGEND OF ST. KENELM.

By E. SIDNEY HARTLAND, F.S.A., *President.*[1]

The ancient abbey of Winchcombe, in a beautiful little dale at the base of the Cotswold Hills, was famous until the Reformation as the shrine of the boy-saint Kenelm. The abbey was founded about the end of the first decade of the ninth century by Kenwulf, king of the Mercians, and father of the subsequently honoured saint. His foundation-charter, dated the 9th November, 811, is beyond reasonable doubt (in its present form, at least) a forgery. At his request Pope Leo III. is said to have granted in the same year to the monastery where he should be buried, and the vills and lands belonging to it, freedom from all secular service, in order that the servants of God (namely, the monks) might constantly devote themselves to prayers for his soul. Whatever may be thought of this document, the confirmatory privilege which purports to have been granted by Pope Paschal I. is no more worthy of our credence than the charter.[2] It is probable that Kenwulf designed to be buried in the church of the monastery, and that he was actually buried there. The generally-accepted date of his death is 821. What then happened is not quite clear. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle he died in 819, and was immediately succeeded by his brother Ceolwulf. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, however, was a West-Saxon compilation, frequently edited and re-edited; and it was primarily interested in events beyond the

[1] A portion of this paper was delivered as the Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the Society on the 3rd July, 1916.

[2] These documents are printed by Royce, *Landboc de Winchelcumba*, i. 18 *sqq*. *Cf*. Haddan & Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents* (Oxford, 1871), iii. 572.

border only as they affected the kingdom of Wessex. To place the date of Kenwulf's death in 819 was an error, inasmuch as we have charters by him, admitted to be genuine, as late as the year 821. If mistaken in the date, the compiler may also have been mistaken or imperfectly informed concerning the events that followed it. Florence of Worcester, writing at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century, and William of Malmesbury a few years later, have a different tale to tell. According to them Kenwulf left a son, Kenelm, a boy of seven years, who was treacherously murdered by one Askebert, at the instigation of his elder sister Cwenthryth, or Quendryth; and it was only after his death that Ceolwulf succeeded to the throne.

Let us begin by taking note of the fact that this tale is first recorded in extant writing three hundred years after the alleged events, and that in the meantime England had passed through two centuries of turmoil and catastrophe involved in the wars with the Northmen, followed by the cataclysm of the Norman Conquest. These changes would not have been favourable to the preservation of the true details of earlier history. Learning of all kinds stagnated, if it did not retrogress, during those disastrous centuries. And though the monasteries may have been at times comparatively safe shelters from the storm, that very fact, by gathering beneath their roofs all sorts of men, would have tended rather to confuse than to clear the memory of the past.

This tale, moreover, assumes that Kenelm, as the son of Kenwulf, had an hereditary and indefeasible right to the kingdom, and in consequence actually succeeded. Florence expressly calls him *heir to the kingdom.* But this is founded on a misconception of Anglo-Saxon constitutional practice, from which no such right can be inferred. To secure the succession to the king's son, he was sometimes crowned or "hallowed to king," like Ecgfrid, the son of Offa, in his father's lifetime. When the king's brother was of age he frequently succeeded, to the exclusion of a son. The true rule of

succession has been formulated as "hereditary in the family but elective in the person." Even this is to put too definitely a rule which in those archaic times probably never received a formal shape. Something in the nature of a rough election by the earls and bishops and other magnates of the kingdom doubtless took place; and a preference was given to members —though often distant members—of the royal family. But the deciding factor, we gather, was very generally the right of the strongest.

Further, it is clear that, failing a son, these post-Conquest writers held that a daughter had at least some claim to the throne. Florence definitely inputes to Quendryth that "dira cupido regnandi" animated her; and William of Malmesbury speaks of her as "falso sibi regnum præsagiens." We look in vain, however, through the lists of the monarchs of the petty kingdoms into which England was divided during the first few centuries of its history for the name of a queen regnant. The only one we find is that of Seaxburh, the widow of Coenwealh, king of Wessex, who seems to have ruled for a year, or possibly longer (672–674), after her husband's death, not by hereditary right, but probably because in a time of intestinal divisions she was an energetic and determined woman, who happened to hold the strings of government in her hands. There were indeed plenty of capable women in high places during the period we call the Heptarchy. If they sat upon the throne, it was as queen consort only; for so long as one of the chief duties of the sovereign was to lead the host to battle, their sphere was held to be rather the cloister than the realm.

The probabilities, then, are all against the story transmitted to us by Florence of Worcester and William of Malmesbury. Let us turn back to the facts we know. King Kenwulf was married to a lady named Ælfthryth. Who she was is not known. Her name is the same as that of one of Offa's daughters, who according to legend was used to entrap Ethelbert, king of the East Angles, to his death; and she may

have been the same person. Of her presumably, whoever she may have been, two children at least were born, namely, Kenelm and his sister Quendryth. Florence adds a second daughter, Burghild or Burgenhild. The first question to be determined is Kenelm's age at his father's death. There is a remarkable document alleged to be a letter from Pope Leo III. to " King Kenelm," and dated in 798.[1] To accept this would compel us to believe that Kenelm had been " hallowed to king " during his father's life, and reigned with him for more than three-and-twenty years. It is, however, spurious, and a fine example of the recklessness of the monastic forger. Still, a number of charters apparently genuine do exist, to which the name of " Cynehelm princeps " or " Cynehelm dux " is among those of the witnesses and consenting magnates. They begin with the year 803 and continue to the year 811. During those nine years Kenelm, as the king's son, must have been a prominent personage at the Mercian Court. We may suppose him to have been not adult, but adolescent—say, sixteen years of age—in the former year. In that case, in 811, the last year in which his name appears, so far from being a boy of seven years of age subject to a *nutritor* (a tutor, or perhaps foster-father), he must have been a man of five-and-twenty. But if his mother were Ælfthryth, King Offa's daughter, and if the legend that connected her with Ethelbert be true, she could not have been married before 793, the accepted date of Ethelbert's murder, and perhaps not until a year or two later. Then, assuming that Quendryth was (as the legend requires) the first child of the marriage, Kenelm might not have been more than five or six years old in 803. This we should think rather youthful to be joining in what was no doubt a solemn act of state. In those days they may have thought differently. At all events, in 811 he could hardly have been less than fourteen, and at his father's death, if he survived him, twenty-four years old. What became of him after 811 is unknown; probably he died.

[1] Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, No. 284 (*cf.* 285).

The facts of Kenelm's life, then, so far as they are known, are quite inconsistent with the legend. Nor can it be said that the facts known about Quendryth are less so. Her earliest appearance is as one of the signatories to a charter of gift in 811 by Kenwulf, her father, to Beornmod, bishop of Rochester, of land at that city. She is there described as *filia regis*. So far as I am aware, she signs none of her father's subsequent charters. In the year 824, three years after Kenwulf's death, she is found as abbess of Southminster, a position incompatible with that of one who was known to have been guilty of the detestable crime of murdering her own brother, and moreover, as we shall learn hereafter, to have been blinded by an offended heaven for heartless mockery of the holy martyr and blasphemous misuse of one of the psalms which formed part of the services of the Church. At this date (824) she is involved in litigation with Wulfred, archbishop of Canterbury, who bore no goodwill to the house of Kenwulf, and would not have failed to cast the crime in her teeth, as the quarrel grew bitter, if there had been any truth in the charge. The merits of the quarrel are interesting chiefly to us now as they throw light on the character and life of Quendryth. We have only the archbishop's side of the story, which is embodied in acts of the Council of Clovesho. It seems that a certain Earl Albert and his sister Selethryth had given by deed to Wulfred, after their deaths, as an inheritance for ever, four *aratra* (the Kentish equivalent of hides ?) at a place called Oesewalum. Selethryth predeceased her brother. Albert had meanwhile retired to a monastery; and there he subsequently confirmed the gift. When he died, however, Earl Oswulf, a kinsman of his, got hold of the deeds by fraud, and deposited them upon the altar at Southminster,[1] in the presence of the abbess Quendryth and the whole convent. This seems to have been

[1] Southminster has been identified with Minster in the Isle of Thanet, which the mention of Reculver (see p. 20) in connection with it seems to favour. It may, however, have been Southminster in Essex.

tantamount to a gift of them and the land to the convent. The archbishop was not the man to sit down under such an injustice. He sent repeated demands to Quendryth and the convent to give up the land; but during four years they refused to do so. The archbishop's first demand, therefore, dates back to 820, and shows that Quendryth was at that time abbess, before her father's death. However easily a royal lady could in those days have obtained the position of abbess, and however lax the ideas of the time were in regard to the position, she must have become professed in religion, and that possibly some years before the date of the transaction in question. Indeed, we may surmise that the reason she does not appear as a signatory to charters after 811 is that she was no longer at her father's court, but in the convent. If so, she could not have enacted the part ascribed to her in the legend.

Impatient of their continued refusal, Wulfred summoned the abbess and convent before the synod or Council of Clovesho, to produce the deeds of the property.

In those inchoate times the council or general assembly of the magnates of a kingdom dealt with civil, military and ecclesiastical affairs alike. For this reason in the Council of Clovesho the king and the archbishop of Canterbury sat side by side as joint presidents. Nor were the legislative and judicial functions as yet separated. The same body exercised both; and what to our ideas is worse than all, a member of the body might be judge in his own cause, uniting in his own person what we should think the inconsistent rôles of litigant and judge. Parliament and synod as separate institutions, the distinct functions of judge, advocate, and litigant, had not then been evolved. These clear-cut conceptions, so elementary to us, are much more modern. In the Council of Clovesho the archbishop of Canterbury, sitting thus as joint president with Beornwulf the king, was plaintiff also. In the presence of Quendryth, the representatives of the convent of Southminster and the whole witan, he stated his

claim and offered the documents to be read. He had taken the precaution to bring his witnesses, the Abbots Wernoth and Feologeld, and the propositus Æthelhun, who testified *viva voce* before the Council to the same effect as the deeds. After hearing the cause, the Council unanimously adjudged the property and deeds to be given up to the archbishop. The king appears to have concurred in the decision ; for his name and cross, together with those of the archbishop and a number of bishops, presbyters, abbots and *duces*, are affixed to the record as consenting. But those of Quendryth and the other representatives of the convent of Southminster, the defeated litigants, are not added.[1]

Evidently Quendryth was a determined lady, as tenacious of what she deemed her rights as the archbishop. But this was only part of his quarrel with her. Having succeeded so far, we find him the following year again in litigation with her, this time in her capacity as heiress of King Kenwulf. She had, in fact, inherited an old-standing quarrel, which had become so inflamed during Kenwulf's lifetime, that the king had appealed to the pope, and at a witanagemot held at London had banished the archbishop from the kingdom, and forbidden his return, in spite of anything that pope or emperor or anyone else might say, until he should consent to give up certain land and pay a hundred and twenty pounds in money, an enormous sum in those days. The archbishop long refused to agree to the terms, and became an exile. He does not seem, however, to have found much sympathy at the court of Rome, where the king's representations prevailed. His friends at last advised him to submit. Reluctantly he did so, on condition that the power and dignity enjoyed by his predecessors should be restored to him, and his peace made also with the pope. Failing these, he stipulated that the money which he paid to the king should be returned to him. After Kenwulf's death the archbishop summoned Quendryth as his heiress before the Council at Clovesho, and

[1] Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, i., No. 378.

complained that the conditions had not been fulfilled by the king. One of his charges against Kenwulf had been that the king's violence and rapacity had despoiled him of his rights over the convents of Southminster (where Quendryth was abbess) and Reculver, and their property and possessions. His grievance now was, that in spite of the reconciliation, he had been for three whole years defrauded of the rights enjoyed by his predecessors and himself over the cloister of Southminster, alike in the material tribute of food, money, and clothing, and in canonical obedience ; and, moreover, in many places of his diocese he was consequently deprived of his due honours. The claims over Southminster touched the abbess nearly. Though she may have been willing as abbess to render canonical obedience to the archbishop, the lordship with its temporalities had descended to her as her father's heiress. Everything else in dispute appears to have been given up by the king on his reconciliation with Wulfred, in return for the archbishop's cession of certain land called " Leogeneshamme " or " Iogneshomme," and the money payment. We do not know her case. The record of the synod naturally has an ecclesiastical tinge ; it altogether omits her answer to the complaint. All we are told is that the Council was unanimously in favour of the archbishop, decreeing complete restitution and damages.

Quendryth, however, did not so easily yield. Consequently King Beornwulf, out of friendship for the deceased king and his heiress, undertook to mediate. With his witan (*cum suis sapientibus*) he humbly prayed the archbishop to compromise his claim, offering him, at the request and on behalf of the heiress and the inheritance, a hundred hides of land in four places, namely at Harrow, " Herefrethinglond," and Wembley, and at " Geddincggum " (possibly Yeading in Middlesex), in full of his demand. At length, not very willingly, but for the love of God and out of friendship for the king, as he declared, he gave way ; the offer was accepted, and the reconciliation on these terms was announced to the synod.

Yet the quarrel was not ended. Twelve months passed, and the agreement had not been fully performed. Three hides at Harrow, and the documents relating to "Boclonde" (perhaps "Geddinge"), Wembley and "Herefrethinglande" — together forty-seven hides—were withheld. But the next year Quendryth recognised the hopelessness of the contest. The archbishop was then at "Oslafeshlau," in the province of the Hwiccas. She sought him out and begged for an interview. There, we are told, she confessed the folly of her conduct. The archbishop, by way of making himself pleasant (*cum magna dulcedine* is the actual phrase in the record), declared at once to her that he was no longer bound by the compromise, since her solemn undertaking was unfulfilled. The abbess humbled herself before him. She promised to give up everything she had kept back; she would make ample amends; she would hand over the missing deeds; for the sake of his friendship, and by way of damages (*ad emendationem*), she would add (from her own property) four hides at Harrow and thirty hides at a place called "Cumbe," in Kent, with their deeds, to him and his heirs for ever, so that their reconciliation might be permanent, and her father's inheritance and his heirs liberated from further claims. Brought again before the council, she subsequently promised all this, we are informed, with shame and humiliation. The archbishop would spare her nothing. Before he agreed he exacted the abolition of certain ancient privileges (we are not told what they were) annexed to lands at "Wincelcumbe," a place identified by Mr. Birch with probability not as Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, but Great and Little Winchcombe, about a mile and a half south-west of Godmersham in Kent, and perhaps the same as "Cumbe" before mentioned. And he made it a condition that if subsequent dispute were raised by any of Kenwulf's heirs the archbishop and his heirs and Christ Church [Canterbury] should be free to require indemnity from Quendryth, and to reopen the controversy now closed.

The record was signed by mark of the cross by Quendryth, it is specially noted, "with her own hands." It was also signed in the same way by the king, the archbishop, and a long array of bishops, abbots, *duces*, and other dignitaries—probably, in fact, by the entire synod or council.[1]

So the archbishop triumphed. The antagonists were not in themselves unequally matched. Both were strong-willed and resolute to obstinacy. Had Quendryth been possessed of the spiritual and secular resources of her opponent, the issue might have been different. It is to be regretted that the record is so biassed, otherwise we might have known something of the motives that actuated her and the skill with which she conducted her case. She probably held herself to be contending not merely for her own hand, but for her father's remoter heirs, perhaps even on behalf of her convent. More than that, she no doubt regarded herself as the champion of her father's memory, which Wulfred's invective had blackened with charges of enmity, violence, avarice and unjust oppression: charges perpetuated in the acts of the council he compelled her to sign.[2] He made use of this unmeasured language as plaintiff, but at the same time as joint president with King Beornwulf. It looks as if, whatever were the merits of the quarrel, his successes were partly gained by overawing the council as president, and by virtue of his sacred character as archbishop. Bitter as the contention was, however, and violent as was his language, he utters no syllable that hints at any complicity by the abbess in a brother's murder.

It is interesting, though somewhat beside the subject, to

[1] There are two records varying slightly in detail, the one supplementing the other: Birch, Nos. 384, 385; Haddan and Stubbs, iii., 596, 601. The latter think Wincelcumbe is Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, and apparently distinguish it from Cumbe (see their observations, *ibid.*, 575).

[2] And yet Kenwulf had been a generous giver to the archbishop. A number of charters are recorded containing grants of domains to him, as well as to other ecclesiastics.

inquire what the archbishop did with the lands he had wrung from Quendryth. The character in which he obtained them is not, on the face of the documents, perfectly free from ambiguity. There are many ambiguities in these old records. Writing was still a laborious art, and was economised accordingly. Legal ideas were somewhat nebulous ; at any rate, the precision of legal expression as yet left much to be desired. Even the laws put from time to time into writing are framed in such concise and general terms, that to us their meaning is often anything but clear. On the whole, however, it seems certain that the lands acquired for himself and his heirs were intended to be for him in his capacity as archbishop, and for the benefit of the Church, as represented by the monks of Canterbury. He recognised this ; but he had worldly ties. There was at least one kinsman whom he desired to benefit, if possible, out of the property of the Church. So he prevailed upon "the family of Christ," namely the monks of Christ Church, to consent to a gift to this relative of the land at Harrow, together with land at Oeswalum and other property, which it does not appear had ever belonged to Quendryth. The deed conveying all these is lost, so that we do not precisely know its terms. We gather, however, that it was an absolute conveyance, not limited to the donee's life, as such gifts sometimes are ; for Werhard, the donee, in the year 845, exchanged one hide of what possibly was a part of the land at Harrow against a similar quantity of neighbouring land, the property of a thegn named Werenberht, at Hroces-seathum (Roxeth).[1] However, the archbishop at the time of the gift, or subsequently, laid it upon him to restore at his death the property to Christ Church and the monks his brethren, and before he died caused the injunction to be put into writing in the testamentary disposition of his property ; charging, moreover, the lands, for the good of his soul and the souls of all who had given assistance to Christ Church, with the maintenance of twenty-one poor men, of

[1] Birch, *op. cit.*, ii., No. 448.

whom five were to be maintained at Harrow, two at Clive, two at Gravenea, seven at Oeswalum, and six at Canterbury, and also with other "charities." Shortly after the archbishop's death Werhard accordingly by his will or testamentary disposition, still extant, reciting the transaction, carried out his wishes,[1] though he seems to have survived his relative for many years. The gift to him was not to be despised. It amounted to the lordship of at least 326 hides, or nearly forty thousand acres. Whether Wulfred secured any pickings out of the estates of the Church at Canterbury for other relatives I cannot say. But it is manifest that to afford one such magnificent family endowment the archbishops and the brethren of Christ Church must have lost very few opportunities. Their talent was not laid up in a napkin.

With the settlement of the quarrel the veil drops, and we lose sight of the lady abbess. For the rest of her life she probably ruled her convent as such a woman was likely to rule it, firmly no doubt—probably wisely—and with due regard for the interests and order of the community. Whether she saw and suffered the stress of the Danish invasion we do not know; silence covers the rest of her career.

Subsequent charters and records make only one mention of her; and that apparently relates to her earlier life. A document dated in the year 897 states that Dux Æthelwulf had investigated the deeds relating to the property of King Kenwulf, and found that he had ordained that none of his heirs should have license to grant away his (Kenwulf's) inheritance which belonged to Winchcombe for longer than one life; and that if anyone would not observe this limitation, or should attempt to transgress it by giving a longer period, he should be subject to anathema, unless he made proper amends. Now there were five hides of land "in Uptune" (perhaps Upton-on-Severn) in the possession of one Wullaf.

[1] *Ibid.*, i., No. 402.

who was of the heirship of Kenwulf. Among other things Æthelwulf spoke to him about this property. Wullaf replied that Quendryth had given it to her father for three lives, and that subsequently Ælflæd had granted it to himself for three more lives. Æthelred, dux of the Mercians, and his council, however, decided that the gift could not stand, save as was determined in the days of Kenwulf. The upshot was that Wullaf delivered up to Æthelwulf the original deeds executed by Quendryth and Ælflæd; and Æthelwulf commanded him afterwards to put the surrender into writing, at the same time directing that he should have and enjoy the property during his life, and it should then be returned without contention to the see of Worcester, whoever might be bishop, as well for the redemption of the soul of King Kenwulf and of all his heirs, as also for the renewal of peace and for reconciliation between "the family which was in the city of Worcester and that which was at Winchcombe," and to calm the discord and reproaches which had arisen between the two convents. This was agreed to by the bishop and both "families."[1]

If we may assume this document to be genuine (never an unnecessary caution in dealing with monastic deeds and charters), interesting and difficult questions arise upon it. Haddan and Stubbs suppose that the real charter by Kenwulf at the foundation of Winchcombe Abbey, on which the forgery that has reached us is based, contained the clause forbidding the alienation of the endowment which is here referred to, though in fact the clause in the extant charter, if roughly equivalent to that cited in Æthelwulf's report, is by no means textually identical.[2] They suppose, moreover,

[1] Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, ii., No. 575; Kemble, No. 323.

[2] Haddan and Stubbs, iii. 575. The clause as cited in the document of 897 runs: "Quod nullus heres post eum [Kenwulf] licentiam haberet hereditatem Cenuulfi quæ pertinet ad Wincelcumbe alicui hominum longius donandam vel conscribendam quam dies unius hominis; sed si quis hoc observare noluisset vel contraire longius spatium addendo conatus fuisset sciret se anathematizandum esse nisi digna satisfactione

that Quendryth was abbess of Winchcombe. This would perhaps not be impossible, having regard to the usages of those days, but so far as I am aware we have no direct evidence of it. If she were abbess, it must have been immediately after the foundation of the abbey, or at all events prior to the year 820, when, as we have seen, she was already abbess of Southminster. It would follow that in the capacity of abbess she had alienated the property to her father himself, in defiance of his own prohibition and the peril of anathema, and with the prohibition and the threat still ringing in her ears. But what claim had the bishop of Worcester, or "the family which was in that city," to the property of the Abbey of Winchcombe? And what moved Dux Æthelwulf to look into the title-deeds of Kenwulf's patrimony? The transaction remains obscure. Perhaps if we had Kenwulf's genuine charter it might become clear. Meanwhile we can only note that, despite the anathema, the soul neither of Kenwulf nor of Quendryth was excepted from the benefits which were to be obtained by King Kenwulf and all his heirs, consequent upon the return of the property to the see of Worcester.

Our survey of the facts has, therefore, shown that the story of Quendryth instigating the murder of her brother, in order that she might succeed to his crown, is not merely improbable, but impossible. We may discount the miraculous incidents of the legend, to be more fully related hereafter, as mere embroidery, though in fact some of them are of its very essence. The story remains equally incredible without them, and that for three reasons :—

1. It assumes direct hereditary descent of the crown unknown to the English of the Heptarchy.

emendaret." In the extant charter it runs : "Nullus fuisset homo aliqua audacitate fretus, quoquo modo torvave cogitatione, aliquid per vim exinde rapere, nec diminuere, neque agros meae hereditatis foras transdonare, vel accommodare, nisi ad tempus et ad conditionis statutum unius hominis ; sed immobiliter permansissent quasi in nostris tribus synodis firmiter decrevimus aeternaliter perdurare."

2. Quendryth at the time of her father's death, so far from being in a position to plot for the throne, had entered the cloister, and was the abbess of a distant convent (in Kent or Essex), a position she had held for some time previously, and continued to hold for three years at least, and probably for the rest of her life.

3. Kenelm, if living when his father died, was not a boy of seven years of age, but a full-grown man. There can be little doubt, however, that he had been dead for ten years, since he disappears from all records after the year 811. Even in that year he was much more than seven years of age.

There is therefore no reason to doubt the statement in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that King Kenwulf was immediately succeeded by his brother Ceolwulf, though the event is antedated by two years.

We turn to the legends. In these Kenelm is not merely regarded as foully murdered, but is exalted into a martyr and a saint. As already stated, the earliest authority for them is Florence of Worcester, writing after the Norman Conquest towards the end of the eleventh century. Florence was a monk of Worcester, who seems to have used as the basis of his *Chronicon* a Worcester version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, not now extant. It was, however, supplemented from other sources, local tradition being probably among them. So far is he from sharing Archbishop Wulfred's estimate of Kenwulf, that he accounts him a saint. Under the year 819 he relates that Saint Kenulphus, king of the Mercians, after performing many good works in his lifetime, passed to everlasting bliss in heaven, leaving his son Kenelm, a boy of seven years, heir to the kingdom. In a few months, however, his sister Quendryth, aiming at the kingdom, plotted his murder with Asceberht, his cruel foster-father (*nutritor*). He was secretly betrayed to death in a vast and gloomy wood under a thorn-tree. But he who was slain, heaven only being witness, was afterwards revealed, heaven being witness by means of a column of light. From his severed head, milk-

white in the radiance of innocence, a milk-white dove with golden wings soared up to heaven. After his happy martyrdom Ceolwulf received the kingdom of the Mercians.

A monkish chronicler, though his style in general be dry as sawdust, will always swell and glow with official rhetoric at the mention of a "martyrdom." Florence here does more: he drops into rhyme. In this connection it is perhaps not unimportant that he does not indicate the site of the "martyrdom," a pass in the Clent Hills not much more than sixteen miles as the crow flies from the monastery where he was writing. It is tempting to suggest that he was translating a current ballad. But Florence is apt to grow dithyrambic over such events, and to indulge in rhymed prose.

William of Malmesbury wrote at Malmesbury early in the twelfth century. Recording the dedication of Winchcombe Abbey and Kenwulf's burial there, he adds that the youthful Kenelm was put to death in his innocence by his sister, and having obtained the name and honours of a martyr, also rests there. What shall the pen contrive, he bursts forth, worthy of Saint Kenelm, a boy of tender years? His father, Kenulf, king of the Mercians, left him to be educated at the age of seven years in the care of his sister Quendryth; but she entrusted her brother to an accomplice who had brought him up, to be made away with. He, taking the innocent child, under pretext of recreation by hunting, killed him and hid the body in a copse (*inter frutecta*). But, wonderful to relate, the crime thus secretly committed in England became known by divine providence at Rome; for a parchment dropped by a dove on the altar of Saint Peter's revealed the place of his murder and burial. But because it was written in English it was in vain attempted to be read by Romans and men of other nationalities who were present. Happily an Englishman who chanced to be there at the very moment explained it in the Latin tongue, and brought it to pass that by a letter of the Holy See to the English kings their fellow-countryman

was disclosed as a martyr. Wherefore the poor boy's body was exhumed and carried to Winchcombe, accompanied by a great crowd. Aroused by the chanting of the clergy and the plaudits of the laity, the wicked (*parricidalis*) woman put her head out of the window of the upper room in which she was standing, and having the psalter in her hands, in which she had been reading and had reached the psalm "Deus laudem meam," she endeavoured to damp the joy of the singers by chanting it backwards, beginning at the end, for an evil charm (*nescio quo præstigio*). But as she proceeded the sorceress's eyes were torn by divine power from their sockets, and polluted with blood the verse "Hoc opus eorum" [now rendered in the English Prayer Book, "Let it thus happen from the Lord unto mine enemies, and to those that speak evil against my soul"]. The chronicler avers that the bloody marks still existed in his day, witnesses to the wretched woman's ferocity and the vengeance of God. The saint's body became an object of veneration. Such was the persuasion of its sanctity and the frequency of its miracles, that at hardly any place in England was there a greater concourse of people on the occasion of the yearly festival.[1]

Here we see already begun the inevitable process of expansion of the tale. Florence's milk-white dove, that soared from the severed head to heaven, here conveys instead the tidings of the murder to Rome, and thus causes the discovery of the body. The punishment of the murderess, rather for the mockery of the rites paid to the "martyr" than for the crime of plotting his death, is a new and picturesque feature. A snowball loses nothing by rolling: so a traditional tale concerning a local or national hero becomes the more detailed and precise the oftener it is told. The story of Saint Kenelm became popular in the midland and southern counties. It was soon included in collections of legends of the saints, and down to the Reformation it grew and prospered. We need not deal with every version:

[1] Wm. Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii. 211.

suffice it to consider as briefly as possible one or two stages in its growth.

A century later than William of Malmesbury Matthew Paris, a monk of St. Alban's, tells the tale in a work embodying the *Flores Historiarum* of Roger of Wendover, also a monk of St. Alban's, who had written a few years earlier. Roger copies from William of Malmesbury with a few variations of phrase, but adds further particulars. He professes to give the very words of the dove-brought parchment: "In Clenc cubeche Kenelm cunebearn lith under thorne havedes bereafed,"[1] of which he adds a literal translation. Subsequently, winding up his account, he tells us: "Concerning the martyrdom of this saint, somebody says:

> 'In Clenc sub spina jacet in convalli bovina,
> Vertice privatus, Kenelmus rege creatus.'"

The Anglo-Saxon version bears the marks of being a snatch of verse, which is thus put into literary medieval Latin. It has been rendered into English by Milton:

> "Low in a mead of kine under a thorn,
> Of head bereaft, lith poor Kenelm king-born."

Probably it is a fragment of folk-song, perhaps part of a popular ballad on the subject.

In the latter years of the fourteenth century Richard of Cirencester, writing at Westminster, gives the most florid narrative. For him, as for Florence of Worcester, Kenwulf is *rex piissimus* who, departing to the starry realm, left with paternal love his son Kenelm, a boy of seven years, as his heir. Kenelm had two royal sisters, Quendryth (Quendritha), who afterwards shed her brother's blood, and Burgenhild, who

[1] These words are also given by other medieval chroniclers and hagiologists, in every case in a more or less corrupt form. The word *beche* or *bache* is conjectured in the *N. E. D.* to be a dialect-form of an Old English word not actually found, whence is derived the modern *beck*, a rivulet or stream. If so, *cubache*, frequently rendered *cow-pasture*, would be more properly *cow-beck*, *beck* being enlarged in meaning to the gully or ravine in which the stream runs.

loved her brother with sisterly affection. Graces and beauty of body and spirit are attributed to him. Quendryth, on the other hand, is likened to Herodias, to Jezebel, and to Cain. Spurred by cruel malice and the ambition to reign, she first tries in vain to poison Kenelm. Then she plots with his foster-father, Askebert, by the promise of great reward and the hope of being her partner in the kingdom, to put him to death. Meanwhile the victim has a vision from God in his sleep, which on awaking he tells his nurse, Wlwen, a woman of Winchcombe, gifted with understanding and the power of interpreting dreams. It seemed that there stood before his bed a lofty tree rearing its head on high, and that he from the top obtained a wide view. The spreading boughs from top to bottom were covered with all sorts of flowers. It was, moreover, brilliant with innumerable lamps, and on three sides the land bowed down to him in allegiance. But while he was wondering at what he saw, certain of his own people, rushing in below, cut down the tree, and it fell with a great crash. He himself, forthwith changed into a white bird, soared into the sky. Scarce had he finished speaking when his nurse, smiting her breast, broke forth into a cry: "Alas! alas! my dearest child! Alas! my sweet suckling, my babe whom I have nourished! Shall then the plot of thy own kin, the malign plans of thy sister and thy foster-father prevail against thee? Alas! I fear that tree cut down portends thy fate! Three parts of the kingdom obey, but thy sister is against thee! Yet the bird soaring into heaven prefigures the glorious destiny of thy soul." All this rhetorical nonsense is natural to the pious legend-monger, adorning his theme. Kenelm is to be represented as a martyr. Therefore the warning does not terrify him. Following in the footsteps of his Lord, he is led as a lamb to the slaughter. Knowing full well what is before him, he accompanies his bloodthirsty enemy to receive the crown of glory. Askebert takes him to the forest to hunt. As they approached it, the tender boy, oppressed with slumber, slipped off his horse, and lying down

on the spot was soon wrapt in sleep. His foster-father, instead of a bed, prepares a grave for him. But the boy, starting up, anticipates the assassin's design. "In vain hast thou dug me this cavern," he *is reported* to have said [even a medieval monk may have his doubts on some of these edifying details]; "for not here, as thou dost purpose, I shall die, but farther away in a place where God wills. Wherefore I will give thee a sign." Taking a twig in his hand, he planted it in the ground, and said: "Let this twig, thus planted, put forth leaves." Immediately the twig began to bud, and from it a great ash-tree has grown, shown to this day and famous as a memorial of Saint Kenelm. Conscience-smitten, the murderer hurried him onwards. Hidden in the forest in question (which is called Clent) there is a deep hollow between two mountains. At that spot, to the embarrassed foe seeking for a lonely place to execute his fury, the martyr *seemed to utter* with the voice of his Lord: "What thou doest, do quickly." Here, therefore, under a hawthorn he cut off poor little Kenelm's milk-white head, which the boy *is related* to have instantly caught up in his outstretched hands, as if he offered a lily or a rose that he had plucked, to the end that the precious death of His saint might be rendered gracious in the sight of the Lord. A milk-white dove with golden wings is *justly believed* to have mounted the skies, such as he saw himself in his vision. *It is also asserted* that as he was being put to death, he began the "Te Deum," and while uttering the verse: "The noble army of martyrs praise Thee," he fell, his throat severed, to the earth. The impious slayer buried the body where it lay, thinking in vain that the vastness of the desert would hide his crime. But a column of light from the heavenly towers was often beheld over it. A white cow, *as is reported*, belonging to a certain widow, having left the common pasture, hastened down from the mountain-top to the grave and there remained, nor could any force drive it away. It returned to its stall always full, and surpassed all the herd twofold in the abundance of its milk:

so wholesome and pleasant was the herbage about the sacred soil where it fed. And wonderful it was that what it had cropped overnight it found growing again in verdure more abundantly in the morning. Hence the place was usually called Cow Valley.

Quendryth having thus purchased the kingdom by the murder of her brother, and taken possession of it, terrorised everyone with an edict that anybody who sought for Kenelm, or revealed what had become of him, or even uttered his name, should be instantly put to death. But the brilliant light which was smothered in England shone forth the more clearly in Rome, the citadel of the world. Then follows the miracle of the scroll dropped by the dove. Pope Sylvester, we are told, was celebrating Mass before an innumerable concourse of persons of various nations, among them a number of English, some belonging to the English school established at Rome by English kings, some recently arrived. By these the sacred message was interpreted. The pope thereupon sent cardinal-legates with Englishmen on whom he could rely, bearing letters and the apostolic authority to the archbishop of Canterbury and the other English bishops, directing the removal of the martyr's body to the care of the Church and for the veneration of the multitude. It was accordingly exhumed, the whole Mercian people concurring, that it might be transferred to the church at Winchcombe, built and endowed by Kenelm's blessed (*beatum*) father, when he fortified the town and surrounded it with a wall. As soon as the body was taken up a sacred fountain burst forth from the place where it had lain. The stream still flows, and has dispensed healing power on many who have tasted of it. Carried out of the wood, a great throng being drawn together with the holy fathers, the corpse was detained everywhere on its journey, while crowds of blind and deaf and dumb and those suffering from all sorts of diseases, pressing about it, were cured. But as it was borne away by the people of Gloucestershire, those of Worcestershire met them with

weapons and withstood them at the ford of Piriford [Pershore], in order to carry off the precious treasure to Worcester by force, unless it were yielded up to them. Both parties disputed, as once the people of Tours and Poictiers for the body of Saint Martin ; but the quarrel was at length adjusted by agreeing that the party which first awoke the next morning should take the hallowed corpse, as divinely awarded to them. Accordingly, in the morning the Gloucestershire folk, the more vigilant of the two, had got five miles away with the sacred dust before the Worcestershire band could rouse themselves. The latter then, inflamed with anger and shame, pursued with all the speed they could. Whom, when the fugitives beheld afar off, they invoked the intercession of the lord Kenelm, and breathlessly hurried forward by a narrow path under cover of a coppice. At length, in sight of the monastery of Winchcombe, worn out with toil and flight and oppressed with thirst, they sank down with the sacred dust to take breath. Before they ventured forward they prayed the saint for his assistance to restore them. Immediately a spring burst forth beneath a certain stone, which being removed the whole company drank and were refreshed, and went on their way. But the spring flows down into the river to this day. As they approached, Quendryth was standing in the upper story of the western church of Saint Peter, which is separated by the highway from the forecourt of the monastery. Then follows the incident of the loss of her eyes, which need not be repeated, since it contains no material variation from the report of William of Malmesbury. Proof of the miracle, we are told, is afforded by the preservation of the psalter bound with silver and bespattered with blood. To round off the story, it is added that the unhappy woman perished shortly after. She could be buried neither in the church, nor in the forecourt, nor yet in the graveyard ; but a shining babe, appearing to a certain man, commanded that the corpse should be taken to a distance and thrown into a pit (*profundo*). The royal martyr Kenelm, on the other

hand, was borne to a resting-place in the paternal monastery of Winchcombe with hymns of triumph, and then and thenceforth was recognised by numberless tokens as a holy victim (*hostia sanctitatis*). Of these tokens, authenticated from of old by heaven, the writer proceeds to give fourteen miraculous narratives culled out of many. [1]

Richard of Cirencester's authority was no doubt one of the collections of legends then very popular, though, being a Gloucestershire man, he may also have heard the tale on the spot. The earliest of such collections now extant were made late in the thirteenth century. One of them was produced from the abbey of Gloucester. It was apparently the work of a number of contributors, of whom Robert of Gloucester, the chronicler, seems to have been one. Probably the whole cloister took an interest in the work, and even neighbouring monasteries contributed. Similar collections were made elsewhere. They seem to have been based on older Latin legendaries, amplified with details from tradition, and with legends of other saints of national or local importance. At Gloucester, among such legends, that of Saint Kenelm was naturally included. [2] The object of the collection was not the record of facts: it was edification. It would provide the lectionary for the refectory, and for times and seasons when

> "The reader droned from the pulpit,
> Like the murmur of many bees,
> The legend of good Saint Guthlac
> Or Saint Basil's homilies."

And it would serve as material for sermons to the faithful laity on the various festivals and saints' days.

The earliest known of these legendaries is M.S. Laud 108 in the Bodleian Library. It was edited some thirty years

[1] Ric. Cir., *Speculum Historiale*, l. ii., c. 67.

[2] An analysis of a number of these old English legendaries has been given by Dr. Carl Horstmann in the introduction to his *Altenglische Legenden* (Paderborn, 1875), iii. *sqq.*, and his *Altenglische Legenden*, neue Folge (Heilbronn, 1881), xliv. *sqq.*

ago by Dr. Carl Horstmann for the Early English Text Society. Dr. Horstmann assigns it to the date 1280–90. It is in verse. Though so early, the verse is more modern than that of *Piers the Plowman*, written three-quarters of a century later. It is in rhyme, in a measure based on seven beats in a line, four in the first half and three in the second, thus corresponding to the English ballad metre. The legend of Saint Kenelm (like others) professes to be derived from a literary source; but either the scribe or his authority had local knowledge of Winchcombe. He delineates the situation of the well, mentions the chapel built over it for pilgrims, describes the procession with the body coming down "from Sudeley," and Quendryth sitting, as it approached, in Saint Peter's Church, "beside the Abbeie-gate, in a soler [an upper room] in the est-side."[1] The story has been modernised by Mrs. Dent, from a manuscript of the end of the fourteenth century, known as the Trinity College (Oxford) MS. No. 57, now also in the Bodleian Library.[2] Both these versions substantially agree with the narrative of Richard of Cirencester.

Finally the tale was taken into the English recensions of the *Golden Legend*, a more general collection of Christian mythology originally compiled by Jacopo a Voragine, archbishop of Genoa, about the year 1275. In the edition translated by or under the superintendence of William Caxton and printed by him, as appears from the colophon, in 1483, we find the story in its latest form. The differences from Richard of Cirencester's version are not material. Kenelm's younger sister is called Dornemilde, and his nurse Wolweline; in his vision "Askeberd, his governor," is

[1] *The Early South-English Legendary or Lives of Saints*, i., M.S. Laud 108, in the Bodleian Library, edited by Dr. Carl Horstmann, (London, 1887), x., 345 *sqq*. Originally Dr. Horstmann attributed to it a slightly later date, viz. *c.* 1300 (*Altenglische Legenden*, x.).

[2] *Annals of Winchcombe and Sudeley* (London, 1877), p. 37. Mrs. Dent is mistaken in calling it a "Saxon MS." It is in English, in rhymed verse of various metres.

specifically named as cutting down the tree; Quendryth's bribe to Askeberd is "a great sum of money and also her body at his will;" after she "took on her to be queen," "she abandoned her body to wretched living of her flesh in lechery, and brought her own men to wretched living;" when the dove appeared to the pope with the scroll, the pope "kept that scroll for a relic, and the Feast of Saint Kenelm was hallowed that day solemnly through all Rome;" the Abbot of Winchcombe led the band sent to fetch the martyr's body; after obtaining possession of it they bare it forth "till they came upon an hill a mile from the abbey. And for heat and labour they were nigh dead for thirst, and anon they prayed to God and to this holy saint to be their comfort. And then the abbot pight his cross into the earth, and forthwith sprang up there a fair well, whereof they drank and refreshed them much;" "the bells rung without man's help," as they brought the body in procession into the abbey; when Quendryth was told, "she said in secret scorn: That is as true, said she, as both my eyes fall upon this book; and anon both her eyes fell out of her head upon the book. And yet it is seen on this day where they fell upon the psalter she read that same time. *Deum laudemus.* And soon after she died wretchedly, and was cast out into a foul mire, and then after was this holy body of Saint Kenelm laid in an honourable shrine, whereas our Lord showeth daily many a miracle." These variations suggest a traditional source. Their general tenour is to glorify the saint and to blacken Quendryth, after the naive fashion of martyrologies.

It remains to inquire what was the origin of a legend so destitute of historical foundation. That is a difficult question; and the results, if any, that we may be able to reach must be more or less conjectural. But the investigation may not be without interest.

Among the earliest monuments of English literature is the famous poem of *Beowulf*, usually attributed in its present form to the eighth century. The action of the poem passes

elsewhere than in England; the hero Beowulf is not an Englishman but a Geat, who goes to the help of Hrothgar, king of a Danish people, against a supernatural foe; and the poem is filled with allusions to continental history and tradition. The traditions it embodies would seem, therefore, to be older than the English settlement in this country, and to have been brought by the invaders from their ancient seats in Sleswick. One of the allusions to personages of the past, whether real or mythical, concerns Thrytho, the wife of Offa, who is conjectured to have been a ruler of Anglen, the oldest England, in the fifth century, and who was at all events a traditional king. The allusion is dragged in for no very obvious reason, unless it be to point an antithesis to Hygd, the gracious queen of Higelac, Beowulf's mother's brother. Thrytho is described as a violent and crafty woman, at whom no man dared to look, lest pretending it was an insult she should compass his death. Her husband, however, checked this, and it is said that her disposition was much softened after her marriage. Her father had sent her, adorned with gold, over the fallow flood to Offa's hall, where she wedded him, and afterwards on the throne enjoyed a happy fate, holding high love with the royal hero, the best of all mankind between the seas. [1]

The name Thrytho seems in its origin to mean, in the old Teutonic mythology (more or less common to the German and Scandinavian branches of the Teutonic people), a supernatural lady, whose exact functions and character are not very clear. Later it sinks on the one hand into a mere synonym for maiden; and as such it forms a component of many female names, such as Ælfthryth (Elfrida), Gertrude, and so forth. On the other hand, it acquires the sinister sense of witch or sorceress. Grimm notes, for instance, that Hans Sachs uses *alte trute* for old witch, and that noisy children are hushed with the threat "the *drut* will come." [2]

[1] *Beowulf*, xxvii., ll. 1931–1962.

[2] Grimm (Stallybrass' translation), *Teut. Myth.* (London, 1880–88), i. 422.

The Thrytho is probably not remotely connected with the *valkyrjur*, or choosers of the slain, sent out by Odin to select those who were to fall in fight. Thruthr is indeed named, in a poem incorporated in the *Grimnis-mal*, among Odin's attendants who serve ale to the Chosen Host, that is to say, the warriors slain and admitted to Valhalla.[1] Thruthr is also the name of Thor's daughter.[2] The *valkyrjur* were clad in armour, as befitted messengers of the war-god, who were, albeit maidens, to mingle in the fray. Such was Sigrdrifa (the original form of Brynhild) in the *Edda*, whom Odin had touched "with his wand of sleep, because she brought low in battle others than those he wished to fall."[3] But once awakened from the slumber, she was capable of human love.

The Russian peasant has a similar tale of a maiden so fierce and warlike that she slays whole armies, yet once wedded she becomes quite a common-place fairy-tale heroine.[4] The same idea forms the foundation of the Greek legend of the Amazons. And it is not unknown elsewhere: several tribes of North-American Indians tell an analogous story.[5]

The name of Offa, in the form of Uffo, appears in the mythical part of Saxo Grammaticus' History as that of a king of Denmark. He is represented as the grandson of Amleth (Hamlet), and son of Wermund in his old age. He surpassed all of his years in stature, but he was dumb and was reputed as an utter fool. His father wedded him to the daughter of Frowin, the governor of the men of Sleswick. About her we are told nothing. But when Wermund had become blind by age, the King of Saxony sent an envoy demanding the surrender of his kingdom, or failing that, challenging him to

[1] Vigfusson-Powell, *Corpus Poet. Boreale* (Oxford, 1883), i. 75.

[2] Grimm, *Teut. Myth.*, iii., 1348, 1404.

[3] Vigfusson-Powell, i. 158.

[4] Ralston, *Russian Folk-tales* (London, 1873), 85; Magnus, *Russian Folk-tales* (London, 1915), 192; both translating Afanasief.

[5] Jones, *Fox Texts* (Leyden, 1907), i. 197; Sapir, *Wishram Texts* (Leyden, 1909), 290; *Journ. Anthr. Inst* xxxviii. 290; *Journ. Amer. Folk-lore Soc.*, xxv. 346.

stake his kingdom on a single combat between their respective sons. The message struck the king and his councillors with consternation. Uffo, who was present, however, broke into speech for the first time in his life. To the astonishment of his father and the other men, he asked for leave to speak. Leave having been given, he offered to fight not only the king of Saxony's son, but also at the same time anyone else of the bravest of his people whom that prince might bring with him. The combat took place. Uffo defeated and slew single-handed the Saxon prince and his fellow-champion, and thus won the kingdom of Saxony. On his father's death he succeeded to both realms, and was noted for the moderation and gentleness of his rule.[1]

Offa, the son of Wærmund, figures, moreover, in the genealogy of Cridda, or Creoda, who was regarded as the founder of the Mercian kingdom. In this pedigree, preserved in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle *sub anno* 626, Offa is represented as the third (or, according to another recension, the fifth) in descent from Woden (whom all the Anglo-Saxon kings claimed as their common ancestor), and reckoning backwards, the sixth in ascent from Cridda himself. He was thus sufficiently far amid prehistoric mists, even if we allow that Cridda was a real personage, to gather a nimbus of legend. Evidence for the actual existence of Offa, the son of Wærmund (or Garmund, as the name is found in *Beowulf*), fails us. The ancient English poem of *Widsith* is perhaps older than even *Beowulf*, for it is ascribed by Professor

[1] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, Elton's translation (London, 1894), l. iv. 130, 138. So, according to Lydian legend, preserved for us by Herodotus (i. 85), the dumb son of Crœsus broke suddenly into speech during the sack of Sardis. On seeing a Persian soldier about to slay his father, he exclaimed in terror: "Man, do not kill Crœsus!" Similar tales of dumb boys speaking under the influence of strong emotion are told by the Peuls or Foula of West Africa (*Rev. d'Ethnographie et de Sociologie*, iv. (Paris, 1913), 253), the Japanese (*Nihongi*, Aston's translation (London, 1896), i. 174), and the Annamites (Dumoutier, *Légendes Historiques del' Annam et du Tonkin* (Hanoi, 1887), 32, 82).

Chadwick substantially to the end of the sixth century. It mentions Offa as ruling over Angel—that is, the old continental England—and as having won the greatest of kingdoms.[1] But it adds nothing to the data. He remains only a legendary figure of interest and speculation.

In the eighth century, however, emerges in Mercia a real live Offa, whose character and deeds powerfully impressed his fellow-countrymen. The warlike Ethelbald, after a reign of forty years, clouded latterly by defeat and probably domestic dissensions, had been murdered by his bodyguard in 757. The throne had been then seized by Beornred, who had perhaps instigated the plot, but did not succeed in consolidating his power. Within a few months Offa, the son of Thingferth, and a kinsman of Ethelbald, defeated him, and was recognised as king. Aided by the temporary collapse of Wessex, he carried his arms from Wales to Kent, defeated Wessex in the battle of Bensington, and made himself supreme in England south of the Humber. As a last step to this end, in 793 he contrived the murder of Ethelbert, king of East Anglia, and overran and annexed that kingdom. So great was his power and reputation, that he corresponded on friendly terms with Charlemagne, and obtained the pope's consent to the erection of Lichfield into an archbishopric. He was a lavish donor to the Church. Among the monasteries he built and endowed was that of Saint Alban's—this possibly by way of atonement for the crime of Ethelbert's death.

He had married a lady named Cynethryth. Of her antecedents and of the marriage nothing whatever is known. Her existence is vouched for in charters and by two coins bearing her name. The Englishman Alcuin, writing from the court of Charlemagne to her son Ecgferth and others, more than once refers to the queen (not however naming her), sending greetings and good wishes, admonishing Ecgferth to imitate her piety and her pity for the poor, and expressing

[1] Chadwick, *Origin of the English Nation* (Cambridge, 1907), 127–9. But see *infra*, p. 65

his devotion to her.[1] After her husband's death she seems to have entered the cloister and become abbess of Cookham. Among the acts of the Council or synod of Clovesho in 797 or 798 is an account of the termination of a curious dispute to which she was party. It seems that Ethelbald had given the convent to the church of Canterbury, by a form similar to that observed in the fraudulent gift by Oswulf of Earl Albert's land at Oesewalum to the convent of Southminster. By the hand of Archbishop Cuthbert he sent the deeds, together with a sod from the land, to be placed on the altar of Christ Church "for his perpetual salvation." But after Archbishop Cuthbert's death two of his officials carried away the deeds to Cenulf, king of the West Saxons, who immediately converted the cloister with all its appurtenances to his own use. Offa subsequently included the convent in the West Saxon possessions he took from Cenulf after the battle of Bensington, and subjugated to Mercian rule. When the deeds were consequently of no further use to him, Cenulf had repented and sent them back to the church at Canterbury, with an offering of money, praying that he should not remain under anathema. Offa, however, though he had not obtained the deeds, kept the cloister of Cookham as long as he lived, and left it to his heirs. Athelhard, the archbishop, having in the second year of Kenwulf, king of the Mercians, brought the deeds before the council and got a decree in his favour, came to an agreement with Cynedrytha, the abbess, that she should give him in exchange for the cloister of Cookham certain lands in Kent which had belonged to Offa, with the deeds relating to them, and that Athelhard should grant to her the Mercian monastery called Pectanege, given to him by Ecgferth, with its documents of title. This agreement was entered into before the whole synod, "so that no dispute may arise hereafter between us and our heirs and

[1] Edith Rickert, *The Old English Offa Saga*, *Modern Philology*, ii., (Chicago, 1905) 328, quoting Alcuin's letters, Jaffé, *Monum. Alcuiniana*. This work is not accessible to me.

those of King Offa."[1] Unless Cynedrytha the abbess were identical with Cynethryth the widow of Offa, this document is hardly intelligible. The good understanding between her and the archbishop is quite consistent with the friendly relations that on the whole subsisted between Offa and the archbishop, and is in marked contrast to those between Kenwulf and his house on the one hand and Athelhard's successor, Wulfred, on the other hand. With this transaction Cynedrytha (or Cynethryth) passes out of history.

On Offa's death in 796 his son Ecgferth succeeded him. He died after a few months' reign, and Kenwulf then secured the throne. Who Kenwulf was we have no certain knowledge. His claim to be of the royal house rests upon the genealogies given by Florence of Worcester, who traces him from Wybba, the son of Creoda, and the second recognised king. Florence's authority is not altogether satisfactory; but he may be repeating the statement of some earlier writer now lost, or recording a tradition more or less trustworthy. Besides Ecgferth, Offa had, presumably by Cynethryth, sundry daughters. Eadburh (Eadburga) married Beorhtric (Brihtric, Brithric), king of the West Saxons. Ælflæd married, according to Symeon of Durham, Æthelred, king of Northumbria. The names of two others are given in a questionable charter; they are Æthelburh, who is said to have been an abbess, and Æthelswith. A fifth, Ælfthryth, is mentioned in Florence's genealogies; and the legend states that she was betrothed to Ethelbert, the murdered king of East Anglia. Kenwulf, as already mentioned, was married to a lady of this name, about whom we know nothing. It is quite possible that she was Offa's daughter, and that Kenwulf sought to strengthen his claim on the throne by such a marriage.[2]

[1] Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, i., No. 291; Haddan and Stubbs, iii. 512. Compare the observations of Miss Rickert, *op. cit.*, 329.

[2] The best account of Offa and Kenwulf is to be found in *England before the Norman Conquest*, by Prof. Oman (a former President of this Society) (London, 1910), 335 *sqq.* and 384 *sqq.*

There are indications that both Offa and Kenwulf belonged to the province of the Hwiccas. Setting aside the evidence of the legend, Offa's numerous gifts to Worcester and other ecclesiastical foundations in the Hwiccas, and Kenwulf's selection of Winchcombe as the place of his own ecclesiastical foundation and of his burial, point in this direction.

As a military leader and sagacious politician Offa had no equal among the kings of the Heptarchy before Egbert of Wessex. The profound impression he made on the minds of his fellow-countrymen is not to be measured simply by the success of the moment, but by the reputation he left behind him, and the legends that gathered round his name. How far these legends were transmitted by writing we can only guess. Little of Anglo-Saxon literature has reached us, and we are compelled to rely on the hints we get from writers after the Norman Conquest. Walter Map, writing about the end of the twelfth century, mentions Offa, whom he calls *regem strenuissimum,* and refers to the dyke with which he had enclosed the Welsh in the proper bounds of their own Wales, and which was and is still known by the king's name. Having raised his kingdom to the height of prosperity, Map tells us, Offa had married the daughter of the Roman emperor. But this did not prevent a Roman invasion, caused by greed of the riches of Offa's realm. The invasion was defeated by the aid of Gado, described as the son of the king of the Vandals.[1] Gado seems to be none other than Wada, the father of Weland, or Wayland Smith. His name was well known in Anglo-Saxon sagas, and by no means forgotten even during the later Middle Ages, though now remembered only in the names of one or two remote country-places like Wade's Gap in Northumberland, and in occasional allusions like those of Chaucer to the "tale of Wade."[1]

[1] Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, dist. ii., c. 17.

[1] Grimm, *Teut. Myth.*, i. 376. Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, l. iii., st. 88; id., *Canterbury Tales*, *Works* (ed. Skeat,) iv. 433. A small fragment of the tale of Wade was discovered at Peterhouse, Cambridge, about twenty years ago by Dr. James, now Provost of King's College, and Mr. Israel Gollancz (*Academy*, 15th February, 1896).

His transformation in Map's narrative into the son of the king of the Vandals is evidence of literary influence, which may have been derived from some learned monk before the Conquest. The references to the dyke and to Offa's marriage with the Roman emperor's daughter are more likely to have been, in origin at least, traditional.

A little later than Map, in the earlier years of the reign of Henry III., a group of chroniclers, writing at the monastery of Saint Alban's, tell the tale of Offa more at large. As the founder of their convent, or at all events one of their earliest and most important benefactors, they had a special interest in him, and desired to clear his character and to enhance his glory. The writers of this group generally pass under the name of Matthew Paris, who gathered their works into final form and added to them, probably up to the time of his death in the year 1237. Their account of Offa forms part of the general chronicle. It also appears in a separate work, the *Historia Duorum Offarum:*[1] This is an attempt to connect the historical Offa with the Offa of prehistoric legend, and to exhibit the parallelism between their careers. Accordingly the prehistoric Offa is made the son of Warmund, a king who founded Warwick, and who is declared to be celebrated both traditionally and in written stories. His only son, Offa, was blind until his seventh and dumb until his thirtieth year. Riganus, a noble, regarding Offa as negligible, endeavours to get Warmund to adopt him as his successor. Foiled in this, he threatens the king with arms. A conference of nobles is called, at which Offa breaks silence, and discomfits Riganus and his party. War ensues. The opposing armies meet on either side of a river hardly to be crossed by horse and man. Offa does cross it, however,

[1] This work was printed by William Wats, D.D., in his edition of Matthew Paris (*Matthæi Paris Monachi Albanensis Angli, Historia Major*, etc., London, 1640). So far as I know, though often referred to, it has never since been reprinted ; but an extract relating the marriage and subsequent adventures of Offa the First was included in the volume of Chaucer Analogues issued by the Chaucer Society in 1888.

with a chosen band, and routs the host of Riganus, killing his two sons. Riganus himself is drowned in flight. In all this the ancient saga preserved by Saxo is clearly to be discerned. Warmund now resigns his throne to Offa, and dying, is buried with a gorgeous funeral at the illustrious city of Gloucester. Offa is crowned. One day as he is hunting he hears in the dense woods the sound of weeping and lamentation. Following the voice, he finds a beautiful maiden, who tells him that she has been persecuted by her father, the ruler of York, with unnatural desires, to which she has refused to yield; and he thereupon had ordered her to be cast out to the wild beasts. Offa takes pity on her, putting her in the care of some of his own people. Some years later his nobles urge him to marry, and insist upon his doing so. The king yields, and marries the maiden who alone pleases him, the maiden whom he rescued from the forest. By her he has a son and daughter. He rules his realm in peace and prosperity, and his counsel and other help are sought from time to time by the neighbouring kings. Thus the king of the Northumbrians, being hard beset by the barbarous nation of the Scots, appeals to Offa, making proposals to wed his daughter and submit himself and his kingdom to him. Offa goes to his help. When he has put the enemy to flight, he sends a messenger with letters home. The messenger on his journey is entertained in a friendly way at the court of the king whose daughter Offa had married. There he is made drunk, and his letters are intercepted, and changed for a letter stating that Offa has suffered reverses, not on account of the cowardice of his troops, but because of his sins; and considering what sins they may be which have so displeased the Most High, the only thing he can lay to his charge is his unhappy marriage with that wicked woman without the consent of his own people. He therefore commands that she with her children be cast out into some desolate place unknown to men, and left as a prey to wild beasts and birds or reavers of the forests, their hands and feet being cut off, that she and her children may

perish. When the messenger reaches them the councillors are stupified, but reluctantly obey. The queen and her children are cast out into a desert place, where, sparing the mother on account of her beauty, the executioners cut the children to pieces. A certain hermit, however, hears the cries of the victims, and finds the mother and the bodies of the children. He collects the severed members, puts them together, and making the sign of the cross over them, revives them. He afterwards takes care of mother and children. Two months later Offa, returning victorious, is informed of what has happened. He mourns, but is aroused by his councillors, and made to put aside his grief. Going hunting, he arrives at the hermitage, where he recalls to mind his wife and children, and breaks into sighs and weeping. The hermit comforts him with the tidings that they still live, and restores them to him. Explanations ensue, and amid the joy of reunion Offa vows to found a monastery. But he forgets his vow, and dies without having performed it, leaving it as a duty on his son to fulfil. It remains, however, unperformed until the time of the second Offa, Winered, the son of Tuinfreth.

The account here given of Offa's wife bears no resemblance to the tale preserved by Saxo, but it seems to contain a dim reminiscence of the Thrytho of *Beowulf*. The wife in this tale, however, so far from being a truculent personage, is falsely accused of wickedness. Her adventures belong to the cycle of the Innocent Persecuted Wife, of which the variants best known are the tale of the Two Sisters who envied their Cadette, in the *Arabian Nights*, and Chaucer's tale of Custance. The men who must be credited with the history of the Two Offas were chiefly concerned with the glorification of their monastery. To that object everything else would be subordinate. They were, moreover, in that stage of civilisation when the true principles of historical criticism were not yet understood. They could not distinguish fact from fancy: they believed what they wished to believe; and to them

history was what they thought it ought to have been, without regard to the necessity of inquiring what it actually was. Now in this case the problem was to account for the monastery of Saint Alban's, and to claim for it the most respectable antiquity possible. To seize, therefore, on the tradition of an earlier Offa, and to link the monastery up with Offa the First, was an achievement worth attempting. The writer apparently knew the Thrytho tale. But either it had previously become contaminated with the Innocent Persecuted Wife story, or he himself manipulated it in that direction in order to harmonise it with his purpose. In the life of Offa the Second we shall see an alternative procedure.

There can be little doubt that the life of Offa the Second, and therefore probably that of Offa the First, is immediately derived from a written original, now lost, though it had its foundation in oral tradition. The hero's name is given as Pinered, by an evident misreading of the Anglo-Saxon character for W: it should be Winered, or Winfrith. He was said to be the only son of Tuinfred, a nobleman of royal stock, and a descendant of Offa the First. Like his prototype, he was blind and deaf, and until adolescence a cripple. Remembering Offa the First, his parents present him in the temple, praying for his full faculties, and renewing the previous vow of a monastery. The country of the Mercians was then ruled by a tyrant named Beormred, who persecuted, bound and put to death all of royal blood. Among others, he laid snares for Tuinfred and his wife, to banish or slay them, but Winered he deemed beneath his notice. Tuinfred with his wife and family fled. Winered or Winefred was then a young man. He stood up as if awaking from heavy slumber. His limbs straightened, and he recovered their use: the bond of his tongue was loosened, and he spake. From a blind and deaf cripple he became elegant in body, eloquent in speech, and sharp of sight, so that none in the kingdom could compare with him. The Mercians called him Offa the Second: they flocked to him, swore fidelity, and made him their leader

against Beormred. After a hard fight Offa is victorious, and Beormred is driven out of the kingdom. Offa's father, Tuinfred, proposes to resign his earldom to his son, and to enter the cloister which his son has vowed to found. Offa, however, refuses the earldom, while he renews his promise to found the monastery. He is chosen king of Mercia.

At that time the great King Charles reigned in France. A certain maiden related to him was liable to an ignominious death for a flagitious crime (undefined) which she had committed. From reverence to her royal dignity she was not adjudged to be delivered over to fire and sword, but was condemned to be put into a boat without oars or tackle, and so exposed to the mercy of the winds and waves. She was driven by storms on the coast of Britain, and on that part of it which was subject to Offa. Being brought before the king, she was interrogated by him. In the tongue of her own country she answered, declaring herself to be a kinswoman of Charles, the king of the Franks, by name Drida, but through the oppression of certain base-born persons with whom she disdained an alliance by marriage she had been condemned to this adventure; adding with tears: "But God, who delivers the innocent from the snares of those who lie in wait for them, has happily sent me a captive to thy protection, Great King, that my misfortune may be changed into happiness, and I may be declared to all posterity as happier in exile than in the country of my birth." The king, moved by pity, sends her to his mother, to be taken care of until the royal commands be known. After a few days, when she has recovered from her hardships, she is recognised as the most beautiful of women; but she proves a troublesome pupil to the old countess, sowing discord between the countess and her husband. Offa, however, marries her secretly without consulting his father and mother or his nobles. After the deaths of his father and mother the queen gives birth to a son, Egfrid (Ecgferth), and to other children. There follow an account of Offa's successful wars against the neighbouring

kings, of his relations with Charles, king of the Franks, and his successor Charlemagne, and of the building of Offa's dyke. Offa's humility in his final victory against the Welsh, his humanity and piety in burying the dead, and his munificence in disposing of the spoils, are the subject of eulogy. He marries one of his daughters to Brithric, king of the West Saxons, and another to Atheldred, king of the Northumbrians. There was a youth named Albert (Ethelbert), of the blood of the East Anglian kings, to whom Offa had granted their realm. A certain versifier, the author tells us, had elegantly written of him :

> "Albertus juvenis fuerat rex, fortis ad arma,
> Pace pius, pulcher corpore, mente sagax."

The archbishop of Lichfield and the bishop of Leicester counselled the king to wed his daughter Aelfleda to him. The queen, Quendrida (that is, it is explained, Queen Drida, so called because she was unexpectedly married to the king), was jealous of their influence with the king, and pursued them with inexorable hatred, being greedy, crafty and haughty, as became one who drew her origin from the lineage of Charles. She therefore opposed all their schemes for reconciling the neighbouring kings with Offa, and uniting them to him by matrimonial alliances. When she knew that the king had called Albert and received him kindly, and had offered him his daughter in marriage, her anger was kindled. She accused Albert to the king of conspiring with Charles to avenge the wrongs of his family and kingdom by obtaining possession of the realm of the Mercians and holding it as tributary to Charles. She accordingly advised the king to put him secretly to death. The king refused, in abhorrence of such treachery, and quitted her in anger. The two kings feasted together and passed the day in great joy. Meanwhile the queen ordered the marriage-bed to be adorned in royal fashion with silken curtains and coverings. Beside the bed she reared a magnificent royal seat, surrounded on all sides

with curtains. But beneath it she caused a deep pit to be sunk. Returning then to the royal hall, both kings rejoiced to see her. Jesting with Albert, who suspected nothing, she invited him to come to his bride, who was eagerly awaiting him. Rising, he followed the queen; but King Offa, fearing no evil, remained behind. Arrived in the chamber, his retainers were excluded, and the queen begged him to be seated while awaiting the bride. When he sat down on the seat prepared he fell with it into the bottom of the pit, and was immediately overwhelmed and suffocated by the cushions, clothing and curtains thrown down on him by the queen and her accomplices. The crime was completed by beheading the corpse, and sending it away in a sack at once to a distance for burial. On the way the head dropped out of the sack in the darkness; a blind man stumbled upon it and received his sight; thus Albert was recognised as a martyr. When Offa learned the crime he shut himself up, and mourned and fasted for three days. He ordered the queen to be kept in confinement for the rest of her life, and never again admitted her to his society. After a number of years thieves, attracted by the silver and gold in her possession, robbed her of them and threw her into her own well, where by the just judgement of God she breathed her last. Meanwhile Offa, when consolation had been administered to him by the holy bishops already mentioned, as guiltless in intention of Albert's murder, sent a powerful expedition into East Anglia, and taking possession of it, united it to his own kingdom, which was thus in no small measure increased. Whether guilty or no, he did not hesitate to avail himself to the fullest extent of the fruits of the crime.

The intention of the narrative thus far, to throw the entire blame upon the shoulders of the queen, is clear. To be precise, the monks of St. Alban's did not *invent* this tale for the purpose of whitewashing their founder. Their task was easier. No phenomenon is better established than the confusion which takes place in tradition between two personages of similar attributes, name or position. Examples

are abundant ; the most familiar to us is the popular identification of Thomas Cromwell, the destroyer of monasteries, with Oliver the Protector. In the course of centuries Thrytho, the wife of the prehistoric Offa, had become confused with Cynethryth, the wife of the historic king. Cynethryth is a name closely related to Thrytho ; in its Latin form, Drida, it is identical. The monks adopted the tradition ; they elaborated it with rhetoric and circumstance, and they applied it to the end they had in view. To the historical student, of course, the result is pure romance. The laconic statement, already quoted, of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, written at a date when, or in a community where, the tradition had not yet confused the facts, expresses the true conclusion.

But this is not all. Offa had not yet performed his vow to build a monastery. To excuse the poor innocent monarch, we are now told that the performance had hitherto been hindered by the wicked queen. When at last he was rid of her he solemnly and in full conclave, with tears and clasped hands, renewed the promise. Not many days after, while staying at Bath, he had a message from heaven. On the royal couch at night an angel visited him, directing him to take up the relics of Alban, the protomartyr of the English or Britons, and place them in a more worthy shrine. Perhaps this vision was intended as a divine recognition of his innocence. At all events, it led to a search at Verulam for the relics, their discovery accompanied by the usual apparatus of miracles, and the foundation and lavish endowment of the abbey. The narrative, given in full detail, occupies the remaining pages of the Life, and after relating the king's death and burial, the author piously concludes by foretelling a heavenly crown more enduring than that of his earthly kingdom. But we need not concern ourselves with that.

Ethelbert must, very soon after his death, have been accounted a martyr. Such was the habit of the time, and of hundreds of years since. In that way the people were wont to express their commiseration, their sympathy, their

admiration for a victim, and their condemnation of his murderers. His relics were enshrined at Hereford. His murder must therefore have taken place at or near that city. Military exigencies no doubt often called Offa to the Welsh border ; and local tradition at Hereford assigns him a palace at Sutton, about three miles away. In the *Hyde Register*, written shortly after the end of the tenth century, Ethelbert is recognised as a saint ; it follows that his name and fame were by that time well established. Before the end of the next century Florence of Worcester records the fact of his murder by Offa's order, and at the persuasion of Cynethryth. This implies that at least the main lines of the legend were then fully developed.

About the beginning of the thirteenth century the celebrated Gerald de Barry, better known as Giraldus Cambrensis, among his voluminous works, wrote a Life of Saint Ethelbert. He was a Canon of Hereford. The Life was written at the urgent request of "certain great men," probably connected with the cathedral and the monastery. It doubtless embodied the local tradition, embellished with all the flowers of imagination and rhetoric of which the author was capable, and which would serve to kindle devotion to the patron saint of the cathedral. Unfortunately we have nothing but fragments, preserved by the Bollandist editors of the *Acta Sanctorum*, for the only known manuscript has perished. Giraldus throws the initial guilt of the murder indeed upon the queen, who suggested it ; but he does not acquit Offa of yielding to her persuasions. It was agreed on in a private conference, to which only a few of the nobles were called. With the assistance of Guymbertus, a man of blood ready for any crime, the victim was lured to a retired place to discuss with Offa the errand on which he had come, namely the marriage with his daughter Alfrida (Ælfthryth). There he was set upon by Guymbert and his accomplices ; he was bound ; his head was cut off by Guymbert, and presented, drenched with blood, to the king and queen.

Giraldus, not being a monk of St. Albans, had no special motive for clearing Offa of guilt, though the part assigned to the queen indicates that the writers of St. Alban's had the genuine tradition behind them in laying the chief blame on her.

He goes on to cite from Asser, the biographer of Alfred the Great, the following remarkable story. When the reports of miracles began to grow about the martyr's tomb, Offa commissioned two bishops in whom he had confidence to go to Hereford and investigate them. It happened that a certain notable (*potentem virum et magnificum*), who ruled in Ledbury North, in Montgomery and elsewhere very widely in those parts, had come at that very time to seek through the martyr's merits for recovery from sickness that troubled him. He suffered, in fact, from a continual quivering of the head (*continuam capitis concussionem*), and from it and the result of his suffering he had obtained the nick-name of Egwin Shaking-head (Egwinus *Quatiens-caput*). That night, humbly and devoutly with vigils and earnest prayers, he waited at the sepulchre. At length by divine disposition he sank down for a little while in slumber. It was but for a moment. Uproused again, and looking around him on all sides, he inquired from his followers where was that good man who had so graciously supported his head on his own bosom while he slept. But when he received the answer that no one had seen such a person, he felt himself restored to health, because since sleeping he was at length able to control his head and keep it quiet and without unusual movement. Immediately rising up, he made a gift to God and the martyr Ethelbert of the whole of Ledbury North, with all its appurtenances. This, it is said, was the first endowment of land conferred on the saint.[1]

Asser's text has been terribly mangled by the medieval forger. This legend, among others, is rightly rejected by

[1] *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. J. S. Brewer (Rolls Series), 1863, iii. 422. See also Preface, xlv.

critics as due to a later hand. The mention of Montgomery, indeed, is enough to put us on our guard. The Welshman Asser never wrote that name. Montgomery, to be sure, was a lordship beyond Offa's Dyke, carved out of Powis by Englishmen before the Norman Conquest. But it owed its name of Montgomery (first given to the castle and the town at its foot) to Roger of Montgomery, earl of the Mercians, who founded the castle between 1066 and 1072.[1]

Walter Map, Giraldus's contemporary, identifies the nameless benefactor of the see, but post-dates the event by some two hundred years. According to this version Wild Edric (Edricus Wilde), a noble of the Welsh border, to which also Map belonged, and one of the last defenders of Anglo-Saxon freedom against the Norman, left a son Alnodus (or Alnoth), a man of great wisdom and piety, though born of a supernatural lady whom Map calls a demon. When he was somewhat advanced in years, Alnoth became paralysed. All the physicians gave him up as incurable, and he was advised to make shift to get as far as the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, where he might be sure of obtaining restoration to health. He replied with spirit that he would never inflict such an affront on Saint Ethelbert, king and martyr, to whose diocese he belonged (*cujus ipse parochianus erat*) without first presenting himself to him. He therefore caused himself to be brought down to Hereford, where the first night he spent before the altar of the martyr he was cured. By way of showing his gratitude, he made over in perpetuity to God and the Blessed Virgin and to the holy King Ethelbert his manor of Ledbury North, with all its appurtenances, which remained part of the endowment of the see, and at the time when Map wrote was reputed to bring in the large sum of thirty pounds a year to its lords.[2]

These two versions of the story are probably both derived from the popular tradition of Herefordshire. Map, we have

[1] Freeman, *Norman Conquest* (1871), iv. 501 *sqq.*

[2] Map, *De Nugis*, dist. ii., c. xii.

the best reason for knowing, was well acquainted with Herefordshire folklore, and was probably a native of the county or its neighbourhood. If we cannot trace the immediate provenience of the version quoted by Giraldus, there is little doubt it is from the same source. Probably it represents an earlier form of the tale. Unfortunately neither version throws any light on the development of the general legend of Saint Ethelbert, or on the question how and when the queen came to be inculpated.

We saw just now that one of Offa's daughters, Eadburh, was married to Brithric, king of Wessex. Asser, in a passage apparently genuine,[1] relates the tale of Brithric's death as told him repeatedly by King Alfred himself. It attributes to Eadburh inordinate greed of power, arbitrary and violent conduct, *like her father's* (*more paterno tyrannice vivere incepit*), and jealousy of every friend of her husband's, insomuch that she used to accuse them to the king with the view of depriving them of life, or at least of influence. When she could not succeed in her object otherwise, she would put them out of the way by poison. Unhappily Brithric himself tasted of the poison prepared for one of his favourites, and so died. The queen fled with immense treasures beyond the sea, and came to the court of Charlemagne, who offered her the choice of marriage to his son or himself. She replied: "If I am to choose, I choose your son, because he is the younger." Charlemagne replied that if she had chosen him she should have had his son, but since she had chosen his son she should have neither. He however made her abbess of a nunnery. Her conduct in that capacity was such that he subsequently expelled her. A course of degradation and misery followed; and she ultimately ended her days as a beggar in the streets of Pavia.

[1] It was doubted by Thomas Wright, but after consideration Dr. Reinhold Pauli (*König Aelfred und seine Stelle in der Geschichte Englands* Berlin, 1851, 11) found in favour of it. Since his time it has been generally accepted.

If this be a genuine paragraph of Asser's life of Alfred, the tale, coming directly from the West Saxon royal family, is doubtless in the main true. The comparison of Eadburh's disposition to her father's may be confidently offered as one argument among others in its favour. For if the tale had been recorded after the legend of St. Ethelbert had thrown the blame for the crime upon Cynethryth, and after the general assimilation of her conduct in popular belief to that of the traditional Thrytho, the comparison would have been with Cynethryth's and not with Offa's disposition. That development of the Ethelbert legend, therefore, cannot have been earlier than the tenth century. It is plausibly suggested, both by Professor Chadwick [1] and by Miss Rickert, [2] the two writers who have most fully examined the Offa saga, that Eadburh's crime caused, or at least assisted, the transfer of the responsibility for Ethelbert's murder from Offa to his innocent wife. That is to say, Eadburh was confused with her mother, and both with the legendary Thrytho : a process probably facilitated by Eadburh's flight across the sea to the court of Charlemagne, with which according to the story Queen Drida (Cynethryth) was originally connected.

From all this it appears that, whether or not there was any substratum of fact for the existence of Offa the First as a prehistoric king of the Angles, there was from the earliest times a tradition in our own country and elsewhere of such a personage. For our own country we have clear proof both in *Beowulf* and in the still older poem of *Widsith*. Outside the poems, it is true, we lack any direct evidence of its persistence in folklore down to the thirteenth century. But in the twelfth century we do find in the *De Nugis Curialium* a legend of the historical Offa reproduced in a form that gives reason to suspect transmission wholly or partly by means of

[1] Chadwick, *The Origin of the English Nation* (Cambridge, 1907) p. 121.

[2] Edith Rickert, *Modern Philology* ii. (Chicago, January, 1905), 343.

some literary work now lost. Nothing is more likely than that a favourite popular tradition should be embodied in literature. The suspicion is strongly confirmed by the *Vitæ duorum Offarum*, written a few years later, and telling the story of both Offas at large, and with much rhetorical elaboration. As there given, it is intended to lead up to the tale of the foundation of St. Alban's Abbey, and to the exaltation of the historical Offa, who is claimed as the founder. The parallelism of the lives of the two Offas proves that there has been assimilation between the traditions of the historical Offa and his prototype, the prehistorical Offa : assimilation that has probably tended to strengthen and render permanent the general legend. When Ethelbert, king of the East Angles, was put to death by Offa, and was taken for a martyr, his legend necessarily came to form part of the Offa saga, and, perhaps assisted by the actual misdeeds of Offa's daughter, united itself to the body of the saga so as to illustrate the ruthlessness of Offa's wife. Though the earliest mention of Saint Ethelbert gives no particulars beyond his name and the place of his shrine, Florence's reference to the murder involves the substance of the whole story. It should be pointed out, however, that in holding Offa as well as Cynethryth guilty, it agrees with the account given by Giraldus a century later, probably embodying the local tradition of Hereford, rather than with the still later version of the monks of St. Alban's. The monks are not above the suspicion of more or less intentional trimming of the details, in order to purge their hero.

This long digression has been necessary because the legend of Saint Kenelm is really a pendant to the Offa saga.[1] Fully to understand it, therefore, we require some knowledge of the

[1] The resemblances between the legends of Saint Ethelbert and Saint Kenelm, in their developed forms, have been pointed out in detail by Miss Rickert (*Modern Philology*, ii. 335). Having regard to the facts and arguments set forth in the previous pages, I need only claim in addition that in both cases the blame is thrown upon a lady who, there can be little doubt, was entirely innocent.

latter. Both relate to the royal family of Mercia. Kenelm himself may have been a grandson of Offa; at all events, he was the son of a lady who bore the name (if Florence of Worcester may be trusted) of one of Offa's daughters (Ælfthryth). We cannot, in the face of the evidence brought forward in this paper, attach much value to Florence's authority for the events here dealt with. Nor does he expressly identify Kenwulf's wife with Offa's daughter. Still, that identity is by no means impossible or, apart from the Ethelbert legend, improbable. The story of Ælfthryth's marriage with Ethelbert—a marriage never consummated—rests on no tangible evidence. It was an imaginative incident traditionally developed in the process of converting Cynethryth into the double of Thrytho. King Kenwulf, Kenelm's father, succeeded Ecgfrid (Ecgferth), so far as we are aware, peacefully. The genealogy given by Florence shows that if he was a kinsman, the nearest common ancestor was Penda, the king who was slain fighting against Northumbria in the year 655. The expression in the chronicle, however, is vague, and may have included kindred by marriage. He certainly belonged to the province of the Hwiccas, as Offa seems to have done. His daughter Quendryth (Cwoenthryth) bore a name similar to that of Offa's wife—in its Latin form (Quendrida) identical with it. Probably, indeed, its similarity reacted with disastrous effect upon her fame, when once the people had got it into their heads that Kenelm was a martyr and a saint. We find that the names were in fact confused, and confused very early, if the formal accord of 897 already cited be genuine.[1] In that document Quendryth, who is incontrovertibly meant, is referred to not by her proper name of Cwoenthryth, but (twice over) by the name of Cynethryth.[2]

[1] *Supra*, p. 24.

[2] There was certainly contamination between the legend of the murder of Ethelbert and that of Kenelm. In the most developed form of his legend, for instance, Ethelbert, like Kenelm, is stated to have had a vision of the cutting down of a great tree and his own flight as a

Kenelm may have been murdered by somebody; he may have been murdered in the Clent Hills. That seems the most obvious suggestion to account for the legend; but there is no word about it in any authentic history. If he was murdered, it might well have escaped report by a West Saxon chronicler; and all the other chronicles that have reached us were compiled after the Norman Conquest, when the real truth was forgotten. If he was murdered, we are ignorant of his murderer. If he was murdered, it must have been in his father's lifetime, because, as we have seen, he disappears from history ten years before Kenwulf's death. He was then a youth of comparatively tender age; and the death of such a child of whom no ill is known, and who occupies a royal position, is one that appeals with pathetic insistence to the popular imagination, all the more if it be caused by violent accident or design. It did not take much in those days, nor for many ages later, to make a saint. Even without a violent end the process was easy. Every violent end might be regarded as a martyrdom. To be convinced of this, we have only to think of such figures in our own history as St. Ethelbert, Edward the Martyr, St. Edmund, Simon de Montfort, Edward II., Charles I. (and they are not the only ones), upon whom popular opinion has conferred the martyr's crown, heedless of any moral or spiritual qualifications. Some peoples go further. In Sicily a remarkable cult is addressed to executed criminals. The Decollati, as such malefactors are called, are indiscriminately invoked by a public whose sympathy they have secured merely by the violent expiation of their crimes.[2]

bird into heaven (*Nova Legenda Anglie: as collected by John of Tynemouth, John Capgrave and others and first printed by Wynkyn de Worde*, A.D. 1516, ed. Horstmann, Oxford, 1901, i. 412 sqq.). Mediæval miracle-mongers had little originality: they copied one another continually. In this case probably the legend of Ethelbert was copied from that of Kenelm.

[2] I have given an account of the cult from the writings of Dr. Pitrè the eminent Sicilian author, supplemented by my own observations *Folk-lore* xxi. (1910), 168.

The fact is that a legend of the kind we are considering always starts from a state of excited feeling. In such a condition people "see things" and "hear tell of things" which they repeat with all sorts of distortion and exaggeration. That is how we must account for many a legend of saint and martyr alike in Christianity and in other religions. So in India, for example, a man who dies a violent death becomes a *bhut*, a malignant ghost, whose vagaries are only to be appeased by offerings and worship. The worship begins in his immediate family; it often spreads around the neighbourhood, and he becomes what Mr. Crooke calls a "village godling." Sometimes even it extends to a wider area, and he attains to more dazzling heights of divinity.

Kenelm was no doubt buried, as he naturally would be, at the monastery where his father ultimately rested, and which Kenwulf doubtless intended as the family mausoleum. Nothing contributed so much to the prosperity of a monastery as the possession of the body of one who was reputed to be a saint. If for any reason Kenelm had obtained an incipient reputation of this kind, it would not be in human nature that the monks should discourage it. The seal of sanctity is martyrdom: when martyrdom could be attributed to the saint his cult was assured. But for martyrdom somebody must be found upon whom the guilt of the saint's death can be thrust. In the present case the romance that dwells, though often dormant, at the heart of the laity, would concur with the fanatical asceticism of the monks to suggest that a woman was the author of the crime. Here, perhaps, it was that the unfortunate resemblance between the names of Cwoenthryth and the already damned Cynethryth came into play. Quendryth was a lady of a stout and determined character. We have seen it expressed in her long contest with Archbishop Wulfred. The litigation took place in the general council of the realm; it lasted for years; and it must have been a matter of common knowledge among all who were interested in either of the litigants—that is to say, among the members

of all the higher classes and the religious communities of the country—from whom it would filter down in a vaguer way to the other classes. Her name and the impression thus conveyed of her personality, handed down and exaggerated in gossip probably through more than one generation, might well have been confused with those of Cynethryth (originally derived from the mythical Thrytho), and thus might have fastened upon her in tradition the guilt of Kenelm's death. The motive of the crime must have been more slowly evolved. It did not attain its final form until society had become reconstituted after the Danish wars, for it is based upon constitutional rights unknown to the English of the ninth and tenth centuries.

The rise and growth of the tradition which we have thus attempted to trace suggest serious misgivings about the value of statements of historical fact unsupported by the witness of contemporary documents, or of some other evidence unambiguous in its terms, and capable of being brought into direct relation with the events it professes to record. It has been too much the fashion, even with experienced antiquaries and anthropologists, to rely upon tradition as evidence of fact. The practice is perilous, for the cases in which it holds good are limited in number. Oral statements transmitted from mouth to mouth suffer constant and imperceptible deformation. They are altered and deflected from the truth by the forgetfulness and even the memory, by the prejudices, the desires, the interests of those who transmit them. They are influenced by other traditions, by the prepotency of a great name, by the horror of a great tragedy, by the dawn of a great national hope, by political and religious changes, by a hundred cross-currents playing upon the stream of human purposes and aspirations. They are like the sentence whispered in one's neighbour's ear in the game of "Russian Scandal," that is never repeated in the same way, and at the end, when uttered aloud by the last player, is found to have no resemblance to the original confidence.

The legend of Saint Kenelm arose and evolved in such a mental atmosphere and through such experiences as these, from which, as we have seen, it did not escape, even when committed to writing. For centuries it continued to grow; it grew until the social and religious revolution of the sixteenth century created a new environment. The earliest mention of Kenelm as a saint in any document that has descended to us is in the *Hyde Register*, where we also found the earliest mention of Saint Ethelbert. By 1175 the monastery of Winchcombe had increased so much in influence and in wealth that Pope Alexander III. (if the document be genuine), in a Bull addressed to the abbot of the monastery of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Kenelm, recognised his saintship, though he had never been formally canonised, took the monastery under apostolic protection, confirmed to it all its property (of which a long list is embodied in the document), granted a number of privileges, and authorised the brethren to choose their abbot from time to time.[1] The abbey remained in unabated prosperity until its suppression in 1539. The feast-day of the saint was the 17th July, the traditional date of the translation of his relics, on which a fair was of course held. Various martyrologists fix his martyrdom on the 3rd November.[2]

The cult of the saint had its day and came to an end. The monasteries throughout the kingdom fell, and with them the shrines of the saints they possessed. To-day there is not left one stone upon another of the great Abbey of Winchcombe, or of the shrine of the saint and martyr, the fountain of its wealth. The wealth has been confiscated, the broad possessions of the abbey have long ago been secularised. The once busy and important town of Winchcombe is now little better than a village, lying in the peaceful lap of the smiling Cotswold valley. The stream described by Richard

[1] Printed by Rev. D. Royce in *Landboc, sive Registrum Monasterii Beatae Mariae Virginis et Sancti Cénhelmi de Winchelcumba* (2 vols., Exeter, 1892–1903), vol. i., p. 25. [2] *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. xl.

of Cirencester as breaking forth where the faithful bearers rested with the saint's body on their flight from the monks of Worcester has been rudely analysed, and now supplies not credulous pilgrims, but the whole town with water; for which beneficent purpose the chapel that covered its source high up in the Sudeley Woods has given place to a more utilitarian building. Saint Kenelm at Winchcombe is only the echo of a once famous name.

But there is one spot where that name survives with a sacred halo. A gully in the Clent Hills, overlooking the head-waters of the River Stour, and easily reached from Hagley Station on the Oxford Worcester and Wolverhampton Branch of the Great Western Railway, is reputed to be the scene of his martyrdom. At the top of the gully[1] a little church, dedicated to the saint stands over the healing spring said to have burst from the place where the body had lain. The water itself was diverted in the middle of the last century when the church was restored, and it is not now visible; but the bottom of the gully is green all the way down. The church was founded in pre-Norman days, and it retains some relics of that antiquity. On the south side under a rude corbel a short distance below the present roof is a figure in low relief of a saint in the act of blessing. His left hand holds a book upon his breast (Plate I.). Whether this is intended for Kenelm I cannot say. It does not indicate the extreme youth the legend would lead us to expect, though want of skill on the part of the ancient sculptor, or the artistic convention of the time, may account for such defect. The church is still in constant use; but beside the name and this archaic sculpture there is nothing to recall the memory of a cult that once filled the country-side with fervour.[2] The

[1] The gully is now known as Clatterbach. *N. E. D.*, s.v. Bache. See note *supra*, p. 30.

[2] There is another sculpture of similar character in the tympanum of the south door. It represents a crowned figure in the act of blessing, in an ellipse upborne by angels, and is probably intended (as Mr. Keyser, who has examined it, pointed out at the meeting at which the address was delivered) to represent the Saviour.

PLATE I.

FIGURE, ST. KENELM'S CHAPEL.

From photograph by the late Dr. Oscar W. Clark, by kind permission of Mrs. Clark.

veneration of Saint Kenelm, arising perhaps in human compassion and sympathy, supported by a tradition of treachery and cruelty on the part of his sister—so far as we can discover absolutely devoid of foundation — and encouraged by the gross superstitions of the time, in which less worthy motives found their opportunity, is dead. After flourishing for six hundred years it might have seemed immortal, unassailable. It fell before the needs of an altered state of society ; and we must return to the barbarism of the Dark Ages and a more than Prussian brutality ere such a cult can again become a living power. Every human institution, having served its time and purpose, is thus destined to inevitable dissolution. It is for the generations as they pass to take care that the memory of the phases of their progress be not lost. This is the object of historical and antiquarian science. It is by way of contribution, small and imperfect though it be, towards this object, that I have to-day ventured to offer you a study of our Gloucestershire Saint Kenelm in history and in legend. [1]

[1] Since the foregoing pages were in type I observe that Professor Chadwick's more mature opinion assigns an even higher antiquity to *Beowulf* and *Widsith* than stated above, pp. 37, 41. He holds that *Beowulf* must substantially be ascribed to the first half of the seventh century, and that the kernel of *Widsith* is perhaps as old as the fourth century (Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, Cambridge, 1912, 56, 58, 63). This carries the Offa tradition further back, but does not prove the historicity of the events connected with that hero.

J. W. ARROWSMITH LTD., BRISTOL.

RETURN TO → MAIN CIRCULATION

ALL BOOKS ARE SUBJECT TO RECALL
RENEW BOOKS BY CALLING **642-3405**

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

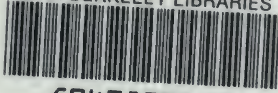
NOV 16 1994

REC. MOFFITT OCT 19'94

AUTO DISC CIRC OCT 19'94

FORM NO. DD6

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
BERKELEY, CA 94720



868622

D113
.5
H4
**

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY