THE
LIFE OF
BISHOP WILFRID
[PRAEIFICATIO]

In nomine domini nostri Christi Iesu. Incipit de humili excusatione Stephani presbiteri scribentis de vita sancti Wilfrithi Deo digni episcopi.

Præceptrorum vestrorum magnitudine, O venerabiles domini Acca episcopus et Tatbrehtus abbass, totiusque familiae arbitrio superatus, utinam ut tam effectu parere valeam quam voto. Est enim et hoc opus arduum et meae intelligentiae et eloquentiae facultas exigua; quae tamen, eti ministerium minime expleret iniuicem, certe debuit obodientia exsolvi obsequium. Maximum enim indicium erga vos meae reverentiae est imperii vestris amplius amplius me impendere voluisse quam possim. Quod si dignum aliquid vestrae electioni confercer, id erit profecto divini munera, quia nec dubitatur ipsorum fide perficiendum quorum est adhoratione susceptum. Quisnam erit quis non intellegat vestris orationibus praesumptum esse, quod etiam per me creditis impendulum? Etenim ingens mihi lucrum est atque utilitas hoc ipsum, quod beatæ memoriae Wilfrithi episcopi recordor. Est siquidem perfecta via ad virtutem illum scire, quis fuerit. Ideo, ut breviter dicam, omnia quae de eo sermo referentium iactavit, credite et minima vos estimate de maximis audisse, quia non ambigo nec eos potuisse omnia cognoscere. Obsecro itaque eos qui lectură sunt, ut fidem dictis adhibeant, relinquentes antiqui hostis millenorum invidiae stimuli et recolentes, quod eloquentia pertonabant. Semper enim in proptculo fortitudo emulos habet: feriantque summos fulgura montes.

Neque enim me quiquam audaci temeritate, nisi quod comptum et probatum a fidelibus sit, scripsisse arbitrentur; aliocin tacere quam falsa dicere maluissem. * Coeptum orationibus vestris nos iter carpamus.

1 Preface from F. C has only De humili excussatione scribentis and in addition in a later hand (possibly that of Sir R. Cotton) per Heddiium Stephanum Monachum Cantuar, An9 720 2 Tatberchtus C 3 et totius C 4 ambitu C 5 misterium F 6 omit F 7 conficerco C and F 8 Quisnamque C 9 impendulum C see Introduction 10 michi C see Introduction 11 Wilfridi and so throughout C (except that occasionally V is interchanged for W) 12 reverentium F

* V. Cudbercti prol. † V. Cudbercti prol.
PREFACE

IN the name of our Lord Christ Jesus. Here begins the humble apology of Stephen the priest, who writes concerning the life of St Wilfrid, the bishop worthy before God.

Constrained as I am by the weight of your commands, my venerable masters, Bishop Acca, and Abbot Tatberht, and by the urgency of the whole community, I would that the result might be as good as my intentions. For this task is great and my powers of understanding and eloquence are small; but, although these faculties are ill able to perform the task you have allotted me, at any rate they will have fulfilled the debt of obedience I owe you. For what greater proof could there be of my respect for you, than that it is my wish to devote myself to your commands, even though they exceed my powers? So, if I produce anything which shall justify your choice, it will assuredly be by the help of the divine gift; because there is no doubt that it will be brought to a successful close, thanks to the faith of those at whose request it was taken up. Who will fail to understand that the task undertaken at your request was one which you believe even me to be capable of carrying through?

In fact, this very task of preserving the blessed memory of Bishop Wilfrid is of great gain and value to myself. Indeed it is in itself a ready path to virtue to know what he was. So, to be brief, even though you believe all the claims that popular report has made for him—and you may well do so—yet be sure that even then you have heard very little about matters that are very great, for I am certain that no one could know them all. So I beseech my readers to believe my report, neglecting the thousand envious pricks of the ancient foe and reflecting on what has been eloquently proclaimed. For boldness ever has its rivals in public places—“the lightnings strike the tops of the mountains.” Nor let it be thought that I have written rashly anything which has not been received on good authority and tested by trustworthy men. Else I would rather hold my peace than state what is false. And now let us start upon the journey which we have undertaken at your request.
THE LIFE OF BISHOP WILFRID

CHAPTER I

Explicit praephatio Stephani presbiteri. Incipit de nativitate et prodigio sancti Wilfrithi episcopi

igitur beati Wilfrithi pontificis, Deo adiuvante et sanctis meritis eius, vitam scribere exordiar, quem Dominus secundum egregii doctoris verba et praescivit et praedestinavit et vocavit, iustificavit et glorificavit. De utero enim matris suae valde religiosae ita eum sanctificatum a Deo prodigium demonstravit, sicut Hieremias audivit a Domino dicente: Priusquam te formarem in utero, novi te; et antequam exires de vulva sanctificavi te; prophetamque in gentibus posui te. Nam cum mater eius dolore partuieritius fatigata in domo sua iacoret et mulieres circa se mansissent, viderunt viri foris stantes domum illam extemplo quasi ardentem et flammam usque ad caelum elevatam; omnes undique concito cursu pavidis advenerunt, flammam minuere aquis hominesque de incendio eripere cupientes. Quibus mulieres de domo obviarunt dicentes: "Sustinet, stabiler expectantes; ecce modo infans huic natus est mundo." Illi vero stupefacti, videntes magnalia Dei, sicut Moyses in rubro vidit flammam sonantem nihilque consumentem, agnoverunt. Nos autem fratres, frequenter legimus spiritum sanctum in igne apparuisse, quia Deus ignis est, consumens peccatores et illuminans iustos; quod lumen non sub modo sed super candelabrum Dominus ponit ipsis. Et hoc per beatum pontificem nostrum omnibus paene Britanniae ecclesiis palam effulsit, sicut praesagia futurorum prodiderunt et rei eventus postmodum probavit.

CHAPTER II

Explicit primum miraculum. Incipit de eo, quod in pueritia Deum elegerit

Cum ergo puerilis aetatis esset, parentibus oboediens, omnibus carus, pulcher aspectu, bonae indolis, mitis, modestus, stabilis, nihil inane more puerorum cupiens, sed secundum apostolum Iacobum

1 De nativitate sancti Wilfridi et prodigio C
2 The capital letter is missing here in F, also at the beginning of over twenty other chapters
3 sententiam C
4 om. C
5 pavide C
6 supra F
7 Wilfridum episcopum for po. no. C
8 presagi C
9 Expl. Incipit om. C
10 cupiens after inane C

* Rom. 8. 29, 30.
† Jerem. 1. 5.
‡ Heb. 12. 29.
CHAPTER I

End of the preface of Stephen the priest: of the birth of Saint Wilfrid the bishop and of a portent. [634 A.D.]

So, with the help of God, and by the merits of the Saint himself, I will begin the life of the holy Bishop Wilfrid, whom the Lord, in the words of the most excellent teacher, “foreknew and predestinated, called, justified and glorified.” For even from the womb of his most pious mother, a sign from God proved him to be sanctified, even as Jeremiah heard the Lord’s word saying, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.” For while his mother, worn out by the pain of her travails, was lying in her house with the women about her, some men who were standing outside suddenly saw the house apparently on fire, the flames rising to the heavens. They all came running from every direction in excitement and terror, eager to quench the flames with water and to rescue the inhabitants from the fire. But the women of the house met them and said, “Stand back and wait, for an infant has just been born into this world.” When they saw this they were amazed and recognized the mighty works of God, even as Moses saw the flame which was roaring in the bush and yet consuming nothing. Now, brethren, we frequently read that the Holy Spirit has appeared in the form of fire, for God is a fire consuming sinners and enlightening the righteous. This light the Lord has commanded to be set, not under a bushel, but on a candelabrum, and through our blessed bishop it has shone openly upon almost all the churches of Britain, even as the omens foretold: and events afterwards gave proof of them.

CHAPTER II

End of the first miracle: How he chose God in his boyhood. [648]

During his boyhood he was obedient to his parents and beloved of all men, fair in appearance, of good parts, gentle, modest and firm, with none of the vain desires that are customary in boyhood; but “swift to hear, slow to speak,” as the Apostle James says: he always
velox ad audirem, tardus ad loquendum*, omnibus in domum patris suæ venientibus humilliter aut regalibus sociis aut servis eorum semper edocte ministravit ut 1 secundum prophetam omnes Dei dociles essent 2†. Postremo tamen quarto decimo anno in corde suo cogitabat paterna rura deserere, iura 3 celestia quae rere. Privigna enim sibi, matre sua mortua, molesta et inimicit 4 erat; tamen arma et equos vestimentaque sibi et pueris 5 eius adeptus est, in quibus ante 6 regalibus conspectibus 7 apte stare posset. Cunque benedixisset eum pater eius, sicut Isaac Iacob et Iacob filios suos, ut crescerent in multa milia populorum, pergens itinere suo, usquedum inveniret reginam 8 Oswiu, nomine Eanfled, et per nobiles viros, quibus ante in domo patris suæ ministrabat 9, laudatus praesentatusque est reginae. Statim, Deo adiuvante, invent gratiam in conspectu ilius 10. Erat enim decorus aspectu et acutissimi ingenii, et concessit 10 ei quod petierat, ut sub illius 11 consilio et munimine Deo serviret. Tunc quidam nobilis eo tempore ex sodalibus regis, valde sibi amabilis et fidelis, nomine Cudda, proponens 12 securaria desideria contemnere propter infirmatatem paralisin, coenobialemque vitam sub regulari disciplina in Lindisfarne insula 13 arripere maluit; cui regina supradicta puerum nuper ad se venientem diligenter commendavit, ut sibi ministaret et Deo serviret. Iam enim ille secundum praecessum reginæ, accepta diligentì ministratìone, domino suo et omnibus senioribus in monasterio quasi filius et coetaneis quasi frater statim in amore factus est, pro eo quod omnem regularem vitam cum intimo cordis amore in humiditate et obedientia adimplet; et omnem psalmorum seriem memorialiter 14 et aliquantos libros didicit. Adhuc enim laicus capite, corde vero a vitis circumcisus, Deo serviebat et partem cum Samuele 15 Heli sacerdoti ministrante beneficitionis accipere meruit.

1 omit F 2 sunt F 3 dona C 4 inimicit F 5 pueros F 6 omit C 7 omit F 8 (insert regis C) regina F 9 insert que C 10 concedit C 11 suo C 12 pro nomen C 13 Lindisfarne (omit insula) C 14 memorialiter C 15 Samuhele C

* James 1. 19. † John 6. 45. ‡ Esth. 2. 9.
ministered skilfully and humbly to all who came to his father’s house, whether they were the king’s companions or their slaves, even as the prophet says, “all shall be taught by the Lord.” At last, however, when fourteen years of age, he meditated in his heart leaving his father’s fields to seek the Kingdom of Heaven. For his step-mother (his own mother being dead) was harsh and cruel; but he obtained arms and horses and garments for himself and his servants in which he could fitly stand before the royal presence. So, when his father had blessed him as Isaac did Jacob, and Jacob his sons, in order that their seed might grow into many thousands of peoples, he made his way to Oswiu’s queen, Eanfled by name, and, being recommended by nobles whom he had once ministered to in his father’s house, he was presented to her. At once, by the help of God, he found grace in her sight. For he was comely in appearance and exceedingly sharp of wit; so that his request, that he might be allowed to serve God under her counsel and protection, was granted.

At that time there was a certain nobleman among the king’s companions named Cudda, one of his truest friends, who resolved, owing to a paralytic infirmity, to despise worldly ambitions, preferring to take to the monastic life with its regular discipline, on the island of Lindisfarne. So this same queen earnestly commended the boy who had just come to her, to Cudda, to minister to him and to serve God. The boy fulfilled the task appointed by the queen with such earnest solicitude that his master and all the older monks loved him like a son and his equals like a brother, because with a loving heart he sought to live the full monastic life in all humility and obedience. He learned the whole Psalter by heart as well as several books. So, although his head was still untaught, yet he served God in purity and circumcision of heart. He therefore deserved to receive a share of the blessing which Samuel received when he ministered to Eli the priest.
CHAPTER III

De eo, quod amaverit sancti Petri apostolorum
principis\textsuperscript{1} limina videre

Deinde post circulum annorum, sugerente spiritu sancto, apellare
et videre sedem apostoli Petri et apostolorum principis, adhuc in-
attritam viam genti nostrae temptare in cor adolescentis\textsuperscript{2} supradicti
ascendit et\textsuperscript{3} ab ea omnem nodum maculae solvendum sibi credens et
beautitudinem benedictionis accipiam. Hunc talesm sensum domino
suo enotuit; qui statim, ut erat sapiens, suggestum a Deo esse cognos-
scens, consensum dedit filio carissimo omnis boni caput accipere.
Tunc autem cum consilio patris sui Eanflaed regina\textsuperscript{4} ad suum pro-
prium propinquum Erconberhtum regem Cantuariorum per nuntios
diligenter commendatum\textsuperscript{5} honorifice emissi,\textsuperscript{3} ut tamdiu esset cum eo,
usque dum fideles socios itineris ad apostolicam sedem tendentes
inveniret. Rex vero venientem servum Dei ad se videns, iuxta con-
suetudinem suam in orationibus et ieiuniis, in lectione et vigilii
semper occupatum, mirifice diligebat. Psalmos namque, quos prius
secundum Hieronymi emendationem legerat, more Romanorum iuxta
qvantam editionem memorialiter transmetuit\textsuperscript{7}. Anni vertente quoque
die, rex secundum petitionem reginae languenti taedio ducem
nobilem et admirabilis ingenii quendam nomine Biscop Baducing
inveniens ad sedem apostolicam properantem, ut in suo comitatu
esse, acquisivit. Pergens\textsuperscript{8} igitur servus Dei cum benedictione parent-
rum suorum ad peregrinationem sicut Iacob, benedictio\textsuperscript{9} quae ei\textsuperscript{10}
demum in bonum contigit. Omnis affabilis, mente sagax\textsuperscript{11}, corpore
strenuus, pedibus velox, habillis\textsuperscript{12} ad omne opus bonum, tristia ora
numquam contraxit;\textsuperscript{13} alacer et gaudens navigio secunde\textsuperscript{14}
Lug-
dunam\textsuperscript{15} Galliae civitatem pervenit; ibique cum suis sociis aliquod
spatium mansit, discedente ab eo austerae mentis duce, sicut a Paulo
Barnabas propter Iohannem recessit, qui cognominabatur Marcus.

\textsuperscript{1} apostoli C adholescentis F
\textsuperscript{2} Eanflaed regine C
\textsuperscript{3} omit C ac
\textsuperscript{4} emendatum F
\textsuperscript{5} commendatus et honorifice emissus est C
\textsuperscript{6} memorialet transmutavit C
\textsuperscript{7} Perrexit C
\textsuperscript{8} omit C
\textsuperscript{9} eis peregrinantibus C sagaci F stabilis F glossed
\textsuperscript{10} id est prospere in C
\textsuperscript{11} Lugduno C
EDDIUS STEPHANUS

CHAPTER III

How he longed to see the abode of St Peter
the chief of the Apostles. [652?]

After the lapse of a few years, it came into the heart of this same young man, by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to pay a visit to the see of the Apostle Peter, the chief of the Apostles, and to attempt a road hitherto untrodden by any of our race. By so doing he believed that he would cleanse himself from every blot and stain and receive the joy of the divine blessing. When he made this known to his master, the latter, who was a wise man, recognized that the plan was of God and gave his consent that his dear son should thus attain to the source of all good. Thereupon Queen Eanfled, on the advice of his father, sent him forth with all honour to her own kinsman, Erconberht, King of Kent, giving him the warmest commendations through her messengers, to the end that he might stay there until he found trustworthy fellow-travellers bound for the Apostolic See. When the king saw the servant of God approach, finding him continually occupied, as was his wont, in prayers and fastings, in reading and vigils, he loved him exceedingly. Now the Psalms which he had first of all read in Jerome’s revision he committed to memory from the fifth edition, after the Roman use. After a year of weary waiting from day to day, the king, in accordance with the queen’s request, found him a guide, a man of high rank and of remarkable understanding named Biscop Baducing, who was bound for the Apostolic See, and prevailed upon him to take the youth in his company. So the servant of God set out on his journey with the blessing of his kinsfolk, like Jacob; and that blessing did not fail him. He was friendly to all, wise of mind, strong in body, and swift of foot, ready for every good work, his face never clouded with sorrow. Glad of heart and rejoicing in his journey, he came at last in safety to Lyons, a city of Gaul; there he remained with his companions for a certain time, his stern guide having left him, just as Barnabas separated from Paul on account of John whose surname was Mark.
CHAPTER IV

De eo, quod Dalfinus episcopus sanctum
Wilfrithum benigne acceperat

Benedictus Deus qui servos suos defendit et protegit et per bonorum auxilia adiuvabit! Nam in\(^1\) supradicta civitate sanctae memoriae Dalfinus archiepiscopus erat, qui super servum Dei mitissimum Wilfrithum posuit oculos suos in bonum et benignum cum sociis\(^2\) hospitio susceperat, videns in facie serena, quod benedictam mentem\(^3\) gerebat. Ideoque omnia illis necessaria, quasi proprii sui essent, abundare\(^4\) fecit et sibi illum in adoptivum filium eligere voluit dicens ad eum: "Si manseris mecum fiducialiter, dabo tibi bonam partem Galliarum ad regendum in saeculum virginemque filiam fratris mei\(^5\) in uxorem et te ipsum adoptivum filium habebo\(^6\) et tu me patrem, in omnibus fideliter adiuvantem." Et respondens sanctus Wilfrithus servus Dei sapienter, sicut erat edoctus, dixit: "Sunt vota mea Domino, quae reddam, relinquentus ut Abraham\(^7\) cognitionem et domum patris mei, ut visitem sedem apostolicam et ecclesiasticae disciplinae regulas didicerim in augmentum gentis nostrae ad serviendum Deo, desiderans a Deo accipere\(^8\) quod diligentibus se promisit, dicens: *Qui reliquerit patrem aut matrem et reliqua, centuplum accipiet et vitam aeternam possidebit*. Iam enim vita comite, Deo adiuvante, si vixero, iterum revertens videbo faciem tuam." Haec et alia audiens sanctus episcopus, veraciter servum Dei esse et a Spiritu sancto imbutum intellexit; praeparans sibi necessaria, in pace Christi secundum voluntatem eius cum ducibus et opibus\(^9\) ad sedem apostolicam emisit.

CHAPTER V

De eo, quod ad sanctum Petrum apostolum
benedicte pervenit

Servus igitur Dei Wilfrithus ad sedem olim optatam apostoli Petri et principis apostolorum gaudens et gratulans cum sociis suis prospere pervenit. Sicut doctor gentium excellentissimus persgens Hiero-

\(^1\) omit F \(^2\) insert suis C \(^3\) benedicta mente F \(^4\) habundare C
\(^5\) after uxorem in F \(^6\) habeo C \(^7\) Habraham F \(^8\) recipere C
\(^9\) operibus F

* Matth. 19. 29.