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**The Lyfe of
Saynt Radegunde**

Edited
from the copy in Jesus College Library
by
F. BRITAIN, M.A.
of the same College

CAMBRIDGE
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Introduction

The copy of *The Lyfe of Saynt Radegunde* which is here edited is to be found in the library of Jesus College, Cambridge, and has the following inscription on the fly-leaf:

“C & P^r

“July 3d 1792.

“Dr. Farmer Master of Eñmanuel presents this Book to the
 “Library of Jesus College. It formerly belonged to the famous
 “Tom. Rawlinson, & lately to that great Collector, Major
 “Pearson. Dr. Farmer has been for many years inquisitive after
 “Pieces of this sort & he does not know, that another copy
 “exists in the World.”

Largely, no doubt, on the strength of Doctor Farmer’s statement, this copy has hitherto been believed at Cambridge to be the only one in existence, though there is at least one other. Curiously enough, this other copy was also considered by its possessors to be unique, and its present owner in all probability still thinks that it is so, as the Jesus copy has never appeared in any lists of early printed books.

The earliest mention of the second copy occurs in the 1785 edition of *Typographical Antiquities* by William Herbert, who states that it is in his possession. After passing through various collections into the celebrated Britwell library, it was sold at Sothebys in 1922, being purchased by an American firm for £295. No other copies are known to exist.

Richard Pynson², the printer of *The Lyfe of Saynt Radegunde*, was a Norman who learned his craft in France and migrated to London some time before 1490. In 1508 he succeeded William Faques as King’s Printer, and in the following year introduced at the end of his books a full-page engraving, the

¹ Rawlinson’s mark for “collated and perfect”

² Cf. E. G. Duff, *Printers of Westminster and London from 1476 to 1535* (Cambridge, 1906).

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use of which some years later by the printer Redman caused a fierce dispute between Pynson and his rival.

This engraving is the one used by Pynson at the end of *Saynt Radegunde* and reproduced in the present edition. Some of the figures in it have no satisfactory explanation. It is difficult to identify the bird above the shield. In previous devices used by Pynson the bird had a shorter bill, and was probably intended to represent a finch (*pinson*). Herbert describes the sprig in its beak as “with two mulberries, as described by Guillam, but appearing rather like the cones of a pine.” The latter seems the more natural explanation, and is also the more probable, as it would introduce a pun on Pynson’s name.

Pynson resigned the office of King’s Printer in 1529, and died early in 1530. Since he is described in the colophon to *Saynt Radegunde* as “printer to the kynges noble grace,” the book must have been published not earlier than 1508 and not later than 1529. As Pynson published, as far as is known, only three small legal works after 1527, the probable limits may be reduced to 1508 and 1527.

The author of *The Lyfe of Saynt Radegunde* is not named on the title-page or in the text. The only detail which he gives about himself is that he was

“lowest of degre
 A man of holy church by true profession.”

The work which most nearly resembles the present one in metre, style, and general treatment is *The Lyfe of Saynt Werburge*¹, by Henry Bradshaw², about whom very little is known except that he was a Benedictine monk at the abbey of St Werburge in his native city of Chester; that he was sent

¹ Edited by C. Horstmann (London, E.E.T.S., 1887); also by E. Hawkins (Chetham Soc., 1848).

² Cf. Anthony à Wood: *Athenae Oxonienses* (ed. P. Bliss, London, 1813), vol. 1.

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by the community to study theology at Gloucester College, Oxford; that on his return to Chester he wrote *The Lyfe of Saynt Werburge*; and that he died in 1513, probably prematurely, and was buried in his monastery, “leaving then behind him others matters to posterity.”

The resemblance between *Saynt Werburge* and *Saynt Radegunde* was noticed by Herbert, and is indeed very striking. Both are written in “rhyme royal” stanzas of seven lines. Only ten stanzas in *Saynt Radegunde* depart from this rule, each of them having eight lines. One of these stanzas is isolated, the extra line being in Latin. The other nine together comprise the penultimate chapter, the eighth line of each forming a refrain. *Saynt Werburge* has some eight-line stanzas for similar purposes and in similar positions, and their proportion to the whole poem is about the same as in *Saynt Radegunde*.

In addition to their similarity in construction, rhyme, and slipshod style, the two poems offer a very close parallel in language and method of procedure, even in small details. Both saints are described as “a myroure of mekenes,” “a lanterne of lyght,” “kynges doughter dere,” “circumfulsed with grace,” and compared to the rose. Each is implored to deliver man from “paynes thrall,” and the carnal desire of both their husbands is extinguished “as water quenbeth the fyre.” Each is invoked by the author in a brief prayer for inspiration at the end of the prologue, as also in a longer prayer just before the epilogue. The wedding festivities of Radegund are described in detail, as are those at the spiritual marriage of Werburge. Each saint sends for her sisters on her death-bed, gives them advice, and utters a lyrical “welcom” to the Viaticum. In both poems the nuns lament the death of the saint, and pray God to restore her to life. The soul of both saints is received by angels, who conduct it to Paradise. Each poem opens with an astronomical introduction, is submitted to the judgement “of all poetes,” is stated to have been

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written to avoid idleness, and for the benefit of the common people, not of the learned. Further, in both poems Chaucer, Lydgate, Skelton and Barclay are mentioned, but no other English poets.

Even after due allowance has been made for the common-places used by hagiographers in all ages, and by English poets in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the resemblance between the two poems is still so very close that one can only conclude that Bradshaw wrote both of them.

Bradshaw's ability as a poet has been variously estimated. Warton remarks that his versification "is infinitely inferior to Lydgate's worst manner," and that he had "more piety than poetry." Dibdin¹, on the other hand, considers that "his name will stand among the foremost in the list of poets of his period"; while Horstmann praises his "attempt at epic style," and states that he "generally retains the old popular long-line used by the Anglo-Saxons." Professor Saintsbury, however, says that "it has been charitably suggested that, in place of Chaucerian decasyllables, Bradshaw retains the 'old popular long line,' whatever that may be. To which it can only be replied that if he did not mean decasyllables he constantly stumbles into them. If he is not quite so shambling as some of his predecessors and contemporaries, he is, throughout, steadily pedestrian."

A passage in *Saynt Werburge* implies that that poem was finished in 1513, the year of its author's death. It is highly probable, therefore, that *Saynt Radegunde*, if we assume that Bradshaw wrote it, is the earlier of the two. This supposition is strengthened by a comparison of the two poems, as *Saynt Werburge* is four times as long, is more mature in style, and has a structure which seems in many ways to be an expansion

¹ *Typographical Antiquities* (London 1812), vol. II, p. 499.

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of *Saynt Radegunde*. As Bradshaw undoubtedly regarded *Saynt Werburge* as his life's work, its composition may have occupied him for several years. If that be so, *Saynt Radegunde* may well have been written about 1500, or earlier.

It is difficult to say why Bradshaw should have chosen Saint Radegund as the subject of a poem, as we have no evidence that he ever lived in any of the few places in England where a church is dedicated to her. It is not likely that he visited her shrine at Poitiers, or he would almost certainly have mentioned the fact in his poem.

Pynson printed several works by Bishop Alcock of Ely. Yet, although the name of Saint Radegund is now inseparable at Cambridge from that of Alcock, there is no evidence that the bishop had any special devotion to her. What evidence there is points in the contrary direction, since, when Alcock converted the nunnery of Saint Radegund into a college, he wished to change its dedication entirely. If therefore, as is possible, he met Bradshaw through the medium of Pynson, he is hardly likely to have suggested the life of Saint Radegund as the subject of a poem.

Yet the suppression of the Benedictine community of Saint Radegund at Cambridge must soon have become known to the Benedictines of Chester, and the reasons which led Bishop Alcock to order its suppression must have formed the subject of more than one hour's surmise and gossip among the monks at the abbey. Listening to it, and doubtless taking part in it, Henry Bradshaw would realise that he could do nothing to alter what had taken place, but that he could at least do something to perpetuate the memory of the saint whose name the nuns of Cambridge, and the Benedictines as a whole, had so long venerated. He could hope, moreover, to find a sympathetic publisher in Pynson, to whom, as a Norman, the cult of Saint Radegund was probably already well known, as his native province contains several churches dedicated to her.

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Saint Radegund¹ is a strictly historical character of the sixth century, and was born about the year 520 in Thuringia², of which her father, Berthaire (“Berengary”) was joint ruler with his two brothers. In the year 531 she was taken prisoner of war by Clotaire (“Lothary”), the youngest son of Clovis, removed to his court at Athies, and forced to marry him at an early age. After several years of married life she left her husband, and was consecrated a deaconess by Saint Medard, Bishop of Noyon. Judging by what is known of Clotaire’s character, she was fully justified in leaving him. Shortly afterwards, she founded at Poitiers a double community of monks and nuns, who followed the Cesarian Rule until long after their foundress’s death. Not long before her death in 587, Radegund received a vision of Christ, who appeared to her in the form of an angel. This visit is the subject of the engraving prefixed to *The Lyfe of Saynt Radegunde*. She was buried in the monastic church, where her tomb still attracts large numbers of pilgrims from all parts of France.

The cult of Saint Radegund was introduced into this country long before the Norman Conquest. Winchester was one of its earliest centres, and the New Minster there, like Glastonbury, possessed relics of the saint. The earliest written mention of her name on this side of the Channel occurs in a calendar written by a priest of Winchester probably about the middle of the ninth century. It is to Winchester also that we probably owe an eleventh-century copy of the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, in the calendar of which we find the name of Saint Radegund. We find it also in the Leofric Missal, written before the Conquest for use in Exeter cathedral; in the *Calendarium Anglicanum*, and in the missals of Ely and Hereford. It does not appear in the Sarum calendar, though

¹ Cf. F. Brittain, *Saint Radegund, patroness of Jesus College* (Cambridge, 1925).

² The author of *The Lyfe* had vague ideas about “Thorynga,” which he makes an African city in the kingdom “now called Barbarea.” This is due to his mistranslation of the original, “haec natione barbara fuit.”

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Salisbury cathedral possessed “the heer of Seint Radegunde” among its “relikes of virginys.”¹

In practically every one of these early missals and calendars we find the saint commemorated, not on August 13th, the anniversary of her death, but on February 11th. This feature is peculiar to England. Not even a minor feast of the saint is kept on February 11th elsewhere.

The Norman Conquest gave little, if any, impetus to the cult in England, but the reverse is true of the Plantagenet period, largely owing to the close feudal connection between England and Poitou from Henry II's marriage with Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152 until the English were driven out in 1369. It is significant that every English church or chapel dedicated to Saint Radegund received its dedication, so far as can be discovered, during the Plantagenet period.

It is somewhat surprising to find that, although the number of dedications to Saint Radegund in England is comparatively small, it exceeds that in any other country except France and Austria. The actual number of English dedications is twelve, five of these being parish churches, three monastic houses (at Bradsole in Kent, Thelesford in Warwickshire, and Cambridge), two cathedral side-chapels (St Paul's and Exeter), one monastic side-chapel in the Benedictine nuns' priory at Usk² in Monmouthshire, and one bath, at Canterbury, which may possibly owe its name to Bertha, wife of Ethelbert of Kent, who was a grand-daughter of Clotaire.

The cult of Saint Radegund spread at an early date into Wales, and her name appears in the Martyrology of Ricemarch, drawn up for use at St David's between 1076 and 1081. It is, however, possible that the commemoration was inserted at a later date³.

¹ Chr. Wordsworth, *Ceremonies of the Cathedral Church of Salisbury* (Cambridge, 1901), p. 40.

² *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. Caley, 1823, vol. iv, p. 592, col. 1.

³ H. J. Lawlor, *Psalter and Martyrology of Ricemarch* (Bradshaw Soc. 1914), vol. 1, pp. xxi, xxxiii.

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That the cult had spread as far as Ireland by the latter part of the twelfth century is shown by the inclusion of Saint Radegund's name in the Martyrology of Gorman, a rhymed calendar in Erse, composed some time between 1166 and 1174¹. In this instance the commemoration falls on August 13th, and is rather prettily worded:

“Radicuind noem nuaghel
 (Holy, fresh-fair Radegund).”

There are a few instances of the use of the saint's name after the Reformation in England. In the parish of Bengeworth, Worcestershire, children of both sexes were christened by the name of Radegund as late as 1580, or thereabouts, as can be seen from the parish registers². The Amazonian queen in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, although utterly different from the saint in character, is named “Radigund.” The same writer sums up a few of the saint's characteristics in his *Mother Hubbard's Tale* (1591).

Of Laurence Sterne's references to the saint in *Tristram Shandy* (1761), one is a mere ejaculation, but the other shows that Sterne knew the details of the saint's austerities. This passage refers to the metal cross, armed with sharp points, which Radegund used to heat in the fire and apply to her flesh. The nuns of Poitiers do not claim to possess this relic. They appear to have made such claims formerly, but a recent writer has shown conclusively that the cross in their possession could not have been the one used for the purpose described. It is quite possible, however, that the community “in your road from Fesse to Cluny” who are said to have shown the relic to Tristram may have possessed it in Sterne's time, and that he saw it, though its existence is unknown to-day.

We are exceptionally well provided with contemporary Latin accounts of the life of Saint Radegund. The first of

¹ W. Stokes, *Martyrology of Gorman* (Bradshaw Soc. 1895), pp. xix and 156.

² *Notes and Queries*, vol. cxlix, p. 196.

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these was written by the chaplain to her community, Venantius Fortunatus, whose biography of the saint was afterwards supplemented by the nun Baudonivia. Much additional information is to be found in the works of Gregory of Tours, who frequently visited the community and officiated at the funeral of its foundress. In the eleventh century Hildebert, Bishop of Mans, compiled a life of the saint, but it is little more than an abstract and re-arrangement of the matter contained in the biographies by Fortunatus and Baudonivia.

None of these writers is mentioned by the author of *The Lyfe of Saynt Radegunde*. This is because, although he used some of the information given by all four of them, he used it for the most part indirectly, through another channel—the works of Antoninus, who is the only writer about Saint Radegund whom he mentions by name.

This Antoninus, in order to distinguish him from other writers of the same name, is generally referred to as Antoninus of Florence, in which city he was born in 1389, and of which he became Archbishop some years before his death in 1459. His chief work is his *Latin Chronicle*, a summary of the history of the world down to the year before his death. Two sections of this work are devoted to the life of Saint Radegund¹, and are admittedly taken from the works of the indefatigable encyclopaedist, Vincent of Beauvais. Except for the omission of two or three short passages, and the alteration of a word here and there, Antoninus follows Vincent word for word in his biography of Saint Radegund. Neither of them includes more than a few words from Gregory of Tours. They are practically content to give a mere summary of Fortunatus and Baudonivia, whom they follow verbatim whenever possible.

The author of *The Lyfe of Saynt Radegunde* follows Antoninus very closely, and about a third of the poem is

¹ Antoninus Florentinus, *Chronicorum Secunda Pars* (Lugduni, 1586), pp. 292–4.

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taken directly from his work. In only three instances (and those very minor ones) does he change the order of events followed by the Italian writer; and he omits only four brief passages from the original Latin. None of these is of any note, with a single exception, which refers to an important event in the saint's life. It tells how her innocent brother was murdered by Clotaire—an event which rightly caused her to leave him and led to her taking the veil and founding her monastery. The English writer implies that her final resolution to seek the monastic life was made owing to the noising abroad of her first miracle. He probably thought that a husband's consent was all that a married woman needed to set her free for the monastic life, and that there was consequently no need to mention the murder, though it is that very incident which makes Radegund appear a much more human figure to the modern reader.

The narrative of Antoninus is supplemented in the poem by eleven incidents or passages drawn direct from Fortunatus, six from Baudonivia, three from Hildebert, and by the account of the Legend of the Oats, which comes from a much later source. These borrowings put together are not equal to a third of the amount which is translated from Antoninus.

Nearly half of the poem is the original work of the English writer, even though he refers to it as a "poore translacion." The prologue and epilogue are original, as are the descriptions of Radegund's wedding and profession, her address to her sisters from her death-bed, her reception of the last sacraments, her "welcom" to the Viaticum, the lengthy account of how she kept her virginity, the summary of her miracles, a number of stanzas extolling her good example, and practically all the prayers.

In only two instances does the author do violence to his sources. Otherwise, he merely adds graphic touches which undoubtedly give more life to the poem than is contained in the Latin biographies. The two exceptions lie in his special

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pleading to prove the virginity of Radegund after her marriage, and in his constant references to her as “abbasse.” On both these points he conforms to mistaken views which grew up during the later Middle Ages, and is at variance with all early writers about the saint, including Hildebert in the eleventh century.

The Legend of the Oats, which furnishes the most picturesque incident in the poem, is based on a late tradition which is first found in a French manuscript of the fourteenth century. The same story is given in a Latin manuscript, *Nova miracula beate Radegundis*¹, of the fifteenth century, which was probably the source used by the English writer.

There exist a number of Romance folk-tales and ballads which bear a striking resemblance to the story of Saint Radegund and the oats. One of these is contained in the fifteenth-century mystery play, *Le Jeu des Trois Roys*², and treats of an incident during the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. A very similar story is related in the Catalan ballad, *El rey Herodes*³; in two Franco-Provençal carols⁴ from the district of Velay; in a ballad from Roussillon⁵; in a Breton legend of Saint Cornelius⁶; in a Poitevin prose legend of Saint Macrine⁷; and in another prose legend from the same province, *Le Conte du Diable*⁸, which relates how two children escaped the pursuit of the devil through the miraculous growth of a crop of oats.

The legend of Saint Radegund and the oats is therefore but one form of a folk-tale which is perhaps a Christian

¹ Ed. Largeault et Bodenstaff, *Analecta Bollandiana*, tom. xxiii.

² Text in Jubinal, *Mystères du 15^{me} Siècle* (Paris, 1837), vol. II, p. 79.

³ Text in Milà y Fontanals, *Romancerillo catalan* (Barcelona, 1895), p. 116.

⁴ Text in *Romania*, vol. VIII, p. 418.

⁵ Chauvet, *Légendes du Roussillon*, p. 95.

⁶ Fouquet, *Légendes du Morbihan*, p. 98.

⁷ Sébillot, *Gargantua dans les traditions populaires* (Paris, 1883), p. 173.

⁸ Pineau, *Contes populaires du Poitou* (Paris, 1891), p. 135.

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adaptation of pagan myths connected with the corn-spirit. At Poitiers, however, the legend is still accepted as genuine by many, and oats are offered at Saint Radegund's shrine in continuation of a custom of which written records can be traced back to 1303.

The author of *Saynt Radegunde* refers to diseases cured in this country "by offeryng of otes" to the saint. His words imply that paralysis was one of these. A passage in the *Nova Miracula* shows that paralysis was known as "Saint Radegund's disease" as early as 1306 in France.

The offering of oats to Saint Radegund, and the story of her escape from her husband, bear a resemblance to the legend of the mythical saint Wilgeforte, otherwise known as Saint Uncumber, this name being given her by women, says Sir Thomas More in his *Dialogue concernynge hereyses*, "because they reken that for a pecke of Otes she will not faile to vncomber them of their housbondes."

..

This edition of *The Lyfe of Saynt Radegunde* corresponds word for word and letter for letter with the black-letter copy in Jesus College Library, except that the contractions in the original have been expanded into italics, and that what seemed to be obvious misprints have been corrected, the original readings being given in the footnotes. The page-headings have been added by the editor.

The punctuation—or the lack of it—has been left as in the original, as the text is sufficiently clear without any alteration in this respect. Only those words which may present difficulty have been explained in the footnotes. Words marked with an asterisk are not included in the *New English Dictionary*.

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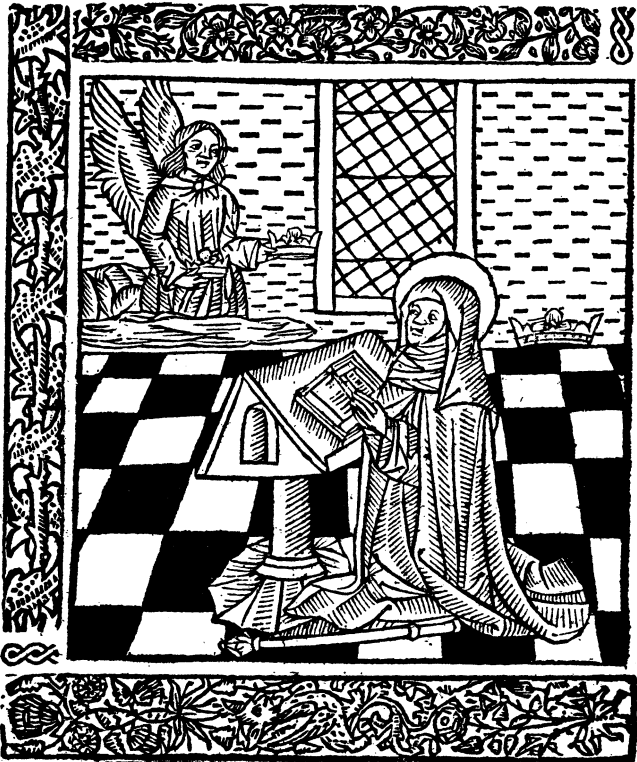
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**There begynneth the lyfe of
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- ¶ The prologue of the *tranzlatour* of the lyfe of mayden Radegunde.
- ¶ Of the progeny of saynt Radegunde and howe she was taken in batell and brought into frau~~n~~ce and theyr maryed to kyng Lothary.
- ¶ Of the vertuous lyuyng of saynt Radegunde undre spousage / and howe she contynued a virgin.
- ¶ Of the great deuocion of mayden Radegund in the tyme of lenton / and of the great mercy & pitie she vsed to all captiue prisoners.
- ¶ Howe quene Radegunde shewed a myracle delyueryng prisoners out of captiuite.
- ¶ Howe blessed Radegunde desired to be religious and of a myracle shewed at her departure by the way goyng to religion.
- ¶ How she was made religious & after electe abbasse and how by grace she was preserued from daunger of her husbände kyng Lothary.
- ¶ Of the feruent deuocyon and the great penaunce and charitable werkes this moniall vsed in religion.
- ¶ Of the great perfection and strayte penaunce this abbasse Radegunde vsed in tyme of lenton.
- ¶ Of the great affliccion and hard punysshement lady Radegund vsed aboue the course of nature in the sayd tyme of lenton and of her gostly conuersacion to euery creature.
- ¶ How this holy abbasse reformed her syster negligent with a lytell exhortacion folowyng.

- ¶ Howe blessed Radegunde deliuered a woman possessed with a fende from daunger and payne to helth and prosperite.
- ¶ How a ratte was slayne without hand approchyng to hurt the vertuous labour of saynt Radegunde.
- ¶ Howe saynt Radegund by prayer reuiued a laurell tre to burge & bryng fourth leaues without rote.
- ¶ Howe saynt Radegunde by humble supplicacion restored a yong Nonne from deth to lyfe agayne.
- ¶ How saynt¹ Radegund saued her seruants from perell of perisshynge / whiche brought a parte of the holy crosse from the emperour.
- ¶ Of dyuerse myracles in generall / and howe this abbasse saued diuerse sicke persons from Leopardy of deth.
- ¶ Howe Radegunde thabbasse cured two sicke women from infirmite / vnto helth and prosperite.
- ¶ How this abbasse healed dyuerse sicke women some from feuers / and som from vexacion of our gostly enemy.
- ¶ Of the gostly visyon she had afore her infirmite & of the noble exhortacion she made to her systers in her sicknesse and payne.
- ¶ With what pacience and deuocion lady Radegund receyued the blessed sacrament and extreme vnction afore her departure.
- ¶ Of the departynge of this holy abbasse / & howe she appered the same houre to a noble prefect / curyng hym from sicknesse of his throte.

¹ PYNSON, *saynt*.

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¶ Howe she cured one of her company from punysshement of fier / and howe she saued & healed many other by true oblacion made to her with deuocion¹.

¶ An orison made of the blessed Radegunde lady and abbasse.

¶ A breue conclusion and end of this poore translacioⁿ mouyng the reders to accept it symple though it be.

Finis.

¹ Here FYNSON omits one chapter-heading from the Table.