

I.

The Life of St. Brynach.

HERE BEGINS THE LIFE OF ST. BRYNACH, A CONFESSOR.

The Lord chose to himself from the sons of Israel, a man near his own heart, named Brynach,¹ who was adorned with elegant manners, and distinguished for remarkable virtues; for he made a vow to the God of Jacob, which he observed inviolably to the last. Embracing the name of his God from his mother's breasts, and not disregarding his commands, he preferred a humble state of life in his own house to enjoying a more distinguished one in the palaces of princes. Deducing his origin from an illustrious stock of progenitors, meritoriously obtaining no small share of reputation, being much enriched with wealth with which the minds of worldly persons are accustomed to be allured, and having hereditary landed property, and also the pleasing society of parents, he would not be captivated either by

¹ Brynach lived about the middle of the fifth century, and was the spiritual instructor of Brychan Prince of Brecknock. He is called in the Welsh Triads, Brynach Wyddel, or Brynach the Irishman, and is said to have married one of the daughters of Brychan, named Corth, or Cymorth, who lived in Emlyn, a district partly in the county of Carmarthen, and partly in that of Pembroke, by whom he had one son Gerwyn, and three daughters, Mwynwen, Gwennan, and Gwenlliw. He is considered to have been the founder of the churches of Llanfrynnach, Brecknockshire, Llanfrynnach, alias Penlin, Glamorganshire, and Llanfernach, Dinas, and Nevern in Pembrokeshire, as they are dedicated to him. It may also be inferred from the analogy of similar cases, that the churches of Henry's Moat and Pontfaen, in the neighbourhood of the latter three, which Ecton ascribes to St. Bernard, should be also ascribed to St. Brynach, whose parishes would thus form a continuous endowment, which was afterwards disturbed. He was commemorated in the Church on the seventh of the Ides of April, being the day of his decease.—*Professor Rees's Essay on the Welsh Saints*, p. 150, 156.

the fame of reputation, or the delights of riches, or be included by the laws of patrimonial inheritance. What then, not considering the country of his nativity to be his own, he was desirous, by removing from it, to acquire one for himself, by travelling to obtain another country. According to the saying of Christ, and following his example, he expected that by relinquishing all things, all things would be given to him; he departed, he proceeded travelling, and came to the sea, he went on board a ship, and sailed in a prosperous course, God so disposing it, and having travelled through divers countries, sowing the seeds of the words of Christ, went to Rome. There, with anxious desire, he administered to some persons the doctrines of God, as soon as he was able.

At that time, a pestilential beast raged in the country about Rome, which either tore with its bloody jaws all such persons as it saw, or inflicted death on them by its poisonous breath. It likewise tore in pieces the bodies of a great many brute animals to satisfy its fury; and its inbred rage could not by any means be appeased. It caused such fear to the inhabitants, that he accounted himself very fortunate, who, by leaving his habitation, and the neighbourhood, was able to escape from this dreadful evil. But the holy man, being desirous to relieve the distress of the district, which the multitude of the inhabitants were not able to do, by the sole use of prayer, he prostrated to the earth, and killed the deadly beast. For which, and also other goodly acts, all persons admired the holy man, and continually extolled him with magnificent praises. But the man of God observing that he was become more publicly known than had been usual; and preferring to please God in secret, to whom the secrets of the heart are known, than to obtain favour from the people, who are accustomed to esteem only outward things, and seeing that so long as he remained at Rome, he would become more publicly known, he accordingly left it privately, as if he had prepared for himself a place of residence.

Then performing a long journey, and wherever he came, giving an example of goodness to be imitated by all, and travelling towards the western parts of the world, he came to Lesser Britain; where he remained for many years, and performed important beneficial acts, and great miracles. Sick persons flocked to him for the recovery of the health of their bodies; and those in health went to him that they might receive salutary instructions of heavenly doctrine for the cure of their souls. Britain was congratulated on account of such a man, by whom health was gratuitously given; the holy man who was able to perform such things by the grace of God, for the poor, was congratulated; but he grieved, and was troubled because flying fame ceased not to make him publicly known. Avoiding that alone as an implacable monster, he privately and alone came to the sea; and not finding a ship, he aptly placed a piece of rock on the face of the water, faithfully recollecting that he, who in the desert produced water from a rock, was able to make that rock swim upon the water. The holy man of God being full of faith, committing himself altogether to God, whose way is in the sea, and whose paths are in the deep waters, went on the rock, because he was founded on a firm rock, that is Christ. Because the most high God who governs all things, holds the earth in the palm of his hand, and weighs the mountains, hardened the sea by his power, and having smoothed the surface of the ocean, carried his saint the length of the British sea, and brought him to the port of Milford, in the region of Demetia, on the banks of the river Cleddyf.¹

When he had remained there some time serving his God, the ancient enemy of mankind, always forming new contrivances of mischief, and continually prepared to attack the purity of chastity, vehemently incited the daughter of the nobleman who gave the land to the holy man, to be in

¹ Cleddau, the name of the Rivers which flow into the sea at Milford Haven, from whence the town of Milford is called in Welsh, Aberdaugleddau, signifying the confluence of two rivers of the name of Cleddau.

love with him. She therefore, as almost every woman who is invincibly prepared by the devil, and has his ancient armour, and is an ample vessel of malignity, and every crime, endeavoured by every means to inthrall the servant of God with her snares of alluring pleasure ; and from the performance of better things, she endeavoured to allure him to her luxurious habits, she mixed wolfsbane with lustful ingredients formally prepared, she ceased not to get it for him to drink ; but she prepared the mixture in vain ; the holy servant of God did not thirst for such a cup ; but refused it, and as the apostle advised, he avoided the assaults of fornication. For in this conflict, he better fights, who gives way than he who resists ; he conquers bravely who bravely flees. The girl, however, setting aside feminine modesty, because she could not dispose the firm mind of the holy man to sinful love, turned her love into hatred towards him, and was desirous to separate his holy body from his soul. A woman indeed, in rejected love, contrives every evil, and on him, whom a little before she had loved, so far as the dividing of the soul from the body, now being inflamed with hatred towards him, she endeavoured to inflict every kind of death.

Because as Seneca, the eminent describer of morals, saith, a woman either hates, or loves, there is no medium ; she therefore sent some cruel fellows to pursue the holy man, and fiercely ordered that if they could not bring him back living, they should not suffer him to depart alive. The wicked men hasten, and proceed blindly to their wicked work ; they find him whom they pursued, and first of all allure him with fair words to return ; but because he refused to come back with them, one of them stabbed the innocent man, inflicting a dreadful wound with a lance, and the others rushed forward desirous to kill him, but by the direction of God, some persons who were present assisted and hastened to take the holy man from the hands of the villains. But he who inflicted the wound, being struck by the vengeance of God, had his whole body attacked by winged insects ;

afterwards he was a long time afflicted with illness, and want, and at length finished his wretched life with a miserable death. The holy servant of God went to a fountain which was near, and getting into the water, washed off the blood; whence unto this day, the fountain is called the Red Fountain; where also in honour of the holy man, the merciful God bestows many benefits of health to the diseased, and without delay, through the mediation of the Lord, they receive the healing of their wounds.

Saint Brynach proceeding further, came to a place by the river Gueun,¹ which now is called the Stone Bridge; where fixing his residence, he liberated the place from unclean spirits, which they, wandering every night, and filling it with dreadful outeries and horrid howlings, had to that day rendered uninhabitable. But because Divine Providence had designed that he should not inhabit that spot any longer, he proceeded further, and came to a certain place on the river Never,² which is called the Grove of an Ancient Church. And as that place appeared appropriate for men who lived religiously, he and his associates girded themselves, and taking hatchets, and other tools, for three whole days cut down trees; and what they cut, and in part carried off, they conveyed to the place where they wished the buildings to be erected. Rising to their work on the fourth day, and searching, they could not see any of those things, which they had prepared the preceding three days; all of which seemed to have been absorbed by the earth, nor could even any trace of them be found: to those who were amazed on beholding this, St. Brynach said, “We should not be astonished at the wonderful works of God, although they appear marvellous, since he who performs them is declared Almighty; let us therefore humble ourselves under the powerful hand of God, let us fast, let us

¹ Gwain, the name of the river at Fishguard, Pembrokeshire, from whence the Welsh name of the town of Abergwain.

² An abbreviation of Nan' Hyver; Hyver being the name of the river that flows through the valley of Nevern, Pembrokeshire, and gives its name to the parish.

watch, and pray that the explainer of all things should shew us what these things forebode." Which was accordingly done.

Therefore on the next night, an angel of the Lord appeared to Brynach as he lay down in prayer, and said "This spot is not to be the place for my habitation, but go on the banks of the river, as far as the rivulet of the holy men, which falls into the river, and proceed by that river and hill until thou seest a white wild sow with young pigs, and there fix for thyself a permanent station. The holy man being cheered by the discourse of the angel, proceeded therefore, and found the promised sow and young pigs in the place, where in his name a church has been built, and is now used, on the banks of the Caman, which was heretofore a deep torrent, and was so called, not on account of its depth, but from the concavity of the vallies. From thence he rendered devout thanks to God, because he had by his angel deigned to shew him the place, where without change, he wished that the service which was required, might be performed by him. A fire was lighted, and he and his companions passed almost all the night without sleep in prayers.

There was at that time a certain lord of the district named Clechre, a just man, and one that feared God, who gave orders in those days; and was named the Old Man. This man rising in a morning, and seeing the smoke from the fire, which the man of God had lighted in the deep valley, rising, spreading abroad, and covering the neighbouring parts of the earth, and being excited by the Spirit of God, called together the twenty sons which he had, and said unto them, "My sons, ye have heard with your ears that the man is arrived, who we know has been for a long time promised to us, the fame of whose goodness is spread abroad upon the face of the earth, and is celebrated in the highest places; and as ye see his smoke spreading abroad, so will the power of his preaching spread, and much wider; let us therefore go, and fall down before his face, and become subject to him, because we ought not by any means contradict or re-

sist the divine will." Going therefore unanimously, they came to the man of God, and placing themselves at his knees, prayed that he would have mercy upon them. Saint Brynach, whose manner of speaking was pleasing, blessed them, and with a modest voice enquired what they wanted. The old man answered, and said, "Sir, I have been for a long time master of this district, but because I know that this place is designed for thee by the providence of God, I submit to the will of God, I also submit to thee, but I commend these my sons to thee, that under the protection of thy paternity, they may adhere to our God." He received them thankfully, and had them regularly instructed in literature, and they were faithful companions in his labours. And the old man taking leave, and saluting all, departed to the country of Cornwall, where serving God, he gave up his happy soul to the Lord.

And Saint Brynach being a faithful performer of divine service, studied to cut off the superfluities of corporeal affection, so much did he desire to live agreeably to the divine will; he wasted his body by continual fastings, he diminished the insolence of the flesh by frequent watchings, he restrained the luxury of clothing by cold treatment, dipping it daily in the coldest water; what he could withdraw from his mouth, from his hand, and from his whole body, he converted to the use of the poor, and what he could acquire he received to relieve their poverty; he was always engaged in prayers, except when he refreshed his body either with food or sleep. Thus he led a life so pleasing to God, that as he deserved, he enjoyed frequently the sight and discourse of angels; and the mountain on which they met, at the foot of which a church was built, was called The Mountain of Angels.¹

The Lord enabled him to act so miraculously in the sight of the people that at his command, wild beasts set aside their brutal habits, and were rendered tame. Therefore

¹ This mountain is supposed to be the same as that at present called Carn Ingli, a corruption of the name Carn Engylion, which overhangs Nevern, the principal church of the district.—Fenton's Pembrokeshire, page 543.

whenever he removed from one place of residence to another, he called from the flock any two stags he wished to have, to draw the carriage, in which his furniture was placed to be taken off; and when loosed from the yoke, they returned to their accustomed pasture. Also a cow which he had selected from the rest, as well for the size of her body, for she was larger than the others, as for the large quantity of her milk, was committed by him to the custody of a wolf; which after the manner of a well-trained shepherd, drove the cow every morning to its pasture, and in the evening brought it safe home. It happened however at that time that Maelgon king of Wales, travelled not far from the habitation of the holy man, and sent to him, ordering that a supper should be provided for him. But the holy man being desirous that he and his associates, and also his local property should be free from all tribute, asserted that he did not owe a supper to the king, nor would he in any way obey his unjust command. The persons who were sent, returned to their master, and told him that the man, to whom they had been dispatched, would not provide a supper for him. The king as he was easily moved from tranquillity of mind, was also a drunkard, and known to be more ready to injure than to relieve, and paying no regard to piety, sanctity, or modesty, sent his messengers to fetch away the cow of the holy man, and thereby provide food for him. Doubtless he would not have spared the others, but they were in distant pastures, and he fiercely said that on the morrow he would deprive the holy man of his territory, and would totally destroy the place to the ground. The servants of iniquity ran, and quickly brought the cow; they prepare their prey for future meals, take off the hide from the ribs, make bare the entrails, part them cut into pieces, and place them in a kettle on the fire, they apply fuel, and on all sides with inflated cheeks hasten to blow it. The wolf which kept the cow, in the mean time ran to its master, and sorrowful and groaning, lay prostrate on the ground, as if asking pardon. Some one was present, who mentioned that the cow

had been taken away by the servants of the king, and had been cut into pieces in order to be cooked.

But the holy man, laying his complaint before God, committed his whole case to be avenged by divine judgment. The king and his attendants were distressed with hunger, but as yet there was not any hope for refreshment, for the water in which the flesh had been placed to be cooked, remained cold, the same as it was when it was put in, nor with a very large fire was it more moved to boiling than if the fire had been taken away, and a large quantity of ice placed in its room. The king, and his attendants perceived the power of God, and that the holy man was dear to him, for they had heard what he had done, and were seized with great fear; the king, being humbled, immediately laid aside his royal haughtiness, and all equally proceeding with contrite hearts, came to the holy man; and having fallen at his feet to the ground; the king being an advocate for himself and attendants, confessed that they had sinned against him, and promising that they would not again do such things, requested with humble prayer, and sincere devotion, that he would have pity, and pray to the Almighty in behalf of him, and his attendants. And Saint Brynach, free from all bitterness, prayed to the Lord, and laying hold of the right hand of the king, raised him up, and had confidence of his having the hoped for piety towards the Most High. And in the sight of them all he restored the cow to her former state, and again committed her to the custody of the wolf.

After these things, in order that he might preserve the king safe from what might follow, asked him to pass the night with him, and what he had a short time before firmly refused, he now gratuitously offered with liberal charity, and a beneficent mind. The king gave thanks, and remained; but what was to be done, for he had little or no provisions to place before them as they sat down, but to hope in God, as he had done, who sent food to the hungry children of Israel in abundance, and rained manna upon them for their sustenance. He went therefore to an oak, which was near.

and plucked off, hanging by the leaves, as many wheaten loaves as were wanted; wherefore it was called the Bread Oak, whilst it remained. He also went to the brook Caman, for it ran near, where for water, he drew wine plentifully, and from the same brook for the stones he extracted a sufficiency of fishes. He came to the king, and his attendants, and caused them to sit down, and placed plenty of food before them; they partook, and were sufficiently filled, nor were they disappointed with respect to what they wished. After supper, the hour calling for it, they lay down, went to sleep, and all of them slept soundly until the morning.

The king rising in the morning, awaked his attendants, and according to the law of hospitality, gave thanks to Saint Brynach, and said, "Because I have received thy gratuitous beneficence, I will not disdain to bestow gratuitously my munificence upon thee. In the name of God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, I will exempt thee for ever from all regal tribute, and the place of thy residence, and all the territory belonging to that place, and also all that reside therein, and moreover I assign to thy jurisdiction the land of the monk Telych; and whosoever therefore shall for the future, cause anything to come against this my donation, may he quickly incur the curse of God, and of all the faithful of Christ." The saint of God gratefully receiving the king's gift, gave thanks, and blessed him and his attendants with a devout mind. Afterwards consoling each other, they parted. How many, and what great miracles were performed by the holy man while he remained in the body, would be difficult for any one to relate. At length it pleased the Most High to take his saint from this uncertain, and unstable habitation, and to place him happily among his saints, and chosen persons in heavenly glory. And he passed from this world on the seventh day of April, and his body lies interred under the eastern wall of his church. Brynach the saint of God is congratulated in heaven, and great miracles are frequently performed upon the earth, through means of our Lord Jesus Christ.