

V.

Life of Saint Tathan.¹

HERE BEGINNETH THE LIFE OF TATHAN, CONFESSOR. ii KAL. JANUARY.

A certain king of Ireland, the most noble of the kings of that island and descended from a royal line, who was named Tathetus, had an only son, named Tathan,² who was adorned with legitimate morals, and from his infancy was immaculate pure and conspicuous from allurements, as the metal of gold. Remaining in this virgin purity, and no one observing in him what was improper, he prayed with diligence, being inspired with divine love and heavenly desire. Therefore his parents, when they saw the boy despising secular things, and proceeding to heavenly ones, were desirous to give up to God him whom he had chosen, because the boy endeavoured to ascend to the place, from whence he at first came. The matter soon proceeded to that effect; the child was committed to the study of letters, and was instructed as his genius expanded; whatever he heard from

¹ From the Cott. MSS. in the British Museum. Vespasian, A. XIV.

² Tathan, in Latin Tatheus, a son of Ammwn Ddu, and Anne, was a member of the college of Iltyd, after which he settled in Glamorganshire, where he founded a church, since called Llandathan, or Saint Athan's. From whence he was called away to be the first president of a college or monastery at Caerwent, in Monmouthshire, under the patronage of Ynyr Gwent, to whom he became confessor. In his old age he returned to the church he had founded and was there buried.—Professor Rees's Essay on the Welsh Saints. Page 256.

his teachers was not followed by forgetfulness. He studied constantly without dislike, until elementary knowledge shone in him, as fruit proceeding from the best blossoms. The fame of this very celebrated young man fled throughout Ireland, which being heard innumerable youths came to him to hear his learning.

The king in the mean time becoming ill, and he being an only son of that branch of the family, was, by the common advice of the citizens, called to the city, that he might receive from his father the care of the government. But he, a worshipper of God, despising an earthly kingdom, and choosing a heavenly one, would not comply with their advice, nor hold the kingdom unwillingly; and he requested that he might advisedly fulfil the precept of Solomon, which says, "Do every thing with advice, and after advice thou wilt not repent." On the following night, the voice of an angel spoke to him, whilst sleeping, "Be steadfast and take care that thou dost not set aside thy original intention, that thou dost not love a perishable inheritance, and that thou dost not lose an infinite country; whatever thou seest in the world, vanishes away with mourning and peril; for all things are mournful which thou hearest, and dangerous that thou regardest. Regard therefore perpetual things, the being of the right hand, and that thou mayest be placed on the right hand part, how great should be thy vigour inwardly that the secret plotter and enemy might be expelled. Go to morrow without delay to the sea harbour and pass over to Britain, that thou mightest do what is designed for thee, as I command." When he awoke, he recalled the vision to his memory, and with a joyful mind came to the sea coast, eight of his disciples accompanying him. And when they came there, they found a little ship unsupplied with naval instruments, but rejoicing they went together aboard, and without a sail, or an oar, proceeded wherever the blowing of the wind directed them, and with the favour of God prosperously sailed to the British Severn.

At last having gone the length of the sea, they approached Gwent, and landed in a port called with the addition of the name of the country. The eight persons went to the shore, and left the ship without a fastening rope, and were like to the virtues eight in number, with which they were adorned from their earliest age. A certain rich neighbour having prepared himself to bathe on the Sabbath day, as was his custom, saw them coming, weary from their journey and voyage; and seeing them, he would not bathe until the strangers, who were more worthy of bathing, had first bathed. After they had come, and entered, they were honourably received by a domestic, as strangers ought to be received; for he remembered the word of the Lord respecting the Judge, who will come at the last day, and shall say, "I was a stranger, and ye received me." Whilst they rested, one was sent to the harbour that he might fasten the loosed ship with a rope. When he went, and came to the margin of the shore, he saw a stag, after the manner of men, holding the rope with his feet, lest the ship should be overturned and lost. Admiring and greatly astonished, he speedily returned, and related to the master and the others what he had seen with admiration.

These things being related, he returned great thanks to the Creator, who had tamed the fierceness of the wild beast. He loosed the beast on account of his tameness, praising and magnifying the clemency of the great Instigator. The stag tamed and retained by a cord, was brought back, and all persons wondered at his coming. He ordered him to be killed, and to be prepared for the dinner on the morrow, yet no one dared to hurt him, or lay his hand upon him, on account of the miracle which was shown in him. God willing to show a sign for him to be killed, forced the beast to lie down and stretch his neck, which was the more wonderful, that by his stretching they might kill him, and make use of him for their profit whilst he lay, as was manifestly done by the divine clemency,—

Which grants gifts to the poor, who ask for them;
At length he ordered him, as he lay, to be quickly killed;
He extended his neck, he shewed that he was about to die,
He contributed to his death, a wonderful thing done by him;
And the wildness of the holy stag was made mild for food.

This miracle having been publicly performed, the rich man and stranger, with the consent of the king, served Saint Tathan, and also his progeny that would proceed from him in future. Caradoc who was the king of the two Gwents, when he heard of the fame of the very celebrated and venerable man, and the magnificence of his miracles, sent ambassadors requesting him to come to him that he might hear from him evangelical exhortations, and when heard to retain them. But he humbly answered the ambassadors, "Your king if he desires to visit us, may come here, but I will not visit a secular king, nor the large family of a king." When the ambassadors returned and related what they had heard, the king did not become angry, but was more obedient, and visited the honourable doctor with twenty four attendant soldiers, requesting with earnest intreaty, that he would come to the country of Gwent, and there govern the institution for study; because the citizens were pleased with his coming, for he would settle among them a stable mastership. The very learned man was obedient to the royal request, and being desirous to make use of the talent committed to him, went to the next city, and began to govern the college for study, and scholars from all parts flowed to him to be instructed in the knowledge of the seven sciences. There was first given to him by the king, a field in the suburbs to preach in, which was from the public way to the river; and the field being given, he saw by an angelic direction, a most suitable place for divine service, and worthy of clerical habitation, and by the donation of Ynyr, the most noble son of king Caradoc, he founded there a church in honour of the holy and undivided Trinity, in which, with the advice and

permission of the bishop of Llandaff, he constituted twelve canons, who should visit the oratory at their respective appointed hours. And Saint Tathan highly commended the city, and its fruitfulness, saying,—

A city that is good, fruitful, lofty, noble, situated in
Gwent,
Which is my lot, and granted by heavenly favour to its
citizens,
And which constantly affords succour, being careful to
defend you,
And it defends us, and governs those who are to be
defended.

OF A RICH MAN AND HIS SON.

A certain noble and rich man had ten sons, the tenth of whom he resolved to commend to the study of letters and the service of God, that through the means of one son the nine might the better prosper. There was given with him to his teacher, a cow which produced so much milk, that by her means seven pupils with their master had food during the summer and autumnal season. She was daily kept with pastoral care in a meadow in the suburbs; and armed men of the city came to the meadow with forty seven horses, which being loosed, by cutting and trampling it they destroyed the whole. The shepherd observing that those things were mischievously done, went to his master Tathan, and related to him the invasion of the company and horses. The holy man bore it patiently, and was not angry, but rather prayed for the offenders that they might be converted, and become better. The prayer was heard by the supreme Auditor, who has said, "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay," and all the horses that had injured the meadow were found dead. The very wicked soldiers beholding that a suitable revenge had been inflicted for the destruction of the meadow, quickly informed the king of the deadly disease of the horses. The king understanding

this to have taken place on account of the injury they had inflicted, expelled the offenders from the city, punishing them with stripes. And they with their naked feet, their families accompanying them, quickly went to the pious and most chaste priest, and with kneeling and asking pardon, offered and promised to amend, according to his wishes, whatsoever they had done wrong. And the elect servant of God not being desirous to pray that they should be punished, pardoned the offence, although they were guilty, being mindful of the evangelical saying of our Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he should be converted and live." Amendment being promised and completed, the horses, in the sight of all there present, became alive, in a wonderful manner. And they all unanimously glorified God, and praised the most glorious reviver after such a miracle.

This miracle having been seen, the king granted to Saint Tathan, the whole city, and all the territory freely, for an eternal inheritance; and being admonished by an angel, he again besought the heavenly worshipper that when he rode on the morrow, he would show him the place of residence, which would be given to God, and would be a royal and suitable palace for himself. Early in the morning he mounted his horse, and without bridle or halter, he allowed him to go wheresoever God would direct and lead him. Therefore he began his journey from the city, the supreme Governor ruling and directing, and proceeded until he came near to the banks of the Severn. When he arrived there, his horse stood with his feet fixed to the ground, fastened with a golden fetter; although he drove him, he would not go any further. When he saw his horse standing, he said,

Observe the signs of God, the horse stands where is a place for remaining;

So he advises, Thou mayest build, and here be thy royal residence.

Afterwards they made a staff out of the fetter, wherewith sick persons were healed of all manner of diseases. The place of habitation would please king Caradoc, if fountain water there flowed, which he obtained for the inhabitants, with the following sayings,—

A horse pressed the ground with his feet, the dry soil produced water,
And flowing so much in quantity, as from a vein in an arm.

OF A COW THAT WAS TAKEN AWAY.

On a certain night, thieves came from the district of Gwynllyw to Gwent, and stole the aforesaid cow; and taking her to the city killed her, and having cut her up, put the flesh into a pot, but the more it was cooked, so much the more did it become bloody in the pot. On the morrow the venerable servant of God being informed by the shepherd of the cow having been taken away, found a trace of her, near the city, marked in wonderful manner on a stone; then the very holy man said,

This stone which is trodden on, and whiter than salt,
Has fixed thereon marks received from the foot of a cow.

Therefore knowing, with his companions, the way on which the thieves went, he ingeniously traced the footsteps of one cow, and of only one, until he came to the door of the palace. King Gwynllyw, who as yet was wicked, saw the innocent man and his companions coming, and ordered his servants to place a kettle full of hot water, and cover it with bulrushes, and put thereon a linen cloth, to form a deceitful seat. The most just man, as he ordered, was placed by such contrivance over the kettle, which proved a heavenly support. When the deceitful knaves expected that he would fall into the hot water, the seat was solid, as if made of stone. The king, seeing that the lover of God was

guarded by divine protection, fell on his kness, beseeching him to grant his mercy for his very wicked deceit. And he, after the manner of a very religious man, for his part forgave the crime, on the condition that his servants should not repeat their robbery. These words being said, they put the flesh and bones on the skin, and those being so placed, the cow came to life, and rising before them all, returned in company with them.

OF THE WONDERFUL FIRE.

Saint Cadoc in blooming youth, and at the time being without the knowledge of his father, after beholding the remarkable miracle, he obtained his father's leave, and associated with a learned doctor that he might be instructed in the knowledge of the scriptures. On a certain day, when the fire had become extinguished in the master's habitation, the youth Cadoc was sent to procure fire from a neighbouring oven, which belonged to a certain rustic, who was rebellious and inexorable when petitioned. And as he would not give it, unless he carried it in his cloak, he brought it on that condition to his master, and yet the cloak was not injured. And the remaining coals, as long as they continued preserved, cured diseases, were called salubrious, and were esteemed by all the country. This wonderful miracle having been performed, the most eminent doctor Tathan, as he saw that Cadoc was meek and obedient, was desirous that he should remain longer in magisterial obedience; for he saw, and heard that God had by him performed so great miracles. Afterwards he departed unwillingly, and with weeping from his most dear master, being better instructed than any of the disciples, and was introduced into a college. On his return he would not permit his father to live wickedly, whilst he performed penance for every unlawful deed. He admonished him to pray, to watch constantly, to feed the poor, to repeat his fastings, and while he fasted to eat every ninth hour ash-bread, that is bread mixed with ashes, and

to drink water after it. And he being converted, obeyed the admonitions of his son; despising earthly things, he applied himself to heavenly ones.

OF THE MARTYRED MAIDEN.

A maiden named Machuta, kept sheep that had been committed to her care. And whilst she kept them, two thieves, and both of them brothers, often came with a desire to steal a three-year old ram, which was great and very fat, and they could not, as he was with the flock. When they could not take it away without her knowledge, they compelled the maiden to go therewith into the wood; and having killed the stolen ram, they beheaded the innocent maiden, that she might not make known the robbery. Afterwards the flock, that was without a keeper and was dispersed, returned in the evening to the sheepfold, which the meek holy man heard coming without the maiden and the ram. On hearing these things, he grieved, and all sympathized with him on the loss of the most faithful maiden. On the first night, as they watched, praying that God would declare what had become of the maiden, and had doubts on the subject, two brothers who were her murderers, came to the door of his residence, confessing that they had stolen the ram, and what was more wicked, had committed the murder; being struck with compunction, they cried with sorrow, requesting that pardon might be given for their crimes, saying, "We will show the place of the martyrdom, that you may not be in doubt any longer." Having heard these things, he ordered them to go to the priest, and after confession to perform the appointed penance. Early in the morning, he went, the clergy accompanying him, to the place which they had mentioned, and they found the virgin martyred, as they had described. In that place he founded a church, built in honour of the virgin Machuta. He would not allow that the body of the virgin should remain there, but in a place where only it ought

to lie. Therefore it was carried to the city of Gwent, and buried in the floor of the church; may whose soul rest in eternal peace.

The swine-herd Tesychues afterwards became a holy hermit, and complained to Saint Tathan respecting the dryness of the land where he kept his herd of pigs; and the words of his complaint having been heard, and prayer made to the supreme Auditor, a most clear fountain flowed, and continues to flow without defect.

The most blessed Tathan had two tame pigeons, which frequently descended, and played on the table; and he was delighted in seeing them and hearing their noise. When on a certain day they were flying between the refectory and the church, a kite took one away; and the clergy seeing it taken off, mentioned it to the master; hearing this, he grieved, but hoped that through the power of God, it would be still restored to him. On the morrow, as he came to the place of entertainment, the celebration of mass having been performed, the rapacious kite descended, holding the pigeon in its talons, and placed it free and safe before the feet of the most holy doctor. Seeing this, he rejoiced, saying,—

Lo the pigeon now lives that was lately dead,
She flies and plays, her breast being safe from wounds,
I praise the Creator who gives comfort to his servant,
He has given me a bird, he has sent it from the talons
of a kite.

The aforesaid swine-herd came on a certain day to his master, the most pious Tathan, complaining much of the loss of his pigs. After he came, he was asked by his master of what he complained, and what had happened to him; but he answered, greatly fearing lest he should be angry on account of the words which he delivered, “A most cruel she-wolf has visited my herd of pigs in the course of this week, and has taken off the young pigs of one sow; they

are gone away, there is not one alive of them to-day. I followed the footsteps of the rapacious wolf to its den, but was unable to defend them ; so it nourishes its whelps with the flesh of pigs. I grieve, now aid me in my grief." These things having been said, he answered the complaining words of the swine-herd, saying, "Go back, faithful servant, and grieve not any more, for God will moderate the cruelty of the wolf by my prayer that it should not do any injury, as it has hitherto injured." The swine-herd therefore returned to his flock glad, and on the morrow morning, he saw the wolf coming, and holding a whelp in its mouth, and letting it loose, left it a stranger at the door; and being tamed it entered the wood not as a beast. The whelp having been left, through the grant of the divine power, sucked the dugs of the deprived sow as those of its own dam. Being nourished, it grew as a domestic dog not as a wolf, and was a keeper in the woods. Then for the space of three years, neither beast nor thief injured the flock ; and at the end of the third year, it visited the residence of its master, Tathan, as it did usually every day, and for some cause which displeased a servant, he gave a blow to the wolf on its side, and it being offended at the blow, and rolling itself three times, it returned to the wood, and did not through indignation come back again to the flock. And the wolf restored the young pigs to the venerable Tathan. What is more wonderful to be heard of than such a miracle !

The most holy Tathan emitting his breath from his body, the heavenly angels became his associates ; and on the decease of the man, angelical lightning filled the chamber, and was most fragrant to all. The sweet smelling nostrils through means of the mellifluous odour enjoying sweetness, as tasting a honey comb. Then passed the soul without spot, of Tathan, the most blessed confessor, whose daily festival we celebrate with eminent affections. Who will not affectionately solemnize the celebrity of this day ? Who will not honour, will not praise the dignity of honour and sanctity ?

He was the father of all Gwent; the inhabitants called and do yet call him, Father. No one dared to injure any one of his attendants, and if he did injure, he was adjudged as guilty of a crime. He was the defender of a woodland country; his refuge was without violation; he patiently bore all inflictions; being never angry, his mind was sober as a dove; whatever was given to him, he liberally gave to the poor, he gave a denial to no one. There was no one more liberal in the western district in receiving strangers and exercising hospitality; those who were hungry, and were distressed by poverty, and who were thirsty, and suffered from drought, he satisfied from his abundance; expelling cold from the sides of the naked, he administered comforts to those who were punished in prison, and to the widows and the destitute he gave assistance, seeking eternal, not transitory things. Saint Tathan lived a heaven-seeking virgin, following the Lord to heavenly glory. After his decease he was buried in the floor of the church, and his seven associated disciples attended the burial of their master, whom God elected, and directed to the country of eternal glory.¹

¹ Our Achau Saint state that Tathan was an Armorican, the son of Amwn Ddu and Anna, daughter of Meuric ap Tewdric. In the *Liber Landavensis* he is said to have been an Irishman; both mention that he was brother of Samson, Bishop of Dole. According to this legend, he was an only son of Tathalius, an Irish king. His name is certainly Irish, and equivalent to David, and the writer of this legend seems to have mistaken the parentage, by confounding him with another of the same name in the Irish lists.

The memory of Saint Tathan is preserved in the name of the church now generally called Llanvaches, but in the records it is named Llandathan, alias Llanvaches, near Caerwent. It has the latter name from Maches, a virgin and martyr, who was probably the same person as the Machuta of this legend, but the story of her death is differently related.—W.