

M. le chanoine Perennès,
"Cornish Saints" series, No. 28.

*Form of inspection
de l'auteur. G.H. Doble
Michaelmas 1932*

SAINT DECUMAN

PATRON OF WATCHET (SOMERSET) AND OF
RHOSCROWTHER (PEMBROKE)

BY

The Revd. GILBERT H. DOBLE, M.A.

(Honorary Canon of Truro Cathedral, Vicar of Wendron and
Examining Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of Truro).

AUTHOR OF:—

"S. Mawes," "S. Euny," "S. Budoc," "S. Winwaloe," "S. Corentin,"
"S. Melaine," "S. Carantoc," "S. Gwinear," "S. German," "SS. Mewan
and Austol," "S. Feock," "S. Petrock," "SS. Docco and Kew," "S.
Melor," "S. Nonna," "S. Brioc," "SS. Sithney and Elwin," "S. Senan,"
"S. Tudy," "S. Clether," "Four Saints of the Fal," "S. Neot," "S.
Selevan," "S. Cuby," "SS. Nectan and Keyne and the Children of Brychan
in Cornwall," "S. Constantine and S. Merryn," "S. Symphorian,"
"S. Perran, S. Keverne, and S. Kerrian," "A John Wesley of Armorican
Cornwall," "Two Cornish Parishes in the 18th Century," "Breage in the
18th Century," &c.

(Reprinted from "A History of Watchet Church," by F. C. EELES,
1932.

WILLITON AND MINEHEAD:
COX, SONS, CO., LTD., PRINTERS
1932

ff
249.
6
DEC

38226

FB

249.

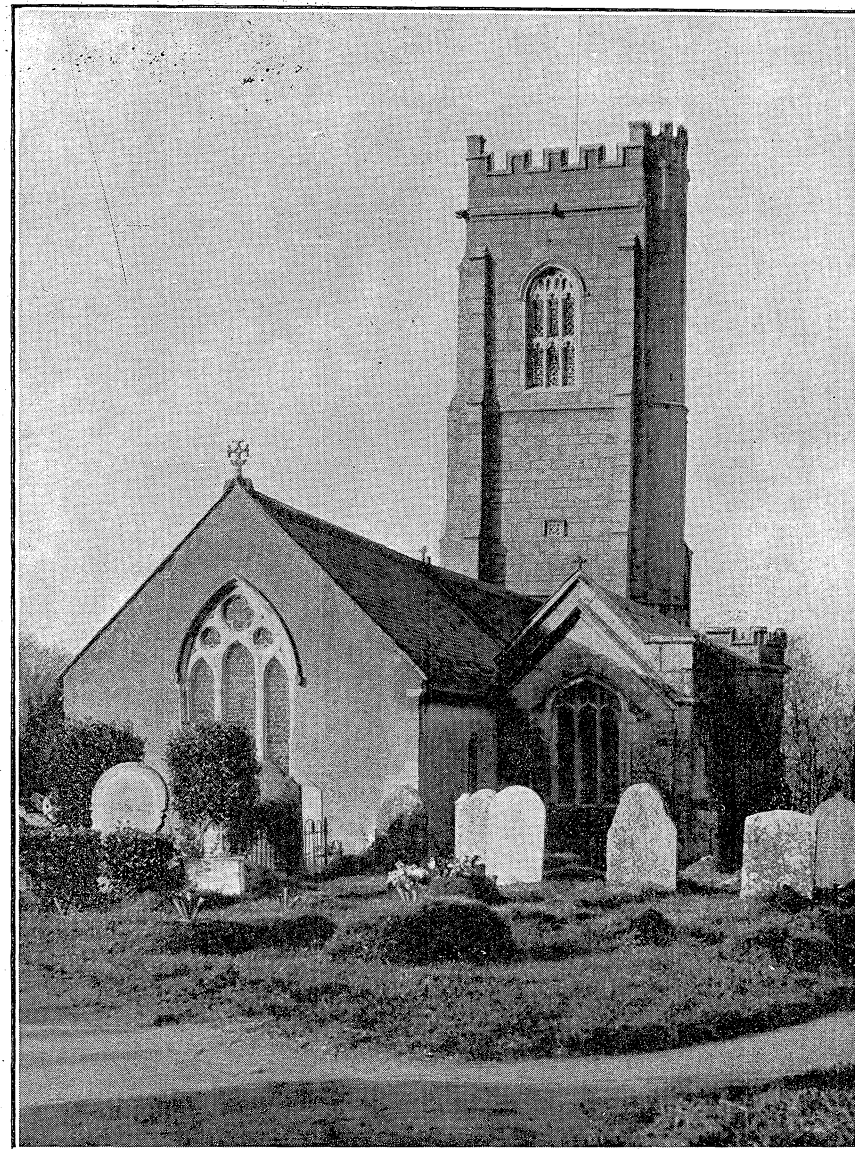
6

DEC



Église catholique
en Finistère

Document numérisé en 2021



St. Decuman's, from north-east, showing late 13th century chancel and late 15th century north aisle and tower.

Saint Decumanus,

THE PATRON SAINT OF WATCHET.

ONE of the most interesting clues to the early history of the West of England may be found in the long line of Celtic dedications which stretches across the north of Somerset. Beginning with Culbone, where the patron saint is the famous Irish missionary S. Columbanus, in the west, we come at once to Porlock, where the church is dedicated to the Welsh saint Dubricius. South-east of Porlock is Timberscombe, dedicated to S. Petrock, the chief saint of Devon and Cornwall. A little further east is Carhampton, the site of a once famous monastery founded by S. Carantoc, a Cardigan monk who also built churches at Crantock in Cornwall, and at Carantec and Tregarantec in Brittany. Next to Carhampton is Watchet, where S. Decumanus is honoured. Not far away is Wick, where there is a holy well of S. Sidwell, the patron of a parish in the Celtic half of Exeter, while at Over Stowey is S. David's holy well. Further east we find the Cornish S. Kew at Kewstoke, and S. Cungar at Congressbury and Badgworth. Near Glastonbury S. Gildas is the patron of the parish of Street, which once contained a place called Lan-to-kai (=the Monastery of Kea). S. Patern is said to have been the original patron of Nailsea, and S. Bridget of

Chelvey. ⁽¹⁾ The progress of historical research will probably add to this list of Celtic dedications. They present a series of problems the solution of which would help us to know what was happening in Somerset in the two hundred years which preceded its conquest by the West-Saxons. ⁽²⁾

Two of these Celtic saints, S. Decuman and S. Cungar, have ancient Latin *Lives* written in Somerset. I will give a translation of the Life of S. Decuman, printed in the *Nova Legenda Anglie* by Wynkyn de Worde in 1516. ⁽³⁾

[A 17th century manuscript in the Library at Wells (the date seems to be about 1680), printed by Prebendary Reynolds in *Wells Cathedral: its foundation, constitutional history, and statutes* (p.clxviii), contains an abbreviated version of this *Vita*, in the original Latin, word for word the

(1) On Brandan Hill in Bristol once stood a chapel of the great Irish saint Brandan. The church of Brendon, in Devon, close to Oare and Culbone, is also dedicated to him. There is a parish called *Withiel* Florey, not far from Watchet, which suggests the Withiel in Cornwall. It is "possibly a personal name." (C. Henderson in "Cornish Church Guide.") Bristol itself may mean *St. Bride's Stow*. There was also an altar of S. David in Wells Cathedral. (Bishop Cornish in 1513 desired to be buried between the altars of Holy Cross and S. David). There was a "store of S. David" at Winsford in 1532 ("in stauro S. David viiid" is in a will dated 12th March that year). There was an altar of S. Nectanus in Cheddar Church in 1493, as Thomas More desired to be buried before his altar. There was also at Cheddar a chapel of another Celtic saint, S. Columbanus, distinct from the parish church. (I am indebted to Mr. M. H. N. Cuthbert Atchley for these interesting facts).

(2) The following Celtic saints are found in Somerset calendars, and, therefore preserved their cult throughout the Middle Ages:—SS. Carantock (see *S. Carantock in Somerset*, by the Dean of Wells, p.2) Petroc, Decuman, Brigid, Samson, Columbanus, Congar, David, Nonita, Nectan, Judoc, and Machutus. S. Nonita was honoured at Wells on 3 March. This saint has been identified (perhaps wrongly) with Nonna, the supposed mother of S. David. (The influence of Continental calendars probably introduced the cult of S. Judoc and S. Machutus).

(3) ed. Horstman, Oxford, 1901, vol. I. pp. 263-5.

same as that printed in *Nova Legenda Anglie*, except that large excisions have been made. The transcriber introduces it with the words, "Before I leave this Chapter I shall give the Reader what I have mett with in an old Legend of St. Decuman, which gives the name to a little village, neere Watchet, on the North Sea, in the West of this Countie of Somersett and consequently to a praebend of this Church:—

De Sancto Decumano Heremita et
Martyre. Beatus Decumanus," &c.]

OF SAINT DECUMANUS HERMIT AND MARTYR.

The Blessed Decumanus sprang from illustrious stock in the western parts of Cambria, which is now called Wales [*Wallia*], from parents who were conspicuous for their devotion to the Christian Religion. For that nation [i.e., the Welsh] laid aside their barbarian savagery and forsook the error of the Gentiles, was initiated by life-giving sacraments and speedily submitted to Christ, and was illuminated by the doctrines of the Gospel, before Greater Britain, which now is England [became Christian]. And therein many did shine forth glorious in faith, eminent in virtue, glittering with miracles. Among whom did Decumanus, chastely brought up, instructed in the Catholic Faith, appear like the daystar among lesser stars, possessing a reputation for perfect integrity. After he had passed childhood's years at home, still preserving his innocence he grew to be a young man of excellent disposition, and never let his imagination wander abroad [into what is unlawful], as many do, but most carefully restrained himself by keeping the rules of discipline. Indeed precepts quickly have their due effect where grace affords its help and obedience lightens [the observance of] commands. For he was pure in speech, letting no wanton word, and no idle word, if he could help it, pass his lips, but only that which was calculated to edify others. In eating and drinking he kept the due mean of true temperance, lest by excess of abstinence he might be accused of superstition, or by eating too much might suffer

gluttony to weigh down [his soul]. And while the other young men of the same age as the Blessed Decumanus were devoted to the various delights of the chase, or occupied with other pursuits and occupations, he, spurning every carnal delight, compelled his flesh to serve the spirit, and studiously frequented churches, and what he heard [there] from the divine scriptures he did with great ardour commit to memory. Without encumbering himself with too much learning, he had given himself up entirely to the pursuit of holiness, and, so far as he was able without incurring the ridicule of the courtiers, he had devoted himself to contemplation. For works teach better than words of learning, holiness understands [the truth] better than disputation, and he who loves most knows most. In truth Saint Decumanus, prevented by the ardour of the Holy Ghost, was already revolving in his mind the high designs to which afterwards he gave effect. And, indeed, he would have fulfilled his pious desires even then, but he was waiting for the tumult of the multitude and the wantonness of his fellow-tribesmen, whom he thoroughly detested, to cease. For "no prophet is accepted in his own country" ⁽¹⁾, and "a man's foes shall be they of his own household" ⁽²⁾. So, for fear of being a stumbling-block [to the thoughtless], he refrained, and committing himself wholly to God alone, postponed for a time the fulfilment of his pious purpose. At length, observing the time, and finding an opportunity for a secret flight, he made his way to the Severn Sea, without the knowledge of any of his friends, taking special care to keep in ignorance his constant companions and those who seemed most closely bound to him by ties of a common zeal for study, taking Christ only as his confidant and guide. Why need I say more? He had neither ship to sail in nor money to pay his passage, and it was necessary to provide against his being pursued. The man of God, trusting in the mercy of God and not doubting of His power [to help him], gathered together into a faggot the twigs he found growing in a thicket by the sea, and using them as a support, launched out into the deep. And so, by the governance of the Divine Providence, he arrived at the opposite shore near Dunster Castle ⁽³⁾. These are thy works, O Christ, who dost thus deal wondrously with thy saints. Truly "Thy ways are in the sea and thy paths in many waters" ⁽¹⁾. At the time when Saint Decumanus, divinely guided, came into England,

(1) Luke 4 : 24. (2) Matt. 10 : 36. (3) *castrum Durostorum*.

(4) Ps. 77 : 19.

there was in that part of the country in which he landed a vast solitude, suitable for the abode of a hermit ⁽¹⁾ covered with thickets and thorn bushes, with dense woods stretching far and wide, lofty mountains, and hollow valleys between them. This site pleased him, it seemed fitted for his pious purpose, so that in very truth he seemed to say, "This shall be my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have chosen it" ⁽²⁾. So then the holy man, having exchanged his native land for exile, and the luxury of a palace for the caves of the desert, began to abide there, living on herbs and roots, and devoting himself to frequent fasts and prayers, taming his flesh with a hair shirt and afflicting his body with vigils : and in proportion as he consorted rarely with men was he frequently comforted and inspired by the conversation of angels ⁽³⁾. Thus leading the life of a hermit he had lived many years in the aforesaid solitude. He is reported also to have had a cow whose milk supplied him with frugal sustenance, as bodily necessity required, at least on the chief festivals, as it is read of the Blessed Giles that he had a hind which provided him with milk. Nor did the saint lack fierce and unexpected persecution. For "all they that will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution" ⁽⁴⁾ : for this life did Christ leave to his fellow-heirs, as it is read in the Gospel, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" ⁽⁵⁾. And the Apostle, too, says, "we must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God" ⁽⁶⁾. For as the furnace to gold, and the file to iron, and the flail to grain, so is tribulation to the righteous man. When therefore Saint Decumanus had worked many signs and miracles, which by the negligence of chroniclers have been almost entirely forgotten in our country—otherwise by the gift of God they would have been preserved for our edification : a certain man, a man of Belial, more venomous than the asp, more poisonous than the adder, envying this great father's sanctity, hating virtue and raging with furious mind in detestation of the Christian name, approached like a wild beast and cut off the head of the Saint of the Lord amid his prayers and holy devotions, and so sent him to the heavenly kingdom. By such martyrdom therefore did he go hence to the Lord, after so many and so great penances which he had inflicted on his body, that he might the more evidently show by his example that

(1) *vasta heremi solitudo*. (2) Ps. 132 : 15. (3) cf. Imit. Lib. I. c. XX. 6. (4) 2 Tim. 3 : 12. (5) John 15 : 20. (6) Acts 14 : 22.

[the way to heaven] is not a passage from [earthly] delights to [heavenly] delights, but they who wish to live according to the Gospel—the whole of their life must be a cross and a martyrdom ⁽¹⁾. For he is too delicate a soldier who wishes to rejoice here with the world and hereafter to reign with Christ ⁽²⁾. But this also is not to be passed over in silence—that when he was beheaded with a certain *vanga*, the trunk of the mutilated body, they say, raised itself and took its own head in its hands and carried it from the place where he was beheaded to a fountain of most limpid water, in which he was accustomed to wash his face with his hands. Which to this day in memory and reverence of him is called the "Fountain of Saint Decumanus," and is sweet, healthful, and necessary to the inhabitants for drinking purposes ⁽³⁾. In which place the head, together with the body, were afterwards sought for and found by the faithful, and honourably placed in a tomb. [Thus] ancient miracles are renewed, and the signs which the Lord deigned to work by the merits of the most blessed Dionysius of the Gauls once more take place ⁽⁴⁾. to the praise and glory of His most holy Name, Who liveth and reigneth through immortal ages of ages. *Amen*.

In dealing with ancient Latin *Lives* of saints, it is necessary first to try to answer the question. Where and when was the *Life* written?

(1) *tota vita sua fiat crux et martyrium*. A quotation from the *Imitatio Christi*, Lib. II. C.XII. 7.—"Tota vita Christi crux fuit et martyrium." (2) *Hic gaudere cum mundo et in futurum regnare cum Christo*. A quotation from the *Imitatio*, Lib. I. c.XXIV. 6.—"Ecce vere non potes duo gaudia habere, delectari hic in mundo, et postea regnare cum Christo."

(3) St. Decuman's well is on the hill side, within a stone's throw of the parish church of St. Decuman's. Dom Ethelbert Horne says that there is a Holy Well of St. Decuman at Williton, a mile or two south of Watchet. It "is in a field at the west end of the church, and the water comes out between great stones set on end, having a third forming a roof on the top of them. As the water runs down the sharply sloping field it flows into a number of stone basins, one below the other. The water is still sought after by the inhabitants, or was when I saw this curious spring in September, 1914." (*Holy Wells of Somerset*, p.50). But Dom Horne has made a slip here. The holy well is at St. Decuman's, *not* at Williton.

(4) St. Denys, first Bishop of Paris, is said to have carried his head, after his execution, to the site of the present Abbey of St. Denys.

It is perfectly clear that this *Life* of S. Decumanus is a Somerset composition. The writer mentions Dunster Castle, and he is familiar with the local traditions of Watchet and Williton. He might be a monk of Dunster, where there was a small monastery, a cell of the great Benedictine Abbey of Bath. As, however, the name of S. Decumanus is not found in the Calendar of Dunster there cannot have been any cult of him in the priory there, and it is more likely that the author of his *Life* was either a monk of Muchelney Abbey, or a canon of Wells Cathedral ⁽¹⁾—probably the latter, as the church of S. Decuman at Watchet was given as a prebend to Wells by Simon Brito at the end of the twelfth century. Our author is a devout student, very fond of the Legends of the Saints, and of the *Imitation of Christ*—from which he culls two direct quotations (another passage contains a clear reference to the *Imitation*, though it is not a verbal citation). Other pious reflexions with which he fills up the gaps in the very meagre stock of traditions at his disposal might be traced to similar sources; he may have copied them from a mediaeval "commonplace book." The fact that he quotes from the *Imitation*, of which the earliest known copy dates from 1425, shows that he lived in the 15th century (perhaps even in the beginning of the 16th century). His

(1) The name of S. Decumanus is found on 30th August in the Colour-list of Wells and Calendar of Muchelney, and a collect for his feast is found on a leaf torn from a 15th century Wells breviary. See *Muchelney Memoranda*, by the Dean of Wells, pp. 7, 16, 42. It is to be noted that the F. of S. Decumanus was a *principal feast* at Muchelney, as were the feasts of S. Giles and S. Denys, who are both referred to in this *Life*.

Life of S. Decuman is, in fact, one of the latest additions to the *Nova Legenda Anglie*.⁽¹⁾

It is possible that our author knew of the existence of a parish in Pembrokeshire dedicated to S. Degeman, as he says that his hero came from "the western parts of Cambria," but all the rest of his description of the Saint's life in his native country he drew from his own imagination. He has very little more to help him when he has brought Decumanus to Somerset. It is clear that the real story of his life had long been forgotten at Watchet—our author himself complains of the scarcity of information concerning him. All he can find is the story of the faggot, the tradition about the holy well, and the story of the Saint's cow. Each of these is a piece of "common form," found in the *Lives* of numerous Cornish saints. S. Ia, for example, crosses the Channel from Ireland on a leaf, S. Piran on a mill-stone, and S. Ilic on a hurdle; cows appear in the *Lives* of S. Cuby and S. Endelienta; and the story of S. Decumanus carrying his head to the holy well after his martyrdom is a repetition of an exactly similar incident in the Legend of S. Nectan.

I fear, then, we must conclude that, beyond the witness which it gives to the vitality of the cult of this Welsh saint at Watchet, the *Life* I have translated does not tell us anything about S.

(1) It belongs to a series of fifteen new *Lives* added to the *Nova Legenda Anglie* by Wynkyn de Worde for his new edition of that work in 1516. Horstman says "of these new lives, those of Cungar and Decuman are late works of the fourteenth century, as is proved by the alliteration." (As a matter of fact, the *Life of S. Decumanus* is later than the 14th century, as I have shown, while the Dean of Wells has discovered a 12th century fragment of the *Life of S. Cungar*.) Baring-Gould and Fisher are therefore in error in saying (*Lives of the British Saints*, II.323) that the *Vita* is by John of Tynemouth, and that it "is an epitome of a Life now lost."

Decumanus⁽¹⁾. But we have another and surer source of information. M. Loth has said that "in these three countries (Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany) it is not the *Lives* of the saints that tell us most about the existence of the saints and the national organisation of Religion, but the *names of places*."

The study of place-names shows us that S. Decumanus, instead of being, as his *Life* asserts, a hermit, whose whole existence was passed in a wilderness, was in reality an active missionary and organiser of Celtic monasteries, whose activities spread over Central and Southern Wales, North Somerset, and West Cornwall.

In Wales we find his name at the chapel of Llanddegyma, in the Parish of Llanvihangel

(1) Camden had obviously seen this *Life*, and quotes from it in his description of Somerset. He says, "Near the castle of Dunster aforesaid, are two small villages, dedicated to two of their Country saints: Carenton is the name of the one, from Carentocus the Britain; the other, St. Decombes, from Decumanus, who setting sail out of South Wales, landed here (as we find in an ancient Agonal) in a horrid desert full of shrubs and briars, the woods thick and close, stretched out a vast way both in length and breadth, strutting up with lofty mountains, severed wonderfully by the hollow vallies. Here, having bid farewell to the vanities of the world, he was stab'd by an Assassin, and so got the reputation of a Saint among the common people." (*Magna Britannia*, Vol. I. col. 69, ed. 1753). In Wilson's Martyrology we find under 27 August "In Anglia S. Decumani eremitae et martyris." He is commemorated on 30 August in a Norwich martyrology of the 15th century (Cotton MS. Julius B.VII;—the words "et sancti decumani martiris" are added at the end of the entry for 30th August); and in the Welsh calendar (apparently written for Llandaff) in Cott. Vesp. A.XIV., 30 August is the feast "Sancti Decumanni conf(essoris)." Nicholas Roscarrock, a West-Country writer of Queen Elizabeth's reign, also gives 30th August as his day. Baring-Gould and Fisher say that the Altemps Martyrology (13th century) commemorates him on 27 August, but they are clearly wrong in saying that his name is in "the Bath Calendar." The calendar to which they refer is really that of the Priory of Dunster, which was a cell of Bath Abbey, and, as we have seen, it does not contain his name. S. Decuman is also mentioned by Wion, Castellanus, and in Alford's *Annales*. No other writer mentions our saint. (See the Bollandist Acta SS., under 27 August).

Cwmdy, in Breconshire.⁽¹⁾ Now we know that from Brecknock went forth numerous missionaries who evangelised Herefordshire to the east and Glamorgan, Carmarthen and Pembroke to the south and west. Consequently we are not surprised to find that S. Degeman is the patron of the parish of Rhoscrowther or Rhos Gylyddwr, otherwise Llanddegyman, in Southern Pembrokeshire.⁽²⁾ He is also said to have been the original patron of the adjoining parish of Pwllcrochan.⁽³⁾

Now Rhoscrowther was once a very important monastery. In the *Laws* of Howel the Good we find that "there are seven bishop-houses (*Esgobdy*) in Dyved; and Mynyw (=St. David's) is the chief in Wales, Llan Ismael (= St. Ishmael's), and Llan Degeman, and Llan Ussylt (St. Issel's), and Llan Teilaw (Llandeilo near Maenclochog), and Llan Teulydawc (Llandeulyddog in Carmarthen) and Llan Geneu. The abbots of Teilaw and Teulydawc and Ismael and Degeman should be ordained scholars. Twelve pounds is the heriot of every one of these, and to the Lord of Dyved it is paid Whosoever shall affront one of those abbots, let him pay seven pounds to him, and let there be a washer-woman from his kindred, as a reproach to the kindred and as a memorial of the vengeance." Mr. Wade-Evans observes "What precisely is meant by *bishop-house* does not appear, but the monastic character of this system is clear."⁽⁴⁾ Abbey-bishoprics are found everywhere in Wales, Ireland, Cornwall, and Brittany before the introduction of the system of diocesan bishoprics.

(1) Wade-Evans, *Parochiale Wallicanum*, p.19. (2) *ib.* p.12. We find, Professor Mawer tells me, the forms Llan Degman, Llan Degeman and Eglwys Degemann. (3) *Arch. Camb.* 1888, p. 127. (4) *Life of St. David*, 94, 5.



Rhoscrowther Church.

The churches of Rhoscrowther and Pwllcrochan are both highly interesting, though they do not seem to contain any work earlier than the Middle Ages. "A short distance to the southwest of the church of Rhoscrowther," Mr. G. E. Evans tells me, "is St. Decuman's well. Any protection or covering to the well has disappeared. On the tithe Schedule it is called St. Agnes' Well."⁽¹⁾ In "South Wales" (*Little Guide* series, by G. W. and J. H. Wade) I read that "at the W. of the church, on the S. side, there is a curious little cell with a piscina and a small opening communicating with the exterior of the building." Can this have been an anker's cell preserving the tradition of a former monastery?

From Rhoscrowther, which must have been his chief foundation, Decumanus evangelised, not

(1) The well was believed to possess healing powers. See Fenton's *Pembrokeshire* (1811), p.400.

only North Somerset ⁽¹⁾, but also the extreme west of Cornwall. A chapel bearing his name existed in the Middle Ages at Degibma (the word = Degamanus), in the parish of Wendron, near the Lizard. In 1397 Simon Body, Vicar of Wendron, obtained a licence from Bishop Stafford, of Exeter, to say mass in the chapel of S. Decuman in his parish once a year, viz., on the feast day of the saint. Degibma is on the Loe pool, which must at this period, before the formation of the Loe bar, have been a tidal estuary—just the place where we should expect to find the chapel of a Celtic saint. Mr. Chas. Henderson, who was the first to identify the chapel of St. Decuman with Degibma, has also discovered that there was another Degibma near Burthogg, in Crowan. He thinks, too, that Decon Downs (*Decam* 1753, *Decum* 1756) might perhaps take its name from our saint, and it is remarkable that at Watchet the name should be written *Decom* in 1418.

It is worthy of notice that touching Rhoscrowther parish, in Pembrokeshire, we find the parish of S. Petrox or Llanbedrog. Now S. Petroc is the chief of the Cornish saints, the patron of Padstow and Bodmin and at least 25 other churches and chapels in Devon and Cornwall, and of Timberscombe (near Watchet, be it observed) in Somerset. It looks as if Decuman and Petroc were associated together. Stanton in his *Menology* (p. 414), probably following the advice of Edmund Bishop, says that "Decuman is also called Decombe and Dagan." Now

(1) A charter of King John on behalf of the Cistercian abbey of Neath speaks of land "inter ecclesiam sancti Decumani et Kanesford" (*Monasticon*, V. 260). (Kanesford is a house a short distance S.W. of St. Decuman's Church). The Calendar of Inquisitiones post mortem in 1274 mentions the church of St. Decuman at Watchet, the Feet of Fines for 1418 calls it *Seynt Decom*. In 1549 it is *Saincte Decomans*.

Leland, quoting from the *De Sepultura Sanctorum Anglorum*, tells us that "Credan, Medan and Dachan [or *Dachuna*], men illustrious by sanctity of life, and imitators of Petrock, were buried at Bosmanach" (=Bodmin)⁽¹⁾. It is interesting to note that a S. Credan, by tradition an early abbot of Evesham, was honoured at Wells (*Muchelney Memoranda*, p. 12).

Thus it looks as if S. Decuman belonged to a group of Brecon saints who founded monasteries in S.W. Wales, from which missions to Somerset and Cornwall were sent out. As Watchet is so near Carhampton, and not far from Timberscombe, while Rhoscrowther immediately adjoins S. Petrox, he may have been associated with the great saints of Cardigan and Pembroke, S. Carantoc, S. Petroc and S. Brioc, who did such an important work in Somerset, Cornwall and Brittany.

The word *decumanus* (a commoner form than *decimanus*) meant in Latin a *farmer of tithes*. *Miles decumanus* meant a *soldier of the tenth cohort*. It is clear that Saint Decumanus must have been a Romanized Briton.

Collect for the Feast of S. Decumanus the Martyr
(from the Wells Breviary of the 15th century).

O GOD, Who art the defence, the strength, and the crown of the innocent, grant unto us that we may both be instructed by the examples of Blessed Decumanus, the Martyr, and aided by his prayers. Through our Lord, &c.⁽²⁾

(1) Williton Church is now dedicated to S. Peter, but the original patron might possibly have been S. Petroc.

(2) *Sancti Decumani martiris. Oratio.*

Deus qui es propugnaculum, fortitudo et corona innocencium, da nobis beati Decumani martiris tui et exemplis instrui et precibus adiuuari. Per dominum.

(Qu. in Article *St. Cungar and St. Decuman*, J. Armitage Robinson, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, xxix., 137, Jan., 1928).

The Cult of St. Decuman in Cornwall.

By CHAS. HENDERSON, M.A.

(Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford).

It is stated in more than one History of Cornwall that the Chapel of St. Euny, at Mertheruny, in Wendron, was also under the patronage of St. Decumanus, but I propose to show that this is an error. On May 28th, 1397, Simon Body, Vicar of Wendron, had license from Bishop Stafford to celebrate mass in the chapel of *St. Decuman*, in his parish, once a year, viz., on the Feast of that Saint. Again, on January 15th, 1420-21, Master William Raffé, Vicar of St. Wendrona, and John Raffé, had license from Bishop Lacy for the chapels of *St. Degaman* and *St. Uneus* (1) in the parish of St. Wendrona. Finally, on August 18th, 1427, Bishop Lacy, while at Helston, gave license to Sir Nicholas Wethen, Vicar of St. Wendrona, for the chapels of *St. Degamannus*, *St. Wendrona of Trelulle* (Trelil) (2), and *St. Henry of Bodyly* (Bodilly), all in his parish.

These extracts from the episcopal Registers make it quite clear that the Chapel of St. Euny and the Chapel of St. Degaman, or Decumanus, were not identical. Where was the latter? The answer to the question is not difficult to find.

On the Eastern shore of Loe Pool is an estate now called *Degibma*, where an ancient chapel is known to have stood. If we compare the early spellings of the name *Degibma* with that of the Chapel of St. Degaman we shall find no difficulty in regarding them as one and the same name.

In 1282, for example, it was found that William de Trevelle held one Cornish acre in *Degemue* (Degibma) and

(1) The editors of Lacy's Reg., Vol. II., p.427, have misread the entry "in the Chapel of St. Degaman and Vuen." (2) The MS. of the Register has been read Tresulle, and it has been assumed that Trussal in Wendron was meant. Trussal, however, was written *Trewrosel* at that period, while Trelil was written *Trelulle*. At Trelil there was a chapel, and the Holy Well near its site remains. It is clear that this was the Chapel of St. Wendrona named in 1427.

Eglosdery (now Eglosderry, 1½ miles from Degibma—another name that points to an early ecclesiastical connection (1), as a free tenant of the Royal Manor of Helston-in-Kirrier by the serjeanty, or service of finding a boat and a net for fishing in the Lake of Helleston (the Loe Pool) whenever the King should come thither and for as long as he should remain there. In a survey of the Manor of Helston, made in 1562, we find Sir William Godolphin, Knight, holding the Cornish acre in *Eglosedery* and paying nothing to the Manor of Helston but the service of finding a boat with nets and *seines* for dragging the *Loo* at the coming of the Lord of the Manor and at the Lord's cost (Captain J. Lionel Rogers, of Penrose, is the present Lord of Helston-in-Kirrier).

In 1317, in an assize of *novel disseisin* relating to land at *Boswen* near *Wyc* (Gweek), one "John of St. Degeman" (*Johannes de Sancto Degemano*) is named. He was clearly the occupier of Degibma. In 1562 we meet with *Degemma*, in 1542 *Degymma*, and in 1647 *Degybmā*. (The intrusive B before M is a usual feature of late West-Cornish dialect—cf. *Pencobben* in Camborne, formerly Pencom; *Tubmas*, the late Cornish form of the name Thomas; *Trecrobben*, for Trencrom, &c.) In the list of subsidy payers in Wendron parish in 1327 we meet with the name of *Pascasius of Dekeuman*.

Thus Degibma is properly *St. Degeman*. The fact that the epithet *Saint* has been dropped need surprise no-one acquainted with Cornish place-names. Wendron, Sithney, Constantine, Gunwalloe, and many more, are examples of the practise. There are not, however, many places in Cornwall, except parish churches, which bear the names of saints by themselves. Degibma is one of the few. Another is Sowanna, near Cury (2), about four miles distant, which appears as *Seynt Sewanna* in 1380, *Saint Sewannowe* in 1582, *Sissewana* in 1500, and is now called *Sevanna*. Here, however, the existence of a *Park-en-Chapel* or Chapel Field, is proof of the former existence of an ancient religious building, of which there are no records whatever.

The estate of Degibma was, perhaps, the endowment of the Chapel in Celtic times, but it had become secular property,

(1) Eglosderry is too far from Degibma for the name to refer to the same religious settlement. It must mark the site of another *Eglos* or Church. (2) Though near Cury Churchtown, it is actually in Gunwalloe parish.

as we have seen, by 1282, being held, with Eglosderry, by free tenants under the great manor of Helston-in-Kirrier. (1) In 1562 *Eglosedery* was held by Sir William Godolphin, and *Degemma* by Francis Godolphin, Esq. In 1647 Francis Godolphin of Godolphin, Esq., sold *Degybma* in *Gwendron* to John Penros of Penros, Esq. It continued to be part of the Penrose estate, and as such passed by sale to the Rogers family.

There is another place called *Degibma* near Burthogg, on the north-western side of Crowan parish. A deed of 1634 in my possession refers to this as *Degibma Down alias Digimba alias Degima Down*. This is about six miles from the *Degibma* on Loe Pool. I cannot learn that any chapel ever stood there.

Tregembo, an old Barton near Relubbus, in St. Hilary parish, was formerly called *Tredigember* 1309, *Tredykember* 1300, *Trethegember* 1445, but this name, although it has a superficial resemblance to *Degibma*, cannot, in reality, bear any relation to it.

On the south side of the town of Padstow, where the main road ascends, is a house called St. Decuman's, which appears to be identical with the tenement of "St. Edmonds," named in the parish map of 1840. It is supposed that *Edmond's* is a corruption of *Decuman's*. It is possible that there was a chapel of St. Decuman here, but there is no historical evidence of it, or, for that matter, of a St. Edmond's Chapel. Padstow, however, was full of chapels and oratories before the Reformation. A deed of 1535 refers to a garden in *Berylond juxta lapidem Withymon* in the town of Padstow. Can this be a corruption of *Decuman*?

(1) The Chapel, however, as the licenses granted in 1397, 1420, and 1427 show, survived until the Reformation, when it shared the fate of other buildings of the same sort and was desecrated, probably by conversion into a dwelling house or outbuilding. There appear to be no remains of it now.



MIRACLES AT ST. MICHAEL'S MOUNT IN CORNWALL IN 1262.

*By the Revd. G. H. Doble, M.A., Vicar of
Wendron, Honorary Canon of Truro Cathedral.*

One of the chief places of pilgrimage in this country, all through the Middle Ages, was St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall. A long line of churches and chapels bordered the road that led through Cornwall to the Mount. Unfortunately we know practically nothing about what happened during these pilgrimages.

I have recently been able to examine and copy out a passage in a manuscript at Avranches, near the French Mont St. Michel (to which the Cornish Mount belonged from the 11th to the 15th century), which gives us a glimpse of the miraculous cures which, no doubt, often occurred during pilgrimages to the Mount, as they now do during pilgrimages to Lourdes.

MS. No. 159 is the most valuable book in the Public Library of Avranches, which contains what remains of the library of the Abbey of Mont St. Michel. It appears to be the original Chronicle which Abbot Robert of Torigni presented to Henry II in 1184, and which he afterwards completed, bringing it down to the time of his death in 1186. The Chronicle is preceded by three pages containing miscellaneous matter written much later, as follows: first, a story of a miraculous flame on Mont St. Michel in 1270; next, a list of books given to the Abbey of Bec by Philip, Bishop of Bayeux, in the time

of Robert of Torigni. Then, on the lower half of the second column of folio 3, which must originally have been left blank, has been squeezed in, by a later hand, the following passage: (1).

"Nulli monasterio sancti michaelis in Cornubia accedenti vertatur in dubium quin quaedam mulier nomine christina (2) de partibus glastonie per sex fere annos oculorum luminibus orbata ad dictum monasterium orationis et peregrinationis causa. cum maxima deuotione accedens ii ydus maii anno domini m cc lx ii ante magnam missam quadam die dominica in conspectu populi in maxima fide perseuerans intercessionem beati archangeli michaelis clausorum recuperavit diuinitus lumen oculorum testibus presentibus quamplurimis religiosis & aliis. Eodem anno iii ydus junii quedam mulier nomine matildis de parrochia lanescli que per duos dies & duas noctes sensum amisit & loquelam a parentibus suis ducta ad illud monasterium die dominica statim cum intrasset ecclesiam precibus celestis milicie principis sensui & loquele fuit restituta. Ego vidi & interfui. erat tunc temporis prior illius loci Radulfus viel. Eodem anno quedam iuencula nomine alicia de partibus de herefort engales nata per septem annos elapsos oculorum luminibus orbata ad dictam ecclesiam orationis et peregrinationis causa cum maxima deuotione accedens iiii kal. Februarii ante solis ortum quadam die lune in maxima fide persuerans precibus beati michaelis archangeli clausorum recuperavit diuinitus lumen oculorum erant tunc temporis socii illius loci

(1) Part of this passage was printed by de Wailly, Delisle and Jourdain, in their *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France* (Paris, Imp. Nat., 1896, in folio tome XXIII, pp. 572, 573.

(2) I had myself read this name, which is much abbreviated, as *Joanna*.

petrus de vallibus eng(elrannus) de baiocis mauricius taboeier quando illa iiii miracula in illa ecclesia acciderunt quartum miraculum de quodam muto est in principio huius libri in vii folio anno domini mclxii xiii kal septembris." (1).

Translation.

"Let no one going to the Monastery of St. Michael in Cornwall doubt that a certain woman, named Christina, of the neighbourhood of Glastonbury, who had been deprived of the sight of her eyes for about six years, coming with the greatest devotion to the said monastery for the sake of prayer and pilgrimage, on 14th May, 1262, before High Mass, on a certain Sunday, in the sight of the people, persevering in the greatest faith, by the intercession of the Blessed Archangel Michael, recovered miraculously (lit. *divinely*) the sight of her closed eyes. There were present as witnesses many monks and others. In the same year, on the 11th June, a certain woman named Matilda, of the parish of Lanescli (Gulval), who for two days and two nights had lost consciousness and the power of speech, being brought by her parents to that monastery, on Sunday, immediately she had entered the church, by the prayers of the Captain of the Heavenly Chivalry, was restored to consciousness and power of speech. I saw it and was present. The Prior of that place then was Ralph Viel. In the same year a certain girl named Alice, of the parts of Hereford, born in Wales, who for seven years past had been deprived of the sight of her eyes, coming with the greatest devotion to the said church for the sake of prayer and pilgrimage on the 29th of January, before the

(1) I have retained the original spelling and punctuation (or rather want of punctuation!) only expanding the abbreviations. The reference to the fourth miracle is omitted by de Wailly, Delisle and Jourdain.

rising of the sun, on a certain Monday, persevering in the greatest faith, by the prayers of the Blessed Archangel Michael recovered miraculously the sight of her closed eyes. The *socii* of that place then were Peter De Vallibus, Engelran of Bayeux, Maurice Taboeier, when those four miracles happened in that church. The fourth miracle, on a certain dumb man, is in the beginning of this book on page 7, in the year of Our Lord 1262, on the 20th August."

This passage is of the greatest interest to students of Cornish history.

The reader will have noticed the constant recurrence of the same form of words. It looks as if a register of cures (from which, perhaps, this entry was copied) was kept at the Mount, and cases of healing entered in it according to a stereotyped formula. We cannot suppose that in the year 1262, and only in that year, neither before or after, cases of miraculous healing occurred at St. Michael's Mount.

The personal names are a specially interesting feature. The passage gives us the name of a Prior of St. Michael's Mount earlier than any hitherto recorded. *Vyell* is found as a Christian name in some old Cornish families (e.g., the Vyvyans) at a later period⁽¹⁾. The *socii* at the Mount (whoever they were) were evidently all Normans. "Eng." is almost certainly an abbreviation for Engelrannus, later Engeran, "a name," M. Bourde de la Rogerie tells me, "fairly common all over Normandy." "Engelrannus, filius Ilberti," signs a charter of 1089 (Livre Rouge de Bayeux, I. 126). M. de la Rogerie cannot explain *Taboeier*. He says there is a

(1) *Viall* is still found as a surname in Cornwall.

tradesman in Avranches called *Tabur*, and I have myself observed the name *Tabourel* on a tombstone there. *Laneschi*, the home of Matilda, is now called Gulval, but the name survives as *Lanisley*, the manorhouse adjoining the church. It is in full view of the Mount. The other pilgrims came from much further away. It is rather puzzling that the words "in Wales" should be in French and not in Latin.

It is not easy to see what is meant by "*socii*." M. de la Rogerie suggests that they were either "persons, having a share in the prayers of the monks, or associated with them in their daily life there." Du Cange explains *societas* as meaning "an association between the monks of different monasteries, by which they shared with each other all their good things and were treated as brethren of the same house."

Unfortunately the page containing the record of the fourth miracle has disappeared.

As to the author of this curious entry, and why he wrote it in the book at Mont St. Michel, we have no clue to guide us. He says "I saw it, and was present," but does not sign his name. Since the Prior of St. Michael's Mount, or a monk deputed by him, was bound, according to Abbot Bernard's charter, to attend the General Chapter at the Norman Mount each year, either on the Feast of St. Aubert (18 June) or at Michaelmas, and bring 16 silver marks, it may have been a monk sent from the Cornish Mount in 1262 or soon after who made the entry.

G. H. DOBLE.