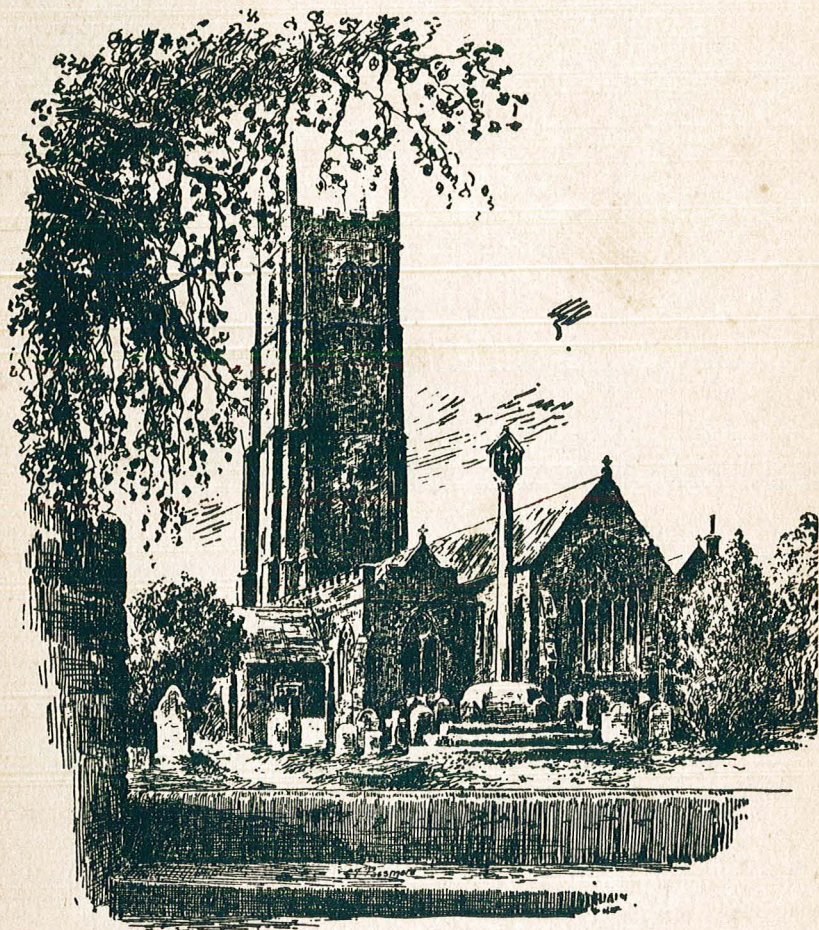


"Cornish Saints" series, No. 45.

ST. NECTAN



By the Revd. GILBERT H. DOBLE, M.A.

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THE LIFE OF SAINT NECTAN

TRANSLATED FROM THE MANUSCRIPT
RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN THE
DUCAL LIBRARY AT GOTHA

BY

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

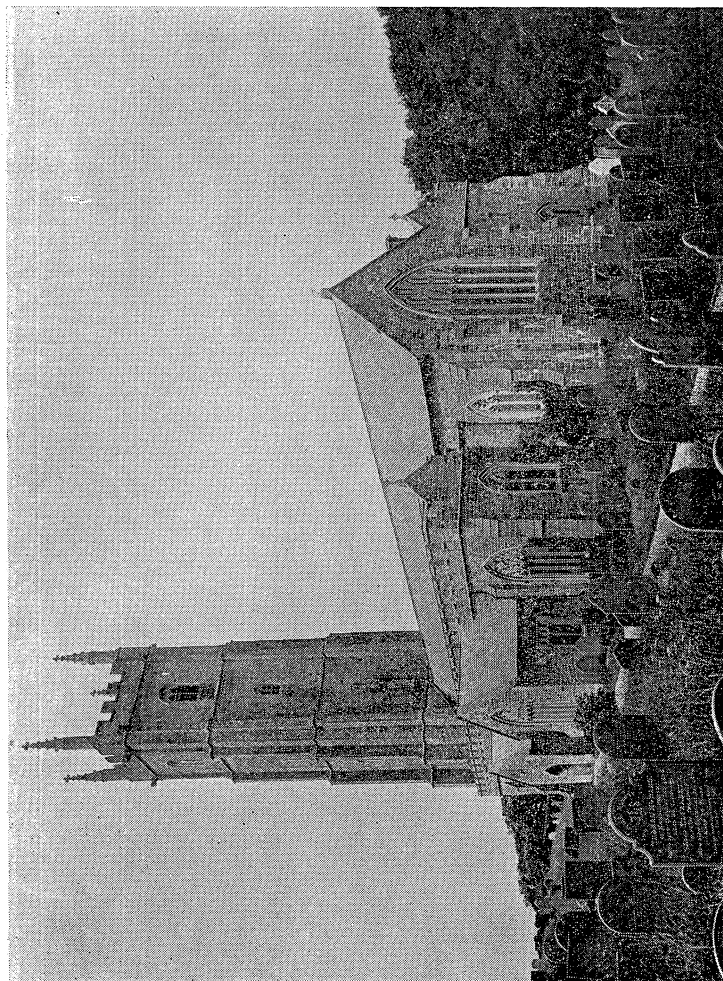
VICAR OF WENDRON, HON. CANON OF TRURO CATHEDRAL

AUTHOR OF

The "Cornish Saints" Series (44 Monographs on the Celtic Saints of Cornwall), The Lanalet Pontifical (Henry Bradshaw Society), Remarks on the Exeter Martyrology, Les Saints Bretons, Parish Histories of Goran, St. Ewe, Lelant, St. Ives, Crowan, Cardynham, etc.

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HARTLAND CHURCH.

Photo by Valentine.

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1940

I am grateful to the Vicar of Hartland (Revd. I. L. Gregory) for permission to reproduce the picture on the cover, and for many other kindnesses.—G.H.D.



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THE LIFE OF ST. NECTAN

(Gotha MS.I. 81, formerly M.n. 57.)

This is the long-lost *Life of S. Nectan* from which extracts were made in 1478 by William of Worcester and sixty years later by Leland in his *Collectanea* (IV. 153). For the problems presented by these extracts, and for the cult of S. Nectan in Cornwall and elsewhere, I must refer the reader to my *S. Nectan, S. Keyne and the Children of Brychan in Cornwall* ("Cornish Saints" series, No. 25), to which the late Mr. Charles Henderson contributed nine pages on the Chapels of S. Nectan in the parishes of Newlyn and St. Winnow, and on St. Nighton's Kieve near Tintagel.

The *Life* is divided into three parts: (a) the *Life* proper, read annually in the Refectory of Hartland Abbey on the saint's festival (see p. 11); (b) the Invention of his body, and (c) a series of Miracles wrought by his relics. The story of the Invention shows that there had been a definite interruption of the saint's cult at Hartland, and the author really knew nothing about his hero except that he had come from Wales. There is little of interest in the first section, beyond the curious version of the legend of King Brychan, which we knew already from William of Worcester's extracts, and the interesting story, now first revealed, of the annual reunion of Nectan's brothers and sisters on 31st December—which seems a dim remembrance of a very ancient tradition, for it was a custom among Celtic peoples to hold banquets on the first or last day of the month (hence the observances of All Hallow'een, and on 1st February and 1st May). The motif of the saint murdered by robbers is found in the Lives of S. Decumanus and of S. Mainboeuf. The second section gives us valuable details about the shrine of S. Nectan at Hartland in the Middle Ages and the relics it contained, together with some very interesting traditions about the history of the church and its clergy in the 11th century (I need not remind the reader that Athelstan and Bishop Lyvng were

not contemporaries). The anecdotes in the third section contain vivid glimpses of life in mediæval Hartland, and some personal names and place-names of which we should otherwise have known nothing. *Wlchesdon* on p. 20 has not yet been identified. It seems impossible to guess where the writer got the name *Huddon* on p. 9.

The *Life of S. Nectan* in its present form must have been composed at the end of the 12th century. The author relates a story which Ailward the Goldsmith, who flourished c. 1168, "used to tell," he has another story about Prior John, and several about Richard Tokelin, who lived at the same time, and he says that "No one to this day knows who" intoned the Responsory *Cives apostolorum* when Bishop Bartholomew (1161-1184) installed the Arroasian canons.

It is worth observing that there is some literary connection between the *Vita Nectani* and the Exeter Martyrology. The author of the *Vita* was fond of speaking of *Devonia* (he is one of the first writers to do so), and the older manuscript of the Martyrology (Exeter Chapter MSS. 3518) has "in Britannia majori provincia *Devonia* sci. Nectani martyris" on 17 June. This MS. contains the names of S. Osithe (7 October) and of S. Just of Amiens (18 October, for the story see Bibl. Hag. Lat., 4590), who are referred to by our author on p. 10, and a later hand has added on the margin of the martyrology, against the entry of St. Osithe, the words, "quæ caput portavit de loco ad locum." It is also worth noting that Athelstan, who was specially venerated at Exeter as *fundator*, appears several times in the *Vita*.

There are some references to this *Vita* in a manuscript at the British Museum (Harley MSS. 3776): "No. 53. De Sancto Nectano XV Kal. Junii. In provincia Devonee apud abaciam de hertilande in confinio Devonee et Cornubie jacet Sanctus Nectanus, heremita et martyr, qui Brocani, viri de Kambria, filius extitit famosus."

The kalendar of the Book of Hours of Launceston Priory has "Sancti Nectani, martyris, mor' oct." on 17 June, and his name appears also in the Litany. William of Worcester also found the name of S. Nectan, martyr, in the Kalendar of Bodmin Priory (in Nasmyth's printed edition it is omitted by mistake). Nectan remained a favourite name for boys at Hartland for a considerable time after the Reformation, as the Baptismal Registers show.

I should like here to give the proof of what I have said in No. 25 of my "Cornish Saints" series on the cult of S. Nectan at Cheddar in Somerset. Thomas More, in his will dated 10 Apr., 1493, desired that his body should be buried in the church of S. Andrew at Cheddar, *ante altare Sancti Nectani*.

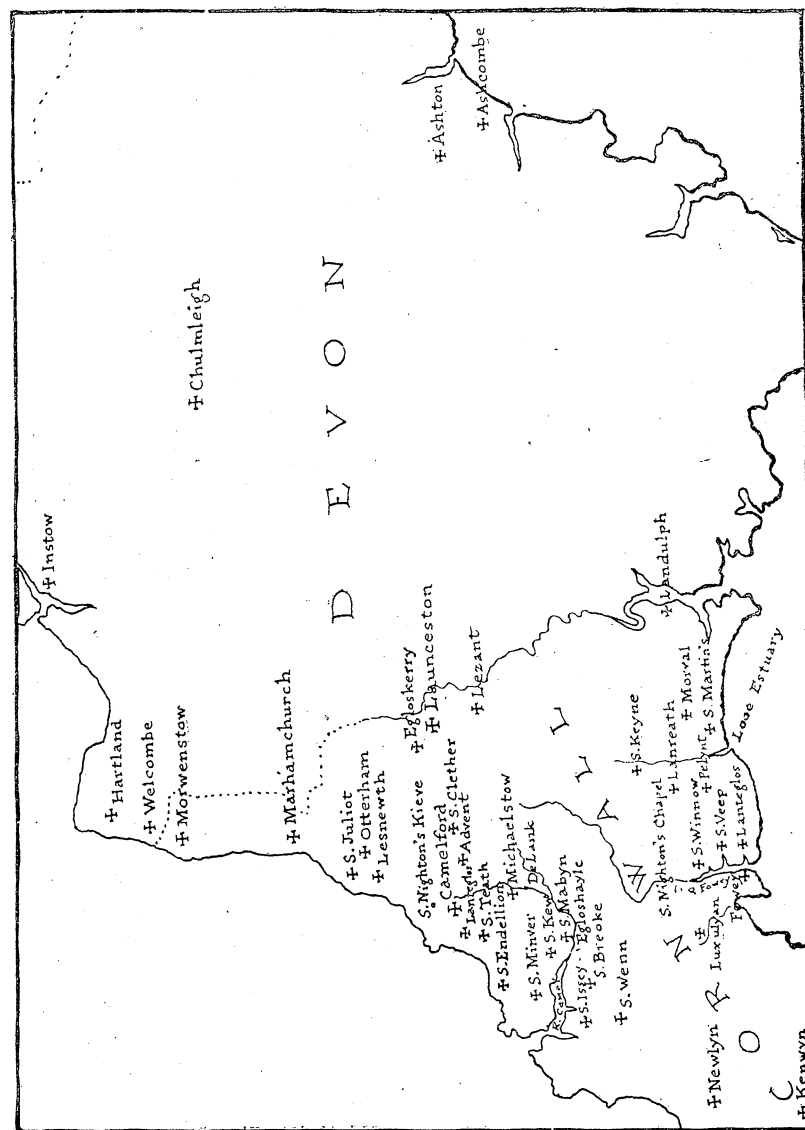
Folio 50b. There was¹ in the further parts of Wales a man who was by rank a prince, distinguished by his faith and worthiness of life, named Brecannus, from whom the province itself (where he lived) derived the name, which it retains to this day, of B(r)occannioch. This Brocannus therefore, before he had begotten of his wife Gladwisa either son or daughter, went into Ireland. He remained therefore in Ireland xxiv years, intent on good works. But afterwards, wishing to visit his native land, he returned to Wales, and there found his wife still living. After some time, as God had fore-ordained, although he had not proposed any such thing himself, he knew his wife, of whom afterwards he begat twenty-four sons and daughters. And wondering at the power of God, which none can resist, he said: "Now hath God punished in me what I vainly intended contrary to the disposition of His will. For God has given to me,

¹ *In margin, in contemporary, but smaller hand:* Of Brocacus [or Brocatus], the father of Saint Nectan, from whom a part of Wales is still called Brekenauk.

A little further down the page follows: Now the land of Brekanauk is a part of Kambria in the southern parts (surrounded by) high mountains. Moreover it is shut in on the north [the passage is hopelessly corrupt] having the mountains of Kanterbowhan [i.e. Cantref Bychan, in Carmarthenshire, east of the Towy] on the south, the chief of which is called Kaerarthur, that is "Arthur's chair," on account of two peaks which look like a chair. And the Priory of Brekenauk is distant xxii miles from Landaf, about xii from Clifford on the south, and xxx from Kedwelly on the east, and xxv from Hereford, and xii from Haye. And it stands on the water called Uske, which goes to Chepstowe.

At the bottom of the page: How S. Nectan was a hermit at Hertiland. And it must be noted that the Abbey of S. Nectan of Hertiland is in the County of Devon, in the west, on the border of Cornwall, and stands by the Severn Sea which divides Cornwall and Devon from Wales. And Hertiland lies northward from the castle of Tyntagel which is in Cornwall xxv miles away. And *south southwest* [in English] from Barnstaple xx, and from Donsterre xliii. And *west-north-west* [in English] from Exeter xl miles, and from the island in the Severn Sea called Londay xv.

who unlawfully fled from the society of my wife lest I should beget offspring, a child for each year of unlawful continence, for after the twenty-four years during which I abstained from my wife I have received from the same wife twenty-four sons and daughters. Now the aforesaid twenty-four sons and daughters which the aforesaid Brocanus begat of his wife Gladwisa were called by these names : Nectan, John, Endilient, Menfre, Dilic, Tedda, Mabon, Wencu, Wensent, Merewenne, Wenna, Juliana, Yse, Morewenna, Wynup, Wenheden, Cleder, Keri, Jona, Canauc, Kenhender, Adwen, Helie, Tamalanc. All these twenty-four sons and daughters were afterwards holy martyrs or confessors leading the heremital life in Devon or in Wales or in Cornwall, for as among all these, with whose life, conversation and miracles the Cornish and Devonian Church is now irradiated, the blessed Nectan was the firstborn, so he was greater than all the others in worthiness of life and was more excellent by the splendour of the miracles he wrought. Now this Nectan, when he was at the beginning in Wales and in the land of his nativity, and afterwards when he had lived in Devon as a pilgrim, was exalted by hope, with his heart enlarged by charity, humble and patient, abstaining from food, ever intent on vigil and prayer, abounding in mercy above all others, a steadfast lover of God and faithfully keeping His commandments in all things. For whatever things the Holy Ghost taught him were to be avoided or else performed, those, by the instigation of the same Spirit, he duly either shunned or fulfilled. Wherefore also, while he was still abiding in the land of his birth, by the inspiration of the Lord it came into his mind to imitate Antony, the greatest of the hermits, and the other Egyptian fathers of godly living, by embracing the observance of the heremital life, that, defended by the spiritual armour of virtues against the snares of the old enemy and the lusts of his own flesh, he might become the Lord's soldier and be worthy to receive with the saints eternal life. The Lord, regarding with merciful eyes his loving devotion, was not slow to co-operate with his good purpose. Therefore, when a little time had elapsed, this man Nectan, in whose memory to-day the Church of the Devonians rejoices, bearing in mind the gospel precept, left father and mother, brothers and sisters, and their kingdom which belonged to him by hereditary right, and went out from his



native land and his kindred, that he might enter a land which the Lord was to indicate to him as suitable for leading the heremital life. Reaching the neighbouring coast, he entered alone into a certain boat, and committing himself and his voyage to the direction of the Lord, Who does not forsake those who put their trust in Him, he sailed away, with a prosperous wind and over a calm sea, leaving behind him everything he possessed and all he had loved in the world. And so, with but little labour yet with good success, under the guidance of the Lord he arrived happily, having escaped all danger of shipwreck, at a certain wooded solitude situated in the northern part of Devon, which, from the huge number of harts who frequently of old time gathered together there, is called Hertiland. But what more shall I say? This venerable man Nectan, traversing wooded tracts and haunts of wild beasts that he might find by the Lord's indication a place convenient for the solitary life, after a short space of time found a valley of marvellous beauty and pleasant with the abundance of the trees that grew thickly there, sloping towards the north. Now this valley running down from the brow of a certain hill has in its recesses¹ a fountain of never-failing water. And near this fountain, in a certain place distant from the said fountain about forty paces (in which place is now the church dedicated in his name, in which his body was buried, and the town which is now called Stokes), he constructed for himself from the branches and bark of trees a convenient hut (*tugurrium*), where he dwelt for a considerable time, eating only herbs and acorns and such-like things, and striving to live in all holy conversation and good works, unto the spirit and not unto the flesh, unto the Lord and not unto himself. But when the news of what he was doing began to spread, and his brothers and sisters learned that he was living in Devon, they followed him, and coming to him ascertained that both in Devon and in Cornwall, but especially in Cornwall, there were many wooded places most suited for the heremital life.² They continued their journey and examined many sites, and found in Cornwall places in which they decided to settle, and built for themselves here and there cells, in which they afterwards lived a most holy life as hermits. But they

¹ The passage is corrupt.

² *In margin* : How S. Nectan was slain on 17th June.

were wont all of them, both his brothers and his sisters, to come together every year on the Vigil of the Circumcision of the Lord to the cell of the blessed Nectan their eldest brother, and to confer together on subjects relating to virtue and the necessity of desiring only the glory of the life of heaven. Afterwards they returned to their own abodes mutually edified, and rejoicing with great gladness.

Now after the holy man had thus lived for some time in this wooded solitude, it came to pass that a certain man named Huddon, who was obedient to the Lord in all things, was dwelling in a certain place four leagues distant from the holy man's hut. This man had a swine-herd, who, when he was one day wandering through the wood searching for his lord's breeding-sow with her young, which he had lost, by chance stumbled across the holy man's hut. Gazing on him, and wondering that such a man should live there, he was at first afraid to approach, but after a short time he plucked up courage to go up and speak to him. He asked him if he knew anything about the sow and her young. Nectan showed him where they were, and the man took them and returned to his master and told him about the holy man and what he had seen and heard. And his master, after hearing what he told him, was touched with a feeling of compassion for (the hermit's) state of extreme indigence, as if it was his own, and going to him humbly, he devoutly offered him, in the spirit of charity and fraternity, two cows which were very good milkers. S. Nectan accepted them with thanksgiving as an offering of brotherly love, valuing more the intention of the giver than the gift itself, allowing himself to depart a little from the voluntary poverty he was enduring for Christ's sake.¹ And when one day (the cows) were wandering through the woods by different tracks, seeking, as animals do, for richer pastures, they were carried off, without his knowledge, by two robbers. And the venerable man of God Nectan, searching the woods to recover them, was found by these same robbers in the place which to-day is still called Neweton,² half a league away from his hut eastwards, and was beheaded on the 17th June, for the faith of Christ and the wholesome exhortation with which, preaching to them the word of God, he sought to

¹ *In margin* : How S. Nectan carried his head after it was cut off.

² W. Worcester read "Nova Villa."

convert them to the unity of the Catholic faith. And immediately a miracle followed as a sign from heaven showing that the death of the illustrious martyr was precious in the sight of the Lord, by which it was proved that the death of the martyr was glorious, seeing that it was straightway approved by the divine goodness. For the venerable martyr of Christ, taking his head in his own hands, carried it for about half a mile to the fountain near the hut where he lived, and there laid it down, smeared all over with blood, on a certain stone, and the bloody traces of that murder and of the miracle still remain marked on that stone, so that neither the lapse of time nor all the rain that has since fallen have effaced them. Nor is this to be passed over, which has been preserved ever since in the memory of the natives, and which they are fond of repeating—for they say that the robber who beheaded him immediately went out of his mind, and tore his flesh with his nails and bit his tongue off with his teeth, and so perished miserably.¹ And the other robber, who had held him while he was being beheaded, became, they say, at once almost totally blind, but while he thus felt his sight failing him more and more, considering what he had done, and seeing what had happened to his companion, and the punishment which was threatening to come upon himself, repented, and followed as best he could, in his semi-blindness, the body of the holy man carrying his head in his own hands, and gathered up the blood from the holy body as it fell upon the ground, and so obtained, by the merits of the blessed martyr, that he should not entirely lose his sight. Feeling this benefit bestowed upon himself, and marvelling at what was taking place in the holy body (of Nectan), pricked in his heart, he followed the holy body, and seeing all that was being done by it he glorified God, and took the body and buried it in his (the saint's) hut near the fountain with the utmost reverence. And surely it was the effect of God's mercy that he who had been the author of the crime should become the first herald and witness and preacher of the martyrdom. And so the blessed martyr Nectan was made equal to the illustrious preacher of the Gauls and martyr, Dionysius, and to the holy child Just, the patron of the people of Amiens, and to S. Osithe the virgin, each of whom, after his beheading, took his head up

¹ *In margin* : Of the robbers who killed S. Nectan.

again in his hands and proceeded from the place of execution to the place where now their monasteries are. It is right for the glorious martyr of Christ Nectan, whose festival we keep to-day, resplendent with these and many other miracles, to enumerate all of which would take too long, to be honoured,¹ praised, and proclaimed with all our might. Now in his church, built not far from the same fountain where he lived, in the town which is called Stokes, where now also his tomb rises on high in the middle of the choir, miracles oft-times manifested declare of what merit the man was. For in that church sight is given to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, the power to walk to the cripples, and to those afflicted with divers other diseases health is restored by his prayers and merits. Here Nectan [*or*, This Nectan], as of old he first consecrated to Almighty God those northern parts of Devon, which touch Cornwall on one side and the sea which looks towards Ireland on the other, with his bodily presence, and holy life, and the miracles he showed, and finally with the shedding of his blood for Christ, so still he does not cease to enrich and make glorious the Devonian Church both by the miracles he works and by the presence of his body, to the praise and glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with Father and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth world without end. Amen.

It² often happens, by a dispensation of God, that the bodies of the holy martyrs, after they have won the victory of martyrdom for Christ in the flesh, have for a long period lain concealed from the sight of men and unknown, and have then been made manifest, to incite the devotion of the faithful and to show the glory of the holy martyrs, so that, by the revelation of that God with Whom they rejoice in unfading glory, their relics may be venerated by believers with perpetual honour. Therefore, in the reign of the most Christian king Adelstan, when the divine providence had decreed that the relics of the most holy martyr Nectan should be revealed, the revelation was made to a certain devout priest, named

¹ *In margin* : Of the church of the blessed Nectan built in the town of Stokes.

² *In margin* : How in the time of Athelstan King of the English the body of S. Nectan was found.

Brictric, a minister of the church, in the following way. One night, while the same priest slept, there appeared to him an angelic man, with hoary head and venerable aspect, surrounded on every side with a great glory of light, saying to him: "When the dawn of to-morrow comes, take with thee some religious and worthy men and enter the basilica of the blessed martyr Nectan, and in that part which looks towards the north thou shalt find the body of the holy martyr buried, which thou shalt take up from the ground and place in a more conspicuous position, to be honoured with the highest honour and due reverence by posterity." The priest awoke and arose, but, as he was a simple soul, he waited a little, that he might prove whether that voice had come from God, not in order to be (at once) obeyed, but that his soul might be instructed how to obey by another heavenly vision. And as the infirmity of his mind was troubled concerning the certainty of the vision, on the following night the angelic man appeared to him in his dreams, shining with heavenly light, and warned him to fulfil the command which had been given him. Finally, with the hope confirmed in his mind, he asked and obtained from the Lord that that heavenly vision should appear to him a third time. For on the third night, as he rested in bed, that heavenly messenger appeared to the same priest, and first reproved him for not having obeyed. Then he showed him by a sign clearer than that given before where the sepulchre of the holy martyr was. Rejoiced therefore by the threefold vision, he went to the pontiff of pious memory, Livyng,¹ who at that time ruled over the Devonian Church, and told him the whole story of his vision. But that venerable (prelate) did not pay any attention to what the priest told him,² because he estimated the truth of the story by the insignificance of

¹ *In margin*: Of Lyvyng the Bishop of Credynton, who united the bishopric of St. German in Cornwall with his own bishopric of Credynton, and of the two made one see, which afterwards Leofric, his next successor, removed from Crydynton to Exonia, that is Excestre, in the time of the holy King Edward who is buried at Westminster.

Livyng was Bishop of Crediton 1031-1046 (Le Neve, *Fasti Eccl. Ang.* I, 366). St. Germans was united with Crediton in 1043 (*Pontificale Lanalatense*, ed. G. H. Doble (Henry Bradshaw Soc., 1937) xiii; see also pp. ix, xii, 143, on the occurrence in this Pontifical, which was used at St. Germans, of Bishop Livyng's name as its owner).

² *Or*: He did not pay any attention to what the venerable priest told him.

the person who related it. The priest, thus despised by his bishop, returned with unquenched zeal to his church, and summoned all the older persons of both sexes who lived in that parish to come together at the church. A considerable multitude both of clergy and people having therefore assembled, he proclaimed to them the vision which he had seen. Having done this, he ordered a solemn three days' fast to be observed, that the divine goodness might make plain to all what the heavenly oracle which he had seen might mean. Then the devout clergy and people continued for three days intent on fasting and prayers with huge devotion. At length, the three days' fast completed, that venerable priest, with the other presbiters, and a devout multitude of either sex, assembled for the festivity of so great a solemnity, with lighted tapers, preceded by the banner of the cross, approached the place pointed out to him from heaven, where all that devout congregation prostrated itself in prayer and supplication to the divine mercy. And when they had finished their orisons they arose and cleared the dust away from the pavement. Then the priests who were present, the rest of the clergy meanwhile continuing in prayer with all the people, take mattocks and dig the earth. But after long labour without any result, they go away to rest a little, as if doubting whether their labour would be rewarded. But that venerable priest, who was taking the leading part in the work, did not depart when the others departed, but, inspired by most fervent love, zeal and devotion, began more eagerly to dig the earth with pious violence. Then at last that holy treasure was opened to him that knocked, revealed to him that sought, (and) given to (his) persevering constancy.¹ For by the will of God he found a stone sculptured with barbarous figures, which afterwards the devotion of posterity placed on the altar built in honour of the martyr near his mausoleum. So on taking away the stone which had blocked the indenture,² so sweet and fragrant an odour arose from it as if within that sepulchre were shut up all the spices and perfumes in the world. And at the same time a brilliant light suddenly shone down on them from heaven, dazzling the eyes of all who were present. Then, approaching the sarcophagus, they lifted up that holy body from the earth,

¹ Matt: 7:8.

² *civographum*, presumably used in a metaphoric sense.

and placed the relics upon the altar consecrated in the name of that same martyr, with hymns and spiritual songs, giving thanks to God, to be preserved with due honour and the greatest reverence, on the 4th of December, which afterwards the devotion of the faithful enclosed in shrines and reliquaries.¹ Now when the venerable prelate Lyvyng heard that the event had justified the truth of the priest's vision, and the story of the finding of the most holy body was made public, he repented, and began devoutly and with suppliant prayer to implore pardon for his ingratitude, in that, when so great treasure had been found during his tenure of the see, he had not believed in the revelation. Wherefore also he gave of his treasures to ornament the church² of the most blessed martyr. He sent therefore as gifts two bells, and an immense mass of lead which sufficed to roof the whole church. He gave also a most beautifully worked³ door, which has been used for the vestry in the church down to our own time. They found also in the sarcophagus the martyr's staff (*baculum*) placed close to the holy body. Which afterwards the people decorated magnificently with gold and silver and precious gems,⁴ and perpetual honour is paid to it, with the other relics, by the faithful people in the church to the present day. Near the saint's body was also found a bone seal which contains the figure of the holy martyr, showing, not his whole body, but a bust only, and marked with the testimony of his name. For letters are clearly cut upon it, thus: SIGILLUM NECTANI.⁵ The inscribing of these two words upon the seal shows that the martyr's own name had been printed on it in order that there might be no doubt as to his person. There was consequently universal rejoicing. Miracles showed how great was the glory of the martyr, and the letters impressed on the seal proved that it was indeed the Nectan who had formerly lived the heremital life in that place.

A⁶ certain blind woman who was close by, hearing the voices of the clerks singing psalms, ran up, and besought the

¹ The text is corrupt.

² church omitted by mistake, and restored in margin.

³ rubricatam.

⁴ In margin: Of the seal of S. Nectan.

⁵ On the seal see F. Wormald in *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, II, No. 1, 70-1.

⁶ Of the blind woman healed.

bystanders that she might be led to the holy body; she was brought therefore to the relics of the holy martyr, and as soon as she put them to her eyes she recovered her sight, and, together with the others who were present, returned thanks to the divine mercy for the grace of healing she had received. Many other miracles also were wrought at that time in the presence of the holy body, according to the providence and disposition of God, to reveal the merits of the martyr, and to proclaim the glory of the Saviour, Who, with the Father and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth and glorieth, God through ages infinite. Amen.

It¹ came to pass that the pious king Athelstan issued a general edict to all the inhabitants of his kingdom capable of bearing arms, that they should join him, with horse and arms, beyond the river Humber. For Anelaws, King of Scots, had invaded the eastern parts of England with a great army. Consequently a large force assembled, and a young man from Hertiland was there, whose name has been forgotten in the long years that have since elapsed, in the service of a certain powerful knight. This young man, while one night he was lying in his lord's tent, which was near the King's pavilion, felt himself suddenly seized with the bubonic plague, which at that time was miserably destroying the army of the English. He began therefore to wail and groan, and with loud clamour to call upon God, repeatedly naming S. Nectan, and so loud were his cries that he disturbed the King and others who were resting in the adjoining tents, so that they could not sleep. After midnight the blessed martyr came, and standing by the sick man gently touched the part of his body that was affected, and the sick man was immediately cured. When it was morning, enquiry was made who it was who had broken the King's rest that night, and he was discovered by the watch and his (fellow) servants, and brought before the King. When the King observed how frightened he was, he bade him not be afraid but tell him why he had cried so loud. Then he said, "I felt that this pestilence which rages among the people had struck me, and inconsolable grief took possession of me,

¹ In margin: How King Aethelstan, by the merits of the blessed Nectan, conquered Anelaws King of Scots, and how the English race was delivered from the bubonic pest through S. Nectan.

to think that I must die unexpectedly, on an expedition in a foreign land, and I began with mournful voice to call upon God, and to invoke again and again, among other saints, S. Nectan, and I was heard; for he came to me when I invoked him, touched with his hand the part affected by the disease and drove away all the disease from me." The King asked him to tell him about the life of the martyr and how he was martyred, and he briefly informed him on both points. Having now recovered his confidence and being no longer afraid to speak to the King, he added, "Begging your pardon, my Lord King, I want to say that I trust in our Lord Jesus Christ and in the help of his martyr, which I have often experienced, that if thou devoutly invoke him and commit thyself to his patronage, by his merits and prayers thou wilt obtain victory over the enemy and drive the pestilence away from the people who are perishing." What more shall I say? The King accepted the wise advice the young man offered him, and promised that he would give the honour to the Lord and to Blessed Nectan if he won the victory and returned safely with his men. The divine clemency consequently regarded the King's faith, gave him victory over his enemies and removed the deadly peril of pestilence which had been threatening his army. Wherefore, at his first coming into Devon, when he had been informed by the bailiffs that the manor of Hertiland was reckoned to contain twenty hides, he bestowed a tithe of them, i.e. two hides, upon the Church of the blessed martyr, and as long as he lived had a special trust in his intercession.¹

After² the death of King Knuton, who was of Danish nationality, his son Hardaknut succeeded him in the kingdom, who, when he had come to the throne, seeing that war was threatening and that his treasury could not defray the expenses that would be necessary, was consumed with anxiety. And because, as we have said, his treasury was empty, he followed an ill-advised counsel and oppressed the people of the English with grievous exactions, making the burghers and manual workers pay the Danegild and the

¹ *In margin*: King Athelstan gave to S. Nectan ii hides from his land.

² *In margin*: How a certain Godwin carried letters ordering his own destruction, but (acting) cautiously, was delivered through S. Nectan, to whom he was devoted.

peasants Horngild, and so arousing great illwill among the people, and earning their curses. Now Hardacnut was obliged (on one occasion) to encounter some enemy forces beyond the bridge¹ of Stafford, and in the battle Godwin, who was a native of the place and possessed three knight's fees (there) by hereditary right, was of great assistance to the King, both by his advice and his active support, and the result was that, by the grace of God and the wise forethought of Godwin, the enemy was destroyed and the King won the battle. From that time Godwin was reckoned the King's chief counsellor, and was enriched with many royal gifts and grants of land, among which he received the manor of Hertiland. But at the same time he incurred the envy of many of the courtiers, who accused him of cunningly devised frauds and of treason against the King's majesty. The King did not venture openly to punish him, but called him and handed to him letters sealed with his own seal, addressed to Suen, sub-king of Galweye, which Godwin respectfully received, suspecting no guile, and started on his voyage. But soon after, when they were out of sight of land and were in the middle of the sea, a raging tempest arose, which seemed likely to prove fatal to them all. The passengers call upon God and the saints, and each one implores the help of his special patron. But as soon as Godwin had devoutly invoked S. Nectan, the weather began gradually to improve, the sea became calm, the storm ceased, and Godwin vowed that he would (in future) even more earnestly honour the blessed martyr. Meanwhile² his chamber-servant, a very prudent man, addressed the earl and said, "I have long been silently thinking, my Lord, that perhaps we are bearing Uriah's letters³ with us on this long journey." The earl replied that he could not think such a thing of the King. The other answered, "With your permission I will examine the letters in such a way as neither to break the King's seal, nor smudge the writing." The earl agreed, and the chancellor proceeded to read what he found written there, while the earl listened: "King Hardacnut to his relative Suen greeting. When you have received this letter, take its bearer, Earl Godwin, who has been guilty of devising

¹ Transponentem. (? for trans pontem.)

² Iterum (? for interea).

³ 2 Sam., II; 14, 15.

treachery against me, and secretly put him to death." At the earl's earnest request, the chancellor wrote another letter, with a better meaning, and covered it with the King's seal: "King Hardacnut to his relative Suen, greeting. I command and intreat you that you give the bearer of these presents, Earl Godwin, my great friend, the fairest and best of my nieces as a wife." Whereupon, when Godwin had landed, he approached the sub-king, gave him the letter, and within a month married Gyditha, and brought her back to England with him. The King was greatly astonished when he heard



of this, but went to meet him and received him with the kiss of peace. He bestowed many gifts upon his niece, and treated her husband as long as he lived as a dear friend and trusted counsellor. This is that Gyditha who greatly honoured the church of S. Nectan, and gave to it silk palls. She brought with her the clerks Ailman and Lemann, whose posterity possessed the church of Hertland down to the time of King Henry, son of the Count of Anjou. She herself

gave the manor of Hartaton, that the clerks might have a safe place wherein to store the sacred vessels, vestments, and other ornaments of the church in the summer time, on account of the snares of the Irish pirates, who used to ravage the coastal districts every year and carry off the inhabitants, to sell them elsewhere as servants and handmaids. Now Godwin (himself) offered to the church, among other gifts, a mark of gold, with which the martyr's staff (*baculus*) was afterwards honourably gilded.

Near¹ the cemetery of S. Nectan was situated a house called Bubernum (? for Hubernum),² in which compatriots³ (*compatriotes*) used to hold annual potations, as if celebrating together, as it were, a certain confraternity as they themselves thought.⁴ In this house one night the servants were boiling water, but though a great fire was kindled beneath, the water felt no heat. The servants marvelled, and kept taking turns in piling wood on the fire, but without success. At last one of them took a candle, and looking into the caldron exclaimed, "Behold the eel who inhabits the fountain of the blessed Nectan is swimming in the water, and this is the reason why our labour is in vain." The eel was taken out and returned to the fountain, and straightway the water began to boil furiously and to foam over. It was indeed wonderful that the servants should have laboured in vain for a whole winter's night, but much more wonderful that the water, absolutely cold before the eel was found, should, immediately it was taken out, have become in one instant boiling hot.

The⁵ Chapel of the Blessed Martin of Meddon was from of old time endowed with a certain little meadow, which was reserved for the use of the clerks of S. Nectan who used to celebrate divine service in the same chapel several times.

¹ In margin: Of the eel from the fountain of S. Nectan, which was in the cauldron on the fire unhurt.

For similar fish and eel stories, which seem to be a stock element in folklore, see Eleanor Hull, *Folklore of the British Isles* (1928), 112-5.

² Du Cange gives *huba* and *huernum* (the latter from Dugdale, *Mon. Angl.*), meaning grange, which would make good sense. Fr. Grosjean, the Bollandist, agrees.

³ Du Cange gives *compater sodalis, amicus*. The story reminds us of the annual "colloquy" of Nectan and his brothers and sisters.

⁴ The whole sentence is obscure.

⁵ In margin: How a certain man cut off his own head.

a year. A dispute arose concerning the boundaries of that meadow between some litigious rustics and the clerks. In the course of this dispute, one of the rustics, more violent than the rest, holding a hay scythe in his hand, repeatedly invoked a curse upon himself if the boundary of the meadow were not there, and wishing to show the (exact) place by fixing the handle of the scythe in the ground, he raised the scythe, and not taking heed that the blade was close to his neck, he cut off his own head. His tomb is pointed out by the inhabitants between Meddon and Wlchesdon, by the old road which is halfway between the two towns, on the south side of the said road. Ailward the Goldsmith,¹ a man worthy of credence, used to tell the story and show the place where he was killed.

A certain Briton, a youth whose mind was undeveloped even for his age, came to the fountain of the blessed martyr and beheld the stone smeared with his precious blood, and making light of what other people told him about the sanctity of so great a martyr,² began to sharpen a knife which he held in his hand on the same stone. When the bystanders saw what he was doing, they began to chide him and bid him desist, but he none the less continued what he had foolishly begun to do. The marks of the sharpening are still to be seen in the stone. Shortly afterwards he was seized by a devil, began to go mad, biting his tongue with his teeth and tearing his clothes with his hands, and there he miserably expired.

Aylward Butta cut down a most beautiful ash-tree in the grove of S. Nectan, which was called the Magpies' Tree. And straightway a mighty weakness took hold of him, and kept him a long time in bed, sore oppressed. At length, feeling a little better, he went to Clovelly and brought back from thence an ash plant and planted it in the aforesaid grove, and immediately he recovered complete health.

Aylmer of Ludekeffordia³ cut down a sapling in the same grove to make a nail, and lost one of his eyes as he did so, and never recovered the sight of it.

¹ Ailward the Goldsmith headed the list of Hartland men who paid an aid in 1168 for the marriage of Henry II's daughter; *Pipe Roll*, 14 Henry II (Pipe Roll Soc., XII, 131). Cf. p. 24

² A word has been omitted.

³ i.e. Lutsford in Hartland Parish (Ludekeford in 1249; *Place-Names of Devon*, I, 75).

After the devotion of the faithful had enclosed the relics of the blessed martyr in shrines encrusted with gold and silver, there came one night robbers, who secretly removed from the church the shrine placed over the altar, and tore¹ away its silver and gold plates. But the *baculus*, when they came to the gate of the monastery, they could in no wise carry out. For none of them could get it through the door, whichever way they turned it, neither could it be taken through the door, and it remained inviolate, while the other shrines had the precious metal stripped off them.

There was a certain man, paralysed from his mother's womb, named Ralph, to whom the blessed martyr Nectan appeared as he was asleep in bed, saying, "If thou dost desire to be freed from this infirmity from which thou hast long suffered, ask for a candle from Bernard the priest, and come to my church and offer it, giving thyself to vigil and prayer, and thou shalt receive cure by the gift of God at my intercession." The man believed, and glad at the thought of the promise, he received a candle from the priest and took it to the temple, where he spent the night in prayer and adoration, the sinews of his knees (*or*, hams) cracked, and forthwith he was raised up, while all the members of his body quivered as with fear, praising God and His blessed martyr for that He had been merciful to the unhappy, and faithful in His promise. There was present there a clerk, watching that same night, who testified to having heard the loosing of his sinews sounding all over the church. Being therefore cured, he left the *scamella*² on which he had previously supported himself in the church as tokens (of the miracle) and returned home rejoicing. After a little time this man set forth to go to St. James (of Compostella), and met (on the way) Richard Tokelin,³ Archdeacon of Poitiers, the future Bishop of Winchester, who had known him very well indeed. For when he was paralysed, the same Ralph had served as a furrier in the house of Robert Earl of Gloucester,⁴ being

¹ *In margin*: Of the robbers who stole the relics of S. Nectan.

² A kind of stool; see Ducange.

³ Richard of Ilchester. He was made Archdeacon of Poitiers between September 1162 and March 1163, and held the office for ten years, till he became Bishop of Winchester (May 1173). See *Dic. Nat. Biog.*, also Oliver, *Mon. Exon.*, 204.

⁴ A natural son of Henry I; he died in 1147.

many years in the employ of Richard Pinserna,¹ and at that time Richard Tokelin was notary in the said Earl's court, and owing to this connection between them the paralytic was very well known to the aforesaid Archdeacon. So when the latter had listened carefully to his story and heard where and how he was cured, he gave thanks to God, and from that day began to reverence and honour the holy martyr Nectan, and by the Lord's inspiration he revolved in his mind what he could do to have the place where the martyr was honoured served with a worship more solemn and more worthy; with this purpose in view he found *all things work together for good*.² For Geoffrey of Dinan, the *dominus fundi*, was very ill-disposed towards the prior Osbert and all the clerks of Hertistoke, because for several years they had detained the annual payment due to him, namely sixty shillings; wherefore, to be avenged of them, he gladly agreed to their expulsion. He found also a ready listener in the person of the diocesan Bishop, the venerable Bartholomew³, who was by no means disposed to cherish them like a pontiff, but rather had long borne with them against his will, since they possessed the prebends of the church as by hereditary right, and in other things had showed themselves wanting in whole-hearted obedience to his high office. King Henry, whose Justiciar he was, was also ready always to further his plans, provided they were just. Relying on the support of the above-named, he (Richard Tokelin) freed the church of the blessed martyr from the scandal of hereditary succession, and by obtaining for Prior Osbert and the clerks the remission of the annual payment of sixty shillings due from them he in part satisfied them, and then substituted for them regular canons.

Nor is this, in my opinion, to be passed over in silence, which happened when first the Canons of the Arroasian (*Arohensis*) order were introduced there. The venerable Bishop Bartholomew was present to receive them, and accompanied by his clerks went to meet the canons as they approached, and when all were hesitating as to what ought to

be sung at a procession of this kind, and there was a short pause during which everyone was silent, a loud voice began that Responsory which, with its verse, is wont to be sung at the solemnities of the Apostles—"The fellow citizens of the Apostles and (those who are of) the household of God have come to-day."¹ And when it was begun, the clerks took it up. None of those who were present knows, to this very day, whose voice it was which was first heard, or who began that chant. All who were there marvelled, but the pontiff himself, silently considering the matter, regarded it as an omen of the reform which would result from the coming of the servants of God. And in truth what man could be so bold, nay so presumptuous, as to appropriate without rashness the song of praise of the Lord's Apostles, the judges of mankind, the lords of the world, for the arrival of poor brothers, clothed in frail mortality, subject to various chances and miseries of this world, as a sign of the amendment that was to follow? That voice, it is believed, was divinely sent. And indeed the canons, when they came, gave light to (all who lived in) that country by their exemplary conversation, and peace to the nations by preaching brotherly charity in the fear of God, and delivered the people of God who were the slaves of vices and various errors with which they were deceived.

Certain² parishioners of Hertiland, who had gone to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, were visiting the holy places consecrated by the birth, baptism, preaching and precious death of the Saviour.³ Returning, they embarked on a ship, with other pilgrims (*jerosolimipetis*), and committed themselves to the winds and waves. So when they were sailing among the islands of Greece, the sky became overcast, the waves began to ride by reason of the fierce winds that blew, and the ship was tossed about and almost submerged. In this danger the passengers called on God for help, asking only for the salvation of their souls, since they despaired of

¹ *Cives apostolorum et domestici dei advenērunt hodie*. [This Responsory is found in the Breviaries of Sarum, York and Hereford, and in those of many English monasteries]. *In margin*: How a certain bird sang the verse *Cives apostolorum* in the procession at the first coming of the canons to the aforesaid church of the Blessed Nectan.

² *In margin*: How xvi men of the parish of blessed Nectan escaped from a shipwreck.

³ The *Vita Petroci* in the Gotha MS. contains most of this sentence word for word.

¹ He was one of the witnesses to Henry II's charter (1168-9) under which the monastery of canons regular was founded at Hartland; Oliver, *Mon. Exon.*, 207.

² Rom. VIII, 28.

³ Bartholomew Iscanus, Bishop of Exeter 1161-1184.

obtaining bodily succour. While the rest were offering up supplications of various kinds, these (the parishioners of Hartland) kept calling on S. Nectan. As they did so, the blessed martyr appears to one of them and says, "Almost everyone will suffer danger of death, but I have numbered you among those who are to escape." The event proved the truth of his words. For the ship was dashed on a rock and went to pieces, and out of more than nine hundred men who were thrown into the water scarcely a hundred got safe to shore, among whom those xvi men who belonged to the blessed martyr's parish escaped from the shipwreck. We have often heard them tell the story and point to the man who saw the vision.

Prior John,¹ afterwards Abbot, a man of most virtuous life, wished to build a house for the servants of God and S. Nectan near the holy martyr's church, and asked the parishioners to lend him oxen and carts, which most of them did. Two peasants, however, Algar and Ailward of Sigginton,² refused, neither helping themselves nor being willing that others should, and put every obstacle in his way. So one day, while the Prior was going to and from the woods with the vehicles lent him, they were passing through the fields of the aforesaid hamlet (*ville*), but as they did so, their oxen, hitherto perfectly healthy, were suddenly seized with cattle-disease and died. None doubted that it was the effect of the divine vengeance on the surly rustics. Not long after, one of those two brothers, the Algar we have mentioned, standing in the cemetery of the holy martyr among the parishioners on the feast day, attacked with bitter words the aforesaid prior. He continued to abuse him, insulting the man of God, as is the way with rude and impudent rustics, and spat on him, covering him with saliva. The man of God patiently endured it all, but Ailward the goldsmith removed the abusive peasant, rebuking him and warning him that he would be punished for what he had done unless he repented. And so it shortly afterwards came to pass. For on that same day next week, on the very day of the week on which he had insulted an innocent man, he was buried. Many believed

¹ John, prior of Hartland, witnessed a charter of Bartholomew, Bishop of Exeter, on 29th Sept. 1169; J. H. Round, *Calendar of Documents preserved in France*, no. 900. It is printed in full in A. Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter*, p. 147.

² Seckington (Sygynton in 1333; *Place Names of Devon*, I, 79).

that this untimely death was the just punishment of his ill-behaviour.

A certain young man of the house of Oliver de Traci, named Vivian, one summer's day adorned his bed with green herbs and sweet-smelling flowers, and went to sleep thereon at noon. On awaking he lost both his senses and his memory. In consequence he wandered about and in our sight did many unbefitting things. At last he came to the relics of the blessed martyr Nectan, venerated and kissed them, and was entirely restored to his senses again. We have seen the same happen to a young woman, who lost her senses, and on being led to the relics of the blessed martyr, after tasting the water in which his relics had been dipped, was made whole and of sound mind.

A certain knight of Donsterre, who had lost all power and feeling on one side of his body, sought the monastery of Saint Nectan in the hope of obtaining a cure. And when he arrived within a mile of it, and caught sight of the church thereof in the distance, the fervour of his faith and devotion were kindled. In that same hour the vigour of his (half)-dead body revived, the arm which before had stuck fast to his neck was loosened, new life returned to all his members at the same time, and he recovered his former health. He came therefore to us, and with tears gave thanks to God, Who, as of old He healed the lepers while they went to the priests,¹ had healed his paralysis before he reached His martyr's church.

There is a village near Barnestapol, to which Canon Alured was carrying the relics of the blessed martyr, and arriving in the evening he asked a certain rustic for hospitality, which the other refused. The canon began more earnestly to entreat for shelter for the night, saying that he would not be burdensome to him, as he was neither hungry nor thirsty, and asked that at any rate he might be allowed to sleep in an empty house which was near his abode. The unrelenting owner only bid him depart. That same night the empty house was burnt, without any man setting fire to it. Next morning, when the rustic saw it reduced to ashes, he repented of his refusal, and realized that the house had been burnt on account of his cruelty in denying hospitality. And

¹ Luke 17: 14.

he was more annoyed by the reproaches and mockery of his neighbours than by the burning of his house.

In the parish of Saint Marwenna the virgin,¹ after the relics of the blessed martyr had been brought one day, and dipped in water, a certain sick man drank of the water, and felt himself relieved. He ordered the water to be stored in a clean place. Next day he asked for it again, that he might drink, and found it changed into the purest honey. It was taken to the church, and the miracle made public, and from that day the *natale* of the blessed Nectan, the most glorious martyr, has been observed there solemnly every year, to the praise of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be praise and dominion throughout endless ages. Amen.

¹ i.e. Marhamchurch, in Cornwall.

APPENDIX

THE MASS OF ST. NECTAN

[Brit. Mus. MS. Cotton Vespasian D XII, fo. 157]

All that remains of the Mass is a single leaf, apparently of the fourteenth century or later, used as an end-paper by an early binder of the volume. It has been transcribed by Neil R. Ker, Esq., who discovered it, and translated by myself.

Transcript

candida pro corporis mundicia. Si qua heserint contagia :
lex tersit heremitica. Fulgebit s- - - a germina absorta
in victoria morte, cum surgent corpora vera octava et
ultima. Cuius colit magnalia : mundi pars occidua. Crebra
fiunt miracula : que iacent in basilica. Tuendo tuum
populum nectane consors martirum. Ora pro nobis dominum
et nunc et in perpetuum. Amen. *Evangelium*. Si quis
vult post me venire. *Offertorium*. Posuisti domine in capite
eius coronam de lapide precioso vitam petiit a te et tribuisti
ei. alleluia. *Secreta*. Hec domine munera altari tuo sup-
posita benedic et sanctifica ut intercessione beati nectani
martiris tui ad fructum proficiant utriusque salutis. Per.
Communio. Magna est gloria eius in salutari tuo gloriam
et magnum decorem impones super eum domine. *Post
Communio*. Perfiniat domine plebs tua beati nectani martiris
tui natalicia celebrando cum exultacione propectum ut quam
celestis mense refecisti communio[ne] eternitatis tue facias
ascribi consortio. Per.

Translation

. . . on account of the shining purity of his body. If any
stains [of sin] remain, the heremital rule effaces them.
He will shine . . . when death is swallowed up in victory,

when the bodies [of the dead] shall rise on the last and true Octave. Whose mighty deeds the western part of the world celebrates. Frequent miracles occur [memorials of] which lie in the basilica. Guarding thy people, O Nectan, companion of the martyrs. Pray to the Lord for us, both now and ever. Amen.

Gospel. If any man will come after me [etc. S. Matt. XIV, 24].

Offertory. Thou has set, O Lord, a crown of precious stone upon his head: he asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him. Alleluia.

Secret. Bless and sanctify, O Lord, these gifts placed upon Thine altar, that by the intercession of Blessed Nectan Thy martyr they may avail unto the fruit of salvation both here and in the world to come. Through [Jesus Christ our Lord.]

Communion. His honour is great in Thy salvation, glory and great worship shalt Thou lay upon him, O Lord.

Postcommunion. May Thy people, O Lord, achieve completion of spiritual progress in celebrating with exultation the birthday of Thy blessed martyr Nectan, that they whom the communion of the heavenly table has refreshed may be by Thee admitted to the participation of Thy eternity. Through [Jesus Christ our Lord].