

S. Oswald.

WITH pride and without prejudice Scotland surely does well to hold in reverence the names of her Patron Saints. In most cases they are the names of noble men and women who, by their labours and still more by their example, brought to our land in days of pagan darkness the light that has shone to our great advantage in the past, and which, in spite of periods of shadow, will yet shine "more and more unto a perfect day." If in these times, so distressingly and with such irritating frequency characterised as materialistic, we accustomed ourselves more to a backward glance on the nature of our foundations we might escape a criticism which from no point of view, philosophical or otherwise, can be deemed creditable. That is one reason why in future issues of this Annual we hope to present our readers with such portraits as history and tradition make possible of the Patron Saints of Scotland. Another reason, perhaps less forcible but still urgent, may be found in the fact that with few exceptions these Saints of old have been attached to special parishes in which they have exercised their influence, thereby, in ways partly outside our ken, giving name and character to these districts of the land. The importance and even the existence of the parish as the unit of social and civic life in Scotland is being threatened at the present time by new political and economic conditions. This development is a matter of regret to not a few who are otherwise than politically conservative, but, lest worse things befall us, and the loss or diminished regard of the parish as a unit in the *religious* life of the country follows upon its secular dethronement, it will be of advantage to us to make stronger than ever the tie that binds most of our parishes to such as in early days brought light and liberty. As of the marriage bond, may we not say in this connection, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" ?

As the present minister of a parish, that of Whittingehame, it has fallen to the present writer to 'lead off' in this effort of pious recollection. From a very remote period this, the largest parish in East Lothian, stretching

from the foot of Traprain Law in the north to the Lammermoor Hill of Kilpallet in the south, has claimed the saintly patronage of Oswald, King of Northumbria. If we want proof of the date when this patronage was claimed, or if we look to anything in the parish for confirmation of the fact in sacred well or ancient stone, we may be as much at a loss as many other parishes to verify tradition. The first historian to mention the fact is John Major, who in his 'History of Greater Britain,' written in 1521, says, "One church I know founded in his (King Oswald's) honour in Lothian, Whittingehame to wit, distant two leagues from Gleghornie." As Gleghornie was Major's birthplace, and as it is only about eight miles from Whittingehame, he must have been conversant with the tradition as held by priest and people in his time. Prior to the church in Whittingehame which Major must have known—the site of which is now the private burial-ground of the Balfour family—had stood a parish church, how long we cannot tell, on the field of Kirklands, a little farther north and sloping down from Traprain Law southwards. This is the church which along with many others David de Bernham dedicated on the 7th of May in the year 1245, and it is reasonable to suppose either that the said Bishop David, from the diocese of St Andrews, then for the first time invoked the patronage of S. Oswald or decreed the continuance of a patronage previously claimed. However that may be, there is no one in the Order of Saints who would more naturally be chosen as Patron of the parish. Long before the name Lothian was given to the country, and long before the country so denominated became distinctively Scottish, it enjoyed the name of Bernicia in the kingdom of Northumbria, and was debateable land between the surging forces of Picts in the north and Angles in the south. Oswald was the first to determine the part and place the country should afterwards occupy in the formation of Scotland. If history since the "Acts of the Apostles" was being raised or sublimated to the standard of a Bible—not an unimaginable enterprise,—then not the least romantic and revealing part of such a modern Scripture would be the story of the King-Saint whom the Lord chose to redeem Bernicia "from the hand of the enemy." The second of the seven sons of Ethelfrid, King of Northumbria, who reigned from 593 to 617, his mother being Acca, sister of Eadwine, the king who succeeded Ethelfrid,

Oswald was compelled along with his brother Eanfrith to fly the country on the death of his father at the hand of Redwald, King of the East Angles. As if directed by the Spirit of the Lord the two brothers found their way to a haven of peace in the holy island of Iona, then known as 'Hy' or 'I.' Being then at the impressionable age of thirteen, born probably in 604, and remaining there for sixteen years, what paganism there was in Oswald's heart was driven out by the religious and educational influences of the already great Columban monastery, the result being that he was eventually baptised into the Christian faith. Owing to continual strife in the country of his father involving the death of one ruler after another, it came to pass that in the year 634 the kingdom of Northumbria in its two parts Bernicia and Deira was without a king to succeed. Herein Oswald, now in his manhood of faith and physical vigour, "tall, with blue eyes and fair hair," saw and promptly seized his opportunity. Setting his face southwards and with a small army raised largely, we must suppose, as in the case of a later and less worthy claimant to kingship, by the attraction of his own personality, he found himself opposed at a place called Heavenfield, possibly Hatfield now, seven or eight miles north of Hexham, by a pagan army under Catlon, sometimes but doubtfully identified with the better known Caedwalla. In Bede's history this is known as the battle of Catsgaul. Bede also relates that there Oswald "slew Catguollum, King of the district of Guenodota." It is surmised that Caedwalla, who was really the Christian king of the West Britons, may have allied himself to the so-called Catlon with no very worthy motive. Before the battle, as S. Adamnan relates, S. Columba, whom he had never seen in the flesh, appeared to Oswald in a vision and assured him of victory. Thereupon Oswald raised a great wooden cross, and in words recorded by the later historian Bede, probably reaching him by hallowed tradition, cried out before his army, "Let us all kneel and jointly beseech the true and living God Almighty in His mercy to defend us from the haughty and fierce enemy, for He knows that we have undertaken a just war for the safety of our nation." It was a case of "The Sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

The victory was easy and decisive, and it is surely appropriate that a chapel called S. Oswald's now stands where the famous wooden cross was raised. If nothing ancient in nature or artifice recalls S. Oswald to the

parishioners of Whittingehame to-day, we must deem it fortunate that as a worthy memorial to the men of the parish who fell in the Great War a stone cross, after the traditional model of S. Oswald's at Heavenfield, has been erected where the main road meets with the avenue to the parish church. Thus is the patron-hero and saint allied with those who in later days helped to deliver the country from an outburst of pagan 'frightfulness' in an otherwise Christian empire.

Having assumed the quondam throne of his father in his native Northumbria, and having united the Kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira in one dominion, and established lordship over most of Southern Britain, Oswald now brought himself into line with those ancient heroes of the faith who not only "subdued kingdoms" but "wrought righteousness and obtained promises" (Heb. xi. 33). Instructed in the faith that was elsewhere gradually displacing Druidism and the pagan worship of Woden and Thor, Oswald set about the instruction of the people in his own dominions, particularly those of Bernicia, who had been left 'cold' by previous efforts in Christianisation from the south. With this end in view he appealed to Iona for assistance, preferring to introduce the Celtic rather than the Roman or Anglican type of Christianity. After the first missionary, by name Corman, had found the people more stubborn than his gifts could master, or, as is more likely, had proved himself more austere than the people could stand, the appeal eventuated in the sending of Aidan, whom Bede calls "A man of singular meekness, piety, and moderation," a saint whose name is rightly honoured in the foundation of not a few churches, and of at least one parish, in the Lothians. To start S. Aidan's mission with any prospect of success King Oswald had to instruct him in the peculiar Saxon language of the people, accompanying him often as interpreter in his preaching and teaching tours in the wild moorlands and wilder marshlands of a country as much untamed physically as its inhabitants were spiritually. Tradition represents the king as blowing a horn to assemble the people from what were more or less their hiding places. While selecting Bamborough for his own royal residence, he thoughtfully made over to S. Aidan the Island of Lindisfarne, part of the territory allotted to which by the king included a portion of Whittingehame parish in the Lammermoors. Lindisfarne for a time became

the Iona of Britain south of the River Forth. Though not too commonly allowed by our brethern across the Borders, England owes about as much to the Christianising influences of Lindisfarne as Caledonia north of the Forth owes to Iona, for far beyond the regions of Northumbria the gospellers of Lindisfarne carried their message of divine peace and goodwill. In fairness, however, it should be stated here that, according to Miss F. Arnold Foster in her 'Studies in Church Dedication,' there are to-day no less than sixty churches in England, most of them ancient, dedicated to S. Oswald. Beside building and staffing churches, one more than likely in what is now Whittingehame parish, and founding monasteries throughout his realm of Northumbria, there is good evidence to the effect that S. Oswald came to have considerable vogue in foreign countries, such as North Italy and parts of Germany, when Celtic missions penetrated those countries in following centuries. In the Venice Academy there is a fine picture by Bonifacio representing S. Oswald in conjunction with S. Matthew. One of the windows in the Church of S. Maurice, near Martigny, in the Bernese Oberland, has a window with figures of three saints—S. Andrew with his cross, S. Peter with the keys, and S. Oswald with a raven carrying a ring, referring to an ancient tradition in his life.

But "God moves in a mysterious way!" After a reign of eight or nine years the jealousy of an old pagan enemy was roused, and at Maserfield on the 5th of August 642 Penda, an erstwhile ruler of Mercia, a kingdom southwest of Northumbria, defeated the forces of Oswald after a fierce contest. With a prayer on his lips for the men he had led the king fell mortally wounded. No place of the name of Maserfield now exists, but the scene of this disaster is generally taken to have been Oswestry in Shropshire, a name which etymologically includes that of Oswald. In Oswestry to-day the Parish Church, as well as a stone cross and fountain, bear the name of the king and saint. The savage Penda gloried in the victory over his Christian rival, and his mind being blank to the conception of immortality, he thought to wipe out Oswald's name and memory by dismembering his body and exposing his limbs on stakes for the contumely of the passer-by. But even the limbs of the saint escaped Penda's pagan purposes, and thereby hangs a tale of romance too long to relate here at any length. Having

been removed by Oswald's brother, Oswy, who afterwards came to the throne of Northumbria, Bede has it that they were blessed by S. Aidan and preserved for some time in a silver case in the Church of S. Peter at Bamborough. From thence, and the story is well authenticated, they were taken, at any rate the right hand and arm, for greater safety to the monastery at Peterborough, which had actually been founded by Peada the son of Penda, we may imagine in filial revulsion to his father's brutal policy. On the monastery being burnt by the Danes the relics were carried to Ely monastery, founded by S. Ethelreda, wife of Egfrid, a former king of Northumbria. But the daughter of Oswy, the saint's niece, and wife of Ethelfrid King of Mercia, had them transported from Ely to the Benedictine Abbey of Bardney in Lincolnshire. Had not a miraculous light appeared above the wagon that brought them, the monks of Bardney would have rejected them as those of a foreigner, but recognising the saintly character of Oswald they were enshrined with the utmost reverence in their church. Thereafter the story becomes somewhat involved, but there is evidence to the effect that after the burning of Bardney by the Danes in 870, some of the relics which had been preserved there, others having presumably strayed elsewhere, were enshrined in the new monastery built about the time of the Norman Conquest. As late as the twelfth century we have Reginald of Durham in his '*Vita Sancti Oswaldi*' recording that only three bones of the saint remained there, another—a finger bone,—according to a later authority, having found its way to S. Paul's Cathedral, London, preserved in an ivory pyx. An arm of the saint, covered with silver plates, is also said to have rested in S. Paul's Cathedral. Whether any of these relics are or are not discoverable or recoverable to-day the story of their strange pilgrimage demonstrates the reverence in which the saint's memory was held throughout the length and breadth of the land. Further afield and in no less a place than the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem there is preserved a bone of S. Oswald.

Another and even more romantic and better-accredited story is attached to the head of S. Oswald. Having shared the fate, or may we say fortune, of the original relics up to their being deposited at Bamborough, it appears that the head of the saint was solemnly transferred to Lindisfarne until the monks there were driven

out by the Danes, when it was secreted—*mirabile dictu*—in S. Cuthbert's wooden coffin which ultimately, and in the year 998, came to rest in Durham Cathedral. Symeon of Durham, the mediæval historian, to whom we owe so much, describes the actual position in which the head lay—*Juxta caput gloriosi pontificis*—referring to S. Cuthbert, and there beyond any reasonable doubt the head rests to-day beside the body of S. Cuthbert in the solemn quiet of Durham Cathedral. It is to be remembered that S. Cuthbert succeeded S. Aidan as Abbot of Lindisfarne. The Rev. Canon Fowler who examined the tomb in 1899 writes: "They (the relics) have been properly examined and reported on with the result of greatly strengthening the presumption that the almost complete skeleton is that of S. Cuthbert, and of all but positively identifying the remains of the skull of S. Oswald." The identification is more to be relied upon when we learn that the skull is cloven, showing "proof of such a violent death as befel S. Oswald in the battle of Maserfield." On the lid of the new oak coffin is incised the cross commonly called S. Cuthbert's, surmounted by a crown with reference to S. Oswald the king. The present Bishop of Durham, Dr Hensley Henson, informs me that he is "not aware that S. Cuthbert's grave has been opened since 1899," but that "*then* the skull of S. Oswald was found resting on the saint's arm," and adds, "I hardly know anywhere a more satisfying chain of evidence than that which identifies the remains of S. Cuthbert and the head of S. Oswald."

Here we must conclude our story where the mortal remains of the great 'Apostle of the Lothians,' the Patron Saint of Durham, once a shepherd lad on the Lammermoors, and of the no less great King and Saint of Northumbria, Patron Saint of Whittingehame, repose together—in death as in honour not divided—in glory, as we believe, now raised and exalted (*in coelo beatificati*). Is it not to be regretted that in these days of swift and easy travel, when pleasure mainly of a fleeting character sways the restless multitudes, there are no efforts made to attract men and women of reverent mind, and indeed of any mind or soul, to such a spot as this, where the eternal illumines the temporal, and where they who are dead still speak of the things that have made, and are making, for our true life?

MARSHALL B. LANG.

My thanks are due to the Rev. H. J. Wotherspoon, D.D., a former minister of S. Oswald's Parish Church, Edinburgh, for procuring the following collects for use on the Saint's Festival Day, 5th August, as also for his translation of the same.

From the MSS. of Robert of Jumiègue—

Omnipotens Sempiternus Deus, qui huius diei jocundam beatamque laetitiam in sancti servi tui Oswaldi solemnitatem consecrasti, da cordibus nostris tui timoris caritatisque augmentum; ut, cuius in terris sancti sanguinis effusionem celebramus, illius in coelo conlata patrocinia mentibus sentiamus. Per Dominum nostrum, &c.

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who, by the commemoration of Thy holy servant Oswald, hast consecrated the joyful and blessed gladness of this day, grant to our hearts increase of Thy fear and love, that we in our minds may know the patronage (protection) bestowed in heaven of him, the outpouring (or 'shedding') of whose blood we on earth do celebrate. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

From the Aberdeen Breviary—

Omnipotens Sempiternus Deus, qui hodiernam diem beati Oswaldi martyrio consecrasti, concede propitius ut cuius passionem celebramus eius patrocinia sentiamus. Per Dominum Nostrum, &c.

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast hallowed (consecrated) this day by the martyrdom of the blessed Oswald, favourably grant that we may feel his patronage (know the benefit of his protection) Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Note.—For much information in this paper I am indebted to the admirable monograph upon the Saint in the 'Transactions of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society (1908)', by J. M. MacKinlay, M.A., F.S.A. (Lond. and Scot.).
