

ST. SWITHIN OR SWITHUN, C.

BISHOP AND PATRON OF WINCHESTER.

THIS city had been famous in the time of the Romans, and a station of their troops being called by Ptolemy and Antoninus, Venta. It became afterwards the chief seat of the West-Saxon kings. Among these, Kynegils, having received the faith about the year 635, gave to St. Birinus the city of Dorchester for his episcopal see, but founded a church at Winchester, which was dedicated by St. Birinus to St. Peter, according to the Saxon Chronicle, or to the Holy Trinity, according to Thomas Rudburn. Wini, the third bishop of the West-Saxons, fixed his see at Winchester, and this church became one of the most flourishing cathedrals of all Britain. St. Swithun, called in the original Saxon language Swithum, received in this church the clerical tonsure, and put on the monastic habit in the Old Monastery, which had been founded by king Kynegils. He was of noble parentage, passed his youth in innocent simplicity, and in the study of grammar, philosophy, and the holy scriptures. He was an accomplished model of all virtues when he was promoted to holy orders by Helinstan or Helmstan, bishop of Winchester.

Being ordained priest, he was made provost or dean of the Old Monastery. His learning, piety, and prudence moved Egbert, king of the West-Saxons, to make him his priest, under which title the saint subscribed a charter granted to the abbey of Croyland in 833. That great prince committed to his care the education of his son Ethelwolf, and made use of his counsels in the government of his kingdom. A degeneracy of manners had crept into the courts of the Mercians and Northumbrians, and their government was weakened by intestine divisions and several revolutions. Egbert having first vanquished Swithred king of the East-Saxons, and added his kingdom to his own, upon several provocations, invaded Mercia, and conquered it in

altar. The portion at Utrecht was also hid for a time for fear of the Normans; but found and exposed to public veneration again by Bishop Baldric. See the life of St. Otger, with notes by Bollandus, and the additional disquisitions of Sülting, ad 10 Sept. t. 2, p. 612.

828, but soon after restored Withlaf, whom he had expelled, to the throne of that kingdom on condition he should hold the crown of him, and pay him an annual tribute. He treated in the same manner Eandred, the last king of the Northumbers, and made him tributary, after he had with a great army laid waste that province. The kingdom of the East Angles submitted to him about the same time with Mercia, with which it had been long engaged in war, and was thereby reduced to extreme poverty. Kent being at that time tributary to Mercia, it fell also to the share of the conqueror. After this Egbert assembled all the great men of his kingdom both clergy and laity, in a council at Winchester, in which he enacted that this kingdom should ever after be called England, and all its subjects Englishmen. At the same time he was again crowned and from that year, 829, was styled king of England. Thus were the names of Saxons and Jutes abolished among us, and an end was put to the heptarchy, or division of this nation into seven kingdoms, which began to be formed by Hengist in 457, when he took the title of king, seven years after his arrival in this island, in 449. Towards the latter end of Egbert's reign the Danes first began to infest England. This general name historians give to those shoals of pirates which were composed not only of Danes, but also of Norwegians, Goths, Sweones or Swedes, and Vandals, as Eginhard, Henry of Huntingdon, and others assure us.*

King Egbert reigned thirty-seven years over the West Saxons, and nine years over all England, dying in the year 838, or according to others in 837. Ethelwolf, his only surviving son, had been educated in piety and learning under the care of St. Swithin, then provost of the Old Monastery in Winchester,† and had been ordained subdeacon by bishop Helmstan, as Rud-

* The barbarians who inhabited the northern coasts of the Baltic were called by one general name, Normans; and the Sclavi, Vandals, and divers other nations were settled on the southern coast, as Eginhard, Helmold, and others testify.

† The authorities produced by Tho. Rudburn, a monk of the Old Monastery in Winchester, in 1450, to prove St. Swithun to have been some time public professor of divinity at Cambridge, are generally esteemed supposititious. See Rudburn, l. 3. c. 2, Hist. Maj. Wintoniensis, apud Wharton, *Anglia Sacra*, and the History of the University of Cambridge.

burn, Huntingdon, and others relate. But upon the death of his elder brother, whose name is not known, he was dispensed with by Pope Leo to marry, and returning again to a secular life, helped his father in his wars, and after his death was advanced to the throne. He married Osberge, a lady of remarkable piety, and had four sons by her, Ethelbald, Ethelbright, Ethelred, and Alfred. He governed his kingdom by the prudent advice of Alstan bishop of Shirborne, in temporal affairs; and by that of St. Swithin in ecclesiastical matters, especially those which concerned his own soul. And though the king was of a slow disposition, yet by the assistance of these worthy counsellors, he reigned prudently and happily; the Danes were often repulsed, and many noble designs for the good of the church and state were begun, and prosperously executed. Bearing always the greatest reverence to St. Swithin, whom he called his master and teacher, he procured him, upon the death of Helmstan, to be chosen bishop of Winchester, to which see he was consecrated by Ceolnoth, archbishop of Canterbury, in 852. Hearne has given us the profession of faith which he made on that occasion, according to custom, in the hands of the archbishop.(1) William of Malmesbury says, that though this good bishop was a rich treasure of all virtues, those in which he took most delight were humility and charity to the poor; and in the discharge of his episcopal functions he omitted nothing belonging to a true pastor. He built divers churches, and repaired others; and made his journeys on foot, accompanied with his clerks, and often by night to avoid ostentation. Being to dedicate any church, he with all humility used to go barefoot to the place. His feasting was not with the rich, but with the needy and the poor. His mouth was always open to invite sinners to repentance, and to admonish those who stood to beware of falling. He was most severe to himself, and abstemious in his diet, never eating to satisfy his appetite, but barely to sustain nature; and as to sleep, he admitted no more than what after long watching and much labour was absolutely necessary. He was always delighted with psalms and spiritual canticles, and in conversation would bear no discourse but what tended to edification.

By his counsel and advice King Ethelwolf, in a *Mycel sy-*

(1) Hearne, *Teat. Roffens*, p. 269.

nod, or great council of the nation, in 854, enacted a new law by which he gave the tithes, or tenth part of his land, throughout the kingdom to the church, exempt and free from all taxations and burthens, with an obligation of prayers in all churches for ever for his own soul, on every Wednesday, &c. This charter, to give it a more sacred sanction, he offered on the altar of St. Peter at Rome in the pilgrimage which he made to that city in 855. He likewise procured it to be confirmed by the pope.⁽¹⁾ He carried with him to Rome his youngest and best beloved son, Alfred, rebuilt there the school for the English, and ordered to be sent every year to Rome one hundred mancuses* for the pope, one hundred for the church of St. Peter, and as much for that of St. Paul, to furnish them with lights on Easter Eve. He extended the Romescot, or Peterpence, to his whole kingdom. He reigned two years after his return from Rome, and died in 857. He ordained that throughout all his own hereditary lands every ten families shall maintain one poor person with meat, drink, and apparel; from whence came the corrodies, which still remain in divers places. St. Swithin departed to eternal bliss, which he had always thirsted after, on the 2d of July, 862, in the reign of King Ethelbert. His body was buried, according to his order, in the churchyard, where his grave might be trodden on by passengers.

About one hundred years after, in the days of King Edgar his relics were taken up by St. Ethelwold, then bishop of Winchester, and translated into the church in 964. On which occasion Malmesbury affirms that such a number of miraculous cures of all kinds were wrought, as was never in the memory of man known to have been in any other place. Lanfrid, in the original Saxon Lantfred, called by Leland an illustrious doctor, being then a monk at Winchester, wrote, in 980, a history of this translation, and of the miraculous cures of a blind man, and many others, through the intercession of this saint, which history has never been printed: though we have two

(1) See Ingulph. Asser. Redborne.

* The value of a mancuse is not known; it is thought to have been about the same with that of a mark.

beautiful fair manuscript copies of it, the one in the Cotton, the other in the king's library in the inclosure of Westminster Abbey.* In the reign of William the Conqueror, Walkelyn, bishop of Winchester, a Norman, and the king's relation, laid the foundation of the new church in 1079, which he lived to finish with the abbey, so that in 1093, the monks, in the presence of almost all the bishops and abbots of England, came in great joy from the old to the new monastery, and on the feast of St. Swithin, the shrine of this saint was in another solemn procession translated from the old to the new church; and on the next day the bishop's men began to demolish the old abbey. William of Wickham, the celebrated chancellor of England in the reign of Edward III., and founder of a great college in Oxford, in 1379, added the nave and west front to this cathedral, which is now standing. This church was first dedicated to the Holy Trinity, under the patronage of St. Peter; afterwards by St. Ethelwold, in presence of King Etheldred, St. Dunstan, and eight other bishops, to St. Swithin, as Redburn relates, in 980.(1) King Henry VIII., in 1540, commanded this cathedral to be called no longer St. Swithin's, but of the Holy Trinity.†

(1) Hist. Major. Wintom. p. 223. Vita metrice S. Swithuni per Wolstanum monachum Winton. ib. 2.

* Casleu and B. Nicholson falsely call this the life of St. Swithin; and it appears from Leland that Lantfred never wrote his life, which himself sufficiently declares in the history of his miracles. The contrary seems a mistake in Pits, Bale, and Thomas Rudburn, p. 223. Rudburn manifestly confounds Wolstan with Lantfred.

† At the east end of this cathedral is the place which in ancient times was esteemed most sacred, underneath which was the cemetery or resting place of many saints and kings who were interred there with great honour. At present behind the high altar there is a transverse wall, against which we see the marks where several of their statues, being very small, were placed, with their names under each pedestal in a row; "Kinglius Rex. S. Birinus Ep. Kingwald Rex. Egbertus R. Adulphus (i. e. Ethelwolphus) R. Elured R. filius ejus. Edwardus R. junior Adhelstanus R. filius ejus (Sta. Maria D. Jesus in the middle.) Edredus R. Edgarus R. Alwynus Ep. Ethelred R. Cnutus R. Hardecanutus R. filius ejus," &c. Underneath, upon a fillet were written these verses:

"Corpora Sanctorum hic sunt in pace sepulta;
Ex Meritis quorum fulgent miracula multa."

At the foot of these, a little eastwards, is a large flat grave-stone, which had the effigies of a bishop in brass, said to be that of St. Swithin. See Lord Clarendon, and Samuel Gale, On the Antiquities of Winchester pp. 29, 30.

St. Swithin is commemorated in the Roman martyrology on the 2d of July, which was the day of his death ; but his chief festival in England was on the 15th of the same month, the day of the translation of his relics. See the calendar prefixed to the chronicle entitled *Scala Mundi* in a fair MS. in folio in the library of the English college at Douay ; also the *Sarum breviary* and *missal*. An arm of St. Swithin was kept in the abbey of Peterborough, as is mentioned by Hugh Candidus, or White, in his accurate history of that monastery, published by Mr. Spark, p. 1723. The abbey of Hyde was first built within the precincts of the cathedral by King Edward the Elder, in pursuance of his father, Alfred's, will, for secular canons, over whom St. Grimbald was intended to preside, had not his death prevented it. These canons, after sixty years' continuance, yielded this church to the monks whom, in 964, St. Ethelwold brought in ; from which time this abbey was called Newminster till it was translated by King Henry I. and the Bishop William Giffard, to a place near the walls of the city called Hyde. Of this magnificent abbey not so much as the walls are left standing, though in it lay the remains of King Edward, his son Alfred, his daughter St. Eadburga, &c. Its church was dedicated to the Holy Trinity, St. Peter, and St. Grimbald. See the short life of St. Swithin, written by Wolstan, a monk of Winchester, dedicated to St. Elphege, then bishop of that city, in 1001, but translated to Canterbury in 1006. It is published by Mabillon, *sæc.* 5. *Ben.* p. 628. See also Malmesbury, t. 2. *de Pontif.* Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle in verse, published by Mr. Herne. Thomas Rudburn, *Historia Major Wintoniensis*, published by Wharton, t. 1. p. 200. Lord Clarendon, and Sam. Gale, on the Antiquities of Winchester, and Pinius the Bollandist, t. 1. *Julij, ad diem* 2. p. 321. Also, *S. Swithuni vita et miracula per Lamfridum monachum Winton.* MSS. in *Bibl. Regia Londini* xv. c. vii. 1.