

there forty-six years; after which it was brought back to Chick or Chich in Essex, near Colchester, which place was for some time called St. Osithe's, as Camden takes notice. A great abbey of regular canons was erected here under her invocation, which continued to the dissolution, famous for the relics, and honoured with many miracles. See Tanner's *Notitia Monastica*, in folio. William of Malmesbury, l. 2. de Pontific. and principally her life by Vere, a canon of St. Osithe's, in Leland's *Itinerary*, vol. 8. p. 41. and in Malbrancq, in *MSS. suorum*, t. 1. quoted by Ericus Pantoppidanus, in the life of St. Ositha, in his *Gesta Danorum extra Daniam, Hafniæ*, 1740, in 4to. t. 2. Sect. 1. § 12. p. 40, 41, 42. See also Alford, *Annal* t. 1.

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## OCTOBER VIII.

### ST. BRIDGET, WIDOW.

From the bull of her canonization published by Boniface IX. an. 1391; Bullar. t. 1, p. 297. Helyot, *Hist. des Ord. Relig.* t. 4, p. 25. Stevens, *Monast.* t. 2, p. 230. Godeau, *Eloges des Princes et Princesses*, p. 454. Messenius *Scandiæ illustratæ*, t. 9, p. 43, auctæ a Joan. Peringkioldo, fol. Stockholmæ, 1700. Vastovius in *vita S. Brigittæ*, cum notis Erici Benzelli in *Vastovii Vitem Aquiloniam*. An. 1708.

A. D. 1373.

ST. BRIGIT, more commonly called BRIDGET, or BRIGIT, was daughter of Birger, a prince of the royal blood of Sweden, legislator of Upland,\* and of Ingeburgis, daughter to Sigridis, a lady descended from the kings of the Goths. Both the parents spent their lives in fervent exercises of piety, and had a singular devotion to the sacred passion of Christ. Birger consecrated all Fridays in a special manner to practices of penance and never failed on that day to confess his sins, and receive the holy eucharist, endeavouring to put himself into such a disposition, as to be able to bear patiently all the crosses that might

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\* In Upland, Stockholm became capital of all Sweden, being, for the convenience of a spacious harbour, built on six islands, in a lake and river ten miles from the sea. Upsal, twelve leagues to the north-west, was then, and long after, capital of Upland and of all Sweden. In the vast cathedral, which is covered with brass like many other places in Sweden, among the tombs of ancient kings and archbishops, is shown that of St. Brigit's father.

befal him till the next Friday. Ingeburgis was not less devoutly inclined, but died soon after the birth of our saint, which happened in the year 1304. Bridget was brought up by an aunt, who was a lady of singular piety. She did not begin to speak till she was three years old; and the first use she made of her tongue was to praise God: nor did she even in her childhood ever take pleasure in any discourse but what was serious. So strong and early was the grace of devotion with which God favoured her, that from her cradle all her views and desires tended only to piety, and in its exercises she found her greatest delight. No symptoms ever appeared in her of anger, spite, envy, jealousy, untowardness, or disobedience. She assisted assiduously at the church office, and at sermons. At ten years of age she was most tenderly affected by a sermon which she heard on the passion of Christ; and the night following seemed to see him hanging upon his cross covered with wounds, and pouring forth his blood in streams in every part of his body; at the same time, she thought she heard him say to her: "Look upon me, my daughter." "Alas," said she, "who has treated you thus?" She seemed to herself to hear him answer: "They who despise me, and are insensible to my love for them." The impression which this moving spectacle made upon her mind was never effaced; and from that time the sufferings of her Redeemer became the subject of her most assiduous meditation, even when she was at work at her needle, and she could scarcely ever call them to mind without shedding abundance of tears. In obedience to her father, when she was only sixteen years of age, she married Ulpho, prince of Nericia in Sweden, who was himself only eighteen. This pious couple passed the first year after their marriage in continence, and having enrolled themselves in the third Order of St. Francis, lived in their own house as if they had been in a regular and austere monastery. They afterwards had eight children, four boys, and four girls, who were all favoured with the blessings of divine grace. Benedict and Gudma dying in their infancy, left their parents secure of their happiness; Charles and Birger died in the holy war in Palestine; Margaret and Cecily served God faithfully in the married state; and Indeburga and Catherine became nuns. The last was born in 1336, and died in 1381. She is

honoured among the saints on the 22d of March.(1) After the birth of these children, the parents, at the suggestion of St. Bridget, made a mutual vow of continency, and consecrated their estates more than ever to the use of the poor, whom they looked upon as their own family, and for whom they built an hospital, in which they served the sick with their own hands. Ulpho entered into the most perfect sentiments of virtue and penance, with which the example of his wife inspired him; and resigning his place in the king's council, and renouncing the court, he imitated her in all her devotions. To break all worldly ties by forsaking their country and friends, they made a painful pilgrimage to Compostella. In their return Ulpho fell sick at Arras, where he lodged with his wife and eight children, first in the street of the Lombards; but afterwards in the city, at the house of a clergyman or canon of our Lady's, the cathedral, son of a nobleman named Bazentin, where, in the following century, Lewis XI. lodged in 1477. He received the viaticum and extreme-unction from the hands of the bishop of Arras, Andrew Ghini, a native of Florence. Bridget spared neither solicitude, pains, nor prayers for his recovery, and received an assurance of it by a revelation. He was accordingly restored again to his health, and arrived in Sweden, where he died soon after, in 1344, in the odour of sanctity, in the monastery of Alvastre, of the Cistercian Order, which rule, according to some, he had embraced, though others say that he was only preparing himself for that state.(2) At least his name is inserted in the Menology of that Order on the 12th of February.

Bridget being by his death entirely at liberty to pursue her inclinations as to the manner of life which she desired to lead, renounced the rank of princess which she held in the world, to take upon her more perfectly the state of a penitent. Her husband's estates she divided among her children, according to the laws of justice and equity, and from that day seemed to forget what she had been in the world. She changed her habit, using no more linen except for a veil to cover her head, wearing a

(1) On St. Catherine of Sweden, see her life printed after the works of St. Bridget, Vastovius, p. 107. Benzeliuss in notis, ib. p. 71.

(2) Olaus Rosencrantz, apud Tho. Bartholinum, t. 2; Actor Medic. Hafniens, p. 56.

rough hair shift, and, for a girdle, cords full of knots. The austerities which she practised are incredible; on Fridays she redoubled her mortifications and other exercises, allowing herself no refection but a little bread and water. About the time of her husband's death, in 1344, she built the great monastery of Wastein, in the diocese of Lincopen, in Sweden, in which she placed sixty nuns, and, in a separate inclosure, friars, to the number of thirteen priests, in honour of the twelve apostles and St. Paul; four deacons, representing the four doctors of the church, and eight lay brothers. She prescribed them the rule of St. Austin, with certain particular constitutions, which are said to have been dictated to her by our Saviour in a vision: but this circumstance is neither mentioned by Boniface IX. in the bull of her canonization, nor by Martin V. in the confirmation of her Order; and the popes, when they speak of this rule, mention only the approbation of the holy see, without making any inquiry about any such private revelation. The diocesan is the superior of all the monasteries of this Order situated in his diocese; but no new convent can be founded but with an express license and confirmation of the pope. The chief object of the particular devotions prescribed by this rule are the Passion of Christ, and the honour of his holy Mother. In this institute, as in the Order of Fontevault, the men are subject to the prioress of the nuns in temporals, but in spirituals the women are under the jurisdiction of the friars; the reason of which is, because the Order being principally instituted for religious women, the men were chiefly admitted only to afford them such spiritual assistance as they want. The convents of the men and women are separated by an inviolable inclosure; but are contiguous so as to have the same church, in which the nuns keep choir above in a doxal, the men underneath in the church; but they can never see one another. The number of religious persons in each double monastery is fixed as above; but most of the great or double monasteries which were situated in the North, were destroyed at the change of religion, with that of Wastein or Vatzen, which was the chief house of the Order. There are two rich convents of nuns of this Order at Genoa, into one of which, only ladies of quality can be admitted. The greater part of monasteries of *Brigittins*, or of *the Order of*

our Saviour, which now subsist, are single, and observe not the rule as to the number of religious, or the subjection of the friars to the nuns. There are still some double monasteries in Flanders, one at Dantzic, about ten in Germany, and some few others.\*

St. Bridget had spent two years in her monastery at Wastein when she undertook a pilgrimage to Rome, in order to venerate the relics of so many saints which are honoured in that city, and especially to offer up her fervent prayers at the tombs of the apostles. The example of her virtue shone forth with brighter lustre in that great city. The austerity of her watchings and penance, the tenderness of her devotion, her love of retirement, her fervour in visiting the churches, and in serving the sick in the hospitals, her severity towards herself, her mildness to all others, her profound humility, and her charity appeared in all she did. Remarkable monuments of her devotion are still shown in the church of St. Paul and other places at Rome, and in its neighbourhood; for the thirty last years of her life, she was accustomed to go every day to confession; and she communicated several times every week. The frequent use of the sacraments kindled every time fresh ardour in her soul. Nothing is more famous in the life of St. Bridget than the many revelations with which she was favoured by God, chiefly concerning the sufferings of our blessed Saviour, and revolu-

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\* There was only one great monastery of this Order in England, called Sion-house, situate near the Thames in Middlesex, about ten miles from London, founded with royal magnificence by Henry V. in 1413. That prince erected at the same time three great monasteries, near his country house at Shene, now Richmond. One of the Carthusians on the Surrey-side of the river, in Shene, opposite to Sion-house, near Isleworth; another of the Celestines, which seems to have stood in Isleworth or Thistleworth, and this of Sion-house, which being very rich, was one of the first houses that were dissolved by Henry VIII. Edward VI. granted it first to Edward duke of Somerset, and after his attainder, to John duke of Northumberland. Queen Mary restored it to the abbess; but Elizabeth being advanced to the throne, it was again dissolved. The nuns all fled, first to Zurichsee in Zealand, thence to Mechlin, then to Rouen; and finding in none of these places any support, they at last passed to Lisbon, where Philip II. and many charitable private persons contributed to their relief, till a Portuguese lady becoming a nun among them, conveyed to their house an estate to which she was heiress. (See Dugdale's Monast. vol. 2, p. 360; Stevens, t. 2, p. 233; Tanner's Notitia Monastica, and Fuller's Church Hist. b. 6, p. 362.) The revenues of this monastery at the dissolution are rated in Dugdale at seventeen hundred and thirty-one pounds, in Speed, at nineteen hundred and forty-four pounds.

tions which were to happen in certain kingdoms. It is certain that God, who communicates himself to his servants many ways, with infinite condescension, and distributes his gifts with infinite wisdom, treated this great saint and certain others with special marks of his goodness, conversing frequently with them in a most familiar manner, as the devout Blossius observes. Sometimes he spoke to them in visions, at other times he discovered to them hidden things by supernatural illustrations of their understandings, or by representations raised in their imagination so clearly, that they could not be mistaken in them; but to distinguish the operations of the Holy Ghost, and the illusions of the enemy, requires great prudence and attention to the just criteria or rules for the discernment of spirits. Nor can any private revelations ever be of the same nature, or have the same weight and certainty with those that are public, which were made to the prophets to be by them promulgated to the church, and confirmed to men by the sanction of miracles and the authority of the church.

The learned divine John de Turre-crematâ, afterwards cardinal, by order of the council of Basil, examined the book of St. Bridget's revelations, and approved it as profitable for the instruction of the faithful; which approbation was admitted by the council as competent and sufficient. It however amounts to no more than a declaration that the doctrine contained in that book is conformable to the orthodox faith, and the revelations piously credible upon a historical probability. The learned Cardinal Lambertini, afterwards Pope Benedict XIV. writes upon this subject as follows: (1) "The approbation of such revelations is no more than a permission, that, after a mature examination, they may be published for the profit of the faithful. Though an assent of Catholic faith be not due to them, they deserve a human assent according to the rules of prudence, by which they are probable and piously credible, as the revelations of B. Hildegardis, St. Bridget and St. Catharine of Sienna." What is most of all praiseworthy in St. Bridget is, that in true simplicity of heart, she always submitted her revelations to the judgment of the pastors of the church; and deeming herself unworthy even of the ordinary light of faith.

(1) De Canoniz. Sanct. l. 2, c. 32, n. 11.

she was far from ever glorying in any extraordinary favours, which she never desired, and in which she never employed her mind but in order to increase her love and humility.\* If her revelations have rendered her name famous, it is by her heroic virtue and piety that it is venerable to the whole church. To live according to the spirit of the mysteries of religion, is something much greater and more sublime than to know hidden things, or to be favoured with the most extraordinary visions. To have the science of angels without charity is to be only a tinkling cymbal; but both to have charity, and to speak the language of angels, was the happy privilege of St. Bridget. Her ardent love of Jesus Christ crucified moved her to make a painful pilgrimage to visit the holy places in Palestine, where she watered with her pious tears the chief places which Christ had sanctified by his divine steps, and purpled with his adorable blood. In her journey she visited the most renowned churches in Italy and Sicily, with a devotion that excited all who saw her to fervour. Being returned

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\* The works of St. Bridget contain, 1. Devout Prayers on the Sufferings and Love of Christ; of which some are inserted in the common prayer-books, and some with her revelations. 2. Her Rule in thirty-one chapters, approved, in 1363, by Urban V. and confirmed by other popes, under the title of the Rule of the Order of our Saviour. 3. Her Revelations. 4. An Angelical Discourse on the excellence of our Blessed Lady; and four long Acts of thanksgiving to God for the principal mysteries of her life in the incarnation of the Divine Word.

The Revelations were printed at Lubec in 1492; at Nuremberg, 1521, with cuts, much esteemed; at Rome, 1521, 1556, 1606, 1608; at Antwerp, 1611; at Cologne, 1626; at Munich, 1690; and an edition of her Prayers was given at Rome, in 1530, in 8vo. A considerable number of the Revelations was written from her relation of them by Peter, a Swedish Cistercian monk, who was her confessarius and companion in her travels, and who died in 1390; but the eighth book was written by Alphonso, surnamed the Spaniard and the hermit, who resigned the bishopric of Jena in Andalusia, and who was also her confessarius. Had she whole been penned by the saint herself, it would have been compiled with more simplicity, and with greater life and spirit, and would have received a higher degree of certainty.

Matthias or Matthew of Sweden, (called also of Craew in Poland, being perhaps a native of that city,) who died bishop of Worms in 1410, as we learn from his epitaph in Oudin, t. 3, p. 1111, was also the saint's director, when he was canon of Lincolnen. He translated for her use the Bible into Gothic or Swedish, with short annotations. (See Benzelius, p. 66.) He also wrote on the Mass, Eucharist, and other theological subjects. Some of his MSS. are still preserved in different libraries.

Before the year 1600, the office of our Blessed Lady by St. Bridget was published in London. See Wharton in his supplement to Usher, *De Scripturis sacris vernaculis*, p. 447.

safe to Rome, she lived there a year longer, but during that interval was afflicted with grievous distempers, under which she suffered the most excruciating pains with an heroic patience and resignation. Having given her last moving instructions to her son Birger, and her daughter Catharine, who were with her, she was laid on sackcloth, received the last sacraments, and her soul, being released from its prison of clay, took its flight to that kingdom after which she had always most ardently sighed, on the 23d of July, 1373, being seventy-one years old. Her body was buried in the church of St. Laurence in Paris Perna, belonging to a convent of Poor Clares; but a year after her death, in July, 1374, it was translated to her monastery of Wastain in Sweden, by the procurement of her son Birger and St. Catharine. She was canonized by Boniface IX. in 1391, on the 7th of October, and her festival is appointed on the day following.(1) At the petition of the clergy and nobility of Sweden the general council of Constance examined again the proofs, and unanimously declared her enrolled among the saints on the 1st of February, 1415.(2) Her canonization was again confirmed by Martin V. in 1419.(3)

The life and sufferings of our divine Redeemer are the book of life, in which both souls which now begin to serve God, and those who have long exercised themselves in the most perfect practices of all heroic virtues, find the most powerful incentives and means of spiritual improvement. The astonishing example which our most amiable and adorable Saviour here sets us of infinite meekness, patience, charity, and humility, if seriously considered and meditated upon, will speak a language which will reach the very bottom of our hearts, and totally reform our innermost affections and sentiments. That inordinate self-love and pride which by the contagion of sin seems almost interwoven in our very frame, will be beat down to the very ground: the poison of our passions with which our souls are so deeply infected in all their powers, will be expelled by this sovereign

(1) Bullar. t. 1, p. 297. See the whole procedure in Mabill. Museum Italic. p. 535.

(2) See Conc. Constant. p. 39. Lenfant, Hist. du Concile de Constance, l. 1, § 71, p. 67. Herman. ab Hardt Prolegom. III. Conc. Constant. p. 15, et 28, t. 4, p. 67.

(3) In premio Op. S. Birgittæ.



antidote ; and sincere compunction, patience, humility, charity, and contempt of the world will entirely possess our affections. The more a soul is advanced in the school of all Christian virtues, the more feelingly she will find every circumstance in these sacred mysteries to be an unfathomed abyss of love, clemency, meekness, and humility, and an inexhausted source of spiritual riches in all virtues. By this meditation she will daily learn more perfectly the spirit of our divine Redeemer, and put on that blessed mind which was in Christ Jesus. In this interior conformity to him consists the reformation and perfection of our inner man : this resemblance, this image of our divine original formed in us, entitles us to the happy portion of his promises.

### ST. THAIS, THE PENITENT.

ABOUT the middle of the fourth age, there lived in Egypt a famous courtesan named Thais, who had been educated a Christian ; but the sentiments of grace were stifled in her by an unbridled love of pleasure, and desire of gain. Beauty, wit, and flattering loose company brought her into the gulf ; and she was engaged in the most criminal infamous habits, out of which only an extraordinary grace can raise a soul. This unhappy thoughtless sinner was posting to eternal destruction when the divine mercy interposed in her favour. Paphnutius, an holy anchorite of Thebais, wept without intermission for the loss of her soul, the scandal of her vicious courses being public in the whole country. At length, having earnestly recommended the matter to God, he formed a project, or a pious stratagem, in order to have access to her, that he might endeavour to rescue her out of her disorders. He put off his penitential weeds, and dressed himself in such a manner as to disguise his profession. Going to her house, full of an ardent zeal for her conversion, he called for her at the door, and was introduced to her chamber. He told her he desired to converse with her in private, but wished it might be in some more secret apartment. "What is it you fear?" said Thais : "If men, no one can see us here ; but if you mean God, no place can hide us from his all-piercing eye." "What?" replied Paphnutius : "do you know there is a God?" "Yes," said she, "and I moreover know that a heaven will be the portion of the good, and that