

ganshire, near the Severn sea, very famous to this time, says Leland: it was originally founded by him.

NOVEMBER VII

ST. WILLIBRORD, CONFESSOR.

FIRST BISHOP OF UTRECHT.

From his life, written by Alcuin, in two books.

A. D. 738.

ST. WILLIBRORD was born in the kingdom of Northumberland, toward the year 658, and placed by his virtuous parents, before he was seven years old, in the monastery of Rippon, which was at that time governed by St. Wilfrid, its founder. Wilgis, our saint's father, retired also into a monastery, afterward became a hermit, and in his old age founded and governed a small monastery between the ocean and the Humber. He is honoured among the saints in the monastery of Epternac, and in the English calendars. Alcuin has left us an account of his life. Willibrord, by carrying the yoke of our Lord with fervour from his infancy, found it always easy and sweet, and the better to preserve the first fruits which he had gathered, made his monastic profession when he was very young. He had made great progress in virtue and sacred learning, when, out of a desire for further improvement, in the twentieth year of his age, he went over into Ireland, with the consent of his abbot and brethren, where he joined St. Egbert or Ecgbright, and the blessed Wigbert, who were gone thither before upon the

same errand. In their company, our saint spent twelve years in the study of the sacred sciences, and in the most fervent exercise of all virtues. Though his constitution was weak, in fervour and exactness, he outdid the most advanced: he was humble, modest, and of an easy obliging temper: and his whole conduct was regular and uniform. St. Egbert had long entertained an ardent desire of going to preach the gospel to the inhabitants of those unhappy countries, in which barbarism and idolatry still reigned without control, and he had chiefly Friesland, or Lower Germany in his eye. But he was diverted from that apostolical design by persons of piety and authority, who engaged him to employ his zealous labours in the islands between Ireland and Scotland, in all which he settled the true manner of celebrating Easter; especially at Hij, where he died a little before Bede wrote his history. St. Egbert is honoured in the English Calendar on the 24th of April. Bede gives a most edifying account of his austere penance, devotion, zeal, and charity. His companion, the holy priest Wigbert, went in the mean time to Friesland; but after staying there two years, came back without having met with any prospect of success. This disappointment did not discourage Egbert, and other zealous promoters of this mission; but excited them the more earnestly to solicit the divine mercy with prayers and tears in favour of so many souls, who were perishing eternally. Willibrord, who was then about thirty-one years of age, and had been ordained priest a year before, expressed a great desire to be allowed by his superiors to undertake this laborious and dangerous charge. St. Egbert, by the known zeal and great talents of our saint, and by his cheerfulness, which sufficiently showed him prepared to encounter all difficulties in the prosecution of such a work, doubted not but God had reserved

to him the conversion of that nation, and encouraged him in this zealous design. St. Willibrord was joined by St. Swidbert and ten other English monks in this mission.

The Frisons, who had formerly occupied a large tract of country on the coasts of the German ocean, crossing the Rhine into Belgic Gaul, had possessed themselves of those provinces about the mouth of the Rhine, which the Catti, who were also originally Germans, then held.¹ Among all the German nations none maintained their liberty against the Romans, with greater success and courage, than the Frisons. Procopius tells us,² that some of them came into Britain with the English Saxons: and by their situation they were doubtless the most expert in maritime affairs. St. Ludger³ mentions that Swidbert, and the rest of these zealous preachers, were desirous to carry the light of the faith to these people, because their ancestors sprang from them. St. Eligius, bishop of Noyon, had preached in part of Friesland, and St. Wilfrid had sown there the seeds of our holy faith in 678. But these seem to have been almost rooted out⁴ before St. Willi-

1 The Catti were esteemed by the Romans the most valiant of all the Germans, especially the Batavi, a part of these Catti who settled in the island between the branches of the Rhine. Leaving Germany they at length settled among the Belgæ; but since the coming of the Frisons among them their name was lost; only in two villages called Catwic. The Batavi, a small part of the Catti, upon the arrival of the Frisons, confined themselves within a little island formed by the rivers in part of Guelderland, named still from them Betawe, near Nimegue. The name of Holland began to be used in the eleventh century, first for a very small district, which reached no further than Dort, or its island. The name was given to the country from the village Hollant, and signifies a low, flat, hollow, or marshy land, *Hol-lant*. (See Ant. Mattheus, de Nobilitate, l. 1. c. 12. p. 49. et Id. Analect. t. 5. p. 480.) A like country in Lincolnshire is called Holland. (See Camden.) So Watten in Artois, Watton in Norfolk, and Wattun nunnery in Yorkshire, signify a watery or damp town: and the last is called in Latin, *Humida Villa*, by St. Aelred. (l. de Miraculo in Sanctimoniali de Wattun, inter 10 Script. Angl.)

2 Procop. de Goth. l. 4. c. 29.

3 In vit. S. Suidberti.

4 See Boschart, in Diatriba de Primis Frisæ Apostolis.

brord's arrival in 690 or 691. The authors of *Batavia Sacra*¹ doubt not but our twelve missionaries landed at Catwic upon the sea, which was at the mouth of the Rhine before it was blocked up with sands, and thither the English were accustomed to export corn, even from the north coasting part of their island: the British tower, as it was called, was built by the Romans at Catwic to defend this harbour.² This old channel was not entirely obstructed in 1050, as appears from the *Chronicle of Woerden*.³ And Alcuin expressly says, that these missionaries landed at the mouth of the Rhine, and travelled thence to Utrecht, a town built by the Romans at the great passage over the Rhine: whence it was called *Trajectum*, afterward *Trecht*, and lastly *Utrecht*, (from *Outrecht*, the Old Passage, and *Ultrajectum*, or passage at the town *Vulta*,) to distinguish it from the ancient town of *Maestricht* or *Passage* over the *Maese*. Pepin of *Herstal*, or the *Big*, who was at that time duke of the French, and mayor of the king's palace, and had lately conquered part of *Friesland*, received courteously *St. Willibrord* and his companions. But *Willibrord* set out for *Rome*, and cast himself at the feet of pope *Sergius*, begging his apostolic blessing and authority to preach the gospel to idolatrous nations. The pope, charmed with his zeal and sanctity, granted him the most ample licenses

¹ *Proleg.* § 7. p. 6.

² The old channel of the Rhine passed by *Arnheim*, *Rhenen*, *Utrecht*, *Leyden*, and *Catwic*; but this channel is now no more than a brook which does not reach the ocean, but two leagues below *Leyden* loses itself in the sands, and in two or three small brooks; its waters having been exhausted by four great channels: 1. the *Wahal*, which goes from it at *Fort Skenk* to the *Meuse*; 2. the famous channel cut by *Drusus* from it above *Arnheim* to the *Issel*; 3. the *Leck*, eight leagues lower, and the *Weck*, which at *Utrecht* almost drains it. The *Meuse* having received the *Wahal* below the isle of *Bommel*, is called the *Meruve*, and being increased by the *Leck* and the *Weck*, disembogues itself into the ocean below *Rotterdam*, where it receives the *Rote*.

³ *Johan. a Leidis*, in *Chron. Belg.* See *Ant. Mattheus*, de *Nobilit.* l. 2. c. 4.

for that purpose, and gave him a great quantity of relics for the consecration of churches. With this treasure the saint returned with all possible expedition to his province, considering the pressing necessities and dangers of so many souls which called for his compassion and relief. St. Swibert was taken from him, and ordained bishop of the Borroctuarrians, who seemed to have inhabited the territory of Berg, and the neighbouring country toward Cologne.

St. Willibrord, with his ten other companions, under the protection of Pepin, preached the gospel with wonderful success, in that part of Friesland that had been conquered by the French; so that after six years, Pepin, by the advice of his bishops, sent the saint to Rome, with strong letters of recommendation, that he might be ordained bishop. His humility made him endeavour that some other should be pitched upon for that dignity: but he was not heard. Pope Sergius, who still sat in St. Peter's chair, received him with great marks of honour, changed his name into that of Clement, with great solemnity ordained him archbishop of the Frisons in St. Peter's church, and gave him the pallium with authority to fix his see in what part of the country he should think most convenient. The holy man stayed only fourteen days in Rome, being impatient to return to his flock, and regretting an hour's absence from them, more than was necessary to procure them greater advantages. He came back to Utrecht the same year, 696, and chose that city for his residence. Pepin having bestowed on him the royal castle of Viltaburg, which, as Bede assures us,¹ was at Utrecht, though Cluverius will have it to have been the present Wiltenburg, three miles and a half from Utrecht: but this town itself was called Vulta, or

the city of the Vultæ.¹ St. Willibrord built at Utrecht the church of our Saviour, in which he fixed his metropolitical see, says St. Boniface,² and that of St. Martin, though this latter he only restored, for it had been a church, but destroyed by the Pagans.³ Heda and Beka think it had been built by king Dagobert, at the desire of St. Wilfrid. This latter church became afterward the cathedral, and both were served by colleges of canons. The archbishop's indefatigable application to the conversion of souls seemed to prove, that with the new obligation he had received at his consecration, of labouring to enlarge the kingdom of his Divine Master, he had acquired fresh strength and a considerable augmentation of his zeal. In the second year after his episcopal consecration, assisted by the liberality of Pepin, and the abbess Irmina, who is said to have been daughter of Dagobert II. he founded, in 698, the abbey of Epternac, in the diocess of Triers, and now in the duchy of Luxemburg,⁴ which he governed to his death. Alcuin relates, that the nunnery of Horrea, of which Irmina was abbess, had been delivered from a pestilence by water, blessed by St. Willibrord, and by his saying mass in the church. Pepin of Herstal, before his death put away his concubine Alpais, by whom he had Charles Martel, and was reconciled to his wife Plectrudis, and in his last will, which is signed by Plectrudis, he recommended to St. Willibrord, his nephews, (without any mention of his natural son Charles,) and bestowed on our saint the village of Swestram, now Susteren, in the duchy of Juliers, near the Meuse, with which the holy man endowed a nunnery which he built there.⁵

¹ Sigebert, Chron. ad an. 679.

² Ep. 97. ad Steph. Pap.

³ lb. See Boschartius, in Diatriba, diss. 49.

⁴ See the charter of Irmina in Miræus, Donationes Piæ Belgicæ.

⁵ Brower. Annal. Trevir. l. 7. Mabill. Annal. Bened. t. 2. l. 19
§ 12.

Pepin of Herstal died in December, 714. A little before his death, Charles Martel's son, Pepin the Short, afterward king of France, was born, and baptized by St. Willibrord, who on that occasion is related by Alcuin to have prophesied, that the child would surpass in glory all his ancestors. Charles Martel in a short time became mayor of the palace, and approved himself equally the first general and statesman of his age. In 723, he settled upon the monastery which St. Willibrord had erected at Utrecht to serve his cathedral, all the royal revenues belonging to his castle there.¹ Of this monastery St. Gregory was afterward abbot; in succeeding times it was secularized. Several other donations of estates made by Charles Martel to several churches founded by our saint, may be seen in Miræus and others. By a charter that prince conferred on him the royalties of the city of Utrecht with its dependencies and appurtenances.² By such establishments our saint sought to perpetuate the work of God. Not content to have planted the faith in the country which the French had conquered, he extended his labours into West-Friesland, which obeyed Radbod, prince or king of the Frisons, who continued an obstinate idolater; yet hindered not the saint's preaching to his subjects, and himself sometimes listened to him. The new apostles penetrated also into Denmark: but Ongend, (perhaps Biorn,) who then reigned there a monster of cruelty rather than a man, was hardened in his malice, and his example had a great influence over his subjects. The man of God, however, for the first fruits of this country, purchased thirty young Danish boys, whom he instructed, baptized, and brought back with him. In his return he was

¹ See his diploma in Heda, p. 28. Le Cointe and Miræus.

² See this chapter in Willh. Heda, p. 28. See also Buchelius in Heda, and Alcuin, l. 2. c. 51.

driven by stress of weather upon the famous pagan island, Fositeland, now Amelandt, on the coast of Friesland, six leagues from Leuwarden, to the north, a place then esteemed by the Danes and Frisons as most sacred in honour of the idol Fosite. It was looked upon as an unpardonable sacrilege, for any one to kill any living creature in that island, to eat of any thing that grew in it, or to draw water out of a spring there without observing the strictest silence. St. Willibrord, to undeceive the inhabitants, killed some of the beasts for his companions to eat, and baptized three persons in the fountain, pronouncing the words aloud. The idolaters expected to see them run mad or drop down dead: and seeing no such judgment befall them, could not determine whether this was to be attributed to the patience of their god, or to his want of power. They informed Radbod, who, transported with rage, ordered lots to be cast three times a day, for three days together, and the fate of the delinquents to be determined by them. God so directed it that the lot never fell upon Willibrord; but one of his company was sacrificed to the superstition of the people, and died a martyr for Jesus Christ.

The saint, upon leaving Amelandt, directed his course to Warckeren, one of the chief islands belonging to Zealand. His charity and patience made considerable conquests to the Christian religion there, and he established several churches. After the death of Radbod, which happened in 719, Willibrord was at full liberty to preach in every part of the country. He was joined in his apostolical labours, in 720, by St. Boniface, who spent three years in Friesland: then went into Germany. Bede says, when he wrote his history in 731, "Willibrord, surnamed Clement, is still living, venerable for his old age, having been bishop thirty-six years, and sighing after the

rewards of the heavenly life, after many conflicts in the heavenly warfare.”¹ He was, says St. Alcuin, of a becoming stature, venerable in his aspect, comely in his person, graceful and always cheerful in his speech and countenance, wise in his counsel, unwearied in preaching and all apostolic functions, amidst which he was careful to nourish the interior life of his soul by assiduous prayer, singing of psalms, watching, and fasting. Alcuin, who wrote about fifty years after his death, assures us, that this apostle was endowed with the gift of miracles, and relates, that whilst he preached in the isle of Warckeren, where the towns of Flessingue and Middleburg are since built, going from village to village, he found in one of them a famous idol, to which the people were offering their vows and sacrifices, and full of holy zeal threw it down, and broke it in pieces. In the mean time an idolater, who was the priest and guardian of the idol, gave him a blow on the head with his backsword, with which, nevertheless, the saint was not hurt: and he would not suffer the assassin to be touched, or prosecuted. But the unhappy man was soon after possessed with a devil, and lost his senses. By the tears, prayers, and zealous labours of this apostle and his colleagues, the faith was planted in most parts of Holland, Zealand, and all the remaining part of the Netherlands, whither St. Amand and St. Lebwin had never penetrated; and the Frisons, till then a rough and most barbarous people, were civilized, and became eminent for virtue, and the culture of arts and sciences. St. Wulfran, archbishop of Sens, and others, excited by the success of our saint’s missions, were ambitious to share in so great a work under his direction. St. Willibrord was exceeding cautious in admitting persons to holy orders, fearing lest one unworthy or

¹ Bede, Hist. 1. 5. c. 12.

slothful minister should defeat by scandal, all the good which the divine mercy had begun for the salvation of many souls. It is also mentioned of him, that he was very strict and diligent in examining and preparing thoroughly those whom he admitted to baptism, dreading the condemnation which those incur, who, by sloth or facility, open a door to the profanation of our most tremendous mysteries. The schools which St. Willibrord left at Utrecht, were very famous.¹ Being at length quite broken with old age, he resigned the administration of his diocese to a coadjutor whom he ordained bishop,² and in retirement prepared

1 Dom. Rivet, Hist. Litter. t. 3. p. 449.

2 The archbishopric of Utrecht failed after the death of St. Boniface, the archbishop of Cologne claiming the administration. But after some interval a bishopric was re-established here, and the authors of *Batavia Sacra* reckon sixty bishops of Utrecht before this see, in 1559, was again made an archbishopric, by Paul IV. with five suffragans, namely of Haerlem, Middleberg, Daventer, Groeninguen, and Boisleduc. But the union or confederacy of the states against the Spaniards formed at Utrecht, in 1579, put an end to this establishment; and since the revolt of the United Provinces, the spiritual government among the Catholics is intrusted to bishops *in partibus infidelium*, with commissions of apostolic vicars, the first being nominated in 1602. Jansenism raised great disturbances in Holland, in the time of John of Neercassel, bishop of Castoria, vicar apostolic, who died in 1686: greater under his successor Peter Codd, archbishop of Sebastie, who was cited to Rome in 1700, and after his return, in 1702, suspended by Clement XI. He died in 1710, having declared that he had always condemned the five propositions, but had not been able to discover them in Jansenius's book entitled *Augustinus*. Theodore de Cock, substituted pro-vicar in his place, was banished by the States, and died at Rome. Gerard Potcamp was created apostolic vicar in Holland, in 1705, but died the same year, and his successor, Adam Daemen, was rejected by the States. On the pretended chapter of Utrecht, and the bishop of Babylon excommunicated by several succeeding popes, &c. see the history and ample confutation of their pretensions, published by the late cardinal of Alsace, archbishop of Mechlin.

himself for eternity. He died, according to Pagi, in 739; according to Mabillion, in 740 or 741, and according to Mr. Smith,¹ in 745, some adhering to Alcuin, others to Bede, &c. St. Boniface says, that St. Willibrord spent fifty years in preaching the gospel,² which Mr. Smith dates from his episcopal consecration; Mabillon,³ from his coming into Friesland: but others think these fifty years mean only thereabouts. For Alcuin says, he came into Friesland in the thirty-third year of his age, and lived eighty-one years; which account only allows him forty-eight years employed in preaching. But, if St. Boniface comprises the two years in which he preached in Ireland, and the Scottish islands, his Chronology agrees with Alcuin's dates, and it follows that St. Willibrord died in 738: which is confirmed by the Chronicle of Epternac, compiled from the Necrology and manuscript registers of that monastery. Alcuin and Rabanas Maurus place his death on the 6th of November: but the Chronicle of Epternac, Usuard, Ado, and the Roman and Benedictin Martyrologies commemorate him on the 7th. He was buried, as he had desired, at his monastery of Epternac, and his relics are there enshrined at this day. The portative altar which he made use of for the celebration of the divine mysteries, in travelling through Friesland, Zealand, and Holland, is kept in the Benedictin abbey of our Lady *ad martyres*, at Triers.⁴ St. Willibrord's Testament in favour of his monastery of Epternac was published by F. Ch. Scribanus, S. J. in his Antwerp, by Miræus,⁵ with notes by Boschart,

¹ In Bed. 1. 5. c. 12. p. 194.

² Ep. 97. ad Steph. II. papam.

³ Ap. Martenne, Ampl. Collect. t. 4. p. 505.

⁴ See Molan. in Indiculo SS. Belgii, and F. Brower, Annales Trevir. l. 7.

⁵ Miræus in Codice Donationum Piarum Belg. Item in Batavia Sacra.

and by Calmet, among the proofs of his History of Lorrain.¹

A true pastor, who is animated with fervour and zeal, allows himself no repose, whilst he can comfort, instruct, exhort, or weep and pray for the souls which are intrusted to his charge, and whose spiritual dangers are continually near his heart. He whose life is regular and methodical, and who is solicitous and earnest, finds time to do with ease, and without a single thought of it, more business than seems credible to the slothful. This every Christian may experience: and, without the obligations of the pastoral charge, every one owes so many and so great duties, both to others and to himself, that, unless he is supinely slothful and wilfully blind, he will find business enough constantly upon his hands to employ earnestly all his moments. Nor is it our misfortune that we have not time, but, that through sloth and thoughtlessness we mispend it.

SAINT WERENFRID, PRIEST AND CONFESSOR.

HE was an English monk, and, according to Mabillon, accompanied, or, as the Bollandists rather think, followed St. Willibrord into Friesland, and assisted him in preaching the gospel.

¹ Bale, Pits, Swertius, (Athen. Belg. p. 701.) Vossius, (l. 2. de Hist. Lat. c. 23.) and bishop Tanner (Bibl. Brit. p. 776.) ascribe to St. Willibrord books on his travels; also canons, homilies, and epistles. Dr. Cave judiciously omits the mention of them. The travels seem a mistake for St. Willibald's: the rest for some others; for no authentic mention is found of them. At Epternac are kept two manuscripts in Saxon letters, brought into France by St. Willibrord; one containing the four gospels copied from the very original of St. Jerom: the other of St. Jerom's Martyrology, which the Bollandists have engraved in their work. In the margin of this calendar is written, in St. Willibrord's hand; "Clement Willibrord came from beyond the sea into France, in 690: though unworthy, was ordained by the apostolic man, pope Sergius, in 695: is now living in 728," &c. See Dom. Martenne, and Durand, Voyage Litteraire, p. 297. Calmet, Hist. de Lorraine, t. 3. p. 99.