

the same church, and are likewise honoured there to this day. These martyrs are named in the Martyrology of Bede and others. These five are said to have been put to death, because being carvers by profession, they refused to make idols.

The rage of tyrants, who were masters of the world, spread the faith which they vainly endeavoured, by fighting against heaven, to extinguish. The martyrs, who died for it, sealed it with the blood, and gave a testimony to Jesus Christ, which was, of all others, the strongest and most persuasive. Other Christians, who fled, became the apostles of the countries whither they went. Whence St. Austin compares them to torches, which, if you attempt to put them out by shaking them, are kindled, and flame so much the more. The martyrs, by the meekness and fervour of their lives, and their constancy in resisting even to death, converted an infidel world, and disarmed the obstinacy of the most implacable enemies of the truth. But what judgments must await those Christians who, by the scandal of their sloth and worldly spirit, dishonour their religion blaspheme Christ, withdraw even the faithful from the practice of the gospel, and tempt a Christian world to turn infidel?

## ST. WILLEHAD, CONFESSOR,

BISHOP OF BREMEN AND APOSTLE OF SAXONY.

WILLEHAD was an Englishman, a native of the kingdom of Northumberland, and was educated from his infancy in learning and piety. The austerity of his life, his humility, the readiness of his obedience, and his constant attendance on prayer, engaged his bishop to promote him to the dignity of the priesthood. The great spiritual conquests which many of his countrymen had

made to Christ, with St. Willibrord in Friesland and St. Boniface in Germany, seemed a reproach to him, and he desired to carry the saving knowledge of the true God to some of those barbarous nations which remained still in the darkness of idolatry and in the shades of death. King Alchred favoured his resolution, and the bishops and other pious persons unanimously approved of his zeal; whereupon he was allowed to follow the divine call. He landed in Friesland, and being desirous to preach in the first place to those nations which had the least acquaintance with our holy faith, about the year 772, began his mission at Dockum, in West Friesland, the place near which St. Boniface and his companions had received the crown of martyrdom in 754. The blood of the martyr contributed powerfully to soften the hearts and open the eyes of the barbarians, and disposed them to receive the faith. Saint Willehad prayed with many tears upon the spot which had been watered with the holy victims of faith, earnestly desiring to attain to the like happiness, and begging of God the salvation of those who continued obstinate in their infidelity. His prayers in their favour were heard. The infidels willingly listened to his instructions, and he baptized an incredible multitude. His stay about Dockum was not very long; and crossing the Lavinca or Issel, he made his way through the country, now called Over-Issel, and several other parts. At a village called Humark the inhabitants, who were all idolaters, cast lots whether he and his companions should be put to death: but Providence determined the lots, which the people foolishly imagined to be directed by the powers they worshipped, for the preservation of the holy missionaries. Having escaped out of their hands, our saint preached in the country then called Trentonia or Drentia, and many were initiated by him in the holy

mysteries. But some of his disciples proceeding to demolish the places dedicated to the practice of superstition and idolatry, the pagans were so incensed that they resolved to massacre the saint and his colleagues, and one of them directed his sword to his neck with such force, as must have cut off his head if Providence had not diverted the stroke; but St. Anscharius assures us that it was entirely broke by cutting a string about the saint's neck, at which hung a case of relics which he always carried with him. This deliverance surprised the idolaters, and struck them with a profound veneration for the servant of God.

The saint thence proceeded into Wigmore, the country where Bremen now stands, and was the first missionary who passed the Elbe. The Saxons at that time had spread themselves from the Oder to the Rhine and the Germanic ocean, occupying the greatest part of the northern provinces of Germany. Though divided into several cantons or tribes, which were distinct governments, they all followed the same rites and customs, and, in case of a general war, united under one commander. St. Willehad preached in this country seven years, till the great rebellion of the Saxons against Charlemagne broke out in 782. They had made inroads upon his territories, and had been compelled to pay him a tribute in 772: in which war he destroyed the famous idol Irmensul, with its rich temple, in the fortress called Ebresburg, which some place near the Weser, others not far from Ratisbon.<sup>1</sup> in 774

<sup>1</sup> Tacitus tells us, that the idol Irmensul represented Mercury: Spelman thinks it was a pillar dedicated to Mars. Mons. Tercier doubts not but it was a monument erected in honour of Arminius, the brave German general who defended the liberty of his country against the Romans, and was long the subject of romances and songs among the Germans. *Herman* signifies *warrior*, and *Sax* (which in Lower Saxony is pronounced *Sul*) a pillar. Whence he conjectures this to have been the name of his office; which the Romans mistook for his proper name, and from *Irman* or *Herman*, formed *Arminius*. See the Diss. of

Charlemagne was busy against the Lombards in Italy; which occasion the Saxons took to revolt; but, being defeated by him, obtained their pardon in 776. Though Desiderius, the last king of the Lombards, had been sent into France, where he probably died a monk, the duke of Benevento and other Lombard princes raised commotions in Italy, which Charlemagne quelled in four months, and returned to curb the Saxons, who had at that time again revolted. They renewed their homage to him in 777: only Witikind, a Westphalian Saxon, who had been at the head of this rebellion, fled into Denmark. In 780 the Saxons were again in arms, and again subdued. But, in 782, at the instigation of Witikind, they entered into a general conspiracy, and renewed hostilities with unparalleled rage and cruelty, raising a dreadful persecution against all the teachers of the Christian religion, and putting to death all the missionaries that fell into their hands. Several suffered martyrdom on this occasion, among whom was one named Folcard, a priest, with his companion Emming; also Benjamin, Attrebanus, and Gerwal, with their companions. Saint Willehad, who had governed this whole mission seven years, escaped by sea into Friesland, and, whilst the tumult of the war rendered his missionary duties impossible, took an opportunity of going to Rome, and laying before pope Adrian the state of his mission. He was honourably received by the pope, and, with his apostolic blessing, made haste back to France, where,

Mons. Tercier, to show the Teutonic or German language to be the oldest now used in Europe. (*Memoires de l'Acad. des Inscriptions*, t. 24. ad ann. 1751. Rimius, in his *History of the House of Brunswick-Lunenbourg*, will have it that Ehresburg or Ebresburg is the present Stadsberg in Westphalia. Charlemagne having taken the fortress of Ehresburg, after a long siege, found there a booty which surpassed imagination. The idol was destroyed, and the column carried away, and placed in a new church built by Charlemagne at Hildesheim; where it is to be seen at this day, and serves to put candles upon, when the church is illuminated on high festivals.

waiting the end of the war, he passed almost two years in the monastery of Epternac, in watching, fasting, study, and assiduous contemplation: he prayed often at the tomb of St. Willibrord. He also copied the epistles of St. Paul and some other books, and here he assembled his fellow-labourers, whom the war had dispersed.

In 785, duke Witikind being baptized,<sup>1</sup> and peace restored in Saxony, St. Willehad returned to his province. Charlemagne, whose protection he implored, allowed him a dwelling in Wigmore, or the country between the Weser and the Elbe: and, two years after, when the saint had founded many churches, that prince procured him to be ordained bishop of the Saxons, on the 15th of July, in 787. The saint fixed his see at Bremen, which city seems only to have been founded at that time, and was afterward much enriched by its archbishop. St. Willehad having received the episcopal character, redoubled his zeal and his solicitude in preaching, baptizing, administering penance, and ordaining priests. His food was only bread, with honey, herbs, or apples; except that, when his health was much impaired, and he was afflicted with frequent distempers, pope Adrian commanded him to allow himself a little fish. Wine or any other intoxicating liquor he never touched, except the wine he took at the altar. Unless some very extraordinary impediment fell out, he never missed saying mass every day, and usually offered that adorable sacrifice with many tears. Holy reading and meditation were his favourite exercises: and he usually recited the whole psalter every day, and frequently two or three times a day, with wonderful alacrity and devotion. His cathedral church he built of wood, which his successor Willeroc

<sup>1</sup> See the History of Witikind, by the celebrated Crusius, in folio. Also, Vie de Witikind le Grand, Tige des Maisons de Saxe, de Brandebourg, &c. par M. Dreux de Radier, duodecimo, 1755.

rebuilt of stone. The saint consecrated it on the 1st of November, in honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the invocation of St. Peter the apostle. In his old age, and in a very weak state of health, he could never be induced to intermit his functions, and scarce to mitigate any of his austerities. If Vespasian used to say that an emperor, considering his great obligations and duties, ought to die standing, how much more justly ought a bishop to die in the field of battle with arms in his hands? When St. Willehad lay dying, one of his disciples said to him, weeping, "Forsake not so soon your tender flock exposed to the fury of wolves." The holy prelate answered, "Withhold me not from going to God. The sheep of mine I recommend to him who intrusted them to me, and whose mercy is able to protect them." St. Willehad died in a village of Friesland, in his diocess, called Bleckensee, now Plexem; and his body was with great pomp conveyed to Bremen, and buried in his cathedral. He had laboured in his missions thirty-five years, and been bishop two years, three months, and twenty-six days.

### SAINT GODFREY, BISHOP OF AMIENS, C

GODFREY was born in the territory of Soissons, of noble and pious parents: his father, Fulco, was no sooner a widower than he consecrated himself to God in the monastic habit. Our saint was educated from five years of age, when he was weaned, in the monastery of Mount St. Quentin's, under the care of the holy abbot, Godfrey, who was his godfather, and uncle to B. Ida, countess of Boulogne and Namur, and mother to Godfrey and Baldwin, the kings and conquerors of Jerusalem. The saint, in his youth always gave the better part of his meals to the poor, and sometimes did not make his appearance at all in