

ST. HILDA, OR HILD, ABBESS.

By despising the world for Christ, this saint became greater, even in the eyes of men, than royalty itself could have made her: but she was truly great only because the applause and veneration of the whole island was to her a most grievous persecution, the dangers of which alarmed her humble soul more than the threats of fire and sword could have done. Hilda was daughter of Hereric, nephew of St. Edwin, king of the Northumbers; and she was baptized by St. Paulinus, together with that prince, when she was but fourteen years old. The grace of this sacrament she always preserved without spot, and, the moment she became a member of the kingdom of God, the obligations and happiness of this great spiritual dignity took up all her thoughts, and engrossed her whole soul. The better to attend to them alone she left her friends and country, and went into the kingdom of the East Angles, where her cousin, the most religious king Annas, reigned. Her first design was to retire to Chelles, in France, where her sister, St. Hereswide, served God: with her she passed one year, till upon her death, St. Aidan prevailed upon Hilda to return into Northumberland, where he settled her in the small nunnery upon the river Were, founded by the first Northumbrian nun, Heiu. After living there one year, she was made abbess of a numerous monastery at Heorteal, or Heterslie, now Hartle-

1 Heortheu, or Heterslie, or Hertesie, i. e. the island of Stags, was founded under the direction of St. Bosa, by Hien, who seems to have been the first nun in the kingdom of Northumberland; and afterward retired to Calcester now Tadcaster. Bede, l. 4, c. 23. Leland and Cressy confound Heiu, with St. Bega or Bees; but the latter served God in Copeland, and no monastery was founded by her, though one was there erected in her honour, in the reign of Henry I. Heiu founded the first monastery in the kingdom of the Northumbers on the northern bank of the Were; the second at Hartlepool in the bishopric of Durham. See Smith in Bede, l. 4. c. 23. Those who confound her with St. Hilda are certainly mistaken

pool, in the bishopric of Durham; and some years after called to found a great double monastery, the one of men, and the other of women, at Streaneshalch, (that is, bay of the Lighthouse,) afterwards called Prestby, from the number of priests that live there, and at present Whitby, (or Whitebay,) in Yorkshire.¹ All her monasteries were destroyed by the Danes, about two hundred and fifty years after her death; only this last was rebuilt in 1067, for Benedictin monks, and flourished till the suppression of religious houses. St. Hilda, for her sanctity and her wisdom, in conducting souls to God, was most dear to St. Aidan, and other holy prelates; and kings and princes frequently repaired to Streaneshalch to consult her in affairs of the greatest difficulty and importance. This holy abbess, who was eminent in all virtues, excelled particularly in prudence, and had a singular talent in reconciling differences, and in maintaining concord, being herself endowed with the spirit of charity, meekness, and peace.

The monastery of men at Streaneshalch, became a nursery of holy and learned prelates; and

i The common people formerly imagined that St. Hilda changed serpents into stones in this place, because on the face of the cliff were found abundance of stones which have the appearance of serpents or snakes rolled up, or in their coil, but without heads; which are natural stones called Ammonitæ; and are still plentiful there, with many other petrification moulded in the shells of fish. The Ammonitæ and many others are natural stones; but others seem clearly petrifications of fish, serpents, shrubs, &c, as Woodward shows, which Mead was not able to disprove. They seem, says Woodward, evident marks of an universal deluge. See an account (in Philos. Transactions, vol. 50, anno 1757, p. 223.) of impressions of plants on the slates of coals in the pits of this kingdom, France, Saxony, Bohemia, &c. most of the gramineous and seed tribes; some very beautiful unknown to botanists. The most part of the impressions of ferns, grasses, &c. are easily recognizable, they so minutely tally to the plants they represent. The like are found in ironstone in Shropshire, Yorkshire, &c. The like is mentioned (ib. p. 396.) in fossils of wood, bones of animals, teeth and palates of fishes, parts of vegetables, seeds, and fruits, as of figs petrified, beans, cherry-stones, walnuts, chestnuts, the body of a crab, coffee-berries, &c. Many sorts of fish and timber unknown in those parts, have been found at the greatest depths in the earth. See Woodward's Theory, Encyclopedia, &c.

out of it St. Bosa, St. Hedda, Ostfor, St. John of Beverley, and St. Wilfrid were raised to the episcopal dignity. In this monastery St. Wilfrid confuted Colman and the Scottish monks concerning the due celebration of Easter. The nunnery of St. Hilda was not less famous; Oswy, king of the Northumbers, was the chief benefactor or founder of this house. He had reigned twelve years, endured many devastations of his dominions from Penda, the cruel Mercian king, and in vain attempted by presents to gain his friendship, when that sworn enemy of the Christian name who had already murdered five Christian kings, (Annas, Sigebert, Egric, Oswald, and Edwin,) undertook the entire conquest of Northumberland, though in the seventy-eighth year of his age. Oswy, finding himself too weak for human relief, and all his offers and gifts rejected, turned them into vows to implore the divine assistance, and devoted his daughter then lately born, to perpetual virginity, with certain portions of land for endowing monasteries. His vows produced greater effects than his treaties; for, with a small army, he defeated the Mercians and their allies, though thirty times more in number; and slew Penda himself upon the banks of the Aire, near Seacroft, a village about three miles from Leeds, in Yorkshire, in 655.¹ From this victory, the village of Winfield seems to have taken its name: and by it Oswy was raised to the height of power: so that in three years he subdued all Mercia, and the greatest part of the country of the Picts, in the north. According to his promise, he gave his daughter, Elflada, scarce then a year old, to be consecrated to God, under the care of St. Hilda, at Heortea, by whom she was removed two years after, to Streaneshalch. The king gave

¹ Bede, l. 3. c. 24, 25. Will. Malmesb. l. 1. c. 4. Thoresby. Duc Leod. p. 143, 144. Mon. Angl. v. 1. p. 71.

to this house twelve estates of land for maintaining religious persons, each estate being ten families. Oswy dying in 670, after a reign of twenty-eight years, his widow, Ealflede, who was daughter to the holy king Edwin, retired to this monastery, and there ended her days in the exercises of a religious life. St. Hilda died in 680, being sixty-three years old, of which she had spent thirty-three in a monastic life. A nun at Hakenes, thirteen miles from Whitby, on the strand, saw her soul carried up to bliss by angels. She was succeeded in the government of her monastery by the royal virgin, Elfleda, who, after serving God sixty years, went to his eternal embraces.

In the church of St. Peter, besides St. Hilda, and the royal virgin Elfleda, were interred king Oswy, his mother Eanfled, his mother's father Edwin, and many other great persons. The body of St. Hilda, after the devastation of the monastery by the Danes, Inguar and Hubba, was carried to Glastonbury by Titus, the abbot, who fled thither. In the time of Hugh, earl of Chester, in the reign of the conqueror, William de Percy, ancestor to the Percies, earls of Northumberland, rebuilt the monastery for Benedictin monks, in which state it continued till the suppression of monasteries. See Bede, *hist.* l. 3. c. 24, 25. l. 4. c. 23, and *Registrum de Whitby*, quoted by Burton, in *Monasticon Eboracense*, t. 1. p. 68, 69, 88. Leland's *Collectan.* t. 2. p. 141. 150.

NOVEMBER XIX.

SAINT ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY, WIDOW.

Theodoric of Thuringia, wrote the life of St. Elizabeth in eight books; extant in Canisius. (*Lect. Antiq.* t. 5.) Lambecius (t. 2. *Bibl. Vind.*) published an additional fragment, with several pieces relative to her canonization. Her life by James Montanus of Spire, published by Sedulius, abridged by D'Andilly, &c. is taken from the work of Theodoric.

A. D. 1231.

ELIZABETH, daughter to Alexander II. the