

**THE SAINT BEES  
COLLEGE CALANDER  
FOR THE YEAR 1859**

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The Saint Bees College Calander for the Year 1859 by Various

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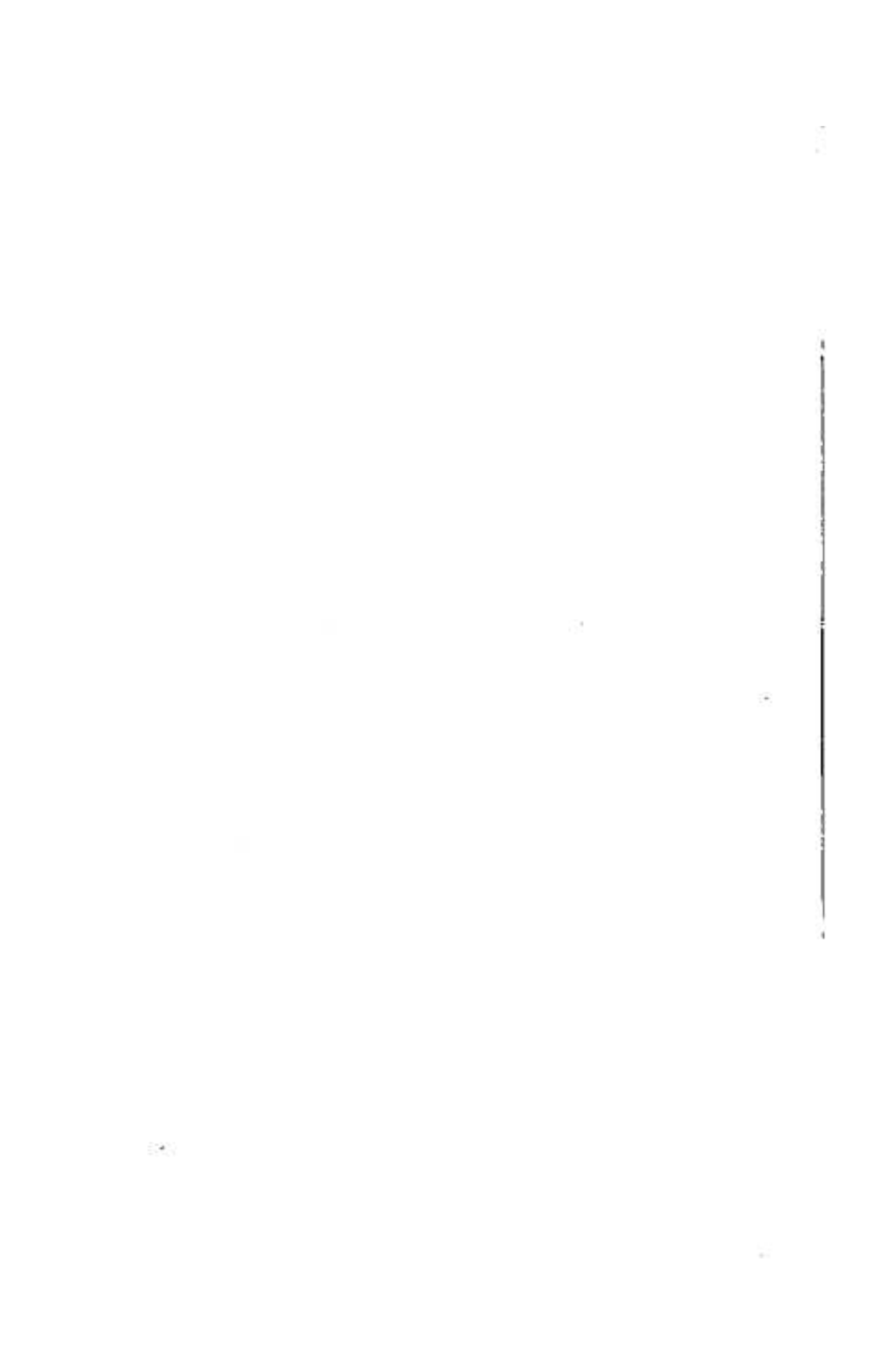


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## INTRODUCTION.

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### THE PRIORY OF ST. BEES.

A SMALL nunnery was founded here about the year 650 by Bega, an Irish saint,<sup>1</sup> from whom the parish takes its name, and where a church was subsequently erected, dedicated in honour of the foundress. The priory and parish are variously called in ancient evidences, *Kirkebybetok*, *Kirkby Begock*, and *Begoth*, which latter name is British, and derived from *Begog*, signifying little young.

Sandford's MS.<sup>2</sup> gives the following traditional account of the foundation of the nunnery:—"This Abbie, by tradition, built upon this occasion, (for the time I refer you to the chronicles:)—That there

<sup>1</sup> From the calendar of saints' days it appears that St. Bega or St. Bees is commemorated on the 6th of September; and St. Bega, virgin, on the 22nd of November. Sancta Bega died the day before the calends of November.—*Life of the Saint*. Ingulphus mentions a little bell at Croyland, which is called Bega.

<sup>2</sup> Dean and Chapter Library, Carlisle.

was a pious and religious lady-abbess, and some of her sisters with her, driven in by stormy wether at Whitehaven, and [the] ship cast away ith harbour, and so destitute. And so she went to the lady of Egremont castle for reliefe. That lady, a godly woman, pitied her distress, and desired her lord to give her some place to dwell in; which he did, at the now St. Bees. And she and her sisters scwed and spinned, and wrought carpets and other work, and lived very godly lives, as gott them much love. She desired Lady Egremont to desire her lord to build them a house, and they would lead a religious life together; and many wolde joine with them if they had but a house and land to live upon. Where-with the Lady Egermond was very well pleased, and spoke to her lord he had land enough and [should] give them some to lye up tresure in heaven. And the Lord laughed at the Ladye, and said he would give them as much land as suow fell upon the next morning and in midsummer day. And on the morrow looked out at the castle window to the sea side, 2 miles from Egremont, all was white with snow for three miles together. And thereupon builded this St. Bees Abbie, and gave all those lands was snowen unto it, and the town and haven of Whitehaven; and sometimes after, all the tithes therabout, and up the montains and Inerdale forest, eastward, was appropriated to this abbey of St. Bees; which was

got by one Mr. Dacres, of kindred to the Lord Dacres; gott a long lease of it at fall of Abbies, and married one Mrs. Latos of the beck hall, Millom; who afterwards married Squire Wybridge [Wybergh] of Clifton in Westmorland, who purchased the inheritance of this Abbie of the crowne, and sold it to old Sir John Lowther, who gave it to his yonger son, Sir Christopher Lowther, Kt. Bart. soon after."

It does not appear that the nunnery of Saint Bees was ever endowed, or that it continued for any length of time as a voluntary society. It is probable enough that it was ruined and dispersed in the Danish wars. Indeed the historian of her life refers to the Danish ravages as the cause which wrapped in oblivion the tomb of Bega for centuries. But although no succession of Abbesses has been transmitted to us, and no historian can give us any intelligence of the endowment of this nunnery, still it seems scarcely probable that it would have been of such brief duration as is generally supposed. If the bell at Croyland abbey were named Bega, in commemoration of the Cumbrian saint, nearly three centuries after the foundation of St. Bees nunnery, it would seem as if there had been successors in the nunnery who cherished the name of their first foundress, and transmitted it to posterity. Otherwise the name would scarcely have attracted the notice of Abbot Turketul. Moreover, the recorded fact,