

**PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS: REPRINTED FROM
THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE
DEVONSHIRE ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE,
LITERATURE, AND ART, JULY 26TH, 1893**

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T. N. BRUSHFIELD

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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

*Reprinted from the Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the
Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art. July 28th, 1893.*

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

WHEN I acceded to the wish of the Council to become the President of this Association for the present year, I naturally turned to the examination of the subject-matter of those Addresses delivered by the former occupants of this Chair, especially with a view to the selection of some topic relating to this county. Ascertaining that Devonshire literature had not formed the theme of any, I have selected it on the present occasion, especially as I may declare myself, with a slight alteration of a well-known Horatian phrase—

"Laudator bibliorum actorum."

If an apology for such a selection were needed, Carlyle has more than amply supplied it. "In books," he remarks, "lies the soul of the whole Past Time; the articulate audible voice of the Past, when the body and material substance of it has altogether vanished like a dream. . . . All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been; it is lying in magic preservation in the pages of Books. They are the chosen possession of men."

As a reverential lover of books—and surely no man has a right to describe them unless he be such a lover—I may exclaim with Chaucer—

*"Books in mine herte have hem in reverence
So hertely, that there is game non,
That fro my bookes maketh me to gone."*

In attempting to give some account of Devonshire Works and their Authors, I do not purpose to pass beyond the year 1640, when the meeting of the Long Parliament became "a definite and distinct turning-point in our printed literature" (Arber); and the exigencies of an Address of this kind will not enable me to give more than a faint and somewhat blurred outline. My aim will be to point out in what directions English literature generally, as well as locally, has been aided by the labours of Devonshire men and of Devon-

shire residents ; at the same time to draw attention to some of the more notable works and institutions, that stand out prominently above their fellows. In so doing, I hope the time spent will not be deemed altogether profitless ; more particularly I trust I may not be accused of misdirected energy, and so fall under the definition included in the scathing lines of J. R. Lowell, as—

" A reading machine, ever wound up and going,
He mastered whatever was not worth the knowing."

As a matter of convenience we may divide our subject into periods, differing much in duration, being for the most part marked by some prominent historical event, rather than by any order of time.*

First Period, -1087.

Our first period extends from the earliest times to the death of William I, in 1087.

The earliest literary man to notice belonging to this county, of whom we have any cognizance, is WINFRID or WINFRITH (680-755), a native of Crediton, more widely known as St. Boniface, "the apostle of Germany"; born in the year when Cædmon, the Anglo-Saxon poet, is reported to have died. Up to this time, learning and learned men had been more especially identified with the north and north-east of England, and with Ireland. Wilfred, Benedict Biscop, Cædmon, Ceolford, Bede, were Northumbrians. The life of St. Boniface was one of too much activity to afford him much leisure for literary work. In addition to a set of ecclesiastical statutes, some sermons, and minor religious works, he wrote a Latin poem termed *Enigmata de Virtutibus*, addressed to his sister. This entitles him to be considered as the earliest Devonshire poet of whom we possess any record. He is, however, best known for his *Epistolæ*, the correspondence between himself and his friends, during the period of his missionary work in Germany, 718-755—the earliest collection of letters of an Englishman that we possess. In the opinion of Green, the historian (i. 4), "the letters of Boniface and Alewine . . . form the most valuable contemporary materials," for the history of England of the period in which they were written. Social and general and personal history, the trials and labours of his missionary work, all find a place in them. His literary character displays itself in his fondness for books, his friends being

* In Appendix A will be found a list of the authorities cited. The references in figures are to notes in that appendix.

frequently urged to send him some, of which he records the titles, &c., the works of Bede being mentioned several times, e.g. In a letter to Abbot Cuthbert he writes, "Interea rogamus, ut aliqua de opusculis sagacissimi investigatoris scripturarum Bedan monachi." (Epistle xxxvii.) These letters "seem to have been the delight of our forefathers during the ninth century, and . . . deserve to be better known than they are, even at the present day." (T. Wright, i. 48.) It is a matter of regret that an annotated translation into English has never been made. To the Rev. Dr. Giles we owe a collected edition of his works in 1844, forming two volumes of the *Patres Ecclesie Anglicanae*.¹

TO ST. WILLIBALD (700-785), also born at Crediton, is usually attributed the memoir of his uncle St. Boniface, *De Vita vel Passione Beatissimi Martyris Bonifacii Auctore Willibaldo*; but Dr. Giles (*Op. cit.* ii. 8, where, in the heading of the memoir, the author's name appears as "Willibaldus Presbyter") affirms it was "not the celebrated bishop of that name, as was long supposed, but another Willibald, of less merit and pretensions," and Heinschenius, in his *Acta Sanctorum*, makes a similar assertion. (T. Wright, i. 344-5.) Be that, however, as it may, it is the earliest known biography of a Devon worthy. *The Itinerary of St. Willibald* (721-727), "written from his own recital by a nun of Heidenheim," is one of the earliest recorded travels in the Holy Land. (Printed at length in T. Wright's *Early Travels in Palestine*, 1848, 13-22.) The convent of Heidenheim had for its abbess St. Walburga, the sister of St. Willibald, and as the nun who acted as his amanuensis is known to have been his kinswoman, she was probably his own sister, and the author also of the life of St. Wunnebald, the brother of St. Willibald.²

ST. BURCHARD (-754), said to be a Devonian by Prince, was associated with St. Boniface in his missionary work, and died one year before him. His claim to our notice rests on some sermons still preserved at Wurzburg (where he was the first bishop), portions of which have been printed in Germany.

ALFREDUS or ALFRICUS (-981?), abbot of Malmesbury, was consecrated bishop of Crediton, *circa* 977. Godwin (320), on the authority of Hooker, affirms he wrote two books, the history of his abbey (*De rebus cenobii sui*), and a scientific treatise (*De rerum naturis*), neither of which are now known.³

LYFING or LIVINGUS (-1047), next but one in succession to Alfredus as Bishop of Crediton (1032-1047), was previously

Abbot of Tavistock. This "eloquent bishop," as he is termed in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, accompanied Canute to Rome, and is stated by Prince (567) to have written *Canutus's Pilgrimage and his own doings*, of which we know nothing but the title.⁴

The successor to Lyfing in the See was Bishop LEORIC (-1072), whose birthplace is unknown. He removed the seat of the diocese from the open village of Crediton to the walled town of Exeter, of which he was the first bishop. Although in many ways a man of mark, he was not an author; but as a lover and a collector of books, the possessor of what was then regarded as a large private library, at a period when books were expensive luxuries, he demands our attention. His name, and his great love of Saxon works, point out his Saxon origin, although by some authors he is thought to have been a Breton. He gave, amongst other presents to the cathedral, between sixty and seventy volumes, some for the daily services, others for the cathedral library. "These church books were evidently in Anglo-Saxon, because he contrasts them with the subsequent list of books in Latin." (T. Wright, *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.* xviii. 222.) The list of works is recorded in his will, and is of especial interest to Devonians, for being "the earliest catalogue of an English library now known to exist." (*Ibid.* 224.)⁵ Of all the works therein enumerated, only one is preserved in the present library, but it is one of the most important Anglo-Saxon MSS. in England. It is entitled, *One great English book on various subjects composed in verse*, and, as the *Codex Exoniensis*, was published, by the Society of Antiquaries, in 1842, under the editorship of B. Thorpe. This is rendered of especial value to philological students by having in parallel columns the original text and an English translation.⁶ The MS. is of small folio size, with vellum leaves, wanting a few at the beginning and end of the work, and, excepting towards the latter, in fair condition of preservation. The writing is in large characters, and believed to be of the tenth century. The contents are of a miscellaneous kind, relating chiefly to moral and religious subjects, drawn from various sources, and vary much in interest and value. The poems are nearly fifty in number, many of them fragmentary. With one exception, they exhibit the main characteristics of Anglo-Saxon poetry; that is, they consist of short rhymeless lines, written like prose (the line-lengths being marked by points), and having a regular alliteration so arranged, that in every couplet the first line contains two words, and the second one,

commencing with the same letter. Here is an example from "The Exile's Complaint," in the *Codex* (443).

"*Andon dena dimme
duna up—heu.*"

"*dim are the dells
the downs high.*"

The exception alluded to is termed by Thorpe the "Riming Poem," from the lines terminating in proper rhymes, but the alliteration is unchanged.⁷ The longest, and the only poem whose author is known, is "the legend of St. Guthlac"; a metrical paraphrase of the life of that saint by Felix, a monk of Croyland Abbey. The volume contains a curious collection of riddles, a form of amusement to which our Anglo-Saxon forefathers appear to have been very partial. Probably the gleeman, as a foil to, and after the recital of, more serious pieces, wound up the evening's amusement by propounding one or more of these riddles.⁸ We can readily believe that some of the compositions were by Devonians, belonging to some religious house, such as the one at Tavistock. The probability of this is increased by the circumstance that the Leofric Missal, one of the volumes given by Leofric to his cathedral, used there during his episcopate, and now preserved in the Bodleian Library, belonged originally to Tavistock Abbey, of which his predecessor Lyfing had been abbot.

A fitting conclusion to this notice of our first period may be made, in a brief allusion to the Great Survey of the country, ordered to be carried out by William I. within a short period of his death, and recorded in the well-known *Domesday Book of the Exchequer*. It contains a complete territorial record of this country. Of even greater interest to us, is the supplementary volume known as *The Exeter Domesday* (which has remained in the custody of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter for 800 years), as it possesses the marked advantage of fuller details than the original work. It would be simply impertinent to expatiate upon its importance.⁹

Second Period, 1088-1300.

Our second period carries us on to the end of the 13th century, during which many works on religious subjects are recorded to have been written, some of which are now unknown.

Of ROBERT FOLIOT (-1186), a Devonian (Fuller, i 251) and Bishop of Hereford, it is reported by Pits (236) that he wrote *De Sacramentis antiquæ et nouæ legis; Concionum;*

and another work, of which the titles alone have descended to us.

RICHARD FISHACRE or FIZACRE (-1248), a native of Exeter (Pits, 317, states "patria Deuoniensis, ex territorio Exoniensi"), was a learned Dominican, and the intimate friend of Robert Bacon. He wrote several treatises on Divinity, Commentaries, &c., of which the titles are given in Pits's work. Some of his MSS. are said to be preserved at Oxford.¹⁰

Although Hooker (in Godwin's *Bishops*) affirms BARTHOLOMEW (-1184) to have been called "Iscanus of Isca," and "a meane Citizen's sonne" of Exeter, his most recent biographer (T. A. Archer in *Dict. Nat. Biog.*) states that he was a native of Brittany. He was, however, Bishop of Exeter for the long period of twenty-three years (1161-1184). Historically, he is known as one of the great opponents of the policy of Becket, yet, after the death of the latter, he was selected to preach the sermon on the re-opening of Canterbury Cathedral. This "luminary of the English church" wrote several works on divinity, of which Pits (250) gives a list. None of them have been published.¹¹

Bartholomew was the active friend of BALDWIN (-1190), a native of Exeter, and Archbishop of Canterbury (1184-1190). They esteemed each other so highly that a life-long friendship resulted, and they "mutually dedicated books to each other's commendation, so that neither wanted praise nor praised himself." (Fuller, i. 274.) His own productions were principally theological, and were included in the works of the Cistercian fathers, printed in 1662. (Wright, ii. 295.) According to Dr. Hook, they "do not contain any matter of deep interest." (*Abps. of Canterbury*, ii. 546.) Several of his original MSS. are in the Lambeth Library. His *De corruptis moribus cleri et populi* contains much of value relating to the social history of the period, and describes "the expectation so prevalent in the twelfth century that the world was approaching to its end." (Wright, ii. 294.) His *De Sacramento Altaris*, written in Ford Abbey before he was abbot there, is of peculiar interest for having been printed, in 1521, at Cambridge, by John Siberch, the year when the printing press was first introduced there. It was the fourth work executed by Siberch.¹²

To the historical student he is better known for his celebrated tour through Wales in the year 1188, on a mission to preach a crusade for the recovery of Jerusalem from the Saracens. Dr. Hook remarks, "The interior of Wales was as little known as the interior of Africa at the present time . . .