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APOSTLE OF POMERANIA, 1060-  
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TRANSLATIONS OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

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# LIFE OF OTTO

## INTRODUCTION

THE story of Otto's missionary labours which gained for him the title of the apostle of Pomerania, constitutes one of the most striking chapters in the history of the evangelization of Europe, and it is not a little strange that this story has never been translated or told at length in the English language. Although the time during which Otto laboured as a missionary outside his own country was comparatively short, nevertheless as judged by outward and visible results he was the most successful of all the missionaries to whom the conversion of Europe was ultimately due. In view of the many and difficult problems that confront us to-day in the non-Christian lands where missionaries are now labouring, we cannot afford to neglect the light and the inspiration which can be obtained from a careful study of the ideals, the methods and the experiences of the great missionaries of early and mediæval times, of whose work any detailed record has been preserved.

In some instances the accounts composed by contemporary or nearly contemporary biographers are fragmentary and of doubtful value, but in the case of Otto we are fortunate in possessing six biographies all of which emanate from the district in which Otto lived and two at least of which may claim to be the work of contemporaries.

From the accounts given by his two earliest



biographers, Ebo<sup>1</sup> and Herbordus, we gather that Otto came from a noble Swabian family. His parents died when he was young, and as his brother, to whom they left most of their property, was unwilling to contribute towards his support, he was early thrown upon his own resources. Thus Herbordus writes :

“ Otto, having carefully studied the works of some of the poets and philosophers and having committed to his tenacious memory the rules of grammar and metre, could not afford the expense of further education and was unwilling to ask help from his brother, or other relations, having acquired a sense of shame and of self-respect in early youth. He accordingly went to Poland, where he knew that there was a lack of educated men, and took over a boys' school, and by teaching others and at the same time instructing himself, he gained much in a short time and was held in honour. He learned also the language of that country and adorned its literature by his teaching relating to thrift, frugality and purity. By these studies he gained the favour of all, even of the great and powerful, being assisted by his elegant personal appearance. Moreover he gave attention to social and personal intercourse and fitted himself to take part in embassies and in conversations of various kinds, with important persons.”<sup>2</sup> In course of time he won the favour of the Duke of Poland and, after the death of his first wife in 1085, was instrumental in helping to arrange his marriage with Judith, the sister of the Emperor, Henry IV. After the death of Judith Otto went to live at Ratisbon, where the abbess treated him “like another Joseph” and made him ruler over all her house. On one occasion the

<sup>1</sup> In the XIIIth century this name was written “Ebo”; Andreas at the end of the XVth century wrote “Elbo,” and his spelling has been followed by some later writers.

<sup>2</sup> *Herbordi Dialogus*, III. 32

Emperor came to stay with the abbess and, having become acquainted with Otto, invited him to become his chancellor.<sup>1</sup> Soon afterwards the bishopric of Bamberg became vacant and on Christmas Day, 1102, the Emperor announced the appointment of Otto to the vacant see. In announcing his appointment he stated that persons of rank and influence had offered him large sums of money in order to secure this appointment for themselves, but he had chosen the man who excelled all others in wisdom and devotion. On approaching Bamberg, although it was the depth of winter, Otto alighted from his horse and walked with bare feet to the cathedral church.<sup>2</sup> He delayed his consecration as bishop for three years in order that he might not enter upon his duties until he had become fully acquainted with the conditions prevailing in his diocese, and at the close of 1105 he applied for consecration as bishop to Pope Paschal II.,<sup>3</sup> and on Whitsunday (May 13) in the following year he was consecrated at Rome.<sup>4</sup> He did not enter Bamberg as bishop till the beginning of 1107. Soon afterwards he began to build a number of new churches and monasteries, and to restore the monastery of St. Michael, which he enriched with many gifts. This monastery was in part destroyed by an earthquake in 1117 and was then rebuilt on an enlarged scale and with great magnificence (1117-21). Many other monasteries, the occupants of which had become lax and irreligious, he endeavoured to reform. He founded altogether twenty new monasteries in Bamberg and other

<sup>1</sup> This is the account given by Ebo (I. 3), who says, however, that other authorities state that Otto was introduced to the Emperor by Judith. This latter statement is also made by Herbordus.

<sup>2</sup> The result of this action was that "unde et postmodum sepius vehementissimo podagræ dolore cruciabatur" (Ebo I. 9).

<sup>3</sup> His letter to the Pope is given in *Udalrici Codex*, No. 128.

<sup>4</sup> He visited Rome again in 1110 when he accompanied the Emperor Henry V., and on this occasion he received the pallium from the Pope.

neighbouring dioceses. The reasons which led to his undertaking missionary work in Pomerania and the circumstances under which his work was commenced are described at length by his two principal biographers, whose accounts we have translated.

At the time in which Otto lived the inhabitants of Pomerania were nearly all pagans, though several attempts had previously been made to evangelize their country. In very early times Pomerania was inhabited by Celts who gave way later on to Teutons. These, from the beginning of the sixth century, had to a large extent been displaced by Slavs. The Polish Duke Boleslav I. conquered the country east of the River Oder and compelled the conquered people to receive representatives of the Christian faith. Reinbern, who was appointed bishop of Colberg in A.D. 1000, was of German nationality, and being greatly disliked by the pagan inhabitants was able to do but little to secure their conversion to Christianity. He was eventually murdered in 1015 as he was on his way to Russia. For more than a century afterwards the inhabitants of Eastern Pomerania lived in a state of constant warfare with their Polish neighbours, and though each successive invasion of their country was followed by the compulsory baptism of a section of the people, Christianity continued to be regarded as the religion of their conquerors and made little progress amongst them. In 1121 the Polish Duke Boleslav III. ravaged the country west of the River Oder with fire and sword and announced his intention of converting all the inhabitants to the Christian faith, or of destroying them, in the event of their refusing to be converted. It was at his invitation that Otto undertook his first missionary tour. Our respect for Otto is increased by the knowledge that, although physical force was almost always at his disposal, he never made use of it either to protect himself from being murdered, or to