

ART. XXXI.—*S. Kentigern and his Dedications in Cumberland.* By the Rev. THOMAS LEES, M.A.

*Read at Keswick, October 5th, 1882.*

**I**N a paper read before this society at Brougham Church, on July 10th, 1879, I submitted to you my reasons for holding the opinion that S. Ninian, the founder of the great Celtic monastery of Candida Casa, on the opposite shore of the Solway, and the Apostle of the Southern Picts, had exercised his holy vocation in Cumbria. His labours here seem to have been supplemented in the last half of the fifth century by those of S. Patrick himself, also, it seems most probable, a native of the northern portion of Strathclyde, for we have, as you know, several churches on the western side of Cumberland named after Patrick's kinswoman and fellow-labourer, Bridget, and at least one, Bampton in Westmorland, after the Apostle of Ireland himself.

The intestinal strife and confusion which succeeded the Roman abdication of this district, during the fifth century, seem nearly to have extinguished what Christianity had previously existed here, till in the middle of the sixth century, Kentigern, who has been appropriately styled the Apostle of Strathclyde, appeared to revive the flame kindled by Ninian, and nourished by Patrick's disciples during that unhappy time, when law, order, and religion seemed sinking into chaos.

We derive our knowledge of Herbert of Derwentwater from the pages of Bede; but Kentigern's story must be looked for in historians of much later date. As Bishop Forbes has observed in his "Kalendars of Scottish Saints," "the greater fame of S. Columba, the apostle of the Scots, has tended in some degree to obscure that of S. Kentigern, who evangelized the Strathclyde Britons — yet it will be found

found that this great saint not only has left traces of an extraordinary moral influence on these, but has imprinted his memorials on the public history of the inhabitants of Cumberland and Wales." The earliest life of Kentigern was composed by his disciple S. Asaph, who succeeded him as the head of the monastery of Llanelwy. This, however, is lost, except such portions of it as may be embedded in the Biography composed by Joscelin of Furness, circa A.D. 1180. This later life has been edited with a translation and most valuable notes by the late Bishop Forbes in the "Historians of Scotland," and to this volume and the Bishop's "Kalendars of Scottish Saints," I am indebted for the short sketch of the saint's mortal career which I now lay before you.

Kentigern's grandfather is asserted to have been a heathen king in Cumbria or Strathclyde; his mother, Tenew, was a believer in Christianity, but not baptised. Being found with child, as it is stated, by Eugenius or Ewen, King of Cumbria, she was, in punishment for her incontinency, according to the custom of her tribe, cast down in a chariot from the summit of a rock. Miraculously escaping, she was accused of witchcraft, and exposed in an open boat, abandoned to the waves in the open sea beyond the isle of May. She drifted to Culenros and on the shore there her son was born. S. Servanus, who was leading a hermit's life in that neighbourhood, warned by a vision, took charge of both mother and child, baptising Tenew and bringing up her son. He called the boy Kyentyern (*quod interpretatur, Capitalis Dominus*), *i.e.*, "head, or capital Lord;" and the boy's rapid advancement not only in secular education, but also in holiness, endeared him so much to his protector, that he used to call him, as a term of endearment, "Munghu," *i.e.*, "the dear friend." Tired out by the persecutions of his envious fellow scholars, Kentigern quitted Culros, and arriving at Carnock just in time to witness the death of Fergus, a holy hermit who dwelt

dwelt there, attended to his burial rites. The body was placed on a wain drawn by two untamed bulls, who drew it of their own accord and without accident to Cathures, now Glasgow, and there Kentigern buried it in a disused cemetery formerly consecrated by S. Ninian. Here Kentigern took up his abode, and after some time "The king and the clergy of 'regio Cambrensis,' the great British kingdom stretching from the Clyde southwards, along with the rest of the Christians, few indeed in number, met together and besought him to be their Bishop." Overruling his scruples, and imploring the blessing of the Blessed Trinity, they enthroned him, and having summoned a Bishop from Ireland, after the manner of the Britons and Scots of that period, they compelled him to be consecrated. After his consecration he visited his extensive diocese on foot, correcting his people, the greater part of whom had apostatised from the Church, reforming abuses, and enforcing ecclesiastical discipline. But heathenism was still strong in the land, and Kentigern was persecuted by King Morken. Even after Morken's death, his relations continued the persecution, not only seeking to entrap the man of God, but conspiring against his life; so, after the pattern of S. Paul, who fled from Damascus, Kentigern fled from the country, and betook himself to S. Dewi, Bishop of Menœvia, in North Wales; and on this journey he visited this district, as you will presently hear, and collected therein a great harvest for the Lord.

Settling on the banks of the Elwy, he founded that great Monastery from which the See of S. Asaph derives its origin. Men of all ages and ranks pressed into it to the number of 965. Here he worked in peace for some years till at length the crowning mercy of the battle of Ardderyd (A.D. 573) placed a Christian king on the throne of Strathclyde. Recalled to his bishopric by the new king, Rederech Hael or the Liberal, Kentigern obeyed the call, and having appointed Asaph, his disciple, as his  
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successor in the monastery and see, he returned to the north, accompanied by 665 monks—300 remaining in Wales with S. Asaph. For thirty years after his return to Strathclyde, Kentigern carried on his Master's work not only among the Britons, but also among the Picts. Before the close of his life, S. Columba, the great founder of the Christian colony at Iona, visited Kentigern at Glasgow. They interchanged embraces, and filled themselves with spiritual feasts before they refreshed the body. "How great," adds Joscelin, "was the sweetness of heavenly contemplation in their holy hearts is not for me to say; nor is it given to me, or to those like unto me, to search out the hidden manna, as, I think, entirely unknown, save to those who taste it." The two saints exchanged their pastoral staves; that which S. Columba gave to S. Kentigern, was long preserved in honour at Ripon, S. Wilfrid's Church.

S. Kentigern died, A.D. 603, in extreme old age—so feeble that his chin had to be held up by a linen band tied round his head. His death took place as he was being lifted from a warm bath. His body was buried, as was fitting, at the right side of the altar in his Cathedral at Glasgow. His day, according to the old Scottish Kalendars, is January 13th, the Octave of the Epiphany.

The Apostle of Strathclyde possesses few dedications in England, and those few are all in that part of modern Cumberland which lies north of the river Derwent.—Mr. J. H. Parker in his *Remarks on Church Dedications in the "Calendar of the English Church,"* says:—"It is impossible to avoid remarking that a large number of dedications in the country prevail in certain localities or districts. These may be traced to various and obvious causes, such as the saint's birth in the neighbourhood where they occur, or from its being the scene of the labours or sanctity of the holy men or women commemorated. A striking instance of the former occurs in Cumberland, which is generally

generally supposed to be the native county of S. Kentigern (and may have formed part of his ancient diocese), who was afterwards Bishop of Glasgow, and has eight churches named in his honour there, this dedication not occurring in any other county in England."

A passage in Joscelyn's *Vita Kentigerni* seems to indicate that we must ascribe the greater part or perhaps all these dedications rather to the second cause than to the first, viz., to the fact of the saint having laboured in the evangelisation of the district. Joscelyn says (cap. xxii. of Bishop Forbes' "Lives of SS. Ninian and Kentigern") that when, on account of the machinations of his pagan adversaries, the saint had for a time to quit his bishopric of Glasgow and betake himself to North Wales, in the course of his journey southwards he came to Karleolum (Carlisle), "he heard that many among the mountains were given to idolatry or ignorant of the Divine law. Thither he turned aside, and, God helping him, and confirming the word by signs following, converted to the Christian religion many from a strange belief, and others who were erroneous in the faith. O how beautiful on these mountains were the feet of him who brought good tidings of good, that published salvation, that said unto Zion, 'Thy God reigneth.' He remained some time in a certain thickly planted place, to confirm and comfort in the faith the men that dwelt there, where he erected a cross as a sign of the faith, whence it took the name in English of Crosfeld, *i.e.*, *Crucis Novale*. In which very locality a basilica, recently erected, is dedicated to the name of the blessed Kentigern; and to exhibit his sanctity he is not doubted to have been distinguished by many miracles."

Thus far the Monk of Furness. The Kentigern or Mungo churches are:—(1) Irthington, (2) Grinsdale, (3) Caldbeck, (4) Castlesowerby, (5) Mungrisdale, (6) Cros-thwaite, (7) Bromfield, (8) Aspatria.

(1) *Irthington* lies some miles east of Carlisle on the line  
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of the Roman Wall and its companion Road, and so would be the scene of the saint's labours either on his southward flight or on his triumphant return to his northern home after the battle of Arthuret. The church retains its ancient dedication, and a strong spring of excellent water, equally abundant in dry and wet seasons, which rises in the churchyard boundary, has now the name of "How" or "Ha' " Well. This title we may conclude to be a corruption of the word "Holy," and the well itself to have served the saint as a place for preaching and baptising. A modern window, placed in the church about 1858, contains two medallions, one bearing a full length figure of Kentigern, and the other a representation of him preaching to the Britons.

(2) *Grinsdale* again is on the line of the Wall and Road. Save the dedication of the church, here too all memorial of the saint has perished. It is thought that his well may have been obliterated by the encroachments of the river Eden.

(3) *Caldbeck* I place next in order, as it seems likely that this would be the first place he would reach from Karleolum on his mission-journey to the mountaineers. Here we find him commemorated by a church and well. The well is near the churchyard, and on the banks of the Caldew. Steps to the well were formerly constructed out of the relics of an old font. The Rev. James Thwaytes, the late rector, had these restored to their proper use. A very remarkable relic connected with this church and saint was exhibited in the Museum at the meeting of the Royal Archæological Institute in Carlisle last August. It is a folio missal, after the use of Sarum—a magnificent specimen of late 14th or early 15th century illumination. At the back of the leaf on which, gorgeous in gold and colours, is the usual picture of the Crucifixion to face the Canon of the Mass, is the following inscription in black letter:—  
 "Orate pro bono et salubri statu domini Roberti Cooke et  
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pro anima illius tunc ab hac luce migraverit, ac etiam pro animabus parentum suorum et benefactorum qui dedit ecclesiæ parochiali de Cawlbek istud missale, calicem argenteum, Paxillum argenteum, duo pallia, unum pallium lineum et superpellicium. Anno Domini 1506." Below the Crucifixion in the dexter corner of the illumination is a shield; gules, on a chevron ermine, a lion rampant sable; and on another shield in the sinister corner; sable, a bend gules, between six mullets of six points pierced sable. As there was no office for S. Kentigern's day in any of the English "Uses," the Oratio, Secreta, Post-Communio, &c., for that saint are added in plain writing on one of the fly-leaves. These are probably taken from one of the Scottish Service Books. This glorious volume is now the property of the Benedictine establishment at Warwick Bridge, near Carlisle.

(4) *Castlesowerby*.—Continuing his journey in a south-easterly direction the next station was at Castlesowerby. Here, as in the other cases, the name of the church still remains. An ancient well, carefully cased with hewn stones, and to which there seems to have been formerly a roof, in the vicarage garden, is probably the saint's well, but has lost the name. A mile and a half away, in the parish of Greystoke, we have, I think, a most interesting memorial of our saint in a well, much visited by strangers and farmers who bring their cattle to drink of it, called "Thanet Well." His mother's name was "Thenew;" Fordun call her "Thanes," and Camerarius "Themetis" or "*Thennat*;" and the change from this last name to "Thanet" is by no means so violent as that which has converted her Church in Glasgow into "St. Enoch's"! The connection of the Earls of Thanet with this county is of far too recent a date for their name to have been attached to an ancient well, and one, too, far away from their possessions. Bishop Nicolson mentions in his visitation, A.D. 1703: "On one of the north windows there's

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a picture of a military person, in a blew mantle and long heel'd spurs, kneeling; and below it part of femal face with a crown; which last I take to relate to ye Legend of S. Mongah and Kentigern (to whom the church is dedicated), said to be begotten on a King's daughter by an angel." If the Bishop be right in his conjecture as to this glass, the knightly figure was most likely intended to represent Eugenius (or Ewan) Mungo's putative father.

(5) *Mungrisdale*.—This, I believe, to have been the saint's next halting place, for it stands at the mouth of a valley running into the very heart of Blencathra, and lies directly on his route from Castlesowerby to Crosthwaite. The little church here has never risen to the dignity of full parochial rites, being still a chapel in the parish of Grey-stoke. Though neither chapel nor well now retains the name of the saint, yet the place-name itself does. Its first syllable, "Mung," I believe to be an abbreviation of Mungo, and the full name to have been originally Mungo-grisdale. There are other Grisedales in the district; but no one except this has a prefix which indicates a personal name. This conjecture of mine receives remarkable confirmation from the inscription on the old communion cup of the date A.D. 1600. That inscription is—"MOUNGE GRIEESDELL."

(6) *Crosthwaite*.—This, with the three churches last enumerated, stands on the roots of the great self-standing mountain group, of which Blencathra (now, alas! Saddle-back) and Skiddaw are the highest peaks; and the inhabitants of these localities, then populated by aborigines as the remains on Carrock Fell and in other places amply testify, might strictly be said to be living in "*montanis*." Those of them who were Christians had fallen back into "*ydolatrie*," or after the Celtic fashion into Pelagianism. There can, I think, be little doubt that the place referred to in the quotation from the "*Vita*" as being "*condenso*"

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or thickly planted, and in Joscelin's day (circa A.D. 1180) called Crosfeld, where a church had recently been built, must be Crosthwaite (*i.e.*, the clearing or thwaite in which the cross stood), the parish church of Keswick, which still retains its ancient dedication. No well is known in the vicinity; and in this case the baptism of converts probably took place in the nearest stream. The biographer thus continues his account of S. Kentigern's labours in this district:—"Turning aside from thence, the saint directed his steps, by the sea-shore, and through all his journey scattering the seed of the divine word, gathered in a plentiful and fertile harvest unto the Lord. At length safe and sound he reached S. Dewi, and found in him greater works than had been reported by fame." The two remaining dedications are Aspatria and Bromfield. These S. Kentigern would visit on his way from Keswick to the sea-coast.

(7) *Aspatria*.—The church here is modern, but portions of the ancient structure are worked up in the new building. Inserted externally in the east wall of the chancel is a rude, time-worn bust, somewhat resembling in form a doll's head, with the inscription "Sanctus Kentigernus" beneath. A well still exists in the middle of the Glebe Field near the church, which we may reasonably conclude has formerly borne the saint's name.

(8) *Bromfield*.—Here, too, the church has been in some measure nicely restored, but one is thankful to say not rebuilt. There are many most interesting points about it, and it will well repay an antiquarian's visit. S. Kentigern's well is in a field to the north of and adjoining the churchyard. It has been carefully cleaned out, enclosed, and covered by a substantial stone circular vaulted dome on which is an inscription, by the reverential care of the present worthy vicar. The Bishop's head, with the chin supported by a cloth as in his last days, is represented in modern glass in the west window—reproduced, I am informed, from a seal in the British Museum.

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Some of my hearers may perhaps wonder why I have dwelt so much on wells connected with these churches. In Eastern nations, as we learn from our Bibles, "wells of water" were considered most valuable possessions, and they were places of public resort, and regarded with a feeling of reverence. Through all their migrations westward our Aryan ancestors preserved that reverence, and the Celts retained it undiminished. It still survives in faint degree among us. In many country parishes there is a well or open spring to which children resort on some special Sunday, "shaking-bottle Sunday" as it is called, and there prepare and partake together "sugar water" or "Spanish water." In some cases a traditional form of words is used in shaking the bottle to mix the ingredients; but I never could induce any child to reveal to me the mystic formula then used. Possibly some member of this Society may be able to recall it to memory, or recover it from some one else. But to return. When S. Kentigern came to a country village he would naturally seek the place of chief public resort and preach there. This, in these early times, would be the village well. Here he would find his audience, and baptize his converts in the water. Wherever S. Kentigern preached a cross was erected; and and in after times, in many cases, a church was placed on the site of the cross. For this reason, in preparing this paper, I found it necessary in all cases to inquire for a well adjacent to the church.

In conclusion, I beg to tender my most hearty thanks to the incumbents of these ancient churches for the kind way in which they have answered my queries, and supplied me with valuable information.

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