

S. Modwen and "The Devill of Drakelowe."

By REV. CHAS. KERRY.



IR W. DUGDALE in his "Monasticon," in the list of the abbots of Burton (I., 272)—quoting from the chronicle of that monastery—under his account of "Galfridus" (*Mala Terra*), writes: "Hujus tempore, contigit illud grande miraculum vel illa horrenda vindicta de duobus rusticis de Stapinhull apud Drakelowe, qui confugerunt ad Rogerum Pictarium Comitem de Drakelowe, ut habetur in Miraculis sanctæ Modwenæ virginis, unde processit illud vulgare dictum "The Devill of Drakelowe."

The location of Burton-on-Trent without doubt owes its origin to the devotion of S. Modwen, a noble Irish virgin, who made her home during the Saxon era in the little island in the Trent called Andersey, immediately opposite and very near the old parish church. This occurred during the reign of Ethelwulf, soon after the year 840, about which time, writes Alban Butler, she came into England. Andersey ere long became wrapped in holy memories, and within two centuries after her death and in the reign of Ethelred, Wulfric Spott, one of the wealthiest of the king's thanes, constructed or founded the famous abbey of Burton, on the banks of the Trent, contiguous to the island on which was then the oratory dedicated to S. Andrew, containing the bones of S. Modwen.

Wulfric endowed his new religious settlement with all his paternal inheritance, the rental of which amounted to 700 libras,

and for the confirmation of this grant, he gave to the king 300 mancás of gold, to every bishop in the realm five, to each of the two archbishops ten, to every abbot one pound of gold, and to every abbess five mancás. It is not with the abbey of Burton, however, but rather with its titular and local saint that this paper proposes to deal. As if to aid the writer in his researches, and to illustrate this paper *already commenced*, the July number of the *Reliquary* for this year appeared with some fragments of a life of S. Modwen, probably printed by Winken de Worde, and recently discovered in the binding of an old book in the possession of the Hon. Mrs. Bulkeley Owen. The legends given in these fragments seem to have been derived from the original biography of that saint by Geoffry, the sixth abbot, who died A.D. 1151, of whom *The Annals of Burton* relate:—"Hic dictavit vitam et miracula sanctæ Modwenæ virginis, pro qua misit in Hiberniam, ut habetur in prohemio eiusdem."

The original manuscript of Geoffry is now in the British Museum. It is referred to by Pinæus, one of the Bollandists, in the "Acta Sanctorum" (July, vol. ii., p. 297), as a volume in the Cottonian collection, "Cleopat. A. 2," but its modern reference is "Royal MS., 15, B. iv."

I am indebted to Sir Robert Gresley, Bart., for the following description of it by the favour of C. H. Jeages, Esq., of the British Museum, to both of whom the editor desires to offer his best thanks for their courtesy, as well as to Lord Burton for his valuable assistance:—"The MS. unfortunately is written in a minute hand, and half of two columns is damaged by damp, and so rendered illegible. The volume contains various treatises, but the article on S. Modwen begins on folio 76 with these words: 'Incipit prefatio Gaufridi Abbatis Burtonie in vita Sanctæ Modwenne virginis.' The preface is followed by 'The Life,' and after that 'Incipit tractatus de Miraculis eius que contingerunt *post obitum ejus*'"; and it is amongst these that we find the legend termed "The Devill of Drakelow."

Pinæus apparently derives his account from a life of the saint compiled by Waræus. "Let us revert," he writes, "to the

truthful Waræus. There is, he says, an autograph of the life of S. Modwen in the Cotton Library, from whence I have my apograph, but in the beginning in a more recent hand it is falsely (?) ascribed to Geoffry, the monk of Burton who wrote the argument to the same: for the antiquity of the characters of the autograph prove the writer to have lived before the close of the twelfth century."* Whether there is any discrepancy between the characters of the prologue and the text of the vita itself, I do not know, but if there had been, it would probably have been noticed by Mr. Jeages in his observations on the MS.

Among the subjects set forth by the Bollandist is one indicated by the following heading:—

"S. Modwen receives the virgin pall from S. Patrick."

This, however, can hardly have been the national saint of Ireland, for he is said to have died as early as A.D. 493.

There is another statement in the *Reliquary* which is not in accordance with the more probable chronology. In the introduction to the early printed fragments it is affirmed that S. Modwen built a nunnery at Faugher in A.D. 638, *i.e.*, 135 years after the death of S. Patrick. Alban Butler states that she came into England during the reign of Ethelwulf about the year 840, and I am the more inclined to follow this chronology because the *same* early record which states that she received the pall from S. Patrick also avers that she was the medium of the recovery of Alured (or Alfred), son of the king of England, from his sickness, a circumstance which can only have transpired at least 377 years after S. Patrick's death, and I think this inconsistency may readily be accounted for when we read that Geoffry *sent* into Ireland for his materials for the compilation of his life of S. Modwen. He would naturally accept without criticism any statement which would associate his patroness with the great herald of Christianity in the western isle, as tending to lend dignity to the mission and character of

* Just when Geoffry did live.—ED.

S. Modwen. Those were not the days of learned criticism. The recovery of Alured or Alfred, son of Ethelwulf, through the agency of S. Modwen, is also quoted by Dugdale from the "Golden History of John of Tinemouth," a MS. in his time in the Bodleian Library:—"This Athulphus also sent his son Alured, languishing of an incurable disease, to S. Modwen, at that time dwelling in Ireland,* from whence, some time afterwards—her own church being devastated—she came to England, where land was given her for the construction of two monasteries; one in Ardenne, at Pollesworth, which flourishes at this time, and in which the virgins Osith and Athea dwelt together, with Edith, the sister of King Adulphus (Ethelwulf). But Modwen herself abode for some time in another monastery at Streneshale."†

This quotation is immediately followed by another extract from an ancient record which in 1640 was preserved at Tamworth Castle, then the property of John Ferrars. In this there is a slight variation. The whole story of the healing is assigned to the preceding reign: instead of Ethelwulf we find *Egbert*, and instead of Alured or Alfred we read *Arnulf*.

"Egbryght the kinge had one son his heir that had the name Arnulfe, and a dowghter that had the name of Edith. This Arnulfe the son of the kinge was lepur, and taken with many sore syknysses that hee himselfe might uneth meve: wherefore the kinge his fadur and his lords made ryght greyt sorrow, and sowghten meddysons all abowyt, and nothyng aveyled. Bott at the last, there came a byshoppe from Ireland towards the king's cowrte, and spake with the Kynge Egbright, and counsyled hym that hee shuld send his son Arnulfe that was taken with soe mony sicknysys into Ireland, to a holy lady, a nune, that was dowgtur of the Kinge of Connoke, and was callyd Modwen, that helyd al maner of syknysez of folke that to hur came. And the

* Alfred, youngest son of Ethelwulf, is said to have suffered greatly by an insidious disease during the most precious years of his life. William of Malmesbury relates that his health was so bad, that he was constantly disquieted either by piles or some disorder of the intestines.

† Called *Trensale* in the Pollesworth legend.

Kynge Egbright did after his counsill to send his sone Arnulfe into Hyrelond to Sent Modwen that him reseyyd full gladly, and hylde him with hur a yeaere and more in Hyrelond, and him heylyd by the grace of God of al maner syknyses, and send him agyne into Englonde to his fadyr Kinge Egbryght the ferist chyld in al the world. And the Kinge Egbright send to Sent Modwen that and she wold come into Englonde to him, hee wold gyffe to hure londs and tenements with the wech shee hurselve myght make an abbey for hur and hure sisters; and sowne aftur thys sendynge, the Kynge of Hyrelond and thoyse of Hyrelond fowghten togedur, and ich one of them dystryde and sluue oder; so that the howse of Sent Modwen in Hyrelond was brunned and dystryde, and al the contrey about, for the wych cause Sent Modwen toke with hur two of hur susters and came into Englonde to Kynge Egbright, and fond Arnulfe that shee hadde helyde—the kynge's sone, one of the feyryst kneytys of the world, and the Kyng Egbright for the holliness that was in Sent Modwen, betoke to hur his dowgtur Edyth, to norych and to kepe, and to informe hur after the rule of Sent Benett, and aftur, to veyle his dowgtur, and gaffe to the seyde Sent Modwen a dwellynge place in the forest of Arderne that was callyd Trensale there where Sent Edyth and Sent Lyne and Sent Osythe were dwellyng togedur. And sone aftur Sent Modwen send to the Kyng Egbright by Arnulfe his sone that he wold come at the leyst every yere one tyme them to vesyt, and that hee wold giffe to his dowgtur Edythe londez and tenements, and a dwelling place worwythesche and hur sisters myght be sosteyned. God to serve: for mony dowgters of good folke were veyled in heir company, and they had not worwyth they might bee susteyned. Wherefore the Kynge Egbright made for to make a dwellyng place not far from Trensale there where Sent Modwen dwelled undyr a revar that was callyd Ancur at Pollysworth, and there the kynge foundyt an abbey in honor of our lady," &c.

Pinaeus, however, obviously following the original MS. of Geoffry the monk, writes:—"But when Saint Modwen had come to the river which is called Trent which flows past Mount Calvus.

which in English is called Calvecliffe,"* they built there a church consecrated to God and S. Andrew, which place is called Andresey because it is a small island. It was desert at that time, and in it St. Modwen and Lazar and Athea dwelt seven years, but Ede and Osid† abode in the former place in the Forest of Arderne aforesaid. And after they returned from Rome, they built a church on the other side of the water, at the foot of Mount Calvus, in honour of S. Peter and S. Paul, and God wrought through them many miracles near the aforesaid river. And after the Abbess had blessed them, she returned to Ireland; but Athea dwelt in Andersey, as the holy Modwen had appointed, for she was recognised as Abbess. Accordingly she requested that she might remain with them. In the great and long wood of Arderne she constructed three churches; the fourth was in a certain island situated in the River of Trent, which flows near to Mount Calvus."

Hence we learn that S. Modwen made her last settlement on Andersey. The delightfully quaint fragments of the life of St. Modwen discovered by the Hon. Mrs. Bulkeley Owen confirm the foregoing statements so closely as to lead to the inference that the writer drew his information from Geoffry's biography.

"And whan she retourned fro Rome, she came to England to a place on y^e south syde of Scaleclyffe Hill called Calve Hill, and there she bylded a churche in the morshy water of Trent. There she bylded a chappell in the ylande of Saynt Andrewe, and therefore y^e sayd yland is called Andronsey at this day, y^t is to saye, Andrewes yle. Here she lyved vii. yeres reclused as an ancesse."

I cannot omit the following story from the same source, because it introduces another kindred spirit—the Hermit of Bredon, residing in the same locality, and a personal friend of S. Modwen's:—

*Now called Scalpcliff, on the east side of the Trent exactly opposite Andersey and overlooking the town of Burton.

† Obviously the *Edith* and *Osyth* of the former legend.

"How two maydens were saved fro drownynge."

"At that tyme dwelled an holy heremyte whose name was Hardulche in a place called Bredon.* He herde tell of Modwen's holy lyuyng, and went off to her, and bare the legends of holy sayntes lyves. On a day this holy man left his boke at home, and therefore she made greate mone and sayd, 'Father, why bringest not thou thy booke with thee as thou were wont to do.' 'Madame,' he sayde, 'I forgote.' That tyme saynt Hardulche had a celle in . . . yffe (? Scaleclyffe) a lytell from Trente. Than she sent two of her maydens in a bote to his hermitage to fetch y^e boke. When these two virgins came to a place named Le . . . there arose a grete tempeste, and overturned the bote, and cast y^e maydens into the water, and there they laye with the bote on them in the botome of the water. Whan Sent Modwyn and the heremyte had long taryed the comynge of the two vyrgyns, they went bothe to theyr prayers, askynge Almighty God to shewe them what was become of these two maydens. Than they arose from prayer, and looked towarde the water, and there was a fayre waye yn the myddes of the water. The water was departyd maruelously asondre in two partes, and stode stedfast on bothe sydes as a ston walle. And therein entred y^e heremyte and Modwen, and went so tyll they came to y^e place where the bote lay, and there the bote lay dry, and the bottom upwarde, and they might go dry all aboute it, and y^e water stode over them on every syde. Then the heremyte put forth his handes, and wolde haue lyfte up the bote, but . . . " (*here the fragment ends*).

The following is from Geoffry's Biography in the British Museum :—

"There was a certain servant of the King, and an enemy of the church named Alfwin de Hopewas† who often wrought much injury to the monastery of Burton, and with evil machinations,

* About eight miles east of Burton.

† Now "Hoppas," a hamlet between Tamworth and Lichfield.

without any reverence for S. Modwen, exulted in his wicked doings." The record goes on to say that on a certain day, returning from the court where he had been prosecuting the monks, and boasting of his deeds in the presence of his family, and what he would do with the bones of S. Modwen, happening to have his fingers on his face, by some sudden motion of his thumb he pulled out one of his eyes, and for ever after remained 'monoculus'—*one-eyed*.

Among the miracles attributed to S. Modwen after her death is the curious incident alluded to by Dugdale, which occurred during the rule of the fourth Abbot, Galfridus (*Mala Terra*), between the years 1083 and 1093. It is recorded on fol. 87, col. 1, line 24, of Geoffrey's MS., but the story is so vaguely told that the reader is almost left in a doubt as to the "Devill of Drakelowe." It can hardly be intended to designate Roger the Earl, and so we must conclude that *one*, at least, of the spectres which haunted the graves of the two rustics, was considered to be that of the "**Devill**" himself.

"Again there arose a certain reproach against the church, on account of which our Lord, considering the merits of S. Modwen, wrought a fearful judgment. Two villains, residing at Stapenhull, on the lands of the Abbey of Burton, and under the rule and jurisdiction of the abbot, fled to the adjoining village of Drakelow, and relinquishing their obedience and fealty to the monks of Burton, desired to live under the power of Roger, the Earl surnamed Pictavensis. The Abbot sent therefore to Stapenhull, and seized their seed-corn which was not yet given out to them, but laid up in the barn, hoping thereby to induce them to return to their dwellings; but they, departing, laid a lying complaint before the earl, which so exasperated him, that he collected a large host of people, and with waggons and arms, and with a mighty hand violently seized all the seed in the abbey barns at Stapenhull.

The abbot declined to send out his ten soldiers, but with naked feet made procession to the church and bier of S. Modwen. But the ten soldiers, in spite of the abbot's orders, issued forth

against the marauders and fought them. The count's steward was killed, and the rest saw visions of the saint's bones when those who were killed in the fight were buried, and all the Earl's men died suddenly."

The manuscript here is at points illegible; but it appears from the remainder, that *spectres appeared at Drakelow* where the two rustics were buried, *and they continued to haunt the graves* until the dead bodies were exhumed and burnt. The story ends thus:—"And, therefore, the village of Drakelow became forsaken and desolate, and for a long time afterwards none were found so bold as to dwell therein, fearing the judgment of the Lord."

·Addenda. (*Vide Dugdale's Monasticon*).

William Melbourne, thirteenth abbot of Burton, gave to the chapel in Andersey 12^d issuing out of the burgage of Robert de Pecco in Burton, because Geoffry the Bishop commanded him *to endow it with something at the dedication of the same*. This William became abbot in 1197, and died 1210. It was then, during his rule, and about the commencement of the thirteenth century, that the ancient Saxon oratory of S. Modwen, perhaps of wood, was replaced by a more substantial structure of stone.

Thomas Pakington, nineteenth abbot of Burton, died on Thursday on the Kalends of October, 1305, and was buried in the middle before the high altar, under a marble stone with a cross upon it in the form of a branched tree (*modo ligni frondosi*),* which same stone was afterwards removed to Andersey by Thomas Feylde, abbot, and it lies upon the tomb of Saint Modwen the virgin.

Camden (*Ric. Gough's edit.*, II., 497) gives the following lines as having been written on her tomb "by way of epitaph":—

"Ortum Modwenna dat Hibernia; Scotia finem:
Anglia dat tumulum: dat Deus astri poli.

* See "Cutts' Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses" for examples: Plates xvi.—xviii. and plate L.

Prima dedit vitam, sed mortem terra secunda :
 Et 'terram terræ' tertia terra dedit.
 Aufert Lanfortin quam terra Conallea profert.
 Felix Burtonium virginis ossa tenet."

Thus rendered

"Ireland gave Modwen birth : England a grave :
 As Scotland death : and God her soul shall save.
 The first land life : the second, death did give :
 The third, in earth, her earthly part received.
 Lanfortin takes whom Connell's country owns,
 And happy Burton holds the virgin's bones."

A curious effigy of Saint Modwen, formerly existing at Stratford-on-Avon, is engraven in Fisher's "Antiquities." She is depicted in the black habit of a Benedictine nun, and a white veil, with a pastoral staff in one hand (as first abbess of Polesworth), and a book in the other. (*Mrs. Jameson.*)

A painted window representing the saint existed at Pillaton as late as 1789. Here, in 1480, a chapel was erected and dedicated to her memory by Richard Littleton. (*The Antiquary.*)

John Sudbury, the 26th abbot (A.D. 1400—1424). In his time, brother John Babe, prior and sacrist, made a new hearse or feretory* for S. Modwen.

Thomas Feylde, 31st abbot, rebuilt the ancient chapel of S. Modwen in Andersey from the foundations, and erected a great hall in the market place. He died 2 July, 1493.†

The isle of Andersey is one of the numerous islands formed by the Trent in its course past Burton. It is about 600 yards long, and 180 wide in the narrowest part.

At its south-western extremity is S. Modwen's Orchard, the site of the original oratory of S. Andrew, now laid out as a public garden with paths, seats, and shady trees. This plot, which is about 100 yards square, is surrounded by an ancient moat,

* For carrying the relics of the saint in processions.

† Dugdale.

probably formed by the monks for the better protection of the detached sanctuary and its valuable relics. On the island is a spring called "S. Modwen's Well," famous in olden times for its anti-scorbutic reputation. There was a well similarly dedicated, and believed to possess the like virtue, at Canwell, near Drayton Bassett.

The present church of S. Modwen stands on the site of the old abbey buildings on the western bank of the Trent. It was commenced in 1719, and not completed until 1726.

