

XV.—THE HOME OF ST. CUTHBERT'S BOYHOOD.

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[Read on the 28th April, 1897.]

In treating of the place-names connected with the life of St. Cuthbert, in a paper read before our society in October, 1892,¹ I allowed myself to be carried away, with the traditional fondness of a mother for her last child, by the new reading of *Rutlingaham* that I had found in a thirteenth-century manuscript of the town library at Treves. I seize the present opportunity for recanting much that I then wrote in consequence, though I believe the fundamental proposition which I advanced, namely, that, so far as we have means of judging, St. Cuthbert was no more a Scotsman in the modern sense than he was in the ancient, remains not only unshaken but confirmed.

All that we really know of the origin of the greatest of our Northumbrian saints is that he was brought up from the age of eight (which would probably be from about A.D. 640) by a widow named Kenswith at a village called *Hruringaham* or *Ruringaham*.² The so-called Irish Life purporting to give an account of his birth and childhood, whatever Celtic legends from other sources may be worked up in it,³ must rank on the whole with the *Arabian Nights* and *Amadis of Gaul*. The rev. George Phillips has most ably demonstrated its historical worthlessness in the pages of the *Ushaw Magazine*.⁴ The harrying of all Northumberland by Cadwalla and Penda after the death of Edwin in 633 may easily have left Cuthbert an orphan and Kenswith a widow.

Now, where was this *Hruringaham*, the home of St. Cuthbert's boyhood? About six miles east of Melrose there was a village

¹ *Arch. Ael.* vol. xvi. pp. 84, 85.

² *Vita Lindisf. S. Cuthberti* (MS. Bibl. S. Vedasti ap. Atreb. 812), ii. s. 7; *Patres Ecclesiae Anglicanae, Miscellaneous Works of the Venerable Bede*, ed. by Dr. Giles, 1843, iv. p. 202.

³ Some of these, especially that in which the little *Nullo* forestalls Professor Rontgen by detecting the red calf with a white star on its forehead while still in its black dam, are too quaint to have been developed *ab ovo* in the 14th century. It seems possible that the compiler may have taken these very Irish legends from some life of a St. Nullo, whom he most wrongly identified with St. Cuthbert.

⁴ *Ushaw Magazine*, June, 1892; see also Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*, ii., p. 265.

of the name of Wrangholm, generally called Wrangham in the muniments of Dryburgh,⁵ and there is a farm called Wrangham situated on high ground about a mile and a half to the north-east of Doddington in Glendale on the way to Lindisfarne. The claims of the former to be *Hruringaham* have been advanced without contradiction by Scottish writers, but from a passage in the Venerable Bede's prose life of St. Cuthbert, it would seem to have been much more natural if he had entered the monastery of Lindisfarne from the very first instead of that of Melrose. 'He *knew* that the church of Lindisfarne possessed many saintly men from whose lives and lessons he might profit, but influenced by a *report* of the high character of Boisil as a monk and as a priest, he *preferred* to *proceed* to Melrose.'⁶ This, surely, implies that *Hruringaham* lay within the sphere of Lindisfarne rather than that of Melrose.⁷ 'No,' say the Scots, 'St. Bede was writing for the monks of Lindisfarne, and he merely wished to show that St. Cuthbert's noviciate at Melrose was no reflection on the state of their own house at the time.' Had this really been St. Bede's object, and had St. Cuthbert really been brought up at Wrangholm, what could have been easier than to say that he naturally entered a monastery which was close to his own home instead of one that was more than thirty miles away?

The Scots' appeal to local tradition is little happier. Local tradition is in any case a fungus of rapid growth, and here it is in conflict with negative evidence of the strongest order. Close to Wrangholm, immediately under the ruined tower of Smailholm, stands the farm-house of Sandy Knowe, where Sir Walter Scott passed his early years, and where every legend and tradition of the neighbourhood was indelibly engrafted in his marvellous memory.⁸ His romantic devotion to the history of St. Cuthbert is well known. *Marmion* is full of it, and in *Harold the Dauntless* Sir Walter confesses that it

⁵ *Dryburgh Chartulary*, a reference kindly given by Mr. John Ferguson of Duns.

⁶ 'Quidam Lindisfarnensem ecclesiam multos habere sanctos viros, quorum doctrina et exemplis instrui posset, *noverat*, sed *fama* praeventus Boisili sublimium virtutum monachi et sacerdotis, Mailros petere maluit'—Beda, *Vita Cuthberti*, s. 6.

⁷ I am glad to be supported in this view by the rev. Charles Plummer of Corpus College, Oxford, and the rev. H. E. Savage of South Shields.

⁸ Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh 1839), vol. i. pp. 7, 109, 209.

gave rise to an intention that otherwise no one ever thought of ascribing to him. Apostrophising 'the grey towers of Durham,' he writes :—

There was once a time
I view'd your battlements with such vague hope,
As brightens life in its first dawning's prime ;
Not that e'en then came within fancy's scope
A vision vain of mitre, throne, or cope ;
Yet, gazing on the venerable hall,
Her flattering dreams would in perspective ope
Some reverend room, some prebendary's stall,—
And thus Hope me deceived as she deceiveth all.

If there had been any shred of ancient tradition respecting the boyhood of St. Cuthbert current near Smailholm in the seventies of the eighteenth century, in all human probability Sir Walter must have heard of it, and must have alluded to it in some one of his numerous writings.

The fantastic 'traditions' of St. Cuthbert's childhood alleged to have been extant in Lothian in the fifteenth century are, indeed, concerned not with Wrangholm but with Childekirk (Channelkirk).⁹ This was more probably the scene of his vision of the beatification of St. Aidan. No argument can, however, be founded on the proximity of Wrangholm to Channelkirk, as St. Cuthbert was in early life a regular *Wandergesell*.¹⁰ His earlier appearance on the bank of the Tyne at North Shields, interceding for the monks being swept out to sea in a westerly gale speaks rather for Wrangham, in Northumberland. Scottish writers, it should be remembered, vainly strove to place this scene on their own Tyne at Tynningham,¹¹ with the same persistency that they endeavour to locate Hruringaham at Wrangholm.

⁹ 'That place is knawen in all' Scotland,
For nowe a kirk thar on stand,
Childe Kirk is called commounly
Of men that er wonand thar by.'

—*Metrical Life of St. Cuthbert* (Surtees Soc. 87), pp. 27, 28. The St. Meldane mentioned in this, as in the Irish Life, was no doubt meant for St. Modon of Dryburgh.

¹⁰ If any further corroboration of the locality was required it has been given in canon Savage's scholarly essay on 'Abbess Hilda's First Religious House,' *Arch. Ael.* vol. xix. p. 66.

¹¹ Mr. Joseph Robertson attributed this error to 'the inexact information given to Mabillon by a priest of the Scottish College at Paris, who, though a learned man, had the mania so common among the Scotch of claiming for his country both places and personages belonging to Ireland and England.'—Montalembert, *Monks of the West*, ed. Gasquet, iv., p. 153n.

It is curious that while Wrangholm, near Melrose, is shown on old maps and not on modern ones, Wrangham, near Doddington, only appears on the latter. This has caused doubts to be thrown on the antiquity of the name. The site formed part of Doddington moor, and, notwithstanding its marked physical character, lay for a long time as waste and desolate as that of Wrangholm is at the present time. At the end of the last century the lord of the manor enclosed the moor with only legal regard for the rights and customs of the inhabitants of Doddington, and built a farm-steading at Wrangham. According to local tradition, the name was due to the belief of the Doddington folk that the lord of the manor did 'wrang em.'¹² This pretty piece of popular etymology is as good evidence as could be desired to show that the name had existed long beyond the memory of man, and that its real origin had long been forgotten.

One of the wells at Doddington is called after St. Cuthbert, and his name has also been given, though, it would seem, without sufficient authority, to a cave on the hill to the south-west of the village.¹³ The real 'Cuddy's Cave' which, 'according to uniform tradition, was at one period inhabited by the saint,'¹⁴ was near the hamlet of Holburn, in a direct line between Wrangham and Lindisfarne. Raine acknowledged that he was mistaken in supposing this to have been St. Cuthbert's retreat when he first withdrew from Lindisfarne in 676, as Thrush Island is the spot meant. Nor is there any period except during his early life as a herdsman to which we can refer the tradition. Here it seems to fall naturally in, and we can picture him purposely driving his flock that way from Wrangham and passing the night in the cave in order to enjoy the glorious view of dawn and sunrise over the Holy Island of Lindisfarne.

I have myself suggested that Bettyfield, near Smailholm, may have been the *Bedesfeld* where St. Cuthbert gave some land for the settlement of certain nuns driven southwards by the Picts after the battle of Nechtansmere in 685.¹⁵ I have hitherto failed to discover whether

¹² I have to express my thanks to Mr. R. G. Bolam of Berwick-on-Tweed for information on this point, as also to Mr. F. Grocock of Heddon-on-the-Wall.

¹³ Murray's *Handbook, Durham and Northumberland*, 2nd ed., p. 319.

¹⁴ Raine's *St. Cuthbert*, p. 21.

¹⁵ *History of Northumberland*, Elliot Stock, 1895, p. 67.

Bettyfield be an ancient name or not. Even if it be verily *Bedesfeld*, this will no more prove that St. Cuthbert's early home was near Smailholm than St. Aidan's similar donation to St. Hilda, at South Shields, proves him to have been brought up at that place.

On the whole, then, the balance of probability seems to be decidedly in favour of Wrangham, near Doddington, and not Wrangholm, near Melrose, being the ancient Hruringham, the home of St. Cuthbert's boyhood.