

III.

TRACES OF THE CULTUS OF THE NINE MAIDENS IN SCOTLAND.

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The story of the Nine Maidens forms a picturesque chapter in the annals of Scottish hagiology. These Nine Maidens were sisters, daughters of St Donevald, otherwise Donald, a Scot, who settled among the Picts. Their exact date is uncertain, but they are said to have flourished early in the eighth century. They lived in what is now the parish of Glamis, in Forfarshire, where St Fergus died later in the same century. Their home there was in the Glen of Ogilvy, now forming part of the possessions of the noble family of Strathmore.

In his *Kalendar*, under 15th July, Adam King has this entry: "The 9 virgines dochters to s. donewalde vnder king eugenius ye 7. In scotland."<sup>1</sup> The tradition is thus given by Bellenden, who, it is to be noticed, assigns *seven* instead of *nine* daughters to St Donevald: "In his (Eugenius's) time was Donevald, the haly man; quhilk levit ane sobir life at Ogilvy, haldin amang Pichtis in gret veneratioun. It is said that he had VII douchteris, quhilk levit with him in gret pennance, on beir breid and wattir. Thay eit nevir bot anis on the day; and the residew thair of occupyit in continewal labour and orison."<sup>2</sup> The names of only two of the Nine Maidens are recorded. Stewart, in his metrical version of Boece's *Chronicles of Scotland*, says:—

"The eldest hecht Mazota to her name  
The secnd sister callit Fyncana;  
Quhat hecht the laif I cannot to zow sa,  
For quhy my author schew thame nocht to me;  
Thair namis now thairfoir I will lat be."<sup>3</sup>

Mazota seems to have been a person of some energy, for we are told that she "maid inhibition to the wild geis, to eit hir faderis corne, and

<sup>1</sup> Forbes's *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> *History and Chronicles of Scotland*, bk. ix. ch. xxv.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. ii. p. 329.

they obeyit hir haly monitionis; and thairfore, wild geis was nevir sene efter on that ground.”<sup>1</sup>

This reminds one of St Milburga, who founded a religious house at Wenlock in Shropshire in the seventh century, and is commonly associated with wild geese from her having forbidden them to fly over her land and devour her corn. The memory of St Mazota and her sisters was kept alive in the neighbourhood of their hermitage. Jervise says: “The Nine Maiden Well was near the old dove-cot within the Castle park of Glamis, where probably stood a chapel which was inscribed to these holy sisters.”<sup>2</sup>

On the death of their father St Donevald, the Nine Maidens, not wishing to be without a protector, removed to Abernethy near the Earn in Perthshire, still noted for its round tower, akin to the round tower of Brechin, though earlier in date than the latter. What then happened is thus narrated by Bellenden:—

“Thir haly virginis, efter deceis of thair fader, come to Garnard, King of Pichtis, desiring sum place quhare thay micht leif ane solitar life, in the honour of God. Garnard condiscendit to thair desiris and gaif tham ane hous in Abernethy, with certane rentis to be takin up of the nixt landis, to thair sustentation quhare thay leiffit ane devote life and war buryit at the rute of ane aik, quhilk is haldin yit in gret veneration amang the pepil.”<sup>3</sup>

What Garnard did for “the Maidens” is thus told in Stewart’s metrical version of Boece:—

“At thair requeist ane proper mansioune  
He biggit thame into that samin toun,  
With kirk and queir, to sing and for to sa  
Thair obseruance and ouris of the da,  
Thair tha remanit lang and mony zeir,  
In fasting, walking, and devoit prayer  
With perseuerance to thair latter da.”<sup>4</sup>

Baring-Gould tells us that after their father’s death the Nine Maidens “are said to have gone to Abernethy, where they lived in a hollow

<sup>1</sup> Bellenden’s *Chronicles of Scotland*, bk. ix. ch. xxv.

<sup>2</sup> *Epitaphs and Inscriptions*, vol. i. p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> *Chronicles of Scotland*, bk. ix. ch. xxv.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. ii. pp. 329–30.

oak.”<sup>1</sup> In his *Menologium Scoticum*, of date 1622, Dempster gives the tradition of his day regarding the Nine Maidens. He says that their names were inscribed among those of the saints, that their abode—an oak—was shown, in the memory of our fathers, full of years, and that their miracles, which had been engraved on the walls of the most ancient oratory, were lately profaned and abolished by the heretics.<sup>2</sup>

Dempster probably meant to indicate that the dwelling-place of the Maidens was at the foot of the oak in question. It is interesting to learn that, even in the seventeenth century, the fame of the oak at Abernethy was such that an enactment was passed by the kirk-session of Glamis forbidding maidens to go to it on pilgrimage.<sup>3</sup>

In treating of the Nine Maidens we are met with certain difficulties of chronology which call for notice. Bellenden says: “Thir virginis war not in time of Conrannus, with Sanct Brigitta, as the commonis haldis, bot in the time of Eugenius the VII; for he perseverit in gud peace with Garnard, and visyit oft times thir virginis with his liberalite and guddis.”<sup>4</sup> Eugenius VII. can be fitted into the chronology tolerably well if we do not lay too much stress on the fact that 715 is given as the date of his death,<sup>5</sup> and *circa* 716 as that of St Donevald, when the Nine Maidens went to Abernethy.<sup>6</sup> Garnard is presumably the same as Garnad, a Pictish ruler, who held sway over the district between Scone and Meigle from 706 till 729.<sup>7</sup> His name, or a name resembling it, is assigned to several other Pictish kings. Thus we find

<sup>1</sup> *Lives of the Saints*, s. v., 15th July.

<sup>2</sup> “Abernethæ Donevaldi agricolæ, et filiarum novem Sanctis adscriptarum, quarum domicilium quercus, patrum memoria, ostendebatur annosa, et miracula Ecclesiolæ vetustissimæ parietinis insculpta, ab hæreticis nuper profanata et abolita.”—Forbes’s *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. J. M’Lean’s *Translations of the Names of Places in the Deeds of Entail of the Breadalbane Estate*; Dr A. Laing’s Introduction, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Chronicles of Scotland*, bk. ix. ch. xxv.

<sup>5</sup> Wyntoun’s *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, vol. iii. p. 326. Wyntoun says that Eugenius died at Abernethy, and was buried in Iona.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes’s *Kalendars of Scotland*, s. v. “Donald.”

<sup>7</sup> Skene’s *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots*, pref., p. 126, n.

Garnard, son of Donald, who reigned from A.D. 584 till 599; Garnaid, son of Wid or Foith, whose rule extended from A.D. 631 till 635; and Gartnaid, son of Donnell, a contemporary of King Oswy of Northumbria in the middle of the same century.<sup>1</sup>

The best known of these, though the furthest removed from the time of the Nine Maidens, is Garnard, son of Donald, as it was during his reign that the church of Abernethy, under the influence of St Columba's mission, was dedicated or re-dedicated to St Bridget, Abbess of Kildare, who died in 523. Bower, the continuator of Fordun, tells what he says he found in a certain chronicle of the church of Abernethy,<sup>2</sup> viz., that, after Garnard had built the church there, St Patrick introduced St Bridget into Scotland, with her nine virgins, and offered to God, to the blessed Mary, and to the blessed Bridget and her virgins, all the lands and tithes which the prior and canons have from of old.

In the *Pictish Chronicle*<sup>3</sup> we read that in the fifth year of Nectan, who ruled over the Picts from 457 till 481, the King gave ("immolavit") Abernethy to God and St Bridget till the day of judgment ("ad diem judicii"), and that Darlugdach (called by an anachronism Abbess of Kildare) was present and sang Alleluia over the gift ("cantavit alleluia super istam hostiam").

Dr W. F. Skene observes: "Kildare was, as we know, dedicated to the great virgin saint of Ireland, St Bridget or St Bride, and was the mother-church of all her foundations; but there was within the country of the Picts one church in especial which was also dedicated to St Bride, and was held to be in a manner affiliated to that of Kildare, and that was the church of Abernethy."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Celtic Scotland*, vol. i. pp. 242, 246-7, 257, 305, 258, 259.

<sup>2</sup> "Garnard filius Dompnach sive Makdompnach, qui fundavit et ædificavit ecclesiam collegiatam de Abirnethy. Postquam illuc introduxit beatus Patricius sanctam Brigidam, sicut in quadam chronica ecclesiæ de Abirnethy reperimus, cum suis novem virginibus in Scotiam; et obtulit Deo et beatæ Mariæ, et beatæ Brigidæ, et virginibus suis, omnes terras et decimas quas Prior et canonici habent ex antiquo." —Fordun's *Scotichronicon*, Goodall's edition, I. p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> P. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 309.

Special notice has here been taken of St Bridget's connection with the church of Abernethy, inasmuch as the *Aberdeen Breviary* links the story of St Mazota with that of the Abbess of Kildare, thereby removing Mazota to a date earlier than her own. The narrative in the *Breviary* is thus given by Bishop Forbes: "Graverdus, son of Domath, the distinguished king of the Picts, and cousin of S. Brigida, while fighting against the Britons, is supernaturally warned to send for her to Hibernia and to obey her precepts. S. Brigida obeyed the summons, and with nine holy virgins came from Hibernia to Scotia, and settled at Abirnethy close to the Taye on the south, in which place she erected a basilica in honour of Almighty God and the Virgin Mary, in which the king with all his family was baptized. Mazota was the most remarkable of these virgins, and she followed in all things the steps of Brigida. The king of the Picts promised that the church should be dedicated by S. Patrick, at that time dwelling in Scotia, and there Mazota with the other virgins continued to serve God, till they all died and were buried. No tongue can tell the miracles that God in Heaven caused to take place by her agency."<sup>1</sup> We may remark in passing that an interesting reminiscence of St Bride's Nine Maidens was to be met with till recent times in Sanquhar parish, Dumfriesshire, where "it was customary to resort on May-day to St Bride's Well, where each maiden presented *nine* smooth white stones as an offering to the Saint, which correspond in number with St Bride's nine virgin attendants."<sup>2</sup>

The solution of the chronological problem thus raised is evidently to be found in the fact that there are clearly two separate traditions which have become intertwined. There is the tradition that St Bridget had nine maidens as her attendants, and there is the tradition of the Nine Maidens, daughters of St Donevald. In both stories Abernethy appears prominently as the rendezvous of the two sets of maidens, and forms a link between both. We are therefore led to conclude that Mazota has been removed from her own proper

<sup>1</sup> *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, p. 395.

<sup>2</sup> Brown's *History of Sanquhar*, p. 30.

date, and by a mistake has been attached to St Bridget as one of her companions.

So much for the chronology of the story. We shall now glance at the dedications, first, to St Donevald's daughters collectively, and then to the two eldest individually. As mentioned above, Bellenden assigns to him *seven* instead of *nine* daughters. It is worth noting that at Inverey, in the Braemar district of Aberdeenshire, is a chapel dedicated to "The Seven Maidens."<sup>1</sup> Bishop Forbes, however, is inclined to associate it with the seven daughters of Fergus of Igh-ingen-Ferghusa, commemorated in the "Martyrology of Donegal" on 24th May;<sup>2</sup> but there is some doubt on the point. In a pass of the Ochils, in Newburgh parish, overlooking Strathearn, is a block of freestone forming the pedestal of the once famous Macduff's Cross; and near it is a copious spring known as the Ninewells, so named, according to the Rev. Dugald Butler, from its connection with the Nine Maidens of the neighbouring Abernethy.<sup>3</sup> In former days the Cross constituted a sanctuary for any one who committed murder in hot blood, and could make good his claim to kinship with Macduff, Earl of Fife, within the ninth degree. When such an one sought refuge at the Cross, he was allowed to atone for his crime by the payment of nine cows and a 'Colpindach' or year-old cow; but, in addition, he had to wash his hands in the water of the Ninewells.

On the outskirts of Dundee is a hamlet called Ninewells; and beside the Whitadder in Chirnside parish, Berwickshire, is an estate bearing the same name. The former may have a relation to the Nine Maidens, but the latter certainly has not. Its name originated in the presence of nine springs on the estate. The Rev. A. F. Smart, minister of Chirnside parish, informs me that "just below the mansion-house there is now such a quantity of water flowing from these into the river Whit-

<sup>1</sup> *Collection of Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, p. 641.

<sup>2</sup> *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, p. 447.

<sup>3</sup> *Church and Parish of Abernethy*, p. 149. Forfar has also a Ninewells, *vide* Alan Reid's *The Royal Burgh of Forfar*, p. 248.

adder as might supply a small town." In Mid-Calder parish is a spring known as the Maidens' Well, which Mr J. Russell Walker connects with our Nine Maidens; <sup>1</sup> but the name of the spring has nothing distinctive about it, and besides, one hardly expects to find such a dedication south of the Forth.

For the chief dedications to St Donevald's daughters we have to look to the shires of Aberdeen and Forfar, where their *cultus* seems to have been specially popular. In the sands near Pitsligo Castle stood a chapel believed to have been dedicated to them, and not far away is, or rather was, a spring bearing their name.<sup>2</sup> Writing in 1870, Dr Pratt remarks: "Patrick Cook tells us that 'a little to the south of the castle is a well of extraordinary fine water. It is called the *Nine Maidens' Well*, and probably takes its name from the nine Muses.'" On this Dr Pratt makes the following comment: "Tradition, however, gives the honour of its dedication to maidens nearer home. It is said that they were the daughters of St Donevald, and that the names of two of them have come down to us." Dr Pratt adds: "But, alas! the Nine Maidens' Well, to whomsoever dedicated, is now a tradition. 'It's just under that sod,' said our kindly and aged guide, as she conducted us to the spot, pointing to some indications of a recently filled ditch; 'an' oh! it was a bonnie spring!' From the quantity of water discharged from a drain near the Castle a fair idea may be formed of the 'bonnie spring' which caused this lament."<sup>3</sup> The church of Tough was under the patronage of the Nine Maidens, and that of Finhaven is thought to have had the same dedication. The latter, of which there is now no trace, occupied a site about a mile from the ruined castle of Finhaven, not far from the junction of the Lemno and the South Esk.

Sir Alexander Lindsay of Glenesk, who died in 1382 on the island of Candia, when on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, made the rebuilding of Finhaven Church his last public act before leaving home, and assembled

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. xvii. p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> *Collections of Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, p. 435.

<sup>3</sup> *Buchan*, pp. 206-7.

his friends at its consecration by the bishop of the diocese.<sup>1</sup> The church was one of the prebends of Brechin Cathedral. The walls of the graveyard were in existence till last century. In 1849, when the graveyard was being trenched, the floor of the church was laid bare and was found to have been paved with plain glazed tiles of the colours of red, blue, and yellow, each about six inches square and an inch thick. On the hill above the site of the church is a spring locally known as the Ninewell.<sup>2</sup> The church of Drumblade had St Hillary as its patron, but on the lands of Chapelton, in the same parish, was a place of worship dedicated to the Nine Maidens. The chapel, which stood on a knoll, had a burying-ground. At the foot of the knoll is a spring still called the Chapel Well. Mr James Macdonald remarks: "In a charter of 1624, conveying the Chapel-Croft, the chapel on Chapelton is called 'lie Ninemadinchapell.' The foundations of the building and the grave-stones in the churchyard were removed about forty or fifty years ago to build a farm-steading."<sup>3</sup> The church of Cortachy was dedicated to St Columba; but there was possibly an altar to the Nine Maidens within the building, the Nine Maiden Well being in its vicinity.<sup>4</sup>

In the wood of Logie, about three miles from the church of Auchendoir, is a spring known as the Nine Maidens' Well. The church of the parish was dedicated to St Mary; but there may have been a chapel to the Nine Maidens near their spring, though definite information is lacking on the point. A local tradition, narrated in Macfarlane's *Geographical Collections*, is to the effect that a bear, which infested the district, killed nine maidens beside the well in question.<sup>5</sup> We are told that "the reason why the family of Forbes carries three bears' heads in its arms is, because the first of this family slew a very ravenous bear at Logie, near Castle Forbes, where, at this day, on a stone, the figure of that bear, though rudely carved, is yet seen."<sup>6</sup> A variant

<sup>1</sup> Lord Lindsay's *Lives of the Lindsays*, vol. i. p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Jervise's *Land of the Lindsays*, pp. 162-4.

<sup>3</sup> *The Place-Names of West Aberdeenshire*, s.v. "Chapelton."

<sup>4</sup> Jervise's *Epitaphs and Inscriptions, etc.*, vol. ii. p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> *Collections, Aberdeen and Banff*, pp. 613-14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 611.



of the story introduces a boar instead of a bear, and adds an incident more in harmony with chivalry than with hagiology. This variant is thus given by Jervise: "Tradition says that one of this family killed, near the Nine Maiden Well, a wild boar that devoured nine virgins, with one of whom—named Bes, or Elizabeth—Forbes was in love, and that when he had slain the animal, he exclaimed, 'It's a' for Bes!' This circumstance, according to the legend, gave rise to the surname of *Forbes*."<sup>1</sup> In all this the original dedication of the spring to the Nine Maidens of the Glen of Ogilvy has evidently been forgotten. In the case of the Nine Maidens' Well in Mains and Strathmartin parish, a later legend has likewise served to obscure the early dedication. The romantic story is thus given by Jervise:—

"Long, long ago, the farmer of Pitempan had nine pretty daughters. One day their father thirsted for a drink from his favourite well, which was in a marsh at a short distance from the house. The fairest of the nine eagerly obeyed her father's wish by running to the spring. Not returning within a reasonable time, a second went in quest of her sister. She too tarried so long that another volunteered, when the same result happened to her and to five other sisters in succession. At last the ninth sister went to the spring, and there, to her horror, beheld, among the bulrushes, the dead bodies of her sisters guarded by a *dragon*! Before she was able to escape, she too fell into the grasp of the monster, but not until her cries had brought people to the spot. Amongst these was her lover, named *Martin*, who, after a long struggle with the *dragon*, which was carried on from Pitempan to Balkello, succeeded in conquering the monster. It is told that Martin's sweetheart died from injuries or fright; and the legend adds that, in consequence of this tragedy, the spring at Pitempan was named the Nine Maiden Well, and the sculptured stone at Strathmartin, also St Martin's Stane at Balkello, were erected by the inhabitants to commemorate the event."<sup>2</sup>

The name of the hero probably arose from confusion with that of the patron of the church of Strathmartin, which was dedicated to St Martin by Bishop David de Bernham on 18th May 1249. The Nine Maidens had a chapel in Strathdichty, which probably stood at Pitempan, not far from the spring bearing their name.

We shall now glance at the somewhat meagre traces of the *cultus* of St Mazota and her sister St Fincana. The festival of the former was

<sup>1</sup> *Epitaphs and Inscriptions, etc.*, vol. ii. p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Epitaphs and Inscriptions, etc.*, vol. i. pp. 205-6.

celebrated on 23rd December, and, in connection with it, there is a collect in the *Breviary of Aberdeen* in which spiritual blessings are sought through the intercession of blessed Mazota the Virgin (*intercedente beata Mazota Virgine tua*).<sup>1</sup> The correct rendering of the saint's name appears to be Mayoca: as Mr F. C. Eeles remarks: "The form Mazota seems to be corrupt, and to be due to copyists mistaking *y* for *z* and *c* for *t*."<sup>2</sup> That Mayoca is probably the correct form is countenanced by the fact that to the parish of Drumoak, on the Dee, she supplied not only dedication but name, Drumoak signifying the ridge of St Maok or Mayoca. The alternative name of the parish was Dalmaik. The writer of the article on Drumoak in the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland* observes: "In this part of the country it is almost always called *Dalmaik*. The church and manse are situated by the river Dee, on a haugh (in Erse *Dal*), and near a well which has still the name of '*Saint Maik's Well*.'"<sup>3</sup>

In pre-Reformation times the day of the patron saint was celebrated with due solemnity in the church of Drumoak, and her virtues were fittingly made known to the parishioners.<sup>4</sup> There is difference of opinion as to the festival day of St Fincana. 21st August and 13th October have both been assigned to a saint of that name; and it has been thought that there were two Fincanas—one belonging to the sixth century and another to the eighth.<sup>5</sup> The probability, however, is that there was but one. In the *Martyrology of Donegal*, under 13th October, occurs the name of Findsech or Finnsech, Virgin of Sliabh Guaire in Gailenga, a name slightly resembling that of our saint. The church of Echt was dedicated to St Fincana, and her feast was commemorated there on 13th October. The *Martyrology of Aberdeen* assigns to St Fincana (whom it describes as a virgin, not a martyr) a church in the diocese of Dunblane. One may presume that the reference is to the chapel of St Fink, in Bendochy

<sup>1</sup> *Pars Hyem.*, fol. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. of Soc. of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol. xxxiii. p. 450, *n*.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. iii. p. 315.

<sup>4</sup> *Brev. Aberd. Pars Hyem.*, fol. 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Collections, Aberd. and Banff*, p. 636.

parish, Perthshire, which gave name to the estate of St Fink and the hill of St Fink rising to the height of 918 feet above the sea. The name appears as *St Phink* in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, where we read: "There was anciently a chapel at *St Phink*, dedicated to that saint, a small part of the foundation of which still remains. It had been surrounded with a burying-ground, out of which the present proprietor's father dug some human skulls, inclosed between four square stones."<sup>1</sup> The lands connected with the chapel lay to the east of the confluence of the Erich and the Isla.<sup>2</sup>

The Nine Maidens, in virtue of their being sisters, are unique in Scottish hagiology; but it is not uncommon to find maidens associated in groups. Thus in the train of St Boniface a certain number of bishops and other clerical attendants are mentioned along with two virgins, Crescentia and Triduana. In one of the legends of St Regulus reference is made to three virgins from Collossia, viz., Triduana, Potentia, and Cineria.<sup>3</sup> In connection with the early ecclesiastical settlements at St Andrews, we are told that in the church of St Muren were fifty virgins of the blood-royal dedicated to God, and veiled eleven years.<sup>4</sup> In the last instance is clearly indicated the germ of that conventual life which we find fully developed in the later mediæval nunnery. That the story of the Nine Maidens and their father laid hold on the imagination of the dwellers in the North-East of Scotland, is indicated by a salutation made in quite modern times to a Buchan farmer who had nine daughters: "James, James, good luck to you! you are as rich as St Donevald."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *N.S.A., Perth*, p. 1188.

<sup>2</sup> *O.S.A.*, vol. xix. p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, vol. i. p. 277, and vol. ii. p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> *Chronicles of Picts and Scots*, p. 187. On the Continent we have St Ursula and her 11,000 virgins, who, according to a wildly romantic legend, were martyred by the Huns at Cologne (Baring-Gould's *Myths of the Middle Ages*, pp. 317-40).

<sup>5</sup> Pratt's *Buchan*, p. 206, *n.*