THE ORIGIN AND FIRST GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY IN BUCKS.

In the first introduction of Christianity into Britain there is nothing to connect it directly with Bucks, but, indirectly, there is a connection through the princely family, which had not indeed its chief seat in Bucks, but certainly extended its authority over the middle and north of the county. King Cunobelin, the Cymbeline of Shakespeare's drama, had a palace or occasional seat at "Velvet Lawn," and the parish which in after times grew up round it still bears his name, now known as the twin parishes of Great and Little Kimble. The traces of earthworks are still visible, and many coins of the well-known beautiful type have been found there. It may be remarked, by the way, that the Cunobelin of his coins must have been really pronounced Kimbellin, and not as I think Shakespeare's hero is generally called, Simbĕlin. I do not see in the play any indication of Shakespeare's own mode of pronouncing the name, but the initial letter must have been hard, to be perpetuated as Kimble, and the accent must have been, in accordance with usual Celtic practice, on the second syllable, to allow of the Welsh softened form of his name *Cynfelyn*.

According to British story, we hardly dare call it history, the daughter of this Cynfelyn became the wife of her father's conqueror, Aulus Plautius, and under her adopted name, Pomponia Græcina, was accused before her husband, on his return to Rome in A.D. 56, of being addicted to a foreign superstition. She was acquitted, but lived in mourning for forty years after. Her brother, Arviragus (Gweirydd of the Welsh), is said to have welcomed Joseph of Arimathea.

Bran (Brennus in Latin), the nephew of this Cynfelyn, son of his brother Llyr Llediaith, is generally believed

by such Welshmen as take any interest in the question, to have been the main instrument in securing permanent footing for our holy religion in this island. I call Bran nephew of the Cymbeline of "Velvet Lawn," because that is the utterance of the Triads. I am aware that Dr. Guest, a very high authority indeed, held Caractacus to be a son of Cymbeline, but all Welsh tradition makes him great nephew. According to this tradition Bran was taken to Rome with his son Caractacus, and during their imprisonment in the capital, they were converted by St. Paul the apostle himself. St. Paul was certainly in Rome at the time. After seven years' detention, Bran is said to have returned to Glamorganshire, as it is now called, and there, with the assistance of the two Christian teachers he brought with him from Rome, he laid the first foundation of the Church in Britain. Caractacus (I give the Latin form of Caradog, the form by which he is known to his own people) is said to have left two of his children behind him in Rome, Llyn, or Linus, first Bishop of Rome on the Gentile side, martyred A.D. 67, and Gladys, or Claudia Peregrina, as Martial calls her (Claudia Rufina elsewhere), the wife of Pudens, and grandmother by him of Hermas, Pope Pius I. and St. Pudentiana. The Church of St. Pudentiana still stands where the palace of Pudens stood. This is not the place to discuss the thorny questions concerning this story. Mr. J. H. Parker, of Oxford, accepted it, and in the remains of the Underground Church, which now is the crypt of St. Pudentiana, are probably the actual walls of the rooms where the daughter of Caractacus lived. The verdict, however, on all these matters must be the delivery a jury is generally inclined to give, however often it has to be balked in its wish, a "may be so," or "may be not."

How and to what extent Christianity grew up in Bucks, we cannot tell. When, some three centuries later, St. Alban, the Roman officer at Verulam, made an epoch, there were crowds still in Hertfordshire to whom the gospel message was as yet untold, and so it may have been in Bucks. Anyhow, history is silent of Christianity in Mid-England: a Bishop or two of London and York, some three names in Oxfordshire of British saints, St. Donaverdh of Beckley, St. Brenwold of Bampton,

and St. Hycrith, the Virgin of Chiselhampton—these are nearly all we can gather in what is England now, apart from Devonshire and Cornwall. Of material remains there is little more than the ground plan of a church in Silchester, and in its original framework, now much altered, the basilican Church at Brixworth in Northamptonshire. One only memorial of a possibly Buckinghamshire woman of those early days exists in the headless figure of a tall stately woman found at Chesterholm, on the great North Wall. She was certainly one of the Catwallauni, so of Beds, Herts, or Bucks.

Whatever was the strength or the weakness of the Church in Bucks, and it was outwardly at least, I suppose, a Christian Church, all outward manifestations of its life were doubtless drowned in blood and ashes when the Saxon came. The ruthlessness of these savage conquerors left few memorials of the older time. It is, indeed, sometimes forgotten that the conquest was very gradual. The kingdom of Wessex, to which most of Bucks belonged before it was grasped by Mercia, advanced with slow steps. From the time when Cerdic had landed in 495, eighty years were to elapse before the great Anderid forest was pierced, and Ceawlin carried his arms to the Severn. It was three years later, in 580, when his brother Cuthwulf stormed Aylesbury. The Catvellauni* (or Catwallauni of the monument), the inhabitants of Bucks in earlier days, through perhaps having lost the name when Saxon rule began, had probably enjoyed peace under the shelter of the great forest barrier, which ran from east to west south of the Thames. In Mid-Bucks, I suspect, the great white church, stately as things then seemed—and stately buildings were not unknown in those days—looked forth over the battlemented walls on the moorland stretch of what is now the Vale of Aylesbury. How came the Saxon conquerors to give the name of the Church Town to Aylesbury, if the church was not the one chief characteristic of the centre of the vale? I assume that the late Mr. Parker, of Oxford, was correct in deriving the name from the "burgh" of the church, or "eglwys," as the Welsh now call it, and

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* Or *Cattieuchlani*.

that the old derivation of Eaglesbury is only a chronicler's guess.

From 580 to 634 the public profession of Christianity in Bucks must have been almost impossible, a few embers of a once flourishing Church only surviving among the downtrodden British slaves who were spared by their ruthless masters. The bulk of the British Christians of Bucks may have gone with Cadrod Calch-fynydd, Lord of Dunstable and Northampton, to the general refuge in Wales. Cadrod's name tells that, while his seat, as tradition says, was at Dunstable, his rule was over the Calch-mynydd, or chalk hills; that is, I cannot but suppose, the Chilterns. His tribe settled in Anglesey, and in due time gave Kings to England, under the well-known name of Tudor. Several of Cadrod's immediate descendants are called saints; those who remained in their old homes were slaves. Reeves, in his "History of English Law," says, "Such an entire destruction had been made of every establishment by the Saxon invaders that the Roman law was quite eradicated." Finlason, in his edition of Reeves, says, "This is quite erroneous," and he maintains that, for the most part, all the Romano-British framework of society was not interfered with, even the boundaries of shires and manors were taken as they stood—only the masters were changed. Anyhow, large numbers of the old Britons must have remained, and those, in a considerable proportion, of the Iberian dark-haired race; but I cannot see traces of any open profession of Christianity surviving in Bucks before our great apostle, St. Birinus, came. I mean after its conquest by Ceawlin and his brothers.

The points that seem deserving of special attention in this new beginning are, first, that Christianity came into Bucks with Birinus, and not from St. Augustine of Canterbury; and, secondly, that we have reason to surmise that the chief agents in fostering the rising Church were the members of a dynasty of sub-kings. These sub-kings were an offshoot from the main stock of the Wessex kings—indeed, according to later practice they were themselves the main stock, but, as not unusual in the earlier days, especially in Wessex, were set aside from military exigencies. The boy son of the eldest son had to give way to an uncle of full age, or of greater military capacity. Of these

sub-kings, the first seems to have held under Wessex; the second, and it seems the last, was, at least in his later years, subject to Mercia.

With regard to St. Birinus, he is not indeed forgotten, but I hardly think we have assigned the due meed of honour to this saintly man, the apostle not only of Wessex, but, in a special sense, of our diocese of Oxford and our county of Bucks. We do not need to forget, nor do we forget, the great influence of Canterbury in later days. It helped most effectually in welding the originally independent sees into one National Church, and it formed, perhaps even still earlier, the chief channel of intercourse and bond of union with Rome, then, and for ages after, the chief fountain of light. Yet the Kentish mission was for a time a comparative failure. It was little operative out of the county; Middlesex and Essex had been won, but the hold of Christianity was evidently slight. Northumbria, though gained for a time, soon fell away, despite the touching birth of its church, and owed its real conversion to Aidan and Finan from the Northern Church. It was thirty-four years after Augustine's arrival before East Anglia was touched, and Wessex had forty-seven years to wait. There seems no hint of any organized attempt to carry the Gospel message into Wessex, or indeed of any attempt at all, unless we accept the old tradition given by Bishop Kennet, how a priest at Compton, on the borders of Oxfordshire, complained to Augustine that the lord of his manor would not pay his tithe, and how Augustine convinced the faulty patron, by raising from his grave the body of an old British squire of a century and a half before, who confessed that he, in his lifetime, had been excommunicated for abstraction of tithe, and that he still felt the consequences. The supernatural part of the story we may easily dismiss, but does the tradition give any ground for supposing that some remains of Christian life still lingered, or had been quickened, even in middle England; and does it testify to any missionary journeys of the good bishop, of which we know nothing beyond the unfortunate attempt when he met Abbot Dunawd in Worcestershire and wrecked the hopes of union with the British Church? Our own apostle was a man of broader views than that excellent prelate of Canterbury who

could hardly hold communion with heretical Quartodecimans, and men who, besides, with shameless wilfulness, shaved the fore half of the head, instead of adopting the crown tonsure of the Romans.

We have no reason to expect even in St. Berrin (to give him the name which is transmitted by the hill above Wallingford, which still bears his name, and where local tradition says he had a cell) that he was other than of the Roman type of churchman, though much broader and wider in his sympathies than St. Augustine. That he was a devoted Churchman as well as a godly man is clear; he could hardly have been otherwise, trained as he had been in the Monastery of St. Andrew, the religious house which Gregory the Great had founded in his own palace at Rome. The traditions of this house, founded by a strong teetotaller and vegetarian as Gregory was, would naturally be of the ascetic character which its famed prior, Augustine, exemplified. Augustine's mission and its great success, at least for a time—ten thousand baptized at once within little more than a year of his landing—must have made the whole story of their famous prior, the Archbishop of Canterbury, a proud memory in St. Andrew's. Mellitus, of London, and Justus, of Rochester, were doubtless St. Andrew's men; and so, I suppose, was Laurentius, the successor of Augustine as Archbishop of Canterbury. We cannot but see that the fortunes of the English mission must have excited unusual interest in St. Andrew's house at Rome, and must have strongly moved Birinus. He was, Bromton says, a Roman, but that perhaps is a guess. He was selected, we are told, by Pope Honorius, or he volunteered, but promised before Honorius that he would sow the Gospel seed in inland Britain, beyond where any teacher had visited. Honorius, for some reason or other, sent him for consecration to Asterius, Bishop of Milan, who was then apparently at Genoa, where he certainly died a few months after. Birinus set out for his future see fortified with a pallula, or corporal, with the Lord's body wrapped in it, and given him by Honorius himself. It was hung round his neck. The chalice which, accompanied by two stoles, was found on his dead body years afterwards, when his remains were removed to Winchester, was doubtless one of the treasures he brought with him. Gregory's liturgy, substantially

our own now, and the old Gregorian chant books too, doubtless, came. There was no bodyguard of forty monks with him when the lonely missionary landed in Hampshire in 634; still less was there a Queen Bertha to welcome him. The King of Wessex, with the bulk of his able-bodied men, was near the northern boundary of his kingdom, at Dorchester, on the Thames, preparing for a decisive campaign against his relentless foe—the merciless foe, indeed, of pretty nearly every neighbour, the last, as it proved, of the great pagan sovereigns—the Cetewayo of Middle England—King Penda of Mercia. It has been said that Birinus was but passing through Dorchester, on his way to the north, when he saw a call in the gathered hosts of the Wessex pagans under King Cynegils. The first baptism of a convert to the new faith that we know of, was that of the King himself. This seems to have been in 635 or 636. Birinus fixed the bishop's stool at Dorchester, and his name, as I have said, still lingers in the Chiltern Hills above Wallingford. In the Chiltern woods, tradition has it that he met his death from the bite of an adder, fourteen or sixteen years after, Dec. 3, 650, or 648, as some say. A confirmation of the legend, if legend only it is, may be found in the local superstition that no viper can live in the sound of Dorchester bells—a curious belief of the "deaf adder." The area of Birinus's action must have been much wider than Dorchester. Dorchester was indeed given him by Cynegils, and somewhat noticeable is the fact that King Oswald, of Northumbria, joins in the grant. But the chief grant that we know of was the not inconsiderable endowment down in Hampshire, Ciltacumbe—then one manor, now seven parishes—which King Cynegils gave to his "baptism-father" (fulluht fader) as he came out of the waters. King Eadweard says so expressly in a confirmation charter hundreds of years after. In the north of Wessex Birinus gave his name to Bicester (Buringceastre), which Bishop Kennet says he rebuilt out of the ruins of Alcester. As he fortified it as well, he seems to have been something of a statesman as well as a bishop. The second son and successor of Cynegils, King Cænwealh, gave him the manor of Dunton, I suppose the Bucks one, and if so, the earliest known endowment of the Church in our own county. This he

gave to Birinus, we are told by King Æthelstan long after, because Birinus baptized, taught, and confirmed him ("baptizavit, instituit, et corroboravit"). Cænwealh's elder brother, Cwichelm, was probably baptized by Birinus, as Cwichelm's son, Cuthred, certainly was.

The baptism of King Cynegils, which seems to have involved the conversion of the whole family, is absolutely the first Christian act recorded in this district. It was not indeed in the county of Bucks, but it was close to its border, and it was without doubt the beginning of the Christian Church in this county as well as in all the rest of Wessex.

The baptism of the Wessex King has not failed to receive occasional notice, but I am almost afraid that even in this diocese, formed so largely of the old Dorchester see, while the solemn entry of Augustine into Canterbury, and even the words of the chant they sung are familiar facts enough, the baptism of King Cynegils is not generally even known as a fact; and yet, apart from its bearing on the original Dorchester diocese, and indeed on all South England, the baptism of the old warrior is of deep interest in itself. He had doubtless shared in the great fight on the Wye, when his uncle Ceolwulf met the aged Tewdrig, who lies at Mathern, in Monmouthshire, with his skull cleft by a Saxon battleaxe in that encounter. He had been King conjointly with his eldest son Chwichelm since 611, and Chwichelm was old enough to command in a great battle in 614, one and twenty years before. So Cynegils himself could hardly have been less than sixty years of age when he entered the waters of baptism at Dorchester. But it is not only the importance of the neophyte himself, and humanly speaking it was of vast importance, though we are not told of thousands following their prince as they did in Kent: our interest is chiefly centred on the godfather, the first we know of in the diocese. He was simply the noblest prince that England ever saw before King Alfred, or after him.

King Oswald, of Bernicia, had been brought up, as a lad, in Scotland, and this is a point worthy of special notice, he was baptized in Scotland, and when he regained his throne, he was the friend of Aidan, and chose him as the missionary bishop of his kingdom. He belonged therefore to the Scottish and British rite, and in no sense

acknowledged obedience to Rome. This marks the tone and attitude of Birinus, as shown in admitting him to free communion, and it distinguishes our Wessex apostle from the narrowness of the specially Italian mission in Kent, though Birinus as well as Augustine came from Rome, and was an alumnus of the same monastery. Oswald was about thirty-two when he came to Dorchester to win the daughter of King Cynegils. He had already broken the power of Gwynedd, and killed the greatest of the British princes since Arthur, and he was as devout as he was brave and able. He had, first of the Angles of the north, raised the cross as the battle standard of his people. He was to die six years after in fight with the fierce Penda and his British allies. His last words passed into a proverb, "'God have mercy on their souls,' said Oswald." His mutilated limbs, hung in barbarian fashion on a cross, gave his name to the place of Oswald's tree, now Oswestry. Montalembert, after sketching his noble character, concludes: "Where shall we find in all history a hero more nearly approaching the ideal, more nobly gifted, more worthy of eternal remembrance, and it must be added" (I am still quoting), "more completely forgotten." Oswald's visit to Dorchester perhaps completed what Birinus had begun, and the old King was baptized in 655 or 656. In his gratitude, Cynegils began the first foundation of the material fabric of the Church by giving Birinus Dorchester as well as Ciltacumbe. As I have said above in the grant of Dorchester, Oswald is joined apparently as an overlord.

Cwichelm, the eldest son and joint king, was baptized probably by Birinus, as Cwichelm's son Cuthred certainly was in 639. Cwichelm was killed within the year in battle against Penda of Mercia.

From Dorchester the Gospel news would doubtless spread northward and eastward, as we know it did to the south. Along the Icknield Street, Wallingford, Watlington, Risborough, Kimble, Ellesborough, Wendover. *

* The Gwaun-y-dwfr, the pleasant glen, where then as now the bright water comes forth from the Chilterns. The meadow of the water seems a more likely origin of the name than the wending over the hills, though there is no historical record of its existence before Earl Ælfeah gave it to the King, about 970.

And so the baptism water must have flowed along the one great channel of traffic between west and east, the only great road then, and for many years after, apart from the south coast. Under the great rampart of the Chilterns, edging the vast tract of moors to the north, the churches stand now, as I believe they did soon after Birinus had gone to his rest in 648, like a long series of pearls on the string of the Icknield way. Perhaps Ivinghoe, whose name suggests a settlement of the East Anglian race of the Yffings, was then, as now, the eastern boundary of the diocese. It was at Edlesborough* that Æthelburga, an aunt of the three saintly Princesses of Aylesbury, and therefore a daughter of Penda, or a sister of Cuthred, instructed two of her nieces and helped to fit them for the title of saints. There is another story, or it was at a different time, that they were inmates of Pollesworth, or Ethelburga might have been not an aunt, but a great aunt, the repudiated wife of King Cænwealh, who was a sister of Penda. There is no daughter of Penda, of the name in our records, but that is not conclusive, as the records are very scanty. The Akeman Street from Tring, cutting then doubtless as now the Icknield Street at Aston (Aston Clinton long after), would be the natural, perhaps necessary, road of Gospel progress to the north, where we know, as I have said, the activity of Birinus reached at least as far as Bicester.

Bede says, before the death of Birinus many churches were built in his diocese and many "peoples" summoned to the Lord by his pious labour. This notice does not expressly refer to Buckinghamshire, nor is that county directly named as having received the Gospel from Birinus, or in his life; but Bicester is sufficiently near the border in North Bucks, as Dorchester is to that of the south of the county, to justify us in assuming that the Apostle of Wessex was neither neglectful of, nor unsuccessful in, this part of his diocese.

When King Cynegils died in 643, his eldest son having predeceased him, and Cuthred being presumably too young to bear the weight of the crown, Cænwealh, the second son, who had followed his elder brother as co-king, became sole king. If he was a pagan at his

* Could it have been at Ellesborough?

father's death, as Bede says, he could not at first have done anything to further the Christian faith. Malmesbury says he had been a Christian and apostatized. Anyhow, he was baptized by Birinus, for we have the express testimony of Æthelstan in his charter of 932. It might have taken place after Cænwealh's recovery of his kingdom in 648. Birinus did not die until Dec. 3rd, 648. Indeed, the annals of Chichester give 650 as the date of his death, a date which corresponds with Thomas Rudborne's eighth year of Cænwealh, which he gives as the explanation of 648. Cænwealh, soon after his accession, had repudiated the sister of Penda and was, in consequence, driven from his kingdom by his incensed brother-in-law. Bede intimates his deposition to have been a divine punishment for his paganism. He sought refuge at the court of Anna, King of the East Angles—the noble sovereign and earnest Christian, the father of four daughter saints. "Vir optimus atque optimæ genitor sobolis," is Bede's description of him. The influence of this holy family and the teaching of the East Anglian apostle, Felix, who ended the thirteen years of his episcopal life while Cænwealh was the king's guest, would doubtless aid in completing what Birinus had begun. One of the first acts on his recovering his kingdom, was to complete the stately fabric of Winchester Church, which his father had begun, and it was in 648 that Birinus consecrated it. A little later, when the Britons of Devon were driven west of the Parret, the new-won territory was studded with "a crowd of churches," as Prof. Freeman states. One of these churches, the only one perfect church of these early times still standing, built, says Freeman, in 652, St. Lawrence, of Bradford-on-Avon, may suggest that what Ealdhelm was doing in Wiltshire with the king's sanction, was going on elsewhere. That Cænwealh became the friend of Benedict Biscop is a proof that he was a warm friend of Christianity in his later days. Benedict was coming back to England at his invitation, when Cænwealh's death, in 672, took him to his old home in the north.

The fact which brings the Buckinghamshire part of Wessex into the more direct Christian influence of Birinus's successors is that, when Cænwealh had re-

covered his kingdom from the aged Penda in 648, he made a grant of 3,000 hides north of the Thames to Cuthred. Cuthred was the son of Cwichelm, the eldest son of, and co-king with, his father Cynegils, who died in his father's lifetime. Cuthred had been baptized, as I have said, by Birinus in 639. He had been set aside from the succession in favour of his uncle, Cænwealh; he had, however, assisted his uncle in the recovery of his kingdom from Penda, and received the grant above-mentioned in payment for his assistance. The place where the grant was made is called Æscendune. Lappenberg, a very high authority indeed, says it was probably Ashdown, in the south of Berkshire; but it seems more probable that it was Ashendon, some eight miles west of Aylesbury, which would thus be near the north boundary between Wessex and Mercia. I am very much inclined to believe that this too was the Assandun where Edmund Ironsides had his ruinous overthrow in 1016, and not, as Lappenberg gives it, at Assingdon, in Essex. Certainly East Anglian earls fell in that fight, and so did Abbot Wulfsige, of Ramsey; but then Eadric and the Magesætas were there too, and our own Bishop Eadnoth was killed, "dum missam cantaret," praying for his country's arms. He might well have been at Ashendon, in his own diocese, but hardly in Essex, for he was no warlike prelate; moreover, Eadnoth's dead body was captured by the monks of Ely when his own brethren were taking it by boat for burial in his own loved Ramsey. How but down the Ouse from Buckingham could the funeral train have gone? One thing that makes for the Essex site of this later battle is that, if Lappenberg is correct in his citation, "Thorkill joined Cnut in erecting a church at Assandun, in Essex, and Thorkill had nothing, as far as I know, to do with Bucks, while he was dux in the Eastern counties."

Cuthred not only had this vast grant from his uncle, which made him so great a landed proprietor, a grant estimated by Lappenberg, or accepted by him from some authority, as a third of the Kingdom of Wessex, but he had the political rule as well. He was sub-king of all Wessex north of the Thames. Cuthred's grandfather, King Cynegils, had before endowed him with 300 mansiones, or manors, so he was a landed proprietor of large means

before his uncle's liberality, now he became a political ruler. His command reached probably from Buckingham to the Thames, and, indeed, we may confidently suppose included some territory south of the Thames, as he is called King of Surrey. He is somewhere called King of Berkshire, but, though certain of the fact that I have met the statement in some old record, I am unable to verify the reference. His successor and, as seems pretty clear, son, is distinctly called in charters *subregulus* of Surrey. The little realm would probably comprise all the diocese of Wessex north of the Thame, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, some parts perhaps of Middlesex, half of Hertfordshire. It is not easy to fix the boundaries either of the diocese or of the kingdom; anyhow, it is clear that the Bishop of London was in closer personal relation to King Cuthred and his successor than the Bishop of Dorchester was, as far as we know, yet the Wessex see extended to the middle of Hertfordshire as late as the time of King Offa, though no Wessex bishop seems to have been summoned to the solemn founding of St. Albans. Unwona, of Leicester, was there, yet Matthew Paris says Bucks, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, and half Herts were in Dorchester diocese. I take the fact, if it is one, from Collier. The see of Dorchester retained its name, as an alias, even as late as Hædde, who removed the chief seat of the bishops from the banks of the Thames to Winchester, about 678. In 886, Ealheard, the first of the twelve bishops who again had their seat at Dorchester, ruled over only a part of the old Wessex diocese; it probably included all those counties which Matthew assigned to it for a century before, and it comprised Oxfordshire, probably from the first. Some time before Edward the Confessor Lincolnshire was attached to the see, and, as we all know, Remigius removed the headquarters of the diocese to Lincoln in the reign of the Conqueror.

The sub-king Cuthred ruled under the Wessex king until his own death in 661, when Cuthred is called King of Berkshire. Most of his little kingdom must have been under the jurisdiction of Bishops Ægilberht and Wini. The south-eastern part, South Herts at least, seems to have been in London diocese, as it was in Henry the Eighth's time. Freeman's map of English dioceses in

may add, was moved again in 1151, but only within Winchester, and there, I suppose, the bones of the apostle of Buckinghamshire lay for centuries and, indeed, are still lying.

During all this time, and for always, I think, the ecclesiastical relations of Bucks never varied; Dorchester, Wessex, Winchester, Dorchester, Lincoln, with varying extent but with no violent transition. The county passed to Mercia, still retaining its sub-king unchanged; and, again, after a few years' return to Wessex domination, was finally incorporated in Mercia by Offa in 774. From that time it was always Mercian, even when Mercia itself became a province of Wessex—now swelled to all England. Reges totius Angliæ was the proud title in royal charters. Risborough is the seat of more than one Mercian Parliament. Through all these changes, even when in after days the Danes swept clean from the Chilterns to Bernwood, the county underwent no change of ecclesiastical position. It was in Dorchester, until Dorchester became Lincoln, and again that part of Lincoln in due time gathered to what roughly speaking is pretty nearly the original area of Dorchester, our present diocese of Oxford.

King Frithewald's influence on the Church in Bucks must have been as potent as it seems to have been in Surrey. We do not indeed know of any direct action of his in forwarding Christian life in this county, but he is immediately connected with Aylesbury, for two, if not all three, of his daughters were born at Quarrendon, just on the outskirts of that town. Moreover, he gave Aylesbury itself to his two daughters, St. Eadgyth (or Edith) and St. Eadburga. There is, it must be admitted, no contemporary authority for this; indeed, Bede does not mention his name, he only mentions several subreguli as ruling after the widow Queen Sexburh, of Wessex. But Leland says St. Osyth was so born, as I have said. Leland too says she was educated at "Ellesburrowe" (Edlesborough, or Ellesborough, both places on the Icknield Street, under the shelter of the Chilterns), by her aunt, Eadburga. It would be interesting to know who this aunt was who presided over the religious house at Edlesborough. Was she a sister of Cuthred, or was she a daughter of Penda; perhaps the one who was divorced by Cænwealh in 644,

and who is not named anywhere; or was she the wife of Wulfhere? Frithewald had, as I have said, three daughters all enrolled among the saints. Some of them, or perhaps all, are said to have had part of their training under the Irish Princess, St. Morwenna, at Pollesworth. Of these three sisters, St. Eadgyth, St. Eadburga, and St. Osyth, we know very little of the first, only, indeed, that she was educated by St. Morwenna, and that she was given Aylesbury conjointly with her sister. St. Eadburga had a priory at Bicester dedicated to her by Gilbert Basset five hundred years or more after, so I suppose her memory was then green in that neighbourhood. Broadway, near Pershore, was dedicated to a St. Eadburga, but that might be more probably assigned to her aunt, Eadburga, abbess of Gloucester. St. Osyth, the third sister, demands a little more notice. She was betrothed by her father to Sigehere, joint King of Essex and nephew of the devout Sæbbi, whose touching death is recorded in Bede. She was born, as I have said, at Quarrendon (Querrendon in Leland), and educated at Ellesburrowe and at Pollesworth. If we are to trust the annals of Colchester, she became the wife of Sigehere in 654, seven years before her father became king. Her husband did not share the throne with his uncle until 665. He apostatized after, and perhaps it was then St. Osyth parted from him and gave herself up to the religious life. This could not have been earlier than 673, for then Bishops Hecca (Æcce generally), of Dunwich, and Baldewyn, of Helmham, were consecrated, and they both, says the "Colchester Annals," dedicaverunt (eam) Deo. Her husband, to whom she seems to have borne a son called Offa, gave her Chiche to enable her to found the religious house which in after times took her name. On the site of the ruined nunnery the house of Austin Canons was founded in 1118. It is this later house which bears the name of St. Osyth in later days, and still is marked by extensive ruins. St. Osyth's own house was ruined by the Danes a century or two after its first foundation, and it was then that her body was removed to Aylesbury, where she was first educated, as Canon Thomas, son of Earl Alberic de Ver and Canon of St. Osyth, told Leland; and he, Leland, names the "incolæ," I suppose the inhabitants of Aylesbury, as Canon

Thomas's authority. Her body remained at Aylesbury forty-six years before being restored to its Essex resting-place.

Browne Willis, an eager investigator of Buckinghamshire antiquities, says a religious house was built at Aylesbury, where the "parsonage" now stands, and here, apparently, the saint's remains had their temporary home. The story of her having been beheaded by the Danes, and having after carried her head in her hands for three furlongs, and of the fountain which sprang up at the place, seems to belong to a later abbess of Chiche. There is a curious story of Bishop Ælfward of London, allowing his curiosity or greed to induce him to open the saintly lady's tomb. He was punished by leprosy, says the tale. It was about 1042, if there is any truth in it. The whole history of St. Osyth is somewhat confused; she is called a virgin, yet she is said to have been mother of the devout Offa, who was certainly son of her husband Sigehere. Then to make the confusion worse confounded, Offa is said to have been betrothed to what must have been his grandmother's sister, if Offa was son of St. Osyth. I suspect, however, that St. Osyth was many years younger than Sigehere, and that Offa was son by a former wife.

It would be matter of deep interest, indeed of gratitude as deep, if we could know who carried on Frithewald's work. No religious foundation, as far as I remember, arose in Bucks while the royal family of Mercia was liberally endowing their western dominions in Gloucester and Worcestershire. Bucks seems to have ceased to belong to a separate little kingdom after Frithewald's death. We do not hear that he had any sons, and though we hear occasionally of subreguli in Mercia, they seem to belong to Gloucestershire or the Hwiccii country. Buckinghamshire constituted or more probably formed part of a Mercian Earldom, under Mercia at first, and afterwards Wessex when that state had absorbed all England. Aylesbury, the gift as we are told of King Frithewald to his daughters, had somehow, before a hundred and fifty years were passed, become the private property of a Mercian Earl, for Earl Ælfeah, brother it seems of the well-known Mercian Earl Ælfhere, the great supporter of the Benedictines, gave both Ægles-

byrig and Wændofram to the king, this was about 970.

One word more on King Frithewald's wife. She was Wilburh, daughter of that Penda whom Aidan appealed to heaven against, in that touching prayer in Farne, when the saint in his island sanctuary saw the flames kindled by Penda sweep over the walls of Bamborough, a couple of miles away, "See, Lord, how great evils Penda is working." He was the last of the great heathen princes, and no man ever did more to crush the rising life of Christianity. When at last he fell in the great overthrow at Winweed, as Bede or his continuator says, "Penda periit et Mercii sunt facti Christiani." Yet savage pagan as he was (as he told his son, who desired baptism), he would scorn a man who would not stand to his faith. Besides his daughter, Wilburh, he had three other daughters, deserving their brother's appellation of most holy, all three abbesses, one in the roll of saints. Besides Wilburh's three daughters, he had three other granddaughters abbesses, and one besides a dedicated virgin. A son and a grandson abdicated and devoted themselves to the religious life. It is a wonderful story of the power of the cross on a family which had been in the forefront of heathenism, and yet came to do so much for the Christian faith.

The chief residence of the family seems to have been near Hereford, but the princes of the family could not but back up their brother-in-law in Buckinghamshire. Alas! that the records are so scanty, and that so much room has been left where we must needs have recourse to "if" and "perhaps." I only wish I could have been in this paper like Sir William de Leybourne at Caerlaverock, "a man without a 'but' or an 'if,'" but I venture to think some cause has at least been shown for somewhat more attention being given to an almost unnoticed chapter of Bucks history.

T. Williams.