

OUR ISLAND SAINTS



“ANGLES CALL YE THEM?” HE SAID. “NAY, ANGELS
RATHER”

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

BY

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WITH EIGHT DRAWINGS IN COLOUR BY

M. DIBBIN SPOONER



YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

There was once a child who spent many happy hours in a beautiful garden. She loved to play among the flowers, to stand on tiptoe and look up at the stately white lilies, or bend down to search among the fragrant leaves for sweet-scented violets. Such rare and exquisite flowers blossomed all around her, that it was difficult to decide which was the fairest, and the child used to fancy as she passed along that each one whispered to her "choose me." But she would only shake her head and hurry on, until she reached her own little plot of flowers in a corner of the garden. It was not so sunny or so gay, perhaps, as some of the other flower-beds, but it belonged to her, and that made it beautiful in her eyes.

"It is you I love best, dear flowers," she would say, bending down lovingly over the velvet pansies and sweet pinks, "because you are my very own, and grow in my very own garden."

It is with us, as with that child. We walk through God's garden and look at the fair flowers we call His saints. Although they are all most fair and we love them all, yet we have a special love for those that have lived in our own dear land, because they seem to belong more particularly to ourselves. The saints of every land belong to God; but as He has

given us our island home, so we feel that the island saints are our special possession, and like the child we say, "We love you best, dear saints, because you are our very own."

AMY STEEDMAN

EDINBURGH, 1912

CONTENTS

SAINT ALBAN.....	1
SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY.....	11
SAINT KENTIGERN.....	24
SAINT PATRICK.....	45
SAINT DAVID.....	68
SAINT MOLIOS.....	74
SAINT BRIDGET.....	81
SAINT CUTHBERT.....	93
SAINT EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.....	114
SAINT COLUMBA.....	127
SAINT MARGARET OF SCOTLAND.....	149
SAINT HUGH OF LINCOLN.....	172

SAINT ALBAN

LONG years ago, when Rome was mistress of the world and her soldiers and citizens were to be found everywhere, even the little island of Britain had its place among the colonies of the great empire. Here the Romans laid their roads and planted their towns, built temples to their gods, and ruled the barbarians with a firm strong hand. Many noble Roman families lived in Britain in those days, and although the life was ruder and rougher than that they were accustomed to in the wonderful city of Rome, still they made their houses as luxurious and comfortable as they could and tried to be content.

It was in one of these well-built houses, with inlaid floors and marble baths, that the little Alban was born, heir to a great Roman family. The parents had settled in the town of Verulam, on the banks of the little river Ver, but they always looked upon Britain as a land of exile, and planned to send their boy back to Rome as soon as he should be old enough to be taught and trained to be a Roman citizen.

But the child himself was very happy in his island home. The little stream that ran past the town

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

was in his eyes a wonderful river which would carry his boats far out to sea. The green hill on the opposite bank was a playground fit for the gods, with its carpet of golden-eyed daisies and yellow buttercups, and the smooth grassy slopes that were so soft to roll upon. The great forests that looked so dark and gloomy held him spell-bound, and he loved to watch the grey mists come rolling over the marshy land, turning everything into a world of mystery.

Never was there a happier child in all the world; but the reason of his happiness was not because he had so many pleasures, but because he was kind and generous to every one round about him. It seemed as if there was a little singing bird in the golden cage of his heart, a bird that was always singing happy songs, and its name was Unselfishness.

Now, as soon as the boy grew old enough, he was sent away to Rome as his parents had planned, for they wished him to learn many things which he could never be taught in the little island of Britain. It seemed to Alban as if he had come to a different world when first he entered the city of Rome. Accustomed as he was to the little town with its few well-built houses, the rude huts and wild marsh wastes, the rolling mists and grey skies, he had never dreamed of such a city as this. Palaces of white marble triumphantly rearing their columns up to heaven; temples of the gods more beautiful than a dream; baths luxurious as those of a king's dwelling; and above all the blue sky, such a blue as he had never

SAINT ALBAN

even dreamed of, and sunshine which kept him even warmer than his fur coat had ever done.

There was much to learn and much to do in this new world of wonder and magnificence, but as Alban grew into a man, he found that there was something he loved better than all this splendour and luxury. Far away on the banks of the little river, in the island of the mist and grey skies, there was something which bound his heart with a golden thread of love and memory which nothing could snap. Although the house at Verulam was no grand palace; although the country was rough and wild and often cold and bleak, it was home. The great forests, the green flowery hills, the rolling mists seemed to be calling him. It meant home to him, and he loved it better than all the glory of Rome.

So Alban returned to the island of the mists, and lived once more in the house where he was born, on the banks of the little river. He was rich and powerful and had everything that heart could desire, and he was as happy as ever, for he was so kind and generous that every one loved him. Rich and poor alike were welcome at his house, and no one who needed help asked for it in vain. Travellers always stopped at his gate, and he never refused hospitality to any guest.

It was late one night, when doors were barred and every one had gone to rest, that a knocking was heard at the outer gate. It was an urgent knocking although not very loud, and the servants at last went to see who it was that sought shelter at that

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

unseemly hour. A weary-looking man dressed in a long cloak was standing there, and he begged that he might be taken in secretly and hidden from his pursuers, who were even now close at hand.

The servants, knowing their master's will, brought him quickly in, and one went to his lord to tell him of the new arrival. "He hath a strange cloak and seemeth to be a teacher, and one of those whom men call Christians," said the servant, as he told his tale: "he saith that even now he is pursued and hath endured great persecutions."

"See that he is made welcome," said Alban, "and that he is hidden secretly, and let no man prate of his presence here."

The poor hunted man, who was indeed a Christian priest, was brought in and secretly hidden, as Alban had commanded, and for a while his pursuers sought for him in vain.

Alban knew well how cruel were the tortures and punishments which these Christians endured, and he looked to find his guest stricken with terror and fear, but to his surprise the priest's face was calm and even happy.

"Art thou not afraid that thy persecutors may track thee here?" asked Alban curiously.

"My Master is stronger than they," answered the priest calmly. "He will protect me."

"Who is thy master?" asked Alban wonderingly.

"The Lord Christ," answered the priest.

SAINT ALBAN

“That poor man who died the death of a criminal?” said Alban, in a mocking voice.

“The King of Heaven, who deigned to come to earth as a helpless child,” answered the priest, “and who became Man that He might teach us to be Men.”

“And what reward dost thou receive for thy service to this King?” asked Alban, looking at the worn clothes, the weary thin face of the man before him.

“They who serve Christ have no thought of reward,” answered the priest. “Their only thought is how much service they may offer their Master. Stripes, persecutions, tortures, death, these are the rewards which His faithful soldiers gladly suffer, that they may be fit to call Him ‘Lord.’ Wilt thou listen to the story of my King?”

“These are strange sayings of thine,” said Alban, “but I will hear no more. ’Tis almost like a call to battle in my ears, and yet I know it is but foolishness. Be silent; I will have no more of thy idle talk.”

Disturbed and angry, Alban turned to go, but all that day the words he had heard rang in his ears. How royally was this King served by His followers! Who was He that could command such splendid service? He had heard of this God of the Christians, but had never troubled himself to learn what His life had been.

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

Then when night came and he lay sleeping, a dream was sent—a dream which told him the story of the King, which he had refused to hear that day. He saw the Man, crowned with the wreath of thorns; he saw the face of majesty and power gazing so pitifully at the cruel throng who seized Him and nailed Him to the cross. He saw the body laid in the tomb, and then the figure of the living Christ ascending with great glory into heaven. And sweeping upwards, there followed a great multitude in white robes, following Him who had conquered death, for whom they too had laid down their lives.

Early next morning Alban went to the secret chamber to seek the priest and ask what that dream could mean.

“God has been very gracious to thee, my son,” answered the priest solemnly. “He has taught thee Himself what thou didst refuse to hear from me.”

“Tell me more,” said Alban humbly; “I will listen to every word that thou canst tell me now.”

With a glad heart the priest told over again the story of his Master’s life, and Alban listened eagerly. Again the battle-call sounded in his ears, and he longed to serve a Master such as this.

“But hast thou indeed counted the cost of such a service?” asked the teacher. “It is no pleasant service which He offers.”

“I seek no pleasant service,” answered Alban.

SAINT ALBAN

“A cruel death may be thy only reward,” said the priest again. “Dost thou not repent the kindness which made thee harbour a Christian?”

“Nay,” replied Alban; “thou hast brought me life instead of death. I have never yet repented of one kind or merciful act which I have done to any man.”

Then the priest could no longer refuse to baptize the new soldier into the service of the King; but as they knelt in prayer together the servants came hurriedly to the door telling of a band of soldiers who had entered the courtyard and demanded to search the house for the hidden fugitive.

Alban sprang to his feet, and caught up the heavy cloak and cowl of the priest. “Quick! quick!” he cried, “escape thou in my mantle, and I will stay here in thy place. They will scarce discover who I am until thou hast escaped far away out of their reach.”

“How can I do this?” said the priest. “Thou wilt suffer in my stead.”

“’Tis my first call to arms,” said Alban gladly. “Let me thus begin to serve the King.”

There was no time for words; the soldiers were at the door; but when they entered there was but one cloaked figure there, and he showed no resistance, but quietly gave himself into their hands.

The judge was in the temple, sacrificing to his gods, when they brought the fugitive Christian to receive his sentence. And when the cloak was

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

thrown back and he saw the young Roman noble, he was doubly furious because he had been deceived.

“Thou has hidden a traitor in thy house, and well dost thou deserve to bear his punishment,” he cried angrily. “Perhaps thou too art a Christian. Sacrifice at once to the gods, and beg for mercy.”

“It is as thou sayest; I am a Christian,” answered Alban calmly. “I serve the King of Heaven, and will offer no sacrifice to thy false gods.”

There was a note of triumph in the voice of the young Roman, and the people wondered when they saw him standing there so fearless and triumphant. Did he not know what it meant to call himself a Christian? He was young and rich and powerful; all the pleasures of life, gay and alluring, lay spread out before him; all the great things which men strive after lay within his grasp; and yet he was choosing torture, dishonour and death. The wondering “why?” was echoed in every heart.

But there was little time for wonder. The soldiers, by order of the judge, seized Alban and dragged him away to be tortured, and then he was led out to be executed in the arena on the opposite side of the river.

All the inhabitants of the town came out to see the sight, and some looked on with pity, remembering the kindness they had received at the hands of the young Roman noble. Others again came out to mock. How gallant and happy he had always looked. There would surely be no smile on his face now! But when they pressed forward, and caught sight of that

SAINT ALBAN

pale young face, their mocking words were silenced, and a feeling of awe fell upon the crowd. Yes, the old happy look was there still, but there was something higher and purer added to it. A light of wondrous happiness seemed to shine forth, and the people as they looked felt as did those men who gazed upon Saint Stephen. "They saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel."

Down to the little river they led him; but when they came to the bridge there was no room to pass, for the crowd was so great. The order was given to ford the river, but the legend tells us that before Saint Alban could step down, the stream dried up, and he crossed over, without so much as wetting his feet.

Then the old legend goes on to tell how the executioner, who watched this miracle from the opposite bank, was struck with fear and remorse. How could he put to death a man whom heaven itself so carefully guarded? He would not fight against the God of Alban, so he threw down his sword and refused to touch him.

But Alban walked steadfastly on to the place of execution. Up the grassy slopes of the green hill he went, along the flowery path of scented thyme and golden-eyed daisies, where he had loved to play as a little lad. On this bright June day the hill was starred with flowers, and they seemed indeed a fitting carpet to spread beneath the feet of the first English martyr.

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

There were other executioners ready to do the bidding of the governor, and there, on the green hillside, the first faithful English soldier in the noble army of martyrs laid down his life.

A clear spring of water, it is said, sprang up to mark the spot where Saint Alban was put to death, near the little town of Verulam which now bears his name; but the miracle was scarcely needed. The memory that sprang from the life laid down in merciful kindness for another, in the service of the King, is a spring of living water that can never fail or be cut off.

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

THE monk Gregory walked through the market-place of Rome and looked with pitying eyes at the slaves waiting there to be sold like sheep or oxen. It always made him sorrowful and angry to pass through the market and see those poor patient slaves who seemed to have never a friend to help them. It was better perhaps not to pass by that way, and yet the little he could do by friendly words and kindly looks might cheer some of the poor souls, and so the pity that he felt always drew him back.

He knew the market-place so well, and the look of those weary toil-worn faces, and it always seemed to him a very grey sad world in which he walked. But to-day a strange new sight woke him from his half-dreaming pity and made him press forward with eager watchful eyes.

Surrounded by a throng of dark-skinned, brown-eyed Italians there stood a little group of fair-haired children such as Gregory had never seen before. Their limbs were white; their curls shone in the sunlight like threads of gold, and their eyes were as blue as the sky above.

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

Gregory beckoned to the merchant who stood close by, and pointing to the fair children, asked from whence they came.

“From Britain,” answered the man, “where all the people are as fair and beautiful as these are.”

“And are they Christians?” asked the monk, with more and more interest.

The merchant shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

“All heathens,” he answered briefly.

“Ah me,” sighed Gregory, “to think that so much beauty should belong to the Prince of Darkness; that the souls in such fair bodies should never be visited by God’s light.”

He turned once more and looked at the boys. “What is the name of their nation?” he asked.

“They are called Angles,” replied the merchant.

For a moment a smile lit up the grave face of the monk, the word sounded with such a happy meaning in his ear.

“Angles call ye them?” he said. “Nay, angels rather; for angel-like they are, and must become fit company for angels. But to what province of their country do they belong?”

“Deira,” was the answer.

“Ay, and from God’s ire they shall be snatched,” said Gregory, still playing with the words.

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

“And the king of the country, how call ye him?”
“Ælla,” said the merchant shortly.

“Rightly indeed is your king called Ælla,” said Gregory, turning to the wondering boys, “for Alleluia must be chanted in his dominions.”

It was an easy matter to buy those fair-haired boys and take them to the convent on the hill, and teach them how to live in the light of God’s love. But Gregory wanted more than this. The light must be carried into that far-away land of darkness. His hand was ready to bear the torch, and his heart was filled with an eager longing to be this messenger of light.

Time after time he begged for permission to set out for England, but the Pope and the Roman people had need of his strong arm and wise head, and refused to allow him to leave Rome. At last, however, the Pope secretly and unwillingly gave his consent, and Gregory started off with a few companions and many high hopes. But he did not go far. As soon as it was discovered that their beloved Gregory was gone, the people demanded that he should be recalled, and messengers were sent in haste to fetch him back. He had only gone three days’ journey when the messengers overtook him, and so the mission to England came to an end, and with a sorrowful heart Gregory returned to Rome.

But although it was plain that Gregory’s work lay in Rome, where ere long he was made Pope, yet he never forgot the great desire of his heart, and never gave up his determination to send the light

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

into that distant land of Britain. So it came to pass that before long he chose out forty monks from his old monastery on the hill and sent them, with Augustine at their head, to the far-away little island which was waiting in darkness for the dawn of God's light.

The monks whom Gregory chose set forth at once as they were bidden, for they had learned above all things to be obedient. But it was a long unknown journey that lay before them, and their hearts were somewhat unwilling and greatly afraid. They started as bravely as they could, but the further they travelled the more troubled they became. People told them the most fearsome tales of the island to which they were bound.

"There is a most terrible sea to cross," said one.

"And even should you escape the fury of the sea, certain death will await you when you arrive," said another.

"Ay," said a third, "for the people are not only heathens but savages, and fierce as wild beasts, and they speak a barbarous language you will never understand."

Sorely disheartened, the monks called a halt, and sent Augustine back to Rome to ask Pope Gregory if they were still to go on in the face of such dangers and difficulties.

It must have been with unwilling feet and a burning heart of shame that Augustine turned back.

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

He who had been specially chosen by Gregory for this special mission could not have been the kind of man who would be willing to turn his back on any foe or give up the fight without even striking a blow.

The little company of monks waited patiently for the return of their messenger, and ere long he was once more in their midst. The tall figure, "higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward," stood erect now, and there was a gleam of triumph in his eyes. The order was to march forward, and there was to be no retreat.

"Let not the toil of the journey nor the tongues of evil-speaking men deter you," wrote Gregory, "but with all possible earnestness and zeal perform that which by God's direction you have undertaken."

They needed a strong leader, this little band of despairing monks, and Gregory wisely added in his letter: "When Augustine, your chief, returns, humbly obey him in all things. Had I my wish I would labour with you."

After that there was not one that talked of going back. Not only was obedience the just rule of their order, but the thought that their beloved Gregory would have been with them if he could, made them set their faces steadfastly to do the work which lay before them.

It was truly a terrible journey which they had undertaken. Their path lay through lonely forests and strange countries, where the people often treated them roughly, stoning them and howling

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

after them as they went. Slowly but surely, however, they went their way, and at last reached the sea which swept its angry raging way between them and the grey island of the north. Then with brave hearts they set sail, but as the ship sped on its way and the land they had left grew fainter and fainter in the dim distance, some wondered if they would ever reach the other side, and others were past caring whether they lived or died. Then some one cried aloud that there was land ahead, and eager strained eyes caught sight of a white line upon the horizon, which grew broader and broader until the cliffs of Albion stood out clear against the blue sky, as dazzling in their whiteness as the ramparts of a heavenly city.

But it was with no expectation of finding a heavenly country that the weary band of monks landed at Ebbesfleet, on the Isle of Thanet. Rather they expected at every turn to meet with demons, savage animals, or still more savage people ready to fall upon them and destroy them.

Now the tales which had been told to these poor monks of all the terrors which lurked in wait for them, were much more frightening than true. The Saxon people of Britain were certainly heathens and worshipped strange gods, but they were a brave kindly people, and Ethelbert, the king of that part of the country, was a strong wise man. Already, too, a star of hope had shone out in the heathen darkness if those poor monks had but known it, for Ethelbert's fair Queen Bertha was a Christian, and near the palace, in the tiny chapel of Saint Martin, God

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

was served daily by a faithful priest who had come with the Queen from France.

So instead of fierce blows and savage treatment, instead of being hunted down and driven out as they had expected, the messengers found a peaceful air of welcome and kindness about this strange land. There was a friendly look in the eyes of the people who watched them pass, and the poor wayfarers thanked God and took fresh courage.

It was in the springtime of the year, when our little grey island forgets her dullness and decks herself in tender green and budding flowers, that Augustine and his monks came to England. There was a feeling of new life and new hope in the air which cheered their hearts, and before long word was brought from the King himself saying he would meet the strangers on the uplands above the sea and hear the message they had brought.

“We will meet in the open air, with the sky above us,” said the King. “All shall be open and straight-forward in the light of day.”

The royal seat was set upon the green sward of a flowery meadow overlooking the sea, and there the King awaited his curious new guests. Across the April blue of the sky the white clouds scudded in ever-changing shapes. Below the sparkling sea shone like a ring of sapphires round our brave little island. In every sheltered nook and corner the primroses peeped out with their broad sunny faces. Sea-birds swooped and screamed around the white cliffs; all the birds were busy with nest-building; the old magic

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

of spring was awake once more in the land. But there was something even more strange and wonderful than the returning life of spring coming that day to England. Across the bare wind-swept uplands a procession began to move slowly from the seashore. The people watched in breathless silence, wondering what it all might mean. These were no warriors, for they bore no weapons and there was no sign of war. In front, lifted high, a silver cross caught the gleams of sunshine as they came. Then a great picture was carried aloft, the picture of a Man, such as none had ever seen before. Close behind followed a little company of men in dark strange garments, and at their head walked one taller and straighter than all the rest. Slowly the procession went forward, and as the gleaming silver cross moved ever nearer, the sound of a low wailing chant came floating over the land, drowned now and then by the thunder of the waves breaking upon the shore. Nearer and nearer came the procession, and the wailing chant sounded more clearly. Now the watchers heard strange words in an unknown tongue, but they did not guess that the words which those dark-robed figures were chanting were a prayer that God's mercy might save and protect our England.

The King listened with deep attention to all that Augustine had to say. The minutes slipped past into hours, and still the dark-robed monk spoke out his message. Beginning with the birth at Bethlehem, he told the wonderful story of God made Man, coming to dwell amongst us; of His Cross and Passion,

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and His call to all men to follow Him.

Then when he had finished there was a silence over all, for the King sat in deep thought, and the people waited for his answer. At last he spoke.

“Truly the words and promises which ye bring me are fair,” he said, “but they are new to me and of doubtful authority. I cannot therefore accept them and forsake the religion in which I and all my people have so long believed. But because you are strangers and have come from afar to my country, and as it would seem that ye believe your teaching to be good and excellent, we will not molest you, but rather receive you with kindness and hospitality. Nor do we forbid you to teach and preach your religion.”

The King was even better than his word, and the forty monks were given a home to live in, near the palace of Canterbury, and were treated in every way as honoured guests. There they taught and preached to all the people who would listen to them. But there was something besides preaching and teaching which won the hearts of these Saxon people.

The simple, honest, busy lives of the little company of monks, the “silent power of holiness,” taught people better than any words what this new service meant. Like the magic touch of spring over the dead land, a new life flowed in, and the first sign of its power was the baptism of the King, when he laid aside his royal robes and took service under his new Master. Before the feast of Christmas came

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

round, ten thousand people were enrolled under the banner of Christ, which had been borne so faithfully by His servant Augustine.

It was good news to send to Gregory, and the monks might well rejoice as they listened to the sound of the Alleluias that echoed now within that heathen land.

But although so much had been done in such a short time, there was ever more and more to do, and the little company of monks, with Augustine at their head, never thought of growing weary or needing rest while so much was still to be accomplished.

Augustine had been commanded by Gregory to return to France and there be consecrated Archbishop; and so the first Archbishop of Canterbury began his work as a prince of the Church and a careful shepherd of his little flock. Many a greeting of encouragement came from Rome, and Pope Gregory sent a most precious gift of a copy of the Holy Bible. It was just one single copy, sent over land and sea to a little island, where God's light had only begun to break dimly through the clouds of heathen darkness, and yet it was the seed from which has sprung the glory and honour of our England.

Slowly but surely the monks worked on, building their churches and carrying their torch further and further into the darkness. King Ethelbert, "noble and valiant" as his name signified, was no half-hearted soldier of Christ, and in simple loyalty he gave up his own royal palace at Canterbury for

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

the monks who were doing God's work in his kingdom. With such an example before them, it was little wonder that the people as well pressed forward to help in the work. It is said, too, that many miracles were performed by these simple faithful monks; many sick folk were healed, and wonders were worked as in the days of the Apostles.

But it was not only the monks who went out to work. Augustine, the Archbishop, would never consent to stay safely at home, but was always the first to undertake fresh journeys and risk new dangers. In his simple monk's robe, unarmed and on foot, he went with his brethren from north to south, from east to west, preaching and teaching through the length and breadth of England. Sometimes they met with harsh treatment; showers of stones, and even sharp weapons were used against them, but no serious hurt ever befell the little band of brave men.

Now among the wild mountains of Wales there were still many of the early British Christians who had been driven there by the conquering Saxons. Augustine was very anxious that these men should join with him now and help to make the whole land Christian. But these poor men hated the Saxons, who had driven them from their home and conquered their land. It seemed almost too much to expect them to return good for so much evil. However, they agreed to meet Augustine and his monks and talk the matter over. They fixed the meeting-place on the border of Wales, and there, under a great oak tree, the stranger Archbishop from Rome,

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

and the hunted bishops and monks of the ancient British Church, met.

They talked long and earnestly, and at one time it seemed as if Augustine would persuade them to help him in his work. But those British Christians were very bitter in their dislike to their Saxon conquerors, and they mistrusted a stranger monk who called himself Archbishop of Canterbury. They scarcely knew what to decide, but took counsel with an old hermit who lived a holy life among the wild mountains of Wales.

“Is it our duty to make friends with this man?” they asked.

“If he is a man of God, then follow him,” replied the hermit.

“But how are we to know if he be a man of God?” they asked.

“If he be meek and lowly, he bears the yoke of Christ, and offers the same to you,” was the answer. “But if he be proud and haughty he cannot be of God.”

“How are we to judge whether he be meek and lowly or proud and haughty?” they asked again.

“Contrive it thus,” said the hermit. “See that this man and his company arrive first at the meeting-place, so that he may be seated ere you come. If he shall arise and greet you, be sure he is Christ’s servant. But if he despises you, and does not rise at your coming, then you may in turn despise him.”

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

The plan was easily carried out. The great oak tree spread its branches over Augustine's little company as they rested there, waiting for the coming of the men who had promised to meet them there. Augustine, weary and anxious, sat in his seat gazing out with thoughtful, troubled eyes which saw no fair green meadows or pleasant landscape, but only dark clouds of distrust and enmity. So when at last the company of British priests drew near, the tall figure dreaming his dreams sat on motionless in his seat, and made no movement to rise or come forward to greet them.

Half triumphantly, then, those men of the ancient British Church decided that Augustine was no servant of God, and they refused to have aught to do with him.

So Augustine went back to his work alone, and it is to him and his little band of faithful monks that England owes her great debt of gratitude. Long and patiently he worked, never sparing himself, and well had he earned his rest when they laid him in his quiet grave in the church at Canterbury, which he himself had built. We know little of Augustine; he was but a messenger sent by the great Gregory who had planned the mission to England. But to us the man who carried out the plan, the messenger who brought the message, the hand that bore the torch, is worthy of a special love and honour. Like that other messenger, Saint John the Baptist, sent by God, he desired no honour for himself, but was content to be a voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make His paths straight."

SAINT KENTIGERN

THE night was dark, and never a star shone in the blackness of the sky. The wind howled as it swept across the troubled waters of the Firth of Forth, and there was no light on sea or land to guide any belated fishing-boat to a safe haven. It would have been a difficult and dangerous task for any sailor to steer his boat on such a night, and yet the one frail little barque that was tossing about in the stormy waters made its way surely and steadily towards the land.

It was indeed but a frail little boat that so gallantly held its way. Over the framework of wooden laths was stretched a covering of hides, scarcely strong enough to withstand the lash of the waves. There were no oars and no rudder, and the boat seemed empty save for a dark form that crouched at the bottom with white upturned face.

But though there was no one to guide the boat, still it went steadily onward, rising like a cork over the crests of the threatening waves, so that scarce a drop of their spray fell upon the dark figure that clung there so desperately.

Presently there was a grating sound, and then a wild sweep upward, as the boat was lifted on the

SAINT KENTIGERN

crest of a wave and dashed high and dry upon a sandy shore, while the sea sank sullenly back. Then the dark figure rose quickly, and tried to peer with her wild sad eyes into the blackness around. She was but a maiden yet, and very beautiful, but her beauty was dimmed by the look of suffering and weariness that had paled her cheek and dulled her eyes. A king's daughter this, driven out by cruel hands, but carried by the pitiful waves to a safe haven.

All was very black and very still as the maiden gazed around, but presently a tiny glow of light showed through the darkness, and, stumbling as she went, she managed to reach the place where a few dying embers in a circle of rude stones marked the spot where some shepherds had left their fire to die out.

With a sob of thankfulness the tired traveller knelt and, with trembling breath, coaxed the ashes into a glow, and gathered some of the sticks that were scattered around to lay upon the embers. How good it was to feel the warmth stealing through her stiff frozen limbs; how comforting to see the merry little red tongues of flame lighting up the darkness that was so lonely and so terrible!

But another light had now begun to melt the darkness of the night. Far away in the east the long-looked-for dawn was lifting with its rosy finger the grey curtain of morning twilight. And with the light there came to the lonely maiden by the little fire, the light and joy of her life—her baby son, sent by God to comfort her. Poor little wailing child, he had but a

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

cold welcome to this world of ours. There was no roof to cover him, no soft garments to enfold him; only his mother's arms to wrap him round, only the little red fire to warm him and bid him welcome.

It was thus that another Baby had come to earth in the stable at Bethlehem long ago, and this little one too, like the King of Heaven, found friends among the kindly shepherd folk. Not far off from the sandy beach the shepherds had been herding their flocks, and as they looked seaward in the dim light of dawn, they saw a thin curl of blue smoke rising from the shore. Surely, then, their fire had not died out, and it would be good to warm themselves in the chill morning air. They were rough strong men these shepherds, accustomed to a rough rude life, but when they came to the sandy beach and saw the poor young mother with her little newborn son, like the shepherds of old they too knelt down in reverence and with tender hands wrapped their warm coats about the mother and child, and brought out their poor breakfast, offering all that they had.

"We must away and tell the good Saint Servanus," said one. "He will care for these poor strangers."

"Hasten, then," cried another, "and we will follow on and gently bear the mother and her little one to the dwelling of the saint."

So it was arranged, and two of the younger shepherds started in hot haste to tell the good saint of the adventure that had befallen them. They knew that they would find him ready to listen to their

SAINT KENTIGERN

story, for he ever rose with the dawn to offer his daily service to God.

“Father, father,” they cried, as the old man came forth from the little church to meet them. “We have a strange thing to tell thee. On the shore of Culross we have but now found a fair young maiden with her newborn son. The child was born at dawn of day, and we would know if we may bring them both hither to thee.”

A wonderful light shone on the face of the old man as he listened to the words. A child born at the dawn of day! Why, that must have been the meaning of the angel’s song which had fallen on his wondering ears as he knelt before the altar! His heart had been lifted up in prayer when the song “Gloria in Excelsis” came floating down, and he waited for some sign to show what it all should mean.

Scarcely had the breathless shepherds finished their tale when the others followed on, one gently bearing the weary mother, while the other tenderly held the tiny babe in a fold of his cloak.

The old saint hurried forward with eager steps and held out his trembling hands to take the child.

“My dear one, my dear one,” he cried, “blessed art thou that hast come in the name of the Lord.”

So the old saint took the child to his heart. The echo of the heavenly voices still rang in his ears, and he felt sure that this little child sent to earth at

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

the dawn of light would be one of the heralds of the True Light that had come into the world.

When a few days had passed and the poor mother had poured her sad tale into his kindly ears, Saint Servanus brought the maiden and her child to the font of the little church, and baptized the mother by the name of Thenew. Then he took the baby in his arms and poured the water over its little downy head, giving him the name of Kentigern. But there was another name by which the child was often called, Mungo, or “dear one,” the name used by the old man that early morning when he took the little one into his arms and into his heart.

Under the care of the good saint the child grew into a strong brave boy. He had no lack of companions, for many boys were gathered at the monastery to be taught and trained by the learned Saint Servanus. With them he learned his lessons and played his games, but, although he was kind and generous, the boys did not greatly love him. It was not so much that they envied his quickness at lessons, or his beautiful voice which soared above all the rest in the daily hymn of praise: this they might have suffered, but they felt sure that the master loved him best, and this was more than they could bear. They began to wish with all their hearts that Kentigern would be tempted to do some mean evil deed and thus lose favour in the eyes of the old man, who took such a pride in his goodness and cleverness.

SAINT KENTIGERN

The saints of God have always had a special love for His dumb creatures, and have treated both birds and beasts with tender care. The blessed Saint Francis was never so happy as when among his “little sisters the birds,” while all animals came to him at his call as if to a friend. Saint Servanus too had his favourite “little sister,” a tiny robin-redbreast, so tame that it would come and perch on the old man’s shoulder, hop upon his hand, and at matins would cheerfully chirp its little hymn of praise with the rest. It was so small and trustful, so sure of its welcome when it came hopping down, cocking its head on one side and looking at him with its bright eye, that the saint would smile and call it his spoilt child. Before eating his own meals the “little sister” had first her share.

Now the boys who were so jealous of Kentigern were inclined to hate the poor little robin too. Many a time had the master bade them take a lesson from his little favourite, mark its prompt obedience in coming at once when it was called, watch its busy ways, and note how cheerful was its song of praise. They answered never a word, but in their hearts they thought it was by no means pleasant to be sent to learn lessons from a silly little bird.

So the evil feeling grew until at last one night, when the saint had gone into the church alone, they found the redbreast chirping away on a branch outside the door, and, as it was so tame, they caught it with the greatest ease. At first they did not mean to harm it, only to frighten it a little, but their ways were rough, and ere long they took to quarrelling as

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

to who should hold it, and began to snatch it from each other's grasp. Then before they half realised what they had done, the poor little bird lay dead in their hands, its feathers all torn and ruffled, its bright eyes closed, its head hanging limp and still. A dreadful hush fell on the noisy throng as they looked at their work.

"Oh! what will the master say?" cried one.

"We dare not tell him," said another.

"He will know without any telling," said a third.

"Oh! how we shall be whipped," wailed all the rest in chorus.

A shiver went round at the words. Each one knew exactly how that whipping would smart, and almost felt it already.

"Here comes the good boy Kentigern," cried another; "he of course is safe from blame, just as he always is."

The boys looked at one another. The same thought had struck them all. Why not put the blame on Kentigern and say that he had killed the bird? Would that not serve two good ends? They would be saved from the master's wrath and that most certain whipping, and Kentigern would be humbled and cast out of favour.

Even as they hurriedly agreed to this plan, the church door opened and the saint came forth. His keen eye saw at once that something was wrong. The crowd of silent boys were all looking expectantly

SAINT KENTIGERN

towards him, and in their midst stood Kentigern bending over something which he held in his hand.

“What mishap has befallen?” asked the old man, gazing at the eager faces.

“It is Kentigern,” they cried with one voice all together. “He has killed thy little bird.”

The master said nothing, but looked at the silent figure bending over the little bunch of ruffled feathers. Kentigern did not seem to hear or to heed the loud accusation. Very gently he stroked the feathers and laid his cheek against the tiny body that was still warm. Then he knelt down, and, raising one hand, made the sign of the cross over the bird.

“Lord Jesus Christ,” he prayed, “in whose hands is the breath of every creature, give back to this bird the breath of life, that Thy blessed name may be glorified for ever.” And as he prayed there was a faint stirring among the feathers, a ruffling of the wings, and the robin flew to its safe shelter on the shoulder of the master. Now the old chronicle which tells this tale does not add whether the boys received the whipping which they had feared, but we trust that their forebodings were smartly realised. If so, it may have taught them to treat God’s creatures more gently, but it certainly did not cure them of the sin of envy and jealousy, for Kentigern continued to have but a hard time amongst them.

It was the rule of Saint Servanus that each of the boys should in turn take charge of the lighting of the sanctuary lamps. Thus the boy whose turn it was to see that the lamps were trimmed and lighted was

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

obliged to keep up the fires while all the rest were in bed, so that there should not fail to be a spark ready to kindle light for the early service. When it fell to Kentigern's turn, the boys thought of a fresh plan to bring disgrace upon his head.

As soon as all the fires had been carefully made up, and Kentigern had gone to rest, the other boys crept silently out of bed and went the round of the monastery, raking out every fire. Not a spark did they leave that could light a single lamp, and then they went joyfully back to bed, feeling well satisfied with their work.

At cockcrow Kentigern rose as usual to go and make ready for the early service, but he found every fire black and dead. Search as he might, there was no means of kindling a light, although he had built up each fire carefully to last until morning.

Then the boy's heart was full of anger. All the wrongs he had suffered patiently, all the unkind tricks of the other boys rose up in his memory, and he felt that he could bear it no longer. It was all so mean and underhand. They did not dare stand up and openly defy him, for they knew he was brave and fearless, but in the dark they plotted and planned how they might punish and disgrace him. No; he would stand it no longer; he would leave the monastery and make his own way in the world.

So forth he went, swinging along with great angry strides until he came to the hedge that bounded the monastery lands. By this time his anger had begun to cool and leave room for other

SAINT KENTIGERN

thoughts. After all it was rather cowardly to run away, even from injustice and persecution, for it meant also running away from duty and the good old man who was like a father to him. What would the master say when he entered the church and found it in darkness, the altar lights unlit, the lamps untended?

Very slowly, then, Kentigern retraced his steps, holding in his hand the hazel twig which he had broken off from the hedge when he stood debating which road to take. He was thinking deeply as he walked, and it suddenly flashed across his mind that there was a way of obtaining the light he needed which as yet he had not tried. Surely God would not fail to help him. So, just as he had prayed in faith over the dead bird, he knelt down on the dewy grass and, making the holy sign over the little twig, prayed God to kindle in it a living spark that might light the lamps for His service. The legend tells us that as he prayed God did indeed send down fire that lit into a tiny torch the hazel twig, and that it burnt steadily until all the lamps in the church were lit, one by one.

Again there is no mention of the whipping which those boys deserved, but Kentigern was no tale-bearer, and this his enemies knew full well.

So time went on, and Kentigern grew into a tall lad, the comfort and joy of his master. He was almost a man now, and it was time that he should leave the monastery and his sheltered life there, and find his own work in the world.

OUR ISLAND SAINTS



HE KNELT DOWN ON THE DEWY GRASS

SAINT KENTIGERN

Not in anger this time did he plan his departure, but with a humble heart, and he prayed to God for guidance. Not only was he the cause of much quarrelling and jealousy among the rest, but, what was even worse, people had begun to praise and flatter him and call him a wonderful boy, and he felt sure that it was time he should go. So he made up his mind to leave the monastery, and early one morning, after his work was done, he started forth.

It was to the river that Kentigern bent his steps, scarcely knowing which way to turn, but drawn to the place where the shepherds' fire had warmed him as a tiny baby, where the cry of the sea-birds and the moan of the sea had drowned his first feeble wail. Journeying on and on by the side of the winding Forth, he reached at last a place where a bridge spanned the silver river. The water was flowing quietly beneath him as he crossed the bridge, but when he had reached the other side it rose higher and higher in a great spate until the bridge was entirely swamped. Then, as Kentigern stood and watched the furious torrent, he saw his old master on the opposite bank, leaning with one hand upon his staff and with the other beckoning him to return. The aged saint had followed him all the long way from the monastery, and his voice came sounding mournfully across the rushing waters.

“Alas, my son, light of my eyes, staff of my old age, wherefore dost thou leave me?”

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

“My father,” cried Kentigern, “it grieves me sorely, but I must go forth to my work. Thou knowest that as truly as I do.”

“Then let me come with thee, my son,” cried the old man. “Thou hast been mine since the day when the angels sang of thy birth, and the shepherds placed thee in my arms.”

“I know it,” said the boy, and he stretched out his arms with a loving gesture towards the old man, “but I must go forth, and my work lies yonder, while thy work lies behind. Fare thee well, and God guard and keep thee until the time when He shall take thee home.”

Saint Servanus knew that the boy was right, and that he must finish his life-work alone, while the strong young lad, the herald of the dawn, should carry the light into the dark places of the land. Sorrowfully, then, he returned to the monastery, and Kentigern journeyed on alone.

For a while Kentigern lived and worked at Camock, but as the years went by, the fame of his holy life and the good deeds which he did reached the ears of the king of that country.

The Church was then in evil plight, for although the people had been taught the true religion in days gone by, they had sadly lapsed, and many had learned to worship idols and believe in strange gods, as did the pagans who had invaded their land.

The King and the clergy, therefore, of the Cambrian region sought to strengthen and fortify the

SAINT KENTIGERN

Church, and what better weapon could they find for their purpose than this wonderful young man, whose influence over people was so marvellous and who lived such a pure and blameless life?

But when they came to tell Kentigern that they had decided to make him a bishop, he was amazed and dismayed.

“I am too young,” he said.

“Thy ways are staid, and thou hast much learning,” they answered.

“It would take me from my prayers and meditations,” urged Kentigern.

“There are other souls to be saved besides thine own,” they gravely answered.

Then Kentigern bowed his head, and said sadly, “But I am not worthy”; and they answered, “Because thou thinkest thyself unworthy, we are all the more certain that thou art the one man we seek.”

There was more talk after this, and at last Kentigern saw that there was no other way but to accept the post of honour and difficulty. A bishop from Ireland was ready to consecrate him to his high office, and he was made Bishop of Glesgu, a little place on the banks of the Clyde. There a wattled church was built and a fortified monastery, and there, in the midst of a wild country and a still wilder people, Kentigern began his rule. Little by little, houses were built close around the church and monastery until a village was formed. Then the village

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

became a town, and as the years rolled by the town grew into the great city of Glasgow.

But in the days of Saint Kentigern Glesgu meant only “the dear family,” for so the saint named the little gathering of God’s servants who dwelt together under one rule and had all things in common, seeking only to do God’s service.

There was no jealousy or ill-feeling now for Kentigern to fight against, for the brethren all loved their bishop and obeyed him as their master. But it was no life of ease to which he was called, but one of difficulty, hardship, and strenuous work. Early in the morning he rose from his bed, which boasted no soft pillow nor warm covering, and however cold the morning, he plunged into the river close by to brace his body for his day’s work. The clothes he wore were rough and coarse below, but above he wore a pure white alb or cloak and the stole of his office over his shoulder. And well might the white folds of his mantle be to men a sign of the pure childlike soul that dwelt in the strong man’s body.

It is said that, as he knelt before the altar, the prayers which rose from “the golden censer of his heart” seemed to reach to the very gates of heaven, for often as the faithful people knelt around him they saw a white dove with a golden beak descend and hover above his head, overshadowing with its snowy wings the altar and the kneeling bishop.

There was little rest for the servants of God in those days. Far and near they journeyed among the people scattered around the wild countryside. How-

SAINT KENTIGERN

ever far the journey, Kentigern always went on foot, and there was no hardship which he shrank from enduring if he could but bring one lost sheep back into the fold. Preaching, teaching, building churches, strengthening and leading back those that had wandered from the True Light, his work went on from day to day.

But once in the year, when the season of Lent came round, Kentigern left his brethren and went to dwell alone in a far-off cave. It was the time when our Lord had gone into the wilderness to wrestle with the tempter, and well did Kentigern know how blessed it was to be alone with God.

In the lonely cave there was nothing to chain his thoughts to earth and men. The song of the birds, the rippling laughter of the burns unlocked from their winter bonds of ice, the little grey furry caps of the willow buds, the soft green of the sprouting grass, everything fitted in with the praise and prayer which filled his days.

Then when Good Friday came he returned to his brethren, wan and wasted indeed with fasting, but with a face that seemed to reflect the light of heaven, so near to its gates had he dwelt.

But although Kentigern fasted and endured many hardships, he had always a happy cheerful face, and he had no belief in gloomy looks. Often he would tell his brethren that what he disliked above all was a hypocrite who went about sighing with eyes cast down and a long face. They seemed, he said, to think they were walking after the manner of turtle-

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

doves, whereas in reality it was the peacock they resembled. And what was the use of looking down on the dust when eyes might be lifted to heaven? No, hypocrisy was one of the little foxes that spoiled the grapes, and God loved those who did their work with a cheerful countenance and simplicity of heart.

So many years passed away and then evil times befell the "dear family" at Glesgu. Another king now reigned, one who hated the Church and talked with scornful contempt of the bishop and his workers. The seasons, too, had been bad and the harvest poor, and Kentigern found that there was no corn to feed the brethren nor to give to the poor who came to him for aid.

It was surely the duty of the King to help his people, so the bishop went boldly to the court and asked that out of his abundance the King would spare corn for his hungry people.

The King laughed aloud at the request and answered with mocking words.

"Thou who teachest others to cast their burden upon the Lord, should surely practise thyself the same. How is it that thou who fearest God art poor and hungry, while I, who have never sought the kingdom of heaven, have all things I can desire, and Plenty smileth upon me? Therefore what thou preachest is a lie."

Calmly then did Kentigern make answer that God has often seen fit to afflict the just and allow the wicked to flourish like a green bay tree.

SAINT KENTIGERN

This enraged the King still further, and he bade Kentigern work a miracle if he could.

“If, without the aid of human hands and trusting only in thy God, thou canst transfer to thy house all the grain that is in my barns, I will yield it to thee as a gift,” he said, with a mocking laugh.

Kentigern left the King, carrying with him an anxious heavy heart. There were so many hungry mouths to fill and all depended upon him. But not for a moment did he lose his faith in the goodness of God, and he prayed earnestly to Him that the daily bread might be provided.

That very night a great storm came sweeping down the river and the waters began to rise. Higher and higher swelled the torrent until it overflowed the river bank, and swirling round the King’s barns, it lifted them bodily from the ground and carried them out on to the river. There the current caught them and swept them along till they reached the place where Kentigern dwelt, where it left them high and dry, with not so much as a grain of corn spoilt by the water. So God took the King’s gift to feed His people.

The mocking King was filled with fury when he learned what had happened, and so cruel became his persecution of Kentigern and his brethren, that they at last determined to leave the monastery and to seek afar off some place where they might dwell in peace.

Travelling southward, Kentigern dwelt some time in Cumberland, where, as was his custom

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

wherever he rested, he erected a stone cross, as a sign of his faith, at a little place still known as Cross-fell. Then, travelling on by the seashore, he sought in the wild country for some convenient place where he might find another home.

There is a legend that tells of a white boar that guided him, but it was more likely a kindly stream like his own river Clyde which led him by its silver thread to a place which seemed all that he could wish.

They were no mere dreamers these monks of old, and they did not look for miracles to work for them when the work could be done with their own hands. The wilderness was soon humming as with a hive of bees, and in a wonderfully short space of time trees were cut down, fashioned into beams, fitted together, and a great wooden church and monastery was built to the glory of God.

But it seemed as if Kentigern was never to be free from persecution, for scarcely was the monastery finished when the prince of North Britain came riding through the forest with his followers, and demanded what these strangers meant by settling on his land.

In vain did Kentigern answer peaceably. The prince would not be appeased, and in his anger he threatened to pull down the church and chase the builders off the land.

Then a strange thing happened, for suddenly the light of day faded from the eyes of the angry man and black darkness came swiftly over him.

SAINT KENTIGERN

“What is this?” he cried, staggering forward, stretching out helpless groping hands. “The light is gone. I can see nothing.”

In haste his men came crowding round and lifted him up, but they saw at once that he was blind and they knew not what to do.

“Bring him hither to me,” said Kentigern, and the men led him forward, guiding his stumbling steps.

The heart of the good bishop was touched by the sight of the helpless man, and he earnestly prayed to God that He would lighten the darkness and restore sight to those dull eyes. Even as he prayed the light returned, and the grateful prince knelt at the feet of the saint and kissed the hem of his robe in reverence and thankfulness.

There was no more talk of pulling down the church or chasing the brethren, but the prince humbly sat at Kentigern’s feet to be taught to know the True Light which alone could lighten the darkness of his mind.

So things prospered greatly at the new monastery, which grew even greater and more powerful than the old home at Glesgu. But just as Kentigern was beginning to dream of a rest in his old age and thought to end his days in his peaceful new home, he was called once again to fresh labours.

A new king had come to reign over the Cambrian kingdom; one who loved the Church, and strove to establish it once more in his kingdom.

OUR ISLAND SAINTS

Surely, then, the first thing to be done was to send for the good bishop and bid the shepherd return to gather together his flock once more in the old home at Glesgu.

It was hard to leave the home he had made and begin all over again the old work and struggle, but Kentigern never hesitated. The new monastery was left under the care of a faithful brother, Saint Asaph, and Kentigern once more turned his face northwards and returned to his native land.

Many years he laboured, and with him returned peace and prosperity, for the brethren were busy skilled workers, and they taught the people to work the land to the best advantage. The King, too, put all things in his kingdom under the rule of the wise bishop, so that his word was law throughout the country. And it is said that the holy Saint Columba journeyed from his island home to greet the saint whose fame had spread even as far as Iona.

So the herald of the dawn did indeed bring light into the dark places of his beloved land, and when his work was done on the morn of the Epiphany, when the silver lamp of the morning star was paling in the light of the coming dawn, the angels came to carry home the soul of him at whose birth they had sung their "Gloria in Excelsis." And surely now their song must have risen in still higher triumph, for his warfare was accomplished, the work of the weary old man was finished, and behold, his soul was still as the soul of a little child!