

ST. FURSEY.

There are two names indissolubly connected with the introduction of Christianity into East Anglia—Fursey and Felix—and it has been suggested that an account of them would appropriately find a place in our Proceedings.

Firstly then as to St. Fursey. He is commemorated in all the older Irish martyrologies on Jan. 16th, his principal Feast Day, e.g., in the Martyrology of Oengus (800 A.D.), we read :

“Craibdig i féil Fursai frisrocabsat rige, tri mili, meit buadae for fichit mar míle.” (On the feast of Fursa the pious there ascended to the kingdom (of heaven) three thousand—greatness of victories—and a score of great thousands).

And the following curious notes are added in Irish. We give them in their English translations only :

“Pious ones on Fursa’s feast. On the feast of Fursa the pious, or other religious ones went to heaven on his day, i.e., twenty-nine thousand in Peronne in France. Of the Conailli Murthemni was Fursa. Mellan great-grandson of Conn, of Inis Maccu-Chuinn on Loch Corrib in Connaught was Fursa’s soul-friend.

“Fursa once happened to visit Maignenn, of Kilmainham, and they make their union, and exchange their troubles in token of their union, to wit, the headache or piles which Fursa suffered to be on Maignenn, and the reptile that was in Maignenn to

enter Fursa. So that it became Fursa's practice every morning to eat three bits of bacon that he might abate the reptile's violence. It came to pass that Fursa crossed the sea and came to a certain city. Therein he practices his usual custom, and he is brought before the bishop of that city to be censured. 'Not devoutly dost thou spend thy life,' saith the bishop. 'Thou hast permission, O cleric,' saith Fursa, 'to prove that which inflicts this on me.' Forthwith then the reptile leaps into the bishop's throat. So when everyone knew that, Fursa calls the reptile back to him; and God's name and Fursa's are magnified by that miracle, and the whole city and its service land is conveyed to God and to Fursa."

This is a characteristically Irish story, and illustrates both the amiability and the vindictiveness of the Irish temperament. It would have been helpful if the name of the city (in Britain) had been preserved where the miracle took place.

Mellan was commemorated on Feb. 7th.

The Martyrology of Tallaght (possibly tenth century) mentions on Jan. 16th Foelan and 'Dormitatio Fursae,' or the 'Falling asleep of Fursa.'

The Martyrology of Gorman (twelfth century) enumerates Fursa and Foillan among the saints commemorated on Jan. 16th. A note describes Fursa as an abbot, of Conalli Murthemni, and Foillan (Fulanus), we are told by Bede, was his brother.

The later Irish Martyrologies of Christ Church, Dublin (fifteenth century), and Donegal (early seventeenth century, but compiled from earlier sources) add no material information, but the latter expresses great doubt about his genealogy.

The interesting Kalendar prefixed to the Scottish Drummond Missal (eleventh century) has this entry on Jan .16th:—"Et apud Hiberniam natale sancti Fursei Scotigenæ confessoris atque abbatis celebratur."

Apart from Martyrologies and Kalendars, the information yielded by them being necessarily scanty, we have full information about St. Fursey in a life of him, which must have been written soon after his death, although the existing MSS. are of considerably later date.

We append a list of known MSS. of this Life, a list which will probably receive additions to it hereafter.

*Vita vel Visio Sancti Fursei.**

- (1). MS. Nero, E1, ff. 91 b-95 b, vell., fol., xi. cent.
- (2). MS. Bodl. Fell., 3 ff. 60-66 b, vell., fol., xi. cent.
- (3). MS. Harl., 5041, ff. 79-98, vell. 8-vo., xi. cent.
- (4). MS. Lambeth, 173, ff. 180-188, vell. fol., xi. cent.
- (5). MS. Harl., 2800, ff. 46-50, vell.-large fol., xii. cent.
- (6). MS. Reg. 5, A 7, ff. 74-84 b, vell. 4-to, xii. cent.
- (7). MS. Bodl., Rawl., B 505, ff. 171-186, vell., fol. xiv. cent.
- (8). MS. Bodl. Rawl., B, 485, ff. 101-109, vell. fol., xiv. cent.
- (9). MS. Lambeth, 94 ff. 113-119, vell. fol., xiv. cent.
- (10). MS. Reg., 8, G, vi., f. 200, vell. fol., dble. coll., xv. cent., incomplete.
- (11). MS. Montis Casinensis 140, vell. fol., xi. cent.
- (12). MS. Monast. S. Vedasti apud Atrebat.
- (13). MS. Eccles, Atrebat, A 13.
- (14). MS. Insul. apud Claudium Deresmleulx.
- (15). MS. S. Mariæ Bonifantis.
- (16). MS. Belfort.

*The war has made it impossible to see the majority of these MSS., including many in England. The more important MSS. in London were buried for protection from German bombs.

The above list is taken from Hardy T.D., *Descriptive Catalogue of MSS. relating to the early History of Great Britain [and Ireland]*, vol. i., pt. I., p. 239. To it must now be added (17) MS., Codex Salmanticensis, Brussels, Royal Library, vell., small fol., coll. 77-102, xiv. cent. This MS. gets its name because it once belonged to the Irish College at Salamanca.

This Vita S. Fursei has been printed by—

- (1.) Surius, Hist. seu., *Vitæ Sanctorum*, Jan. 16th, 13 vols., 8-vo. Augustæ Taurin, 1875-80, vol. I., p. 357.
- (2.) Bollandus, *Acta Sanctorum*, Jan. ii., 35 (Jan. 16th)
- (3.) Achery (Luc. d') et Mabillon (J.), *Acta Sanctorum*, Ord. S. Benedicti, ii., 287.
- (4.) Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ*, i., 75.
- (5.) But the most accessible and most recent publication of this Vita S. Fursei is that of De Smedt (C.) and De Backer (J.) in their *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ*, printed at Edinburgh, large 4-to, in 1888, at the expense of the Marquis of Bute, Coll. 77-112.

Several of the above MSS., viz., (3), (12), (13), (14), (17), contain a second book on the 'Miracula Sancti Fursei,' which is full of wonderful miracles, including the restoration of an only son to life after death. Although not found in every MS., there is no valid ground for questioning its early date. A saint of whom no miracles were reported would hardly be accepted as a saint. Cogitosus' Life of St. Bridget was for a long time regarded with suspicion on internal evidence, including its list of extraordinary miracles, but its genuineness has now been established, and it may be assigned without hesitation to the seventh century. Bede, it has been objected, did not know the liber ii. De Miraculis, or if he did know it, did not make use of it; but why should he? He was.

not writing a life of St. Fursey, but only introducing him as a bye-subject in the history of East Anglia; and he quoted facts historically, though sometimes rather confusedly, from a 'libellus,' which may be with almost certainty identified with the *Vita S. Fursei* of which we have been speaking; and the story of St. Fursey has been popularized through its introduction by Bede, though in an abbreviated form, into the 19th chapter of the third book of his famous *Ecclesiastical History*.

There are other and later, but still early, Lives of St. Fursey in existence, which it is perhaps unnecessary to catalogue or describe here, but a description of which by Sir Thomas Duffus Hardy will be found in his *Descriptive Catalogue*, vol. I., part 1, pp. 241-246.

Popular acquaintance with the story of St. Fursey rests rather on Bede's summary but interesting account of him than on familiarity with any of his 'Vitae.'

Let us now put the story together so far as it is known from the above, and a few other sources of information.

Fursa, in Latin, Furseus, in English, Fursey, was an Irishman of noble birth, his father being Fintan, the son of Finlog, an under-king in South Munster; and his mother Gelges, daughter of Aedh Finn, a prince in Connaught. The date of his birth is unknown. It is not recorded in any Irish annals, but it must have been about 600 A.D. He was educated under St. Meldan, bishop and confessor, in a monastery at Inchiquin (Inis-mac-ui-cuinn), in Loch Corrib (Loch Oirbsen) Co. Galway; and then himself entering the monastic life, he founded a religious community at Rathmat, now Killursa, on the east side of the Loch. He then

went back to Munster about A.D. 627, to visit his relations, and while there had a sickness in the course of which he had those wonderful visions, a detailed account of which occupies by far the larger part of the Lives of St. Fursey. He had very poor health, and it was in a state of bodily weakness and therefore probably also of mental excitement, that he saw and recorded the visions which made him famous, and which are for ever associated with his name. But they were seen by him in Munster in Ireland, and not in Suffolk in England, as is implied in the story as told by Bede.

In 631, when Sigebert came to the throne of East Anglia, or soon after that date, Fursey, with that love of wandering and pilgrimage which was a marked Irish characteristic, left Ireland and travelled through Britain into Suffolk. There is no record of the route which he pursued, or of the places where he stayed, except that he spent a short time on a small island, evidently off the West coast of Ireland, but it is not named and cannot be identified (*Vita* § 26). He did not travel alone, but was accompanied by his two brothers, Fullan, a bishop, and Ultan, a hermit, and two presbyters, Gobban and Dicul. Fursey spent several years in Suffolk, preaching and converting many of its inhabitants to the Christian religion, and founding a monastery, or building his cell, in the castle of Cnobheresburg, granted to him by King Sigebert, and identified with Burghcastle in Suffolk, about four miles south-west of Great Yarmouth. The architectural remains now existing there are those of the ancient Roman fortress, or encampment of *Gariononum*, within which the monastery was founded, but no traces of monastic building survive. In it Fursey lived as an anchorite, the charge of the monastery being assigned to the two priests, Gobban and

Dicul. But after the invasion of East Anglia by Penda, king of the Mercians, he fled with his brothers Fullan and Ultan to Gaul.

The date of Fursey's journey to Gaul, like most of the dates of his life, is not exactly known, but it was in the reign of Clovis II., who came to the throne in 638, and in the mayoralty of Erchinwald which began in 640; and the date generally assigned to it is between 640 and 644. Anna had succeeded, after Ecgrice, as king of East Anglia in 636, and is reported to have supported and endowed the monastery liberally. Fursey therefore must have made a stay of 10 or 12 years in Suffolk before, being alarmed by Mercian invasions, or impelled by his own love of wandering, he left for Gaul. There is no further record of his evangelistic work in Suffolk, and we do not know how widespread or successful it was. There is no record of his having met Felix, the first bishop of East Anglia, who held the see of Dunwich 631-647, though they must have met. There are no *reliquiæ celticæ* in Suffolk. As we have said there are no surviving traces of monastic buildings within the Roman encampment at Burgh-castle. There is an extremely ancient bell, found in Suffolk, and now in the Moyses Hall Museum at Bury St. Edmunds, which resembles Celtic monastic bells in material and shape, but not in size, and its history and date are unknown. There is also a beautiful seventh century MS. of portions of St. Luke's and St. John's Gospels now in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (MS. No. cxcvii.). This MS. is undoubtedly of Irish execution, but unfortunately it contains no colophon or note or gloss to indicate its provenance or original ownership. There is an old tradition, which can neither be proved nor

*There is some uncertainty about his pedigree, Martyrology of Donegal, p. 18. See Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore, edit. W. Stokes, Anecdota Oxon., series iv., vol. 5, p. 294.

disproved, connecting it with Suffolk. If there were any truth in it, it may have belonged to Fursey or one of his monks, and have been brought over by them from Ireland. There is a good description of this MS. with beautiful coloured facsimiles, by Rev. J. Goodwin, in a quarto volume of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society in 1847; and its history is given by Dr. M. R. James in his *Descriptive Catalogue of C.C.C.C. MSS.*, Cambridge, 1912, vol. I., p. 474, and discussed by him in his *Sources of Archbp. Parker's Coll. of MSS.*, at C.C.C.C., Cambridge, 1899, pp. 6-9.

Fursey's career in France belongs rather to French than to English history, and need only be briefly told here.

On arriving in Gaul he was favourably received at the court of Clovis II. through the influence of Erchinwald, Mayor of the palace, who befriended him, and gave him land at Lagny, near the Marne, about 30 miles from Paris, where he founded a monastery, 'Cœnobium Latiniacum,' which afterwards became famous, and attracted many pilgrims and monks from Ireland. He afterwards founded two religious houses at Peronne under the continued patronage of Erchinwald and the favour of Queen Bathildis (Baldechildis). Then wishing to revisit former scenes he travelled northward, and got as far as Maceries or Mazeroelles, where he died, but the exact year of his death is uncertain, 649 being the most probable date. He was buried in the new church of Perrona (Peronne on the Somme), in connection with which a monastery was founded, so largely frequented afterwards by Irish, that for several centuries it was known as "Perrona Scotorum." Four years after his burial a chapel was added to the church, and his remains were solemnly translated to it by

Eligius bishop of Noyon, and Autbertus, bishop of Cambray.

Some poems and a litany, preserved in a MS. in Trinity College, Dublin Library (formerly H, i., II., now No. 1285), have sometimes been attributed to him, but without proof or reason, and the same must be said of the sayings and prophecy in MSS., 1318 and 1336 *Ibid.*

VISIONS OF ST. FURSEY.

Translated from the Vita S. Fursei in the Codex Salmanticensis, printed edition, p. 78, capp. (4)—c. 23), with a summary of (2) prefixed. (1) and (2) describe his family and character in very general terms.

(2). On one occasion before he had left Ireland, St. Fursey had been paying a visit to his parents, and holding a mission among his old neighbours. On his return he was seized with a sudden and serious attack of illness. He could see nothing, he could not move a foot, and he was carried by his companions like a dead man into the nearest cottage.

(4). While he lay there in a state of darkness, he saw four hands stretched out to him from above, which grasped him by the arms, and flew upwards with him by the aid of snow-white wings, which covered the hands; and through the darkness he could begin to distinguish angelic forms. As he rose higher he could see the bright shining faces of the holy angels, and their white bodies which seemed to be incorporeal, and only masses of most brilliant light. Then he beheld a third dazzling angel with a bright shield and a flashing sword, who went in advance before them. The three angels of equal and wonderful beauty made a strong impression upon his mind by

the melodious noise caused by the beating of their wings, and by the beauty of their appearance.

They were singing, one voice leading the rest : " They will go from strength to strength, and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion."*

There was a crescendo and a diminuendo in the singing. He heard also another and as it were unknown canticle sung by many thousands of angels, of which he could just catch these words : " They went forth to meet Christ."† So far as he could see through the dazzling heavenly light, the countenances of all the angels were alike.

(5). Then one of the heavenly host commanded an angel, armed and going before, to lead the venerable man back to his body, that he might carry with him and bear his own cares. The angels accordingly carried him back obediently by the way by which they had come. Then Fursey recognized for the first time that he was out of the body, and asked them whither they were carrying him. An angel on his right hand said to him, " Thou must return to thy body and take thy life's cares upon thee again." Then he, moved with regret at having to leave the angelic company, said that he was unwilling to be separated from them. The angel of the Lord replied, " We will return to thee to receive thee when thy cares are finished " ; and they sang the second half of the verse, " And unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion."‡ Charmed by the sweetness of this song, he could not understand how his soul re-entered his body.§

*Ps. lxxxiv., 7.

†With ' sponso ' for ' Christo,' these words occur in Mat. xxv., i. (Vulg.), but the song is otherwise unknown.

‡Ps. lxxxiv., 7.

§Throughout this chapter, and henceforward for brevity's sake, we have often omitted the word ' holy ' which almost always precedes the word ' angel,' and occasionally the word ' man.'

(6). Then at cock-crow, when his face was suffused with the rosy morning light, the angelic songs ceased in a twinkling, and he heard words of bewilderment and lamentation; and some one, beholding the motion of the mantle laid over him, slowly uncovered his face. The man of God then said to those surrounding him, "Why are ye amazed and utter such disquieting sounds?" They in reply related the whole matter in due order, telling him how in the evening hours he had fallen into a trance, and how until cock-crow they had watched round his lifeless body. Then Fursey sitting up, and dwelling on the brightness and sweetness of his angelic vision, thought with what anxious warning he had been received; and he was sad because he had not any wise man there with him, to whom he could clearly relate the things which he had seen, and he feared lest the angels should return and find him unprepared. Then he sought and received the communion of the sacred body and blood, and lived on, though infirm, through that day and the next.

(7). At midnight on the third day, when his parents, relations, and many neighbours came to see him, darkness again fell on him, and his feet grew stiff with cold, and extending his hands in prayer he joyfully awaited death; for he remembered the joy of the vision which under the same signs he had seen before. But now falling back upon his couch as if overcome with sleep, he heard the horrible voices of a great multitude shouting and urging him to go forth, yet when his eyes were opened he saw no one except the three aforesaid angels, one on either side of him, and the third armed and standing at his head. Then finding himself in a wonderful manner blind to earthly sights, and deaf to earthly sounds, he saw the holy angels, and heard their songs all sweetness and delight, and the angel that was on his right side consoled

him with these words, "Fear not, thou hast protection."

(8). And on the angels bare him, beyond the sight of house or home; and as he went he heard the howling and clamour of demons, and passing through the midst of them he overheard one of them saying, "Let us go in advance and stir up war before his face." Then he saw to his left in front of him a warlike array gathering like a black cloud. The demons' bodies, so far as they could be seen by him, were deformed and black, emaciated and horrible, with heads swollen like brazen cauldrons. When they flew, and when they fought, he could not distinguish any outline of bodily form, but only saw horrible and hurrying shadows. Their faces were invisible in the terrible darkness, just as the angels' faces had been invisible on account of the strong light.

(9a). The warring demons hurled burning arrows against them, but all their deadliest weapons fell powerless against the angel's shield, and the enemy fell prostrate at the sight of the warrior angel, who addressed them thus, "Do not hinder our journey for this man is not a partaker of your damnation." The enemy contradicted, and blasphemously argued that Fursey was an unjust man, consenting with sinners, and that he ought not to go unpunished, because it is written that "not only they that do such things, but also those that have pleasure in them that do them, are worthy of death."* While the angel thus contended with the demon, it seemed to the holy man that the noise of the battle and the clamour of the demons was heard over the whole world: and when Satan like a crushed serpent had

*Romans i., 32.

raised his venomous head, he said, "This man hath often spoken idle words,* and therefore ought not, without loss, to enjoy the life of the blessed." The angel replied, "Unless thou canst produce serious charges, on account of lesser accusations he shall not perish." The old accuser then said, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."† The angel said, "Where did he avenge himself? or to whom did he do injury?" The devil replied, "As he hath been accustomed to receive evil, so shall he receive punishment from the supreme judge." The angel retorted, "Let us be judged before the Lord." Then the vanquished enemy emitting venomous poison rejoined, "If God is just, this man shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven; for it is written, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."‡ The angel replied, "Let us be judged before the Lord"; and the angel thus contending, the adversaries were crushed.

(9b). Then the angel on his right hand said, "Look upon the world." Then he looked, and saw a dark valley in the depth beneath him, and four fires burning in the air at some distance from each other. And the angel asked him, "What are these four fires?" Fursey replied that he knew not, and the angel told him, "These are the four fires which burn after that in baptism all sins are forgiven, through confession, and the renunciation of the devil, and his works, and pomps. The first is the fire of falsehood, when men have promised at their baptism to renounce Satan, and all his pomps, and they fail to keep their promise. The second is the fire of avarice, when

*St. Matt. xii., 36.

†St. Matt. vi., 14, 15.

‡St. Matt. xviii., 3.

men prefer the riches of the world to the love of heavenly things. The third is the fire of discord, when men do not hesitate to offend the minds of their nearest friends, even over trifles. The fourth is the fire of impiety, when men reck nothing of robbing and defrauding those weaker than themselves. The flames increased till they formed one huge fire, which he was approaching. Alarmed at the threatening fire, he said to the angel who was with him, "The fire is coming near me." The angel said, "That which you have not kindled will not burn you, for though the fire be great and terrible, yet it tests each person according to their merits and their works; and according to the growth of avarice in each person will be the growth of fire, until he be wholly consumed; for as the body is inflamed by unlawful passion, so also will the soul be consumed by the punishment due to it."* Then he saw the angel in front of him dividing the flames of fire into two walls on either side of him, and the two angels on each side of him protecting him from being burned.

(10). He also saw four unclean spirits flying through the flames, and engaged in terrific warfare in the midst of the fire, and one of them said, "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes."† The angel replied, "What was there in his lord's will which he did not fulfil?" Satan answered, "The most Highest is not pleased with the offerings of the wicked,"‡ and the angel replied, "He believed that each of them had repented." To which the devil said, "He ought to have proved first that they persevered in their repentance, and then to have received the fruit thereof,

*Compare I. Cor. iii., 13.

†St. Luke xii., 47.

‡Eccclus. xxxiv., 19.

for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous."* The angel replied, "Let us be judged before the Lord."

(11). Baffled thus far, the lying evil spirit broke out into blasphemies against the Creator, saying, "Up to now we have believed God to be truthful." The angel replied, "What else is he?" Most shamefully the devil rejoined, "He promised that every sin which is not purged on earth should be punished from heaven, as Isaiah the prophet announced, 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword.'† Yet this man was not punished for his sins upon earth, nor hath he received punishment here. Where, then, is the justice of God?" The angel chode with them saying, "Do not blaspheme since ye know not the secret judgements of God." The devil replied, "What secret judgment is there here?" The angel answered, "As long as there is a hope of repentance the divine pity accompanies a man." Satan replied, "But there was no room for repentance here." The angel rejoined, "You are ignorant of the depth of the mysteries of God; perhaps there will be room for repentance in this case too." The devil said, "Then let us go, because there is no reason in the judgments here." Another of his satellites said, "There still remains for him a narrow gate, through which none except a few enter, and we shall be able to overcome him there, and the gate is this, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'" The holy angel replied, "This man did good to his neighbours." The adversary replied, "It is not enough to do good, unless a man also shall have loved his neighbour as himself." The angel answered, "The fruit of love is to do good works, for God will

*Deut. xvi., 19.

†Is. i., 19, 20.

render to every man according to his works."* The evil spirit replied, "But because he did not fulfil the word of God by loving [his neighbour] he is to be damned." In this fight with the crowd of evil spirits, the holy angels were victorious.

(12). Six times vanquished, the devil, after his manner, broke out into blasphemy, saying, "If God is not unfair, and if lying, and the breaking of his word displeases Him, that man will not be exempt from punishment; for he promised to renounce the world, and on the contrary, he loved the world, against the apostolic precept, which says, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, etc.'† This man was restrained neither by his own promise, nor by the apostolic injunction." The angel replied, "He loved not the things of the world on his own account only, but for the sake of being able to give them away to all in need." Most wickedly the devil replied, "In whatever way the world is loved, it is contrary to the divine command, and the Christian's promise at baptism." The adversaries having been thus vanquished by the victorious angels, the devil returns to his cunning, and says, "It is written, 'Unless thou warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, his blood will I require at thine hand.'‡ This man did not worthily preach penitence to sinners." The angel replied, "Concerning this time it hath been written, Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.§ For when hearers despise the word, the tongue of the teacher is hindered from speaking, while God sees that the preaching which is heard is despised." The accuser of ancient days replied, "But he ought to go on proclaiming the truth even unto suffering and death, and not to yield or be silent."

*Rom. ii., 6.

†St. John ii., 15.

‡Ezek. iii., 18.

§Amos, v., 13.

(13). Throughout the whole opposition of the demons a fierce battle raged, until in the sight of God the angels triumphed, the enemy was trodden down and vanquished. Then Fursey was surrounded by boundless light, and as the quires of angels sang together, he considered within himself, that no labour ought to seem hard, no time ought to seem long, by which and in which eternal glory is obtained, and joy and gladness are heaped together. Then gazing upwards he saw immense hosts of angels, glittering in extreme brightness, and hosts of all the saints who have passed on before, who flying towards him like a flock of birds, surrounded him with illimitable light, and drove far away all fear of fire, and all terror of evil spirits. He beheld also two venerable men, from that province in which Fursey, the man of God, was known, named Beanus* and Meldanus†, bishops worthy to be remembered by all men, and celebrated even to the present day. These came close to him, and announcing their names, held familiar conversation with him.

(14). Then he beheld, and, lo, a great calm in heaven, and two angels entered through the celestial gate seeking the highest joy of heaven‡. A marvellous bright light shone round about them, and there were heard the voices of multitudes of angels, divided into four quires, and singing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts."§ Then his soul, filled with the sweetness of the heavenly song, and with the sound of ineffable joy, soared upwards to the point from beyond which the heavenly song came. Bands of angels encircled him then, and one of them standing

*Beoan (Beanus) from South Munster, bishop of Tamlacht-Menainn; commemorated on Oct. 26th.

†Meldan (Meldanus) bishop and confessor at Inchiquin in Loch Corrib, Co. Galway, where Fursey had been his pupil.

‡Proximam celi jocunditatem (?).

§Is. vi., 3, or more exactly, Te Deum laudamus, v. 4.

on his right hand, asked him, "Knowest thou whence this delight and joy prevail?" and upon his confessing that he knew not, the angel told him, "In the assembly of heaven whence we, too, are come." Then his mind, forgetting all toil and trouble, was filled with boundless joy, because hearing the heavenly songs more clearly and tunefully it seemed to him as if he alone was being sung to. Filled with wonder he exclaimed, "It is a great joy to hear these songs," and the angel rejoined, "We are often deprived of the joy of hearing them, because our appointment is to minister to the human race; and that which we spend much time and labour in announcing to men, is rendered nugatory by the devils who tempt their hearts." Again the angel of the Lord said to him while intent on listening to the heavenly songs, "In this heavenly kingdom there is never any sorrow, except what may be felt over the damnation of man."

(15). Then Fursey beheld the aforesaid bishops* coming forth from the secret chamber of heaven, like angels radiant with light; and approaching him they bid him return to the world. Silent, and stupified with sorrow at the announcement, he returned [to earth] in a moment of time, holy angels accompanying him. The aforesaid venerable men [Beoan and Meldan] asked for time that they might speak with him, and they said, "Why dost thou fear? It is a one day's journey to the scene of thy future labours. Preach there to all and announce that the day of judgment is at hand." Blessed Fursey then enquired about the end of the world; and they told him that the end of creation was not to be then, although it was very near, but first the race of men

*"Sacerdotes." In early ecclesiastical language 'sacerdos' was frequently the equivalent of 'episcopus' rather than of 'presbyter.' See my *Liturgy and Ritual of the ante-Nicene Church*, 2nd edit., London, 1912, pp. 128-9.

were to be plagued with famine and death, which had been signified by an eclipse of the sun in the past year, when it shone only with the light of the moon. " But there are two kinds of famine, one consisting in a want of wisdom, and in understanding the word of the Lord without fulfilling it, and the other when the mind is absorbed in the abundance of riches. For as the avaricious man is not satisfied with money, and the bitterness of avarice prevents his feeling the sweetness of good precepts, while he ever hankers after forbidden lucre ; so other men's minds, occupied and detained by the bitterness of malice, cannot perceive the sweetness of the word of God. Death, however, may be deferred for a time through the patience of God ; yet if a man sees these signs, and despises the warnings of holy scripture, unless he repents, his death is very near.

(16). " Although the wrath of the supreme judge hangs over men who despise the divine warnings, yet his anger is chiefly directed against the teachers and rulers of the church ; because the souls of the faithful are perishing for four reasons, firstly, through the alluring vices of this world ; secondly, through the suggestion of the devil, always at war with man ; thirdly, through the negligence of teachers ; fourthly, through the examples of depraved rulers. Teachers then should ponder on and understand the books of the prophets, and recognize the signs of the times. Those men's work is only half done, who by God's mercy have obtained the grace of liberality and yet through carnal incontinence are slipping off the right way. Others have acquired the grace of chastity, but are burnt up with avarice and cupidity. Others profess the grace of gentleness, but their rank minds are weak. Others forget their injuries, and quickly pardon them ; but for want of self-control they quickly get angry and provoke strife. Others boast about

what God has graciously granted to them, as if it had been acquired by their own labour. Others through vigilance have conquered the vices which assailed them, but neglect growth in virtue, by failing to be instant in good works.

(17). "Some people there are who are assailed by spiritual vices, and who leaving them unnoticed, afflict their bodies with fasting. For example, they think a great deal about various small faults, but they do not abjure avarice, which caused the expulsion of the first man from the pleasures of Paradise; nor envy, through which the murderer Cain slew his brother Abel; nor false witness through which the Saviour was condemned to death; nor blasphemy; nor do they consider what kind of punishment, and how great punishment was imposed upon those who did such things. Many people, while abstaining from meats which God created, and commanded to be received with thanksgiving, nevertheless partake of the following abominations as if they were lawful: pride, avarice, envy, false witness, blasphemy; and thereby, as it were, eat the flesh and drink the blood of their neighbours; and what are slighter faults in the divine judgment they consider more serious, and what are serious they consider slight.

(18). "Every teacher therefore ought to meet particular vices with appropriate medicines. He who reckons gluttony and fornication among the lighter vices is to be considered an enemy of souls rather than a teacher. The cure of pride is to be publicly upbraided in the presence of all, and to humble oneself in dust and ashes*. The cure for avarice is generous giving; the cure for envy is benevolence and

*This language is probably not pure metaphor, but contains a reference to the public penitential system of the early church.

benignity. In the case of false witness, it is desirable that the guilty person should make humble confession to him about whom he has made a false statement, and should ask his pardon. The cure for blasphemy is similar, that is to say, through humble subjection, the refraining of the tongue from all idle speech, and by being instant in prayer. Contrary vices are healed by contrary virtues. It is not enough to afflict the body, if the mind is not cured of malice and wickedness. Therefore the rulers and teachers of the church of Christ should excite the minds of the faithful, after faults committed, to lamentation and penitence, feeding them spiritually with doctrine, and fortifying them by the reception of the holy body and blood; lest they incur damnation through neglect, lest they plant an elm tree instead of a vine, and an elder instead of an olive,* while they prefer worldly and unfruitful labour before the love of God, which is the root and culmination of good works.

(19). "God is angry with the teachers, because they neglect the divine books, and all their affection and all their energy is spent on the cares of this world; and if they neglect to understand the sayings of the prophets, not even if one rose from the dead would he be able to instil more fear and compunction into the hearts of his hearers. But there is no one to restrain them or to urge them on, and in accordance with what has been written† the king and the bishop do each of them that which seems to be right in their own eyes. Pride is the cause and root of all evils. The people rise against their ruler, the clergy against their bishop‡, monks against their abbot, sons against their parents, the younger against their elders, and proudly differ from them; and as each one of them

*Both the elm and the elder were associated with funerals and death.

†Judges xvii., 6.

‡Sacerdotem, see cap. (15), n. 3.

has not learned to exhibit humble obedience to him who has been placed over him, so by the just judgment of God it comes to pass that disobedience spreads through all ranks ; and by the just decree of a strict judge, the injustice which one man commits through pride he has himself to suffer at the hands of another. The evil of pride, which once corrupted and destroyed the host of angels in heaven is inordinately perverting and destroying the present generation of men.”*

(20). When Meldan, who had been speaking throughout, stopped, the aforesaid holy bishop Bean turned to the blessed Fursey and said : “ Preserve thy life by using what God hath created ; reject and refuse all that is evil. Be like the faithful steward, claiming nothing for thyself but food and clothing, and I entreat thee, be temperate in carrying off gain as thou art temperate in acquiring it. Those who willingly accept loss as gain will be able to make the dumb to speak ; begging for nothing ; refusing no man, because it is a thing hateful to God, to seek what belongs to others, while retaining what belongs to ourselves. Paupers and prisoners have a moral right to beg ; and those who have are likewise bound to give to those in want. But if there are none that ask, alms ought still to be given to the poor. Good is to be done unto all men specially unto them that are of the household of faith. The gifts of wicked men should be bestowed upon the poor, and the disconsolate. Let there then be no discord in the church of God, but let those who preside over the people insist upon apostolic order, and the doctrine of the holy church ; and let those who live in monasteries work in silence, and eat their own bread.†

*The whole of the chapter gives a vivid picture of the turbulence of Ireland in the seventh century.

†The generosity of the early Irish character comes out strongly in this chapter.

(21). "There are some men who excuse themselves from the office of teaching holiness, and on account of worldly care leap forward into public life, keeping secret any good that they do they hide the light of a good example from their nearest neighbours; but as they get publicly involved in secular cares and contentions, they openly infuse into their hearts the deadly poison of cupidity. Therefore be thyself neither always in retirement, nor always in public life. If thou wishest to live in retirement, guard thy heart with all care, by observing all the divine precepts, and when thou goest into public life, keep thy heart intent on the salvation of souls, and not on hankering after this world's gains. And if any one shall have made thee presents in the first hour of the day, and before eventide shall have regretted it, as thou didst willingly receive them, so joyfully give them back to him. Be not diligent or eager-hearted to guard thy patrimony, or in connection with any worldly care. With an indulgent and pure heart return good for evil to all adversaries and opponents. Beseech God for thine enemies. For he shall preserve his gentleness and peace of heart uninjured by opponents and enemies. He changeth the ferocity of wild beasts into gentleness. No sacrifice of good works is so acceptable to, and approved by God, as the gentleness of a heart, most patient against all attacks, which accounts all adversity and loss as prosperity and gain, with the help of God, and which rejoices in the hope of a future reward. There are two enemies of the soul of man, the devil and the world: each of them by a kind of mutual agreement insinuates the love of the other, so that by this means the soul, having succumbed to the enticements of this world, may be held bound and possessed by the adversary. Go forth then, proclaim the word of the Lord to the chieftains of this land of Ireland; tell them to

let go iniquity, and through penitence to reach the salvation of their souls. Then announce these very tidings to the more eminent bishops of the holy church ; for our God is a jealous God towards those who love this world more than they love him, who neglect the service of souls, and are enslaved to this world's gain, who preach a late death-bed repentance, and then receiving gifts from dying men suffer their fiery torments."*

(22). When St. Bean and St. Meldan had thus spoken, together with the celestial throng of angels, they were received back up into heaven. And as the blessed Fursey, with three angels only, was about to return to the earth, an enormous fire approached them, but the angel of the Lord, as before, divided it in the midst. Then the devils seizing one man out of the middle of the flames, threw him over the shoulder of blessed Fursey, and their cheeks met ; and Fursey's shoulder and cheek were burnt. St. Fursey recognized the man as one who on his death-bed had given him his own garment. Then this same man was seized by the holy angel, and hurled back into the fire from whence he came out, the angel who was flying on the left hand, standing between Fursey and the fire. Then the devil, repeating ancient fallacies, said, " Do not repel this man, whom you lately received, as if he was our ally, and not yours. As ye received his goods, so ought ye to be partakers of his punishment." Then the angel of the Lord said to Fursey, " What thou hast kindled, that hath burned in thee ; for if thou hadst not accepted the garment of this man dying in his sins, neither would his punishment affect and burn thy body. Declare therefore unto all men that penitence is to be prac-

*This throws a lurid light on the character of Irish chieftains and bishops. The language is not so strong as that of Gildas, but it resembles his indictment of the morals of British chieftains and clergy.

tised, and accepted by the bishop even up to the last hour, but nevertheless no part of the property of a sinner ought to be accepted, nor ought his body to be buried in consecrated ground. But while a man is alive let it be impressed upon him very eagerly in order that bitter compunction may touch his heart, and that when thus touched he may be cleansed, and may renounce all his former iniquities, and distribute alms abundantly to the poor. Henceforth let no gift be accepted by the bishop who ministers to a man, but at his burial let his goods be distributed to the poor, lest in any way the bishop be a partaker in his iniquity."

(23). Having been thus instructed and exhorted, the man of God stood still, among the angels, over the roof of the church, looking down upon his own body; he could see neither the walls of the building, nor the crowd of mourners, nor even the shroud in which his body was wrapped. The angel bade him recognize and resume his body. But not recognizing it as his own body, and shrinking in horror from an unrecognized corpse, he replied that he was unwilling to go near it. Then the angel said to him, "Fear not to take unto thyself this body which thou canst have, though it be weak, and yet without any resistance of vice or infirmity; for by this tribulation thou hast conquered all unlawful desires, so that hereafter they shall not prevail against thee." Then he saw the body opened from the breast, and the angel said to him, "Let water from the fountain be poured over thy reviving body, and then thou shalt be unable to feel any pain, save that of the burn only. Continue in thy good path unto the end, and we will receive thee doing well, and with joy." Then Fursey arose as out of a profound death-sleep, and gazing round, and wondering at the happy change, and at the great-

ness of the reward in store for those who reach their happy home, told his vision step by step throughout. And when the living water was poured over him, he felt the burn between his shoulders, and there appeared in his face the scar of the blow which he had received from the wicked man, and his flesh showed outwardly in a wonderful manner the injury which only his soul had sustained.

This closes the story of the vision. The Life then goes on to tell of Fursey's ten or twelve years mission labours in Ireland before he started for Britain.

The interesting question as to whether Dante was acquainted with the visions of St. Fursey, and made any use of them in his Divine Comedy, is a literary rather than an archæological question, and must be discussed elsewhere. It is touched on by Miss Margaret Stokes in her picturesque volume, *Three months in the Forests of France*, London, 1895, which also contains an English version—it is more a condensation than a translation—of the Vita S. Fursei.

There are few traces of St. Fursey's name or influence left in East Anglia. There was a chapel dedicated to him in Aldeby church, which, though in Norfolk is only a few miles from Burghcastle; and there is a representation of him in a mediæval stained glass window at Blythburgh church. St. Fursey is there depicted in the full vestments of a mediæval bishop, instead of as wearing the low crown, and carrying the Tau-shaped cambutta or staff of a seventh century Irish ecclesiastic.

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