

S. ROBERT OF BURY ST. EDMUNDS.

REV. H. COPINGER HILL.

In sanctity of life non proven for saintship, yet in death distinctly martyrs are three traditional names which belong to the Eastern Counties but of whom legend says but little, except as to the method of their deaths: they belong to a long list of children crucified in derision by the Jews throughout Europe, viz.: S. William of Norwich (1137 or 1144), S. Robert of Bury St. Edmunds (1179 or 1181) and S. Hugh of Lincoln (1255). (A boy was martyred at Winchester in 1192). *William*, whose age is given as 12 or 13 is said to have been crowned with thorns in Passion Week and crucified on the Good Friday, to have been found in Thorpe Wood and buried there on the scene of the murder; shortly afterwards, about March 28 (Easter Tuesday) a priest, Godwin Sturt by name, exhumed the body in company with his son Alexander and a nephew Robert, all three identifying the body as that of William, son of Wenstun, a priest, and his wife, Livia, whose sister was wife to G. Sturt. Another account states that the body was not found till five years later, hanging on a tree. By order of Bishop Everard, he was buried in the Monk's Cemetery; then after a succession of miracles, etc., deposited in a shrine in the Cathedral. On a screen at Loddon in Norfolk he is represented as bound saltirewise to stakes and Jews are wounding his side and receiving the blood in a basin. At Eye he holds a cross and nails: at Litcham, Norfolk, a knife and nails: at Somerhyton with a hammer and lastly at Worstead, Norfolk, with a crown of thorns, a dagger in his side, holding two nails and a book. Dr. M. R. James found his life story in an old M.S. at Brent Eleigh, which he edited with Dr. Jessop in 1896. The M.S. was of the 12th cent. by Thomas of Monmouth; his festival was held on March 18th or 24th.

Hugh of Lincoln we learn (from a history of that town) was a chorister, whose mother, led by a dream, found his body in a well outside the Newport Gate. A Jew, by name Jopin or Chopin, (French Peitevin) confessed to the murder when accused and was punished by death. Hugh was buried in 1255 next to Bishop Grosteste. He is, or was, found in glass (1423-25) at Walpole S. Peter, Norfolk.

Robert of Bury St. Edmunds has a few references which are more than legendary. In the Library of Corpus C.C. Cambs., there is a 14th cent. M.S.—a small volume—by Brame, who may, perhaps, not be considered as generally reliable, but in his “*Chronologia rerum memorabilium ab incarnatione verbi ad annum 1399*” are these two dates, which are interesting, with their numerous contractions :

“Anno gr'e Mill° Cxliiij° pu* Willi 'us c'fix* e' a judeis
apd Norwyc anno etatis sue xij.”

Anno gr'e Mill° Clxxxj° pu* Robert' passu e' a judeis
apd Stū Edm'd.”

In the “*Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*” edited by Arnold, under “*Jocelin Cronica*” we find “*M C LXXX in quo videlicet anno puer Robertus apud Sanctum Edwardum a Judeis, martirizatur iij idus junii, feria iij*” (June 10th). Jocelyn of Braklond also has ‘*Abbacy vacant when Robert suffered and was buried in our Church, and many signs and wonders were wrought among the people (fiebant prodigia et signa multa in plebe, conf. Acts Apost. V, 12) as we have written elsewhere.*’ But alas! his writings are gone. Gervase says it happened “*ad Pascha.*” N.B. Hugh was Abbot of Bury 1157-82, followed by Sampson. Mr. V. B. Redstone kindly contributes the following reference from the Reg. Album fol. 42 “*Helias de Coulinge, chaplain, celebrated at the altar of Edward the Confessor at the back of the Chapel of S. Robert at Bury Abbey.*” This Chapel does not, as yet, appear in the plans of the Abbey.

Blomfield stated that he had seen on the screen at Erpingham, Norfolk, “a man kneeling and invoking

a child with these words "Sancte Roberte succurre mihi pie."

Lydgate (1375-1461), the monk poet of Bury, amongst his minor poems has a prayer in verse to the Saint. In Vol. X of our Proceedings in his account of Lydgate Mr. J. Greene does not mention it, so perhaps he never saw it. These "Minor Poems" have recently been edited by McCracken. The Brit. Museum has kindly supplied a photo copy of the Prayer which will be given in full later on.

The only clue to the Saint's story as stated by Dr. James in his "Suffolk & Norfolk" is that miniatures evidently referring to it are to be found in a M.S. in the collection of Mr. Dyson Perrins. "If yer don't ast yer 'on't git" is an old Suffolk saying. The owner was therefore approached for a photo but he had none. On Dr. James' suggestion that our Society ought to possess one he was again tackled and kindly consented to allow the British Museum to photograph the page—which resulted in a very clear copy. Mr. D. Perrins states that it is a full page, $6\frac{1}{2}'' \times 4\frac{3}{4}''$; that the M.S. is the "Life of Christ and of the Virgin" consisting of 49 miniatures without text, executed in England at the end of the XII century, but additional pictures and text were added in the XV century and that the "Oracio Sancti Roberti," with the picture of the martyrdom, are among the latter. A note to the effect that a full description of the M.S. could be obtained from the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge amongst other places was a great help. The Museum kindly sent the following:—

"In 4 compartments the story of the boy martyr S. Robert.

1. A woman puts his body into a well, with scroll 'Volut set non potuit abscondere lucerna(m) dei.'
2. A tree in centre: a man on L. shoots an arrow into it: the boy's naked body lies on a slope to R.: above rays on right and two hands on L. holding a sheet in which is his soul. (N.B. On an old seal of Bury Abbey, St. Edmund's soul is also thus taken up).

3. A tonsured figure in red robes kneels to R. with scroll 'Meritis Sancti Roberti hic et in eum misereatur mei.'
4. Drapery in front of a distended sail : on or in front of it a robin painted on what looks like a charter with a large pendent red seal. The last two subjects on a gold ground."

They add : " This appears to be a unique record of the circumstances of the alleged martyrdom. The inclusion of this memoria and miniatures points to a connection of the M.S. (or at least the later additions) with Bury St. Edmunds."

Facing the miniatures the page is headed " Oracio Sti. Roberti." Then follow four lines of an antiphon and respond, or " Ave," of which the following is a rough translation : " Hail sweet boy, blessed Robert, who in the time of (thine) infancy didst bear the martyr's palm, pray for us to God that we may rejoice in thine own town (home). Pray for us Blessed Robert and let us too pray worthily."

Beneath this is the prayer in rather larger type with a fine uncial D. " God who didst grant unto Blessed Robert such strength that in the weak body of a boy he endured a glorious martyrdom for Thy name's sake—mercifully vouchsafe unto us absolution of all our sins by His merits Who liveth and reigneth with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Ghost God throughout all ages. Amen." Scholars will note that " absolvas " is awkward, there being no invocation to our Lord—though the Doxology shows that the prayer is to the Son.

At the base—to fill up the page—in an oblong, are the figures of a stag, bear, cat of some sort, and a yak (?) or some representation of that tribe because of its high shoulders. If America had been discovered at the date of this work—the figures might represent Buck, Ursus, Racoon, Yak = Bury—as monks of old were capable of mystery—but, alas ! Racoons were unknown then ! *Notice that the writings in the Ave, Prayer

*But in his Royal Nat. History, Lydekker gives a Civet Cat under the name of a " Rasse."

and scrolls are quite different in size and perhaps detail. There is nothing except the name "Robert" to connect the miniatures with Bury—unless we see in the Archer a suggestion that the boy suffered death à la St. Edmund. Another suggestion may seem rather far-fetched—but in one scroll you read "hic et in euum" (aevum). "Nunc et semper" is more often thus used. What if the painter remembered St. Edmund's cry under the bridge at Hoxne, "hic, hic, hic" — !

As regards the pictures, notice that the archer is left-handed; also at what is he shooting? Robert, the robin, is a play on the name!

The sun's rays are evidently to disclose the body below. The dress of a Benedictine should be black—here it is red. The charter—what charter is referred to? If a "papal bull" the seal would be dark, i.e. of lead. The Jews were banished from St. Edmundsbury in 1190, as appears from the chronicle of John de Taxster, who, under that year, says "Multi jerosolimam tendentes judaeos occiderunt — apud Norvic — apud Stamford—apud Eboracum—apud Sanctum Edmundum occiduntur Judaei xv Kal. Aprilis, scilicet in die Palmarum: qui vero remanserunt procurante Abbate Sampson, de predicta villa perpetuo sunt ejecti."

This was because, as Jocelyn says, "Dominus Abbas petiit a rege literas ut Judei ejicerentur a villa S. Edmundi."

Richard I in 1191 issued an order for the downfall of the Jews, but that was quite a common occurrence and means of raising money. "Magna Charta" had its origin on the Altar at Bury in 1205. In 40 Henry III, the year after Hugh of Lincoln's murder (1256) a commission was held for the trial of the Jews and a warrant issued for their execution. In painted glass in the Priory of Great Malvern, S. Edward the Confessor is represented granting a Charter to a monastery, when the actual charter is of similar design to that in this M.S. and not a long narrow parchment—which might have been expected. Several poets have made use of the incident of the boy-martyrs. Marlowe (1564-1593) has the story in his "Jew of Malta."

Longfellow in the "Nativity Play" in his "Golden Legend" makes Friar Claus sing thus :

"Of the innocent boy—who some years back
Was taken and crucified by the Jews
In that ancient town of Bacharach."

But when we turn to Chaucer, there in the *Canterbury Tales*, the Prioress tells the tale at full length.

Geoffrey Chaucer's dates are 1340-1400 and the *Canterbury Tales* were written towards the end of his life. Suffolk, according to Mr. V. B. Redstone in his account of the Chaucer-Malyn family (Vol. XII of the *S.I.A.*) can lay claim to the poet's family at Ipswich.

As the poet was a man who made his mark early in life and moved in high society—it is quite possible and very likely that he passed through Bury on the way to Walsingham with the King's Court when Edward III made a pilgrimage there in 1361. Bury, too, is more likely the scene of a visit on the pilgrimage than either Norwich or Lincoln, when coupled with Walsingham. If so, no doubt he picked up and treasured in his mind all that he could learn about the boy-martyr to weave later on into this tale told by the Prioress—for in it there is much that can be made to dovetail in with what we see, and now know, in these miniatures. A Lincoln historian has already connected Chaucer and the martyr boy Hugh. (N.B.—This was discovered after these lines were written!)

Chaucer lays the scene in Asia—"in a great city amongst the Christian-folk was a Jewery." The Jews, we are told, in Bury lived in Hatter-street—a corruption of "Heathen-man." The widow's small boy is described as a "litel clergeoun that seven yere was of age" (like Samuel, we'll say, destined for the Church). Possessed evidently of a glorious voice he insisted on learning an Antiphon (to the B.V.M.) which he heard sung each day on his way to school (? in the Abbey) and had resolved to "con it all ere Christmas be went." This Antiphon which begins "Alma Redemptoris Mater" was one appointed to be used in the services from Advent to the Purification (Feb. 2) according to the Sarum

Use, which "Use" was customary at the Benedictine Abbey here. The boy sang "Alma" and the word is used in the Ave to the Prayer in the M.S. as also "succurre" from it on the screen at Erpingham.

The full Antiphon is as follows :

"Alma Redemptoris Mater, quae pervia coeli
Porta manes, et stella maris, succurre cadente
Surgere qui curat populo : tu quae genuisti,
Natura mirante, tecum sanctum Genitorem,
Virgo prius ac posterius : Gabrielis ab ore
Sumens illud Ave, peccatorum miserere."

Chaucer says further that, after the murder, the boy was found in a pit, or well—properly a "bumbly", "lying upright" and speaks thus of a figure in prayer at his side, "this Holy monk, this Abbot him mean I." One tradition has it that the boy was first of all buried, but that the earth could not hold him. In the picture he is shown lying on a slope. The poet's last stanza begins "O fair young Hugh of Lincoln : slain also with cursed Jews." "Also" suggests that Hugh was not the subject of the poem.

Before the pictures are finished with, look upon the Robin—our best native songster—as representing the boy in the poem, with the blood of a martyr on his breast, and the background of snow to fit in with "ere Xmas be went."

For a deeper meaning behind the scenes of these miniatures our worthy Secretary sends me the following notes : "At the time of the drawing of this four-fold sketch—symbolism was passing into ornamentation and much of its meaning was forgotten. The archer is L. handed, symbolically, as being more propitious than the R., and he is aiming towards the soul, in fact shooting the soul heavenwards. The Well is a well-known symbol of the womb and Robert is being re-born to his new life. The rays of the sun symbolise Power, the power of God. These rays, striking upon the "Tree of Life" below them render the meaning obvious. The Bell (?) and kneeling monk typify the power of prayer over evil spirits, which they are keeping off the child. Robin

Oratio s^{ti} Roberti

Aue dulas puer beate Roberte qui infancie
tempore floristi in arbori palma ora p nob
denm ut gaudeamus in patria alma v^o Ora
p nobis beate Roberte & ut digni efficiam^{ur} ore

Deus qui beato roberto talem
fortitudinem tribuisti ut in
puerili corpustulo gloriofi pro no
mine tuo subiret martiri concedere
proprians ut ipius integredentibus
meritis ab omnibus nos absolvas
peccatis. Am^{en} v^o v^o regnas cum
deo patre in unitate spiritus sancti
deus per oia secula seculoru^m Amen.



is a "rebus" of Robert and we see his name thus written on a folded scroll, that is, in the Lambs' Book of Life—in which it is sealed. The background, a sheet, i.e., the Veil between things seen and unseen, sometimes cloud, and so—heaven."

29. TO ST. ROBERT OF BURY.

[MS. Laud 683, leaves 22, back-23.]

Here beginneth a praier to Seynt Robert.

(1)

Blessed
Robert,
sacrificed
by Jews.

O blyssid Robert, Innocent and Virgyne, [1 leaf 22, back]
 Glorious marter, gracious & riht good,
 To our prayer thyn eris doun Enclyne,
 Wich on-to Crist offredyst thy chast blood, 4
 Ageyns the the Iewys were so wood,
 Lyk as thy story makyth mencyoun,
 Pray for alle tho, to Crist that starff on rood,
 That do reuerence on-to thy passioun. 8

(2)

as a child
alas :

Slayn in childhood by mortal violence,
 Alas! it was a pitous thing to see
 A sowkyng child, tendre of Innocence,
 So to be scourged, and naylled to a tre; 12
 Thou myghtyst crie, thou spak no woord, parde,
With-oute langage making a pitous soun,
 Pray for alle tho, knelyng on thy kne,
 That do reuerence on-to thy passioun. 16

(3)

Fostrid *with* mylk and tendre pap *thi* foode
 Was it nat routhe to se *thi* veynes bleede?
 Only for Crist, crucyfied for our goode,
 In whos despit al sangweyn was thy weede, 20
 Slayn in erthe, in hevene is now thy meede, [leaf 23]
 Among marteris, vp-on thyn hed a crown,
 O gracyous Robert! to pray for hem tak heede
 That do reuerence on-to thy passioun. 24

(4)

Suffredist deth or thou koudist pleyne,
 Thy purpil blood allayed *with* mylk whiht,
 Oppressid *with* turment koudest no woord seyne,
 Fer fro thy norice, founde no respight; 28

Be grace enspired, Iesu was thy delight,
 Thy sowle vpborn to the hevenly mansioun,
 Pray for alle folk that haue an apetyght
 To do reuerence on-to thy passioun. 32

(5)

Haue vpon Bury *thi* gracious remembraunce
 That hast among hem a chapel & a shryne,
 With helpe of Edmund, preserve hem fro grevaunce,
 Kyng of Estynglond, martir and virgyne, 36
 With whos briht sonne lat thy sterre shyne,
 Strecchyng your stremys thoruh al *this* regioun,
 Pray for alle tho, and kepe hem fro ruyne,
 That do reuerence to both your passioun. 40
 Explicit.

Remember
 Bury,
 which holds
 thy chapel
 and shrine.

Lydgate's poem given above has a few words to form a glossary :
 —“eris” of course = ears ; “wood” = furious ; “starff” = died ;
 “sowking” = sucking ; “parde” = pardieu ; “routhe” = pity ;
 “weede” = garment ; “pleyne” = complain ; “nорice” = nurse ;
 “stremys” = rays (of light).

The thanks of the Society and of the County in general are
 extended to Mr. Dyson Perrins for his great kindness in taking his
 valuable M.S. in person to the Brit. Museum for the photo to be taken.

H. COPINGER-HILL.