

ST. MARY'S MINSTER IN THANET, AND  
ST. MILDRED.

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THOSE who have visited the beautiful church of Minster in Thanet must have arrived at the conclusion that the great Monastery of St. Augustine, which so early came into the inheritance of the ancient Saxon foundation at Minster, with all its possessions, has been, in one sense at least, its greatest benefactor. The whole of the present church is due to that architectural and religious zeal of the monks of St. Augustine's, which almost every church affiliated to their Abbey testifies. The connection was extended from the period of King Knut, until that fatal day which consigned the most ancient ecclesiastical house in England to ruin and almost utter extinction. But while the monks of St. Augustine were able to say, of this great work of re-edification, what St. Paulinus of Nola said of the church of St. Felix—

“ Quæque prius pilis stetit, hæc modo fulsa columnis,  
Vilia mutato spreuit cœmenta metallo ”—

in their attempt to produce similar effects in the history of St. Mildred and her foundation at Minster, they have woven into it such a web of falsehood, anachronisms, legends and miracles—have so interpolated and sometimes even fabricated its documentary records and charters, as to leave scarcely any of them free from the most serious suspicion, while many bear on their face the features of a pious fraud. Our first work, therefore, in entering upon this labyrinth of legendary history, is to separate truth from fiction as far as possible; to see what foundation of truth there is in the earlier history of the foundress and her labours, and then to pass on to that later period in which

the annals of Minster are incorporated with those of St. Augustine's, and the former house became merged in the latter.

The authorities for the Anglo-Saxon portion of this history were all so connected with St. Augustine's, and so deeply interested in maintaining the superiority of their house over the rival houses of Christ Church and St. Gregory, by magnifying the saintly persons whose lives and relics had become, in a manner, their special heritage, that we cannot receive them as reliable witnesses, whenever the claims of their great foundation come into conflict with those of their opponents, whom they never fail to attack with a kind of hereditary and feudal animosity. Goscelinus, the principal of these, who was himself a monk of St. Augustine's, flourished between 1058 and 1096, and compiled from early documents, which he sometimes refers to, the lives of most of the eminent saints and abbots of Kent. He was so energetic and unscrupulous a partisan of his house, in its long and bitter controversies with Christ Church and the Canons of St. Gregory, that wherever these controversies crop up in his narrative, it is to be read as the Roman censors say, *cautè et cum delectu*. Thorn, who wrote his Chronicle just three centuries later, was also an Augustinian monk and a native of the Isle of Thanet, and to its legendary history he naturally gives a very much higher value than a less prejudiced or more critical stranger. He may have been born within this parish, as the tomb of Edila de Thorn is one of the most curious relics in its church. Thomas of Elmham, to whom the History of St. Augustine's, published in 1858 by the Record Commission, is attributed by its editor, was also a monk of the same foundation and a most vigorous partisan of his house. He wrote about 1414, a little more than a century before the dissolution of the Abbey, and at the period of its culminating glory. All these writers, but especially the first, must be held to have possessed most singular advantages in regard to the history of a period whose earlier annalists have not survived. The history of Bede is almost entirely limited (except in its opening chapters) to that northern kingdom with which he

was altogether identified. He received all his knowledge respecting Kent from Albinus, an abbot of St. Augustine's, whose information would be slightly tinged with that devotion for his house and its founder which was so greatly developed in a later day and in so polemical a form. But Goscelinus had the advantage of a reference to Anglo-Saxon records, long since perished, which he sometimes refers to in the words "*Legitur in Anglico.*" It is an unfortunate fact that while many Anglo-Saxon charters have survived, the histories of Anglo-Saxon saints and eminent men seem to have altogether perished. These gave Goscelinus his materials, and give also the only value to his numerous biographical essays. But the charters, which were written in Latin, and not in the Anglo-Saxon vernacular, which had become a dead language to the monks of the Norman period, were so altered and interpolated, by the copyists at St. Augustine's, that almost every one of them is marked by Kemble with the note of spuriousness, or at least evident corruption. This renders the early history of Minster in connection with St. Augustine's Monastery peculiarly obscure, as the earliest and most numerous of the charters of the latter foundation are those which relate to the successive donations to Minster.

The literary dishonesty of the Augustinians was early noted and denounced, for their fabrications were too gross to escape the detection even of the credulous and uncritical age in which they were produced. The claim of exemption from episcopal jurisdiction asserted for the Monastery in its very foundation, nearly two centuries before such exemptions existed: the leaden seal attached to St. Augustine's pretended privilege, which Elmham spends four pages of his history in the fruitless endeavour to prove a possibility: with many other fatal anachronisms, induced Archbishop Richard, as early as 1180, to charge the monks with putting forth *bullæ adulterinæ*, and whenever they were urged to exhibit their *privilegia* in public, they always prudently but suspiciously declined the invitation. And when, out of mere shame, they produced them in the thirteenth century, the description which Gervase of Canterbury gives of them is such as to

convince us that they were as lightly regarded in his day as they are in the critical pages of Kemble. Such are the materials with which the writer of the history of Minster has to deal. But he would err as greatly in assigning no value to these documents, as he would in giving them too great a weight of authority. Undoubtedly they have a genuine foundation, though the superstructure is always precarious and often even spurious; and this is evidenced by the fact that almost all the names in them are obsolete in the village and in the island, while the names which remain are sufficiently ancient to have tempted a scribe in a later period to have substituted them for those brought in by the Norman or later settlers. Thus Domneva would have been inserted in the place of *Æbba*, while such unknown names as *Haeg* and *Humantun* would have given place to the later designations of the Norman or post-Norman period. It is easy to conceive that the older documents were copied and re-copied by the monks, with a thousand variations, and adaptations of them to the style and language of the times, while the dates are so confused and corrupted as constantly to clash with one another. Thomas of Elmham himself notes the great discrepancies which existed between the original charters, in the library of the monastery, and the copies of them preserved for reference in the registers of the Abbot's chamber. From these preliminary remarks, which are necessary in order that we may gain a comparatively safe footing, in the maze of traditional history upon which we are entering, we will begin the brief but romantic tale of the sainted Domneva, and her still more illustrious daughter St. Mildred, with which the history of Minster opens—a tale which we might well designate as the “Thunnor Legend.”

According to this tradition, which is foisted into a charter of Edward the Confessor, to be noted presently, *Æadbald* had two sons, *Eormenrede* the elder and *Earconberht* the younger one; *Eormenrede* died in his father's lifetime, leaving two sons, *Æthelred* and *Æthelberht*, under the care of his surviving brother, who was authorised to administer the kingdom until the elder of his nephews became old enough to succeed to it. An unscrupulous courtier, however,

who had clung to the ancient idolatry, and whose name was Thunnor, endeavours to persuade the king to put to death the two nephews who stood in the way of his quiet possession of the crown. But failing in his attempt, he despatches them himself, in the town of Eastry where he lived, and buries them in the saloon of his house. Hereupon a divine portent appears, in the form of a celestial light of miraculous brilliancy, shining constantly on the graves of the murdered princes, which at once discovers the guilt of the courtier and awakens the fears of the king. The abbot Adrian, of St. Augustine's, and Archbishop Theodore, working upon this good foundation, induce the king to make compensation to the sister of the murdered princes, this restitution being accomplished by the grant to her of a site for a nunnery, and an ample endowment of land in Thanet. The extent of this land was to be determined by the course of a stag, and was to include whatever the stag could enclose in a single run. The author of the crime, the base Thunnor, blames the king for making the royal gift dependent upon the capricious course of a mere brute. And while Earconberht is watching, with undissembled gratification, the course of the stag, Thunnor, with truculent face, endeavours to restrain and divert its progress. At this moment the earth suddenly opens and the wretched murderer is swallowed up (as the legend closes) like Dathan and Abiram, and goes down quick into hell. The chasm which was thus occasioned is said by the monkish chroniclers to have been still called, in their day, Thunnor "his lope" or leap, and is carefully marked out in the map of Thanet annexed to the original MS. of Elmham's History, which was executed about 1414.

Now let us confront with this romantic story the real and authentic relation of Bede, which, as he tells us, was derived from the Abbot Albinus of St. Augustine's, who (as Minster had not then devolved with its precious relics to his monastery) had no interest, at least in this case, in giving a miraculous colouring to the then almost cotemporary history. "Æadbald passing from this life"—are the words of the patriarch of English history—"left the government of the kingdom to his son Earconberht, who, having held it for

twenty-four years and several months, carried on his reign most nobly." "Earconberht left the throne to Ecgberht, which he held for nine years."\* Here we have no mention of any elder son of Æadbald, nor even a hint that Earconberht usurped the kingdom, or held it in trust for another; but it may be asked, "how then did the name Eormenrede originate, and how was it imported into the story?" I reply, from an endeavour of the monkish chroniclers to clear up the meaning of that early charter of their house, in which the "land which Ermenrede sometime possessed" is granted to Domneva as a part of the endowment of her nunnery; for this suggested the idea of a restitution of property unjustly acquired by the king, and (though a minor could have hardly been held even then to possess land) a place was found for Eormenrede in the pedigree of the Kentish family. We know that a mere casual hint, or correspondence of name or circumstance, was enough for a monk of St. Augustine to construct a legend upon, for the single charter of St. Augustine's, which establishes its connection with Lyminge, is made the groundwork by Elmham of an elaborate but most incredible theory, in order to account for the origin and descent of the title to so distant a property. Not only at this point, but in regard to every incident of the Thunnor legend, we find the great oracle of our Anglo-Saxon history absolutely silent. Domneva, who is the heroine of the romance, has no place whatever in his story. In all the earlier charters of Minster she is called Abba or Æbba, while the chroniclers assign to her the name of Ermenburga. The popular name of Domneva is so absolutely unlike the female names in use at that time, that we cannot but regard it as a compound of *Domina* and *Æbba*, the original title of the foundress, and one rather derived from her official rank as Abbess, than representing her personal name. In this view the word Domneva would simply mean the "Lady Abbess," a name sufficiently indicating its Augustinian origin, and denoting the popular title given her in the neighbourhood of her great foundation, where she was pre-eminently and distinctively *the* Abbess—

\* Hist. l. iii., c. 8, and l. iv., c. 1.

the *Great Lady*—which was the only title given to the late Duchess of Sutherland by her humbler clansmen. The complication of the three names greatly puzzles the later chroniclers, and indeed they can only be reconciled by supposing that two of them represent, in different forms, the official title, while the third, Ermenburga, is the personal one; yet they all belong to a much earlier period than the Thunnor legend, which I propose now to translate from the mythical into the historic form. The name of Thunor or Thor, which (as far as my memory serves) was never attached to a mere human being in the days of the Anglo-Saxon idolatry, points rather to the destruction of idols in the reign of Earconberht and his son than to the imaginary courtier, who is represented as dissuading the king from his pious purpose of endowing the nunnery of Minster. If we collate this legendary history with the simple narrative of the conversion of the Northumbrian kingdom given us by Bede, when the High Priest Coifi threw down the national idol to the great terror of its worshippers, we shall interpret it thus.

The worship of Thor survived still in Thanet, and had hitherto escaped the zeal of Earconberht, which was devoted against every relic of the ancient idolatry in his kingdom. Ecgberht found it thus existing; and, by publicly destroying the idol and casting it into the great chalkpit known afterwards as “Thunor’s leap,” proved to the simple worshippers the utter impotence of their deity, just as Coifi proved it in the Northern kingdom; and, as we might add, from the history of our own time, just as the late Queen of the Sandwich Islands proved it when she descended into the terrible crater of Kilauea—a perfect sea of fire—to defy and denounce the idol of her country, Pelé. Probably the Northumbrian incident, which must have been handed down traditionally to Ecgberht from his great aunt Æthelburga, who had herself witnessed it, formed the precedent for a similar one in his own kingdom. He then took the opportunity of founding a nunnery, over which he placed his niece Ermenburga, as the best means of carrying on the work he had begun, and endowed it with the lands immediately surrounding the place of its foundation. And now we come to the history of

the stag, which, apart from the family resemblance it bears to the legend of the foundation of Carthage, is convicted of falsehood by the facts relating to the endowment of the nunnery which are disclosed in its successive charters. From these it appears that this was a very gradual process, one grant of land within the island being added to another, at irregular intervals, through a long series of years, all these gifts being massed together (but not until the Norman period) in order to form the manor of Minster. This accounts for the extraordinary irregularity of the boundaries of the manors of Minster and Monkton, representing respectively the inheritance of St. Augustine's and that of the monastery of Christ Church. To suppose that half the island was granted to Domneva by a single act, is almost as signal a violation of historical truth as to suppose that the *whole* island was granted to St. Augustine's, according to the charter of Edward the Confessor, into which the Augustinians contrived to foist the Thunor legend. The donations already secured to Christ Church, by still older charters, rendered it impossible for the king to carry out the fanciful caprice of the stag, whose course would have inevitably trespassed on the lands of the Archbishop, who is described as witnessing this exciting scene. The truth is, that the endowment of Minster (like the still earlier endowment of Lyminge) was a very composite one. Either by exchange or arrangement with the monks of Christ Church, the properties of the two foundations were so adjusted that the eastern half of the island fell to the Augustinians, and the western to the cathedral foundation; and the story of the stag is probably a mythical representation of some early perambulation of the bounds of the manors, which this re-arrangement of them rendered necessary. The extreme and almost grotesque irregularity of the line which separates them would have naturally suggested to the mind of an imaginative monk the idea of the stag and its eccentric course. We have many instances of exchanges and adjustments of property, in these Saxon charters, by which irregular and intermixed possessions became more easily adapted to that feudal system which was introduced in the Norman period.

Before we pass away from the consideration of the early charters relating to Minster, we may suggest that the name of Haeg is represented in the form of Heggisdale, afterwards given to the so-called "Thunor's leap," but now long since obsolete; while Humantun, which finds no place in the fifteenth-century map, may probably be represented by the modern name of Manston—a manor and residence of considerable antiquity between Minster and Ramsgate. But probably those who are acquainted with the obscurer local names, which are still attached to the smaller farms and lands in Thanet, may find a nearer approach than any which I can make, as a stranger, to the identification of the names preserved by the earlier charters. It is now time that we should turn to the history of the nunnery itself, and its brief but illustrious succession of sainted abbesses. Here the chronology is extremely perplexing. According to the Charter of Wihtraed in 697, Æbba (or Domneva Ermenburga) was abbess up to that year, while the charter of 696 assigns the office to her daughter Mildred. Probably we should not be far wrong in assigning to Æbba (or Domneva Ermenburga) an incumbency of twenty-five years. Her original foundation is said to have been on and around the site of the present church of St. Mary, to whom her nunnery was dedicated. Here she received the veil from Archbishop Theodore, who appointed her the first abbess of the new house. Of her life we know very little. Its interest appears to have faded away before that of her sainted daughter Mildred, so as to leave but little trace in the pages of the monastic chroniclers; while the whole foreground of their picture is filled up with the miraculous legends of her successor. St. Mildred belonged to a family of saints, whose names have been connected with some of the earliest foundations in England. The number of churches in which her own name has survived is an indication of the veneration in which she was held, and the number of families in which it has been perpetuated is scarcely less signal a proof of the influence her memory has retained in the secular households of a later day. Her pedigree is carefully drawn out by Thomas of Elmham, as well as by Florence of Worcester and

his copyists, and exhibits on either side an unbroken line of royal and saintly personages. As to her life, it was a continuous history of miracles and wonders; while those which she wrought after her death were so many and surprising that they surpassed even the most astonishing proofs of her supernatural power in the days of her earthly sojourn. It would seem, indeed,

“As if in death were propagation too.”

Her biography is frequently referred to by Elmham, and extracts from it, sadly garbled and mutilated, are to be found in Leland. But the principal source would seem to be the memoir by Goscelinus, which supplied the materials for the later chroniclers. She is said to have suffered a long illness before her death; and it must strike us as a subject of surprise and perhaps regret, that saints—who are described as exercising so vast a power over the bodies of all who had recourse to them—should have failed to exert the same influence over their own bodies, or those of their friends and relatives, when they stood in need of their healing virtue. St. Mildred is said to have ruled over seventy nuns, among whom were her sainted sisters St. Milburga and St. Milgitha—one afterwards abbess of Wenlock, and the other of Eastry—and also her aunt, St. Ermengitha. She was succeeded by the Abbess Edburga, whose first work was to build another church and nunnery, at some little distance from the original foundation and farther from the marshes, which doubtless rendered the early site unhealthy, if not sometimes untenable. This second foundation is represented by the remains of Minster Court, or Abbey, and the two structures were said to be so connected as to have formed one building. To this new church, which was dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul, she removed, with great solemnity, the remains of her predecessor St. Mildred, and from this second resting-place they were again removed to St. Augustine's in a later age. Elmham attributes this additional work to the great increase of the number of the nuns, which rendered an enlargement of the building necessary; but this would not account for the translation to the second church of the relics of St. Mil-

dred, which appears to me to indicate the fact that the ancient Minster Church of St. Mary had been secularised and made parochial, and a new church was therefore required for the special use of the nuns. The circumstances attending the translation were such as we invariably find on these occasions. Amid an immense concourse of people the tomb was opened; the coffin emitted a delicious fragrance; the virgin-saint was found in the whitest robes, perfect, and without the slightest vestige of corruption or decay. "Miracles were met by miracles" (*miracula miraculis occurrebant*), as our enthusiastic chronicler exclaims. Forty-five years had passed, and yet she was found rather like one sleeping in a bed than one resting in a tomb. Many miracles of healing and sudden floods after great drought attended this first translation of the relics of St. Mildred, by which not only the breast of Edburga, but those of all the sisters are said to have been "melted" (*sorum omnium pectora liquefacta sunt*). Edburga, "uttering immense thanksgivings to God," removed the relics to her own church and placed them in a tomb on the north side of the Presbytery. Edburga herself died in A.D. 751 and was buried in her new foundation. To Edburga is addressed a charter of King Æthelred, assigning to her foundation half the toll or tribute of a ship, which she had purchased and which had accrued to the king. This is very justly marked by Kemble as spurious, or at least greatly corrupted; and indeed it describes Edburga as having, as early as May, 748, translated the body of St. Mildred and completed her new foundation, while a charter, dated in the September of the previous year, describes Mildred as still living, although the chroniclers describe forty-five years as elapsing between her death and this translation. In any case, seven months (and those chiefly winter months) give a very short time to a work which, in these days, generally lasted as many years.

The charter supplies only a fresh instance of the manner in which later facts were inserted by the monks into ancient charters, as we have seen already to have been done in the case of the charter of Edward the Confessor, in which the Thunor legend appears for the first time. I question,

indeed, whether that charter is not a fabrication from beginning to end, for it most suspiciously introduces and settles the controversy between Christ Church and St. Augustine's on the burial-place of the archbishops, and claims descent for the king himself from Æthelberht, to which, as the descendant of Cerdic, he had no claim, the family of Æthelberht having been extinct more than two centuries before. Æthelberht, moreover, claimed his origin from Wehta, the eldest son of Woden, while Cerdic's was from Bealdeag, his sixth son. The charter, moreover, contradicts itself by affirming Ecgberht to have succeeded to these lands "jure hæreditario," while, in the next sentence, it describes the murder of the two princes, to whom they lawfully belonged.

We pass on to the reign of the fourth Abbess Sigeburga, which was sadly contrasted, in all its features, with those of her illustrious predecessors. It was her misfortune to witness the first descent of the Danes upon Thanet; and almost every year after this first inroad their ravages along the coast, and often far into the interior of the country, are recorded in the Saxon Chronicle and by the later annalists. Everywhere their bitterest hostility seems to have been directed against the religious houses of Kent, though the secular churches and clergy appear to have been treated with much greater consideration, and even spared in the case of mixed foundations like that of Minster. I believe that the exclusive attention we have given to our English chroniclers—almost always monks, or at least identified in interest with monastic foundations—has led us to form a very inaccurate and one-sided opinion on the nature and tendency of these piratical raids. It is always assumed by these chroniclers, and too readily admitted by all their copyists of a later day, that the Danes were heathens as well as barbarians, and the most virulent haters and persecutors of Christianity in all its forms. On the other hand, the ancient Danish writers maintain that they were the converters of East Anglia, and the introducers and propagators of a purer form of Christianity than that which had hitherto been propagated in England. Those who imagine the Danes of the

Anglo-Saxon period to have been idolaters should remember that the conversion of the whole of Denmark to Christianity took place in 858, and that in 880 the Danes are asserted by their ancient chroniclers to have introduced Christianity into East Anglia, on the occasion of their re-conquest of that kingdom. Ansharius, Archbishop of Hamburg, had spread Christianity in Denmark in the beginning of the ninth century; and we are told by the Saxon historian, Albert Krantz, that it was handed down from father to son among the common people, even in the days when it suffered persecution from the rulers. I do not hesitate, therefore, to express the conviction that the Danes, from the period mentioned (although so terribly maligned as idolaters) were Christians, and to affirm that there is no reason why we should give greater weight to the authority of the Saxon Chronicle, than to the writings of Saxo-Grammaticus and the earlier Scandinavian historians. The conduct of the Danes at Minster establishes the fact that it was not against the religion, but the religious orders, on account of their implacable enmity to the Danish settlers, that their hostility was directed; for when they utterly destroyed the conventual buildings at Minster, they spared the chapels of St. Mary and St. Peter and St. Paul. This is a fact which you will be invited to consider, in determining the possibility of any relics of these historic buildings being enclosed in the more modern setting which meets the eye of the present inquirer. It is certainly an important fact as bearing upon the real character of these marauding parties, whose most strenuous opponents, both in Thanet and at Lyminge, were the monks and those whom they marshalled in their defence. In the battle which occurred at the latter place, the secular priest is said to have been the only man who escaped—an almost incredible fact—unless his life had been actually spared by the enemy.

The whole history of these invasions looks like an anticipation of the Bohemian warfare in the Hussite period, which was a crusade against the monastic orders by those who professed a simpler form of Christianity, and regarded them as carrying on an organised conspiracy against their rights

and even existence as a nation; and I think that my friend Mr. Parker will agree with me in the belief that much of the so-called Anglo-Saxon architecture of the east of England is in reality Danish, and to be attributed rather to the early Danish settlers, and the great revival of the days of Knut, than to builders of the Saxon race. The Saxons—as they had only a few Roman models before them, and followed these with a rude and servile devotion—were not likely to originate a style so peculiar and distinctive, and so evidently pointing to the old wooden temples of Scandinavia, as that of the towers of Barnack or Earl's Barton. The mythical statements of the monks in regard to the first piratical invasion of the Northmen might well lead us to receive with caution their descriptions of the events of this period. The story of Hyngwar and Hubba, and their descent from a bear, must prepare us for narratives scarcely less mythical.

According to the monastic historians, the incumbency of Sigeburga was one of constant afflictions and losses to the reduced and imperilled community of Minster—its lands and other possessions failed and were sequestered—and (to use the words of Elmham), “from the deficiency of the pasture, the flock wasted away.” The date of the first Danish inroad into Thanet is fixed by the chroniclers at 753, while the death of Sigeburga is carried on to the year 797, giving her a reign of forty-six years, a period of unusual length for an abbess in those turbulent days. She was succeeded by the Abbess Selethrytha, who appears to be the same person who was afterwards Abbess of Lyminge, and is mentioned as such in the short but authentic charter of Cuthred and Kenulf in A.D. 804. (*Cart.* 188.)

She is said to have been a person of great energy and influence, and to have recovered to her church and nunnery all that the weakness and misfortunes of her predecessor had lost or surrendered. But the end of her public life contrasted sadly with its beginning. According to Elmham, she was doomed to witness the utter destruction of the costly work of her predecessors and to become a martyr in its defence, having been burnt to death with her nuns and the priests and servants of the fated abbey, which is said to have

been so utterly destroyed as to have left not a vestige above ground—not one stone upon another of its historic walls. This is the state described by Thomas of Elmham as existing in his day; and this again will have to be taken into consideration, in determining the inquiry, whether any Anglo-Saxon relics are still enshrined in these walls or those of the abbey beyond. But in regard to the death of Selethrytha—if the Abbess of Lyminge be the same person, as a comparison of the dates and other circumstances must, I think, clearly evince—it would follow that the martyrdom story arose out of her disappearance from the scene without leaving any relics behind her, rather than from any actual proof that she perished in the alleged conflagration. There can be little doubt that a new home was provided for her at Lyminge; and the charter, which gives her a new place of refuge in Canterbury, shews that this first move, though farther inland, was not altogether sufficient, and that the removal of the rural foundations into cities and towns (carried out afterwards by St. Dunstan) had become an inevitable necessity. The martyrdom story is, in fact, contradicted by its very narrator, who, after describing the burning to death of Selethrytha, tells us that she was buried with all the consecrated virgins in the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, together with the priests and levites (as he calls them), whose utter destruction he has just detailed. How the bodies were identified or the funeral rites performed we are left to conjecture. If the identification of our two Selethrythas is correct, another link is established between the nunnery of Minster and the still more ancient foundation of Lyminge, which may prepare us for the singular and embittered controversy that sprang up from the attempt to identify two other saints, each named Mildred, who were not (as these were) contemporaneous, but lived at an interval of more than a generation. I allude to the great conflict for the possession of the genuine relics of St. Mildred, which, springing up after the death of Lanfranc, was carried on up to the period of the Reformation. Æthelburga (popularly called Eadburg), daughter of Æthelberht and Beretha, is said to have founded the nunnery of Lyminge in 633, for the sake of

her niece, an earlier St. Mildred, who, as I have often pointed out, could have been none other than the daughter of Æadbald by that fatal marriage, whose illegality excluded her name from the pedigree of the Kentish kings. In any case, she is described as having been buried with her aunt in the church of Lyminge, where most of those whom I am addressing have seen her burial-place. Now, when the Abbey of Minster was destroyed, the site fell into the hands of the king, and was regranted with all the ancient lands of the nunnery by King Knut to the Monastery of St. Augustine. In this grant was included that priceless treasure, valued in those days above lands and gold, the relics of the later St. Mildred, which were removed to a shrine at St. Augustine's by the Abbot Ælfstan in the days of Edward the Confessor. In the beginning of the Norman period it occurred to Archbishop Lanfranc to grant a similar endowment to the new house he had founded at Canterbury in honour of St. Gregory, and to bestow upon it the relics of St. Æthelburga or Eadburg, then quietly reposing at Lyminge. Not only was the body of that saint discovered in the tomb, but next to it another, to which the popular tradition assigned the name of St. Mildred. Without stopping to consider the possibility of two Saxon saints having the same name, or the distance of the periods at which they lived, the Gregorian monks immediately asserted for themselves the possession of the great and wonder-working Abbess of Minster, and invented a story by which she and her nuns were alleged to have fled from the Danes to Lyminge and to have there died. The Augustinian monks, infuriated at the idea of a claim which threatened a diversion of so many of the offerings and devotions of their house to the newly-founded Gregorians, rushed to the encounter with all the polemical weapons they could muster, and the result was the production of almost a literature on this subject, including sermons, treatises, and writings of all kinds, as Goscelinus tells us in that singular contribution to it which he terms "Contra inanes B. Mildrethae usurpatores."

Fragments of the Gregorian treatises may, I think, be recognised in Leland's confused and corrupted pages. But

the work of Goscelinus on the side of the Augustinians gives us the fullest picture that we have of it. After detailing the heresy of the Gregorians regarding the flight of the nuns from Minster to Lyminge, he exclaims indignantly, "But how could they have fled from the hands of the enemy in Thanet to get into his very jaws at Lyminge? This would indeed be to seek the protection of the lion against the wolf. . . . And with what face can the writer, who describes the translation of St. Eadburg, give to the unknown body which they found under the pavement of the tomb at Lyminge the name of Mildred? when for nearly three years it was doubtful whether a second body had been found there;" then slightly contradicting himself, he adds, "For a long time the other body, which was found there with that of Eadburg, received no name. At length they insidiously feigned this title for it. 'Twas then that the brethren at St. Augustine's heard that the name had been found carved on a stone. On this the Abbot Wydo, calling to him the parish priest of Lyminge, a sensible man (for so I think *vir sensatus* must be here rendered), "who had taken up the corpses, adjured him not to conceal anything he had found from him." He accordingly, fully satisfying this adjuration, exclaimed, "I who with these hands took up both the corpses from their tombs, call everything sacred to witness that I found no name, no writing, no title, no proof such as has been alleged. No Mildred was there, nor were any remains there discernible except those which were believed to be St. Eadburg's." The contradiction here involved is rather curious, and the admission that two bodies were actually brought from Lyminge and put on either side of the high-altar at St. Gregory's, shews that the zeal to deny the possibility of the fact very far outran the admissions of the witnesses themselves. But the saint in the meantime was by no means idle. Her apparitions were both numerous and startling, producing conviction even in some of the more ingenuous Gregorians, and specially in an aged monk, who is described as "eminent in conversation, prayers, and psalmody," who was "relieved from the error that the blessed Mildred was

detained in the parish of St. Gregory” by a vision of the injured saint herself. Nevertheless the Gregorians hardened their hearts, and on every return of the festival of the translation of the relics “profanely twitted the monks of St. Augustine (‘subsannabant et exprobabant fratres’), telling them that all their zeal about St. Mildred was superfluous, and that the feast of her translation was a mere empty dream.” The bitter controversy was carried on until the dissolution of the rival houses and the destruction of the disputed relics, those real bones of monastic contention, left it among the débris of a period of confusion and ignorance which is never likely to return.

We now pass to that period in which the Church of Minster, which had given so great a treasure to St. Augustine’s, became indebted to that great foundation for the four beautiful churches in Thanet which adorn the ancient inheritance of St. Mildred—those namely of St. Mary’s Minster, St. Laurence, St. Peter, and St. John—of which the three last were made parochial at the close of the thirteenth century. Doubtless you will have observed (or will yet observe) many features in these venerable buildings (especially in that of St. Laurence) which indicate an earlier period than that of their actual dedication, and will be able to determine better than I can venture to do, the approximate date at which these ancient chapelries were originally founded. Several saintly persons are said to have been buried in them, among whom St. Ymarus is specially mentioned as buried in St. John’s, *i.e.*, Margate. Beyond his name, and the fact that he was a monk of Reculver, there is I believe no record of this saintly person, who was probably one of the “priests and levites” mentioned by Elmham as having suffered martyrdom during the incursions of the Danes. St. Florentius, who was buried at Minster, was probably a levite of the same canonization. Domneva is said to have been buried at St. Mary’s, the foundress of the nunnery not being worthy probably of a translation to the more favoured church of St. Peter and St. Paul. By resting in this quiet churchyard she has escaped the perils which befell the last home of her more honoured daughter at St. Augustine’s, and the destruction

which awaited St. Æthelburga's relics at St. Gregory's. Ermengitha and Edburga lay the one a mile distant from the nunnery, the other in the second church now destroyed; while there also the remains of Sigeburga and Selethrytha (if at least she left any remains whatever) were deposited. Thomas de Elmham—who speaks of the *plebeia parochia* which succeeded the nunnery, and of the secular clergy who officiated in it, with a contempt worthy of a regular priest, and above all an Augustinian—mentions in his chronology three Papal Bulls adjusting the tithes of St. John, St. Laurence, and St. Peter, and preserving them to their respective churches. These are all assigned to the year 1301, and probably were consequent upon the formation of these parishes out of the original manor of Minster, and the elevation of their churches into a parochial dignity from their original status of mere chapels to the mother church of Minster. The great value of the Manor of Minster in the Domesday computation cannot fail to strike you—the yearly value of a hundred pounds representing what would be a vast endowment in the present day. This may well account for the church building and church restoration of which we see so many traces, and for the remains of those ancient farm-houses and granges which indicate a degree of beauty and refinement, which few but monastic proprietors, holding possessions of unusual value, could have bestowed upon such buildings.

Little of interest occurs in the history of the Church of Minster during its connection with the monastery, or after the dissolution, when the manor and the advowson were separated. But I must not close this sketch of its various transitions without mentioning the connection it had with the learned Dr. Meric Casaubon during the period of the Long Parliament, when he was denounced with so many others to the Committee of Religion of Sir Edward Dering, and charged with various Popish errors and innovations. Against these accusations he appears to have successfully vindicated himself. One of them was the charge of non-residence, which he regrets had been in some degree justified by the unhealthi-

ness of the place, in which, on one occasion, the plague had broken out—a confession of the surrender of his post in the hour of danger which few (we may safely affirm) would not be ashamed to make in our own more favoured day. We have now reached a period at which our inquiries may well terminate. The unfortunate chaplain to Archbishop Laud soon realized the peril of so exalted a situation, in the deprivation of his livings and cathedral preferment, and the church of Minster fell from that time into the once normal state of all our country churches—suffering much from many churchwardens—until in our own day it has received that complete (I venture to think *too* complete) restoration by which its masonry is sufficiently concealed to at once elude the scrutiny of the antiquary and to illustrate the skill of the plasterer. I cannot here avoid commending the taste and judgment of the late churchwarden, who has unclothed a portion of the interior, and much wish that this good work (whose effect is so striking could have been continued.