

CHAPTER V

THE MONKS AND THE CONVERSION OF THE GERMANS

I. THE MONASTIC ATTITUDE OF MIND

32. Jerome's plea for the life of solitude (373).

One of the earliest and most eloquent pleas for monasticism is found in a well-known letter of St. Jerome's, who himself led the life of a monk for many years. He thus urges on a friend, first the duty, then the beauty, of a hermit's existence.

Family ties and obligations should not stand in the way of the monastic life.

Though your little nephew twine his arms around your neck; though your mother, with disheveled hair and tearing her robe asunder, point to the breast with which she nourished you; though your father fall down on the threshold before you, pass on over your father's body. Fly with tearful eyes to the banner of the cross. In this matter cruelty is the only piety. . . . Your widowed sister may throw her gentle arms around you. . . . Your father may implore you to wait but a short time to bury those near to you, who will soon be no more. Your weeping mother may recall your childish days, and may point to her shrunken breast and to her wrinkled brow. Those around you may tell you that all the household rests upon you. Such chains as these the love of God and the fear of hell can easily break. You say that Scripture orders you to obey your parents, but he who loves them more than Christ loses his soul. The enemy brandishes a sword to slay me. Shall I think of a mother's tears?

Delights of the hermit.

[When once his friend has cast off the responsibilities of the world he will discover that the desert is full of attractions.] O solitude, whence are brought the stones of the city of the Great King! O wilderness rejoicing close to

God! What would you, brother, in the world, — you that are greater than the world? How long are the shades of roofs to oppress you? How long the dungeon of a city's smoke? Believe me, I see more of light! How refreshing to cast off the things that oppress the body and fly away into the pure sparkling ether!

Do you fear poverty? Christ called the poor "blessed." Are you terrified at labor? No athlete without sweat is crowned. Do you think of food? Faith fears not hunger. Do you dread the naked ground for limbs consumed with fasts? The Lord lies with you. Does the thought of unkempt locks disturb you? Your head is Christ. Does the infinite vastness of the desert affright you? In the mind walk abroad in Paradise. So often as you do this there will be no desert. Does your skin roughen without baths? Who is once washed in Christ needs not to wash again. In a word, hear the apostle as he answers: "The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us!" You are too pleasure-loving, brother, if you wish to rejoice in this world and hereafter to reign with Christ!

The spirit of rigorous monasticism is admirably expressed by a monk of the sixteenth century, as follows:

First of all, carefully excite in yourself an habitual affectionate will in all things to imitate Jesus Christ. If anything agreeable offers itself to your senses, yet does not at the same time tend purely to the honor and glory of God, renounce it and separate yourself from it for the love of Christ, who all his life long had no other taste or wish than to do the will of his Father, whom he called his meat and nourishment. For example, you take satisfaction in *hearing* of things in which the glory of God bears no part. Deny yourself this satisfaction: mortify your wish to listen. You take pleasure in *seeing* objects which do not raise your mind to God: refuse yourself this pleasure, and turn away your eyes. The same with conversations and all other things.

33. The practice of monasticism as described by a Spanish monk of the sixteenth century.

Act similarly, so far as you are able, with all the operations of the senses, striving to make yourself free from their yokes.

The radical remedy lies in the mortification of the four great natural passions, joy, hope, fear, and grief. You must seek to deprive these of every satisfaction and leave them, as it were, in darkness and the void. Let your soul, therefore, turn always:

Not to what is most easy, but to what is hardest;
 Not to what tastes best, but to what is most distasteful;
 Not to what most pleases, but to what disgusts;
 Not to matter of consolation, but to matter for desolation rather;

Not to rest, but to labor;
 Not to despise the more, but the less;
 Not to aspire to what is highest and most precious, but to what is lowest and most contemptible;

Not to will anything, but to will nothing;
 Not to seek the best in everything, but to seek the worst, so that you may enter for the love of Christ into a complete destitution, a perfect poverty of spirit, and an absolute renunciation of everything in this world.

Embrace these practices with all the energy of your soul and you will find in a short time great delights and unspeakable consolations.

Professor William James has set forth the various feelings which lie at the basis of asceticism in the following remarkable passages:

34. A modern psychologist's view of the ascetic spirit. (From James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.)

Where to seek the easy and the pleasant seems instinctive — and instinctive it appears to be in man; any deliberate tendency to pursue the hard and painful as such and for their own sakes might well strike one as purely abnormal. Nevertheless, in moderate degrees it is natural and even usual to human nature to court the arduous. It is only the extreme manifestations of the tendency that can be regarded as a paradox. . . . Some men and women, indeed, there are who can live on smiles and the word "yes" forever.

But for others (indeed for most), this is too tepid and relaxed a moral climate. Passive happiness is slack and insipid, and soon grows mawkish and intolerable. Some austerity and wintry negativity, some roughness, danger, stringency, and effort, some "no! no!" must be mixed in, to produce the sense of an existence with character and texture and power. . . .

Asceticism may be a mere expression of organic hardihood, disgusted with too much ease.

Temperance in meat and drink, simplicity of apparel, chastity, and non-pampering of the body generally, may be fruits of the love of purity, shocked by whatever savors of the sensual.

They may also be fruits of love, that is, they may appeal to the subject in the light of sacrifices which he is happy in making to the Deity whom he acknowledges.

Again, ascetic mortification and torments may be due to pessimistic feelings about the self, combined with theological beliefs concerning expiation. The devotee may feel that he is buying himself free, or escaping worse sufferings hereafter by doing penance now.

In psychopathic persons, mortifications may be entered on irrationally, by a sort of obsession or fixed idea which comes as a challenge and must be worked off, because only thus does the subject get his interior consciousness feeling right again.

Finally, ascetic exercises may in rarer instances be prompted by genuine perversions of the bodily sensibility, in consequence of which normally pain-giving stimuli are actually felt as pleasures.

II. THE DEVIL AND HIS WICKED ANGELS

The following passages give some idea of the religious world in which the monks and missionaries lived, and the views of the next world which they inculcated in the minds of the newly converted barbarians.

35. The pagan gods only devils in disguise. (From the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, condensed.)

Belief in miracles and ever-present demons.

Andrew, by God's mercy bishop of Fondi, was a man of most holy life, but the ancient enemy of mankind sought to tempt him, by causing him to think evil thoughts.

Now one day a certain Jew was coming to Rome from Campania, and he traveled by the Appian Way. When he reached the hill of Fondi he saw that the day was darkening toward evening, and he did not know at all where he might sleep. He was near a temple of Apollo, and he decided to stay there.

He feared the sacrilegious character of the place, so, though he had not the faith of the cross, he took care to protect himself with the sign of the cross. In the middle of the night he was disturbed by the very fear of solitude, and lay awake. Suddenly he looked up, and saw a crowd of evil spirits. He who was in authority over the rest took his place in the midst of them and began to discuss the deeds of each spirit, and to ask how much evil each one had accomplished.

One of the spirits told how he had caused Bishop Andrew to think an unholy thought. Then the evil spirit and enemy of the human race exhorted that spirit to carry out what he had begun in Andrew's soul.

Then the spirit who commanded the rest ordered his followers to find out who had presumed to sleep in that temple. But the Jew made the sign of the cross, and all the throng of evil spirits, crying out "Woe, woe!" disappeared.

36. St. Gall and the demons. (From the *Life of St. Gall* (630) by an anonymous writer.)

[St. Columban and St. Gall came, about the year 610, to a village near the Lake of Constance called Bregenz, where they had heard that there might be opportunity to serve God.] There the brethren's hands made ready a dwelling, and the holy Columban fervently prayed to Christ in behalf of that place. The superstitious pagans worshiped three idols of gilded metal, and believed in returning thanks to them rather than to the creator of the world.

So Columban, the man of God, wished to destroy that superstition, and told Gall to talk to the people, since he himself excelled in Latin, but not in the language of that

tribe. The people gathered at the temple for their wonted festival; but they were attracted by the sight of the strangers, not, however, by reverence for the divine religion. When they were assembled, Gall, the elect of God, fed their hearts with honeyed words, exhorting them to turn to their Creator, and to Jesus Christ the Son of God, who opened the gate of heaven for the human race, sunk in indifference and uncleanness.

Then before them all he broke in pieces with stones the enthroned idols, and cast them into the depths of the lake. Then part of the people confessed their sins and believed, but others were angry and enraged, and departed in wrath; and Columban, the man of God, blessed the water and sanctified the place, and remained there with his followers three years. . . .

Some time after, in the silence of the night, Gall, the elect of God, was laying nets in the water, and lo! he heard the demon of the mountain top calling to his fellow who dwelt in the depths of the lake. The demon of the lake answered, "I am here"; he of the mountain returned: "Arise, come to my aid! Behold the aliens come, and thrust me from my temple. Come, come! help me to drive them from our lands." The demon of the lake answered: "One of them is upon the lake, whom I could never harm. For I wished to break his nets, but see, I am vanquished and mourn. The sign of his prayer protects him always, and sleep never overcomes him."

Gall, the elect of God, heard this, and fortified himself on all sides with the sign of the cross, and said to them: "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you, leave this place, and do not presume to harm any one here." And he hastened to return to the shore, and told his abbot what he had heard.

When Columban, the man of God, heard this, he called the brethren together in the church, and made the accustomed sign (the cross). Before the brethren could raise their voices, the voice of an unseen being was heard, and wailing and lamentation echoed from the mountain top. So the

malicious demons departed with mourning, and the prayer of the brethren arose as they sent up their supplications to God.

Gregory the Great tells the following tale in his *Dialogues* to illustrate the manner in which the devil was wont to harass those who sought to avoid worldly temptations by seeking solitude:

37. Martin, a hermit, resists the terrors of the devil. (From Gregory's *Dialogues*.)

In Campania, upon Mt. Marsicus, a venerable man called Martin lived for many years the solitary life, shut up in a very small cave. Many of us knew him, and were witnesses of his deeds. I myself have heard much of him both from Pope Pelagius, my predecessor, and from other religious men who related anecdotes of him. His first miracle was this: hardly had he established himself in the cleft of the mountain, when from the very rock which was hollowed out to make his narrow cave burst forth a stream of water just sufficient to supply the daily need of the servant of God, and there was never too much or too little. . . .

But the ancient enemy of mankind envied the man's strength, and labored with his wonted skill to drive him forth from the cave. For he entered into the beast that is his friend—the serpent—and sought to make the monk afraid, and to drive him from his dwelling. He came at twilight, and stretched himself out before the holy man when he was praying, and lay down with him when he went to rest.

The holy man was entirely unafraid. He would hold to the serpent's mouth his hand or his foot, and say to him, "If thou hast leave to smite me, I do not say thee nay." After these things had taken place continually for three years, on a certain day the ancient enemy of mankind, vanquished by such great endurance, groaned; and the serpent let himself glide over the steep mountain side to a precipice. And the flame that went out from him burned all the trees in that place. Almighty God constrained him to burn the mountain side, and so compelled him to show forth the great virtue of the man from whom he had departed, conquered.

III. PURGATORY, HELL, AND HEAVEN

At this time [Bede writes] a memorable miracle, and like to those of former days, was wrought in Britain; for, to the end that the living might be saved from the death of the soul, a certain person, who had been some time dead, rose again to life, and related many remarkable things he had seen; some of which I have thought fit here briefly to take notice of.

There was a master of a family in that district of the Northumbrians which is called Cunningham, who led a religious life, as did also all that belonged to him. This man fell sick, and his distemper daily increasing, being brought to extremity, he died in the beginning of the night; but in the morning early he suddenly came to life again, and sat up, upon which all those that sat about the body weeping fled away in a great fright: only his wife, who loved him best, though in a great consternation and trembling, remained with him. He, comforting her, said, "Fear not, for I am now truly risen from death, and permitted again to live among men; however, I am not to live hereafter as I was wont, but from henceforward after a very different manner."

Then rising immediately, he repaired to the oratory of the little town and, continuing in prayer till day, immediately divided all his substance into three parts, one whereof he gave to his wife, another to his children, and the third, belonging to himself, he instantly distributed among the poor. Not long after he repaired to the monastery of Melrose, which is almost inclosed by the winding of the river Tweed, and having been shaven, went into a private dwelling which the abbot had provided, where he continued till the day of his death in such extraordinary contrition of mind and body that, though his tongue had been silent, his life declared that he had seen many things, either to be dreaded or coveted, which others knew nothing of.

Thus he related what he had seen. "He that led me had a shining countenance and a bright garment, and we went on silently, as I thought, towards the northeast. Walking on, we came to a vale of great breadth and depth, but of

38. Description of purgatory, hell, and heaven. (From Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England*.)

Vision of purgatory

infinite length; on the left it appeared full of dreadful flames; the other side was no less horrid for violent hail and cold snow flying in all directions; both places were full of men's souls, which seemed by turns to be tossed from one side to the other, as it were by a violent storm; for when the wretches could no longer endure the excess of heat, they leaped into the middle of the cutting cold; and finding no rest there, they leaped back again into the middle of the unquenchable flames.

"Now whereas an innumerable multitude of deformed spirits were thus alternately tormented far and near, as far as could be seen, without any intermission, I began to think that this perhaps might be hell, of whose intolerable flames I had often heard talk. My guide, who went before me, answered to my thought, saying, 'Do not believe so, for this is not hell, as you imagine.'

Vision of the
mouth of hell.

"When he had conducted me, much frightened with that horrid spectacle, by degrees, to the farther end, on a sudden I saw the place begin to grow dusk and filled with darkness. When I came into it, the darkness, by degrees, grew so thick that I could see nothing besides it and the shape and garment of him that led me. As we went on through the shades of night, on a sudden there appeared before us frequent globes of black flames, rising, as it were, out of a great pit, and falling back again into the same.

"When I had been conducted thither, my leader suddenly vanished, and left me alone in the midst of darkness and this horrid vision, whilst those same globes of fire, without intermission, at one time flew up and at another fell back into the bottom of the abyss; and I observed that all the flames, as they ascended, were full of human souls, which, like sparks flying up with smoke, were sometimes thrown on high, and again, when the vapor of the fire ceased, dropped down into the depth below. Moreover, an insufferable stench came forth with the vapors, and filled all those dark places.

"Having stood there a long time in much dread, not knowing what to do, which way to turn, or what end I might

expect, on a sudden I heard behind me the noise of a most hideous and wretched lamentation, and at the same time a loud laughing, as of a rude multitude insulting captured enemies. When that noise, growing plainer, came up to me, I observed a gang of evil spirits dragging the howling and lamenting souls of men into the midst of the darkness, whilst they themselves laughed and rejoiced.

"Among those men, as I could discern, there was one shorn like a clergyman, also a layman, and a woman. The evil spirits that dragged them went down into the midst of the burning pit; and as they went down deeper, I could no longer distinguish between the lamentation of the men and the laughing of the devils, yet I still had a confused sound in my ears.

"In the meantime some of the dark spirits ascended from that flaming abyss, and, running forward, beset me on all sides, and much perplexed me with their glaring eyes and the stifling fire which proceeded from their mouths and nostrils; and they threatened to lay hold on me with burning tongs, which they had in their hands; yet they durst not touch me, though they frightened me. Being thus on all sides inclosed with enemies and darkness, and looking about on every side for assistance, there appeared behind me, on the way that I came, as it were, the brightness of a star shining amidst the darkness, which increased by degrees, and came rapidly towards me: when it drew near, all those evil spirits that had sought to carry me away with their tongs dispersed and fled.

"He whose approach put them to flight was the same that had led me before; who, turning then towards the right, began to lead me, as it were, towards the southeast, and having soon brought me out of the darkness, conducted me into an atmosphere of clear light.

"While he thus led me in open light, I saw a vast wall before us, the length and height of which, in every direction, seemed to be altogether boundless. I began to wonder why we went up to the wall, seeing no door, window, or path through it. When we came to the wall, we were presently, I know not by what means, on the top of it, and within it was

a vast and beautiful field, so full of fragrant flowers that the odor of its delightful sweetness immediately dispelled the stench of the dark furnace, which had penetrated me through and through.

"So great was the light in this place that it seemed to exceed the brightness of the day, or of the sun in its meridian height. In this field were innumerable assemblies of men in white and many companies seated together rejoicing. As he led me through the midst of these happy people, I began to think that this might, perhaps, be the kingdom of heaven, of which I had often heard so much. He answered to my thought, saying, 'This is not the kingdom of heaven, as you imagine.'

Vision of
heaven.

"When we had passed those mansions of blessed souls and gone farther on, I discovered before me a much more beautiful light, and heard therein sweet voices of persons singing; and so wonderful a fragrancy proceeded from the place that the other, which I had before thought most delicious, then seemed to me but very indifferent, even as that extraordinary brightness of the flowery field, compared with this, appeared mean and inconsiderable. When I began to hope we should enter that delightful place, my guide on a sudden stood still; and then, turning round, led me back by the way we came.

"When we returned to those joyful mansions of the souls in white, he said to me, 'Do you know what all these things are which you have seen?' I answered that I did not; and then he replied, 'That vale you saw, so dreadful for its consuming flames and cutting cold, is the place in which the souls of those are tried and punished who, delaying to confess and amend their crimes, at length have recourse to repentance at the point of death, and so depart this life; but nevertheless because they, even at their death, confessed and repented, they shall all be received into the kingdom of heaven at the day of judgment by the prayers, alms, and fasting of the living, and more especially by masses.

"That fiery and stinking pit which you saw is the mouth of hell, into which whosoever falls shall never be delivered

to all eternity. This flowery place, in which you see these most beautiful young people, so bright and gay, is that into which the souls of those are received who depart the body in good works, but who are not so perfect as to deserve to be immediately admitted into the kingdom of heaven; yet they shall all, at the day of judgment, see Christ and partake of the joys of his kingdom; for whoever are perfect in thought, word, and deed, as soon as they depart the body immediately enter into the kingdom of heaven; in the neighborhood whereof that place is, where you heard the sound of sweet singing, with the fragrant odor and bright light.

"As for you, who are now to return to your body and live among men again, if you will endeavor nicely to watch your actions, and to direct your speech and behavior in righteousness and simplicity, you shall, after death, have a place of residence among these joyful troops of blessed souls; for when I left you for a while, it was to know how you were to be disposed of.' When he had said this to me I much abhorred returning to my body, being delighted with the sweetness and beauty of the place I beheld and with the company of those I saw in it. However, I durst not ask him any questions; but in the meantime, on a sudden, I found myself alive among men."

IV. THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND, AS DESCRIBED BY BEDE

In the year of our Lord 582, Maurice, the fifty-fourth emperor from Augustus, ascended the throne and reigned twenty-one years. In the tenth year of his reign, Gregory, a man renowned for learning and behavior, was promoted to the apostolic see of Rome, and presided over it thirteen years, six months, and ten days. He, being moved by divine inspiration, about the one hundred and fiftieth year after the coming of the English into Britain, sent the servant of God, Augustine, and with him several other monks who feared the Lord, to preach the word of God to the English nation. . . .

39. The arrival in Kent of the missionaries sent by Gregory the Great (597). (From Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of England*.)

[Augustine, with his companions, arrived in Britain.] The powerful Ethelbert was at that time king of Kent; he had extended his dominions as far as the great river Humber, by which the southern Saxons are divided from the northern. On the east of Kent is the large Isle of Thanet, containing, according to the English way of reckoning, six hundred families, and divided from the other land by the river Wantsum, which is about three furlongs across and fordable only in two places, for both ends of it run into the sea.

In this island landed the servant of our Lord, Augustine, and his companions, being, as is reported, nearly forty men. They had, by order of the blessed Pope Gregory, brought interpreters of the nation of the Franks, and sending to Ethelbert, signified that they were come from Rome, and brought a joyful message, which most undoubtedly assured to all that took advantage of it everlasting joys in heaven, and a kingdom that would never end with the living and true God.

King Ethelbert meets the Roman missionaries.

The king, having heard this, ordered them to stay in that island where they had landed and that they should be furnished with all necessaries till he should consider what to do with them. For he had heard of the Christian religion, having a Christian wife, of the royal family of the Franks, called Bertha, whom he had received from her parents upon condition that she should be permitted to practice her religion with the bishop, Luidhard, who was sent with her to preserve the faith.

Some days later the king came into the island and, sitting in the open air, ordered Augustine and his companions to be brought into his presence. For he had taken precaution that they should not come to him in any house, lest, according to an ancient superstition, if they practiced any magical arts they might impose upon him, and so get the better of him. But they came furnished with divine, not with magic, power, bearing a silver cross for their banner, and the image of our Lord and Saviour painted on a board; and singing the litany, they offered up their prayers to the Lord for the

eternal salvation both of themselves and of those to whom they came.

When Augustine had sat down, pursuant to the king's commands, and preached to him and his attendants there present the word of life, the king answered thus: "Your words and promises are very fair, but they are new to us and of uncertain import, and I cannot approve of them so far as to forsake that which I have so long followed with the whole English nation. But because you are come from far into my kingdom, and, as I conceive, are desirous to impart to us those things which you believe to be true and most beneficial, we will not molest you, but give you favorable entertainment and take care to supply you with the necessary sustenance; nor do we forbid you to preach and gain as many as you can to your religion."

Augustine founds a monastery at Canterbury.

Accordingly, he permitted them to reside in the city of Canterbury, which was the metropolis of all his dominions, and pursuant of his promise, besides allowing them sustenance, did not refuse them the liberty to preach. . . .

Augustine preaches to the king.

As soon as they entered the dwelling place assigned them, they began to imitate the course of life practiced in the primitive church: applying themselves to frequent prayer, watching, and fasting; preaching the word of life to as many as they could; despising all worldly things, as not belonging to them; receiving only their necessary food from those they taught; living themselves in all respects conformably to what they prescribed to others, and being always disposed to suffer any adversity, and even to die for that truth which they preached. In short, several believed and were baptized, admiring the simplicity of their innocent life and the sweetness of their heavenly doctrine.

There was on the east side of the city a church dedicated to St. Martin, built whilst the Romans were still in the island, wherein the queen, who, as has been said before, was a Christian, used to pray. In this they first began to meet, to sing, to pray, to say mass, to preach, and to baptize, till the king, being converted to the faith, allowed them to preach openly and to build or repair churches in all places.

When he among the rest, induced by the unspotted life of these holy men and their delightful promises, which, by many miracles, they proved to be most certain, believed and was baptized, greater numbers began daily to flock together to hear the word and, forsaking their heathen rites, to associate themselves, by believing, to the unity of the Church of Christ.

The great sagacity and practical good sense of Gregory the Great are exhibited in his instructions to the missionaries.

40. Pope Gregory's instructions to the missionaries in England (601).

When Almighty God shall bring you to the most reverend Bishop Augustine, our brother, tell him what I have, after mature deliberation on the affairs of the English, determined upon, namely, that the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed, but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples; let altars be erected, and relics placed. For if those temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God; that the nation, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts and, knowing and adoring the true God, may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed.

And because they have been used to slaughter many oxen in the sacrifices to devils, some solemnity must be substituted for them on this account, as, for instance, that on the day of the dedication, or of the nativities of the holy martyrs whose relics are there deposited, they may build themselves huts of the boughs of trees about those churches which have been turned to that use from temples, and celebrate the solemnity with religious feasting, no more offering beasts to the devil, but killing cattle to the praise of God in their eating, and returning thanks to the Giver of all things for their sustenance; to the end that, whilst some outward gratifications are permitted them, they may the more easily consent to the inward consolations of the grace of God.

For there is no doubt that it is impossible to efface everything at once from their obdurate minds, because he who endeavors to ascend to the highest place rises by degrees or steps and not by leaps. Thus the Lord made himself known to the people of Israel in Egypt; and yet he allowed them to use the sacrifices which they were wont to offer to the devil in his own worship, commanding them in his sacrifice to kill beasts to the end that, changing their hearts, they might lay aside one part of the sacrifice, whilst they retained another; that whilst they offered the same beasts which they were wont to offer, they should offer them to God, and not to idols, and thus they would no longer be the same sacrifices.

The heathen should be gently and gradually weaned from their old gods.

Bede relates the story of the conversion of Northumbria to the Roman Catholic form of faith, as follows:

[Edwin, king of Northumbria, urged by his Christian wife, Ethelberga, and by the bishop Paulinus,] answered that he was both willing and bound to receive the new faith which the bishop taught, but that he wished, nevertheless, to confer about it with his principal friends and counselors, to the end that, if they also were of his opinion, they might all be cleansed together in Christ, the Fountain of Life. Paulinus consenting, the king did as he had said; for, holding a council with the wise men, he asked of every one in particular what he thought of the new doctrine and the new worship that was preached.

41. Bede's account of the conversion of Northumbria.

To which the chief of his own priests, Coifi, immediately answered: "O king, consider what this is which is now preached to us; for I verily declare to you that the religion which we have hitherto professed has, as far as I can learn, no virtue in it. For none of your people has applied himself more diligently to the worship of our gods than I; and yet there are many who receive greater favors from you, and are more preferred than I, and who are more prosperous in all their undertakings. Now if the gods were good for anything, they would rather forward me, who have been more

careful to serve them. It follows, therefore, that if upon examination you find those new doctrines which are now preached to us better and more efficacious, we should immediately receive them without any delay."

Another of the king's chief men, approving of Coifi's words and exhortations, presently added: "The present life of man, O king, seems to me, in comparison with that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in winter amid your officers and ministers, with a good fire in the midst, whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door and immediately out at another, whilst he is within is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather he immediately vanishes out of your sight into the dark winter from which he has emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before or what is to follow we are utterly ignorant. If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed."

The other elders and king's counselors, by divine inspiration, spoke to the same effect. But Coifi added that he wished more attentively to hear Paulinus discourse concerning the God whom he preached. So the bishop having spoken by the king's command at greater length, Coifi, hearing his words, cried out: "I have long since been sensible that there was nothing in that which we worshiped, because the more diligently I sought after truth in that worship, the less I found it. But now I freely confess that such evident truth appears in this preaching as can confer on us the gifts of life, of salvation, and of eternal happiness. For which reason I advise, O king, that we instantly abjure and set fire to those temples and altars which we have consecrated without reaping any benefits from them."

In short, the king publicly gave his permission to Paulinus to preach the gospel, and, renouncing idolatry, declared that he received the faith of Christ: and when he inquired of the high priest who should first profane the altars and temples of their idols, with the inclosures that were about them, the

high priest answered, "I; for who can more properly than myself destroy those things which I worshiped through ignorance, for an example to all others, through the wisdom which has been given me by the true God?"

Then immediately, in contempt of his former superstitions, he desired the king to furnish him with arms and a stallion, and mounting the latter, he set out to destroy the idols; for it was not lawful before for the high priest either to carry arms or to ride on any beast but a mare. Having, therefore, girt on a sword and carrying a spear in his hand, he mounted the king's stallion and proceeded to the idols. The multitude, beholding him, concluded he was distracted; but he lost no time, for as soon as he drew near the temple he profaned the same, casting into it the spear which he held. And rejoicing in the knowledge of the worship of the true God, he commanded his companions to destroy the temple, with all its inclosures, by fire.

This place where the idols were is still shown, not far from York, to the eastward, beyond the river Derwent, and is now called Godmundingham; where the high priest, by the inspiration of the true God, profaned and destroyed the altars which he had himself consecrated.

The Roman monks, sent by Gregory the Great, found that the Christian missionaries from Ireland observed Easter at a different time from that appointed by the Roman church. After years of controversy it was agreed that a synod should be held where the difficulty might be settled. Bede thus describes the arguments advanced by both sides and the victory of the Roman party:

[Bishop Colman spoke for the Scots (i.e. Irish) and said:]
"The Easter which I keep I received from my elders, who sent me hither as bishop; all our forefathers, men beloved of God, are known to have kept it after the same manner; and that this may not seem to any contemptible or worthy to be rejected, it is the same which St. John the Evangelist, the

42. The controversy between the Roman and Irish missionaries in regard to the time of Easter.

disciple beloved of our Lord, with all the churches over which he presided, is recorded to have observed." . . .

Then Wilfrid was ordered by the king to speak for the Roman practice: "The Easter which we observe we saw celebrated by all at Rome, where the blessed apostles, Peter and Paul, lived, taught, suffered, and were buried; we saw the same done in Italy and in France, when we traveled through those countries for pilgrimage and prayer. We found that Easter was celebrated at one and the same time in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, and all the world, wherever the Church of Christ is spread abroad, through the various nations and tongues; except only among these and their accomplices in obstinacy, I mean the Picts and the Britons, who foolishly, in these two remote islands of the world, and only in part even of them, oppose all the rest of the universe. . . .

"You certainly sin if, having heard the decree of the apostolic see, and of the universal Church, and that the same is confirmed by Holy Writ, you refuse to follow them; for, though your fathers were holy, do you think that their small number, in a corner of the remotest island, is to be preferred before the universal Church of Christ throughout the world? And though that Columba¹ of yours (and, I may say, ours also, if he was Christ's servant) was a holy man and powerful in miracles, yet should he be preferred before the most blessed prince of the apostles, to whom our Lord said, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven?'"

When Wilfrid had spoken thus, the king said, "Is it true, Colman, that these words were spoken to Peter by our Lord?" He answered, "It is true, O king!" Then said he, "Can you show any such power given to your Columba?" Colman answered, "None." Then added the king, "Do both of you agree that these words were principally directed to Peter,

The king's decision in favor of the Roman Church.

¹ An Irish missionary (d. 597); not to be confused with St. Columban, who carried the gospel to the Franks.

and that the keys of heaven were given to him by our Lord?" They both answered, "We do." Then the king concluded, "And I also say unto you, that he is the doorkeeper, whom I will not contradict, but will, as far as I know and am able, in all things obey his decrees, lest when I come to the gates of the kingdom of heaven there should be none to open them, he being my adversary who is proved to have the keys." The king having said this, all present, both great and small, gave their assent and, renouncing the more imperfect institution, resolved to conform to that which they found to be better.

V. BONIFACE AND THE CONVERSION OF GERMANY

The following documents make clear the close relations between Boniface and the papacy.

Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to the devout priest Boniface:

Knowing that thou hast from childhood been devoted to sacred letters, and that thou hast labored to reveal to unbelieving people the mystery of faith, . . . we decree in the name of the indivisible Trinity, through the unshaken authority of Peter, chief of the apostles, whose doctrine it is our charge to teach, and whose holy see is in our keeping, that, since thou seemest to glow with the salvation-bringing fire which our Lord came to send upon the earth, thou shalt hasten to whatsoever tribes are lingering in the error of unbelief, and shalt institute the rites of the kingdom of God. . . . And we desire thee to establish the discipline of the sacraments, according to the observance of our holy apostolic see.

Gregory, pope, to our well-beloved bishops established in Bavaria and Alemannia:

. . . It is fitting that ye recognize our brother and fellow-bishop, Boniface, as our representative, and that ye receive him with due honor in the name of Christ. And ye shall maintain the ministry of the Church with the Catholic faith

43. Boniface commissioned by Pope Gregory II to preach the gospel to the heathen tribes (719) (condensed).

44. Gregory II appoints Boniface the presiding bishop in Germany (722).

according to the custom and precepts of the holy Catholic Apostolic Church; . . . And ye shall abhor the rites of the heathen, and the teaching of those coming from Britain and of false heretical priests. . . .

45. Oath taken by Boniface to the pope (722).

I, Boniface, bishop by the grace of God, promise to you, the blessed Peter, chief of the apostles, and to thy vicar, the blessed Pope Gregory, and to his successors, by the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, the indivisible Trinity, and by this thy most holy body, that, God helping me, I will maintain all the belief and the purity of the holy Catholic faith, and I will remain steadfast in the unity of this faith in which the whole salvation of Christians lies, as is established without doubt.

I will in no wise oppose the unity of the one universal Church, no matter who may seek to persuade me. But as I have said, I will maintain my faith and purity and union with thee and the benefits of thy Church, to whom God has given the power to loose and to bind, and with thy vicar and his successors, in all things. And if it comes to my knowledge that priests have turned from the ancient practices of the holy fathers, I will have no intercourse nor connection with them; but rather, if I can restrain them, I will. If I cannot, I will at once faithfully make known the whole matter to my apostolic lord.¹

46. How Boniface destroyed the oak of Thor. (From Willibald's *Life of Boniface*, written before 786.)

Many of the people of Hesse were converted [by Boniface] to the Catholic faith and confirmed by the grace of the spirit: and they received the laying on of hands. But some there were, not yet strong of soul, who refused to accept wholly the teachings of the true faith. Some men sacrificed secretly, some even openly, to trees and springs. Some secretly practiced divining, soothsaying, and incantations, and some openly. But others, who were of sounder mind, cast aside all heathen profanation and did none of these things; and it

¹ This oath follows almost word for word that taken to the pope by the bishops in the immediate vicinity of Rome, who were under his special control.

was with the advice and consent of these men that Boniface sought to fell a certain tree of great size, at Geismar, and called, in the ancient speech of the region, the oak of Jove [i.e. Thor].

The man of God was surrounded by the servants of God. When he would cut down the tree, behold a great throng of pagans who were there cursed him bitterly among themselves because he was the enemy of their gods. And when he had cut into the trunk a little way, a breeze sent by God stirred overhead, and suddenly the branching top of the tree was broken off, and the oak in all its huge bulk fell to the ground. And it was broken into four parts, as if by the divine will, so that the trunk was divided into four huge sections without any effort of the brethren who stood by. When the pagans who had cursed did see this, they left off cursing and, believing, blessed God. Then the most holy priest took counsel with the brethren: and he built from the wood of the tree an oratory, and dedicated it to the holy apostle Peter.

The following account of the founding of the famous monastery of Fulda was written by Sturmi's disciple Egil, who was abbot of Fulda during the years 818 to 822.

[The holy and venerable archbishop Boniface came to Bavaria, and turned many people to the gospel of Christ. Among them a certain boy, Sturmi, son of noble and Christian parents, followed the teaching of Boniface and was ordained priest.] For almost three years he fulfilled the duties of the priesthood, preaching and baptizing among the people. Then by the inspiration of God the purpose came into his soul to chasten himself by the straiter life and the hardships of the wilderness. He sought counsel thereupon from Boniface, — his master in the spirit, — who, when he understood Sturmi, knew that this purpose was inspired of God and rejoiced that God had designed to lead him by his grace. He gave Sturmi two companions, and when he had prayed and blessed them all he said: "Go forth into that solitude which is called Bochonia and seek a place meet for

47. How the monastery of Fulda was founded in the German forest. (From the *Life of St. Sturmi*.)

the servants of God to dwell in. For God is able to prepare for his servants a place in the wilderness."

And so those three went forth into the wilderness and entered into places solitary and rough, and saw almost nothing but heaven and earth and great trees; and they prayed Christ fervently that he would direct their feet in the path of peace. On the third day they came to the place which even to this day is called Hersfeld; and when they had seen and explored the region round about, they asked Christ that the place might be blest to the dwellers therein. On the very spot where the monastery now stands they built poor huts of the bark of trees. There they tarried many days, serving God with holy fasts and watching and prayer. . . .

Then after some time spent in holy meditation Sturmi returned to the bishop, and described the lay of the land and the course of the streams, and the hills and valleys. . . . Boniface heard him attentively, and answered: "I fear to have you dwell in this place which ye have found because a barbarous race lives close by, for, as thou knowest, the fell Saxons are near at hand. Wherefore seek a dwelling in the wilderness farther away and higher up the stream, where ye may remain without danger."

[Somewhat condensed.]

Then the holy man Sturmi returned to his companions. With two brethren he entered a boat and traveled along the river Fulda, spying out the land, but they found no place which pleased them. So Sturmi went again to Boniface and said, "For many days did we sail along the river Fulda, but we found nothing that we would dare to praise to you." And the holy bishop saw that God had not yet revealed the place which he had chosen.

Sturmi starts forth alone to discover a proper site for the monastery.

Sturmi returned to the cell which had now been built in a place above Hersfeld. Here he saluted the brethren and reported to them what the holy bishop had counseled. Then after resting a little he mounted his ass and set forth alone, commending his journey to Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. All alone, sitting upon his ass, he began his journey through the vast places of the wilderness. He eagerly explored the region and observed with quick eye the

mountains and the hills and the plains, the springs and torrents and rivers. With psalms always upon his lips, he prayed to God with groaning, his soul lifted up to heaven. And wherever night found him, there he rested; and he hewed wood with the sword which he bore in his hand, and laid it in a circle, and set it on fire to protect his ass, lest the wild beasts which were there in great numbers might devour him. For himself, he made on his forehead the sign of the cross of Christ, in the name of God, and rested in safety. . . .

Once as he had paused at sunset, and was busied with preparing for the night, he heard a sound as of a living creature, but whether it was man or beast he knew not. . . . Then because the man of God did not wish to cry out, he struck a hollow tree with the sword he bore in his hand. And verily when the man had heard the sound of the blow he came thither, and spoke to Sturmi. And when the man of God asked him whence he came, he answered that he came from Wetteran and led in his hand the horse of Ortis, his lord. So they talked together and stayed there together that night. Now the man had a full acquaintance with the solitudes of the forest, and when the man of God made known to him what was in his mind and what he would fain do, he began to tell him the names of the places, and to show him how the torrents and springs did flow. . . . At sunrise they blessed each the other, and straightway the secular man went upon his way to Grapfelt. . . .

[And Sturmi also went on his way till he reached the torrent that even to this day is called Grezzibach.] He saw how the land lay, and what was the nature of the soil, and he tarried there a little space. And then he went back a little way and came to the place already made ready and blessed by God, even the place where the holy monastery [of Fulda] now stands. When he had come thither straightway the holy man Sturmi was filled with exceeding great joy, for he knew that through the merits and prayers of the holy bishop Boniface the place had been revealed to him by God.

Then on the second day the man of God came again to Hersfeld and found his brethren there calling upon God with