

I.

NOTES ON THE MS. *LITURG. f. 5.* ("QUEEN MARGARET'S GOSPEL-BOOK") IN THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY. BY THE RIGHT REVEREND JOHN DOWDEN, D.D., F.S.A. SCOT., BISHOP OF EDINBURGH.

In the *Life of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland*, commonly, and probably rightly, attributed to Turgot, Prior of Durham, and afterwards Bishop of St Andrews, we find a passage in which the writer, after expressing the view that in the history of Queen Margaret we should marvel rather at her deeds of justice, piety, mercy, and love, than look for miraculous signs and wonders, adds that yet one incident he would relate as "a sign of her religious life" (*religiosæ vitæ illius indicium*). The story is to this effect. "She had had a book of the Gospels, richly adorned with gems and gold, in which the figures of the four Evangelists were decorated with colours and gold. Moreover, the whole of each capital letter shone with the ruddy glow of gold (*auro rutilabat*). This book she had always cherished with even a greater affection than she felt for the others which she was wont to read and study. A certain man who was carrying the book, which had been wrapped up with insufficient care in pieces of cloth (*pannis*), happened to be crossing a ford, and the book fell into the middle of the water. Unconscious of what had occurred the bearer went on his journey unconcerned; and not till afterwards, when he wished to produce the book, did he find out that he had lost it. It was long sought, but it was not found. At last it is discovered in the depth of the river, lying open, so that its leaves were moved without ceasing to and fro by the strength of the current, and the little bits of silk (or serge), *panniculi de serico* (which had protected the gold letters from being dulled by the contact of the leaves), were carried off by the force of the river. Who would fancy," continues the writer, "that the book could afterwards be of any value? Who would believe that even a single letter in it would have been visible? Yet, as a fact (*certe*), it is taken up out of the middle of the river perfect, unharmed, uninjured, so that it did not seem to have been even touched by the water. For the whiteness of the leaves

and the form of the letters throughout remained just as they had been before it had fallen into the river, except that some sign of damp could just be seen in part of the end leaves (*in extremis foliis in parte*). The book is taken to the Queen, and the miracle is at the same time related to her. And she, when she had given thanks to Christ, cherished the volume as much more precious than before. Wherefore let others see in this whatever they may suppose; I do not doubt that the sign was wrought by the Lord out of his love for the venerable Queen."¹

It is scarcely open to reasonable doubt that the very volume of which this story is told has been lately brought to light, and is now among the treasures of the Bodleian Library.

Seven years ago a little volume of manuscript, written on vellum, and adorned with miniatures, occupied a place in the parish library of the village of Brent Ely in Suffolk. How it came there has as yet baffled inquiry. It may have been the gift of the "Fane Edge," whose name appears on one of the blank leaves. The name "William Howard,"

¹ The text is here printed for convenience of comparison with the Latin verses.

Habuerat librum Euangeliorum, gemmis & auro perornatum, in quo quatuor Euangelistarum imagines pictura auro admixta decorabat; sed et capitalis quaeque littera auro tota rutilabat. Hunc codicem, prae ceteris, in quibus legendo studere consueverat, carius semper amplexata fuerat. Quem quidam deferens, dum forte per vadum transiret; liber, qui minus caute pannis fuerat obvolutus, in medias aquas cecidit; quod ignorans portitor, iter quod inceperat securus peregit: cum vero postea librum proferre vellet, tum primum quod perdiderat agnovit. Quaerebatur diu nec inveniebatur. Tandem in profundo fluminis apertus jacere reperitur, ita ut illius folia impetu aquae sine cessatione agitentur, & panniculi de serico violentiâ fluminis abstraherentur, qui litteras aureas, ne foliorum contactu obfuscarentur, contexerant. Quis ulterius librum valere putaret? Quis in eo vel unam litteram parêre crederet? Certe integer, incorruptus, illaesus, de medio fluminis extrahitur, ita ut minime ab aqua tactus videretur. Candor enim foliorum, & integra in omnibus formula litterarum ita permansit, sicut erat antequam in fluvium cecidisset; nisi quod in extremis foliis, in parte, vix aliquod humoris signum videri poterat. Liber simul & miraculum ad Reginam refertur: quae, reddita Christo gratiarum actione, multo carius quam ante codicem amplectitur. Quare alii videant, quid inde sentiant; ego propter Reginae venerabilis dilectionem hoc signum a Domino non ambigo.—*Vita S. Margaretæ Reginæ Scotiae*, c. 3 § 25. AA. SS. Jun. tom. ii. p. 333 (Antv. 1698). Also in Pinkerton, *Vitæ Sanctorum Scotiae* (p. 348), and in vol. 51 of the *Surtees Society (Symonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, vol. i. p. 250.)

which also appears inscribed, is declared by Mr F. Madan to be "undoubtedly in the handwriting of Lord William Howard of Naworth, who died in 1640." This nobleman, the friend of Camden, Selden, and Cotton, we know to have been a collector of MSS., but beyond this the history of the book cannot now be traced. Lord W. Howard's collection of MSS. we know was dispersed, as MSS. with his autograph are to be found in several libraries.¹ The Library at Brent Ely appears to have been founded by a Dr Colman, Fellow of Trinity, Cambridge, who placed (according to Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary*, 1831, s.v. *Brent Eleigh*) "a collection of useful books for a parochial library" in "an apartment," which he had built "at the end of the chancel" of Brent Ely church. Perhaps it was thought that other books more suitable to the needs of the Suffolk villagers could be procured for the price which the old manuscript might fetch at a sale in London. At any rate, on 26th July 1887 it was offered for sale at Sotheby's (being described in the auction catalogue as the four Gospels, a manuscript on vellum, of the fourteenth century, "with intitulation in letters of gold and 4 figures of the Evangelists, illuminated in gold and colours"), and was purchased by the authorities of the Bodleian Library for the sum of £6. After its acquisition, on being examined by competent experts, it was seen to be the work—not of the fourteenth—but probably of the early part of the eleventh century. It further appeared that the pictures of the Evangelists and other ornaments were particularly fine specimens of decorative work, and that the details pointed to an English origin. If no other interests belonged to the volume than those attaching to a beautiful specimen of the work of English scribes and illuminators, dating from before the time of Edward the Confessor, the Bodleian had made an uncommonly good bargain. But a further discovery was made. On leaf 2, and before the commencement of the text, *i.e.* of the extracts from the Gospels, a Latin poem, consisting of twenty-six hexameter lines, was found written in what is regarded as the handwriting of about the close of the eleventh century, and the story therein related, when compared throughout with the narrative in Turgot's *Life of St Margaret*, at once raised a presumption, which must be regarded, I think, as rising to the

¹This Lord William Howard is the "belted Will" of *The Lay of the last Minstrel*.

level of moral certainty, that the Bodleian had become possessor not only of a valuable specimen of early English workmanship, but of the veritable volume which had been held by Queen Margaret as the most precious of her books. Mr Falconer Madan, of the Bodleian, made known the discovery in a letter which appeared in the *Academy* of 6th August 1887. He there describes the book with much care, and prints the text of the verses referred to. Mr Madan was followed in the same journal (25th August) by Professor Westwood, who discussed the subject with his usual thoroughness from the side of the critic of Palæography and Decorative Art. And in subsequent communication to the *Academy* (3rd September) Rev. F. E. Warren deals with the work in its liturgical aspect. Little remains to be said after the very thorough treatment of the subject by such competent authorities. But a brief description of the book, and of the nature of its contents, may not be uninteresting to the members of this Society. My own rather hasty inspection of the volume is supplemented, where I do not follow the authorities just named, by careful notes sent to me by the Rev. H. A. Wilson, Fellow and Librarian of Magdalen College, Oxford.

The volume is small, consisting of only thirty-eight leaves of vellum, the size of the pages being $7\frac{1}{16}$ by $4\frac{5}{16}$ inches. "The text of the MS. is written in a beautiful minuscule hand" (Prof. Westwood). A full page figure of each of the four Evangelists, in the usual order, is given on the verso of the leaves 3, 13, 21, and 30. "The Evangelists," says Prof. Westwood, "are drawn with much spirit. They are engaged in writing or holding their individual Gospels, and are seated on stools and cushions (*more Byzantino*). Each has a plain circular gold nimbus. Their Gospels are either book-shaped or in the form of a long scroll or roll; their feet rest on footstools, most inconveniently placed in slanting positions; and their dresses, each consisting of an inner robe (visible on the breast and over the feet) and body-covering of various colours, each being strongly relieved with dark shades of the local tints, and with the sides of the garments much angulated, the edge of each being relieved by bright lines of white, or of the local tints, agreeing in this respect entirely with the treatment of the dresses in such of the Canute-period MSS. as have come down to us."

Other details may be found in the communication of Professor Westwood to the *Academy* (vol. xxxii. p. 120). But I would here call attention to Professor Westwood's observing the peculiar red tint of the gold which is liberally applied to the ornamentation of this MS., and which is found in MSS. which are of the Canute-period. This gold of redder tint, he assures us, is entirely unlike the burnished gold of the illuminations of the twelfth century. Now, surely it is extremely interesting to notice the language of St Margaret's biographer in speaking of the application of gold to the capital letters—each letter “shone ruddy with gold” (*capitalis quaeque littera auro tota rutilabat*). Here was something that struck the writer of the *Life* in the beginning of the twelfth century. It was not what he had been familiar with.

The book has been erroneously described in Mr Madan's communication as “a Latin copy of all three portions of the four Gospels which were used in the Mass.” It may be more correctly described as selections from the four Evangelists, arranged according to the recognised order, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and generally corresponding to certain “Gospels” of the Mass, with the addition of some verses from the beginning of the canonical Gospels even when they may not (*e.g.*, in the case of Luke i. 1-4) have made part of a *liturgical* Gospel. The sections are twenty-seven in number. After the full page miniature of each Evangelist are the words “Incipit Evangelium secundum Mattheum,” “Marcum,” &c., as the case may be. Then follow, as has been said, some verses from the beginning of the Gospel. The subsequent sections are headed with the words “secundum Mattheum,” “Marcum,” &c. There is no indication of the days on which the passages were used in the service of the Church, but these headings and the frequent initial liturgical formula “In illo tempore” at the beginning of the passages shows that the choice was not independent of liturgical use. The long passages (S. Matthew xxvi. 1-xxvii. 66; S. Mark xiv. 1-vx. 46; S. Luke xxii. 1-xxiii. 53; S. John xviii.-xix.), known technically as the “Passions,” have each a fuller heading, as “Passio Dni nri Ihu Xpi secundum Mattheum,” “Marcum,” &c.

For the purpose I have here chiefly in view, an indication of the Gospels for the particular days to which the sections correspond need

not occupy us, more particularly as the book, written in the early part of the eleventh century, cannot be taken as in any way illustrating any special devotions of St Margaret. What seems a forgetfulness of the date of the MS. may have led Mr F. E. Warren to spend time fruitlessly in searching for reasons connected with St Margaret for what he takes to be the prominence given to S. John Baptist.¹ The contents and character of the book have been sufficiently described.

We may now turn to the Latin verses which some one inscribed on a blank leaf at the beginning of the book. They run as follows :—

“Christe tibi semper grates persoluimus omnes,
 Tempore qui nostro nobis miracula pandis.
 Hunc librum quidam inter se iurare uolentes
 Sumpserunt nudum sine tegmine nonque ligatum.
 Presbyter accipiens ponit sinuamine uestis :
 Flumine transmisso codex est mersus in amnem :
 Portitor ignorat librum penetrasse profundum,
 Sed miles quidam cernens post multa momenta
 Tollere iam uoluit librum de flumine mersum,
 Sed titubat subito librum dum uidit apertum,
 Credens quod codex ex toto perditus esset.
 At tamen inmittens undis corpus cum uertice summo²
 Hoc euangelium profert de gurgite apertum.
 O uirtus clara cunctis, O gloria magna !
 Inuiolatus enim codex permansit ubique,
 Exceptis foliis binis que cernis utrinque,
 In quibus ex undis paret contractio quedam,
 Que testantur opus Christi pro codice sancto.
 Hoc opus ut nobis maius mirabile constet
 De medio libri pannum lini abstulit unda.
 Saluati semper sint Rex Reginaque sancta,
 Quorum codex erat nuper saluatus ab undis.
 Gloria magna Deo, librum qui saluat eundem.”

Here, then, we have alleged of the volume with which we are dealing an account quite akin to that related by Turgot, with different, but not discrepant, or at least not seriously discrepant, details. The book

¹ Mr Wilson suggests that the verses of S. Luke (i. 1-4) have been given only as being the opening verses of S. Luke.

² This line is hypermetrical.

was the property of a king and queen, whose names are not given, while the epithet "holy" is applied to the queen alone. The event recorded is said to have lately occurred; there was obviously no need to *name* the king and queen. All falls in with the supposition that Malcolm Canmore and Margaret are the king and queen referred to. I am inclined to think that the verses may have been written before the year 1093, the year of the death of Malcolm and Margaret. Allowing for the requirements of metre, "Salvati semper sint Rex Reginaque" are quite sufficiently near the idea of "Domine, salvum fac regem," while such a form of expression would be highly exceptional as applied to the departed.¹ If this supposition be correct, the verses give us the earliest account of the incident referred to, for Turgot's *Life of Queen Margaret* was written after the marriage of Edith with Henry I. of England, an event that took place in A.D. 1100. But the matter is of little importance: the verses were at any rate written shortly after the event recorded.

The poem gives us some further particulars about the incident of the strange preservation of the book. It was with the view of oaths being taken upon it that the book was being conveyed when the accident occurred. It was carried by a priest in a fold of his robe. It was "bare, without cover, and not fastened," which expression suggests that the gold and precious stones referred to by Turgot were decorations of a *case* in which the book was preserved. A glance at the little volume in the Bodleian will show how easily its loss might have escaped the notice of the bearer. It is a soldier (*quere* "knight," *miles*) who discovers the book in the stream, and perceives it to be open. He hesitates for a little, believing that the book must be entirely destroyed, but afterwards throws himself into the water and fetches it out.

It is perhaps worth noticing that the discovery of the book in the

¹ Mr Madan (*Academy*, Aug. 6, 1887) argues against the lines being written during the lifetime of Margaret, from the use of the word *sancta* applied to her, "to whom the author of her life never ventures to apply the term, so far as I [*i.e.*, Mr Madan] have noticed." The epithet is applied to Margaret in the section of the *Life* immediately preceding that which recounts the miracle. Neither in the prose or verse need the word be taken in the technical sense of saint.

river is described by the verse-writer as taking place *post multa momenta*. One cannot, indeed, lay much stress on the language of poetry, but this expression conveys a somewhat different impression as to the length of time the book was immersed, from the prose account of Turgot. In an abbreviated version of a Life of Queen Margaret, attributed to a certain Adeldredus [Ailred, third Abbot of Rievaulx¹], which is to be found in the *De probatis Sanctorum historiis* of Surius (tom. iii. p. 580), the book was "for a day and a night" in the water. It looks as though the story had begun to grow. The story in verse in the line "Exceptis foliis binis que cernis utrinque" is free from the ambiguity which made possible Mr Forbes-Leith's translation² of Turgot's words "in extremis foliis" by "on the margin of the leaves," while, no doubt, the writer meant "on the end leaves." And the "utrinque" may probably be taken as referring to the beginning and the end of the book.

As a matter of fact, there are signs of certain leaves having been subjected to the action of water. The crinkling (*contractio*) of the vellum at the end is quite apparent. On folio 3 the colours of the illumination of St Matthew on the *verso* seem to have soaked through, and are seen more or less distinctly on the *recto*; but, to use the language of a very careful observer, Mr H. A. Wilson, writing to me on the subject, "the colour of this illumination is hardly, if at all, less bright than that of the other three, and it has not run, or become smudged."

Both the prose narrative and the verses relate that the force of the water carried off a piece (or pieces) of cloth which had been inserted in the volume to prevent (as we learn from the prose account) the golden letters being dulled by the contact of the leaves.

The verses say

"De medio libri *pannum lini* abtulit unda,"

while the prose account reads "*panniculi de serico* violentia fluminis abstraherentur." If there be a discrepancy as to the *material* of the

¹ *The Chronicle of Melrose* gives 1167 as the date of Ailred's death.

² *The Life of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland*, by Turgot, Bishop of St Andrews; translated by W. Forbes-Leith, S.J. Second edition (1889), p. 67.

cloth, it is, as occurring in a trivial detail, unimportant. But a reference to Ducange shows that in mediæval Latin "sericum" and "sericalis" were used not only of silk, but of other textile fabrics; of which fact our own English word "serge" is a constant reminder. Indeed Ducange regards the word "siricus" (sometimes used for "sericum") as being, in one passage cited (*Lex Alaman*, tit. 59, § 7), equivalent to linen stuff, "lineum tomentum," which in French is called *charpie* (lint). So perhaps in the case before us we have no real discrepancy.

The verse account, however—which, as I suppose, is the earlier account—speaks of only one piece of cloth being removed from the book by the action of the water. This is perhaps worth notice. It partakes somewhat less of the marvellous than the subsequent prose story. This piece may have been the piece inserted between the portrait of St Matthew and the opening words of his Gospel. It is the portrait of St Matthew that shows signs of the colour having soaked through, according to Mr Wilson.

It is no part of our province to discuss the credibility of the story related in the verses, or, if the story be credible, the supernatural character of the preservation of the manuscript. English manuscripts of the Canute-period are too precious and too rare to allow librarians to experiment on the permanence of the pigments used. I would only observe that the assumed miraculous preservation of books supposed to possess a special sanctity, is one of the common-places of hagiological literature. For example, in Adamnan's *Vita S. Columbae* (lib. ii. c. 8), we read how a volume written by the saint, after being for twenty days in the river Boyne, was found dry and wholly uninjured. Again, a book of hymns in the saint's handwriting, after lying in a river from Christmas to Whitsuntide, was in a like manner uninjured. And in an ancient Irish life of St Columba contained in the *Leabhar Breac* we read, "whatever book his hand would write, how long soever it would be under water, not even one letter of it would be obliterated." Again, Simeon of Durham (*Hist. Eccl. Dunelm*, lib. ii. c. 12) relates, with reference to the Lindisfarne Gospels, that on an occasion of the monks attempting to cross to Ireland in the ninth century, the precious volume fell into the sea, but after three days it was discovered on the

coast of Whithorn, with only a few stains of water, which it still exhibits. Here, in the last case, we have the same feature as in the St Margaret story. There were some signs of water, but no material injury. Miss Stokes, in her *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (p. 20), writes, "In the *Annals of Clonmacnois*, the translator, Connell Macgeoghegan, has alluded to the belief in Ireland respecting the peculiar property of St Columba's MSS. in resisting the influence of moisture, in which he refers to the Book of Durrow. 'He [*i.e.* Columba] wrote 300 books with his own hand. They were all New Testaments; he left a book to each of his churches in the kingdom, which books have a strange property, which is, that if they, or any of them, had sunk to the bottom of the deepest waters, they would not lose one letter, or sign, or character of them, which I have seen tried, partly by myself, on that book which is at Dorowe, in the King's Co., for I saw the ignorant man that had the same in his custodie, when sickness came on cattle, for their remedy put water on the book and suffer it to rest therein; and saw also cattle return thereby to their former state, and the book receive no loss.'"¹

¹ Since this paper was read, a Fellow of this Society, the Rev. Hugh J. Lawlor, has been so good as to point my attention to a story of St Moling of Ferns (whose death has been placed at A.D. 697), which may be added to the three related above. The saint one time was sitting by the banks of the river, reading "the canonical Epistles," when some strangers on the other side hailed him to ferry them over to the monastery. He left the book where he had been sitting, to comply with their wish, and while he was so engaged the tide rose and washed the book out to sea. However, at the demand of the saint, the tide brought the book back to the same spot, wholly unharmed (*ab omni corruptione intactum*).—Bollandists, AA. SS. Junii, tom. iii. p. 409.