

IV.

NOTE ON TWO LATE NOTICES (1560 AND 1563) RELATING TO THE CULTUS OF ST NINIAN IN ENGLAND. BY THE RIGHT REVEREND JOHN DOWDEN, D.D., F.S.A. SCOT., BISHOP OF EDINBURGH.

In the year 1560 was published a Commentary on the Prophet Haggai by James Pilkington, who in the following year (March 2) was consecrated Bishop of Durham, in succession to Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall, deprived. This work was republished in 1562, together with an Exposition of the Prophet Obadiah,¹ and has again been printed (1842) in the Parker Society's edition of the *Works of James Pilkington, B.D.* (under the editorship of Professor Scholefield, of Cambridge), to which the references are here made. Pilkington was a vigorous controversialist on the side of the Reformation; and in his Exposition of the Prophet Haggai, he attempts to reply to the charge of "diversity" among "the gospellers" by a *tu quoque* charge against his opponents. "Some pray to one saint as more in God's favour, some to other. Some use Trinity Knots, and other St Katherine's. Some have St Tronion's Fast, other our Lady's, and many the Golden Fridays" (p. 80).

A later work by Bishop Pilkington, published in 1563, and entitled *The burnynge of Paules Church in London, in the yeare of our Lord 1561, and the iiii. day of June by Lyghtnyng, &c.*, contains a passage following the same line of comment:—"Fastings were more than I know; some used St Rinian's, some our Lady's, some the Golden Fridays, some every Wednesday, some half Lent, some whole," &c. (p. 551).

It will be observed that the "St Tronion" of the earlier work is "St Rinian" in the later. The various forms of the name of St Rinian, as exhibited by Bishop A. P. Forbes in his edition of the *Life by Ailred (Historians of Scotland, vol. v. pp. xxv, xxvi, 304)*, will probably leave no doubt that it is St Ninian who is referred to under the names used by Pilkington. That Pilkington was referring to *English* devotional practices, the context leaves little doubt.

¹ *Aggeus and Abdias Prophetes, the one corrected, the other newly added, and both at large declared. . . . Imprinted at London by William Seres, 1562.*

Pilkington does not appear to have had any connection with Durham before his elevation to the See, and the date of the publication of the earlier of the two works referred to as preceding that event supplies no suggestion for associating the practice of "St Rinian's fast" with the N.E. of England. But an inquiry into the writer's earlier history may perhaps supply the clue. He was himself born in Lancashire, and was of an old Lancashire family; and in 1550 he had been appointed to the vicarage of Kendal, in Westmoreland. Possibly it was the observance of a fast of St Rinian by some in that neighbourhood, or in Lancashire, that supplied him with the basis upon which he founded his remark. And that the veneration of St Ninian was known in that quarter in the 16th century we have proof from the Chetham Society's *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills*. The extract is given by Forbes (*Historians of Scotland*, v. p. 304):—"Also I will that one be hyryt to go for me . . . Seynt Truyons in Scotlande, and offer [for] me a bende placke whyche ys in my purs." This will is dated in the year 1540, the notice in Pilkington being twenty years later.

The easy access by sea from the Lancashire and north-western coast of England to the shrine at Whithorn would not unnaturally have stimulated the cultus of St Ninian in those parts.

The mention of "our Lady's fast" in connection with "St Ninian's fast" would naturally lead one to conjecture that the latter was, like the former, a special voluntary, or, as it is technically called, *votive* fast, undertaken as a penance, or as an act of special devotion to the saint.

There is a passage cited by the Bollandists (*Acta Sanctorum*, Septemb., tom. v. p. 326) from a manuscript work of a certain Patrick Ninian Wemyss, *De indubitatis Scotiae sanctis*, which may throw some light on the character of this fast. This writer, I am enabled to state (on the authority of the Reverend Father Smedt, S.J., President of the Society of Bollandists, who has with much courtesy replied to my inquiries), is without doubt to be identified with "Patrick Weems," a Scotch Father of the Society of Jesus, employed in the Province of Bohemia in the early part of the last century.¹

¹ See *Records, English Province of the Society of Jesus*, by Henry Foley, S.J. (vol. vii., part second, p. 824, London, 1883). "Weems, Patrick, Father (Scotch), born

Wemyss declares that the solemn fast of St Ninian was well known, and a matter of common discourse (*in ore omnium versatur*); and then he goes on to state that the saint was accustomed to abstain from all food and drink from Thursday in Holy Week till he had celebrated the Easter mass on the following Sunday. It is natural to suppose that "St Ninian's fast," observed by devotees, was a similarly rigorous fast during Good Friday and Easter eve, and Easter morning till mass had been said.¹

It may be observed that in Ailred's *Vita S. Niniani* no mention is made of any special fast observed by the saint. The only notice I have observed in this work that has any possible relation to the subject before us is the modest statement that he was *in cibo sobrius* (cap. i.). The *Office* of the saint in the *Aberdeen Breviary* is similarly silent. But to whatever source the story of St Ninian's own special fast in Holy Week may be traced, the character of the fast observed by those who sought to pay to St Ninian special devotion is sufficiently described in the old Scottish poem on St Ninian, which forms part of the MS. Gg. ii. 6 in the Cambridge University Library, and the text of which was published for the first time in 1882 by Horstmann under the title *Barbour's des Schottischen Nationaldichters Legendensammlung* (Heilbronn). There we learn that the fast, at least in the time of the writer of the poem (that is, the time of King David II.),² consisted of a fast from noon on a Friday till after mass on the following Sunday, and that

June 29, 1671; entered the Society Jan. 15, 1698. In 1709 he was employed in the province of Bohemia (Oliver, from *Stonyhurst* Scotch MSS.). He is mentioned in a Scotch catalogue for 1729 as being then at Prague."

¹ Patricius Ninianus Wemyss, in manuscriptis de indubitatis Scotie Sanctis, suas de S. Niniano observationes ita claudit; Solemne sancti Præsulis jejunium in ore omnium versatur: solebat enim Vir sanctissimus quotannis a Feria quinta Majoris Hebdomadae ab omni cibo potuque abstinere, dum sacrosanctae die Paschalis Dominicae Resurrectionis mysteria perageret, miraculorum gloria cum S. Dutacho in regno Scotiae longe celeberrimus.

² Of Sanct Niniane zet I zu tell

A ferly in my tyme befel.

line 815.

þis wes done but lessinge

Quhene Sir Davi Bruys ves kinge.

line 941.

—HORSTMANN (*Zweiter Band*, pp. 131-133).

this fast was kept three times in each quarter of the year,—twice, as it would seem, in successive weeks, and once at any time within the quarter, as chosen by the devotee.

It will be observed that, in the 14th century at least, we do not find, so far as evidence is supplied by this poem, that Good Friday and Easter eve were specially selected among the Fridays and Saturdays that were “fasted.”¹

I have only to add that the initial “T” in the form “Tronion,” used in one of the passages of Pilkington, may perhaps be accounted for by the vocal adhesion or *liaison* of the last consonant of the word “saint” with the initial “R”. Examples of forms of the word with the “T” have been cited by Bishop Forbes. But Professor Scholefield, the editor of *Pilkington*, was evidently unacquainted with them, and supposes “Tronion” to be merely a clerical or compositor’s error (*Pilkington’s Works*, p. 551, note 2), nor does he offer any explanation that would help to identify the saint referred to.

¹ After referring to the great crowds that visited St Ninian’s shrine at Whithorn the writer proceeds—

“And þar-of suld nane ferly
 For þe merwalis done Ithandly [*i.e.* constantly]
 þat he kithis one sare and seke,
 þat deuotely vil hyme seke,
 Or fastis with deuocione
 His fastinge, bat nov is commone,
 þat is fryday fra þe novne
 Til sonday at þe mes be done ;
 & how mene fastis it, gif þ^u vil spere :
 Thyse ilke rath [*i.e.*, quarter] of þe zere ;
 Twise to-giddire, þe thrid be skil
 In þat quartare quhene þu wil.”

—HORSTMANN (*Zw. B.*, p. 130, lines 763-774).