

## Excerpts from Butler's *Lives of The Saints*

### **ST BEGA, OR BEE, VIRGIN (SEVENTH CENTURY)**

SHE is the heroine of a legend which makes her the daughter of an Irish king, sought in marriage by a son of the king of Norway. She had however, vowed herself a virgin to Christ, and had been given by an angel a bracelet marked with a cross as a token of her heavenly betrothal. The day before she was to be given to the prince, while her suitor and her father were revelling in the hall, she escaped with the help of this bracelet and, seated on a clod of earth, was navigated across the sea and landed safely on the coast of Cumberland. For a time she lived as an anchoress, and the sea-gulls, guillemots and gannets brought food for her sustenance; but human marauders were less kind, and she was advised by the king of Northumbria, St Oswald, to become a nun. She therefore received the veil from St Aidan and established a monastery at St Bees (Copeland) which afterwards became a cell of the Benedictine abbey of St Mary at York.

Whatever background of truth there may be in the legend of St Bega, she was venerated in Northumbria. The promontory on which she lived is named St Bee's Head after her, and she was the patroness of the people of the neighbourhood, ground down between the exactions of their lords and the raids of the border Scots. They claimed even to possess her miraculous bracelet, and treasured equally the stories of how St Bega in her earthly life had been devoted to the poor and oppressed and had cooked, washed and mended for the workmen who built her monastery.

### **ST CLODOALD, OR CLOUD, (C. A.D. 560)**

ON the death of Clovis, King of the Franks, in the year 511 his kingdom was divided between his four sons, of whom the second was Clodomir, Thirteen years later he was killed fighting against his cousin, Gondomar, King of Burgundy (he had first murdered St Sigismund of Burgundy, whom the Roman Martyrology calls a martyr), leaving three sons to share his dominions. The youngest of these sons of Clodomir was St Clodoald, a name more familiar to English people under its French form of Cloud from the town of Saint-Cloud near Versailles.

The three boys were brought up by their grandmother St Clotilda, widow of Clovis, who lavished much care and affection on them in her home at Paris, while their kingdom was administered by their uncle Childebert. When Cloud was eight years old, Childebert entered into a plot with his brother, Clotaire of Soissons, to get rid of these boys and partition their kingdom. A familiar of Childebert was sent to Clotilda asking her to choose whether the three boys should be put to death or forcibly tonsured and shut up in monasteries. He so twisted the reply of the distracted queen that she was made to appear to choose their death, whereupon Clotaire seized the eldest boy, Theodoald, and stabbed him. The second, Gunther, fled in terror to his uncle Childebert, whose heart was so softened by fear and sickened at the brutal killing that he tried to protect him. But Clotaire did not approve of such faintheartedness, dragged Gunther from Childebert's arms and killed him too. Cloud escaped, and was taken for safety into Provence or elsewhere.

Childebert and Clotaire shared the fruits of their crime, and Cloud made no attempt to recover his kingdom when he came of age. He had seen quite enough of the politics of the world, and voluntarily hid himself in a hermit's cell. After some time he put himself under the discipline of St Severinus, a recluse who lived near Paris, and he afterwards went to Nogent on the Seine and had his hermitage where is now Saint-Cloud. St Cloud was indefatigable in instructing the people of the neighbouring country, and ended his days at Nogent about the year 560 when he was some thirty-six years old.