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An Eighth-century Poem on St. Ninian

by WILHELM LEVISON

WHITHORN in Galloway and Kirkmadrine nearby are famous to the archaeologist and historian as the homes of the oldest Christian monuments in Scotland, namely the memorial stones still to be found there. They were erected in a district where the church history of Scotland originated through the efforts of St. Ninian. A few lines in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 4, contain the earliest traditions about him which have come down to us. According to this late record, 'Nynia' was a British bishop who brought the Christian faith to the southern Picts (*australes Picti*). He had got his spiritual instruction in Rome, and had his episcopal see and his last resting-place amidst other saints—at Whithorn, *Ad Candidam Casam*, so called after the church dedicated to St. Martin which he built of stone, a fashion unusual to the Britons. As to his age, Bede merely says that he was at work a long time before St. Columba came to the northern Picts in 565. The intercourse with Rome can hardly have been later than the fifth century; a dedication to St. Martin who probably died in 397, cannot have been made before the same century. When Bede finished his History in 731, Whithorn was under Northumbrian rule, belonging to the northern 'province' of Bernicia. An English episcopal seat had been erected there shortly before, having Pecthelm as first bishop (*Hist. eccl.* v, 23); he had been a long time deacon and monk in Wessex with Aldhelm, the abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne, famous for his writings, who died in 709. Pecthelm was one of Bede's authorities (*ib.*, v. 13, 18); so it has been suggested that the latter was indebted to Pecthelm for his knowledge of Ninian. Pecthelm was one of the correspondents of St. Boniface who also came from Wessex, and who wrote him a letter on a question of canonical law shortly before he (Pecthelm) died in 735.¹ It must also be noted that Bede distinguishes clearly between Whithorn, situated amongst the British, and the Pictish country, the scene of Ninian's missionary efforts.

¹ *Die Briefe des heil. Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl (in *Mon. Germ. hist., Epistolae selectae*, 1), 1916, p. 55, no. 32.

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The numerous English and Scottish authors who wrote on Ninian, have used, besides Bede and what information they thought they could get from monuments and church dedications, a late 'Life' of the Saint. The episcopal see of Whithorn disappears after 803, the last time we hear of Baldwulf, the fifth Saxon bishop. When the diocese was restored in or shortly before 1128,² there existed concerning Ninian 'a book on his life and miracles written in a barbarous style' which is now lost and owing to its *sermo barbaricus* did not suit the refined taste and learning of the age. Probably the second bishop of the revived see, Christian (1154-1186), prompted another 'Life' which was to change the 'darkness' of 'rustic' language into the 'light of Latin elocution'. It was written by Ailred of Rievaulx (c. 1110-1167), the Cistercian abbot some of whose works have been the subject of research in recent years. He 'doubtless was frequently in Scotland'; he came to Galloway probably in 1159 and certainly in 1165, when he visited Dundrennan, a daughter-house of Rievaulx,³ but there may have been many other occasions which led him to write a new 'Life' of the founder-saint of Whithorn. In composing it he used the practice of rhythmical endings, the *cursus* of medieval terminology. His tale is legendary in character and verbose, containing besides miracle-stories few facts which were not given by Bede. Ninian is said to have been the son of a king, to have visited St. Martin while returning from Rome, and to have got from him masons who constructed the church of Whithorn which he dedicated to the saint of Tours who had died in the meantime. Ailred refers for his work to the older source mentioned above, and modern historians attributed to this earlier writer the story of the visit to Tours which enabled them to date Ninian's age a little more accurately by the life-time of St. Martin, though they recognized the weakness of arguing from the words of an author writing more than 700 years after the times of his hero.

But there is other evidence available. It seems to have escaped

² The first certain date is given by the mandate of Pope Honorius II (Jaffé, *Regesta pontif. Rom.* 1², no 7225. Raine, *The Historians of the Church of York* III, p. 48; it belongs to the year 1128 (not 1125) according to W. Holtzmann, *Papsturkunden in England* II (= *Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philol. hist. Klasse*, 1935, 3d Series No. 14, p. 105, (cf. 147).

³ F. M. Powicke, *Ailred of Rievaulx and his biographer Walter Daniel*, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, 1921-22, VI, 480. The *Vita Niniani* was edited by A. P. Forbes, *Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern* (= *The Historians of Scotland* v), Edinburgh 1874, 137-57, and by W. M. Metcalfe, *Pinkerton's Lives of the Scottish Saints* (Paisley 1889), I, 9-39.

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the notice of most students of the ecclesiastical history of Scotland that a new text appeared twenty years ago which gives us the opportunity of forming a somewhat clearer idea of Ailred's lost source. It was edited by Karl Strecker, the Berlin professor of medieval Latin philology now retired, who, besides other excellent work in the field of the Latin poetry of the Middle Ages, brought to a successful conclusion the last volume of the Latin poems of the Carolingian age in the collection of the *Monumenta Germaniae historica*. I should like to call the attention of British readers to the studies on St. Ninian found in this edition, but very naturally overlooked, owing to the general contents of the collection.⁴

There exists a letter of the famous Alcuin directed to the brethren of Candida Casa. He sends a present to the body of their holy father 'Nyniga' and asks them to intercede for him by their prayers in the church of 'Nynia'. He mentions the miracles worked by this holy bishop of which he knew from poems lately sent to him by his pupils, the scholars of the church of York, proving to him the erudition of the poet as well as the saintliness of the miracle-worker.⁵ Alcuin was a friend of Bishop Aedilberct of Whithorn (777-790) who exchanged his see for that of Hexham in 790 and died in 797. Alcuin wrote a letter to him and his Hexham congregation in these years, remembering the old friendship.⁶ But we are unable to say whether the letter he sent to Candida Casa belongs to the Whithorn years of Aedilberct, or of his successor Baldwulf, the last Saxon bishop consecrated to Ninian's see in 791, or even to the time of the vacancy about 790, no bishop being mentioned in Alcuin's Whithorn letter. But it was written after he had left England about 782 to stay with Charlemagne; Alcuin's death in 804 sets the other limit. The poems on Ninian mentioned by him were unknown for many centuries, but they are preserved in a manuscript at Bamberg in Franconia. The latest editor of Alcuin's letters, Ernst Dümmler, referred there to it in 1895 in a short note; a mention is

⁴ A short mention of Strecker's essay and edition (see below) has been made by J. F. Kenney, *The sources for the early history of Ireland*, New York 1929, I, 159, n. 9; of the essay, by L. Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands*, London 1932, p. XLIX. The text has been used by J. D. A. Ogilvy, *Books known to Anglo-Latin writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin* (=The Mediaeval Academy of America, *Studies and Documents*, no. 2), Cambridge (Mass.) 1936, pp. XIV, 33, 36, 79.

⁵ Alcuin, Epist. no. 273, ed. Dümmler, *Mon. Germ., Epist.* IV, p. 431. William of Malmesbury has inserted the relevant part of the letter in his *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* III, § 118 (ed. Hamilton, p. 256).

⁶ *loc. cit.*, p. 72, no. 31.

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also to be found in Vollmer's edition of the African poet Dracontius (*Mon. Germ., Auct. ant.*, 1905, xiv, p. xv). But it was Strecker who actually made it known by an important essay in 1920: *Zu den Quellen für das Leben des hl. Ninian* (in *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde*, 1920-22, XLIII, 1-26), and by the edition of the text in 1923 in the *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, vol. IV, fasc. II-III, pp. 943-62 (cf. also pp. 452 ff. on the MS.).

Codex B II, 10, of the public library of Bamberg is not the manuscript sent to Alcuin. It is a composite volume of which the second and older part (fol. 133r-161v) was written in the tenth century and contains a copy of a *florilegium* of four books collected by Alcuin, as the title indicates. The fourth book embraces extracts from poems and ends with the Ninian texts, *Miracula Nynie episcopi* (fol. 157v-161v) and a *Hymnus sancti Nynie episcopi* (fol. 161v), undoubtedly the poems mentioned by Alcuin. The longer text, consisting of 504 hexameters which are divided into 14 chapters by prose headings, refers to the life of Ninian and to the miracles worked after his death. The 'hymn' is composed of 27 'epanaleptic' elegiac couplets, where the second part of each pentameter repeats the first part of the preceding hexameter; the distichs each begin with one of the 23 letters of the alphabet and with the four letters of *Amen*. The poet followed in this artificial way the model of the poem in honour of Queen Aedilthryd which Bede inserted in his History (IV, 20), but which was also copied separately.

The hymn is written by the same author as the larger poem, but as it gives no new facts it can be neglected here except for the dating provided by the imitation of Bede. It contains also poetical scraps taken from elsewhere, and in this resembles the principal work, which in several places is nothing but a mosaic of borrowings, the sources of which are pointed out in Strecker's annotations. The poet read and used some earlier Christian poems; but, what is more relevant here, he made larger use also of Anglo-Latin poetry nearer to his own times, of Aldhelm's works, and of Bede's metrical Life of St. Cuthbert composed between 705 and 716.⁷ We have to remember that Pecthelm, the first Saxon bishop of Candida Casa, was attached a long time to Aldhelm and was a friend of Bede; so it is natural that writings of both should be known at Whithorn. Even the headings of the chapters are on Bede's pattern. The poet must therefore belong to the eighth

⁷ W. Jaeger also has shown the dependence of the *Miracula Nynie* on Bede's poem in the notes of his edition of the latter: *Bedas metrische Vita sancti Cuthberti* (= *Palaestra* 198), Berlin 1935 (cf. p. 8).

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century, and Strecker may be right in supposing that the poems were a fresh piece of work when they were sent to Alcuin by his York pupils across the sea in the later part of the century. That the author wrote at Whithorn is shown by several verses in which the place and the district are referred to as *noster*, 'our' (v. 21, 82, 99, 324); so he is one of the earliest writers of Scotland, working about a century after Adamnan of Iona. The poem is not a masterpiece; though the manuscript is not free from copyist's errors, and it is difficult sometimes to distinguish between the mistakes of the latter and those of the poet himself; he is no doubt accountable for a large part of the grammatical and prosodic blunders in spite of all his learning. Nor are his style and arrangement always very clear, even when all concessions are made to the poetical setting. The poem nevertheless has its place in literary history on account of its age; as Strecker has observed, not only do a few phrases of Alcuin show the influence of the work sent to him, but it has also impressed its mark on the poem which Aedilwulf at the beginning of the next century devoted to the history of a Northumbrian monastery (Crayke?).

But the significance of this early piece of northern poetry is not restricted to its literary interest; it has also its historical importance. About the middle of the twelfth century Ailred of Rievaulx referred, as I mentioned before, to an old Life of Ninian. The poem does not represent this lost source itself, but the poet as well as Ailred has drawn from the same Latin text, as Strecker's comparison of both has established. It makes all the difference whether a historian is depending for the same points on a 'witness' of the eighth century or of the twelfth. The contents of the poem and of Ailred's work correspond with each other on the whole, even in the order of subjects, except that the poet gives the first place after the saint's return from Rome to the Pictish mission (ch. 3), whereas Ailred postpones the conversion of the Picts (ch. 6) until after the building of the church at Witerna and two miracles (ch. 3-5). The poet knew no more of Ninian's life than Ailred; the poem also is rather a collection of miracles (as the title indeed indicates) than a biography, of miracles worked by the saint when living and after his death. Here also we are told of his British origin, his studies in Rome and his episcopal consecration by the Pope, the return to his native country and his missionary work in the lands of the Picts, where churches (*basilicae*) were erected and where 'now an excellent swarm of monks' resides. Here also the Picts are clearly distinguished from Ninian's British *patrias fines*, where he built a church

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founded on *coctilibus muris* (a word of Ovid, *Metam.* iv, 58) and adorned it with a marble pavement (v. 322, 327, 407). He dedicated it in honour of St. Martin, and had monks there with him (v. 106, 189, 206). The church was to become also the last resting-place of the saint and is visited by many people (v. 92). The funeral is indicated in the heading of ch. 9, but the account is missing, a number of verses apparently being lost; we may also have lost a short description of the tomb as well.

The poet omitted certain miracles, as he expressly declares in his last chapter, and Ailred tells some more which we may ascribe to the common source: the story of the saint travelling with his brother Plebia in the rain which does not touch them while they read the psalter, and descends on Ninian only when unlawful thoughts divert him from his book (ch. 9); the tale of a pupil who being afraid of the threatening birch intends to flee to Ireland (*in Scotiam*), but being in danger of his life on the sea repents and is rescued by Ninian's staff which he had taken with him; the staff became rooted in the ground and afterwards grew into a large tree, a fountain springing from the soil at its foot (ch. 10). Ailred ends his work by telling of the cure of two lepers effected by the waters of a well near the tomb (ch. 12, § 4). The second and the last story are connected with Ninian's wells and a tree and belong to the numerous class of topographic legends.

On the other hand the poet's longest story, the last (ch. 13), is missing in Ailred's work, who may have omitted it because it does not relate to Ninian at all but happened in his church. It is a eucharistic miracle:⁸ the priest Plecgils⁹ desired to see the mysteries of the Lord's Supper; the wafer was transformed into the infant Jesus and converted into the Bread again, after the priest had embraced Christ and touched him with his lips. The originality of this story is confirmed by the fact that Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie in his famous book *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, ch. 14, § 5 (*Migne Patrol. Lat.*, cxx, 1319 f.; Strecker pp. 957 ff.) about 832 translated the tale which he refers to *gestis Anglorum*, into prose, in which echoes of the verses occur.¹⁰ Alcuin had been

⁸ Cf. Peter Browe, *Die eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters* (= *Breslauer Studien zur historischen Theologie*, New Series iv), Breslau 1938.

⁹ The same name is found in the anonymous *Life of St. Cuthbert* II, 3 (ed. Colgrave, p. 78), and in the *Liber Vitae* of Durham.

¹⁰ Caesarius of Heisterbach in his *Expositio sequentiae 'Ave praeclara maris stella'* borrowed the story from Radbert; see A. Hilka, *Die Wundergeschichten des Caesarius von Heisterbach* I (= *Publikationen der Gesellschaft für Rheinische Geschichtskunde* XLIII, vol. I, p. 177), Bonn 1933.

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a friend of Adalhard of Corbie, and we have several letters written by him to this abbot ; so that it is easy to guess how the poem became known to Radbert, and how he could use for his work one of the best told stories in it which does not occur in the later ' Life '.

Ailred and the poet supply not only complete stories. There are also details of common chapters given by one or the other which may be referred without hesitation to their source. Both tell how the British king Tudvael¹¹ was punished with blindness and healed by Ninian ; but only the poet mentions that he ejected the saint from his lands (v. 111-112). He (ch. 10) and Ailred (ch. 12, § 1) relate that a crippled boy was restored to his normal state while lying at the saint's tomb during the night (after the manner of the ' incubation ' of antiquity), and that he was tonsured and lived in the service of Ninian's church, but only the poet gives his name *Pethgils*¹² in the last verse of the chapter (v. 324). Poets of this kind are inclined to drop proper names owing to difficulties of metre. Ailred alone (ch. 12, § 2.3) mentions the names of a leper (poem ch. 11 ; cf. hymn 13) and of a blind woman (poem ch. 12) cured at the saint's tomb, *Aedelfridus* and *Deisuit* (Old English *Daegswith*).

The poet and Ailred tell (ch. 8) how cattle thieves were frustrated in their purposes, and how their chief was killed by a bull and revived by the saint. The beast left the impress of its track on the rock :

228 et—mirum dictu—torvus vestigia taurus
impemit [in] silici velut [in] mollissima cera

230 unguibus et teneris cessit firmissima cautes.

It is no doubt an aetiological and etymological legend originating like many similar stories in some special feature of the rocky soil and in the relevant name of it ; one expects to find a sentence to the effect that the mark could be seen to the present day, and that the place had been given a name derived from the event. But Ailred alone preserved this motif which like Strecker I think is original :

Deinde terram *ungulis* fodiens, mirabili impetu saxum quod invenerat pede percutit, ac *mirum* in modum in tanti miraculi testimonium quasi in *molli cera* in lapide pes mergitur, relinquens in petra

¹¹ So v. 104, *Thuvahel* in the title of ch. 5 of the poem ; *Tudwallus*, that is *Tudwallus*, Ailred ch. 4. The name occurs as Tothail in Adamnan's *Vita Columbae* ; as Tutagual in the Welsh Genealogies of the tenth century, etc.

¹² Better *Pehtgils*, that is, *Pectgils*, as the name appears several times in the *Liber Vitae* of Durham.

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vestigium, et ob *vestigium* loco nomen designans. Adhuc enim ipse locus Anglice Farres Last, Latine Tauri Vestigium nuncupatur.

Anglo-Saxon *farres last* is of course the 'bull's track'.

But not all things which are missing in the poem and related by Ailred, can be attributed to the common source; he made additions which have to be explained only by reference to his own age. He contrasts not only Ninian's virtues, which are after all merely conventional, with the morals of his own times which he deplures (ch. 9); nearly all agree also that he transplanted institutions from twelfth century Scotland into the fifth by ascribing to Ninian the consecration of bishops and the establishment of separate parishes in the country of the Picts (ch. 6). The poet, as I have said before, mentioned only the construction of churches where in his time a monastic 'swarm' flourished. Nor did he speak of the saint's infancy nor of his descent except by a passing allusion:

97 *Arbiter eternus, qui condidit omnia, sanctum*

late per populos lustravit (=illustravit) stemmate claro.

Ailred (ch. 1), besides many commonplaces, not only declares him to be descended from a noble family: *haut ignobili familia*, but even from a king: *Pater eius rex fuit*, probably a legendary addition.

The poet, like Bede, relates that Ninian erected a stone church, *Casam Candidam*, and dedicated it in honour of St. Martin (ch. 4). But only Ailred (ch. 2) tells that Ninian returning from Rome stayed some time with the saint of Tours and got masons from him to introduce the Roman method of churchbuilding in his native country, and he adds accordingly (ch. 3) that Ninian chose Martin as patron-saint having heard that he had died in the meantime. It is unthinkable that the poet would omit a personal link of his hero with the celebrated bishop of Tours, if he had found it mentioned in his source. We have here no doubt a later accretion to the legend made either by popular imagination or invented by Ailred himself. He knew of course Martin's 'Life' written by Sulpicius Severus, one of the most widely read books of the Middle Ages, and refers to it; in reading of Severus' visit of the saint he may have got the idea of a similar story about Ninian:

Severus, *Vita Martini*, ch. 25: *Nam cum olim . . . desiderio illius aestuaremus, gratam nobis ad eum videndum suscepimus peregrinationem. . . . Quo quidem tempore credi non potest, qua me humilitate, qua me benignitate suscepit. . . .*

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Ailred, ch. 2 : Rediens itaque ab Urbe vir Dei spiritu plenus, tactus *desiderio videndi eum*, ad civitatem Turonicam iter divertit. Quo gaudio, qua devocione, quo affectu ab eo *susceptus* sit, quis facile dixerit ?

Martin's death in 397 gave many historians some doubtful help in dating Ninian's time : we must, however, be satisfied with ascribing his activity broadly to the fifth century. Whithorn nevertheless retains the fame of having had one of the oldest churches of Scotland, to be compared with St. Martin's of Canterbury. There are also the monumental stones, and excavation may one day confirm the tradition.

The distance of four centuries between the poet and Ailred is emphasized even by the name of the saint. Ailred uses the Latinized form *Ninianus*. In the new texts we find the genitive *Nynie* and the accusative *Nyniam*, corresponding with Bede's ablative *Nynia*. The nominative also is twice given as *Nynia* or *Ninia*, which may be a correction of the copyist ; for in two other verses the spelling is *Nyniau*, in accordance with modern scholarship which identified the name with the British Nynnyaw.¹³

Ailred in mentioning the Picts converted by Ninian calls them the southern Picts, *australes Pictos* (ch. 6), following Bede whose lines on Ninian he had copied in his preface. The poet in the heading of his third chapter has a different specific word. It is corrupt in the unique manuscript, and Strecker did not find a suitable emendation :

Quomodo patriam reversus Pictorum nationes, quae *naturae* dicuntur, Christi converterit ad gratiam.

There exists, however, if I am not mistaken, an obvious correction suggested by the old prose Lives of St. Cuthbert, for the first critical edition of which we are indebted to Bertram Colgrave.¹⁴ The earliest biographer, an anonymous monk of Lindisfarne who wrote his work between 698 and 705, tells of a voyage which Cuthbert made by ship after Christmas from Melrose (II, 4, p. 82) :

Alio quoque tempore de eodem monasterio quod dicitur Mailros cum duobus fratribus pergens et navigans ad terram Pictorum, ubi dicitur *Niuduera* regio, prospere pervenerunt, where their return was delayed for some days by a storm at sea till the fourth day after Epiphany. Bede in repeating the story says (ch. II, p. 192) :

ad terram Pictorum, qui *Niduari* vocantur, navigando pervenit.

¹³ W. J. Watson, *History of the Celtic place-names of Scotland*, Edinburgh 1926, p. 293.

¹⁴ *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, Cambridge 1940.

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These Picts who could be reached from Melrose in a few days *navigando*, viz., down the Tweed and by the sea, dwelt no doubt in the eastern part of Scotland, perhaps in Fife or the neighbourhood. The name may have been given to them by the Angles and perhaps be connected with Old English *neothe-(weard)*, *nithe-(weard)*, 'down' (cf. the comparative *neothera*, *nithera*, later *nether*, 'lower'), and mean the low-dwellers, the Picts of the Lowlands, opposed to those of the Highlands in accordance with Bede's description of the dwelling-places of the southern and northern Picts (*Hist. eccl.*, III, 4).¹⁵ The philologists must judge the possibility of this etymology; in any case Bede's *australes Picti* correspond to the Picts of the poem, so that I may correct consequently: *Pictorum nationes, quae Niduaræ dicuntur*, inserting an *a* after *u* and writing *id* for *at*. There is no lack of errors in the manuscript; an Anglo-Saxon *id*, having the upper part of the *d* (or *ð*) raised only a little above the line, may have been easily mistaken by a Continental copyist of the tenth century for an 'open' *a* (in the *ic*-form) and a *t*.

The poet was fulfilling the wishes of the Saxon community of Whithorn in the eighth century, just as Ailred satisfied the aspirations of the restored bishopric of the twelfth, by establishing and increasing the fame of the ancient founder. What about the common source? It was certainly not much older than the poem. The author of the lost 'barbarously' written Latin Life did not know more of his hero than Bede. He also lived in the time of Northumbrian predominance in Galloway; except Ninian, his brother Plebia¹⁶ and the British king Tudvael, all names of persons given in the poem or by Ailred connected with the miracles, are English names: Pethgils (=Pectgils), Plecgils, Aedelfridus, Deisuit (=Daegswith); to which must be added the local name of F(e)arres Last, if it also has been rightly traced back to the first Life. Bede has not seen this; introducing what he has to say of Ninian with the words *ut perhibent*, he is alluding as usual to hearsay.¹⁷

¹⁵ Patrick's letter against Coroticus making mention *Pictorum apostatarum* does not help here, though the historians may be right in connecting them with the Picts converted by Ninian; see e.g. J. B. Bury, *Life of St. Patrick and his place in history*, London 1905, p. 313; Gougaud, *loc. cit.* p. 26; J. A. Duke, *History of the Church of Scotland to the Reformation*, Edinburgh 1937, p. 9.

¹⁶ Perhaps the name may be connected with Latin *plebs* (Welsh *plwyf*, having the sense of 'parish') cf. Gougaud, *loc. cit.* p. 119.

¹⁷ See Ch. Plummer, *Baedæ Opera historica* (Oxford 1896), I, XLV, and my remark in *Bede, his Life, Times, and Writings* (ed. A. Hamilton Thompson), Oxford 1935, p. 140; see also C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*, Edinburgh 1939, pp. 39 ff., 246 f.

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He had not even heard of the existence of the Life, as he had of St. Columba's, of whom he says in the same chapter: *de cuius vita et verbis nonnulla a discipulis eius feruntur scripta haberi*; and being a friend of Bishop Pecthelm, one of his informants, he would probably have had knowledge of a written text on Ninian, if it had existed then. So the lost work in my opinion was not the source of Bede's information on Ninian, as Strecker thought, but was rather composed in the middle or the second part of the eighth century. The author may have read Bede's lines, as Ailred did later; this is how I explain the correspondence between Bede and the presupposed source.

The new text was found in a Continental library, not in England or Scotland, nor does it stand alone in this respect. The English missionaries and scholars working in the Frankish kingdom since Willibrord's days brought books with them and sought to get others from home. The British Isles acted as intermediaries not only for classical and earlier ecclesiastical texts, but their own contemporary literary achievements also participated in this wandering of manuscripts. The first Life of St. Cuthbert, written about 700 at Lindisfarne, exists today only in seven manuscripts, all either written or preserved on the Continent; the first Life of Pope Gregory the Great, composed about the same time at Whitby, has been saved in a unique copy at St. Gall. The Continental tradition of the Penitentials originating in the rules of Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury prevails by far over the 'insular' transmission. Bede's Martyrology survived on the Continent, having received there an addition on the martyrdom of St. Boniface and his companions. The rhythmical poems of Aethilwald exist only in a manuscript of the letters of this Boniface, from Mainz, now in Vienna. Alcuin's great poem on York has survived only in two manuscripts of Reims.¹⁸ Mostly through the devastations of the Norsemen such works disappeared from British libraries, but copies were saved beyond the sea; so in a later age, owing to the burning of the heretics and of their books, many of Wycliffe's writings were destroyed in his native country, but survived in Bohemia, the land of his follower Hus. A part of the manuscript tradition of Cuthbert's fine letter on the death of Bede is connected with Alcuin's continental

¹⁸ Both seemed to have disappeared; so the latest editors of Alcuin's poem, Raine (1879) and Dümmler (1881), had to recur to a transcript (now at Cambridge) sent to Gale by Mabillon. But the *Codex S. Theodorici* was found in the meantime, a MS. of the ninth century, now no. 426 of the public library at Reims; see Strecker, *loc. cit.* p. 1128.

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years,¹⁹ and it is perhaps worth while to remember that King Alfred's *Orosius* can be read not only in a few English copies, but that fragments of it are also found in a palimpsest of the Vatican Library used for a second time about 1100 at Trier.²⁰ The poems on St. Ninian emerging from oblivion after more than a thousand years, join this company, which could be easily enlarged. *Habent sua fata libelli.*

¹⁹ See N. R. Ker, *Medium Aevum* (1939), VIII, 40 ff: but also R. Brotanek, *Anglia*, 1940, LXIV, 162 f.

²⁰ See *Mon. Germ., Scriptores rer. Merov* (1920), VII, 666 on Vaticanus Reginae Christinae Lat. 497 (with earlier literature). Ampler knowledge may be expected with the progress of Dom Wilmart's *Codices Reginenses Latini*.