

CAP. XXIV

*Quod in monasterio eius fuerit frater, cui donum canendi  
sibi divinitus concessum.*

In huius monasterio abbatissae fuit frater quidam divina gratia specialiter insignis, quia carmina religioni et pietati apta facere solebat; ita ut quicquid ex divinis literis per interpretes disceret, hoc ipse post pusillum verbis poeticis maxima suavitate et compunctione compositis, in sua, id est, Anglorum lingua proferret. Cuius carminibus multorum saepe animi ad contemptum saeculi, et appetitum sunt vitae caelestis accensi. Et quidem et alii post illum in gente Anglorum religiosa poemata facere tentabant;

<sup>1</sup> Should perhaps be *conversionem*, Pl.

<sup>1</sup> The sisters were sent for by the abbess, as stated earlier.  
<sup>2</sup> And so professed nuns.

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sed nullus eum aequiparare potuit. Namque ipse non ab hominibus, neque per hominem institutus canendi artem didicit; sed divinitus adiutus gratis canendi donum accepit. Unde nihil unquam frivoli et supervacui poematis facere potuit; sed ea tantummodo quae ad religionem pertinent, religiosam eius linguam decebant. Siquidem in habitu saeculari usque ad tempora provecioris aetatis constitutus nil carminum aliquando didicerat. Unde nonnunquam in convivio, cum esset laetitiae causa decretum ut omnes per ordinem cantare deberent, ille ubi adpropinquare sibi citharam cernebat, surgebat a media coena et egressus ad suam domum repedabat.

Quod dum tempore quodam faceret, et relicta domo convivii egressus esset ad stabula iumentorum quorum ei custodia nocte illa erat delegata, ibique hora competenti membra dedisset sopori, adstitit ei quidam per somnium, eumque salutans, ac suo appellans nomine: "Caedmon," inquit, "canta mihi aliquid." At ille respondens, "Nescio," inquit, "cantare; nam et ideo de convivio egressus huc secessi, quia cantare non poteram." Rursum ille qui cum eo loquebatur, "Attamen," ait, "mihi cantare habes," "Quid," inquit, "debeo cantare?" At ille, "Canta," inquit, "principium creaturarum." Quo accepto responso, statim ipse coepit cantare in laudem Dei Conditoris versus, quos nunquam audiverat, quorum iste est sensus; "Nunc laudare debemus auctorem regni caelestis, potentiam Creatoris, et consilium illius, facta Patris gloriae; quomodo ille, cum sit aeternus Deus, omnium miraculorum

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gal. i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Beer-drinking, in King Alfred's translation.

CHAPTER XXIV

*How that in her monastery there was a brother to whom  
the gift of singing was divinely given.*

In the monastery of this abbess there was a certain brother made notable by a grace of God specially given, for that he was wont to make songs fit for religion and godliness;<sup>3</sup> insomuch that, whatsoever of the divine writings he learned by them that expounded them, he set it forth after a little time with poetical language, put together with very great sweetness and pricking of the heart, in his own, that is to say, the English tongue. With whose songs the minds of many men were oft inflamed to the contempt of the world and desire of the heavenly life. And indeed other too among the English people after him assayed to make religious

<sup>3</sup> The story and the name of Caedmon are known to us only from Bede. A considerable body of verse has come down under his name, but modern criticism does not hold it all to be the work of one author.

STORY OF CAEDMON

poems; but no man could match his cunning. For he himself learned the art of singing without being taught of men nor of men's help;<sup>1</sup> but he received the gift of singing freely by the aid of God. And therefore he could never make any fond or vain poem, but only such as belong to religion befitted his religious mouth. For as long time as he was settled in secular life, until he was well stricken in age, he had at no time learned any songs. And so it was that sometimes at the table,<sup>2</sup> when the company was set to be merry and had agreed that each man should sing in his course, he, when he saw the harp to be coming near him, would rise up at midst of supper and going out get him back to his own house.

And as he did so on a certain time, and leaving the house of feasting had gone out to the stable of the beasts which had been appointed him to look to that night, and there at the fitting hour had bestowed his limbs to rest, there stood by him a certain man in a dream and bade him God speed, and calling him by his name said to him: "Caedmon, sing me something!" Whereupon he answering said: "I know not how to sing; for that too is the matter why I came out from the table to this place apart, because I could not sing." "But yet," quoth he again that spake with him, "thou hast to sing to me." "What," quoth he, "should I sing?" Whereupon the other said: "Sing the beginning of the creatures!" At which answer he began forthwith to sing in praise of God the Creator verses which he had never heard before, of which the sense is this: "Now ought we to praise the Maker of the heavenly kingdom, the power of the Creator and His counsel, the acts of the Father of glory; how He, being God eternal,



auctor exstitit; qui primo filiis hominum caelum pro culmine tecti, dehinc terram custos humani generis omnipotens creavit." Hic est sensus, non autem ordo ipse verborum quae dormiens ille canebat: neque enim possunt carmina, quamvis optime composita, ex alia in aliam linguam ad verbum sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis transferri. Exurgens autem a somno, cuncta quae dormiens cantaverat memoriter retinuit, et eis mox plura in eundem modum verba Deo digni carminis adiunxit.

Veniensque mane ad villicum qui sibi praeceperat, quid doni percepisset indicavit, atque ad abbatissam perductus, iussus est, multis doctioribus viris praesentibus, indicare somnium et dicere carmen, ut universorum iudicio quid vel unde esset quod referebat, probaretur. Visumque est omnibus, caelestem ei a Domino concessam esse gratiam. Exponebantque illi quendam sacrae historiae sive doctrinae sermonem, praecipientes eum, si posset, hunc in modulationem carminis transferre. At ille suscepto negotio abiit, et mane rediens, optimo carmine quod iubebatur, compositum reddidit. Unde mox abbatissa amplexata gratiam Dei in viro, saecularem illum habitum relinquere, et monachicum suscipere propositum docuit, susceptumque in monasterium cum omnibus suis fratrum cohorti associavit, iussitque illum seriem sacrae historiae doceri. At ipse cuncta

<sup>1</sup> Of this hymn there are two versions in Saxon, Pl. ii. 251.

quae audiendo discere poterat, rememorando secum et quasi mundum animal ruminando, in carmen dulcissimum convertebat; suaviusque resonando, doctores suos vicissim auditores sui faciebat. Canebat autem de creatione mundi, et origine humani generis, et tota Genesis historia, de egressu Israel ex Aegypto et ingressu in terram repromissionis, de aliis plurimis sacrae Scripturae historiis, de incarnatione Dominica, passione, resurrectione, et ascensione in caelum, de Spiritus Sancti adventu, et apostolorum doctrina. Item de terrore futuri iudicii, et horrore poenae gehennalis, ac dulcedine regni caelestis multa carmina faciebat; sed et alia perplura de beneficiis et iudiciis divinis, in quibus cunctis homines ab amore scelerum abstrahere, ad dilectionem vero et solertiam bonae actionis excitare curabat. Erat enim vir multum religiosus, et regularibus disciplinis humiliter subditus; adversum vero illos qui aliter facere volebant, zelo magni fervoris accensus: unde et pulchro vitam suam fine conclusit.

Nam propinquantem hora sui decessus, quatuordecim diebus, praeveniens corporea infirmitate, pressus est; adeo tamen moderate, ut et loqui toto eo tempore posset et ingredi. Erat autem in proximo casa, in qua infirmiores et qui prope morituri esse videbantur, induci solebant. Rogavit ergo ministrum suum vespere incumbente, nocte qua de saeculo erat exiturus, ut in ea sibi locum quiescendi

was the author of all miracles; Which first created unto the children of men heaven for the top of their dwelling-place, and thereafter the almighty Keeper of mankind created the earth."<sup>1</sup> This is the sense but not the selfsame order of the words which he sang in his sleep: for songs, be they never so well made, cannot be turned of one tongue into another, word for word, without loss to their grace and worthiness. Now on rising from slumber he remembered still all the things that he had sung in his sleep, and did by and by join thereto in the same measure more words of the song worthy of God.

And coming on the morrow to the town reeve under whom he was, he shewed unto him what gift he had received; and being brought to the abbes, he was commanded in the presence of many learned men to tell his dream and rehearse the song, that it might by the judgment of them all be tried what or whence the thing was which he reported. And it seemed to them all, that a heavenly grace was granted him of the Lord. And they recited unto him the process of a holy story or lesson, bidding him, if he could, to turn the same into metre and verse. Whereupon he undertaking so to do went his way, and on the morrow came again and brought the same which they had required of him, made in very good verse. Wherefore by and by the abbes embracing the grace of God in the man, instructed him to forsake the secular habit and take upon him the monastical vow, and when he had so done she placed him in the company of the brethren with all them that were with her, and gave commandment for him to be instructed in the regular course of holy history. But he by thinking again with

himself upon all that he could hear and learn, and chewing thereon as a clean beast cheweth the cud, would turn it into very sweet song; and by melodiously singing the same again would make his teachers to become in their turn his hearers. Now he sang of the creation of the world, and beginnings of mankind, and all the story of Genesis, of the going of Israel out of Egypt, and their entering in the land of promise, and of very many other histories of Holy Scripture, of the incarnation of the Lord, of His passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven, of the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the teaching of the apostles. Also he would make many songs of the dread of judgment to come, of the terror of the pains of hell, and of the sweetness of the kingdom of heaven; moreover, many other songs of the divine benefits and judgments, in all which his endeavour was to pull men away from the love of wickedness and stir them up to the love and readiness to do well. For he was a man very devout and humbly obedient to the discipline of the rules; but very zealous and fervently inflamed against them that would do otherwise: wherefore too he closed his life with a goodly end.

For when the hour of his departing was at hand, he was taken before with bodily sickness which was heavy upon him fourteen days; and yet so temperately, that he might all that time both speak and walk. Now there was thereby a building wherein they that were sick, and such as seemed near to die, were wont to be brought. He desired, therefore, him that served him, at the falling of evening on the night that he was to depart from the world, to provide him a place to rest in that building: and



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praepararet: qui miratus cur hoc rogaret, qui nequam adhuc moriturus esse videbatur, fecit tamen quod dixerat. Cumque ibidem positi vicissim aliqua gaudente animo, una cum eis qui ibidem ante inerant, loquerentur ac iocarentur, et iam mediae noctis tempus esset transcensum, interrogavit, sit eucharistiam intus haberent. Respondebant, "Quid opus est eucharistia? neque enim mori adhuc habes qui tam hilariter nobiscum velut sospes loqueris." Rursus ille: "Et tamen," ait, "afferte mihi eucharistiam." Qua accepta in manu, interrogavit, si omnes placidum erga se animum, et sine querela controversiae ac rancoris haberent. Respondebant omnes, placidissimam se mentem ad illum, et ab omni ira remotam habere: eumque vicissim rogabant, placidam erga ipsos mentem habere. Qui confestim respondit: "Placidam ego mentem, filioli, erga omnes Dei famulos gero." Sicque se caelesti muniens viatico, vitae alterius ingressui paravit; et interrogavit, quam prope esset hora qua fratres ad dicendas Domino laudes nocturnas excitari deberent. Respondebant, "Non longe est." At ille: "Bene, ergo exspectemus horam illam." Et signans se signo sanctae crucis, reclinavit caput ad cervical, modicumque obdormiens, ita cum silentio vitam finivit. Sicque factum est ut quomodo simplici ac pura mente tranquillaque devotione Domino servierat, ita etiam tranquilla morte mundum relinquens ad eius visionem veniret, illaque lingua quae tot

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salutaria verba in laudem conditoris composuerat, ultima quoque verba in laudem ipsius, signando sese, et spiritum suum in manus eius commendando clauderet: qui etiam praescius sui obitus exstitisse, ex his quae narravimus, videtur.

## DEATH OF CAEDMON

the other marvelling why he desired this, when he seemed nothing likely to die yet, nevertheless did as he was bid. And when they were laid in the same place, and were having some merry talking and sporting among themselves and them that were there before, and the season of midnight was now passed, he asked whether they had the sacrament there within. They answered: "What need is there of the sacrament, for your time is not come to die yet, that art so merrily talking with us as a man in good health." "And yet," quoth he again, "do ye bring me hither the sacrament." Which when he had taken in his hand, he asked them, whether they were all of a quiet mind toward him, and without complaint of quarrel and bitterness. They answered all that they were very peaceably disposed toward him and were far from all wrath: and they asked him in their turn to have a quiet mind toward them. And he forthwith answered: "I do bear, my dear children, a quiet mind toward all God's servants." And so arming himself with the heavenly voyage-provision he made him ready to enter into the other life; and asked how nigh the hour was at which the brethren should be roused to say their night lauds to the Lord. "It is not far off," answered they. "Well then," quoth he thereat, "let us tarry for that hour." And signing himself with the sign of the holy cross, he laid his head on the bolster, and falling a little in slumber so ended his life in silence. And thus was it brought about that, even as he had served the Lord with a simple and pure mind and peaceful devoutness, so likewise leaving the world with a peaceful death he might come to His sight, and that tongue, which had

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framed so many wholesome words in the praise of the Creator, might also close up its last words in His praise, by the signing of himself and commending his spirit into His hands; and by these things that we have told it appeareth also that he had known beforehand of his departing.