

# From the Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation (c. 731)

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Bede ‘the Venerable’, the most learned writer of the Anglo-Saxon period, was born in Northumbria around 673. At the age of seven he entered the twin monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow and remained there, except for a few short excursions, until his death. Under the abbot Ceolfrith Bede received a thorough education in grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, music, natural science and the study of scripture; he was ordained a deacon at 19 and a priest at 30. In a brief autobiographical note appended to his *Ecclesiastical History* he describes himself in this manner: “amid the observance of the discipline of the Rule [of St Benedict] and the daily task of singing in the church, it has always been my delight to learn or to teach or to write.” Over the course of his life Bede produced a remarkable body of writing still impressive for its clarity, intelligence, range and devotion. His works, which survive in hundreds of manuscripts, were deeply influential and widely copied throughout the Middle Ages. Apart from a brief and enigmatic Old English poem and a lost translation of the Gospel of John he is said to have composed on his deathbed, all Bede’s works were written in Latin, the international language of scholarship and the Church.

The founder of Jarrow monastery, Benedict Biscop, had traveled extensively and assembled an impressive library; during Bede’s lifetime this remote outpost on the northeastern coast of England—founded about the year Bede was born, and scarcely 50 years after the rulers of Northumbria had converted to Christianity—was perhaps the most learned monastic center in all of Europe. Bede’s writings include numerous works of scriptural commentary, many homilies, works on meter and orthography, lives of several saints, books of poetry and hymns, and several treatises on cosmology and timekeeping. He was deeply interested in time and its measurement, a matter of some urgency in his lifetime because the Irish and Roman churches had different methods for calculating the date of Easter. In some years the two churches celebrated the feast on different days, which to Bede was a shocking sign of disunity. In his works promoting the Roman method of Easter reckoning he also helped establish the foundations of medieval astronomy and chronology; Bede is primarily responsible for popularizing the western ‘BC’ and ‘AD’ system of reckoning dates (using the *anno domini* or ‘year of our Lord’).

It is Bede’s historical works, however, that are best known today. His *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*), completed in 731, is an extensive history of England which takes as its theme the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon invaders who had displaced the native Christian British population. The *Ecclesiastical History* imagines an ‘English’ people united not so much by culture or language or geography as by faith, the Roman Christianity brought to the island by Augustine of Canterbury and other missionaries, sent by Pope Gregory the Great in 597. This work still provides the foundation for much of our knowledge of England in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Bede’s talent as a historian was his ability to take multiple sources—documents, other histories, local oral traditions and legends—and weave them together into a coherent narrative. Though Bede was not fully a historian in the modern sense, his approach is far less foreign to the modern historical sensibility than those taken by most medieval chroniclers—unlike many writers of the time, for example, he makes frequent reference to the sources for the material he is recounting. In Bede’s narrative, written very much from the Northumbrian point of view, the English are gradually and inevitably brought into the happy embrace of the Roman church, triumphing against the bitterness and treachery of the native British, the well-meaning but deluded zeal of the Irish missionaries, and the temporizing and backsliding of one pagan king after another. It is a tribute to Bede’s great literary talent that in

many ways the story he constructs from whatever meager evidence was available to him is still regarded as a fundamentally accurate account.

## Chapter 1

BRITAIN, an island in the ocean, formerly called Albion, is situated between the north and west, facing, though at a considerable distance, the coasts of Germany, France, and Spain, which form the greatest part of Europe. It extends 800 miles in length towards the north, and is 200 miles in breadth, except where several promontories extend further in breadth, by which its compass is made to be 3675 miles. To the south, as you pass along the nearest shore of the Belgic Gaul, the first place in Britain which opens to the eye is the city of Rutubi Portus, by the English corrupted into Reptacestir. The distance from hence across the sea to Gessoriacum, the nearest shore of the Morini, is fifty miles, or as some writers say, 450 furlongs. On the back of the island, where it opens upon the boundless ocean, it has the islands called Orcades. Britain excels for grain and trees, and is well adapted for feeding cattle and beasts of burden. It also produces vines in some places, and has plenty of land and waterfowls of several sorts; it is remarkable also for rivers abounding in fish, and plentiful springs. It has the greatest plenty of salmon and eels; seals are also frequently taken, and dolphins, as also whales; besides many sorts of shellfish, such as muscles, in which are often found excellent pearls of all colours, red, purple, violet, and green, but mostly white. There is also a great abundance of cockles, of which the scarlet dye is made; a most beautiful colour, which never fades with the heat of the sun or the washing of the rain; but the older it is, the more beautiful it becomes. It has both salt and hot springs, and from them flow rivers which furnish hot baths, proper for all ages and sexes, and arranged according. For water, as St. Basil says, receives the heating quality, when it runs along certain metals, and becomes not only hot but scalding. Britain has also many veins of metals, as copper, iron, lead, and silver; it has much and excellent jet, which is black and sparkling, glittering at the fire, and when heated, drives away serpents; being warmed with rubbing, it holds fast whatever is applied to it, like amber. The island was formerly embellished with twenty eight noble cities, besides innumerable castles, which were all strongly secured with walls, towers, gates, and locks. And, from its lying almost under the North Pole, the nights are light in summer, so that at midnight the beholders are often in doubt whether the evening twilight still continues, or that of the morning is coming on; for the sun, in the night, returns under the earth, through the northern regions at no great distance from them. For this reason the days are of a great length in summer, as, on the contrary, the nights are in winter, for the sun then withdraws into the southern parts, so that the nights are eighteen hours long. Thus the nights are extraordinarily short in summer, and the days in winter, that is, of only six equinoctial hours. Whereas, in Armenia, Macedonia, Italy, and other countries of the same latitude, the longest day or night extends but to fifteen hours, and the shortest to nine.

This island at present, following the number of the books in which the Divine law was written, contains five nations, the English, Britons, Scots, Picts, and Latins, each in its own peculiar dialect cultivating the sublime study of Divine truth. The Latin tongue is, by the study of the Scriptures, become common to all the rest. At first this island had no other inhabitants but the Britons, from whom it derived its name, and who, coming over into Britain, as is reported, from Armorica, possessed themselves of the southern parts thereof. When they, beginning at the south, had made themselves masters of the greatest part of the island, it happened, that the nation of the

Picts, from Scythia, as is reported, putting to sea, in a few long ships, were driven by the winds beyond the shores of Britain, and arrived on the northern coast of Ireland, where, finding the nation of the Scots, they begged to be allowed to settle among them, but could not succeed in obtaining their request. Ireland is the greatest island next to Britain, and lies to the west of it; but as it is shorter than Britain to the north, so, on the other hand, it runs out far beyond it to the south, opposite to the northern parts of Spain, though a spacious sea lies between them. The Picts, as has been said, arriving in this island by sea, desired to have a place granted them in which they might settle. The Scots answered that the island could not contain them both; but “We can give you good advice,” said they, “what to do; we know there is another island, not far from ours, to the eastward, which we often see at a distance, when the days are clear. If you will go thither, you will obtain settlements; or, if they should oppose you, you shall have our assistance.” The Picts, accordingly, sailing over into Britain, began to inhabit the northern parts thereof, for the Britons were possessed of the southern. Now the Picts had no wives, and asked them of the Scots; who would not consent to grant them upon any other terms, than that when any difficulty should arise, they should choose a king from the female royal race rather than from the male: which custom, as is well known, has been observed among the Picts to this day. In process of time, Britain, besides the Britons and the Picts, received a third nation the Scots, who, migrating from Ireland under their leader, Reuda, either by fair means, or by force of arms, secured to themselves those settlements among the Picts which they still possess. From the name of their commander, they are to this day called Dalreudins; for, in their language, Dal signifies a part.

Ireland, in breadth, and for wholesomeness and serenity of climate, far surpasses Britain; for the snow scarcely ever lies there above three days: no man makes hay in the summer for winter’s provision, or builds stables for his beasts of burden. No reptiles are found there, and no snake can live there; for, though often carried thither out of Britain, as soon as the ship comes near the shore, and the scent of the air reaches them, they die. On the contrary, almost all things in the island are good against poison. In short, we have known that when some persons have been bitten by serpents, the scrapings of leaves of books that were brought out of Ireland, being put into water, and given them to drink, have immediately expelled the spreading poison, and assuaged the swelling. The island abounds in milk and honey, nor is there any want of vines, fish, or fowl; and it is remarkable for deer and goats. It is properly the country of the Scots, who, migrating from thence, as has been said, added a third nation in Britain to the Britons and the Picts. There is a very large gulf of the sea, which formerly divided the nation of the Picts from the Britons; which gulf runs from the west very far into the land, where, to this day, stands the strong city of the Britons, called Aicluith. The Scots, arriving on the north side of this bay, settled themselves there.

### **The Conversion of King Edwin of Northumbria**

[Edwin, the king of Northumbria, urged by his Christian wife Ethelberga, and by the bishop Paulinus,] answered that he was both willing and bound to receive the new faith which the bishop taught, but that he wished, nevertheless, to confer about it with his principal friends and counsellors, to the end that, if they also were of his opinion, they might all be cleansed together in Christ, the Fount of Life. Paulinus consenting, the king did as he said; for holding a council

with the wise men, he asked of every one in particular what he thought of the new doctrine and the new worship that was preached.

To which the chief of his priests, Coifi, immediately answered: "O king, consider what this is which is now preached to us; for truly I declare to you that the religion which we have hitherto professed has, as far as I can learn, no virtue in it. For none of your people has applied himself more diligently to the worship of our gods than I; and yet there are many who receive greater favours from you, and are more preferred than I, and who are more prosperous in all their undertakings. Now if the gods were good for anything, they would rather advance me who has been more careful to serve them. It follows, therefore, that if upon examination you find those new doctrines which are now preached to us better and more efficacious, we should immediately receive them without any delay."

Another of the king's chief men, approving of Coifi's words and exhortations, soon added: "The present life man, O king, seems to me, in comparison with that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the hall wherein you sit at supper in winter amid your officers and ministers, with a good fire in the midst whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door and immediately out another, whilst he is within is safe from the wintry weather. But after a short space of fair weather he immediately vanishes out of your sight into the dark winter from which he has emerged. So this life of man appears for a short while. But of what went before or what is to follow we are ignorant. If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed."

The other elders and king's counsellors, by divine inspiration, spoke to the same effect. But Coifi added that he wished more attentively to hear Paulinus' discourse concerning the God whom he preached. So after the bishop had spoken at greater length by the king's command, Coifi, hearing his words, cried out: "I have long since perceived that there was nothing in that which we worshiped, because the more diligently I sought after truth in that worship the less I found it. But now I freely confess that such clear truth appears in this preaching as can confer on us the gifts of life, of salvation, and of eternal happiness. For which reason I advise, O king, that we instantly abjure and set fire to those temples and altars which we have consecrated out reaping any benefits from them."

In short, the king publicly gave his permission to Paulinus to preach the gospel, and, renouncing idolatry, declared that he had received the faith of Christ. And when he inquired of the high priest who should first profane the altars and temples of their idols, with the enclosures that were about them, the high priest answered, "I will. For who can more properly than myself destroy those things which I worshiped through ignorance, for an example to all others, through the wisdom which been given me by the true God?"

Then immediately, in contempt of his former superstitions, the king desired to furnish him with arms and a stallion, and mounting the latter, he set out to destroy the idols; for it was not lawful before for the high priest either to carry arms or to ride on any beast but a mare. Having, therefore, girt on a sword and carrying a spear in his hand, he mounted the king's stallion and proceeded to the idols. The multitude, beholding him, concluded that he was distracted; but he lost no time, for as soon as he drew near the temple he profaned it, casting into it the spear which he held. And rejoicing in the knowledge of the worship of the true God, he commanded his companions to destroy the temple, with all its enclosures, by fire.

This place where the idols were is still visible, not far from York, to the eastward, beyond the river Derwent, and is now called Godmundingham; where the high priest, by the inspiration of the true God, profaned and destroyed the altars which he had himself consecrated.

## The Story of Cædmon

In the year of our Lord 680 Hild, the most devout servant of Christ, abbess of the monastery that is called Whitby,<sup>1</sup> departed on the 17th of November after having performed many heavenly works on earth, to receive the rewards of the heavenly life, at the age of sixty-six. She spent her first thirty-three years living most nobly in the secular habit, and more nobly dedicated the remaining half to our Lord in the monastic life. She was of noble birth, being the daughter of Hereric, nephew to King Edwin; in Edwin's company she received the faith and mysteries of Christ at the preaching of Paulinus of blessed memory, the first bishop of the Northumbrians, and she preserved her faith undefiled until she was rewarded with the sight of Him in heaven. Resolving to give up the secular habit and serve Him alone, she withdrew to the kingdom of the East Angles, for she was related to the king there; she intended to pass over from there into Gaul, leaving her native land and all that she had to live as a stranger for our Lord's sake in the monastery of Chelles, so that she might more easily reach her eternal home in heaven. Her sister Hereswith, mother of Ealdwulf, king of the East Angles, was at that time living in the same monastery under the discipline of the monastic Rule, waiting for her heavenly crown. Inspired by her example, Hild continued a whole year in the kingdom of the East Angles with the intention of going abroad; Bishop Aidan called her home, however, and gave her enough land to support herself on the north side of the river Wear, where she lived in the monastic life for a year, with a small group of companions.

After this she was made abbess in the monastery called Heruteu,<sup>2</sup> which had been founded not long before by Heiu, a devoted handmaid of Christ, who is said to have been the first woman in the kingdom of Northumbria to take the habit and vows of a nun, having been ordained by Bishop Aidan. But soon after she had founded that monastery, Heiu went away to the town of Calcaria, which the English call Kælcacæstir,<sup>3</sup> and there made her dwelling. Hild, the handmaid of Christ, was appointed to rule over that monastery, and immediately began to establish a rule of life there in all things, as she had been taught by many learned men; for Bishop Aidan and other devout men who knew her visited her frequently, instructed her diligently, and loved her dearly for her innate wisdom and devotion to the service of God.

When she had ruled over this monastery for some years, wholly intent upon establishing a rule of life there, it happened that she also undertook either to found or to reform a monastery in the place called Streaneshalch, which she carried out with great industry. She established the same rule in this monastery as in the other, and she taught there the strict observance of justice, piety, chastity, and other virtues, above all peace and charity. After the example of the primitive church, no one there was rich, and no one was poor, for all things were common to all, and none had any private property.<sup>4</sup> Her wisdom was so great that not only ordinary people, but even kings

<sup>1</sup> Bede uses the Old English name *Streaneshalch*.

<sup>2</sup> Hartlepool.

<sup>3</sup> Uncertain; possibly Tadcaster.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2: 44-5.

and princes sometimes asked for and received her advice; she obliged those who were under her direction to devote so much time to the study of the Holy Scriptures, and to exercise themselves so much in works of justice, that there might be no difficulty in finding many there who were fit for ecclesiastical duties, that is for the service of the altar.

In fact we have seen five men from that monastery become bishops, all of them men of singular merit and sanctity: Bosa, Ætla, Oftfor, John, and Wilfrid. The first of them, as we related elsewhere, was consecrated bishop of York; of the second, it may be observed that he was appointed bishop of Dorchester. Of the two last we shall later relate that John was consecrated bishop of Hexham and Wilfrid, bishop of York; of Oftfor we will here note that after he applied himself to the reading and observance of the Scriptures in both of Hild's monasteries, being anxious to attain to greater perfection, he went to Kent to join Archbishop Theodore, of blessed memory. After he had spent more time in sacred studies there, he resolved to go to Rome, which in those days was considered to be an act of great merit. After his return to Britain, he went to the province of the Hwicce, where King Osric then ruled, and remained there a long time, preaching the word of faith and setting an example of holy life to all who saw and heard him. At that time Bosel, the bishop of that kingdom, suffered such weakness of body that he could not carry out his episcopal duties; so Oftfor was appointed bishop in his place by universal consent, and was consecrated at King Æthelred's command by Bishop Wilfrid, of blessed memory, who was at that time bishop of the Middle Angles because Archbishop Theodore was dead, and no other bishop had been ordained in his place. Before Bosel, a most learned and industrious man of excellent ability named Tatfrid had been chosen bishop there, also from Hild's monastery, but he had been snatched away by an untimely death before his consecration.

All who knew Abbess Hild, the handmaid of Christ, called her Mother because of her outstanding piety and grace. She was not only an example of holy life to those who lived in her monastery, but provided an opportunity for repentance and salvation to many who lived far away who heard the happy news of her diligence and virtue. This was bound to happen so that the dream which her mother Breguswith had during Hild's infancy should be fulfilled. When her husband Hereric lived in exile under the British king Cerdic, where he was later poisoned, Breguswith dreamed that she was looking for him most carefully, and could find no sign of him anywhere; but suddenly, after having tried with all her might to find him, she found a most precious necklace under her garment, and as she was gazing at it very attentively, it cast such a blaze of light that it spread throughout all Britain. This dream came true in her daughter Hild, whose life was a bright example, not only to herself, but to many who desired to live well.

After she had governed this monastery many years, it pleased Him who has made such merciful provision for our salvation to subject her holy soul to the trial of a long sickness so that, like the apostle, her strength might be made perfect in weakness.<sup>5</sup> She was struck by a fever and fell into a violent heat, and for six years was afflicted continually; during all which time she never failed to give thanks to her Maker or to instruct the flock entrusted to her care both in public and in private. From her own experience she admonished every one to serve the Lord dutifully in health and always to return thanks to Him in adversity or bodily illness. In the seventh year of her illness, she began to suffer internally and approached her last day. Around cock-crow, having received the viaticum of Holy Communion, she called together the handmaids of Christ who were in the monastery, and admonished them to preserve the gospel peace among

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. 12:9.

themselves and towards all others; and as she was exhorting them she joyfully saw death approaching or, to use the words of our Lord, she passed from death into life.<sup>6</sup>

That same night it pleased Almighty God by a vision to reveal her death in another monastery at some distance from hers called Hackness, which she had built that same year. In that monastery was a nun called Begu, who for thirty years or more had dedicated her virginity to God and served Him in the monastic life. While she was in the dormitory of the sisters, she suddenly heard in the air the well-known sound of the bell which used to awaken the sisters and call them to prayers when any one of them had been taken out of this world. Opening her eyes, she seemed to see the top of the house open, and a strong light pour in from above; looking intently at that light, she saw the soul of the handmaid of the Lord borne into heaven in the midst of that light, attended by angels. Then awaking and seeing the other sisters lying around her, she realized that what she had seen was either a dream or a vision; greatly frightened, she rose immediately and ran to a maiden named Frigyth, who was then presiding over the monastery in place of the abbess. With many tears and sighs, Begu told her that the Abbess Hild, mother of them all, had departed this life, and that she had seen her ascend with a great light, and with angels conducting her, into eternal bliss and the company of the inhabitants of heaven. When Frigyth heard this, she awoke all the sisters, and called them to the church; she ordered them to pray and sing psalms for Hild's soul, which they did for the rest of the night. At break of day, the brothers came from the place she had died with news of her death. They answered that they already knew it, and when they told how and when they had heard it, it was found that her death had been revealed to them in a vision in the very same hour that the brothers said she had died. Thus it was happily ordained by Heaven that when some watched her departure out of this world, others watched her entrance into the eternal life of the spirit. These monasteries are about thirteen miles distant from each other.

It is also reported that her death was made known in a vision the same night to one of the holy maidens who loved her most passionately, in the same monastery where this servant of God died. She saw Hild's soul ascend to heaven in the company of angels; and she declared this, the very same hour it happened, to those servants of Christ who were with her, and awakened them to pray for her soul, even before the rest of the congregation had heard of her death, for it was only made known to the whole monastery the next morning. This same nun was at that time with some other servants of Christ in the remotest part of the monastery, where the women who had recently entered the monastery used to spend their time of probation until they were instructed in the Rule and admitted to the society of the community.

In Hild's monastery was a certain brother specially marked by the grace of God, who used to make pious and religious verses, so that whatever he learned from the holy Scriptures through interpreters, he soon afterwards turned into poetry of great sweetness and humility, in English, which was his native language. By his verses the minds of many were often inspired to despise the world and to long for the heavenly life. After him other Englishmen tried to compose religious poems, but none could ever compare with him, for he did not learn the art of poetry from men or through a man,<sup>7</sup> but received the gift of song freely by divine grace. For this reason he never could compose any trivial or foolish poem, but only those which were concerned with devotion and were fitting for his pious tongue to utter.

He had lived in the secular life until he was well advanced in years, and had never learned any verses; therefore sometimes at feasts, when it was agreed for the sake of

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<sup>6</sup> John 5:24.

<sup>7</sup> Gal. 1:1.



entertainment that all present should take a turn singing, when he saw the harp coming towards him, he would rise up from the table in the middle of the feast, go out, and return home. On one occasion when he did this, he left the house of feasting and went to the stable, where it was his turn to take care of the animals that night. In due time he stretched out to rest; a person appeared to him in his sleep, saluted him by name, and said, “Caedmon, sing me something.” Caedmon answered, “I cannot sing; that is why I left the feast and came here, because I could not sing.” The man who was talking to him replied, “Nevertheless, you must sing to me.”<sup>8</sup> “What shall I sing?” he asked. “Sing about the beginning of created things,” he replied. At that, Caedmon immediately began to sing verses which he had never heard before in praise of God, whose general sense is this: “We ought now to praise the Maker of the heavenly kingdom, the power of the Creator and his counsel, the deeds of the Father of glory and how He, since He is the eternal God, was the author of all marvels and first, as almighty Guardian of the human race, created heaven as a roof for the sons of men, and then the earth.”<sup>9</sup> This is the sense but not the actual order of the words he sang in his sleep, for poetry, no matter how well composed, cannot be literally translated from one language into another without losing much of its beauty and dignity. Awakening from his sleep, Caedmon remembered all that he had sung in his dream, and soon added more verses in the same manner, praising God in a worthy style.

In the morning he went to the steward, his master, and told him of the gift he had received; the steward led him to the abbess, who ordered him, in the presence of many learned men, to recount his dream and repeat his poem, so that they might all decide what it was and where it had come from. It was clear to all of them he had received a gift of heavenly grace from our Lord. Then they explained to him a passage of sacred history or doctrine, and ordered him, if he could, to turn it into verse. he undertook this task and went away; when he returned the next morning he repeated it to them, composed in excellent verse. At this the abbess, recognizing the grace of God in this man, instructed him to renounce the secular habit and take up the monastic life; when this was done she joined him to the rest of the brethren in her monastery and ordered that he should be taught the whole course of sacred history. He learned all that he could by listening, and turned it over in his mind like a clean beast chewing the cud,<sup>10</sup> turned it into the most harmonious verse, and recited it so sweetly that his teachers became in turn his audience. He sang of the creation of the world, the origin of the human race, and all the history of Genesis: and made many verses on the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, and their entry into the Promised Land, and many other stories from the holy Scriptures; of the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of our Lord, and of His ascension into heaven, of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of the apostles, also of the terror of future judgment, the horror of the pains of hell, and the joys of the kingdom of heaven, and many more songs about the Divine mercies and judgments, by which he tried to turn all men away from the love of vice and to inspire in them the love and practice of good works. He was a very devout man, humbly submissive to the discipline of the monastic rule, but full of zeal against those who behaved otherwise; for this reason his life had a lovely ending. When the hour of his departure drew near, for fourteen days he was afflicted with a bodily weakness which seemed to prepare the way, yet mild enough that

<sup>8</sup> Lat. *mihi cantare habes* – the subtle difference in meaning between ‘you are able to sing to me’ and ‘you are obligated to sing to me’ seems critical to our understanding of this scene, but we cannot entirely recover it.

<sup>9</sup> See below for *Caedmon’s Hymn* in Old English. Bede gives only this paraphrase; in two manuscripts of Bede’s Latin *Historia* a poem in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English is added in the margins. When Bede’s work was translated into Old English at the end of the ninth century, the translators substituted a version of this poem for Bede’s paraphrase, and omitted the disclaimer that follows it.

<sup>10</sup> Lev. 11:3, Deut. 14:6. Rhetorically speaking, Caedmon has made the leap from cowherd to cow.



he could talk and walk the whole time. Nearby was the house to which the sick and dying were carried; As evening fell on the night he was going to depart this life, he asked his attendant<sup>11</sup> to prepare a place for him there so he could take his rest. The attendant wondered why he should desire that, because there seemed to be no sign of his dying soon, but did what he had asked. They went there and were talking pleasantly and joyfully with the people who were already in the house; when it was past midnight he asked them whether they had the Eucharist there. They answered, "What need do you have of the Eucharist? you are not likely to die, since you talk so merrily with us, just as though you were in perfect health." "Nevertheless," he said, "bring me the Eucharist." When he had taken it into his hand he asked whether they were all in charity with him, without any complaint or quarrel. They answered that they were all in perfect charity, and free from anger; and likewise asked him whether he felt the same towards them. He answered at once, "My sons, I am in charity with all the servants of God." Then strengthening himself with the heavenly viaticum, he prepared for his entrance into the next life; he asked how near it was to the time when the brothers had to awaken to sing their nightly praise of our Lord. They answered, "It is not far off." He said, "Good; let us wait until then," and signing himself with the sign of the holy cross, he laid his head on the pillow and fell into a slumber, and so ended his life quietly. Thus it came to pass that, just as he had served God with a simple and pure mind and quiet devotion, so now he departed into His presence and left the world by a quiet death, and his tongue, which had composed so many holy words in praise of the Creator, uttered its last words while he was in the act of signing himself with the cross, and commending his spirit into God's hands; and from what has been said, it seems he had foreknowledge of his death.

### **Cædmon's Hymn in Old and Modern English**

- Nu sculon herian heofonrices weard,  
 Metodes meahta ond his modgeþanc,  
 weorc wuldorfæder, swa he wundra gehwæs,  
 ece Drihten, or astealde.
- 5 He ærest scop ielda bearnum  
 heofon to hrofe, halig Scieppend;  
 þa middangeard manncynnes weard,  
 ece Drihten, æfter teode,  
 firum foldan Frea ælmihtig.
- Now (we) ought to praise Heaven-kingdom's guardian,  
 the Maker's might and his mind's thoughts,  
 the work of the glory-father, as he of each of wonders,  
 eternal Lord, established a beginning.<sup>12</sup>
- 5 He first shaped for men's sons  
 Heaven as a roof, the holy Creator;  
 then middle-earth mankind's guardian,  
 eternal Lord, afterwards prepared,  
 for men the earth, the Lord almighty.

<sup>11</sup> Older monks were attended by young novices who took care of them.

<sup>12</sup> i.e., "He established the beginning of every wonder."