

From the *Transactions* of the  
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

**The Holy Blood of Hayles**

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1900, Vol. 23, 276-284

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## THE HOLY BLOOD OF HAYLES.

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RELICS known by the title of 'Sanguis Christi,' otherwise, drops of the Holy Blood, belonged to several categories. They sometimes derived from the blood shed at Calvary—from hands, feet, or side of the Christ; sometimes from the blood issuing from His forehead, wounded by the crown of thorns; others still (as was the case with the Lateran Relic) derived from the occasion of the Circumcision. Still others (and these were not uncommon in the 13th and 14th centuries) derived from crucifixes which had been struck, or had accidentally fallen; or, from "Hosts" which had either been called in question, or had been profaned by impious hands, and had bled.

The long list of these latter would take us back to the instance of the Crucifix said to have been struck by some Jews at Berytus, in A.D. 765; while the history of the former may be referred to the discovery at Mantua, in A.D. 804, of a small leaden chest which contained a vase, upon which was found inscribed: "Jesu Christi Sanguis." Close beside it was a man's body, which, we are told, the Mantuans recognised to be that of Longinus, who was, according to tradition, the soldier who pierced the Saviour's side, and was afterwards converted to Christianity. We learn, also, that Pope Leo III., stimulated by the reverend curiosity of his friend and protector, Charlemagne, concerning this remarkable discovery, journeyed to Mantua. Thence, having satisfied himself regarding the genuineness of the Relic, he went into France to visit that Emperor. The political conditions then obtaining in Rome happened to be far from agreeable, and the Papal

visit to Mantua may well have been dictated by other motives; but that concerns us not.

The Emperor himself, later on, visited Mantua, and took a portion of the Blood into France, perhaps the origin of that formerly at Saintes in Charente, certainly of that at Paris.

But although a vase of the Holy Blood had reached Mantua with the body of Longinus, it would seem that much still remained in Jerusalem, where the Patriarchs of the 12th and 13th centuries appear to have disposed of it to various Crusading Princes, appending their guarantees with seals thereto. In 1247, Robert, Bishop of Nantes, Grand Master of the Temple, forwarded to Henry III. of England a phial containing some drops of it. How that king received it, carried it in state to Westminster on the Feast of the Confessor, had it preached upon, and obtained indulgence for all who came to worship it there, of six years and one hundred and forty days, may be read in the pleasant pages of Matthew Paris and Matthew of Westminster. The tradition, trustworthy or not, which has reached us respecting the Hayles Relic does not greatly differ. It came to Europe, into the possession of William II., Count of Holland, Zealand, and Friesland, authenticated by the seal and guarantee of Jacques Pantaleon, Patriarch of Jerusalem 1255—1261, afterwards Pope, as Urban IV. As this Pontiff was both a Cistercian, and the Institutor of the great festival of Corpus Domini, the Monastery of Hayles, at a later day, no doubt considered its Relic to be above all question. He died in 1264. Three years later we find Edmund, son of Richard, Earl of Cornwall, the Founder of Hayles, purchasing the relic from Florenz Vth, Count of Holland, and taking it back to England with him.

The excavations at Hayles, whither the Relic was destined, have revealed the base, or quadrangular platform, of the splendid shrine in which eventually it came to be placed; but they have likewise made manifest that the entire east end of the church underwent extensive and beautiful altera-

tions in order to accommodate the Relic; in fact, a polygonal apse of five chapels was thrown out, displaying the form almost of a 'corona,' with the Shrine of the Holy Blood forming its base-centre.

To Hayles, Edmund, in honour of his father Richard, gave one-third of his Relic, and the remainder he kept until 1297, when he bestowed it on the House of the Augustinian Bons Hommes at Ashridge, in Buckinghamshire, which he had founded in 1283. The Chronicle of Hayles relates the Relic to have been brought to Hayles by Edmund himself in 1270, and to have been carried by that Prince on Holy Rood day (at Harvest) and deposited in its shrine with great ceremonial, the Abbots of Winchcomb and Hayles, with their respective convents, attending its inauguration. It was now placed under the surveillance of a special custodian, or 'Altarius,' whose duty it became to display it at appointed times to the pilgrim and devotee, who paid for the sight of it, and miracles became of frequent occurrence. It has been thought by Blaauw (author of the *Barons' War*) that the presence of the renowned Relic at Hayles may have given rise to the saying: "As sure as God is in Gloucestershire," although he does not deny that the peculiar wealth of this County in ecclesiastical edifices might well have originated it (p. 351, Note 3).

It is not a little interesting to note that at precisely the same period as the Hayles Relic was so rapturously enshrined and adored, the greatest theologian of the century, S. Thomas Aquinas, expressed his opinion that Blood of this nature did not, and could not, exist, for the simple reason that at the moment of Christ's resurrection the blood that had been shed had perforce been re-united to the resuscitated body (cf. *Summa*, iii. 54). Other and later Theologians argued that by being shed the blood lost hypostatic union, and consequently its divinity.

This view proved to have serious consequences; for it tended to depreciate the value of these much-revered relics by casting doubt on their authenticity, and such doubt only

gained force by time. Moreover, by becoming a party-question it embittered the rivalry between the two new mendicant orders; for the Franciscans favoured Relics of this kind, possessing, as they did, certain of them at their own convents at Saintes and elsewhere. In A.D. 1351 the controversy raged at Barcelona, and Clement VI., at Avignon, was vainly appealed to for a decision. The controversies, indeed, to which this opinion gave rise were still being waged in 1463-4, when we find three Franciscans (one of whom, Francesco della Rovere, became Pontiff as Sixtus IV.) taking part in a debate before the Pope with three Dominicans concerning the point. The arguments occupied three days; but so little did this serve to settle the matter, that Pius II. silenced both parties and wisely postponed pronouncing any decision (cf. L. Wadding, *Annal. Minor*, xiii. 58, 206).

Nevertheless, the far-reaching influence exercised by such relics could not be underrated, and with reference to that of Hayles alone in that very century we find John XXIII., Eugenius IV., Callixtus III., and Paul II. all assisting Hayles in the difficulties<sup>1</sup> into which it had fallen by throwing their special favour on the side of the Relic and granting Indulgences to its venerators. Thus Leland (*Collectanea*, vol. vi., p. 283) tells us that Eugenius (1431) granted absolution for four confessions at Corpus Christi, and seven years and three Lents to all "who give anything to the worship of God and that precious Blood." Eight-and-twenty years later Callixtus III., although absorbed in his struggles with the Ottoman Turk under Mohammed II., granted full remission "at Corpus Christi and at Holy Rood in May and Harvest; also fifteen Cardinals, each by himself, gave one hundred days' pardon to those who put their helping hands to the

<sup>1</sup> These difficulties oppressed every monastic establishment in the Kingdom, and had their origin in the universal dislocation and disorder caused by the visitations of the Plague in 1348, 1361, 1368 and 1375,—the consequent rise in wages, depression of rents, and ruin of the crops. As the Western Counties were specially desolated once more in 1407, it is manifest the slowness of recovery in the case of Hayles is not difficult to account for.

welfare of that aforesaid Monastery of Hayles." And in relation to this last I have found an interesting document in the Vatican dated April 18th, 1458 (Callixtus III., Reg. Secr. Vatic., N. 463):—"Cum itaque accepimus, monasterium S (M) de Hayles, Ord: Cist: Vigorn: Dioc: in suis structuris et edificiis magnam ruinam patiatur, fructusque redditus et proventus Dicti Monasterii ad faciendum structurarum, edificiorum hujusmodi reparationem non sufficiant, sed Christi fidelium suffragia sint quamplurimum opportuna nos cupientes, &c., septem annos et totidem quadragenis singulis misericorditer relaxamus." Another, dated June 1st, 1468, from Paul II. shows Hayles to continue in a poor way and still unable to afford hospitality, even as we shall find it had been sixty years before.

From these documents, then, we gather two important facts—first, that these Pontiffs regarded the Relic favourably; secondly, that Hayles Abbey during the Wars of the Roses, like many another convent, was tumbling about the ears of its inhabitants, and was looking to its Relic of the Holy Blood to save it from perdition. As we presently (in A.D. 1470) find the Abbot of Hayles, William Whitchurch, practically rebuilding the Church of Didbrook, we may safely conclude that Papal favour toward the Relic was proving really efficacious and brighter days had dawned on our monastery.

But it is clear that by that date attacks had been made upon the genuineness of the Relic; for when at his trial Sir John Oldcastle uttered his indignant protest against monkish fictions and pious frauds, at the beginning of the century, he had included in his indictment reputed nails from the cross, pieces of it (such as Hayles likewise possessed), and the Blood of Hayles. As is well known, he presently paid the price of his honest independence and clear-sightedness at the stake. John XXIII. (1412) permitted Abbot Henley to grant absolution for all but certain reserved sins after two confessions. Letters of this Pontiff to the Abbot shew that the number of monks to be maintained at Hayles was

twenty-two, and that it had been used to dispense hospitality; whereas in 1412, the Revenues had so far fallen off, "propter varios sinistros eventus," that the Convent could neither maintain its numbers nor continue its accustomed generosity. (Cf. Arch: Secr: Vat: Reg: LAT: 166. iii. IDVS: Febr: Anno tertio).

A vesica-shaped seal of Hayles displays a monk standing upon three steps, supporting in his right hand a flask surmounted by a cross, and in his left another relic shaped like a short staff. He is surrounded by a scroll design, bearing nine conventional roses edged with the legend, "Sigillum Monasterii Beate Marie De Hayles" (cf. Pynson's *Little Treatise of Divers Miracles shown for the Portion of Christ's Blood in Hayles*).

That the faithful, both pilgrims and patrons, came forward to help Hayles towards the end of the 15th century cannot be doubted. Abbots Whitchurch, Clitheroe, Anthony Melton, and finally Stephen Sagar, enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing the Cloisters enriched with solid restoration, the Chapter-house handsomely re-tiled, and all the crumbling structures rehabilitated. The recovery of six finely carven heraldic bosses from the west cloister walk, to which they belonged, has revealed the names and qualities of these generous patrons—Sir John Huddleston, Sir William Compton (cf. his Bequest to Hayles, in Cal: S. P., June, 1528), Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, and the Abbot of Evesham.

But the progress of Inquiry, indeed of Scepticism, had by this period made great strides. Popes were ruling the Church then, who in spirit and letter were undisguised Renaissance Pagans. Nevertheless, Religious orthodox opinion in England was quite strong enough to permit of a charge of Heresy being formulated in 1508-9 against Roger Brown, of Coventry, for uttering the notion that it was foolish for anyone to worship the Blood of Hayles; and nine years later similar proceedings were instituted against Sir John Drury, vicar of Windrush, Oxford, on the evidence on oath of a servant to the effect that his master had called

the Blood a fabrication of man's hands, and had declared himself to have wasted eighteenpence in going to visit it. It is clear that the reputation of the Hayles Relic was gravely at stake, and it behoved the custodians to behave very circumspectly regarding it. Speaking of Hayles, Leland wrote that there, in his day, "God daily sheweth miracles through the virtues of that precious Blood."

In 1521 an interesting pilgrim made his appearance at Hayles, on a visit from Thornbury, in Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, presently executed by his Royal master and kinsman on Tower Hill. In 1533 Hugh Latimer, later on a bitter enemy to Hayles, wrote to his friend, Master Morice, from his living at West Kington (Cal. State Papers, vol. 6, p. 247):—"I dwell within a mile of the Fosseway, and you would wonder to see how they come by flocks out of the West Country to many images—to our Lady of Worcester, &c., but chiefly to the Blood of Hayles," which, he says, they believe to be the very Blood of Christ, and that the sight of it puts them in a state of salvation. Latimer presently preached against the Relic at Bristol, denouncing it in similar terms with those used by Ridley. (Cf. *Commentary in Englyshe upon the Ephesians*, 1540.) And at last the fateful visit of the Royal Commissioners comes upon our Abbey. Anthony Saunders writes to Cromwell, November, 1535: "Whereas you have appointed me to read the pure and sincere Word of God to the monks of Winchcomb. . . . I have small favour and assistance amongst those pharisaical Papists. The Abbot of Hayles (Sagar), a valiant soldier under Antichrist's banner, resists much, fighting with all his might *to keep Christ in the Sepulchre*. He has hired a great Goliath, a subtle *Duns* man, yea, a great clerk, as he saith, a Bachelor of Divinity of Oxford, to catch me in my sermons."<sup>1</sup> Hayles surrendered Dec. 24th, 31 Henry VIII., when the Abbot and twenty-one monks were pensioned. The value of the Abbey was declared to be £330 2s. 2d.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Calendar IX., No. 747, by F. A. Gasquet, p. 93, in his *Henry VIII. and the Monasteries*. See also his *Eve of the Reformation*, p. 424.

The Commissioners, now headed by Latimer (become Bishop of Worcester), stated that "they have had from that House (Hayles) right honest sorts of jewels, plate, ornaments, and money, besides the garnishing of a small shrine, wherein was reposed the counterfeit Relic of times past; which all we do reserve unto the King's Highness" (*M.S. Cott., Cleopatra*, E. IV., ff. 254-6). In Latimer's Certificate, dated Oct. 28th, they state that "we have viewed a certain supposed Relic called the 'Blood of Hayles,' which was enclosed within a round Beryl, garnished and bound on every side with silver, which we caused to be opened in the presence of a great multitude of people, being within a little glass; and also tried the same, according to our powers, wits and discretions, by all means, and by force of the view, and other trials thereof, we think, deem, and judge the substance and matter of the said supposed Relic to be an unctuous gum coloured, which being in the glass appeared to be a glistering red resembling partly the colour of blood: and after we did take our part of the said substance and matter out of the glass then it was apparent glistering yellow colour, like amber, or base gold, and doth cleave to as gum, or bird-lime." This was handed over to Mr. Richard Tracy, High Sheriff of Gloucestershire, and sealed. One month later it was destroyed in public at Paul's Cross by John Hilsey, Bishop of Rochester, on November 24th, 1539, that prelate affirming it "to be no blood, but honey clarified and coloured with saffron."

This statement seems to give the lie to the calumnious affirmations which had been sown broadcast, describing it as the blood of a duck, from time to time renewed by its custodians, which were repeated by Fuller, Burnet, Herbert, and others who followed Holinshed, Fox, and other writers; all which derived from the testimony of William Thomas, Clerk of the Council to Edward VI. (cf. Bodl. MS., N.E.B. 2, 7).

When the last Abbot, Stephen Sagar, was interrogated concerning the averred trickery in connection with it, he

replied that to his own knowledge it had been entrusted to the keeping of one old and worthy custodian for forty years (cf. Hearne, *Benedict. Petroburg*, vol. ii., p. 71). Against this may have to be placed the evidence of the wife of a miller living near Hayles as given before Bishop Hilsey, to the effect (which tends deeply to compromise the virtuous integrity of that time-honoured custodian) that he had been her lover. But to this I have not yet obtained access.

It is quite clear that these statements are mutually contradictory, and that really no reliance can be placed upon them. The statement that it was duck's blood was one which at that time, in the absence of microscopes, could be neither proved nor disproved; and duck's blood would not answer to the description given either by the visitors or Bishop Hilsey, formerly a Dominican superior. Again, a portion of clarified honey, coloured with saffron, would hardly have been described in the terms applied to the Relic by the Visitors. The Relic may not have been what it professed to be, and its nature was evidently considered an open question by the highest ecclesiastical authorities; but we can have no confidence whatever in the statements made at the time of the dissolution of the Monastery as to what its nature really was.

It is possible that the former Historic Relic of the Holy Blood of Hayles may have been borne in mind by Madeleine de Beauregard, Abbess of a Cistercian Convent in Paris, in 1661, when she founded a reformed Congregation of '*Cistercians of the Precious Blood.*'

Visitors to Bruges in the month of May, 1899, witnessed a Procession with the Relic of the Holy Blood, in which the Clergy and Confraternities of Bruges (in their mediæval costumes), followed by the Archbishop of Mechlin and other prelates, took part. This particular Relic of the Holy Blood was given to Bruges in 1150 by Thierry, Count of Flanders.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I desire to express my thanks to the Rev. Canon Floyer of Worcester, for kindly looking through this Paper for me, and to the Rev. C. S. Taylor for valued suggestions: