



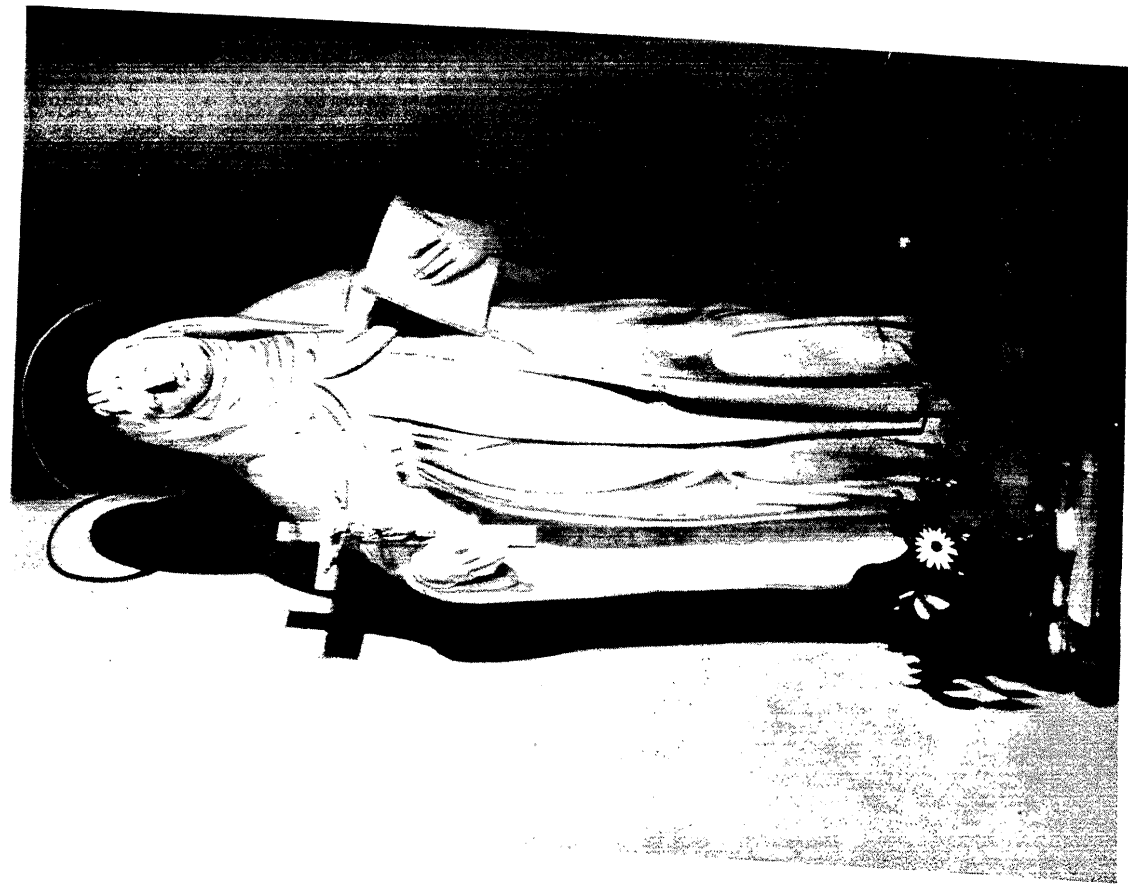
# GOD'S AMBASSADRESS

St. Bridget of Sweden

BY HELEN M. D. REDPATH  
BRIDGETTINE OF SYON ABBEY

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St. Bridget of Sweden  
"Fortis et intrepida" (Proc. can.)  
A pre-Reformation statue in possession of the Syon Community

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## Introduction

ST. BRIDGET of Sweden, set in her own time by the Providence of God in full light, seems in these later times to have been set by men somewhat in the shadows. This partial eclipse of so great a figure is no doubt mainly due to the fact that her writings, or at least a large portion of them, contain messages and warnings to particular persons or classes of persons; passages moreover clothed in a phraseology alien to the thought and taste of a later day. But there are those who look deeper, and who tell us that it is more than time St. Bridget was once again known not merely by the few but by the many; that she belongs to every age — even very particularly to our own — and that to know her will also be to love her.

Not many accounts have been written of her in English and not one that is both complete and at the same time fully documented. This book is an attempt to tell simply and as briefly as may be the story of her remarkable life, and if it can hardly take to itself so important a title as a complete and documented history, it can at least claim that it states nothing as a fact in that life which has not behind it the authority of contemporary documents, and that full references to its sources of information have been noted.

This has involved no diving into almost undecipherable manuscripts, but only care and patience. For Swedish scholars have been at work for years studying everything that might throw light on St. Bridget, her life, and her writings, and have published the results of their research for all who care to examine them. If, as in the case of the present writer,

ignorance of the Swedish language is in some instances an unsurmountable obstacle to firsthand examination, the full text of one document at least has been made available to all who have an elementary knowledge of Latin, and it is to the biographer by far the most important source of information.

The Process of St. Bridget's Canonization has been published within recent years, after careful comparison of all the codices extant, by Dr. Isak Collijn, Librarian of the Royal Library, Stockholm. A study of this work enables anyone to build up the life of St. Bridget at least in its main features.

It does much more. For in spite of its stiff, formal phrases and the endless repetitions which seem to belong to the legal profession of all ages, it is a more eloquent eulogy of the Saint than any studied panegyric. A first glance at 600-odd pages of fairly close print gives the impression of a monotonous repetition of cures wrought by St. Bridget, but a closer reading reveals something very different. The Process is found to be a remarkably human document. The witnesses stand out one from the other with wonderful distinctness. Each, though giving evidence on the same points as that given by all the others, gives it in a different way, throwing little flashes of light on the Saint's personality. St. Bridget is alive: we see her in her daily life, with her friends, on her journeys, before the pope. Finally, we stand by her deathbed and hear the last words she spoke on earth.

By use of the Process, then, we shall be able to see a picture of St. Bridget painted by contemporaries and intimates.

But though the Process, and the early Life of the Saint which is really a part of it, has been my main source of information, this book owes its being originally to a manuscript which I first had the privilege of reading in 1930. Its author, Margaret Howitt, daughter of William and Mary Howitt, both well-known writers in their day, gives in this work the results of something like sixty years' study of St. Bridget and her times. An untiring student, she worked at the book she

hoped to publish with amazing vigour of mind and will until her death, very nearly at the end of her ninety-first year. She was a gifted linguist, had learned first in Sweden to know of the Saint she so greatly venerated, and later corresponded with Scandinavian scholars and with the utmost care collected information on all that even remotely touched her subject. Her work, unfinished, but with copious notes ready for its completion, was judged too long and too discursive for the public of to-day, but its most valuable material has been freely used in these pages, especially in matters relating to the Sweden and Rome of St. Bridget's day. Where references are found to works inaccessible to me, such references have been accepted without personal verification but with full trust in the accuracy of a most painstaking and scholarly author whose only aim was to write history. Her references to St. Bridget's writings have also been of the greatest value.

It is beyond the scope of this book and beyond the power of its author to discuss in detail or in any way to appraise the extraordinary spiritual gifts which St. Bridget possessed. Yet since in any Life of her there must needs be allusions to strange and unusual things — voices, visions, heavenly commands and messages, it will be as well perhaps to anticipate to the extent of telling briefly, first, how she herself tried to explain these when questioned by those who guided her soul, and, secondly, what the Catholic Church has said concerning them.

The Spaniard Alfonso da Vadaterra, formerly Bishop of Jaen, later an Olivetan hermit, was one of St. Bridget's spiritual directors, knew her intimately, edited her works after her death, and was one of the theologians included in the papal commission appointed to examine these before the canonization. In his long Prologue to Book VIII of the *Revelations*, he discusses the different kinds of visions granted to mankind — corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual, and gives many quotations from the works of the Doctors of the Church. He says that all three classes of vision

were known to St. Bridget. Her earliest vision, when she was a child of seven, was of the first kind, affecting her bodily senses, and later on she had others of the same sort. But more often she had imaginative visions.

St. Teresa thus describes her own imaginative vision of our Lord: "Had I spent year after year trying to picture to myself anything so beautiful, I should have neither the power nor the talent to succeed in doing it." Though such vision is not seen with the bodily eyes, "it is a living image. It is not a dead man but a living Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Most frequent of all, however, were the intellectual visions which came to St. Bridget, accounted the highest of the three kinds. Of such she says, in one of her prayers: "Thou puttest my body to sleep when it pleaseth Thee, yet it is not a bodily sleep, but a certain repose of the spirit. Then Thou wakest my soul as out of a slumber to see, hear and feel after a spiritual manner."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes she understood what she saw, sometimes not. Afterwards a voice would come which she recognized as that of Christ or of His Blessed Mother, or it might be that of an angel, telling her the meaning of the vision or making some communication of a prophetic nature, or again conveying some divine command. Of such locutions St. Teresa has said: "Interior words are heard, perfectly distinct, but they are not usually heard by the ears of the body. Yet they are much more clearly perceived than if they were audible, and they cannot be resisted: it is impossible not to perceive them. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

All that came to St. Bridget by revelation she at once made known and dictated to one of the priests who directed her. She always declared that what she described with many explanatory words was perceived by her in an instant of time. Her dictated revelation was translated into Latin by her con-

<sup>1</sup> *St. Teresa's Life by Herself*, Eng. Transl. by David Lewis, Chap. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Revis.*, IV, 77.

<sup>3</sup> *St. Teresa, op. cit.*, Chap. 25.

fessor and was then shown to her. But translation, however carefully made, cannot have the same value as the original language, and scholars who have made a study of St. Bridget's eight books of revelations are convinced that in their rather barbarous Latin dress they are not always an exact expression of the mystic's mind.

Long before she received her messages for mankind, St. Bridget was favoured with a very high gift of prayer and seems to have lived in the almost continual consciousness of the presence of God. This led her to a simple form of intercourse with heaven of a character totally different from the often mysterious sayings of which mention has just been made. Such conversations, if we may give them this name, are gathered together under the title of *Revelationes Extravagantes*, and concern Bridget's personal affairs or those of people she had to help, or again, her perplexities over regulations for the religious order she was to found. These she lays with the utmost simplicity before Christ or His Blessed Mother. Here she is as one who could have said with the psalmist: "My eyes are ever looking unto the Lord." She asks questions; she records the answers received. What are we to think of all this? Who shall say? To the Saint her conversations were as real as any with a friend on earth. She is, of course, by no means the only soul who has made such a claim. St. Gertrude's *Revelations* bear abundant witness to the same thing. And we read in the Life of St. Catherine of Siena that Christ deigned to walk and talk with her and to recite with her the Divine Office.

Nor is it necessary to look back so far, as if such assertions were something peculiar to the Middle Ages. The name of Lourdes would have no significance if a little peasant girl had not recorded her conversations with the Virgin Mother. Yet more recent, there is the saintly old French Curé, Père Lamy, who died in 1931 and who has been made known to us by Comte Biver and M. Maritain. When one reads what Père Lamy has to say, with its mingling of artlessness and the

dignity of a deep and humble reverence, one might be listening to St. Bridget herself.

The *Revelations* of St. Bridget were subjected to more than one careful examination by papal commissions, and received such high praise that princes of various lands, we are told, at once sent to Rome to have copies made. Forty years after the Saint's canonization, owing to rash and wholly unauthorized statements made by a handful of Bridgettine monks at a monastery in Lübeck, the *Revelations* had the very doubtful benefit of being made the subject of discussion at Basle. Doubtful benefit, because, though they gained thereby the invaluable "Defence" written by the learned Cardinal Torquemada, fully and forever vindicating their orthodoxy, yet some of the dust raised by the controversy never seems quite to have been laid. In accounts written of St. Bridget it is not at all uncommon to find her singled out from others who have recorded their revelations; the Council of Basle is cited as having examined her writings, and the cautious words of the Church concerning all private approved revelations are emphasized. There is suggestion of a warning against overmuch credulity.

While asking from no reader of this book more credence of St. Bridget's statements than that allowed in the cautious words just referred to, namely that her works contain nothing against faith or morals and much that can give edification to the faithful, it will be well to recall certain pronouncements made by the Catholic Church concerning her spiritual gifts which seem to imply a good deal. The Office and Mass authorized for the feast of any saint are certainly an expression of the Church's mind. In the daily Commemoration made of St. Bridget to be found in the special breviary belonging to the religious order she founded, she is declared to be a "new light," one to whom were "revealed the secrets of heaven." The words from the Book of Wisdom are chosen as the Epistle of the Mass: "I called upon God and the spirit of wisdom came upon me," while in the Bull of Canonization

we read: "By means of the grace of the Holy Ghost this noble widow was able to see and understand manifold visions and revelations. And in the spirit of prophecy she predicted many things, of which prophecies not a few have been fulfilled."

St. Bridget's century was a troubled one. Fierce wars tore Europe asunder, the Black Death raged relentlessly. Then there was the absence of the Pope from Rome with all its consequences. And yet side by side with much unrest and great moral corruption there was not only outstanding holiness but deep and peaceful mysticism. St. Bridget was fully conscious of the evils of her time but her message was by no means merely one of rebuke. Her history will show that she understood the ordinary life of mankind, not only by her gift of sympathy but by actual experience. If she is numbered among the founders of religious orders, among the ascetics, the mystics, and the sects, it is well to keep in mind that during more than half her lifetime she had her place among the wives and mothers, among those who must look after and rule large households, who fill important positions in the social world, who organize works of charity, yes, and even among those who have a share in political life and who labour for the good of their country. As wife of an important state official she stood by her husband's side and helped him to study the laws of the land; she brought up eight children with conscientious care, training them to realize the responsibilities which rank and wealth laid upon them; she was a gracious hostess to her many guests and held a high post at Court. Her works of charity, including what we should call hospital and rescue work, were well organized and efficiently carried out.

When, later on, we see her leave behind all worldly ambitions and in answer to an irresistible call become wholly centred in God, her necessarily unusual way of life never makes her unapproachable. On the contrary; those in trouble turn to her instinctively for help in their various needs and never find her unresponsive. Some forty years after her death

she is remembered by one as homely and kind, while another recalls her smiling face.

Let us then think of St. Bridget not as some remote prophetess, but as one homely and kind — an understanding person with whom we can be quite at our ease. If we find her at times saying strange and stern words, it will not be in her own person, and it will be with inward fear and shrinking on her part. She never adopts the role of the teacher; she makes no claim to sit in the seats of the doctors. She hides her graces when she may and guards jealously the secrets of her soul. If she is consulted, she will reply: "I am a sinner"; if she is praised for her words, she will protest that she is only like the humble runner of a great lord, who delivers his master's message and is straightway forgotten.

To the strictly biographical chapters of this book have been added a few intended to show St. Bridget as living on in the Order she founded and inspiring it with her own ideals. If the Saint is unfamiliar, still more so in all probability is the Order commonly called by her name. Yet it exists to-day though in greatly diminished numbers from those of pre-Reformation times, and in its own particular sphere claims to be the expression of the spirit of its foundress. It has played no startling role in history; it has lived as it still lives, the hidden life St. Bridget planned for it — her own life of adoration, sacrifice, and prayer. But it, like other orders, has trodden the way of persecution and has given the Church martyrs, one of whom belongs to our own land of England. And since it does exist, no history of St. Bridget can be considered really complete without mention of something that was so truly a part of herself.

Two Swedish authors, Torvald Höjer and Carl Silverstolpe, are considered the greatest modern authorities on the history of the Bridgettine Order. Among Miss Howitt's notes

for her work on St. Bridget are many translations from their writings. With the information gained from these as well as from the Latin edition of the "Diary" or chronicle of the first monastery at Vadstena, an attempt has been made to tell very briefly the events which led to the confirmation of the Order some five years after the Saint's death, of its spread into other lands, of difficulties it encountered in the century following, and finally to see in the Rule its foundress gave it some reflection of her own inner life.

To all the good friends at home and abroad who have given generous help by making suggestions, correcting errors, supplying references and translations, or answering questions most grateful acknowledgements are offered.



PART I

St. Bridget in Sweden



## CHAPTER I

### The Child

*When the child Bridget, Bride of Christ, had reached her seventh year, she saw one night when awake, an altar opposite her bed, and seated above it a certain lady, clothed in shining garments and holding in her hands a precious crown, who said to her: "Bridget, come!" Hearing this voice, she at once rose from her bed and ran to the altar. Said the lady: "Will you have this crown?" and when she assented, the crown was placed on her head so that Bridget felt its touch. When she returned to her bed the vision vanished, but she could never forget it.<sup>1</sup>*

This is the earliest record of St. Bridget's first vision. To her it was a mystery, to us it is symbolic. Heaven's precious gifts offered for her acceptance, unasked and undeserved; the assent to the invitation given at once, unhesitatingly, wonderingly, gratefully. All through the years now opening would come unasked-for gifts and graces; graces of which she would know herself to be wholly unworthy. Invitations would come, too, to do and say this or that, invitations often unwelcome to nature; and each would be accepted with the same spirit of glad and prompt obedience.

If Bridget shared the secret of her night's vision, as we may suppose she did, with her mother, the Lady Ingeborg of Finsta, her confidante would rejoice but perhaps hardly be surprised. For over this little daughter hung mystery. Years before, Ingeborg had heard the story of a visit paid by her own mother, Sigrïd, to a monastery of nuns. One of the community had passed hard judgement on the great lady, richly

dressed and therefore, of course, proud, and had afterwards been rebuked by a voice from heaven. "Why have you slandered My handmaid, calling her proud? This is not true. Moreover I shall cause a daughter to be born of her line by whom I shall do wondrous things in the world, and I shall infuse into her such grace that all will marvel."

Then not long before Bridget's birth, Ingeborg had in her turn heard a heavenly voice. She had had a narrow escape from drowning and afterwards said an angel had appeared to her telling her she had been saved because of the child to be born to her, and adding: "Bring her up in the love of God, for she is His gift to you."

Rumours had reached her too, that the night Bridget was born, the parish priest had seen a vision of the Virgin Mother who announced: "A daughter is born to Birger whose wondrous voice will be heard by all the world."

Bridget had not been like other babies: not like the four children who had preceded her. For this child whose voice all the world would hear had made no sound. Not until the age of three years did she utter a word. What was maturing in the baby mind? She was not unconscious of what was going on around her, for when at last she spoke it was in clear, distinct words that had in them no trace of baby language.<sup>2</sup>

St. Bridget, fifth child of Birger Persson, knight, and of Ingeborg Bengtstodter, was born somewhere between the years 1302 and 1304, probably in 1303, and tradition says it was on June 14.

Except for a very few facts, we know nothing of St. Bridget's early years, but certain influences are clearly traceable in her after-life and in her writings. Her parents are described as "just and devout; noble according to the flesh since they were sprung from the race of the Gothic kings, but more noble according to God." Who these Gothic kings were is unknown; Birger's coat of arms was a shield having a pair of wings with the tips downwards; his family can only

be distinguished by the name of the Finsta race. He was known to be fervent in the fulfilment of his religious duties, and was accustomed to say that since he did not know how long God might spare him, he wished to be always ready for death. At some time in his life he made two of the great pilgrimages — to Jerusalem and to the tomb of St. James at Compostela, and in performing these acts of devotion he was following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather before him.<sup>3</sup>

Birger was perhaps the most notable man of his day in Sweden. Governor of the province of Upland, to him was entrusted the task of drawing up a new code of law for his country when it was decided to do away with the Vig Saga, a law composed by a heathen named Vig, and strangely enough still in use only some seven or eight years before Bridget's birth. Sweden had been visited as early as 829 by Christian missionaries brought back by the Northmen as a result of their adventurous journeys into other lands, but it had taken centuries to win the people as a whole away from their old beliefs. Many set-backs, some martyrs; it was not really until the beginning of the thirteenth century that Sweden could be called a Christian country.

Ingeborg Bengtstodter, mother of St. Bridget, was Birger's second wife. Her father, Benedict Magnusson, Governor of East Gothland, belonged to the mighty Folkung race.<sup>4</sup>

The Folkung race had ruled Sweden from the middle of the thirteenth century and took its name from Folke the Big, the most powerful man of his time (1079-1110) and Jarl, what we might call prime minister to the king, and therefore next in importance to him. Folke's more famous descendant was Birger the Younger (so called to distinguish him from his predecessor Birger the Smiling). He was Sweden's greatest statesman. Under his rule, acting as regent for his young son — the first of the Folkungs to be chosen as king — Sweden became a united kingdom, and to him is attributed the foundation of Stockholm.

Neither St. Bridget nor the man she married were direct descendants of Jarl Birger, so had no claims to the titles of royalty persistently given to the Saint. Very commonly she is called a princess, sometimes even a queen. But as the child of an exceedingly wealthy and important family she grew up among "fair and noble customs" as she calls the traditions of her race and time. Constant guests were well entertained, grand banquets prepared, rich clothes worn, and there were hosts of retainers. All this has to be borne in mind fully to appreciate St. Bridget's later attitude towards the goods of this world, her self-reproach for her pride of race, her eagerness for poverty, and her desire to be the servant of all.

We can picture her home as a centre of immense activity; messengers coming and going, the Governor summoned to council or *Ting*, or again, receiving those he ruled to settle their disputes or redress their wrongs. Bridget's intense interest all through her life in law and politics — the relations of the ruler to his subjects which is the burden of many of her revelations — had its rise in the years spent at Finsta.

Many allusions in her writings to forests, rivers, mountains, birds, as well as some of the grim apparitions she describes in such vivid words, show how greatly she was affected by the natural surroundings of her home and the legends, some graceful, some fearsome, which took the place of storybooks. Strongest influence of all was that of the teaching on the truths of faith, given her we may suppose by her mother who is described as "virtuous in all her ways."<sup>5</sup> When Bridget sprang from her bed to receive the crown offered her, it was no stranger that she saw but one she recognized and knew already as the Queen of Heaven. It was part of that intimacy with the saints which meets us all through her life and which surely had its rise at Finsta.

In the Middle Ages a girl of twelve or thirteen, who, had she lived to-day, would have been busy with studies or games, commonly found herself the mistress of a large household as wife of some powerful lord. Childhood, girlhood, woman-

hood tripped each other up, and in the course of a few years much had to be learned. She must know not only how to read, write, and count, to sew and spin, but also what were the duties of a good housewife and hostess; she must watch her mother directing her many servants and know what was the work expected from each; must learn how to receive and entertain guests of all ranks, from royalty to the poorest passing stranger.

That Bridget learnt her lesson well, we shall see in her after-history, but it was in the midst of this practical training of head and hand that there came to her a second vision, and one which was to shape the whole after-course of her life. The first vision had been beautiful but bewildering; she had been crowned, she knew not why, by the Queen of Heaven herself! The second was a divine favour of another kind: Bridget's first invitation to a share in the cross. It came in sleep, yet she was convinced it was no mere dream.

It was Holy Week and the Governor and his family had been to hear a sermon on the Passion which was deeply moving. Bridget had fallen asleep with her mind full, no doubt, of all she had heard described so graphically. Then she saw before her Jesus Christ and from His wounds fresh blood was flowing. He said to her:

"See how I am wounded!"

Had He just been crucified again? So Bridget asked herself and cried out: "Oh, Lord, who has done this to Thee?"

"Those who despise Me and spurn My love," came the answer. "It is they who have done this."

The vision was over, but it had pierced Bridget's heart. Henceforth, we read, she had so deep a devotion to the sufferings of Christ that she could rarely hear them mentioned without tears.<sup>6</sup>

She was at this time ten years old. A year later she lost her mother. Ingeborg died in the same simple and strong faith in which she had lived. In her last words there is no trace of anxiety over leaving her young family. Her work is done.

"Why do you grieve? I have lived long enough and the great God is calling me."<sup>7</sup>

Bridget was now the eldest of the family, as the brothers and sisters who had preceded her were dead, and a sister, Katherine, and a brother, Israel, had followed her. After the stately funeral to Upsala cathedral, where her mother's body was laid in the Finsta chantry, she was told that she was to leave her home in company with her sister and go to live with her mother's sister Katherine, wife of Sir Canute Jons-son, Governor of East Gothland.

A long, wearisome journey, probably first by trading smack and thence on horseback, brought the two girls to their new home at Aspenäs, built on a headland and overlooking the beautiful lake of Sommen, dotted over with islands said to be as many as there are days in a year.

The great house — consisting as was usual of a collection of wooden buildings round a courtyard — the numerous retainers, the daily life, were all much the same as at home in Finsta. In the winter evenings the whole household would gather in the hall and sit round a blazing fire fed with great logs from the forests. Bridget with the rest would sew or spin, join in the songs, or listen to the legends of which the countryside was full.

She was, of course, often homesick and lonely with the loneliness that can be so intense when among strangers. There was little opportunity for quiet by day, but the nights were her own, and she had the habit of getting up when all was still, and pouring out her heart in prayer to One who had deigned to share with her His sufferings.

The Lady Katherine, we are told, was a most devout woman, but naturally enough she expected Bridget to be like other children. So when one night she found her out of bed, on her knees, tears streaming down her face, she was both puzzled and angry. Praying all by herself in the cold! This was either vanity on the girl's part or hysteria. She determined to put a stop at once to such foolish nonsense. She

sent for a rod. But when she raised it to strike her niece, it fell at her feet in small pieces. This was still more disconcerting. The servants must have been putting the girl up to some heathen superstitious arts; she might even be under the influence of evil spirits.

"What are you about, Bridget?" she asked sharply. "Some of the women must have been teaching you false prayers."

Bridget answered simply: "Nothing, my Lady; I only rose from my bed to praise and magnify Him who is always near and ready to help me."

Her aunt's heart was touched. From that day, says the early Life, she not only loved Bridget but held her in honour, and when her niece confided to her later that she had had a terrifying apparition of the devil, she gave her advice that was both kindly and sensible. "Keep silence, have a great trust in God, love Him more and more, and beware of all that is mere emotion."

In after-years, says an old chronicle, Katherine would tell many stories of her niece's piety. One was the tale of Bridget's receiving miraculous help over a difficult piece of embroidery. Bridget saw no one; only knew that what had seemed an impossible task had somehow been accomplished, but her aunt saw among her "maidens" in the workroom one unknown to her, bending over her niece's embroidery frame. The work was so exquisite that Katherine kept it ever after among her most treasured possessions as something sacred. The unknown visitor was, she always maintained, none other than the Virgin Mother herself.<sup>8</sup>

The somewhat severe training of Aspenäs lasted not quite two years, for in the summer of 1316 Bridget was again at Finsta. She was thirteen, her sister twelve; childhood had ended and it was time for them to marry.

proof. So we can take for granted that it became quite plain to her that to be Ulf's wife was God's call, and that any other way of life would be self-pleasing. But how hard was the sacrifice to her we can gather from her forcible words to her daughter many years later when speaking of this time: "I would rather have died than marry!"<sup>11</sup>

The double betrothal took place, according to custom, at the home of the brides. It was a very ceremonious affair, ending with a banquet at which the "betrothal ale" was drunk. The marriage was expected to follow almost immediately, and this, also according to custom, took place at the home of the bridegroom.<sup>12</sup>

On a day in September, 1316, Finsta was full of guests awaiting the bridal train sent by Ulf Gudmarsson to escort his bride to her future home. It consisted of his brothers-in-arms and of many maidens for the bride, and all were on horseback with colours flying.

Presently Bridget was led out by her father. Her biographers have left no description of her personal appearance, but we can picture the thirteen-year-old girl as slight and fair, with a serious face full of spiritual beauty and high resolve, and wearing on her brow the bridal crown set with precious stones.

The ride was a long one, and forests through which the bride would pass must first be explored by the fully armed escort. At last the train reached Ulfåsa, standing high above the south bank of Lake Boren. Trumpets announced the approach of the bride and Ulf came out to meet her. Sir Birger gave his daughter to the bridegroom with the words: "I give her to you to honour and to marry; to share your bed, your locks and keys, every third penny and all legal right. In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The marriage in the private chapel followed, and then the many guests — including, according to law, relatives to the third remove — sat down to the wedding banquet.

## CHAPTER II

### The Wife

BIRGER, Governor of Upland, and Gudmar, Governor of West Gothland, wished, for some reason no longer known, to form a connection between their families, and so had arranged that Birger's two daughters, Bridget and Katherine, should respectively marry Gudmar's two sons, Ulf and Magnus.<sup>9</sup>

The prospective bridegrooms belonged, as did Bridget and Katherine, to the younger branch of the Folkungs, and this also on their mother's side. Ulf, the elder, owned the fine estate of Ulfåsa. He was eighteen at this time and is described in an early Life of St. Bridget as "rich, noble and wise." Another chronicle says of him that he was "early in life a godfearing and polished scholar, and also a distinguished courtier."<sup>10</sup> Possibly he owed his unusually good education to the Cistercian monks at the great abbey of Alvastra, or he may have been taught by one of the solitaries — often quite learned men — living in the forests near his home.

Surely, Birger must have thought, he could not have chosen better for his eldest daughter, and his relations fully agreed. But the eldest daughter heard of the plan made for her with dismay. What else had she expected? Perhaps she simply had not faced the future. She only knew that to marry anyone, however desirable, was the last thing she wished to do. God had long ago claimed all her heart. Yet finally she gave in to the persuasions of her father and other relatives. That this yielding was no mere following the line of least resistance, no weak betrayal of any promise or principle, everything in Bridget's character and after-life gives ample

At last night fell, and husband and wife were alone. In her earnest and quite decided way, Bridget made the suggestion which so plainly showed her own strong desire, that for the present she and Ulf should live as brother and sister, preparing themselves by prayer for whatever God might will for them.<sup>12</sup>

Next day Bridget appeared in the dress of a matron, which included the wearing of a cap. A quaint little figure she must have looked serving her guests as mistress of the house. She formally received from her husband what was called her "Morning Gift" — *morgongåva* — that is the property he bestowed on her as her very own. Part of it, oddly enough, was a spear. The wedding festivities went on for several days; tournaments, dancing, minstrelsy, and banquets, and the poor of the neighbourhood streamed to Ulfåsa to receive abundant food and alms.

At last the guests went away and ordinary life began. Bridget threw herself heart and soul into her new duties with all the intensity of an ardent nature. One less well balanced and less spiritually developed might have let her thoughts dwell on the solitary life of prayer she had hoped and longed for, and have allowed scruples as to her social claims to trouble her soul. But Bridget, with that marvellous ingenuity of which the saints have the secret, found a way by which she more than fulfilled what her husband expected of her as mistress of Ulfåsa, and at the same time followed a path of prayer and increasingly rigorous mortification.

She inherited the immense energy and strength of will of the Folkung race, and with it the power of ruling and organizing and also of carrying others along with her. She recognized fully the danger of these natural gifts, and to the end we shall find her fighting against what she calls her "pride." Vain of her gifts she was not. Never introspective, she looked out over a horizon as wide as the interests of God's kingdom, and the spiritual favours which crowded her life as time went on and which made her such a centre of interest

and admiration, simply overwhelmed her with confusion. But she was by nature a masterful character, and this explains what will seem to many utterly exaggerated submission and detachment when, many years later, she found herself free to choose her own way of life.

Meanwhile between her and Ulf there grew up a deep affection and respect. Ulf realized at the outset that this youthful bride of thirteen had a strength of character greater than his own, though it never let her fail in wifely submission and obedience. He had lived his eighteen years blamelessly and loved his holy Faith: Bridget by degrees drew him on to walk not along the highroad, but up the mountain. The early Life tells us that Ulf learned his wife's prayers and the two would recite together the Hours of Our Lady.<sup>14</sup> Bridget certainly, and probably Ulf also, joined the Third Order of St. Francis, and in an age which was one of strong faith but equally one of strong passions, the master and mistress of Ulfåsa set a high standard.

Many years later Bridget reproached herself for her former pride of birth and for having taken pleasure in being one of Sweden's great ladies. "When true humility was preached to us," she says, "we replied that our ancestors had bequeathed to us great possessions, grand and fair customs, and why shouldn't we follow them? Our mothers sat among the first of the land, were richly dressed, had many servants, and brought us up in accordance with our rank, and was it not our duty to bring up our children in the same way that was taught us?"<sup>15</sup>

This gives us a glimpse of the life at Ulfåsa. With all her personal austerity, Bridget lived outwardly according to the traditions she had inherited, and took for granted she was right in so doing. On great occasions she wore the rich brocades, velvets, furs, and jewels which women of her station were expected to wear. She had her maidens, her husband had his pages. Much hospitality was shown at Ulfåsa and the guests were well entertained. Old deeds give proof of a con-

stant stream of visitors: clergy and laity; people from all parts of Scandinavia. Besides distinguished guests there were humble ones; wandering scholars from the Dominican Priory at Skeninge who went from house to house and sang for their bread, mendicant friars, and even at times the recluses from the forests.

A few years after her husband's death, Bridget tells how he appeared to her, told her he was in purgatory, and begged that prayers and certain good works should be offered for his soul. One of the things for which he reproached himself was that he had been too fond of banquets and feasting and had sat too long at table. He directed his wife to sell some of his elaborately chased drinking cups for the benefit of the Church. Bridget had nothing to reproach herself with on this score. The covered drinking cup set before her on the table contained only water, and while she appeared to eat the delicate meats she provided for those around her, she would contrive more often than not to take dry bread. Her fasts, and those of the strictest kind, were many; so many indeed that it seems as if there were hardly a place for a feast day in her calendar. In any case she seldom satisfied her hunger. And like another holy Franciscan Tertiary, St. Elisabeth of Hungary, she knew how to mortify her flesh with haircloth, worn under the rich clothes her rank demanded, and not even laid aside at night.<sup>16</sup>

Some time after their marriage, Bridget and her husband built themselves a new house; it was of stone and several stories high. Instead of the usual skylights, there were proper windows, and in one of the rooms there was even the luxury of a fireplace adorned with carvings.

Perhaps it was for this house that Bridget ordered an elaborate bed which, she tells us, brought a rebuke from heaven.

Sweden's housewives took pride in providing costly quilts, wadded and embroidered, or even fur coverlets for their beds during the very severe winter season. Now Bridget had ordered for herself a richly carved bed which was to have the

usual luxurious coverings. She was looking one day at her new possession with much satisfaction, when she felt a sudden and violent pain in her head, exactly as if a hand had struck her. She fell and lay unable to move, while a voice, seeming to come from the wall, said: "I did not rest, but hung on the cross and My head had no support. But you seek this curiosity and a place of repose."

The pain in her head was gone, but she felt her heart pierced with sorrow and shame. She had forgotten her vision of the Crucified Saviour and she wept bitter tears. Henceforth when possible, she sternly avoided the comfort of a bed and would take her rest lying on some straw or a bearskin.<sup>17</sup>

No doubt it was incidents such as this, showing a natural pride in her house or thought for her own comfort, that made Bridget later so often reproach herself for her worldliness, but there is certainly little trace of it in the way she ordered her daily life. Those who knew her — members of her household or intimate friends — would tell, after her death, of her early rising at Ulfåsa, and how, after her daily attendance at Mass, she would go apart to some oratory of her own for her private devotions and then spend hours over Church embroidery. This young chatelaine of perhaps fifteen or sixteen, would gather her "maidens" around her, and while they worked would read to them the Lives of saints she had had translated into Swedish.<sup>18</sup>

Ulf and Bridget were lavish almsgivers. They built a hospital on their estate and repaired others in various parts of the country. Bridget delighted in visiting the sick. They were her dearly honoured guests in whom she saw her Divine Master. She had skilled attendants provided for them but, not content with this, would nurse them herself. Day by day she was to be seen kneeling by the beds, her face full of love and pity, bathing repulsive sores, shrinking from no humble task. Every day at home, before she took her own meal, she personally fed twelve poor, and on Thursdays, in memory of the Maundy, washed their feet. She interested herself too, in

poor girls; some she placed in convents, to others she gave dowries to enable them to marry. Her special care was for those who had fallen into sin. She provided them with a shelter, taught them, and gave them a fresh start in life. "To all who were in trouble," says her daughter Katherine, "to sinners, to the poor, to orphans, widows, and children, she was like a mother, showing them the utmost tenderness and compassion."<sup>19</sup>

When Ulf was twenty-five he was dubbed knight, and his wife had the intense joy of hearing him swear with upraised hands, by God, the Virgin Mary, St. Eric, and St. Canute, to defend the Church and her ministers, orphans, virgins, and widows, and to be true to his country.

The subject of knighthood had the deepest interest and significance for Bridget. She had grown up in the atmosphere of chivalry and her whole spiritual outlook was affected by it. Intrepid courage, loyalty, zeal for the honour of the King of heaven and earth — these are notes constantly sounded in her writings, and there are many references to knights, their vows, and their duties.<sup>20</sup>

Two years after being made knight Ulf was appointed governor of the province of Närke. With characteristic energy, his wife helped him to make a serious study of the various laws, and documents are still extant which prove his activity in public affairs. In one of St. Bridget's revelations she says it was told her that her husband had always judged fairly, neither from partiality nor policy.<sup>21</sup>

It was about this time that Bridget's father died, and the fortune she inherited from him made her one of the wealthiest women in Sweden. The funeral of the Governor of Upsala took place in Upsala cathedral with almost royal magnificence, and his body was laid beside that of his wife. The slab which covers the tomb can still be seen and has traced on it the effigies not only of husband and wife but also of their seven children. Bridget is without a halo, showing that the work dates from a time before her canonization.<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### The Mother

THE time of prayer and waiting on God's will which Bridget and her husband had imposed on themselves, ended in two years, and in the years that followed, eight children were born to them: four sons and four daughters.

Just in what order sons and daughters came cannot now be precisely determined. An early Life of St. Bridget gives the names first of sons: Charles, Birger, Benedict, and Gudmar, with some account of each; then of daughters: Merita, Katherine, Ingeborg, and lastly Cecilia, who was certainly the youngest of the family.<sup>23</sup>

Bridget was a devoted mother and took the utmost pains to bring up her children well. She was careful over their education and provided the best tutors for them.<sup>24</sup> She used to take them with her on her various errands of charity, to the horror of some of her friends.

"Exposing children to the danger of bad air and epidemics!" they expostulated.

"God has placed my children in a position which will give them the honour of helping their poorer brethren," answered Bridget, "and I wish them from the very beginning to learn to serve Jesus Christ in the persons of the poor and sick for whom they will one day be the treasurers."<sup>25</sup>

The eldest son and daughter were probably something of an anxiety to their mother from the first. Merita, from what we know of her later, was a rather hard character, ambitious and determined. Charles was high-spirited, attractive, wilful: his daring and a certain levity of character, which never left



him, got him into one scrape after another. Ulf laughed at his son's high spirits and his pranks and was proud of his clever sayings,<sup>26</sup> but Bridget shed many tears over what she saw was often a lack of principle. She always felt that the sins of her children were in some way her responsibility, and she already had the unenviable gift of reading consciences. One day her eldest son came into her room and she greeted him with: "Go and confess that mortal sin you have committed!"

Convinced his mother could not possibly know what was on his conscience, Charles denied having committed any mortal sin. But it was no use; Bridget persisted in her assertion and he had finally to admit she was right.<sup>27</sup>

Birger, the second son, was a complete contrast to his brother: quiet, obedient, always to be depended on; rather stolid and uninteresting, one always feels, but a good and devoted son.

The two boys received the usual education of young nobles. Systematic training began at seven years old. There was training in gallantry, to which belonged a knowledge of chess, dice, music, and languages; there was bodily training: riding, jumping, climbing, and leaping; the use of bow and arrow, the skilful handling of lance, sword, and shield. Social training too, in discipline and good manners. In their quite early years Bridget would certainly teach her children their Faith; later they would go to the parish priest or the household chaplain.

One of the tutors engaged was a remarkable boy, Nicholas Hermansson, whose parents lived at Skeninge, not far away. If the date given as that of Nicholas Hermansson's birth is correct, namely, 1326, it would seem as if he must have been several years younger than his pupils; a lad perhaps of thirteen or fourteen, who gave lessons in his school holidays. He is said to have annoyed his mother by his excessive devotion to study when he attended the Dominican grammar school at Skeninge.

In the old Life of Nicholas Hermansson we read: "He

once observed that when he was appointed tutor to the sons of Bridget, he also instructed her in grammar. He behaved so honourably, piously and maturely at her seat of Ulfåsa that he was specially included in the fervent prayers she offered to God. And we learn from a very trustworthy source that when the scholar begged her to pray most fervently to the Lord for him, she received from the Blessed Virgin Mary the answer that he would become Bishop of Linköping and be the first to establish her new Rule and induct the Order into her monastery at Vadstena. All of which later was fulfilled. And the Lady Bridget in familiar conversation called him her 'bishop'; to which, however, at the time he gave no heed."<sup>28</sup>

What are we to make of Bridget's prophecy concerning the future dignity of Nicholas and the new religious order she would establish at Vadstena? Can we think that this young married woman with children growing up around her had any inkling of what the future held for her? It seems hardly possible; and even if she had some dim presentiment of the work awaiting her, one cannot easily imagine her sharing anything so intimate and so strange with her young tutor. The explanation lies perhaps in the supposition that Bridget and her husband among their other good works intended to build a monastery for religious belonging to one of the existing orders, to all of which they seem to have been benefactors. Supposing then, that their scheme was well known to their household, we can imagine Bridget looking at the gifted boy who was preparing for the priesthood and saying to him: "Some day you will be Bishop of Linköping and then you will look after my monastery." Henceforth she would playfully call Nicholas her bishop, which he would not take seriously. When, later on, all the prophecies were fulfilled, and Nicholas, as bishop, had installed the first religious of the new Order in the monastery at Vadstena, it was natural to see in the words of long ago a greater significance than they actually held.

Bridget's two younger sons were not trained to feats of chivalry. Probably both were intended for the priesthood. Benedict was received by the Cistercian monks at the Abbey of Alvastra after his training by women had ended. Of Gudmar, a chronicle concerning St. Bridget's family, written by an abbess of Vadstena, says only that he died when a young boy, having been at school in Stockholm.<sup>29</sup>

Both the Cistercian and Dominican nuns had monasteries not far from Ulfåsa and received into their enclosure as pupils the daughters of the nobles. Many of these intended from the outset to stay in the monastery and become nuns, and were known as *scholares*; others were expected after their schooldays ended to return to the world and were called *saeculares*. All were given a careful education, became well-read women, and often were excellent musicians, painters of missals and miniatures, weavers and embroiderers of rich vestments and carpets.

To the Cistercian nuns at Risaberga Bridget's two daughters Katherine and Ingeborg were sent.

Katherine was only a few years old when her mother gave her into the care of the Abbess of Risaberga. There seems to have been no thought of her becoming a nun, but just at this time Bridget was often obliged to be absent from her family, as she held a high position at Court.

The old chronicle tells various tales of Katherine's early days: how she absolutely refused the breast of a nurse whom her mother had inadvertently engaged and who was found to be of bad character; how she roused the fury of the devil at Risaberga and saw him in the form of an angry bull which tossed her from her bed on to the ground.<sup>30</sup>

Her sister Ingeborg was from the outset among the *scholares*, and when she was still very young, her parents gave the monastery a farm as part of her dowry.<sup>31</sup> In due time she followed the path marked out for her and died a Cistercian nun some years after her mother had left Sweden for Rome.

The birth of Bridget's youngest child, Cecilia, very nearly

cost her mother her life. Ulf had determined to give his eldest daughter Merita in marriage to Sigvid Ribbing, a rich and influential Dane. It would be a brilliant match, but Bridget knew that Sigvid was a bad man and, moreover, hard and cruel. The chronicle of Margaret Clausdotter, already quoted, says: "This was done against the will of St. Brita because the King and nobles willed it."

By this time both Bridget and Ulf were, off and on, members of the King's household, and no doubt Bridget's quiet influence over her husband was less felt than at home. Ulf was a man of importance in the realm: it was for him to listen to the advice of the King and nobles who urged the match. Merita sided with her father in the matter, and the betrothal ceremony was accordingly arranged. Abbess Clausdotter thus describes the event:

"On the day that the betrothal ale was drunk, she [Bridget] wept her heart out and refused to enter the house where the feast was being held, where the great men were gathered together making merry as on such occasions they are wont. And while St. Bridget sat alone and wept that her daughter should come into the power of so cruel a man, being with child of her who was called Cecilia, the babe in its mother's womb spoke, saying: 'Mother, do not kill me.' St. Bridget answered: 'My dear child, because God has given you your soul I will not kill you.' Thereupon she arrayed herself in her richest attire and went in and gladdened them all."

As the betrothal was such a serious affair, involving the approval of relatives on both sides, the indignity offered by Ulf to his wife in not obtaining her consent was great. Bridget must certainly have felt this, but it was for no personal grievance that she sat apart and wept; it was the heart-break of knowing that her child was being given into the power of one who, if he did not make her offend God, would at least bring her sorrow and shame.

Two touches in the old account just quoted let us see the generosity of Bridget's self-conquest. Having realized that it

was right for the sake of her unborn child to put away her grief and go to the feast, she did so graciously, by wearing splendid attire and with a manner that gladdened her guests.

But the strain on her nerves was so great that very soon she was in grave danger of dying in childbirth. In the Bull of her Canonization we read: "She ever had a great devotion to the Virgin Mary, and when the midwives and nurses stood around her, despairing of her life, a woman, unknown to the onlookers, majestic and clad in white silken garments, came into the room, and standing by the bed, touched each limb of the sufferer. Then the stranger disappeared, and forthwith the birth of the child followed without further pain."

The early Life of St. Bridget adds that later she had a vision of the Virgin Mother who told her it was indeed she who came to help her, adding these words: "So you would be ungrateful if you did not love me. Do your utmost to see that your children are also mine."<sup>22</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### The Queen's Lady-in-Waiting

WHEN Bridget was about thirty-two, she left her home temporarily to take up an important post at Court.

Magnus II, King of Sweden and Norway, was expecting the arrival of his bride, Blanche, a daughter of Count John of Flanders, and had asked Bridget to be her chief Lady-in-waiting. His choice of her was natural enough. She was a relative, belonging to the same race of the Folkungs, she was greatly looked up to by all, had daughters of her own, and would be a help to the new young Queen, who was little more than a child and coming to a strange country.

Bridget accepted the invitation as a command, and in the autumn of 1335 was at Bohus castle on the borders of Sweden and Norway, ready to receive the royal bride and be present at the wedding.

It was in the early years of her married life that Bridget had seen Magnus, as a child of three, held up in her father's arms to receive the homage of his subjects. It was hoped that his reign would be the beginning of better things, for there had been much unrest, ending in revolution. The king who was reigning at the time of Bridget's birth was an unworthy member of his race, weak and cunning. His two brothers, the Dukes Eric and Valdemar, were always plotting against him and finally got rid of him by a treacherous ruse. They invited him to a banquet during which they had him and his family seized and imprisoned. They then jointly ruled Sweden. Later, the captive was released — and retaliated. He had his brothers taken prisoner in much the same way, and in prison

they both died — it was commonly believed by a violent death. Popular sympathy seems always to have been with the dukes, and their disappearance was the signal for a general rising. The King tried in vain to quell it and finally fled to Denmark, and as his son had been put to death, Sweden was left without a ruler. It was probably by the advice of the Governor of Upland, Bridget's father, that the young son of Duke Eric was elected king.

The mother of Magnus II, a daughter of the King of Norway, was no help to her son. She was flighty and headstrong, and stringent laws had to be passed both in Norway and Sweden to prevent her from interfering in affairs of State. Perhaps it was because of this that Bridget made the young King such a special object of her prayers. He was to prove one of her bitterest disappointments.

When he first assumed the government of his two kingdoms he seemed to have high ideals, revived good laws which had fallen into disuse, and went about among his people with whom he was popular because of his easy, affable manners. There was at this time no Swedish capital, though Stockholm was the most important town. The King himself was considered the centre of administration and had estates all over the land. So Bridget, as Lady-in-waiting to the Queen, must move from place to place and be now in Norway, now in Sweden.

Queen Blanche had come from a land of wealth. In Flanders everyone was prosperous; the houses were magnificent, the food luxurious, the dress splendid. No good preparation for a kingdom whose Royal Exchequer was in a bad condition. The newcomer had no wish to know anything about the affairs that were already worrying Magnus. She was young, she was a queen; why think about expense? Under her influence, Magnus gladly put aside unpleasant thoughts for the time, and ordered elaborate preparations to be made for the coronation of himself and his queen the year following the marriage.

History has painted Magnus and Blanche in very dark colours, at least towards the end of their reign, following reports spread by the Swedish nobles who became the King's bitter enemies. Nobles versus King: it had nearly always been so, and it would have needed a firmer and abler hand than Magnus ever possessed to keep the turbulent lords in their place.

I am reminded here of an old tale of a predecessor of King Magnus, told in a Norwegian chronicle.

Eric, King of Sweden, had subdued Vermland — then a part of Norway — and, bent on continuing his conquests in the realm of King Harald, visited a powerful landowner, named Ake. King Harald likewise arrived, and the host, seeing it would be dangerous for the royal combatants to meet, decided to entertain them in different houses. Eric was lodged in an old house filled with old furniture, but Harald in a new one fitted up with new plenshings. Eric came to know this and expressed his annoyance.

"Sire," replied Ake soothingly, "Your Majesty is of venerable age and it is fitting that you should be entertained in a venerable house with furniture suited to its years, whereas King Harald is a stripling and so is in a house but lately built."

Eric was dissatisfied with the explanation and killed Ake forthwith.

There seems little likelihood that Magnus committed the particularly odious and cold-blooded crime laid to his charge — namely the murder by poison of his son Eric,<sup>88</sup> yet it is undoubted that the generally severe judgement of later generations on him as a ruler are based on St. Bridget's writings. Her condemnation of him is uncompromising. His contemporaries saw in him merely a weak and ineffective sovereign, and as his financial difficulties became ever more acute, an oppressive one also, for his Swedish people were ground down by taxation. Bridget, too, saw this, but to her the King was

one to whom God had given a great trust and with it the power to be faithful if he would, and who yet by his folly and above all by his disobedience to the heavenly warnings and commands sent him, was in large measure responsible for the troubles which marked his reign and brought at last ruin on his kingdom. Many a time, as the years went on, was she to plead with him by word and by letter, showing him how greatly beloved he was of God and what he might do if only he would hearken and break loose from bad counsellors and crafty allies whom she names the wolf and the fox. One of the only two scraps of Bridget's actual handwriting still extant contains a warning to Magnus sent from Rome some twenty-five years later than her first sojourn at Court.

The eighth book of St. Bridget's *Revelations* bears the title "The Heavenly Emperor to the Kings." It is a collection made by Alfonso da Vadaterra, editor of the Saint's writings, of words spoken or sent to various rulers at various times. A number of the admonitions are addressed to King Magnus II and of these some definitely belong to the quite early years of his reign.<sup>34</sup> He is exhorted so to rule and to judge that he may be both feared and honoured by his subjects, to be merciful as well as just. He is to wear kingly attire on the great feasts of the Church, but is to be humble, remembering the grave responsibility of his office.

It is easy to dismiss without further thought, as counsel given to an irresponsible young man in the Middle Ages, these directions as to what may be called kingly pomp, especially as they include the wearing of his crown. There are those to-day who regard the time-honoured ceremonial of a court as something not merely tiresome but outworn, and who would, or think they would, gladly see it swept away. Yet perhaps our own age, with its impatience, independence, and loss of reverence, has need like Magnus of just such outward signs of kingship, as a reminder whence earthly sovereignty derives; outward signs which suggest — albeit so feebly — something of the majesty of the heavenly Emperor. As for

the sovereigns themselves, it is those who understand the significance of the dignity belonging to their high office who best know just when and how to unbend, and show themselves with simplicity and gladness akin to those over whom they have been called to rule.

This last aspect of kingship was not omitted in the directions given to the young king of Sweden. He is charged to know how to be simple and friendly. He ought not to dine alone, but choose as his table companions those whose counsel will be of value to him. After the meal, he is to linger awhile with his guests and let the talk be informal and pleasant. This will recreate him and also give him an opportunity of getting to know the thoughts and outlook of his subjects. He must avoid flippant and shallow talk and fly all flattery.

Sweden's history would have been different had Magnus always followed the advice given him. Sometimes it was welcomed, but more often spurned. It seems evident that both the King and Queen were at times awed by their relative. It is in fact the only explanation of their tolerance of her admonitions. Magnus probably had, like his ancestors before him, an innate sense of reverence for a woman who claimed to speak words not of her own wisdom but given her from heaven. In pagan times, we are told, the opinion of the Vala or prophetess had more weight than that of a whole *Ting* or Parliament. The King saw, too, in Bridget one of his own mighty race and realized that her character was a far stronger one than his own. So the two young sovereigns would have fits of great piety, when they listened humbly to the advice given them, and once went so far as to make rash vows on their own responsibility from which they had later to be dispensed. Then they would relapse and return to a view of life which was less uncomfortable.

Bridget was Lady-in-waiting for six years, though with occasional breaks, for she went on various pilgrimages with her husband, and during these years too, her youngest child was born. Possibly Queen Blanche was glad at times to be without

one whose presence made her conscious of things she would rather forget. Two sons were born to the Queen, and after the birth of the second prince, Bridget resigned her post. The years at Court had been for herself a useful experience, but as regards her influence with the King and Queen, they were frankly a failure, since no lasting impression for good had been made on those she had been so eager to help.<sup>35</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### The Widow

IN THE earliest Life of St. Bridget, as proof of the great piety of her forbears, the many pilgrimages they made to the shrines of the saints are cited. "It is an unheard of thing," exclaim the two authors of this chronicle, "that men so mighty and so noble, with so great riches and renown, should set out from the remote ends of the world and make such a laborious journey to see the shrine of St. James and Jerusalem."<sup>36</sup>

Probably nowadays we should think it denoted greater piety in a poor man than in a rich one to undertake a long pilgrimage, but in the Middle Ages it was just the reverse. The "noble and mighty man" must exchange his rich furs and velvet for the pilgrim's smock, with hood, cape, and broad-brimmed hat. Instead of having a company of servants to go before him, prepare his meals and arrange for his lodging, he must carry food and money in a wallet hung from the broad strap across his breast, and for many hours a day he must walk, often over rough roads and passes, until footsore and weary.

Each country had its national places of pilgrimage, and then there were the universally famous shrines, visited by pilgrims from all lands. Such were Jerusalem, Rome, and Compostela. For each of these three the pilgrim had his special passport in the shape of a sign which protected him from assault and even enabled him to pass through an enemy's ranks. If he wore the two crossed palms, he was known to be on his way to Jerusalem; if the crossed keys or the vernicle

(St. Veronica's veil), he was bound for Rome, and the scallop shell was the sign for the shrine of St. James at Compostela.

Bridget and her husband took their full share in what was such a distinctive feature of their time.

They visited Nidaros in Norway to venerate the relics of St. Olaf, King and Martyr, and were absent for thirty days, probably the prescribed time for the pilgrimage.<sup>37</sup>

Very likely they were there on July 29, the Feast of St. Olaf, for on this day there was yearly a great gathering of pilgrims. It was, to quote an old chronicle, a day of reunion for "all the nations of the northern seas, Norwegians, Swedes, Goths, Cimbrians, Danes, and Slavs."<sup>38</sup>

They set off on foot, tramping through dense pine forests, deep-cut valleys, and finally over the Dovrefjeld, a range of bare mountains. Pack horses carried necessities for the journey, but Bridget and her husband would make no other use of them.<sup>39</sup>

All the various Swedish shrines were visited by Bridget at one time or another. One of these was the tomb of St. Botvid, a Swedish martyr. No doubt a vision she records belongs to this time. She was praying, when she fell into an ecstasy, and the Saint appeared to her.

"I, together with other saints," he said to her, "have merited for you a special grace to see, hear, feel and see things spiritual, and the Spirit of God will inflame your soul."<sup>40</sup>

This was Bridget's preparation for the great spiritual favours to be poured out on her in such abundance four years later; a reminder that graces are often due to the holy prayers and sufferings of others, maybe wholly unknown, rather than a recognition of any special sanctity in the recipient.

It was in 1341 that Ulf and Bridget made a vow to visit the shrine of St. James at Compostela.

Bridget had definitely resigned her post at Court, and Ulf had at least for the time retired from his public duties. In that age of faith it would not seem at all surprising or ridiculous even to the worldly-minded, that the chief Lady-in-wait-

ing and her husband, one of the King's trusted councillors, should put on the garb of pilgrims and set off to gain the graces attached to so holy a project.

The crowds that flocked to Compostela at this time were immense.

"Kings, queens, lords and ladies," says a writer on this subject,<sup>41</sup> "pious men who trudged there barefoot in their shirts; knights and common folk, pilgrims who were not pilgrims but men disguised, pedlars with silk and furs and cloth; monks on their way to Rome to the great abbeys; eminent clerics moving on diplomatic affairs of kings; merchants and criminals; all were on the road. Some went for piety alone, some for worldly profit, like the Slavonians, who after three such journeys could live exempt from taxes; while others were condemned to perpetual pilgrimages because of their crimes."

Of Bridget and her husband at this time we read: "They lived a number of years in absolute continency. And under great difficulties, with much expense and with the most ardent devotion they both made the pilgrimage to St. James in Galicia."<sup>42</sup>

Special acts of mortification beyond those entailed by the hardships of the journey were always considered part of such a pilgrimage. Ulf, appearing to his wife shortly after his death, tells her that during this pilgrimage he made expiation for his former bad habit of sitting too long at table, eating and talking too much, by never drinking except at meals.<sup>43</sup>

A large number of their fellow countrymen accompanied Ulf and Bridget on their pilgrimage; priests and layfolk, men and women. They visited Cologne to venerate the relics of the Magi in their jewelled shrine in the cathedral, and from there went on to Aix-la-Chapelle, where they would meet countless swarms of pilgrims from Germany, Austria, Hungary, England, and other countries.

It was a disturbed world through which the travellers passed. Civil war, revolts, hostility of one kind or another

aged in Germany, France, and Flanders. The pilgrims, protected by their dress and welcomed as possible bearers of tidings, received hospitality in monasteries and hostels, and with Compostela as their goal, visited all the famous shrines en route. Among these, as we know from the Process and other sources, were the tombs of St. Mary Magdalen near Aix, and of her sister Martha at Tarascon.<sup>44</sup>

Did Bridget visit Avignon? Avignon had been the papal residence for some thirty-five years — ever since the French Pope Clement V had been crowned in France and had refused to face the political troubles in Italy in which residence in Rome would involve him. Since Avignon is only thirteen miles from Tarascon and on the direct way to Compostela, it is quite probable that a halt was made there by the pilgrims from Sweden. It is highly improbable, however, that Bridget had any personal dealings with the Pope. It is certain she would be little at ease in the worldly atmosphere which for the most part pervaded the papal palace, and she was more likely to shun an audience than seek one. However, several references in her revelations to the war going on between France and England seem to show that on the way to Spain she heard something about French politics.<sup>45</sup>

In the cathedral at Compostela is still preserved a codex in Latin with the title *De miraculis Sancti Jacobi*. It is the work of Pope Callistus II, who, as Bishop of Vienne, made the pilgrimage to Compostela and afterwards wrote what we should call a guidebook for the benefit of pilgrims. The principal roads leading from France to Compostela and other Spanish places of pilgrimage are described, also the inns, hostels, and monasteries to be found on the way. The rivers and mountains to be crossed are noted. The shrine itself is described and the concourse of pilgrims of different nationalities, who apparently used to bring with them their national musical instruments and sing their special hymns in honour of the Apostle. "There does not exist," says the author, "a language or dialect that is not heard in the cathedral."<sup>46</sup>

Among those who took part in this pilgrimage was a Cistercian monk named Svenung. While at Compostela, there came to him one of those strange indications of Bridget's coming mission which run like some refrain through the history of these earlier years of her life. He saw in vision, as he afterwards told, the Lady Bridget crowned with seven diadems, and he watched the sun first darken and then become quite black. What could it mean? he asked himself. Then he heard a voice which said: "The darkened sun signifies the prince of your country, who once shone as the sun but will be utterly despised and the object of men's scorn. And the woman whom you see will have the sevenfold grace of God, as signified by the seven diadems. This shall be a sign to you: you will recover from your malady, you will return home and be promoted to higher rank."

Dom Svenung had been so seriously ill during the journey that it had seemed as if he must end his life in Spain. After the vision he recovered and on his return to Sweden was made Abbot of Varnhem, a daughter house of Alvastra.<sup>74</sup>

On the way home from Spain, it was Ulf's turn to become dangerously ill and it was now Bridget who had a vision and consoling assurance of recovery.

They had reached Arras, and Bridget was praying for her husband in great anxiety when St. Denis appeared to her.

"I am Denis," she heard, "who in my lifetime came from Rome to France to preach the word of God. You honour me with a special devotion, and so I declare to you that God will make Himself known to the world through you, and you are given into my particular charge and care. I will help you always, and I give you this sign: your husband shall not die of this illness."

Some days later she had another vision which she afterwards told her confessor. It was mysterious, for she saw in spirit places she would one day visit, and the time and manner of her death were shown her.<sup>48</sup>

Ulf recovered, and the miraculous cure and all the other



graces of the pilgrimage made a deep impression on both husband and wife, with the result that they agreed each to make a vow to enter a religious house in order to give themselves wholly to a life of prayer. So we read in the Bull of St. Bridget's Canonization.

As Ulff died the following year in the monastery at Alvastra, it is commonly assumed that it was here he intended to fulfil his vow. This is, however, contradicted by a statement made by his daughter Katherine many years later, which is found in the Process of St. Bridget's Canonization. It is as follows:

"Both [husband and wife] made a vow to enter religion, and thus purposing, the said husband, father of the . . . witness then speaking, died, and so death coming upon him *before he could complete the building of his monastery*, he was unable to fulfil the aforesaid vow."<sup>40</sup>

Although he recovered from the illness which threatened his life in France, his health gave way again after his return home, and feeling he had not long to live, he may have gone to Alvastra with the thought that if he could not fulfil his vow fully as he had hoped, he might do what was next best, by retiring from the world in order to die in a religious house.

It was in February of the following year, 1344, that he knew his end was near. He sent for his wife, took an affectionate farewell of her and gave her a ring to wear in remembrance of him, begging her to pray for his soul.<sup>40</sup> His holiness during the few months he lived at Alvastra made so deep an impression on the brethren there that after his death he was commonly known as "Blessed Ulff."

The past months, ending with her husband's death had, as Bridget knew, deepened her life of prayer and detachment. She thought of the pilgrimage as a time of grace and spiritual strengthening, a preparation for the life she hoped to lead in the cloister. But it had besides other effects on her life of which she was probably less aware. Torvald Højer in his work on St. Bridget and her Order has summed these up in the following words:

"The pilgrimage to Compostela was of the greatest importance for her mental development and for the widening of her spiritual horizon. By it she came into touch with all the great questions which occupied the contemporary mind in the principal countries of culture; the conflict between France and England, the bitter complaints which from every quarter were levied against the papal court of Avignon on account of its great moral corruption. Her already acute political interests were carried from the small affairs of her native land to the weightiest problems of European and Church politics."<sup>51</sup>

## The Bride of Christ

A FEW days after Ulf's death, Bridget looked at the ring he had put on her finger when he was dying, and taking it off, she wore it no more. Her friends, who had heard of the bequest, were shocked. Who would have thought that one who had always seemed a devoted wife could be so heartless? they asked each other. Some of them even took it upon themselves to go to Ulf's widow and expostulate. It was surely no great sign of affection for her husband, they said, to take from her finger this token of his love.

Bridget showed no resentment at their interference.

"When I buried my husband," she replied, "I buried with him all earthly love. Though I loved him as my own heart, not for anything would I bring him back to life against the will of God, and while I had his ring on my finger it was like a weight, because to look at it reminded me of that first love. I wish to detach myself both from the ring and from my husband and give myself to God, centring my love on Him alone."<sup>82</sup>

Ulf and Bridget alike had vowed themselves to the undivided service of God and to a life of prayer. Ulf's sacrifice had been accepted, even if not just in the way he had expected, and had been quickly crowned by a holy death. But what lay before Bridget? Was she to enter one of the neighbouring monasteries? While she thought about this there must have come to her mind various mysterious hints she had had regarding the future. There was the strange journey her spirit had taken when in France: an angel had seemed to take her

now here, now there, to places she would one day visit; he had even showed her something of her last hours on earth. There was the prophecy of St. Denis that God would make Himself known to the world through her. What did it all mean? How could such things happen if she were a nun enclosed in some monastery?

She was praying one day in her oratory and begging for guidance, when suddenly earth dropped away. She was rapt in ecstasy, as she had sometimes been before, as she would so often be in the future. A bright cloud seemed to envelop her and from it came a voice:

"Woman, hear me."

Bridget, coming to herself, was terrified and fled to her room. Was it not perhaps the evil monster of her girlhood days transformed into an angel of light? Lest she should have displeased God, she went to confession and received Holy Communion, and in accordance with her confessor's advice, fasted and prayed.<sup>83</sup>

A few days passed and the strange experience was repeated. Again Bridget fled, and again, after an interval of days, came the voice, and in the cloud she seemed to see the figure of a man who added these words:

"I am your God who chooses to speak to you" — and when she still feared, the voice continued: "Fear not, because I am the Creator of all things. I do not deceive, nor do I speak to you for your own sake only, but for the salvation of others. Hear My words and go to Mathias, your confessor, who is skilled in the discernment of spirits. Tell him from Me what I say to you; that you shall be My spouse and My instrument and shall hear and see spiritual things, and My Spirit shall be with you until your death."

And again: "I have chosen you and taken you as My spouse that I may show you My secrets, for such is My will. You have become Mine by right, because when your husband died you gave your will wholly to Me. You considered how you could become poor for My sake and you wished to leave all

for Me. And as by right you are Mine, it is fitting that for so great love I should provide for you in all things. I take you for My bride, that I may have the delights in you that God takes in pure souls."<sup>54</sup>

Bridget's confessor, Mathias, was a canon of Linköping cathedral. He was a Doctor of Divinity, the most eminent Swedish theologian of the Middle Ages, and the author of a commentary on the Bible which became famous. Besides being learned in the Scriptures, he knew much about mystical theology and of the extraordinary dealings of God with certain souls. He knew the story of Bridget's early visions, of the various spiritual favours which had marked the different periods of her life so far. He had watched the growth of her soul during the years spent at Ulfåsa and had guided her along the path of high perfection which he recognized was her vocation. Not one of her rigorous penances had been undertaken without his sanction. What she now told him surprised him far less than it did her. Yet in what way God meant to make use of this chosen soul as His instrument neither he nor anyone could say.

Meanwhile there were obvious duties to attend to. Ulf had done what he could to leave his affairs in order, but both he and Bridget had many possessions and large fortunes. The carrying out of her husband's wishes took her probably something like a year, spent, no doubt, at Ulfåsa, now the home of her eldest son, who had succeeded his father as Governor of Närke. Then, taking two servants with her, Bridget left her home, established herself in a house adjoining the monastery of Alvastra, and began a life of penance and prayer.

Pope Boniface IX in the Bull of Canonization thus describes her bodily mortification: "After the death of her husband she wore, in honour of the Holy Trinity, round her body, next her skin, a hempen cord tightly bound and with many knots, and below each knee a similarly knotted cord, even in time of illness. She wore no linen except on her head [this would be her widow's veil], rough clothing next her

skin, and outer garments which were poor and mean and not in accordance with her social rank. She kept not only the vigils and fasts ordained by Holy Mother Church, but added many more. Until a few years before her happy death she rested her wearied body only for a few hours of light sleep, lying clothed on the ground or on a sack of straw. Every Friday, in remembrance of the Sacred Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, she fasted on bread and water and dropped burning wax from the candles on her bare hands so that they were continually scarred. And on that day she had always in her mouth a root of gentian which is a very bitter plant."<sup>55</sup>

The early Life by Peter of Alvastra and Peter of Skeninge tells us what was the motive of Bridget's retirement to Alvastra. We read: "She was told to obey Master Mathias in matters of theology, to tell him of her temptations and revelations, and to live in the monastery of the monks of the Cistercian Order called St. Mary of Alvastra, in Sweden, in the diocese of Linköping, it being said to her in her vision: 'I, the God of all, who am above all Rules, permit you to live for a time near the monastery, not to do away with the Rule or to introduce a novelty, but rather that My wondrous work may be seen in a place which is holy. Even so David, for the necessity of the moment, ate the hallowed bread which at another time would have been unlawful.'"<sup>56</sup>

The above quotation shows that Bridget was allowed not merely residence near the monastery but entrance to the cloister of the monks, as we know to have been the case from various incidents which belong to this time. How was this brought about?

The Abbot of Alvastra (at this time one Ragnvald), as superior of the oldest Cistercian monastery in Sweden, was leader and visitor of all the other houses of the Order in the land; but it is obvious that even so, no private revelation would justify him in departing from the law which forbids any woman entering the monastic cloister under pain of excommunication. Evidence given by four monks of Alvastra

some years after Bridget's death prove that a special dispensation was applied for from the Abbot of Citeaux, called the "abbot of abbots." These monks definitely state (April 2, 1377) that Bridget lived at Alvastra for four years after her husband's death "by permission of the Head of the Order."<sup>57</sup>

Certainly Abbot Ragnvald must have been deeply impressed by Bridget's sincerity and holiness and by all that Master Mathias could urge in support of so unheard-of a proposal, for him to consent to apply for the necessary authorization. But though it was granted, one is not surprised to learn that the sight of the Lady Bridget within their sacred enclosure was a grievous trouble to some of the community.

"The woman is mad," declared Brother Paul, and his opinion was shared by others.

The remark was repeated to the intruder.

"God bless Brother Paul," smiled Bridget. "He well knows me and my sinfulness. He spoke truth when he said I was mad, for until now I have indeed been so in that I have loved the world more than God. But now that I only want to love and please God, I hope to be of sound mind. Beg that brother to pray for me."

Bridget did not find her new life easy. In spite of everything her thoughts would go back to the past, to the riches and honours she had given up. Then she would remember the words of a revelation: "If you will despise all for Me, I will give you a reward most precious and most sweet. Not gold or silver but Myself as your spouse and your reward, I who am the King of Glory. If you are ashamed at being poor and despised, think that your God has trod that way before you. What would you deserve if you had offended an earthly master as you have offended Me? . . . Embrace willingly a little labour to purify your soul and arrive more speedily at your great reward. The bride should be willing to be wearied in company with her bridegroom that she may the more surely rest with Him."<sup>58</sup>

Then would come a more dangerous temptation. Was not

God showing her a very special love? One day, she turned on the devil, crying: "Oh cursed devil! You fell because of your pride, and shall I give way to pride, since the queen is made of no nobler stuff than her maiden but both are alike dust? Why don't I humble myself? For I cannot have the slightest thought that is good unless God sends it." Then, says Bridget, Christ appeared to her and said: "Humility is like a ladder that rises from earth to the heart of God."<sup>59</sup>

Excavations made at Alvastra in 1922 revealed the remains of a stately stone house of two stories, dating from about 1300. It was here no doubt that Bridget and her two servants lived. This is the description of her daily round, given by an intimate friend. "She served God in coarse raiment, went every day to confession, and if she spoke any unbecoming word to man or maidservant at once acknowledged it. At night she rose many times to pray, got up at cockcrow and went to the church until Prime had been sung. Then, constrained by the cold, she would go to a room with a fireplace and there read the psalter. Afterwards she returned to the church to pray and hear the canonical Hours until dinner time. When she had dined she prayed for some time and then did embroidery work for altars or vestments. Never was she without employment. At Vesper-time she returned to the church until her supper; after supper despatched business with her attendants, read Compline and then kept silence until the hour of Prime next day. She was so perfect in patience that she was never disturbed by any hard words or injuries done to her, but bore all with a smiling face."<sup>60</sup>

She took temporal losses with the same serenity. One day a man arrived at Alvastra to tell her there had been a serious fire in a house belonging to her and that she had suffered severe losses.

"God be praised!" was her very unexpected reception of the news. "He has rewarded me as I deserved. I have abused His gifts, never been grateful enough for them nor prayed earnestly enough for the souls of the former possessors." Then

she added: "It's a grief to me to think of these worldly possessions, for my whole thought and desire is to be poor, and if it were God's will, I would like to be a beggar for love of Him. A day must come when I must in any case leave all temporal goods, so it is a great thing to give them up while they still give me satisfaction."<sup>61</sup>

Naturally enough Bridget was criticised for her strange choice of a home and her manner of life by others besides the Alvastra monks. Those of her own rank who had seen her in her high position at Court not only thought her behaviour absurd but openly told her so.

"I didn't begin this way of life to please you," she replied with the utmost serenity, "and neither will I give it up to please you. When I began it I resolved to bear blame from others. Pray that I may be able to persevere."<sup>62</sup>

The stern régime had gone on for something like a year when even Bridget's strong constitution rebelled, and she became seriously ill. The doctors pronounced her illness incurable unless she underwent a special treatment of baths. It meant leaving her retreat for a time and returning to a life of comparative ease and luxury such as she hoped she had renounced forever, and it seemed to her it would be breaking a solemn resolution to give her consent. Someone told Master Mathias the state of affairs, and he came post-haste to Alvastra, and knowing just how much it would cost her to give up her penitential life even for a time, said with emphasis:

"I command you in the name of holy obedience to obey the advice of the doctors, because it will be for your good and therefore for the good of others also."

He found, however, that Bridget's mortification of will was as perfect as that of her body, for she replied simply: "Oh, Father, if you had only said one word, I should have done what you wished: how much more when you command me in virtue of holy obedience! For it is my greatest joy that I have one whom I can obey without scruple, and I am ready

for the sake of obedience to do whatever is hardest, and even to die if need be."<sup>63</sup>

Master Mathias had tested his penitent's obedience: he soon began to test her in another way and one which was infinitely more trying to her humility than would have been the sternest rebuke. He openly praised her in the pulpit for her holiness of life, which he exhorted his hearers to imitate. Her revelations had by now become frequent and, as the next chapter will tell, she had for the time left Alvastra and was being seen and talked about by others.

She was actually present in church when Master Mathias preached his laudatory sermon. Overcome with misery and confusion, she went to him afterwards and said imploringly:

"Father, I beg of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, never to speak of me again in your sermons! What am I but as a little ant in the sight of God? And if some great lord sends his humble runner to his friends, what notice is taken of any but the sender? So if God gives me visions and divine revelations for princes or prelates or any others, praise must be given not to me but to God alone."

However, the only answer she received was: "Don't be surprised, my daughter, because men and women who set a good example have to be praised for the help of others."

"My barque is in the midst of the waves and I need prayers," said Bridget. "We see the beginning of things, but it is the end that counts."<sup>64</sup>

During these years two priests came into Bridget's life who gave her invaluable help and loyal friendship. It is to their collaboration that we owe the earliest of the many Lives of the Saint, a work already often mentioned. The fact that both priests bore the name of Peter Olafsson, that both acted as confessor to St. Bridget and both translated her revelations into Latin, has caused a natural confusion between them. Yet in the Process they stand out perfectly distinct from one another. One was a secular priest, Master Peter of Skeninge,

who, after Bridget's death, joined her Order; the other, Prior Peter of Alvastra, lived and died a Cistercian monk. In his deposition, he often speaks of his fellow-priest in Rome and calls him Bridget's confessor. We shall meet Master Peter somewhat later, when Bridget is about to set out for Rome, but her friendship with Prior Peter — at this time Sub-Prior of Alvastra — began during her residence there.

Prior Peter himself tells the story of the beginning of his work for her. One day she begged the Sub-Prior to come to her and told him that she understood it was Christ's will that she should tell him of her many visions and revelations that he might write them down and so enable them to be of use to others.

Peter received the message with respect but hardly knew what to think of the request. It was not exactly that he doubted Bridget's mission, but he was very much inclined to doubt his own part in the affair. He prayed earnestly for light that evening in the church and had just decided that if the revelations were divine he was quite unworthy to record them and that there was also great danger of his falling into some snare of the devil, when suddenly he felt a violent blow on his cheek, so violent that he fell to the ground. There he lay unable to move, until he was found by some monks and carried to his cell where he remained as if dead. Suddenly a thought came to him: "Perhaps I am like this because I refused to obey that revelation and command given by Christ through the Lady Bridget." Then from his heart he said: "Oh Lord God, if it be this, spare me, for I am ready to obey and write all the words she will say to me from Thee." And immediately he was cured, hastened to Bridget and offered himself to write whatever she should dictate to him.<sup>65</sup>

He found that Bridget seemed already aware of what had been happening. She told him he must take the greatest pains over the work, in which he would have the help of a Master of Theology. By these revelations, she had been assured, the proud would be humbled and the worldly-wise put to silence.

The Master of Theology was, of course, Master Mathias, who was Bridget's support all through, and whose long Prologue in defence of the heavenly origin of her visions prefaces all the printed editions of her writings.<sup>66</sup>

The consent given by Peter Olafsson to become translator and secretary meant a complete change in his life. For the next thirty years he was to be engaged on this exacting work, and, with only occasional breaks, was with Bridget until her death.

Again one cannot help being struck by the extraordinary impression her holiness made on the Abbot of Alvastra that he thus consented to give up one of his monks (whom just about this time he had appointed Prior), that he might devote himself to making her revelations known. Abbot Ragnvald's successors, the Abbots Daniel and John, both of whom ruled the monastery during Bridget's lifetime, showed equal magnanimity.

## The New Vineyard

IT SEEMS to have been early in the year 1346<sup>or</sup> that Bridget again went to the court of King Magnus. Like another John the Baptist she had left her desert, and, clad in her rough woollen garment, had come to exhort king and nobles to do penance if they would avoid the judgements of God prepared for the careless and sinful.

Nothing but a command she felt bound to obey would have drawn Bridget from her retreat at Alvastra to go into an atmosphere even more distasteful to her than it had been when she was Lady-in-waiting to the Queen. But Christ Himself had bidden her, she said, to go to the King, Queen, and nobles and deliver to them His warning. She had pleaded that she would not know what to say. The reply had come in the words of the psalm: "Open thy mouth and I will fill it." So she obeyed, and "at once," says Prior Peter, "divine and marvellous words were infused into her, not only concerning the reformation of the King and the realm, but concerning things of the future."<sup>88</sup>

St. Bridget's life as an apostle and a prophet now begins. The strong, burning words found in the revelations delivered to Magnus and others suggest someone totally different from the woman, strong indeed, but gentle and humble, whom her children and friends knew and loved. She speaks, not in her own character, but as one burdened with a message from God which must be delivered at all costs, and it is certain that to her the cost was great.

The message Bridget brought was primarily to the King,

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who was oppressing his people with taxes, letting his responsibilities sit lightly on him, and swaying this way and that as he came first under one influence and then under another.

The King received his relative graciously and seems at once to have fallen under the spell of a personality so much more forceful than his own.

St. Bridget's Danish biographer, Hammerich, attributes to her influence — and surely with reason — a proclamation which Magnus issued at this time, since it is a frank confession of the injury done to his subjects by overtaxation and even a humble plea for forgiveness with promise of amendment.

"It is the duty of a king," it runs, "to think of his subjects' best advancement, that they may have peace and enjoy their belongings undisturbed. We have, therefore, compassion with you over the sufferings and burdens you have had to endure. We cannot remember them without bitterness of heart." And so on, in the same strain.

This was Magnus at his best. One can imagine that after this promise and act of contrition had been wrung from him there was reaction, and that for a time at least a feeling of intense irritation against his monitor took possession of him with a dread of what more this impelling personality might require of him. It had always been so: awe and irritation had alternated. When Bridget was not present, Magnus was apt to indulge in sarcasm at her expense. Meeting Birger, Bridget's second son, and apparently at this time one of the courtiers, the King would say with a sneer: "Well, what did our cousin your mother dream about us last night?" Birger, of course, must not answer back but would redder and wince. He was a devoted son and felt keenly the slight offered his mother. He felt, too, the personal humiliation, and many years later recalled these taunts, how he had hung his head abashed, wishing, one can imagine, that Bridget did not feel called to follow so strange a path and bring derision on her and on her children.

The King's two small sons watched the strange visitor who went with them from place to place, and they listened to the comments of their elders. Imitating their father's mocking tone, they would accost Bridget with such questions as: "Will it rain to-day, Cousin, or be fine?" Or, "Are your sons going to be kings and take our thrones?" Bridget looked at Eric, the elder son, whom Magnus had proclaimed King-elect of Sweden to compensate him for his younger brother being already King of Norway, and said: "If you do not correct your faults you will not be king, nor will you live long and see your posterity. Your mother will have no joy in you and you will soon be forgotten. So, humble yourself before God that you may find mercy." Bridget's words were remembered later when her prophecy had been fulfilled to the letter.<sup>69</sup>

It would seem to have been when the King and his household were in Norway, and Bridget with them, that she felt the call to found a religious order, for in the Preface to her Rule, written by Alfonso the Olivetan hermit who edited her writings after her death, these words occur: "In the realm of Norway which among those of kings is the uttermost northern . . . it happened to the Lady Bridget when applying herself fervently to prayer, that she saw in a vision a man and woman of surpassing beauty."<sup>70</sup>

Either Alfonso or Bridget herself, speaking in the third person, goes on to say that a voice was heard saying: "These two whom you see are Jesus Christ and His Mother Mary as they appeared on earth, but what their bodies are now in heaven it is impossible for you to know or see." The writer adds: "After this Jesus Christ began at once to speak."

A parable follows concerning a vineyard belonging to a mighty king, which was filled with fruitful vines. But an enemy came and sowed bad seed and ruined the vineyard so that it was only with difficulty the owner could find any grapes. Thereupon he resolved to plant a new vineyard, hedge it carefully, look after it diligently, and so in time it would yield abundant fruit.

Next comes the explanation. What are the spoilt vineyards but the religious orders founded by holy men, which once yielded abundant fruit; which refreshed those who were athirst, humbled the proud and enlightened the ignorant, but now lie almost waste? Therefore, God will plant a new vineyard, will set those to guard it who will not slumber, and will hedge it round with divine charity. Bridget herself is to be the vine of the new vineyard, that is, the foundress of a new and most holy religious order, from which shall spring fruitful branches.

Finally come these words: "You therefore must be strong and stable, lest the devil deceive you. . . . Stand firm and love Me with your whole heart. Flee from pride, be clothed with humility; guard your lips and all your members to My honour. Be obedient to what I command, examine your conscience hourly. If you fall, rise quickly. Care not for the world's honours or friends, for if you have Me it will sweeten all things for you. And if you love Me perfectly, all beside Me will seem to you bitter as poison."<sup>71</sup>

It has been worth while to quote at such length from this revelation, for it sets out Bridget's vocation as she henceforth understood it. The thought of a new vineyard of Christ's own planting would never leave her. She was called not only to help in casting down the work of the devil by proclaiming the judgements threatening evil-doers, but to the glorious task of bearing a part in building up the city of God.

The revelation which contains the Rule to be observed opens with these words: "This Order to the honour of My most beloved Mother I shall have instituted chiefly by women, and its Rule and statutes I shall by My own mouth most fully declare."

The Rule is based on the three usual vows of religion expressed as follows: "The beginning therefore of this religion is true humility, pure chastity and voluntary poverty."

The extreme strictness of the poverty is declared at the outset; the religious must not touch gold or silver even with



the hand without leave of the Abbess. Every year reckoning shall be made as to how much money will be needed for the coming year and the surplus must be given to the poor "if the Abbess will flee the peril of her soul."<sup>72</sup> If she erects stately or unnecessary buildings it will be reckoned as a grave sin, as if she had despoiled the needy of food and clothing. The monastery church shall also bear the stamp of poverty in having only what is strictly necessary in the way of silver and gold altar vessels and candlesticks. The treasure must consist "not in gold, silver, or gems, but in the grace of God, continual study, devout prayer and divine praise." The religious habit is to be of humble grey homespun and it signifies a garment of penance. A distinctive feature of the dress is the crown which the nuns shall wear over their black veil. Of white linen, it must have sewn on it five small circular pieces of red cloth; one on the forehead, one at the back, two more at the sides and the fifth on the top of the head, thus making the crown in the form of a cross. Bridget's devotion to the cross and the wounds of her Saviour was to be a special mark of her Order, and these reminders of the Passion were to be constantly before the eyes of her nuns.

The new vineyard was to be not only a planting of nuns but was to include monks. A double order of men and women each with their own separate monastery and choir, but worshipping God under one roof and governed in temporal things by an abbess who would represent the Virgin Mother, was not something entirely new. Such a monastery had been founded as early as 1099 at Fontevault in France, and Bridget may have visited it on her pilgrimage.<sup>73</sup>

The monks of the new Order might only number twenty-five, while the nuns were to be received up to the number of sixty. Thirteen of the monks must be priests and typify the Apostles (including St. Paul); four must be deacons, though they might be priests if they chose, and their number was a symbol of the four great Doctors of the Church. The remaining eight monks were to be lay brothers. The priests were to

act as chaplains to the nuns, and one, chosen by the whole community, was to be named Confessor-General, ruling the double monastery in spiritual matters, and to whom the monks must yield entire obedience as the nuns to the abbess. The whole monastic family, numbering thus eighty-five, typify, we are told, the thirteen Apostles and the seventy-two disciples of the Gospels.

The life of both monks and nuns was to be wholly contemplative and the enclosure was of the strictest kind, such as is now called papal enclosure. For nuns in the Middle Ages, life behind the grille was the only approved and normal one, though there was certainly relaxation sometimes, but in the new Order even the monks were to share in the papal enclosure, being separated from the outer world by a grating, and might never leave their cloister except for some grave necessity. Yet although cut off for the most part from the sight of men, they were to preach on Sundays and feast-days to the people who might attend the monastery church, simply and fervently after the example of the first mendicant friars.

Finally, the Divine Office of monks and nuns was to alternate; the monks singing theirs from their choir behind the high altar, and the nuns theirs from a choir high above, and this latter Office was to be a special one in honour of our Lady whose Votive Mass they were also daily to sing.

Bridget's joy over the new work with which she felt herself divinely entrusted, is shown in the way she attempts to describe how the revelation came to her: "God, the Creator of all things," she says, "conveyed to me with His blessed lips all the words of this Rule in such a wonderful and rapid way that it is impossible for me adequately to describe it. . . . Imagine many diverse gems flung suddenly and all at the same instant out of a vase, and a beholder able at once to see the nature of each and to handle each separately. Even so when Jesus Christ opened His blessed lips and began to speak, instantaneously each article of the Rule and the words in which it was expressed were before me, not as if written,

but in such a way as He alone knows who enabled me so marvelously to hear them. And I remained enraptured until by the aid of Christ's grace all these things were impressed on my memory. After the vision my heart was filled with such fervour and bliss that it seemed impossible for more to enter without its breaking for joy. . . . My heart remained dilated for some days until I had related all the articles of the Rule and the words in which they were expressed to a pious man, a friend of God, who wrote down all with the utmost speed. When this was done, my heart and body returned by degrees to their natural condition. Praise and glory be to God Almighty. Amen."

The "friend of God" of whom Bridget speaks was, of course, Prior Peter. Having undertaken the onerous task of secretary and translator to one who frequently had important revelations, he must have held himself in readiness to go to her wherever she might be.

But Peter was not the only one to whom the strange revelation was shown. We are told in the introductory chapter to the Rule that after it had been revealed to her she submitted it "humbly, with great reverence and in the fear of God" to the judgement of the Archbishop of Upsala and three other bishops, to a certain "devout Master who was known to be an eminent theologian and to a very holy abbot." The theologian was without doubt Master Mathias, the abbot, we may take for granted, was Ragnvald, Abbot of Alvastra, whose reverence for Bridget's spiritual gifts had led him to make such great concessions in her favour.

But though she was filled with exultation at the time when the revelation came to her, she feared as always some snare of the angel of darkness. Personal humility and self-distrust were surely needed. She was claiming nothing less than the authority to set on foot a new religious order. And more: with this claim was coupled the assertion that its Rule had been dictated to her word for word by Christ Himself.

The five whom she asked to scrutinize her revelation asso-

ciated with them "many friends of God," we read, and after consulting together were of opinion that what she had submitted to them was inspired by the Holy Spirit and was a most special grace granted to her. There remained the most important approbation of all — that of Christ's Vicar. The command to seek this necessary permission and the opportunity of doing so came a year or so later.

The Norwegian historian, P. Munch, states that soon after King Magnus went to his Norwegian residence near Oslo, intending as it seemed to stay there some time, he suddenly returned to Sweden with the Queen, and in the presence of his councillors executed a will. This, Munch suggests, may have been due to some illness which made the King fear an early death.<sup>74</sup> But when we find that the will in question was in fact a generous deed of gift to Bridget's future monastery, assigning for its use a royal estate near Vadstena, another explanation presents itself. It seems clear that she at once made known her revelation to the King and Queen and that they entered with a good deal of enthusiasm into her project. Possibly Magnus felt that here was an opportunity of letting charity cover a multitude of sins, since at times his shortcomings and failures seem to have weighed somewhat heavily on his conscience.

According to another revelation belonging to this time, St. Bridget was told that Christ, while needing no man's help, yet willed that the King should build a new monastery in expiation of the sins of his country, and that his subjects should make a yearly contribution, each according to his means, in order to share in the good work. When, by Peter's advice, this was made known to the King, he ordered a tribute to be levied which had the approval of the Swedish bishops. This contribution came to be known as "Our Lady's Pence" and continued for many years.<sup>75</sup>

The year following his first gift, Magnus made another will, this time in Norway, assigning a large sum of money in current coin to the new foundation, and the work of adapting

the present building to its future use was begun at Vadstena. The royal benefactors also promised gifts of vestments, statues, relics, and books, and chose the monastery church as their place of burial.

It is clear that at this time Bridget was high in the King's favour, and in consequence his former favourites became first apprehensive and then angry as they watched their influence lessening in proportion as hers increased. Those who had encouraged Magnus to spend lavishly on pleasure, naturally did not relish his sudden piety, and those who were seeking high posts in the kingdom had their own reasons for dismay. They were finding that Bridget had home truths to deliver to others besides the King, and that somehow or other she knew altogether too much about them.

Since there was no getting rid of the unwelcome prophet, and no open insult could be offered her for fear of the King's anger, some of the nobles found petty and vulgar ways of venting their hatred. One poured a quantity of water over her as she passed beneath his window. Another in a crowded place gave her a violent push in the back which onlookers were to suppose was accidental. Yet another, feigning to be tipsy, called out so that all could hear: "Oh Lady, you dream too much, you watch too much, you should drink more and sleep more! Is it likely that God will forsake those who fear Him for those who have such a good opinion of themselves?"<sup>76</sup>

These injuries and bitter words Bridget met not only with serenity but with gladness and a smile. She was always ready to agree with those who humbled her and to thank God for the opportunity of suffering something for His glory. It was no doubt acts of patience and magnanimity such as these that called forth the pulpit eulogies of Master Mathias, to Bridget's infinite confusion.

The opinion of so eminent a preacher as Master Mathias was weighty, but even his testimony could not convince Katilmund, Prior of the Dominican house at Skeninge, that all the graces and revelations said to be received by the Lady Bridget

were genuine. One night, however, as he afterwards told Prior Peter, he saw her in his dreams with fire from heaven descending on her. He woke and thought little of this, but falling asleep, he again saw Bridget. This time fire issued from her mouth and enkindled many who were gathered about her. Then he heard a voice saying: "Who can forbid this fire from going forth? For it is I who have sent it by My divine power." After this, Katilmund felt in himself so strong a faith in the existence of the graces he had before doubted, that he became one of Bridget's warmest defenders.<sup>77</sup>

Hemming, Bishop of Åbo, who had known Bridget from childhood, was a real friend and had no wish to criticise, but even he found himself puzzling over her life while at Court. Though she did not change her attire, she no longer lived — at least outwardly — the life of an ascetic. Like her Master, she "came eating and drinking," and sitting next her at table, the good bishop watched her taking the delicate meats set before her and wondered how this agreed with the high spiritual gifts she was said to possess. Later, his thought was revealed to her while she was at prayer, and she gave him a message which she said she had received for him, to the effect that obedience was better than sacrifice.<sup>78</sup>

When Bridget returned to Alvastra, it was to find that her young son Benedict was dying. She shed many bitter tears, sure that these sufferings of her child were in some way caused by her sins and unfaithfulness. The devil seemed to taunt her, but the inner voice she always listened for told her that Benedict's present pain would win him a great reward in heaven. Then amid what sounded like the song of many birds, her son gave back his innocent soul to God and her heart was comforted and filled with peace.<sup>79</sup>

Naturally her main preoccupation at this time was her future monastery, and she would ride back and forth between Alvastra and Vadstena, watching the building operations and dreaming of the days to come. If she hoped to enter and rule her monastery, as presumably she did, she yet knew that the whole undertaking must first be sanctioned by the Pope. But she seems to have had no doubt as to his approval, and a little band of aspirants had even been gathered at Vadstena, awaiting the beginning of regular monastic life.<sup>81</sup>

Bridget and Prior Peter had many things to discuss together in regard to the amplification of the Rule in matters of daily observance, for she had been instructed, she says, to seek help in this from one belonging to the Benedictine or Cistercian Order and to Peter she naturally turned. Then he would beg her to lay before God in her prayer their various doubts and questionings, and she in all simplicity would tell him the answers she received, which he would carefully note down. We find these in the short revelations at the end of her writings.<sup>82</sup>

Prior Peter says that it was about two years after Bridget began her life at Alvastra, consequently in 1347, that she received a command from Christ: "Go to Rome, where the streets are paved with gold and dyed with the blood of saints. There you shall remain until you see both the Supreme Pontiff and the Emperor, and you shall tell them My words."<sup>83</sup>

A Year of Jubilee had been proclaimed in 1350 in a Bull issued by Pope Clement VI in 1343, soon after his election. This was the result of a petition which a delegation from Rome brought to Avignon to beg the new Pope to have the Jubilee celebrated every fifty years instead of only at the beginning of each century as his predecessor Boniface VIII had appointed. As Bridget says it was "several years" after the revelation of the Rule that she was told by Christ to seek its confirmation from His Vicar to whom had been given the power of binding and loosing,<sup>84</sup> it seems probable that the command which Prior Peter says came in 1347 really belongs

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Way of Faith

WE CANNOT take literally the statement made in the early Life of St. Bridget that immediately after the death of her husband she distributed her possessions among her children and the poor, for she certainly continued for some time to watch over her large property and give alms, though living herself in poverty. A day would come when her spirit of poverty would go further; when what little she still might have called her own would be handed over to another and she would humbly ask leave to give the alms her generous heart longed to pour out. But during the years at Alvastra, in her dealings with those dependent on her, she delighted in being Lady Bountiful, and would go about visiting her various estates as she did when at Ulfåsa. On one of these visits she was begged by a tenant for a dowry for his daughter. Bridget at once called her steward, and when she heard what money he had in hand, said: "Give this poor man a third part of what you have, so that his daughter may be happy and pray for us." Going on, they came to a town where they were to lodge. Outside the inn they found a crowd of poor people. Bridget again told her almoner to give them help. He replied he had not sufficient to pay their own expenses unless he borrowed money. "And why pour out money so lavishly?" he grumbled. "A pretty kind of charity this, to give alms to the poor and then have to borrow from others!" But Bridget only said sweetly: "Let us give money while we have it, because our good God is rich enough to give to us when we are in want. I am bound to these poor folk because they have no one else to help them."<sup>80</sup>

to 1349 when the definite announcement of the coming Holy Year was made public. Peter's evidence is always fresh and detailed, but his dates are sometimes faulty. However that may be, various things go to prove that Bridget, always so prompt in responding to the demands made on her obedience, did not leave her native land until the end of 1319.<sup>85</sup>

But the opportunity of submitting her Rule to the Pope came before this.

One day she announced to Prior Peter that she had received from heaven an admonition for the Holy Father which must be delivered without delay.

This is the first of the letters she sent to various popes and so marks the beginning of her intervention in the affairs of the Church at large.

The revelation begins: "The Son speaks to the Bride: 'Write on My behalf to Pope Clement these words: I have exalted you and placed you above all others. Arise then to make peace between the kings of France and England, who are dangerous beasts of prey, devouring souls. Then come to Italy and preach there the word and the year of salvation and divine love [an allusion to the Year of Jubilee]. See the place watered with the blood of My saints and I will give you an unending reward. Look to the past; how you have provoked My anger and I have been silent. But now My time is come, and I shall require of you an account of your negligence. Even as I caused you to ascend, so will I make you to descend — a descent which you will experience in both body and soul unless you obey My words. Your boastful tongue will be silenced and your name will be forgotten and will be a reproach in My sight and in that of My saints. I shall require of you an account of the unworthiness with which you, albeit with My permission, rose to so high a dignity; unworthiness which I, your God, remember better than your careless conscience heeds it. I shall ask of you why you have been so half-hearted in making peace between the kings and as to your partiality. Again, I shall not forget how greatly

ambition and greed have flourished and increased in the Church in your time, and how many things you might have amended. But you, lover of this world, would not. Arise then, for your last hour is near at hand. Wipe out your past neglect by zeal at the last.'"<sup>86</sup>

Such were Bridget's first words to the Church's earthly Head. Startling in their outspokenness they must have seemed to the one who penned them and to the priest charged to take them from far-off Sweden to the French Pope at Avignon. Could there be stronger proof of Bridget's conviction that she was but a mouthpiece, one charged by God Himself to deliver His warning and His rebuke?

There have been wishful thinkers who have seen in this and in later letters of St. Bridget's to Clement and his successors a spirit of rebellion against papal claims, who have (by way of praise) hailed her as a forerunner of Luther, disregarding the fact that these admonitions always contain the same urgent plea to the Pope to come back to Rome as to his rightful place and there rule the flock of Christ as His chosen Vicar. Bridget is no rebel. How can the spirit of rebellion have any fellowship with the spirit that is always looking for guidance and delights only in obedience? It is this last spirit that breathes in all her words, actions, and decisions.

Bridget chose as her messengers to Avignon her old friend Hemming, Bishop of Åbo, and Prior Peter, and the two went off together to France.<sup>87</sup> But credentials were needed. These were furnished by Master Mathias and may be found in substance in the Prologue to the *Book of Revelations*. It opens with the words: "Signs and wonders have arisen in our land," and ends with an account of miracles Bridget has performed which witness to her sanctity.<sup>88</sup> For miracles, which were almost a part of her daily life in Rome, had already begun in Sweden. By touch, by prayer even at a distance, cures had been wrought which were becoming known all over the kingdom.

The Pope received the two messengers from Sweden and

was sufficiently impressed by the letter they brought to charge the bishop with negotiations to the kings of France and England, then on the battlefield. Hemming accordingly visited both sovereigns but returned to Avignon discouraged, as Bridget's revelation had been received somewhat ungraciously.<sup>89</sup> Nor were the envoys successful in the other part of their mission, for the papal approbation of the proposed Order was withheld.

This whole year of 1349, Bridget's last in her native land, was a dark one indeed. King Magnus, as a temporary escape from his financial worries and to gain some prestige among his discontented subjects, proposed to undertake what he called a crusade against the heathens in Russia. To underline its religious character, he made a show of consulting Bridget, telling her to ask God for light as to His will and assuring her he was under a vow to go. Bridget, knowing the King, is not likely to have had much trust in his sincerity, but the very word crusade had always power to stir her enthusiasm. She prayed.

"If he wishes to go on a crusade to the heathen," were the words she heard and recorded, "he must first examine his conscience and make contrite confession of his sins as if he were about to die. He must have followers who go of their own free will. He must first go about his kingdom and see that justice is being administered. He must lay aside all levity in dress and conduct. If he has possessions unjustly acquired he must make restoration. His only intention in undertaking the crusade must be the love of God and the salvation of souls, and he must admonish the heathen to be converted, approaching them with gentleness and peace."

Needless to say this advice was the last which the King intended to follow. His idea was to gather a great and imposing army, and not having sufficient soldiers of his own, he hired foreign mercenaries ready for booty.

Bridget continued to pray.

"It seems to him a fine thing to march out with a great

army," were the words she now heard; "he does not consider the misery and famine which will follow. He who seeks to gain souls should have two banners: justice and mercy, and the banner of mercy must first be unfurled. Nor must he retreat from any cowardice, listening to those who say he is attempting what is beyond him."

Magnus set out with his army, gained an important position and then grew weary of his effort and abandoned it, while the Russians were soon in possession once more of the ground they had lost.

To Bridget, watching and praying, had come these stern words: "My daughter, in what condition is the world to-day?" And she had replied: "As a man running and caring not what may come."

"It is just, then," the voice had continued, "that I pass over the world with My plough. I will spare neither old nor young, neither rich nor poor, but each will die in his sins and be judged according to My justice, and the houses shall be left without inhabitants. Nor will I even then make an end."

Bridget had cried out in anguish: "Oh Lord, be not angry if I speak! Send some of Thy friends to preach and warn them of their danger." But she had been told to remember the rich man in the Gospel who in hell wished his brethren might be warned and was told they had Moses and the prophets.

"So do I say to you. They have the Gospels and the sayings of the prophets; they have the examples and the teachings of the Doctors; they have reason and intelligence; let them make use of these and they shall be saved. If I should send you, you could not cry so loud that you would be heard. Yet I will send My friends to those whom I shall choose and they shall prepare a way for the Lord."<sup>90</sup>

The exact date of this prophecy is uncertain, but whether it came earlier or at this time, Bridget could not doubt its fulfilment when the Black Death swept over Europe and finally reached Norway and Sweden. Thousands died daily

on land and water; rivers were blessed — among them the Rhone by Clement himself — to receive the dead bodies, and great pits were dug where there was no water. Here was unmistakably the hand of God; a punishment sent to a careless, sinful, and self-sufficient world, before which that world must needs bow.

Meanwhile the work which Bridget knew to be specially her own was also under a cloud. Not only had she so far failed to gain the Pope's permission to found her Order, but the buildings she had watched being made ready for the future monastery were now attacked by those who hated and feared her, and the little band of aspirants gathered there was dispersed. Either by this attack or as the result of an accidental fire, the whole place which Magnus had assigned for the foundation was utterly destroyed. The King was angry; humiliated, no doubt, that what had seemed likely to bring glory to Sweden and to himself had not received encouragement from the Pope; the Swedish bishops, hitherto Bridget's warm supporters, now turned against her; only two out of the seven still stood by her. Like other founders of religious orders before and since, she had to wait, helpless, while God seemed to contradict Himself. She recalled words heard in prayer concerning the monastery of the future: "As in the past, tears and groans of those whose blood cries to Me have been heard in this place, so now the voice of praise shall ascend from here. And as it was once a place of punishment, now shall be gathered here those who will seek mercy for living and dead and make expiation."<sup>91</sup>

And now the place was desolate! What did it mean? Nothing remained; and yet . . . yes, something. There was God's own promise which must somehow be fulfilled, if not now, then later. Among the denunciations against Magnus, Bridget had heard these words: "The King shall not build My house as did Solomon . . . nor will he receive the crown of Eric, My friend. Who that person is who will build My monastery and when he will come, you shall know later."<sup>92</sup>

With this assurance Bridget must be content. The only clear command that sounded in her ears was the "Go to Rome." And no urging had as yet moved the Pope to leave Avignon. To her it must have seemed, as indeed it turned out, that her sojourn in Rome might last for the rest of her life. Is it here we should place the poignant supplication for guidance which has come down to our own day, and is to be found in the State prayer-book of Sweden?

"Hasten, O Lord, to enlighten my darkness. As one who is dying longeth, so yearns my soul for Thee. Speak to my soul; assure it that nothing can happen without Thy permission and that what Thou dost permit can never be the subject of pity. O Jesus, Son of God! Thou who didst remain silent before Thy judge, refrain my tongue until I have bethought me what and how to speak. Show me the way in which I should go and give me grace to tread it. In delay lurks danger, but in haste is likewise peril. Therefore, O Lord, give ear to my petition and show me the path of safety. To Thee do I come as one sick and in need of a physician. Give me a tranquil heart, O Lord."

At the last moment Bridget's heart turned with a mother's terrible yearning towards her children. True, they were all provided for, all settled in life except the youngest daughter Cecilia, still at school, but with every likelihood, her mother thought, of becoming a Dominican nun. Charles and Birger were married; Merita, now a widow, had never depended on her mother for guidance. Ingeborg was a Cistercian nun and Katherine had been married for some years to the best of husbands. Yet they were all very young, thought Bridget, very rich, too, and exposed to many temptations. Her monastery no longer needed her but surely her children did.

Suddenly she seemed to see before her a brazier with charcoal burning in it, and beside it a boy who was blowing on the coals with all his might.

"Why are you trying so hard to enkindle a flame?" she found herself asking.

"So that the love of your children may burn more fiercely in your heart," replied the boy.

She began to feel afraid.

"Who are you?" she questioned.

"I am," said he, "one who trades."<sup>83</sup>

There was no more hesitation. Had it indeed been only her children's need of her of which she had been thinking? Was it not mainly her own dread of leaving those she loved? Long ago she had declared that God should come before all and that all should be loved only in Him. And was not the Father of lights from whom every best and perfect gift comes, able to watch over her children? Her part was, as always, to obey; to go forward trustfully, even gladly; willing to see nothing of what lay before her until God's time came to reveal it.

Out into the darkness she went.



## PART II

### St. Bridget in Rome



## CHAPTER I

### The Holy Year of 1350

BRIDGET and a number of other Swedes took ship in the autumn of 1349, landed at Stralsund, and from there began their long ride through Germany and Italy.

Prior Peter Olafsson could not leave Alvastra at this time,<sup>1</sup> and as Bridget's other spiritual director, Master Mathias, was about to accompany King Magnus on one of his military expeditions, she had been in some perplexity as to the choice of a priest who would help and guide her spiritually on her long journey with all its uncertainties and difficulties. Obviously it must be someone who could understand the unusual ways by which she was led, and who could act as translator of her frequent revelations. Prior Peter would follow her to Rome and be with her when he could, but there would be necessary absences from time to time.

One day it was made known to her, she says, that just such a director as she sought had been provided for her. This was Master Peter Olafsson of Skeninge, a secular priest, at that time the head of the Holy Ghost House (or hospital) in that town. It seems probable that she already knew of him, and that he also had heard of her, but whether this was the case or not, as soon as he understood what was asked of him, he resigned his post and "promptly and cheerfully consented."<sup>2</sup>

Thus began Bridget's connection with the second Peter who was henceforth to play such an important part in her life.

Whatever the pilgrims had expected Rome to be like, its actual condition in the Holy Year of 1350 must surely have caused them something like dismay.

It was just over forty years since the papal residence had been transferred to Avignon, and if the popes when in Rome had rarely been successful in checking the lawlessness of the nobles, things were many times worse now. The Roman magistrates might issue orders, but continual strife went on between the party of the Guelphs, led by the powerful family of the Orsini, and that of the Ghibellines, led by the Colonna. All the great houses were in consequence defended by towers. It has been calculated that there were as many as nine hundred in or on the city walls. St. Peter's had become a fortress, likewise the Pantheon, and in nearly all the churches the campanile was used as a tower of defence.

While towers had risen to defend or to threaten, many of Rome's old buildings had on the contrary fallen. Great masses of ruins, once houses and early Christian churches, rose from grass-covered mounds. Inundations of the Tiber and earthquakes at different times had wrought havoc, and no one had troubled to make any attempt to repair the damage. There were no proper streets; the original ones lay buried several feet below the ruins. Meandering roads, unpaved, muddy, wholly uncared for, led everywhere and nowhere.

Meanwhile thousands of pilgrims from all lands poured and continued to pour into the city. All the Romans became hosts, says the contemporary chronicler, either entertaining strangers or leaving their houses empty for them to occupy. The inns overflowed, giving what accommodation they could to men and horses. It was anything but luxury and the weather was unusually cold — ice and snow, followed by severe floods. But it was much to find a roof. Many of the pilgrims had to be content to camp outside the city walls round great fires.

The same chronicler paints a vivid picture of the contrast

between the pilgrims, recollected and devout, and the Romans, noisy, excitable, grasping. The Pope might be absent, but Rome was still the centre of Christendom; nowhere else could the Jubilee be gained, and now was the time to fill pockets too long empty.

The Holy Year opened badly. The Pope had sent as his Legate a most unworthy representative in Cardinal Annibale Ceccano. His life was not in any way suggestive of penance, and as he was very displeasing in appearance — small, squinting — the Romans from the outset heaped ridicule on him, caricatured him, and nicknamed him *Scimmia* (monkey). He had brought a camel with him, we read, and the great, ungainly creature still further roused the unruly populace. They jumped on its back, plucked out its hair, and made an indescribable scene outside the Legate's residence which he was powerless to control.<sup>3</sup>

But what had been ridicule turned to anger and finally to ungovernable fury when the Cardinal shortened the time of the Jubilee visit owing to the increasing number of pilgrims and the difficulty of accommodating them all. The Romans cared little for the inconvenience and much for the loss of money involved, and went so far as to make an attempt to attack the Legate's palace. This had only the effect of making him still further shorten the visit, now to be limited to a week. Soon after, when he was riding to St. Paul's, an arrow came from the window of a house and pierced his hat. No attempt was made, except by his immediate entourage, to discover the offender. The Legate then placed the city under interdict for eight days, to the dismay of arriving pilgrims who found all churches closed.

The unpopular Cardinal thankfully took an opportunity, which some trouble in Naples gave him, of leaving Rome for a while, but on the journey he was seized with severe illness and died. It was commonly believed that his death was due to poison.<sup>4</sup>

Picture all this and then see crowds of devout pilgrims

making their way daily, or trying to make their way, to the different basilicas for the prescribed visits. The floods had made the so-called streets ten times worse than usual; all must move with the stream and had the greatest difficulty in moving at all. Horsemen jostled those on foot; it was nothing uncommon, especially on festivals when Rome's great relics were exposed for veneration at St. Peter's, for as many as a dozen people to be crushed to death.

One who visited Rome in the Holy Year of 1925 described to me the arrival of a large Polish pilgrimage at St. Peter's. Visiting Rome, many of them for the first time, surrounded and watched by crowds of varying nationalities, these devout pilgrims never looked about them, or even raised their eyes. They made their visit, said their prayers, intent only on what they had come to do. So we can see Bridget in the months that followed her arrival, going from place to place, as best she could, amidst a babel of tongues and noisy street-fighting, with eyes downcast and in continual prayer. Was this indeed the city whose streets were paved with gold and dyed with the blood of God's saints, which in her revelation she had been told to seek? "Oh Rome, for My many benefits you have made evil return!" are words we read in a revelation received at this time.<sup>5</sup> One who often went with Bridget on her visits of devotion says it was quite useless to try to draw her into conversation or interest her in the sights which caught the attention of the ordinary traveller. She would not even turn her head to look at the ruins of ancient Rome.<sup>6</sup>

Bridget sent no further message to Pope Clement, but he is the subject of one of her revelations not very long before his death took place.<sup>7</sup> Her prayers for him, that he might even at the last obey the divine call, were answered in a measure, for he died, it is said, in deep humility and devotion, though it was too late to undo the evils of his reign.

Where Bramante's great church of S. Lorenzo in Damaso now stands, there stood in the Jubilee Year of 1350 the basilica which it replaced, under the same dedication and

built by Pope Damasus in 370. Attached to it was a house belonging to the Cardinal whose titular church it was — at this time Hugh Roger, brother of the reigning Pope Clement VI. The owner being absent, Bridget had been given permission to use it as her residence, and here she and her companions established themselves on their arrival in Rome. The house was their home for a number of years, and to this time belongs the story of the composition of the breviary to be used by the nuns of the future religious order, a story, which, like the breviary itself, is unique.

The revelation containing the Rule and the directions for founding the Order says that the nuns are to sing daily the Hours of Our Lady with three Lessons.<sup>8</sup> But this was not the office known as the Little Office of Our Lady, in use among so many modern congregations as a substitute for the longer Divine Office of the Church. Bridget's nuns were to sing a new Divine Office. But how was it to be composed? What were those three Lessons for each day to be? Bridget was wondering over this and praying in the quiet sanctuary of her room in the Cardinal's house, when her difficulties were solved. What followed had best be told in the words of Alfonso da Vadaterra, who later edited her writings.

"When Bridget, Princess of Nericia in the kingdom of Sweden, had lived for some years in Rome in the Cardinal's house adjoining the church of San Lorenzo in Damaso, she still did not know what Lessons were to be read by the nuns of her monastery which Christ had told her to found, and whose Rule He had Himself dictated in honour of the Blessed Virgin His Mother. When therefore blessed Bridget was praying and wondering over the matter, Christ appeared to her and said: 'I will send My angel, who will reveal to you the Lessons to be read at Matins by the nuns in your monastery in honour of My Virgin Mother. He will dictate to you and do you write down what he says.' Now blessed Bridget had a room whose window faced the high altar and from which she could see daily the Body of Christ. So every day after she

had said her Hours and prayers, she prepared pen, ink, and paper, and awaited the coming of the angel of the Lord. When he came, he took up his position at her side, standing erect and dignified, having his face turned reverently towards the altar where the Body of Christ lay hid. So standing, he dictated distinctly, in order, and in blessed Bridget's mother-tongue, the Lessons to be read by the Sisters, treating of the supreme excellency of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And devoutly each day she would write what fell from the lips of the angel and then humbly show her spiritual Father what she had written. But it chanced that on certain days the angel came not. And then, when asked by her spiritual Father concerning her writing, she would humbly reply: 'Father, to-day I have written nothing, for though I waited long for the angel of the Lord, he did not come.'

'In this manner therefore, was written the Angelic Discourse, and it was divided by the angel into Lessons to be read at the Sisters' Matins throughout the week, during the whole year. And when the angel had finished dictating this discourse, he said: 'Behold, now I have woven a garment for the Queen of Heaven, God's Mother.'"<sup>9</sup>

Let the reader who finds the above story fantastic, make what he wills of it. The Angelic Discourse, as it is called, is a praise of the Virgin Mother which has never been surpassed in fullness and beauty and has been described as a masterpiece of Christian literature. It is divided into twenty-one portions, making the three long Lessons of the Office of Matins for each day of the week, and has formed part of the Breviary authorized for the use of the Bridgettine Order from its beginning until now.

The arrangement of the rest of the Office was entrusted to Master Peter. Many parts he took from existing praises of our Lady, often with some adaptation; others he composed. His work as to both words and music is highly praised in St. Bridget's writings, and she believed he received a very special help from heaven.<sup>10</sup>

## CHAPTER II

### The Promised Helper

It was during her first year in Rome that Bridget felt a hard command laid upon her: she, a stranger, a woman, unknown and unannounced, was to go to the Abbey of Farfa on a mission of reform and deliver a stern message to its abbot.<sup>11</sup>

Farfa, one of the most celebrated of the Benedictine monasteries, founded by saints and formerly a centre of learning, had in the course of centuries become also exceedingly wealthy. Its abbots lived like princes. A story is told of one who saw the Pope at Corose and felt sure he was on the way to Farfa. The Abbot called his majordomo and said to him: "That is the Pope and he is on his way to Farfa. Of course, I cannot be expected to return, but you will go back and be there to receive him. See that the same respect is paid to him as to me and that a fattened calf is killed for him."<sup>12</sup>

It was to Dom Arnold, sixty-fifth Abbot of Farfa, that St. Bridget was sent. He was a Frenchman from Cluny. She had sent no word of her coming, had not even made any arrangement for her lodging. The words heard in prayer were enough for her: "Go to Farfa where a chamber is prepared for you."

It was about a day's journey. Through the desolate Campagna with its ruined tombs and aqueducts, Bridget, Master Peter, and one or two others — probably servants — made their way, and found themselves in the mountainous Sabine region. In its most fertile part, amid rich cultivation, watered by the rushing stream of the Farfarus, stood the great monastery.

The appearance of the unknown travellers caused much surprise, as they asked for a lodging. The porter refused rudely, saying it was not the custom to give women hospitality. Finally some kind of outhouse was suggested as a roof to cover them for the night. Bridget accepted the offer with real joy, seeing that here was an opportunity to learn humility and make reparation for luxurious living in days gone by.<sup>13</sup>

After this rebuff, however, it was probably no easy matter to beg an interview with the Lord Abbot, and it was certainly no smooth and pleasing message the ambassador had to deliver. "Lord Abbot, you should be a mirror to your monks and are instead the mainstay of harlots. You should be an example to the poor, a dispenser to the needy, but are rather a mighty lord than an almsgiver. You prefer to live in a castle to a monastery. You ought to be a teacher and a mother to your brethren, but have become a stepfather and step-mother. You revel in splendour and dissipation, and they suffer and murmur all the day. Therefore, unless you amend, I will depose you from your castle and you shall not have the companionship of the very least of your brethren. You shall neither return to your own country as you think to do, nor shall you enter Mine."

Just how the Abbot received the stern message from heaven we are not told, but the revelation has at the end this remark: "All of which things were fulfilled."<sup>14</sup>

A second mission of reform undertaken by Bridget was more encouraging. After returning to Rome she again announced she must set off on a journey, this time as far as Bologna. Because of the well-known Dominican house at Bologna, some of St. Bridget's biographers have taken for granted it was here she delivered her message. But the supposition has no foundation whatever. The reform of a whole community is a sufficiently important event to be on record in the still existing Priory, but no trace of such a visit or such a reform is there. All that is known is that having been un-

successful at Farfa, St. Bridget went to Bologna to reform another monastery which was not that of the Friars Preachers. We may take for granted that she would visit the tomb of St. Dominic, and it may be that it was at this time she received a revelation praising his rare sanctity and lamenting that some of his sons had now grown worldly and had left the path of austere poverty and simplicity he trod in life and in which on his deathbed he had begged the Queen of Heaven to keep them.<sup>15</sup>

The monks whom Bridget had come to reprove, received her with great courtesy and even honour, making her task more difficult. But this time she did not speak to deaf ears. The Abbot amended his evil life and his whole community followed him.

While she was engaged on her delicate mission of reform, Master Peter came to Bridget in much distress of mind and announced that he must leave at once for Rome. He gave no reason and seemed to have none, but said he could neither eat nor sleep until he had carried out what he was inwardly urged to do.<sup>16</sup> Bridget did not try to dissuade him though unwilling to be without his help.

A few days later he reappeared and was not alone. Hardly able to believe her eyes, Bridget found herself face to face with her daughter Katherine.

When Bridget left Sweden at the end of 1349, her daughter Katherine had been the wife of Edgar von Kyren for something over five years. The marriage had been arranged by her parents and had taken place either shortly before or after her father's death.<sup>17</sup> The von Kyrens were one of the foreign families King Magnus I had encouraged to settle in Sweden and who had not adopted the Swedish custom of using the father's name as surname. The members of this family were in Bridget's day frequent visitors at Ulfåsa, and Edgar was the son of one Lyder von Kyren who in 1315 had been military governor of Finland. Edgar was already knighted when

he asked Katherine's hand, so must have been at least ten years older than his twelve-year-old bride, and he owned a beautiful estate known by the name of Edgar's Promontory.

Katherine never seems to have shown any inclination for the cloister during her schooldays with the Cistercians at Risaberga; yet, like her mother before her, her one desire was to belong wholly to God, and though she offered no objections to the marriage arranged for her, she had quite definite ideas as to the life she wished to lead, and counted on persuading Edgar to share her views. And her will prevailed. On the night of the wedding, after hearing all she had to urge, he consented to make with her a vow of perpetual continency.

Outwardly the two lived the life of those around them; Edgar attended to his duties as landlold, as knight; Katherine was a charming hostess to her friends, and a generous almsgiver to her dependants. But in private they followed a rule they had imposed on themselves of prayer and rigorous penance.

Bridget must have known all this, because we are told that something of their secret leaked out, and reached the ear of Charles, the eldest son of the family, who was highly incensed at the gossip, and as guardian of his widowed mother and sister by the law of the province, tried to interfere. But vainly. Katherine and Edgar took his angry remonstrances calmly and went on as before. Whatever the mother thought of the step taken by the two concerned, she at least could plainly see that they were supremely happy, content with each other and with the way of life they had chosen.

What then could have happened that Katherine should appear suddenly in Italy, with no warning and without her husband? And again: what part had Master Peter in it all? Katherine told her long story.

The detailed account of all that happened after the parting with her mother a year earlier, as well as Katherine's reactions later to the new life that now began for her, can only

have come from herself. She told how the absence of her mother had so saddened her that as the months wore on life seemed to have become well-nigh unbearable. She knew her husband could not take her to Rome — he was out of health, as we are later told — so she kept her unhappiness to herself, as she thought. But one day he had begged her to say what was the matter. Why was she so sad? Many years later she was to tell St. Catherine of Siena that on the day her mother left Sweden she forgot how to smile. When Edgar himself opened the subject she had poured out all her troubles and, as it was the Jubilee Year, had asked him if she could not join some of the pilgrims going to Rome and pay her mother a visit. It had taken some persuasion, she said, but finally he had yielded. She seems to have been able to make Edgar share her own conviction that this longing for her mother had some special significance, for we read in the early Life from which this story comes, that when she was so earnest, he began to fear to oppose her lest he should also be opposing the will of God. Had he some premonition of his death which would take place in a year's time? It seems possible, and if so, he might see in the journey to Rome a provision for the future of his young wife.

Then, continued Katherine, came a most violent letter from her brother Charles to Edgar, threatening to kill him if he allowed her to leave the country. Edgar happened to be away from home, but she had suspected trouble and had opened the letter. She had not known what to do till suddenly the idea came to her of appealing to her uncle. This was Israel Birgersson, Bridget's brother, a man of great wealth and importance in the kingdom, whose support — if she could gain it — would certainly prevent Charles from doing any harm to Edgar. Katherine had written to him at once, had had a most kind reply with the promise of every help in the way of protection for her husband and money and servants for her journey. So she had set off as soon as possible under the special care of Sir Gustav Tunesson, a

relative of Edgar's, and in company with quite a number of pilgrims. After three months of difficult travelling,<sup>18</sup> they had at last reached Rome, had gone straight to the house by S. Lorenzo and had, of course, found it empty — only servants in charge, who seemed to know nothing of her mother's whereabouts. Then had begun a week of agonized searching, and finally, when praying one day in St. Peter's, she had looked up and had seen — Master Peter. He had told her just where her mother was and had promised to take her to Bologna next day. Master Peter's strong inward urge to go to Rome was now explained.

The Abbot of the monastery received the newcomer with great reverence "because of the esteem in which he held her mother, by whose holy exhortations he had been converted to a better life." These are the words of Katherine's biographer. The meeting between the mother and daughter is placed by most of St. Bridget's biographers at Farfa. I venture to part company with these, for reasons which need not detain us here but which are discussed in the notes to this chapter.<sup>19</sup> St. Katherine's Life makes explicit mention of Bologna, and unless its author was drawing on his imagination when he described the reception she received and its cause, his words better fit the penitent abbot at Bologna than the impenitent one at Farfa.

Mother and daughter returned after a few days to Rome, and Katherine began with great ardour and devotion to visit the various stations and shrines as the condition for gaining the Jubilee.

The Holy Year was drawing to its close and the pilgrims from the various countries were preparing to return to their homes. Katherine began to think it was time she, too, went back. She had left Sweden with the one idea of being with her mother; the Jubilee was quite a secondary consideration. But now that she and Bridget had met and she had poured out all her news, she began to long to be back with her hus-

band. There seemed as much reason now for leaving Rome as there had earlier been for leaving Sweden.

One day when the time for leaving was near, Bridget came to her daughter and asked a direct question.

"Are you willing," she said, "to stay in Rome with me and work for the cause of Christ?"

Truly this seems an amazing question from anyone with Bridget's strong sense of wifely duty, until we remind ourselves that in all her words and actions she let herself be guided by the lights received in prayer. Earlier, as we know, she had distrusted such lights, but now, with a child's simple faith, she listened to the voices that were heard so often and obeyed blindly the commands that came. And it was now "by command of Christ," we read, that she asked this sacrifice of Katherine. Much as she longed for a helper in her necessarily lonely life — and that she did so long we shall learn a little later on — it is certain that to put such a question to her daughter, when she knew of her anxiety to leave, cost her much, but she never faltered.

If Bridget's question surprises us, still more perhaps does Katherine's answer. With implicit trust in her mother's intuitions, she at once cried out:

"Not only my country and my friends, but even my husband whom I love more than myself will I give up and willingly, if it is pleasing to Christ!"

It was an outburst of enthusiasm, and very soon there was, as we might expect, reaction. Yet Bridget accepted the sacrifice quite simply and soon had another light in prayer.

"Your daughter Katherine," she was told, "is the one I promised you as a faithful co-worker in the affairs divinely entrusted to you. She is a fair sapling whom it is My will to plant and have under My special care that she may grow into a fruit-bearing tree. And because she needs the dew of grace, I will water her with My wisdom. Advise her to stay with you, for it will be better for her to stay than to return. . . . She loves Me and also loves her husband, and because I

am the Lord of all, I will provide for him by giving him gifts which will be valuable to his soul, for it is My will to call him to Myself, and the illness from which he suffers is a sign of his death. But her I will fit for the work which from all eternity I have designed for her, and will make it known."

Meanwhile Katherine continued to regret her promise to stay in Rome. And even when her mother could tell her definitely that Edgar had died on Good Friday and that Christ Himself had said He would be all in all to her,<sup>20</sup> it was long before she could resign herself to the new life, the austerity of the daily round, and the long hours of silence. Her penances at home had, after all, been self-chosen and she and Edgar had had no sense of restraint. Here she felt like a prisoner, the more because, owing to the notice she attracted in the streets, her mother felt obliged to forbid her to go out unless she had a large escort. It was a time of testing and the strain nearly broke the poor captive. She tried severe bodily penance and thought she had conquered her homesickness, only to find it return worse than ever.

One day she was in a terrible state of depression and bitterness as she sat alone in the house thinking how useless, after all, was the sacrifice she had made, when Bridget and Master Peter returned from one of their visits to the churches. They were alarmed, for she looked as if she were going out of her mind. When asked to say what was the matter, she only said miserably that she was unable to explain. Bridget had perhaps not realized that things had gone so far, but saw that her daughter must fight her battle out in her own soul and that all she could do for her was to pray.

Then at night there came to Katherine a vivid dream which filled her with compunction and took her humbly to her mother to beg her forgiveness. The whole world, she said, had seemed to her to be in flames, and as she was about to be consumed, she had seen the Virgin Mother who reproached her with her unfaithfulness to her promises and said no one could help her until she had surrendered her will. Katherine,

at her mother's suggestion, now made a vow of obedience to Master Peter and at last found peace and strength and also the self-forgetfulness that was to make her the ideal helper and companion for whom Bridget had yearned.

When the definite news of Edgar's death reached Rome, Bridget told her daughter she must make her choice between the state of marriage and that of widowhood, for she was still very young, rich, and of noble rank. Katherine said decidedly that she intended to be faithful to the life she had vowed. But when it became known that the fair stranger so often kept hidden away was a widow, offers of marriage poured in. Every persuasion was used, but Katherine stood firm. Then attempts were made to capture her. One of her most persistent suitors was Count Latino Orsini. Twice he lay with his followers in ambush, and twice his plan failed. The first time the sudden appearance of a stag made his retainers give chase, and Katherine and her friends were able to escape. Bridget had not been with them but seemed to know all about their danger, for they found her waiting at the door, while she exclaimed: "Blessed be the stag that saved you!"

The next time Orsini somehow came to know that Bridget and her daughter would visit the church of S. Lorenzo-out-side-the-walls, and lay in wait all night. His servants saw the two women pass, and waited their master's command. He thought it was still night, and found he had been struck with complete blindness. He recognized this as a punishment from heaven, had himself led to the church, where he humbly confessed his intention to Bridget and her daughter, and promised if they would only forgive him, that he would henceforth be a faithful friend and protector. By their prayers his blindness was cured, and Latino Orsini fully redeemed his promise. His name is often found in the Process.

Later he married, and when his little son was dying, the parents at once summoned Bridget to save him. She would not refuse. She remembered her own son's death-bed at Alvas-tra long ago, over which she had shed so many tears. Going



apart she prayed for some time, then was taken to the sick-room. She asked to be left alone with the boy, and spreading her cloak over him and laying her face to his, she prayed again. Then she said: "Sleep, my child, sleep." Soon she called the parents and nurses, and repeating the words of the divine Physician, said: "The child is not dead but sleeping," and at once left the house.

When the boy woke, he asked for his clothes. He seemed bewildered. "Mother," he asked, "what has happened? When Lady Bridget spread her cloak over me, I didn't feel ill any more." Thereupon he got up and ran away to play with his friends.<sup>21</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### St. Bridget and Her Friends

NO PICTURE of St. Bridget in Rome is complete without mention of those among whom she moved and of her relations with them; for though she lived — it would seem almost uninterruptedly — in thought and prayer in the unseen world, yet she was never aloof, never uninterested in those around her or unmindful of their needs. Her desire was always to serve, and serve she did, whether the service was the one so painful to her of delivering messages to those in high places, or the grateful one of humbly mending the clothes of her household.

The saints are leaders in spite of themselves, and in the measure in which they have lost all thought of and interest in themselves, they become a centre of thought and interest to others. Bridget might wish, as she did, to live hidden and unnoticed, but a large circle of friends and even only acquaintances, revolved round her. The faithful friends that shared her roof in Rome shared also to some extent her austere life, in many cases during a number of years. They seconded all her interests, stood by her in all her dangers, and to them we owe the detailed accounts of her daily life found in the Process of Canonization. We feel in reading these that she was an object of love, veneration, and wonder.

Bridget's household, constantly referred to in the Process as her *familia*, seems to have been a large one. It included some who came and went, like Prior Peter of Alvastra, some who joined her after she had been absent from Sweden for a number of years, and again those who were always with her.

To this latter class belongs the faithful Master Peter who was looked up to by all as the head of the house and ruled it in both spiritual and temporal matters, and always, it is said, with great wisdom and calmness of soul.<sup>22</sup> He had need of both qualities, for his position was no easy one. On the spiritual side he had the direction of a saint possessing extraordinary gifts, who would do nothing without his sanction. On the material side, he found himself in a strange land and with a purse generally slender, often quite empty.

The following is an instance of the money difficulties in which Bridget and Master Peter often found themselves: "Once," we read in one of the short revelations, "it happened before the Feast of All Saints that blessed Bridget had borrowed money from various people, because she had received nothing from her country for three years, and she was in great anxiety since her creditors daily pressed her for repayment. Then said Christ to her: 'Boldly borrow money and reassure your creditors, promising to pay them back on the first Sunday after the Epiphany when the Sudarium is exposed, for on that day the whole debt will be discharged.' And so it happened. About Vesper-time on the said Sunday came a messenger from her country bringing money, and she at once satisfied her creditors."<sup>23</sup>

But such miraculous assurances and helps were the exception. Usually Bridget felt just the same embarrassment that any of us would feel in like circumstances. Then would ensue a conversation such as the following. Bridget, heading her revelation, "The Bride speaks to the Virgin," describes how Mary told her to trust in God who feeds the sparrows, and to have no care as to the morrow.

"To which I replied: 'Oh, dearest Lady, fair, rich, and full of virtues, for you have never sinned and are God's beloved friend, perfect in all good works. Hear me who am full of sins and poor in virtue. We have food to-day but we shall have nothing whatever tomorrow and how can we be without care?'

"See if you have nothing superfluous,' replied the Virgin, 'and if so, sell or pawn it and so be at rest.'

"We have the same clothes for day and night,' I answered, 'and a few cups and plates for our meals; the priest has his books and for Mass we have the chalice and vestments.'

"The priest must not be without books, nor you without Mass,' said the Virgin.

"I said: 'May I borrow money, pledging my word to repay it at a fixed time?'

"Yes, if you can pay it back at the time appointed, not otherwise.'

"Shall I work for a living?' I asked.

"What do you do now every day?' asked the Mother.

"I learn Latin, I pray and I write.'

"You must give up none of these things for manual work.'

"On what, then, shall we live tomorrow?'

"If you have nothing left, go and beg alms in the Name of Jesus Christ.'"<sup>24</sup>

Some six or seven years after Bridget's arrival in Rome, she was joined by a Swedish knight, a connection of hers named Magnus Persson, who from that time became one of her very intimate friends, helping her in all her works of charity and going with her on her pilgrimages. He had known her first at the Court of King Magnus, but had not been among those who derided her for her prophecies. He was at that time a man of wealth with a wife and children. So Bridget had surprised him considerably when she announced one day that he would become a priest and enter the Order she was going to found. However, one after another of those belonging to him died. He then went to Rome and Bridget's prophecy was fulfilled in due time, though not until after her death.<sup>25</sup>

Besides her friends, there were also servants. Bridget recognized she had a duty towards them as mistress of the house and did not pass over their faults, but, says her daughter,

corrected them always gently and at a fitting time. "Very quiet and peaceable," are her words, "never roused to anger, and suffered the faults of her household humbly."<sup>26</sup>

In one case something more than patience was needed. Her cook came to her.

"Signora, your son Charles has been hanged!"

"God forbid!" she exclaimed, "who told you?"

"Pilgrims from Sweden," said the man, unabashed.

When Bridget found the report was without any foundation, there was no reproach, and when, some months later, the cook died, penitent for his cruelty, she poured out her soul in prayer for him.<sup>27</sup>

Alfonso da Vadaterra, editor of St. Bridget's writings, has been mentioned more than once. If he did not live under her roof, he was so often with her that he may be reckoned as one of her *familia* during the last years of her life. He was a Spaniard of noble birth, had been consecrated Bishop of Jaen in Andalusia in 1359, and some nine years later resigned his office to become a hermit. He joined the Order of Our Lady of Mount Olivet which had established itself in Tuscany, and later founded the monastery of San Girolamo di Quarta, outside Genoa, where he died. In his evidence given in the Process of St. Bridget's Canonization, he states that he first heard of her from a hermit, Brother Lawrence of Spain; how she and her daughter had lived for many years in Rome, sharing their goods with the poor. This filled him with a great desire to know her, and when later he found himself in Rome, he sought her out and often talked with her.<sup>28</sup> In fact, from this time on, he stayed in Rome and devoted himself to Bridget's interests. He often acted as her confessor, went with her later to the Holy Land, was secretary and messenger between Rome and Avignon, and finally, as already said, undertook the editorship of her recorded revelations.

The relationship between Bridget and the Bishop was one of mutual reverence. He trusted absolutely her intuitions and marvelled at her gifts. If he guided her, he also let him-

self be guided by her, and it seemed quite natural for her to address him as "my son."

In spite of the distance, the difficulties and dangers of travel — indeed, perhaps because of them, since they made the journey more meritorious — many were the Scandinavian-ans who came to Rome long after the Jubilee Year had closed. Not only did Charles and Birger visit their mother, but various Swedish governors and knights, the Earl Marshal, the Archbishop of Upsala and others of the Swedish hierarchy, priests, monks, and also pilgrims from among the peasantry found their way to the home of their country-woman and were welcomed by her. These various visitors brought her news from home and took back with them her letters and messages.

Among the things she heard was that her daughter Ingeborg had died in the Cistercian monastery of Risaberga.

Bridget's first exclamation was one of thanksgiving.

"I thank Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, that Thou hast called her away before the world became dear to her!" (Was she looking into the future when Risaberga was to become relaxed and worldly?)

Then she locked herself in her oratory and burst into a storm of tears. But it was not so much grief at the loss of one she had hardly expected to see again, as shame that she had given her child a bad example of pride and had not done more to help her.<sup>29</sup>

Bridget also learned that her wilful eldest daughter Merita, who had become a widow, had made a second marriage, and one which was little less displeasing than the first had been, for Canute Algotsson was known to be worldly, ambitious, and incurably avaricious. The news, too, of Cecilia, Bridget's youngest child, was disquieting. She had left her convent school secretly to be married to a young squire, and her mother's hopes of her finding peace and safety as a Dominican nun were dashed to the ground.

Besides family news the Scandinavian visitors brought with

them political gossip of absorbing interest to one who had always followed closely the events affecting her country. It was a troubled Sweden of which Bridget heard. King Magnus and his elder son, Eric, whom he had been forced to accept as co-Regent of Sweden, were always at strife. When, in 1359, Eric, his wife, and children all died suddenly (thus fulfilling Bridget's prophecy made to him in his childhood), the enemies of Magnus said openly that they had been poisoned by order of the King and even by the hand of Blanche herself. The story of the unnatural crime has come down to our own days, but there is not the slightest hint of such a thing in St. Bridget's writings, for all her denunciation of Magnus.<sup>30</sup>

At another time Bridget heard how the nobles had risen in rebellion and that they, her son Charles among them, had offered the crown of Sweden to Albert the Younger of Mecklenburg, the King's nephew, but a German.

Though Magnus had gathered together an army and had faced his rebellious nobles, he had been defeated and imprisoned.

For her eagerness to hear news of her country, Bridget reproaches herself, and says Christ rebuked her.

"Why do you take such delight in hearing about worldly people and their doings, and the wars of princes? Why are you so absorbed in all these idle tales?"

I am tempted to make a short digression here and continue my quotations from a revelation which, though recorded six centuries ago, seems to be peculiarly significant to-day.

"The Devil moves the lords of this world to follow his will," we read, ". . . yet I am the Lord, and it is by My judgement they will be judged. They have made to themselves a new law which is contrary to Mine. They care only how to be honoured by the world, how to grow rich, how to do their own will, how to increase their race. Therefore by the truth of My Godhead and My Manhood, I protest that if they die in this frame of mind they will never enter that land of which the land flowing with milk and honey promised

to the children of Israel was a figure. And as those that desired flesh died by the sudden death of the body, so will these die the death of the soul. But those who do My will shall enter the land flowing with milk and honey, that is, heavenly glory, where there is no earth beneath and heaven above, for I, the Creator and Lord of all, am beneath and above, without and within, for I fill all things. I will satisfy My friends not with honey but with sweetness ineffable and wonderful, so that they shall desire nothing but Me and shall want for nothing, for in Me is all good. This good My enemies shall never taste except they turn from their evil ways. If they had but thought of what I have done for them, if they had but considered what I have given them, they would never have provoked Me to anger. For I gave them to possess all things necessary and desirable, but in reason. I allowed them honours, friends, and pleasures, but in moderation. If a man in an honourable position thinks within himself: Since I am so placed, I will live according to my state, I will honour God, I will oppress no one, I will care for those under my charge, I will love all — then one in such a post of honour is pleasing to Me. If a man has riches and says: I am rich, but I will never receive any unjust gain, I will do injury to no man, I will keep myself from mortal sin, will help the poor — then that man with his wealth is pleasing to Me. . . . But many put their own law before Mine. They will suffer none to be in greater honour than they, they are never satisfied with their wealth. And in their pleasures they exceed what is right. Therefore, unless they amend and follow another way, they cannot enter My land which flows with spiritual milk and honey — that is, with sweetness and plenty."<sup>31</sup>

Here are ideas and expressions only too familiar to us. Men letting themselves be led by the devil; a New Order, a world organized without reference to God and His laws; lust of power, worship of race, greed for wealth, unbridled pleasure. But as ever, St. Bridget's message is not something merely negative but also positive; not merely destructive but

constructive as well. If we hear in it the fulminations of divine justice, we hear also the pleadings of divine love.

Sometimes Bridget was allowed to know of happenings in the land she had left without the aid of a messenger. There was the death of Katherine's husband, for instance. Another time she came to Master Peter and told him she had heard these words: "Oh Master Mathias, blessed you, with such a crown prepared for you in heaven!" Master Peter at once made a note of the date, and when, some time later, Prior Peter arrived from Sweden, bringing news of the death of Master Mathias, at which he had been present, it was found that the dates coincided.<sup>32</sup>

It was not only occasional visitors to Rome that flocked to Bridget's house. As the years went on she became one of the notabilities of the city and her front door was always opening and shutting during the hours she received visits. Those who sought her out might not always relish what she had to say in answer to their questions. If anyone came who was proud or in a state of sin, she at once became aware of an intolerable odour and had a bitter taste in her mouth. Once when seated by such a person, the odour almost overpowered her. She told him quite frankly that she knew him to be possessed by a devil, and naturally he was very angry. Yet he afterwards amended his life and then the bad odour was replaced by a good one.<sup>33</sup>

But if this plain speech was felt by Bridget to be necessary on occasion, it was surely something unusual. One who visited her speaks in his evidence of the gracious and smiling welcome that it was her custom to give her guests. In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, that curious mediaeval work whose unexpected discovery and publication has aroused so much interest, there are two references to St. Bridget of extraordinary value. Between Margery Kempe and St. Bridget there is, in some directions, a certain similarity. Both claimed to have had intimate personal communications from Christ Himself;

neither was ever in the cloister, but on the contrary fulfilled the duties of wife and mother. Both could be, on occasion, outspoken in rebuke. Both went on long pilgrimages of devotion and to the same shrines. Here, however, the resemblance ends. The spiritual excitement, the cries and loud weeping which made Margery so exceedingly unpopular, have no counterpart in St. Bridget; are indeed unthinkable in connection with her. Her ecstasies caused wonder, but never repulsion. We have a sense of restraint; with all her love of poverty and humility, something of the *grande dame* remains with her to the end, and though sometimes mocked at for her prophecies we cannot picture her incurring the censures passed on the very emotional Margery.

It was some thirty-five years after Bridget's death that Margery Kempe went to Rome. She stayed at the Hostel for English pilgrims, now the Venerable English College, and visited the near-by house where St. Bridget had lived and died. There she found one who had been in the Saint's service. She asked her to say something of her former mistress. The incident is best told in Margery's own words. "This creature" (so Margery always speaks of herself), "spake with St. Bridget's maiden in Rome but she could not understand what she said. Then she had a man who could understand her language, and that man told St. Bridget's maiden what this creature said and how she asked after St. Bridget her lady. Then the maiden said that her lady, St. Bridget, was kind and meek to every creature, and that she had a laughing face. Also the good man where this creature was at host told her that he knew her himself, but he little thought she had been as holy a woman as she was, for she was ever homely and kind to all creatures that would speak with her."<sup>34</sup>

Many who could not come to Bridget in person consulted her by letter. One engaged in matters of state asks her advice and begs for a rule of life. Another propounds his difficulties about the seven thunders mentioned in the Apocalypse. Some

of the Orsini family even implore her help in putting an end to scandal caused by one of their relatives keeping ill-gotten gain.

Bridget writes to the delinquent: "My Lord, I warn you of the danger that besets your soul. By the Passion of Jesus Christ who redeemed your soul, by His Precious Blood, I exhort you not to lose it for the sake of perishable riches. Give back what you have seized. God is witness that I say this to you not of my own accord, for I do not know you. But a certain person keeping vigil and not asleep, heard in prayer these words spoken by an angel: 'Orso, Orso, what audacity is this that you show towards God and His justice? Self-will has mastered your conscience. You will speedily be judged by God; then your conscience will speak and condemn you.'"<sup>35</sup>

And the woman who was thus consulted, admired, feared, would, in the privacy of her room, pour forth her soul to God in utter self-abasement. "O Lord God Almighty, blessed art Thou who hast created and redeemed me, and when I was worthy of damnation didst lead me back to penitence. I acknowledge, O Lord, in the presence of Thy Majesty, that I have wasted all that Thou hast given me for my salvation: the time for repentance in vanities, the grace of Baptism by my pride. I can do nothing of myself but sin. Send to me Thy Holy Spirit that He may illuminate my heart and strengthen me in the way of Thy commandments, so that I may persevere in those things which I know I am inspired by Thee to do, and that no temptation may separate me from Thee."<sup>36</sup>

Bridget could not but know well her power of working miracles, for these seem to have been of almost daily occurrence, but her humility always shrank from any suggestion that her prayers were specially acceptable to God. Sometimes it took a definite command from Master Peter to induce her to exercise her gift of healing by prayer or touch.<sup>37</sup>

The Bull of Canonization says: "She stretched out her hands to the needy, showing to the poor and sick an inexhaustible love." Rome's poor soon knew where they could

find help and the love of a friend. She served the sick, washing their sores; she often received into her house as guests those who needed special care, nursing them back to health. And as in Sweden, she befriended girls who had fallen into sin, sheltered them under her roof, taught them, and finally provided for them.<sup>38</sup>

Not only by sympathy but by experience did she know what it was to fear for the loss of a home. After some four years in Rome she was given a month's notice to quit the Cardinal's house which had been her home since her arrival. She was in great perplexity, even anguish, for it was no easy matter to find a suitable place for her large family, and the thought of having to go to one of the hostels for strangers with the beautiful daughter who already attracted so much attention, filled her with alarm. It must have been just about this time, too, that Cola Rienzi, once Rome's idol, was stabbed to death amidst scenes of indescribable excitement and horror. The only direction Bridget received in prayer was that she and Master Peter must go and search for a suitable house. They obeyed, but day after day the weary tramp went on with no success. Bridget was all packed up and ready to go to a hostel, when just two days before the month was up, a letter from the Cardinal arrived telling her she was quite at liberty to stay on in his house. She then understood that the trial had been sent to teach her what many a poor pilgrim had to suffer who arrived homeless and unwelcomed in Rome.<sup>39</sup>

Although the Cardinal's house was Bridget's home for more than four years, the house in Rome which will always be associated with her is that which now bears her name — Casa Brigida, in the Piazza Farnese, with the church dedicated to St. Bridget attached to it. It belonged to Pietro Papazzuri, a Roman noble whose wife Francesca became acquainted with Bridget during the Jubilee Year. When Pietro died, Francesca invited her Swedish friend and her household to make Palazzo Papazzuri their home. It was known as the

House of the Five Columns, the portico having that number of columns, taken possibly from the old Theatre of Pompey close by.

In St. Bridget's time it faced south on to what is now known as Via Monserrato (then Via Regola), a gravelled road running parallel to the Tiber. Scarcely a house was to be seen; fields lay between the road and the river. To the north was the Campo dei Fiori, a meadow which left the view open to S. Lorenzo in Damaso, the church Bridget continued to attend. In the Process, Bridget's home is referred to as the house in the Campo dei Fiori.<sup>40</sup>

Bridget's daughter seconded her mother in all her works of charity and followed her example in the practice of penance and poverty, wearing the shabby gowns patched for her by one who had made herself her household's servant. Yet it seemed as if heaven itself could not bear anything so fair as Katherine to be meanly clad. Stories were told by those who knew her and her mother to be in need of money, of Katherine's cloak falling back when she was out walking, and revealing a gown of rich silk embroidered with flowers, and again, one who visited her when she happened to be ill in bed, declared that her coverlet was of gold and scarlet. Why, asked the bewildered onlookers, did not these ladies sell such costly things, instead of being pinched for food?<sup>41</sup>

But before Bridget gained the love and veneration of the Romans, she had for a time to face their fury.

She felt herself charged with a message, not merely to this one and that in private, but to all who were leading dissolute and unworthy lives. When it was found that she claimed to have revelations from God telling of His coming judgements, she was denounced as a mad soothsayer; some even threatened to burn her alive.

Bridget bore all this with her usual serenity, but she had her household to consider, and questioned, had she any right to expose them to danger? Yet such a strong sense of the help and protection of Christ and His Mother came to her in

prayer, that the thought of leaving Rome until the storm died down was given up. There came a revelation from the Virgin Mary, who said: "I will be to you and yours a shield of protection against your spiritual enemies and against all attacks made on you. It is my wish that you and your household, when you assemble for Vespers, sing the hymn 'Ave maris stella.'" The direction was faithfully carried out, and continued later in St. Bridget's Order.<sup>42</sup>

Animosity quickly gave way to veneration. Rome became proud of possessing one so favoured by God, the "saintly widow," as she is termed by Martin V in his confirmation of the Bull of Canonization. So much a part of Rome did she become that the "Fifteen Prayers of St. Bridget," said to have been composed by her at Alvastra, and richly indulged when said by the crucifix in the basilica of St. Paul, were inserted as important for pilgrims, in a Latin guide-book often printed in Rome at the end of the fifteenth century. The prayers in question, though always bearing St. Bridget's name, yet find no place among her writings as edited by Prior Peter and Bishop Alfonso, but certainly breathe her spirit.

Among St. Bridget's revelations concerning the Rome of the future is one which has aroused interest in our own day when we have seen the signing of the Lateran Treaty and the formation of the Vatican City. It runs:

"I saw in Rome as it were a plain, extending from the Pope's palace near St. Peter's to the castle of Sant' Angelo, and from the castle of Sant' Angelo to the Hospital of the Holy Ghost, and from there back to St. Peter's; and this plain was surrounded by a very strong wall by which were divers dwellings. Then I heard a voice saying: 'That Pope who loves his Bride with the love wherewith I and My friends have loved her, shall possess this place with his Cardinals, so that he may summon his councillors more freely and in greater peace.'<sup>43</sup>

To many it is a favourite pastime to make prophecies fit their own time. But can we by any possibility imagine St. Bridget visualizing a Rome in which that "plain, girt about

with a strong wall," was all that Christ's Vicar could claim as his own, while the rest of the city of Peter and Paul was accounted merely the capital of an earthly kingdom? Had it been given her to foresee what we see to-day, she would assuredly have heard again in her anguished heart the lament of Christ: "Oh Rome, for My many benefits you have made evil return!"

If we want to find a fulfilment — at least in desire — of the prophecy in St. Bridget's revelation, we need go no farther than the century following her death. Nicholas V (1447-1455) truly a "Pope who loved his Bride," drew up plans for a new Vatican Palace, the details of which bring St. Bridget's vision vividly to mind. I quote from Pastor's *History of the Popes*: "The new Vatican was to be a citadel . . . the papal Palace was also to include quarters for the College of Cardinals." And again: "The tomb of St. Peter, actually situated at one extremity, was to be the centre of this grandiose plan. The opposite extremity was to be formed by a large square in front of the Castle and Bridge of St. Angelo." The same author gives us the following words from the speech the Pope addressed on his death-bed to his Cardinals: "If," said Nicholas, "We had been able to accomplish all that We wished, our successors would find themselves more respected by all Christian nations, and would be able to dwell in Rome with greater security both from external and internal foes. Thus it is not out of ostentation or ambition or a vain-glorious desire of immortalizing Our name that We have conceived and commenced all these great works, but for the exaltation of the power of the Holy See throughout Christendom, and in order that future Popes should no longer be in danger of being driven away, taken prisoners, besieged, and otherwise oppressed."

These words, spoken just five centuries ago, have surely a very special significance to-day.

## CHAPTER IV

### Her Daily Life

ST. BRIDGET, surrounded by a large circle of friends, looked up to, consulted, working actively among the poor, visiting the great houses of Rome and receiving all who came to her; does this suggest the life freed from outside cares, intent on God, which we are told she had come expressly to seek? But did the things to which God called her ever develop in the way she expected? To the end we shall find her reaching her goal only by seeming to turn her back upon it.

She had, after her husband's death, wrenched herself from her former life of family affections, social duties, and active works of charity, and had tried by prayer, solitude, and rigorous mortification to prepare herself for the unknown future. Her renunciation had been accepted and she had been granted a union with God close and intimate, the portion of certain specially chosen souls. And now in Rome, whither she had come in obedience to a divine call, she found restored to her, so to speak, some of the things she had renounced and which in the past had seemed a hindrance. They were so no longer. Her soul, simplified, saw all people, all events in God, so that she could pass from deep contemplation to the active exercise of a very practical charity towards her neighbour, without losing the peace in which she was now firmly established or her inner light of God's presence.

She drew up for herself, and to a certain extent for her household, a definite plan of life, one which she believed had been given her by the Divine Founder of her Order. In its



main features it was to be a model for the future monastery, and so we find it monastic in its spirit of poverty, obedience, and mortification. No hour was unaccounted for. The hours for sleep were regulated, fasts were frequent and severe, though if more food was really needful it could be asked of Master Peter. Study, prayer, and manual work were a part of every day, and some recreation was also provided for, when Bridget gathered her household round her and gave them pleasure by her conversation. There was, too, the Great Silence of the Cloister, and other times when all but necessary speech was to be strictly avoided.<sup>45</sup>

However faithfully Bridget's friends kept to the prescribed rule, she herself, as we should expect, gave it its strictest and most literal interpretation. And since the hours allotted to sleep might be shortened though never lengthened, she saw to it that her nightly rest was the minimum. When she lay down on the only resting place she allowed herself — a rug on the floor with an old cloak to cover her — it was, says her daughter, her almost invariable custom to wait until she was getting warm and sleepy and then to rise for an hour's prayer. Afterwards she would return to her so-called bed and sleep till about midnight, and then continue her prayers with many genuflections until daybreak, and this even when it was freezing and the cold intense.

Katherine, who shared her mother's room, watched this austerity with some uneasiness, and sometimes when Bridget was asleep would contrive to slip under her something warmer and softer than the threadbare carpet which was little better than the stone floor it covered.<sup>46</sup>

During the time of prayer after midnight, Bridget would often be quite lost in contemplation, sometimes lying prostrate with arms extended, thus making herself a living cross. At dawn she confessed what she counted as her sins. Any failures in thought, word, or deed, she always declared were at once made known to her by a taste in her mouth of sulphur. In the early morning she went out accompanied by her con-

fessor to visit the churches in Rome and outside its walls. She had first heard Mass in her own oratory, but during these visits she would often hear many others.<sup>47</sup> Probably she would only return at dinner time.

She was always silent at meals, though apparently others were allowed to talk if they wished, for it is said that it was no uncommon thing for her to be rapt in ecstasy when at table and to be quite unconscious of what was said or done by those with her.

Bridget did not share all her secrets with Katherine, deeply as she loved her, and it was only after her mother's death that the daughter learned the reason of a curious custom that took place during the meal. Thrice she would raise and extend her hands and then join them together, in a threefold commemoration of Christ's Passion.<sup>48</sup>

After dinner Bridget would go to her room or to the oratory and there pray, read, or write down in Swedish any revelations she had received, to be translated later by one of her confessors. The translation made, she carefully compared it with what she herself had written. If unable through illness to write down her revelations herself, as sometimes happened, she would call her confessor and a specially appointed secretary and "with great devotion and in the fear of God, as if reading from a book," says the early Life, she would dictate words which her confessor at once dictated to the scribe in Latin. Then what he had written she would have read to her, listening with the closest attention.<sup>49</sup>

What, besides the particular class of revelations already mentioned, does that great volume of close print named *Revelationes caelestes* contain?

Had warnings, prophecies, and sometimes denunciation of those among whom she moved been the exclusive burden of her writings, they would hardly have found their way so rapidly over Europe. The people of that age found nourishment for their souls in the direct consideration of the great fundamental truths of Faith; the Creation, the Fall, the Incarna-

tion, and Redemption; man's struggles here on earth, his failures and recoveries; Death, Judgement, Purgatory, Heaven, Hell. These were the subjects they found treated of in Bridget's writings. As to her manner of conveying the message she felt heaven had entrusted her with, the phraseology is that of her time. The allegorical form of speech is such as would be familiar to her hearers, accustomed as they were to similitudes, parables, bright lights, and dark shadows. The wealth of the imagery used by her, combined with her reputation for possessing extraordinary spiritual gifts, made her works among the most popular spiritual readings of the fifteenth century.

She broke no new ground. When the Church hails her as a "new light" and says that to her were revealed heaven's secrets, such expressions in no way imply she had some new gospel to deliver. She said what others had said before her and with an accuracy of expression that won the assignment to her special Mass of the words from the Book of Wisdom: "I called and the spirit of wisdom came upon me," since her acquaintance with the writings of the Doctors of the Church can have been but slight.<sup>50</sup> Truly no one who reads her *Book of Revelations* even cursorily can think that she would have been capable of producing what she did without some very special assistance.

There are also revelations which treat quite simply of things constantly in her thoughts, such as the sufferings of the Passion, or the rare gifts of God's saints, and in particular the glories and prerogatives of Mary. And underneath all Bridget's words — here, surely lies much of the secret of her power — we hear the beat of her own loving, humble, and grateful heart, which breaks forth every now and again into acts of deep self-abasement, of adoration, thanksgiving, and burning love.

"O my most tender God," she cries, "when Thou dost deign to visit me, my heart is so full of sweetness I can scarce contain myself! It seems to me Thou dost so imprint Thyself

upon my soul that Thou Thyself becomest my very heart and inmost being. Happy should I be could I do what is pleasing to Thee. Do Thou, O Best Beloved, give me Thy help in all things, that I may seek and promote Thy glory."<sup>51</sup>

No doubt it was because she felt she had a message for mankind that Bridget spent a part of her day in the study of Latin. She could hardly have been wholly ignorant of it before this time, as some evidence in the Process seems to suggest, but her progress in her study and the ease with which she came to write and speak a language so different from her own were sufficiently notable to have been considered as something in the nature of a miracle.<sup>52</sup>

But as we have seen, the hours set apart for work included humbler tasks than learning Latin, for she took delight in mending the clothes of her big household. And when the purse kept by Master Peter was nearly or quite empty, she would sit among the Italian beggars gathered on the steps of S. Lorenzo in Panisperna and beg alms of the passers-by. She would receive with great sweetness and humility what was given her, kissing the gift devoutly as something bestowed on Christ Himself.<sup>53</sup> Here was her opportunity of making some small reparation for that pride over which she grieved as she thought of the days when she had been one of Sweden's great ladies.

Vespers, more walks to Rome's sanctuaries, and the visits she must make or receive as part of her apostolate occupied her afternoons, and at night the whole household gathered in the oratory to sing the Divine Office and, as expressly mentioned, the Sequence of the Holy Spirit. When Bridget finally retired for the night, none might speak to her, not even her daughter.<sup>54</sup>

Such was her daily life as seen from without. What was its inner character can only be guessed at. We have her ardent outpourings of praise, adoration, and love, some of which have just been quoted, and we are told by Alfonso in his Prologue to the eighth book of the *Revelations*, that the

favours showered on her by heaven brought an almost overwhelming joy. As far as we know, she does not seem to have suffered from the long periods of spiritual darkness and weariness which are so often the lot of God's special friends, until the last months of her life, when her desolation came almost as a surprise and was accompanied by sharp temptations. Yet it is certain that this ardent lover of the cross was never without suffering, and that her pain over man's rejection of his Redeemer's love and over her own human frailties grew ever more keen as she was drawn closer to the ineffable purity of God.

The disciplined life we have sketched went on for more than twenty years, interrupted only by various pilgrimages, during which the daily mortification was as great, though it necessarily took a somewhat different form.

The earliest pilgrimage was to Assisi, and the date given for it by Swedish scholars is 1354, that is, five years after the arrival in Rome. The journey was undertaken in consequence of a vision Bridget had of the Poverello when praying in the church dedicated to him, S. Francesco a Ripa. It was on his feast, October 4, and he said to her: "Come into my cell and eat and drink with me." She needed no urging. She took the invitation to mean she must journey to Assisi, and at once she prepared to go.

In Assisi two churches, one very different from the other, draw the lovers of St. Francis. On the very edge of the steep hill to which clings the little rose-coloured town, is the great church built after the Saint's death and containing his tomb. In the fourteenth century its magnificent frescoes had not long been completed. In the plain below lies St. Mary of the Angels (not then as now covered by a basilica), and in this first home of the Friars Minor every stone of the humble little building speaks of Francis.

In St. Bridget's day, the exact place of the Saint's relics was still undiscovered, and the sight of that fine building on the hill was pain to her, since it seemed to show on the part of

his sons a turning away from Lady Poverty. She was thinking about this and praying in the church St. Francis loved, when she had a vision of Christ. He said: "My friend Francis descended from the mount of pleasure into a cave, where his bread was divine love, his drink tears, and his bed the contemplation of My works and My commands. But his brethren now ascend the mount of worldly cares and pleasures and regard not the humility and the consolations of their Father and My friend."<sup>55</sup>

When after a few days Bridget paid a last visit to the church in order to commend herself and her companions to the prayers and protection of St. Francis on their return journey, to her delight, he appeared to her, saying:

"You did well to come, for I invited you to my cell to eat and drink with me. Yet the cell of which I spoke is not this house. My cell is true obedience. My meat was drawing my neighbour from the vanities of the world to serve God with his whole heart; this was to me delicious food. And my drink was the joy I tasted when I saw those I had converted love God with all their might. Enter into this my cell and share my meat and drink that you may be refreshed throughout eternity."<sup>56</sup>

This story of Bridget and St. Francis is typical of her attitude towards God's saints. They are all her dear and honoured friends, and when she visits their shrines it is to make no formal visit of devotion but to have an interview with the saint she has come to honour. During a much longer absence from Rome some years later than the visit to Assisi, she visited the various shrines in the kingdom of Sicily: Ortona, Bari, Salerno, and Benevento, where in turn she honoured the relics of St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Nicholas, St. Matthew, and St. Bartholomew, and she tells us what she said to them and what they said to her, or it may be what their Divine Master said of them in their praise, such as the following: "The Apostle St. Thomas was My treasure . . . truly a light in the world." And of St. Andrew whose tomb at Amalfi

was visited a few years later: "His body was My temple, adorned with all virtue. Therefore is his shrine a place of help to sinners, for those who go there with faith will not only be absolved from their sins but will receive abundant and eternal consolation. Nor is this strange. For he was not ashamed of My cross but bore it with joy, and therefore I hear and receive those for whom he prays, for his will is Mine."

A visit was also made to the shrine of St. Michael at Monte Gargano, and Bridget declared afterwards that she had heard angels singing there the praises of their Creator.<sup>57</sup>

During this pilgrimage, extending over two years according to Katherine's account,<sup>58</sup> Naples was the headquarters. Here Bridget already had a friend, Nicholas Orsini, Count of Nola, who had made her acquaintance first in Rome during the Jubilee Year. We know she went to Court, for Orsini in evidence given for the Process of Canonization, speaks of having seen her there, but the revelations which concern the Queen of Naples seem to belong to a later visit.

Queen Joanna of Naples had succeeded her grandfather Robert the Wise when she was only seventeen, and had at this time been reigning thirty years or thereabouts. She had inherited his taste for art and letters but not his virtue, and Petrarch has painted a revolting picture of her Court, where every kind of vice was to be found.

Joanna was curious to see one who had long been a notability in Rome and who had the reputation of being a seer, and with the curiosity was mingled a certain reverence for Bridget's sanctity. For in the Queen's strange character there was somewhere a spirit of faith, and though she was to pay little heed to the Saint's admonitions, she would have for her to the end a real respect — almost an affection.

Joanna's subjects were immensely proud of her, fascinated by her wit, brilliance, and beauty, and were always ready to smile on those she favoured; so when Bridget was received and honoured by the Queen, all Naples flocked to her.

Some real and lasting friendships were made by Bridget during this visit. There was, for instance, Lapa Buondelmonte, a native of Florence, but living with her husband and little son in Naples. The friendship began perhaps with the cure of the boy. Lapa went to Bridget and humbly begged her as a favour to touch her child or even only make the sign of the cross over him. Bridget did both and the cure was immediate and complete.<sup>59</sup> This friendship with the Buondelmonte family has given us a letter of St. Bridget's still extant and discovered some years ago in the State Archives in Florence. It runs:

"To the noble lady, Donna Lapa de Azarolis, my revered daughter, this letter is to be delivered.

"Most revered Lady and my dearly beloved daughter.

"With the customary salutations in the Lord, I wish to tell you that we have received good and comforting news from our native land and on that account shall remain here for the present, God willing, to see to various affairs. Oh, that during this time we might do something good to further our soul's salvation and through us, though unworthy, honour, benediction, praise and thanksgiving might be rendered eternally to the Lord Jesus Christ!

"We long with all our hearts to see you here, most beloved daughter, and should your Ladyship decide to come here, I beg you to send word as soon as possible not only to your own people but also to us who never forget your kindness, and as long as we live will be at your service. Also we beg you as soon as may be, to give our respectful greetings to Nicholas Soderini, thanking him in our name and on our behalf for having provided for our welfare by his daily kindness, repeated expenditure and solicitude.

"Master Peter gets better every day and humbly commends himself to your prayers. Remember us all to . . . Esau . . . and all your household. May the Most High ever preserve and guide you by His grace.

"Written in Rome on the morrow of the Feast of the Virgin Lucy.

"BRIDGET DE RACHMAN FROM NORWAY."<sup>60</sup>

The allusion to Master Peter gives us the year 1370 as the date of this letter. What is the meaning of its signature? It has been suggested that it may be a reference to some misnomer given to Bridget which amused her and Lapa and is now recalled. It is rather a pleasing thought, bringing the Saint nearer to us, that a letter, written in the formal style of the time should end with something like a joke between two intimate friends. The letter is considered to be undoubtedly Bridget's.

Another friendship made in Naples brought under the Saint's influence a young man, Elzear de Sabran. When Bridget came into his life, he was at the cross-roads, considering his future career, wavering between studying for the priesthood and following a worldly course, as his friends urged. He met Bridget by chance at the house of a mutual friend, fell under her spell, and asked her to give him a rule of life. This she later did, saying it had been revealed to her by the Virgin Mother. Elzear found that thoughts and conversations of his were all known and his questions answered, and following the advice given, he gave up his worldly ambitions and went off to Bologna to study for the priesthood. Years later as Cardinal and a member of the papal commission appointed to examine Bridget's writings and religious rule, he was able to repay in some measure the debt he owed her.<sup>61</sup>

The Bull of Canonization says that St. Bridget was often seen raised from the ground when at prayer. As far as evidence goes, this phenomenon seems only to have been seen by chosen witnesses. First by a brother at Alvastra whose doubts about her were set at rest by seeing her raised up while praying in the monastery church. Then, after she came to Rome, it was a certain John of Pormacio, noted for his holy life, who

asserted that he had seen her raised in the air about half the height of a man. This was somewhere near the Colosseum and when in company with others. Her feet, said the witness, did not seem to move, but she was borne along like a ship. Another time he saw her thus raised while hearing Mass at the basilica of St. John Lateran. When the Epistle had been sung she was lifted up and borne along in the air to the chapel called Sancta Sanctorum, whither he followed her. At yet another meeting, he declared her face shone with so brilliant a light that it dazzled him.<sup>62</sup> Was Bridget herself aware of these wonders? We do not know, and it seems unlikely, as she took the utmost pains to hide her spiritual gifts from others or to seem in any way different from those around her.

It was when increasing age and her stern treatment of herself were beginning to tell seriously on her, that Bishop Alfonso came to know her, and henceforth watched her daily with astonishment and ever deepening reverence. A sort of amazed admiration is constantly appearing in his evidence given some ten years later. The aristocratic Spaniard, who never forgets Bridget's noble birth, tells how she would kneel humbly before Master Peter to beg from him some of her own money to buy perhaps a pair of shoes for one of her family. Or it might be she asked leave to give alms; this restraint was her hardest sacrifice. Sometimes, notes Alfonso, her request was granted and sometimes refused. Again, he heard her sharply rebuked "by word and gesture" for what only her saintly confessor could consider faults. Bridget would immediately ask pardon, striking her breast. Or if, in her eager enthusiasm she expressed her ideas too freely, she would check herself with a humility which had about it nothing artificial.

Alfonso often went with her on her visits to the churches, and could hardly bear to see one whose bodily strength was clearly giving way, tramping Rome's muddy, uncared-for streets in rain and snow. Sometimes, says this tender-hearted hermit, he would secretly take with him sweetmeats, and

when he saw her ready to drop from sheer exhaustion, would offer them to her. One is glad to know she accepted this slight relief, motivated as it was by charity. It is well to remember that this intrepid walker was not only fasting, but wearing, as had been her custom for many years, haircloth and hard knotted cords next her flesh.<sup>63</sup>

Alfonso would sometimes lay his doubts and difficulties before her, even those of conscience. She had but one answer for him as for all who asked her advice: "I am a sinner and unworthy to pray to God for you, but do you ask God to give me His grace and I will gladly think over the matter, and perhaps He will reward your humility and not take account of my sinfulness." Self-abasement, says the same witness, was her constant attitude of soul before God. She never presumed on the favours granted her, but only marvelled at God's choice of her. She related them to her confessors from no motive of vanity, but only in fear lest she might be deceived. This ardent advocate for Bridget's canonization sums up his belief in her sanctity thus: "Her gifts were not against nature but above it; given for the strengthening of faith and proved by a life full of virtues persevered in to the last and crowned by a holy death. She was firm in faith, humble in her conversation, sincere and exemplary in her ways, just in her workings, loving in her deeds, austere in abstinence, assiduous in watchings, fervent in prayer; most patient in adversity, most devout in her use of the sacraments, most obedient to commands, most zealous in all her work for Christ; not seeking the vain praise of men, for she despised worldly honours and display; never seeking after wealth, for she despised her own; shunning the pleasures of the flesh, for she mortified her body and treated it but as dung that she might glory in Christ; with no thought for worldly well-being, as is attested by her confessors, by her servanis and by all."<sup>64</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### Before the Pope

EARLY in the year 1367 Rome was astir with a wholly new excitement. Men were at work on the crumbling walls of the papal palace, trying to make it look habitable; the Vatican gardens, so long a wilderness, were being set in order; the Pope was at last coming home.

Pope Clement VI had been followed by Innocent VI — like his predecessor, a Frenchman, though more independent of French control. From one of Bridget's revelations it would appear that writings of hers had been sent to him.<sup>65</sup> It is supposed that he had the intention of restoring the papacy to Rome; he certainly prepared for his successor's return by the appointment of Cardinal Albornoz as Legate, for the Spaniard, by his gifted administration, brought back the whole of the Church States under papal rule.

Innocent's reign lasted ten years and he was succeeded in 1362 by a Benedictine abbot who took the name of Urban V.

The election must have filled Bridget with hope, for the new Pope was austere in his life, disliked the luxury of Avignon, and showed plainly his intention to reform certain abuses. One of her revelations found its way to Avignon. This, together with the persuasions of the Emperor Charles IV and the entreaties of Petrarch, strengthened the Pope's own desire, and in April, 1367, he left for Rome in spite of the protests and opposition of his French cardinals. He was met at Corneto by Albornoz and went first to Viterbo, where the Legate died and so could not take part in the triumphal procession into Rome which took place in October.

The enthusiasm in Rome was immense. Petrarch greeted the returning pontiff with the words: "When Israel went out of Egypt, the House of Jacob from a barbarous people, then was our mouth filled with gladness and our tongue with joy."

On October 16 the Pope sang Mass at St. Peter's and as soon after as might be, Bridget did homage, taking with her her two sons Charles and Birger who lately had come to Rome. Abbess Margaret Clausdotter, in her chronicle concerning Bridget's family, has described the scene. Birger wore a long silk robe, the usual dress of his country on state occasions. But Charles was decked out in fanciful extravagance, with a massive belt set with little bells and a mantle of ermine skins, so arranged that the ermines seemed alive, some running up, some down, and each with a gilt bell at its neck and in its mouth.

The Pope looked at Bridget's pale, ascetic face and then turned to her sons.

"You," he said to Birger, "are your mother's son." Then to Charles: "And you are a son of the world."

Bridget at once fell on her knees and begged for her son the remission of his sins. The Pope in reply lifted the belt Charles wore and then his own monastic girdle.

"Surely," he said, "to carry the weight of this belt is penance enough!"

But Bridget burst out with: "Oh, Holy Father, free him from his sins and I will free him from his belt!"

Soon Magnus Persson was sent by Bridget to the Pope with a letter telling of a vision she had had concerning him.

She describes the condition of the Church in terms of an actual building in which the Pope represents the doors. The building is in a terrible state of decay and filth and is in danger of ruin. The return of Christ's Vicar to the place where Peter once ruled is praised as the beginning of a better state of things. The Pope if he wills can repair the building; first by personal humility, then by making restitution for money wrongly acquired, giving it to the needy;

again, by doing away with luxury and living in the utmost simplicity. A severe indictment of the worldliness and pride of the cardinals follows. They should be the support of the Pope and must be turned from their present evil ways, first by gentle words and remonstrances, and then, if these do not suffice, the hammer of a just anger must be employed.

And so the revelation continues, treating of each section of the Church in turn.<sup>66</sup>

Bridget had had long training in waiting: a particularly hard lesson to learn for one of her intense nature, whose will was masterful and whose eyes always looked straight through every obstacle towards the end she sought. In her ears often sounded words heard long ago in prayer: "Go to Rome and stay there until you see both Pope and Emperor." Now her hopes soared high. The Pope had come; the Emperor would surely follow, and then at last she could present her Rule and it would be ratified by the Head of the Church. But when she spoke confidently of the speedy coming of the Emperor, her prophecy was met with incredulous laughter.<sup>67</sup>

All connection between the two great universal powers — Empire and papacy — had practically ceased. The Empire had fallen in 1250, and though restored in Germany, counted for little in Italy. The Emperor Charles IV, elected in 1346, had the ambition to be crowned in Rome, and his wish was fulfilled five years later, but according to the condition exacted by the Pope, he left immediately after the ceremony. And now, seventeen years later, he appeared in Italy again, and Rome saw the amazing sight of the Head of the Church and the heir of the Caesars entering the city together. This was in 1368. From the castle of Sant' Angelo to St. Peter's, the Emperor humbly led the Pope's white mule, and later acted as deacon at his Mass.

Yet Bridget's own hopes in regard to this momentous meeting were not fulfilled. She sent the Emperor two letters. One was an allegory, bidding him look at four daughters of the heavenly King: Humility, Abstinence, Self-Denial, and Char-

ity, who had been driven from their heritage by Pride, Pleasure, Luxury, and Simony. A second letter was a direct appeal to Charles to support her request to the Pope. She spoke, as was her way, on behalf of Christ Himself. Briefly, the letter was as follows:

"I am the True Light, who have Myself set you as a light in the world. Because it was My good pleasure, I set you on the imperial throne. I speak to a woman the words of My justice and My mercy. Receive the words she has written and study them, for they come from Me. I would have you know, you to whom I have committed the power of ruling, that I, the Creator of all things, have dictated a Rule for religious in honour of My beloved Mother and have given it to this woman who writes to you. Read it and do your utmost to see that what comes from Me may be approved by the Supreme Pontiff who is My Vicar on earth, even as I, who am God, have approved it before the heavenly court. . . ."<sup>68</sup>

The Pope kept the copy of the Rule Bridget had given him, but gave no sign of approval. To the Emperor the whole thing no doubt seemed unreal and fantastic, and he made no response.

Bridget had always felt sure that in order to gain the desired confirmation, she must herself work hard and do her utmost. She had been told, she says at the end of the revelation of the Rule, that if the Pope, influenced by others, should not give credence to its heavenly origin, three witnesses from her own country, a bishop, a priest, and a religious, would be in Rome together and would help to persuade him.<sup>69</sup> Now these three witnesses seemed to Bridget to be at hand. The Bishop of Växjö, who knew her well, happened to be in Rome at this time. Might not he be the promised bishop, and the two Peters the priest and the religious?

However, she recognized that someone was needed to bring her cause personally before the Pope; one who knew just how to approach him and awaken his interest. So she turned to

Nicholas Orsini, Count of Nola, always ready to be of service, and in Rome at the moment. She begged him to bring the matter of the Rule to Urban's notice and to plead for its confirmation and for permission to found the monastery in Sweden in accordance with her revelation.

Orsini undertook the commission, no doubt with much misgiving. We can easily imagine how the whole thing must have looked to him. More than twenty years ago in far-away Sweden, Bridget had, so she affirmed, received a direct command from Christ to found a new religious order. Its Rule purported to come from the very lips of Christ, word for word, and according to these directions, a monastery was to be built for both monks and nuns on a certain plan, at an unknown place called Vadstena. Meanwhile Bridget had been told to go to Rome, wait there for the coming of Pope and Emperor and then seek the papal confirmation. Well, the improbable had happened; Urban and Charles were both in Rome. Bridget, when received in audience, had told the Pope of the prediction, and the prelates who had laughed before at her words were there to bear witness. At the same time, it had to be remembered that when Bridget had sought permission to establish her Order from Urban's predecessor, Clement VI, it had been definitely denied.

Yet, whatever the Count's personal feelings were as to his own part in this affair, his deep reverence for Bridget's holiness, his belief in her supernatural gifts, and his warm friendship urged him to do his very best. Not only once but many times did he bring up the matter in conversations with the Pope, and thanks to these persevering efforts, Urban at last handed him the draft of Bridget's Rule, told him to show it to some others whose opinion could be trusted, talk the whole thing over with them, and then report to him.

The Count obeyed, asked the help of various men, religious and others, and together they examined the document. They very soon saw that in its present form it would have no chance whatever of being accepted or even looked at by the



Roman Curia, accustomed to a very different style of diction from Bridget's mysterious language, rendered moreover into bad Latin by a Swedish monk. The only thing to be done was to recast the whole Rule, though without changing its meaning and spirit. This the Count of Nola undertook to do, and showed his draft to Bridget, telling her that if it met with her approval he would take it to the Pope. Bridget declared herself satisfied, and accordingly Orsini sought another interview with Urban, who this time showed that he thought seriously of the matter. He appointed two cardinals to confer with a number of theologians and make any necessary corrections.<sup>70</sup>

And now, because Bridget felt hopeful as to the result of the Count's mediation, and possibly, too, because she wished to show that the establishment of her Order was not merely a scheme on paper, she determined to have the building of her monastery begun.

One day she called to her John Persson, a brother of Magnus, and at this time staying with her.

"My dear John," she said, "when you return to Sweden, go to Vadstena, and when the necessary houses have been built, stay there until I come, God leading me, for in that place a monastery must be built."

John understood her to mean (as indeed she did) that he was not only to superintend the building of the new monastery but to enter it as a monk. And like his brother Magnus, when long ago his entrance into the Order had been prophesied, he was dismayed.

"My Lady," he protested, "I am a married man with children, I cannot become a monk!"

"You will take your wife with you to Vadstena," answered Bridget serenely, "and I will have your children and provide for them. Go to the Bishop of Linköping and he will give you letters concerning this place and help in every way on my behalf."

It may be remembered that the royal residence at Vad-

stena, given by King Magnus for the new monastery, had been destroyed and the site was merely a heap of ruins. These ruins John Persson, obedient to Bridget's command, arranged to have cleared away as soon as he returned to his own country and building was begun. Later his children died and he became a monk, his wife a nun.<sup>71</sup>

It seems to have been during the time of waiting for the report of the cardinals on the new Rule and the Pope's final decision as to the Order, that Bridget and her friends again went on pilgrimage.<sup>72</sup> She did not want to go. For the first time we hear her uttering a very human protest when a divine command came to her in prayer to go to Amalfi and there venerate the relics of St. Andrew and afterwards go on to Naples over Christmas.

"Oh, Lord," she cries, "time is slipping away, old age and infirmity are coming on me and money is melting!"

Then in her heart sounded words of comfort: "I am the Lord who creates and re-creates, a helper in necessity, a defender and a giver of gifts."<sup>73</sup>

Pope Urban, though still silent as to the Rule, yet showed his interest in Bridget and her journey by granting leave for Mass to be said on a portable altar wherever they might be, even in countries under interdict. And later he gave her a passport for herself, her daughter, and her two sons to go to the shrine of St. Nicholas at Bari and to Monte Gargano.<sup>74</sup> So it would seem as if the pilgrims went over much the same ground as before.

If Bridget had quailed before the long, cold journey to Amalfi (it was December), she proved to be the most eager and energetic of all when on the way to visit Ortona for the second time. She longed to possess a relic of the Apostle St. Thomas, and afterwards told her confessors that during the first visit the Saint had appeared to her and had promised that when she came again her wish would be granted. So on she pressed, refusing to listen to prudent suggestions from other travellers they met that they should halt for the night.

Darkness fell and they were still far from Ortona. Rain was coming down heavily, the cold was intense and everyone was weary. Even the horses, relates Prior Peter, with vivid remembrance of what one can suffer from a saint's enthusiasm, even the horses seemed utterly exhausted. No inn was in sight, but after some search a shelter of sorts was found about midnight. There the travellers stood until daybreak, Bridget still full of joyful anticipation. Later she told Prior Peter that in the morning she had a vision of Christ and He rebuked her. It was He who had allowed those they met the day before to tell her it was impossible for her to reach Ortona before dark. She should have listened but had refused to believe them. Yet the promise made by St. Thomas would shortly be fulfilled.

The shrine was reached and St. Thomas again appeared to Bridget. "What you have so long desired I will give you," were the words she heard, and the next instant, in some incomprehensible way, a small relic of the Saint passed from the reliquary into Bridget's hand. She received it with unbounded joy, "with deepest reverence and tears and tender words," says Katherine, describing the incident of which she was a witness.<sup>75</sup>

One other happening on this pilgrimage is worth recalling as an instance of the way Bridget looked on her power of working miracles.

There was much serious sickness about and during one of the halts on the journey, a Flemish servant in the party fell a victim. She was in great pain and so ill that there seemed no hope of recovery, and the Last Sacraments were given her. One might suppose that as a matter of course Bridget would have tried to cure the girl as she had cured so many other sick people by prayer and touch. But no: she let events take their natural course. In her own eyes she was, as she so often said, only a sinner, to be used by God when and as He pleased.

Katherine came to her, and fell at her feet in tears.

"Oh, dearest Mother," she cried, "I implore you to save

us from this great trouble! I know if you pray fervently, you can get the cure of this poor suffering girl from God."

But it took a definite command from Master Peter to induce Bridget to act as if her prayers were any more powerful than those of others. As soon as he spoke, she prostrated on the ground, and with her face to the earth and her arms outstretched, she lay quite still for a while deep in prayer. Then she rose and simply called the sick woman to her. She came, to all appearance as well as everyone else, and soon the travellers had mounted their horses and were on their way to Rome, "happy and praising and blessing God," says Prior Peter.<sup>76</sup>

The return from the former pilgrimage had been all joy, for Bridget knew the Pope would soon be in Italy. But now all was in complete and tragic contrast.

Pope Urban had definitely made up his mind to go back to Avignon. In spite of the remarkable achievement of Cardinal Albornoz, it would have required courage, resource, and persevering energy on the part of any pope to re-establish the Holy See in Rome after so many years, and Urban felt himself unequal to the task. His position seemed to him most insecure. The restlessness in the Papal States was shown by the revolt of Perugia, a revolt which had to be crushed by force. Besides, Urban was in bad health; he was homesick for France, and naturally his French cardinals urged him to follow whither his desires led him.

What, Bridget must have asked on learning this news, was she now to do? Was God again making impossible or allowing man to make impossible what He Himself had required of her? Was this retreat from Rome final? If Urban, with all his high ideals and real desires for reform, could not bring himself to face his task, what likelihood was there that his successors would feel encouraged finally to break the Avignon fetters?

Then there was the Rule. Bridget had heard nothing as yet as to the recommendations of those appointed to examine

it, and Urban had already left Rome and was spending his last months in Italy at his favourite palace at Montefiascone. Undaunted, she determined to follow him there and ask for an audience. Not only must she make a final attempt to have her Order established, but she had two revelations for the Pope himself.

It happened just at this time that both Prior Peter and Master Peter were ill and so could not accompany her to Montefiascone, but she took with her as confessor and counsellor her new friend, Bishop Alfonso.<sup>77</sup>

It was not until August that she was accorded an audience with the Pope. Only Nicholas Orsini was with her at this momentous interview. She had told him she had an important revelation to make known to the Holy Father. Now Orsini knew both Urban and Bridget well. He was aware that she had acquired a certain facility in speaking Latin, but he pictured the Swedish seer and the French Pope meeting, speaking Latin with the accent of their respective countries, and he felt convinced that Bridget's request, clothed in her usual allegorical form, was doomed to failure. So the Count offered himself as interpreter.

This is what he read in the document Bridget handed to him. "Tell him," it said, as from Christ Himself, "tell him that I have caused to be delivered to you the Rule of the Order which shall be founded and begun at the place Vadstena, in Sweden. It has proceeded from My mouth. Now it is My will that it shall not only be confirmed by your authority but also strengthened by your blessing, since you are My Vicar on earth. I have endowed it with a spiritual dowry, for I have granted to it the indulgences which the church of St. Peter *ad Vincula* possesses. Ratify now before men what has been appointed before My heavenly host."

If it had needed courage for Bridget's ambassador to ask for the confirmation of a new Rule, Orsini may well have wondered if there was any end to the holy audacity of the saints. At a moment when the very existence of her Order hung in

the balance, the would-be foundress was calmly demanding an unheard-of favour — that an indulgence belonging to one of Rome's ancient churches should be enjoyed by a monastery not yet built.<sup>78</sup>

On August 5 the Pope issued the Bull which gave permission for the new foundation, but there was no mention of the indulgence. The great *Vincula* indulgence, which later made Vadstena a famous place of pilgrimage and over which many battles were to be fought in years to come, was one of the promises whose fulfilment Bridget was only allowed to see from heaven. And even the Bull of Confirmation was a profound disappointment. There was in it no mention of the double monastery of the revelation; only permission to build two houses, one for men and one for women. Monks and nuns alike were to live under the Rule of St. Augustine.

Bridget had never dreamed of founding an Augustinian monastery; she had hoped and expected her Rule to stand by itself as one of the recognized rules of the Church. The Lateran Council of 1215 had, however, decisively forbidden the establishment of any new rule. That of St. Augustine is a short one whose statutes deal with the fundamentals of religious life, and on which it has been found possible down to our own day to build spiritual edifices differing widely from one another.

Bridget's Rule, as revised by the appointed theologians, was to be added to that of St. Augustine as Constitutions, and as such, the Swedish bishops might sanction its observance.

With all this Bridget must perforce be content for the time, and the year 1370 ranks as that in which her Order first received its confirmation.<sup>79</sup>

There was still another message to be delivered to the Pope. It was no favour to be asked; rather a prophecy of coming evil, a pleading with him not to leave Italy. And this time, though Alfonso stood by her, Bridget had no interpreter when she presented to Urban the message she said she had received for him from the Mother of God.

This second and final audience took place on the eve of the Assumption. "I am the Mother of God," read the Pope in the paper offered him. "Listen now, while I tell you of my two sons. The first is my Son, Jesus Christ, born of me in order to redeem mankind, who spared not Himself in bodily labour and the shedding of His Blood. He is God Almighty and is in eternal joy. My second son is he who occupies the papal chair. Now I will speak of Urban. It was through my prayer that he received the inpouring of the Holy Spirit prompting him to go to Rome, to execute justice and mercy, to uphold the Catholic Faith and confirm peace. It was I who gained for the Pope the grace of the Holy Ghost to leave Avignon for Rome and who brought him in safety. And what has he done to me? He turns his back on me, and it is the Evil Spirit who leads him. He is weary of the divine labour and seeks only bodily comfort. He follows the advice of worldly friends who seek their own will and pleasure rather than the salvation of his soul and the will and honour of God. If he ever reaches the land in which he was elected Pope, he will shortly after have a stroke which will make his teeth chatter, his eyes grow dim and all his limbs tremble."

Aware of what met Urban's eyes, Alfonso stood by amazed at Bridget's calm courage. But she felt herself to be, as always, only the humble runner who delivers a master's message.

The Pope seemed unmoved by the prophecy, or if he feared it, he would not show his fear, for still more did he fear to stay in Italy. He agreed that the Holy Spirit had led him to Rome. "But," he added, "now He leads me hence."

A renewal of the war between France and England made a further excuse for departure, for from Avignon the Pope might be able to negotiate peace. When he arrived there he was worn and ill. Not in any luxury but as a poor religious clad in his Benedictine habit and lying on a hard pallet, he died on December 30, 1370.

Cardinal Roger de Beaufort was unanimously elected Pope, taking the name of Gregory XI. Bridget had made his

acquaintance during her days of waiting at Montefiascone and soon had an urgent message to send him, choosing as her ambassador her other friend in the Orsini family, Count Latino.<sup>80</sup>

In the long revelation there is tenderness but also sternness, for the new Pope is told he cannot plead ignorance of the state of things in Rome, and that if he does not have the care for the sheep which becomes him as the chief Shepherd, he will feel the rod of God's justice.

A second revelation followed quickly. It begins:

"Holy Father, a certain person who is well-known to you was in prayer and heard a voice saying: 'Write to Pope Gregory the words you now hear. I have in the former writing exhorted Pope Gregory to hasten to Rome or to Italy with humility and divine charity, establish his seat and remain until death. Let him know for certain that it is the will of God he should hasten his coming and arrive in March or at latest the beginning of April.'"

More follows concerning the war between France and England and the crusade to the Holy Sepulchre. At the end comes this injunction, received, says Bridget, from the Mother of God.

"Tell the Bishop my hermit [Alfonso] that he is to make a copy of the letter . . . then close and seal the letter. The open copy he shall show to that abbot who is the Pope's nuncio, and also to the Count of Nola that they may read and understand its contents. Then let him give them the sealed letter to take immediately to Pope Gregory. But the open copy he shall tear into small fragments before their eyes, as a token that if the Pope does not return to Italy at the time appointed, the lands of the Church which now give him their allegiance, shall be split up into many parts and fall into the hands of enemies. And his sorrow will be increased when he sees with his own eyes the fulfilment of these things and that by no power of his can he bring back these lands to their former peace and loyalty."<sup>81</sup>

The directions given were faithfully carried out by both Bridget and Alfonso; the important sealed letter was taken at once to Avignon by the Count of Nola.

Three more of Bridget's revelations concern Gregory XI and will be mentioned in their place. It was not given her to see the final re-establishment of the papacy in Rome. Her warnings, sufferings, and prayers helped to pave the way which Gregory at last trod with such difficulty and hesitation under the firm leadership of the great Saint of Siena who, at this very time, unknown to Bridget, was being prepared for her truly amazing mission.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Holy Land

LIFE at the house in the Campo dei Fiori went on as before. Bridget's dream of going to Vadtstena and planting the new vineyard had faded. Though building was going on steadily, and in consequence of the late Pope's Bull of Confirmation a beginning of religious life could soon be made, the founderess must stay at her post in Rome and go on working, praying, and suffering for the fulfilment of the other part of her life's mission — the return from Avignon of Urban's successor.

In the spring of the following year came an unexpected call. One day she was rapt in prayer, she relates, when Christ appeared to her and said: "Prepare to go to Jerusalem to visit My sepulchre and the other holy places there; and set out from Rome when I shall bid you." Somewhat later came the definite command she had been told to expect: "Go now."

The early Life tells us that this was the fulfilment of a promise received fifteen years earlier, yet the sudden announcement that the time had come seems to have brought surprise and dismay.<sup>82</sup> What in younger days she would have eagerly welcomed as being the realization of one of her most ardent desires, she now felt physically wholly unfit for. If the winter journey to Amalfi had seemed beyond her strength, what about a long voyage to Palestine with all its hardships, and the long pilgrimages on foot when she got there? She pleaded her feebleness, her old age.

"Why do you plead your age?" came the reply. "I am the Creator; I make men weak and I make them strong as it

pleases Me. I will be with you, will direct your way, lead you forth and bring you back, and will supply all your needs."<sup>83</sup>

The blind obedience and trust Bridget at times demanded from others, she herself gave in full measure. *Fortis et in-trepida*, as more than one witness would later call her, she at once began her preparations for what was to prove the last of her pilgrimages.

The party numbered twelve in all and included, besides her usual companions, Alfonso, and Bridget's two sons, Charles and Birger.<sup>84</sup>

Alfonso was leaving Rome, as he thought, forever. He had accepted his work on Bridget's behalf as a mission entrusted to him and not to be abandoned while she lived. But if she was getting old, so was he. Bridget and Katherine, like another Paula and Eustochium, would find a home in some holy spot, and he, like another Jerome, would choose a cave and live his hermit's life, though ready to help in whatever way he might be needed. He had few belongings, but would take what he had with him, for never would he see Rome again.

Bridget watched him packing up his books and vestments. "My son," she said, "don't take more than one or two books with you. We shall not stay long in Jerusalem, but shall soon be back."

Alfonso looked up from his work in amazement. "Are you sure we shall return?" he said.

Bridget was quite certain, and the Bishop followed her advice without further question.<sup>85</sup>

The pilgrimage left Rome at the end of November. Latino Orsini accompanied his friends as far as the city gate. Would he ever see Bridget again? When the time for parting came, a shadow fell over her brave spirit. Something like dread had seized her. She called Prior Peter to her and told him what had just been revealed to her.

"All of us will return safe," she said, "except one who will die on the way."

She did not say who this one was; she did not know. Later, she said she had taken for granted it was Katherine whom she would lose.

"All who come to the Holy Land must expect to suffer." So its guardians of to-day say to visitors. Bridget accepted her share of the cross with courage, and humbly following her Divine Master, set her face to go to Jerusalem.<sup>86</sup>

The welcome in Naples was of course a warm one. They were not to sail at once, perhaps because Bridget's sons had not yet come from Sweden, and many would have been glad to have her as their guest. But she preferred to go to the humble hospice belonging to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem.

Soon after her arrival, both the Queen and the Archbishop of Naples sent to her asking her advice on matters greatly perplexing them. She received several revelations in answer to their questions and herself delivered them to the Queen and the Archbishop.<sup>87</sup>

But besides this private interview with Joanna, Bridget, her sons and daughter must present themselves at Court and pay the homage expected of them. In due course an audience was accorded. Birger was first presented and as a matter of course complied with the custom of the court at which he found himself, and kneeling at the Queen's feet, kissed them. Before Charles bent down to this lowly position he looked full at Joanna and their eyes met. Though now about forty-five, she had lost none of her charm, and the Swedish knight was swept off his feet. Tradition says he kissed her on the lips. Certainly his bold admiration was obvious to all, and whatever the courtiers might have wished to do to this audacious foreigner, they had to check their anger, for it was just as obvious that the Queen was more than willing to accept the homage paid her by Sir Charles.

Bridget's shame and misery over the incident, and over the favours which now began to be showered on her son, became acute anguish when it was made known in public that he was

the Queen's accepted suitor and would shortly be her husband. What did this terrible thing mean? Joanna was a married woman. Charles, a man past fifty, had a wife in Sweden. But in the Queen's eyes, Karin Glysing in the far north was even less of an obstacle to a marriage with the Swedish knight than was her own third husband, James of Mallorca, away at present on business connected with his Spanish inheritance. Nothing had ever been allowed to stand in the way of her will.

And so Bridget had to stand by and see Charles throw himself with reckless gaiety into entertainments arranged in his honour. His desire to visit the Holy Land — which had been a real desire as his mother knew — seemed quite forgotten. Nothing mattered but the fascination of Joanna's society. And Naples had to accept the situation and show him all the honour the Queen demanded for one who was her future husband.

Bridget spent her days and nights in a very agony of prayers and tears. No comforting assurance came from heaven to ease her pain. She must drink the cup to the dregs, look on and see her son throwing away not only his honour but the salvation of his soul.

February came. One night the Court gaieties were rudely interrupted by news of the sudden illness of Sir Charles. Bridget had prayed that her son might die rather than persist in his sin. As she watched him consumed by fever, she knew this was the answer to her prayer.

In a fortnight's time he was dead.

Priests were gathered round the death-bed reciting the prayers for the dying. Alfonso looked anxiously at Bridget. He knew how large a share of her heart this wayward son had always had. What would not his loss be to her, with all that had been happening these past months? She was sitting in perfect silence some eight or ten paces from the bed, and even when the last breath was drawn she never moved or even

wept. It seemed as if her face showed signs of gladness, and presently she raised her hands as if giving thanks.

Words which head one of her revelations explain that at this moment when she neither spoke nor moved nearer her son, she was being consoled and strengthened by a vision of the Virgin Mary who said to her: "I stood by your son Charles just before he died, that he might lose all memory of carnal love, might not think or speak anything contrary to God nor omit anything that would be pleasing to Him. . . . I helped him in that strait passage when the soul leaves the body, that he might not have such pains of death as to make him despair or be unstable and that he might not forget God. . . . And when his soul left the body I took him under my protection and the devils fled. . . . But just how the soul of Charles was judged after death I will show you when it seems good to me."

This seems to give the key to Katherine's description of her mother at this time when she speaks of her "reverence and patience."

Some words written by Ernest Hello concerning the Middle Ages are an apt description of Charles with his life-long reverence for the Virgin Mother and his unchecked earthly passions; his real spirit of faith and his so often unstable conduct. He says: ". . . Vice and crime were frequent. Yet deep down in human nature, a vivid, inextinguishable faith lived and reigned. Men abandoned themselves to their passions, but they did not worship them; they fell, but they rose again. They were addicted to evil-doing, but they did not mistake it for good. Things were known by their right names."<sup>88</sup>

Though Queen Joanna seems to have kept away from the death-bed, she commanded a grand and stately funeral. The unwanted James of Mallorca had meanwhile returned, since he is mentioned as being present at the burial of his rival. The nobility of Naples also attended, both men and women; indeed the whole city seemed to take part in the funeral pro-

cession that made its way to the church of S. Chiara which was the royal place of burial. And all wept and lamented in the sensational way that was supposed to be a fitting tribute to the Queen's grief.

To this noisy company Bridget must needs join herself, but she was probably hardly aware of the presence of the so-called mourners. She seemed to be in ecstasy as she said: "Go, my son; go forth traveller blessed by God and me." And to a friend she said: "Were I to know that my son would be lord of the whole world, I would not recall him to the miseries of this life, but am greatly content at the divine good pleasure shown towards him."<sup>89</sup>

While the death of Charles and his mother's calm resignation are mentioned many times in the Process, there is no hint as to the reason which made her peace and submission so truly remarkable. For Joanna was still alive when the evidence was given. We owe the story of what happened at the Court of Naples to Abbess Margaret Claudotter's chronicle concerning St. Bridget's family, which, though written many years after the events it records, can only be based on traditions faithfully handed down and coming originally from eye-witnesses: Katherine, Birger, the two Peters.

It was on Passion Sunday, which that year fell on March 12, that Bridget and her fellow pilgrims at last left Naples and set sail for Palestine. It was the season for storms, and three weeks after sailing, the flat-bottomed boat was still being tossed to and fro on the roughest of seas. Captain and crew alike made no secret of their fear that the vessel would be submerged or broken to pieces on the rocks. At a particularly bad moment, Alfonso went in search of Bridget. He found her patient and serene, and as the immediate danger passed she raised her hands to heaven — her usual gesture of thanksgiving — and her face was full of peace and even joy.

"My son," she said, turning to Alfonso, "how greatly am I bound to praise God who has deemed me worthy to suffer

tribulation for love of Him! I am thanking Him that He has allowed us to endure these trials."<sup>90</sup>

At last they reached Cyprus, and here a wholly unexpected mission awaited Bridget.

Cyprus was at this time an independent kingdom under the rule of the Lusignan family,<sup>91</sup> and Bridget may have made the acquaintance of its king when he was in Rome begging Pope Urban for help against the Turks. However that may be, she was welcomed in the island with great honour, but not by King Peter, for he had lately been murdered as the result of a conspiracy. The dead King's son was a lad of fourteen; his uncle the Duke of Antioch, suspected of being implicated in the murder, was Regent.

Bridget was horrified at the atmosphere of guilt, profligacy, and intrigue in which she found herself, but she stayed two weeks, for she knew she had a message to deliver to Cyprus and especially to its rulers.

The Queen-mother, Eleanor, had sent at once for one she knew was reckoned as a seer and a wise counsellor, and had begged her advice as to the future. Bridget promised her prayers, but directed that all the principal people of the kingdom should be gathered at Nicosia, the ancient capital of Cyprus, so that she might speak to them.

The inhabitants of Cyprus included Genoese and Venetian merchants who had a great deal of power in their hands and were also extremely quarrelsome. Curiosity brought all together to Nicosia to hear what the stranger had to say.

This is the first time we hear of Bridget speaking in public. She stood, calm and collected, and began by telling her hearers that she was on her way to visit the holy places in Jerusalem. But also she had come with a warning from God to the Queen, barons, and nobles to bid them repent of their sins which were abominable in His sight. Unless they repented, the divine vengeance would speedily fall on them. Then she added that if they wished it, she would pray to God in all humility for their repentance.



A few were struck with shame, among them a Franciscan friar, who had been living in great luxury and now cast away his possessions and joined the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But the majority of those present made game of the prophet, mocking at the predictions of a foolish old woman.

Bridget was fearless of the consequence of her words in so far as her personal safety was concerned.

"I don't mind in the least what they say of me," she said, "if only I do God's will."<sup>82</sup>

The voyage from Cyprus, though short, proved exceedingly dangerous. The harbour of Jaffa is always treacherous because of its hidden rocks and dangerous currents, and it was here that the galley sprang a leak and quickly began to fill. The passengers' belongings were ruthlessly flung overboard so as to lighten the vessel, and a small boat was lowered. There was little chance of escape and cries of terror were heard on every side. Katherine fled to her mother. Bridget alone was calm, her hands joined in prayer.

"Don't be afraid," she said to her daughter, "for not one soul will be lost through the wreck of the ship."

Alfonso ruefully watched his modest packet of books being flung into the water and remembered Bridget's words to him in Rome, telling him not to take much with him. "Had I taken more, I should have lost more," he said afterwards in describing the scene.<sup>83</sup>

The perils by sea were over; they pressed on, for the goal was near: Mount Sion, Calvary, the Holy Sepulchre.

To this time belongs the revelation concerning the judgement of Bridget's son, which was finished, she says, during her first visit to the Holy Sepulchre.

The Saint describes how she saw in vision the divine consistency of angels and saints, and the soul of her son standing at the seat of judgement; how the devil accused him of certain sins and the Virgin Mother replied, pleading for his soul. The devil asks why he was driven away from Charles at the time of his death and so was unable to arouse fear in him or

to make evil suggestions. Mary replies in words which must surely have sounded sweetly in Bridget's ears: "This I did because of the ardent love he had for me and because of the joy he always felt that I am the Mother of God."

The devil says Charles was wanting in virtue and good works. His good angel replies that the Scriptures teach that to him that asks all shall be given, to him that knocks with insistence it shall be opened. Now the mother of Charles by her charitable prayers and her works of piety has knocked without ceasing at the door of mercy for more than thirty years, shedding an abundance of tears and beseeching God to pour into her son's heart His Holy Spirit. And God so long besought has granted this grace, so that at the last, the one desire of this soul was to do the will of God.

It was during the Octave of the Ascension that the pilgrims reached their journey's end. Bridget humbly begged admission to the common hostel for pilgrims. Her first visit was to the Holy Sepulchre, and besides the deep emotion she felt at being in so unspeakably holy a place, she had the added joy of hearing the final words concerning the judgement of her son.

She seemed to see the devil flee away from the soul for whose salvation she had trembled, and as the invitation came from the Judge: "Come, My elect!" she broke forth into rapturous praise: "O Eternal Might, Thou incomprehensible God and my Lord Jesus Christ! It is Thou who dost pour into hearts all good thoughts and prayers; Thou dost hide them there and then eternally reward them with a glorious reward. To Thee, then, be worship and thanksgiving for all Thou hast created. O my most tender God, Thou art to me most beloved, and truly dearer to me than body and soul!"<sup>84</sup>

The day following this visit, Bridget and her companions followed the Via Dolorosa to Mount Calvary, that is, to the chapel built on the site of the Crucifixion within the church of the Holy Sepulchre. As she wept bitterly over her Lord's

sufferings, she seemed to see before her the naked, bleeding Figure of her childhood's vision. She had no need now to cry: "Oh, my Lord, who has treated You so?" She knew herself to be on the very place where mankind's redemption was wrought, that redemption which all through the years had been the subject of her loving meditation.

The centuries disappeared; she saw Christ surrounded by those who were about to crucify Him. The Divine Victim Himself pointed out to her the hole in the rock into which the cross would presently be fixed. She watched the nailing of the hands and feet; saw the blood flowing, the face growing livid. She gazed at the Mother of Sorrows and heard the words which commended her to the beloved disciple. Nowhere more than in this revelation is Bridget's power of vivid and realistic description shown.

When the vision ended at last with the sight of the sacred body being taken down from the cross and then borne from Mary's arms to the tomb, Bridget, coming to consciousness, called to her the two Peters and Alfonso and told them in detail all her prayer had unfolded to her. Then, leaving the church, she went to the hospice of St. Sepulchre close by, and wrote down in Swedish what she had just related.<sup>95</sup>

The months that followed were spent in visiting the various places in and about Jerusalem to which pilgrims always go. Bridget's enthusiasm would have known no bounds, but her health had begun to fail seriously. In July she was seized with what was recognized as a grave illness accompanied by fever, and she was never well again. But she managed to go to Nazareth, to Hebron, and finally, in August, to Bethlehem, where she expected the fulfilment of the promise made to her in prayer long before, that she would one day be in spirit at the scene on the first Christmas night. The revelation which she recorded after this visit was the reward of frequent and loving pondering over the wonders of the Incarnation.<sup>96</sup>

But about this time she felt interiorly warned that the time

for leaving Palestine was at hand. A message had yet to be delivered to the Pope. Perhaps she had hoped that her illness was the prelude to her release from the troubles of the world, but it seemed that her work for the Church was to continue as before.

On September 8, the Feast of Mary's Nativity, when visiting her tomb in the valley of Josaphat, came a vision of the Mother of God.

These were the final words she heard: "Return now all of you to Christian lands; live ever holier lives with great watchfulness and in constant remembrance of the holy places where my Son and I lived our bodily life, died, and were buried."<sup>97</sup>

## Last Warnings and Revelations

BRIDGET made one more effort to arouse the people of Cyprus. She sent from Jerusalem a revelation she had received and asked that it should be made public.

When she stopped at the island on her way back to Naples, she found no notice whatever had been taken of her request. So once again she was her own spokesman.

Rulers and people alike knew that no smooth words were to be expected, but again a large number gathered, some possibly out of common courtesy, others, it may be, to do her harm. Alfonso says she was in imminent danger even of death, and marvelled at her courage as he stood by her acting as interpreter of her burning words.

Very soon after, just before Bridget and her friends sailed, the young King was crowned, and in connection with the festivities, the Genoese took offense and attacked the islanders. The following year they conquered Cyprus, and in fulfilment of Bridget's prophecy, all the inhabitants, not excepting the young King, were destroyed.<sup>98</sup>

The voyage to Naples was uneventful, but the discomfort and inconveniences made Bridget's companions anxious and unhappy for she was by now very ill.

"Never," says Katherine, speaking of this time, "either on sea or land, did anyone ever hear an impatient, querulous, or idle word from the sufferer. On the contrary, she always praised her God and Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ, and when any complained of inconvenience or want of something which she needed, she would console them lovingly and

kindly, saying: 'Don't be sad, for I have received so many and such great benefits from God that if every member of my body were bruised you ought not to grieve, since the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared to the glory God has promised to those who love Him.'<sup>99</sup>

When Naples was reached, it was absolutely necessary to wait there until the invalid had regained strength enough to continue the journey to Rome.<sup>100</sup>

Plague was raging in the city and as soon as Bridget's arrival became known, Queen Joanna sent to implore her prayers. The agonies of the plague had struck fear into the heart of the frivolous queen and had aroused in her once more a certain sense of awe at Bridget's supernatural gifts. This woman had an uncanny knowledge of the future; she must be made to say what was going to happen in the kingdom.

A deputation accordingly arrived at Bridget's humble lodging, consisting of the Archbishop of Naples, some Masters of Theology, and various notabilities of the city. The visitors found her lying on a couch, but were received with the greatest respect. She answered all the questions put to her in her usual direct and fearless way. She had indeed implored light from God, she said, and He had given her a revelation concerning Naples. She then asked Alfonso to read the divine message aloud. The Queen and people were told that God's justice would shortly come upon them unless they repented of certain sins mentioned. To further questions put at Joanna's request as to the manner in which her revelations came to her, Bridget is said to have answered with great humility but also with a prudence and subtlety that deeply impressed her hearers.<sup>101</sup>

Besides general warnings, she had particular ones for both the Archbishop and the Queen. Archbishop Bernard accepted the counsel and urged his flock to do penance. The Queen showed every sign of friendliness and even invited her monitor to her palace at Aversa. And Bridget went. Putting aside

the natural shrinking she must have felt, she stayed under Joanna's roof, and told her what she felt it was given her to say. She had seen, she said, a terrible picture of the Queen's soul, and she warned her to repent while there was yet time. Some of the advice given is found among St. Bridget's revelations, but we are told many counsels were given in secret. Joanna knew how to listen and promise amendment; perhaps she even thought she meant what she said. She was quite sure her monitor was a saint. Beyond that she did not go.<sup>102</sup>

While Bridget lingered on in Naples trying to pick up sufficient strength for the rest of her journey, she had two revelations concerning Gregory XI.

Of the first, she says that Christ appeared to her while she was praying for the Pope and told her he was like a paralysed man unable to use either hands or feet. Yet by the help of the Virgin Mary he would begin to move, that is, he would do God's will by returning to Rome. There he would begin a good work but would not complete it. Bridget then begins to make excuses for Gregory's hesitation.

"Oh Lord, my God, the Queen of Naples and many others tell me it is impossible for him to come to Rome because the King of France and the cardinals and others put obstacles in his way. I have heard, too, that many prevent him coming by saying they have the Spirit of God and divine revelations and visions, and with this pretext they dissuade him."

The claim to speak by the Spirit of God in advising Gregory was the very same later to be flung at St. Bridget and St. Catherine of Siena by those who considered the Pope's return to be the direct cause of the papal schism that began under his successor.

Bridget then gives Christ's answer to her plea.

"Soothsayers, dreamers and carnal friends of Pope Gregory may persuade or dissuade him, but I am above them all. I shall bring the Pope to Rome. Whether or not you will be permitted to see that day, it is not given you to know."

There was no command, says Prior Peter, to deliver this

message to the Pope, so it was not sent to Avignon. But the following month came a revelation in the form of a direct address to Gregory. It begins:

"Holy Father. That person who is well known to Your Holiness, while watching in prayer, was rapt in a spiritual ecstasy and saw in a vision a throne. On it was seated a form like to a man, of inconceivable beauty, a Lord of incomprehensible might. . . . Before Him who sat on the throne stood a bishop in pontificals. . . . And the Lord spoke to him saying: 'Listen, Pope Gregory, to the words which I speak to you.' After chiding the Pope for not having yet reformed his court, the admonition ends with these words: "'Come as quickly as possible to your Chair in Rome. The time I leave to your choice. But the longer you delay, the more will your soul diminish in virtue. The sooner you come, the greater will be your growth in virtue, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the divine fire of love will inflame you. Come, not in worldly pomp but with humility and ardent charity.'"<sup>103</sup>

How often would Catherine of Siena repeat this urging!

Bishop Alfonso had stood by Bridget in all the various perils which had attended this last pilgrimage, and she knew she could always count on his help. When this message for the Pope came, she turned unhesitatingly to her faithful friend and asked him to take it in person to Gregory. He obeyed; and as the Pope kept him at Avignon until the autumn, he never saw Bridget again.<sup>104</sup>

It was February when Alfonso left for France, and soon after Bridget planned to return to Rome. But money had come to an end; what was to be done? It was Queen Joanna who came to the rescue with an anonymous gift of money. Bridget guessed at once who was the donor and was told, she says, to accept the alms with charity and reverence and pray that the divine warmth might reach this cold heart.<sup>105</sup>

In March the doors of the house in Campo dei Fiori opened to receive the pilgrims from the Holy Land. All but one had returned in safety.

## Fulfilment

LENT had begun, and Bridget at once tried to take up her former habit of visiting the Stations each day. She even went to see some of her friends.

One day in company with Master Peter, she visited Count Latino Orsini. His delight at seeing her was changed to wonderment when, before a word had been spoken, she turned away from him, covering her face.

Orsini asked what the matter was; Master Peter in reply only said that he thought the Lady Bridget did not find him in such good dispositions as when they had parted.

"But what have I done?" asked Orsini. Then he added: "Oh, well, it's true I have been very angry with some of my vassals."<sup>108</sup>

Another visit was paid to a new disciple known hitherto only by correspondence, who had come specially to Rome with his wife and family to see and speak with Bridget. Gomez Albornoz was a nephew of the Cardinal, and had taken a prominent part in the military operations in connection with the recovery of the Papal States. That he should have fallen under Bridget's spell is only another instance of the varying types of character she influenced. Gomez was a fierce fighter, but had a strong spirit of faith, and when one day he heard his fellow-countryman, Alfonso, speaking of Bridget with his usual enthusiasm, he begged him to ask her for her prayers that he might know how best to please God.

The result, as in the case of the young student at Naples, was a rule of life sent to Perugia, where Gomez now occupied

the position of governor. The rule, said Bridget, had come to her from the Mother of God.

When Gomez read the rule, he at once "felt his heart transfixed by the fear of God and he was changed into another man." So said Alfonso giving evidence in later years (Gomez was by that time dead), and the bishop proceeded rather quaintly to enlarge on this conversion, saying that not only did Gomez at once undertake such good works as washing the feet of the poor, giving liberal alms, and practicing much abstinence in secret, but his inward change of heart was also reflected in his outward attire. On Fridays he wore black cloth, on Saturdays, white, on other days, grey. No doubt he had been noted for the splendour and richness of his dress, so that this was a particularly impressive sign in an age that loved colour and brave attire.

Bridget followed up the rule with two long letters which are proof that her interest in the subject of government and its special responsibilities and duties remained keen to the last.

"Since [she writes] you are such a great and powerful man, have the right to administer justice and control others as your subjects, possess fine estates, the riches of this world, noble birth, and human happiness through a wife and children . . . and further have been divinely visited by the Holy Spirit; it is above all needful to preserve this latter grace in order that precious spiritual gifts may in no way be lessened for the sake of any earthly or perishable advantage.

"You are divinely exhorted to watch when governing others and administering justice, that you do not pass sentence wrongfully. You are likewise commanded, should you have acquired property unjustly, at once and entirely to restore it. Moreover, since you ought to govern the lands belonging to the Church with equity, you must be careful that those subject to you are not burdened with superfluous rates and taxes, but see that they enjoy fully the rights granted them in former times by just governors.

"And now I speak to you with maternal affection and in all humility, and because you wish it, I even call you my son. I advise you, my son, often to confess your sins, and if at times you feel the desire to partake of Holy Communion, receive the Body of Christ willingly and humbly. I also advise you to let no day pass without thinking at a fixed hour of Christ's holy wounds and sufferings. . . . Think, my son, how the gentle Jesus was seized, bound and scourged, betrayed and crowned with thorns; doomed to death, crucified and fixed with nails; how bitter gall and vinegar were offered Him to drink, how He was mocked and went to a cruel death, and was pierced with a lance for your redemption — He who is the King of Glory and Lord of Lords. And when you have bethought you of all this, then pray to Him humbly and with tears to increase the fire of His divine love in your heart and to perfect your desire after what is good, and for the fulfillment of God's will."

Such is a saint's programme for one to whom has been given the duty of ruling others.

In her second letter she says: "I counsel you always to keep before you the thought that the works you perform as one who bears office, are done for God and for the High Priest Jesus Christ who is in heaven, rather than for the Pope or anyone else here on earth; preferring the friendship of God to all the presents and emoluments the Pope can give you in return for your services. . . ." <sup>107</sup>

Bridget was now seventy. The body she had used so unsparingly was taking its final revenge, and she had to recognize that even her strong will could no longer completely subdue it. Master Peter had, some time before this, forbidden her to sleep on the stone floor, but the hard bed without mattress or pillow was not much less rigorous. Now, during the last weeks of her life, she had to consent to rest in comparative comfort. Her body, says Katherine, was by this time all bruised and broken by her infirmities. <sup>108</sup>

But besides severe physical sufferings a great darkness had

come down on her soul. From living in the supernatural world — so much more real to her than the material one — she found herself dropped, as it were, on to earth, and earth seemed very hard and very commonplace. The enthusiasm for bodily mortification was replaced by the most humbling temptations. In hours devoted by her rule to silence, she longed to speak; on fast-days, she craved for food. Was it possible she no longer dreaded but even enjoyed a comfortable bed? Then there were humiliating thoughts for which her sickness could in no way be pleaded as an excuse. The pride of birth she had thought conquered, returned. She seemed no longer to want to be one of the crowd. Worst of all she was beset by loathsome thoughts such as the devil loves to present to the minds of the pure and the heroic. And, of course, she thought she gave way to the temptations. She could only wonder that so many things which had never appeared attractive in the past should now draw her away from God.

Easter Sunday at last brought consolation.

She tells how the Virgin Mother appeared to her and said that these temptations which surprised her, and were something so new, were allowed in order to perfect her humility and show her what she would be without God's special grace and help. She had to learn that privileged as her life had been, there was yet no sin she was not capable of falling into, if left to herself. So she must take refuge in prayer and beg her Master to guard her in thought, word, and deed. And as a pledge that this vision came from God, the temptations would cease and the flesh be henceforth subject to the spirit. <sup>109</sup>

The promise was fulfilled, but another trial came: discouragement. Her work was unfinished and she saw no possibility of completing what yet she had been commanded to do. The assurance that Pope Gregory would return to Rome was there to comfort her, but the future of her monastery was veiled. The monastery was being built, but how could she ever enter and become a religious? How was she to train the souls com-

mitted to her, the young plants of the new vineyard? All the glow of the days in Palestine, all the enthusiasm she had felt long ago when the new Rule was revealed to her, had vanished. She was just a suffering, dying woman, daily growing weaker, not only in body but in soul. God had turned His face from her and all her life seemed to spell failure.

Such thoughts as these were going round and round in her tired brain, as we may gather from what follows.

Again Mary appeared to her, telling her she would not really die but would enter the place prepared for her as promised by Christ Himself. Though her strength had left her, she would yet be the mother of vigorous sons and daughters.

Bridget still doubted. How was this thing possible?

The answer came: "My Son and I love you. You remember how my Son told you when you went into the church of the Holy Sepulchre that all your sins were forgiven as if you had just received baptism. But He made no promise that you would not suffer during the remainder of your earthly life. It is God's will that love should respond to love and that past negligence should be atoned for by patience and infirmity. Remember, too, that I have often told you my Son's words must be understood spiritually, and how, if you should be called from this world before the literal fulfilment of the divine words in the revelations, you would yet, because of your good will, be reckoned as a nun of Vadstena and a partaker in all the promises of God."<sup>110</sup>

After this vision much of the weight was lifted from Bridget's soul, and though her Master's face was still hidden, she could offer as a sacrifice and last act of penance the spiritual darkness which before had seemed to her a sign that her life had not been pleasing to God.

Meanwhile Pope Gregory, uneasy and still vacillating, had sent letters asking in strictest confidence for Bridget's advice.

In July came her last revelation for him and she sent it at once to Alfonso.

It begins: "Our Lord Jesus Christ told me, my Lord Bishop, to write these words for you to show the Pope."

There is a repetition, as from Christ, of the command to return to Italy, and finally these words:

"Let the Pope look to Me alone, even though all dissuade him from coming to Rome and oppose him with all their power. I will help him and none shall gain the upper hand over him. For as fledglings in the nest, when the mother-bird comes, raise themselves, call out and rejoice, so will I hasten joyfully to meet him and will exalt him . . ."<sup>111</sup>

The hot days of the Roman summer had come, and Bridget's life was rapidly drawing to its end which came on Saturday, July 23, 1373.

The best, because the truest account of the last days and hours of the Saint's life is surely to be found in her own writings and in the depositions made later by those who had been eye-witnesses. The similarity in the witness given by Prior Peter, Katherine, and Magnus Persson for the Process of Canonization, shows how carefully each detail had been noted at the time, and how often they had talked together afterwards of those solemn moments.

"Five days before the death of Bridget, the Bride of Christ" — so says her revelation — "Our Lord Jesus Christ appeared before the altar in her room and His look was glad."

"I have treated you," He said, "as a bridegroom might treat his bride, if he stayed away from her in order to make her long more ardently for him. I have given you no consolation all this time because it was the time of your proving. But now that you have been proved, make ready; for what I promised you is about to be fulfilled: you shall be clothed as a nun at the altar and consecrated, and shall be known henceforth not only as My Bride but also as a religious and the

Mother of Vadstena. Yet you shall die here in Rome, and your body will remain here until it is taken to the place prepared for it. For it is My will to release you from your labours and to accept your will for the deed."

Then followed the cry: "Oh Rome, My Rome, the Pope despises you and will not listen to My words and takes doubtful things for certainties! And because he reckons the time of My mercy according to his will, he shall no longer hear My pleading."

Then turning to Bridget: "Tell the Prior to give all My revelations to My Bishop [Alfonso], on whom I will pour out the fire of My Spirit and whom I will fill with grace."

Many other things not recorded were told at this time to Bridget, she says, and especially things concerning various members of her household whom she saw, as she afterwards expressed it, "as in the presence of God." Finally came these words:

"On the morning of the fifth day from this, when you have received the Last Sacraments, summon each person singly whom I have named, and tell them what they have to do, and then in their presence you shall enter your monastery, that is, you shall enter into My joy, and your body shall be buried at Vadstena."

This, then, was the explanation of the last dark months. The merciful love of the Divine Master had accepted her work, and what she could not finish He Himself would bring to pass. The Pope would return though she would rejoice only from heaven; her mortal eyes would never see her monastery but Christ's word would not fail. Bridget would live on in her Order and be not only its foundress but its spiritual mother and a true religious. Had not her divine Bridegroom promised to clothe and consecrate her? It was not failure but fulfilment, glorious fulfilment, beyond what her human heart could have dreamed.

She sent at once for Master Peter, and having been confessed, told him that in five days' time she was to die and that

she wished to receive Extreme Unction and Viaticum. Only with him and Prior Peter did she as yet share her great secret, but Katherine noticed a change in her mother. She had returned to her harsh treatment of her body, refusing it even the slight comforts she had accepted since her illness.

In this very room where Bridget once lay dying, there can be seen to-day a table on which is the following inscription:

## S. BIRGITTA

HUIC TABULAE INNIXA LIBRUM REVELATIONUM SCRIPSIT  
CIBUM CUM SODALIBUS SUMPSEIT  
SPIRITUM DEO REDDIDIT

(On this table St. Bridget rested, wrote the book of her revelations, took her meat with her companions, gave up her spirit to God.)

There is a tradition that she asked to be placed on the table, in order, like her Lord, to die on wood. The tradition certainly receives strong support from the preservation of the table, but there is no mention of the request in the accounts of those who were present at the Saint's death-bed, unless Katherine refers to this when she says that her mother's last austerities were undertaken "out of reverence to and in remembrance of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Katherine noticed that during these days her mother refused all food, taking only a little water to moisten her mouth, and that a great silence seemed to have descended on her, for she spoke no word unless it was absolutely necessary. It was not the silence of extreme weakness, for when she was obliged to speak her voice was strong and unfaltering and her memory clear.

Friday night came, the vigil of the day for which she longed.

At midnight she called her daughter to her and said her death was at hand, and foretold the exact hour at which it would take place. She begged Katherine to be patient and calm, to call the two confessors and Birger and others of the



household, but quietly and with no excitement. She wished all to be present at Mass and at her death. No doubt it was now that she told Katherine of the promised mystical clothing as a nun, which had brought such joy and consolation, for her daughter expressly says she heard this from her mother herself as well as afterwards from the two priests.

When the Prior of Alvastra came in answer to the summons, Bridget asked him to be ready at dawn to say Mass and to give her the Last Sacraments. And at dawn, we read, Christ appeared to her once more, consoling her.

Prior Peter, the faithful friend of many years, vested and said Mass in Bridget's presence. He gave her the Food for the way — for her a valley that now seemed to have no shadow — and administered Extreme Unction.

Then Bridget gathered her little family round her. She told them what had happened five days before. She had seen, she said, with her bodily eyes, Jesus Christ Incarnate, and certain members of her household she had then seen as in God's presence. Jesus had told her what was His will for Katherine, Birger, the confessors, and others. In a strong, clear voice which showed no sign of bodily weakness, she then gave directions to each one. The *Vadstena Diary* tells us that Magnus Persson was told at this time that he was to be ordained a priest.

She comforted them all in the loving way they knew so well, told them to persevere in the fear of God, in love of their neighbour, and in all good works.

Then she was silent. The moment for which she was waiting was at hand. Those gathered round her saw her look up to heaven, her eyes alight with a great love, adoring yet filial, as she seemed to be thanking God for the many and wonderful graces of her seventy years. Then, closing her eyes, she said: "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit," and immediately breathed forth her soul.<sup>112</sup>

The door, so long ajar, had opened wide, and Bridget had entered her cloister.



### PART III

## St. Bridget in Her Order

## CHAPTER I

### St. Bridget's Rule Ratified

BRIDGET's bones were taken to Sweden in accordance with the promise of her revelation. Her daughter, Prior Peter, and other witnesses affirmed on oath that when the sealed coffin was opened in Rome after lying six weeks in a tomb at S. Lorenzo in Panisperna, only a skeleton was found. All the flesh had disappeared save for a small portion on the skull.<sup>1</sup>

The long journey through many lands lasted from the December of that year (1373) until the July of the following year. Before leaving Italy a halt was made at Montefalco, in order that an initial enquiry might be held concerning Bridget's life and miracles in preparation for her canonization, confidently expected to take place before long. Gomez Albornoz was present as Governor of Spoleto, and no doubt was largely responsible for the choice of a place of meeting. This was the occasion of the two Peters writing the short Life of St. Bridget to which reference has so often been made, and it is Master Peter's only written testimony.<sup>2</sup>

The travellers were received with unbounded enthusiasm as soon as they landed in Sweden. They had some wonderful tales to tell of their journey. It was a bright star seen at mid-day, they said, that had guided them across the pirate-infested seas to port. And once armed robbers had lined the road along which they must pass, but had been unable to attack them. Then Bridget's voice had been heard saying: "By the power of God I blinded them that they should do you no harm as they intended."

The welcoming crowd grew ever larger, and it was a tri-

umphant procession that the Bishop of Linköping and his Chapter came out to meet when the last halt was made. Bishop Nicholas Hennansson we have met before, when as a boy he was tutor to Bridget's two elder sons. He had lately been elected to the See of Linköping and remembered her prophecy of years ago that he would one day be a bishop and would be the protector of her monastery.<sup>3</sup>

When Vadstena was finally reached, early in July, Birger, who had hurried on ahead to see that all was in readiness, met the procession and proudly bore into the temporary wooden church the relics of his mother. Abbess Clausdotter describes the scene; how Birger said "with vast delight: 'Now I can gladly hold up my head; for often I stood very downcast before my lord King Magnus when he would say to me: What may our cousin, your mother, have dreamed of us last night?'"

The relics were received, we read in the early Life of St. Katherine, with much rejoicing by both Brothers and Sisters. This shows that some beginning of religious life had already been made in accordance with the permission given to Bridget four years earlier by Urban V. The future monks and nuns were, as is known from other sources, following the Rule of St. Augustine, but they had made no vows, nor were they wearing a religious habit.<sup>4</sup>

Katherine's part was now to form the aspirants according to her mother's ideal, and teach them her Rule. Hers was also the task, probably none too easy, to blend into one harmonious whole those who had come with her from Rome intending to join the new Order and those she found waiting at Vadstena.

Bridget's tomb became almost at once a place of pilgrimage and was soon covered with *ex voto* offerings in token of cures worked by her intercession.

One day, a carpenter knocked at the monastery gate and offered his services. The monastery was still in course of building; a year's work could easily be found for a carpenter,

but money was none too plentiful. But no, he did not want any wages; he had come to give his services in fulfilment of a vow. Then he told his story. His leg had been badly crushed in an accident more than a year earlier. He could do no more work and the doctors gave him no hope of a cure. Then he heard of the wonders happening at Vadstena, of the blind receiving sight, the lame able to walk, even of a dead child being raised to life. So he prayed to Bridget and said he would give her monastery two cows if only she would give him back the use of his leg. But, he said, the Lady Bridget did not cure him. He tried again, offering to visit her tomb and put on it a wax image of a leg. Still useless. Finally he promised to work at his trade in her monastery for a year without wage, and that pleased her so much that she appeared to him in his sleep, straightened the leg, and he woke cured. Katherine and the rest were delighted with the story and the carpenter fulfilled his vow faithfully.<sup>5</sup>

Sweden began to clamour for Bridget's canonization. Someone must go to Rome, and bishops, clergy, and nobles all felt the one who could most successfully carry on the necessary negotiations was Bridget's daughter.

A year after her arrival at Vadstena, Katherine accordingly found herself again in Rome in the familiar house in the Campo dei Fiori. Prior Peter and Magnus Persson were with her, and she had found Alfonso waiting for her, ready to give every help in his power.

Five strenuous years were spent in working for the two causes she had so much at heart: the canonization of her mother and the full confirmation of the Rule of her Order in its original form, since Bridget had expressed herself dissatisfied with certain changes made by Pope Urban's advisers, and had told her daughter to do her best to have the Rule approved in full agreement with her revelation.<sup>6</sup>

More than a year passed before Katherine could present her petitions to the Pope in person. Gregory XI, the paralysed man of Bridget's revelation, still tarried at Avignon,

but finally broke his chains in October, 1376, and under the forceful guidance of Catherine Benincasa, sailed for Italy.

Gregory had known Bridget, having as Cardinal been present at Montefiascone when she made her last desperate effort to dissuade Urban from leaving for France. The new Pope had already shown practical interest in the matter of the canonization by instituting an enquiry in Sweden, and Katherine's request was being supported besides by the petitions of others. One came from the Emperor Charles IV whose interest and help Bridget had vainly tried to enlist in the matter of her Order. Queen Joanna of Naples was another petitioner.

Two formal proposals for the canonization were made in consistory this first year after Gregory's return and a third was promised, when quite unexpectedly the Pope died in March, 1378, which brought all proceedings to an end for the time.<sup>7</sup>

The next Pope, Urban VI, was approached, and again Katherine received encouragement and sympathy.

"Ah, my daughter," exclaimed the Pope, as he looked at the eager face of his petitioner, "you have indeed been nourished with your mother's milk!"<sup>8</sup>

Almost immediately came the tragic schism which was to divide Christendom for many long years, one part giving allegiance to the pope in Rome, the other to the anti-pope at Avignon. Those who have studied the contemporary documents relating to the stormy episode of Urban's election, when the excited Roman crowd broke into the Vatican, tell us that it was easy enough for anyone to doubt the freedom and therefore the validity of the election, and as is well known, saints were found some on this side, some on that. Katherine of Sweden, like Catherine of Siena (I keep to the traditional spelling of their respective names), never wavered in allegiance to Urban, and to both women the harsh and unlovable Pope invariably showed himself kind and fatherly. These two future saints formed a friendship at this time and

the Pope wished to associate them in a mission to Queen Joanna who had now ranged herself on the side of the Anti-pope, Clement VII. The failure of the plan of a visit to Naples is commonly laid at the door of Katherine of Sweden, who is said to have refused point blank to see again the woman she had such good reason to know. Raymund of Capua, biographer of St. Catherine of Siena, gives a different version of the episode, however, and says he himself dissuaded the Pope from exposing two women to dangers and insults.<sup>9</sup>

A fresh commission of cardinals and theologians was appointed by Urban to examine Bridget's writings and as a result, we are told, they were "again by Urban as by his predecessor Gregory, declared genuine, full of truth and instinct with the Spirit of God; highly profitable to those who should read them or hear them read, and most wholesome teaching for the faithful of the Church of God."<sup>10</sup>

This pronouncement had the effect of making Bridget and her writings widely known, for the rulers of various lands at once sent messengers to Rome to obtain copies of the revelations.

Katherine's appointed procurator had drawn up in the required legal form fifty articles concerning Bridget's life and alleged sanctity, and these were presented to the Pope with the formal petition for the canonization. During the summer months of the year 1379, the examination of many witnesses took place. Chief of these of course were Katherine herself, Alfonso, Magnus Persson, and other of Bridget's intimates, while the testimony of Prior Peter, given at the beginning of the following year, is a book in itself and is given the title *Depositio copiosissima*.

In the course of the year (1379) two formal proposals were made in Urban's presence.<sup>11</sup> The end so long desired seemed near. But those who were watching affairs in Rome and in Italy generally saw that there was little hope of anything so momentous as a canonization taking place under present conditions, and Katherine was advised to leave all the docu-

ments concerning the Process in safe keeping awaiting the Pope's final ratification, and herself to return to Sweden.

Disappointing as this check was after all her persevering efforts, Katherine had one great consolation.

By the end of 1378 she had seen her other wish accomplished when Urban ratified Bridget's Rule and confirmed the foundation of her Order; and this in no uncertain terms, for the Bull he issued was *ad perpetuum rei memoriam*. The entry which records this momentous pronouncement of the Pope, found in the chronicle of the monastery at Vadstena, is as follows: "She [Katherine] received from Urban VI the confirmation of the Rule of St. Saviour by way of Constitutions."<sup>12</sup>

From these last words we see that the hope of the new Rule being ranked as one of the great religious rules of the Church was not fulfilled. It would have needed much consideration and handling on the part of the Holy See to override the decree of the Lateran Council already referred to, and Urban's stormy pontificate, the divided allegiance of Christendom, and his own personal unpopularity were not likely to incline him to make such an exception in favour of the new Order. Practically, however, the wish of the foundress was realized. Though obedience is vowed by the Bridgettine religious to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of St. Bridget, there is no question of their being called or considered as Augustinians. The Church's designation of the Order, commonly known as Bridgettine, is the Order of Our Most Holy Saviour.

Katherine seems to have felt fully satisfied with the results of her efforts in regard to her Order, for in a letter written to the Archbishop of Upsala after her return from Rome, she says: "I desire Your Most Reverend Paternity to know that all my affairs for which I went to the Roman Court have been perfectly expedited according to my wish except that the canonization of my most dear Mother, the blessed Bridget, is not yet manifestly and solemnly declared according to the

style and solemnity of the Curia, because of the dissensions between the true Pope and the Anti-pope. However, the Most Holy Father our Apostolic Lord calls her a saint, saying he has canonized her in his own heart, and promises, if he lives, to consummate the Cause."<sup>13</sup>

Not only had the new Rule been confirmed but Katherine had the satisfaction of having received, only a few months after Urban's election, the privilege denied to Bridget. This was the "spiritual dowry" which came to be known as the Vincula Indulgence, that is, the plenary indulgence granted at the church of St. Peter *ad Vincula* in Rome on August 1.<sup>14</sup> It was a really remarkable concession to a wholly new Order, whose Rule, moreover, had not at that time been formally approved.

Sisters after Katherine's death, but four years after the enclosure ceremony, the first regular abbess was elected, blessed, and installed.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, the permanent monastery church grew slowly but steadily, the work done by the monks, just as in our own day we have seen the great abbey church of Buckfast rise by the labours of the Benedictine monks.

St. Bridget's detailed directions, as recorded in the revelation of many years before,<sup>17</sup> were faithfully carried out, and Vadstena served later as a model for churches of the Order in other lands.

This first Bridgettine church, "plain, humble and strong," can be seen to-day. Its peculiar feature (no longer existing) was the arrangement of the altars. These stood, thirteen in number, at the west end instead of the east, each one dedicated to one of the Apostles (including St. Paul). St. Peter's altar was the high altar, and on each side were six others on descending steps. The monks' choir was behind the altars, and the celebrants at Mass thus faced east.

At the east end of the church was a small Lady Chapel, raised somewhat above the level of the nave. It was behind a grille and reached only from the ambulatory of the monks. At its altar the nuns' Mass was daily celebrated. Their choir was somewhere between the east and west ends of the church, but high up, with some of the pillars below piercing its floor. It no longer exists, but traces of the entrance to it on the north wall (beyond which was the monastery of the nuns) can still be seen. Looking down, they could see both the high altar of the monks and the Lady-altar, without themselves being seen.

The monks were cut off not only from sight of the adjacent community, but also from the world outside, with almost the same strictness as the nuns. They, too, had their parlours for seeing visitors, separated by grilles. The only door leading from their cloister into the main part of the church was never opened save for the reception of new subjects or for the visi-

## CHAPTER II

### St. Bridget in Many Lands

SOME nine months after the return to Vadstena, Katherine followed her mother. She died on March 24, 1381. She had brought back from Rome not only the confirmation of the Rule and the Vincula grant but many other privileges, and to the very end of her life she worked for the good of her Order. She left all in readiness for the development of regular monastic life.

Practically all we know of the life lived at Vadstena is what we find in the monastery's *Diary*. Of this interesting monastic document, a Swedish author, Dr. A. V. Lundberg, has thus written: "The history of the monastery is drawn chiefly from its diary which is also an important source for the mediaeval history of the North. It witnesses to the morale of the monastery being good. The chronicles were never intended for circulation, yet they contain hardly an utterance which, though whispered in the ear, could awaken shame if spoken aloud on the housetop. Neither in the prosperous days nor in the ensuing ones of heavy persecution is there an arrogant word, only words of childlike gladness; neither hatred nor ill-will is shown, only silent submission. Memoirs are seldom edifying reading, but the *Diarium Vazstenense* stands the proof with honour."<sup>18</sup>

Three years after Katherine's death the buildings, though still in course of erection, were yet sufficiently ready to allow of the formal enclosure of both communities, after which the observance of St. Bridget's Constitutions became binding. A temporary superior had been placed over the

tation of the Bishop. They were seen only when preaching or saying Mass.<sup>18</sup>

In 1391 Bridget's canonization took place at last. Magnus Persson, now Confessor-General — the name given in the Order to the superior of the monks — was summoned to Rome for the great event, and was one of the very few of the old "familia" to be present. Prior Peter was dead, Master Peter had died before Katherine, and Birger had lately followed his sister.<sup>19</sup>

The death of Urban VI in 1389 had prevented him from carrying out his intention of canonizing Bridget in 1390, which was to be a year of Jubilee, but all the evidence was ready in Rome, and when the next Pope, Boniface IX, was approached, he showed himself favourable to the petition and after instituting another formal examination of Bridget's writings, fixed October 7 as the day for the great ceremony. It is described with jubilation in the *Vadstena Diary*: the enthusiasm in Rome, the Pope's eulogy of the new saint, the miracles that took place.

Two years later, amid great rejoicings, there was a solemn ceremony at Vadstena, when St. Bridget's relics were placed in a silver shrine and venerated by a vast congregation of the faithful.<sup>20</sup>

As we should expect, soon after the canonization the new Order began to spread its wings. Naturally enough, the first foundation was made in Italy. A request reached Vadstena in 1394 for a foundation to be made near Florence at a place known, on account of its fine position, as Porta Paradiso. A monastery was already built and subjects from the mother-house were asked for. Magnus Persson was enthusiastic over the project, resigned his office as Confessor-General, and set off for Rome to obtain the necessary permission. Two years later, he died in the new monastery.<sup>21</sup>

Early next century came the offer of an English knight, Henry FitzHugh, to found a Bridgettine monastery in his own land. He had visited Vadstena as one of the suite of

Queen Philippa, daughter of Henry IV, lately married to Eric XIII of Sweden. The result of FitzHugh's gift was finally the foundation of Syon monastery at Isleworth by Henry V, as part fulfilment of his father's vow to found three religious houses in reparation for the murder of Richard II and Archbishop Scrope.<sup>22</sup>

In these early years of the fifteenth century we find foundations being made also in Estonia and in Denmark. The daughter houses of Vadstena, in turn, made their own foundations, and so the Order quickly spread over Europe.

With the rapid rise of monasteries arose some natural difficulties as to organization.

St. Bridget's Rule shows each house as a separate little kingdom, ruled over by the abbess and confessor-general with the bishop of the diocese as "Father and Visitor."<sup>23</sup> But some way had to be found of ensuring uniformity of spirit and observance, more especially as the Order was a new one. So we find General Chapters being held at this place and that, and a tendency in some quarters to centralize government. This was resented by the Vadstena nuns as an innovation. The question was undoubtedly a difficult one, since the Order was instituted primarily for women, and the nuns, who outnumbered the monks, could not, because of their enclosure, attend chapters, so that there was danger of their opinions being overridden or at least not given full weight, and also of the ideal of the foundress being superseded by a novel form of government.<sup>24</sup>

In the English monastery of Syon, monks and nuns alike clung always jealously to her first constitution, and though the exit of monks on affairs of the Order was provided for by St. Bridget, this permission was sparingly taken advantage of. In 1425 a special grant was obtained from the Pope by which Syon should enjoy complete independence from Vadstena and other monasteries of the Order, and independence of the decrees of general chapters, which she might attend or not as she judged best. This does not mean, however, that there

was any lack of good spirit. On the contrary, we find Syon sending monks to Vadstena on occasion to make enquiries as to points of the Rule, and of Vadstena appealing to Syon, the most powerful and influential of her daughter houses, for help and support in various difficulties.<sup>25</sup>

The independence and autonomy which St. Bridget's Rule dictates has, of course, both advantages and disadvantages. To the modern mind the disadvantages will seem most obvious. Yet it is worth noticing that Syon alone of all Bridgettine houses founded direct from Vadstena, and alone of all English pre-Reformation communities, has survived with an unbroken family life, in spite of suppression, persecution, and exile.

Chapters continued to be held at intervals in this monastery and that, and in the seventeenth century the Confessor-General of Altmünster in Bavaria held the position of General Prior of the whole Order. But there was never any detailed and definite organization such as is seen to-day in one form or another in the various monastic orders, and the after history of the Bridgettines would in itself have made such impracticable. For in this house and that the monks gradually died out, and the Order became not primarily but entirely one for women, living the strictly enclosed life that had been theirs from the outset.<sup>26</sup>

It was only at the beginning of the past century that the double monastery of St. Bridget's plan finally disappeared. But as early as 1422 there was a movement in Italy to do away with the arrangement. A papal decree sent to Vadstena caused dismay, and urgent petitions went to Rome from both Sweden and England. Syon obtained exemption, but Sweden was not so fortunate. However, the papal prohibition of double monasteries never took effect outside Italy, and a later Pope annulled the Bull.<sup>27</sup>

St. Bridget had dedicated her Order to the crucified Saviour. From the sixteenth century onwards the way of the

cross was the only one open to most of her communities. The cross came in different forms: now it was a devastating fire, now military occupation; flight, perhaps restoration for a time, then once again flight. Persecution the whole Order had in abundance; in some cases it brought imprisonment, in others martyrdom. Bridget had some valiant followers.

Monasteries dedicated to the Virgin Mother continued to be founded even into the seventeenth century. Each one bore her name. Mary had her Heavenly Stairs, her Throne, her Vale, her Spring, her Mount, her Crown. Of all these houses scattered over Europe, three alone remain, going back to early days: Syon — or to give the full title: St. Saviour, St. Mary the Virgin, and St. Bridget of Syon; Maria-Altmünster, and a monastery at Uden in Holland. Syon, after many wanderings, has returned to her own land though not to her original home; Altmünster, founded in 1407 from Maria-Mayingen, has come back to the place of her first planting, while the monastery at Uden began its life in 1434 at Bois-le-Duc. In 1843 this house made a foundation at Weert which still exists and carries on the early traditions of the Order.

When the heavy hand of Gustavus Vasa fell on the religious houses of Sweden in the sixteenth century, a few nuns remained at Vadstena in hopes of better days, though under conditions that must have made life almost unbearable.<sup>28</sup> The better days came, but not to last, and finally an edict was published ordering all Catholics to leave the land forthwith. As the nuns sailed across Lake Vetter on their way to exile, legend says that the bells of the empty monastery pealed a farewell.

The nuns' cloister is now used as a hospital for the insane. The monastic church is used for Lutheran worship and the former home of the monks is, or will soon be, a museum.

In 1918, a "Bridgettine Exhibition" was held in Stockholm in the States Historical Museum. An appeal sent out for contributions had met with a remarkable response. The Museum Society of Vadstena dived into its stores and brought



out what was left of the former treasures of the monastery church — statues, altar pieces, embroidery. Like some poor captives from an underground dungeon they came blinking up to the light of day, dusty, discoloured, and in most cases maimed.

The Exhibition over, the monastery church once again received its own, and to-day these pathetic reminders of Vadstena's past glory can be seen displayed in different parts of the church. No longer objects of devotion, the treasures of pre-Reformation days now stand there in patient dignity to be looked at and explained by the guide to the passers-by. Here is a finely carved crucifix, said to be one of the master-pieces of Swedish art, there a wooden statue fitly named "The Beautiful Madonna," and somewhere else stands the elaborately carved triptych which once belonged to St. Bridget's altar.<sup>29</sup>

At the west end of the north aisle is to be seen a chest covered with red velvet to which are attached many silver-gilt ornaments. Of these more than a hundred and fifty once there, the guide-book tells us, have been wrenched off; many of those that remain bear the badges of distinguished families connected with St. Bridget and her relatives. The chest is known as "St. Bridget's shrine." It is carefully locked, and if opened by request, will be found to contain some bones, including two skulls. The custodian would like to be able to assert positively that here are true relics of St. Bridget and her daughter, St. Katherine, but too much has happened since the sixteenth century to make certainty possible.

Early in the eighteenth century appeared a Swedish work by Pastor Peter Kylander, bearing the title: "An account of St. Bridget and St. Katherine and their bones preserved in Vadstena during and after the Papacy." The author is described by one who printed his work some years later as "one of our most industrious and experienced collectors of the chronicles of the Fatherland." From this account and from

the *Vadstena Diary* has been taken what follows, supplemented by what the nuns of Altonminster have put together in a work published by them on the Bridgettine monasteries.

The wooden chest we see to-day may have held St. Bridget's relics after her daughter's return from Rome, until they were placed in the silver shrine some years later.

In 1512, the *Diary* says, an elaborate shrine was begun to hold the relics of St. Bridget's daughter.

The Bridgettine Order had made strenuous attempts towards the end of the fifteenth century to obtain the canonization of Katherine. Finally in 1481 by permission of Pope Innocent VIII, there was a solemn translation and veneration of her relics at Vadstena, and a promise was received that the canonization would follow. It never did, but as in the case of some other saints, St. Katherine's cult has been recognized and she has been given her place in the Roman martyrology without formal canonization. The privilege of celebrating a feast in her honour was given first to Sweden and later was extended to all houses of the Bridgettine Order.

One day in the year 1524, we read in the *Vadstena Diary*, King Gustavus Vasa extorted from the monastery some of the silver intended for St. Katherine's shrine, in order to fill the royal treasury. More was extorted later, but the shrine itself was left in its place. Life at Vadstena was at this time going on much as usual, but the storm-clouds had begun to gather. It was some sixteen years after this that a representative of the King came to forbid the celebration of Mass and to order that all Church ceremonies be abolished. After this the Abbess took the precaution of having the monastery's treasures put in hiding.

As said above, better days came after the death of Gustavus. His son John was friendly, and had a devout Catholic wife, a Polish princess. On his death, his son Sigismund came from Poland, of which country he was already king, to claim his inheritance in Sweden, but was driven out by his uncle

the Duke Charles, youngest son of Gustavus, who was determined to pursue his father's policy and establish the Lutheran religion.

"Now," writes Pastor Kylander, "the time was approaching when these relics [of St. Bridget and St. Katherine] so highly venerated in the days of popery, should, after a clearer light had arisen, be either forgotten or entirely destroyed. . . . At the Upsala meeting and also at the Swedish Diet . . . it was resolved that all popish practices should be abolished at Vadstena, that the nuns should be expelled and the monastery turned into a high school or hospital. In consequence . . . Duke Charles repaired to Vadstena to carry out the resolution of the Diet. The nuns, who had been previously warned by their friends of the impending doom, had not only removed their articles of value to Wisingborg, but had also hidden the bones of St. Bridget, St. Katherine and St. Ingrid, as well as other bones in their house. But on the Duke's sharp reprimand, the Abbess was not only forced to confess where the treasures were preserved but also where their saints' shrines and relics were. The shrines were on this occasion left intact, but the bones of other deceased nuns were secretly buried."

The Altomünster book does not wholly agree with this account. It tells that Duke Charles, after trying to make the Abbess and the eleven remaining nuns renounce their Faith, which they steadfastly refused to do, forced them to give up the monastery's treasures and took away the two magnificent silver shrines. He then had the relics secretly buried. A footnote adds that it is believed these precious relics were taken to Poland some years later, with the greatest secrecy. Of the wooden chest now at Vadstena nothing is said.

Pastor Kylander goes on to say that in 1598 King Sigismund had a search made at Vadstena for the relics, but only recovered the shrines, as the bones had previously been hidden. He further states that, during the Polish war of Charles Gustavus X, the Swedes in 1636 regained the velvet-

covered shrine which was then in Warsaw. It was finally taken to Vadstena (in 1766) to enclose the bones which, according to tradition, were those of St. Bridget and St. Katherine.

A modern writer, describing a visit to Vadstena, mentions having been told that the supposed head of St. Bridget had been venerated in France. According to a French statement, Gaspar Coignet de la Thuilerie, ambassador at the Swedish Court, himself took the skull out of its grave in 1653 (consequently fifty-eight years after the total suppression of the monastery). The ambassador's son later gave the relic to the parish church of Courson near Auxerre and the bishop of the diocese testified to its having been venerated when he was examined as to its genuineness.

Kylander's conclusion, with which the author just mentioned seems to agree, is that the relics disappeared entirely in 1599, and that the so-called bones of the two saints were sought for in the charnel house perhaps as late as the eighteenth century, in order that a town so celebrated in Catholic times might have some mementoes of the former days to show to visitors.<sup>90</sup>

After all this, we shall feel no surprise that the Church does not recognize the relics at Vadstena as those of St. Bridget and St. Katherine. Some of the precious dust which once formed the bodies of St. Bridget and her daughter and which will flower in the day of mankind's resurrection, still receives in various parts of Europe the honour the Church's children pay to the relics of God's saints, but Vadstena guards the secret of what it was once her glory to possess.

Three hundred years ago, the Bridgettine tree put forth a new shoot.

Marina Escobar, foundress of the Spanish Bridgettine nuns, bears a curious resemblance to St. Bridget in certain respects. She was never a religious, though she had felt drawn to the cloister; her foundation was made with intense shrinking on her part as a result of visions and revelations. It was

Christ, she said, who appeared to her in company with His Blessed Mother and told her to found a monastery of Bridgettine nuns in Spain. Certain regulations of the existing Rule were to be altered to suit the time and country; certain new ones were to be added.

Doña Marina, who knew nothing whatever before of St. Bridget and her Order, asked the help of her confessor and the King of Spain (Philip IV), and her Rule was sent by them to Pope Urban VIII. It was approved, and the King himself founded the first monastery at Valladolid. Four other houses of the "Recollects of St. Bridget" have been founded in Spain and came safely through that country's ordeal of civil war, and of two foundations made in Mexico, one still exists.

Again, in our own times, the Bridgettine tree has put forth a new shoot.

Early in the present century, Mother Elisabeth Hesselblad, a Swedish convert, founded a community of nuns in Rome and has since made a number of other foundations. The nuns lead a life of adoration and reparation, combining with this and the recitation of the Divine Office a certain amount of apostolic work by having houses of rest and retreat attached to their convents. They profess the Rule of St. Augustine and have their own Constitutions based on St. Bridget's Rule and suited to their particular organization. They have houses now in Sweden, Switzerland, England (at Iver Heath), and in recent years have made a foundation in India, the community there including Indian subjects. These communities are governed from their mother-house in Rome by a superior general to whom they give the title of Abbess General.

It was the great desire of the foundress to be able to benefit St. Bridget's fellow-countrymen who are also her own, and this desire has been realized in a twofold way. Two houses have been founded in Sweden, and one of these stands actually on a part of what was once the site of the monks' cloister at Vadstena. Again, in Rome within the past few years, these

nuns have acquired as their mother-house that spot so sacred to the Order, Casa Brigida in the Piazza Farnese. St. Bridget's house, after being taken over by the monastery at Vadstena — the gift of Francesca Papazzura — went through many vicissitudes, which it would take too long to detail, and was finally lost to the Order. But through the generosity of the late Pope, Pius XI, and surely in answer to the prayers offered by Mother Elisabeth during many years, the house has been assigned to her nuns in perpetuity. Here, in a very true sense, the life of St. Bridget and her "familia" is lived again in Rome. The hospitable doors of the guest-house at Casa Brigida open as of old to the many Scandinavians who find their way thither to receive a welcome which recalls St. Bridget's own. In that room in which the Saint once lived, watched, prayed, suffered, heard her last Mass, and finally gave back her soul to God, the unchanging Sacrifice is again offered. And as she and her household sang the Hours of the Divine Office at the appointed times, so now the voice of praise rises from the nuns' choir, and in the words of one of the revelations, those gathered there "seek mercy for living and dead and make expiation."<sup>21</sup>

## St. Bridget Attacked—and Vindicated

ST. BRIDGET had many hard things said of her in her lifetime, and living on in her Order she continued to be the object of a criticism which no doubt had its rise in envy. Sweden as a whole was proud of possessing a religious order of its own, founded by a saint and enriched with many privileges. But in some other countries it was not long before opposition showed itself both among the members of other orders and among the secular clergy, to the claim that heaven itself had placed Vadstena and its daughter houses in a position enjoyed by no other monastic family.

There was first and foremost the famous indulgence of August 1—St. Bridget's "spiritual dowry," given to her Order by its Divine Founder. Denied to her, as already told, it had been granted at her daughter's request by Urban VI, and it drew yearly crowds of pilgrims to Vadstena, giving to the monastery the name of the "Rome of the North."

Again, what is known as the Portiuncula Indulgence, granted to St. Francis of Assisi, became also a privilege of the Bridgettine Order, though it was to be gained on Mid-Lent Sunday instead of in August.<sup>32</sup>

Yet these important privileges and other lesser ones had been granted during the time of schism; the Order had only received its full confirmation after the schism had begun and St. Bridget owed her canonization to a pope whose authority was denied by a large portion of Christendom. All this put a powerful weapon into the hands of those unfriendly to the Order.

The Bridgettines and their supporters seem to have been fully alive to the perils and uncertainties of their position and during the years between the canonization in 1391 and the Council of Basle in 1431, many were the petitions that were sent to pope or council or to some powerful patron. Monks from Vadstena and other houses go back and forth between their monastery and Rome or to the great Church Councils; kings and queens are among the supplicants. Every opportunity is seized to make sure that no part of the Order's inheritance shall be forfeited.

The attempt made in 1409 to end the thirty-year-old schism, by assembling a council at Pisa, only resulted in there being three claimants instead of two to the throne of Peter. Vadstena, with a portion of Sweden, accepted the decision of the self-styled oecumenical council and acclaimed the new Pope with enthusiasm.

What would St. Bridget have said to her monastery thus setting aside a pope who had ruled from Rome and had until now been accepted at Vadstena as the rightful successor of St. Peter? Yet in those distracting years who can be blamed for sharing in the ever increasing confusion of ideas—when theologians were openly proclaiming theories unheard of before, as to the authority of councils and as to the pope's relation towards them?

When the Pisan Pope, Alexander V, died only ten months after his election, he was succeeded by Cardinal Cossa under the name of John XXIII, and this Pope, too, was naturally accepted by the Bridgettine Order as Head of the Church. His confirmation of the Rule and Order was sought, and from him came its most important charter, commonly known as *Mare magnum*. It was a gathering together of all that had hitherto been granted, in a definite and orderly form.<sup>33</sup>

But in spite of having received this sign of favour, when John XXIII announced that a General Council would meet the following year (1414) at Constance, Vadstena recognized the expediency, not to say the necessity of sending envoys in

order to obtain the formal ratification of St. Bridget's canonization and of all the privileges granted by various popes. Father Thor Andersson, one of the most distinguished and diplomatic of the Vadstena monks, was chosen to accompany the deputation from Scandinavia, and was at Constance early in 1414.

This is not a history of the Council of Constance except in so far as it is found to affect the Bridgettine Order, so all that need be said concerning John XXIII, who opened it in person, is that after a year he disappears from the scene. Gregory XII, the Roman Pope, deposed at the Council of Pisa, is allowed, after promising his abdication, to summon the Council of Constance in his own name, and then fulfils his promise, and finally the schism ends by the election of the Roman Cardinal Odo Colonna, known henceforth as Martin V.

However, before Pope John's flight from Constance, at one of the opening sessions of the Council, he had confirmed St. Bridget's canonization at the petition of the Scandinavian deputies, after the authenticity of her miracles had been attested by nine chosen theologians.

Though the decision as to the re-affirmation of the canonization is said by Hefele to have been unanimous, it is certain that had not the French delegation arrived late, there would have been decided opposition. For John Gerson and the other representatives of the University of Paris were well known to be opposed to what they considered an excessive number of canonizations during past years, and in particular to show disfavour to Bridget's having been placed on the roll of the saints. Gerson had written a treatise *De Probatione Spirituum*, dealing among other things with this very matter and censuring what he called the blind, extravagant faith of the time in all sorts of alleged divine revelations. It was at the door of St. Bridget and St. Catherine of Siena that he laid the responsibility of the schism, since it was these two who had

worked so strenuously for the return of the Pope from Avignon to Rome.

The Bridgettine envoys in their letters to Vadstena speak of this opposition to the Order shown by France, and, on the other hand, count on the support and help of the King of England. It was during the Council, in February, 1415, that Henry V laid the foundation stone of the monastery at Isleworth — Syon Abbey — and he became henceforth one of the doughtiest and most influential champions of St. Bridget's Order in all its difficulties.<sup>31</sup> Even before the schism ended, together with his brother-in-law, Eric XIII of Sweden, he had prepared a petition in favour of the Order's rights and privileges to be delivered to the "future pope," whoever he might be.

The Council had met to consider many weighty matters and to effect various reforms. One of these concerned the suppression of indulgences granted to particular shrines, and when Martin V was elected, a concordat was made by the Pope with various nations, in which one of the articles dealt with this question.

The system of voting by nations had been adopted at the Council, and this was to the Bridgettines a disaster, for Scandinavia was assigned to the German nation, and its small delegation had little chance of voicing its wishes. When it came to the concordat with Germany, the Swedes had to stand by helplessly and see their much prized *Vincula* grant disappear.

In this matter Syon alone was fortunate, for the concordat made with the English nation left the question of the suppression of indulgences to be decided by the English bishops, who were to report later to the Holy See. The Bishop of London was hardly likely to wish to deprive his diocese of the famous Pardon, and to make things doubly sure, Henry V succeeded two years after Martin's election, in obtaining from the new Pope a ratification of all the Order's privileges

in favour of the monastery he had founded. It was in this same year, 1419, that St. Bridget's canonization was affirmed for the last time.

While Vadstena submitted to the conciliar decree, the monks of a Bridgettine monastery at Lübeck took up a defiant attitude. On August 1 they openly preached about and proclaimed the indulgence, and quoted the authority of Christ Himself as their justification. This act of disobedience and their insistence on the divine origin of all St. Bridget's writings, for which they demanded the same credence as that given to the Gospels, gave the none too friendly Bishop and Chapter of Lübeck a splendid opportunity, and they sent to Rome demanding that the monastery of Maria-Wald be forthwith suppressed.

To the action of the monks of Lübeck we can certainly trace the troubles that came to the Order fifteen years later.

Martin V had summoned a General Council to meet at Basle in 1431. It had not opened when the Pope died. He was succeeded by Eugene IV, and for a time it seemed as if there would be a repetition of the irregularities of the synod of Pisa, for the new Pope distrusted the Council; and when he ordered its transference to Bologna, the members refused to separate, so that once more the Church was threatened with schism. The party that supported the new theories as to the superiority of the Council to the Pope had become a powerful one. Its adherents gained the name of the *Moderni*, while those who still upheld the supreme authority of the Pope and Curia were nicknamed the *Antiqui*.

Vadstena heard of the temper of the assembly at Basle and grew alarmed for the safety of the Order. A perturbed letter reached Syon begging that monks might be sent to defend it. Though no representatives of the English monastery were sent to the Council, assurances went to Vadstena that their King and Council would see to it that the envoys of England defended the Order if attacked.

**One day a writ from the Council arrived at Vadstena which**

caused consternation. The Confessor-General and the Abbess were summoned to appear at Basle and bring with them the documents concerning the revelations of St. Bridget and the indulgence of the Feast of St. Peter's Chains.

The Confessor-General obeyed the summons and took with him a distinguished priest of the Order who later became one of Sweden's bishops. The two went first to Rome, and while there made acquaintance with the Dominican, John Torquemada, Master of the Sacred Palace, the Pope's official canonist and theologian.<sup>35</sup> It was for St. Bridget's Order a happy meeting, since Torquemada's later defence of her writings was to prove the turning point in its affairs.

The Vadstena monks found on arrival at Basle that the Lübeck chapter had carried its suit against the monks of Maria-Wald to the highest tribunal, namely, the Council; that the defendants persistently harped on the divine inspiration of the Vincula grant, and so attention had naturally been drawn to the question of the authenticity of private revelations in general and of St. Bridget's in particular. This was the reason for the peremptory order to Vadstena to produce all the documents concerning the Vincula indulgence.

The General Procurator in Matters of Faith, a delegate of the University of Paris, an official plaintiff in the proceedings instituted against the monks of Lübeck, called on the conciliar Judge in Matters of Faith (Cardinal Cervantes) to consign *St. Bridget's Revelations* to a commission of theologians for examination.

Quite apart from the question of revelations, the temper of the Council grew ever more contentious. St. Bridget, because of her severe words to more than one Pope, has, as said earlier in this book, been hailed by some as a forerunner of Luther. At Basle, she was regarded as far too staunch an upholder of the papacy. All her defenders at this time were on the papal side; all her opponents on the conciliar.

The Commission appointed to examine the *Book of Revelations* had among its numbers some doughty adversaries of

the Bridgettine Order, one of whom, Master Döring, author of a polemical pamphlet, is described in a report issued later at Vadstena, as "princeps et Achilles."

It was in April of the following year that the report of the commissioners was finally issued, stating that a hundred and twenty-three doctrinal errors had been found in St. Bridget's writings. It was made evident that the spiritual favours said to have been showered on the Saint were specially reprobated. Six days later it was decreed that a fresh commission should sit, with the Judge on Matters of Faith at its head, and the following year before any report had been given, an auxiliary commission was appointed by request of the Confessor-General of Vadstena to test the incriminated articles. For this commission a member was chosen by each of the five nations at the Council. Torquemada, the president, recognized as one of the leading theologians of the day, was the representative of the Spanish nation. He clearly and concisely vindicated the hundred and twenty-three articles said to contain errors. Several, he said, had been copied inaccurately, others had been falsified. Other members of this commission examined a certain number of the articles and pronounced favourably.

In March, 1436, came the opinion of the conciliar commission of which Cervantes had been head. He had been succeeded in his office of Judge in Matters of Faith by Cardinal Louis d'Allemand, the most virulent of the *Moderni*, so the Bridgettines cannot have expected much from him.

No reference whatever was made to the writing in defence of St. Bridget and her revelations which must certainly have been delivered to the Council earlier. The report delivered jointly to Cardinal d'Allemand as a so-called *avisamentum*, stated that thirty-eight of the articles, if rightly understood, were not contrary to the Church's doctrine, thus leaving eighty-five errors to be condemned. Thereupon the Cardinal, in his capacity as Judge, forbade the Bridgettines, either openly or secretly, directly or indirectly, to announce in their

monasteries the special indulgences. All must conform to the earlier papal prohibition. The conduct of the Lübeck monks was condemned, but the monastery was not suppressed. So far, the sentence was what all would have expected.

The Judge then went on to speak of the *Book of Revelations* in general, condemning its title and its contents. (*St. Bridget's Revelations* bore the title *Libri Divinarum seu Caelestium Revelationum S. Birgittae.*) Much, he said, in these writings needed to be adjusted and explained by wise and skilled theologians. Therefore no one might expound or promulgate them in their present form. They needed to be brought into harmony with the teaching of the Church and the *avisamentum* mentioned above was to be added as a commentary to all collections of the *Revelations*. The assertions of some of the Bridgettine monks (this refers to those of Lübeck) were condemned, but stress was laid on the fact that the decree in no wise implied an attack on St. Bridget's sanctity, canonization, cult, or Order. Finally came the penalties to be incurred by those who should not conform to the decree.

And so, in spite of Torquemada's vindication, and the contrary judgement of the commission of which he was the head, so far the *Moderni* had won the day. A Bull issued by the Council ratified the adverse verdict, but as a result of later events at Basle the decree was never promulgated and remained a dead letter.

The Swedish Bridgettines returned to Vadstena the same summer, but the entry in the *Diary* recording their arrival shows they did not consider their case hopeless. "The day after John and Paul day," it notes, "the Confessor-General came from the Church Synod at Basle without the affairs of the Order being settled."

Meanwhile at Basle the conflicting religious, political, and personal interests contending for the supremacy, or at least eager to secure an advantage, were reaching a climax. It came in September, 1437, when there was a complete rupture be-

tween the Pope and Council now controlled by the *Moderni*. Negotiations with the Greek Church had been opened, and the question of a meeting place was being discussed. The majority at Basle voted for Avignon, but Pope Eugene confirmed the opinion of the minority; thereupon he was summoned before the Council to answer to many charges.

The Pope's reply was vigorous. He published a Bull announcing that on the arrival of the Greeks, the Council would be transferred to Ferrara. There he would himself preside.

Though the synod at Basle declared the Bull invalid and threatened the Pope with deposition, a deadly blow had been dealt to the adversaries of papal supremacy. Cardinal Cesarini, who had been president of the Council and its guiding spirit in opposition to the Pope, now left Basle and joined him at Ferrara. He was followed by all the cardinals except d'Allemand, and by the majority of the bishops.

The defeat of the *Moderni* had its effect on the Bridgettine Order. Torquemada, who had done so much at Basle to uphold the Pope's authority, was created a cardinal in 1439. And it was he, the Pope's official canonist and theologian, who had defended St. Bridget's orthodoxy when attacked. He had based his defence on the fact of her canonization, which had required for its completion that nothing against faith or morals should be found in her writings. These writings had been examined by theologians of the Pope's appointing, and at the close of the schism the canonization had, as we have seen, been ratified by Martin V.

Vadstena could therefore feel assured that no slur rested on St. Bridget's orthodoxy in the eyes of the Church.<sup>36</sup>

All the same, every precaution must be taken against any such charge being made in the future. So in 1444 two monks left Vadstena for Rome on a threefold errand: to obtain the formal approval of the *Revelations*, the signatures of Torquemada and the theologians who, with him, had examined and vindicated them, and finally the confirmation of the Order.

With this last was bound up the hope of regaining the lost privileges.

The envoys were robbed on the way and one of them returned to Vadstena. But next year the Confessor-General himself set out.

There seems to have been no personal interview with the Pope, though the petitions were presented, but the monks returned to Vadstena with the full authentication of Torquemada's "Defence" and his signature to it.

The "Defence" is printed at the beginning of all the Latin editions of the *Revelations*. It is introduced by what the Cardinal wrote in Rome at the request of the monks. After stating that he has been asked to give witness to the truth that the "Defence" was indeed written by him, he says: ". . . From zeal for the truth and ardour for the honour of St. Bridget, we eagerly and carefully read all the books of the said *Revelations*, and according to the grace given us and the capacity of our scant intellect and the shortness of time, produced these explanations and comments . . . in confirmation whereof we have signed and attested with our great seal the following writing."

The monks also obtained the signatures of other theologians who had sat on the commission with Torquemada, but they did not succeed in regaining the Vincula indulgence. The decree of the Council of Constance still held good. Not until 1484, when Pope Sixtus IV annulled that Council's decrees, was the much prized grant restored to Vadstena by a *motu proprio*.<sup>37</sup>

Cardinal Torquemada, who had shown himself such a true friend of the Order — not only at the Council but also in Rome over affairs connected with the Hospice of St. Bridget — received a horse from Vadstena, in acknowledgement of his services. It was one of the breed for which Vadstena was famous, and in days when horseback was the chief means of transport, would be a gift much valued.



During all the years of stress and anxiety between the councils of Constance and Basle, one monastery of St. Bridget's Order went peacefully on its way. In spite of having come into existence at such a critical moment, Syon Abbey, thanks to the foresight and watchfulness of her royal founder, never forfeited either the Vincula or Mid-Lent indulgence. Over and above the security given by the concordat made with the English nation, King Henry had, as said above, obtained from Martin V, the same year as that in which St. Bridget's canonization was finally re-affirmed, the ratification of all the monastery's privileges. Again, under Henry's successor, a charter of privileges was drawn up in 1425 which was to serve for all the Bridgettine houses that might be founded in England. And when the storm broke at Basle, though Syon's independent position seemed to keep her safe, the precaution was taken of having all privileges confirmed before the verdict of the conciliar commission was given.<sup>38</sup>

And so, as Mid-Lent Sunday and August 1 came round each year, pilgrims came in crowds to the monastery church by the Thames to gain the great "Pardon of Shene." Among these, in 1434, the very year of the troubles at Basle, came, as we read in her "Book," that tireless and intrepid traveller, Margery Kempe.<sup>39</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### St. Bridget's Legacy

ST. BRIDGET'S Order has been seen growing from infancy to its full stature, spreading in different lands, meeting attacks from without, suffering persecution, and even giving martyrs to the Church. We are not told whether any of this tuture history of her Order was foreseen by the foundress, except its spread into other countries than her own, which is expressly mentioned in her revelations.<sup>40</sup> Something must now finally be said of her Order's more intimate life, that it may be seen how her creation is, in its aims and ideals, a real part of herself, and in its own way a picture of its foundress. For founders of religious orders bequeath to their spiritual descendants not merely the actual prescriptions of a rule, but something also of their own personality. This it is, surely, which gives to an order that rather undefinable thing — its particular "spirit."

St. Bridget's Order is not exceptional in this matter, even though she claimed to have received its Rule by quite direct inspiration. The outstanding features of her spirituality are stamped upon it throughout. Of her Order she dreamed, for it she planned, concerning it she constantly prayed and asked for guidance. Her great consolation at the end of her life was to know that her long-cherished hopes of herself tending her new vine would not be frustrated; that she would be reckoned as a nun and the true Mother of Vadstena and that to the church of her first monastery her earthly remains would be taken.

It has to be borne in mind that, just as St. Bridget's writings teach nothing new but rather emphasize truths which in

her day were being forgotten or ignored, so her Rule makes no claim to originality. Nor does it aim at the reform of any particular order. She says she understood Christ's complaint to be that many of the religious orders once pre-eminent in holiness, had fallen away from their high ideals, and that the founding of a new order would rekindle fervour and these ideals would again be set up as a beacon for mankind. Therefore, as it was the re-assertion of the monastic idea in general that St. Bridget felt herself charged with, it is to be expected that her Rule should be something in the nature of a blend, emphasizing now this, now that characteristic of the older orders, but especially such characteristics as made the strongest appeal to her own soul.

In all monastic orders the first place is given to the corporate worship and praise of Almighty God. The monastic life is primarily one of adoration, an offering of the homage of all creation to its Creator by the lips and hearts of those who pledge themselves to this great work.

Though St. Bridget was never a nun, her life was quite certainly one in which adoration had the first place. Her spirit of adoration, of deepest reverence, breathes through her writings. Her *Book of Revelations* begins with the assertion of God's incomprehensible Being, of His creative power, of the mystery of the Trinity in Unity. The thought of God's majesty is never far away. But it is not only a spirit of adoration that is found in her life but the actual practice of it. From the time that her disciplined life at Alvastra began until the day of her death, the Church's liturgical offering of praise in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and in the Canonical Hours was her daily offering also and her spiritual meat and drink. Not content with this, she would recite the Hours of the Trinity daily as an act of private devotion.<sup>41</sup>

Not only was direct adoration of God to be given the first place in her Order, but that adoration was the very reason of its existence; and coupled with this and never separated from it was the praise of Mary, Queen of Heaven.

"I will institute this Religion," we read at the beginning of the Rule — words still retained in their original form at the beginning of the nuns' breviary — "in honour of My most beloved Mother."<sup>42</sup>

Bridget, from the time of her childhood's visions onwards, may be said to have lived in thought and affection with Christ and His Mother. And as the ties that bound her to earth were loosed one by one, the intimacy deepened. Surely the almost overwhelming joy she felt when the revelation of the Rule came to her, making it seem, as she expresses it, as if her heart would burst, was in large measure caused by the realization that here was a way and a new way by which she could give honour to the Queen of heaven. The Order would be Mary's own. It was she who would be at the head of the double monastery, even as after the Ascension she had been "Head and Queen," as the revelation puts it, of the apostles and disciples. She would have a breviary all her own, a new Divine Office in the Church, whose Lessons at Matins were a hitherto unheard-of praise, brought from heaven by one of God's angels.

And so in Bridget's regulations provision is made for an almost constant offering of loving praise and worship; adoration of God, praise of God's Mother. Just as Bridget would rise at midnight to begin her prayer, so in her monasteries each new day would begin with the Divine Office of the monks, sung in their choir, and some two hours later the long procession of nuns would enter their upper choir and would sing for another couple of hours or thereabouts the praise of their "Saviour, their Creator and of St. Mary." The Office of monks and nuns alternated thus all through the day, and the monastery church can seldom have been empty or silent. The place of honour was given by Bridget's directions to the new Office of Our Lady, that all might see "how greatly Christ would have His Mother honoured in her monasteries."

If adoration is to be of the heart it is to be of the body also, and this not merely of the lips. We cannot think of

Bridget ever offering a worship that was hurried or perfunctory. Her genuflections, her prostrations, her habit of lying face down with arms outstretched, expressly mentioned by her daughter, show that she gave her whole being its share in her work of adoring God. And so in the directions for the choir service, the ritual to be observed is described with detailed care — the beautiful, unhurried manners of the court of heaven which are the glory of monastic worship. There is to be nothing slovenly and nothing that is merely individual; all are to be "as angels," we read, "kneeling together, rising and inclining together, all after one form." Even the depth of the inclination is indicated and is in itself a lesson in reverence.

The recognition of God's absolute sovereignty and right to adoration implies the acknowledgement by the creature of its own nothingness. Profound humility has been seen as one of Bridget's most marked characteristics. We recall her confusion when praised, her joy not only in self-condemnation but in the rebukes of others, and her willingness at all times to submit her judgement. The virtue of humility is continually stressed both in her Rule and in her teaching. Here Benedictine influence is evident, for the Confessor-General is told to expound the degrees of humility as taught in the Rule of St. Benedict, so that Mary's daughters may learn the foundation of those virtues on which their spiritual edifice will stand firm.

Even in the worship in choir there is room for humility, and here we find another influence at work. The religious hidden behind their grilles are offering their adoration to God in company with the hosts of heaven by whom alone they can be seen, but their chant as it rises from the choir can be heard by earthly ears. And so let it be serious, simple, uniform, and above all humble, as is the chant of the Carthusians. For if singing is done to please men, it is odious to God, says Bridget, but if it is humble and devout it edifies hearers and gives glory to God.

This note of something like austerity is struck again in the forbidding of organ accompaniment. We read: "Though it is good and pleasing to hear organs and in no way contrary to good discipline, yet in My Mother's monastery there shall never be any such. Here must be gravity of chant, purity of mind, the cultivation of silence . . . and above all, true humility and prompt obedience."

It is not, it may be said in passing, the actual chant of the Carthusian Order that is here enjoined, but the mode of its execution. The music found in the Bridgettine Office is in parts original — as already said, the work of Master Peter of Skeninge — but for the most part, his adaptation of the early chant of the Church as found in different uses.

Before leaving the subject of the nuns' life of prayer, we may mention the privilege granted to the Order of having the Blessed Sacrament exposed in a crystal pyx, which no doubt is the earliest instance of a direction for Exposition as a part of devotional life. St. Bridget's love for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was intense, her Holy Communions were frequent. She could not bequeath to her daughters the visions which at times were her privilege during Mass or when at prayer; these were God's gift and at His disposal alone. But she could help to keep keen and constant a spiritual hunger and thirst for God, and this practice of allowing the religious to gaze daily at their Lord under the sacramental veils was specially intended to awake or sustain their longing to possess Him. "That seeing Me daily under another form," as we read in the revelation, "they may more fervently desire Me."

The express permission of authority for this privilege was, of course, required.

Love of the hiddenness and silence which would have been Bridget's by choice, finds its counterpart in her Rule in the careful provision for enclosure not only in the case of the nuns but also in that of the monks. A writer on religious rules has remarked on the number of times directions as to enclosure are mentioned in the Constitutions of the Bridget-

tine Order. The same writer speaks also of the extreme strictness of the poverty enjoined, and this reflects another characteristic of the foundress which has already been touched on more than once.<sup>43</sup>

St. Bridget's spirit of poverty was Franciscan in its ardour, and not content with denying herself the power of spending money for her own use, we have seen her strip herself even of the power of bestowing alms freely and according to her own judgement. Poverty as she practised it was something more than detachment; something positive rather than merely negative. Yet, though the influence of St. Francis is thus felt in her teaching as in her practice, it was no mendicant order that she founded. A Swedish writer says in his work on the Bridgettine Order: "St. Bridget's Rule forbade first and foremost the individual right of property in the most authoritative terms . . . but on the other hand . . . in nowise aimed at forming any new mendicant order, which would indeed have been quite incompatible with the whole Bridgettine organization. The monastery's right to possess property, both real and personal, is expressly acknowledged."<sup>44</sup>

However, the Rule is exceedingly strict as to the sources of such possessions. No matter how great the necessity, nothing may be received while any doubt remains as to its having been in the first instance lawfully acquired. Extreme simplicity also is insisted on in the monastic buildings, with the warning that should these be stately it will be reckoned as robbery of the poor of Christ.

In the after history of the Order there is no evidence of relaxation of observance in this matter. It is a temptation towards monastic life, to see in the careful arrangements made for things temporal, evidenced by account books, proof of a falling away from the simplicity and poverty St. Bridget had so tirelessly taught. Certainly to her English monastery some historical writers have been none too kind in regard to such matters. The large income received yearly from the

lands bestowed on Syon by a generous royal founder, inventories reproduced which suggest a well-appointed table, have made it seem to readers who know nothing of St. Bridget's Rule as if the monks and nuns lived in luxury. But here, as at Vadstena, estates were scattered over the land, and officials were needed to gather in rents and oversee affairs which strictly enclosed religious could control in no other way. A steward lived in the outer court of the monastery and royal visitors were often entertained. The linen and silver mentioned in the inventories were assuredly not for the use of the monastic refectories. The Abbess was required by her Rule to make a strict reckoning of the necessary expenditure for the coming year and to give all superfluous income to the poor. It must also not be forgotten that it was forbidden to accept a dowry from anyone entering the monastery when it had been sufficiently endowed at the time of its founding, and that the full number of religious was eighty-five.

No doubt, in certain details — indeed it seems inevitable — life changed to some extent in the course of years. Yet Syon was noted at the time of its suppression for its strict observance, and not the most carping critic was able to bring evidence of laxity or luxury.<sup>45</sup>

There is no provision in the Rule for the religious to live by the work of their hands; no mention, either in the original Rule or in the "Additions," as they were called — drawn up by the Cistercian Prior Peter, who was St. Bridget's helper during so many years — of the field of labour which forms such an important part of St. Bernard's plan. The strict enclosure of the monks would in any case have made extensive land cultivation impossible. The thought seems to have been to provide for monks and nuns alike a life of seclusion and peace; a mountain top where they would be removed from the noise and glare of the world though never unmindful of its needs and sorrows; from which intercession for living and dead would rise to heaven day and night.

The life of the priests was quite definitely to be one de-

voted to prayer and study. For this purpose they were to have as many books as they might need. The monastery of Vadstena had one of the finest libraries in the North, and Syon Abbey one of the finest in England at the time of its suppression. Of the Bridgettine monks of Scandinavia a Norwegian historian, P. A. Munch, says: "The Vadstena Order exercised a great influence both on the manners and language of the North, and formed in a certain sense an idiom that might fitly be called *lingua brigittana*. It is Swedish mixed with Danish or Norwegian phraseology according to the land for which it was intended. It is found in many manuscripts of the fifteenth century, at which period nearly all Norwegian documents bear traces of this Swedish monastic language."

Among the English Bridgettine monks distinguished for their learning, two names stand out prominently in the fifteenth century.

Richard Reynolds is called "Blessed" by the Church, for he was martyred at Tyburn in 1535 for denying the right of Henry VIII to assume the title of Supreme Head of the Church in England. Reynolds was already a priest and a distinguished scholar before he joined the Bridgettine Order. A Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, he had been appointed preacher to the University because of his eloquence. Later it was said of him that he was not only noted for his holiness of life but also for his learning, being the most learned monk in England, with knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Nearly a hundred books in the Syon Library were inscribed with his name.

A contemporary of Richard Reynolds was Richard Whytford, and both alike were close friends of St. Thomas More. Whytford spent long, quiet years in the cloister in prayer, study, and writing. A number of books came from his pen, signed usually, "The Wretch of Syon." The beautiful devotion called "The Jesus Psalter" is his, and he made an outstanding translation into English of the *Imitation of Christ*.

The first edition of this remarkable work (*circa* 1530) has, quite recently, through the scholarship and research of the Rev. Dr. Edward Klein, been reprinted, for the first time since the sixteenth century, and published in America.

St. Bridget valued learning as a help to prayer and to a deeper knowledge of self and of God, and so, also, a help to humility and adoration. She wished above all, that the priests of her Order should study in order to become apostles, giving the fruit of their reading, their prayer, and their contemplation to souls in words easily understood—the simple, fervent preaching of the first friars. It was preaching such as this, simple and direct, that had gained for Bridget in early childhood that devotion to the Passion which never left her.

The eight lay brothers of St. Bridget's Rule were admitted as in other orders to do manual work necessary in house and garden, and so set the priests free for their choir duties and studies. In the case of the nuns, the Rule prescribes that their days are to be divided, as were those of the Mother of God, between the praise of God with their lips and work for God with their hands. Reading, study, and the work of illuminating manuscripts, some of which, now scattered over the libraries of Europe, may be seen to-day, occupied hours left over from those devoted to the Divine Office, but humble manual work was the definite duty of a part of each day, work such as Bridget delighted to do in imitation of that done long ago at Nazareth.

There is no need to say more than has been said in earlier chapters concerning St. Bridget's spirit of penance. Hers was no mere resignation to suffering; it was rather a running to embrace it. If in her Rule she did not demand the extremes of asceticism she herself practised and delighted in, she yet pointed out to her religious no other way than that of the cross. The Rule is indeed everywhere stamped with the cross. The Order bears the name of the divine Victim under His title of Saviour; even the habit worn is to be a constant

reminder of the Passion. Bridget has no wish to hide the fact that the way to perfection is a steep, uphill climb. On the contrary, she requires that none shall be admitted to her Order until its "hardness and sharpness" have been shown them and they are prepared willingly to embrace the life with all that it involves. Yet with the austerity there is mingled a remarkable discretion. In renewing dimmed ideals of monastic perfection there is no trace of the harshness that is sometimes seen in reformers. This ardent soul, whose own mortification of the flesh could only be restrained by the still harder mortification of the will imposed by obedience, never, in prescribing for others, loses her sense of proportion. True discretion may be a part of humility, we read; fasting is good but not the highest good, which is charity. This, says St. Bridget, Christ Himself taught her. And so the abbess is given a wide power of dispensation which she is to exercise in case of feeble health, old age, sudden or unwontedly hard labour; but there must be a just cause, and those dispensed must accept the relaxation of the Rule in the spirit of obedience. In the consideration to be shown to the sick there is something of the tenderness of the Saviour whose name the Order bears.

But sickness and necessary dispensation apart, does this outline of St. Bridget's ideals and rules for her Order leave on the minds of readers an impression of almost unrelieved austerity, even of gloom? Possibly; one may say almost certainly in the case of those who have no personal knowledge of enclosed, contemplative orders. To complete the picture, something must be added which cannot be stated in terms of a religious rule but rather is its outcome, and which to omit would be unfair, even disastrous, since it was to the home at Nazareth St. Bridget looked to find the model for her religious family.

The word penance bears a sinister sound to many ears; silence suggests perhaps a depressing taciturnity; doesn't humility, constantly stressed, come dangerously near to an

inferiority complex? Enclosure surely means imprisonment not only of bodies but also of minds and souls — something narrowing if not degrading? Yet those who go to the grate of the Bridgettine cloister commonly say that the glimpse they get of happy family life, the evident good health, peace, joy, and even gaiety of those with whom they converse, make an impression which remains. St. Bridget's "laughing face" has its reflection in her monasteries.

What is the explanation of this apparent contradiction?

It is not simply because they belonged to the Latin races that certain saints devoted to the practice of penance and poverty were noted for their joyousness; St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa for the freshness of their laughter, St. Francis and St. Dominic for their song as they tramped the highroads. Our English martyrs of the sixteenth century, faced with a ghastly death, showed the same lightheartedness. It was the Bridgettine monk, Blessed Richard Reynolds of Syon, of whom an eye-witness of his martyrdom said: "When he put his neck within the murderous halter, he seemed rather to put on a regal chain than an instrument of death, such was the alacrity manifested on his countenance."<sup>46</sup> A few weeks later, St. Thomas More mounted the scaffold with a jest.

Nor can we regard this joy only as a token of rare sanctity, although the instances just given are its finest expression. It is neither peculiar to the saints nor to this or that individual. It is a heritage come down through the centuries that have passed since the cross was raised on Calvary, something which belongs of right to those who, having nothing, yet possess all things. It is the paradox of losing life to find it and of the meek who possess the earth.

## POSTSCRIPT

St. Bridget has a bequest for others besides her cloistered daughters. The claim was made at the outset of this book that she could be an inspiration and example to those in various walks of life because of her own faithful fulfilment of duties that are those of the majority of mankind. It was not because of the unusual things found so abundantly in her life that she was declared eminent in sanctity, though these marvels, joined as they were to utter humility, were powerful signs that her life was pleasing to God. Each call as it came was obeyed, whether it was a call to domestic affairs, to charity towards her neighbour or, later, to a painful apostolate. She had struggles as have all the saints; she had to strive with her pride, with her naturally masterful will, with her spirit of independence. She gained her victory by an entire self-surrender.

Our times, so different from hers in almost every respect, are yet like them in one point: the powers of evil are ever active. If their attacks take varying forms, they are always directed to one end — the destruction of goodness and truth among the children of men.

As a challenge flung to these malign forces by those who watch to-day at the gates of the city, there is a vigorous Christian activity, whether called Catholic Action or by some other name, which is bringing out what is best and most self-sacrificing among the laity. Were St. Bridget alive to-day she would assuredly have no need to urge forward the Chief Pastor of the Church and his under-shepherds; no need to exhort them to be faithful to their charge, for she would see them going before the flock, guarding it in all danger, helping it in all difficulties. But can we not see her among the most loyal, steadfast, and eager of their followers, praying for the peace of the nations, working for the reign of justice? Self-surrender, unflinching courage, and, above all, charity; these are

the qualities needed in every conflict with the powers of darkness, in every struggle to raise aloft the standard of Christ. All were found in the woman whom her contemporaries described as *fortis et intrepida*.

And to those who strive for truth and justice she can promise a prize — their guevdon even while they fight. It is the same as was her own, and the only one she ever coveted: a blessing from Hands that bear the marks of wounds.

## Notes and References

The most important and most frequent references in this book are to the *Process of St. Bridget's Canonization*. The edition used is one brought out within recent years in Sweden by Dr. Isak Collijn, Librarian of the Royal Library, Stockholm. He calls his work: *Acta et Processus Canonizationis Beate Birgittæ*. With the *Process* is bound up the earliest *Life of St. Bridget* written a few months after her death by her two confessors, as their sworn testimony. This edition is the result of long research and careful comparison of the various codices extant, two of which had never before been made use of. The *Vita b. Brigide* appears twice. It is both at the beginning and at the end of the *Process* proper, the first being according to the codex hitherto used, the second, and in Dr. Collijn's opinion the most valuable because the fullest, following two codices used for the first time. The references found in this book to the *Vita* are to these last two codices. The spelling throughout is a reproduction of the original, and in the case of some of the proper names is unusual. We find "Katherina" and "Alfonsus," for instance, instead of the usual Latin forms of these names, and in spite of the fact that St. Bridget's name in the title appears in the accepted Latin form — her name in Swedish being Birgitta — in the various depositions in the *Process* it is always "Brigida." I have followed the spelling in these references as found. The folios referred to are those from the codex as given by Dr. Collijn in the margin of his work.

## PART I

## CHAPTER I. THE CHILD

1. *Vita b. Brigide Prioris Petri et Magistri Petri*; Cod. olim S. Laurentii in Panisperna, f. 2 r.
2. *Ibid.*, f. 1 v.
3. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, super art. 2, f. 200 v.
4. Although the name of St. Bridget's mother is given in the *Process* as Sigrid or Sigretis, it seems to be an established fact that Sigrid was the wife, not the daughter, of Benedict Magnusson and that the daughter's name was Ingeborg. The correction is noted in the text as printed by Dr. Collijn.
5. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 2, 201 r.
6. *Ibid.*, 29, 213 r. He states that he heard of the vision from Master Mathias, Canon of Linköping. St. Bridget's first confessor.
7. *Vita b. Brigide*, 1 v.
8. *Ibid.*, 2 r., 2 v.

## CHAPTER II. THE WIFE

9. *Svensk Litteratur — Historia* by H. Schück and K. Wurlburg, p. 176.
10. *Svenska Folkets Saga Haldar* by A. A. Azelius, IV, 176.
11. *Proc. Can. dep. Katherinae*, sup. art. 4, 125 r.
12. These details of the ceremonial — traces of which are still seen at peasant weddings in Sweden to-day — are to be found in Prof. Hammerich's book: *Den Helligste Birgitta og Kirken i Norden*, footnotes to pp. 47, 51, in which the author quotes old chronicles; also they are given by Nordstrom, author of a history of Swedish social institutions. Countess de Flavigny, in her *Vie de Ste. Brigitte de Suède*, and other writers after her, state that Ulf came to fetch his bride, possibly confusing the betrothal with the marriage ceremonies.
13. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 5, f. 125 r.
14. *Vita b. Brigide*, f. 3 v.
15. *Revelationes*, VI, 52. (All references to St. Bridget's Revelations are to the Latin edition.)
16. *Revelationes Extravagantes*, 56 (a collection of short revelations printed at the end of the last book of the Revelations proper); *Proc. Can.*, art. 16; ff. 7 r., 7 v.; *dep. Pr. Pet.*, f. 205 r.; *dep. Kath.*, f. 12 v.
17. *Sveriges Medeltid* by H. Hildebrand, II, 3; *Revel. Extrav.*, 53; *dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 8, f. 203 r.
18. *Vita b. Brig.*, 3 r.
19. *Proc. Can.*, art. 20, 8 r.; *dep. Kath.*, 129 v.
20. It has sometimes been stated that St. Bridget was the foundress of a military Order. The author of *Histoire des Ordres monastiques religieux et militaires* (Paris: 1715), gives the names of Hermant and Schoonbeck as writers who have declared that such an Order was founded by St. Bridget in 1366, and received the approbation of Pope Urban V. They even describe the insignia of the supposed Knights, who are said to have followed the Rule of St. Augustine. However, the author of the first work quoted is of opinion that the Order never existed, since St. Bridget was not in Sweden in 1366, and having by then disposed of her fortune, could not have assigned it to the Order as stated. Nor is there any allusion to such a creation in the Bull of Canonization. I have seen within recent years a brochure, written by a Swede, describing the military Order as if it were a fact of history, but enquiries sent to Swedish scholars brought the reply that St. Bridget's military Order was a myth.
21. *Vita b. Brig.*, 3 v.; *Revel. Extrav.*, 56.
22. See *Sveriges Historia* by Emil Hildebrand, II, 193; and F. Hammerich, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

## CHAPTER III. THE MOTHER

23. *Vita abbreviata S. Birgittæ* (included in all the Latin editions of the *Revelations*. The author is uncertain).
24. *Vita b. Brig.*, f. 3 r.
25. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 20, 129 v.
26. *Revel. Extrav.*, 56.
27. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 29, f. 132 v.
28. *De Vita Nicolai*, published in the original Latin in "Antievarisk Tidskrift for Sverige," Part V, 316. The prophecy concerning Nicholas is also alluded to in the *Diarium Vastenense* or Chronicle of St. Bridget's first



monastery, in the notice of Bp. Nicholas Hermansson's death, which seems to show it was a tradition. Yet among the various instances given in the Process of Canonization concerning St. Bridget's power of seeing future events, there is no mention of her conversation with Nicholas, although when the evidence was being collected, he was still alive and most active in furthering her Cause.

29. The chronicle referred to is one written by Margaret Clausdotter, tenth Abbess of Vadstena (1473-1486) and published at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Erik Benzelius, Jr., under the title: *Margareta Nicolai Filiae Abbatissae Vadstencensis de Birgitta Chronicon*.

30. *Vita sine Legenda D. Catharinae, Filiae S. Birgittae de Regno Sueviae*, printed at the end of the Latin editions of St. Bridget's Revelations, and written in the early part of the fifteenth century by Ulf Biggeresson, monk of Vadstena.

31. *Diplom. Succ.*, V an., No. 3558.

32. *Vita b. Brig.*, 3 r.

#### CHAPTER IV. THE QUEEN'S LADY-IN-WAITING

33. See Note 30 to Chap. III, Part II, of this work.

34. *Revis.*, VIII, Chap. 3. 4.

35. *Ibid.*, Chap. 11.

#### CHAPTER V. THE WIDOW

36. *Vita b. Brig.*, 1 r.

37. In the *Consuetudines* of the Canons of Hereford Cathedral, it is stated that for a Canon to go abroad to the tomb of St. Denis seven weeks' leave of absence was considered legal; sixteen weeks were allowed for the pilgrimage to Rome or Compostela and a year for Jerusalem.

38. *Adami gesta pontificum Hammaburgensium*, Hanover, 1876, II, 82.

39. *Proc. Can.*, art. 13. f. 6 v.

40. *Ibid.*, *dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 15, 205 r., *Revel. Extrav.*, 72.

41. *The Way of St. James* by Georgiana Goddard King.

42. *Epistola Solitarii*, cap. 3. This is the name given to the Preface written by Alfonso, former Bishop of Jaen, to Book VIII of St. Bridget's Revelations.

43. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 56.

44. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 13, 126 v.

45. *Revis.*, IV, 103, 104, 105.

46. This interesting manuscript, says Margaret Howitt, was the subject of an article which appeared in *The Universe*, May 4, 1928. It was called: "A Pope's First Tourist Guide."

47. *Revis.*, VI, 36, *Declaratio* (end of chapter).

48. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 13, 203 v., *Revel. Extrav.*, 92.

49. *Ibid.*, *Kath.*, sup. art. 4, 125 v.

50. *Ibid.*, *dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 5, 202 v.

51. *Studier i Vadstenas Klosters och Birgittinordens Historia* by Torvald Höjer, p. 31; trans. by M. Howitt.

#### CHAPTER VI. THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

52. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 5, 202 v.

53. From the *Defensorium* of Cardinal Torquemada which prefaces the Latin edition of St. Bridget's Revelations; see also *Vita b. Brigide*, f. 4 r.

54. *Revelations*, I, 2.

55. *Bulla canonizationis; dep. Kath.*, 126 r.

56. *Vita b. Brigide*, cod. olim S. Laurentii in Panisperna, 4 v.

57. *Proc. Can.*, 8th, 9th, 10th witnesses at Vadstena, 26 v.

58. *Dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 17, 206 r.

59. *Revis.*, Bk. I, Chap. 2.

60. *Dep. Pr. Pet.*, f. 206 r.

61. *Proc. Can.*, 25 v.

62. *Dep. Pr. Pet.*, 208 r., 5 m.

63. *Vita b. Brigide*, 7 v.

64. *Dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 18, 206 r.

65. *Ibid.*, sup. art. 17, 206 r.

66. *Ibid.*, 214 r.

#### CHAPTER VII. THE NEW VINEYARD

67. The exact date is not given but is assumed from events following St. Bridget's appearance at Court—events belonging to history.

68. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 29, 213 v.

69. *Ibid.*, 215 v. Although the Process makes the child who asked the last question the younger son of Magnus, namely Håkan, who was already King of Norway, this is obviously a copyist's error and an example of the inaccuracies found in medieval history. St. Bridget's prophecy was fulfilled to the letter in regard to Eric, the elder of the two boys, since he was later continually at strife with his father, certainly no joy to his mother, and died suddenly with his wife and children, probably as the result of an epidemic.

70. This seems to be a clear indication of place. The revelation of the Rule is commonly said to belong to the time of retirement at Alvastra. But Margaret Howitt, after a most careful study of the history of the time, the movements of King Magnus, and the deed of gift he made to the future monastery, was convinced that the revelation came to St. Bridget in Norway when she was one of the royal household, and this view I have adopted as having so much more to support it than the opinion expressed above as to Alvastra. It may be noted, too, that in her description of the way in which the revelation came to her, quoted later on in this chapter, St. Bridget speaks of her making it known "after several days" to Prior Peter, whom she calls "the friend of God," and this points to her not being at the time at Alvastra.

71. The *Regula Sabatoris* follows Book VIII of St. Bridget's Revelations. It is prefaced by Alfonso's Prologue of three chapters and is itself composed of thirty-one chapters. The actual Rule ends with Chapter 27. The remaining chapters deal with the confirmation to be sought from the Pope and with promises as to the future of the Order.

72. The quotations from the Rule here given are taken from the fifteenth century English translation as used in the Monastery of Syon.

73. At Fontevault the Rule followed was that of St. Benedict. The abess (as in the Bridgettine Order) represented the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, after the Ascension of our Lord, was, as St. Bridget's Rule puts it, "Head and Queen" of the apostles and disciples. In the church of this abbey both King Henry II of England and King Richard Coeur de Lion were buried. The Order lasted until the time of the French Revolution.

74. See *Unions Perioden* of the History by the Norwegian, P. Munch, pp. 452, 454, 455.  
 75. *Revel. Extrav.*, 26.  
 76. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 19, 128 v.; *dep. Pr. Pet.*, 207 v.; *Revs.*, IV, 122, *Alditto*.  
 77. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 22, 211 r.  
 78. *Ibid.*, art. 30, 218 r.  
 79. *Vita b. Brig.*, 9 v.

## CHAPTER VIII. THE WAY OF FAITH

80. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, f. 210 r.  
 81. *Revel. Extrav.*, 26.  
 82. *Regula S. Salvatoris*, cap. 26; *Revel. Extrav.*, 2.  
 83. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 5, 262 r.  
 84. *Reg. S. Salvatoris*, cap. 30.  
 85. It has often been said that St. Bridget went to Rome in 1346, no doubt because of what Prior Peter says in the Notes he adds to some of the *Revelations*. In *Revel. Extrav.*, 8, he is quite precise in stating her age when she left Sweden and the length of time she was in Rome before she saw Pope and Emperor together. Yet, worked out, one finds the dates do not tally. The date of the meeting of Pope and Emperor belongs to history: 1368. Fifteen years before this (the number given by Peter) would make St. Bridget's arrival in Rome after the jubilee year in which we know she took part. It is Peter who says it was two years after she went to Alvastra that she was told to go to Rome. 1346 is the date given in the Vadstena Diary, showing it was a tradition. The reasons for adopting the date 1349 are, briefly, two. One is the testimony of the three monks of Alvastra that St. Bridget spent four years there, and the second, and surely convincing one, is given by the Countess de Flavigny in a footnote to p. 228 of her work *Ste. Brigitte de Suède*. Quoting cod. 86 of Upsala Library, she says that, according to the *passport*, St. Bridget arrived in Rome "anno videlicet proximo jubilee," that is, 1349.  
 86. *Revs.*, VI, 63.  
 87. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 29, 214 v., 10 m.  
 88. *Prologus editus per Venerabilem Virum Matthiam de Suecia* (it prefaces the Latin editions of St. Bridget's *Revelations*).  
 89. *Sveriges Historia* by Hildebrand, II, 273.  
 90. *Revs.*, VII, 39; VIII, 43; IV, 37.  
 91. *Den Hellige Birgittas Lif och Skrifter* by R. Steffen, p. XV. In the Preface to an edition of the Bridgettine Breviary published in 1697, the then Confessor-General of Altonmünster, Simon Hörmann, states that St. Bridget before leaving Sweden, carried out all the directions received as to founding her monastery at Vadstena, introducing sixty nuns and twenty-five monks. Hörmann says he has this from the Chronicles of the Friars Minor by Luke Wadding, who, in his turn, followed the Chronicle of Marianus Florentius. No doubt, this statement of Wadding's is responsible for that of many writers since, who say St. Bridget left her monastery all in order (some even say, ruled it). It seems strange that Hörmann did not know of the *Vadstena Diary* which speaks of the site of the monastery containing only ruins in 1367, cleared away by Bridget's directions — she was then in Rome — so that the building of her monastery could be begun. See Part II, Chapter V, of this work, and the reference. But besides this,

there is the express statement in the Process that St. Bridget founded her monastery "after she came to Rome." (See art. 21, and *dep. Pr. Pet.*, 210 v.) How could it be possible for her to have a monastery with sixty nuns and twenty-five monks, when she had not received the papal confirmation of the Rule and Order she was told to seek and obtain? See also: *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 24.

92. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 27. There is nothing to indicate a definite time as to this revelation. It might be that it was after St. Bridget went to Rome that she heard of the destruction of the buildings, but I have followed Margaret Howitt, who in her turn followed R. Steffen, the writer quoted above, who speaks of the anger of Magnus and the defection of the bishops as having taken place while the Saint was still in Sweden, though he gives no reference. The point is not important in itself. What is important is that the buildings were destroyed and the whole enterprise had to be begun over again.

93. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 5, 262 v., 2 m.

## PART II

## CHAPTER I. THE HOLY YEAR OF 1350

1. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, 215 v.; Prior Peter here states that he remained in Sweden some time after St. Bridget left for Rome.  
 2. The Life of Master Peter from which this quotation is taken, forms part of Cod. Harl., 612, Brit. Museum, a codex which once belonged to Syon Abbey. It is called *Vita Petri Olavi*. It was very likely written with a view to his possible canonization.  
 3. For the description of Rome as St. Bridget found it, see *Röm*, by H. Schück (Stockholm: 1862-1867). Also *Cronica di Matteo Villani, libro primo*, p. 43, a copy of which is in the Bodleian Library.  
 4. *Muratorii Antiqu.*, Ital. III, 482 et seq.  
 5. *Revs.*, Bk. IV, Chap. 10.  
 6. *Proc. Can. dep. Ingeburgis Eric*, f. 25 r.  
 7. *Revs.*, VI, 96.  
 8. *Reg. S. Salv.*, Cap. 5. "Sorores omni die ob reverentiam Matris mee Virginis Mariæ cantabunt solemniter Horas ipsius cum tribus lectionibus, tam festis quam privatis diebus." In the Rule as confirmed by the Church, the above is put in the third person, but is printed in the original form at the beginning of the breviary.  
 9. *Prologus in Sermonem Angelicam de Excellentia Virginis Mariæ*. The Angelic Discourse, as it has been called, has been translated into English together with certain prayers of St. Bridget by Dom Ernest Graf, O.S.B. (*Revelations and Prayers of St. Bridget of Sweden*, Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1928).  
 10. The Bridgettine *Antiphonarium* shows evident traces of Cistercian influence. St. Bridget was, of course, accustomed to the Offices at Alvastra Abbey. Again, certain settings are those found in the Dominican rite. It was lately pointed out to me that the psalms at Compline in the Bridgettine breviary are those also found in the Little Office of Our Lady in the Dominican rite and nowhere else. Master Peter, who was responsible for the music and also for the distribution of the psalms through the days of the week, came from Skeninge where there was a Dominican House of

Studies. The praise of Master Peter's work can be read in *Revelationes Extravagantes*, 113 and 114.

CHAPTER II. THE PROMISED HELPER

11. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, 207 r., 5 m.
12. See *Days near Rome* by Augustus Haec, II, pp. 22, 23.
13. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 97.
14. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, 220 r. *Revel. Extrav.*, 105.
15. The revelation concerning St. Dominic is in *Revs.*, III, 17, but there is nothing in it to indicate time or place.
16. *Vita D. Catharinae*, from which the contents of this chapter are almost wholly taken. The Life was written by Ulf Birgersson, a monk of Vadstena, and can be found at the end of most of the Latin editions of the Revelations as well as in manuscript in both Stockholm and the British Museum (cod. Harl., 612).
17. Ulf Birgersson (St. Katherine's biographer) says it was five years after St. Bridget left for Rome that Katherine felt she must follow her there. He supposes Bridget left Sweden immediately after her husband's death, but as already said, it was not till the end of 1349 that she arrived in Rome, that is some five years after she became a widow. See Part I, Chap. VIII.
18. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 29, f. 133 r. See also *Studier i Vadstena Klosters och Birgittinordens Historia* by Torvald Höjer, p. 273 (footnote).
19. The majority of St. Bridget's biographers seem to be convinced that the meeting between the Saint and her daughter took place at Farfa. The point is left uncertain in *Acta Sanctorum*, Tom. IV, 1780, a Jacobo Buco (and others); *De Birgitta*, p. 432, par. 264; also p. 438, par. 268; also *De Cath. Suecia*, Tom. III, Antwerp, 1668, pp. 507, 508. But James de la Bue is strongly inclined to Farfa and supposes the name *Parpensis*, given by Ulf in his mention of the monastery at Bologna, is his faulty rendering of Farfa, a place he knew only by hearsay. Countess de Flavigny — author of *Ste. Brigitte de Suède* and a most painstaking historian — makes no reference whatever to any journey to Bologna undertaken by St. Bridget, only of the one to Farfa, at which place she describes the meeting. This author places the revelation about St. Dominic in connection with a reform of a Dominican house in Sweden which she asserts St. Bridget worked before she left her native land. There is an account in the *Process* of a Dominican Provincial named Assor who, by St. Bridget's counsel, was led to stricter observance (see *dep. Kath.*, f. 134 r.) and it may be to this incident the French writer refers. In regard to Farfa she is obliged to admit that the Abbot's friendly reception of Katherine is a mystery.
- Again: Margaret Howitt, following in part a German biography (later translated into French) written by a nun of the convent of Perpetual Adoration, Mainz (1875), and based, its author asserts, on old documents, says that St. Bridget reformed the Dominican Priory at Bologna, but later than Farfa Abbey, and that Katherine was already in Italy and accompanied her mother to Bologna. In order to make sure of this supposed reform at Bologna, the Prior of the still existing Dominican house was written to and gave the answer quoted in this chapter. His assurance that some monastery (name now unknown) at Bologna was reformed by St. Bridget seems to fit in with the abbot's gracious reception of Katherine, as told by her early biographer. Why should not *Parpensis*, whether faulty or correct, be the name of the monas-

tery at Bologna? Those interested in the question must form their own opinion as to the evidence. To me it seems clear that St. Bridget was found by her daughter at Bologna.

20. *Revs.*, Bk. VI, Chap. 118.
  21. *Proc. Can. dep. Golticiae de Urstinis*, sup. art. 24, 194 r.
- CHAPTER III. ST. BRIDGET AND HER FRIENDS
22. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 18, 206 v.
  23. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 103.
  24. *Revs.*, VI, 46.
  25. *Diarium Vasstenense*, an. 1396; *dep. Magni Petri*, sup. art. 15. If, as the *Diary* says, Magnus Persson went to Rome with St. Bridget, he must at some time have gone back to Sweden, since he says he lived with her eighteen years. He was certainly with her during her last years and present at her death. Magnus Persson has been called Magnus of Eka, as in Countess de Flavigny's work, and also in Dr. Collippi's Index to his edition of the *Process*. Margaret Howitt says it is a confusion between two families; that the Magnus of the *Process* had as coat of arms three lilies shunting on a shield, while that of the Eka family had a bend sinister. I should hesitate to differ from Dr. Collippi.
  26. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 19, 128 v.
  27. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 112.
  28. *Proc. Can. dep. Alfonsi olim episcopi Giennensis*, sup. art. 3, 149 v.
  29. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 98.
  30. P. Munch, the Norwegian historian, maintains that the story of Eric's having been poisoned by his mother and at his father's instigation, was a calumny invented by the Swedish nobles who were bitter enemies of King Magnus. The story has come down through history and is repeated today. See, for instance, the article on Sweden in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. The Swedish Rhymed Chronicle openly stated that Queen Blanche herself administered the poison, but the Danish Chronicle, belonging to about the same time, gives no intimation of such a crime. Its wording rather points to some pestilential sickness being the cause of these deaths. Smallpox is known to have been raging in Sweden in the year after Eric's death.
  31. *Revs.*, VI, 27.
  32. *Ibid.*, I, 3. *Declaratio; Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 29, 133 r.
  33. *Proc. Can. dep. Magni Petri*, 113 v.; *Revel. Extrav.*, 81.
  34. *The Book of Margery Kempe, a Modern Version* by W. Butler-Bowdor (1936), Chap. 38, pp. 140, 141.
  35. *Revs.*, IV, 46.
  36. *Ibid.*, IV, 74.
  37. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, art. 34, 223 v.; *dep. Magn. Pet.*, 112 v.
  38. *Ibid. dep. Kath.*, art. 20, 129 v.
  39. *Revel. Extrav.*, 107.
  40. *Proc. Can. dep. Franciscæ Pappazaræ*, sup. art. 3, 188 r.; art. 8, 188 v. See *Minnen och Märken i Rom* by C. Bildt, p. 5.
  41. *Vita D. Catharinae*, Chaps. XI and XII.
  42. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 8.
  43. *Revs.*, VI, 74.

## CHAPTER IV. HER DAILY LIFE.

44. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 5, 123 v.  
 45. *Revel. Extrav.*, 63; *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 15, 127 v.  
 46. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 8, 126 v.  
 47. *Ibid. dep. Alfonsi*, art. 36, 170 v. (13); art. 4, 149 v.  
 48. *Ibid. dep. Alfonsi*, art. 36, 170 v. This is possibly the origin of a somewhat similar practice at table in Bridgettine monasteries: a pause is made two or three times during the meal, when prayers in commemoration of the Passion are said in silence.  
 49. *Vita b. Brigide*, f. 6 r.  
 50. "Tu nova lux ecclesiarum." These words occur in an antiphon in honour of St. Bridget, appointed to be sung at Vespers daily. In the Mass proper to her feast on October 8 as observed in the Order, the Epistle is taken from the Book of Wisdom — the same as that assigned to the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas — and contains the words quoted in the text.  
 51. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 116.  
 52. *Proc. Can. dep. Dni Hartlevi*, sup. art. 38, f. 123 v.  
 53. *Dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 17, 128 r.  
 54. *Dep. Nicol. de Ursinis*, 93 v.; *dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 15, 127.  
 55. *Revel. Extrav.*, cap. 90.  
 56. *Reus*, Bk. VII, cap. 3.  
 57. *Ibid.*, VII, 4. *Additio*; VI, 103; IV, 129. *Additio*; VI, 107; IV, 125. *Declaratio* (H); IV, 131.  
 58. *Dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 29, f. 132 r.  
 59. *Dep. Kath. and Magni Pet.*, sup. art. 34, ff. 136 r., 112 r.  
 60. See *Birgittiska Gestalt* (1929) by Isak Collijn, p. 19, note 17. The letter, written in Latin, was discovered within recent years by Dr. Isak Collijn in an old volume in the State Archives in Florence. There is, the author says, in the same old volume, a statement to the effect that the original of St. Bridget's letter was found in 1552 in the monastery La Certosa among other papers of Donna Lapa.  
 61. *Dep. Eliazarii Card. Theatini*, sup. art. 30, f. 103 v.; *dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 29, 132 r.; *Reus*, Bk. VII, cap. 5.  
 62. *Dep. Joh. de Pormacio*, sup. art. 12, 79 r.  
 63. *Proc. Can.*, art. 10.  
 64. *Dep. Dni Alfonsi*, ff. 150 v.—155 v.

## CHAPTER V. BEFORE THE POPE

65. *Reus*, Bk. IV, Chap. 186.  
 66. *Ibid.*, IV, 49; *Proc. Can. dep. Magni Pet.*, sup. art. 19, f. 107 v.  
 67. *Dep. Pr. Pet.*, sup. art. 5, 202 r.; *dep. Kath.*, sup. art. 32, 135 r.  
 68. *Reus*, IV, 45; VIII, 51.  
 69. *Regula S. Salvatoris* (printed after Book VIII of the *Revelations*), cap. 31.  
 70. *Proc. Can. dep. Nicol. de Ursinis*, sup. art. 21, f. 94 r.  
 71. *Diarium Vazstenense*, an. 1495.  
 72. The dates of St. Bridget's various pilgrimages are difficult to fix, and Margaret Howitt refers to the journey to Amalfi as "indefinite," but after a careful reading of all references to the various happenings on the journeys about southern Italy, of two distinct visits to Ortona, and of a passport

issued by Pope Urban V in 1369 for Bridget, her sons and daughter, it seemed to me the only explanation was that a second round of visits more or less the same shrines was made during this time of waiting for the Pope's final decision as to the Order to be founded in Sweden. And I was glad to find that St. Bridget's French biographer, Comtesse de Flavigny, had reached the same conclusion. So, with no wish to be dogmatic, I have placed the journey to Amalfi, the second visit to Ortona, and other shrines visited before, as found in this chapter.

73. *Reus*, VI, 107.  
 74. "Urbani P. nob. mul. Birgittae et Katerinae. Dat. ap. montem Flus. II id. Jun. pont. VII (12 June, 1369) Viaticum pro Dña Birgitta ejusque liberis Carolo de Ulfasa, Birgero et Catharina, de Romana curia, recedentibus ad S. Nicolaum de Baro et locum Sancti Angeli de Monte Gargano. Sijponte diocesi. Dat. Rom. op. S. Petri IX kal. Dec. P. VIII (23 Nov., 1369). Celsi Bull., 131—132. Quoted in Comtesse de Flavigny's work, p. 377. Note 1, ed. 1892.  
 75. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, f. 137 r.; *dep. Magni Pet.*, art. 35, 112 v.; *Reus*, VII, 4. *Additio*.  
 76. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, art. 34, 223 v.; *dep. Magni Pet.*, 112 v.  
 77. *Id. dep. Dni Alfonsi*, art. 3, 149 v.  
 78. *Id. dep. Nicol. de Ursinis*, art. 29, 95 r.; *Reus*, IV, 137.  
 79. Höjer, *op. cit.*, p. 61; Pope Urban's Bull has these words following the direction as to the adoption of the Rule of St. Augustine: "sacris omnibus constitutionibus infrascriptis," referring to St. Bridget's Rule; *Diarium Vazstenense*, an. 1370.  
 80. *Reus*, LV, 138; *Proc. Can. dep. Alfonsi*, art. 19, 152 v.; *dep. Latini de Ursinis*, art. 19, 146 v.; see also *Den Hellige Birgittas Uppenbarelser i Ural och Öfersättning* (Stockholm: 1909), an edition in Swedish of the *Revelations* prepared by R. Steffen, in which they are grouped according to their subject matter, p. 73.  
 81. *Reus*, IV, 139, 140. *Proc. Can. dep. Nicol. de Ursinis*, art. 19, 94 r.

## CHAPTER VI. THE HOLY LAND

82. *Reus*, VI, 6; *Vita b. Brig.*, 4 v.  
 83. *Reus*, VI, 9.  
 84. *Proc. Can.*, art. 14, 6 v.  
 85. *Id. dep. Alfonsi*, art. 29, 155 v.  
 86. *Id. dep. Pr. Pet.*, 217 v.  
 87. *Id. dep. Alfonsi*, art. 30, 157 r.  
 88. *Id.*, art. 19, 152 r.; *dep. Kath.*, 128 v.; *Reus*, VII, 13; see *Studies in Saints* by Ernest Hello, in its English translation.  
 89. *Proc. Can. dep. Eliazarii Card. Theatini*, sup. art. 19, 103 r.  
 90. *Id. dep. Alfonsi*, art. 19, 152 r.  
 91. Richard Coeur de Lion, when on his way to Syria for the third Crusade, captured the island of Cyprus from Isaac Comnenus, representative of the Eastern Emperor, and gave it to Guy de Lusignan, a French warrior and King of Jerusalem.  
 92. *Proc. Can. dep. Alfonsi*, art. 19, 152 r.; *dep. Guillelmi Guillelmi Anglici* (an Englishman whom no one, I believe, has yet been able to identify), 186 r.  
 93. *Dep. Alfonsi*, art. 29, 155 v.  
 94. *Reus*, VII, 13.

95. *Ibid.*, VII, 15; *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 32, 134 v.; *dep. Alf.*, 158 v.  
 96. *Revs.*, VII, 21.  
 97. *Ibid.*, VII, 26.

## CHAPTER VII. LAST WARNINGS AND REVELATIONS

98. *Revs.*, VII, 19; *Proc. Can. dep. Alfonso*, art. 19, 153 v.; *dep. Karoli Matansel de Janna*, 185 v., 185 v.; also *dep. Guill. Guillens*, 186 v.  
 99. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 25, 130 v.  
 100. *Id. dep. Magni Petri*, art. 29, 109 v.  
 101. *Id. dep. Dñi. Card. S. Ciriaci*, f. 231 v.  
 102. *Id. dep. Alfonso*, art. 36, 170 v.  
 103. *Revs.*, IV, 141, 142.  
 104. *Proc. Can. dep. Alfonso*, art. 19, 152 v.; art. 25, 155 v.  
 105. *Vita b. Brig.*, 17 v.

## CHAPTER VIII. FULFILMENT

106. *Proc. Can. dep. Latini de Ursinis*, art. 30, 147 v.  
 107. *Id. dep. Alfonso*, art. 3, 156 v. For the facts concerning Gomez de Albornoz and the extracts from St. Bridget's letters to him, see Dr. Isak Collijn's book, *Birgittinska Gestalter* (1929). The letters, there given in Swedish, were translated into English by M. Howitt.  
 108. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 8, 126 v.  
 109. *Revs.*, VI, 94. There is nothing to indicate a date for this revelation which may belong to some earlier time, but it seems to accord with the one which certainly belongs to the Saint's last days.

110. *Revel. Extrav.*, 67.

111. *Revs.*, BK. IV, 143.

112. *Diarium Vastense*, an. 1372; *Revs.*, VII, 31; *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, ff. 130 v., 131 v.; *dep. Pr. Pet.*, 212 v.; *dep. Magni Pet.*, 109 v., sup. art. 25. Although the Bull of Canonization (Boniface IX, 1391) states that St. Bridget's death took place during Mass, which may mean that a second Mass was said in her room, I have preferred to keep to the account of those who were present at her death eighteen years earlier. These eye-witnesses agree in saying that it was after Mass and her reception of the Last Sacraments that she gathered her household round her and gave them the directions she said she had received from Christ for them, and that all having been arranged, she raised her eyes . . . and the rest as in the text.

One more thing may be noticed in this connection. St. Bridget's French biographer, Comtesse de Flavigny, and at least one other author of recent times, has stated that *Magnus Persson* said a second Mass, during which the Saint's death took place. The statement is considered to be supported by an entry in the *Valstena Diary*. The entry certainly says that after the return from Jerusalem Magnus was ordained priest, but the words which follow seem to have been overlooked: "*Quia unus erat de illis personis quas S. Birgitta parum ante obitum in spiritu vixit ad stare ante Deum ut habetur in Legenda sua. Et tunc praeceptum fuit ut presbyter ordinaretur.*" This quite obviously refers to the vision five days before St. Bridget's death, when she saw certain persons, as she said, "before God" and received commands concerning them. Magnus Persson was for years Confessor-General at Vadstena, following Master Peter, and the information in the *Diary* must have come from him. In the Process, Magnus is always given the title of priest, since at the time the evidence was being given he had been ordained for

some years. In one place we find Alfonso refer to him as "chaplain of the Lady Bridget" (f. 158 v), but as he was at that very time in Rome with Katherine, as her chaplain, may it not have been merely a slip of the tongue?

## PART III

## CHAPTER I. ST. BRIDGET'S RULE RATIFIED

1. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 50, 141 v., 141 v.; *dep. Pr. Pet.*, art. 26, 213 v.; *dep. Magn. Pet.*, art. 49, 117 v.  
 2. *Relacio Galhardi, ep. Spoletoni, cod. Siena* (printed at the end of Dr. Collijn's edition of the *Processus*).  
 3. *Proc. Can. dep. Pr. Pet.*, art. 45, 230 v.; *dep. Kath.*, art. 50, 142 v.; *Vita D. Cath.*, cap. 14.  
 4. Torvald Höjer, *op. cit.*, p. 80, Latin footnote.  
 5. *Proc. Can. dep. Kath.*, art. 45, 139 v.  
 6. *Id. dep. Franciscane Papazarrae*, art. 24, 189 v.; *Proc. Can. states* (4 r.) that Katherine was in the Palazzo Papazanti (that is, the house in Campo dei Fiori where St. Bridget lived and died). Some writers have wrongly stated that St. Bridget's daughter on her return to Rome lived in the convent by S. Lorenzo in Panisperna.

In regard to St. Bridget's dissatisfaction with the Rule as amended when Urban V saw it, this is following the account of the Bridgettine Order to which Höjer makes use, which says that the Saint told her daughter to work for the ratification of the Rule in another form, so that clauses omitted, altered, or introduced against her will in the decree of 1370, might be duly corrected, condensed, or explained, and that other matter, which she said had been revealed to her might be added. (See p. 65 of Höjer's work.) In the deposition made by Nicholas Orsini (*Proc. Can.*, f. 94 r.) he says, as already stated in Part II, Chap. 5, of the present work, that Bridget was satisfied with the amendments made. Probably she accepted the alterations as the best that could be done for the moment; one cannot imagine her resting satisfied with a Rule that differed from the one of her revelation.

7. *Proc. Can.*, f. 24 r.; *id.*, ff. 20 v-23 v; the date of the first proposal for the canonization is given as 1376: "*coram Gregorio papa Xmo in palatio sanctae Mariae Maioris in consistorio publico de mense Maii, anno Dni. MCCCLXXVI*" (1 v). Whatever reckoning is here used the year certainly cannot have been 1376; since Gregory did not leave Avignon until the September of that year and entered Rome only at the beginning of 1377.

8. *Attestatio sanctimoniac B. Catharinae Filiae Divae Birgittae*, which introduces *Vita D. Catharinae*.

9. Raymond of Capua in his Life of St. Catherine of Siena gives the following account of his interview with the Pope and his own part in the affair: "I thought the Queen of Naples might follow the counsel of Satan's agents who surrounded her and cause these two good women to be insulted, or even forbid them to enter Naples. I went therefore . . . to Pope Urban . . . and made him acquainted with my view of the matter. His Holiness looked disappointed and remained for a long time reflecting. . . . At last he looked up and said: 'You say well, it is better that they should not go.' Then although it was late, I went to Catherine and announced to her the decision of the Pontiff. She heard me with indignation. . . ."

10. *Prologus D. Joannis Cardinalis de Turrecremata in defensorium*

*et usdem super Revelationes Caelestes S. Birgittae de Watzsteno, cap. primum.*

11. *Proc. Can.*, 1 v. There is a confusion as to the proposals of the canonization. Höjer (*op. cit.*, p. 108), quoting a letter written by Bishop Alfonso, says the third proposal was made by a famous Master of Theology from Germany, John of Basle, while the text of the *Processus* says the third proposal was made by William, Bishop of Achary in Ireland. Aguin, Torquemada (writing much later, of course) makes the Bishop of Orvieto the second proposer in the presence of Pope Urban VI instead of that of Pope Gregory XI.

12. The Bull of Urban VI "*super confirmatione Regulae Sancti Salvatoris*" is printed on folio 694 of the 1680 Latin edition of *St. Bridget's Book of Revelations*. For some reason unknown, the *Vadstena Diary* has placed this event, so important for the Order, a year later than that in which it occurred. (See *Vadstena Diary*, an. 1379.) Yet Pope Urban dates this Bull from his palace by S. Maria in Trastevere, and in the first year of his pontificate. Owing to the occupation of Castel Sant' Angelo by French troops, Urban lived at his palace across the Tiber during this first year, but by 1379 he had moved to the Vatican, from which place other Bulls in favour of the Order were issued.

13. *Scriptores rerum Suevicarum*, Tom. III, S. 99. Translated from the original parchment.

14. See Höjer, *op. cit.*, p. 98. Urban VI, by a Bull dated July 30, 1378, granted to Vadstena and all Bridgettine houses the plenary indulgence "*veram et aeternam remissionem omnium peccatorum*," belonging to the church of St. Peter ad Vincula in Rome. Magnus Peisson, when in Rome with Katherine, obtained in March, 1380, from the Chapter of St. Peter ad Vincula the certificate and transcript of the Vincula indulgence, which could be gained on August 1, the Feast of St. Peter's Chains.

#### CHAPTER II. ST. BRIDGET IN MANY LANDS

15. See *Vadstena Anteckningar* by Dr. A. V. Lundberg, p. 68.

16. See *Diarium Vastense*, annis 1384, 1397, 1388.

17. *Revel. Extrav.*, 28.

18. We read in this chapter of directions: "There must be an ambulatory within the church, with iron gratings, in which the Brothers can go, and thus not come where the people are [i.e., into the nave of the church, used by seculars]. There shall be no door into the ambulatory except one by the high altar, and it shall always be kept locked except when anyone will enter the Order, or when the Bishop makes his Visitation." So strict was the enclosure that when one of the monks was consecrated bishop and the ceremony was to take place in the monks' choir, the chronicler shows obvious uneasiness over the entrance of the necessary three prelates, as an infringement of the Rule as defined in a recently issued Bull. (See *Diary*, an. 1422.) "*Utiam non sit periculum cum sit ingressus episcoporum sub gravi poena prohibitus.*"

19. In the *Vadstena Diary* Master Peter's death is noted in 1378, Prior Peter's in 1390, and that of Birger, St. Bridget's second son, in 1391, very shortly before the canonization.

20. *Vadstena Diary*, 1391, 1393.

21. *Ibid.*, 1394, 1396. See *Gesammelte Nachrichten über die einst bestanden Klöster vom Orden der hl. Birgitta*, p. 210. This work, published in 1888, at the Bridgettine monastery at Altmünster, Bavaria, gives a brief

history of all the foundations made from Vadstena and its daughter houses.

22. *Vadstena Diary*, 1406. The deed of gift made out by Sir Henry FitzHugh is printed in full at the end of Benzelius' edition of the *Vadstena Diary*. See also *The Story of the English Bridgettines of Syon Abbey* by John Rory Fletcher, Chap. I, pp. 17, 18.

23. *Reg. S. Salvatoris*, cap. 26.

24. See Torwald Höjer, *op. cit.*, as to various measures taken in the matter of organization, pp. 133, 284-287.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 192 (footnote); also *The Story of the English Bridgettines of Syon Abbey* by John Rory Fletcher, p. 26.

26. The last Confessor-General of Altmünster died in 1808.

27. A certain John Sermini had started a movement in Italy against the Bridgettine double monasteries, and as a result a number of houses of the Order were founded for monks only—in Rome, Venice, Murano, and Bologna. These monks sent a petition to Pope Martin V for a revision of the Rule of St. Saviour. Confessors-general, abbesses, and prioresses of the double monasteries were to be cited to appear in Rome or in some other city appointed by the Pope. Hence the peremptory summons received at Vadstena. But for some reason, says Höjer, a decided change took place in papal politics regarding this affair, and the reform of the Order and the settling of the dispute between the double and single monasteries was committed to a general chapter to be held at Vadstena in 1429. After this, no trouble seems to have arisen, and the Bull of Martin V was annulled by his successor Eugene IV, March 18, 1435.

28. For some two years the community was without any spiritual help and often the Abbess was dragged from her cloister and flogged. See *Gesammelte Nachrichten*, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

29. Dr. Andreas Lindblom, at that time curator of the States Historical Museum, and therefore mainly responsible for the Exhibition of 1918, wrote a "Guide," descriptive of the monastery church and its art treasures.

30. A translation into English of Pastor Kylander's account was found among Margaret Howitt's notes, and the extracts from *Nordische Fahrten* by Fr. Alexander Baumgarten, S.J., are also her translation.

31. *Revel. Extrav.*, 24. The title of Abbess General has apparently caused some writers of articles on the Bridgettine Order to suppose that the Order has been revived in our day and reconstituted, with its central house in Rome and under the governance of an abbess general. As explained in the text, the jurisdiction of the Abbess General in the convent in Rome extends only to the houses founded from it and following the same way of life.

#### CHAPTER III. ST. BRIDGET ATTACKED—AND VINDICATED

The events related in this chapter are taken mainly from Höjer's carefully documented work on the Bridgettine Order, already often quoted, and which was translated in Paris, with its author's permission, by Margaret Howitt, *Pastor's History of the Popes* (Eng. translation), Vol. I, has also supplied me with information, and Hefele's *History of the Councils* (French translation), Vols. X and XI, I have made use of. References to other works are given below.

32. *Diarium Vastense*, an. 1408.

33. The date of this important Bridgettine charter was May 1, 1413.

34. "*Anno primo in MCCCCXV in festo cathedrae sancti Petri . . . positus*

*fuit primus lapsus in monasterio S. Salvatoris*" (Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 2285): see also Augier's *History of Syon*, p. 31.

35. *Diarium Vas.*, an. 1433; see also, *Klosterfolket i Vadstena* by Carl Silverstolpe, p. 126, as to the meeting with Torquemada.

36. Concerning the vindication by Torquemada of St. Bridget's orthodoxy, Margaret Howitt says in the Introduction to her unpublished work: "Were such a thing conceivable as that the Pope, discarding the official decision of his own theologian, Torquemada, had signed and sealed the Bull of the recalcitrant Council of Basle, then its *Assessment* and not the *Defensorium* must of necessity have been inserted in every copy of the Revelations." She adds that a collection of dissertations in praise of St. Bridget and her writings was carefully preserved at Vadstena. It is still extant, in the University of Upsala (cod. 518). Chief among these writings is, of course, Torquemada's Defence. Others come from theologians of varying nationalities, including a "doctor anglicanus." Allonso's Preface to Book VIII of the *Revelations*, called "*Epistola Solitarii*," is in the collection, and again, this time rather surprisingly, the famous *Assessment* of the Council of Basle. It is suggested that its inclusion may be due to the historical interest of the document and to the Council's assertion (though surely a contradiction in terms) that its verdict contains no charge against St. Bridget's sanctity, cult, or Order. The *Defence* of Torquemada was, of course, something quite different from the claim made by the Lübeck monks that the revelations were "of faith." This the Church has never allowed in the case of approved but private revelations. (Benedict XIV in *De Canoniz. Sancti.*, lib. II, cap. 32.)

37. See *Catholic Encyclopedia*: article "Sixtus IV."

38. "*Quantum ad indulgentiarum publicam denunciationem absolutioes a domino papa gratoise indulta ac a consilio generali Basiliensi, a singulis quoque summis pontificibus usque in hodiernum confirmata.*" (Extract from a letter sent from Syon to Vadstena in 1473.)

39. See the Chronology in the modern edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (W. Butler-Bowdon).

#### CHAPTER IV. ST. BRIDGET'S LEGACY

40. *Regula S. Salvatoris*, cap. 31.

41. *Proc. Can.*, art. 7, f. 5 v.

42. The quotations from and allusions to the Rule and regulations of St. Bridget's Order, found in different places in this chapter are, in order, as follows: *Reg. S. Salvatoris*, cap. I, cap. 29; *Revis. Extrav.*, cap. 3; "Syon Additions," Chap. 14. (The "Additions" are proper to each monastery, but are all based on those drawn up for Vadstena in accordance with St. Bridget's wish, by Prior Peter. They supply details as to observance.) *Revis. Extrav.*, cap. 1, cap. 4, cap. 10, cap. 37; *Revis. S. Sabæ.*, cap. 20, cap. 12, cap. 15, cap. 23; *Revis. Extrav.*, cap. 13, cap. 14.

43. *Analecia Juris Pontificii*, Vol. V, sect. XI: "Règle de Ste. Birgitte." I owe this reference to the kindness of the Librarian of the London Oratory, the late Brother Vincent.

44. Höjer, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51.

45. Ad. 1539. "The 25 date of November the house of Syon was suppressed into the Kinges handes and the ladies and brethren putt out, which was the vertues [virtuouses] house of religion that was in England, the landes

and goodes to the Kinges use." (Contemporary *Chronicle of Wriotheshley*, quoted in *The Story of the English Bridgettines of Syon Abbey* by John Rory Fletcher, p. 36.)

46. Blessed Richard Reynolds, monk of Syon, was martyred at Tyburn, May 4, 1535, for denying the Supremacy of Henry VIII in the Church of England. In a Life of the martyr, *The Angel of Syon* by the late Dom Adam Hamilton, O.S.B., the author quotes (p. 77) from Cardinal Pole's *Defence of the Unity of the Church* (using, he says, Fr. Stanton's translation), in which occur the words in the text, to which this note refers. The description of Blessed Richard at Tyburn was given to Pole, as he himself says, by an eye-witness of the martyrdom.

*virginem Katherinam de Senis cuius fama mire [mirae] sanctitatis per orbem divulgabatur."*

Next, we have a *Salutatio Sanctae Birgittae virginis* (sic), written in English by the blind and deaf poet, John Audelay, soon after 1426. The only extant copy is in the Bodleian. The *Salutatio* takes the form of a poem giving a sketch of St. Bridget's life. The writing of it shows that devotion to her had quickly spread over England, as Audelay was chaplain to a monastery in Shropshire, and Syon Abbey had at that time only been founded a few years.

Another Life written in English belongs to about the same time. It is incomplete, and precedes a translation into English of the *Revelations* (MSS. Cotton Claudius B. 1.). But the fullest and most valuable account published in the vernacular is that now in the Bodleian (Mason H. 192), belonging to the end of the fourteenth century. It was at one time Pynson and included in his *Kalendar of the Seyntes*. It was at one time supposed to be written by Thomas Gascoigne, Chancellor of the University of Oxford and a great friend of the community of Syon, for he is known to have written a Life of their foundress for the use of the nuns. However, as a miracle which he himself says elsewhere he has included is not to be found in this work, the supposition has been abandoned. In his *Liber Veritatum* Gascoigne has a good deal to say about St. Bridget's canonization.\*

To return now to works written in countries other than England. Laurentius Surius, the Carthusian hagiographer (1522-1578), included a biography of St. Bridget in his work *De probatis sanctorum historiis ab Al Lipomano olim conscriptis*.

The last part of the eighteenth century produced the biography of St. Bridget found in Volume IV (October) of *Acta Sanctorum*. Fr. James de Bue gives in this careful work all the information he has been able to gain from every available source, and prefaces each part of the text with a preliminary study in order to determine its author and its historical value. He also adds notes of explanation to clear away possible difficulties. The Bollandist biography with its commentary became henceforth the chief source of information for students of St. Bridget and her work. An Italian abridgement, called *Istorico della vita di S. Brigida*, was made by Giuseppe Marconi, Roman Professor of Theology and Morality, and published in Rome in 1789. This work was again translated into Swedish by an unknown author and published in 1890. It was written with the idea of discrediting the Catholic Church and showing that it was St. Bridget's misfortune to live at a time when "the Pope was counted as higher than God." This work has long since been forgotten, but thirty years later appeared a work of outstanding merit by Frederick Hammerich, a Dane, and for years a Lutheran pastor. He became professor of Church history in the University of Copenhagen, and his book *Den Helliga Birgitta og Kirken i Norden* (St. Bridget and the Church in the North) was published in

\* I owe the information concerning the manuscript at Merton College and the notice of other English Lives to a yet unpublished Essay on the development of the legend of St. Bridget in England during the fifteenth century, which I was privileged to read by the kindness of its author, Mr. F. R. Johnston.

## Some Sources of Information Concerning St. Bridget and Her Writings

WHAT follows is taken, in a much abbreviated form, from Margaret Howitt's Introduction to her uncompleted *Life of St. Bridget*. But as, strangely enough, she omits all mention of the early Lives composed in England—far more numerous than those written in any other country except Sweden—these have been noted in their place.

The earliest Life of St. Bridget is the *Vita b. Brigidae*, written only five months after her death by her two confessors, Prior Peter Olatsson, Cistercian monk of the Abbey of Alvastra, and Master Peter Olatsson, secular priest of Skenege. This work was used for the very much fuller *Acta et Processus canonizationis beatae Birgittae* and remained the chief source of all that followed. A manuscript copy of the *Vita* is extant in the Royal Library, Stockholm.

Next, there is the *Vita Abbreuiata* given in all the Latin editions of the *Revelations*. It is uncertain whether the two Peters produced this Life or whether it was the work of Nicholas Hermansson, Bishop of Linköping. A Swedish translation was made between 1373 and 1385.

Again, there is *Vita S. Birgittae, auctore Birgero Archiepiscopo Upsaliensi*. Birger, Archbishop of Upsala, was a contemporary of St. Bridget, an ardent promoter of her canonization, and owing to his position and his acquaintance with others of the clergy appointed to examine the miracles attributed to the Saint, was able to write with authority. A Bridgettine monk, John Michael van der Ketten, found a copy of the Archbishop's book in a monastery of his Order—Maria-Baum, near Calcar. It was published for the first time in 1780 in *Acta Sanctorum*.

In the Upsala Library is a manuscript called *Vita Metrica S. Birgittae*. Its authorship is still, I believe, the subject of research.

We come now to works written by Englishmen. The earliest is in Latin, found at the end of a copy of the *Revelations* made at the close of the fourteenth century and therefore very soon after the canonization of St. Bridget. It is now at Merton College (Merton 215). The author is unknown but presumed to be an Englishman, both because the script belongs to England and because it would be hardly likely that a copy of a foreign manuscript would be made so soon after the canonization. The chronology is faulty, but the Life is interesting in that it makes two statements found in no other account of the Saint—namely, that she founded in Rome a hospital for the poor, and that it was her great desire to travel back to Sweden from Rome by way of Siena "*ut visitaret et saluaret beatissimam*



1863 by the Danish Historical Society. Though written from the Lutheran standpoint, the author has a wide outlook on the facts of history and a deep appreciation of what is beautiful and poetic in the imagery of St. Bridget's *Revelations*.

Lives of St. Bridget have been written also in French, German, Spanish, and Italian. Of those that go to the original sources of information and are therefore historical, probably the most scholarly among the modern ones is *Sainte Brigitte de Suède, sa Vie, ses Revelations et son Oeuvre*, by the Countess de Flavigny, written for the occasion of the fifth centenary of the Saint's canonization (1891). In this work the author shows her knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Swedish, Danish, Italian, Spanish, and English. Her book has detailed notes of reference. She made a special journey to Sweden in order to gain knowledge from original sources, and her portrait of the Saint is both sympathetic and convincing. Yet with all her care, there are occasional slips and also occasional substitution of hypothesis for fact, the more misleading because she seems qualified to be such a valuable guide.

A work which concerns St. Bridget's family, and which fills in details not given in the early Lives of the Saint, was published at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Erik Benzelius, Jr. It is the Latin chronicle written by Margaret Clausdotter, an Abbess of the monastery at Vadstena († 1486), and he gives it the title *Margaretæ Nicolai Filiae abbatissæ Vadstenensis de Birgitta Chronicon*. Benzelius also published the Record Book of the monastery under the title *Diarium Vadstenense*, which gives a vivid picture of the life lived at Vadstena.

During the last century the learned Swedish scholars Klemming, Annerstätt, Geete, and Schück, were at work throwing fresh light by their researches on St. Bridget and her work, and during the present century others continue this work by studying mediæval documents and giving in print the results of their research. The most valuable of these is the edition of the *Processus*, edited by Dr. Isak Collijn, referred to so often in this book.

St. Bridget usually wrote her revelations herself, but all these precious documents are lost except two parchment sheets now in the Royal Library, Stockholm. The first contains a revelation belonging to the year 1367, just after Pope Urban V arrived in Rome, and concerns a plan of reformation. It is given in a much condensed form at the end of Book IV, with the last bit suppressed. On the back of the manuscript in missal penmanship of the fifteenth century is written in Swedish: "St. Bridget wrote these words with her own hand about the Pope and Cardinals." The second sheet contains advice to Magnus, King of Sweden, and belongs to the year 1360. A later hand has written at the end: "*Creditur scriptum esse propria*." Something followed which has been carefully erased.

St. Bridget realized that her revelations, though intended for particular people, must be given a permanent form and so convey God's message to others besides those for whom they were originally intended. She, therefore, appointed Alfonso da Vadderia, her friend and confessor, as her literary executor. Someone was needed with literary ability and sound judgement whose opinion as a theologian would carry weight. Someone, too, who had relations with the Roman Curia. Such a one was Alfonso, former Bishop of Jaen. He accepted the task, and Prior Peter handed over to him his collection of the revelations which he had divided into seven books. To this collection Alfonso added an eighth book which he called *Liber caelestis imperatoris*

*ad reges* and to it he wrote a long preface or prologue bearing the title *Epistola Solitarii*. (Alfonso was an Olivetan hermit.)

This collection of the revelations was ready to be shown to the commission appointed in 1377 by Gregory XI to examine St. Bridget's writings, and many copies were made at this time. One of these copies, used by the members of the commission appointed by Gregory's successor, Urban VI, was preserved in the former Royal Library, Berlin.

Alfonso's edition forms the groundwork for all later printed editions of the *Revelations*. It includes as a separate treatise the *Sermo Angelicus* or Lessons for Maids used by the nuns of St. Bridget's Order, and also four prayers of St. Bridget, known as the *Orationes*. The *Regula S. Sabatoris* seems to have been issued separately to the commissioners, but it follows the prayers in the printed editions and is in its turn followed by the *Revelationes Extravagantes*. It was during the last years of his life that Prior Peter arranged these. He had brought from Rome a number of quite short revelations written from Bridget's relation on scraps of paper. He gave all these to the Bishop of Linköping, affirming on oath that they had been revealed to Bridget and were a faithful translation into Latin. Some were already in Alfonso's collection: the rest, 116 in all, were made into a book and called *Extravagantes*. Peter also wrote at this time explanations of some of the longer revelations, which are termed *Declarationes*, though some of these would seem to have come from a later commentator.

By the end of the fourteenth century the Vadstena monks had produced a Swedish edition of the *Revelations*. Whether this version was wholly or in part taken from St. Bridget's original writings or was a re-translation from the Latin has been a matter of discussion among Swedish experts. Prior Peter returned to his own monastery, but was often at Vadstena, watching over Bridget's foundation and working at the completion of the constitutions (called the *Additions*), and it was at Vadstena that he died in 1390. Probably the transcribers of the *Revelations* did their work under his direction, as he must still have had in his possession the first notes made by Bridget herself.

When printing was invented in the fifteenth century, one of the new presses was set up at Lübeck, and thither in 1491 went two of the Vadstena monks to have the *Revelations* printed in their Latin form. In a year's time they returned to Sweden with 800 copies printed on paper and sixteen on vellum. Some fifty of the paper copies are still extant in various important libraries. Of the sixteen on vellum only four are now known, and of these one is in the Bodleian Library. The printed edition of 1492 became the authorized one and later editions followed it in contents and order. It includes Torquemada's *Defensorium*, the Bull of Canonization issued by Boniface IX, and Martin V's confirmation.

All translations of the *Revelations* — Italian, French, German, Dutch, and English, are from this Latin edition and from those which followed it. There were manuscript translations in Polish and Bohemian as early as 1392. Nine Latin editions in all have appeared, the last being printed in Munich in 1680.

In the British Museum there is a codex of 303 pages (cod. Harl. 612) which once belonged to Syon Abbey. It contains St. Bridget's *Revelations* as found in the usual Bridgettine codices. Then follows *Tractatus ad pontifices*. This is a collection made by Alfonso of St. Bridget's various revelations to

the popes which was not included in the earliest editions of the *Revelations* out of political caution. Chapters 136-144 of Book IV in the printed editions, however, contain some of these omitted revelations. Following the *Tractatus* in the Harleian codex is another collection made by Alfonso and dedicated to the nun of Vadstena. It is a weaving together of revelations to form a book of devotion and is called *Celeste Viridarium*. (There is another copy of this work in the Bodleian Library.) Some explanations follow. Then come various defences of the Rule of St. Bridget's Order and of her revelations. Next we have the text of the Process of Canonization, and lastly three biographies: a Life of St. Katherine of Sweden, one of Master Peter of Skeninge, and one of Nicholas Hermansson, Bishop of Linköping, canonized the century after St. Bridget's death.

Members of the Syon community translated portions of *St. Bridget's Revelations* into English and in 1483 William Caxton translated into English and printed the popular *Legenda aurea* which had included the story of St. Bridget in its later editions. As we have already seen she became well known to English readers.

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