

# **THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ST. BONIFACE**

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The Life and Times of St. Boniface by James M. Williamson

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**JAMES M. WILLIAMSON**

**THE LIFE AND TIMES  
OF ST. BONIFACE**



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LIFE AND TIMES OF  
ST. BONIFACE

BY

JAMES M. WILLIAMSON, M.D.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS



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## DATES

- 680 *c.* Birth of Boniface.
686. Kedwall succeeds Kentwin in Wessex.
688. Ina succeeds Kedwall in Wessex.
705. Old See of Dorchester divided into Winchester and Sherburne, having been at Winchester alone (moved from Dorchester) since 680.
715. Charles Martel succeeds Pepin of Heristal.
716. Boniface sets out for Friesland, but soon returns.  
Charles Martel defeats Radbod and Chilperic at Amblève.
718. Boniface leaves Nutselle for Rome.
719. Boniface leaves Rome via Lombardy and Bavaria for Thuringia.  
Death of Radbod of Frisia.  
Boniface returns to Frisia.
723. Boniface's second visit to Rome, where he is consecrated Bishop.  
Boniface returns to Germany.
731. Death of Pope Gregory II; accession of Gregory III.
- 731(? 2). Carl Martel defeats the Saracens at Tours.
731. Gregory III sends Boniface the pallium of Archbishop.
738. Boniface's third visit to Rome.  
Boniface returns to Germany.
739. Luitprand, threatening Rome, is stayed by Gregory III's appeal to Charles Martel.
741. Deaths of Leo III, Gregory III, and Charles Martel.
742. Pepin and Carloman summon a State Council (?) at Salz.
743. Synod of Lessines.

744. Boniface appointed to See of Cologne. Founds by Sturm the Abbey of Fulda.
745. Boniface appointed to See of Mainz, which is raised to an Archbishopric.
746. Boniface founds Bishoprics of Wurtzburg, Franconia, Erfurt, &c.  
Death of Bishop Daniel of Winchester.
747. Abdication of Carloman. Pepin rules alone.
- ?750. Deposition of Childeric, the last of the Merovingians.
- 750-1. State Assembly at Soissons. Pepin chosen King and crowned by Boniface.
752. Pope Zachary dies.
753. Pope Stephen visits Pepin regarding Luitprand's threats against Rome.
754. Pepin recrowned by Pope Stephen.
755. State Council at Braine. Lullus succeeds Boniface at Mainz. Boniface revisits Frisia, and is slain at Dorkhum.

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## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SAINT BONIFACE

### I

ABOUT the year 680 there was born within a few miles of Exeter, at a place generally believed to have been Crediton, a man who lived to become a striking and a memorable figure in European history. His parents, who were Anglo-Saxons of Wessex, called their son Winfrith<sup>1</sup>. When he was well on in manhood Winfrith changed that name to the Latin one of Boniface, which he bore for the rest of his long life. His memory has been reverently passed down through the succeeding ages of Christendom as St. Boniface of Mainz, the Great Apostle of Germany.

Twelve long centuries throw their obscuring veil between us and the far distant year 680. The time is remote, facts that are trustworthy and fit to rest upon are few, and such records as are available are crusted over with legend. But even though these real difficulties were less than they are, it is natural

<sup>1</sup> Menzel's *Germany*, Bohn's edition, vol. i, p. 227.

## 2 THE LIFE AND TIMES OF

that the mind should at first toss about rather helplessly when it is suddenly asked to realize, in due relation to its historical connexions, an event that happened so long ago. An endeavour is at once made to find some anchorage by trying to recall kindred events which took place at or near the period mentioned.

Now in regard to 680 several helpful facts of the sort rapidly present themselves; and as the date refers to the birth of a great churchman, a choice of such aids can be made from clerical careers. There is the pious St. Cuthbert<sup>1</sup>, for instance, with seven important years still before him, but as yet spending his days austere in his lonely cell on Lindisfarne. Then a thought is given to St. Chad of Lichfield, lying in his newly-made grave at Lestingay, a victim, only seven years before, to the great pestilence. A moment more and there stands before the mind the travelled and practical Benedict Biscop, just beginning from his Wearmouth Monastery to teach his fellow countrymen how to build stone churches instead of wooden ones; while, every bit as great a work as rearing buildings of stone, he was in that year 680 engaged in bringing up a little boy of seven, the future Venerable Bede of Jarrow. Four well-known names, these; and yet there will be no sense of overweight if room is made for two

<sup>1</sup> Butler's *Lives of the Saints*.

others. There was the worthy Aldhelm of Malmesbury, bent on study, but happiest as he worked out his service of song. And there was that energetic and restless man, Wilfrid of York, chafing this self-same year in his northern prison under King Egfrid's vindictive hand.

But full of interests as this little circle could be, the range must be widened. A general outline of the history of the day must be obtained, for it is desirable, in relation to Winfrith's birth, to picture before the mind something of the state of the southern part of this country towards the end of the seventh century. A little study will show how full the times were of activity, and how likely one of Winfrith's natural temperament was to be drawn to an earnestness and a decision of character by special circumstances that existed in the locality of his birth and early training.

All of us know that the English nation has drawn neither its origin nor its strength from a single parentage, but that it is indebted to repeated blendings with some of the most stalwart races of the European Continent. The nation has, as it were, gone through successive stages of development, and the initial steps of every stage produced, for a time, a convulsion throughout the country. About the year 680 England was passing through one of these mighty experiences. A new race was amalga-