

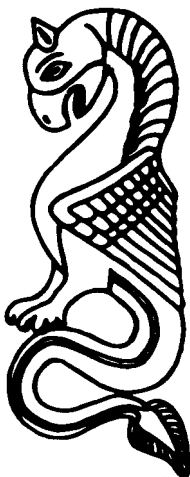
# Leeds Studies in English

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SENT KASI.<sup>1</sup>

At page 170 of his *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (Oxford 1925) Kenneth Sisam publishes, from the Bodleian MS. Rawlinson C. 288 a Middle English charm against rats. In the charm itself there is little that is distinctive, the rats being conjured in the names of the four Evangelists, the Virgin Mary, St. Gertrude and *Sent Kasi* to leave the place which they are infesting. In such a connexion the use of the names of the Evangelists is not surprising, and St. Gertrude of Nivelles was universally known to be efficacious against plagues of rats; mice or rats in fact were her emblem.<sup>2</sup> She was known and honoured in England, her figure being found on the rood screen at Babbingley in Norfolk, and probably on those at Hennock and Wolborough in Devonshire.<sup>3</sup> But the mention of *Sent Kasi* was difficult since no such saint was known, and no saint with whom the name could be connected was known to have had anything to do with rats. But, in a recent discussion on "Charms" held by the Language and Literature Colloquium of this University, Professor Paul Barbier mentioned certain French charms against rats in which, side by side with St. Gertrude, we find mention of a Saint Nicaise. These charms have been collected by Eugène Rolland in his *Faune Populaire de la France*, and the significant ones are to be found on page 24 of the first volume of that work. The following charm was apparently in use in the Ardennes:

"M. Tarbé cite un autre exorcisme des Ardennes, tiré de la collection de ce même M. Nozot:

Rats et rates, souviens-toi

Que c'est aujourd'hui<sup>4</sup> la Saint-Nicaise.

<sup>1</sup> This article owes much to the helpful criticism and valuable suggestions of Father Paul Grosjean, S.J., Société des Bollandistes. In addition we have to thank Mr. N. R. Ker for drawing our attention to the English medieval charms, and for transcripts of those in the Bodleian and Royal Manuscripts.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Drake, *Saints and their Emblems*, London 1916.

<sup>3</sup> C. E. Keyser, *Archaeologia* lvi, 210.

<sup>4</sup> Father Grosjean, S.J., points out that this is obviously a translation from the original Walloon; "on voit en effet que le vers 2 est trop long; au lieu du français 'aujourd'hui,' l'original avait assurément le wallon 'ouye' (monosyllabe)."

Tu partiras de chez moi  
 Sans attendre ton aise  
 Pour aller à . . . en poste  
 Tu t'en iras trois par trois.

On devait écrire cette formule sur autant de feuilles de papier qu'il y avait d'endroits ravagés par les rats, nommer la personne qui les chassait, désigner l'endroit où on les envoyait, ordonner le défilé par nombre impair 3, 5, ou 7. Si, pour aller au lieu où on les expédiait, il fallait passer un cours d'eau, il était nécessaire d'y placer une planche en guise de pont. Enfin on devait réciter cinq *pater* et cinq *ave*. Au bout de neuf jours les rats avaient quitté la maison. (Tarbé, *Romancero de Champagne*, 2e vol. p. 74)."

A similar charm is given as having been in use in Champagne:

"Rat, roi des rats,  
 De la Saint-Nicaise  
 Te souviendras.  
 Va-t-en, va-t-en  
 Sans attendre ton aise  
 Dirige-toi sur . . .  
 Et ne reviens plus."

The saint invoked in the Middle English charm under the name of *Kasi* is clearly to be identified with this Saint Nicaise or Nicasius.<sup>5</sup> The English form can be derived easily enough from the Latin, since loss of the first syllable is found elsewhere in a similar name; cf. *Col*, *Colin*, *Colet*, the Dutch *Klaas* and the German *Klaus*, all derived from *Nicholaus*. The third charm quoted below is evidence that a beheaded form is to be found in Latin too.

Father Paul Grosjean, S.J., of the Société des Bollandistes, has very generously furnished us with the following list of Pre-Reformation saints who bore the name of Nicasius:

<sup>5</sup> This identification was suggested, as Mr. Sisam informed us, by Professor F. Holthausen in the course of a review of *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* which appeared in *Anglia Beiblatt* xxxiii, 90. No reason however was given for the identification.

“ 1. Nicasius, moine d'Elnone, ami de S. Amand, qu'il accompagna à Rome, fête le 4 mars; 2. Nicasius, confesseur, évêque de l'ancien siège de Die, en France, fête le 20 mars; 3. Nicasius, martyr romain, fête le 17 juin; 4. Nicasius, martyr, qu'on dit avoir appartenu à la fameuse (et légendaire) légion Thébaine, vénéré à Schlötz en Suisse, le 22 septembre; 5. Nicasius, prétendu évêque de Rouen et apôtre de la Neustrie, vers 250. Était peut-être un évêque régional (itinérant), qui en voyage de Paris à Rouen fut tué pour la foi avec le prêtre Quirinus et le diacre Scubiculus (en français Scuviculle ou Egobille), à Scannis, près de La-Roche-Guyon (aujourd'hui Gasny), diocèse d'Evreux. Il n'a jamais été évêque de Rouen. C'est peut-être un doublet de S. Nicaise de Reims. Fête le 11 octobre. 6. Nicasius, premier archevêque de Reims, martyr. Une légende tardive fait de lui un disciple de S. Denis l'Aréopagite; né à Athènes, il aurait été envoyé en Gaule au premier siècle. En réalité, semble-t-il, il fut évêque de Reims vers l'an 400, construisit la basilique de Notre-Dame, maintenant la cathédrale, et y transféra le siège épiscopal qui était à la basilique des Apôtres (maintenant Saint-Symphorien). Avec sa sœur Eutropia, le diacre Florentius, le lecteur Iucundus et beaucoup d'autres, il aurait été martyrisé par les Vandales et Alains, dans sa cathédrale, en 407. Fête le 14 décembre.”

It seems probable that S. Nicasius of Rheims is the one referred to in the charms since, in a later charm against mice, we are told: “Saint Nicaise chasse les souris de la maison, lorsque le jour de sa fête (14 décembre), on inscrit son nom sur la porte (Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, Légendes et traditions, t. II, p. 313).”<sup>6</sup> The following quotation, sent to us by Father Grosjean, shows that the practice of invoking S. Nicasius against a plague of rats was not confined to Northern France and England: “Ch. Cahier, Caractéristiques des saints dans l'art populaire, tome II, Paris, 1867, p. 724, col. 1-2, a la référence suivante: “J'ai rencontré (à la bibliothèque royale

<sup>6</sup> E. Rolland, *op. cit.* i, 27.

de Bruxelles, si je ne me trompe) parmi des lettres adressées au père Papebroch, celle d'un Hongrois qui lui demandait d'où pouvait venir une dévotion répandue dans les États autrichiens, consistant à invoquer un saint Nicaise contre les loirs et les rats<sup>3</sup> (NOTE 3: "Cur S. Nicasius contra mures et glires, unde mos obtinuit in Austria, Hungaria, etc., portis aut valvis inscribere: S. Nicasi ora pro nobis; fugite, mures et glires"). J'ignore quelle fut la réponse du docte Bollandiste, ou même s'il en donna une; ainsi, je ne saurais décider ni le pourquoi de cette pratique, ni même quel est celui des divers saints Nicaise qu'on avait en vue."<sup>7</sup>

Nicasius of Rheims does not seem to have been particularly well-known in England;<sup>8</sup> no church dedications to him are recorded. The cult of this saint is described in a monograph by Henri Jadart, *Saint Nicaise, évêque et martyr rémois. Son culte à la cathédrale de Reims, son iconographie, sa liturgie* (Reims 1911), which is an offprint from vol. 128 of the *Travaux de l'Académie de Reims*. According to him the following churches were under the patronage of St. Nicasius: "l'abbaye de Saint-Nicaise de Reims,<sup>9</sup> et les églises paroissiales ou succursales suivantes dans le diocèse, savoir: de Cauroy-lès-Hermonville (avec Notre-Dame), de La Neuville-à-Tourne-à-Fuy, de Montmeliant, de Girondelle (secours de Fouzy), de La Ferée (secours de Liart), de La Neuville-aux-Tourneux, de Chilly, de Fagnon, de Villers-le-Tilleux, de Raucourt, de Cuy, de Louvergny; le tout extrait d'un Pouillé manuscrit du Diocèse de Reims, composé en 1711, et comparé avec le Pouillé de Bauny, en 1777 qui énonce les paroisses de Louvergny,

<sup>7</sup> Father Grosjean suggests that the cult of S. Nicasius may have been carried to Austria and Hungary during the seventeenth century by Walloon regiments in the Imperial army. He also informs us that he has succeeded in identifying the letter in question. It is now preserved in MS. 170, Bibliothèque des Bollandistes, and appears to have been written by a certain Fr. Joseph Ignatius, a Carmelite of Tournai.

<sup>8</sup> A number of relics of martyrs (including a *Nigasius*, presumably the saint celebrated on 11 October) were given to the Abbey of St. Albans by Abbot Geoffrey (1119-46); cf. T. Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii S. Albani* (Rolls Series 28, iv, 94).

<sup>9</sup> According to Jadart the church of Saint-Nicaise at Rheims was completely destroyed during the Revolution.

Prémecy, Aumenancourt-le-Petit, le Han, Chilly, Girondel, La Férée, Villers-le-Tilleux, Fagnon, Montmeillant, Raucourt et Cuis" (p. 19, note 1)."<sup>10</sup> A St.-Nicaise is to be found in the department of Oise, Canton Conchy-les-Pots.<sup>11</sup> In medieval sources there is reference to a church dedicated to him at Meulan, Department Seine-et-Oise; "Robert earl of Leicester grants to the church of Notre-Dame of Bec and to the church of Saint-Nicaise of Meulan 10*li*. 5*s*. worth of land in the manor of Pimperne, in exchange for the land of Ralph Piquet in Blandford."<sup>12</sup> Again, during the reign of Henry VII we hear of the "presentation of Thomas Waren, one of the clerks of chancery, to the parish church of St. Nichasius, *alias* "Sayntre-case," in the marches of Calais in the diocese of Théroutanne, void by the death of William Hasilbech."<sup>13</sup> This is the modern St-Tricat in the Pas-de-Calais.<sup>14</sup> In England the name is sometimes found in medieval kalendars; cf. the references in the first volume of F. Wormald's *English Kalendars before A.D. 1100* (Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. lxxii) to BM. Cotton Vitellius A xviii, f. 8b, and MS. C.C.C.C. 422, p. 40. In both the date (December 14) makes it clear that the reference is to the saint of Rheims. His presence in the Cotton Vitellius manuscript is explained by Father Grosjean who points out that the Kalendar originated at Wells during the episcopate of Bishop Giso, a native of St-Trond in the diocese of Liège bordering on the archbishopric of Rheims. He notes too that the Corpus manuscript comes from Sherborne, c. 1061, and suspects that at Sherborne about this time "s'est exercée une influence "lorraine" ou "lotharingienne" fort semblable à celle de Giso à Wells." The saint of Rouen appears in the late twelfth-

<sup>10</sup> We owe this reference and the quotation to the kindness of Father Grosjean.

<sup>11</sup> P. Joanne, *Dictionnaire Géographique et Administratif de la France*, Paris 1890-1905, p. 4249. There is no evidence that the St-Nic in the Department of Finistère (Joanne, p. 4249) has anything to do with the saint.

<sup>12</sup> W. Farrer, "An Outline Itinerary of Henry I" (*English Historical Review* 34, 510; Document 392).

<sup>13</sup> Calendar of Patent Rolls, 20 Henry VII, pt. 2, May 20, 1505.

<sup>14</sup> Joanne, p. 4323.

century kalendar from Exeter,<sup>15</sup> and in the Canterbury Cathedral kalendars.<sup>16</sup> No doubt an exhaustive search through medieval kalendars would extend this list still further, but it is far from certain that the results could prove anything concerning the popularity of the saint.

S. Nicasius is invoked in three medieval Latin charms against smallpox, the first of which is to be found in the BM. Cotton Caligula A xv, f. 125:

“ Wið poccas.

Sanctus nicasius habuit minutam uariolam *et* rogavit dominum ut quicumque nomen suum secum portare[t] scriptum.<sup>17</sup>

*Sancte* nicasi presul *et* martir<sup>18</sup> egregie ora pro me. N. peccatore *et* ab hoc morbo tua intercessione me defende. Amen.”<sup>19</sup>

The second charm, probably thirteenth-century in date, was formerly to be found at the end of the now burnt MS. Cotton Otho A xiii. It was transcribed by R. James and is now preserved on p. 127 of the Bodleian MS. James 27:

“ + In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti L. Amen. a. Sanctus Nichasius habuit minutam uariolam in oculo, et orauit ad dominum ut quicumque hoc malum habuerat et nomen suum super se scriptum portaret lib[er]aretur ab hoc morbo. + Sanctus Nichasius oret pro isto Rogero. + Sanctus Nichasius oret pro isto Rogero. + Sanctus Nichasius oret pro isto Rogero. Cristus uincit. Cristus regnat. Cristus imperat. Cristus per intercessionem Beati Nichasii liberet hominem Rogerum ab hoc morbo et ab omni alio. Tetragrammaton. + qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit saluus erit +.”

<sup>15</sup> R. T. Hampson, *Medii Ævi Kalendarium*, i, 458. Exeter Cathedral had among a collection of relics given for the most part by King Æthelstan some of S. Nicasius the Martyr (MS. Bodley 579, f. 6r).

<sup>16</sup> F. A. Gasquet and E. Bishop, *The Bosworth Psalter* (London 1908), p. 109. The Feast Nig[asii] *Confessoris* is given under 11 October in the twelfth-century Ely kalendar in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. O. 2, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Some such phrase as *hoc malum non haberet* is to be understood after *scriptum*.

<sup>18</sup> This phrase indicates that the saint invoked is to be identified with Nicasius of Rouen or Nicasius of Rheims who, as Father Grosjean has pointed out, were perhaps the same person.

<sup>19</sup> Printed by O. Cockayne, *Leechdoms* (Rolls Series 35, iii, 295).

The third, in a twelfth-century hand, is to be found on f. 52 of MS. Royal 2 A xx:

“ Sanctus cassius minutam habuit. dominumque deprecatus est ut quicumque nomen suum portaret secum: hoc malum non haberet. dic pater noster tribus uicibus.”

There appear to have been at least seven saints called Cassius, all equally obscure, but the saint invoked here is obviously identical with the one mentioned in the two preceding charms. All three are suspiciously similar and may derive from a common original. It is difficult to believe that they can have any connexion with the later charm against rats, though it is presumably the same saint who is invoked. The fifteenth-century charm is more probably due to the influence of similar medieval French charms.

Nevertheless, whilst there can be little doubt that *Sent Kasi* is to be identified with S. Nicasius of Rheims, two points still remain obscure. What had the saint to do with rats, and how does he come to be known in England in that connexion? Perhaps, as Father Grosjean would suggest, the belief in his efficacy against rats may have been introduced by Lotharingian ecclesiastics, such as Giso of Wells and Leofric of Exeter, who obtained preferment in this country. Or possibly the belief spread into England from the Marches of Calais during the latter half of the fourteenth, or the beginning of the fifteenth century.

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