

On a Painting of St. Barbara in the Church of St. Lawrence, Cucklington, Somerset.

BY THE REV. F. W. WEAVER, M.A.

ALTHOUGH there is said to have been a British Church at Glastonbury in very early times, yet from the time when the Romans evacuated Britain, till the arrival of St. Augustine on our shores (410--597), a period of nearly two hundred years, the South of England, at any rate, was plunged in the darkness of heathenism ; and it was not for another hundred years that St. Aldhelm flourished as a missionary preacher and church builder in this Wessex of ours.

The see of Sherborne, of which he was the first bishop, was founded in 706, and he also founded a church at Frome, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, which was still standing in the time of William of Malmesbury (*circa* 1115).¹

When Aldhelm then first began his missionary labours in Somerset, he was preaching to people who had been heathens for at least three hundred years. Now these people had (as we have) certain sacred spots, among which *wells* and *fountains* may particularly be mentioned, as places especially presided over by various tutelary deities.

The policy of the Christian missionaries was not to uproot entirely the ancient faith, but to consecrate it afresh under a true and worthier patron : thus many of the sacred springs

(1) *The Life of St. Aldhelm*, by the Rev. W. H. Jones, F.S.A. (1878), p. 25.

and wells which we find (for instance) in Cornwall undoubtedly date from pre-Christian times. Cornwall is the most celebrated county for wells and well chapels; but there are sacred springs in Somerset too, for those who will take the trouble to search for them. It is not always an easy task, for the names of Saints have first been turned into *pet names*, and then afterwards frequently corrupted. I give the following as a few out of many examples:—

Agace is a corruption for St. Agatha.

Audrie for St. Ethelreda.

Bittle for St. Botolph.

Bride for St. Bridget.

Leger for St. Leodegar.

Loy for St. Eligius.

Maudlen for St. Mary Magdalene.

Pallets for St. Hippolytus.

Parnell for St. Petronilla.

Tooley for St. Olave.

The meaning of the names of parishes is frequently obscured by their modern forms. Who, at first sight, would suspect that Bethersden (Kent) was really Betrisden from the church being dedicated to St. Beatrice?²

Some of our popular vulgarisms are corruptions; St. Martin was always a very favourite saint in England, and the pious aspiration "*O mihi beate Martine*" is said to be the origin of the saying "All my eye and Betty Martin."³

In the western suburb of Leicester is a well called *St. Austin's Well*: a correspondent of *Notes and Queries* (vi., 152) tells us that he enquired for it under the name of St. Augustine's Well: the oldest inhabitant seemed thoroughly puzzled, and at first pleaded entire ignorance of such a place; at length, brightening up, he suddenly exclaimed, "Oh! you mean *Tosting's Well*!"

(2) Ecton's *Thesaurus* (1742), p. 6.

(3) *The Last Abbot of Glastonbury* (Crake), p. 230.

Some parishes are named from famous springs. Thus we have our own cathedral city, which takes its name from the plenteous spring known as St. Andrew's Well, whose waters, after replenishing the moat round the bishop's palace, run in a refreshing stream through the principal street of the city of Wells⁴; Holwell, now in Dorset, was formerly in Somerset; Stowell (Stone-well) is a small parish near Templecombe.

St. Aldhelm's Well still gives a plentiful supply of water to the parish of Doultong, and the Church there is dedicated to that saint: two other churches are named in his honour, Broadway (Somerset) and Bishopstrow (Wilts), and a chapel on St. Aldhelm's Head in Dorset.

Holwell (Holy-well) is a name frequently to be met with on the ordnance map of this and other counties. There are Holwells at Nunney, Spaxton and Asholt, and Holywell at Wellington. Patwell (St. Patrick's Well) and Ladywell are familiar names to our Bruton neighbours. Herswell (St. Ursula's Well) gives its name to a farm in the parish of Trull. Rumwell (St. Rumbold's Well) is near Taunton, Luckwell Bridge (St. Luke's Well) is in Cutcombe, Skipperham (St. Cyprian's) Well is in Ashill, Kitswell (St. Christopher's) is in Carhampton, Pedwell (St. Peter's) is in Ashcott, while two Ashwells, one in Cutcombe and the other in Ilminster, retain their ancient name, the *ash* being a sacred tree with our heathen ancestors.

A learned writer on Cornish wells⁵ divides them into two classes, namely: those which were used as baptisteries, in connection with the churches near which they are situated; and those which are to be found by the side of some little chapel or hermitage in remote and retired places.

Sometimes these are still resorted to as *wishing wells*. There is such a well at Upwey, near Weymouth, which is a

(4) This sentence was not in the paper as originally read before the Society; it is due to the kind reminder of Canon Church, who was in the chair at the time.

(5) Mr. J. T. Blight, in the *Reliquary* ii. 126—133.

favourite place of resort to the inhabitants of that town, especially on that day in the week which is devoted to the early closing of the shops.

Wells are occasionally to be met with inside the fabric of the church itself. There is a well (now choked up) in the crypt of what is popularly called St. Joseph's Chapel at Glastonbury. There is another in Carlisle Cathedral, another in the nave of Marden Church, county Hereford, and a famous one in the eastern part of the crypt of York Minster, in which King Edwin is said to have been baptised in the year 627.

A sacred spring there was and is in the parish of Cucklington, an exquisitely situated village on the south-eastern border of this county: the spring gushes forth near the church, a little way down the hill, and gives a plentiful supply of excellent water to the whole village. In this water St. Aldhelm himself may very likely have baptised converts to Christianity, for we know that he frequently preached in the immediate neighbourhood; indeed Bruton, where he founded a church dedicated to St. Peter,⁶ is only distant seven miles from the village of Cucklington. What this spring was called in heathen times I cannot say, but there is no doubt that it became in Christian times St. Barbara's Well, now known as Babwell; Bab being the pet short form of the Christian name Barbara. There is no mention of the name Babwell in the Exchequer Lay Subsidy for Somerset in 1327,⁷ but we are assured by competent authorities that nothing among us so is old as our place names, and so I venture to think that Babwell is a very old name indeed.

These ancient springs were considered efficacious in cases of sickness, and in process of time people would think that miracles of healing were performed at St. Barbara's Well, and then some pious rector or parishioner would wish to give

(6) *Life of St. Aldhelm*, p. 24.

(7) *Somerset Record Society*, iii., 98.

permanent form to her cultus in the parish, and this was the origin, if I mistake not, of the very beautiful and interesting painting of St. Barbara, which is to be found in (what I venture to call) her chapel in the south transept of Cucklington Church (see *illustration*). There is another and better known Babwell in England. The Franciscan friars had a house at Babwell, near Bury St. Edmunds.⁸

There were four great Virgin Saints venerated in the medieval church—St. Agnes, St. Margaret, St. Katharine, and St. Barbara. The first three still retain their places as black-letter Saints in the Anglican Calendar. Miss Yonge, the accomplished writer on Christian Names, says that each of these four great saints has been made the representative of an idea.

St. Agnes, of the triumph of conscience.

St. Margaret, of victory through faith.

St. Katharine, of intellectual devotion.

St. Barbara, of artistic devotion.⁹

“Barbara” is a Greek name, meaning “a stranger.” The Greeks called those who did not speak their language, *οἱ βάρβαροι* : the word is supposed to be an onomatopœia, “*bar, bar*” being an imitation of the incomprehensible language of foreigners. “Barbe” is the French form of the name : from the village of St. Barbe, in Normandy, the family took its name, which afterwards was seated first at South Brent, and then at Ashington, both in the county of Somerset.¹⁰

Alban Butler’s account of St. Barbara is rather meagre.¹¹ He says that her history is obscured by several false acts. One account says that she was a scholar of Origen, who suffered martyrdom at Nicomedia about the year 235 ; another

(8) *Bury Wills* (Camden Society). In the Index Locorum (under Bury) there are sixteen references to “the fryers of Babbewell.”

(9) *Christian Names*. i. 260.

(10) Collinson, i. 199 ; iii., 213 ; and 1573 *Visitation of Somerset*, p. 73.

(11) *Lives of the Saints* (Dec. 4).

gives Heliopolis, in Egypt, as the place of her martyrdom, and the year 306 as the date. Mr. Baring Gould, in his "Lives of the Saints," gives a fuller account.

It appears that her father was a noble Greek named Dioscorus, who, on account of her exceeding beauty, caused his daughter to be immured in a tower: in this tower a bath chamber was about to be constructed, when St. Barbara, unknown to her father, caused three windows to be inserted instead of the two originally decided upon. On her father's return from a journey she shewed him the three windows, and tried to induce him to accept the doctrine of the Trinity, for she had without his knowledge become a Christian. Her father was exceedingly incensed, and delivering her over to Marcianus, the governor, offered himself to be her executioner. No sooner had her inhuman parent beheaded her with his own hands than he was struck by lightning.

It will be noticed that the tower in our illustration has three windows, and there is also a beautiful emblem of the Trinity in the stem of tre-foil with three leaves, each leaf being itself a similar emblem.

In allusion to this story of the three-windowed tower and the destruction of Dioscorus by lightning, Miss Young remarks, "Here, of course, was symbolised the consecration of architecture and the fine arts to express religious ideas, and St. Barbara became the patroness of architects, and thence of engineers, and the protectress from thunder, and its mimic, artillery."

Another accurate and learned writer on English saints says,¹² "St. Barbara occupied among female saints the same position as St. George among the other sex, and was regarded as the

(12) *Calendar of English Saints*, Oxford, J. H. Parker (1851), pp. 190—2. See also Mrs. Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art*, vol. ii., p. 111. The *Calendar of English Saints* contains an illustration of St. Barbara from a MS. in the Bodleian Library; she is holding a palm in her left hand, and has a tower behind her.



ST. BARBARA
(CUCKLINGTON CHURCH, SOMERSET.)

patroness of knights and chivalry ; in later times she became the patroness of fire-arms and gunpowder. From these causes we often meet with her on suits of armour and field-pieces, and in later paintings she has cannon at her feet."

Mrs. Jameson, in her *Sacred and Legendary Art*, thus writes : "It is usual in a sacred group to find St. Catherine and St. Barbara in companionship, particularly in German art ; and then it is clear to me that they represent the two powers which in the middle ages divided the Christian world between them. St. Catherine appears as the patroness of schoolmen, of theological learning, and a contemplative life ; St. Barbara as patroness of the knight and the man-at-arms, of fortitude and active courage."

There is a custom in Italian men-of-war of calling the stoke-room and engine-house "*The Santa Barbara*,"¹³ perhaps because she is the patroness of engineers, and would very likely often have a statue in such a place.

St. Barbara presided as a patron saint over hills,¹⁴ and this may be the reason of her veneration at Cucklington. Those who have been there will remember how the village (including the church) is perched on a hill, and will also call to mind the lovely view of the Blackmore Vale, which is obtained from the road between the church and the rectory. She was also the patron of artillery, engineers, mechanics, married women and captives ; she took care that none died without the viaticum, and was prayed to for protection in thunderstorms. She is also noted as a sea-saint.

"And as for the thunder and the thunderbolts, St. Barbe (their saint for harquebuziers) obtained this office, to beate back the blowes of the thunderbolt."¹⁵

In reference to the interest she was supposed to take in

(13) For this fact I am indebted to a learned antiquarian friend, the Rev. Ethelbert Horne, O.S.B., of Downside Monastery, Bath.

(14) Brand's *Antiquities* (Bohn), i. 360.

(15) Brand's *Antiquities* (Bohn), i., 362.

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artillery, she is sometimes represented with cannon at her feet, as in the Church of Sta. Maria Formosa at Venice, but her favourite symbol was a tower or tower-shaped monstrance. It is difficult to determine whether what she holds in her left hand in our illustration is intended to represent the three-windowed tower in which she was immured, or the vessel of precious metal (often shaped like a tower) in which the Host is carried in solemn procession¹⁶: in the latter case the allusion would be to the saint's pious care that none died without the last consolations of the Church.

Barnabe Googe, in the *Popishe Kingdome*, gives the following translation of Naogeorgus under the head of *Helpers*:—

To every Saint they also doe his office here assine,
 And fourtene doe they count of whom thou mayst have ayde divine;
 Among the which our Ladie still doth holde the chieffest place
 And of her gentle nature helps in every kinde of case.
 Saint Barbara lookes that none without the body of Christ doe dye,
 Saint Cathern favours learned men, and gives them wisdom hye.¹⁷

Although this poem is written in a satirical spirit of unbelief which we neither admire nor endorse, yet it is useful as showing the popular names of Saints at the date at which it was written, and the popular view taken of each of them.

In one instance a likeness of St. Barbara is appropriately found engraven on the pax brede¹⁸ (*osculatorium*), which was a small tablet of ivory or wood overlaid with precious metal, used in the Western Church for communicating the kiss of peace during the service of the mass.

The rule of Sarum was to send the pax just before Communion to all the faithful present, and it was given by kissing

(16) The cross on the top of the tower seems to favour the idea that a *monstrance* is intended; there is a representation of St. Barbara seated, holding a tower on her knee, in Mrs. Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art* (ii. 105), but the tower is larger and of a different design to the one in our illustration.

(17) Brand's *Antiquities*, i., 363.

(18) *Brede*—board; *mensula*, *tabella*, *asserulus*. See *Promptorium Parvulorum*, s.v. *Brede*, or *lytlylle borde*.

a small plate of ivory or metal, which was furnished with a handle behind: on this plate was usually engraved the Crucifix or the "Agnus Dei," but occasionally saints were represented on it. Thus St. Jerome is found on one,¹⁹ and the Church of St. Saviour, Southwark (formerly the priory of St. Mary Overie), possessed in 1552 two paxes, one engraved with the crucifix and the other with the likeness of St. Barbara.²⁰

In the inventory of plate belonging to Queen Katharine of Aragon, dated 1533, the year in which she was formally divorced, besides images of St. Peter, St. Margaret, Our Lady, St. Katherine, and St. John the Baptist, is the following "item," the first in the list of images:—"Item, an Image of Seint Barbara, with a towre and a rede in her hand, all gilte, standing upon a fote silver and gilte with a vice [screw] of silver undre the fote, poiz xxxiiij oz iij qrt."²¹

This seems to have been very like the representation of St. Barbara given in the illustration.

The "rede in her hand" is, we suppose, that palm of victory which was the symbol of triumph after confession of Christ:

"After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Rev. vii. 9).

We now come to a consideration of the cultus of St. Barbara as far as it relates to England. She is naturally often represented in Greek Churches, and her relics are very numerous in Germany,²² but her cultus seems never to have taken very deep root in England. As far as I have been able to ascertain, there is only one church dedicated to her in England, namely, Ashton-under-Hill, situated eight miles E.N.E. from Tewkesbury, in the deanery of Campden and the

(19) *Reliquary*, N.S., Vol. V., ii., 113.

(20) *Surrey Inventories*, temp. Ed. vi., p. 89.

(21) *Reliquary*, N.S., V. ii., 113.

(22) Baring Gould's *Lives of the Saints*.

county of Gloucester. It is a chapelry to Beckford.²³

The painting at Cucklington is possibly unique in the South of England, while six churches in Norfolk and one in Suffolk contain sculptures or glass in which she is represented.²⁴ There were gilds named in her honour in the Church of St. Katharine next the Tower of London, at Lynn Regis, and in the churches of the Gray Friars and White Friars in Norwich.²⁵

According to Husenbeth's *Emblems of Saints*, she is represented *carrying a tower* on the roodscreens of the churches of North Walsham, Barton Turf, and Filby, all in Norfolk; *with a tower by her side* on the roodscreen of Yaxley Church (Suffolk), *with a tower and palm* on the north parclose of Ranworth Church, in the north window of the nave of Babur Church (both in Norfolk), and in a painted carving in alabaster in the Church of St. Peter Mancroft in Norwich; in the last church there was a chantry named in her honour.²⁶

St. Barbara is sometimes represented holding in her hand a feather, either a white ostrich feather or a peacock's feather, and, as this is only found in German pictures of the Saint, Mrs. Jameson thinks that it refers to an old German version of her legend, which relates that when she was scourged by her father, the angels changed the rods into feathers.

She is commemorated on December 4 in the French, Spanish, German, Greek, and modern Roman calendars.

In the Exon Calendar, December 16, is given as the date of her *Depositio* or burial, and this too is the date assigned to her festival in the ancient Roman Martyrology; while the Armenian Calendar gives October 8.

We may conclude that December 16 was the date of the

(23) Ecton's *Thesaurus* (1742), p. 184.

(24) *Emblems of Saints* (Husenbeth), 1850, p. 17.

(25) Stow's *Survey of London* (Hughes), Bk. ii, p. 7; *Index Monasticus*, p. 73.

(26) Blomefield's *Norfolk* ii., 635; *Index Monasticus*, p. 70.

ancient feast, and that Rabbanus (A.D. 840) put it for some reason on December 4; and from his time it has been observed on that day.

We have seen that Norfolk was the chief home of the cultus of St. Barbara, and it is interesting to find that there is an allusion to her in the will of a Norfolk knight, Sir Thomas Wyndham, of Felbridge, who died in 1522.

By his first wife, Eleanor Scrope, he had two sons, Edmund and John. The former succeeded his father at Felbridge, and left three sons, but as they all died childless, the manor eventually descended to the heirs of his brother John. Sir John Wyndham, the second son of Sir Thomas, married Elizabeth, daughter and co-heir of John Sydenham, Esq., of Orchard, in the parish of St. Decuman's; he was the ancestor of the Earls of Egremont, and of the Somersetshire and Wiltshire families of Wyndham; and from him the manor became known as Orchard-Wyndham. The following is the passage in Sir Thomas Wyndham's will to which allusion has been made:—

“and specially to myn accustomed advourrys²⁷ I call and crye, Saint John Evangelist, Saint George, Saint Thomas of Canterbury, Saint Margaret, Saint Kateryn and Saint Barbara humbly beseching you at the houre of dethe to ayde, socour and defend me.”

He also ordered that a thousand masses should be said for his soul in the county of Norfolk, thirty of which were to be “in the honor of St. Barbara.”²⁸

Sacred springs are not altogether a thing of the past: writing in 1870 the late Mr. Hawker, the poet-vicar of Morwenstow, says that the water used for baptisms was still drawn from the “Well of St. John of the Wilderness,” which stands not far from the church of Morwenstow, midway down the cliff, “around it on either hand are rugged and sea-worn rocks, before it the wide sea.”²⁹

(27) A word formed from *advocatores*.

(28) *Testamenta Vetusta* pp. 581-2.

(29) *Footprints in far Cornwall* (1870), p. 11.

“ Here dwelt in time long past, so legends tell,
“ Blessed Morwenna, guardian of this well.
“ Here, on the foreheads of our fathers, poured,
“ From this lone spring, the laver of the Lord.

“ If, traveller, thy happy spirit know
“ That awful Fount whence living waters flow,
“ Then hither come to draw : thy feet have found
“ Amidst these rocks a place of holy ground.

“ Here, while the surges stormed and raved the blast,
“ The grain of mustard seed was meekly cast,
“ Till grew and multiplied that goodly tree—
“ Shrines in the vale and towers along the sea.

“ Then sigh one prayer, pronounce a voice of praise
“ O'er the fond labour of departed days ;
“ Tell the glad waters of the former fame,
“ And teach the joyful winds Morwenna's name ! ”

[I take this opportunity of thanking the Rev. James Phelps, rector of Cucklington, the Rev. Ethelbert Horne, O.S.B., and the Rev. C. H. Mayo, R.D., for many kind suggestions ; and also the Rev. H. J. Poole and Mr. C. C. Hughes D'Aeth for the excellent photographs which they have taken of the painting. Without their valuable help, we should not have been able to give the illustration which accompanies this paper. F.W.W.]