

A Glastonbury Relic.

BY REV. J. A. BENNETT, F.S.A.

IN the course of last summer I had the opportunity of carrying out a long cherished wish of paying a visit to Naworth Castle, in Cumberland, for the purpose, amongst other things, of seeing what I had somewhere seen described as a few pages of a MS. history of Glastonbury.

Fortunately, Mr. Howard was at home to direct me otherwise I might very possibly have passed by the object of my search without noticing it. Instead of handing to me a MS. of the usual form he led me into a room away from the Library, and pointed out what looked like a wooden fire screen standing in the middle of the floor. It was a folding wooden frame, 3 ft. 8 in. in height, and 3 ft. 6 in. in breadth when opened flat, containing two wooden leaves somewhat smaller so that they may fold within the outer case when closed, like the pages of a book. All the six interior faces are covered with MS. written upon parchment affixed to the surface of the wood. The form and arrangement are well shown in the photograph which forms the frontispiece of this volume.

The unusual form of this MS. at once suggested the idea that it could not have been intended as a mere historical record but that it had some special purpose, and this purpose, as it seems to me, is pretty clearly shown by internal evidence. Other evidence I have not been able to find. No one of those to whom this photograph has been submitted have ever met with anything similar.

By the great kindness of the Rev. T. Lees, F.S.A., Vicar of Wreay, Carlisle, who lent to me a transcript of his own making, I have been able to go deliberately through the whole, and find that it does not contain a word of secular annals, but is a record of the early mythical history upon which the Abbey of Glastonbury prided itself so much and founded its claims to super-eminent sanctity, and is identical in this respect with the histories of William of Malmesbury, and John of Glastonbury, with the exception of a few sentences at the end, to which I will refer presently. John of Glastonbury himself draws the moral of this story. Kings, Queens (he says), Archbishops, Bishops, Princes, nobles—men and women of every rank and position—have thought themselves fortunate if they could either dwell in that holy place, or be its benefactors, if they might rest there in death, or at least have some of its holy earth within their graves if they lay elsewhere. There are three notable reasons why burial therein is so eagerly sought for. One, that the Lord Himself in Person dedicated this place for the burial place of His servants. Another, that to all who are buried here, or in any portion of holy earth from this sacred place if they lie elsewhere, there is granted remission of sins by the prayers and merits of the saints who are resting here. And thirdly, because they are sharers in the benefits of the masses and prayers which are here offered for them daily. Such is the virtue of that holy place, cried the great Soldan, that hardly one in a thousand, no matter how great a sinner he may have been, if he be buried there shall suffer the pains of hell.

The monks of Glastonbury, therefore, being very eager to promote pilgrimages and burials, I would suggest that this was the motive of the *Tabula*. And this idea seems to be supported by the fact that there are three pairs of nail holes in the upper, and four pairs in the lower, edges of the frame, upon the left side only. These seem to show that it was affixed to a wall in such a way that it might be opened out as

a book, and probably in some public place such as a guest chamber, so that the attention of visitors might be drawn to it, to the mutual advantage of themselves and the Abbey.

The whole MS. takes up about sixty pages, closely written, of ordinary exercise book size. As it is already in print it is not necessary to give more than a very short account of the several subjects dealt with in it.

The first six pages of Mr. Lees's MS. contain the miraculous story of Joseph of Arimathæa.

P. 7. The lines "Josephaen ab Arimathæa nobilem decurionem," etc., from the "Gesta Arthuri."

P. 8. A quotation from the "Book of Melkin."

P. 9. "Versus de S. Joseph de Aurora," etc.

"Versus de Arvirago," etc.

"Hec scriptura testatur quod rex Arthurus de stirpe Joseph descendit," etc., etc.

PP. 10-13. "Quo modo 12 discipuli SS. Philippi et Jacobi primo ecclesiam Glastoniensem fundaverunt."

PP. 13-16. "De SS. Phagano et Diruviano."

PP. 16-22. "De S. Patricio:" his charter, his burial, etc.

PP. 22-27. "De SS. Benigno, Bridgida, Kolumkill, David, Paul et Acca."

P. 27. "De Translatione S. Dunstani."

PP. 28-30. "De venerabili Cruce que locuta est."

"De Alia Cruce de quo cecidit diadema."

"Alia Crux antiquissima."

"De Cruce vulnerata."

"Imago Beate Marie."

"Imago de qua narrat Ed. Stowton."

PP. 30-35. "De Sanctis ibidem requiescentibus."

PP. 35-38. "De Arturo et aliis regibus requiescentibus."

"Inventio Arturi in diebus H. de Soilli."

"De Archiepiscopis."

PP. 39-40. "De Glasteng et fratribus suis."

PP. 40-47. "De Sanctitate Vetuste Ecclesie."

P. 48. "De Fundatoribus."

"De capella argentea quam Ine fecit."

PP. 49-50. "De duabus pyramidibus."

PP. 50-52. "Nomina sanctorum requiescentium Glaston."

PP. 53-54.

The following passage is not in the Glastonbury historians, and is, I think, new, and a further proof that the *Tabula* was intended to make known the advantages of pilgrimage and burial at Glastonbury:—

"De Capella Sanctorum Michaelis et Joseph et Sanctorum in cimiterio requiescentium.

"Scientes igitur sancti patres nostri dignitatem et sanctitatem hujus sancti cimiterii quendam capellam ejus medio construxerunt quam in honorem Sancti Michaelis et Sanctorum inibi requiescentium dedicari fecerunt, sub cujus altare ossa mortuorum ac sanctorum reliquias licet incognitas in magna multitudine cumulaverunt, et missa de cimiterio in ea cotidie celebrari constituerunt. Capella siquidem illa A.D. MCCCLXXXII pre vetustate pene consumpta per preceptum domini Johannis Chinnock Abbatis in predictorum sanctorum honore de novo est reparata, viz in honore Sanctorum in predictis cimiterio et capella requiescentium, quorum primus fuit Joseph ab Arimathæa ille nobilis decurio qui et dominum sepelivit. Ob ejus memoriam predictus abbas fieri fecit in eadem capella tres ymages, quo modo Joseph cum adjutorio Sancti Nicodemi dominum de cruce deposuit atque sepelivit, et secundum illud quod ex traditione patrum didicimus facta est ymago media secundum longitudinum stature Corporis Christi, Qui det omnibus hic et ubique in Christo requiescentibus et omnibus pro eis orantibus vitam et requiem sempiternam. Amen."

This passage raises a question of some interest in that it suggests that there was another chapel in the cemetery as well as S. Mary's chapel. If it were so this may help to account for the common application of S. Joseph's name to the existing building, which ought rather to be called S.

Mary's chapel. But the architectural questions which might arise upon this passage hardly belong to our subject and therefore I pass them by.

The contents of the *Tabula* end with a double column of Indulgences, as will be seen in the fac-simile. This list, though not always in exactly the same order, is printed by T. Hearne in the second volume of his *John of Glastonbury*.

How and when this *Tabula* came to Naworth Castle I have not been able to ascertain, but can add a few references to it kindly supplied by Mr. Lees, which show that it was there in the time of the great Lord William Howard (Belted Will), and that it was known to Archbishop Ussher.

Antiquitates, p. 9 of the London edition of 1687:—"Est etiam penes nobilissimum virum D. Gulielmum Howardum (Thomæ Norfolkicæ Ducis filium) ingens Tabula, Glastonienses antiquitates undique conquisitas complectens, in quâ, inter alia fabulosissima, et ista legimus Joseph ab Arimatheâ," etc., etc.

He refers to it again as "Magna tabula Glastoniensis," on pp. 12, 13, 15, 29, 58, 60; and on p. 56, after a long quotation from William of Malmesbury, he adds, "habentur ea quoque ab anonymo quodam Glastoniensi monacho . . . in magnâ Glastoniensi Tabulâ eisdem verbis descripta, una cum additamento isto, Illic duo sancti Phaganus," etc., etc.

Mr. Lees adds, "I have searched in vain in the *Archbishop's Life*, but found no reference to it, and have not been able to find how it came into Lord William's hands. It is not mentioned in the catalogue of his books in *The Household Book*, published by the Surtees Society. The first mention of it I have been able to unearth is in Pennant's *Tour to Alston Moor*, made in 1773. On p. 174 of the 4th edition of 1801, he writes, 'In Lord William Howard's bedroom, arms and motto over the chimney. His Library is a small room in a very secret place, high up in one of the towers, well secured by doors and narrow staircase. Not a book has been added since his days. In it is a vast case, three feet high, which opens into three

leaves, having six pages pasted in; being an account of S. Joseph of Arimathæa and his twelve disciples, who founded Glastonbury, and at the end a long history of saints, with the number of years and days for which each could grant Indulgences.’”

Mr. Lees has also pointed out to me that the Proclamation of Henry VIII, June 9th, 1534, “to cause all manner of prayers, orisons, rubrics, canons, mass books, and all other books in the churches wherein the said Bishop of Rome is named, or his presumptuous and proud pomp and authority preferred to be eradicated and rased out, and his name and memory to be never more, except to his contumely and reproach, remembered, but perpetually suppressed and observed,” has been carefully obeyed in this case, but that in one instance “papa Celestino” has been written in a current hand over an erasure.

Another passage from the *Antiquities* may be printed here though not bearing directly upon the *Tabula*, in order to draw attention to another Glastonbury relic, which was in existence in 1639, and may be so still:—

“Habetur et hodie Welleæ in adibus D. Thomæ Hugonis equitis aurati, Tabula ænea, columnæ Glastoniensis ecclesiæ olim affixa, cui incisum legitur, anno post passionem Domini,” etc., etc.
