

## Nettlecombe Church :<sup>1</sup>

GLASS IN THE TREVELYAN CHAPEL

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THE two eastern windows of the north aisle, or Trevelyan chapel, contains glass of unusual character. It is evidently not medieval, and, on the other hand, it does not belong to the Gothic revival of the nineteenth century, for its present complete appearance is due to restoration which seems to have taken place about a hundred years ago, when the glass must have been in a fragmentary state. The new glass is easily distinguished from the old, especially the white used for faces, hands and feet. The original flesh tone is darker. The design and details of the sacred figures may be said to be in the medieval tradition, and this might be explained if we could suppose that the glass was painted before that tradition was quite extinct among English glaziers, and when, probably, numerous examples of saints still survived in fifteenth-century church windows, which might serve as models.

Looking at the figures in the east window, SS. Laurence, Mary, Urith and John, it will be noticed that the names inscribed below them are in the vocative, *Sancte Laurente* [should be *Laurenti*], *Sancte Johannes*, a peculiarity which I have occasionally noticed in medieval examples. Perhaps it was due to the artist having looked for the names he wanted in the Litany of the Saints. The bare feet given to all the figures are, I think, modern restoration, except in the case of St. John, from which the others have been copied. In medieval art only apostles and male figures of the apostolic age have bare feet when wearing the Early Christian costume. St. Laurence

<sup>1</sup> For Nettlecombe, see *Proceedings*, liv (1908) i, 77-87; lxxvii (1931), lix-lxii.

has the only original head in the window. There is a patch of restoration in his pink dalmatic, and the right-hand part of his alb is new. The maniple on his right wrist is of an unusual form, and may have been intended for a purse, symbolising the fact that he was the keeper and dispenser of the treasures of the church. Except for the head, the figure of the Virgin seems to be mainly original. The dress is powdered with M's.

Though the name of the next figure *Sca Uritha* is new, like the bare feet and lower part of the dress, it is no doubt copied from or based on the original, for no one would be likely to invent the name of this rare and local Devonshire saint, a sort of duplicate of St. Sidwell.<sup>1</sup> As her legend ended in the same way, by her head being cut off with a scythe, the artist has simply adopted one of the common representations of St. Sidwell, in which she is carrying her own head. The latter is evidently modern, like the head of the saint herself (the original long hair may be seen on either side of the mantle, of a different tone from and not quite fitting the modern golden tresses). The whole design will have been copied from some Devonshire example, perhaps at Chittlehampton itself. With St. John the head is new, and some of the white gold-flowered undergarment on the right. These figures are framed in borders formed by an upright rod wreathed with conventional foliage, a well known medieval design, but a good deal restored. Whether the gabled canopies are original may be doubted. In the other window the wreathing is carried round the head of the light.

The north window of the chapel contains three saints, Katherine between two bishops who are labelled *Sancte Georgeus* and *Sancte Petrus*. The figure of St. Katherine, of the usual type holding sword and wheel, has a new head and bare feet, and has suffered generally, so that the proportions have been curtailed. The so-called St. George is in mass vestments (red chasuble: the lower part of the figure, with the bare feet, is modern), and holds a crozier and open book. The name *Georgeus* is obviously modern, the original name having disappeared before the restoration took place. It may be that

<sup>1</sup> Her cult was localised at Chittlehampton. *Devon & Cornwall Notes and Queries*, xvii (1933), 250, 290.

it was due to misunderstanding of a damaged *Gregorius*; and if the glass is post-Reformation his representation as an ordinary bishop would be explained. The third figure professes to represent St. Peter, vested as a bishop in mitre and red cope, and holding in one hand a book and in the other a crozier and also a key. The latter arouses suspicion, for in medieval examples Peter nearly always has two keys. Here, the whole of the key, except the ring at the top through which the fingers pass, is modern. In representations of St. Clement, his emblem the anchor sometimes hangs from a ring through which the fingers (or the thumb) pass, just as here; and I think it is not improbable that St. Clement was the bishop depicted, but the lower part of the figure, together with the anchor, having perished, the restorer turned it into St. Peter. St. Clement would be quite appropriate near the sea-coast and the neighbouring port of Watchet, for he was one of the patrons of mariners.

We thus see that while, apart from the modern restorations, the character and details of these seven figures belong to the tradition of the fifteenth century, which survived till the end of the reign of Henry VIII, the execution and general effect is unlike that of pre-Reformation glass. This might be explained if we suppose that they are the work of some country (Devon or Somerset) glass-painter of the Elizabethan or Jacobean age, when the ancient tradition was not quite forgotten. A clue to an approximate date is perhaps provided by the inclusion of St. Urith, for in 1591 John Trevelyan of Nettlecombe married Urith, daughter of Sir John Chichester of Raleigh (Devon).<sup>1</sup> As it was John Trevelyan who rebuilt Nettlecombe Court, he may well have adorned the family chapel in the neighbouring church with painted glass, including figures of his own and his wife's name-saints. In style the glass recalls that of the east window in Abbey Dore Church, Herefordshire, given by Lord Scudamore in 1634; and though Sir John died in 1623, the Nettlecombe windows may almost be said to illustrate the Laudian revival. There was another marriage with a Urith in the family, for Sir John's great-great-grandson, also Sir John

<sup>1</sup> Collinson, *History of Somerset*, iii, 539. *Visitation of Somerset*, Harl. Soc., xi, 112.

(1670-1755), married Urith Pole of Shute; but I cannot believe that the windows are as late as 1700, or indeed as any year after the Civil War began. In any case the Nettlecombe windows seem to illustrate a provincial survival or echo of the English medieval tradition at a time when most of the glass put into town churches and college chapels, if not merely heraldic, was definitely Renaissance in character, and foreign in origin or inspiration.