ENGRAVING OF ST. CHRISTOPHER IN NEWDIGATE CHURCH AND A WINDOW.

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ON A PAINTING OF ST. CHRISTOPHER IN NEWDIGATE CHURCH, SURREY.

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ON the north wall of the church of Newdigate are the remains of a figure of St. Christopher, unhappily much obliterated, and rendered still more obscure by the injudicious, though well-meant, use of an oil varnish. As all our wall-paintings of the middle ages are executed in *tempera*, they should never have applied to their surfaces any other preservative than size, and this only in a dilute state. They are very absorbent, and oil will sink in and darken the colours, and a varnish will both darken them and make the surface brittle and liable to scale off.

The painting at Newdigate is generally well designed. Its execution displays considerable merit, being bold and vigorous in outline; and it may be ascribed to the latter half of the fifteenth century. There is the usual mode of treatment, viz., a gigantic figure sustaining upon his right shoulder a small one of the youthful Christ, who, in his left hand, holds the emblem of sovereign power—the orb surmounted by a cross; his right in the attitude of benediction. The giant is wading across a stream, supporting himself by a ragged staff, like an uprooted tree. His head, bound about with kerchief or turban, is turned round and upwards towards Christ, and, in all good examples, an anxious expression is given to the features of the saint. Upon the shore, to which he is wending, a figure in the attire of monk or hermit is holding a lantern as a guide across the waters. In the

stream fish are shown disporting, and several ships are in this example, a device of the artist's to indicate a sea or water of great depth. It is a very usual convention. Beneath the knees the figure is entirely obliterated, as well as every other part of the composition, and would be seen by all who entered by the door through the south porch, the chief entrance for the congregation.

Of all figures of saints introduced into our churches this was the most popular; and still, upon the continent, a figure of St. Christopher of gigantic size, often sculptured out of wood, salutes the eye of the worshipper as he enters the church. In a compilation made by the authorities of the South Kensington Museum, the number of churches in England in which remains of paintings of this saint have been discovered, amount to twenty-eight. Of course, many have been utterly destroyed, as it was a very obnoxious figure to the Reformers; but many may still remain concealed beneath the whitewash of our churches. I shall notice a few of those designs, which present to us illustrative details, and then show the bearing of legendary story upon the general subject. First, I shall take that which formerly existed in Croydon church, in this county, as it offers some special points for our consideration.

This was discovered during repairs in 1846, and was the subject of remarks in the "Journal of the British Archæological Association,"[1] and also in that of the Archæological Institute.[2] In neither, however, is it particularly or completely elucidated, though in the latter there is an engraving which shows the character of the design. It was unhappily very much defaced. There was scarcely a single part quite complete; but, nevertheless, indications existed of details not frequently observed. The figure of St. Christopher was tolerably perfect; but the lower part was concealed by panelling. He wore a deep-red tunic, and a green mantle waving in the wind. His ragged staff was imperfect, and of the figure of Christ nothing but the feet remained. The hermit

[1] Vol. i. pp. 65, 66, 139. [2] Vol. ii. p. 267.

holding the lantern was the most complete part of the composition, and on the opposite side there was a castellated building, from a window of which appeared figures of a king and queen. These were very distinct, and are engraved in the "Archæological Journal," vol. ii. p. 268, and were conjectured by some to be Edward III. and Philippa his queen. But this was quite an untenable view; the king at least belongs to the legend. There were fragments of an angel playing upon a pipe, and of another upon a double tabor. This idea of an attendance of celestial harmony is by no means usual. There were also two scrolls with traces of inscriptions—upon one, the words "Qui por . . . . . " were visible, which was most likely a part of the ancient hymn, as given below; and these two scrolls, which were on either side of the head of St. Christopher, were doubtless the two first lines of it:—

O Sancte Christophore
Qui portâsti Jesum Christum
Per Mare rubrum,
Nec franxisti crurum,
Et hoc est non mirum
Quia fuisti magnum virum.

The painting belonged to the end of the fourteenth century.

As I have previously stated, numerous examples of the subject have been discovered from time to time. Usually, they resemble each other very closely in plan and details. St. Christopher is always going from right to left, and I do not know of an instance to the contrary. His staff, like an uprooted tree, is often showing leaves at the top, and the hermit, fish, and ships are very general; but the Croydon example is the only one which I have noted as giving us celestial minstrelsy.

The fullest subject, and one which enters more completely into the rest of the legendary story of the saint, making it thus the most remarkable example, is that discovered at Shorwell, in the Isle of Wight, and which is engraved in the "Journal of the British Archæological Association," vol. iii. p. 85, with a memoir by Mr.

Fairholt. In this we have the figure of St. Christopher occupying the centre, and above, by the side of that of Christ, a scroll bearing these words, "Ego sum alpha et ω (Omega)." On the strand which he has left, stands also his figure with pointed shoes and closely-fitting jerkin, a fashionable attire of the time (fourteenth century), yet holding the uprooted tree; and he is turning his head back, waving his right hand as if in parting. A little distance off is a crucifix, and still farther two figures on horseback, behind a hedge or perhaps a wood. There is a little figure sitting quietly fishing, which is not uncommon. The hermit and hermitage on the opposite side are in the distance. In the middle distance stands a king, and a man with drawn sword by his side; and an arrow sticks in the king's right eye. This portion belongs to the subject of the martyrdom, which is represented in the foreground, where the Saint bound to a column is being shot with arrows. Many of these, however, glance upwards towards the king, and one has reached his right eye. In the legend it is stated, that on an attempt being made to put Christopher to death by arrows, one entered the eye of the king. All the incidents here given are close illustrations of the popular legend, which I shall presently detail; but such a complete rendering of it as this is so extremely unusual, that I cannot remember another like it. Though it does not embrace the whole of the story, it contains so much of it as to exhibit a full and popular account, ending with the martyrdom.

Having thus given a general glance at some of the examples of this subject which have been discovered on the walls of our churches, I will now proceed to consider the legend. Perhaps, of all the stories which appear in the lives of the saints, there is scarcely one other which warrants so little credence. As a myth it presents itself as a typical form, showing how easy is such a growth from elements of the vaguest character. The commonest suggestion applied to all such, is fraud; yet a closer inspection and more mature consideration, casting aside all prejudice, quite dispels such an idea.

Fraud demands art and a defined purpose; here is certainly neither. Recluses, who form, for the most part, our legendary writers, lived in a narrow world; if not bounded entirely by the walls of their cloister, it did not go much beyond their order. They lived in an age when criticism was unknown; when the ordinary operations of nature were looked upon as special manifestations of divine energy; when dreams were often interpreted as miraculous; indeed, living a life of illusion as regards the physical and moral world about them. We have only to peruse the works of Cæsarius of Heisterbach[1] to be convinced of the truth of these remarks. He was certainly an honest and conscientious writer, never intending to deceive or to be otherwise than truthful. Many of his stories are no wonders at all; many are so, merely by the halo he casts around them; others he narrates from authorities he thinks correct, but does not vouch for. And so it certainly was with other writers of the same kind. A sacred narrative was the last thing they ever thought of calling in question, even in the smallest details. What had gone before was reproduced; and a story, like a ball of snow, gathers as it rolls along. Thus it was that legends grew and multiplied; and now I will consider specially that of St. Christopher, as it unconsciously unveils to us the mode of development rather more clearly than any other of its kind. My authority shall be the *Legenda Aurea of Jacobus à Voragine.* It thus begins:—

"Christopher before baptism was called *reprobate,* but afterwards was called Christopher, as bearing Christ on him. That is to say, he carried Christ in four modes—upon his shoulders in carrying, in the body by maceration, in the mind by devotion, in the mouth by confession or preaching."

This exordium is literally the key to the whole story. What is this but the life of a Christian converted? Before he becomes Christian, he is reprobate, ignorant, but, by conversion, becomes one bearing Christ in his

[1] *Vide* his *Dialogus Miraculorum.*

heart, and mind. So his name. Almost everything else which follows is built upon this. His great stature is but a means of indicating moral as well as physical strength, one long practised and known to art, especially when in its infancy.

"Christopher was a Canaan by race, of lofty stature, and terrible countenance: he measured twelve cubits in length. Whilst residing with a certain king, it came into his mind to find out who was the greatest prince of this world. He then went to a king esteemed by report to have no equal in dignity. The king received him, and he remained at his court. But the jester, who often sang before the king, frequently named the devil, and the king, who held the faith of Christ, whenever he heard it, made the sign of the cross upon his face. This Christopher observing, wondered what it meant, and asked of the king the reason, who was unwilling to tell him. Then Christopher told him if he did not, he would no longer remain with him. On this the king said, 'As often as I hear the name of devil, I make this sign, lest I should fall into his power, and he do me injury.' To whom Christopher said, 'If you fear the devil should hurt you, he must be stronger than you;' and he then left the court of the king in search of the devil as the greater prince. As he proceeded across a certain solitude, he met a great multitude of soldiers, out of whom one fierce and terrible came up to him, and demanded whither he went. He answered, 'I go to seek my lord the devil, whom I intend to be my lord.' At which he replied, 'I am he whom thou seekest.' Christopher rejoiced, and bound himself to perpetual service, and received him for his lord. As they proceeded together, they came to where a cross was erected on the common way. Presently the devil, seeing the cross, fled terrified back to the solitude. Christopher demanded the reason, which was given very reluctantly, and was told 'that a certain man named Christ was affixed to the cross, which sign when I see much alarms me, and I fly.' To this Christopher rejoined, 'Christ must therefore be greater and more powerful than thee, as his sign you fear so much. In vain, therefore, have I laboured, for as yet the greatest prince of the world I have not found. Now, then, it follows that I must leave thee and seek after Christ.' Then he, proceeding on his search, found a certain hermit, who preached Christ to him, and diligently instructed him in his faith. The hermit told him that the king he desired to serve required of him that he should frequently fast. Christopher asked if there were nothing else. The hermit rejoined, it was requisite to say many prayers. To which said Christopher, 'I know not what profit such service only can be.' To whom the hermit: 'Knowest thou not a certain river in which many crossing are in danger and perish?' He answered, 'I know it.' Then replied he, 'You are of lofty stature, and of great strength; if by that river you live, and you carry over all to the King Christ, whom you desire to serve, it will be grateful, and I hope that there he may manifest himself to thee.' Christopher acceded to the hermit's teaching, and went and dwelt by

the river, having built himself a habitation, and thence he conveyed every one across. Many days had passed. Whilst he rested in his dwelling, he heard the voice of a child calling him, saying, 'Christopher, come out and carry me over.' Immediately he went out and found no one. Returning back he heard the same voice calling, but on again going out he saw no one. A third time he was called, and went out and found a child by the bank of the river, who asked Christopher to convey him across. So taking the child upon his shoulder, and his staff in his hand, he entered the river in order to cross over. And behold the waters of the river began by degrees to swell, and the boy to weigh like the heaviest lump of lead. The more he proceeded the more the waves increased, and the child more and more pressed upon his shoulder as an intolerable weight, so that Christopher was in great strait, and threatened with extreme peril. But scarcely had he got across the river, and placed the child upon the bank, than he said to him, 'In great peril, boy, hast thou placed me, for thou hast weighed so, that if the whole world had been upon me it would not have been greater.' To whom the child, — 'Wonder not, Christopher, for not only the whole world but him who created it hast thou borne upon thy shoulder, for I am Christ thy King whom in this office thou hast served. And that I say the truth, and can prove it, when thou crossest back fix thy staff in the earth by thy dwelling, and in the morning thou wilt see it flower and in leaf.' Immediately he vanished from his sight."

It will be at once seen that this is the incident on which the subject, so frequently discovered in our churches, is founded. Occasionally the staff is shown with leaves even as he is crossing the stream. This kind of license is common enough in legendary art, the intention being obviously to fill the subject with as much matter as possible connected with the story; the unities being of very little importance.

The situation in which the figure of St. Christopher is generally found in our churches, is that opposite the chief or common entrance, or at least in such a conspicuous place as to be seen at once by every worshipper on entering.[1] Now the meaning of this,—for it has a special meaning, will be found by examining into the popular ideas of the power of this Saint, which are expressed in several ancient Latin rhymes. One, for

[1] Sometimes a figure of St. Christopher is found externally. One was on a house at Treves. It seems to have been a very common practice in some parts of Germany, and especially so in Carinthia.—Molanus, *de Hist. SS. Imaginum*, lib. iii. cap. xxvii.

instance, tells us that "so great are thy virtues, St. Christopher, that whoso sees thee in the morning will smile at night."

"Christophore sancte,
Virtutes sunt tibi tantæ,
Qui te manè vident,
Nocturno tempore rident."

Also, "Whoever honours the form of St. Christopher, on that day will not die a bad death." [1]

"Christophori sancti speciem quicunque tuetur,
Istâ nempe die non morte malâ morietur."

And, "Behold Christopher, afterwards thou art safe."

"Christophorum videas; postea tutus eas."

Without question, then, the worship or honour paid to St. Christopher was very great with the common people. It cannot be doubted that the lastly quoted phrase expressed a desire, which the walls of our churches so often fulfilled, viz., of giving an opportunity of seeing so gracious a form. Let us remember also the yeoman in Chaucer's "Canterbury Pilgrimage" is described as wearing a St. Christopher.

"A Cristofre he bare upon his brest of silver sheen."

Perhaps this was as a charm against ill.

But Erasmus has given us a whimsical dialogue in his "Colloquy of the Shipwreck," in which a fellow makes the most extravagant vows to the Saint, which his fortunes are quite unable to fulfil, if he would only release him from his threatened peril. He offers to the figure of St. Christopher at Paris, "a mountain of wax" as big as that of the statue itself.[2] A neighbour of his

[1] Perhaps this means sudden death.

[2] This celebrated statue, to which Erasmus refers, was twenty-eight feet in height, and was fixed to the second pillar of the nave of Notre Dame, near the grand or western entrance. It originated in a vow made by Antoine des Essarts, chamberlain, councillor, and valet-carver to Charles VI., king of France (1413), when in prison, and in consequence of his miraculous deliverance at night, ascribed to Saint Christopher. It was destroyed at the Revolution.

hearing him, touched his arm, and reminded him, that if he sold all his goods by auction, he would be unable to pay for such an offering. The man answers in a low tone, as if in fear the Saint should hear him, "Hush, hush, you fool! Believe me, I speak my mind; let me only once touch land, and that waxen candle shall not do me much damage." The *Naufragium* is one of the best of the colloquies, and Erasmus very caustically satirizes those who, in the hour of danger, appeal only to popular objects of worship.[1]

The story of St. Christopher was treated by the Reformers as a mere parable, at best shadowing forth ideas rather than things. This is the view of it taken by Melancthon, and the whole legend is dismissed from any place in sober history. Even the Roman Catholic writers after the Reformation denounce the earlier part of it, that which is here quoted, and which belongs to our subject, as a fable, or interpret it in an allegorical sense. But they retain other portions quite as miraculous, and which have but little consistency without the rest of the legend; such, for instance, as the budding of the staff, &c.[2] It is sufficient to say, that, of the historical portion, it may or may not have occurred, but it has little to separate it from what might have happened to many Christians in the days of persecution, and its narration is beyond our subject. I do not know whether any of the great masters of Italy have furnished a St. Christopher of the popular type. But on this side the Alps, Memling and Albert Durer, though belonging to very different sections in the school of art, have both given characteristic examples. But the noblest work in connection with this story is that series at Padua, painted by Andrea Mantegna, in the church of Santa Maria degl' Eremitani. These are fine frescoes, in a decaying state, forming a series of the Saint's history and martyrdom, but without any such incidents as have here been

[1] Erasmus alludes again to the superstitious honour paid to St. Christopher in his *Encomium Moriæ*. Amsterdami: Henricum Wetstenium, 1685, pp. 65, 75.

[2] *Vide* Ribadineira, Surius, &c.

detailed, belonging to the earlier part of the legend, except that of the arrow glancing into the king's eye, which is given in one of the subjects.

One of the earliest of wood-engravings,[1] dated 1423,[2] is a figure of St. Christopher of the usual type, and beneath it is a variation of one of the Latin distichs previously given; viz. :—

> "Christoferi faciem die quacunque tueris,
> Illâ nempe die morte malâ non morieris."

One instance occurs of a St. Christopher forming a brass, and examples have been found on signet rings, attesting the popularity of the Saint.

The etymological composition of the name, which both in Greek and Latin signifies "Christ" and "to bear," at once expresses, perhaps, the whole truth belonging to this myth. And as this is by no means the only instance, but that in which principles are more clearly seen, the legend has a special interest, which would not otherwise belong to it.

Subjoined is a list of those churches in which figures of Saint Christopher have been discovered painted upon the walls, taken from that previously referred to.

Barkston Church, Lincolnshire.—*Assoc. Arch. Soc. Reports*, ix. 23.
Belton Church, Suffolk.—*Arch. Journal*, xxi. 218.
Canterbury Cathedral, Kent.—Duncan's *Canterbury*, 47.
Crostwight Church, Norfolk.—*Norfolk Archæology*, ii. 352.
Croydon Church, Surrey.—*Archæological Journal*, ii. 267.
Cullumpton, Devonshire, Church of St. Andrew.—*Exeter Dioc. Architect. Soc.*, iii. 264, 268.
Ditteridge Church, Wilts.—*Archæological Journal*, xii. 195.

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[1] Copied in Jackson's *Treatise on Wood Engraving;* also in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for August, 1839; and Agincourt's *Histoire de l'Art*, &c.

[2] The date on this is a subject of much dispute. It appears to read "Millesimo CCCC° XX° tercio" in Agincourt's copy. Without entering into this question, which has been so much debated, I will venture to state that the style of the work more nearly resembles that found at the end of the fifteenth century.

Drayton Church, Norfolk.—*Norfolk Archæology*, iii. 24.
Feering Church, Essex.—*Brit. Arch. Association Journal*, ii. 190.
Fritton Church, Norfolk.—*Norfolk Archæology*, iv. 345.
Gawsworth Church, Cheshire.—*Norfolk Archæology*, v. 222.
Horley Church, Banbury, Oxfordshire. — *Archæological Journal*, xiii. 416.
Melcombe Horsey Church, Dorsetshire.—*Archæological Journal*, iii. 265.
Norwich, St. Giles's Church.
Norwich, St. Etheldred's Church.—*Norfolk Archæology*, v. 120.
Reading, Berkshire, Church of St. Lawrence.—*Civil Engineer and Architects' Journal*, 1851, p. 195.
Salisbury Cathedral, Wilts. Hungerford Chapel. — Hoare, *South Wiltshire*, vi. 542.
Shorwell, Isle of Wight.—*Brit. Arch. Association Journal*, iii. 85.
Somerford Keynes Church, Wilts.
Stedham Church, Sussex.—*Sussex Arch. Coll.*, iv. 1.
Stow Bardolph Church, Norfolk.—*Norfolk Archæology*, iii. 136, 138.
Watford Church, Herts.—*Brit. Arch. Association Journal*, iv. 71.
Wells Church, Norfolk.—*Norfolk Archæology*, v. 84.
Whimple Church, Devon.—*Trans. Exeter Dioc. Architect. Society*, iv. 51.
Wimbotsham, Norfolk.—*Norfolk Archæology*, ii. 136.
Winchester, St. John's Church.
Winchester, St. Laurence's Church.—*Brit. Arch. Association Journal*, x. 80 ; vi. 184.
Witton Church, Norfolk.—*Norfolk Archæol. Coll.*, vi. 40.

An example was also found at Hengrave, Suffolk, "Journ. of Brit. Arch. Association," i. 139.

There is one, but much defaced, on a pier of the north side of the nave of St. Alban's Abbey church. In the church of West Wickham, Kent, on the borders of the two counties of Kent and Surrey, among some exceedingly interesting remains of painted glass, date about 1480, is a figure of St. Christopher. The head and expression is so well designed, that it will favourably compare with any of the figures among the boasted Fairford windows, whilst in precision of execution, and even in style, it is certainly superior to the greater number in that series. I do not know of any example of St. Christopher strictly belonging to mediæval art which is so good. In Knockmoy Abbey, Sligo, Ireland, an example has been found. It is recorded in the "Archæological Journal," xx. 180. In

the interesting little church of Northolt, Middlesex, one was discovered about ten years ago, similarly situated to that at Newdigate; it was unhappily destroyed against the wish of the rector, and was not recorded by any sketch or drawing.

In the art of the Eastern Church St. Christopher does not seem to occupy so much regard, and I must express my opinion that the legend itself belongs entirely to the West. The saint, however, is acknowledged, and in the "Manuel d'Iconographie Chrétienne," p. 325, published by M. Didron, the directions for painting him are simply as "young and unbearded." In a note he says: "In Greece Saint Christopher is ordinarily represented like an Egyptian divinity, with the head of a dog or wolf. I have several times asked for an explanation, and no one has ever been able to give it to me. The Greeks of to-day, less believing than their ancestors, destroy or mutilate this dog's head, as I have remarked on a fresco of Saint Laura at Athens." So that neither in the recent mode, nor in the convention of ancient use, do we recognize anything analogous to the art of the West. This discrepancy not only gives colour to the idea that the legend is not known to the Eastern Church, but also that it is not of very remote antiquity. It is possibly not much older than the eleventh or twelfth century; but St. Christopher is said to have suffered martyrdom under Decius in the third century.

Since the above was written, an amended list of paintings has been put in progress by the authorities of South Kensington, in which an addition of nine more churches containing representations of St. Christopher are given. They are as under:—

Ampney Crucis Church, Gloucestershire.
Bartlow Church, Cambridgeshire.
Bloxham Church, Oxfordshire.
Bradfield Combust Church, Suffolk.
Bemburg Church, Cheshire.—*Archæological Journ.*, xxiv. 67.
Chesham, Bucks.
Cirencester, St. Katherine's Chapel.
Headington, Oxfordshire.—*Proceedings Soc. Antiq.*, 2nd series, ii. 316.
Preston, Suffolk.

Also in the "Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall," No. xiii., April, 1872, is the description of one found in Ludgvan church, 1740, with a drawing by Dr. Borlase, accompanied by some observations by the same. These are full of fancies which do not require any attention; but the work itself appears, from the drawing which Dr. Borlase made of it, to have some curious points. First, the saint is not moving, as usual, towards the left, but towards the right. The hermit stands in front of his oratory, holding out a lantern from a pole; and above is this legend on a scroll: "Miror res minima carnis sit cleris ademta." Another scroll above the figure of St. Christopher has, "Dux geres mentem, quia tu fers cuncta regentem." A serpent curls round the base of the staff, which one on the shore seems attempting to hook; and there is also the fisherman. But the most curious part of the Ludgvan painting was its association with what appears to be the story of Reynard the Fox. A door separated the two compositions, over which was the oratory of the hermit; but the subjects were, in a manner, connected together by birds flying about, a dog or otter carrying a fish in its mouth, and a hare or rabbit. On the opposite side of the door are trees; on one an owl is seated, birds pecking at its eyes, and below the fox carrying off a goose. On another tree he is caught and being hanged by the geese. This must have been an exceedingly rare instance of the fable of the Fox being introduced on the walls of a church, still more curious its being associated with the legend of St. Christopher.

Fragments of a St. Christopher appear to have been found at Mylor, in the same county, 1869.