

ENGLISH MEDIEVAL ALABASTER CARVINGS IN ICELAND  
AND DENMARK.

By PHILIP NELSON, M.D., F.S.A.

There exist in Iceland no fewer than three English medieval reredoses, in addition to which there is also a group of the Blessed Trinity in its original wooden case, all of which were no doubt exported thither at the time of their manufacture. The most probable port from whence they would sail would be either Hull, Scarborough or Bristol, all these places having a considerable trade with Iceland in the fifteenth century, in sulphur, eider-down, salt-fish and wool.

Christian I of Denmark, who became king of Norway in 1450, permitted traffic with Iceland,<sup>1</sup> and in the same year William Canynges, merchant of Bristol, was licensed by Henry VI to trade for fish and other goods in Iceland.<sup>2</sup> Some years later, in 1478, Robert Alcock was licensed to trade with Iceland<sup>3</sup> and in 1483 Robert Alcock, merchant, of Kyngeston-super-Hull, received a license to carry on trade with Iceland.<sup>4</sup> Richard III is said to have 'encouraged trade, and especially voyages to Iceland and the northern fisheries,'<sup>5</sup> and it is possible that it was at this latter period that the examples of English alabaster work now preserved in Iceland found their way thither.

Of the reredoses under review two are in the form of triptychs, and these and also the group of the Trinity are now in the museum at Reykjavik, whilst the other, a small fixed reredos, is in Tingöre church. These carvings are as follows :—

I. Passion reredos in Reykjavik Museum (plate 1), formerly at Reynistaar church. in Skagaflord. This consists of the wooden frame, hinged between the first and second panels and also between the fifth and sixth, containing seven scenes from our Lord's passion, with terminal figures

<sup>1</sup> Rymer, *Foedera*, xi, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xi, pp. 277-278.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* xii, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* xii, p. 180.

<sup>5</sup> Markham, *Life of Richard III*, p. 161.



PASSION TRIPTYCH FROM REYNISTAAR CHURCH, IN REYKJAVIK MUSEUM, ICELAND.

of saints. Above the panels are detached canopies, composed of three tall *single* gables and four buttresses, whilst the lesser canopies over the saints were similar, but consisted of only two single gables and three buttresses. Upon the coving beneath are painted leaves and sprays, a unique form of decoration, in place of the usual groining.

Across the upper part was the wooden cresting, interrupted by the canopy of the taller central panel. Below the panels is a band of inscriptions, descriptive of the carvings above, which inscriptions are:—

**Ses petrus ; Captus est ihc ; Flagellatus est ihc ;  
 Baulacio crucis ; Crucificus est ihc ;  
 Depositus est ihc ; Sepultus est ihc ;  
 Resurreccio dni ; Ses paulus**

The chamfers of the stiles are adorned with colour and gold, the latter being enhanced with gesso knobs, with the exception of those bordering the terminal figures. The carvings are as follows:—

A. St. Peter in a long robe and cloak, holding in his right hand a key and in his left a book.

1. The Betrayal. This panel is of the usual type as is also the following.

2. The Flagellation.

3. Carrying the cross. In the middle is our Lord carrying the cross upon his right shoulder, assisted by the Virgin, who follows behind. In front is a man dragging upon a rope attached to our Lord, whilst in the background are two other men, who carry the torse and the three sacred nails.

4. The Crucifixion. This tall central panel, much of which is missing, includes our Lady, the two Maries, St. John and St. Longinus, in addition to whom are two angels bearing chalices.

5. The Deposition. We have here our Lady, upon the left of the cross, and Nicodemus, who supports the figure of Christ, and on the right are Joseph of Arimathea upon the ladder, and at the foot of the cross St. John withdrawing the nail from the feet.

6. The Entombment. Our Lady stands behind the tomb, beside whom are St. Mary Cleophas, St. Martha and St. John. St. Mary Magdalene kneels in front of the tomb in which our Lord is being placed by Nicodemus at the head and Joseph of Arimathea at the feet, in whose gypciere may be seen the three sacred nails. In this and in the next scene the tomb is adorned with sprigs of leaf-work.

7. The Resurrection. The treatment is unusual, in that two adoring angels appear in the upper corners and of the four soldiers one rests his folded arms upon a square shield blazoned with a cross.

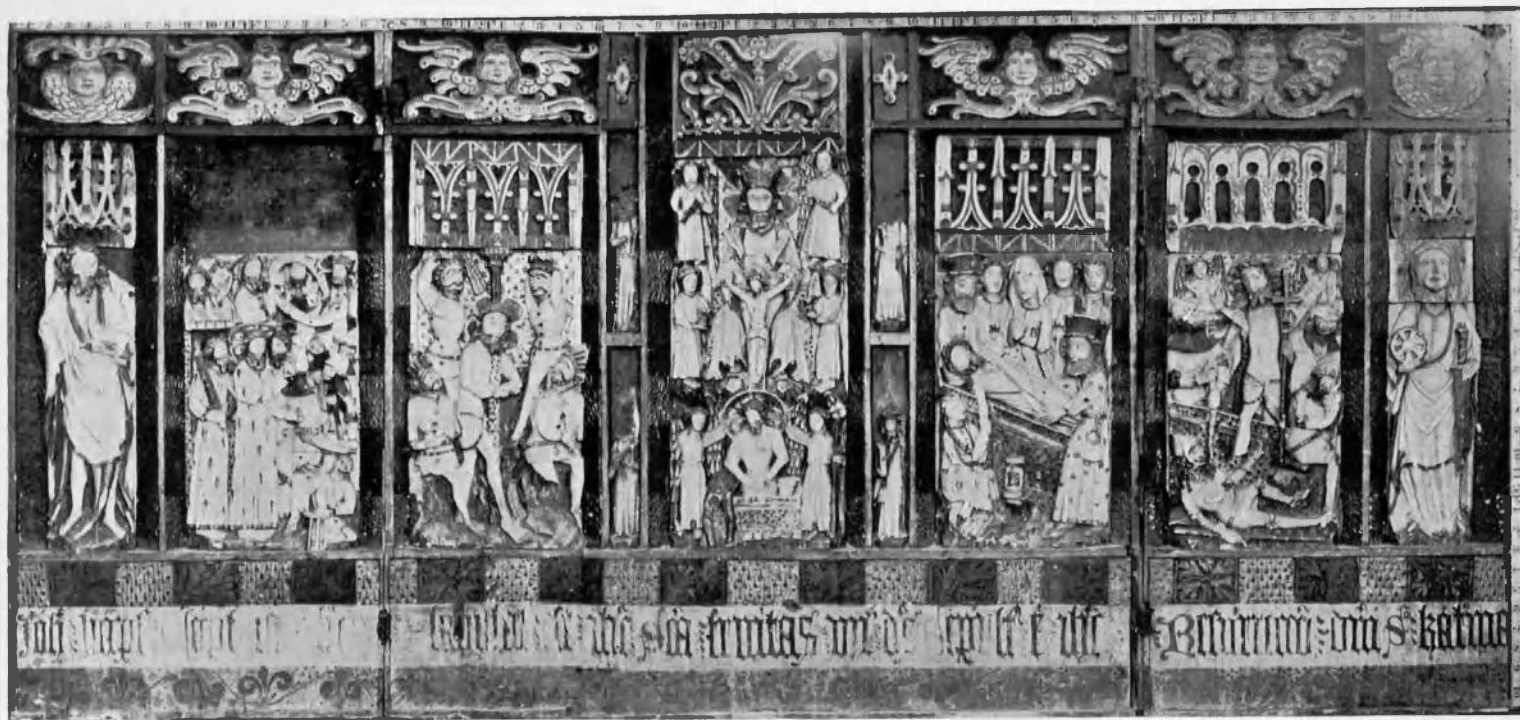
B. St. Paul. This figure is very similar to that of St. Peter, but the treatment is reversed; he holds in his right hand a book and in his left a sword.

II. In the Reykjavik Museum, formerly in the church at Hólar, is a Passion triptych in its original frame, the wings of which are hinged between the first and second, and between the fourth and fifth panels respectively (plate II). The wooden cresting above the canopies is lost, as are also all the alabaster canopies, save the two small terminal canopies and the remains of the large one over the Resurrection. From this fragment it would appear that the large canopies consisted of three tall gables and four buttresses, whilst the smaller are formed of two gables and three buttresses, identical with the canopies over the panels in no. I previously described, save that the coving is enriched with groining. Across the base is a band of inscriptions explanatory of the scenes above, with line fillings of vertical leaf-work, above which are blocks of colour and gilt gesso-work, and beneath is a band of scroll-work on a background adorned with gesso knobs. On the two central stiles are four small saintly figures, there being two such on each.

The carvings are as follows:—

A. St. John Baptist, in camel's skin, shewing the head and knuckle-bone, over which he has an ample cloak. He holds on his left hand a closed book, on which rests the Agnus Dei.

1. This panel depicts two scenes, viz.: the Agony and the Betrayal, and is in this respect unique.



PASSION TRIPTYCH FROM HÓLAR CHURCH, IN REYKJAVIK MUSEUM, ICELAND.

In the upper part is the Agony, which represents our Lord, behind whom are the heads of St. John, St. Peter and St. James Major, holding in His hands a scroll whilst He prays before a chalice and wafer. In the background is the Father, who holds in His right hand a scroll. Both Divine figures have cruciferous nimbi.

Below is the Betrayal, which presents unusual features. Our Lord, behind whom is St. Peter with a drawn sword over his right shoulder, is about to be kissed by Judas. A group of six soldiers, at whose feet is the kneeling figure of Malchus, resting his right hand on the lantern, occupies the right-hand portion of the panel.

2. The Scourging. This is of the usual type.

3. This tall central panel is unique in that it depicts two scenes :

(a) The Blessed Trinity, surrounded by four standing angels, the upper two censing, the others holding chalices.

(b) Our Lord's Pity. The half-length figure of Christ stands in the tomb with both hands folded upon the loin-cloth ; behind His head is a large cruciferous nimbus. Across the tomb lies the holy coat, in front are the three dice, and on either side is a standing figure of an angel supporting the nimbus, one of whom in addition supports a cruciferous staff.

The close connexion between this Eucharistic symbol and the Saint John's head is remarkable, and points to Nottingham as the source of this somewhat crude and late triptych.

4. The Entombment. This is of the usual type.

5. The Resurrection. This is of the usual style, but includes two adoring angels.

B. St. Katherine, clad in a long robe and ample cloak, holding in her right hand a wheel and in her left a large sword pointing to the earth.

Upon the faces of the central stiles occur the four following figures :

(a) Headless saint with a paternoster hanging from his right side and in his left hand a closed book.

(b) Headless figure of St. Andrew, holding in his right hand a saltire cross and in his left a closed book.

(c) Headless figure of St. John the Divine, holding in his right hand a closed book and in his left a palm branch.

(d) St. James Major, holding in his right hand a closed book and in his left a bourdon, whilst from his shoulder hangs a bag upon his right side.

The inscriptions are as follows (omitting suspensions):—

**Joh bapt; Capt est ihe; Flagellat est ihe;  
Sca trinitas un ds; Sepult e ihe; Resurrecto  
dni; S katina.**

In the church of Tingöre, Iceland, is a remarkable small fixed Passion reredos of three scenic panels, separated by panels of two saints (plate III).

Across the top is a deep band of oak cresting, interrupted by the alabaster carving of a church, whilst across the base is a band of inscriptions, above which and upon the stiles are blocks of coloured leaf-work and gilt gesso. The inscriptions are as follows:

**Flagellat est ihe; Michael; Sta Trinitas;  
Gabriel: Resurrectio dni**

Over the lateral panels and the figures are alabaster canopies of unique design: those over the former consist of four low gables separated by five buttresses, which terminate below in leaf-work and above in spreading foliage, whilst those over the latter consist of the two low gables and three buttresses.

1. The Flagellation. This is of the usual style.

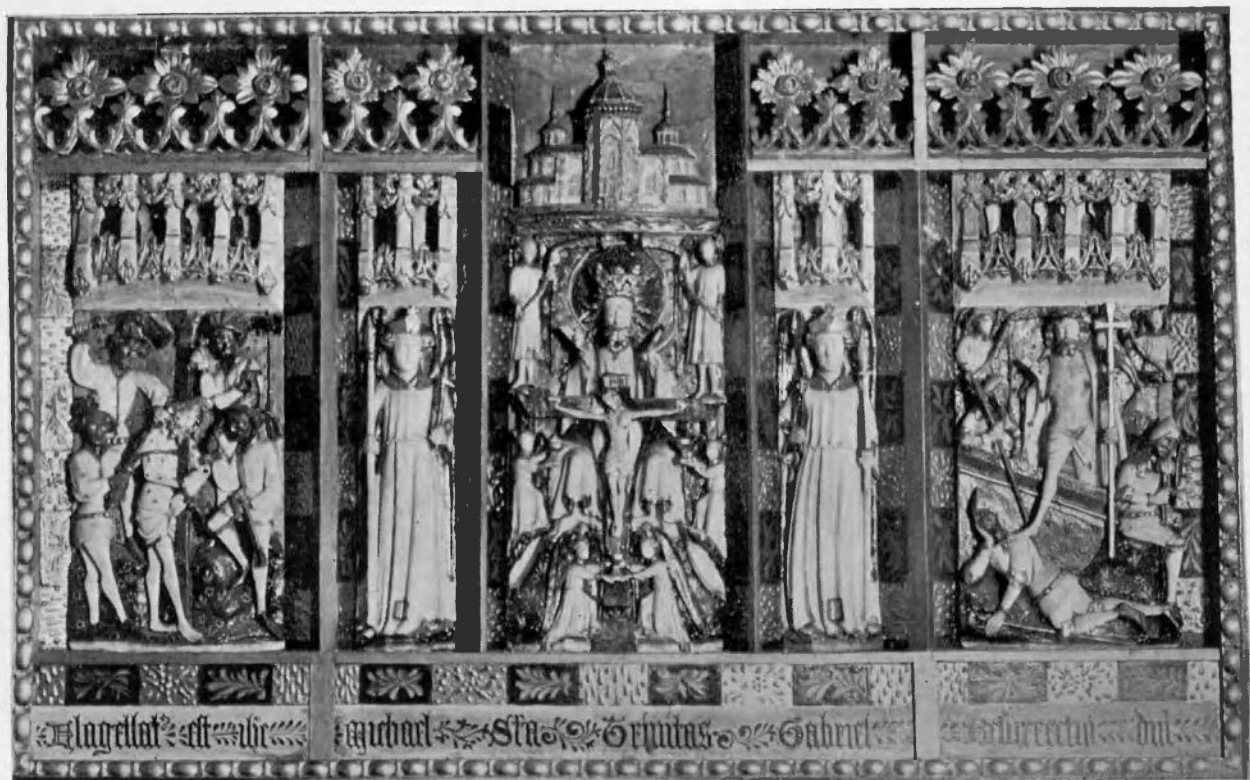
A. St. Michael, winged, in amice and girded albe, wearing a cross-surmounted mitre, and holding in his right hand a spear.

2. The Blessed Trinity. Above the central group are two censing angels and beneath the cross are four angels catching the sacred blood in three chalices.

B. St. Gabriel, very similar to St. Michael, but he holds in his right hand a sceptre surmounted by a fleur-de-lys and in his left hand a spear.

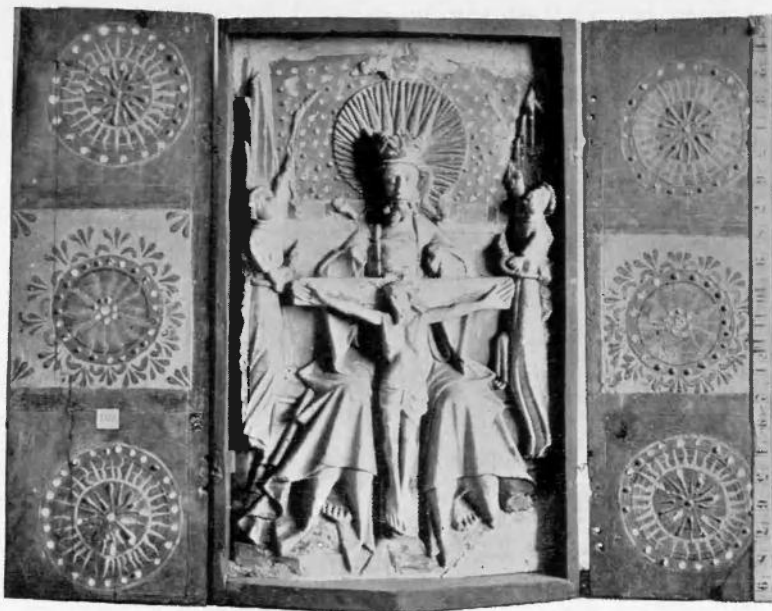
3. The Resurrection. This is of the usual type, but includes at the top figures of two censing angels.





PASSION REREDOS IN TINGÖRE CHURCH, ICELAND.





NO. I. THE TRINITY, REYKJAVIK MUSEUM, ICELAND.



NO. 2. ST. KATHERINE TRIPTYCH IN VEJRUNG CHURCH, DENMARK.

There is preserved in the Museum at Reykjavik a panel representing the Blessed Trinity (plate iv, 1), in which the Father has a rayed nimbus placed between two censing angels, whose uplifted wings have the primaries indicated by the chisel. This panel is contained in its original wooden case or housing, which projects forwards in the centre, and is fitted with two narrow doors painted with sun ornaments enhanced with gesso knobs.

The case measures 22 in. in height by 14 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. in width, whilst the doors are 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide.

In the church at Vejrum, in Denmark, is an English alabaster reredos in the form of a triptych, to the honour of St. Katherine, of about the year 1470 (plates iv, v and vi, 1). The reredos contains five subject panels with two terminal figures of female saints, all of which would originally have alabaster canopies over them. At present, however, only those over the second and fourth panels survive. I do not consider the woodwork of this triptych to be original, but on the other hand to be continental in origin and of a slightly later date than the contents: it is now inset in a Renaissance altar-piece. Across the lower part of the triptych was a series of inscriptions descriptive of the scenes above. The carvings are as follows:—

A. St. Barbara, clad in a long robe, laced over the body, and an ample cloak, bearing in her right hand a palm and in her left a tower.

1. St. Katherine interrogated by Maxentius. On the right hand is the emperor, from whose crown proceeded a devil's head, seated beneath a curtained canopy, holding in his right hand a drawn sword. Before him is the saint, who is crowned, with hands uplifted, behind whom is a jailer, carrying a number of keys. In the background are three judges, wearing caps and tippets, two of whom hold parchment rolls.

2. St. Katherine in prison. Through the window of the prison, from which the metal bars are now missing, may be seen the saint, with uplifted hands, wearing a laced dress, cloak and crown. Above flutters the dove and upon the left are the empress Faustina wearing a head-dress, and Porphyry, whilst upon the right stands our Lord, wearing the torse and loin-cloth, and carrying the cross-staff.

3. St. Katherine saved from the wheels. This subject, which as usual is equal to the height of the lateral panels with their canopies, is unusual in that the Almighty does not appear above the central figure of the saint.

4. The Decollation of St. Katherine. In the foreground the saint is kneeling and lays her head upon the block, which she clasps with her hands. Above her stands the headsman between the emperor and the jailer, with his falchion swung aloft. The jailer, who carries the keys, stands within the prison gateway.

5. The burial on Mount Sinai. The crowned body of St. Katherine is placed within the tomb by an archangel standing at the foot of the tomb. Behind is another archangel holding an asperge and a holy-water stoup, standing between two angels with uplifted hands whilst in the foreground is another angel, seated.

B. St. Mary Magdalene. She holds in her right hand an ointment-pot and in her left a tress of hair.

The surviving canopies are constituted of three low *double* gables, separated by two two-light windows, and of six buttresses. Canopies of similar character are to be seen at Venice (St. Katherine triptych), at Ecaquelon (Passion, but taller gables), and at St. Avit-les-Guespieres.

I know of only one other triptych dedicated to St. Katherine, which retains all its panels, viz. : that at Venice ; but separate panels from St. Katherine altar-pieces are of frequent occurrence, as may be realised from the following list, which shows where examples are to be seen.

1A. St. Katherine refuses to sacrifice. British Museum.

1B. Trial before the Emperor. Este coll. ; Vejrum ; Nelson coll.

2. Burning of the Philosophers. Venice ; Lydiate ; Este coll. ; Rouen ; Dieppe ; Trieste.

3. St. Katherine in prison. Vejrum ; Soc. Antiq. ; Fuenterrabia ; Este coll. ; Venice ; Nelson coll. ; British Museum ; Preston in Holderness (fragment) ; Trieste.

4. St. Katherine saved from the wheels. Carcassonne ; Elham ; Venice ; Lydiate ; Fuenterrabia ; Vejrum.

5A. St. Katherine kneels in prayer. Lydiate.

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Journ.* vol. lxxvii, pl. ii, p. 68.



NO. I. LEFT WING OF THE ST. KATHERINE TRIPTYCH,  
VEJRUN CHURCH, DENMARK.

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NO. 2. RIGHT WING OF THE SAME.

PLATE V.



NO. 1. MIDDLE PART OF THE ST. KATHERINE TRIPTYCH, VÊJRUM CHURCH, DENMARK.



NO. 2. MIDDLE PART OF THE ST. GEORGE TRIPTYCH, BORBJERG CHURCH, JUTLAND.

5B. Decollation of St. Katherine. Este coll. ; Vejrum ; Venice ; Fuenterrabia ; Nelson coll. ; Trieste.

6. Burial of St. Katherine. Venice ; Vejrum ; Lydiate ; Shaftesbury.

The terminal saints flanking the St. Katherine series are always female, and the following shews their variety and location.

Vejrum. St. Barbara and St. Mary Magdalene.

Venice. St. Elizabeth and St. Dorothy.

Este coll. St. Margaret and St. Apollonia.

Fuenterrabia. St. Margaret and St. — (lost).

There is preserved in the church at Borbjerg, Jutland, Denmark, a remarkable triptych dedicated to St. George, consisting of five anecdotal and two image panels (plates vi, 2, and vii ; and this, in its wooden frame, has been inserted into a seventeenth-century Renaissance altar-piece. This triptych, which appears to date from *circa* 1480, still retains all its original oak cresting of fleurs-de-lys ; the piece now over the central panel should however, be placed above the adjacent one.

Some of the colour and gesso ornament still survives, but the alabaster canopies belonging to the central and fourth panels are unfortunately lost. So far as I am aware, only one of the anecdotal panels, viz. that which depicts the resurrection and arming of St. George, is represented elsewhere, at La Celle, where these incidents appear separately treated.

The present sequence of the scenes suggests that the carvings have been disturbed and I imagine that the following was the original order :—

A. a. St. George, in plate-armour, holding with his left hand a shield, blazoned argent, a cross gules, whilst with his right hand he spears the dragon, on which he stands.

i. 5. St. George fights against the Gauls. The saint mounted on horseback, carrying a heater-shaped blazoned shield, spearing a foe, whom with his charger he has hurled to the earth. The vanquished man-at-arms, who wears a salade, has upon his left arm a shield, the charges upon which are uncertain, perhaps three fleurs-de-lys. Behind upon a city gateway are three figures, a king



wounded in the eye by a dart and two men in plate armour.<sup>1</sup>

It may be suggested that this scene represents the overthrow of Julian the Apostate at the hands of the saint, in which case this must be regarded as the second panel in the series and would be preceded by his resurrection by the Virgin.

ii. 4. The resurrection and arming of St. George. St. George, in complete mail, kneels in front of a tomb at the feet of the Virgin, who is placing over his head his helm, whilst at the same time an angel fixes on his spurs. Behind are two other angels, holding his spear and sword, whilst in the background stands his charger saddled and bridled.

This scene of the resurrection and arming of the saint, after his death at the hands of the Gauls was one of the most renowned of the miracles of the Virgin. It really refers to the story of St. Mercurius as related by the Pseudo-Amphilochius in the Life of St. Basil, and was the subject of numerous illustrations in England during the middle ages.<sup>2</sup> I only know of one representation of this incident in continental art, viz. that upon the fifteenth-century painted reredos of Spanish workmanship in the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>3</sup>

iii. 1. The martyrdom of St. George with brands. St. George, who is nude, save for a pair of short drawers, is martyred by three executioners, armed with large knives. Behind the saint, who raises his eyes to heaven, are Dacian and an attendant.

‘And after he did do take brands of iron and join them to his sides, and his bowels which then appeared he did do froit and salt, and so sent him into prison, but our Lord appeared to him the same night with great light and comforted him much sweetly.’<sup>4</sup>

iv. 2. St. George preserved from the poisoned cup. This apocryphal incident is referred to in the following

<sup>1</sup> This incident also occurs in fifteenth-century glass in the church of St. Neot, Cornwall.

<sup>2</sup> Queen Mary's Psalter ff. 222 v. & 223; Carew-Poyntz Horae (M. R. James, *Cat. of MSS. in Fitzwilliam Mus.* p. 116), Winchester Cath. Lady chapel N. side 9 and 10. Ely Cathedral, Lady chapel.

<sup>3</sup> This includes the arming by the Virgin, offerings to the dragon, dragon girdled by Cleodelinda, baptism of royal family, Saint George fights the Moors, and also the incident of the poisoned cup.

<sup>4</sup> *The Golden Legend*, ed. Ellis (*Temple Classics*, vol. iii, p. 129-130).



NO. I. LEFT WING OF THE ST. GEORGE TRIPTYCH,  
BORBJERG CHURCH, JUTLAND.

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NO. 2. RIGHT WING OF THE SAME.

PLATE VII.

passage : 'Then, when Dacian the provost saw that he might not surmount him, he called his enchanter and said to him : I see that these christian people doubt not our torments. The enchanter bound himself, upon his head to be smitten off, if he overcame not his crafts. Then he did take strong venom and meddled it with wine, and made invocation of the names of his false gods, and gave it to St. George to drink. St. George took it and made the sign of the cross on it, and anon drank it without grieving him any thing. Then the enchanter made it more stronger than it was tofore of venom, and gave it him to drink, and it grieved him nothing. When the enchanter saw that, he kneeled down at the feet of St. George and prayed him that he would make him christian. And when Dacian knew that he was become christian he made to smite off his head.<sup>1</sup>

The above enchanter was by an extraordinary freak of fancy named Athanasius. St. Athanasius, the Trinitarian bishop of Alexandria, was succeeded in that See by the Arian George, who was murdered by the inhabitants, during the reign of Julian the Apostate A.D. 363.

Then the emperor ordered him to be put in prison, and bade enquire everywhere for some noted sorcerer.

Then Athanasius the sorcerer heard of the matter, and came to the emperor, and asked him boldly, 'Why badest thou fetch me thus suddenly to thee ?'

Datian answered Athanasius thus,

'Canst thou extinguish the Christian's sorcery ?'

Then the sorcerer answered Datian thus,

'Bid the Christian man come to me,

and may I be guilty if I cannot

totally extinguish his magic by my sorcery.'

Then rejoiced Datian that he had found such a sorcerer,

and bade bring God's champion out of prison,

and said to the saint, with fierce anger,

'For thee, George, I have procured this magician ;

overcome his magic, or let him overcome thee,

either let him undo thee, or do thou undo him.'

George then looked upon the heathen magician,

and said that he perceived Christ's grace in him.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130.

Athanasius then speedily took  
 a great bowl, filled with a noxious draught,  
 and dedicated all that drink to the devils,  
 and gave it him to drink, but it hurt him not.  
 Then said again the magician, 'Yet one thing will I do,  
 and if that hurt him not, I will submit to Christ.'  
 He took then a cup, with a death-bearing drink,  
 and cried aloud to the black devils,  
 and to the foremost devils, and to the most powerful,  
 and in their names enchanted the fearful drink,  
 and gave it to the Lord's saint to drink;  
 but the fiendish liquor harmed him not a whit.  
 Then the sorcerer saw that he could not hurt him,  
 and fell at his feet, praying for baptism;  
 and the holy George straightway baptised him.  
 Then Dacian became fiendishly angry,  
 and bade seize on the sorcerer, who had there believed in  
 God,  
 and bring him out of the city, and instantly behead him.<sup>1</sup>

In the middle stands the saint, holding a scroll, to whom the magician hands the poisoned cup, from which the evil spirit is exorcised by the saint. The kneeling bearded figure and the headless body in the foreground are apparently successive incidents following the enchanter's declaration of faith. Behind is Dacian holding a drawn sword and wearing a triple crown.

v. 3. The high central panel was misplaced by the original sculptor. The martyrdom scene should have formed the taller centre-piece, but the architectural details no doubt demanded this departure from the chronological sequence of events as related in the Golden Legend.

St. George kneels before the temple of Apollo, in the doorway of which stands a man with hands raised in prayer, and above which is the horned figure of a devil standing on a pedestal flanked by two pinnacles. Behind the saint, who holds a scroll, are Dacian, triple crowned, holding a sceptre, and two attendants.

It is recorded that St. George told the son of a widow named Cholastike, which son he had cured of lameness

<sup>1</sup> Aelfric's *Lives of the Saints*, E.E.T.S. vol. 76, p. 311, 13.

and blindness, to proceed to the temple of Apollo and there command the idol to descend. As the result of his order, the devil within the image at once leapt down and was swallowed up by the earth.

The scene before the temple is thus related in the Golden Legend. 'Then Dacian . . . said to him : George, the patience of our gods is over great unto thee which hast blasphemed them, and done to them great despite, then fair, and right sweet son, I pray thee that thou return to our law and make sacrifice to the idols, and leave thy folly, and I shall enhance thee to great honour and worship. Then began St. George to smile, and said to him : Wherefore saidst thou not to me thus at the beginning ? I am ready to do as thou sayest. Then was Dacian glad and made to cry over all the town that all the people should assemble for to see George make sacrifice which so much had striven there against. Then was the city arrayed and feast kept throughout all the town, and all come to the temple for to see him.

'When St. George was on his knees, and they supposed that he would have worshipped the idols, he prayed our Lord God of heaven that he would destroy the temple and the idol in the honour of his name, for to make the people to be converted. And anon the fire descended from heaven and burnt the temple, and the idols, and their priests, and sith the earth opened and swallowed all the cinders and ashes that were left.'<sup>1</sup>

B. B. A winged and feathered figure of St. Michael, clad in a cloak and wearing a cross-surmounted mitre, spearing with his left hand the dragon, on which he stands, whilst upon his shield he rests his right.

The alabaster canopies which surmount the carvings are of a type previously unknown to me. The larger canopies consist of three *single* gables and two two-light windows separated and flanked by buttresses. The smaller terminal canopies have two *single* gables and three buttresses.

The only other reredos of English alabaster to the honour of St. George is that at La Celle (Eure) which was described and illustrated by Count Paul Biver, *Arch. Journ.*

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Legend*, vol. iii, p. 131.

vol. lxvii, pp. 71-79. This however is a compound fixed reredos to the honour of the Blessed Virgin and St. George, to the latter of whom some six panels are devoted, which include the resurrection, the arming, the slaying of the dragon, the royal baptism, the interrogation of the saint by Dacian and the decollation. A very close relationship existed between St. George and the blessed Virgin, altars to whom existed with a compound dedication, as is apparent from the following extract from the will of James Glastebe, 1534, 'To the light of our Lady and Sancte George ijs' (at Towcester church).<sup>1</sup>

The story of St. George, who became patron saint of England in 1222, was a very popular one in England in medieval times. As early as 1385 we find a gild of St. George existing in Norwich, which had a chapel in the cathedral. It was of course a very frequent subject among the mystery plays of the middle ages, *ridings* of St. George occurring on April 23rd, the saint's day, at Chester, Coventry, Leicester, Norwich and York, among other places. On the occasion of the visit of Prince Edward to Coventry in 1474, there was a pageant held, 'upon the Conddite in the Crosse Chepyng of seint George armed and Kynges dought<sup>r</sup> kneyl yng afore hym w<sup>t</sup> a lambe and the fader and the moder beyng in a toure a boven beholdyng seint George savyng their dought<sup>r</sup> from the dragon.'<sup>2</sup>

In 1416 the emperor Sigismund was entertained by Henry V at Windsor, when on 24 May, he was admitted a knight of the Garter. He brought with him a notable relic of St. George, his hand, which was still preserved at Windsor in the reign of Henry VIII. At the dinner given by the king in honour of the Emperor three 'soteltes' or sweetmeats formed items of the feast. These 'soteltes' depicted three incidents from the life of St. George, viz.: (1) 'armyng seint George and an Angel doyng on his spores,' (2) 'seint George ridyng and fightyng with the dragon, with his spere in his hand,' (3) 'a castel and seint George and the kynges doughter ledyng the lambe in at the castel gates.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Journ.* vol. lxx, p. 418.

<sup>2</sup> E.E.T.S. Extra Series, vol. lxxxvii, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, vol. i, p. 223; Cotton MS. Julius, B, 1.



It is not to be doubted that the scenes we find in the English medieval alabaster reredoses depict in carving the various incidents represented in the mystery plays and pageants so popular in the fifteenth century. These scenes followed very carefully the lines laid down by



FIG. 1. THE SCOURGING : COPENHAGEN MUSEUM.

tradition for the suitable rendering of the various subjects, and a careful study of medieval alabasters should enable us to reconstruct in essentials the medieval stage. Even such a detail as the green foreground 'with daisies pied,' probably only represents the rush-strewn stage of a wheeled theatre.

It is a remarkable circumstance that the reredos at Borbjerg should omit the well-known incident of the slaying of the dragon and portray the much less popular subject of the poisoned chalice. Perhaps we have in this a rendition of a lost mystery play.

In the church at Torning, near Viborg in Jutland, are the remains of an English medieval reredos in alabaster.

In the National Museum, Copenhagen, are several examples of English alabaster work, which include the following :—

The Blessed Trinity. This, which consists of the upper half of a group, shows the crowned figure of the Father supporting the crucified Christ down to the level of the loin-cloth. This fragment came to the Museum in 1828 from the church of Hvam in Iceland.

The Flagellation. This panel, purchased in 1862, is of unknown provenance. It is of refined execution and follows the usual type.

The Resurrection and the Ascension which were added to the Museum in 1829 present the usual treatment which we have allocated to the latter end of the fourteenth century ; but in these two panels the embattled canopy ends in a small turret. These have been described at length in a previous paper,<sup>1</sup> as also has the early fifteenth-century triptych, in its original wooden case, shewing five 'Joys of the Virgin.' This remarkable example came from the church of Münkathveraa, Iceland.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Journ.* vol. lxxv, pp. 332, 333, pl. x, 2, pl. xxv.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Journ.* vol. xxv, p. 313, pl. 1.