

I.

NOTICE OF A SCULPTURED REPRESENTATION OF ST GEORGE AT FORDINGTON, IN DORSET, AND OF A SIMILAR SCULPTURE AT LINTON, IN ROXBURGHSHIRE. BY SIR MOLYNEAUX NEPEAN, BART., F.S.A. SCOT.

In offering a few remarks upon St George, I suppose the first step is to give some information as to what is said of him prior to his becoming the patron saint of England.

Metaphrastus, who wrote in the ninth and tenth centuries, relates that he was born of noble Christian parents in Cappadocia early in the fourth century, and he is often mentioned as St George of Cappadocia.¹ After the death of his father he went to Palestine with his mother, who owned some property there, and when old enough took service under the Emperor Diocletian; but during that Emperor's persecution of the Christians, St George having remonstrated with him, the Emperor caused him to be beheaded.

His being the patron of soldiers is partly due to his being a soldier himself, and partly because he appeared to the Christian army under Godfrey de Bouillon before the battle of Antioch, and again to Richard Cœur de Lion during the Crusades, which miraculous events being made known to the troops, gave them so much encouragement that they forthwith defeated the Saracens with great slaughter. He was chosen by our ancestors as their patron saint under the first Norman kings, for what reason it is not easy to conjecture.

Having thus noticed the history, such as we have, of the saint, I will briefly allude to the church, in which is the original of the drawing which I have here, with the view of supporting my theory.

From Dugdale's *Monasticon* we learn that the church of Fordington was dedicated to St George, and was endowed with the church of St

¹ Greek scholars will doubtless remark the singularity of such a name being given to a patrician, as the word Γεωργος means a husbandman or labourer, from Γην εὐεργεῖν (one of the tenses of ἐρδω), meaning "to work the earth."

George at Dorchester by Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury, in 1091. It certainly appears from the style of the building that it was primarily erected some time previous to the Conquest. It is cruciform, and is a curious combination of the Saxon and Norman styles of architecture—*e.g.*, in the south aisle are two pillars with *Saxon* capitals, but crowned with the *Norman* arch.

The village of Fordington is the "Fortitone" of *Doomsday Book*, and the "Fortintun" of the time of Henry II., and derives its name from the ford which in olden time crossed the Frome river at this place "Fording-Tún," or, the town of the ford. "Ford" is from the Anglo-Saxon verb "faran," to go on or across. "Tún" expresses a town or village, more especially the group of houses round the proprietor's dwelling.

That there were fights between Christians and pagans in this locality appears pretty evident. When the bridge was built here in 1747, in place of the old ford, when digging for material in the vicinity, the workmen turned up about 200 skeletons, the skulls of many of which were peculiar, being of very remarkable thickness. Some of them lay east and west, others north and south. These were supposed to be the remains of men slain in the Danish wars, and that the difference of position marked the distinction between Christians and heathens. It has also been assumed that these were remains of people who died in the plague of 1340; but from the "separate" burials I should lean to the first theory, more particularly as a sword was found buried with one of the skeletons, and further, the victims of the plague were usually shot into pits without much ceremony.

The sketch which I now lay before you is from one taken about 100 years ago from Fordington church, and is engraved in Hutchin's *History of Dorset*. It represents an armed figure or knight on horseback (St George), who is riding down and destroying the heathens. Behind are two kneeling figures evidently asking quarter, their weapons placed behind them, the javelins apparently stuck in the ground and the shields resting against them. A glory is round the knight's head and a cross on the banner of his lance. I think that this undoubtedly represents St

George slaying the heathen, which, as my learned friend Dr Anderson observed to me, appears to symbolise the triumph of Christianity over Paganism as much as the conquest of the dragon, "the great serpent" (typical of sin) in other representations of the saint. The rather pronounced form of the heathen nose *may* be attributed to their wearing "nasals," a nasal being a bar which, taking the place of the modern "peak," protected the nose and face from a sword-cut, but this is merely a suggestion.

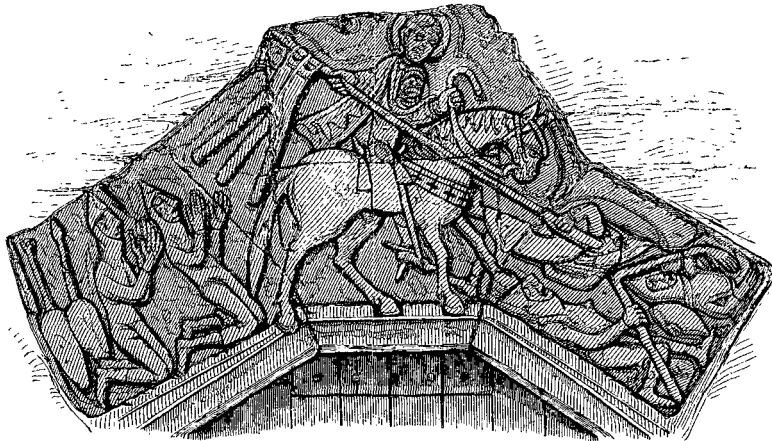


Fig. 1. St George Triumphant over the Heathen, on the Church of Fordington, Dorset. (From a Photograph.)

It will be observed that the sketch is of an irregular fragment built into a wall. That from a photograph (fig. 1) differs in some trifling points from Hutchins'. The form of the shields for instance, the treatment of the knight's head, and the banderol, but "restoration" may have something to do with it.

Another instance may be noted of the knight and monster. I hope I may not bring on my innocent head the wrath of families connected with the sculpture, but there is in the church of Linton, in Roxburgh, a curious

figure of a knight charging a monster (fig. 2). Legend relates that a monstrous worm (the Anglo-Saxon "vyrn" or "wyrn" and the Norse "ormr"; compare Orms-Head) lived in this neighbourhood, and naturally, from his generally unpleasant manners and large appetite, became an intolerable nuisance. This monster Sir Walter Scott thought a wolf or boar; but be this as it may, it was slain by a certain John Somerville, who is said to have acquired the manor of Linton as a reward for his bravery by gift from William the Lion in 1174. It may represent the

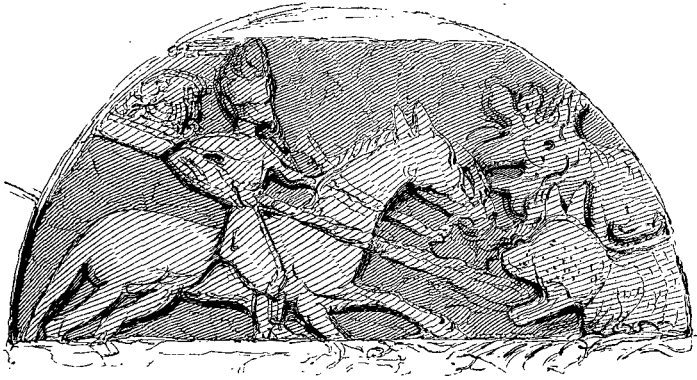


Fig. 2. St George and the Dragon on the Tympanum of the Doorway of the Church at Linton, Roxburghshire.

valiant knight, but it has a most suspicious resemblance to George and the Dragon,—the idea, at any rate, seems borrowed from it.

All these representations symbolise the triumph of Good over Evil. The symbol itself was used thousands of years before St George was thought of, as we find from mural paintings and illustrations connected with hieroglyphics that the Egyptians of the Pyramid times figured deities overcoming sin in the form of the "Great Serpent," or sometimes Typhon or the Evil principle. Compare the goddess Serke, whose star-spangled robe typifies her heavenly character, overcoming the serpent (see drawing),

or Horus slaying Typhon, the latter also typifying the triumph of Light over Darkness, or Day (Horus) over Night (Typhon).

I shall now conclude with the remark that this myth applies to three people, two of whom I have noticed ; but the third, my countryman, the redoubtable More of More Hall, who

“ With nothing at all
He slew the Dragon of Wantley,”

has, I am afraid, no monumental slab of the kind. *His* dragon is perhaps the representative of the dragon-flag of the northern pirates, some of whom the valiant More had got the best of.

I also lay before you for the purpose of comparison a very early specimen of Saxon art, which you can place alongside the slabs to show the difference of Saxon and Norman art. It is from the church of Hinton Parva in Dorset, and represents an angel ! The right hand holds a book (the Bible) against the breast, the left plants a cross. To the right of the figure is a butterfly (the Greek $\Psi\chi\eta$ = the soul), intimating apparently that the Bible and cross were the means of salvation. The characteristics of the figure, the holding of the book and cross, correspond curiously with some of the Early Ecclesiastical sculptured stones of Scotland.