

# A MANUSCRIPT IN THE RYLANDS LIBRARY AND FLEMISH-DUTCH AND LOW GERMAN ACCOUNTS OF THE LIFE AND MIRACLES OF SAINT BARBARA

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THERE were four great Virgin Saints venerated in the medieval Church—St. Agnes, St. Catherine, St. Margaret, and St. Barbara. The first three still retain their places as black-letter saints in the Anglican Calendar, but in this country St. Barbara is almost forgotten. Indeed, her cult has never been widespread here. There is only one certain church dedication in her honour, that of Ashton-under-Hill, near Tewkesbury, but even this is to be attributed to French Augustinian monks at one time settled in neighbouring Beckford, whither they had moved from the convent of SS. Martin and Barbara in Normandy.<sup>1</sup> Only in the Norfolk area does a popular cult appear to have existed to any appreciable extent, though this, too, may well have owed its origin to foreigners, in this case to the Flemings, ancient immigrants in East Anglia. In this connection one might mention the puzzling dedication of Haceby Church, near Grantham. The meagreness of the records of this old church leaves room for doubt as to the authenticity of the present dedication to St. Barbara, as quoted, for example, in Crockford's *Clerical Directory* for 1951-2, but it is worth noting that as early as Domesday Book land at *Hazeby* was held by the powerful adventurer Gilbert de Gand who came over with the Conqueror. On the other side of the Channel, however, the cult of St. Barbara was among the most popular. Her power was rated very high, and she was affectionately regarded as the patron saint in time of peril from lightning or fire, as a guardian of those employed in dangerous undertakings, such as armourers, miners

<sup>1</sup> Arnold-Forster, *Studies in Church Dedication*, i (1899), 122.

and quarrymen, and especially as a protector against sudden death.<sup>1</sup>

St. Barbara was widely revered in Flanders, the Netherlands and eastwards into Germany, as is clear from the many foundations bearing her name. It is also clear from the literary records in the vernaculars—Flemish, Dutch, and Low German—in particular the manuscript accounts of the saint which have come down to us chiefly from the second half of the fifteenth century, and it is mainly these I wish to discuss here.

These accounts—prose monographs—may be said to represent the effective end of a long development in hagiographical writing, the ultimate origin of which is to be found among the earliest records of Christian saints—lists of their names arranged according to the order of their feasts. Such lists are known as *ferials* or, since many of those celebrated were martyrs for the faith, they are frequently also called *martyrologies*. The first of these dates from the middle of the fourth century, while the most famous, the “Hieronymian”—it was erroneously ascribed to Jerome—was drawn up in the second half of the fifth century. Later, the utility of such lists was enhanced by the addition under each name of a few sentences summarizing the saint’s history or the circumstances of martyrdom. These are the so-called *historical martyrologies*, of which many are extant. Thus, from the eighth century we have Bede’s *martyrology*, and from the ninth century works by Florus, who supplemented Bede, Hrabanus Maurus, Ado and Usuard, whose *martyrology* was the most used document of its kind until well on in the latter half of the Middle Ages. All these compilations are, of course, in Latin. The Eastern Church encouraged analogous developments; here the Greek collections are generally termed *synaxaries* and their evolution culminated in the work of Simeon Metaphrastes in the tenth century. His histories are considerably longer than the short notices of the Western *martyrologists* mentioned above, and in this respect his *synaxary* may be compared to the best-known of all Latin *martyrologies*, the *Legenda*

<sup>1</sup> There is no comprehensive modern study of this saint; the *Acta Sanctorum* have not yet reached her day (4 Dec.). Studies of historical interest are N. Müller, *Acta S. Barbarae virg. et mart.* (1703) and F. A. Zaccaria, *De S. Barbarae Nicomediensis cultu* (1781).

*Aurea*, compiled by Jacobus de Voragine between 1260 and 1270. This work, being "worth its weight in gold", soon became immensely popular throughout the Roman Church and generally superseded older compilations. As an excellent source of *exempla*—brief tales naturally lending themselves to moral interpretation—it was quickly rendered into the vernaculars, and many such versions were made in the Netherlands and Germany. In this way the history of St. Barbara as given by Jacobus became the basis for the further development of the Barbara legend there.

The results of this further development may be seen in the manuscript sources dating from 1440 to the first decade of the sixteenth century. In these the history has been greatly expanded—it is generally provided with a conventional prologue and is followed by an account of the translation of the relics. It is usual to find also an appendix containing a varying number of miracles attributed to the saint. Authorship is anonymous. None of these copious texts has as yet been published, indeed they have scarcely been studied.

Manuscripts of this type are noted by De Vooy's in his standard work *Middel nederlandse legenden en exemplen*, 2nd edition (1925), pp. 43-4, where he refers to four manuscripts containing miracles. However, there are actually several more, at least fifteen altogether, to which may be added a single surviving copy of an incunabulum, located in the libraries of Darmstadt,<sup>1</sup> Düsseldorf,<sup>2</sup> and Hamburg<sup>3</sup> in Germany, The Hague<sup>4</sup> and Nijmegen<sup>5</sup> in Holland, Brussels<sup>6</sup> and Ghent<sup>7</sup> in Belgium, and Manchester<sup>8</sup> in this country.<sup>9</sup> This last manuscript

<sup>1</sup> Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, MS. 991.

<sup>2</sup> Landes- und Stadtbibliothek, MS. C. 20; Staatsarchiv, MS. G.V.1.

<sup>3</sup> Stadtbibliothek, MS. 1731.

<sup>4</sup> Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MSS. 71 H 6, 75 H 17, 133 B 13. A fourth item here is the incunabulum referred to above.

<sup>5</sup> Oud-Archief, MS. 8; Bibliotheek der R. K. Universiteit, MS. 66.

<sup>6</sup> Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MSS. 15087-90, 15142, 19554.

<sup>7</sup> Universiteitsbibliotheek, MSS. 123, 1761.

<sup>8</sup> John Rylands Library, Dutch MS. 9.

<sup>9</sup> I am much indebted to Dr. F. P. Pickering, who kindly drew my attention to the Manchester MS. and introduced me to the subject, to Drs. G. I. Lieftinck and J. Deschamps who have greatly assisted me in my search for manuscripts, and to M. Coens, S.J.

is among the longest and details no less than thirty-five miracles out of a total of thirty-nine recorded altogether, the whole document containing some 50,000 words, the equivalent of a small volume today—a far cry from the brief notes of a few dozen words in the historical martyrologies of the early Middle Ages. One can say little about the origin of the documents as the oldest manuscript tradition is confused. But the general background is clear. The demand for this type of literature in both the vernacular and Latin<sup>1</sup> increased rapidly during the fifteenth century and numerous free and partly independent elaborations of the legend were produced. In several of the documents under consideration—and these are the oldest—one can infer from the text that the work is a copy; sometimes this fact is expressly stated, and three copyists signed their names. Occasional Latinisms in one text suggest a translated work, and there are Latin versions corresponding fairly closely to some of the vernacular accounts. Sometimes the Latin and the vernacular are obviously related, for instance, when they both append the same miracles in the same order. On the other hand, the vernacular texts record fifteen miracles not found, so far as I have been able to ascertain, in any Latin codex. Finally, three of the Dutch texts are identical, and two of the German texts are derived from these. Generally speaking, the German texts show dependence on Flemish-Dutch sources, especially as regards the miracles; on the other hand, the purely Flemish and Dutch documents regularly include miracles described as having taken place in Germany. It is apparent that though Flemish-Dutch influence is predominant, German tradition is also important. This is precisely in keeping with the wider spiritual and cultural movements of the age, when a great mass of devotional and moralizing literature of Flemish-Dutch provenance appeared in north Germany, while at the same time the influence of Cologne, as a great ecclesiastical centre, extended far into the Low Countries. Such mutual influences were encouraged by the circumstance that neither a political frontier nor any appreciable linguistic barrier existed between the Low

<sup>1</sup> Cf. especially the Bollandist publications: *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina* (Brussels, 1898-9); *Codices hagiographici bruxellenses* (Brussels, 1886-9).

Countries and northern Germany. Standard literary languages of a national character—"Nederlands" on the one side, "Hochdeutsch" on the other—had not yet arisen. All writing was done in the various regional literary dialects, themselves close to the spoken dialects which nearly everywhere merged imperceptibly into one another, thus forming a continuum from Flanders to Pomerania.

It may be said that the legendary tradition concerning St. Barbara has remained relatively consistent as regards the basic notions, which are quite simple. The saint is a fictitious person. Her name does not occur in the original recension of the Hieronymian martyrology, but she was widely revered in both the Eastern and Western Churches by the seventh century. The accounts of her life and passion are all substantially the same and tell how, refusing suitors, she was immured in a tower by her heathen father. She became a Christian and scorned the idols. Accordingly she was tried, horribly tortured, and finally beheaded by her own father, who was consumed by lightning immediately afterwards. The place of the passion varies in the different sources, reflecting local adaptations of a martyrdom about which there is no genuine historicity—association with the much older story of Danaë may be taken for granted,<sup>1</sup> as was noticed by the Bollandist Papebroch (d. 1714).

The history given by Usuard is rather short, but typical of the early martyrologists. We read :

In Tuscia, passio sanctae Barbarae virginis, sub Maximiano imperatore. Haec post diuam carceris macerationem et nervorum caesionem ac lampadarum adustionem, mamillarumque praecisionem, atque aliorum tormentorum cruciationem, ad extremum gladio data, martyrium consummavit.<sup>2</sup>

It will be noticed that the martyrologist deals chiefly with the sensational torments ; this trait occurs as an integral part of the legend at all stages.

By the time we reach the *Legenda Aurea* we find the characteristic details in full. Jacobus locates the martyrdom in Nicomedia. The father is a nobleman, Dioscorus, who shuts Barbara up in a tower specially built for her. Barbara doubts

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Wirth, *Danaë in den christlichen Legenden* (1892).

<sup>2</sup> Migne, *Patrologia latina*, CXXIV, col. 807.

the value of idol-worship, and meditates on the Christian faith. Next she corresponds with Origen, who sends the priest Valentinus to baptize her, after which she commands workmen to make three windows in the tower. Her father now returns from a long journey, and, curious about the three windows, is told by his daughter that she has become a Christian. The incensed father draws his sword, but the intended victim vanishes through the wall and escapes onto a mountain. Two shepherds see her and one of them reveals to Dioscorus where Barbara is hiding. For this treachery he is turned into a marble statue and his sheep into grasshoppers—at this point the texts often add a touching note in brackets: *hoc apocryphum est!* The tortures are elaborated. In prison her wounds are miraculously healed and Christ clothes her naked body with a white raiment. Condemned to death, she cheerfully hastens to the place of execution. Just before her father strikes the blow, she hears a voice from heaven granting her prayer that she might intercede for the dying in times to come.

A Dutch or German translation of the Barbara legend according to the *Legenda Aurea* runs to about 3,000 words; some of the expanded texts of the fifteenth century, however, are quite ten times as long. In these versions we find the saint provided with a pedigree which connects her both with the royal house of David and with the royal house of Bohemia. This remarkable union owed its origin to the actions of Titus and Vespasian who “destroyed Jerusalem to avenge the holy blood of Christ”. Seeing that the Jews had sold one man, Christ, for thirty pence, the victors now offer thirty Jews for sale for one penny. Among their customers was the king of Bohemia, and in his lot was his future bride, the lovely Esther. Barbara herself is described as of surpassing beauty, filled with grace and wisdom far beyond her tender age of thirteen or so. Her views on idolatry are contained in a series of arguments and she expounds the mystery of the Trinity. Her dealings with Origen are treated at length, and their correspondence is reproduced *in extenso*, the “works” of Origen being cited chapter and verse as authority for various of the facts given. When finally Barbara becomes a convert to Christianity, angels are sent to greet her and John the Baptist

comes in person to baptize her. Then Christ himself appears as a youth and espouses her, leaving a girdle of gold. The latter half of the legend deals largely with Barbara before her accusers. Her defiant words are quoted. But the judge's invariable reaction to her theological arguments is to order yet more sadistic tortures, all of which are described in revolting detail. Her last prayer, in which she begs to be allowed to assist the dying, is reported *verbatim*, likewise the heavenly assent. She was martyred on 4 December 267, aged 13 or 15. Her blood-stains on the rocks can be seen today, as can also the marks of the fire which burnt the ground as it consumed her father, when it left of him but a few ashes which a storm wind at once blew into hell.

Such were the proportions the Barbara legend reached by the end of the Middle Ages, after which it ceased to grow. It is, however, necessary to state that the legend was modified at various points in the mystery plays which had for their theme the passion of the saint and which were in vogue at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. Such Barbara mysteries are known to have been performed in both Dutch<sup>1</sup> and German,<sup>2</sup> but they have not survived. It seems that her passion was more successfully dramatized in France, for two French Barbara mysteries have been preserved, one in manuscript,<sup>3</sup> the other in an early print, which was reprinted no less than ten times between 1520 and 1602.<sup>4</sup> A Breton print of 1557 (reprinted 1647)<sup>5</sup> is the third known dramatic version. These three anonymous dramas are, like the prose accounts, elaborations of the story found in the *Legenda Aurea*. They are independent of each other, and contain matter not found in the prose texts. The French print, for instance, heightens the dramatic tension with a scene in which the mother implores Barbara to submit

<sup>1</sup> F. Prins, "Het oudste Tooneel te Antwerpen", in *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Konink. Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* (1933), pp. 865-72.

<sup>2</sup> A. Rapp, *Studien über den Zusammenhang des geistlichen Theaters mit der bildenden Kunst des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (1936), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed description in M. Brandenburg, *Mystère de S. Barbe* (1907).

<sup>4</sup> P. Seefeldt, *Mystère français de S. Barbe en deux journées* (1908), with reprint of oldest text.

<sup>5</sup> E. Ernault, *Mystère de S. Barbe, tragédie bretonne* (1887), with Breton text and French translation.

to her father and worship the pagan gods, prominent among whom is Mohamet. Later, a courtesan is introduced, whose flippancy and worldliness are a foil to the saintly behaviour of the heroine. In all the dramatized versions the torments are prolonged with fiendish barbarity, and without going into the question of whether the audiences credited even the most robust human frame with the strength to survive such treatment, it seems clear that they, like the readers of the prose versions, somehow called for it.<sup>1</sup>

We must not find fault with the scribes and preachers who, bit by bit, added to the legend throughout the ages. Accounts of saints' lives have from the earliest times borne the stamp of the imaginative, the fantastical, the poetic; they belong to the living mythology of Christianity. The church may have been despotic in matters of doctrine and dogma, but it recommended to the attention of all the products of a mythologizing process which continued, sometimes with official approval, sometimes without, but which continued nevertheless, an ever-growing garland surrounding and colouring the central creed. In this mythologizing process the saints were the chief personalities.

It will be noticed that in the account of the life and passion there are no traces of special Flemish, Dutch or Low German material. There is, however, a tradition preserved in Latin manuscripts of the fifteenth century that the saint's head was brought to Pomerania and Prussia.<sup>2</sup> The contents of several of the Latin texts associated in the documents with the account of this translation are well-known in the vernacular sources, but these latter make no mention of the translation. Linguistic analysis proves that none of the vernacular texts could have been composed east of the Rhenish area; conceivably then the story about the head in Pomerania and Prussia was local boasting only, not supported in other districts, which would explain its absence from the vernacular tradition under discussion.

<sup>1</sup> The taste for sadistic extravagancies of this kind is similarly attested in the legends of other martyrs, and notably in the free elaborations of the story of the Crucifixion. Cf. F. P. Pickering, *Christi Leiden in einer Vision geschaut* (1952).

<sup>2</sup> Selections printed in Toeppen, *Scriptores rerum prussicarum*, ii (1861-74), 397.



In the miracles, on the other hand, the local background has most often some importance. Of the thirty-nine different miracles recorded, about two-thirds give the name of the place where the miracle took place, e.g. Ypres, Brussels, Louvain, Nijmegen, Cologne, or, more vaguely, in Flanders, in Gelderland. Merchants are discovered preparing to sail from St. Botolph's haven (Boston, Lincs.) on Christmas Eve, three abbots are described riding from Frisia to attend an ecclesiastical meeting. Only occasionally are names of persons given, only two people stated to have been assisted by the saint are actually named. In five miracles, the dates of the occurrences are noted, all in the first half of the fifteenth century. Then, in fifteen miracles, the circumstances are shrouded in complete anonymity as to place, persons or time, in the style of a fairy story.

The miracles are chiefly repetitions of the same motive, the assistance given by St. Barbara to her devotees in the hour of death. She miraculously keeps them alive long enough for a priest to come to hear their confessions and perform the last rites. In two cases she appears in a vision to warn of impending death, while in a few miracles she actually saves the lives of her followers, as in the tale of the priest who accidentally rode into a pond and would have drowned had not the saint speedily brought rider and beast to the shore. Prototypes of these miracles may be found among those attributed to the Virgin Mary, the first collections of which date from the twelfth century. These came into existence as a consequence of the increasing devotion being shown to the Virgin; indeed mariolatry gave rise to a veritable surge in devotional fervour and artistic impulses, inspiring some of the noblest productions of the human spirit in literature as in painting. Barbara was less fortunate in her admirers. The Marian miracles are often characterized by genuine poetic feeling, but the Barbara wonders have little of this. Instead, we have a monotonous, prosaic repetition of the fantastical and the crude, as the specimens to follow (chosen also for their brevity) will illustrate. In the same way as the legend can only emphasize the ideal of steadfastness in the face of persecution by multiplying the torments, so the miracles try to convey some idea of the saint's great power by describing a

series of the most grotesque miracles, clearly on the principle of the more grotesque the more effective. To the modern reader the greatest part of these extravagant tales will sound merely gruesome and not at all edifying. But these pious stories had a fair vogue in their day, as the considerable literary remains prove. It is this which gives them their significance, for they, like the legend of the saint herself with all its elaborations, are commonplace specimens of popular sensational religious literature at the close of the Middle Ages.

The kernel of all the Barbara miracles, as of the Marian miracles, is the assumption that, no matter what one's faults, constant devotion to the saint will work salvation. Such devotion may be quite formal, for it can happen that her devotees are thoroughly bad people—one was condemned to death on the wheel for his crimes, another was judicially buried alive for her wickedness—and yet the little prayer they were wont to say in Barbara's honour saved them from hell-fire. And this is the whole point: these miracles were composed to win active support for the cult of the saint, and through it for the Church and the Faith.

Each miracle is in itself an *exemplum*, in fact, such a phrase as *Noch een exempel* or *Een schoen exempel* frequently acts as a title. Sometimes we have the express statement: This miracle was preached in such-and-such a church. Typical in style and treatment is the following miracle from MS. 991 of the Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, Darmstadt. The dialect is Lower Rhenish German of the second half of the fifteenth century.

### *Eyn mirakel*

It was eyn ridder, de dese selige joncfrouwe S. Barbara mit groisser devocien ind mynnen eirde ind gedachte des wortz dat David sait: "Lovet den Heren in synen hilgen." Ind hei plach, zo yren love, den avent yrre passien zo vasten ind den dach zo vieren, ind dat wart eme al wail gelaynt, want da en blyvet als Salmon sait: "Geyn goit ungeloynt, ind de ere de men den hilgen deit, de deit men Gode". Do desen ridder op eyn tzyt syne mechtige viande verwilgen woilden, do veyngen sy in ind

onthoifden in. Ind syn pert, da hei op gesessen hadde, dat quam zo hois bespreng~~et~~ mit den blode. Ind syn gesynde verwonderde ind worden ververrt, do si dat sagen, ind geyngen zo den preister, umme raet zo nemen. Ind zo hant geyngen sy haistlichen zosamen zo der stat, daer des ridders licham doit lach. Ind der preister droch mit eme dat hilge sacrament ind, do sy quamen zo der stat, vonden sy dat hoift gescheiden van den licham. Do geynck der preister dar nairre, ind dat hoift sprach eme aldus zo : O knecht Gotz, drager des Heren ind des beholders, cum haistlichen herwartz, want overmits dich mach ich verkrigen gesuntheit van beiden mynschen—dat is der selen ind des lichams. Mer der preister wart ververrt ind waynde of it eyn scheine were. Ind en dorste neit nairre gayn. Do sprach dat hoift anderwerff : By der genaden Gotz ind S. Barbaren, hulpe !, ind sachte all spechende : Ganck herwart ind voege mich an mynen licham. Ind vur de verdiente van mynre vrouwen S. Barbaren sal ich genesen, in den genen de selicheit is alre mynschen. Ind do der preister de bede vollenbracht hadde, stoint der ridder op, ind eme bleif geyn ayn tzeichen der wonden. Ind hei vertzalte mit waerachtigen worden, we dat de hilge bruit Christi, S. Barbara, eme beschyrmt hadde, vur dat hei sy in groisser devocien ind werdicheit gehat hadde. Ind hadde yren avent gevast ind yren dach geviert. Ind her um hadde sy in behoit, dat hei neit in storven sunder waerachtige bichte ind ontfangen dat hilge sacrament, op dat hei na den dode gebruchen moichte der ewiger selicheit. Do der ridder dit gesacht hadde, bichte hei den preister ind ontfeynck dat hilge sacrament. Ind do de orlage alsus gesoynt ind gevredet was, do ruste dei in vreden in den heren overmits der verdienten der seliger mertelerschen Sante Barbaren.

(A knight's head is cut off by enemies and the blood-stained horse returns home riderless. Relatives set out with a priest and find the head alive. The head explains that St. Barbara has interceded so that her faithful follower should be able to make his last confession and receive the necessary comfort of the viaticum.)

There are several cases of heads speaking in this way, including three versions of the story of the heathen who was a devotee of the saint. Many years after death his grave is

opened, and the head, which alone has not decayed, calls for the last rites. Other miracles tell of drowned men, washed up from the sea, who lie buried in the sand until people come near enough to hear them calling for a priest. And, like all the other examples, the drowned men explain that they have been miraculously spared to receive the last sacrament through the good offices of St. Barbara to whom they had always shown particular devotion. In a similar vein we hear of soldiers who, though mortally wounded in battle, cannot die until a priest has visited them with the last sacrament. As though all this were not enough, we have two miracles which know of even more lurid achievements to the credit of the saint. The first tells how a priest heard a pitiful voice emanating from a heap of bones which had been cast up by the sea. Through the intervention of the saint, the soul could remain with the bones until they had spoken a last confession. The second recounts how a drunkard perished when his house burnt down. A year later, his heirs were clearing the site when they heard a voice beneath the rubble. Digging further, they came across the sole surviving bit of the drunkard—his tongue, which called for absolution. The priest laid the sacramental wafer upon the tongue, which immediately crumbled to dust. Then there is the miracle of the devout madman who ran himself through with a long knife so that the point stuck out of his back. He walked about in this condition and his wife fainted when she saw him, but the priest feared to grant absolution to a man who had laid violent hands upon himself. The prince of the province examined the matter, then all heard that St. Barbara was miraculously keeping him alive. A conversation between the prince and the priest is quoted, in which the latter agreed that it would be permissible to perform the last rites and release the soul, as it was clear that the man would not otherwise be able to die. Equally bizarre is the case of the master who struck his servant with his sword, but to no effect, repeated blows only bending the sword into sickle shape. The invulnerable servant explained that he was protected by St. Barbara. And so the master forgave him, but, still incredulous, he handed the sword to an executioner. To the wonder of all, the sword which had been unable as much as to

mark the servant struck off the head of the next condemned man at one stroke.

The great majority of the miracles recorded are phantasies of this type. It is rare that Barbara intervenes outside her own province, but two of these cases are interesting and I quote them in full. In the first she inspires an artist who was painting the scene in her legend where the sheep turn into grasshoppers; the second strikes a comminatory note, the blasphemer is visited with sudden death.

From MS. G.V. 1 of the Staatsarchiv, Düsseldorf. Dutch-German border dialect, written in 1450 :

*Eyn myrakel*

Het was een guet maelre ende was een meister van synen werck. Ende solde op een tyt maelen die historie der saliger maget ende martelaersche XPI Barbaren. Ende doe hi quam totter steden, dat des heerden scapen worden sprynkelen, doe en wiste hi niet, woe die forme der beestekens waren, ende it was in der tyt, dat men se nerghent vinden en conde. Doe bughede die maelre oetmoedeliken syn knyen ende bat der edelre bruyt XPI Barbaren, dat sy gewerdigen wolde, hem die forme der beesten te toenen. Ende doe hi dat bat, quam daer rechte vort een sprynkelken sprynghen voer hem. Ende hi besach se wael ende maercte der forme ende sloet se in een busse. Ende doe maelde hi die historie vort, also dat een yeghelyc, die die historie sach, dochte, dat die spryncken levendich waren, die hi ghemaelt hadde. Ende doe die maelre daer nae weder ginc totter busse, do vant hi daer niet in, al was dat die busse toe gesloten was.

(The painter, not remembering what grasshoppers looked like, prayed to Barbara. A grasshopper appeared and the painter painted it so well that it looked alive on the canvas. The grasshopper was then put into a box. Later this was opened, but the creature had vanished.)

From Dutch MS. 9, John Rylands Library, Manchester. Beginning of sixteenth century :

*Noch een schoen mirakel*

In der stadt van Kolen opten dach der passien deser heyligher joncfrouwen Sinte Berbaren soe hielt men hoechtyt ende feest van haerder heyligher passien ende ghedencknisse in der Minder-Bruederen-Kercke, alsoe dat daer veel menschen quamen, den dienst Gods ende misse te hoeren ende to offeren. Onder welcke quam een quaet rabbant, die sprack ende sede tot den volck, het waer veel beter ende orberlyken, dat ghy my desen offer gaeft dan uwer heyligher Berbaren, want die miraculen, die men van haer seet, syn alsoe waer als ic hier doot ligghe. Als hy dese woerden hadde ghesproken, terstont sonder merren soe voer hem syn baseleer, die hy hanghende hadde aen syn syde, overmidts die wraeke Gods in syn hert, ende hy viel neder ter erden ende was doot. Aldus heeft onse heere nae synre ontfermherticheyt synre alre heylichster bruyt Sinte Barbara gheert ende die blasphemie, die daer ghedaen was, ghewroken.

(A wicked vagabond mocked the congregation gathered to celebrate St. Barbara's day, saying that it would be more to the point to give him the offerings rather than St. Barbara, whose miracles were as true as though he were lying dead. Whereupon the knife hanging by his side pierced his heart and he fell down dead. Thus did God punish his blasphemy and vindicate the saint.)

I conclude with a summary of the contents of one of the two *exempla* which mention the appearance of St. Barbara in a vision, because these provide, one may fairly say, the only relief from the mass of crudities contained in this miracle literature. I choose the more striking of the two, in which we see a young man as the saint's "bridegroom", a trait often found in the Marian collections. Barbara's jealousy and his love for her cause him to spurn a human bride. The presence of St. Catherine as Barbara's friend reminds us that this saint is frequently depicted alongside St. Barbara in art and their legends are often found together.<sup>1</sup> The story is as follows :

A young man had been accustomed to show great devotion to St. Barbara. But the devil plotted to destroy the young

<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Busse, *Die Legende der Hl. Dorothea im deutschen Mittelalter* (1930).

man's affection for her and he influenced friends and relatives to persuade the young man to take a wife "honorable and rich after the way of the world" that he might hope to have an heir to his great properties. The young man consented. Then one night he saw in a vision fair maidens walking in a marvellous orchard. One of them was beautiful beyond description, but she turned away from him with a gesture of anger. Another maiden standing near asked her the reason. She replied: That young man served me faithfully for many years, but now he has forgotten me, and she told how, through the intrigues of the devil, he was soon to wed an earthly bride. Having heard this, the maiden said she would gladly mediate between them. She went up to the young man. She told him that all the maidens he saw were celestial beings and that she was Catherine, a friend of Barbara's, who was angry with him for having neglected her in favour of another. Catherine promised to help him to a reconciliation if he so wished. The young man was deeply moved and said he would gladly forgo anything that was displeasing to Barbara. So Catherine led him by the hand to her and spoke on his behalf. Then Barbara turned sweetly to him and admitted him again to her favour. She said that he must prepare himself, for he would shortly die.

At this the young man awoke and understood that he had seen a true vision from God. He at once summoned his friends and relatives and annulled his consent to marry. Then he fell very ill. He had a priest called, from whom he partook of the holy sacraments of the church and after that his spirit departed to enjoy through all eternity the companionship of his heavenly bride.