



Thurible of the Twelfth century.
In the possession of the Very Rev. Daniel Rock, D.D.

NOTICE OF A THURIBLE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

BY THE VERY REV. DANIEL ROCK, D.D.

THE thurible which is represented in the accompanying illustration is of copper gilt, and when it came into my hands had unfortunately lost all its chains and much of its original gilding. Wanting it for use at the altar, I had new chains put to it, and had it regilt by the electrotype process—a method which hindered the slightest abrasion, or the smallest hurt from being inflicted on it: the regilding, in fact, was absolutely needful to keep it safe from those injuries so sure to follow from the effects of damp and oxidation.

As may be seen at a glance, it is a work of the twelfth century. At Lille there is another so very like the one engraved that, at first sight, both would seem to have been cast in the same mould: there cannot be the slightest doubt that they were wrought by the same hand. A short inspection however will show that they differ one from the other so much as to be easily distinguished; which is the earlier of the two it would be hard to decide. The other thurible belongs to M. Benvignat of Lille, who found it among some broken iron in an old-store shop of that town, and bought it for a few francs. M. Didron, in his *Annales Archéologiques*, tom. iv. p. 293, published an engraving of it, of the full size, from a well-executed drawing by the pencil of M. Viollet-Leduc.

The names, inscribed upon both thuribles, show at once that the youths seated upon the lid, with their heads towards an angel sitting above them on the top, represent the three children, Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago, otherwise called, Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, spoken of by Daniel, cap. iii. These Hebrew martyrs are thus figured singing their beautiful song of praise scathless amidst the flames of the Babylonian furnace, gazing upon the angel whom God had sent them for protection in their burning trial. All around

and beneath them are the flowers of the field, the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of the air. The symbolism of this ornamentation is most fitting for such an ecclesiastical appliance as a censer, in which incense was to be burned—the emblem of prayer and worship. The three children typify the faithful people of God uplifting to Him their notes of adoration and praise, in joy and grief—at all times. By the angel bearing in his left hand an object resembling the flat dishes for holding incense—like that belonging to St. Paul's, London, in the thirteenth century (see *Dugdale's St. Paul's*, p. 312), we are reminded of the angel in the Apocalypse (chap. viii., verse 3) to whom “was given much incense that he should offer of the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne of God.” Highest and uppermost sits the angel; below him are seated the youthful Hebrews; and under them are birds, beasts, and flower-bearing branches and boughs: thus are we at once reminded of the “Benedicite” which our Church sings every day in her service at Lauds, and in which she says:—“All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord—O ye angels of the Lord—O all ye things that spring up in the earth—O all ye fowls of the air—O all ye beasts and cattle—O ye sons of men—O Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, bless ye the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever,” &c. By comparing the copper-plate given by M. Didron, in the *Annales*, with the wood-cut, we shall find that there are several differences in design between M. Benvignat's thurible and mine: the foot of this is a trefoil, that in France has it fashioned like a rose of six petals, or as M. Didron calls it “une rose à six lobes, comme les roses qui couronnent les fenêtres de la cathedrale de Reims:” the doves, the lions, and other animals, though evidently cast in the same mould, are placed differently on each thurible: the spaces between the semicircular bands in this, are filled in with a three-petaled floweret; in that, with a sprig of five leaves: the names, Ananias, &c., are written at the feet of, and between the three children, on this—on that, upon the broad bands spanning the animals: in that, the angel at top is seated upon a cushion which, in this, is not to be seen; though, in both, the wings, originally fixed upon the angel's shoulders, are broken off. Besides these, there are some other variations not worthy of mention; but they, with those mentioned show that, while the

maker of such thuribles could employ very many of the same moulds upon the vessels that he sent forth from his hands, he knew well how to diversify them and put in a few small differences of a leaf or flower, so as to render one easily distinguishable from all his other censers. But we must not forget to notice that around the horizontal rims of the bowl and lid of the Lille thurible, runs an interesting Latin inscription of three hexameters telling how a certain Reinerus gave it to some religious house, or capitular body, that, after death, he might be prayed for. This, as well as two other twelfth century thuribles, of which one is still to be seen in the cathedral of Trèves, has been figured by Texier, in his very useful *Dictionnaire d'Orfeverie, de Gravure et de Ciselure Chretiennes*, just published, at Paris, by Migne. The learned Abbé gives the decided preference to that at Lille, and says: "C'est encore à l'époque de Theophile que se rapporte l'encensoir beaucoup plus remarquable, conservé à Lille par M. Benvignat." But long before M. L'abbé Texier, the same preference had been enthusiastically expressed by one to whom mediæval archæology is so much beholden—I mean M. Didron, who tells us:—"L'encensoir que nous avons vu à Trèves, ceux que sont sculptés ou peints dans nos monuments, ceux que nous avons observés dans plusieurs églises de France ou dans quelques collections d'antiquaires, ne pouvaient pas nous donner une idée de l'encensoir de Lille Lorsque nous avons vu de nos yeux et touché de nos mains cet idéal exécuté dans l'encensoir de Lille, notre amour pour le moyen âge a véritablement redoublé."—*Annales Archeol.*, tom. iv. p. 305.

Among the several liturgical appliances, few show, in their mouldings and outline, more of the architecture of their times than these thuribles, so that it becomes an easy matter to determine the period when they were made. Within the last few years, several fine specimens have either been discovered or drawn forth from out of the obscurity under which they lay hidden. Not long ago there was found, while draining Whittlesea Mere, a beautiful silver censer, gilt all but the chains, weighing 50 ounces: it belongs to Mr. Wells, who claimed it as lord of the manor; and it is well figured by Mr. Shaw in his valuable *Decorative Arts of the Middle Ages*; it is noticed also in this Journal, vol. viii. p. 195. In that truly magnificent collection of

mediæval antiquities, belonging to Prince Soltykoff, at Paris, may be seen one of the two large silver thuribles which, with other precious articles of church-plate, were brought, several years ago, from Basle to this country, and exhibited for sale in London: this has been figured in *Le Moyen age et la Renaissance*, tom. iii., by Lacroix and Seré. The treasury of St. Antonio's church at Padua possesses a most beautiful thurible of a very large size, silver gilt: the navicula, or boat, for holding the incense is even finer and more curious than the censer itself, and is fashioned like a ship with a mast and stern-gallery; all about it are little figures of mariners and soldiers, some cased in regular armour: the thurible and boat were the gift of a Roman pontiff, but the workmanship, in my opinion, is German: they are, however, the finest things of the kind to be met with: my impression is that they never were meant to be employed at the altar, but intended as votive offerings to be hung up at a shrine by way of ornament.

About the use of incense in general some notice may be seen in "Hierurgia," cap. xvii, and its employment in the Anglo-Saxon ritual has been pointed out in *The Church of Our Fathers*, t. i., 205.

What may have been the shape of the censer used by the Jews in their ceremonial it would be now hard to find out, for among the sacred vessels brought away from Jerusalem by Titus, and still to be seen sculptured on his triumphal arch at Rome, no appliance for burning incense, if I remember rightly, appears; probably, the Hebrew censer was fashioned like a small chafing-dish or cassolette, resembling, in fact, the thymiamaterium or acerra of the ancients. By the early Christians, however, swinging thuribles, just like those now in use, seem to have been employed, and a tunic-clad figure on one of the frescoes in the catacomb of St. Callistus on the Appian way (given as the frontispiece to *Hierurgia*) appears to hold in his hand such a censer. One of the oldest representations which I know in Western Christendom, is figured among the curious illuminations of that precious Bodleian MS. of Caedmon published in the *Archæologia*, vol. xxiv, where, at plate 83 is seen a figure bearing, on the fore-finger of his right hand, a thurible, in all essential parts, exactly like the one before us; and assuming those

illuminations to have been executed towards the end of the Xth or beginning of the XIth century, we have a valuable illustration of what was the shape of, as well as the mode of carrying, the thurible among the Anglo-Saxons. Of certain large thuribles not swung by the hand but kept constantly hanging from a beam, and at one time used at Rome and in this country, mention is made in *The Church of Our Fathers*, t. i. 206. In St. Paul's, London, a curious method of using the censer is recorded: by means of some kind of mechanism, it would seem that the figure of an angel swinging in one hand a large thurible, was made to come down from the roof of the church and incense the King as he walked into the nave:—"at afternone the King (Henry VII) came riding through the citie to the weste doore of Powles, where his Grace alightde. To receyve hym into the chyrche was the quere of Powles in ther habites and copes.—And at his entre into the chirche, his Grace was sensende with the great senser of Powles by an angell commyng oute of the roof."—*Leland's Collectanea*, t. iii, 217, 218.

While giving the symbolism, some liturgical writers have noticed the shape of the vessels used in the sanctuary, and in such a manner as to let us know some peculiarities of their make; thus Innocent III, circa 1190, in a work not sufficiently read, *De Sacro Altaris Sacrificio*, tells us that the thurible sometimes had not three but four chains:—"Nam sicut in thuribulo pars superior et inferior tribus cathenulis uniuntur, ita tres in Christo sunt uniones quibus divinitas et humanitas conjunguntur—Quidam autem quartam unionem assignant, videlicet Deitatis ad compositum ex anima simul et carne. Nam et quædam thuribula quatuor habent cathenulas."—*Lib. ii., cap. xvii., De forma thuribuli*. Again, Sicardus says:—"Thuribulum vero est vas utrique legi commune, quod, vel orationalem significat prædicationem quæ excitat ad orandum, vel domini carnem—Si quatuor habuerit lineas, demonstrat eam ex quatuor elementis constare, &c. Quinta linea quæ partes dividit, animam designat, &c. Si vero tres habuerit lineas, figurat carnem, animam et verbum in unam convenire personam. Quarta quæ partes separat potestas est quæ animam suam pro ovibus suis posuit: si una tantum linea sustentatur, significat quod solus de Virgine generatur, vel solus est inter mortuos liber." *Sicardi Ep.*

Cremonensis Mitræ, l. i., c. xiii., p. 48, ed. Migne : by 'linea' is evidently meant "chain : " and it is curious to find, in the XIIIth century, when Sicardus wrote, a reference made to those singular thuribles, not carried about but kept hung up in some part of the church—"una tantum linea." Durandus, as is his wont, merely repeats what has been said by others before him, and in his *Rationale*, l. iv., c. x., embodies the very words of Pope Innocent and Bishop Sicardus. To save the liturgical student some trouble, I would observe that, by an easy mistake of an R for S, in the printed copies of the *Rationale*, l. vi., c. 105, n. 4, Sicardus is thus quoted :— 'Ricardus Episc. Cremon. dixit in Mitræli,' &c. I once found, figured in an illuminated MS., a thurible, the lid of which was not drawn up by a chain, but attached to the bowl by a hinge.

That like all the other liturgical appliances the thurible was often not only formed of gold and silver as well as copper, but had bestowed upon it all the beauty of design which the cunning of the artist could devise, we gather from various sources, and more especially from that precious book the *Diversarum Artium Schedula*. One of the forms in which the so-called Theophilus the monk suggests it should be made, is that of the Temple as fore-shadowed by the angel, in Ezechiel. In another of those word-sketches which he writes so well, he says :—"fiant flosculi aut aviculæ vel bestiolæ seu fenestellæ—ponantur quatuor capita leonum sive hominum fusilia per quæ catenæ transeant," &c. (*cap. lix.*, p. 205, Paris, Didot.) The dimensions of a thurible, he informs us, should be such—"ita ut altitudo in se ipsius latitudinem totam habeat et ejus medietatem," (*ib. p. 204*) : the small windows, the little birds and beasts, the flowerets, the lions' heads, through which the chains run, on the thurible figured above, speak for themselves ; while curiously enough, its height is about half as much again as its width ; so that, although we may not be justified in ascribing it to the hand of Theophilus himself, it may have come from that of one who was bred up in the school and followed the teachings of the good old workman-monk.