

NOTE ON A WALL-PAINTING IN CLAVERLEY
CHURCH, SALOP.

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At the meeting of the Institute in November, 1902, a paper on "Claverley Church and its wall-paintings," was read by Mr. P. M. Johnston, who exhibited in illustration tracings of a series of mounted figures painted upon the upper part of the north wall of the nave.²

In his description of this remarkable painting Mr. Johnston expresses his concurrence in a suggestion of the vicar of Claverley, the Rev. T. W. Harvey, that the subject represents "nothing more nor less than an incident in the Battle of Hastings with which the founder of the church, Roger of Montgomery, was prominently associated."

For an account of this incident we have only the authority of Wace, who describes in his *Roman de Rou* how a gigantic Englishman, who was doing tremendous execution with his battle-axe at the head of a company of a hundred men, was at last struck down by Roger of Montgomery, who came galloping up with his lance set. Wace's own words are as follows :

Bien le faseient li Normant,
Quant un Engleiz vint acorant ;
En sa cumpaigne out chent armez,
De plusors armes atornez.
Hache noresche out mult bele,
Plus de plain pie out l'alemele,
Bien fu armé a sa maniere,
Grant ert é fier, o bele chiere.
En la bataille el primer front,
La ù Normanz plus espez sont,
En vint saillant plus tost ke cers ;
Maint Normant mit li jor envers
Od sa cumpaigne k'il aveit.

¹ Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute on 4th November, 1903.

² See Mr. Johnston's paper and accompanying plate, *ante*, pp. 51-71.

A un Normant s'en vint tot dreit,
 Ki arme fu sor un destrier ;
 Od la hache ki fu d'acier,
 El helme ferir le kuida,
 Maiz li colp ultre escolorja ;
 Par devant l'arcon glaceia
 La hache ki mult bien trencha ;
 Li col del cheval en travers
 Colpa k'a terre vint li fers,
 E li cheval chaï avant
 Od tot son mestre a terre jus.
 Ne sai se cil le feri plus,
 Maiz li Normanz ki li colp virent,
 A grant merveille s'esbahirent.
 L'assalt aveient tot guerpi,
 Quant Rogier de Montgomeri
 Vint poignant, la lance beissie ;
 Onc ne leissa por la coignie
 K'il aveit sus el col levee,
 Ki mult esteit lonc exhanstee,
 Ke il Engleiz si ne ferist,
 K'a la terre platir le fist ;
 Dunc s'ecria : Ferez, Franceiz ;
 Nostre est li champ sor les Engleiz.¹

To my mind there are several serious objections to the acceptance of the ingenious explanation put forth by Mr. Harvey and Mr. Johnston.

In the first place, supposing we admit the very fanciful story of Wace, who is not at all a trustworthy authority, how should we expect it to be represented pictorially? To begin with, the big Englishman and his followers were not mounted, but fighting on foot, and would almost certainly have been depicted as a band of men, armed like their leader, with the formidable battle-axe. Roger of Montgomery and his Norman followers, on the other hand, were all mounted, and would appear as a group of horsemen galloping headlong into the fray, which Wace describes as ending in a fierce *melee* noteworthy for the gallant defence of the English, who slew the horses of the Normans and clave the shields of their riders. We should in fact have expected such a picture or series of pictures as those so graphically portrayed in the version of the Battle of Hastings itself on the Bayeux Tapestry, an authority to which Mr.

¹ Frédéric Pluquet, *L'Roman de Rou Wace* (Rouen, 1827), ii. 225-227, lines 13387-13423.

Johnston quite reasonably appeals for the resemblance of style between it and the painting under notice. But where in the Claverley picture is the band of English footmen? and where such violent action as that described by Wace, or so vividly depicted in the stitchwork? In the Claverley painting not a footman is to be seen; the whole of the men are mounted; and the movements of their horses are not in the least suggestive of a fight. Moreover, the chief figure, he who is falling from his horse, has for arms not an axe, but a sword and lance, the former of which he grasps in his hand, and the latter he has broken in his fall, while the man confronting him, whom Mr. Johnston regards as Earl Roger, looks quietly on with dropped lance, instead of transfixing his foe. These important discrepancies may perhaps be explained on the supposition that the painter of the picture knew naught of Master Wace's version of the story; but in that case we should like to know whose and what other version was current.

So far there is nothing whatever in the painting to recall a fight between a gigantic Englishman armed with a battle-axe and on foot, and a mounted Norman who slew him with his lance.

Admitting even the possibility of the painting having been drawn according to some tradition of the event, we have a scene depicted which, as Mr. Johnston himself points out, "is wholly secular in character, although invested at the time when it was painted with a semi-religious halo." I do not quite follow Mr. Johnston's saving clause, but I would venture to ask him if he can point to any other wall-painting yet discovered in an English church that is "wholly secular in character." Mr. C. E. Keyser tells me he does not know of a single instance.

The next point is, what can the picture, or series of pictures, represent?

Mr. Johnston has called attention to the fact that, as in the Bayeux Tapestry, conventional trees are used to divide different parts of the subject. The portion of the painting reproduced in the *Journal* depicts three subjects thus divided. That on the extreme right contains three figures, the next three figures, and there are three others in the imperfect remains of the third

subject. It will also be noticed that there is an attempt to repeat in each subject the same coloured horses, but this is not a very important point.

In the first picture the three figures are shown as quietly riding away from what Mr. Johnston thinks are the walls of a town. In the next picture one of the riders is tumbling headlong from his horse, breaking, as I think, his lance in his fall, while his two companions look quietly on. In the third picture the dismounted man is lying on the ground beside his horse, the reins of which, Mr. Johnston points out, are "being held apparently by a supernatural hand," while the other two men are facing each other, and one seems to be gesticulating with his sword. The rest of the painting is too fragmentary for anything to be made out with certainty, and many of the minor details have perished.

Now I would venture to suggest that we have here exactly what we should expect to find, a story taken from the Bible, and in this case that of the Conversion of Saul as described in the 9th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and by St. Paul himself in the 22nd chapter. The first scene shows the departure of Saul from Jerusalem; the next his falling to the earth as he journeyed to Damascus, when the great light shined from heaven. The third picture shows him lying on the ground while the voice questioned him, a fact emphasized by the arresting of his horse by the supernatural hand, and the astonishment of the two companions confronting one another, who "stood speechless hearing a voice, but seeing no man." There was room on the wall for exactly two more pictures, and these possibly represented Saul remounting his horse, and being led off his friends to Damascus.

Although no other wall-painting of the Conversion of Saul seems to have been preserved or discovered elsewhere in England, there is no conceivable reason why it should not be found,¹ and in that case we should expect

¹ The Liberate Roll of 36 Henry III. orders the wardens of the King's works at Woodstock "to paint the old chapel with the story of the woman taken in adultery, and how the Lord wrote on the ground, and how the Lord

smote St. Paul (*dedit alapham Sancto Paulo*), and paint something concerning St. Paul, and likewise paint the history of the Evangelists in the upper part of the same chapel." T. H. Turner, *Some account of Domestic Architecture in*

it to be depicted much as we see it here. Saul was "come nigh unto Damascus about noon," so the horses are trotting gently along in the mid-day heat. There is of course no mention in the Acts of the Apostles of Saul and his escort being mounted, but it is more than probable that they were, and we may be quite sure that an English or Norman artist would not have represented them otherwise than on horseback, since that was the accustomed method of travel in this country then and for long time before and after.

In an early fifteenth century Bible of English work in the British Museum,¹ in an initial letter P on fol. 306, Saul is shown as riding at the head of a band of six mounted men, all in armour, with sleeved surcoats, and pointed bassinets and camails; one, and perhaps a second, carries a long red rod (or spear). The horse Saul is riding is stumbling, and he himself is being thrown over its head. He is armed like the escort, but his hands are bare, and he is also bareheaded. Neither Saul nor his followers are shown with any weapons. In the foreground to the right is a town or city to which the band is riding. In the upper right hand corner is a figure of Our Lord in the clouds, with a scroll lettered

Durum est tibi contra stimulum calcitrare.

In another MS. of the same period in the British Museum,² a massbook (?) of English work, in a large initial L on fol. 12, Saul is depicted riding as before at the head of a band of four companions, but none of them is in armour. Saul's horse has stumbled, and the rider, who wears a long red tunic and blue cloak, is sprawling over it; Saul is also shown nimbed. Above is a half-length figure of Our Lord in the clouds, painted in red, with rays of the same hue radiating from Him.

England from the Conquest to the end of the thirteenth century (Oxford, 1851, 239).

¹ Royal MS. I.E.ix.

² Add. MS. 29704.