NO. I. OLD MAN AND YOUTH: BRUGES CATHEDRAL CHURCH.

NO. 3. VALENTINE AND ORSON:

PLATE I.

NO. 2. GROUP: BRUGES CATHEDRAL CHURCH.

NO. 4. MESSENGER: BRUGES CATHEDRAL

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MISERICORDS IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF SAINT-SAUVEUR, BRUGES.[1]

By A. ABRAM, D.Sc. F.R.Hist.S.

The misericords in the cathedral church of Saint-Sauveur at Bruges have considerable artistic merit; it is not, however, primarily as works of art that I wish to deal with them, but as illustrations of life and manners; and from this point of view I venture to think that their value could hardly be surpassed by any similar set of carvings. They are records of the life of the people of Bruges during the period when it was one of the most important cities of northern Europe, and they have a special interest for us because at that time intercourse between England and Bruges, and indeed between England and the whole of Flanders, was very frequent. Many English traders visited Flanders, and many Flemish artisans settled in England, and the two countries were bound together by the most intimate political and commercial ties.

M. L. Maeterlinck, the Conservateur of the Musée de Gand, in his study of *Le Genre satirique dans la sculpture flamande*, claims that Flemish influence is visible in a large number of beautiful stalls in English churches, and that many of them were actually executed by Flemings.[2] It is also said that many of the misericords in Norfolk and Kent, counties especially rich in wood-carving, were chiefly the work of Flemish artists who came over to England in the reign of Edward III.[3] A discussion of the general effects of the immigration of these craftsmen lies outside the limits of this paper, but in the course of it attention will be drawn to some English examples analogous to those at Bruges, so that we may see whether there is sufficient resemblance between them to suggest that they emanated from workmen of the same nation, or whether they merely indicate a similarity between the manners and customs of England and Flanders. Resemblances are sometimes due to the use of common

[1] Read before the Institute, 6th December, 1914.

[2] p. 269 et seq.

[3] Miss Emma Phipson, *Choir Stalls and their Carvings*, 7.

sources such as bestiaries and sacred legends, or to the employment of recognised conventional methods. We ought not to attach much importance to anything which can be explained in this way; but we must be on the watch for features, however trivial and commonplace they may be, which have been taken from life.

The Bruges misericords are made of brown oak, and are forty-three in number, arranged in two rows on the north side of the quire, and two on the south, the back rows being raised above the front. There are eleven in the back row on the north side and twelve in the front, and ten in each row on the south side. Three seats on the north and two on the south are plain. Some return stalls were removed in 1679, so probably at one time there were several more than there are now. Unfortunately many of those that remain have been injured, some very badly, some only slightly, and it is to be feared that they may fare even worse in the future.

There are slight differences of opinion as to the date of the misericords. The custodians give it as 1430; M. Maeterlinck says that they were certainly executed in the first half of the fifteenth century, but thinks that some of them were remade in 1608[1]; M. Weale and M. Verhaegen believe that they were put up in 1478, when the thirteenth chapter of the Order of the Golden Fleece was held in Saint-Sauveur.[2] Unfortunately I have not been able to communicate with any of these gentlemen, or to obtain first-hand documentary evidence on the point, but by comparing the misericords with pictures and illuminations in manuscripts whose history is well authenticated we can, I think, satisfactorily settle the question.

They deal with a great variety of subjects, and throw much light upon the physiognomy, taste, and costume of the people for whom they were made, and upon their manner of living. I have classified them under eight heads: those depicting (1) everyday life, (2) child life, (3) trades or occupations, (4) travelling, (5) amusements, (6) foliage, (7) those inculcating moral lessons, and (8) sacred

[1] Maeterlinck, op. cit. 83–84.
[2] W. H. J. Weale, *Bruges et ses environs*, 50; A. Verhaegen, *Monographie de l'eglise cathedrale de Saint-Sauveur a Bruges*, iv.

subjects. Some of them are very difficult to understand, and I may have interpreted them wrongly, while others could be placed equally well under one or two of the heads.

They have some general characteristics which are very striking; foremost amongst them an extreme simplicity in composition and treatment, which is heightened by the fact that each consists of one piece of carving only, without supporters. This arrangement is common abroad, but it is particularly noticeable here because the centrepiece is very small in comparison with the size of the seat, its width ranging from $11\frac{3}{8}$ to $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches, while the seats measure 2 feet $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in width. In England supporters are not often omitted, but are frequently important adjuncts, and occasionally integral parts of the design, adding greatly to the richness of the effect. The simplicity of the misericords in the church of Saint-Sauveur is the more remarkable because, although the decline of Bruges had really begun, the city appeared during the first half of the fifteenth century to be at the very height of its prosperity. Its wealthy citizens, following the example of their rulers, the great dukes of Burgundy, were lavishing enormous sums of money on luxuries of all kinds: their buildings, their dress, their food, their jewellery, their pageants were as gorgeous as they could possibly be,[1] and their splendour was reflected in other forms of art. Nevertheless there seems to have been good reasons for the simplicity of our misericords. At this time Saint-Sauveur was not a cathedral: it did not attain to that dignity until the nineteenth century, after the destruction of Saint-Donatien. It was a collegiate foundation,[2] but it was also a parish church. The misericords were designed to suit the taste of the parishioners, for an entry in the archives of the city concerning a dispute between two laymen as to the ownership of a stall in the quire proves that in some cases at least the seats were used by members of the

[1] H. Fierens-Gevaert, *Psychologie d'une ville, Essai sur Bruges*, chaps. xv and xvi; H. Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, ii, 392–393.

[2] M. Verhaegen (op. cit. 1) says that Saint-Sauveur 'est devenue collegiale en 1501,' but M. Gillioedts van Severen quotes a document dated 1455-6 in which it is mentioned, and also speaks of it in reference to an event which took place in 1429: Louis Gillioedts van Severen, *Inventaire des archives de la ville de Bruges* (hereafter cited as *Archives*), v, 474, 334 n.

congregation.[1] There is much in the misericords themselves which leads us to think that the models studied by the carver were for the most part persons of somewhat humble position; moreover the smallness of the space at his disposal and the hardness of his material rendered elaboration of detail difficult and out of place, and, with the instinct of a true artist, he respected the limitations imposed upon him. His work, however, though simple, is never weak or lacking in character: on the contrary it is extraordinarily vigorous and expressive. It must be admitted that it sometimes appears rough and lacking in finish, but this is largely due to the coarse grain of the wood of which the misericords are made, and to the bad treatment which they have received. Not only are they broken, but they have been so badly rubbed that some of the faces are almost featureless, and in addition the wood has been varnished, and the varnish has peeled off, leaving irregular patches.

Another very noticeable characteristic of the Bruges misericords is their realism; many of the personages depicted are so natural that they seem copied straight from life. The carver was obliged occasionally to conform to the conventions of his craft, but on the whole there is extremely little of what Mr. Bond has called the standardisation of persons and animals.[2] In this, I think, they are typically Flemish; the Flemings when left to themselves were fond of realism, and much of their idealism was the result of foreign influence. The woodcarvers seem to have been a class apart by themselves, not in touch with foreign artists; and this gives their work unique value as a revelation of the tastes and character of the Flemish people, especially those of the lower classes. It is greatly to the credit of whoever is responsible for the Bruges carvings that their naturalness, judging by what remains of them, never degenerates into impropriety or vulgarity. I must confess, however, that M. Maeterlinck suggests that some of those which are missing may

[1] Stalls were apparently a source of revenue, and this one seems to have been sold to a second person while the owner was still alive: *Archives*, ii, 319. A similar dispute regarding a stall in the church of Saint-Gilles is also recorded, and one of the witnesses stated that it had been bought by a woman; so sex was evidently no bar to possession: ibid. ii, 320.

[2] F. Bond, *Wood Carvings in English Churches. Misericords*, 201–202.

have been removed because their character was not in keeping with the sanctity of the place,[1] and his extensive knowledge of Flemish sculpture gives his opinion great weight.

Another quality which renders the work of the Bruges carver very pleasing is his intense feeling for light and shade. The contrast between them is sometimes so strong that the effect is almost Rembrandtesque. This must, I think, be attributed mainly to the skilful placing and deep undercutting of the misericords, as the cathedral is very dark, and upon some of them hardly any light falls even on a bright day. This peculiarity, however, has its disadvantages, as a good deal which we should like to see is blotted out by shadows.

Several of the carvings seem to be illustrations of tales; M. Maeterlinck thinks that they are probably French or Provençal fabliaux, but they may be Flemish stories.[2] Unfortunately I have not been able to identify them, but even without the context they are valuable as pictures of everyday life, showing what the people of Bruges liked to see. On the first (plate 1, no. 1) we have a young man, hat in hand, standing in a very deferential attitude before an aged man who is seated in a low-backed arm-chair. M. Maeterlinck describes them as a young noble and a hermit. He may be right as to the old man, but I do not think that the younger can be a noble, as his clothes are extremely plain, quite as plain as those of the working men we shall see later.

Next we have a group of five (plate 1, no. 2), amongst them the two we have already seen, who appear to be lending their support to a suppliant kneeling at the feet of two seated men. From this group we can gain a good idea of the masculine costume of the period: it consists of a fairly full gown reaching about three quarters of the way down the leg, or further in some cases, with a V-shaped opening at the neck, and held in place by a band round the waist. The sleeves are tight at the wrist, but loose and baggy above it. The young man, the one whose feet we can see best, is wearing low boots or buskins, slightly pointed, and fastened across the front by a strap,

[1] Maeterlinck, op. cit. 87 and 90. [2] ibid. 87.

and is carrying a round hat with a brim. The old man has a hood, and as he has a large mantle over his other clothes, he may be dressed for travelling, or perhaps his age makes it necessary for him to be protected against the cold. One of the seated men seems to be wearing a tight cap, which may be some kind of coif, but on the other hand may be intended to represent closely-cropped hair. The other seated figure has short stiff hair, but the young man's is long and wavy; they are all clean-shaven, with the exception of the old man.

In one of the side panels of Roger van der Weyden's celebrated picture of the Seven Sacraments some of the men have closely-cropped hair, and baggy sleeves, and their gowns are not unlike these, though they do not fall negligently, but are pleated down the back and front. The frame of this picture bears the arms of the bishopric of Tournay, and of Jean Chevrot, bishop from 1437 to 1460, and we may safely conclude that it was painted between these dates.[1] Baggy sleeves occur a few times in a beautiful late fifteenth-century manuscript of the Romance of the Rose,[2] and also in a manuscript[3] written at Bruges about the same date, but the costume is otherwise very different from what we have here, and we ought not to attach too much importance to a single feature, which may be a survival from an earlier period. Fashions, if they caught the public fancy, often lasted a very long time in the middle ages: one of the characters in the Romance of the Rose, the Lover, who always wears baggy sleeves, also has shoes with very pointed toes, which we know were quite out of date at the end of the fifteenth century, and all the other characters have broad ones. Both these manuscripts are now in the British Museum.

A misericord from Beverley St. Mary's (plate 1, no. 3), executed in 1445, enables us to compare English and Flemish costume; it depicts an episode from the story of Valentine and Orson. The twin brothers, who had been carried off in their infancy, meet unexpectedly in a forest. One has been brought up at court, and the other is a woodman, and each is dressed according to his station; their hanging sleeves and Valentine's hat have no counterparts at Bruges,

[1] H. Fierens-Gevaert, *La Peinture en Belgique, Les Primitifs Flamands*, i, 46.

[2] MS. Harl. 4425.

[3] Roy. 14 E. v.

but in other respects there is a good deal of resemblance between the styles of dress in the two countries. The workmanship of the carvers, however, presents a great contrast, and the lightness and delicacy of the Beverley work makes the Bruges misericords look somewhat heavy. We cannot see the hair of either of the brothers: probably it was too short to be visible, as close cropping was fashionable in England at this time. A manuscript in the British Museum,[1] written in 1445, contains a picture of John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, offering the book in which it appears to Margaret of Anjou, and some of the onlookers have the short coif-like hair which we have already noticed at Bruges. Other kinds of hair-dressing can also be found in England; on a fifteenth-century misericord at St. Gregory's, Norwich, we have a curious example of a very stiff beard.

The third of our misericords (plate 1, no. 4) introduces new personages. The young man kneeling in the foreground seems to be reading some communication to the lady; perhaps he is a messenger, and the object that she is holding in her hand a token which he has brought as credentials. He is clad in armour, but as it is only very slightly indicated, and there is another better rendering of it, I will not comment upon it now. The man standing behind the messenger, listening to what he is reading, is possibly one of the lady's retainers; he is dressed in a pleated or quilted jacket, with buttons down the front. The lady affords an illustration of Flemish female costume: she has a very long voluminous robe, cut low at the neck, with an edging, or a turned-down collar, round the opening; the band placed only a little way below the bottom of it gives a high-waisted effect. Her head-dress is formed of a veil draped over large cauls. The humility of the messenger conveys the impression that she is a person of high rank, but her appearance is by no means aristocratic: her figure is very portly, she wears no jewellery, and her gown is of homely material. In style the gown is somewhat similar to that of St. Barbara in Jan van Eyck's unfinished study of the girl martyr, which is signed by him, and dated

[1] Roy. 15 E. vi.

1437.[1] St. Barbara's skirts and sleeves, however, are much fuller; she is bare-headed, but Jan van Eyck's wife, as we see her in a picture he painted in 1439,[2] wears cauls. They were common in England for a considerable time; a pair on a misericord at Sherborne, carved in 1436,[3] and another at Rothwell described by Miss Phipson as belonging to the fifteenth century,[4] are very like the specimen we have here. Low-necked, high-waisted, trailing gowns were popular in England during the reigns of Henry V and Henry VI.

On the fourth misericord (plate II, no. 1) the lady is having a meal with the aged man and the young one whom we saw on the first and second; the trestle-table is of the usual mediaeval type, but extraordinarily massive, and the extreme simplicity, if not poverty, of its equipment confirms us in the view that the carver, even if he wished to present persons of high rank, has really given us people in a humble way of life. There is no cloth, and not even a knife on the table, although there is a big jug under it. The diners have their hands on the table, but that was not thought bad manners in the middle ages. There is also a representation of this scene in the Gruuthuus, a fifteenth-century mansion, preserved as a municipal museum; and there the table has a long cloth, a knife is lying in front of the woman, and either a plate or a saucer, and what seems to be a fowl before the old man. This piece of work was done for an aristocratic patron, and possibly the designer had the chance of seeing society of a higher grade. The lady looks older than in the group in the cathedral, and the young man wears a hat.

The fifth misericord (plate II, no. 2) is very like the fourth, but two persons are seated at the table instead of three.

Another, which is very badly broken, bears traces of two figures moving towards each other, one of them, perhaps, carrying something, but so little is left that it is impossible to speak with certainty.

[1] 'Iohes de Eyck me fecit 1437': Fierens-Gevaert, *La Peinture en Belgique*, i, 15.

[2] On the frame is written 'Conjux meus Johes me complevit ano 1439': ibid. 16.

[3] Reproduced in Wright, *History of Caricature*, 124.

[4] Phipson, op. cit. p. 43 and plate 30.

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NO. I. DINNER : BRUGES.

NO. 2. A MEAL : BRUGES.

NO. 3. LEARNING TO WALK : BRUGES.

NO. 4. OLD MAN AND CHILD : BRUGES.

Children are prominent upon no less than four of the comparatively perfect misericords, and they may also have figured upon two or three that are much injured. This is an unusually large proportion, as child-study was not general in mediaeval times. The first of the four (plate II, no. 3) shows us a tiny child learning to walk with the help of a prop ridiculously like the 'ski-cycle' so loved by the children of to-day. Its mother is watching over it and gently guiding its steps. They are not idealised, and they must both have been copied from life; the mother is too short and plump to be graceful, and the child has no neck. Nevertheless they make a tender and charming picture. In the second (plate II, no. 4) a little boy is standing by a table at which is seated an elderly man, perhaps our old friend. The child is evidently making himself useful; he has just handed food of some kind to the old man, or else is going to take it from him. It was quite in accordance with the ideas of the age that children should wait upon their elders. The boy, as is customary in mediaeval art, is dressed as if he were a man, except that his gown is a little longer, and it makes him look very dwarfish. The third of this little set (plate III, no. 1) ought perhaps to be placed amongst sacred subjects; it depicts Abraham about to offer up Isaac, but it is appropriate here as an example of filial obedience. M. Maeterlinck tells us that the sacrifice of Isaac is also to be found on a misericord in the church of Notre-Dame at Aerschot, and that it was intended to show the cruelty of the Jews in sacrificing little children.[1] It is extremely improbable that such a meaning was attached to it here: in 1438 Bruges submitted to the duke of Burgundy, after a very severe struggle against him; two years later he entered the city in triumph, and to welcome him the people put up gaily-decked arches, and arranged allegorical groups, conspicuous amongst which was the sacrifice of Isaac, meant to typify the absolute obedience they owed to him.[2] In England the subject was very popular; there are plays, or fragments of plays, on it included in the Chester, York, Towneley, and Coventry mysteries, and in the Brome

[1] Maeterlinck, op. cit. 162.

[2] E. G. Smith, *Bruges*, 245.

manuscript. In all of them Abraham is presented as a most affectionate father, and in none of them is there a hint of disapproval of his conduct. At Worcester two misericords illustrate the episode.[1] Here Isaac is a well-made and well-proportioned child, much superior to the others we have seen.

Next we have a schoolmaster and two pupils (plate III, no. 2): he is seated, and one of the boys is kneeling before him repeating a lesson, while the other is assiduously studying a book. His face is so full of character that we cannot help wondering whether it is a portrait of some distinguished teacher of Bruges. There was a school connected with Saint-Sauveur,[2] and he may well have been one of its masters; or perhaps he was a doctor of divinity, or of some other faculty.[3] His cap is not unlike that worn by some of the cathedral clergy at the present day, and it bears a decided resemblance to one on the head of a doctor attending patients carved on a panel of a sixteenth-century chest in a room leading out of the dispensary at the hospital of Saint-Jean. He is pulling the ear of the kneeling pupil, but this form of correction is mild compared with that often inflicted by mediaeval schoolmasters. One of the early Chancery Proceedings relates to an action for damages brought against a priest for beating a child whom he was teaching, and the defendant replied that 'he had never hurt ne bete the child but as a child ought to be chastised for his lernyng.'[4] This point of view is well exemplified by a very interesting piece of carving in Norwich cathedral church (plate III, no. 3), apparently a monastic school held in the open air, for the master is a monk, and trees are growing in the background; perhaps the children are having their lessons in the garden instead of in the cloister. On another misericord at Sherborne a master is also inflicting corporal punishment on a pupil.[5] It is remarkable that in all three cases almost every one of the

[1] Bond, op. cit. 131.

[2] *Archives*, introd. 455, 481.

[3] It is suggested that the chancellor of the chapter formed the model for this representation of a teacher. His specific duty would be to look after the education of the young clerks as in many chapters. Both at Lichfield and Lincoln it was the office of chancellor to govern the school, and at Lincoln the divinity-school is known as the 'scholae cancellarii': *Statutes of Lincoln Cathedral*, ed. Bradshaw and Wordsworth, part ii, 20, 158, 687.

[4] *Early Chancery Proceedings*, 46, 162.

[5] Reproduced in Wright, op. cit. 121.

NO. I. ABRAHAM AND ISAAC : BRUGES.

NO. 3. CHASTISEMENT :
NORWICH CATHEDRAL CHURCH.

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NO. 2. MASTER AND PUPILS : BRUGES.

NO. 4. VINTAGE : BRUGES.

PLATE III.

NO. 1. A TILER: BRUGES.

NO. 2. A SCULPTOR: BRUGES.

NO. 3. ALMSGIVING (?): BRUGES.

NO. 4. BOATMAN AND PASSENGER: BRUGES.

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children has a book; so they could not have been very scarce, although it was before the days of printing.

Four or five misericords are devoted to men engaged in various occupations. On the first (plate III, no. 4) we see a man gathering fruit, probably grapes, though they are growing the wrong way up, and are much too large, but the mediaeval artist had no sense of proportion, and their size would not trouble him. On one of the misericords in Winchester cathedral church is a beautiful carving of a squirrel eating a beech-nut: the nut is nearly as large as the squirrel's head, and one of the leaves is bigger than the whole animal. The grape-gatherer's tunic is shorter than anything we have yet seen, and it is slit up the front; perhaps the nature of his work made this necessary, as a long robe would have been in his way. His boots are particularly large and clumsy, and he has a big purse or pouch hanging on a branch of a tree behind him. We shall probably not go very far wrong if we look upon this as the typical dress of an agricultural labourer, and it is interesting to compare it with a vintage scene from Gloucester cathedral church: one man is holding a basket and the other is picking the grapes. The vine is not unlike ours, but treated rather more conventionally: both men have short tunics.[1]

The next misericord (plate IV, no. 1) exhibits the same lack of proportion, a man standing on the bottom rung of a ladder is able to reach the top of the building against which it is resting. We suppose that he is a tiler laying or repairing the roof, and that the figure behind him, of which only faint traces remain, was his mate or his boy. The municipal authorities did their utmost to encourage the use of tiles because thatched roofs were so dangerous in case of fire; in 1417 they offered a subsidy of one-third of the number of tiles used to any one who covered either a new or an old house with tiles, and this they could easily do, as the city had its own tile-works. In 1467 an ordinance was passed forbidding any one to cover the roof of a newly-built house in the principal streets with anything but tiles.[2] The most valuable part of this misericord is the glimpse it gives us of the architecture

[1] *Trans. Bristol and Glouc. Arch. Soc.* xxviii, illustr. facing p. 65.

[2] Ad. Duclos, *Bruges*, 234.

of the period. Although the building is so small, we can gain some idea of the style, and of the material of which it was made. It is probably a house, but it might equally well be the porch of a church: it bears a strong resemblance to one which we shall see on another seat. Domestic and ecclesiastical buildings were very similar in those days, and perhaps the similarity was typical of the attitude of the mediaeval mind, which drew no distinction between things secular and things sacred.

The third of this series (plate IV, no. 2) has been much injured, but we can tell its meaning; on a trestle table lies the statue or effigy of a man, and the figure behind it was doubtless the sculptor who was shaping it. In Rouen cathedral church are three misericords showing carvers at work,[1] and there is one at the Architectural Museum, Tufton Street, formerly at Lynn St. Nicholas, of an English carver. Methods of work in England, France, and Flanders seem to have been very similar.

The next (plate IV, no. 3) is difficult to understand. The man with his hand on his knee is absurdly like a modern shoe-black. He is in exactly the right attitude, and might easily be holding a boot-brush, but this is, of course, an impossible interpretation, and one can only suggest that he is selling something, or collecting alms, as the man standing opposite to him seems to be giving money.

The last of this set (plate IV, no. 4) is on the face of it quite simple, but it may have some secondary meaning. We take it to be a boatman and his passenger, perhaps one of the ferrymen of Bruges, but it might be Charon. From an artistic point of view it is one of the best of the misericords. The boat, its occupant, and the water are all excellently rendered; the craftsman had many opportunities of studying boats and boatmen, for the harbours of Bruges and of its port of Damme, three miles away, were full of shipping. In the first half of the fifteenth century the Zwin, an arm of the sea, came right up to the city, although unfortunately the sand was silting up and threatening to block it. This misericord serves to remind us of the great value of waterways in the

[1] E.-H. Langlois, *Stalles de la cathedrale de Rouen*, pl. iv, no. 18, p. 22; pl. v, nos. 22 and 26, pp. 140 and 141.

NO. 1. THE TRAVELLER : BRUGES.

NO. 3. A PILGRIM : BRUGES.

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NO. 2. A COUNTRYWOMAN (?) · BRUGES.

NO. 4. THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL : BRUGES.

NO. 1. HAWKING: BRUGES.

NO. 2. A FALCONER: BRUGES.

NO. 3. FALCONER FEEDING A HAWK: BEVERLEY MINSTER.

NO. 4. A GAME: BRUGES.

middle ages, when much traffic was carried on by means of them.

We also have examples of other methods of travelling. A venerable old man (plate v, no. 1) with a long beard, in clothes fit to withstand any weather, is hurrying along as if he had a long way to go, and a woman (plate v, no. 2), a nun it seems from her hood, but possibly merely a countrywoman, has tucked up her skirt in a most business-like manner, as if in preparation for a journey. It is very tantalising to see only part of these two misericords; in both cases the missing figures seem to have been short, and in the first the feet are evidently those of a small person, and may have belonged to a child; but the outline of the second does not suggest a human being at all.

Religious motives inspired many persons to undertake journeys to shrines far and near, and this characteristic of mediaeval life is embodied in a delightful carving of a stalwart pilgrim (plate v, no. 3), staff in one hand, and a bag for provisions in the other, resolutely making his way up a steep rock to a town perched on the top of it, perhaps intended to be one of the holy places. Its architectural features and the strength of its walls are well indicated, and it is interesting to compare it with an equally good but somewhat more detailed representation of the walls of a city, from Ripon minster, executed about 1490, which serve as a background for Samson carrying away the gates of Gaza. Zeal for pilgrimages seems to have lasted longer in Flanders and the surrounding district than elsewhere: it had almost died out in England by this time; but in 1447 the relics at Aix-la-Chapelle attracted so many worshippers that the États de Liége could not assemble.[1] At Bruges pilgrims were housed for the night at the hospice of Saint-Julien, and if they fell ill they were taken to the hospital of Saint-Jean.[2] At the very end of the fifteenth century we find the city setting aside money for gifts to help those who were going to the holy Sepulchre.[3]

A very clever rendering of the conversion of St. Paul (plate v, no. 4) illustrates the ordinary mode of travelling amongst the well-to-do. We call to mind the descrip-

[1] Pirenne, op. cit. ii, 437.
[2] *Archives*, iii, 440.
[3] ibid. vi, 401.

tion of St. Paul's horse in the Digby mystery play which deals with his conversion :

> a palfray
> There can no man a better bestryde.

It is so much more life-like than any other animal at Bruges, and the details of the carving are so much more carefully elaborated than those of the other misericords, that one is inclined to regard it as by a different hand. Its date can be approximately fixed by an article of St. Paul's costume, for turbans similar to the one he is wearing occur in Lydgate's metrical Life of St. Edmund,[1] written for Henry VI in 1433, and in a Flemish Bible belonging to the Huth collection in the British Museum,[2] said to have been executed about the middle of the fifteenth century. They are also to be seen in a picture of the Martyrdom of St. Sebastian painted by Memlinc about 1470,[3] in his Martyrdom of St. Ursula, which is slightly later,[4] and in a rather more elaborate form in his Beheading of St. John Baptist (one of the wings of the *Mariage mystique*, at the hospital of Saint-Jean, Bruges) begun about 1473.[5] The date of our carving should therefore lie between 1433 and 1475 to 1480. Fortunately there is another indication of the date in the shortness of St. Paul's spur ; long ones, sometimes inordinately long, were in use until about 1460, and then shorter ones became general,[6] so we shall probably not go far wrong if we attribute the carving to the third quarter of the fifteenth century.

Our misericords give us some idea of the sports and pastimes of the Flemings. They were evidently very fond of hawking : two represent a couple of men carrying falcons. One (plate VI, no. 1) is riding through a wood. It is difficult to believe that the uncouth beast on which he is mounted is by the same artist as St. Paul's magnificent horse ; moreover his spur is much longer than St. Paul's, which points to the two carvings being of different dates. The spur has no rowel, and oddly enough there is no sign of there ever having been one. The other hawk is carried by a falconer (plate VI, no. 2). This misericord

[1] Harl. MS. 2278.
[2] Add. MS. 38, 122.
[3] Fierens-Gevaert, *La Peinture en Belgique*, ii, plate 83 and p. 126.
[4] ibid. pl. 102, p. 135.
[5] ibid. pl. 86, p. 128.
[6] Planche, *Cyclopaedia of Costume*, i, 478.

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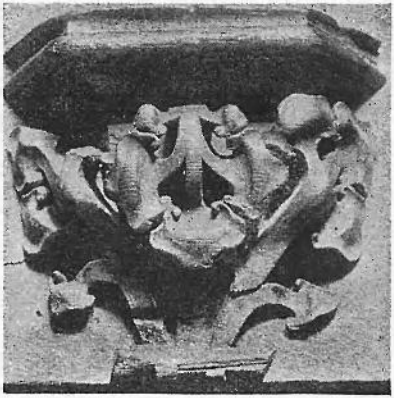
NO. 1. KNIGHT AND LADY: NORWICH CATHEDRAL CHURCH.

NO. 2. BLIND MAN'S BUFF (?): BRUGES.

NO. 3. A MEDIAEVAL FANCY: BRUGES.

NO. 4. ELBOW-REST: CLEY CHURCH, NORFOLK.

NO. I. A VINE-BRANCH : BRUGES.



NO. 3. CONVENTIONAL FOLIAGE : BRUGES.

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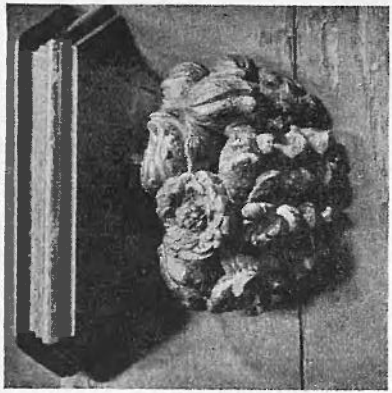
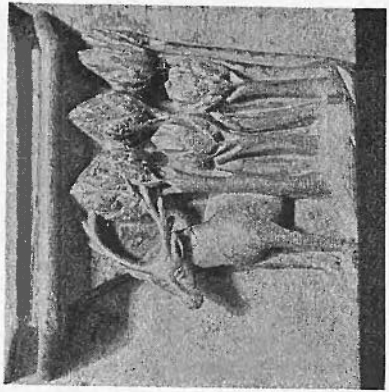


NO. 2. FLOWERS: BRUGES.



NO. 4. A STAG IN A WOOD: BRUGES.

is an example of the beautiful effects produced by sharp contrasts of light and shade, and it is also worthy of praise for the masterly way in which swift motion is suggested. Hawking was a favourite subject for misericords in England, and many phases of the sport are illustrated upon them. In Winchester college chapel we have a hawk killing its prey; at Beverley minster (plate VI, no. 3) a falconer is feeding his bird; and at Sherborne two men, one on horseback and the other on foot, are following the hawk.

The next subject (plate VI, no. 4) though badly mutilated, is still recognisable: two men are seated on the ground face to face, their feet pressed together, struggling for the possession of a stick which they hold between them. The same game is depicted on a misericord in the cathedral church at Rouen, and M. Langlois calls it 'le panoye.'[1] Strutt has a picture of it, but he terms it an exercise derived from the quintain.[2] This misericord affords a second illustration of the armour worn at Bruges at this time, and we are surprised to find it so plain, as we know from manuscripts that extremely elaborate suits were in general use. Among the most noticeable features here are the little fastenings apparently holding the upper and lower parts together; they are very like the arming points fastening ailettes on an effigy of a knight of the Pembridge family, of the time of Edward II, in Clehonger church, Herefordshire.[3] They also remind us somewhat of the straps which sometimes join tuilles to the lowest hoops of tassets. There are several of these on English brasses, the earliest being on that of John Leventhorpe, in Sawbridgeworth church, Hertfordshire (1433),[4] and one of the latest on a brass of Sir Anthony Grey, who died in 1480, and is buried at St. Albans[5]. It was perhaps rather difficult to give the effect of armour in wood, but it could be done. In an example from Norwich cathedral (plate VII, no. 1) we see the devices adopted to protect different parts of the body, the head, neck, chest, elbows, knees, feet, in the 'camail period,' and another from Beverley St. Mary's

[1] Langlois, op. cit. pl. xii, no. 83 and p. 158.

[2] Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes*, 112 and pl. xv.

[3] Planche, *Cyclopaedia of Costume*, i, 4, and plate ii.

[4] J. Hewitt, *Arms and Armour*, supplement, 436.

[5] *Hist. Mon. Comm. for Herts.* 183.

gives us a specimen of fully-developed plate armour, but this is not so satisfactory.

A carving of a young girl with her eyes bandaged and two young men beside her (plate VII, no. 2) is rather curious. It appears to be a game of Blind Man's Buff, but in that case it is difficult to explain why she should be holding anything in her hand. M. Maeterlinck thinks the object is a dagger and that she intends to kill herself or one of her companions with it, but their attitudes are so playful that the subject can hardly be tragic, but is more likely to be a game of some sort. The girl has a long trailing robe like a matron, but her hair, as was usual at her age, is hanging down over her shoulders.

The next (plate VII, no. 3) is also somewhat difficult to understand. It is a man's head with either flames or leaves issuing from his mouth. The former recall the fire-eating tricks of Indian jugglers, and the type of face seems rather Asiatic, but probably the more prosaic interpretation is the right one. At Beverley St. Mary's there is a man, who looks like an African, with bunches of fruit hanging out of his mouth, and another at Cley church, Norfolk (plate VII, no. 4), has leaves coming out of his : fancies of this kind pleased the mediaeval mind, and were possibly borrowed from travellers' tales.

Ten misericords deal with foliage, fruit, or flowers. One is a branch of a vine (plate VIII, no. 1) which recalls the grape-gatherers we have already seen. It may have some symbolical meaning, or perhaps is an allusion to a verse in the Bible, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches.' Another consists of a bunch of flowers (plate VIII, no. 2), possibly roses and tulips, but they are not at all natural. The rest are foliage of a conventional type (plate VIII, no. 3), bold and not ineffective, but somewhat coarse ; they vary slightly, but are all of the same style. They are so different from the other misericords that it seems probable that they were executed at a later date, and possibly were some of those which, as M. Maeterlinck suggests, were remade in 1608. The only piece of English work at all like any of them that I have discovered is some fruit on an elbow-rest in Sall church, Norfolk, which bears a faint resemblance to the vine-branch.

Four or five misericords inculcate moral lessons, and

these are particularly interesting. A stag emerging from a forest (plate VIII, no. 4) may be a reminiscence of the chase, but is more likely to be of symbolical import. Such a subject sometimes signifies solitude and poverty of life, and sometimes baptism.[1] Both the stag and the forest are poor and conventional; this carver was at his worst when he attempted animals. Stags or harts very often appear on stalls or on other parts of churches in England; there are two on the back of the early fifteenth-century watching-gallery at St. Albans, and each has a tree behind it, perhaps intended to do duty for a forest. At Cawston, Norfolk, we have a stag with leaves issuing from the top of its head and from its mouth. In addition to these there are many carvings of stags forming heraldic bearings, and also of stag-hunts.

A very curious hybrid (plate IX, no. 1), having the head, arms and body of a man joined to the hind quarters of a hoofed animal, teaches the evil effects of giving way to animal passions. Mediaeval artists were fond of grotesque hybrids, and there are numbers of them on elbow-rests and misericords, and in miniatures in manuscripts. This one looks particularly comical because it is clothed, and its oddity is increased by the quaintness of the weapons it bears, a knife which might have come out of the kitchen, and a very crude shield or buckler. This is the only really funny carving among our misericords, but probably its humour is unconscious. As the human part of the creature wears a cowl we may assume that it belongs to a monk, and somewhat analogous mixtures of monks and animals are to be found on elbow-rests in Norwich cathedral church (plate IX, no. 2), and at Cley in Norfolk. There is also a centaur on a bench-end in Ripon minster, but it is very dignified, quite different in spirit from any of these.

On another misericord an awe-inspiring monster (plate IX, no. 3) is pouring coins from a bag into a large coffer, while a man standing by is apparently making notes about them on a tablet or a piece of parchment. M. Maeterlinck thinks that the monster is a devil, and that perhaps this is an illustration of one of the tales current at this period of men obtaining money from demons and cheating them out of repayment. It might, however, equally well be an ape, as in Flanders the ape was the

[1] Phipson, op. cit. 109.

symbol of avarice or of a usurer, and the word '*aap*' meant both an ape and a treasure.[1] In either case the moral is the same, the hideousness of avarice.

On the next (plate IX, no. 4) an old man, rosary in hand, is about to enter a church, but a devil is trying to drag him back. It is not so alarming as the monster on the last, but nevertheless, it is sufficiently unpleasant to show that the Bruges carver took devils seriously. English artists, although they gave their demons hoofs, tails, and other attributes which they no doubt thought calculated to strike terror into the beholder, often introduced some humorous touch which makes us suspect that they were slyly laughing in their sleeves.

Another warning to the wicked is conveyed by the spectacle of a nun (plate X, no. 1) being wheeled to Hell in a wheelbarrow, her humiliation increased by the lowliness of her vehicle. Only the feet of the person wheeling her remain, but they are enough to prove that it was a human being and not a devil as we might have expected. In England Hell was generally represented under the form of a monster's wide-open jaws, into which the condemned were thrown, and a good example of it is to be found on a misericord in Ludlow church, where a fraudulent ale-wife is meeting her doom,[2] but the conception of it as a flaming house was not unusual in the Low Countries. Sir William Martin Conway, in his interesting account of the *Woodcutters of the Netherlands*, tells us that the normal Dutch type may be seen in Gerard Leeu's quarto, and the picture of the Alkmaar roof. Here the mouth of Hell is open on one side, and in the background is a building filled with flames, and souls in torments are at the windows.[3]

Four of the Bruges misericords appear to deal with sacred subjects: two, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the conversion of St. Paul, we have already considered; the third (plate X, no. 2), a seated man writing on a long scroll, is possibly one of the evangelists, or a prophet, copied perhaps from a stained-glass window, or from a miniature in a manuscript. Like Abraham, he is clothed, not in the costume of the period, but in a long shapeless robe, which the carver, who seems to have possessed a

[1] Bond, op. cit. 181.

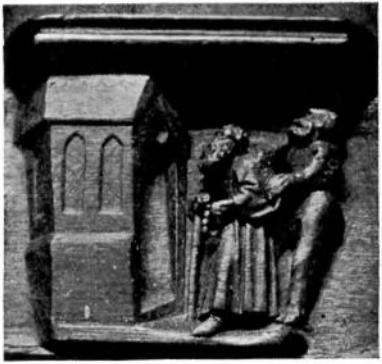
[2] Reproduced in Wright's *Hist. of Caricature*, 140.

[3] *The Woodcutters of the Netherlands*, 65–66, 32.

NO. 1. A CENTAUR : BRUGES.

NO. 3. AVARICE : BRUGES.

NO. 2. A HYBRID: NORWICH.



NO. 4. AT THE CHURCH DOOR: BRUGES.

NO. 1. GOING TO HELL: BRUGES.

NO. 3. THE ANNUNCIATION: BRUGES.

PLATE X.

NO. 2. A WRITER : BRUGES.

NO. 4. A SEATED LADY : BRUGES.

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sense of the fitness of things very unusual in the middle ages, doubtless thought more in keeping with his sacred character. A piece of furniture in the background gives us some idea of a mediaeval bookcase or bureau. Unfortunately time or rough usage has almost obliterated the writer's features, which greatly lessens his dignity.

The fourth (plate x, no. 3), an Annunciation, has also suffered terribly, but the spirit which inspired its maker still lives in it and reveals something of the religious aspirations of the people for whom it was wrought. The Flemings of the fifteenth century, in spite of all their moral laxity, their luxury, their wild pursuit of pleasure, were at heart deeply religious, and the Virgin was the special object of their adoration.[1] Every year a procession, in which the Chapter of Saint-Sauveur took part, wended its way to the Bourg, and made three genuflexions before a statue of the Virgin which stood there.[2] Our artist's conception of the Annunciation is a little out of the ordinary; in pictures the Virgin is almost invariably represented kneeling at a prayer-desk, but here she is sitting reading, and the plainness of her dress and surroundings is remarkable when we remember the splendour with which they are generally depicted.

The most beautiful of all the carvings (plate x, no. 4) has been left to the last because it naturally stands apart from the rest, and seems worthy of special notice. Whether it be intended for a saint, the personification of some Christian virtue, or simply a lady of the period, it is impossible to decide, but we certainly have in this seated figure a most magnificent specimen of womanhood, and, what is most extraordinary, her face is of a pure Greek type, a fact which it is most difficult to explain except on the supposition that it was copied from some classical work of art which the carver had seen.[3] There is very little in her dress to help us to determine her date, but tight sleeves such as she wears, with the addition of cuffs, are to be found in both the late-fifteenth-century manuscripts already quoted.[4]

The impression left by an examination of these carvings may be summed up as follows. We may be fairly certain

[1] Fierens-Gevaert, *Essai sur Bruges*, 115–117; Pirenne, op. cit. ii, 436–437.

[2] *Archives*, v, 334 n.

[3] I am indebted for this suggestion to Sir Henry Howorth.

[4] Harl. MS. 4425 and Roy. MS. 14 E. 5.

that all the misericords depicting persons, with the exception of the last and the conversion of St. Paul, were executed in the first half of the fifteenth century, probably in the second quarter of it, or at the latest a few years after the middle of the century, since the costume both of the men and women corresponds in the main with that found in pictures and on carvings of this date. St. Paul and the seated lady (plate x, no. 4) may possibly belong to the third or fourth quarter of the century.

The similarity between English and Flemish misericords in choice of subjects and conception seems quite sufficient to prove that there was a similarity in social customs and in thought in England and Flanders, but the workmanship and technique are so different that one cannot believe that they came from the hand of craftsmen of the same nation.

The physiognomy of the people of Bruges in the fifteenth century appears to have been very much what it is now; they were short, sturdy, and vigorous, like the Belgians who are in our midst to-day. Their plain, sensible clothing, free from the fantastic extravagances which we see elsewhere at this time, marks them out as persons of much common sense, with an eye to utility and convenience rather than to beauty and grace. Judging from the subjects represented, their tastes were simple, they had a love of home life, respect for women, and a special tenderness for children. It is surprising to find so few traces of conscious humour, or of skill in depicting animals, as these two qualities were so general in the middle ages, but they had the mediaeval liking for drawing a moral in a very pronounced degree.

These seem the chief characteristics revealed by our misericords. From historical records we do not gain quite the same impression of the Flemings, but this is perhaps largely because there we have more information about the upper than the lower classes, and deal with them rather in a public than in a private capacity, whereas here the conditions are exactly reversed. No doubt our carvers' point of view was somewhat one-sided, but they have given us a true picture of one aspect of Flemish life and character which may serve to supplement what we already know of them from other sources.