

THE PAINTED BOARD FOUND IN DERBY CATHEDRAL.

By R. S. M. O'FERRALL.

THE Consistory Court has suggested a new problem. When its floor was being taken up in 1948 to repair damage by beetle and dry rot, one of the boards was found to be painted on the under side. The painting is only a small part of a much larger picture, the main subject of which is open to conjecture. All other boards in the Court floor were examined, but there was no further sign of painting on any of them.

The history of the Court can tell us how long the board has been in its present position, but as there is only one painted board it is probably much older than that. If the picture had just then been broken up more painted boards would probably have been used for this floor. *The Chronicles of All Saints'* by Cox and St. John Hope give the following extract from The Book of Orders, April 8th, 1634:—

“It is agreed that the Churchwardens this day chosen shall erect a Consistory and provyde a table to be set before it on the south syde of the church in Snt. Katherine Queere to be speedily begun and finished.”

From the Churchwardens' Accounts they quote as follows:—

1635	for removinge ye seats, placing ym & for meales, to make way for ye consistory	2	0
„	for 4 peeces of timber, Henges & to Atherley for ye consistory	9	16 0



THE PAINTED BOARD.

„ for lime & sand, given in drink, & to Harrison & 2 laborers about levelling ye ground & ground cellinge ye consistory	8 9
1636 for mending ye consistory door	2
1640 bands (nails) for ye consistory	3 1

This suggests, though not conclusively, that the Court was first set up in 1635 and that the painted board was then incorporated in the floor. But there is the possibility of a different date on either side. The board might have been added when the Court was moved from the South to the North side when Gibbs' church was built in 1725, or it might have been part of an old pew floor used at the time of the making of the Court in 1635, or even part of a previous Consistory Court floor.

What does the picture represent? Professor Tristram, an authority and writer on Medieval painting, thinks that it is part of a large Last Judgement picture and sends the following description and notes:—

“On the board may be seen, in the centre, one half of a disc, apparently the remains of a nimbus, the background being part of a Firmament with clouds and stars, including, on the left, the Moon and, on the right, a large star with a lion's head in the centre, probably representing the Constellation Leo. All these features would be consistent with those in the representation of the Last Judgement, the nimbus being that of a figure of Christ placed centrally and sitting on a rainbow.

The following is quoted from the Catalogue of the loan exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art, Burlington House, London, 1927, edited by Sir Martin Conway, page 8. 'It is interesting to note that the majority of Last Judgements were not Triptychs nor painted for church altars, but were made to adorn Courts of Justice. Almost everywhere such pictures were to be found in the Justice Rooms of Town Halls.' It seems probable therefore that this floor-board was originally part of the painting of a Last Judgement adorning the Consistory Court.

In the work itself there is little evidence upon which it may be dated with any degree of precision. Judging from its general appearance I think it may have been executed in 1635, when

the Court was erected in St. Katherine's Queere in the south side of the church; but I should have thought it slightly earlier than this."

There are however other views both on the subject matter and the date. Some people think that the board is a fragment of the top of a reredos panel representing perhaps Our Lord in Glory or The Creation. Others say that it is part of a non-Christian picture with pagan emblems. The lion's head is a problem in itself: many think the background is the Sun and not a star in the Constellation Leo, some suggest that the drawing of the lion was super-imposed at a later date. Others would put the date in the XVIth rather than the XVIIth century.

The painted board now hangs just outside St. Katherine's Chapel on the South wall of the cathedral, and near it is a photograph of the mural painting of The Last Judgement in the Guild Chapel at Stratford-on-Avon, which has been recently restored by Professor Tristram. The latter shows Our Lord in Glory, and the saved and the damned on either side below Him.