



Lines as shown are black filled in with vermillion.

FIG. I.

An Old Fresco Painting.

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In 1940 when removing some old plaster from the wall of a room in an old 16th Century house in London Street, Reading, a small piece of colour became exposed. I was asked to call and see this, and found what appeared to be part of some fresco painting. I began carefully to remove some of the plaster. After taking off three thick layers, some red and black lines of fresco paint could be seen. These were painted on a thin layer of "Gesso" which was covering a very old wall of "Wattle and Daub" work, in very bad condition, and almost ready to crumble to pieces.

However, with gentle handling, and only removing very carefully small pieces, a design began to appear, showing two interlacing square frames, enclosing what appeared to be the Monogram "I.H.S."

I had a photograph taken at once but unfortunately much of the design was lost, owing to the many dark shadows where the loose "Wattle and daub" material had fallen away. I made a drawing (Fig. I) showing the design more clearly, and there is no doubt that the monogram "I.H.S." represents the initials for the latin "Iesus hominum salvator." The "I and H" are fairly plain, but the "S" is almost lost in the scroll work,

only part of which can be traced. The top part of the "H" is probably intended to form a cross. The outline of the frames and monogram, as well as the vertical lines at the back are black, filled in with vermillion which still retains much of its original brightness. On part of the frames can be seen portions of a rope pattern painted and shaded in brown.

On further examination of the house I found that the roof is supported by massive "crutched" beams. The floors also have some heavy timbers, one of which stands nearly a foot above the middle of the floor. All the timbers are roughly shaped with the adze.

In looking at this crude design one is inclined to wonder how it came to be painted on this old wall? Was the room ever used as a chapel? Did an old priest paint it when it was perhaps his study? We do not know, but that this design is found after 300 years is at least interesting.

The house which is at the entrance to Fountain Court, was called "The Wheat Rick," afterwards altered to "The Wheat Sheaf," and there is a record that in 1833 the "Union Lodge of Freemasons was founded"—in the private room at the back of "The Wheat Sheaf" Inn.