Mural Paintings in Berkshire Churches.

By E. T. Long, F.S.A.

THE interiors of our ancient churches formerly glowed with a rich profusion of delicate and harmonious colouring lavishly applied not only to the fittings and roofs, but also to the arches and plastered surfaces of the walls. The general effect of such a decorated interior must have been one of surpassing magnificence, as even the comparatively small fragments that have survived the onslaught of reformers and restorers abundantly testify. The use of wall paintings can be traced back to very remote times and occurs in the tombs of the Pharoahs, as well as in the principal buildings of Pompeii and other Roman cities. Remains of mural decoration have been found in the ruins of Roman villas in this country. The Christians made early use of this effective method of decoration and the catacombs contain many striking examples from the second century onward. In the primitive basilicas at Rome and elsewhere numerous beautiful mural paintings are to be seen, notably in the lower church of San Clemente. No English examples of an earlier date than the end of the eleventh century have survived, but there is documentary evidence of their use in our churches within a century of the coming of St. Augustine. We learn that in 674 St. Wilfred of York had the walls, capitals of the columns and the sanctuary arch of his church decorated with paintings.[1] Again at a Council held at Calcuth in Northumberland in 816 a decree was issued ordering every Bishop before consecrating a church to see that a picture of the Patron Saint was painted on the walls, or over the altar.[2] It is improbable that the exteriors of English churches were decorated in colour to any great extent, and such painting as there was would probably be confined for the most part to doorways and niches, which were more or less protected from the elements. A notable instance, however, existed until about sixty years ago at Winchfield, in Hampshire, where a red dragon was painted on the exterior of the west face of the tower. It was believed to have dated from the twelfth century.

English mural paintings were usually executed in tempera on the dry plaster, and, it is, therefore, quite incorrect to call them frescoes, as is often done even by otherwise well-informed persons. A fresco is a painting executed on the wet plaster, so that it becomes permanently incorporated with it. The vast majority of English mural paintings were executed on the dry plaster with water as a

1 *Richard of Hexham*, lib. I, cap. III.
2 Wilkins' *Concilia*, I, 169.

medium and with nothing of a more binding nature than honey, size or white of egg. The late Mr. P. M. Johnston, F.S.A., however, a pioneer in the preservation of wall paintings, states that he came across several instances of true frescoes, most of which date from the twelfth century. They all occur within a strictly limited area in Surrey, Sussex and Kent, with an isolated instance in Hampshire. The most important examples are at Clayton, in Sussex, and Witley, in Surrey, where Mr. Johnston claimed that he was able to detect the actual joinings-up of each day's fresh coat of plaster and colour. It was, he said, found possible to sponge repeatedly the surface without disturbing the colour.

If true frescoes are very rare in this country a process somewhat analogous, which may be termed semi-fresco, seems to have been sometimes employed. By this method the colour was applied before the plaster had completely dried out, with the result that the former was to a certain extent incorporated in the latter. The present writer has come across this method in more than one place and notably at Willingham, in Cambridgeshire, where an exquisite fifteenth century painting of the Visitation exhibits this technique.

In late medieval wall painting oil was fairly frequently employed. Notable examples occur at St. George's, Norwich, and Attleborough, in Norfolk, and Alton, in Hampshire. Occasionally only certain details of the picture are executed in oils, as at Kirtlington, in Oxfordshire, and Winslow, in Buckinghamshire. The fact that most English mural paintings are executed in tempera accounts largely for the poor state in which so many of them are found, and it, moreover, adds greatly to the difficulty of uncovering and preserving them.

It was in the reign of Edward VI, when the parish churches of England were systematically pillaged and defaced, that the first attack was launched against mural paintings. They were then ordered to be obliterated with limewash and texts painted in their place. During the brief Catholic restoration under Queen Mary an attempt was made to repair the devastation and sacrilege of the previous reign, and, doubtless, many wall paintings were executed at this time, but few, if any, now existing can be definitely assigned to this period. The texts were ordered to be obliterated and several entries like the following occur in churchwardens accounts of the time: " Payde for washing oute the Scriptures." Early in the reign of Elizabeth orders were again given to place sentences of Scripture on the walls instead of " pictures and other like fancies." Many of these texts still exist and often exhibit good examples of lettering within pleasing and sometimes elaborate borders. The use of these texts as mural decoration lasted into the eighteenth century. Examples of this type of mural decoration occur in a number of Berkshire churches, e.g. Finchampstead, North Hinksey, Ruscombe, and Sutton Courtenay.

In the seventeenth century Prophets, Patriarchs and Apostles were occasionally portrayed on the walls, as at Martock, in Somerset, and Willingham, in Cambridgeshire. The Royal Arms were often painted direct on the plaster, especially over the chancel arch, as at Boxford and Sutton Courtenay, in Berkshire.

During the " restoration " to which the majority of our ancient churches were subjected in the nineteenth century mural paintings were frequently brought to light on the removal of the limewash, and in some instances several layers of pictures were discovered, one on the top of another. Many of these paintings were almost immediately obliterated, though fortunately, in some cases copies—usually rather indifferent—were made as records. The very reprehensible practice of scraping the walls of the church, which came into vogue during the second half of the nineteenth century, was responsible for the loss of many wall paintings. Though Berkshire suffered less in this respect than some other counties—notably Northamptonshire—several churches, *e.g.* Inkpen and Longcot, lost interesting paintings in this way.

Within recent years there has been a growing interest in medieval wall paintings fostered to a great extent, doubtless, by the striking examples which have been discovered after being obscured for centuries beneath successive coats of limewash, and, also, by a somewhat belated appreciation of their merit as works of art. Berkshire, though less rich in surviving examples than Oxfordshire and many other counties, retains, nevertheless some very important instances of medieval colour decoration, several of which have within recent years been cleaned and treated under expert direction with the most gratifying results. Cases in point are Ashampstead, Kingston Lisle and Tidmarsh. On the other hand it is sad to reflect how many valuable mural paintings were wantonly destroyed by the Victorian restorers. Arborfield, Bray, Inkpen, Longcot, St. Laurence, Reading, and Sonning all belong to this unhappy category, having lost all traces, except in the case of Arborfield, of the schemes of mural painting brought to light during the Victorian era. In several other instances the destruction has only been partial, *e.g.* Padworth, Stanford Dingley and Tidmarsh.

There is very little direct evidence to show who executed these paintings. It is known that the principal religious houses, and particularly St. Albans, Bury St. Edmunds, Westminster and Winchester, maintained schools of art, and Professor Tristram has been able to identify various paintings as being in all probability the work of some of these schools. Henry III, a great patron of the arts, gathered round him a group of accomplished artists, who may be said to have formed a Court School. Unfortunately, most, if not all of the works that could be attributed with any degree of certainty to these artists have been lost.

In the following century Edward III commissioned Hugh of St. Albans to decorate St. Stephen's Chapel in the Palace of Westminster. These paintings perished almost entirely in the disastrous fire of 1834, but a few fragments are preserved in the British Museum, and the other portions are known from coloured drawings made at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the paintings came to light after centuries of obscurity. Again, it is known that the remarkable monochrome paintings above the stalls in Eton College Chapel, executed between 1478 and 1483, are the work of William Baker and his assistant Gilbert. They show strong Flemish influence and are quite unlike the ordinary run of contemporary work in this country. A series of grisaille paintings in the Lady Chapel of Winchester Cathedral have an affinity with those at Eton, though they are by a different hand and of rather later date. The artist was almost certainly acquainted with the Eton work. A painting of St. Christopher formerly existing at Ampney Crucis, in Gloucestershire, is said to have borne the name of the artist, "Thomas ye payntre of Malmesburie." This claim is open to grave suspicion, but if it is a fact it is the only recorded example of a signed wall painting in this country. So far as the present writer is aware there seems to be no evidence to show the provenance of existing mural paintings in Berkshire. Much at any rate of the late medieval work was probably executed by itinerant artists who employed standard patterns, into which they introduced slight variations, for the medieval craftsman was naturally inventive and rarely, if ever, indulged in wholesale copying, even of his own work.

Although the variety of subjects in medieval mural painting is very considerable and their treatment differs a good deal in many cases, certain subjects came in course of time to be assigned with more or less regularity to certain positions in the church. Of these the two principal were the Doom over the chancel arch and St. Christopher opposite the main entrance. The position of the former is sufficiently explained by the symbolism which pictured the nave as representing the Church Militant on earth and the chancel as the Church Triumphant in heaven, separated by the Judgement, which is to pass sentence on all souls at the Last Day. Berkshire possesses no surviving examples of the Doom in this position, though it is possible that one exists at Sutton Courtenay beneath the Stuart Royal Arms. Sometimes, however, the Doom is found in other positions. At Great Bowden, in Leicestershire, it is placed in the north chapel; at Broughton, in Buckinghamshire, on the north wall of the nave; at Rainham, in Kent, on the south side of the nave; at Stanford Dingley, in Berkshire, over the north arcade. Lack of space over the chancel arch was, no doubt, a reason for its being placed elsewhere in these instances. On the other hand we find sometimes the space over the chancel arch occupied by the Crucifixion, as at Ashampstead, in Berkshire, and

occasionally this space was decorated in colour to serve as a background to the Rood, *e.g.* at Raunds, in Northamptonshire, where there are depicted with much charm angels bearing the Instruments of the Passion on either side of the silhouette of the Rood and its attendant figures. At North Leigh, in Oxfordshire, the Doom served as a background to the Rood, the silhouette of which may still be seen.

When space allowed the following scheme was usually adopted in depicting the Doom. In the centre was Our Lord seated on a rainbow with hands upraised and feet and side exposed to display the Sacred Wounds. On His right knelt the Blessed Virgin interceding for mankind. Sometimes St. John Baptist was also introduced kneeling on the other side, and occasionally angels bearing the Instruments of the Passion were introduced. Beneath, the dead were shown rising naked from their graves—their rank denoted by crowns, mitres, tonsures, etc.—being summoned to judgement by Angels blowing trumpets. On Christ's right hand the redeemed were depicted approaching the gate of Heaven, where they were received by St. Peter. On His left the damned were shown being dragged off to Hell by revulsive fiends, where they were depicted undergoing fearful torments. Usually the mouth of Hell was represented as the jaws of an immense fish.

The position and popularity of St. Christopher is explained by the fact that it was piously believed that all who looked upon a representative of the Saint and at the same time invoked his aid were safe that day from a sudden and unprepared death. The earliest surviving wall painting of St. Christopher occurs at Little Hampden, in Buckinghamshire, and dates from the middle of the thirteenth century. Berkshire possesses at Aldermaston an example dating from about 1300. The majority of surviving instances of this subject belong to the fifteenth century. At first the figure of the Saint is depicted standing upright with the Holy Child merely resting on his arms and with no attempt at realistic treatment such as we find later. The fishes were the first accessory detail to be added. They occur in the Aldermaston picture and also at Little Hampden. Later the hermit and his chapel were introduced together with the mermaid and her mirror and other quaint details. Probably the earliest occurrence of the mermaid is at Aldermaston. Sometimes in late examples all manner of quaint details are added including ships, persons fishing on the river bank and a crab biting St. Christopher's toe. In a few instances other scenes from the legend of the Saint are depicted at the sides of the main picture, *e.g.* at Great Ellingham, in Norfolk, and St. Keverne, in Cornwall. The later representations of the subject are often treated in a very realistic manner and the giant Saint is depicted as literally staggering beneath his Sacred Burden. The Child usually holds an orb in His left hand, while the right is raised in blessing in the later examples.

Nearly 250 paintings of St. Christopher are recorded, but of these less than 100 are now in existence, and many of those still surviving are in a very fragmentary condition. Of the five examples noted in Berkshire only those at Aldermaston and Ashampstead are now visible. A drawing of the destroyed picture at Stanford Dingley proves it to have been a particularly fine and perfect example dating from the end of the thirteenth century, the loss of which is most regrettable. So great was the popularity of St. Christopher in the latter part of the Middle Ages that, as the late Mr. C. E. Keyser remarks,[1] "it is conjectured that every English church possessed a figure either in painting or sculpture, of this Saint." A rough sketch of the destroyed picture at Sulhampstead Abbots is in existence,[2] but, so far as the present writer is aware, there is no pictorial record of the Sonning example.

The position of other subjects varied considerably and there seems to have been no very definite rule though St. George is often found near, or opposite St. Christopher, as at Kirtlington, in Oxfordshire, and Fritton, in Norfolk. It is natural to expect that St. George as Protector of the Realm should be frequently depicted in English churches, and a considerable number of representations of the Saint occur and, doubtless, there were formerly many more. One of the earliest surviving examples is at Little Kimble, in Buckinghamshire, which dates from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Here the Saint is depicted on foot without the dragon, or any other of the usual accessory details. He holds a lance and on his surcoat is a red cross, while at the bottom of the picture is the word *Georgius* in Lombardic capitals. Berkshire retains a single and sadly mutilated example of this subject at Sutton Courtenay dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. It is possible that a painting on the north wall of Baulking Church, now concealed by a mural tablet, may depict St. George.

Another popular subject is the Weighing of Souls, sometimes found in conjunction with the Doom. It usually takes the following form. A large figure of St. Michael is depicted holding a pair of scales, on one side of which is a human soul, represented as a small naked figure, and in the other a demon. Beside the first, as a rule, stands the Blessed Virgin, who places a rosary on the scale to weigh it down. On the other side one, or more demons are pulling vigorously, but ineffectively, on the scale. In the earlier examples the treatment is often rather simpler and some of the accessory details are absent. No example of this popular subject survives in Berkshire, but there is a very notable one at South Leigh, in Oxfordshire, which, though rather drastically restored in the last century, is still a valuable record of fifteenth century art.

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[1] *List of Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland having Mural and other Painted Decorations*, p. LI.

[2] Believed to be in the possession of Mrs. E. E. Cope of Finchampstead Place. *Ed.*

The Gospel story was a very popular theme, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Scenes from the Nativity and the Passion were the most frequently represented, and they were sometimes associated with subjects from the life of the Blessed Virgin as recorded by tradition and the early Christian writers. Berkshire is fortunate in possessing two Nativity series dating from the thirteenth century at Ashampstead and Baulking, the former particularly notable and exhibiting a very high degree of artistic merit. Far more extensive and, on the whole, better preserved is the splendid mid-fourteenth century series at Chalgrove, in Oxfordshire, where the walls of the chancel are decorated with a series which includes both Nativity and Passion scenes as well as episodes connected with the death of the Blessed Virgin.

The Annunciation often occurs as an independent subject and Berkshire possesses a fine but sadly mutilated example of late fifteenth century date at Aldermaston. The Assumption and Coronation of Our Lady, also, appear as independent scenes, but there are no examples in Berkshire.

Other subjects, which occur fairly frequently are the Seven Deadly Sins; the Seven Works of Mercy; the legends of St. Catharine and St. Nicholas, the latter of which is found at Padworth in this county; the Martyrdom of St. Thomas of Canterbury; the Trinity; the Madonna and Holy Child, which occurs at Hampstead Norris, in Berkshire; the Crucifixion, as at Ashampstead. More rarely we find St. Gregory's Mass, the Pieta and the Jesse Tree. Single figures of Saints often occur on the splays of windows as at Tidmarsh in our county. Another subject, which was popular in the latter part of the Middle Ages, was the morality of the Three Living and the Three Dead. This story simply relates that three kings went hunting in the forest and there met three grisly spectres, who warned them of the transitory nature of earthly pomp and power, saying in effect, " As you are we were and as we are you will be." This subject does not now occur in Berkshire.

A remarkable subject, which is sometimes found, depicts the nude figure of Christ surrounded by various implements which include pincers, hammer, shovels, scythe blades, axes, saws, trumpets, knives, weighing scales and in one case, at Hessett, in Suffolk, a playing card, the six of diamonds. Certain authorities consider that this subject was inspired by the *Piers Plowman* of Langland and that it is intended to portray the sanctification of labour. The late Dr. M. R. James, however, who was one of the greatest authorities on medieval iconography, believed that this picture was intended to show how Christ is wounded by men in their work and recreation. The fact that in some examples the body of Christ is depicted covered with wounds lends support to this theory. There was in the fifteenth century a campaign on the part of the clergy against profanity and the habit of swearing

by the different members of Christ's body. The Parson in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* says, "For Criste's sake ne swereth nat so sinfully in dismembringe of Crist by soule, herte, bones and body." At Broughton, in Buckinghamshire, is a remarkable early fifteenth century wall painting, which, undoubtedly, echoes the teaching of contemporary sermons on the subject of profanity. The Blessed Virgin is depicted seated with her dead Son on her lap in the manner of a Pieta, but with this difference; the figure of Christ has lost the right foot and the lower part of the right arm. Around stand figures of fashionably dressed young men, the first holding an arm, the second the head of Christ, the third a heart, the fourth some bones, the fifth two large bones, the sixth bones and a wafer and the seventh a foot in one hand and a bone in the other. Below are two youths at a gaming table; one with a dagger is being struck on the head by the other with a sword. A wall painting formerly at Walsham-le-Willows, in Suffolk, exhibited features occurring both at Broughton and in the other type. During the drastic and destructive "restoration" to which the Berkshire church of Inkpen was subjected in the nineties an example of the former type of this subject was revealed only to be speedily obliterated.

The arcades were decorated in a variety of ways. In the twelfth century and even later chevron ornament was commonly employed. Floral patterns and scroll work are found fairly often and sometimes the soffits of the arches are decorated with figures, as at Stanford Dingley, in Berkshire. Caps and columns were often decorated in colour, the former with chevrons, scroll work, or barber's poling. Columns sometimes have figure painting, as at Waltham St. Lawrence and Warfield, in Berkshire, Alton, in Hampshire and Broughton, in Oxfordshire.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a popular form of simple mural decoration consisted of masonry pattern, lines in colour intersecting each other at right angles and dividing the surface of the plaster into oblong divisions. In the later examples a masonry pattern of double lines was sometimes employed, as at Arborfield, in Berkshire. Often a spray, or conventional flower is painted in each division, *e.g.* at Black Bourton and Eynsham, in Oxfordshire. The use of heraldry in wall paintings came into vogue in the fourteenth century, notable examples occurring at Chalgrave, in Bedfordshire, and Hailes, in Gloucestershire. Scroll work was often introduced for borders and to fill up vacant spaces, as at Ashampstead, in Berkshire. In the fifteenth century and later a wide range of decorative patterns was employed. Chevrons of different colours, tapestry designs and barber's poling are characteristic of the period.

Tomb recesses were frequently decorated in colour as at Dodford, in Northamptonshire, and Turvey, in Bedfordshire. The latter has an exquisite Crucifixion of early fourteenth century date,

one of the most beautiful examples of this subject now in existence.

Consecration crosses marking the places annointed with chrism by the Bishop at the dedication of the church were painted on the walls. There were usually twelve such crosses on the internal walls. The external crosses, also twelve in number, were generally cut in the stone work, though occasionally they were merely incised in the thin coat of plaster with which the walls were often covered, especially in districts where building stone was scarce. When so incised they were probably painted. Some of the internal crosses, especially in East Anglia, were of very elaborate design, but more often they were comparatively plain. Usually the cross is in red with splayed ends on a cream ground contained within a red circle. Berkshire examples of painted consecration crosses occur at Ashampstead, West Hendred and Padworth.

The framing of subjects and single figures was managed in various ways. In the earlier work the surrounds are often of architectural character, as at Ashampstead, or in the form of roundels, as at Black Bourton, in Oxfordshire. Later we find it customary to frame subjects in a rectangluar border ornamented in a variety of ways. Sometimes the picture has no kind of frame whatever.

Something must now be said about the colour decoration of vaulting, of which two of the most notable instances are at Copford, in Essex, and Kempley, in Gloucestershire, both belonging to the twelfth century. In each case the decoration of the walls and vaulting of the chancel forms one continuous scheme and this would seem to have been the normal treatment. A less elaborate example, dating from the thirteenth century, occurs at Checkendon, in Oxfordshire, where in the centre is Christ in Majesty with the Apostles grouped on either side. At Copford and Checkendon this group occupies the walls of the apse, but at Kempley, where the chancel is rectangular the Apostles are placed on the lateral walls in groups of six and the figure of Christ is found in the centre of the vaulting. Unfortunately, both at Copford and Checkendon the paintings have been extensively renewed. The apse at Padworth formerly had painting on walls and vault, but it was destroyed at the " restoration." Sometimes in twelfth and thirteenth century work the vaulting was decorated most effectively with simple masonry pattern in red lines.

In conclusion, a few words may be said about the chief characteristics of medieval figure painting. The figure work is always interesting and if sometimes rather crude in execution it invariably exhibits a certain naiveté and charm. Such twelfth century examples as survive display as a rule the rather stiff and formal manner associated with most Romanesque art, together with a considerable range of colours, producing a decidedly rich effect. The thirteenth century figures tend to be rather angular with a

more restricted range of colours than in the preceding period. It was in the fourteenth century, probably, that English figure painting reached its zenith and the best examples are full of a grace and diginity, equal to the best contemporary work on the Continent. The later figure work is often rather stumpy, but there is frequently much interesting detail and the colour schemes are usually rich and harmonious. There was a marked deterioration in mural figure painting after the Reformation and such as exists, and that mostly in secular buildings, is strangely crude and even grotesque.

It is now proposed to describe briefly in alphabetical order the surviving remains of medieval mural paintings in Berkshire. With regard to Post-Reformation colour decoration only those examples occurring in churches with medieval work have been noticed here.

ALDERMASTON.

An extensive scheme of colour decoration was discovered during the restoration of the church in 1893 and much of this still remains. Though carefully uncovered the paintings have never received expert preservative treatment and consequently they are tending to deteriorate in spite of efforts made by this Society to arouse the local authorities to a sense of their duty in this respect.

Most of the surviving work occurs in the south chapel and is of two dates, late thirteenth century and fifteenth century. Originally the walls of the chapel, except the portion to the east of the south window, were entirely decorated with a double masonry pattern in red with a conventional flower on a stalk in each compartment; much of this scheme still remains. The space to the east of the south window is occupied by a contemporary figure of St. Christopher, one of the earliest surviving examples of this subject in England. The Saint is shown beneath a triangular headed and cusped canopy in red and yellow and is clad in a cloak and tunic outlined in red. On his left arm he bears the Holy Child, who holds an orb in the left hand, while the right is raised in blessing. St. Christopher is wading towards the west and holds in his right hand a sort of eel spear with prongs instead of the usual staff. In the water round his feet can be seen an eel and several fish, while on the right of the picture is a mermaid, the earliest instance of this latter detail. Part of a border in red and white remains. On the opposite side of the south window is a late fifteenth century painting superimposed on the masonry pattern and, unfortunately, much damaged. At the top is an elaborate vaulted canopy with lofty pinnacles in yellow ochre, the underside of which has two pendants and is coloured pink. Two openings, probably intended for windows, can be discerned at the back and the upper part of a kneeling figure with an angel above. It is probable that this picture represents the Annunciation, but

Mr. Keyser thought that it depicted some event in the life of St. Nicholas. On the east wall of the chapel are remains of three scenes of fifteenth century date superimposed on the original masonry pattern. At the bottom two ships are seen obviously storm tossed and with figures visible in them. Above are two ecclesiastics holding croziers and at the top two men in armour before what may be intended for an altar. It is possible that these scenes depict St. Nicholas, who is patron of seafarers, rescuing distressed mariners with the grateful travellers returning thanks at his shrine.

The nave and chancel are covered with modern mural paintings, but a certain amount of old work survives in the former, including a scroll border in red on the north wall. The masonry pattern is probably a restoration of what was found in 1893. There are, also, two texts, which date from about the end of the sixteenth century (*Berks, Bucks and Oxon Arch. Journ.* XVII (1911), 34.)

ARBORFIELD.

The old church of St. Bartholomew, a pleasing little fabric of local type dating from the thirteenth century, was abandoned in favour of a pretentious modern successor in 1863. The roof was then removed and the building left to decay. There were formerly considerable remains of mural paintings, but all that has survived nearly eighty years of exposure to the elements consists of some double masonry pattern in red on the splays of the east window and slight traces elsewhere.

ASHAMPSTEAD.

There is here an interesting and extensive scheme of mural painting, the greater part of which belongs to the second half of the thirteenth century, and was brought to light during the restoration of the church in 1895.

The principal section is found on the north wall of the nave between the door and the window and consists of four subjects, each within a trefoil headed arch surmounted by battlements and pinnacles. The background within the arches is painted crimson and vermilion alternately, the same colours being reversed on the outside. The arches are in blue and are from 33in. to 36in. in height and about 33in. in width. The figures vary from 27in. to 30in. in height. The figure drawing, the manipulation of the draperies and the modelling of the features are most accomplished and betray at once the hand of a master.

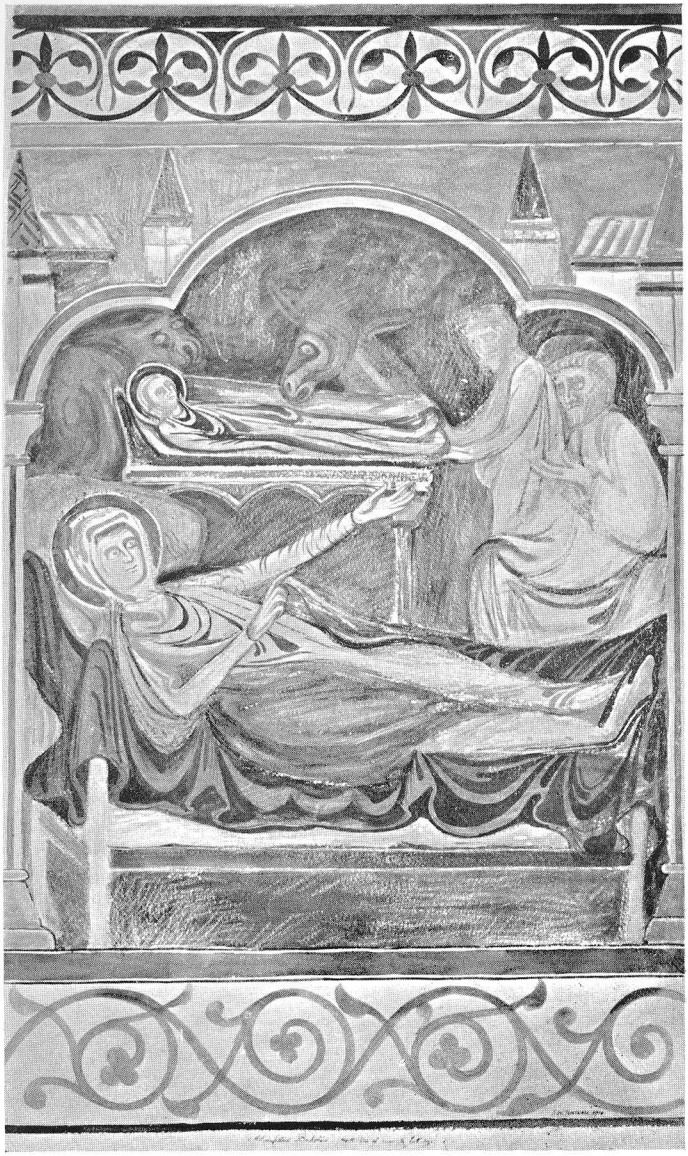
Starting from the west we have first the Annunciation. On the right is the Blessed Virgin in a red cloak with uplifted hands and close to her head is the Holy Spirit in the form of a white bird. The figure of St. Gabriel has, unfortunately, perished. The next scene depicts the Visitation. (*Plate* No. I). Our Lady and St. Elizabeth, who are shown within a tent-like erection, have their hands raised towards each other in greeting. This is perhaps the

Drawing by Professor E. W. Tristram, 1914.

By permission of Victoria and Albert Museum, E. 1529 — 1922.

PLATE I.

Ashampstead. The Visitation.



Drawing by Professor E. W. Tristram, 1941.

By permission of Victoria and Albert Museum, E. 1530 — 1922.

PLATE II.

Ashampstead. The Nativity.

most effective scene from the artistic point of view, as the figures are very delicately drawn and posed. The third compartment contains the Nativity. (*Plate* No. II). This is the best preserved of the series and contains the most detail. The Blessed Virgin reclines on a couch draped with crimson. Her left hand is stretched towards the manger where the Divine Infant is lying, with Joseph and an Angel at the foot and the heads of an ox and ass appearing from behind. The fourth scene depicts the Appearance of the Angel to the Shepherds. The Angel clad in a long robe has his right hand stretched towards three figures, one of whom in a red garment has his hand raised to his head. The other two figures are fragmentary. Part of an animal, probably a sheep, can be dimly discerned. The foliage is executed in red and white. The figure of the Angel is a most accomplished piece of work. To the east of the window are traces of other subjects, which have been for the most part destroyed by the insertion of mural tablets. The whole series is framed above by an effective border of scroll work in red and white. There are also traces of a border beneath the subjects.

On the splays of the north window there is a bold vine pattern in red and yellow with bunches of fruit. There are no indications of medieval colour on the south wall of the nave and it is probable that the plaster has been renewed.

The chancel retains considerable remains of colour decoration. On the north wall is a diaper of roses and scroll work with a scroll border in red. Between the two windows is a well executed consecration cross in white on a red ground within a yellow circle. There are also indications of foliage decoration on the splays of the windows.

All the paintings described above belong to the thirteenth century. In the nave there are two sections of fifteenth century work. Over the north door are fragmentary remains of a St. Christopher, of which the most conspicuous portion is an arm clad in red and grasping a yellow staff. There is no chancel arch, but its place is taken by a beam supporting a plaster partition, on which is depicted the Crucifixion with Mary and John flanked by several figures in niches, while above is a seated Christ in Majesty. Some eighteenth century texts and the tables of the Commandments are painted on the nave walls, to which, in all probability, the following item in the churchwarden's accounts for 1725 refers: "Pd to the paynter for drawing the sentences in the church" £2 10s. The Commandments are placed on the north wall above the Nativity scenes and it is possible that further examples of thirteenth century painting may exist beneath them. The paintings now visible were all carefully cleaned and treated a few years ago with admirable results. The paintings on the north wall of the nave are probably the most accomplished work now surviving in Berkshire. (*Berks, Bucks and Oxon Arch. Journ.* XXI (1915), 34.)

(*To be continued.*)