

## PAINTED GLASS.

It would hardly be proper in a publication like the present, to pass over without notice the most brilliant of the pictorial arts—that of glass painting, as practised by our medieval ancestors. We therefore gladly embrace the present opportunity of directing the attention of our readers to the subject, with a view not only to the preservation of existing specimens of ancient painted glass, but to the ultimate and complete revival of the art itself. No apology can be necessary for this; the intrinsic excellence of the art of glass painting, when, as in the middle ages, practised according to its *true principles*, and with due regard to the peculiar properties of glass, its brilliancy and transparency, and the value of the specimens now remaining to us, as illustrative of customs and decorations, and especially of the condition of the arts at various periods, alike entitle it to our attentive consideration.

Glass painting may be emphatically termed a medieval art; its development took place during the middle ages, and it attained its greatest perfection towards, or almost immediately upon, their close. The models for our imitation are consequently of somewhat ancient date; their number is daily diminishing; and we therefore cannot too strongly urge upon all, especially upon those charged with this duty, the extreme importance of preserving what time and violence have spared. It is not merely to the preservation of the greater and more perfect works that we would call the attention of our readers. Every little fragment of painted glass is interesting to the observant student: insignificant though it be in itself, it is a *fact*, which may confirm or qualify some preconceived opinion.

It is lamentable to think of the quantities of old glass that have been, and are in process of being, wholly lost through neglect alone. An ancient glass painting is composed of many pieces of glass, of various sizes, held together by means of *leads*, i. e. narrow strips of that metal, having a groove on either side sufficiently wide to receive the edges of the glass. From age, and other causes, the leads become decayed; a

piece of glass drops, or is blown out of the leads by the wind ; the leads, deprived of its support, become gradually relaxed in other parts ; other pieces of glass are in consequence lost, and so the painting rapidly perishes. A similar result follows the loss of a piece of glass occasioned by a stone thrown by an unlucky boy, or other accident. It may safely be affirmed, that nearly as much glass has been lost in this manner during the last two hundred years, as fell a victim to mistaken zeal during the Reformation and Rebellion. Now all this might have been prevented by a little care in the first instance. Had the work been examined occasionally, and the old leads repaired, or replaced with new, the loss arising from mere decay would not have occurred : or, had the lost piece of glass been promptly replaced with a piece of new, the further progress of decay might in all probability have been arrested. The old adage, "a stitch in time saves nine," applies with peculiar force to a painted window. Again : had the work been protected by a wire guard on the outside, much wanton, as well as accidental injury, would have been prevented.

Let us in future adopt these precautions ourselves. Whenever a glass painting, although in other respects perfect, appears to *bag*, or bulge out in places, that is a symptom that its *leading* requires reparation or renewal. If the latter, the restoration ought to be most carefully conducted. The pieces of glass of which it is composed should be retained in their original positions, and the forms of the ancient lead-work preserved as much as possible. When the work is complicated, it is better to have it re-leaded by a regular glass painter, than to trust it to the tender mercies of an ignorant glazier ; but even this is better than to suffer it to fall to pieces without an effort to save it. If the painting should be already much shattered, no time ought to be lost in repairing or renewing the leads, and in replacing the missing pieces with new glass. And here we condemn the practice of what is called *restoring* an ancient glass painting, by supplying its defects with modern painted glass. It may be allowable, in some cases, to fill the place of what must have been plain colour with a corresponding plain piece of coloured glass ; or even perhaps to restore a portion of ornament, or other matter, where sufficient authority exists for the restoration ; but in all other cases, it is safest to make up the deficiency with a piece of plain white glass, slightly dulled, or smeared

over, so as to subdue its brilliancy<sup>a</sup>. It should never be forgotten, that the value of an ancient authority depends upon its *originality*. The moment it is tampered with, its authenticity is impaired. There is no true artist who would not rather contemplate an antique *torso*, in its mutilated condition, than however well restored to what, according to conjecture, might have been its original state. These venerable remains ought to be preserved intact. The ancient artist alone should be permitted to address himself to us through them. A figure which has lost its head, or is otherwise mutilated, no doubt renders a glass painting defective; but it is far more disagreeable to detect an imperfect, or conjectural "restoration," of an ancient work. Indeed the restoration is the more dangerous in proportion to its deceitfulness—its similitude to the ancient work. A practised observer may discover the cheat, which therefore only excites his suspicions as to the originality of the rest of the painting; but it is to the *student* that authorities are of the greatest use; and he, through inexperience, is the more likely to be misled, by what he honestly supposes to be a genuine relic. If a showy effect is desired, that can be safely obtained by supplying in a *copy* all the defective parts of the original. Good taste is better evinced by treating an ancient specimen of glass as an *authority*, than as a mere matter of ornament.

It may be urged, that the ragged and mutilated condition of an ancient painting on glass has, in many instances, occasioned its entire destruction; the painted fragments having been cast aside, and replaced with plain white glass. But this again has been occasioned by the default, or indifference, of those whose duty it was to preserve, rather than to consent to the destruction of any harmless remnant of antiquity: and we must hope that the awakened taste for ancient art will prevent the recurrence of similar barbarism.

Painted glass loses so much of its interest and value, in every point of view, when removed from its original situation, that a collection of fragments from various places into one window, with

<sup>a</sup> An instance of a real restoration of an ancient painted window is afforded by the central east window of the chancel of Westwell church, Kent. The remnant of the painted glass in this window was re-leaded, and many of the missing pieces of glass supplied with plain bits of coloured, or

white glass, by Mr. Willement, under the superintendance, and we believe principally at the cost, of William Twopeny, Esq., of the Temple. We have had occasion to examine this window ourselves, and can bear testimony to the good taste displayed in its repair.

a view to their better preservation, is a measure, which, however laudable on account of the motive, should not be resorted to except in an extreme case. We cannot, however, be too grateful to those who, actuated by this spirit, at a time when these things were treated with greater neglect than at present, formed such collections, and thus have been the means of preserving to us much old glass. We may mention in particular Colonel Kennett, to whose exertions we owe the greater part of the glass now existing in Dorchester church, Oxfordshire. Whether it would be advisable to attempt the removal of such remains to their original positions is a question worthy of much consideration. It would require great care and experience in many cases, to discover whence the glass had been originally taken, and a misplacement of it would be a worse evil than suffering it to continue in its present place. In those cases, however, where there is sufficient evidence to shew the original situation of the glass, it ought certainly to be put back again: as, for instance, the glass of the clear-story windows of the choir of Canterbury cathedral, the greatest part of which, being now scattered about other windows of that building, and mixed with other glass of various dates and styles, no longer affords, at least to the casual observer, any idea of its original arrangement; and by the generality of persons passes wholly unnoticed.

We cannot too earnestly recommend the protection of painted windows by means of external wire guards. The present good condition of the beautiful glass at Fairford church, Gloucestershire, is no doubt, in great measure, owing to the munificence of the Hon. Mrs. Farmer, who, about the year 1725, at her own cost, supplied those windows with their present wire guards. It is sad indeed to witness the serious injury annually sustained by painted windows, even in some of our cathedrals, for want of such protection. Much expense must necessarily be incurred by the re-leading of a window, or even by supplying it with wire guards, and this without producing any apparent show. Considering, however, the extreme value of ancient authorities in glass, to the artist especially, and even to the antiquary, their fragile character, and the irreparable nature of their mutilation, or loss; we will venture to affirm, that such spirited individuals as Colonel Kennett, the Hon. Mrs. Farmer, and other true preservers of ancient glass, have been greater benefactors to the art itself, and are even more deserving of our praise, than those, who with perhaps more ostentation,

and with a hardly increased outlay, erect modern painted windows as monuments of their own liberality.

We are unwilling to take leave of this portion of our subject without a slight reference to the *cleaning* of painted windows, concerning which some difference of opinion we believe exists. All, we trust, are agreed as to the degree of *caution* which ought to be observed in such a matter. Upon the whole, we have arrived at the conclusion, that the later glass, i. e. that painted since the first half of the fifteenth century, is as much improved in appearance as the earlier specimens are injured by this process. We would, however, refer our readers to the windows of Cologne cathedral, which contain painted glass of various dates, the greater part of which has been cleaned; and beg them to judge for themselves. The latest glass in that cathedral is contained in the five north windows of the north aisle of the nave; and as a true specimen of glass painting can hardly be surpassed. Almost the whole of the glass in these windows is of the same period, and painted in the same style, that of Albert Durer; some of the subjects are respectively dated 1508, 1509. These windows are now as fresh in appearance as on the day when they were first executed. Yet there is no unpleasing glare; no confusion of colour; all is grand, harmonious, and quiet, although the colouring is of the most brilliant character that can be conceived. On the other hand, the eastern window of the eastern chapel of the choir, in particular, (a work of the thirteenth century at least,) which has also been cleaned, presents to the eye a very confused, and speckled appearance, whether viewed closely, or from a distance; although its colouring is hardly so brilliant as that of the windows before mentioned. It is true that a good deal of modern glass has been inserted into this window; but the most original parts have nearly the same effect as the restored parts. A similar result has been produced by the cleaning of other early windows in the choir; whose general effect contrasts but poorly with the grandeur and solemnity of such of their contemporaries as are still permitted to retain the rust of antiquity.

This difference, as it appears to us, may in some measure be accounted for by considering the peculiarities of an early and a late glass painting<sup>b</sup>. The one is a mosaic, being com-

<sup>b</sup> It is not our intention at present to enter into any detailed account of the various styles of painted glass. We may however, remark, *en passant*, that the pecu-

liarities of glass paintings of different periods are as well defined as those of the corresponding styles of architecture. And inasmuch as the general change of

posed of very small pieces of various coloured glass, varying greatly in depth, and much intermixed. The natural tendency of this arrangement is not only to give by contrast undue prominence to the lighter colours, but also, through some optical delusion, to produce confusion of colour, in proportion to the smallness of the coloured particles employed. Thus we observe, that an intermixture of very small pieces of red and blue glass, has at a distance the appearance of purple. These defects are in some measure corrected by age. The brilliancy of the lighter colours is subdued by the partial obscuration of the glass; which also has the effect of more completely separating the various tints, and of thus preventing confusion of colour. The rust of antiquity, therefore, greatly adds to the effect of an early glass painting, by increasing its breadth and harmony. A later glass painting requires no such adventitious aid. Larger pieces of glass are mostly employed in its construction, and thus its individual colours (which possess a greater equality of depth than those of early paintings) are originally arranged in broad and distinct masses. Amongst other late windows which we think have been improved by cleaning, we may mention those superb specimens of *cinque cento* art, the windows of St. Jacques church, Liège: and also such of the windows of King's chapel, Cambridge, as have already undergone this process.

We will now offer some remarks on the present low state of glass painting, considered as an *art*.

It cannot we fear be denied, that the works of our modern glass painters are, in general, inferior, not only to ancient examples, but also to the productions of modern continental artists; and that this is owing, not indeed to the nature of the materials employed,—for glass of every kind (with the important exception of white glass, that *silvery white* which forms so essential an ingredient in every old glass painting) may now be easily procured at a reasonable rate, and equal, if not superior in quality, to the glass used on the Continent, or in the ancient times, at the most flourishing

style in both branches of art took place nearly at the same time, we see no impropriety in denominating, for the future, the various classes of medieval glass by the terms of "Early English," "Decorated," and "Perpendicular:" terms, which, from their long use, have now acquired a certain and definite meaning. As, however, glass

continued to be painted according to true principles as late as 1545; and as its ornamental details, &c., in great measure, lost their Gothic character about 1520, if not earlier, we shall in future distinguish the style of glass painting which prevailed during the short interval between those dates, by the name of the "*cinque cento*" style.

period of the art,—but, because the hand to execute, and more especially the faculty to design an artistical glass painting, are in general wanting. The cause of this deficiency exists not in any inferiority of native British art, to that of foreign states,—such an imputation, if made, could be instantly refuted by a reference to the recent exhibition of the fresco cartoons in Westminster Hall,—but in the general indisposition of the patrons of glass painting, at the present day, to encourage *artists* in practising this branch of art. It is unfortunately too much the custom to regard glass painting as a *trade*, not as an *art*, to favour the tradesman at the expense of the artist.

Upon the whole, we are inclined to think, that the period embracing the latter part of the last, and the commencement of this century, was more favourable to a development of *art* in glass painting, than the present age. However justly we may condemn the mode of execution, and the design of the works of that period, as being contrary to the fundamental principles of glass painting, and unsuitable to the nature of painted windows, we cannot deny the *artistical character* of such works, in general. At the present day, however, although we see the *practical part* of glass painting conducted according to truer principles, it is seldom that we meet with a window which is really entitled to be regarded as a work of art. Let us not be supposed by this to condemn the present preference for imitations of ancient glass,—far from it; being ourselves very ardent admirers of ancient painted glass, we are the more anxious to see *real* imitations of it,—such works indeed as may resemble ancient authorities in *spirit*, that is, in artistical feeling and composition.

That glass painting during the middle ages, and for some time afterwards, was almost universally practised by artists in no wise inferior in skill to their cotemporaries in other branches of art, we need only refer in proof to existing examples. We will venture to assert that it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to point out any ancient glass painting, whatever may be its age, or subject, that is totally devoid of artistical feeling, and propriety of taste. Every ancient glass painting in general bears the stamp of originality; a certain style, or character, pervades it; all its parts are rendered subservient to some leading principle, or general design. This propriety of feeling may be observed in the simplest, as well as in the most elaborate works; it is not

confined to any period, and is the best proof that the ancient glass painters were *artists*. It is a common opinion that in the earlier styles of glass painting in particular, the representations of the human figure are unartistical, and ridiculous, because generally out of drawing, and sometimes grotesque. To the careful observer, however, hardly any ancient figure appears unartistical. Whether it occupies a place by itself, or forms part of a group, and however rude in execution it may be; its attitude and aspect to him appear calculated to convey some definite meaning, according to the design of its original imaginer. The representation of the artist's idea may indeed be more or less strongly given, according to the nature of the subject itself, the state of art at the time, his power of conception, and his skill in carrying it out in execution: and it may consequently require an educated eye to read the painted story; but we should not ridicule the ancient artists, because we ourselves happen to be dull of apprehension.

If then the ancient glass paintings are so replete with good taste, and proper artistical feeling as we have asserted, and upon which point we fear no contradiction, it follows, that in order successfully to imitate them, we must employ those who possess these artist-like qualities. That this point has hitherto been much neglected, we do not scruple to affirm. By an indiscriminate exercise of patronage, we have greatly discouraged those few artists who already practise glass painting, and have deterred others from adopting it: our glass paintings are gradually becoming more correct in point of ornamental detail, but we see little amendment in respect of general design, and artistical feeling. We quite agree, that if the style of any one period is selected as that in which an intended glass painting is to be executed, that style must be *entirely* followed, consequently the painter is not at liberty to import into a painting, designed in an early style, the improvements of a later period; but he should always select as his model the best and most artistical specimens of the particular style adopted, and endeavour to enter into their spirit. This, we apprehend, is the view an *artist* would take of the subject. We leave it to our readers to judge for themselves, whether our modern glass paintings have in general been designed and executed upon this principle. With the exception of certain heraldic windows, the work of Mr. Willement, we fear that we

could point out but few modern glass paintings really entitled to rank with the productions of former ages. Of the rest, some are indeed *examples* of composition and drawing! others are inharmonious compilations from various authorities, parts of different designs having been indiscriminately huddled together: or else *weak* copies of ancient examples, the timidity or coarseness of the drawing betraying both the mediocrity of the painter, and his inability to embrace the spirit of the original.

The only sure mode, we apprehend, by which similar results may be avoided in future, will be by adopting the system so successfully practised abroad,—of seeking out *artists*, and employing them. We would therefore wish to see glass painting regarded again as an *art*, not as a mere decorative trade; and we would advise all persons to bestow their patronage in future with discrimination, making the artistical skill and knowledge of the practitioner the principal cause of his employment. By acting thus, we should not only stimulate to further exertion such of the present glass painters as are entitled to be called artists, but open as it were a new field of enterprise to artists, and encourage them to enter upon it. We have that confidence in the energy, industry, and skill of our native artists, that we feel assured that with fair play, and proper encouragement, we should witness them not only soon successfully imitating ancient glass paintings, but even at length bringing the art itself to a degree of perfection which it has never yet attained. We would strongly recommend the adoption of some vigorous measure for raising the standard of taste in regard to glass painting: it is absurd to leave things as they are. It should be recollected that every bad glass painting may be considered almost as an absolute waste of so much money as has been expended upon it.

The means that we would propose for effectuating this object would principally be, the subjecting to competition at least all the greater intended works in painted glass, and the submitting the rival designs to the judgment of *competent* persons, in whom *artistical competitors* might be induced therefore to place confidence. We cannot help thinking that such a censorship might be constituted, by associating with some *first-rate artists*, a select number of antiquaries, possessing a competent knowledge of glass painting; and that great results might be expected from such an union of artistical and technical knowledge. The difficulty of understanding the principles of glass

painting, is often held up as a bugbear by interested persons ; but we are convinced that those who have already mastered the practical part of glass painting, (at least as practised by the medieval glass painters,) will agree in saying that its difficulties have been grossly exaggerated. A very little attention to the subject, would soon enable any artist to pronounce an opinion as to the suitableness of a design for a glass painting, as well as upon the merits of the work itself when executed ; and as the good effect of every glass painting depends in reality, less on the mere technicalities of detail, than on composition, artistical feeling, goodness and character of outline ; we are sure that *artists* should always be consulted as to the choice of one of several designs. We are convinced that a tribunal of antiquaries and amateurs exclusively, would fail in its object. No real artist would submit to its decision. Such judges would often be misled by a reverence for mere antiquity, and correctness of detail ; and for want of that experience which nothing but an *habitual*, and *professional* contemplation of works of art can give, would often fail to appreciate the most truly artistical design.

We would also suggest the adoption, to a certain extent, of a system pursued in trials at the Royal Academy. We are aware that it is the practice of many glass painters to employ artists to make their designs for them, and afterwards to pass them off as their own. And as our chief object would be to secure a *fair trial*, and to raise the character of glass painting as an *art*, we think that each competitor should be required himself to design, and execute some subject, under the inspection of competent judges. No true artist would shun this ordeal ; and we should thus become acquainted with many of the most improving of modern glass painters, whose names and merits are, at present, not generally known or appreciated. A step in the right direction has been taken in the matter of the designs for the painted glass for the Houses of Parliament ; and we should gladly see it followed up in other quarters, and indeed more fully carried out. We confidently predict, that the example which would be afforded by a few of our leading institutions adopting some such plan as that above submitted, would be eagerly followed by private individuals ; and that the result would be, the creation of a good school of glass painting in this country, and the raising of the art in public estimation.

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