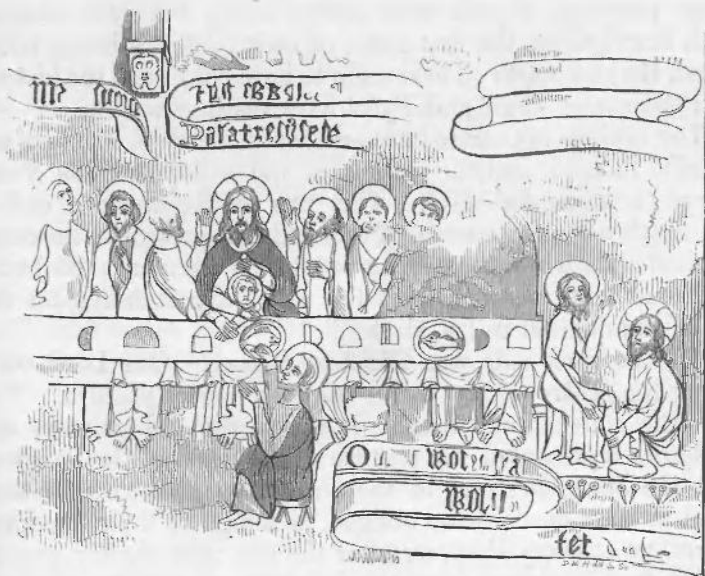


DECORATIONS IN DISTEMPER IN STANTON HARCOURT CHURCH, OXFORDSHIRE.



The Last Supper.

The Washing of the Disciples' Feet.

THE repairs lately in progress in the church of Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire, brought to light numerous pictorial decorations in distemper, which have unfortunately been already destroyed, as well by being chipped away to get a firm face for the new plaster, as by being actually re-plastered. I propose to give a brief description of the most remarkable parts.

The lower division of the walls was adorned with a very elegant design of diamond panelling. The intersecting lines, which gave the diamond shape, were enriched with two red cords intertwined, and at the points of intersection with an expanded flower. Within the diamond panels was a white foliated pattern, and on that an elegant device, which had much the appearance of a pine-apple. No single panel was quite perfect, but I collected the design from different panels as well as I could. I judge from the mode in which the

pine-apple was laid over the white design that the whole was done by stencilling.

There appear to have been three series of decorations, the lower just described, the middle which I shall now proceed to notice, and an upper of which nothing remained but the feet of many persons. Scrolls were carried along the walls charged with inscriptions, the first letter of each sentence being rubricated, the rest black. These seem to have continued the history, and the names *Cryst* and *Pylat* were distinguishable.

The designs appear to have embraced the chief events of our Lord's Passion, and the earliest of the series was *The Washing of the Disciples' Feet*. This was at the western end of the south wall of the nave. Our Lord is represented kneeling, habited in a white cope and a red under garment; St. Peter, with one hand raised, as if in the act of expostulating for this act of humiliation in his Master.

On the same side was *The Last Supper*. Our Lord occupying the centre of the table, sits in an erect posture. This was the conventional mode, in which the old painters and sculptors represented the posture at the Feast of the Passover. But the Jews, contrary to their ordinary practice of sitting erect at their meals, were obliged, as a sign of their freedom^a, to recline at every Passover after the one immediately preceding their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. This reclining posture at the Last Supper is expressed in the words "lying on His breast;" which painters interpreted literally, and depicted St. John as really on our Lord's breast, and not according to the classical interpretation as reclining on His right side, when St. John, raised on his left elbow, had his head thrown back near the breast of our Lord, who would be reclining in a similar manner. St. John presents a very youthful appearance, and has his hands crossed; St. Peter has a bald head; the other disciples are in the vigour of manhood, with full hair and beards. St. Peter occupies the place next our Lord on His left, the other Apostles are arranged on either side, one on the right having been removed to make way for an "admonitory text," inscribed at a later period. Judas Iscariot sits in the front of the table, before our Lord, separated from the rest of the twelve, and is extending his hand to receive the sop which is in our Lord's

^a Lewis's *Antiq. Heb. Republic*, vol. ii. l. iv. c. 3.

hand. On the table are two dishes, with a fish on each, and figures in the shape of beehives, which are probably intended for loaves and broken loaves of bread.



The Descent from the Cross
and Entombment.

The Descent into Hell

On the north wall was *The Descent from the Cross*. A soldier is on a ladder removing our Lord, and on the other side are the feet as it were of another person in a similar position. The costume resembles the dress of the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century. From the left hand of our Lord (the only one remaining) great gouts of blood are diffused over the arm. There is no wound in the left breast; a nail passes through each foot, the feet not being crossed.

Beneath the Descent from the Cross is *The Entombment*. A coffin-shaped sepulchre receives our Lord's body, of which the hands are crossed. As in the other painting the wound is represented in the *right* breast, which seems to have been the early and most general mode of expressing it. Of the three figures engaged in entombing the body, the two next the feet are males, one of whom has a vessel in his hand with a serrated or rather embattled edge; the third figure is a female saint, probably one of the Maries, but there are no distinctive emblems.

Between the two north windows was *The Descent into Hell*. Our Lord, holding a cross with banner attached, preaches to "the spirits in prison," who are standing in the jaws of death. He tramples on a monster, whose head is bent down to the ground, with one paw chained and the other holding a triple hook. One of the pieces of sculpture in the choir of Mont St. Michel has a little demon in a similar position to the one winding a horn above the open jaw.

The accompanying sketches, by Mr. Philip De la Motte, will convey a more accurate notion of these decorations than my words. The drawings are defective only in one point, in not giving the colours.

It is much to be regretted that these interesting specimens of medieval art were not spared from destruction, that when others are laid bare we might come to satisfactory conclusions as to the mode in which churches were decorated, and our fathers instructed when books were scarce and learning almost confined to the cloister and the palace. Several churches in Oxfordshire were similarly enriched, of which considerable portions remain at Cassington, and the colours are seen through the whitewash at Cuddesden, Great Milton, and Dorchester.

WM. DYKE.

ON THE TORC OF THE CELTS.

IN investigating the history of our Celtic ancestors, we can place but little reliance on the traditions which have descended to us respecting them, traditions enveloped in doubt, which mere philological inquiry cannot satisfactorily resolve, and in the absence of better evidence, their remains are the chief tests of their social condition, and the place to which they are entitled among the past races of mankind. Thus the question arises, whether the art-remains of the Celts are sufficient to enable us to fix the position which that people occupied in the scale of nations?

It should always be borne in mind, that there is an art-history co-existent with the traditional or written history of every country, and that there is a relation subtle and philosophical, but not less certain, between all the products