

NOTICE OF A DECORATIVE PAVEMENT, OF THE THIRTEENTH
CENTURY, IN THE CHURCH OF ST. REMI, AT RHEIMS.

As no part of ancient Ecclesiastical edifices has of late years been left unstudied, and no class of their details, however minute, has remained without attracting the careful attention of a particular band of especial admirers, the subject of Tiles amongst others has been found a very interesting study to many. I trust, therefore, that a short notice of some French paving slabs, of a character totally unknown in England, may possibly meet with the approbation of readers of the Journal. The pavement I am about to describe originally adorned the ancient church of St. Nicaise, in the city of Rheims, but has lately, after various transportations, been placed in St. Remi, another church in the same city, second only in interest to the cathedral itself. The quarries of which it is composed are of a hard quality of stone resembling that of Yorkshire. They are all of one uniform size, viz., twenty feet square, and were always intended to be laid down diagonally as they are at present, the disposition of the subjects on their surfaces plainly denoting this arrangement. A narrow border surrounds each, enclosing a curvilinear compartment, which together form a sort of frame to the subject engraved in the centre. These borders and compartments are not all of a similar pattern, four varieties being observable in the former, and three in the latter. Within them is a series of designs, once probably forming a complete illustrated history of the Old Testament, but now exhibiting the sad losses they have sustained in the long breaks observable in the series. The whole design on each quarry, after having first been carefully incised, has then been filled in with melted lead, even with the surface of the stone, a process which while it enhanced the appearance of the subjects represented, seems to have added to the durability of the workmanship, these slabs still remaining in a most perfect state notwithstanding all the vicissitudes they have encountered, to which I will more particularly allude presently. Their present number amounts to forty-eight,

and their subjects consist of the building of the Ark, the trial of Abraham's faith, four from the history of Lot, seven from that of Jacob, nineteen from the life of Moses, ten from the history of Daniel, and six from that of Susannah, besides a series of half quarries ornamented with foliated designs. Of these I am enabled to give five illustrations as samples of the rest, selected from a work treating of these specimens of ancient art, by Professor Tarbé, to whom I am otherwise indebted for much information on this subject.

The four varieties of border will be seen in figs. 1, 2, 4 and 5, and the form of the three varied compartments which enclose the historical subjects will also be understood from the three first illustrations.



1. The Building of Noah's Ark.

No. 1 commences the existing series. It portrays the building of the ark. Above is the Deity giving his command,

represented with a cross on the nimbus encircling his head. Below, to the left, is Noah, in the act of obeying it, with so much alacrity that he not only superintends the work, but, armed with a goodly hatchet, takes a part in it himself ; and to the right, the high forecastle of the ark rises up, composed of planking, which a workman is apparently in the act of hammering on.

The next subject represents the plague of flies, wherein Pharaoh, seated on his throne, is tormented with a cloud of these insects, and expanding his hands in the attitude of entreaty before Moses and Aaron, the latter of whom is



2. Pharaoh and the Plague of flies.

earnestly pressing some counsel upon the monarch in return ; the time of this scene being apparently that when Pharaoh relenting said, "I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness ; only ye shall not go

very far away : entreat for me ; " whilst Aaron (speaking for Moses), after assenting to his earnest request, concluded with these words of caution, " But let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord." It may be remarked that the flies surround Pharaoh alone, filling the air above him and crawling upon the ground beneath his feet, whilst Moses and Aaron, although close to him, and absent from their favoured Goshen, still enjoy immunity from the plague tormenting the guilty king, not one fly approaching them.

No. 3 (as the legend informs us) represents the Division of the Red Sea. Moses is seen stretching out his rod over its waters, which are in a troubled state, resulting from the



3. The Division of the Red Sea.

strong east wind passing over them, and the dry passage through their bed is in the act of formation. Whilst the

great lawgiver still extends his hand towards this means of salvation for the Israelites, Aaron turning round appears to be addressing them reproachfully for having previously been so faithless towards God, so disloyal towards their divinely appointed leader. The fish are delineated, I imagine, simply to denote that the wavy lines around them are meant to indicate the sea, after an ancient Assyrian and Egyptian custom ; although M. Tarbé finds a further reason for their appearance here, when, speaking of this subject, quaintly observing : “ On voit Moïse fendre la mer, les poissons sont surpris de ce qui arrive ! ”

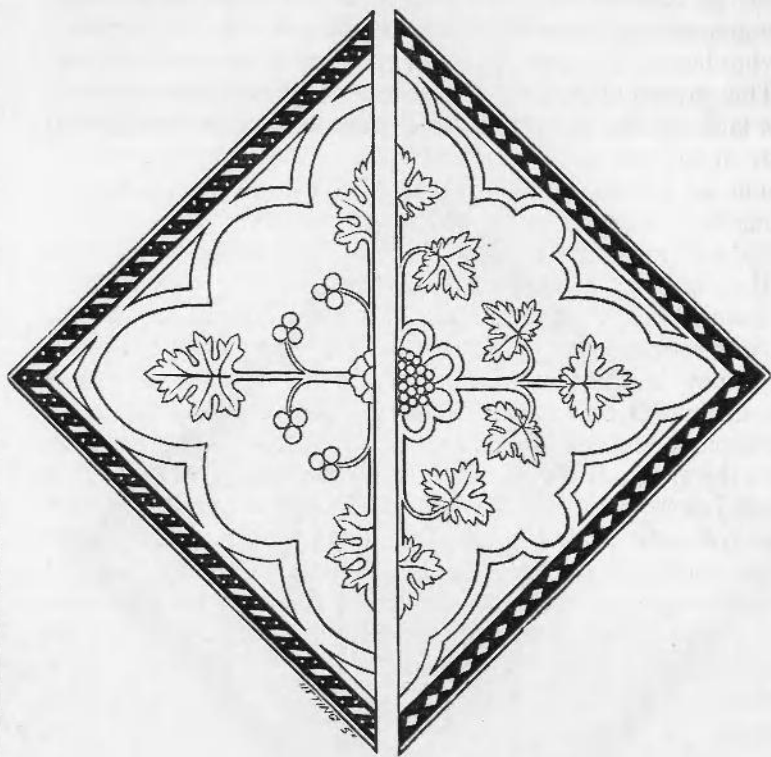
No. 4 portrays Nebuchadnezzar, clothed in ample flowing robes, and with a peculiar kind of cap on his head, whilst



4. Nebuchadnezzar.

before him stand Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This scene is laid when the threat of the burning fiery furnace had

DECORATIVE PAVEMENT AT ST. NICAISE, RHEIMS.



Two Designs of Half Slabs, forming the sides of the Pavement.

DATE, EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

just been uttered, which, instead of rendering the holy youths pliant, caused them to break forth with such united energy in defying the monarch's power, that he seems to be momentarily rendered speechless, before "his countenance was changed," and that fury arose in which he condemned them to the furnace.

To fill up the vacant spaces round the edge of the pavement formed by the diagonal arrangement of its quarries, a series of triangular slabs have been provided. These are ornamented with various foliated patterns, chiefly composed of vine leaves, &c., two of which are here given.

The pavement which I have here endeavoured to describe was laid down originally in the sanctuary before the high altar in the church of St. Nicaise, an edifice commenced by Simon of Lyons, elected Abbot in 1222; Hugh Li Bergier being his architect. The latter commenced the works in 1229, but although he lived thirty-four years after this (i.e. to the year 1263), and was employed by the Abbots Simon de Dampierre, Simon de Noirmoutiers, and Gérard de Cernay, he only completed the nave and towers of the edifice; Robert de Coucy, another architect, having added the choir and the various chapels attached to it. He also left it in an incomplete state at his death in 1311, and thus it remained until the greater part of its venerable appearance was entirely destroyed by a fatally extensive renovation which it underwent under the Grand Prior Hubert during a period of seven years, commencing with 1757. No record remains of the artist's name who wrought the slabs which enriched the pavement, nor of the abbot or other benefactor who presented them to the church. Possibly they may have been the work of Li Bergier, and covered the last resting-place of one of his patrons, that of the abbot Dampierre, who died previous to him, having been marked by a leaded slab, so that this style of decoration was certainly already known, whilst his own grave was distinguished by a similar slab (happily, still preserved in the cathedral), which seems to point to his approbation of such a sepulchral memorial. In addition to this, some of the details of dress, observable on his monument, are also to be seen on these slabs, such as the limp and pointed shoes, the flowing cloaks, and the flat cap with a tuft rising from its centre; still, as the lettering on these two works of art do not perfectly agree, as the church was in such an unfinished

state, until de Coucy had added the choir, and as this architect was also honoured with the same kind of leaded monument, and above all as he was the builder of the choir, it seems most probable that the pavement was part of his work, and that it was laid down early in the fourteenth century. It remained in its original position until the time of the renovation in the last century before alluded to, when it was ejected from the sanctuary to make room for a new marble pavement, although it was still thought worthy of being used to pave three small chapels behind the choir. During the Revolution it was taken up once more to be sold, in common with all the other saleable adjuncts of the church, and it passed into a variety of private hands. In 1846, Madame Clicquot, of Verzenay, was their owner, who had devoted them to the ignoble purpose of paving a passage leading to her stables, in which place they had suffered much injury, many of them having been cut to suit the shape of their new position, in addition to the wear and tear they had experienced from the rough usage they met with.

To the good taste of M. Brunette, an architect of Rheims, is due the great credit of rescuing these valuable reliques of the past from their abovenamed ignoble and degraded site. After repeated efforts he was at length enabled to procure them for that city which they were at first intended to adorn; but as the church of St. Nicaise no longer existed, a worthy resting-place has been found for the remnant of this very interesting piece of ancient workmanship in that of St. Remi, where it is to be seen at this time, and it is well worthy of the archæologist's inspection.

EDWARD TROLLOPE.