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NOTES ON EARLY GLASS IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.

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It is but fitting that the oldest, and perhaps I may add the best, stained glass in England should be found in Canterbury Cathedral. To a few small specimens in other churches chiefly consisting of ornamental work without figures, a greater antiquity has been doubtfully assigned. But in the three windows which contain the Miracles of St. Thomas; in the east window, which displayed the mystic symbolism with which the piety of the middle ages overlaid the story of the Redeemer's Passion; in the two windows of the north aisle, which are all that is left to us out of six described in an early manuscript; in the circular window of the north-eastern transept, and in more than half a dozen subjects now scattered in various parts of the church, and separated from the different series to which they originally belonged—in all these examples of the art of glass painting as it was practised in the thirteenth century—perhaps, as I hope to show, in the twelfth—Canterbury can boast of such a display as may favourably compare with any other either here or on the continent.

Three windows in Trinity Chapel are filled with representations of the Miracles of St. Thomas. The third of them appears to me slightly later than the other two, or two and a half—and this, for three reasons: first, because the scroll work is rather more free than in the other two; secondly, because the lettering is of a slightly different and not so rigid a type; but principally for a reason, which it is not very easy to put into words, but which, nevertheless, is of weight, especially with any one whose eye is accustomed to the comparison and criticism of works of art. It is this, that

[1] Read at the Canterbury Meeting of the Institute, July 22nd, 1875.

not only do the designs appear inferior to those in the other two windows, but they are imitated from them. No one can pronounce absolutely upon an imitation. It is impossible in such cases as this to say with any certainty, which is the original of two very similar pictures. But as a rule we infer that the better is the original and the inferior the copy. And so in this third window not only do we find the same designs and the same compositions as in the others, but we find them carried out by the hand of a less skilful artist, and have grounds for a presumption, not of course amounting to proof, that this is the latest of the three windows. It has, however, received a considerable amount of attention, especially because of the great number of separate subjects it contains. For, while the first window has *sixteen* and the second *twenty-two*, this one has no fewer than *thirty-three* different pictures.

Canon Robertson has told us the story of Becket. There is no need that I should trespass on the ground he so well occupies. The records of the Life and Miracles of St. Thomas of Canterbury fill many volumes. The four earliest of these compilations were irreverently likened in their day to the four Gospels, and the legend, with all the wonders it included, was probably much better known to the Englishman of six centuries ago, than the comparatively tame story to be found in the Evangelists. The subjects of these windows would therefore appeal to the senses of the pilgrim in the thirteenth century, as pictures of the Good Samaritan, or the Lost Sheep, might appeal to ours. There would, at least, be no doubt as to their meaning, and no question as to the lesson they were intended to inculcate.

Unfortunately for any very complete explanation of the different stories represented, there are few of them which do not involve some circumstance of a nature wholly unfit for modern ears. Many of them, indeed, go further than this ; and we can only suppose that the monks desire for the glory of their Saint was such, as to override all considerations of morality and decency, even such considerations as were current in the thirteenth century.

Having said so much by way of preface, I will endeavour to give you a somewhat shortened and chastened version of one or two of those stories which you will see most plainly in the glass.

The centre window of the three, contains four sets of designs. They are, beginning at the top—

A. The appearance of the Martyr to Benedict, as related by himself, and it is most interesting as containing in the first compartment a picture of the *Shrine*, of which a full description is given in Mr. Austin's note in the Dean of Westminster's "Memorials of Canterbury." Six separate pictures make up the whole compartment, two being smaller "spandrils" or angular pieces containing isolated cures wrought by the intervention of the Saint.

B. The second compartment contains representations of a story, which is not only several times repeated in each of the legend books, with changed names, but also occurs, with changed colours, in the other windows. It relates to the case of a lady of high rank, whose disease is arrested by drinking water from the well which the blood of St. Thomas had stained after his murder. Strange to say, the exact place of this famous well is now unknown, though the trade in water from it was, three hundred and fifty years ago, one of the chief sources of the revenue of the Shrine. It probably stood in the ground, now bare, to the north of the choir. In the first compartment is a curious verse, repeated in the first window (and elsewhere) :—

Aruit exanguis redit hausto sanguine sanguis,

signifying that the patient having arrived ill, was completely restored to health by a draught of the blood. The legends or verses which occur with each subject in these windows are often very hard to make out, especially when, as in the present case, the words are spelt according to the fancy or convenience of the glass painter. To Mr. Godfrey-Faussett I am indebted for almost all I now endeavour to put before you, and he gave me the interpretation of the word which both here and in another picture is written HVASTO. In this second compartment another verse occurs :—

Cessant quartane vis forma subit quasi sane,

which is also to be found in the neighbouring window, with a very similar picture.

C. The third compartment relates to a curious story, and one which well illustrates the manners of the age. It is related in more than one of the books, and must have been

extensively believed. A certain man at Dunstable, according to one version,—at Weston, "a royal town," according to (Benedict) another,—but as both say, in Bedfordshire, bore the name of Eilward, and had among his neighbours one named Fulk, to whom he owed 2d. for the ploughing of half an acre of land. It happened on a certain festival after the passion of the blessed martyr,—so we read—that these two men, Eilward and Fulk, debtor and creditor, went together by chance to the same tavern, "for," says the narrator, "it is the custom of the English on holy days to indulge in feasting and drunkenness, so that their enemies see them and deride their sabbaths." These two, then, seem to have been not only no better than their neighbours, but no better, or worse, in this respect than Englishmen at the present day, after the lapse of six hundred years. They began to dispute about the debt, one denying that he owed it, and the other offering to let him off a part if he would spend it in beer. Indeed, if the names were changed, the dispute, which is given at some length, would fit exactly to what is repeated in our police courts every Easter and Christmas, or oftener. Eilward leaves the tavern first, and smarting under the taunts of his creditor, goes to Fulk's house, breaks in the door, and in a blind drunken kind of way seeks what he may destroy. A pair of gloves, such as are used to this day, for hedging, and a whetstone, are all he can find. The children of Fulk, who are playing in the hall, run out to call their father. He comes in haste, and meeting Eilward at the door, seizes from him the whetstone, and at once, as we read, "breaks the whetstone on his head, and his head on the whetstone." He then fetches the parish beadle, or, as we should say, the constable, in Latin "præco," whose name is also Fulk, which, by the way, adds an element of great confusion to the story, and Eilward, lying drunk and with his head broken, is speedily apprehended and lodged in gaol at Bedford. He protests his innocence of any design of robbing Fulk; but, though he calls loudly on St. Thomas and the other Saints, he only secures thereby the interest of an old priest of his village, and of the prior of Bedford, or according to the other account, of Dunstable, whose name is Geoffrey; they both support him with food in prison, and confirm him in his faith in the intervention of the martyr, and especially, says one account, because he had been baptised on the

Eve of Pentecost. Geoffrey is adduced by the narrator in witness of the truth of the story. At length the time arrives for the trial, and Eilward, taken before the sheriff—*Vicecomes* (at Leighton Buzzard ?)—fails to clear himself, and refusing to submit to the ordeal of battle with Fulk, and being forbidden that of fire, which he desired, owing to the intervention of the other Fulk, who had been bribed, he is tried by water, "from which he could not escape," as we read, and he is then condemned. Being dragged to the place of execution his eyes are plucked out, and he is otherwise mutilated, as appears in the window, where we see him lying on his back, at the feet of the Judge, while," as the narrator tells us very minutely, "his left eye is pulled out bodily, and the right eye is lacerated and in part cut in two, but not altogether dug out—(*effossus*)." Then, the parts thus cut out having been buried under the sod, he is left half dead. Eilbrictus, a householder of the town, takes pity on him, and receives him into his house. There he remains for some days, praying earnestly. There comes to him at length a vision of angels by whom he is desired to address himself in particular to the Blessed Virgin and St. Thomas of Canterbury. According to William, he was visited by St. Thomas himself, who touched his eyes with his staff, as represented in the window. At length, to the surprise of himself and all the neighbours, he begins to be conscious of returning sight, and his eyes, "the pupils half hidden," as we read, "in his head, hardly as large as the eyes of a little bird," are gradually restored, as well as the other losses he had suffered at the hands of the executioner, and he stands whole and well in the presence of many witnesses as shown in the lower compartment of the picture. William vouches for the truth of the story, and adds that Eilward became a pensioner at Canterbury.[2] As the ordeal was condemned by the Council of the Lateran in 1214, this story may be dated in the early years of the century.

D. The lowest compartment tells the story of a certain physician of Perigord. Having healed men all his life he fell sick of a dropsy himself. The physicians despaired, and the patient, from his own experience, knew how hopeless was his case. But one chance remained for him :—

Spes desperanti superest in sanguine sancti.

[2] "De martyris substantia stipem habens."

He obtains some water from the holy well. He drinks and is cured; and coming to the Shrine makes there an appropriate offering. The design for this last scene occurs also in the first window, the colours only being changed.

There are many other stories of a similar kind; one relates to the resuscitation of a drowned pig; and another tells of a gosling which was brought to life, when it had been killed by a dog; and which, eventually becoming a grown up goose, lived to be eaten, in the ordinary course of nature, by the Monks of the Priory, who were willing to testify to the truth of the miraculous resurrection, having a lively recollection of the feast they made of him!

Such are the subjects in the middle window. It is by far the most perfect. Of the sixteen subjects in the most westerly of the three complete windows, I must say something, only remarking first that the glass appears to have been designed by the same hand as the one just spoken of; and that several of the designs are repeated.

The first four pictures are of ordinary cures, such as are narrated literally by the score in the miracle books. The fifth and sixth are modern copies from pieces in the clerestory windows of the south choir aisle. They relate to the history of William de Kellet (Chislet?), a carpenter, who, in cutting wood, hurt his leg with an axe, but calling in his fright on St. Thomas of Canterbury, his wound was miraculously healed. In the first picture we see him at his bench, the axe just slipping so as to strike his leg. In the second, he lies on his bed, and is removing a bandage, but the wound is not to be found. The next pictures tell a tale of ingratitude, of which several occur in the books. One of them is in the third window, and has been carefully described by Mr. Austin (Stanley, "Historical Memorials of Canterbury," p. 242). We may, therefore, go on to one of the lower groups, passing by another cure of a lady, perhaps "Tangareta of Wales," whose story I had better omit. We then come to two medallions, which, at some period have been misplaced. The first is that to the right. It represents a maniac, led by his attendants with cords and staves to the tomb of the Saint. The words over his head are part of a verse which is completed in the other picture; *Amens accedit.* In the second, the panel to the left, we have the lunatic cured, the cords and scourges thrown upon the ground, and the patient kneeling

by the tomb, meekly giving thanks for his recovery. The rest of the verse is over his head :—

Amens accedit : at sanus absque recedit.

In the lowest range we have scenes almost the same as those in the adjoining window ; and the same verses underneath them.

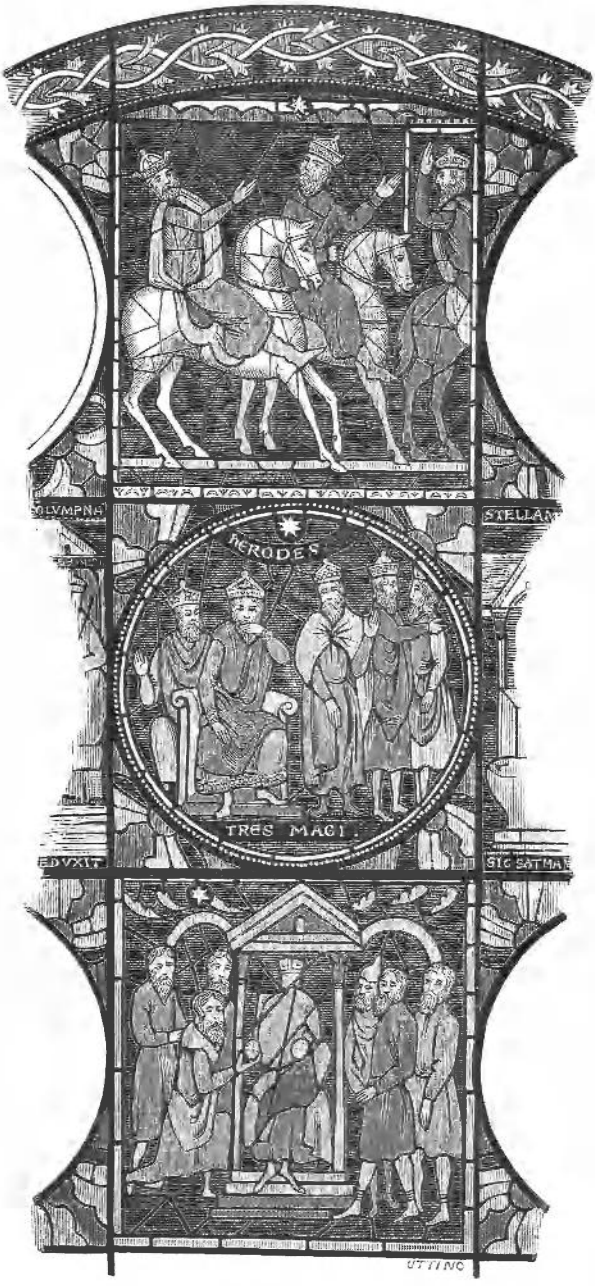
The many representations of the Martyr's tomb as it was before the relics were translated to the Shrine are remarkable. They all agree in their main features, but almost all disagree in the colours. The two holes in the sides are clearly shown. The box, which Erasmus describes, as containing the Archbishop's sudary, and which Colet turned from with such disgust, is on the slab in most of the views. The windows were probably made while the tomb was still fresh in the memory, perhaps, while it yet existed, and while there was, so far, only the one miracle to record as having taken place at the new Shrine itself.

Six subjects, not very easily made out, but five of them apparently relating to the Saint's life, are in the adjoining half window to the westward, and with them a fine lozenge-shaped picture in a different style, representing the Agony in the Garden, which I do not doubt formed a portion of one of the series of windows in the "Crown" at the east end.

Of these beautiful windows only one remains. It is very complete, however, and is an admirable example of the intricate symbolism of the time. The subjects are arranged in three quatrefoils and two lozenges : the Crucifixion occupying a square panel at the foot, surrounded by representations of the Spies carrying the great Bunch of Grapes ; of Moses Striking the Rock ; of the Sacrifice of a Lamb in the Temple ; and of Abraham offering up Isaac on Mount Moriah. Next above is a lozenge-shaped panel, painted with the Entombment, adjoining which, we have Joseph's brethren putting him into the pit ; Sampson shorn in his sleep by Dalilah ; Daniel in a walled city, labelled "Babilonia ;" and Jonah let down into the jaws of the whale, by two men in a ship. Above these scenes is a quatrefoil, in the centre of which we see the Resurrection, surrounded by representations of Moses and the Burning Bush ; Noah in the Ark ; Rahab letting the Spies down by the Wall ; and Jonah landing near Nineveh from the mouth of a great whale. Then

another lozenge represents the Ascension, and the scenes surrounding it are, The Ark of the Mercy Seat; Elijah ascending in a Chariot of Fire; the Burial of Moses; and Hezekiah sick, while an Angel gives him the sign of the shadow on the Dial of Ahaz. The last of the series is at the top. In a square panel we see the great event of the Day of Pentecost. Above it Christ sits enthroned in glory. Moses receiving the two Tables of the Law is below. On one side is the first Ordination of Deacons, and on the other the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Disciples. The whole style of this window is later than that of the Becket window, but not much, and the foliage is more free in design, while the colour is hardly so brilliant.

In the north aisle of the choir are two windows, all that remain of six described at folio 185 of a manuscript, now in the library of Corpus Christi College at Oxford, which Mr. Coxe considers to be of the sixteenth or seventeenth century. It is printed by Battely in his edition of Sumner, and reprinted by the late Mr. Winston, in his "Hints on Glass Painting." From these sources we are able to make out that the first now remaining, is the second of the old series, the original first having been built up when the Lady or Dean's Chapel was made. From the list in Battely and Winston, we are able to gather that in the first remaining window are fourteen medallions, which were always in it, though now slightly misplaced, and seven which were in the sixth of the series. The Birth of Christ and His Early Life, together with the types from the Old Testament, which were considered symbolical, are depicted in the first fourteen panels. Thus, Balaam on his ass and with his star and the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah support at either side a representation of the Magi riding towards Bethlehem, the star appearing over their heads. In the third row again, we have the Mother and Child in the centre, with the Magi and Shepherds in one panel, and Joseph and his Brethren in the other. In the next series, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba should be at one side, but this panel is gone; and at the other we still see the prophet with Jeroboam sacrificing. In the centre the Magi, asleep, all together in one bed, are warned by a dream not to return to Herod. After this point the series is interrupted, and we have a picture of Ahab with Jezebel and Elijah, which was in another part of the original



Canterbury Cathedral.

The first remaining Window in the North Aisle. "Fenestra Secunda," MS. C. C. Coll. Ox.
Three of the Central Compartments.

arrangement, and underneath a legend which appears to belong to a picture of three holy widows and virgins. Next we have a very quaint scene. Shem, Ham, and Japhet are engaged in dividing the earth, which one of them holds in his hands like a gorgeously-painted map. A figure stands by, which may be intended for Noah, but from the inscription and from Battely's MS. it seems more likely it is intended to represent a personification of the Church. Two scenes from the Parable of the Sower, and a picture in which the rich of this world are represented as counting their ill-gotten gold, all from the sixth window, complete this one as it now is.

In the other window we have a number of scenes of a very mixed character. Four full circles are flanked by six half circles, and two smaller panels. The circles are filled with (1) Christ Disputing with the Doctors; (2) The Apostles Fishing; (3) The Marriage in Cana; and (4) Nathaniel under the Fig Tree. The first circle has on the dexter side a scene from the life of Moses, in a half circle, and Daniel in judgment on the sinister. This set of three pictures appears to be in its own place, according to the Battely list. The medallion which represents the Apostles drawing their nets, is the third subject of the fourth window, now destroyed, and is flanked, on the dexter, or left hand, by "Noah in the Ark," which is in its original place in this window, and on the right by the "Six Ages of Man," from the original fourth window. The Marriage in Cana is also from the fourth window, where it was flanked by the "Six Ages of Man," and by the "Six Ages of the World,"[3] a subject now lost. The two half circles adjoining it now are, on the left, or dexter side, "The Doctors of the Church," from the fourth window, but it is not very clear, and appears to me to represent David with his harp, Solomon bearing his temple, and two other figures, which do not seem to be in the Battely list. On the other side is a panel from the sixth window. It represents Peter preaching on the Day of Pentecost. The medallion of "Nathaniel" is flanked by two little segments which apparently represent respectively the unbelieving and the believing Jews.

Among the most curious things to observe in the drawing of these subjects is a representation of a bronze idol in the

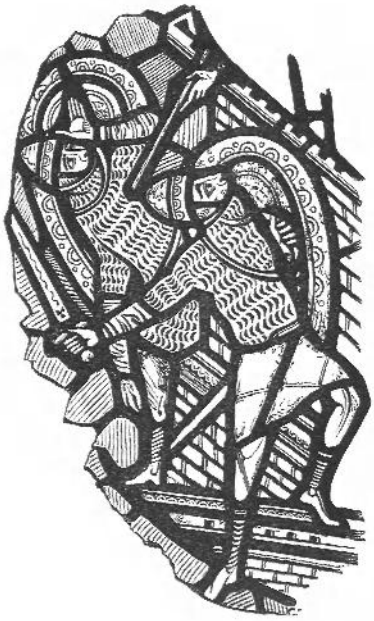
[3] Possibly this means the *Six Days of Creation*, as represented in MS. Bibles.

sixth panel of the first of these two windows. From it we may infer that the artist, whoever he was who designed the work, knew what was classical art, and deliberately preferred his own. The exaggerated muscular development which came in again three hundred years later under Michael Angelo and his contemporaries in Italy, is here seen quite plainly. The three clerestory windows above cannot be made out, but contain glass of the same period as that in the Becket windows, already described.

One thing more I must remark with respect to these windows. The first time I saw them I observed facing them a most interesting set of stone seats, evidently of contemporary work, for they formed part of the structure of the aisle. It appeared that these windows were made for instruction, and the seats were evidently provided for the bands of pilgrims who, coming to the shrine of the martyr, were here able at their ease to study the Gospel story. I cannot tell you my distress on discovering that, for some reason I have not been able to hear, these ancient stone seats have been hacked away and their places filled with hot-water pipes.

It would be very interesting if we could give an exact date to all this early glass. The representation of Becket's shrine makes it certain that the windows which contain his legend were placed here after 1220. On the other hand, the frequent representations of the tomb make it improbable that they are much later. In the stories of the Miracles we have very little to help us. The Bedfordshire miracle must have taken place before 1214, but very little before, as we gather from Benedict's mention of Prior Geoffrey, or Gervais. There is nothing known to exist in any manuscript which will give us the exact date more nearly.

But if exact information is thus meagre, we may console ourselves with the very decided indications afforded in these designs that they belong to the middle of the thirteenth century, or a very little earlier, without any reasonable doubt. The learned archæologist will easily find proofs in the Becket series on which he may ground an opinion. The dress, the architecture, the form of letter in the inscriptions and many other things of the kind will give him information, on which he may rely. For myself I must depend on none of these things, being insufficiently acquainted with any of



Canterbury Cathedral.

Fragment from a window in the North aisle of Choir, showing armour of the twelfth century.

the branches of research I have mentioned. But I have endeavoured to compare them with the illuminations of the thirteenth century, and have found reasons not only for believing that these designs were made at that period, but even for believing that they were made in England, and what is more, by English artists. At least two Bibles, now in the British Museum, contain illustrations of a very similar character, and of a similarly high rank in art. One of these Bibles has at the end the name of the writer, which is written *Wills. Deuoniensis*, William of Devonshire ; and in it under a Crucifixion is a picture of the martyrdom and three other scenes of the history of St. Thomas of Canterbury.[4] The other Bible is of even more importance, for, although it is in a slightly inferior style of art, it is clearly contemporary with the work of William of Devon, and it bears not only the name of the scribe, but a date, a precious date. It was written by another William—Williams abounded in the walks of architecture, illumination, and literature, in those days—William of Hales, who finished it in the year 1254. The Vulgate had been revised by Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury, as you may remember.

By a comparison of the art, the English art, of these Bibles and others, for similar manuscripts are very common, we may obtain some idea of what English painters could do at the time. I do not doubt that these windows, then, were designed and painted some time in the early part of the thirteenth century, and that they were the work of an English artist. And perhaps I may add, that remembering William of Sens, and English William, and William of Devonshire, and William of Hales, and William of Canterbury, the biographer, it would not surprise me very much if the artist's name should appear to be William, too ; though a contrary conclusion would perhaps be safer. Taking all things, then, into consideration, we may approximately date the Becket windows by remembering that the Trinity Chapel was completed, and the Saint's relics removed to the shrine on the 7th of July, 1220.

But we have still, if we can, to give a date to the windows in the north aisle. Mr. Winston, speaking of the stained glass of the period prior to 1280, says of them, "The most interesting series of English *picture* windows of this period

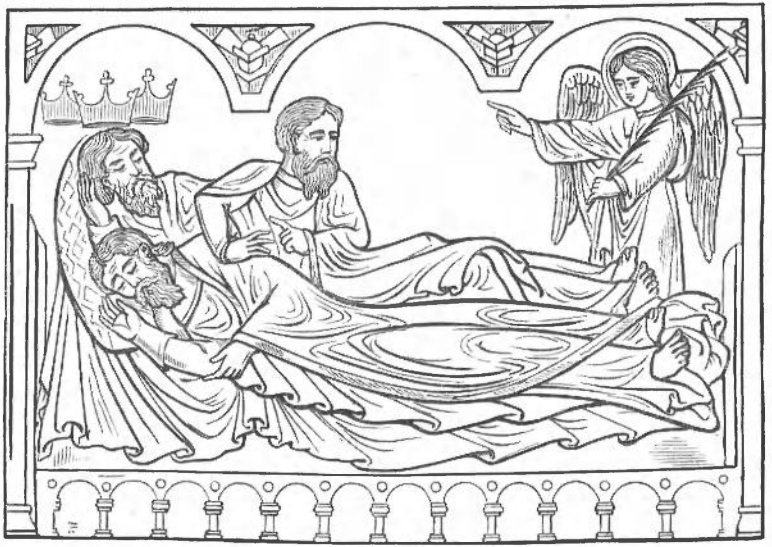
[4] Reg. 1. D. 1. fol. 231. vo.

that I have met with is in Canterbury Cathedral. Remains of painted glass, of an earlier character than this glass, are scattered about the country, but they are chiefly valuable as specimens of detail. Of the Canterbury glass, however, notwithstanding the severe injuries it has sustained at different times by actual violence, as well as neglect, and by being displaced in the course of alterations and removals, enough still remains, not only to afford abundant examples of detail, but also, with the aid of the descriptions left of it by Sumner and Gostling, pretty clearly to indicate the general nature and arrangement of the windows as they originally existed in the choir of the building." In a note Winston adds, "No documents have been found by which the date of the present glass can be determined. It is, I think, of the first half of the thirteenth century."

It would be very satisfactory to have a more exact date than this to offer. And after much useless conjecture I was on the point of giving up the problem when I met with a manuscript book of pictures in the British Museum, which appears to throw some light on the subject. It is known as "Nero C., iv.," and is certainly of the twelfth century. It contains a large number of scenes from Scripture history, beginning with the Creation, and including the well-known representation of Adam and Eve when they receive from the hands of the Creator a spade and a distaff respectively.

It consists of a Psalter, preceded by a series of "historiations," and a Calendar in which are entries which identify the manuscript as one belonging to the Nuns of Shaftesbury, and written for them about the year 1174.

The pictures have a remarkable likeness to those in these two windows, and as the aisle itself was finished in or before 1185, we may be justified in supposing that the windows are of a date not very much later. Among other subjects which occur in the Shaftesbury MS., and which are represented similarly in these windows, I may mention "Noe in Archa;" The Adoration of the Magi, one offering a ring; The three Magi asleep in one bed; Christ with the Doctors; The Marriage in Cana; The Magi and the Star, although in the picture the star itself is above the limits of the view, and the Kings are shown looking up towards it. The armour in which Goliath confronts David is very similar to that depicted on the glass.



Facsimile from Cott. MSS., Nero, C. iv. The Three Magi in bed.

No representation remains in the glass of Becket's murder. Yet such subjects are not uncommon in other parts of England, and one in Christ Church at Oxford has only been mutilated by the removal of the martyr's face. It is probably of the fourteenth century.

I have thus endeavoured to enumerate roughly the subjects in these remarkable windows. Fragments of glass of the same period are to be found scattered in other parts of the Cathedral, and some of them in the eastern transepts are well worthy of notice. The rose window in the southern transept represents, but dimly, the Synagogue, surrounded by Fortitude, Justice, "Epiphania," and Prudence. In that of the northern we see Moses and a Sybil in the centre, while figures of the four major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—fill the corners. The remaining spaces were probably filled with the minor prophets. Of all these subjects there is one thing to be observed as especially curious. In no case that I have yet been able to find, is more than one scene represented in the same picture. In later times, both in glass and in illuminations, such double and even treble scenes are common ; but the better taste of the thirteenth century seems, for the most part, to have forbidden them. It is the same in the MS. Bibles.

Both in the north-eastern and the south-eastern transepts there are clerestory windows, very high up, which appear to represent scenes of Becket's life, but their distance and the age and obscurity of the glass have prevented my making them out with any distinctness.

A good deal of modern stained glass to imitate the old, has been inserted at different times. Some of it is very good. Some, on the other hand, is the very worst I have ever seen. I do not know who has put up the greater number of these windows, and hope I do not, unintentionally, wound any one's feelings if I say that some of them might judiciously be removed. The best modern imitation is, perhaps, a window to the memory of the late Dean Alford in the south transept. But two small lights higher up in the gable, serve by their hideous and startling discordance to injure very much the effect of the lower one.

A very fair Jesse window has been placed beside the "Passion Window" in Becket's Crown. It is much out of place there, and is paled and injured by its proximity to the

old glass. At the other end of the Cathedral, and in a wholly different style, are some staring and gaudy transparencies which have a sadly disturbing effect in every view of the Nave from the east.

As a Museum of the magnificent school of glass painting which existed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, then, Canterbury Cathedral stands alone. That so much should have been preserved to us, in spite both of destroyers and of restorers, is a matter for surprise. We have here no fewer than eight magnificent windows, all either complete or nearly complete, and all dating before the year 1300, some probably before 1200 ; a precious legacy such as can be seen nowhere else in our country ; rivalled, perhaps, but not surpassed, by any of the same antiquity on the continent. I wish I could believe that anything I have ventured to say might be effectual in causing them to be valued as they ought to be valued, not alone in Canterbury, but in all England. Few of our Cathedral churches, it is true, have suffered more from the injudicious efforts of so-called restoration ; but in one thing credit is due and praise should be recorded, and I venture to hope you will join with me in acknowledging the care with which these noble examples of the taste of our forefathers have been preserved for our instruction and enjoyment, after all the changes and chances of more than six hundred long years.