

A RECENTLY DISCOVERED PANEL PAINTING OF THE DOOM.

The parish of Wenhaston is situated in the north-east part of the county of Suffolk, between Halesworth and Southwold, and about two miles from Blythburgh to the abbey of which the advowson of its church formerly belonged. The church consists of western tower, nave, north aisle, south porch and chancel. The chancel retains two windows of late twelfth-century date, the tower and nave arcade are of the second half of the fourteenth century, while the windows in the nave and aisle and the south porch are probably not earlier than the sixteenth century. The font, though it has been cruelly mutilated, still remains as an interesting example of late Perpendicular work. The sculpture on the panels of the bowl, which probably represented the Seven Sacraments and an incident in the life of Christ, as may still be seen in several churches of the neighbourhood, was carefully hacked away in 1809, as appears by the churchwarden's accounts for that year, and at the same time it was newly embellished with colour and gilding. The nave roof is high-pitched and of the hammer-beam type, though the figures at the end of the hammer-beams have been destroyed. A visit by one of the emissaries of Dowsing, the well-known iconoclast of the eastern counties, is recorded as having been made to this church in 1643, when the stained glass, font cover, and organs were removed.

Beyond certain churchwarden improvements, such as the erection of a west gallery and the consequent blocking up of the tower arch, but little in the way of restoration had been attempted until the present vicar, the Rev. J. B. Clare, took the matter in hand. There was no chancel arch, but the old rood beam remained, and above this was a large whitewashed partition reaching to the roof and entirely blocking off the chancel. This the vicar had taken down with the view to the erection of the present chancel arch of nicely carved oak; and, as only traces of texts were visible and it was not anticipated that anything of archaeological interest was being removed, the partition was accordingly taken to pieces and placed in the churchyard. A very heavy shower of rain in the night washed away some of the layers of plaster and exposed portions of figures of early character. On this fact being communicated to the vicar, he at once had the several portions of the partition conveyed to the old parish school-room, and proceeded to get rid of the whitewash, and, after removing various layers of plaster, texts, &c., eventually brought to light a very interesting panel painting of the Doom, or

great Day of Judgment. The panel is 17ft. 3in. in breadth at the bottom, by 8ft. 6in. in height in the centre, and attached to it—and this is one of the most uncommon features in connection with it—has been a sculptured representation of the Holy Rood, our Blessed Lord on a crocketed Cross in the centre, and a figure of the Virgin and St. John the Evangelist on either side. Only the outlines of these now remain. The painting of the Doom occupies the whole of the remaining space of the panel, between and on either side of the subjects of the Holy Rood. In the upper part, on the dexter side of the Cross, is a figure of the Divine Judge seated on the rainbow, with hands held out and side bare, and with the drapery so disposed as to show the wounds in His hands and side, from which blood is flowing. By His head is depicted the sun, and near His right hand a scroll, no doubt formerly charged with the words "Venite benedicti." On the sinister side of the Cross are kneeling figures of the Blessed Virgin, and St. John the Baptist in his raiment of camel's hair, clearly supplicating on behalf of sinful mankind. Above is the moon, and behind, a scroll formerly charged with the inscription, "Discedite maledicti." Below, the subject is divided into four main groups by the Cross and attendant figures of the Virgin and St. John. On the sinister side of the Cross is the Weighing of Souls, a majestic figure of St. Michael holding a sword in one hand and the balances in the other. In one scale is a small nude figure, representing the good deeds of the deceased, while in the other are two demons, emblematical of the evil deeds. By this scale is a figure of Satan, with horns and tail, bat's wings, and eyes in his legs, holding a closed scroll, probably the indictment against the deceased, and superintending the soul-weighing. Another scroll, which he appears to have received from St. Michael, seems to contain the words "Nam quo deest tu facias tui bonum esto," and is apparently an answer to the indictment of Satan, that all that is deficient in the record of the deceased shall redound to Satan's advantage. It is satisfactory to note that here, as is commonly the case, the good deeds are outweighing the evil ones. The next group on the dexter side of the Cross comprises St. Peter in rich vestments, with triple papal tiara, and holding the key of the gate to heaven, receiving four redeemed souls. These are still unclothed, but two have crowns, one a mitre, and the other a cardinal's hat, denoting their worldly rank as a king, queen, bishop, and cardinal. On the dexter side are the heavenly mansions, portrayed by a castellated building with two entrances, at each of which an angel is admitting a nude figure. Above can be made out part of an angel blowing a trumpet, but this portion of the panel has been cut away to make room for a stove pipe. On the sinister side of the picture are the jaws of hell depicted by a large fish's head with a swine's snout, on which a demon is seated, blowing a ram's horn. Within the jaws is a black demon with monster ears dragging in a recumbent figure, while eight more nude figures in attitudes of the deepest despair are encircled by a red-hot chain, and are being forced into the terrible chasm by a demon with a pronged fork. Another demon is carrying a female head-downwards, possibly a typical representation of Pride, the chief of the seven deadly sins. In the intervening spaces five figures are represented as rising from their graves. The subject is, no doubt, realistic according to our modern ideas, but it is to be hoped that means may be adopted for its preservation.

There are many points of interest about it. The arrangement of the several groups and the expression of the individual figures are not without merit. The various colours employed harmonise well, and the flesh-tints are delicately depicted. The ground colour of the picture is olive-green. The chief peculiarities about it are (1) the fact of its being painted on panel, and (2) of the Holy Rood being actually attached to it. The panel paintings of the Doom in England of which any record has been preserved are very rare, and only about seven other instances can be cited, though it is possible that many may have existed in pre-Reformation times. The most interesting is the one still preserved in the triforium of Gloucester Cathedral. Only two or three instances have been noted where the Holy Rood has been incorporated with the subject of the Doom. There is no great difficulty in assigning a date to the painting, which is clearly but little anterior to the period of the Reformation, probably not earlier than 1520, at which date considerable alterations were being effected in the church. There are many distinctive features, which prove it to be of late character. As to the hand which executed it, there is no record, but it is probable that it was painted at the cost, and most likely by one, of the monks of Blythburgh who would naturally take a special interest and direct any improvements in this church so closely connected with their own foundation. Below the Rood beam, and painted on a separate panel, is a text from Romans xiii. 1-4, which may be as early as the time of Queen Elizabeth.

C.E.K.