

ON SOME ALABASTER SCULPTURES OF NOTTINGHAM WORK.

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At the monthly meeting of the Institute on 9th April, 1907, there were exhibited, by Mr. E. Herbert Fison and the Rev. E. S. Dewick respectively, two alabaster tables and a series of little alabaster images of more than usual interest, owing to their excellent state of preservation and the considerable remains of the original colouring. As they seem, on this account, to deserve more than a mere passing notice, I have thought it desirable to describe them in detail.

The larger of Mr. Fison's tables (Plate I) measures $16\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height and $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches in width, and is of the second half of the fifteenth century.

It apparently belongs to one of a series of panels representing *Te Deum*, and consists of two rows of figures, an upper and a lower.

The lower series consists of a pope, a cardinal, a king, and an archbishop, standing in a row one behind the other and all facing one way, towards the left. The pope is shown wearing an amice (out of which hangs the hood, incorrectly painted red, of the grey amice he wears underneath, over his surplice), girded albe, quire cope, and tiara, and holding in his left hand a double-barred cross; his right hand is raised in blessing. The edges of his amice-apparel, albe, and cope, are gilt, as are his girdle, cope-brooch, tiara, and staff, and likewise his hair; the cope is lined with red, which is also the colour of the sandals. The cardinal stands somewhat in the background, and wears apparently a long red gown, a red hood edged with gold which is drawn over the head, and above that a broad-brimmed red hat with a green knob or tassel on top, and two long hanging cords or strings of the same colour; the cords are conjoined at the ends by a golden sliding ball and finished with tassels. The king is arrayed in a long tunic to the ankles, with a deep gold border and a golden girdle, a white mantle and a short tippet with hood; both tippet and mantle are



ALABASTER TABLE WITH PART OF A *TE DEUM*
in the possession of Mr. E. Herbert Fison.

edged with gold, and the lining of the latter and the hood are painted red. On the head is a golden crown, in the left hand a sceptre (the upper half broken away), and in the right a large ring. The hair and beard are gilt, and the pointed shoes painted dark green or black. From the prominence given to this kingly figure, and the ring in his hand, he is clearly intended for St. Edward the Confessor. The archbishop, who may be St. Thomas of Canterbury, wears an amice, albe, white tunicle or dalmatic, white chasuble with gold pall, gloves, a golden mitre, and black sandals; in his left hand he holds a tall gold cross, and the right hand is raised in blessing. From the neck is suspended a gold reliquary, or what may be a brooch. The amice-apparel and chasuble are bordered with gold and lined with red, but the albe and tunicle are edged with brown. The hair is gilt.

Of the upper series of figures little more than the heads and shoulders appear above the lower group. The figure above the pope is a bishop, apparently vested like him, and wearing a gold mitre; his hands are upraised in prayer or adoration, and hold between them his crosier, but the crook of this is broken away. Behind him is a tonsured clerk in a white gown, white tippet edged with red, and a red hood edged with gold and lined with green. The hands are apparently upraised in prayer or adoration, and the hair is gilt. The third figure apparently wears a white gown or tippet, with a green hood, but the head is broken away. The hands are uplifted like the figure before him. The last figure has also lost his head; an amice-apparel shows that he was in orders.

The ground on which the figures stand is coloured green with the usual groups of spots, each formed of a red one encircled by six white; the background is simply gilt.

The figures are all wrought in bold relief, and unusually well modelled. They also exhibit the peculiarity of having the eyeballs drilled with small holes to indicate the pupil and iris, which are generally shown in colours.

Owing to the amount of gold and painted decoration which has been preserved, this table has a brightness about it that is usually lacking.

On the back are five plug holes for the wire fastenings for holding the table in place in the reredos of which it formed part.

Mr. Fison's smaller panel (Plate II) is somewhat earlier than the other. It is 12 inches high and $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad, and represents Our Lord's Ascension.

In front is a group of six kneeling figures, arranged in two series of three, consisting respectively of St. John the Evangelist holding a long palm branch, St. Peter with a key (broken), and St. Bartholomew with a large knife in his hand, and of Our Lady with clasped hands, St. Andrew holding a small cross-saltire, and another Apostle holding an emblem, now broken.

Behind these figures is a mount on which rests a square block with the imprint of Our Lord's feet, and on either side appear the heads of five other Apostles; that of a sixth is broken away.

All the figures are shown gazing up into heaven, and they are vested alike in long gowns and mantles. The Apostles are likewise all barefooted, but Our Lady is shod.

The panel still retains considerable traces of gilding on the hair of the figures and the emblems they carry, and a small patch of the usual green ground.

Mr. Dewick's three little images (Plate III) are of especial interest as representing the rarely preserved canopied saints that were used in combination with such tables as Mr. Fison's to form reredoses for altars. They are all of about the same height, $11\frac{1}{4}$ inches, with a width of from $2\frac{1}{4}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and of the second half of the fifteenth century.

One represents an Apostle, evidently one of a series bearing scrolls with the clauses of the Apostles' Creed. He is shown with long hair, short beard, and barefooted, and clad in a gown and mantle. In the left hand he holds a scroll nearly as long as himself, and in the right hand a scimitar. On the Ranworth screen this emblem is assigned to St. Matthew. The scroll has been painted black and lettered, but all that is now left is a red initial, apparently S. This would fit St. Matthew, to whom is usually attributed the clause of the Apostles' Creed: *Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam, Sanctorum Communionem*. Even in an abbreviated form, this



ALABASTER TABLE OF THE ASCENSION
in the possession of Mr. E. Herbert Fison.



THREE ALABASTER CANOPIED IMAGES
in the possession of the Rev. E. S. Dewick, M.A., F.S.A.

sentence would require such a long scroll as that carried by the figure. The hair and beard, the borders of the garments, and the sword-hilt are gilt, but the blade of the sword is painted brown. The ground on which the saint stands is coloured green with the characteristic Nottingham spots. Above the figure is a crocketed and pinnacled traceried canopy,¹ with embattled tablement, ornamented with touches of gilding, but the coved under-surface is painted red. On the back is the stump of a leaded-in latten wire for holding the image in place when set up, and the same arrangement occurs in the other images.

Another of the images represents St. Barbara, with golden hair encircled by a brown fillet, long gown and mantle, both with gold borders, and black shoes. In her left hand she carries a dark green palm-branch, and in the right a small marbled tower or turret surmounted by a lead-coloured spire. The ground is green with traces of the usual spots, and above the saint is a like canopy to that over St. Matthew.

The third image is that of a bishop vested for mass, holding a golden crosier in his left hand and blessing with the right. He has no distinguishing emblem. The mitre and vestments have golden apparels, and the gloves gold tassels. The tunic and dalmatic are indicated by a painted band of fringe, and the buskins are coloured red. The orphrey of the chasuble is singular in showing the much earlier double-Y form. The ground on which the bishop stands and the canopy above his head are treated as in the other images.

It will be seen by comparison of these sculptures with others of the same class described and figured in my paper, "On the Early Working of Alabaster in England,"² that there can be little doubt as to their Nottingham origin, and the only ground for regret is that nothing is known as to their history after leaving the "alabaster-men's" hands.

I have to thank Mr. Arthur Gardner for the photographs from which the accompanying illustrations have been made.

¹ A canopy of precisely similar design surmounts the very fine "St. John's Head," preserved in Amporth church,

Hants. See *Archaeologia*, lii. plate xxxv.

² *Archaeological Journal*, lxi. 221-240.